Evening ensemble - The Circus Collection

Object: Evening ensemble

Place of origin: Paris (made)

Date: February 1938 (made)

Artist/Maker: Elsa Schiaparelli, born 1890 - died 1973 (designer)

Materials and Techniques: Silk twill, fastened with cast metal buttons

Credit Line: Given by Miss Ruth Ford

Museum number: T.395&A-1974

Gallery location: In Storage

Public access description

Four handmade, cast metal acrobat buttons leap from this bright pink fitted jacket by Schiaparelli. The heavy buttons are attached to the cloth with industrial slide hooks behind providing the actual fastenings. Such novel buttons and fastenings were a trademark of Schiaparelli’s work. The circus theme of the garment is further emphasised by the woven silk twill fabric, with its repeating design of rearing horses in two shades of blue, with metallic thread manes, saddles and feathered headdresses.

The jacket was worn with a dark purple crêpe evening dress with a draped culotte hem, which can be worn either as a normal skirt with both feet through one opening, or with one foot through either opening.

The ensemble was part of Schiaparelli’s Circus collection of 1938. When she presented the collection, it was described as the most riotous and swaggering fashion show that Paris had ever seen. The clothes featured many novelty effects and motifs, including prancing horses, performing elephants, spotlit acrobats, tents and clowns.

Descriptive line


Physical description

Evening ensemble consisting of silk twill dress and jacket.

Museum number

T.395&A-1974

Object history note

Ref. Paris Centre de Documentation de Costume, Schiaparelli, Album no 19, 1938, p.41 (although jacket has a different pattern)

Given by Miss Ruth Ford and worn by her mother

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Placement of fabric animates the horses — appearing to dance around the jacket. There are also horses on the interior collar facing. Horses very similar to ornamental buttons on maroon Circus Collection jacket with marble decoration

Photo Notes:

Button detail: method of closure – spiral hooks, cast metal buttons

Button closure detail: hardware with hooks attaching acrobat ornamental buttons with screws

T.395A-1974

Dhoti dress (Purple crepe evening dress with Dhoti Skirt)

Could be worn both as a conventional skirt (legs through bottom opening) or as a dhoti (legs through side holes)

Photo Notes:

Right leghole: conventional hem Schiaparelli’s hems rarely looked like this

Covered zipper: has a placket and hooks and eyes that cover it up

Jan G. Reeder, Curator, The Costume Institute, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Taken May, 2011, Compiled September, 2011

URL

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O15665/the-circus-collection-evening-ensemble-elsa-schiaparelli/