Public access description
To many contemporaries the sinister black skeleton evening dress with its padded representations of human bones was an outrage - an offence against good taste. Although otherwise in elegant harmony with the prevailing lines of late 1930s evening wear, the skeleton dress is so constricted that it became a second skin and the imitation anatomy sat defiantly proud of the fine matt silk surface. Schiaparelli exaggerated the usually delicate trapunto quilting technique to make enormous 'bones' - the design was stitched in outline through two layers of fabric, then cotton wadding inserted through the back to bring the design into relief on the front. The shoulder seams and right side are closed by bold plastic zips.

Descriptive line

Physical description
Black evening dress and petticoat of silk crêpe, with exaggerated trapunto quilting technique to make enormous 'bones'. The design was stitched in outline through two layers of fabric, then cotton wadding inserted through the back to bring the design into relief on the front. The shoulder seams and right side are closed by bold plastic zips.

Museum number
T.394&A-1974

Object history note
Ref. Paris Centre de Documentation de Costume, Schiaparelli, Album no 19, 1938, p.128

Featured in the "Circus Collection" of summer 1938, presented February 1938

Donated by Ruth Ford

Photo Notes:
Top bodice front: exposed zippers at the shoulder
Bodice front: shows the ribs and exposed zipper at the left
Neck interior back: shows the interior of the spine (padded). The spine facing has a rough and
Bodice back: vertebrae and ribs
Back hip: seductive end of tailbone. Does have a waist seam. Below waist seam there is a triangular insert ending at the coccyx (very Jamesian). Two side zippers (4 zippers total on dress).

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/O65687/the-skeleton-dress-evening-dress-elsa-schiaparelli/