

French Fashion, Women, and the First World War

On View September 5, 2019 through January 5, 2020



"Vive la France!" Artist: Georges Lepape 1917
 Lithograph, pochoir coloration, Diktats bookstore.



Callot Sœurs. Day dress, Summer 1917. Silk charmeuse, fillet lace, metallic flower. ©The Museum at FIT, Gift of Rosalie Davidson, 86.156.

French Fashion, Women, and the First World War—on view at Bard Graduate Center Gallery, 18 West 86th Street, New York City, from September 5, 2019 through January 5, 2020—is an examination of the fraught and dynamic relationship between fashion, war, and gender politics in France during World War I. Women mobilized to keep the French economy afloat as did the clothing industry (the second largest economic driver in France at the time). The fashion press promoted Paris's leading female designers—Jeanne Paquin, Jeanne Lanvin, and Jenny Sacerdote—intensively. Paquin, Lanvin, and Sacerdote were smart businesswomen prior to 1914, and the war only enhanced their dominance on the international scene. Among rising Parisian couturiers was Gabrielle Chanel, whose simple, elegant designs helped her rise to prominence during the war and whose jersey skirt suits captured the zeitgeist of this new era.

With its diverse range of clothing and ephemera, from the exquisite to the quotidian, this exhibition brings into sharp focus the relationship between fashion and war, and how fashion reflected social change and became the locus of male anxiety in the face of rapid social upheaval. What role did fashion play in the disjunction between the horrors of the front experienced by French soldiers, resulting in almost 1.5 million dead, and the reality of life in wartime, in which women worked valiantly to provide for their families and contribute to the war effort? Can the endless critical discourse around what women wore, how they wore it, and the anxieties it provoked explain the stilted progress of women's emancipation in postwar France, where women did not gain the right to vote until 1944?

Through detailed research and loans from major fashion houses and museums, curators Maude Bass-Krueger and Sophie Kurkdjian have amassed a collection of wartime skirt suits, nurses' and ambulance attendants' uniforms, mourning dresses, and "military-style" hats that will be exhibited alongside fashions by Chanel and Lanvin that are making their first appearance in the United States. In addition, printed documents—postcards, commercial catalogues, fashion magazines, advertising posters, and photographs—that have rarely, if ever, been previously exhibited—will be on view.

Lenders from French and American institutions include Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand, Musée de la Grande Guerre du Pays de Meaux, The Costume Institute of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology, Collection Patrimoine de Chanel, Patrimoine Lanvin, Association Pour l'Histoire de la Mode, Archives de Paris, Bibliothèque Forney, Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris, Fashion Institute of Technology Library Special Collections and College Archives, Diktats bookstore, Thomas J. Watson Library of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.

Maude Bass-Krueger is a postdoctoral fellow at the Center for the Arts in Society at Leiden University who received her PhD from Bard Graduate Center, and Sophie Kurkdjian is a research fellow at The Institut d'histoire du temps présent (IHTP-CNRS), who received her PhD from the Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne.



Model wearing the "Déesse" dress by Callot Soeurs, shown at the "Fête Parisienne" in New York, 1915. Photographed by Philippe Ortiz. Silver gelatin print. Diktats bookstore.



Six women in skirt suits posing outside, May 15, 1919. Silver gelatin print. Association Pour l'Histoire de la Mode, FIL.2018.7.

About the Exhibition

Laid out on three floors of Bard Center Gallery, *French Fashion, Women, and the First World War* is organized in sections that include the pre-war days of 1914, wartime textiles and fashion, French-American fashion cooperation, women at work, nursing, mourning practices, the seamstresses' strike of 1917, tensions that rose from women's changing identities, and the question of postwar women's rights.

Throughout August and September 1914, German troops bombed French factories around Lille, Turcoing, and Roubaix in an attempt to destroy the textile industry. Manufacturers and designers mobilized and worked together to salvage the losses, focusing production on silk textiles made in Lyon, rather than on the wool, cotton, and linen textiles produced in the north. At the same time, Parisian couture houses marketed the new fall silhouette as a "war crinoline" and urged domestic and international buyers and clients to purchase the garment as a way to help the French war effort.

After the first chaotic months of the war had passed, the fashion industry intensified its marketing efforts, focusing on the United States and South America. French designers sent couture models abroad, staged fashion parties in New York City, and presented their designs at the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco, all to ensure that France maintained its position at the pinnacle of worldwide fashion. Alongside photographs and



Dartey, pseudonym of Anette Osterlind. "La 'Fête Parisienne' à New York."

illustrations of garments presented at these “Fêtes Parisiennes” in New York, a Callot Soeurs evening dress in pink silk and metallic thread that was presented at the 1915 San Francisco Exposition will be on view. Publishers such as Lucien Vogel created new magazines to disseminate new styles at home and abroad, helping to accelerate changes in women’s attire introduced before the war, like simplified silhouettes and higher hemlines. The exhibition includes examples of plates and articles from publications such as *Les Éléances Parisiennes*, *Le Style Parisien*, *Femina*, *La Gazette du Bon Ton*, and *Continental Vogue* and *Vogue UK* that reflect this intense shared marketing effort to protect the industry. Indeed, the European editions of *Vogue*, launched by the American publisher Condé Nast with the explicit purpose of helping the French war effort, featured pro-France cover illustrations such as Georges Lepape’s “Vive la France” (*Vogue UK*), which will be on view.



Paul Iribe. *La Baionnette*, October 4, 1917, n°118. Lithograph. Association Pour l’Histoire de la Mode, FIL.2016.24.



Belle Jardinière. U.S. Military nurse’s uniform, ca. 1916. Wool twill. ©The Museum at FIT, Gift of Margaret Lawson, 84.55.1.

With designers like Paul Poiret and Jean Patou off at the front, woman designers such as Gabrielle Chanel, Jeanne Lanvin, and Jeanne Paquin advanced. Wartime fashions by Chanel and Lanvin, among them, two rare examples of early Chanel archives—a silk jersey blouse from 1916 and a hat from Spring–Summer 1917, both of which will be shown in the United States for the first time—reveal how these designers, as well as women of all classes, adapted to wartime conditions. Wartime fashions reflected a new practicality with the rise of the skirt suit, the introduction of pockets, and the use of “sportswear” textiles like jersey.

Women’s changing roles necessitated this new practicality. With eight million French men away at the front, women replaced men in many positions. Fearing the advance of women’s suffrage along with a host of other freedoms and expectations, the

French government did not provide official uniforms for jobs in the public service. Women wore their own dresses and skirt suits along with armbands or hats to signal their status. Women who went into nursing bought their nurse’s uniforms ready-made or had them tailored according to specifications. One such example of a 1916 U.S. military nurse’s uniform purchased at Parisian department store La Belle Jardinière will be on view. Factory workers initially wore their own garments, until the government finally agreed to allow women to wear work overalls for their own safety. Women’s efforts to



Anor Marvel Bertuleit, U.S. Army Nurse Corps, ca. 1918. Silver gelatin print. Private Collection.

wear clothing that was appropriate and safe to work in incited fierce public debate around gender, social class, and emancipation. The exhibition offers rich examples of these uniforms as well as a striking collection of photographs of women who have styled themselves for their work as letter carriers, chimney sweeps, tramway drivers, and other positions traditionally held by men.

Fashion was a lightning rod for wartime anxiety: soldiers took note of what women wore, commenting even on the black-clad widows. “The tension between the fashionable aspects of mourning dress and the expected behavior of women in mourning was aggravated by the war,” according to Maude Bass-Krueger, “as mourning etiquette was forced to simplify during the war, men feared that women would forget them or replace them too quickly.” Satirical magazines and trench newspapers caricatured women’s fashions for being either too frivolous or too “masculine.” Postcards sent back and forth from the home front to the trenches heightened the contrast between the two worlds. Unlike the caricatures, which contrast the fashionability of women at home against the misery of the French soldier, one of the most popular genres of postcards depicted a strikingly different kind of woman: simply dressed and patiently waiting for her soldier to arrive, this “good” woman wrote letters and dreamt about her absent lover. A fascinating collection of these postcards, revealing the horrors and loneliness soldiers faced at the front as well as their intense longing for the companionship of women, will be on view.

In addition to the carefully selected garments and the range of documentation on view, *French Fashion, Women, and the First World War* provides rich contextual material illustrating tensions within the couture industry during the period, notably the major strike of 1917 by fashion house workers; the idealization and criticism of nurses and their uniforms; changes in mourning etiquette; the efforts of the couturiers, during wartime disorder, to protect and promote their interests abroad; and the suffrage movement, which advanced in the United States and Britain immediately following 1918, but stalled in France, where women did not gain the right to vote until 1944.

About the Book

French Fashion, Women, and the First World War will be accompanied by a lavishly illustrated catalogue published by Yale University Press in collaboration with Bard Graduate Center. In addition to Maude Bass-Krueger and Sophie Kurkdjian, editors of the volume, contributors include Margaret Darrow (Dartmouth College), Michele Majer (Bard Graduate Center), Jérémie Brucker (Université d’Angers), Susan Grayzel (Utah State University), and Johanne Berlemont and Anaïs Raynaud (Musée de la Grande Guerre de Pays de Meaux). The 375-page book will be available in the Gallery and at store.bgc.bard.edu.



Champot. Suit jacket and skirt, ca. 1915. Silk velvet, fur trim. ©The Museum at FIT, P84.3.1.

About Bard Graduate Center

As the leading research institute in the United States dedicated to the study of decorative arts, design history, and material culture, Bard Graduate Center and its Gallery have pioneered the study of objects as a means to better understand the cultural history of the material world. Offering experiences for scholars, students, and the general public alike, Bard Graduate Center is built on multidisciplinary study and the integration of research, graduate teaching, and public exhibitions.

Since its founding in 1993, it has established a network of more than 400 alumni who work in leading museums, universities, and institutions worldwide to advance new ways of thinking about material culture.

In celebration of its 25th Anniversary, Bard Graduate Center is presenting a series of exhibitions and events that showcase the institution's groundbreaking research and approach to the study of tangible 'things.' Beginning in fall 2018 and continuing through 2020, the 25th Anniversary celebration includes exhibitions on a diverse range of subjects, including *Agents of Faith: Votive Objects in Time and Place*; *French Fashion, Women, and the First World War*; and *Eileen Gray: Designer Artist*, an in-depth examination of the work and contributions of the iconic modernist designer and architect, presented in collaboration with the Centre Pompidou, Paris. Other initiatives during the anniversary years will also advance research and scholarship, recognize leaders in the field, present engaging programs for the public, and foster a new generation of students and scholars. bgc.bard.edu.

Gallery Programs

Lectures, gallery talks, and conversations are offered in conjunction with the exhibition. For more information, please call 212.501.3011 or e-mail public.programs@bgc.bard.edu.

Exhibition Tours

Group exhibition tours are offered Tuesday through Friday between 11 am and 4 pm and Thursday until 7 pm. Reservations are required for all groups. To schedule a tour, please call 212.501.3013 or e-mail tours@bgc.bard.edu.

Bard Graduate Center Gallery is located in New York City at 18 West 86th Street, between Central Park West and Columbus Avenue. Gallery hours are Tuesday and Friday through Sunday 11 am to 5 pm; Wednesday and Thursday 11 am to 8 pm. Suggested admission is \$7 general, \$5 seniors and students; people who identify as disabled and their caregivers always pay as they wish.

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