

The Tale of Two Dresses From The Early 20th Century

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The 20th century played a very essential role to the fashion industry. Throughout the 1900s the world was introduced to several new designers with unique ideas and neoteric trends that were never seen before. Designers such as Mariano Fortuny and Madeleine Vionnet were two of the many who extremely influenced fashion with their designs. Fortuny is most known for going against the norms of his time period. Heavily inspired by several different cultures, his garments differentiated from his contemporaries. His method was to approach his work through art, technology and science. Although Vionnet opened her fashion house a few years after Fortuny, she did not lack originality or taste. Her experience with Callot Soeurs prepared her for a top spot as an influential innovator of fashion. Considering both designers graced the fashion industry around the same time, there are several similarities that can be seen in their designs. However, due to their different backgrounds and interests, Fortuny and Vionnet designs also shared many differences. Mariano Fortuny's "Tea Gown" (Figure 1) designed between the years 1930 and 1932, and Madeleine Vionnet's "Evening Dress" (Figure 2) of 1924 are great examples of two garments that at first glance might seem very similar but actually contrast in numerous ways as well.

Fortuny's "Tea Gown" (Figure 1) is an ankle length tunic dress with dolman batwing sleeves that drape down to the lower thigh. It has a high jewel neckline that extends above the collarbone. The garment consists of only two colors, black and gold. The gold parts of the dress formulate medieval patterns all over the dress, which makes sense because of Fortuny's interest in classical Greek and Renaissance culture (N. Munroe, personal communication February 26, 2020). This dress is of Italian culture and is made of silk ("Tea Gown", n.d.). According to Fortuny ("Tea Gown", n.d.), this garment "is related to a type of garment derived from the

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classical robe, but its design is so shaped and arranged that it can be worn and adjusted with ease and comfort." Fortuny's love for art and culture most likely was due to the fact that he was born on May 11th of 1871, to an artistic family in Granada, Spain (Osma, 1980). His father was a painter who died when Fortuny was only three years old (Osma, 1980). After that his family moved to Paris, France (Osma, 1980). It was there Fortuny met Henriette Negrin, who later became his model, muse and wife ("History", 2020). Fortuny's "Delphos" dress of 1907 is one of his most popular designs. To this day no one has ever been able to recreate the pleating on that particular dress because he did each one by hand and never discussed his technique.

Madeleine Vionnet's "Evening Dress" (Figure 2) is a Grecian-style black silk dress with a floor length train. It has a metal gold trimming that wraps around the waist. The dress has strap sleeves and the back of the garment has a deep V-neck cut. It is of French culture ("Evening dress", n.d.). Vionnet was born into a poor family on June 22nd of 1876 in Loiret, France ("Madeleine Vionnet, Puriste de la mode", 2010). Vionnet began her career as a lace maker apprentice (N. Munroe, personal communication, February 19, 2020). She was twelve years old when she left school and started her apprenticeship ("Madeleine Vionnet, Puriste de la mode", 2010). Unfortunately by the age of 18 Vionnet was already married and divorced (N. Munroe, personal communication, February 19, 2020). Vionnet then moved to London where she worked as a fitter for Kate Reily, a British dressmaker (2010). When Vionnet returned to France she began working for Callot Soeurs, one of the leading fashion houses of the 1910s and 1920s that was established in 1895 by three sisters (N. Munroe, personal communication, February 19, 2020). She opened her fashion house in 1912 ("Evening dress", n.d.). Vionnet

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massively influenced the fashion world by popularizing the bias cut and her invention of the halter neck .

The main similarity between Vionnet's and Fortuny's garments are the color scheme. The "Tea Gown" (figure 1) and "Evening Dress"(figure 2) both incorporate only two colors, black and gold. Both dresses are also very long, as they completely cover the entire calf. The dresses are also somewhat fitted at the waist and then flow slightly outward to the floor, similar to an A-line silhouette. Both designers used silk as a material. The two garments are both loose fitting pieces and look very comfortable to wear. Both garments are also inspired by Greek culture, Fortuny's with the use of the embroidered Renaissance patterns and Vionnet's Grecian-style, which is characterized by draping or pleated fabric (Smith, 2009).

Fortuny's dress (figure 1), as mentioned previously, has long sleeves. In contrast, Vionnet's dress (figure 2) has short sleeves. Fortuny's dress (figure 1) is also way more modest, as Vionnet's dress shows much more skin, a great example of how Vionnet set herself apart from most designers of her time. While Fortuny's dress only includes silk as material, Vionnet used metal as well. Although both garments are long, Vionnet extends longer with the added fabric used to make the train. The "Evening Dress" (figure 2) is a lot more simplistic and dainty, while the "Tea Gown", also elegant in its own right, is more loud because of the medieval patterns.

Mariano Fortuny and Madeleine Vionnet were both European designers who set aspirational blueprints for designers everywhere. Their innovative ideas are used to formulate collections and runway looks even up to today. Even though much of their work was very

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contemporary and different, not just compared to each other but other designers as well, it also equates in more ways than one.

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[Figure 1]



Title: Tea gown

Designer: Mariano Fortuny

Date: 1930–32

Culture: Italian

Medium: silk

Accession Number: C.I.51.86.6

[Figure 2]



Title: Evening dress

Designer: Madeleine Vionnet

Date: ca. 1924

Culture: French

Medium: silk, metal

Accession Number: 2017.314

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