

Fashion Plate

An Opening Exhibition for the New Costume Institute

So much has been written and said *about* fashion that most of us have forgotten it *is* something. It is also *not* something. It is not clothing, although it has something to do with clothing. It also has to do with motor-cars, holiday resorts, and pet dogs. It is, in fact, a social phenomenon that defines the ways people do things at certain times, making them identifiable as characteristic of a particular time, place, and social level.

In relation to clothes as well as other things, fashion sets up criteria, and people who care about being fashionable will respect those standards. This involves an enormous industry based on the activities of designers, manufacturers, buyers, retailers, the fashion press, and people in related fields. The word itself, *fashion*, has been made synonymous with that industry. But although fashion is this industry's chief motivating force (as it is of other industries), it cannot invent the visual forms that express the moment's taste. It is the designers, as artists, who create the look of long skirts, short skirts, full sleeves, no sleeves, mane hair, chopped hair — endlessly. *What* the fashion of the moment says may in fact be less important than *how* it's said; and how it's said is a matter of terms that are visual, not economic, not social.

To salute the fashion industry of New York, whose tireless efforts and financial contributions were instrumental in making the new Costume Institute a reality, the Museum will present *Fashion Plate* in the Costume Institute in the fall of 1971. Plans

for the new facility call for the contents of the ten galleries to be changed every three months. *Fashion Plate* will be the first of these gallery installations — the inaugural exhibition.

Drawn entirely from the Costume Institute's own collection, the garments and accessories in *Fashion Plate* will represent a succession of fashions in clothing during the past 200 years. The clothes will be shown in conjunction with enlarged reproductions of fashion plates of their time. Both the plates and the clothes exhibit that taste for idealized line, for exaggerated form, for dramatized detail that conditions the visual language of fashion in clothing. To demonstrate fashion's consistency of action through the ages, the staff will arrange the groups of costumes and plates without regard to chronological sequence. In this way, without the distraction of tracing developments from one period to another, the visitor will be free to concentrate on the purely formal aspects of the images and to identify those elements of line, form, and color that the designer manipulated to achieve a fashionable look, whether he was working last year or a century ago. Possibly this will lead to some private and personal definitions of fashion in clothing. In any case, the visitor will see that our ancestors 200 years ago were just as close to (or far from) the fashion-plate ideal as we are.

Adolph S. Cavallo, *Chairman
The Costume Institute*

Robe à l'anglaise, 1784 or 1785. Fashion plate drawn by Watteau fils, engraved by Le Beau. Plate 198 from Galerie des Modes et Costumes Français (1911-1912 reprinting). Metropolitan Museum Library

Coat of satin and velvet. Detail of plate 487 from Townsend's Monthly Selection of Costumes, London, 1833. Metropolitan Museum Library



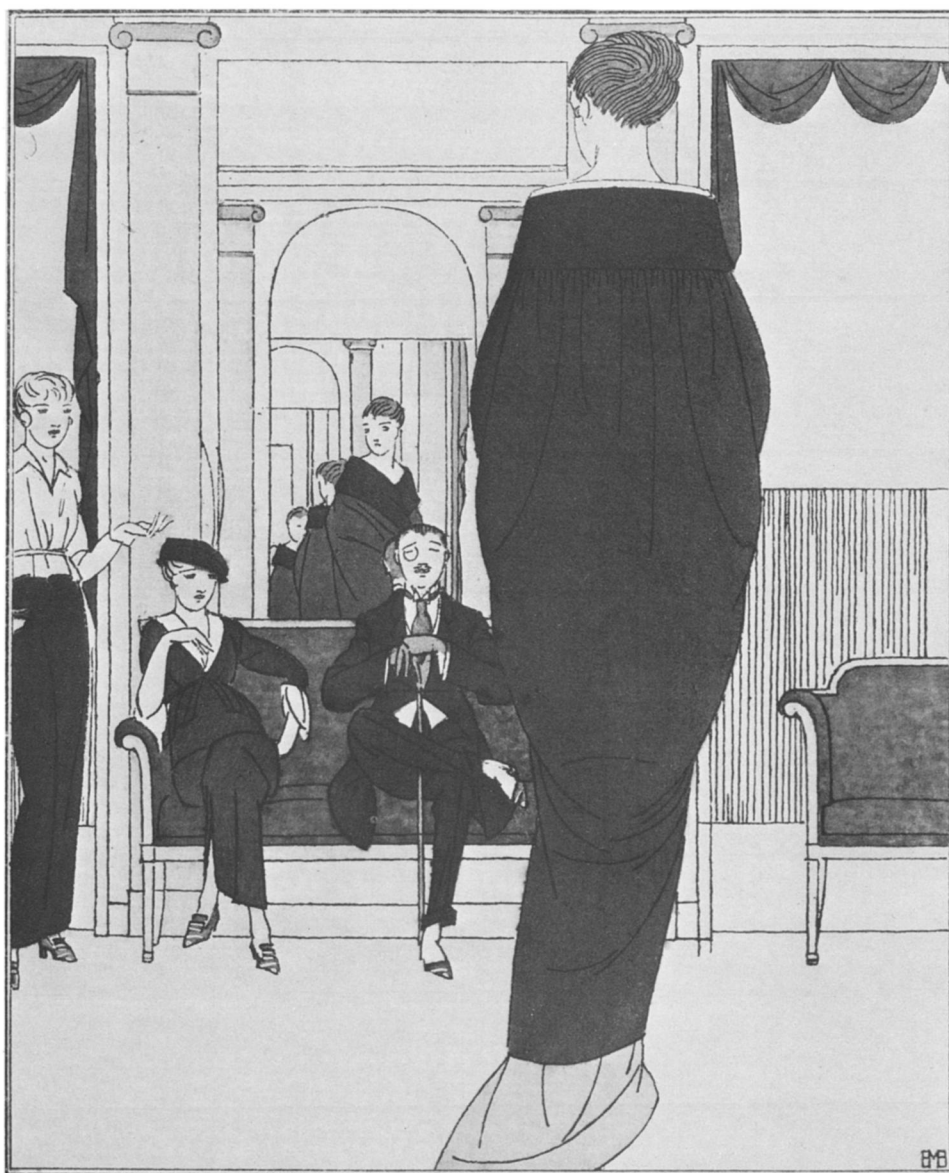




Two concert gowns. Fashion plate painted by Toudouze, engraved by Bracquet, and printed by Leroy. From *La Mode Illustrée*, Paris, February 5, 1865. Gift of Lee Simonson, Ly 61.16.12

Housecoat of brocaded silk and linen. Fashion plate by Barbier from *Journal des Dames et des Modes*, Paris, June 20, 1913. The Costume Institute Library





Beginning with this issue, the *Bulletin* will appear every other month throughout the year. On alternate months, Museum members will receive the *Calendar/News*.

Both have been redesigned and enlarged; the *Bulletin* will contain more articles and illustrations than before, and each issue of the *Calendar/News* will provide a day-by-day listing of events for the coming two months, as well as information on the Museum's activities and programs.

We hope that you enjoy these changes, and welcome your comments.

Katharine Stoddert, *Editor of the Bulletin*

*Evening coat by Worth. Fashion plate by
Boutet de Monvel from La Gazette du Bon
Ton, Paris, April 1914. The Costume
Institute Library*

*Robe de style by Jeanne Lanvin. Fashion
plate by Benito from Vogue, New York,
June 15, 1924. Purchase, Irene Lewisohn
Bequest, Ly 61.31.118*

