Chapter Two

Hybrid Modern

Since the eighteenth century, French fashion producers had to contend with an aesthetic theory that assigned them to the lesser category of a craft, not the more prestigious category of an art. One of their tactics in combating this assignation was claiming status as artists.¹ Twentieth-century couturiers and couturières positioned themselves as artists, patronized the fine arts, publicized their artistic influences, and called themselves “creators” to raise their status and prop up claims to property in their own designs. Despite some designers’ penchant for collecting avant-garde art and collaborating with avant-garde artists, most designers, and their publicity, focused less on their associations with cubism or surrealism than on their alignment with other decorative artists to revive the reputation of French luxury and decorative goods industries after the war, notably at the 1925 International Exhibition of the Decorative Arts held in Paris. In the 1960s, art historians relabeled much of what was called modern art in the 1920s “art deco,” after the name of the 1925 exhibition. Art deco emerged as an eclectic style, combining the traditional and the modern, the functional and the decorative, the familiar and the exotic, the fine and applied arts, even hand-crafted and machine-produced goods.² The exhibition itself promoted a kind of “hybrid,” or feminized, modernity. Art deco fabrics incorporated “exotic,” especially colonial, elements, while art deco fashion illustrations depicted modern women as youthful, nonmaternal, and active.
Artists/Creators

The founding father of modern couture, Charles Frederick Worth, dressed as an artist to raise the status of couturiers and to attest to his respectability as a man in what had, in the immediate past, been a female occupation. Although the best-known example of artistic dress in France is the Romantic and Bohemian refusal of fashion, the association between artists and bohemianism was in decline by the time Worth donned artistic attire in the 1860s. When Gwen John, an artist in her own right as well as being the sister of Augustus John, adopted an artistic appearance in the Belle Epoque, she assembled a mix of fashionable garments purchased at shops with apparel she designed and made herself, thereby signaling that she was aware, yet not a slave, of fashion. In the interwar decades, few couturiers or couturières followed Worth’s sartorial example. Although several couturières wore their own models at public events to publicize their designs, few of their models qualify as artistic in the bohemian sense. Even when Chanel’s spare chemise dresses and tweed suits were new and mildly controversial, they did not communicate either bohemianism or Worth’s extravagance.

Nevertheless, designers continued to patronize the fine arts. Worth and Paquin employed the Russian artist Bakst, better known for his fantastic stage designs for the Ballets Russes. Before the First World War, Jacques Doucet collected eighteenth-century art and acquired seminal works of modern art, including Les Demoiselles d’Avignon. Couturières were equally supportive of the fine arts. Jeanne Lanvin was among the small number of French collectors of Impressionist art. Poiret’s sister, Nicole Groult, who left her brother’s employ to show her own designs in 1912, was closely tied to art deco artist Van Dongen and Futurist artist Fuzito. Unlike her brother, she designed by subtraction, using decorative detail only to emphasize dress structure, which helps explain her success just as her brother was losing popular appeal in the early 1920s. Although her fashion house also ended in bankruptcy, this did not happen until well into the depression.

Many interwar designers stressed that they were influenced by the fine arts, and the fashion press repeated their assertions. Press commentary on Vionnet invariably mentioned her inspiration from classical art and her individual genius. Schiaparelli, who had encountered Italian futurists and French fauves and cubists in her adolescence, worked with surrealists Cocteau and Dali after settling in Paris. Fashion writers called her a “proponent of modern art.” She borrowed surre-
alistic elements for models, such as the scarlet fish wriggling on a bright blue bathing suit, handbags in the form of birdcages, and the famous hat shaped like a telephone.\footnote{Similarly, she absorbed the futurists’ interest in bright colors and startling color combinations. But she attributed her introduction of “shocking pink,” which she described as “bright, impossible, impudent,” to exotic locations in “China and Peru,” not the West.} The fashion press, which was not enamored of avant-garde art, was more interested in her “exotic” than in her surrealist influences. Likely their readers were similarly inclined.

Only two interwar couturières were practicing artists. Alix, later known as Mme Grès, had been a sculptor before she opened her couture house. Like Vionnet, she was influenced by ancient sculptures at the Louvre, though her austere designs drew more on the restrained lines of Roman statuary than did Vionnet’s flowing lines, which were inspired by Greek statues.\footnote{The fashion press, which was not enamored of avant-garde art, was more interested in her “exotic” than in her surrealist influences. Likely their readers were similarly inclined.} Alix was more successful than Sonia Delaunay, an abstract artist, which suggests that the fashion market was more open to representational art and classical style than to abstract art or clothes. Society magazines rarely wrote about cubism, and when \textit{Vogue} did, it was condescending: “After the total check of cubism in art, it is amusing to study its decorative possibilities for feminine costume.” Generally, the fashion press was more open to cubism in textiles, shawls, and scarves than in the construction of ladies dresses.\footnote{Conversely, society magazines regularly covered such representational artists as Van Dongen, known as “the most expressive painter of modern women.” Society magazines promoted the identification of fashion with some, not all, modern art. The men’s style magazine \textit{Adam} expressed the policy of qualified modernism succinctly: “A modern spirit, very up to date. . . . \textit{But no cubism or dadaism.”}}}

A more common way of linking couture to artistry was for designers to call their models \textit{créations} and label themselves \textit{créateurs}. When \textit{L’Officiel de la Couture et de la Mode} was founded in 1920, the subtitle was \textit{Organe de propagande et défense de toutes les industries de la nouveauté}. From 1924, the subtitle was \textit{Organe de propagande et d’expansion de l’art français}. For several years, it made frequent use of the terms \textit{création} and \textit{créateur}, even applying \textit{création} to models of the major \textit{confectionneurs} among their sponsors.\footnote{In the society and fashion press, photographs and drawings of designs by couturiers and couturières were captioned “Créations Jean Patou” or “Créations Jeanne Lanvin,” etc. Use of the word \textit{création} spread in response to couturiers’ uncertain property rights to their designs and models. Soon designers employed by textile manufacturers and under contract to...}
department stores adopted the nomenclature. This wholesale usage debased the term, causing couturiers to be more selective in their terminology. Schiaparelli refused to use the word, saying it “strikes me as the height of pretentiousness.” Yet she considered dress designing “an art, not an occupation.”

Finally, fashion arbiters taught that fashion was an art and dressing well was also “artistic.” Princesse Marthe Bibesco, a fashion writer, called it “an art that is movement, movement that supports countless industries; it is a methodical, minute and creative effort.” According to Bibesco, “native Parisiennes performed the service of being pleasing to observe.” (In her book, *Noblesse de Robe*, Bibesco acknowledged that couturiers could make a Parisienne of an Italian, an Argentine, a Greek or an Irish woman.) Vogue distinguished between women who treated fashion as an expression of their personality, or the “créatrices,” and those who limited themselves to existing types, or the “imitatrices.” Less socially prominent journalists, writing for more modest readers, simply declared that composing an ensemble was an art.

Efforts to educate everyone in the clothing business about the artistic nature of couture extended to new professional schools for women working in couture, where Daniel Gorin, director of a couture firm, instructed teachers that “couture proper . . . that is to say, creation,” is not just chic, “which by itself does not suffice.” Couture was “the beautiful” in a classical sense, having to do with harmony. It was “rare and different.”

**Art Deco Fabrics**

Poiret made three important contributions to art deco, two of which involved fabrics. First, Poiret’s travels introduced him to new methods of textile design. In the Belle Epoque, textile design had become fashionable among artists like Fortuny in Italy and the Wiener Werkstätte in Vienna. When Poiret traveled in Central and Eastern Europe, he discovered the Wiener Werkstätte, with its naturalistic style of woodblock fabric design. Impressed by the work he saw in children’s schools, he set up a school, L’Ecole Martines, for working-class teenage girls in Paris. Instructors took the pupils on excursions to parks and zoos and encouraged them to paint freely in watercolors. Large, naïve flowers were their favorite motif. Although Poiret closed the school after the Great War, he continued to commission designs from a few talented graduates. Textile producers imitated the naïve flower motif.

Second, Poiret employed artists of the stature of Raoul Dufy (1877–1943) to design fabrics. By 1910, when Poiret first hired him, Dufy had exhibited at major...
salons and galleries, been a member of the fauves movement, and experimented with cubism. He had encountered “l’art munichois,” the decorative style consecrated in Munich in 1908 and celebrated in Paris in 1910, when the entire ground floor of the Grand Palais at the Salon d’Automne was given over to the Exposition des Arts Décoratifs de Munich. At the Salon, Munich designers furnished and decorated a whole room, including wallpaper and window treatments. When Dufy decorated a pavilion for Poiret’s Thousand and Second Night extravaganza in the spring of 1911, it was in “Munich” style, with panels painted with bold flowers similar to Bavarian folk art. Around this time, Dufy was making woodcarvings to illustrate Guillaume Apollinaire’s “La Bestiaire ou Cortège de l’Orphée.” Flora and fauna would be recurring motifs in the fabrics Dufy designed for Poiret and later for Bianchini-Férier, a prominent Lyonnais silk firm. Working for Poiret until 1925 and for Bianchini-Férier until 1928, Dufy formulated the principles of modern fabric design: the use of vivid colors, clean lines, and an eclectic mix of traditional and exotic elements.

Textile producers contributed more to popularizing modern fabric design than Poiret did. Bianchini-Férier, a company founded in 1888 by three former employees of a large Lyonnais silk store, had a history of innovation in the mechanical weaving of luxury silks, the integration of production, and the elimination of commercial intermediaries by establishing outlets in Paris (1897), London (1902), and New York (1909) to deal directly with couture houses and other customers. One of the partners, Charles Bianchini, registered new fabric designs called “Poiret type” in 1911 and designs called “Dufy genre” after 1912. Although Lyonnais manufacturers traditionally employed local designers, Bianchini-Férier hired Dufy in 1912, provided him with a design workshop, and renewed his yearly contract until 1928. Dufy determined the style and quantity of designs he submitted; Bianchini examined and approved every design to be produced. From 1919 onward, Dufy commanded the annual sum of 2,000 francs for the “absolutely exclusive” right to his designs in dress and furniture fabrics. Although Dufy cut back on designing dress material in 1922, he designed furniture material until 1928. Meanwhile, Bianchini employed prominent art deco artists and illustrators, for example, Georges Barbier and Paul Iribe.

The silk industry, in conjunction with Lyonnais municipal authorities, mounted an impressive exhibit, “The Renaissance of French Art,” as part of the effort to revive French decorative arts after the Great War. In 1927, they subsidized the impressive Exhibition of the Art of Silk in Paris, which excluded traditional or copied
fabrics in order to introduce couturiers to new fabrics their designers produced. The organizers felt that the exhibition promoted closer collaboration with couture. The municipality of Lyon financed schools to develop skills needed in the silk industry, schools with courses—including ones for women—on “industrial design applied to textiles.” The Lyonnais Fine Arts School offered instruction on silk design that emphasized artistic training. Michel Dubost taught a master class, “The Flower as Applied to Decoration,” from 1918 until 1923, when he was hired by a prominent silk firm. François Ducharne installed Dubost and thirty-three associates in the capital to collaborate directly with couturiers. Breaking with the Lyonnais tradition of profuse, detailed flower motifs, largely due to his exposure to Japanese prints, Dubost set stylized flowers against an expanse of blank space. He published luxurious albums of prints of his designs on vellum paper with text by no less an author than Colette. His successor in the course on flowers in decoration, M. Durieux, was not as inventive, but he encouraged a modern approach, defined as more minimal and serene than art nouveau style. Durieux arranged class visits to Paris couture houses so that students could learn directly about couturiers’ needs and requirements. Dubost, Durieux, and their students and associates contributed to the vogue for silk prints with large, vividly colored flowers against a black background, prints that became “a part of the patrimony of Parisian haute couture.” Floral and plant motifs dominated silk print collections through 1931.

Although floral designs defined art deco textiles in the 1920s, geometric designs made headway from the mid-1920s. Here the Rodier firm, founded in 1853, made an impression on textile design similar to Poiret’s influence on fashion, insofar as Rodier introduced “exotic” elements into fabric design. Whereas Poiret was influenced by the impact of sub-Saharan art on cubism and by his travels in the East and Middle East, Rodier and a new generation of textile designers were shaped more by the texture, straight lines, and sober colors of North African textiles and the motifs of South Asian textiles they had seen at colonial exhibitions. As Elizabeth Ezra writes in The Colonial Unconscious, the French public between the world wars was “inundated with images of sub-Saharan Africa, the Mahgreb, southeast Asia, and the West Indies in books, film, advertising, and exhibitions.” By the 1920s, the French colonial policy of assimilation—which implied making French citizens of colonial subjects—was being challenged by the policy of association—which emphasized the cultural distinctiveness of each colony. Both of the operative policies were rhetorical devices that obscured a fun-

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damental contradiction: French domination over the colonies. Central to the dis-

course of difference between the metropolis and the colonies was the concept of

the primitive as opposed to the civilized, mediated by notions of the exotic as some-

thing that could be consumed and thereby domesticated. Textile manufactur-

ers and haute couture alike contributed to this consumption and domestication.

France already exported textiles to former colonies and contiguous areas in

North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia. One of the twelve branches of the

Lyonnais silk fabrique, or industry, known as Articles for the East, the Middle East,

and the Indies, supplied heavy cloths interwoven with silver and gold, scarves,

shawls, and handkerchiefs for Muslims “from Morocco to the Indies and as far as

China.” Annual business in this branch amounted to 40 million francs in 1919. In

the 1920s, as the silk industry faced challenges due to a fluctuating currency

and protectionist barriers in European and American markets, they put more em-

phasis on the colonial market. When crushing tariffs were imposed on silks dur-

ing the Great Depression, the fabrique relied even more on the colonial market.

By 1935, French colonies were taking 23 percent of its exports. Accordingly,
textile manufacturers were well represented among the exhibitors and were in-

spired by colonial displays at exhibitions.

As one of nearly three thousand metropolitan exhibitors at the national colo-
nial exhibition of 1922 in Marseilles, Paul Rodier wandered among the African

and Indo-Chinese colonial exhibits, taking notes on the composition and motifs

of colonial textiles. Unlike earlier colonial exhibitions, the colonial products on

display were not behind windows, with tiny labels, but spread out where the pub-

clic could examine and touch them. Like colonial exhibits at world fairs and ear-

erlier colonial exhibitions, there were disturbing elements of the “exhibitionary com-

plex,” or spectacles with live colonial subjects acting French scenarios about

primitive life, as opposed to their actual, hybrid kind of colonial experience, and

illustrating a racialized myth of progress whereby colonial administrators claimed
to be moralizing “brothers of different colors.”

Inspired by Indo-Chinese and North African textiles, Rodier blended wool

with silk or cotton, introduced color combinations borrowed from sub-Saharan

Africa, and included Indo-Chinese motifs in his next collection of fabrics. He

publicized the colonial theme in the names he gave to blends (“Phnom-Penh,”

“Tchin-Sou”) and prints (stylized South Asian flowers on “Djersador de

Mampikong”). In subsequent years, Rodier traveled to many colonies and es-
established workshops in Indo-China that, although directed by French artists, wove
in the native manner to ensure the primitive and exotic quality of the fabric. Textile reporters called him “the inspiration of fashion” and “a renowned creator of new fabrics.” In turn, Rodier and other textile producers called themselves “créateurs” and their products “créations.”

The 1931 colonial exhibition was held in Vincennes on the outskirts of Paris, a site “redolent of romantic associations as the home of marginal people exiled from Paris proper.” On site, the exhibition segregated the metropolitan section, which consisted of 42,000 square meters of commercial exhibits of goods produced for the French colonies, from the colonial section, visibly replicating the appropriately hierarchical economic relations between metropolis and colonies. Despite the intentions of the chief organizer, Marshall Hubert Lyautey, who wanted to avoid the carnivalesque aspects of previous exhibits, the exhibition required that “natives” (racialized colonials) wear indigenous clothing instead of the mix of European and local attire that they usually wore. Directors also demanded that natives demonstrate archaic techniques, rather than the combination of traditional and modern techniques they normally employed.

After the colonial exhibition in Paris in 1931, many fabric designers blended different textures, mixed black, brown, and beige colors in geometric designs, and named new blends and designs after colonial sites and events. The new fabrics soon made their way into couture collections. Marshall Lyautey had asked Georges Lepape (1887–1971) and other French artists to make sketches of colonial artifacts; Bianchini-Férier and other major silk producers wove or printed fabrics from these sketches. The silk firm Chatillon Mouly Roussel produced a silk print covered with animals and zigzags based on a Vera Schoukhaieff sketch. Coudurier, Fructus, et Descher launched prints inspired by Crozet’s Cambodian courtside sketches. Colonial motifs—as appropriated by French artists and designers—continued to be part of fabric collections through the 1930s.

Exposition des Arts Décoratifs, 1925

At the exposition, Adornment (Parure) was one of the sections. Almost all leading couturiers showed models in boutiques on the esplanade along the Seine, on the Alexander III Bridge, or on Poiret’s specially designed barges anchored along the river. “Being rather weary of the habitual shop windows of preceding expositions,” the designer Drecoll wrote, “we resolved to group all the chef-d’œuvres of couture into an interesting ensemble, which is why we built, beside the grand central stairway in the Grand Palace, a two-story display space.
composed of various salons, reception rooms, etc. The grand stairway sloping down to a runway would become a staple of fashion shows. Jeanne Lanvin’s prize-winning exhibit of an inanimate mannequin dressed in a Lanvin gown seated at a dressing table full of Lanvin cosmetics represented femininity and consumption in a theatrical manner. According to Tag Gronberg, this shop epitomized the fair’s motif of Paris as a fashionably dressed Parisienne. The motif recalled an earlier association of the Parisienne with Paris world fairs, notably, the enormous statue of La Parisienne above the entrance gate to the 1900 fair. However, the statue had been imposing and remote, unlike the human-scale and more accessible mannequin.

Before and after the exhibition, couturiers employed interior decorators and furniture makers, other groups seeking recognition as artists that also marketed to women. Vionnet, a successful couturière, used the opportunity of moving to new premises in 1923 to renovate a Beaux Arts building in a strikingly modern way. In her sales salon, furnishings were in complementary shades of pale gray, set on a white carpet flecked with black, and against walls covered with frescos by a symbolist painter whose depiction of women as strong and (some thought) cruel, aroused controversy. Newcomer Jean Latour redecorated his “sumptuous hotel in Louis XIV style . . . according to modern conceptions of a couture house,” conceptions that included a wide staircase of pink marble up to the second floor, where collections were presented in large rooms decorated in Louis XIV woodwork, with carpets, curtains, and walls in a “soft dull green enhanced with gold.” On the third floor, fitting-room walls were covered and furniture was upholstered in Rodier fabrics “in pretty shades of gray and golden brown.” Doucet, Jane Regny, Mme. Paquin, and other couture houses commissioned furniture from the leading art deco furniture designer, Jacques-Emile Ruhlmann (1879–1933), who tried to reconcile tradition and modernity and saw affinities between the art of the decorator and that of the couturier.

The art deco exhibition showcased modern design for shop premises. As one art critic wrote: “For the aesthetic of curves, modern art has substituted that of straight lines and angles; for ornamentation, the bare mass. . . . These principles should apply in architecture and interior decoration, including those of retail shops, all of which are affected by the mobility and fast pace of modern life. All should be ‘calm and sober.’ ” This alignment with modern décor raised some difficulties about the gender of modernity, which was usually cast as masculine. Fashion journalists drew analogies between modern decorative arts and modern
women (as represented in fashion illustrations), highlighting “the same simplicity of long lines.” Others found “the rigorously simple, geometrical, and unadorned style [of the displays] . . . too austere for elegant women of today. Whitewashed walls, bare floors, uncovered windows, and angular furniture are no setting for the life of a woman of the world.” General-interest magazines retorted that the Elegance Pavilion was less angular than other pavilions and included fewer modern and more feminine touches of pale blue and rose colors. One reporter called it “a harmonious home,” using the English word home in the text. The official reporter for the Adornment Group noted that presentation salons “most often borrowed their décor from styles of the past.” In short, the pavilion represented feminized, or hybrid, modernity. Something similar characterized much of modern fashion.

Tag Gronberg credits the International Exhibition of the Decorative Arts (and changes in regulations for building façades in 1923) with new investments in shop façades and show windows—and linking fashionable feminine allure to sales displays. Ghislain Wood considers the fusion of art deco with shopping and, in particular, women shoppers “the greatest legacy of Paris 1925.” Before and after the war, architects had been trying to “modernize shops” through better lighting and ventilation, wider aisles for customers to stroll through the merchandise, and spotlighted product displays inside the shop and in the show windows—in short, to make products visible and attractive to actual and potential customers. The 1925 exhibition, followed by three years of prosperity, encouraged these initiatives, until monetary problems stalled them in 1928. Luxury goods shops used “the clean lines” of polished steel and aluminum and mounted minimalist window and counter displays.

As a mélange of traditional and new elements, couture shop design, like the Elegance Pavilion, should be classified as hybrid modernity. Many couturiers renovated seventeenth- or eighteenth-century buildings using the harmonized colors and clean lines of modern décor. Couturiers and their publicists understood that “an ambiance of good taste and great luxury” mattered to their clientele and considered décor “an indirect kind of publicity . . . that operates by the association of ideas, spatial continuities.” Drawing on a nineteenth-century notion of bourgeois taste, they argued that bourgeois women responded best to older buildings and antiques. Jean Patou furnished his main sales room with forty-seven Louis XVI–style chairs but installed a “modern bar with mural mirrors” in his central fitting room.
Poiret’s support of artists extended to hiring academy-trained artists to illustrate his designs. Here his intervention was decisive. In 1908, Poiret commissioned Paul Iribe to create an album of Poiret dresses, and three years later, he commissioned Georges Lepape for a second album of fashion plates. Poiret’s art gallery, next to his couture house, displayed Lepape’s original plates, along with works by artist friends Pierre Brissaud (1885–1944) and Bernard Boutet de Monvel (1884 or 1891–1949). Although these albums copied fashion journal practices of including fashion plates, the term *album* referred to an art publication. Once again art was called upon to obscure an essentially commercial purpose. Influenced by Japanese prints, Iribe and Lepape foregrounded mannequins and used few props to set the scene. Both artists employed the *pochoire* technique of using several stencils, one atop the other, to build up a design layer by layer. The albums were printed on heavy vellum, and a thin opaque sheet protected each plate. The layering process and paper quality made these very expensive publications: forty and fifty francs apiece. Only 250 copies of Iribe’s and 1,000 copies of Lepape’s were printed. Albums by individual illustrators continued to promote haute couture for more than a decade, with a hiatus during the Great War. Even in the golden age of catalogs between the wars, couture houses preferred artistic albums—which were less original versions of Poiret’s prewar albums.

Despite their limited distribution, these lavish albums represent a fundamental break between the nineteenth-century tradition of fashion plates and the twentieth-century apogee of illustrated fashion magazines. French illustrators had submitted fashion plates to women’s magazines since the eighteenth century and to the new genre of fashion magazines since the nineteenth. At least as early as 1815, when a fashion periodical first employed the word *artistic* in its title, fashion illustrators aspired to be considered artists. In 1829, the first exhibition of fashion drawing was held. A group of painters who drew for the fashion press, several of them women, formed an association in 1880 to publish a large journal of “artistic fashions.” Fashion plate settings evolved from timeless landscapes featuring gardens and balconies to scenes from contemporary urban life, similar to impressionist paintings. However, many nineteenth-century illustrators were constrained by magazine style preferences and a teamwork approach that required individual artists to work only on layouts, or draw figures, or apply washes. Another constraint on individual artistic expression was the need to convey the de-
tails of the garment’s construction and the number and types of buttons and trim to serve the neighborhood dressmaker who copied the designs.  

Long allied with the genre of fashion magazines, fashion illustration was swept along by the surge of new publications after removal of the stamp duty in 1870 and of government authorization and financial bonds in 1881. In the following decade, developments in offset- and helio-gravure initiated the era of the modern magazine, with its increased visual content. These changes meant illustrated newsprint magazines could be produced and sold for as little as ten centimes and better quality paper versions for fifty centimes. In the 1890s alone, eighty-eight new women’s, fashion, and society magazines began publication (though there was much duplication and many of these publications were ephemeral). The modest fashion weekly appeared then. *La Mode Pratique* (1891–1939) was published by Hachette, which had a monopoly of the 1,081 railway bookstands in 1900. Circulation rose after the addition of a pattern per issue, notably in *La Petite Echo de la Mode*, which boasted 210,000 readers in 1893. A handful of publishers who maintained closer contact with the fashion industry than with the journalistic world controlled one-quarter of the new magazines. Publishers put out illustrated bimonthlies on paper thicker and shinier than the newsprint used by more modest fashion magazines. Pierre Lafitte, who published *La Vie au Grand Air* (1897), added a bimonthly titled *Femina* (1901–54). The prospectus read: “Elegance. Worldly Affairs. Fashion. The Home. Theaters. Sports, Music, Literature, and Art.” Because *Femina* ran more ads than other society magazines, it cost only fifty centimes per issue. Pierre Lafitte borrowed his advertising policy from Anglo-American magazines, with which he had many agreements. *Femina* also innovated in running photographs of socialites at the races, and soon at other sites where high society gathered, reflecting readers’ interest in what society ladies actually wore, not just clothes shown in the collections (fig. 7). This practice spread to other magazines and newspapers.

In this propitious context, Lucien Vogel, a former art student and son-in-law of the publisher of the major illustrated paper, *L’Illustration*, launched a monthly printed on thick matte paper that included several *pochoire* prints per issue. Vogel called upon academy-trained friends like Georges Lepape to collaborate on *La Gazette du Bon Ton*. His goal was ambitious: “Now that fashion has become an art, a fashion gazette must also be an art revue.” He employed promising young artists who also drew for Cheruit, Doeuillet, Doucet, Paquin, Poiret, Redfern, and Worth—“those creators of masterpieces who have made the entire world envy and
admire French fashion.” Not coincidentally, these same designers (and prominent silk firms) subsidized the new publication. After the Great War, *La Gazette du Bon Ton*, which cost twenty-five francs per issue, reached a circulation of 20,000. However, it filed for bankruptcy in 1925.

Happily for Vogel, his father-in-law had purchased a biweekly magazine entitled *L’Illustration des Modes*, to which he appointed Vogel director and his
daughter fashion editor. When the American publisher Condé Nast purchased *L’Illustration des Modes* in 1922, he changed it to a monthly and nearly halved the price of an annual subscription to twenty-five francs. The retitled *Jardin des Modes* lasted until the fall of France in 1940 and was revived after the war. As director for a few years, Vogel continued to promote art deco illustrators, though he and his replacement employed less-talented illustrators over the course of time. One reason for the decline was the departure of Erté and other imaginative illustrators to the United States.

Condé Nast called upon Vogel when he started a Paris edition of *Vogue* in 1920. For a few years, the Paris edition was run from London and bore a striking resemblance to the London edition. The Paris edition cost six francs per issue until 1924, when it became a monthly and lowered its price to four francs. As artistic director of *Vogue* Paris, Vogel commissioned many of the illustrators he employed at *La Gazette du Bon Ton* and *L’Illustration des Modes*. Georges Lepape drew more covers than any other *Vogue* illustrator in the early and mid-1920s, but Georges Barbier, Pierre Brissaud, and Erté also signed covers. Most of these illustrators simultaneously served designers who distributed drawings of their models to magazines and used them for other publicity purposes. Many of these illustrators also worked for *Fémina* and other fashion magazines, including the two men’s fashion magazines.

Drawings predominated on French magazine covers long after photographs had taken over the covers of glossy magazines in the United States and Great Britain. French designers preferred drawings, which maintained couture’s connection with art and which were more amenable to manipulation to display the best features of an outfit. Advertising experts maintained that line drawings drew attention to the silhouette and appealed more to consumer desires than photographs did.

**Gender, Race, Maternity**

Very few cover artists were women, and, like most fashion illustrators, they are not profiled in reference books on illustrators. Best known are Gerda Wegener (b. 1889), who drew for *Fémina* and two other magazines before and after the war; Helen Dryden and Harriet Meserole, who signed covers at *Vogue* until the Paris edition became more independent; Elisabeth Branly, who drew for *La Gazette du Bon Ton*; and Catherine Marioton, who worked for the in-house magazine *Art-Goût-Beauté*, the luxury publication *L’Art et la Mode*, and the humbler fashion
Like many well-known illustrators, Helen Dryden tried her hand at fashion designing. If there are differences based on the gender of the illustrator, they are minute. Based on a comparison of the 22 Vogue covers by Helen Dryden and Harriet Mesorole and 226 covers drawn by their male counterparts between 1920 and 1940, women were slightly more likely to portray women outside in gardens or parks, shopping, or on vacation. The setting of one Meserole cover was tropical, making it one of only four “exotic” backdrops for Vogue Paris covers. Although these backdrops included a few non-Caucasians, figures in the foreground are clearly Caucasian; indeed, almost all the figures on art deco covers are pale-skinned. Inside, some advertisements depicted dark-skinned and exotically dressed women to sell cocoa and rum, but these images were not as pervasive as they had been in fin-de-siècle posters. They were not deployed to market haute couture.

Photographs were slightly more diverse and inclusive, largely because fashion photographers participated in the cultural phenomenon called “Negrophilia,” or the Parisian “craze” for what was (often incorrectly) considered to be African in the 1920s. One manifestation was fascination with the African-American dancer Josephine Baker, although society and fashion magazines were less interested in photographs of her revealing dance costumes than in promotional photographs in which she posed, like a modern woman or a French socialite, in couture models identified by designers. Another form of diversity was manifest in the photographs showing visiting Indian “Princesses,” a reassuringly elitist, foreign, and temporary inclusion. Among the many “missing persons” on fashion covers and inside illustrations were Frenchwomen of color.

Whatever the gender of the artists, illustrations conformed to the emerging art deco style, which was spare and streamlined. In the 1920s, the style was angular and geometrical and, in the 1930s, more sinuous and botanical. Covers and advertisements focus on the female silhouette, a flat, stylized, and fully clothed outline of the female form. As Roland Barthes observed in his study of the art deco illustrator Erté: “All sexuality and its symbolic substitutes are absent.” Specifically, all signs of the maternal or the mature female body—obvious breasts or distended abdomens—are erased. Content analysis of 600 female figures on covers and in fashion spreads in Vogue and Femina found none with prominent breasts or protruding bellies. The only exceptions to the slim, boyish profiles were internal photographs of plump society women at charity events, photographs belonging to the genre photojournalism. In short, fashion illustrations did not rep-
resent or acknowledge the very real phenomenon of the aging of the female pop-
ulation. This virtual erasure is closely connected to the culture of youth in the press.

Maternity and maturity were slightly more evident in the less-expensive fash-
ion and women’s press than in the society press. Yet none of the 400 covers of
fashion and women’s weeklies surveyed for this book shows perceptibly preg-
nant figures, and even internal illustrations accompanying features on “future
mothers” do not include visibly pregnant women. A few drawings illustrating ar-
ticles about clothes for “women past forty” or “femmes fortes” include stocky
figures. Readers of weeklies got less indoctrination in the youthful, slim, and
childcare-free aspects of modern womanhood than did the readers of society
monthlies.

Ideal Readers, Real Women

Covers were supposed to appeal to a magazine’s “ideal reader” through depic-
tions of attractive figures in interesting settings, visual narratives of what their
target readers fantasized about doing. But cover drawings were also supposed
to display fashions, which is why they favor full-length drawings over headshots,
except on the covers of special hat issues. This commercial purpose explains why
the heads on fashion figures on the covers were small compared to the length of
the torsos and why their facial expressions are ambiguous or aloof. In magazine
illustrations, as on show window mannequins, facial features were effaced to en-
courage the viewer to focus on the product. Very few of the faces are smiling
on society monthly covers, though women’s weekly covers show more smiling faces.
The disparity in facial expressions is less significant than the chasm between the
scowls on models in elite fashion magazines and the smiles on models in women’s
magazines in contemporary America. These disparities reflect not only class dif-
fferences in self-presentation and marketing but also national variations in self-
presentation and marketing. One French exception was Marie Claire, which
began publication in 1937 and copied many practices of American women’s mag-
azines, including more headshots of smiling faces on their covers than appeared
in older fashion magazines.

Who were these magazines’ ideal readers and what did they do? Vogue and Fem-
ina covers portray a largely feminine world of leisurely but not indolent pursuits,
a significant proportion of them outside the domestic sphere. The term leisure
here means “the state of having time at one’s own disposal; time which one can
spend as one pleases; free or unoccupied time.” Most scholarship on leisure
has studied its articulation with class privilege (which certainly applies here), but very little of this scholarship is about women’s access to leisure time, no doubt due to cultural assumptions about women’s relegation to the domestic sphere and to the cultural reality that most women fulfilled time-consuming duties as housewives, mothers, and paid workers.  

What has been written about women’s leisure focuses on remarkable sports pioneers. Several of the photographs employed on magazine covers are full-length shots of famous sportswomen dressed in couture sports clothes, sometimes accompanied by their sports equipment. Most, though not all, of these sportswomen were amateurs, and their sports activities could be considered leisure activities. Inside the covers, articles lauded explorers and travelers, representatives of “feminine activity in modern life.” One cover and several articles in Femina featured an aviatrix wearing quite masculine coveralls, and all the fashion magazines surveyed for this book ran at least one photograph of these icons of modern womanhood (fig. 8). As Siân Reynolds has demonstrated, stringent military restrictions on flying licenses ensured that there were very few women pilots in France. The pioneering few fascinated the readers of all kinds of periodicals. Their daring exploits, disregard for gender boundaries, and representation as androgynous accounts for this fascination.

Interwar society magazine covers share the elision of work and the proposition that “all pleasure is dynamic” that Barthes found in the fashion magazines of the 1960s. Covers of monthlies regularly represented nondomestic, dynamic leisure. Most covers show a single female figure or a pair of them standing (243 of the principal figures), with fewer (89) sitting. Most seated figures are in dressing rooms, but over the two decades, more are located in commercial settings, such as tearooms or theaters. Most of the upright figures are outside, in private gardens, though several are at the threshold of the larger world, framed by a doorway or the pillars of a terrace. These covers are emblematic of the limited mobility and qualified modernism promoted by these periodicals.

However, dozens of monthly cover figures are located in public parks or on city streets, in the countryside or mountains, or at the beach. Several are boarding trains or ocean liners. The captions on these drawings, and the articles about travel inside the covers, refer to travel, not tourism—that is, a privileged phenomenon, not a mass experience. Most figures taking long strides or swinging their arms are skating, skiing, hiking, or playing tennis or golf. In Femina, a few
are canoeing and one group is kayaking. Inside the covers, ads and advertorials promote sportswear and sports gear. If these are ladies of leisure, in the sense that they appear not to work, they are not the idle creatures of nineteenth-century fashion magazines. Only eleven of the female figures are reclining on divans like the languid ladies of leisure represented in women’s magazines of the mid- to late-nineteenth century.
In stark contrast to the models that assume subordinate postures in the ads in American magazines analyzed by Erving Goffman and feminist scholars, these active, upright female figures are not subordinate. One indication of their autonomy is the absence of dominating masculine figures.\textsuperscript{113} All sixty-three male figures depicted on fifty-one covers are companions of female figures and most are in the near background, almost like props. Sometimes all that is visible is the male upper body, helping a female figure into an automobile, or one arm and hand, giving the female figure a bouquet. Very few female figures lean toward or gaze at the male figures as if for approval. Society magazine covers, like the photographs in \textit{Vogue} New York in the 1940s, portrayed an independent feminine world of pleasure and active leisure.\textsuperscript{114}

The most distinctive feature of French society magazine covers is how rarely they showcase the family and children. Only twenty children appear on \textit{Vogue} Paris or \textit{Femina} covers, mostly in summer vacation and Christmas issues. Only thirteen covers depict women with babies, a striking underrepresentation of babies in an era of pervasive propaganda for more births. Only five covers show women in a realistically or sentimentally maternal manner, supervising children’s piano practice or gazing fondly at children. For comparison, ten covers showed women walking dogs. Few articles discuss children, and most of them focus on maternal selection of girls’ clothing or shopping for children’s Christmas gifts. The principal message is one of “consuming motherhood” and raising appropriately feminine daughters. Of course, consuming femininity was a touchstone of fashion magazines. However, there are intimations that instructing girls about clothing and shopping with them were pleasures as well as responsibilities and that these activities fostered mother-daughter bonds.\textsuperscript{115}

The abundance of nonmaternal images and the scarcity of articles on maternity in these magazines mirror bourgeois Frenchwomen’s resistance to being defined primarily as mothers and their stubborn opposition to having many children. Between the wars, expectations about maternal childcare, especially childhood hygiene, and the hours per day French mothers actually devoted to childcare rose steadily. State subsidies for having more than two children were too meager to encourage most women, and especially bourgeois women, to have three or more children. The results are clearly documented in the decline in the national birth rate from 21.4 to 16.2 per thousand people between 1920 and 1933.\textsuperscript{116} Perhaps overworked women read fashion magazines for fantasy escapes from the realities of childcare?

\textbf{4.4. Gender, Genius, and Publicity}
Modest fashion and women’s weeklies appealed less often to the “modern woman.” Like society magazine covers, most of the fashion and women’s magazine covers show a single woman or a small group of women, occasionally with a male companion. Comparatively more female figures interact with children and are situated in the home, where a few do domestic chores, usually with an appliance or product advertised in the issue visible on the cover. Articles offer advice about mothering beyond clothing children, such as assuring proper hygiene and physical fitness. Clearly the ideal readers—and presumably the actual readers—of fashion and women’s weeklies were more domestic and maternal than the ideal or actual readers of society monthlies. 

*C'est la Mode* was quite realistic: “For Your Moments of Leisure” implied that leisure had to be squeezed in between maternal and housewifely duties. 

*La Mode Illustrée* ran one of the few articles on housedresses in these magazines; the author encouraged readers to make “simple, clean, and attractive” housedresses, “appropriate for domestic and maternal duties in the morning [and] for [indoor] leisure activities in the afternoon.” The most modest weekly spilled more ink on peignoirs than on housedresses. The rationale was that “one must be elegant at home.” The reason was that haute couture and confection made and marketed lingerie.

*La Mode Pratique* and *La Mode du Jour* ran articles on clothing for “future mothers,” breaches in the wall of silence about pregnancy that offer clues about the reasons for the silence. The writers recommended “dresses that do not draw attention,” specifically, dark-colored dresses with vertical stripes and pleats to dissimulate the rounded belly, and without “any ornamentation encircling the bust or the hips, which tends to enlarge the silhouette.” Swelling bellies and hips were supposed to be concealed. Although medical columnists warned about corsets and tight clothing compressing the fetus, no fashion columnist expressed concern about the fetus.

Not all readers recognized that covers were idealized representations of women. Responding to a letter from a reader criticizing a cover, the editor of *La Mode*, Mme. Georges Regnal, explained: “A cover has never been a true fashion engraving. It involves fantasy, amusement of the eyes. . . . Consider the background of these color illustrations, and you will see skies, waters, nuances that do not exist in nature. Modern decorative art wants it that way.” Her explanation accords with Catherine Marioton’s description of the process of illustration: she received sketches and swatches of material from couturiers and then she would “work up whole scenes with different dresses and accessories against an imaginary back-
No editor acknowledged that the tall, slim, straight or slightly curved silhouettes on these covers might be equally misleading.

In the 1920s and 1930s, couturiers and couturières sought to raise the status of their work from a craft to an art by associating with artists, collaborating in theatrical and film productions, collecting art, publicizing their artistic influences, and calling themselves creators and their products creations. For the most part, however, designers were more closely aligned with other decorative artists, for example, interior decorators and furniture designers, who were also trying to improve their standing in relation to the fine arts and at the same time to restore the reputations of the French luxury goods industries after the Great War. The pinnacle of their joint efforts was the 1925 International Exhibition of the Decorative Arts. The type of art and design promoted at the exhibition was later dubbed *art deco*, though the mélange of the fine and applied arts, the functional and the decorative, and the familiar and the exotic might better be termed *hybrid modern*.

What has been known as art deco influenced fashion through fabric design, notably by introducing prints with large, vividly colored flowers against a black background and by adopting (and adapting) the textile blends, straight lines, and sober colors of North African fabrics and the motifs of Indochinese prints as seen as colonial exhibitions. Designers favored fashion illustrators who emphasized more angular and geometric silhouettes, with little attention to the curves of art nouveau or the signs of a maternal or mature female body. But as extensive as designers’ efforts to position themselves as creators were, they were only one aspect of the promotional strategies of haute couture.