

Final Exam Essay

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20th Century Dress and Culture

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Hubert de Givenchy was born in Beauvais, France in 1927 and died on March 10, 2018 at the age of 91. He left home at the age of 17 to start pursuing his passion for fashion and art. He studied at the Ecole des Beaux arts in Paris. An interesting fact I never knew about him is that he also studied law. He is well known for his ready to wear designs and couture designs. He is especially known for all the garments he designed for the late actress Audrey Hepburn for all her cinematic looks as well as her personal closet.

He is the designer behind the iconic dress Audrey Hepburn wore in the opening scene of the movie *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. The "little black dress" lbd became a sensation and the scene of her wearing that dress became the most recognizable and talked about scene in the history of American movies. It's fascinating how sensational it was when the movie came out because while doing my research I read about how Audrey Hepburn was initially going to wear pants and T shirt but Mr. Givenchy thought it just wasn't right and even though Hubert de Givenchy was busy designing his own collection he told her that he would do anything for her and get it done. I strongly believe that the movie wouldn't have been what it was if it wasn't for that specific scene and dress. After Audrey Hepburn realized how talented Mr. Givenchy is, she insisted that he designs all of her looks for other projects. Audrey Hepburn said that Givenchy's designs gave her the confidence needed to play a character's part.

Some people might not think much of the black dress Audrey Hepburn wore (see 5th slide for images). It's not an easy task to design a well constructed, chic little black dress.

“The little black dress is the hardest thing to realize,” Mr. Givenchy said, “because you must keep it simple.”

And he did indeed achieve that with his design. However Givenchy wasn't the one who invented the little black dress, it was mostly noted to Coco Chanel in 1926 when her design of a knee length black dress was featured in American Vogue. Audrey Hepburn just defined absolute elegance in that dress and that's what Givenchy's style is all about. His style was the combination of elegance, sophistication, simplicity but still glamorous. He kept a balance of tradition and modernity. If he were to include bold prints and details to his design he would balance it with a timeless silhouette and the best fabric to give it the elegance and modernity he loved.

Coco Chanel kept the aspect of sophistication and elegance in her designs. The change in silhouette and style occurred in the 1940s when Christian Dior put a few twists on the little black dress taking it more to the sexier side with a cinched waist and very feminine details.

And then came Givenchy with his simple but iconic black dress he created for Audrey Hepburn.

Another designer that we discussed in class is Elsa Schiaparelli. Her and Givenchy were friends in real life. He stayed at her house for a few years and they have collaborated before. Elsa

Schiaparelli was a single woman who was achieving her dreams and she constantly gave

Givenchy advice on the fashion industry and tried to protect him and help him from her own

experience. For example Givenchy wanted to start his own business at a time when no one really

believed in couture in addition to couture being more expensive. “She was grumpy and furious,

and told me ‘you will go bankrupt,’” Givenchy said.

Givenchy has mentioned that YSL had an influence on his work and that Elsa Schiaparelli was also an inspiration to him because she was “very modern” and had “originality and audacity” he said. In my opinion Givenchy’s and Elsa Schiaparelli’s had more differences than him and YSL’s

style. Although one thing Givenchy and Schiaparelli definitely agree on is modernity. Givenchy is not as bold and as daring as Schiaparelli is with her design. Givenchy’s work had a little bit of both but I definitely recognize YSL style in Givenchy’s garments because they resemble each other's elegance and chicness but are still glamorous and recognizable.

I compared Givenchy with Elsa Schiaparelli, Coco Chanel, Christian Dior and YSL because they all played a role in Hubert de Givenchy’s life and career. Givenchy was friends with, and collaborated with Schiaparelli. Coco Chanel was mostly noted for “the little black dress” which Givenchy sort of redefined and took the title in 1961. And Yves Saint Laurent was an inspiration to Givenchy and influenced many of his styles and garments. Every designer I mentioned here is accomplished, unique in their own way and without a doubt left a mark in the fashion world. But since my research was on Hubert de Givenchy and based on everything I read, he was called the “Creator of Personality” and “Fashion Pillar of Romantic Elegance” , both beautiful and accurate titles he earned and described him perfectly. Looking back on his active period and to this present day I would have to say that he had the most profound impact and his designs and legacy will live on and be remembered and appreciated forever.

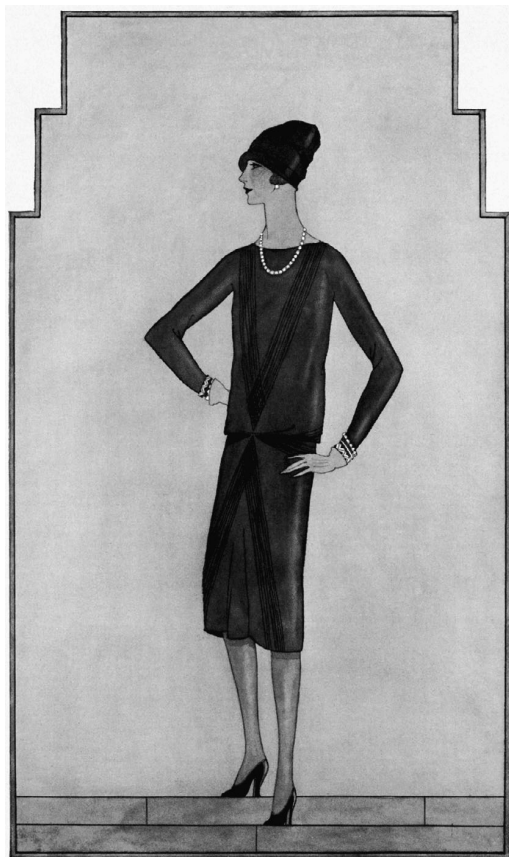


1. Audrey Hepburn:Breakfast at Tiffanys,1961





2. Hubert de Givenchy in 1960 in France from the new york times .



3. Coco Chanel's drawing of the black dress featured in American Vogue in 1927, from the vogue website "From the Archives".



4. Elsa Schiaparelli lobster dress, 1937 from FIT's website.



5. Givenchy's design of the black dress, 1961 from "readers digest"

- I included two designs of two different designers that I talked about to show that they both have different styles and ideas.



References:

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Hubert-de-Givenchy>

<https://www.cnn.com/style/article/audrey-hepburn-little-black-dress-remember-when/index.html>

<https://wwd.com/fashion-news/fashion-scoops/hubert-de-givenchy-marisa-berenson-remember-elsa-schiaparelli-7388192/>