Oglethorpe University

À la Française

Fashion, Art, and the Birth of an Industry

Aleece Bustamante

Dr. Jeffrey Collins

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Paris is the fashion capitol of the world, but how did that come to be? Twice a year every year members of the fashion industry clamor into Paris by the thousands to experience Paris Fashion Week, the finale of the 'Big Four' fashion weeks, London, New York, Milan, and Paris. During this time, designers present their designs for the spring/summer or fall/winter season and the elite of the fashion industry make decisions on what is in vogue. Though the now $2.4 trillion fashion industry has spread across the world, its heart has remained in its birthplace, Paris (Amed, et al.). Fashion as a genuine industry emerged in the last three decades of the seventeenth century, but its maturation into the global phenomenon it is today began in the eighteenth century. Art, particularly that of the Rococo and Impressionist movements, can be used to illustrate the birth of fashion and its evolution across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The Birth of the Fashion Industry

To truly represent the origins of the modern fashion industry, one must cast their eye to Paris in the 1670s. During this time, many aspects of modern fashion come into existence – fashion journalism, manufacturing, marketing, fashion seasons, etc. (DeJean 35). Developments in technology were the driving force behind the transformation of fashion into an industry. Before the fashion revolution of the 1670s, made-to-measure garments were all that were available; no two outfits were ever the same because there was no way to reproduce clothing (DeJean 36). From the Industrial Revolution came new methods of making clothing that allow garments and textiles to be produced on a grand scale in factories. The ability to manufacture garments means that people can copy each other's dress – imitation is the key to fashion (DeJean 37). With imitation comes trends and styles; one woman wears a blue gown with white trim to court, suddenly every woman is able to get the same ensemble and blue and white are trending. And the rise of printmaking meant the ability to circulate news of fashion moments and trends

widely and quickly (DeJean 35). But technological innovation alone does not birth an industry, there must be people and demand behind the industry.

Fashion and couture became industries to satisfy the demand for high-fashion garments from the members of Louis XIV's royal court (DeJean 36). The women of Versailles worked with the first designers to turn fashion into a public institution – they made decisions about trends much in the way the fashion elite do today (DeJean 38). The key concepts of fashion evolved naturally through this collaboration, concepts such a styling, as in the way a person wears garments together, and seasons; the trends for winter cannot possibly be the same as those for the spring or the winter of the previous year (DeJean 38). The general population was fascinated with the constantly evolving styles of the fashion industry. This fascination spread across the borders of social class; to accommodate for this, couturiers simplified their designs and used moderately priced materials to create affordable garments, allowing the new middle class to participate in fashion (DeJean 38). Journalists also adapted their content to appease the public's desire for fashion news.

In 1672, Jean Donneau de Vise launched *Le Mercure Galant*, a newspaper that reported on contemporary news, including fashion (DeJean 46-47). He was the first journalist to treat changes in fashion as important news. He was also the first journalist to adopt a rhetoric around the fashion season when, in January of 1678, he announced in a special fashion issue of his newspaper that he would release a comprehensive report on 'la mode' at the beginning of each season (DeJean 48). By the end of the decade, the foundations had been laid for one of the largest industries in the contemporary world. And throughout the eighteenth century, with the use of fashion dolls and plates, it was transformed into an international business.

<u>Crossing Borders: Fashion Dolls and Fashion Plates</u>

Starting in the early eighteenth century, fashion dolls were used to market the latest French fashions to international clientele (DeJean 63). The earliest dolls are made entirely of wood, typically with glass eyes; one French fashion doll from the mid-eighteenth century (fig. 1) is made with human hair to give the doll the double duty of advertising the latest hairstyles (DeJean 64). Even earlier fashion dolls had articulated joints, giving them the affectionate nickname "jointed babies" in English (DeJean 65).

Based on newspaper accounts, the traffic of fashion dolls was swift; by the early eighteenth century they were flowing from France to England monthly (DeJean 67). The arrival of these fashion dolls was so important to the English upper-class that during times of war they were granted diplomatic immunity; the dolls were even given cavalry escorts to ensure a safe journey (Roche 475). The comparison between these fashion dolls and modern mannequins is an easy one to make; in fact, the dolls were referred to as "mannequins" until about 1750 (DeJean 65). However, these dolls were not easily accessible to a broad international audience, leaving much of the population without the latest in fashion news. The solution is simple – engravings, or fashion plates (DeJean 68).

Fashion plates serve a similar role to fashion dolls, but they can broadcast trends in fashion to a wider audience because they are easy to reproduce and ship. Charles Baudelaire was open about his great appreciation of fashion plates; he believed a series of fashion plates could illustrate the evolution of beauty standards over time (Steele 99). This is certainly true as fashion plates were typically heavily idealized to fit the ever-changing ideals of beauty. Similar to the way photoshop is used now to make models look perfect, engravers often altered women's bodies, making their waists thinner and longer than natural (fig. 2) (Steele 113).

The rise of fashion journalism and marketing can be illustrated by the rise of fashion prints. Between 1700 and 1750 the number of working engravers went from 11 to 20 and the number of fashion plates went from 229 to 1275 (Roche 477). Of course, this does not account for the numerous engravers who went unnamed or the many anonymous plates. Moving forward to the nineteenth century, fashion journalism grew into its own field; from 1830 to 1870 the number of journals and magazines dedicated solely to fashion multiplied rapidly, both in publications for general fashion enthusiasts and specialized journals for dressmakers, tailors, and milliners (Steele 104). As the number of journals grew, so too did the Parisienne as a genre.

Illustrations of the modern Parisian woman helped to define new standards of beauty, particularly those of Sulpice-Guillaume Chevalier (1804-1866), better known as Gavarni. Gavarni created fashion illustrations for *La Mode*, the *Journal des Dames et des Modes, Petit Courrier des Dames, Fashionable, Sylphide,* and *La Vogue*, just to name a few (Steele 100). Though he worked for many fashion journals, Gavarni's fame is not for his fashion work, but rather for his numerous illustrations of contemporary Parisian life (Steele 100). His work transformed the Parisian into an icon of fashion and style, and the effects of that are felt to this very day. The world is still in love with Parisian women because Gavarni created an image of them as sophisticated, chic, aloof creatures; so many people wish to embody the Parisian ideal that multiple books have been written to teach people how to be Parisian. This stereotype is a perfect representation of how much modern culture has been affected by the fashion journals of the nineteenth century. And this influence is not just felt in style, it is also seen in art.

Monet's *Femmes au Jardin* (1867) (fig. 3) borrows heavily from the conventions of fashion illustration – the poses of the women and the emphasis on their clothes as opposed to their faces is reminiscent of a fashion plate by Anais Colin Toudouze from *La Mode Illustree*

done the same year (fig. 4) (Steele 125). And Paul Cezanne's *La Promenade* (ca. 1871) (fig. 5) is

directly copied from a fashion plate (fig. 6). This is not the first instance of fashion influenced

art; from the industry's birth, the changing trends affected the way artists paint.

Fashion Trends in Art: Rococo

The death of Louis XIV in 1715 marks a shift in fashion and art, from the heavy, rich,

dark tones of the Baroque to the light pastel tones and frilly textures of the Rococo (Pilar).

Rococo artists are renowned for their command of texture; it is possible that the focus on

rendering textures in detail was a result of the shift in fashion to garments with varied textures,

like lace and silk. Nowhere are these textures better represented than in Rococo portraiture,

which also serves as a perfect tool for illustrating the changes in fashion across the eighteenth

century.

In the first decades of the eighteenth century, the reigning style of dress was the pannier,

so called for its inverted basket shape (Pilar). Adapted from the seventeenth century Spanish

guardainfante, the pannier emphasizes volume on the hips with a cage-like undergarment (fig.

7), sometimes up to 16 feet in diameter (Pilar). The most popular variant on this style was the

robe à la française (fig. 8), which was popularized in the 1740s by Madame de Pompadour; this

style of dress is less exaggerated than its predecessor, making it more comfortable and more

suited for mobility (Pilar). The basic *robe à la française* is made with three parts: the gown, open

at the front and wrapping around the backside to the train, the skirt, and the bodice (Pilar).

Francois Boucher's *Portrait of Madame de Pompadour* (1756) (fig. 9) is a perfect example of a

robe à la française – the bodice is decorated with frilly pink bows, the sleeves end in a puff of

lace, and small roses line the edges of the rich teal gown and skirt. This painting is meant to

indicate Madame de Pompadour's social status, so she must be dressed in the absolute height of fashion.

The *robe à la française* stayed in fashion for much of the eighteenth century, though more informal gowns like the Polish polonaise and the *robe à l'anglaise* came into fashion during the 1760s, indicating a growing taste for international fashions (Pilar). The main difference between the *robe à la française* and the *robe à l'anglaise* is that the English gown is close-bodied, meaning the gown wraps around the torso, unlike the French gown which exposes the bodice. It is important to note that all of these gowns were supported by a pannier underneath, but they were much smaller than the ones used in the earlier decades of the eighteenth century.

The dramatic, huge panniers came back into fashion during the 1770s, reintroduced by Marie-Antoinette. The queen's wardrobe is best illustrated by Elisabeth Vigee LeBrun's portrait of her done in 1779 (fig. 10), which shows the queen in a giant, highly decorated gown which must be at least six feet wide. The style did not last long and knowing Marie-Antoinette's fate it is not hard to understand why. The French Revolution marks a significant shift in the way fashions were viewed; large panniers and frilly dresses represented everything terrible about the monarchy, so a new style was needed. And that style had already been discovered in 1748.

The Neoclassical Shift

Just as the discovery of Pompeii in 1748 changed the way people view art, it also changed the way people dress. Though Neoclassicism flourished for much of the latter half of the eighteenth century, it was not until the 1790s that it infiltrated fashion (Cage). Fashion plates from the turn of the century demonstrate the influence of Pompeiian dress on European fashion.

The boned corsets and heavy fabrics of the past were replaced with empire silhouette dresses which featured high waistlines like those seen in Greco-Roman art (fig. 11). These dresses were made of much lighter fabrics, like gauze, muslin, or cashmere, and were cut much closer to the body (Cage).

Napoleon's first wife, Empress Josephine, was highly influential in popularizing the style. Pierre Paul Prud'hon's portrait of the Empress depicts her in an empire gown, lounging in a wooded area (fig. 12). The painting shows her in a moment of contemplation and reflection. The painting itself is not Neoclassical, but it shows the impact of the rediscovery of the classical world. Though Prud'hon's portrait was done in 1805, by that time the Neoclassical trend was falling out of fashion. This is mainly a result of Napoleon's suppression of trade with England and India, both producers of fabrics typically used in empire gowns, and his promotions of Lyon's silk industries (Cage). The empire trend was over by the 1820s; the waistline deepened to its natural state and in contrast the skirt became fuller and bell-shaped ("Introduction to 19th Century Fashion").

Nineteenth Century Fashion and Impressionism

In the 1860s skirts were very full and worn over a petticoat supported by a frame of steel hoops that gave the skirt volume and shape ("Introduction to 19th Century Fashion"). A fashion plate by Jules David from 1861 depicts two women wearing the popular style of the time, their small waists shown in stark contrast with their large skirts (fig. 13). However, the 1870s marks a shift towards a more natural silhouette, with smaller skirts and the loss of the steel frame; a popular style was the 'princess line' dress, which has streamlined, tightly fit skirts ("Introduction to 19th Century Fashion"). It was during this period that the relationship between fashion and art was fully realized. By this point, fashion was at the forefront of society and the Impressionists

embraced contemporary fashion as the harbinger of modernity ("Impressionism, Fashion, and Modernity").

Impressionist were divided in their rendering of clothing, some painted garments with ardent exactitude, while others emphasized the play of light on clothing. Albert Bartholome's *In the Conservatory* (1881) (fig. 14) depicts his wife wearing a summer day dress (fig. 15) which he had replicated with precision. The dress is a princess line gown with a prominent bustle that cannot be seen in the painting; it is a perfect model for what women were wearing in the early 1880s when bustles were still in vogue. Pierre-Auguste Renoir's *The Swing* (1876) (fig. 16) depicts a gown of similar fashion, but the details are not rendered with nearly as much specificity. Instead, Renoir places emphasis on the dappled sunlight falling on the woman's dress. In this instance, the gown exists as a tool for expressing modernity, rather than a centerpiece.

Most Impressionist portraits are not as naturalistic as Bartholome's, in fact most were critiqued for focusing too much on the clothing the figures wore rather than the faces of the figures themselves. Edouard Manet, for example, was criticized for "valuing a head no more than a slipper" ("Impressionism, Fashion, and Modernity"). Criticisms of this nature were likely directed at Manet's *The Parisienne* (1875) (fig. 17). The painting depicts the young actress Ellen Andree dressed in a black variation on the princess line gown; black gowns typically communicated that the wearer is elegant, sensual, or artistic ("Impressionism, Fashion, and Modernity"). The choice to paint the woman's full-body, rather than doing a portrait from the waist up, is an interesting one. Manet, in doing this, takes the focus away from the woman's face and identity, and places it on her outfit; the *parisienne* is not a person but a style, and that seems to be what Manet is trying to capture in this painting. The technique used emphasizes the texture

of brushstrokes and the silhouette created by the dress. The level of detail in the gown and in the woman's face is roughly the same, which is to say there is not much detail in either. In removing detail from the painting, Manet forces the eye to focus on the silhouette created by the gown rather than the decorative embellishments, which is understandable as silhouettes tended to define new trends more than patterns and fabrics. And the ultimate goal for many Impressionists was the expression of modernity, hence their gravitation towards fashion. Trends change so often, the perfect way to express the contemporary world is to paint the most recent styles. This is seen in the modern world as well; a person who wants to communicate to the world that they understand modernity and youth can do so by dressing in the latest fashions. If a company wants to convince consumers that it is innovative and modern, it makes a commercial with young people dressed in modern fashion. Fashion is engrained in modern culture, and it all started in France.

<u>The Modern World</u>

In examining the modern world of fashion, it is interesting to find that the culture which invented fashion trends now vehemently opposes them. The modern French woman is considered chic and timeless; she does not concede to ephemeral trends. Most members of the Paris fashion scene criticize Americans, specifically New Yorkers, for indulging in fast fashion and fads. But throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Paris was the world's informant on the latest styles in fashion; the trends in Paris were always changing, particularly in the latter half of the nineteenth century, as evidenced by the art of the period. How did such a shift occur? When did the shift occur? It must have been some time in the twentieth century, as the fashion industry grew, and individual designers took hold of the world's attention.

I posit that the change is related to the spread of the fashion industry to the United States. The culture in America is not rooted in tradition the way French culture is, so it is only natural that the US be better suited to establishing and following trends. It is possible that the US took over France's role as fashion trend informant to the world and the French took on an anti-trend attitude out of spite towards American culture. Of course, that is only speculation, more research would be required to definitively explain the change in French culture.

Regardless of France's role in modern fashion, it is undeniable that the relationship between fashion and art is still strong. Though, now the two seem to have switched roles. While fashion influenced much of the art cited in this paper, now art influences fashion. A perfect example of this is Yves Saint Laurent's iconic Mondrian Collection, which featured cocktail dresses inspired by the art of Piet Mondrian. There are plenty of other examples, too many to list; it is clear that from its conception fashion has been inextricably intertwined with art.

Appendix

Fig. 1. Fashion doll, ca. mid-eighteenth century, French. DeJean, Joan E. *The Essence of Style: How the French Invented High Fashion, Fine Food, Chic Cafés, Style, Sophistication, and Glamour*. Free Press, 2005. pp. 64.

Fig. 2. Anonymous illustrator known as B.C., Fashion plate from *Journal des Demoiselles*¸ date unknown, French. Steele, Valerie. *Paris Fashion: A Cultural History*. Oxford University Press, 1988. pp. 113.

Fig. 3. Claude Monet, *Femmes au Jardin*, 1867. Oil on canvas, 255 x 205 cm. Musee d'Orsay, Paris. "Impressionism, Fashion, and Modernity." The Met's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2013/impressionism-fashion-modernity.

Fig. 4. Anais Colin Toudouze, Fashion plate from *La Mode Illustree*, 1867. Steele, Valerie. *Paris Fashion: A Cultural History*. Oxford University Press, 1988. pp. 125.

Fig. 5. Paul Cezanne, *The Promenade*, 1871. Oil on canvas. Private Collection. "Promenade." *PaulCezanne.org*, www.paulcezanne.org/promenade.jsp.

Fig. 6. Anonymous illustrator, Fashion plate from *La Mode Illustree*, 1871. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Steele, Valerie. *Paris Fashion: A Cultural History*. Oxford University Press, 1988. pp. 131.

Fig. 7. Woman's Hoop Petticoat (Pannier), ca. 1750-1780, English. "Woman's Hoop Petticoat (Panier)." *Nympheas | LACMA Collections*, collections.lacma.org/node/214714.

Fig. 8. Robe a la Francaise, ca. 1750-1775, French. "Robe à La Française." *The Met's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*, www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/81687?searchField=All&%3BsortBy=relevan re&%3Bwhen=A.D.%2B1600-1800&%3Bao=on&%3Bft=robe%2Ba%2Bla%2Bfrancaise&%3Boffset=20&%3Brpp=2 2&%3Bpos=30.

Fig. 9. Maurice-Quentin de la Tour, *Portrait of Madame de Pompadour*, 1755. Oil on canvas, 1.77 x 1.3 m. Musee du Louvre, Paris. Chabod, Christine. "Full-length portrait of the Marquise de Pompadour". *Louvre Museum*, https://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/full-length-portrait-marquise-de-pompadour.

Fig. 10. Elisabeth Louise Vigee LeBrun, *Marie Antoinette in Court Dress*, 1778. Oil on canvas,
273 x 193.5 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. "Marie Antoinette in Court
Dress." *The Met's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*,
https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/656452.

Fig. 11. Fashion plate from *Ladies*, 1801. "Introduction to 20th-Century Fashion." *Victoria and
Albert Museum*, 28 Mar. 2013, www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/i/introduction-to-19th-
century-fashion/.

Fig. 12. Pierre Paul Prud'hon, *Portrait of Empress Josephine*¸ 1805. Oil on canvas, 2.44 x 1.8 m.
Musee du Louvre, Paris. Pomarede, Vincent. "The Empress Josephine." *Louvre Museum*,
https://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/empress-josephine-1763-1814.

Fig. 13. Jules David, Fashion plate, 1861. "Fashion Plate | David, Jules." *V&A Search the Collections*, collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O727069/fashion-plate-david-jules/.

Fig. 14. Albert Bartholome, *In the Conservatory¸*1881. Oil on canvas, 233 x 142.5 cm. Musee d'Orsay, Paris. "Impressionism, Fashion, and Modernity." The Met's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2013/impressionism-fashion-modernity.

Fig. 15. Summer Day Dress, French, 1880. Musee d'Orsay, Paris. "Impressionism, Fashion, and Modernity." The Met's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2013/impressionism-fashion-modernity.

Fig. 16. Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *The Swing*, 1876. Oil on canvas, 92 x 73 cm. Musee d'Orsay, Paris. "The Swing". *Musee d'Orsay*. https://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/collections/works-in-focus/painting.html?no_cache=1&zoom=1&tx_damzoom_pi1%5BshowUid%5D=2314.

Fig. 17. Edouard Manet, *The Parisienne*¸ ca. 1875. Oil on canvas, 192 x 125 cm. Nationalmuseum, Stockholm. "Impressionism, Fashion, and Modernity." The Met's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2013/impressionism-fashion-modernity.

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