

ANALYSIS OF THE DIOR & BALENCIAGA FASHION MUSEUM EXHIBITION

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INTRODUCTION

Centuries ago, fashion was not something everyone considered important. People focused on survival, respect, and wealth. Fashion before the first war had more of a structured military look with jobs often requiring a uniform or trousers. Women and girls wore long dresses and skirts; men and boys wore jackets and ties. Lifestyles were plainer, with sober, muted colors. Women wore less jewelry and dress codes were less gender-specific. During World War II, fashion designers began analyzing the women of the world, and their comfort. Two historical innovators that impacted the world of fashion after WWII were Christian Dior and Cristobal Balenciaga by challenging the eyes of the public with their luxurious garments. The Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) had a temporary exhibit named “Dior + Balenciaga: The Kings of Couture and Their Legacies” that focused on the most creative designs that both designers were able to style during their era. I was able to visit the exhibit on November 6th and I believe that both designers continue to inspire the world of fashion with their passion for guaranteeing comfort and freedom of movement for their consumers.

THE HISTORY BEHIND THE DESIGNERS

Christian Dior was a French couturier, and he is best known for his eponymous fashion house in France. He was born in Normandy, France, and was the son of a wealthy businessman who grew up in Belle Epoque. Through Dior’s childhood, he was able to learn leadership and direction skills from his father, whose company in the 1950s accounted for more than half of France’s couture exports. His father's passion for sharing his vision of fashion allowed Dior to accomplish many goals when he opened his own couture house on February 12, 1947. Dior would pass away ten years later on October 24, 1957. His legendary designs have remained

relevant in the fashion world. Dior envisioned his dresses to be constructed like buildings, molded to the curve of the female form and styling its shape at the same time. He emphasized his garments with wide hips and gave the bust its shape. He interpreted these shapes when Dior said “revived the old tradition of cambric or taffeta linings.” His work was defined by his eagerness to change the world of fashion and give women the freedom of following express themselves through their clothes.

On the other hand, Cristobal Balenciaga was born into a modest Basquet family. His upbringing was very humble as he was taught to use natural skills that eventually became a passion. Balenciaga began as a tailor’s apprentice at the age of 12 years old, and he opened his first boutique in San Sebastian, Spain. As the Spanish Civil War began to affect Spain, Balenciaga relocated to Paris in 1937. He was a very conservative designer who deliberately avoided both society and the press. Yet despite this, his unique work was lauded by fashion editors, socialite clients, and his fellow couturiers throughout his long career; he died in March 1972 at the age of 77. The maturation of his unusual style truly emerged during the days of the Nazi Occupation of Paris. In the 1940s, there were very few couture designers like Balenciaga, who worked closely on metier of commercial constraints. Through his skillset, he was able to transform his dressing-making experience into the most unique couture.

EXHIBITION ANALYSIS

Although both designers were elevated in their success, they each had their unique styles of design. In the Dior and Balenciaga exhibit at the FIT Museum, the original designs of both designers were displayed, allowing the audience to analyze the colors, textures, and shine of the fabrics used for each piece. Their designs were displayed with comparisons of their craft and the

messages behind the garments. The dimmed light of the showrooms enhanced the soft, straight silhouettes as the length of the hemline and relaxed waistline transitioned throughout the centuries of fashion. The garments that Dior and Balenciaga designed signified the change in culture and the fashion rules that were implemented after World War II. The evening dresses were popular in medium length and were often made of wool chiffon or jersey fabric. For example, the cocktail evening gowns designed by Balenciaga and Dior were displayed adjacent to one another. The Balenciaga dress was a blue silk dress that was designed in 1956 and the Dior's garment was created in 1955 and was named "Zemire," which was a brown silk cocktail dress. Both designers created their garments with interior corsets with stiff silk gazar fabric which stands away from the body and displays a strong architectural shape. Both dresses are arm revealing, with torso-fitting bodices and a full, calf-length puffy skirt, considered a high fashion essential at the time.



There's always a hidden story behind the inspiration of every contemporary designer. Many times they are influenced by the history of their country or by the images they envision for the future of fashion. In 1996, Christian Dior hired one of its most innovative designers; John Galliano, who turned the house Dior into a palace of luxury couture. Galliano used Dior's first collection that he launched in 1947 and recreated the brand and made it his own, with its streamlined femininity and opulence. His first collection, in which he introduced the "New Look," featured rounded shoulders, a cinched waist, and a very full skirt (Kloster, 2020). The

“vibrant Eighties club scene” was a big influence on Galliano, who worked as a dresser at the National Theater during his years of studies (Neel, 2011). He received widespread critical



acclaim for his haute couture and ready-to-wear collections. He became known for introducing rich, theatrical, and memorable fashion spectacles to the runways and for his genre-breaking collections. The FIT Museum exhibit for Dior and Balenciaga had two dresses on display that were designed by Galliano in the early 2000s. The red silk Devore velvet and chiffon evening dress, and the black leather and satin dress. Both garments demonstrated his fusion of romantic historicism with technical skills and progressive aesthetics. These designs

continued to mark the world of fashion by honoring Dior in his unapologetic gowns that became the creation of exclusive fashions.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the centuries, fashion has become a form of expression and given people the feeling of freedom to be who they are. Our ancestors fought all around the world to change and to hopefully allow everyone to feel like they walk on their own red carpet. The FIT museum exhibit, “Dior + Balenciaga: The Kings of Couture and Their Legacies,” allowed the new generations (millennials and Gen Z) more of a sense and inspiration as to where fashion can take you. From the detailed garments on display to the visual flatscreen showing how designers use technology to edit and adjust the designs, they have created. Complementing the exhibit, even

more, were the visuals on a tv screen of the CAD for Fashion Design Art Certificate Program that was developed to meet the fashion industry's need for trained talent with advanced Fashion Design computer skills. The program offers students the opportunity to upgrade their digital fashion design skills to industry standards, and the exhibit allowed the audience to turn back in time to the ruffled bustle skirts, the Crinoline, the corsets, and haute couture.

REFERENCES

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