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Le prêt-à-porter des couturiers

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Structured at the beginning of the 20th century, the Parisian haute couture sector was based on an economic model that matched the designers of the fashion houses with a luxury market:
the wealthy women of the Western world aspired to be dressed in this type of garment.

Foreign markets are an essential asset, including the American market, driven in particular by department stores and by the purchase of rights to reproduce designs while respecting their brand identity.

However, the subsidaries set up by some couturiers in London and New York both before and after the Great War, did not prosper over the long term.
As a result, the haute couture collection had a relatively small clientele.

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The sector underwent a profound transformation bewteen 1945 and 1975.
In 1945, it became essential for Parisian couturiers to find a new source of income.
The solution was found by Christian Dior Couture, created in 1946 as part of the Boussac textile group.
This led to the signing of a number of licensing contracts from 1949 onwards.

The principle of the licensing contract was to grant exclusivity, geographically and by product category for the manufacture and sale of products signed by the label. The company that held the rights to the brand was paid a royalty based on the previous year's sale. In addition to the rights to reproduce, Christian Dior was therefore able to beneift from regular, guaranteed income, without any initial investment.

Others designers followed suit.
Pierre Cardin is an example of a company that has taken the practice of licensing to the extreme (800 licensing contracts).

At the same time, a large proportion of couturiers' clothes are in fact reproduced by workshops in many foreign markets.

American departments stores, for example buy rights to reproduce Parisian couture garments in order to make legal copies in New York.
Mass production of clothes bearing the trademarks of Parisian couturiers was therefore initially carried out outside France.
Nevertheless, the profitability of these contracts remained low and no stylistic unity was guaranteed.

In the second half of the 1960s, the haute couture business was characterised by a decline in the number of Parisian couture companies. In fact, the couture business alone could not guarantee that these companies would retain their position. It was against this backdrop that couture companies were encouraged to sell ready-to-wear activity under their own name in France.

Saint Laurent Rive Gauche launched in 1966

C. Mendès

1967: factory in Angers, 450 people.

End of the 1990s: the model was reviewed.

Couture companies integrated their ready-to-wear activities.

For several decades, Parisian haute couture dominated high-end women's fashion. The codification of haute couture by its statutes made the change brought about by the emergence of ready-to-wear all the more spectacular.

Ready-to-wear was a response by French fashion manufacturers to the new economic and social conditions of the post-Second World War era, and to the development of the market in the United States.

The case of C. Mendès, an intermediary turned manufacturer and distributor of twelve ready-to-wear lines for fashion designers, is a striking example of this shift.

The case of Saint Laurent Rive Gauche illustrates a new way of distributing fashion design.

Today, the word prêt-à-porter tends to be used less frequently.

From a professional point of view, it is the word « fashion » (mode) that is once again in the limelight.

In 2017, the Fédération Française du Prêt-à-Porter des Couturiers et des Créateurs de Mode changed its name to become the Fédération de la Haute Couture et de la Mode.

Thank you for your attention!

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