



Cristóbal Balenciaga, evening dress,  
black and ivory silk gazar, 1968.

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**Paris Refashioned, 1957–1968**

February 10–April 15, 2017

Organized by Colleen Hill

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*couture council*



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Cover: I.D. (Emmanuelle Khanh), dress, 1966.

# PARIS REFASHIONED 1957–1968



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# PARIS REFASHIONED 1957–1968

*Paris Refashioned, 1957–1968* examines the combined influence of French haute couture, ready-to-wear, and popular culture, highlighting how changes that took place during this time period helped to shape the fashion industry as we know it today. Exhibitions and books about this era tend to focus on London as the center of innovative, youth-oriented design, but this perspective overlooks the significant role that Paris continued to play in the fashion industry. Like England, France had a large population of young people – more than eleven million of its citizens in 1958 were under 15 years old. This generation came of age during the 1960s, listening to their own music, watching films featuring their own movie stars, and frequenting their own boutiques. Paris’s creative output was singularly dynamic, far-reaching, and innovative.

Although the French ready-to-wear revolution did not truly begin until the 1960s, the concept of lively, youth-oriented design had been set in motion during the previous decade. By the late 1950s, a few young, talented couturiers – including Pierre Cardin, Hubert de Givenchy, and Yves Saint Laurent – had made names for themselves. In 1957, the House of Christian Dior promoted 21-year-old Saint Laurent to creative director. While fashion insiders questioned the decision to place an unknown, seemingly naïve designer at the helm of such a prestigious institution, Saint Laurent’s first solo collection for Dior quickly silenced his detractors. His line of short, swinging, A-line dresses – known as “Trapeze” dresses – was a critical and commercial success, ushering in an unmistakable shift toward more relaxed and, ultimately, more youthful designs.



Pierre Cardin, mini dress, black wool crepe and polished steel, 1968.



Hubert de Givenchy, evening gown, purple gazar, 1967.

By the early 1960s, a few designers were challenging the traditions and confines of the couture system. André Courrèges, a protégé of the famed couturier Cristóbal Balenciaga, established his own house in 1961 and immediately eschewed some of the formalities of couture. Courrèges’s first collection was devoid of eveningwear, and his clothes were introduced on models who strode briskly to lively music, a striking contrast to the slow pace of traditional couture showings. Courrèges’s 1964 “Space Age” collection – featuring his famous white, calf-length boots – would come to epitomize the decade’s future-forward fashion aesthetic.

In her 1964 style guidebook *Elegance*, Geneviève Antoine Dariaux wrote, “While high fashion is still the star of *Vogue* and *Harper’s Bazaar*, the ready-to-wear industry, because of its financial means and its enormous clientele, is playing an increasingly important role.” Dariaux, a former couturier who was then employed as the *directrice* of the couture house Nina Ricci, provided fascinating insight into an industry turned upside-down. At the time of Dariaux’s writing, the century-long reign of French couturiers was being undone by an unlikely group of young, ready-to-wear designers known as the *stylistes*, whose vibrant aesthetic and democratic approach to dressing proved highly influential.

*Stylistes* such as Emmanuelle Khanh, Karl Lagerfeld, Michèle Rosier, and Sonia Rykiel, among several others, provided a new identity

to French fashion sold off the rack. Earlier machine-made, mass-produced garments in France were labeled as *confection* and had been generally disliked for their poor design and inconsistent quality. During the 1950s, *prêt-à-porter* – a literal translation of the English phrase “ready-to-wear” – had begun to replace both the term *confection* and its negative connotations. It became evident during the following decade that the future of French fashion was in *prêt-à-porter*. In 1966, Saint Laurent launched his ready-to-wear line, called Rive Gauche, to enormous success. While the fashion world lauded Rive Gauche for its progressive approach, some of Saint Laurent’s experiments with new designs and materials can be traced to the influence of the *stylistes*. Cardin, Courrèges, and Givenchy also produced ready-to-wear fashion that offered high style at more affordable prices.

Long-established couturiers such as Balenciaga, Chanel, and Madame Grès did not make the transition to ready-to-wear, but they did adapt their aesthetics to keep pace with the changing times. Other well-known houses hired younger couturiers to breathe fresh life into their businesses. Gérard Pipart, formerly of the pioneering *prêt-à-porter* label Chloé, took over the house of Nina Ricci in 1963 when he was still in his late 20s. In spite of these efforts, the once-unassailable dominance of haute couture could not regain its lost ground. Balenciaga closed his business in 1968, lamenting that it had become impossible to design true couture. By 1972, the fashion writer Hebe Dorsey concluded, “Fashion liberation has taken over from fashion determinism. Each woman is free to choose for herself, to interpret the mode according to her own style, taste and figure, to participate in creation without being reined by absolutes.” Through the innovations of both couturiers and *stylistes* during the 1960s, the French fashion system had been forever changed.

Colleen Hill, curator



Yves Saint Laurent Rive Gauche, raincoat, yellow vinyl and wool, 1966.



Nina Ricci (Gérard Pipart), suit, pink wool, circa 1966.



André Courrèges, boots, white leather and Velcro, 1964.

Chloé (Karl Lagerfeld), evening dress, hand-painted silk, 1967.