



(above) 1.7: Beaux ball gown attributed to Marie Jean "Rose" Fortin, 1760s, with permission of the Royal Ontario Museum. ©OM

(opposite) 1.8: "Coffre à l'Indépendance ou le Triomphe de la Liberté" (Independence or the Triumph of Liberty), c. 1778. Colored print. Photo: Gérard Bot. Musée de la coopération franco-américaine, Bercy-Seine, France. Photo credit: RMN Grand Palais Art Resources, NY

With the Terror at an end, some observers expressed the hope that peace would return to Europe and "Paris will be what it was, what it must be, the rendez-vous of nations, the homeland of fashions, of taste, of intelligence, of politeness, of arts, letters, and sciences, the modern Athens."²¹ Peace obviously did not return, although under Napoleon's empire a new group of courtiers dressed in silk, as Paris did become, in a sense, the "capital of Europe."²²

The Ancien Régime and the French Revolution have been subject to repeated reinterpretations over the years and centuries, but within the world of fashion, the tendency has almost always been to celebrate "the sweetness of life before the Revolution." Napoleon III's consort, the Empress Eugénie, for example, deliberately





1.9. Robe à la française, c. 1780, France. Collection of the Kyoto Costume Institute, photo by Tara Kogan.



(left) 1.10. Jean Paul Gaultier, spring/summer 1998 haute couture collection. Photo © Guy Martinon.

(below left) 1.11. Jean Paul Gaultier, spring/summer 1998 haute couture collection. Photo by David Laundy/Gamma Liaison via Getty Images.

(below right) 1.12. Marie Antoinette à la Rose, 1785. Vierge-Labrousse, Marie Louise Elisabeth (1755–1842). Musée National de Châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon. Photo by Fine Art Images Heritage Images/Getty Images.





(top left) 1.17. The Empress Eugénie, 1854. Franz Xaver Winterhalter (1805–1873). Oil on canvas. Purchase, Mr. and Mrs. Glass von Billewitz Gift, 1979 (1979.401). The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image copyright: The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source: Art Economy, NY.

(top right) 1.18. "La belle Mathématis" Mante de marbre et Zéphyr-Pied (1914). Illustration by George Ballou. Image courtesy of Fashion Institute of Technology/ SUNY FIT Library Special Collections and College Archives.

(bottom) 1.19. Costume designed by Adrian and worn by Gladys George in the MGM film Marie Antoinette (1938). The Museum at FIT, 70.6.21. Photograph: The Museum at FIT.



styled herself after Marie Antoinette. Later, others also looked back nostalgically at the Ancien Régime, and eighteenth-century aristocratic style exerted a powerful influence on elite women's fashion. Hollywood would also build a mythic image of Marie Antoinette, dressed in gowns by Adrian.

In the twentieth century, fashion professionals began to draw connections between fashion leadership under the Ancien Régime and the glorification of the haute couture as the uniquely Parisian epitome of high fashion. During the 1930s, couturiers turned away from easy-to-copy modernist styles to embrace elaborate historicizing looks. Elsa Schiaparelli, for example, recalled the splendor of the Sun King with her luxurious "Apollo" evening cape. The Ancien Régime came into fashion even more strongly in the late 1940s and 1950s, when designers such as Christian Dior and Pierre Balmain created dresses with names like "Versailles," "Marie Antoinette," and "Evening in Paris."

(below left) 1.20. Elsa Schiaparelli, "Apollo of Versailles" cape. Winter 1938–1939. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, USA. Image copyright: The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source: Art Economy, NY/Inage.

(below right) 1.21. Model Renée Friton photographed at Versailles, wearing Dior's "J'ai des Marguerites" gown. Christian Dior, spring/summer 1954 collection. Photo by Willy Maywald, 2014. Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGE, Paris.





(above left) L.43: Model wearing Christian Dior's "Palais de glace" dress, spring/summer 1957 haute couture collection, Librairie, outside Paris Louvre library, 1957. Photographed for *L'Espresso* magazine's article "Bright young things in Paris." Photo: Mark Shaw/eyenragns.com.

(above right) L.44: A mid-revolt dinner dress by Chanel, photographed in the view being Paris courtyard, Cour de Rohan, in 1955. Photograph: Mark Shaw/eyenragns.com.



and Emanuel Ungaro. The French clothes were opulent, the New York styles simple, but the contest quickly centered on the different styles of presentation.

The fashion shows took place at the theater at Versailles, the setting of so many fashion photographs. The French productions were lavish, although *Women's Wear Daily* called the sets "so tacky they weren't even camp," adding that "only the clothes of Dior, St. Laurent and Givenchy were strong enough to survive the spectacle." By contrast, the Americans had a minimal presentation (partly by accident) and their models, many of whom were African American, "knew how to move in the clothes."⁷³ The French press agreed that the American mannequins were "the true stars of the show," which was "applauded by everyone."⁷⁴ It was increasingly possible to believe, at least in New York, that the city might one day be more than just the capital of American fashion. Milan was also rising rapidly in both influence and sales.



(above left) L.45: Jacques Fath, fall 1947 collection, presented by models Louise and Bettina (left), M.M.C., Palace Galleries, Richard Dornier—(John Lipton's) Galleries Museum—Parisienne de photographs.

(above right) L.46: Jacques Fath, for Joseph Stiglitz, 1952. Image courtesy of Fashion Institute of Technology/UNY FIT Library Special Collections and College Archives.

Nevertheless, the 1980s also saw the growing success of Paris fashion, with the revival of Chanel under Karl Lagerfeld, the establishment of Christian Lacroix's couture house, and the flourishing of a new generation of Paris designers from Jean Paul Gaultier to Claude Montana. When Philippe de Villiers, Secretary of State for Culture and Communication, was asked where the haute couture fit within French culture, he replied: "It is a machine to dream and to create. The Haute Couture is part of the patrimony of France and, as such, must be protected and supported. Fashion also belongs to history and the history of costume is the ambassador of cultural feeling." He also agreed that *couturiers* (i.e., stylists or ready-to-wear designers, not *couturiers*) were "ambassadors of French culture."⁷⁵

The 1990s were a more difficult period for Paris fashion, with strong competition from New York and Milan. When French periodicals referred to Paris as the capital of fashion, they often did so in relation to foreign designers in Paris. This could be flattering to a French sense of importance. In 1991, for example, the French press reported on a young Californian, Lloyd David Klein, who, "full of audacity, dreams of conquering Paris, capital of fashion."⁷⁶ On the other hand, an article "Pretty Woman Chez Pierre Balmain" began with scare tactics: "One of the last temples of elegance

1.32 Small Landmarks Reflecting
1995. David LaChapelle



couture!" demanded a headline. "The Americans have never accepted that Paris is the capital of fashion," complained Jacques Mouclier. "However, the numbers are there. There are 2,400 journalists at the ready-to-wear collections in Paris, compared to 600 in New York, 900 in Milan, and 500 in London."³³

"Is Paris Still the Capital of Fashion?" asked *Le Figaro*. The new schedule of fashion shows, putting New York in January (before London, Milan, and Paris) rather than, as

formerly, in April, was troubling to many French people. But Didier Grumbach, the new president of the *Chambre syndicale de la Fédération française de la couture*, *du prêt à porter des couturiers et des créateurs de mode*, insisted that this would help to "separate the problem of fashion shows from that of orders." According to Grumbach, "Paris has always been the capital of fashion, but not where one takes the most orders." By contrast, "Foreign brands . . . produce and distribute what they create. . . In Paris, a collection is defined by its creativity. In New York and Milan, a collection needs to please the buyers."³⁴

In 2010, two years after the global economic crash, *Le Figaro économique* warned that it was necessary to "act quickly if Paris, so-called capital of fashion, is not to be out-distanced by New York or Milan."³⁵ On the other hand, journalists also suggested that Paris might once again become the "capital of fashion for men, too."³⁶ After all, the Italians had a huge commercial success with menswear as well as with women's fashion, while American-style sportswear was the clothing of choice for young people around the world. When French fashion leaders gathered in 2014, they agreed that

1.33 Christian Dior, spring 2014
venue, Louvre, Paris. Photograph
David Berni for Bureau Betak.

