Hat - The Pagan Collection

Object: Hat
Place of origin: Paris (designed)
London (sold)
Date: Autumn 1938 (made)
Artist/Maker: Elsa Schiaparelli, born 1890 - died 1973 (designer)
Materials and Techniques: Woven sea-grass, metallic trimming
Credit Line: Given by Lady Alexandra Trevor-Roper
Museum number: T.427-1974
Gallery location: In Storage

Public access description
Pink and green flies and beetles crawl at random over this woven grass hat. This example of wearable surrealism was part of Elsa Schiaparelli's Autumn 1938 collection. She called it her 'Pagan Collection' and used natural themes - blossom, leaves, and insects. One necklace was made from clear plastic set with metallic insects like those on this hat.

Schiaparelli was famous for her creative fashion designs and unorthodox, free-thinking approach to detail and decoration. Her skill was in taking everyday garments and using unexpected details and trimmings to make them extraordinary. She was inspired by the work of her friend the artist Salvador Dali, who regularly included crawling insects in his 1930s Surrealist pictures.

Descriptive line

Physical description
Wide-brimmed hat made from white woven sea-grass. Grosgrain hatband, trimmed with pink and green metallic beetles and other insects.

Museum number
T.427-1974

Object history note
Worn and given by Lady Alexandra Trevor-Roper

Historical significance: Important example of one of Schiaparelli's surrealist hats from a significant period of her creativity

Photo of this on pg. 70 of Surreal Body.
Although hat shape looks like 1950s, it may well be earlier, as bugs are very similar to those on Rhodoid bug necklace from Fall 1938 collection and would have been more in step stylistically then.

Jan G. Reeder, Curator, The Costume Institute, The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Taken May, 2011, Compiled September, 2011

Historical context note
"April 28: Schiaparelli's collection for Autumn 1938, "A Pagan Collection", features Botticelli-inspired and spring themes: leaves, apple blossoms, wild strawberries and insects. There are also doll-sized hats, three dimensional petal and leaf embroidery, and a flat collar necklace of Rhodoid set with insects." (Blum, p.297)

The above-described necklace, now in the Metropolitan Museum, New York (gifted by the Brooklyn Museum) can be seen on pages 170-171 of "Fashion and Surrealism", which clearly shows how similar the insects are to those scattered over this hat. The hat was acquired as 1950s, however, the label in this hat is from the Schiaparelli London salon, which closed in 1939. This confirms beyond a doubt that the hat dates from the 1930s and is a rare example of headwear from this significant and relatively little-known Schiaparelli collection.

- Daniel Milford-Cottam, 2011

Bibliography

References:

URL

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O133550/the-pagan-collection-hat-elsa-schiaparelli/