



THE
Roaring
TWENTIES

and

THE
Swinging
SIXTIES



The Museum at **FIT**

Presented by the School of Graduate Studies

THE
Roaring
TWENTIES

THE
Swinging
SIXTIES

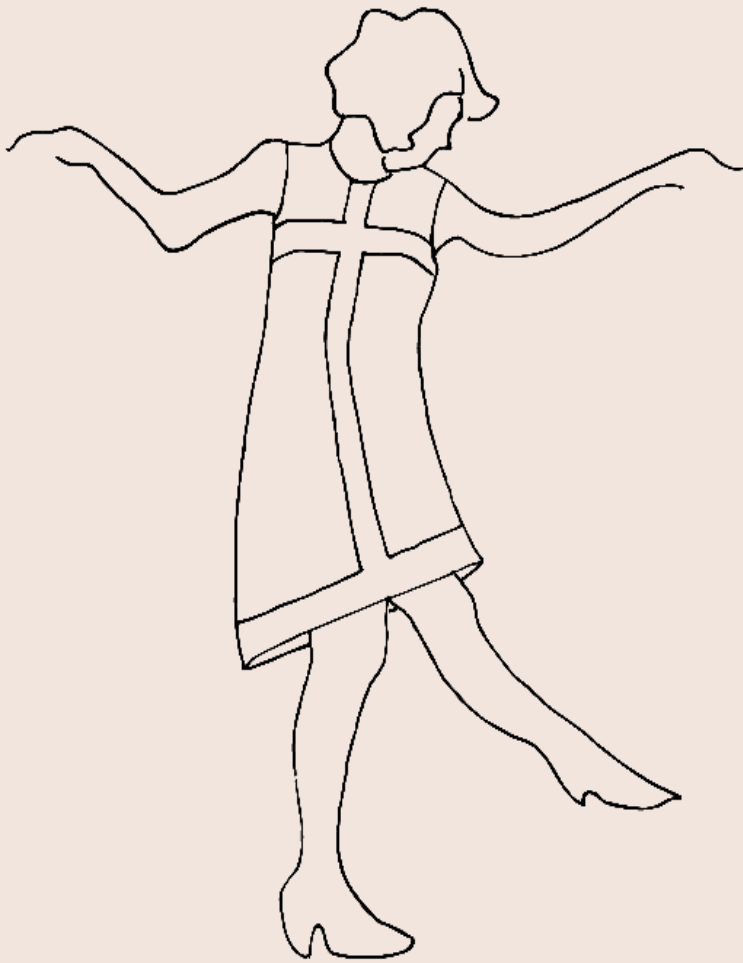


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explores the revolutionary spirit of the 1920s and 1960s. These decades saw dramatic political and social changes resulting in new definitions of the “modern woman” and societal norms, which impacted women’s fashion in remarkably similar ways. Dresses not only had similar silhouettes but textile design and color palettes as well. The silhouettes of these dresses were straight and tubular, mirroring each decade’s infatuation with the young female body. The shortened hemline allowed the body more movement, which coincided with new dance crazes set to music such as jazz during the 1920s and, pop and rock and roll during the 1960s. During both decades, Western fashion was heavily influenced by non-Western cultures and appropriated motifs that appealed to Western ideas of fantasy and escapism in tumultuous times. Art styles, such as Cubism and Art Deco during the 1920s and Op Art and Pop Art during the 1960s, influenced fashion as well, giving dresses bold color palettes. Technology was also a major theme in dress design as both decades saw dramatic scientific developments.

Fashion during these two periods embraced the changes that were affecting society and culture, changes that are similar to those occurring today. Movements for social justice and racial and gender equality characterized 2020. ***The Roaring Twenties and the Swinging Sixties*** invites you to consider the effects of contemporary social movements, protests against oppression, and societal unrest on current fashions, and how today’s style changes might compare to those that occurred during the 1920s and 1960s.



Twenties Nostalgia

During the 1960s there was a resurgence of 1920s styles, both in the form of new designer fashions and in the wearing of vintage garments. Designers like Norman Norell were directly inspired by 1920s designers such as Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel. His 1965 collection showed tubular dropped-waist silhouettes on models with 1920s styling. Modern art of the 1920s also served as inspiration, most notably in Yves Saint Laurent's "Mondrian" collection. While designers of the 1960s pushed the boundaries of 1920s style, most obviously by raising hemlines even higher, this resurgence speaks to the many parallels between the two decades.



Yves Saint Laurent dress
Multicolor wool jersey, Fall 1965, France, 95.180.1, Gift of Igor Kamlukin from the Estate of Valentina Schlee.
© The Museum at FIT



Norell Evening dress
Wool crepe, circa 1965, USA, 70.43.21, Gift of Lauren Bacall.
© The Museum at FIT



Dreams and Discontent

The 1920s and 1960s were both periods of major change in society that brought about a zeitgeist of revolution. Due to racism, oppression, and lack of opportunity, many African Americans moved to Northern cities during the 1920s. Harlem, New York became a creative hub, and the Black writers, artists, and musicians there had a profound influence on American culture and political thinking. The echoes of the Harlem Renaissance, and the fight for social equality, were heard during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. The high visibility of this movement characterized the years between 1954 and 1968, which saw an intensive period of organization and highly publicized protests against segregation and discrimination.

These were also decades of changing gender roles and increased women's rights. In the year 1920, women's suffrage was ratified in the United States. This statute did not apply to all women, and less than half of women eligible to vote did so in the 1920 election. Nevertheless, activists for women's rights persisted. The 1960s saw a high point of its continuation, this time with a focus on the sexual revolution. With the approval of the oral contraceptive pill in 1960 by the FDA, as well as evolving societal perspectives on sex, women expanded their control over their bodies and questioned established gender norms.

Young people of the 1920s and 1960s protested against the status quo and embraced alternative lifestyles. During the 1920s, the Prohibition of alcohol fueled illegal bootlegging and underground speakeasies. During the 1960s, a youth-led counterculture movement experienced reevaluation of social values. This included public disapproval of the Vietnam War, as well as experimentation with drugs.



Protestors at the March on Washington
August 28, 1963, Washington, D.C. © Photograph by Rowland Scherman, courtesy of the photographer.



Obsession with Youth

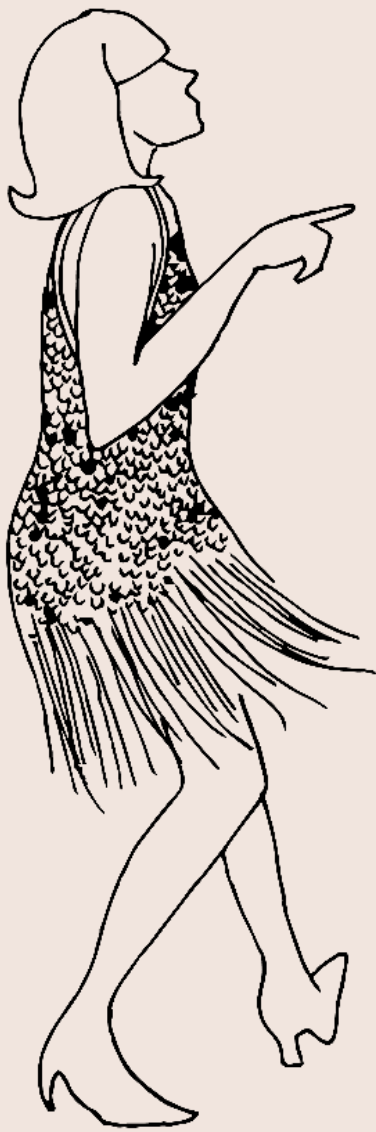
The 1920s and 1960s saw a growing divide between older and younger generations. Fashion and beauty placed a heavy emphasis on embracing the new and modern, which was reflected in an obsession with youth. These styles embodied the rebellious nature of the younger generations, empowering them to look and behave in ways that stood in stark contrast to their parents' generation. Hemlines grew shorter and bodies were shaped by undergarments – girdles in the 1920s and improved versions with spandex in the 1960s – to flatten out curves and look slender and preadolescent. In addition, hairstyles fashionable among youth during the 1920s and 1960s starkly contrasted with the mature styles of previous decades. Trends in cosmetics placed emphasis on large, child-like eyes. Mainstream society and the media often misunderstood youth culture and critiqued young people for dressing solely for entertainment and shock value, rather than appreciating their style as a form of expression and liberation.



Strouse, Adler Co. girdle
 Brocaded satin, elastic, and ribbon, circa 1920, USA, 85.80.21, Gift of the Strouse, Adler Company.
 © The Museum at FIT



Vanity Fair lingerie set
 Printed nylon and elastic, circa 1960, USA, 75.183.69, Gift of Mrs. A.S. Guimares.
 © The Museum at FIT



Music Mania



Josephine Baker dancing the Charleston at the Folies Bergère
1926, Paris France, Photograph by Stanislaw Julian Ignacy Ostrorog. Waler
(1863-1929), Public Domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

Changes in silhouette also encouraged freedom of movement, which was emphasized by the popularity of the new music of the time, jazz during the 1920s, and pop and rock and roll during the 1960s. These rebellious music styles mirrored the revolutionary nature of the decades. Teenagers' adoration for rock and roll and pop during the 1960s was controversial to their parents and viewed with the same distaste that jazz inspired forty years prior. The popular dances of the time also concerned the older generations as they were seen as sexually suggestive and immoral. This distaste for the new music and dances was heavily influenced by their origins in Black culture. The criticisms of teen dance crazes of the 1960s were reminiscent of those mounted against 1920s jazz dancing. In 1965, one teen wrote *Seventeen* magazine in their defense: "After all, wild dances

were'n't invented in the sixties (what about the Charleston?)" Dance clubs in both decades were popular places to showcase dresses with fringes and sequins, and metallic shoes that emphasized the dancers' movements.



Yves Saint Laurent dress
Beaded silk organza with sequins, Fall 1969, France, 74.107.8, Gift of Lauren Bacall. © The Museum at FIT



Experimentation within fashion during the 1920s included a conspicuous borrowing from other cultures. This occurred most notably through the lenses of Orientalism, the appropriation and mixing of Far and Middle Eastern designs, and Primitivism, which draws upon the perceived uninhibited creativity of “uncivilized” or untrained cultural groups and individuals. Western “discoveries” of non-Western cultures, such as the 1922 excavation of King Tutankhamen’s tomb in Egypt and Jacqueline Kennedy’s 1962 goodwill trip to India and Pakistan, helped bring these cultural trends into fashion, and the counterculture movement of the 1960s bolstered their popularity.

Milgrim evening ensemble
Multicolor silk crinkle crepe and silk, 1924, USA, 74.72.12, Gift of Mrs. Jerome Kilty © The Museum at FIT

A Milgrim evening ensemble from 1924 features cloud motifs that reference this symbol of abundance and good fortune in Chinese culture, and the printed gold designs of a 1968 Christian Dior evening dress reference the embellished metallic borders on Indian saris. In both decades, appropriative styles such as these that incorporate design elements from other cultures reflect both current events and larger issues of European imperialism, colonialism, and cultural hegemony.



Christian Dior evening dress for Bonwit Teller,
Sheer pink silk with gold metal chain, faux pearls, and coins, 1968, France, 80.58.5, Gift of Ms. Beatrice Renfield. © The Museum at FIT

Cultural Appropriation



Mode and Modernity



Callot Soeurs evening dress
Black silk crepe de chine, gold lamé, and tulle, circa 1924, France, 2002.87.1 © The Museum at FIT

Fashion of the 1960s saw similar influence from contemporary technology, by way of new synthetic materials, as well as in futuristic Space Age style. The expansion of space exploration inspired designers like Pierre Cardin to imagine fashion for a quickly-approaching future. Also, as during the 1920s, straight dress silhouettes acted as ideal canvases for fine art movements like Op Art and Pop Art.



Pierre Cardin dress
Black wool crepe with polished steel plates, 1968, France, 87.92.4, Gift of Ms. Liz Bader. © The Museum at FIT

The Roaring Twenties and The Swinging Sixties

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Sarah Brennan-Martin

Becca Carr

Ellen Greene

Rachel Gumbrecht

Alyson Katz

Summer Lee

Kenna Libes

Alina Osokina

Michelle Ralph-Fortón

Kristen Robinson

Geena Roth

Anna Lucia Uihlein

Diane Walker

Emily Werner

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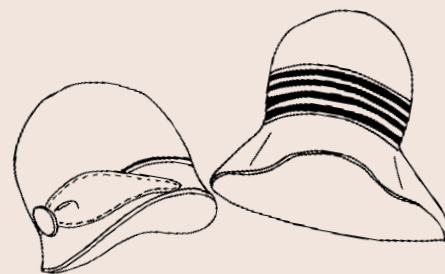
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TWENTIES SIXTIES



The Museum at 

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Front page photography credits

Top, from left to right:

1. *Paul Poiret evening dress*, gold silk chiffon with beads and rhinestones, circa 1926, France, P83.5.9. © The Museum at FIT
2. *Mila Schön dress*, linen, circa 1968, Italy, 78.208.2, Gift of Mrs. Donald Elliman. © The Museum at FIT
3. *Ensemble*, blue, grey and turquoise wool knit and navy wool crepe, circa 1929, France, 2009.15.7. © The Museum at FIT
4. *Mila Schön dress and coat*, blue double-faced wool, 1968, Italy, 78.208.1, Gift of Mrs. Donald Elliman. © The Museum at FIT

Bottom, from left to right:

1. *Adige evening shoes*, satin and leather, circa 1965, France, 78.55.95, gift of Dorrance H. Hamilton. © The Museum at FIT
2. *Palter De Liso for Bonwit Teller evening shoes*, silk satin, leather and rhinestone, circa 1930, USA, 2006.61.1, gift of Judith Neuman-Cantor and Beth Neuman. © The Museum at FIT
3. *Hellstern & Sons evening shoes*, leather, 1920s, France, 2018.51.1, Gift of Thomas A. Buckley. © The Museum at FIT