

### **ELIZABETH KECKLEY**

Keckley was born into slavery in 1818 in Virginia. As a young girl, she was sent to work for various members of her owner's family in Virginia, North Carolina, and Missouri, suffering harsh treatment and rape that resulted in her becoming pregnant at age fourteen. By 1847 she was working for the Garland family in St. Louis. Facing financial difficulties, the Garlands became dependent on Keckley's talents as a dressmaker to rise out of debt. Her reputation for fine-quality clothing grew, and after a few years she was able to earn enough money to purchase her freedom.

In 1860 Keckley moved to Baltimore and then settled in Washington, DC, where she quickly and astutely set up shop, completing commissions for Mrs. Robert E. Lee and Mrs. Jefferson Davis. Within a year, she was recommended to Mary Todd Lincoln, who had just arrived at the capital. The two women immediately hit it off, and Keckley became the official White House modiste and confidant of Mrs. Lincoln while still maintaining her shop. In 1868 Keckley published Behind the Scenes: or, Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House, considered one of the most candid and poignant of narratives of an enslaved person. The book included details about the Lincoln family that, while never disputed, were considered controversial, and Keckley was forced to leave the capital. She accepted a teaching position at Wilberforce University in Ohio (the first black-owned and -operated college) and passed on her skills to a number of hopeful designers. —PS



above: Elizabeth Keckley (American, 1818-1907), about 1861

opposite: Elizabeth Keckley, dress made for Mary Todd Lincoln, about 1861, Smithsonian National Museum of American History, bequest of Mrs. Julian James, 1923, 70138





# GABRIELLE CHANEL

#### Fashion passes; style remains.

Throughout her career, Chanel created fashion that liberated women to pursue modern, active lifestyles. She learned to sew in an orphanage run by nuns, where Chanel was educated after the death of her mother. She began her fashion career as a milliner in 1910, opened a couture house in Paris in 1912, and soon added shops in the seaside resorts of Deauville and Biarritz with financial backing provided by wealthy male lovers. Her early work featured dresses and garments made of wool jersey, a stretchy, utilitarian fabric typically used for men's undergarments, not for fashionable clothes. She closed her establishments in 1914 with the onset of World War I.

Reopening her businesses in 1919, Chanel designed simple, practical clothing with styles pared to essentials, to be worn in a relaxed manner that defined modernity. She drew inspiration from sportswear for tennis, swimming, and golf for her daytime designs and borrowed elements of menswear for her androgynous, tailored suits that appealed to young women entering the workforce—and to wealthy clients intrigued by youthful styles that suggested an aura of "deluxe poverty." In the 1920s, Chanel's short, slim, and shimmering evening dresses were the essence of Parisian chic. —PBR

left: Gabrielle Chanel (French, 1883-1971), evening dress, 1939, for Chanel, Kunstmuseum Den Haag, 1003192

opposite left: Gabrielle Chanel, evening dress, about 1925, for Chanel, Kunstmuseum Den Haag, 1023330

**opposite right:** Model in a dress by Gabrielle Chanel, 1926, for Chanel, photo by Edward Steichen





# JEANNE PAQUIN/CALLOT SOEURS



Although once overshadowed by male couturiers Charles Frederick Worth and Paul Poiret, Jeanne Paquin emerged in recent scholarship as a major force in fashion of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The daughter of a physician, Paquin found employment managing the atelier of Maggy Rouff (pp. 57-59). In 1891 she opened, in partnership with her husband, the House of Paquin and became the first major female couturiere in Paris. The house quickly expanded and eventually employed 2,700 people. She blended tailoring, dressmaking, and drapery in exquisitely designed and constructed garments with details that added comfort and practicality. Her designs spanned day to evening wear in response to changing lifestyles, and she was attentive to the needs of clients that included European royalty, aristocrats, socialites, and courtesans. In 1900 Paquin was asked to organize the fashion section at the Exposition Universelle in Paris. In 1913 she received the Légion d'honneur, becoming the first female designer to receive that prestigious accolade from the French government. In 1917 the Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture, the organization that oversees couture designers of Paris, appointed Paquin its first female president.

Other female-led couture houses soon followed. In 1895 the four Callot sisters—Marie, Marthe, Régine, and Joséphine, the daughters of a lacemaker and an artist—founded the fashion house of Callot Soeurs. It was renowned for the artistry and superb craftsmanship of its designs. Like Lucile Ltd. and Jenny (pp. 36–37 and 46–47), Callot Soeurs cultivated an extensive clientele in the United States. Early in her career, Madeleine Vionnet (pp. 48–49) worked for Callot Soeurs as the head of the atelier and credited the sisters' influence on her later work. —PBR

left: Evening dress, about 1920–24, for Callot Soeurs (French, active 1895–1937), Kunstmuseum Den Haag, 322376

opposite left: Evening dress, about 1925, for Callot Soeurs, Kunstmuseum

opposite right: Jeanne Paquin (French, 1896–1936), dress, 1921, Kunstmuseum Den Haag, 0322364





# MADELEINE VIONNET

#### I don't know what fashion is. I make clothes I believe in.

Madeleine Vionnet's pioneering experiments with the drape and movement of fabric set the tone for fashion in the twentieth century. Often referred to as an "architect among dressmakers," Vionnet established an enduring new model for the relationship between dress and the female body. She began her career under the English court dressmaker Kate Reilly and later refined her tailoring skills with French couturieres Callot Soeurs (pp. 42-43) and Jacques Doucet. By the time she opened her first atelier in 1912, Vionnet had become a masterful designer and a technically rigorous seamstress. She had also developed an interest in freeing the female form from the highly structured, corseted garments of the previous decades.

In the 1920s Vionnet famously perfected the bias cut, a method of cutting a textile diagonally across the grain. This technique allowed fabric to drape across the body and move with the wearer, creating an elegant silhouette reminiscent of ancient Grecian costume. Vionnet's sensuous designs rendered in luxurious fabrics were suggestive of the bodily landscape beneath, instantly shifting the expected silhouette for women's evening wear. Those designs became a hallmark of Vionnet's oeuvre and a staple of the aesthetic of early Hollywood. Though Vionnet is less well known today than some of her peers, her artistry remains an influence on fashion, as designers continue to mimic her construction methods in clothing that celebrates the female body. —LM

opposite: Models in gowns by Madeleine Vionnet (French, 1876–1975) for Vogue, 1930, photo by Edward Steichen

right: Madeleine Vionnet, evening dress, about 1930-31, Kunstmuseum Den Haag, 0393991





# ADELE SIMPSON

### I don't make clothes for a woman to make an entrance in. She has to live in them.

Simpson was born in New York City, the fifth daughter of Latvian immigrants. In 1924, after completing studies at Pratt Institute, she secured the position of head designer at Seventh Avenue outlet Ben Girshel, and then later at Mary Lee. After designing under her own name, she bought Mary Lee and renamed it Adele Simpson, which she helmed for four successful decades. Best known for her stylish, comfortable clothing, Simpson specialized in what she called "realistic" fashions. She promoted the use of coordinating separates that could take a wearer from day to night, which became a favorite of active working women everywhere. Long before the cotton T-shirt became ubiquitous, Simpson was known as the designer who "took cotton out of the kitchen." In 1953 she was named winner of the Cotton Council's Cotton Fashion Award for her innovative use of the fabric in cocktail dresses—a development that helped pave the way for the material to become a twenty-first-century fashion staple. —PS



**opposite:** Model Beverly Johnson in an ensemble by Adele Simpson (American, 1904–1995) with Van Cleef & Arpels diamond accessories for *Vogue*, 1974

right: Adele Simpson, dress, about 1947-53, Kunstmuseum Den Haag, 0321922

## ELSA SCHIAPARELLI



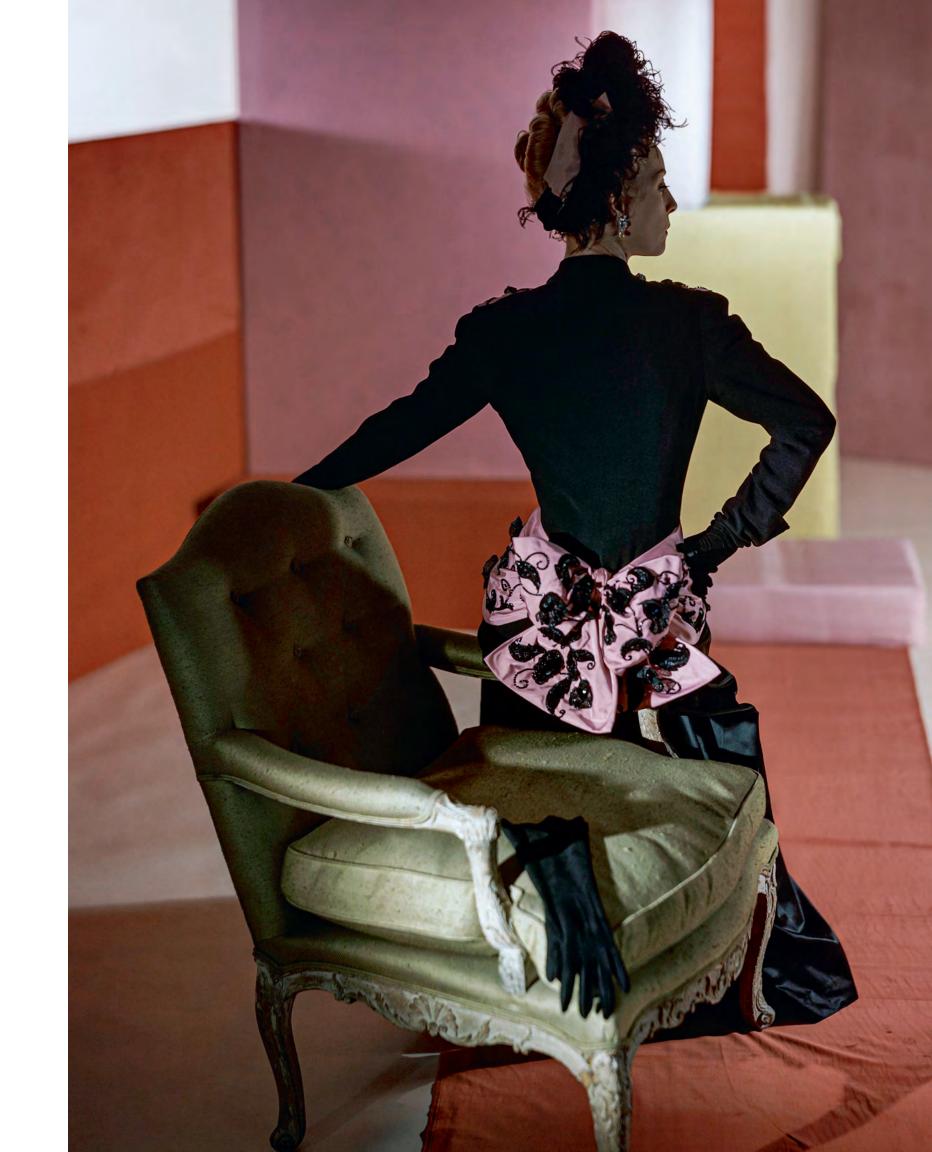
### Schiaparelli is above all the dressmaker of eccentricity. Jean Cocteau

Many consider Schiaparelli to be one of the most influential designers between the World Wars, along with her great rival Gabrielle Chanel (pp. 38-41). Schiaparelli was born in Rome; her mother was from an aristocratic family, and her father was a scholar and library director. After a brief marriage in the early 1920s, Schiaparelli was introduced to an artistic circle in Paris that included Francis Picabia, Man Ray, and Marcel Duchamp. With few resources and a young daughter to support, Schiaparelli designed a gown for her friend Gabrielle Picabia that caught the eye of the leading French designer Paul Poiret, who became a friend and supporter. By the late 1920s Schiaparelli had produced knitwear and sportswear with designs inspired by Cubism, Art Deco, and Surrealism. She collaborated with major avant-garde figures such as Salvador Dalí (a lobster evening dress worn by Wallis Simpson) and Jean Cocteau (a jacket with embroidery by Lesage based on a sketch by the artist).

In 1935 Schiaparelli opened the Schiap Boutique in Paris, where she created and sold some of her most imaginative works, including the Circus collection of 1938, in which runway fashion became theatrical spectacle. In 1940 Schiaparelli left Paris for New York. After the war, she returned to Paris and produced collections into the early 1950s but was unable to adapt to changes in taste and closed her couture house in 1954. —PBR

left: Elsa Schiaparelli (Italian, 1890-1973), dress from the Circus collection, 1938, Kunstmuseum Den Haag, 1058927

opposite: Model in a dress designed by Elsa Schiaparelli, 1947



## ROSE MARIE REID/ CAROLYN SCHNURER

Along with Tina Leser, Rose Marie Reid and Carolyn Schnurer were instrumental in evolving swimwear styles from the saggy, itchy wool tunics of the early 1900s into functional, fashionable sportswear designed for active, stylish women. The trio also created a range of beautiful, practical resort wear that helped define the emerging American Look of the mid-twentieth century. Reid in particular worked hard to ensure that the fit, comfort, and functionality of her athletic swimwear maintained a sense of glamour. Her infrastructure, underwiring, boning, and other techniques are still used in lingerie and swimwear development today. Schnurer and Leser focused on creating a range of suits that could be adjusted and adapted to a wide range of body types, looking to cotton as their material of choice. The swimwear of these designers frequently appeared in magazines such as Vogue, Harper's Bazaar, and Life, and with them, fashion editorials began to adopt a new style of playful fashion photography. Each designer was an excellent entrepreneur and shrewd innovator who went on to receive numerous accolades. —PS



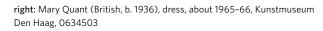
**right:** Tina Leser, swimsuit, late 1950s; Rose Marie Reid (American, 1908–1978), swimsuit, about 1962; Carolyn Schnurer (American, 1908–1978), swimsuit, early to mid-1950s, Collection of Jimmy Raye, Salem, Massachusetts

# MARY QUANT

### It wasn't me or Courrèges who invented the miniskirt anyway—it was the girls in the street who did it.

Long touted as the inventor of the miniskirt, Quant is much more than a raised hemline. Born in London, she opened her boutique, Bazaar, in 1955 on the ground floor of the home she shared with her husband on the King's Road in Chelsea. The self-taught Quant rejected the highly structured styles and techniques of high-end couturiers, relying on her eye and her sensitivity to an evolving generation coming out of postwar England. Her alteration of popular patterns allowed for the birth of the shift dress and the miniskirt, both of which were made famous by supermodel Twiggy and adored by bohemians and the trendsetting Chelsea Set alike.

Quant's clothes championed evolution, liberation, revolution, and female independence. Using bold colors, odd materials (she used PVC for both tunics and shoes), and redesigned shapes, she worked to revitalize a world struggling to move forward. Her innovations didn't end with the miniskirt: one of the first celebrity designers, she was her own best model; she built a cosmetics empire that streamlined everyday cosmetic application; and licensing her name allowed for total penetration into the consumer market. It is estimated that by the end of the 1960s close to 7 million women had a Mary Quant product in their homes. Her designs proved to be a major foundation for the Swinging Sixties, and to this day they look like they just walked off the runway. —PS



opposite: Model in an oilskin outfit by Mary Quant, London, 1963



DIANE VON FÜRSTENBERG

#### My definition of beauty is strength and personality.

Diane von Fürstenberg, fashion powerhouse and stalwart of female empowerment, built her brand on bold, easyto-wear clothing for the modern, self-assured woman. In 1974 Fürstenberg created a garment that would seal her status as a fashion icon and industry mogul: the wrap dress. Constructed of form-fitting jersey and available in a dizzying array of colors and patterns, the timeless, flattering design felt equally at home in the office or a nightclub. Likening the dress to traditional, single-garment costumes such as the toga or kimono, Fürstenberg noted that what set it apart was the use of jersey, a clinging fabric that intrinsically adapts itself to the wearer's form. This flexibility and ease catapulted the dress into a symbol for women's liberation and has to this day remained a staple in women's wardrobes. Fürstenberg insists the intent behind the wrap dress was to inspire self-assurance: "It is about freedom and power and confidence . . . It is really all about empowering women, and I hope that is my legacy."  $-\mathsf{LM}$ 



opposite: Diane von Fürstenberg in her own dress at a screening of Andy Warhol's film *Flesh for Frankenstein*, New York, 1974







## CAROLINA HERRERA



### I don't get my inspiration from books or a painting. I get it from the women I meet.

Herrera grew up amid wealth and privilege in Venezuela and understood well the world of couture, sometimes even stepping in to help the designers of her own clothes get a fit or look just right. She began her career in fashion in 1965 as a publicist for the Italian designer Emilio Pucci. She appeared on the International Best-Dressed List in 1972 and was elected to its Hall of Fame in 1980. In 1981 she started her own company at the behest of her friend Diana Vreeland, the fashion arbiter and former editor in chief of Vogue. Herrera's house specializes in elegant ready-to-wear garments that look, feel, and fit like couture. She has dressed Jacqueline Kennedy, Nancy Reagan, and Michelle Obama and is a favorite of film stars such as Renée Zellweger. Herrera opened her flagship store on New York's Madison Avenue in 2000. In 2008 she was honored with the Geoffrey Beene Lifetime Achievement Award from the Council of Fashion Designers of America. —PS

**opposite**: Carolina Herrera (American, b. Venezuela, 1939) poses with her designs, New York, 2014

**left:** Carolina Herrera, dress, 2016, PEM, Gift of Susan Esco Chandler, 2018.34.60



## IRIS VAN HERPEN



#### I try to sense where "today's" woman is.

Iris van Herpen has stood at the forefront of contemporary, experiential haute couture since the debut of her first collection in 2007. Her innovative and often physics-defying designs worn by models of all ages effectively altered modern thinking about the definition of couture—how it is made and who gets to wear it. Van Herpen achieves her futuristic visions through the successful union of cutting-edge technologies such as 3-D printing and the use of wildly unusual fabrics, metal, and printed plastics. Her pieces are constructed using superb craftsmanship rooted in the couture tradition, while her process

capitalizes on her fascination with nature, resulting in designs that manifest as sculpture rather than clothing. Van Herpen continues to break new ground, designing not for the retail market but instead for select clients that include private collectors and museums. Revolutionizing the way the world sees haute couture, and reminding us that it is truly a form of engineering, van Herpen created a style of dress that reflects our present moment by marrying advanced technology with traditional design philosophy. —PS

opposite: Model in an ensemble from the Ludi Naturae collection by Iris van Herpen (Dutch, b. 1984), 2018

above: Model in a dress from the Wilderness Embodied collection by Iris van Herpen, 2013