Dress and belt - Delphos

Object: Dress and belt

Place of origin: Italy (made)

Date: 1909-1920 (designed)

Artist/Maker: Fortuny, Mariano, born 1871 - died 1949 (designer)

Materials and Techniques: Pleated silk, trimmed with glass beads, and hand-sewn

Credit Line: Given by Miss Irene Worth

Museum number: T.193&A-1974

Gallery location: In Storage

Public access description
The multi-talented Mariano Fortuny was a painter, theatre designer, photographer, inventor and scientist. He is, however, best known as a creator of extraordinary fabrics and clothes. In 1909 he registered his design for the 'Delphos' dress. It was based on the Ionic version of the Greek classical garment the chiton. Actresses such as Isadora Duncan and Sarah Bernhardt were among the first to wear them. Other women began to adopt them as informal tea gowns but later they became more acceptable for evening wear outside the home.

In a letter dated 25 June 1923, the sculptor Hamo Thornycroft described his daughter in a pure white Delphos dress: 'Elfrida...looking lovely in her silk Greek clinging dress - white, against the light of the Jap lanterns outside'. She gave her dress to the V&A in 1982.

The dress consists of narrow widths of pleated silk hand-sewn into a tube. Fortuny pleats make the fabric elastic so that the simple, flowing gown clings to the contours of the body. He used Venetian glass beads at the hem and sleeves as decoration and also to weight the fine silk so that it draped elegantly. All the gowns were hand-made and adjusted to the body with concealed drawstrings on the shoulder and bodice. The silk was dyed in a vivid range of colours including olive green, apricot, pale blue, and black stencilled with gold fleur-de-lis.

Descriptive line
Silk 'Delphos' dress trimmed with beads, and belt, designed by Mariano Fortuny, Italy, 1909-1920

Physical description
Apricot silk Delphos 'Chiton' dress with tunic overlay hanging in extended points. Pleated silk trimmed with Venetian glass beads, and hand-sewn. With belt.

Museum number
T.193&A-1974

URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O88649/delphos-dress-and-belt-fortuny-mariano/