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Elsa Schiaparelli's 1937 evening jacket was created at the crossroads of some of the most important historical moments worldwide. 1937 saw rising tensions on a global scale that would lead to the start of World War Two in just two years, all while the world was still recovering from the lasting impacts of the Great Depression and World War One which had ended not too long ago. The 1930s in terms of fashion had a major shift from the look of the twenties, some changes included the return of the waist and increase in the length of hemlines. This look was more feminine and very contrasting from the popular looks of the 1920's which had a more boyish silhouette and shorter hemlines (Reddy 1). Schiaparelli's design of this evening jacket fit in with the popular look of the thirties as it had that long, slender silhouette with a noticeable waist. Her precise tailoring worked well with the silhouette changes that occurred in the thirties' fashion and can be seen in this evening jacket. This piece is a perfect example of how Schiaparelli was able to combine a popular silhouette of an era with an artistic twist; she accomplished this by incorporating unique details and designs which make her work stand out. Her skillful tailoring allowed her to create a silhouette that captured the simplicity and subtle femininity of 1930s women's fashion.

Elsa Schiaparelli was an Italian designer who was born in Rome in 1890 to an aristocratic family. She started her own company in 1927 where her designs were noticed by major magazines such as Vogue, specifically her hand-knit pullovers with trompe l'oeil motifs. As her company grew, she set up altiers and offices under the name "Schiaparelli Pour le Sport" and

began expanding her knitwear line (“Discovery of Fashion” 1-2). Her designs at the time were something people had not seen before; she brought a fresh take to women’s sportswear. She would continue to create several innovations with her designs for years to come in regard to the materials she used, cuts, accessories and details. As her company grew, she changed the name to “Schiaparelli- Pour le Sport, Pour la Ville, Pour le Soir”, having over four hundred employees and eight ateliers. She was also able to expand her company out of Paris and into cities like London and New York City (“Global Expansion” 1). By this point it was undeniable that the Schiaparelli brand was extremely successful, and her innovation and creativity made the brand stand out among the other high fashion French designers of her time. She was even the first female designer to be featured on the cover of Time Magazine in 1934. Schiaparelli ended up closing her couture house in 1954 and later died in 1974. Overall, Schiaparelli’s innovation in her designs is what made her get noticed and established in the fashion industry and is what allowed her to continue growing her brand up until she decided to retire. Her career was truly remarkable, because she was not afraid to make designs that were more artistic and creative than they were conservative and by doing so she was able to leave a lasting impression in fashion history.

Schiaparelli’s haute couture evening jacket from her 1937 Autumn collection, made in collaboration with Jean Cocteau is the perfect combination of fashion and surrealist art. The jacket is ankle length, made of black silk jersey, and has short lapels on the front. The front is simple and looks like many other women’s evening coats made in the 1930s because of the popular silhouette used. What makes this a Schiaparelli design is the subtle details she is known for adding which elevate her pieces and makes something seemingly simple become one of a kind. She added only one black ceramic button to the front of the jacket and although from far

away it may look as though it is just a regular black button, it has the design of a skirt along the edge with a leg in the center of the button wearing a high heel shoe. Meanwhile, the back of the jacket, which Jean Cocteau designed for Schiaparelli has the profile of two women facing each other embroidered with gold thread. Both gold faces feature identical embroidered bright blue eyes and bright red lips. What makes this design so interesting is that in the negative space where the two faces meet is also the outline of a vase, which is filled with roses that spill out onto the upper back and shoulders of the jacket. The roses are made of a beautiful pink silk and have silk stitched pale green leaves placed among them. The back of the evening jacket also has four vertical gold thread embroidered lines that start at the waist and go all the way to the bottom which gives the illusion of pleats (V&A 1). The double image of the faces featured here is what makes the design on this jacket so unique and is a motif that Cocteau and many other surrealist artists used in their work. The small details such as the button, the subtle illusion of the heads and pleats are what make it so unique and add the element of surrealism to the evening jacket.

Schiaparelli often collaborated with artists to combine their art skills with her amazing fashion skills, some of these artists include Salvador Dali, Meret Oppenheim, Andy Warhol and Leonor Fini. She would use these artists' work in her fashion designs, advertisements, and even to help with the design of her perfume bottle. For this evening jacket, she collaborated with Jean Cocteau who drew the design that appears on the back of the jacket and was embroidered by Lesage. Cocteau was a surrealist who had an impressive career prior to his collaboration with Schiaparelli; he was a poet, dramatist, screenwriter, artist, and novelist (Poetry Foundation 1). The drawing of the two heads shows Cocteau's inspiration from double images which could often be found in his work. In Schiaparelli's autobiography she speaks about her collaboration with Cocteau saying, "Jean Cocteau made some drawings of heads for me. I reproduced some of

these on the back of an evening coat and one, with long yellow hair reaching to the waist, on a gray linen suit.” (Schiaparelli 109) Besides this long evening jacket, the two also collaborated on another gray jacket also featuring an embroidered woman’s face in gold; these jackets were all part of the same Autumn collection. The designs were a beautiful way to combine art and fashion all from a surrealist perspective. Collaborations with artists were a significant part of Schiaparelli’s work and helped to elevate her already creative and beautiful designs.

Just as the 1930s began the world was coming out of a very dark few decades, right before the 1920’s World War One had just ended, then the “roaring twenties” were brought to an end by the stock market crash and Great Depression. Besides this throughout the thirty’s tensions were rising on a global level that would ultimately lead to the start of World War Two. These devastating events prior to the 1930s caused the surrealism art movement to gain popularity among artists. Surrealism is an art movement that started in France and was most popular in the thirties, it served as a way for artists to express their reactions to the horrors of World War One. The war helped to popularize this art style because there was so much devastation seen in Europe that people needed an outlet, and many turned to art to express their feelings. Artists were able to make art pieces that were “beyond-the-real” world and dream-like worlds all in an effort to escape the harsh realities that they had to endure during the war (Wood 2). This art style was a major influence in a lot of Schiaparelli’s work where she would exaggerate ideas and push the norm to create unique pieces that offered deep meanings. She used concepts from surrealist art such as symbolic images, dream-like scenes and visual puns in her designs allowing her the ability to turn her fashion designs into wearable artwork. Schiaparelli used traditional tailoring in her designs but used details, materials, and imagery of surrealism to create designs such as her 1937 evening jacket.

This evening jacket was worn by Viscountess Doris Castlerosse who was a fan of Schiaparelli's work and would often wear her pieces. The Viscountess was one of the leading English socialites of the 1930s and was married to Valentine Edward Charles Browne who was the 6th Earl of Kenmare. The jacket was kept in her family for several years up until it was donated to a museum to be preserved (V&A). This jacket is a haute couture piece which is the reason why a wealthy woman such as the Viscountess would have been the one to own it. Schiaparelli is one of the most notable haute couture designers, this means she made high-end clothing, constructed by hand, and it was custom made. This is a process that is highly regulated by the French government to ensure any pieces claiming to be haute couture are accurately represented and not a fake. These pieces are made for the average person to wear as they require a lot of work and high-quality materials, so they cost quite a lot of money which reserves pieces such as this for only the very wealthy.

In conclusion, Schiaparelli was a fashion designer who had the ability to turn clothing into beautiful, often over the top wearable artwork that could convey deep memorable meanings all through a surrealist perspective. Designs such as the evening jacket mentioned prior, are important parts of fashion history because the design, artistic influences, and silhouette can tell us as historians so much about the way people of that era felt and how major events impacted fashion styles. It is apparent that surrealism was a driving force behind Schiaparelli's designs and her collaborations with artists such as Jean Cocteau helped her to further explore this artistic side of her designs. The fact that surrealism influenced so many of Schiaparelli's designs also shows just how much she was impacted by World War One. She was using those surrealist concepts in her designs to express her own feelings of the 1930s and how they impacted her making her a standout for 1930's fashion designers.

**Elsa Schiaparelli Evening Coat From the Autumn 1937 Collection. All images from the V&A Museum.**



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