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Buyers and licensing

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Haute couture 1919-1939

The buyers

Grumbach (2014, page 92):

‘Amongst the buyers, one could clearly distinguish three specific types:

a) Manufacturers who made mass-produced garments for their own production
b) Shops that were developing an integrated made-to-measure department or providing sub-contractors with patterns and models for mass production
c) Couturiers working for order.’

Haute couture 1919-1939

The buyers

Grumbach page 92:
‘Buyers came from all over the world, and amongst them, the most influential Americans; if not the largest numbers, were nicknamed ‘the Seventh Avenue’ after the New York City neighborhood where their business were generally established. (...)

In some cases and under very restrictive conditions, shops were allowed to associate their names with the couturiers, on the label of the copied garment: ‘Christian Dior for Saks Fifth Avenue’ (...)

Haute couture 1919-1939

The buyers

Grumbach (2014, page 92):
‘This phenomenon continued to grow until the 1960s. Harrods of London (...) attended the shows along with everyone from the department stores on New York’s Fifth Avenue. The buyers from Lord & Taylor, Bonwit Teller, B. Altman, Saks Fitfth Avenue, and Bergdorf Goodman competed skillfully to obtain the couturiers goodwill. There were two types of buyers. The first owned a couture workshop; the second had « line for line » copies made by sub-contractors. (...)

The jewel in crown of luxury shops was incontestably Bergdorf Goodman.’

Haute couture 1919-1939

The American market

Grumbach (2014, page 91):
‘In the years around 1925, the most eagerly awaited buyers were the American buying offices. Twice a week at Le Havre, transatlantic ships uploaded their overexcited buyers (...)
They ordered a number of models in different sizes that they wanted different copies of. These purchases were meant to fill the luxury departments of America’s biggest shops that, in turn, carried out any necessary alterations for their clients. For America, haute couture at the time, was only luxury ready to wear. It meant that agents had to choose the kinds of garments likely to satisfy a traditional clientele, little inclined to excesses.’

Haute couture 1919-1939

The American market

Grumbach (2014, page 91):
‘ The 1929 crash rang in the end of this opulent commerce. America was in crisis. To defend itself, the American government levied a 90 per cent customs tax on imported garments. At the same time, other States imposed draconian quota systems or established controls on exchange rates. All these regulations destroyed the couture industry bit by bit. In order to get around the taxes, buyers imported fewer couture dresses, and instead, more patterns with permission to reproduce the model in large numbers ’.

Haute couture 20th century

(Grumbach, 2014, page 91):

‘Once they [the professional buyers] had acquired their card, the professional buyers could register at the couture houses they wanted to visit, where that had to pay in advance on possible future purchases to be able to attend the collection viewings. This ‘security deposit’ had to be paid to the couture house in any event. (...)

From 1930 until the 1970s, the United States represented couture’s main market.

Haute Couture
Christian Dior (c. 1950)

‘Jacques Rouët then developed an idea that was to prove fruitful. The idea was to sell the patterns of the dresses, a practice that already existed but which he applied systematically. Since the Dior line is copied no matter what you do, you might as well take a tithe in passing by selling what could be called interpretation rights’.

(Pochna, 1994)

Haute Couture
Christian Dior (c. 1950)

‘Any buyer attending the Avenue Montaigne collection pays a deposit (60 000 F) which is refunded against the first purchase. Jacques Rouët offers two types of patterns:

The canvas pattern, which gives the reference of the original fabric, buttons, supplies, and the address of a commission agent in charge of guiding the buyer. The pattern thus made will have to wear the label.

In the less high end style, a simple paper pattern is also proposed, leaving the manufacturer more free to Americanise his choice of fabric and colours.’.

(Pochna, 1994)

Haute Couture
Christian Dior (c. 1950)

‘An American woman ordering her dress from Bendel will wear ‘Christian Dior’ in large letters and « Bendel » in smaller letters sewn inside. (...). This list is handed over to costums at the same time as the special haute couture plane that flies to New York each season, carrying its cargo of patterns and models’.

(Pochna, 1994)

Haute Couture
Christian Dior (c. 1950)

‘During the first 5 years of its existence, 50% of Christian Dior’s turnover was generated on the new continent, which is obviously a springboard for the future.

(...)

1949: signature of the first stocking license in the United States with Julius Kayser & Co.’

(Pochna, 1994)

Haute Couture
Christian Dior (c. 1950)

‘In 1950: first licence for ties (…) with Stern, Meritt & Co.

Even before the opening of the house, Dior accepted the proposal from the New York company Prestige (…) to markets its stockings by affixing the name « Christian Dior » to its own stockings’.

(Pochna, 1994)

Haute Couture
Christian Dior (c. 1950)

‘An American manufacturer of silk twill also came to avenue Montaigne, still under construction, to propose to Christian Dior to put his name on ties. Never seen before! Christian Dior gave the green light to Jacques Rouët to negotiate with this Mr. Benjamin Theise (...)

These two historic contracts are the prelude to hundreds of other...

It is then the stockings that make their entrance at Galeries Lafayette. (...) The presence of a couturier’s label in a French department stores’ is totally new.’

(Pochna, 1994)

Thank you for your attention!

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