

Art deco and fashion



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‘ Fashion Signifies a change of time, a cultural turn, and (wo)men’s roles in a society.’[Choose a period of time in history and use examples to discuss this statement. You can focus on a specific society in your discussion.]

The Art Deco Movement and the influence of France on how it effected women’s fashion during the early 20th century.

Introduction

Throughout history the field of fashion has gone through many changes which has been shown in society.

This essay will explore the above statement and will be done by focussing in at a particular period of time which is the beginning of the twentieth century, just after the first World War. For this discussion the role of the Art Deco movement and the influence of France will be addressed to see whether fashion does in fact reflect changes in a society. This essay will begin by a brief overview of the Art Deco movement, exploring the influence of the Jazz Age, the impact of France and haute couture as well as World War Ones effect on the employment of women and see whether fashion reflected this new era. But first one needs to start by defining Art Deco.

The Art Deco Movement

Art Deco can be simply defined as a style ‘ *characterised by precise and boldly delineated geometric shapes and strong colours ...*’

OxfordDictionaries. com

The Art Deco movement 1909-1939 was a period of time which pushed through new developments in architecture, film, photography as well as fashion and textiles. Its influence permeated throughout society promoting a new aspirational lifestyle. In addition to this, the Art Deco movement coincided with World War One which took place 1914-1918. The combination of the war and the rise of the Art Deco movement continued to prove favourable to the fashion industry as peoples attitudes were more open to change.

The Influence of Haute Couture On Women

One of the examples of the Art Deco movement effecting attire of women was via fashion illustration and as a result the clothing magazines were gaining in popularity as beautiful publications to look at. Furthermore, entering the twentieth century meant that women felt more empowered to embrace new styles, important in pushing the boundaries further in clothing design. Haute Couture was a style which reflected this — led by France. Haute Couture is an expensive, made to measure, hand made way of making garments. It gained attraction and popularity of upper class women due to the new appeal of the Parisian fashion houses. The Parisian designers transformed the fashion scene away from the nineteenth century by designing easy to move tailored garments.

The Art Deco scene and Haute couture inadvertently caused women's dress to undergo a further radical change. Women were finally able to leave behind the restricting corsets and petticoats, this meant they were able to dress in less time and not need a help of a maid thus becoming more

independent. This was because the designers were making garments which were slimmer with narrower silhouettes as well as flatter busts. Fashion designer Paul Poiret is one prominent example of the first Parisian fashion designer who excelled in haute couture by creating slimmer dresses therefore leaving behind the corset. Lussier, author of the book, Art Deco Fashion, talks about a collection Paul Poiret created in the early 1900's when art deco interior was in demand, Lussier described the collection as a '*harmonious passage towards the straighter silhouettes*' and then goes on to say it was a '*revolution to fashion*'.

At the beginning of the century, as women were becoming more confident and empowered, they began to participate more in sporting activities. This created an additional demand for practical easy to move garments. Parisian designers experimented with functional designs and cuts. In France, as in Europe, horse riding became popular and the races became social events which meant that the upper class customers took this opportunity wear these styles. Furthermore, french haute couture houses sent models to races showcasing their clothes. The combination of the Art Deco movement and haute couture both originating in France – influenced the rest of Europe and parts of the world to cement its reputation as the style capital which meant all women felt compelled to copy.

World War One

As World War one began in 1914 it interrupted fashion and stopped it from being the main focus for women. Although, it is said that the economy at the time effects fashion perhaps the economic hardships of the war helped keep

the androgynous style in. The iconic french fashion designer Coco Chanel began designing during the war creating tailored outfits and comfortable styles which linked with the simpler looks of practical work wear making it more acceptable. Her designs were a sign of the times as more women began working, taking over the jobs of men who went to fight. Before the war in France at the start of the 20th century women were already joining the work force however when the war took place ' female employment grew by 20%'[Online] Available at: [http://europeanhistory. about. com/od/womeninworldwar1/a/womenworkww1. htm](http://europeanhistory.about.com/od/womeninworldwar1/a/womenworkww1.htm)[Accessed: 26 November 2014]

As the Art Deco movement was a period of time which saw the great war, the war was a factor that brought significant changes to fashion when it ended. Women became competitive for jobs when men returned. They wanted to be noticed, therefore, they experimented with their appearance with the use of make up and hair styles. After the war, haute couture continued to rise due to the influence of French Vogue within it the promotion of the Parisian designers such as Coco Chanel, Jean Patou and Elsa Schiaparelli. These Parisian designers showcased casual easy movement sport clothing and ' *Chanel and Patou consistently championed the shorter length* ' - (Valerie , 19 pg,).

During the 1920's, cosmetics and their new role in defining beauty, which Vogue encouraged, became all the rage amongst young women. The moon manicure was featured as something really daring and was quickly copied - bringing nails to the focus like never before. Nail lacquer, mascara, and lipstick became popular ' *rouged lips, pencilled eyebrows and dangling ear-*

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rings ' (Lanver, 1964, p12) To add to this they cut their hair which was also a dramatic change to women's appearance, ' *The other thing that shocked elderly people was the zeal of the modern girl for cutting of her hair.* '

This description was what consisted of the heavily made up look which was apart of the ' flapper' style which is going to be explored further below within the jazz age.

The Jazz Age

A new exciting music style of jazz which originated from America after the war which was quickly embraced by France and its Art Deco credentials in the twenties up to The Great Depression. This ' Jazz Age' added ' *a unique combination of exoticism and modernity, which was at the core of the art deco movement* ' (Lussier, 2003, p1).

At this time it was uncommon for women to wear short garments however the Jazz Age sparked a new age of young women where they adapted shorter lengths as well the heavily made up look. It marked a time for change for a new way of lifestyle which consisted of nightclubs, dance mania and general promiscuity. Although the Jazz Age stemmed from America it became popular within Europe due to it offering a new exciting way of life especially after the gloom of being in a war. The Jazz Age can be marked as the starting point for women socialising freely, a new trend for women emerged and they became known as the ' Flappers'. The combination of the Jazz Age and the new styles of clothing coming from Haute Couture linked together to change women's role in society. The unstructured shorter styles of dresses were perfect to the dancing styles they adopted such as the

energetic ' Charleston' and the increased time required for socialising.

Overall, there was a general female emancipation. They ditched the elaborate up-do hairstyles and cut their hair short in blunt hair cuts.

The notoriety of the flappers and their lifestyle transformed the idea of women into something modern that allowed them to be independent and have freedom. It was a dream that eventually trickled down to all woman at the time.

Conclusion

To conclude, the above statement is correct. It has been shown how fashion goes hand in hand with changes to circumstances in the society it is in. By focussing on one period of time and place — one can see how women's fashion in the 20th century was affected by the Art Deco movement – in the influence of forward thinking designers who took on the long thinner silhouettes reflecting the new interior and exterior trends emerging in France. It also addressed the need for women to move more freely particularly starting with the upper classes and the need for more women wanting to participate sporting activities. It in turn influenced corsetry doing away with the restrictive corsets. The unexpected turn of events of World War One allowed women to break away from the traditional role of a women by having to adopt the simpler and practical lines of the Haute Couture designs of dress which now became more mainstream to them. The Jazz Scene coming over from New York was embraced by France and resulted in the iconic Flappers who wore strong make up colours echoed in palates of Art Deco. Their shorter hairstyles and endorsement of the loose unstructured

clothing had a knock one affect and was easily copied by the masses. By considering the above time period and looking over at the fashion at that time – one can say that fashion does signify a change in time, women’s role and its culture.

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