

## Fashion Inspired by Works of Art

By Kathleen McShane

Fashion designers look to various sources for inspiration: nature, literature, music, and, yes, works of art. A stroll through an art museum could well trigger the glimmer of an idea for a piece of clothing or fashion accessory. Here are a few instances where the visual arts inspired top fashion designers.

**Elsa Schiaparelli** (1890-1973), Italian designer and rival of Coco Chanel, collaborated with the Spanish Surrealist **Salvador Dalí** (1904-1989) to create several dresses, including the Lobster Dress (1937). Cecil Beaton famously photographed Wallis Simpson, wife of Edward VIII, wearing the Lobster Dress. The Lobster Dress was inspired by Dalí's *Lobster Telephone* (1936), made for the British poet Edward James, an avid collector of Surrealist art.

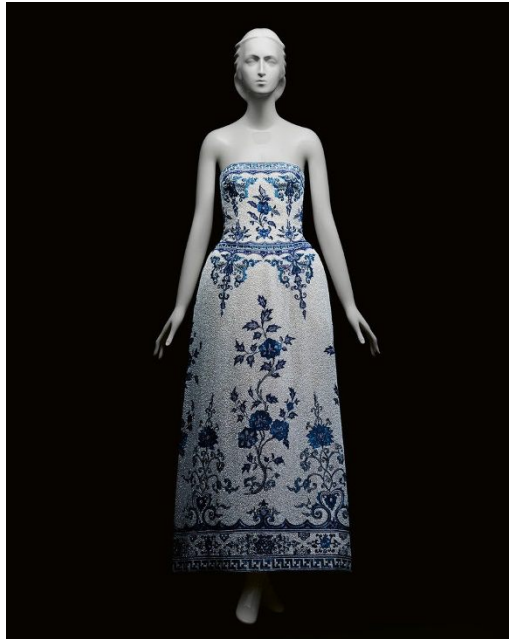


Schiaparelli also created the Shoe Hat (1937-38), inspired by a photograph that Dali's wife, Gala, had taken of him wearing a woman's shoe on his head.



Although the German fashion designer **Karl Lagerfeld** (1933-2019) claimed that art and fashion were distinct, perhaps, according to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, even antithetical, his creations frequently exhibit influences from the decorative and fine arts.

The photo below shows a Chanel beaded gown designed by Lagerfeld for the spring/summer 1984 couture season. Lagerfeld described the dress, which is entirely beaded, as “right out of a portrait by Sargent.”



The Chanel gown's blue and white porcelain motif is evident in John Singer Sargent's *The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit*, 1882. *Lagerfeld: The Kaiser of Fashion* (2019) is available for rent on Amazon Prime.



**Christian Dior** (1905-1957) believed that, after women, flowers are the loveliest thing that God has given the world. Floral themes were often incorporated into his designs. Several artists influenced the French designer, including Degas, Manet, Seurat, and Monet. Dior's Spring/Summer 1949 Trompe L'Oeil collection included a dress inspired by **Claude Monet's** painting, *The Path through the Irises* (c. 1914-1917). The Miss Dior dress was covered in hand-embroidered flowers.



**Dame Vivienne Westwood** (1941-2022), who has been called one of Britain's most influential designers of the 20th century, was primarily responsible for bringing punk and new-wave fashions into the mainstream. An unabashed fan of 18th-century art, Westwood's designs frequently took inspiration from such artists as Jean-Honoré Fragonard, Thomas Gainsborough, Francois Boucher, and Jean-Antoine Watteau.

**Jean-Antoine Watteau** (1684-1721) was a French Rococo painter whose works often reflect the fashion of his day. In particular, the women in his paintings are frequently attired in the then-popular sack dress, with long flowing pleats at the back. The dress was so associated with Watteau that it is often referred to as the Watteau dress. An example is shown in Watteau's 1721 *Gersaint's Shop Sign*.



Vivienne Westwood recreated the Watteau dress with a distinctly modern look, an off-the-shoulder asymmetric design, and a polonaise pouf on one side only.

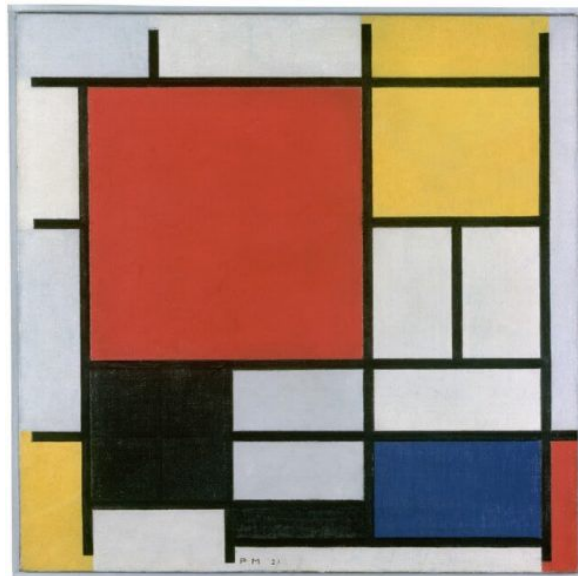
Westwood's Watteau was part of her 1996 *Les Femmes* collection.



If you want to learn more about Vivienne Westwood, the documentary *Westwood: Punk, Icon, Activist* (2018) is available to rent on Amazon Prime.

**Yves Saint Laurent** (1936-2008) is considered among the foremost fashion designers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The French designer (and one-time assistant to Christian Dior) once said, "I believe the work of a couturier is very much like that of an artist. I have constantly found inspiration in the work of contemporary painters: Picasso, Matisse, Mondrian."

The influence of **Piet Mondrian** (1872-1944) is particularly striking in Saint Laurent's 1965 geometric dresses, a series of dresses that paid homage to the Dutch painter. Several dresses from Saint Laurent's 1965 Mondrian collection are shown below, along with Mondrian's 1921 *Composition with a Large Red Plane, Yellow, Black, Grey, and Blue*.



**Pablo Picasso's** 1937 *Portrait of Nusch Éluard* is reflected in a jacket from Saint Laurent's 1979 Autumn/Winter collection.



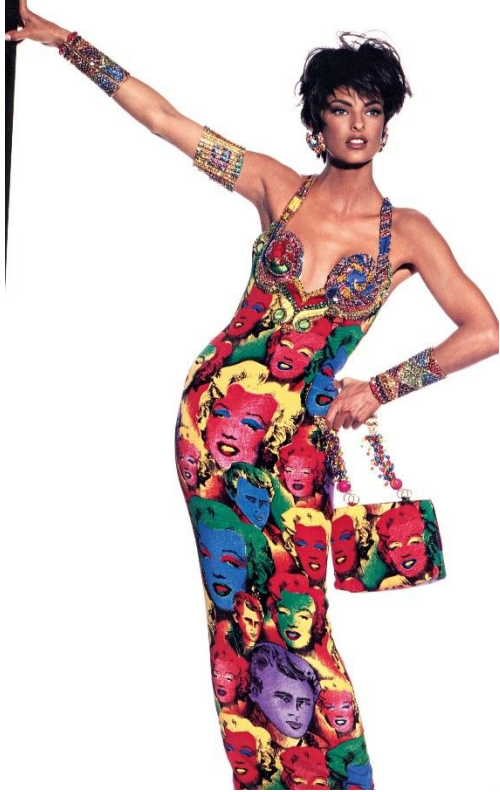


In 1981, Saint Laurent again took inspiration from a French artist, this time **Henri Matisse** (1969-1984). Matisse became fascinated with the blouse after he received one as a gift. Known in Romanian as simply “i.e.,” the blouse was featured in several Matisse works portraying women in the peasant garment. Matisse’s 1940 *La Blouse Romaine* appeared in Saint Laurent’s collection. Saint Laurent became the first designer to incorporate the traditional Romanian piece of clothing into his clothing line; it would later be adopted by other designers, including Oscar de la Renta.



**Gianni Versace's** passion for the American pop artist **Andy Warhol** (1928-1987) helped fuel the former Warhol dresses that were part of his Spring/Summer 1991 collection. The Italian designer (1946-1997) fused Warhol's silkscreen portraits of Marilyn Monroe and James Dean to create the gown below.





**Alexander McQueen** (1969-2010) cultivated a reputation as Britain's baddest bad-boy designer early in his career. His Spring/Summer 2013 resort collection showcased the influence of the Austrian artist **Gustav Klimt**. Gustav Klimt (1862-1918) was an Austrian symbolist painter whose work focused on the female body, frequently in an erotic manner. The picture below features a dress from McQueen's 2013 resort collection alongside Klimt's *Portrait of Adele Bloch Bauer I* (1907), also known as *Woman in Gold*. Bauer's husband, a Jewish industrialist and art patron, commissioned the portrait. The painting was completed during Klimt's "Golden Phase," reflecting the influence of the Byzantine mosaics in the Basilica of San Vitale in Ravenna.



The documentary *McQueen* (2018) provides more insight into McQueen's life and controversial career. It is available to rent on Amazon Prime.

Valentino's 2017 Spring/Summer fashion show took inspiration from the Renaissance artist **Hieronymus Bosch** (c. 1450-1516) and his fantastical triptych painting, *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1490-1510). Valentino's head creative director, **Pierpaolo Piccioli**, teamed up with punk designer Zandra Rhodes to create a collection of diaphanous dresses with a color palette of apple green, blush pink, and robin egg blue reminiscent of the colors in Bosch's work.

