



John Galliano for Christian Dior
Haute Couture, autumn/winter
2000-2001. Photo © Guy Marineau.

PARIS

CAPITAL OF FASHION

September 6, 2019–January 4, 2020

The Museum at **FIT**

Seventh Avenue at 27th Street, New York City

Hours:

Tuesday–Friday, noon–8 pm

Saturday, 10 am–5 pm

Closed Sunday, Monday, and legal holidays

Admission is free.

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Photos: Cover: Karl Lagerfeld for CHANEL's Advertising campaign for the 1987/1988 fall/winter haute couture collection with Ines de la Fressange. Photo by Karl Lagerfeld ©CHANEL. Interior: John Galliano for Christian Dior haute couture, fall/winter 2000-2001. Photo ©Guy Marineau.

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Robe à la française, 1755–1760, France.



The Duchess of Burgundy.
Antoine Trouvian. Paris, circa 1697.
Courtesy of Diktats Books.



Emile Pasquier, ballgown,
1889–1890, France.

Paris has long been regarded as the international capital of fashion. According to *The New Yorker*, Paris remains, despite competition, “the most glamorous and competitive of the world’s fashion capitals.” Paris has unquestionably played a very important role in the history of fashion. But Paris has also been mythologized, and this exhibition explores how the “aura” of Paris fashion was constructed over many generations.

“Fashion is to France what the gold mines of Peru are to Spain,” declared Louis XIV’s minister of finance, Jean-Baptiste Colbert. The statement may be apocryphal, but already by the 1670s, fashion and luxury goods were a source of wealth and “soft power” for the French state. The splendor of the French royal court at Versailles contributed greatly to French fashion prestige — or what critics called “French fashion hegemony over Europe.”

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was a much better candidate. Not coincidentally, by the 1830s London had replaced Paris as the capital of men’s fashion, and New York would emerge later as the leader in ready to wear. Yet Paris was more than ever the capital of women’s fashion. Paris = La Parisienne = La Mode.

The rise of the haute couture was crucially important to the consolidation of Paris as a modern fashion capital. In 1858, when Charles Frederick Worth established his couture house on the Rue de la Paix, Paris was already home to many “little” dressmakers, but Worth created grande (big) couture, which was soon known as haute (high) couture. Elite American women were attracted by the prestige of Paris fashion, and Worth recognized their importance as clients, saying they had



(L) Suit by Gabrielle Chanel, 1966, France, and (R) licensed copy of a Chanel day suit, c. 1967, USA.



Stephen Burrows, evening dress, 1973, USA.

“the faces, the figures, and the francs.”

Just as the image of the chic Parisienne speaks to transnational ideas about luxurious femininity, so also does the idea of Paris fashion “work” across fashion cultures. Manufacturers and retailers in other countries have often profited by creating inexpensive imitations of Paris styles. Alternatively, they could present, say, New York fashion as a “liberating” alternative to Parisian “dictatorship.”

Moving into the 20th century, as Paris faced growing international competition, the French increasingly presented the haute couture as the epitome of art and luxury, and a part of the unique patrimony of France. During World War II, when Paris was occupied by the Nazis, New York and London were

forced to draw on their own resources. In 1945, the haute couture gained legally protected status, and in 1947 Christian Dior’s New Look inaugurated a new golden age for the Parisian couture.

Over the years, London, New York, and Milan have repeatedly challenged the dominance of Paris — without ever permanently dethroning it. The Japanese fashion revolution of the 1980s ended by reinforcing the prestige of Paris. Today, many of the world’s most acclaimed designers choose to show their collections in Paris. More importantly, the headquarters of many luxury conglomerates, such as LVMH and Kering, and private luxury fashion companies, like Chanel and Hermès, are based in Paris. More than any other city, Paris has produced and maintained its brand image as the international “capital of fashion.”

Valerie Steele
Director, *The Museum at FIT*



Madame Grès, circa 1945, France. Lent by Hamish Bowles.



Jacques Fath for Joseph Halpert, cocktail dress, 1952, USA.



Jean Paul Gaultier, spring/summer 1998, France. Lent by Jean Paul Gaultier.