

Fashion



Over time

Fashion portraits over time: the evolution of taste and the permanence of beauty in fashion and art across 22 digital collages.

Attempted Corruption



The man looking at us is the self-portrait of the English artist Joseph Wright of Derby, painted in 1765.

The work displays remarkable technical skill. The fur collar worn by Wright is superbly rendered, as is the green dress embroidered with gold.

The two figures on the left, on the other hand, are taken from the painting by the Frenchman Jean Fouquet entitled *The Melun Diptych*, depicting Étienne Chevalier, treasurer to King Charles VII of France, alongside Saint Stephen, dating to 1455.

The saint brings as a gift the Book of Hours, the beautifully illuminated manuscript crafted by Fouquet himself and considered among the masterpieces of 15th-century illumination.

Our collage provides us with the opportunity to compare two different eras and, consequently, two different men's outfits.

Among the two figures on the left, however, we must exclude Saint Stephen who, as a venerable saint, wears a blue velvet habit—far too elegant for a Christian martyr.

The stone placed on the manuscript he holds is there to remind us that Stephen was the first martyr of Christianity, killed by stoning.

We see Étienne wearing a striking, full-length red surcoat, buttoned at the front, with long, wide sleeves. In the 15th century, it was worn only by nobles, doctors, wealthy merchants, and bankers.

Joseph Wright, an 18th-century painter, is an aesthete dressed in the fashion of the era, a time when England reigned supreme as the epitome of elegance in the latter half of the century. His green jacket is fitted and fastened at the front: the 'riding coat' is a must-have to maintain style without sacrificing comfortable wearability.



Black Outfits



Black clothing has always been synonymous with elegance. The woman at the bottom left holding a fan is the famous *Lady with the Veil*, a 1768 portrait by Swedish painter Alexander Roslin.

Partially hidden by a black silk veil, the Lady holds a fan—an accessory that all distinguished ladies knew how to wield, even to send non-verbal signals.

Beneath the veil, she wears a gown for a special occasion, made of white lace and pink silk.

The *Lady with the Veil* is no stranger; she is Roslin's wife, who was also an artist: the French painter Marie-Suzanne Giroust.

Boldini never seen



Giovanni Boldini was one of the leading Italian painters of the late 19th century, among those closest to Impressionism. Boldini was known for his lively high-society life and his bourgeois circle of acquaintances, which earned him great fame as a talented portrait artist—in Florence as well as in London and Paris, where he settled permanently.

He painted portraits, mostly of women, with mastery, dynamism, and psychological depth, also focusing on the elegance of their attire and thus shunning more conventional portraiture.

At the center of our collage, wearing an elegant, low-cut black gown, is the divine Franca Florio, one of the legendary figures of the Belle Époque.

Baroness Franca had married Ignazio Florio, one of the wealthiest Italian entrepreneurs of the time. For their honeymoon, the couple traveled to Paris. There, Ignazio ordered several dresses for his wife from Worth, had a bespoke perfume crafted for her by Houbigant—perfumer to both the Tsar and Queen Victoria—and bought her a stunning 13-strand 'peau d'ange' coral necklace by Cartier, also as a way to seek her forgiveness for his numerous mistresses.

Franca's beauty was at its peak. One of her most famous portraits dates back to that period: the very one Giovanni Boldini painted of her in 1901. With her lips slightly parted and her magnetic, somewhat distant gaze, Franca posed for him in her boudoir wearing a low-cut black velvet gown, which today is part of the collection at the Museum of Fashion in Florence.

When Ignazio saw the lascivious sensuality with which the artist had depicted his wife, he flew into a rage, disgusted by her 'overly sensual' pose.

The portrait was promptly sent back to Paris to the painter's studio, where he was forced to alter it making it less sensual resulting in the version now at the center of our collage.



Decide your Future



Let us consider the noble-looking young man at the center of our collage. This is the English monarch George III, portrayed in 1765 by Allan Ramsay. He became famous for two things: he was the king who lost America, and in his later years, he went completely mad.

The general public came to know 'the mad king' after watching the Netflix series that tells the story of Queen Charlotte's rise to the throne (top left) and her love story with King George, who became King of England in 1760 at the age of 22.

When the monarch was officially declared permanently insane in 1811, Charlotte became his permanent guardian until her death in 1818, remaining faithful to him until the end.

Often associated with the sun and summer, the color yellow has a dark history. In antiquity, it was almost sacred—a symbol of light, warmth, and prosperity.

Chinese emperors used the saffron plant to dye their robes, and later, yellow was reserved for the daughters of European royal families, as the dye would only take on the finest silk.

But all that glitters is not gold, and yellow's reputation was tarnished when yellow garments, said to have been worn by Venus, became a discriminatory mark forced upon prostitutes.

Great artists of the Medieval and Renaissance periods used it to depict sinister moments such as betrayal, terror, disease, and the Apocalypse.



We conclude with the exquisite Chinese porcelain statue (on the right side of the collage) created to celebrate Tang, a princess of the long-lasting Tang Dynasty, which ruled for nearly 300 years.

Ancient Chinese culture has handed down wisdom, artifacts, and proverbs, such as this one: “A wise man does not worry about the past because it is over and cannot be changed, nor does he worry about the future because it has yet to come”.

Dominant Gold



Gold has been a central element in art history, from the "gold ground" painting technique of Orthodox icons to the mosaics of the Byzantine period (with magnificent examples preserved in Ravenna) and paintings of the Gothic period.

In 1903, Gustav Klimt visited the Church of San Vitale in Ravenna and its Byzantine mosaics; he was particularly struck by the image of Empress Theodora, shimmering against an abstract golden background. "Mosaics of unprecedented splendor," as the Austrian artist wrote.

The portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer (the woman at the center of the collage) is the oil-on-canvas painting created by Klimt in 1907. Byzantine in inspiration, it is considered today the most representative work of his "Golden Phase."

A faithful ally of any party look worth its salt, gold fashion has always showcased its full allure.

Adding just a touch of gold is enough to elevate any outfit and make you feel like a queen like Cleopatra.

In ancient Rome, the use of gold—in fabrics and jewelry alike—was the exclusive privilege of the nobility, though civilizations where golden treasures have been uncovered predated even the Roman Empire.

"The attraction to gold, as shown by scientific studies recently published in the *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, is an anthropological one. The golden shimmer that defines it triggers an innate response in the viewer, the result of a desire deeply rooted in the unconscious.



Dominant Purple



Purple, with its duality between refinement and eccentricity, has always been a distinctive choice in the world of fashion. Ever since the Victorian era, purple has been the color of luxury.

Its shades have made their way onto runways all over the world. Symbolizing luxury and mystery, purple adds a sophisticated dimension to evening gowns and accessories for creating bold, contemporary outfits.

In the collage, the three women wearing purple—in order of appearance from left to right—are: Lady Mostyn, portrayed by the Englishman Thomas Gainsborough in 1759; an anonymous young woman depicting Saint Cecilia from 1626, a work by the Frenchman Simon Vouet; and the Comtesse d'Haussonville, in an 1845 painting by Auguste Ingres.

Dressed in Blue



The color blue has always fascinated humanity, as it appears in nature in the form of the sky and the sea—symbols of infinity, depth, unknown and the divine. It was used by Michelangelo to paint the skies of the Sistine Chapel and by Giotto for the starry night sky of the Scrovegni Chapel.

We have arranged several portraits in blue. They are in order from left to right and top to bottom: The young man with a hat by the great Raphael (1515); the Madonna and Child by the Flemish painter Jan van Eyck (1439); the bearded man by Pontormo (1543); the woman with a book and the young girl with her back turned, painted by the Parisian Édouard Manet (1873); the mother in a light dress with her two young daughters by the Frenchman Auguste Renoir (1884); and the last woman in blue, portrayed by the American Guy Rose in 1910.

Fashion Hats

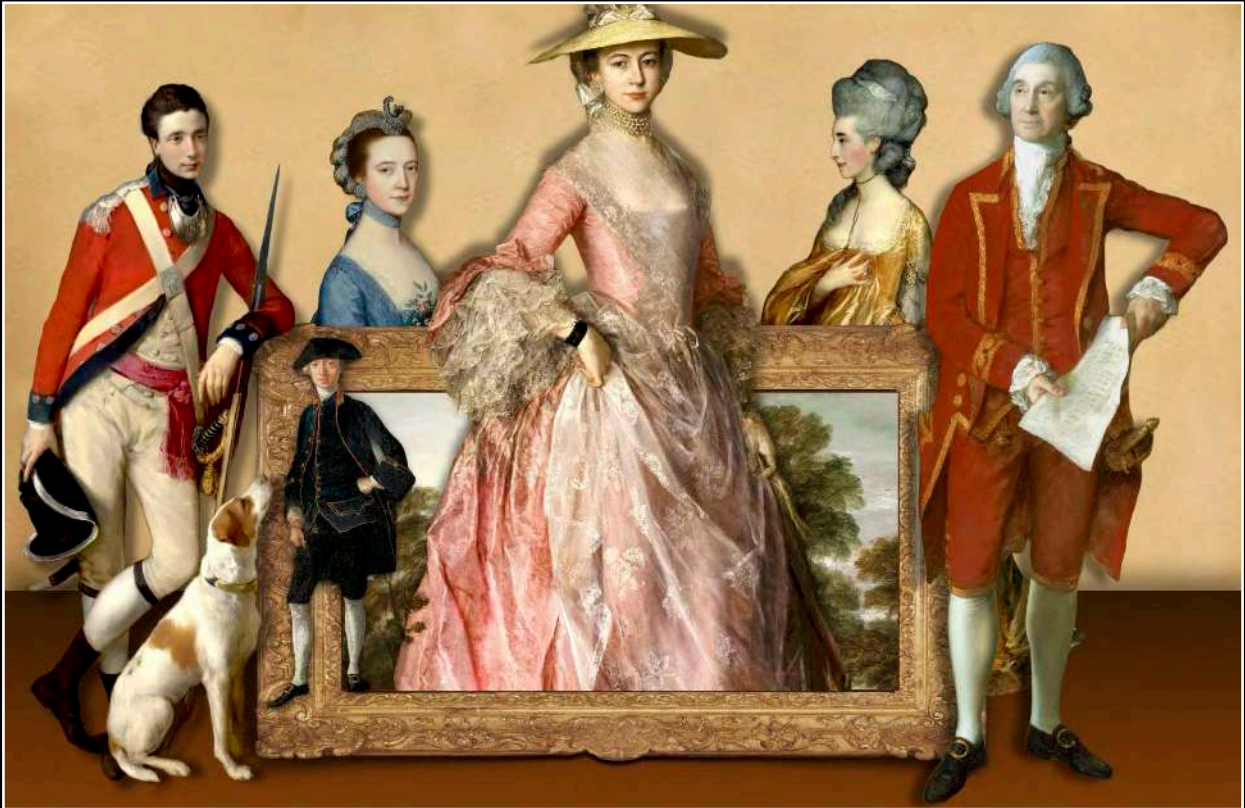


Made of straw, wool, felt, or fur, paper, leather, or bamboo; headwear can take on endless variations, covering any head, whether that of an emperor or a beggar. Essential for protection from the cold and the sun, or completely useless objects of pure vanity, hat has an ancient history.

Numerous 15th-century paintings feature young men posing for portraits wearing a red cap, suggesting it was a truly beloved color. The artists themselves—who needed to socialize with wealthy patrons to secure work and cared deeply about their own respectability—always wore a bright red hat when painting a self-portrait.



Gainsborough never seen



Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788) was an English painter, primarily active as a portraitist and landscape artist.

At the center of our collage is an elegant lady:

Countess Mary Howe, featured in one of Gainsborough's most striking and iconic female portraits, dating to 1764.

The countess has a proud stance, with her hand on her hip, and looks directly out of the canvas as if she had been interrupted while walking.

Gainsborough believed that attire helped capture a sitter's true likeness, and here Countess Howe is portrayed in the most fashionable dress of the 1760s.

The noblewoman wears a pink silk taffeta gown, a "Robe à l'Anglaise," known for its precise tailoring, construction, and elaborate trimmings. This dress is complemented by over a dozen accessories, including a sheer *fichu* edged with bobbin lace and an embroidered apron made of silk gauze and cotton muslin.

Several layers of ruffled lace, known as *engageantes*, attached to the ends of the sleeves, cascade down the countess's forearm, adding further volume and prestige to her appearance.

Her outfit is completed by an extraordinary broad-brimmed "Leghorn" straw hat, which would have been imported directly from the Tuscan city.

It is worth recalling that in Renaissance Florence, there was a distinct fashion for both men and women—featuring seasonal elements and fabrics for summer and winter—that served as a reference point for the nobility across half of Europe, fostering the rise of numerous Tuscan artisan workshops in the field.



Gotch never seen



Thomas Cooper Gotch (1854–1931), the English painter from whom we drew several details for our collage, achieved considerable success with his portraits.

However, he became widely popular and acclaimed for his depictions of young boys and girls in medieval attire, using his daughter Phyllis as a model.

The Renaissance marked an important era in the history of children's clothing. Children from wealthy families were often dressed elaborately, in clothes that reflected the style and wealth of their parents.

During the Enlightenment, children's clothing became more functional, with the introduction of softer and more comfortable fabrics, such as cotton.

With the Industrial Revolution came a significant turning point. The rise of the textile industry allowed for the creation of more affordable clothing, making children's fashion available to a broader audience.

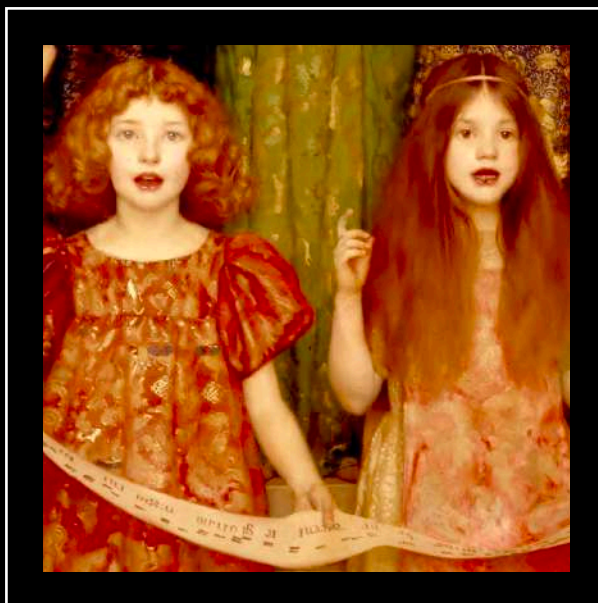
During this period, the concept of clothing designed specifically for childhood also emerged, featuring styles and designs meant solely for young ones.

In the 20th century, children's clothing evolved further, placing a growing emphasis on functionality and comfort.

The first half of the century saw the introduction of garments like overalls and sportswear, designed to allow children to move freely while playing.

In the digital era, children's clothing has become a dynamic, rapidly evolving industry.

Furthermore, there is a growing awareness surrounding sustainability and ethics in clothing manufacturing as a whole.



Hairstyle



In art history, we can find many examples of women's hairstyles. Here are a few, from top to bottom and left to right, that make up our collage: we begin with one of the most famous portraits of the Italian Renaissance: the profile of the "Young Woman" looking to the left, a Florentine noblewoman painted by Pollaiuolo in 1470.

Beside her, although partially hidden, is another young woman—this time Venetian—portrayed by the German artist Albrecht Dürer in 1505. The central nude figure is the famous Venus from 1484, painted by the Florentine Sandro Botticelli, considered the most beautiful female portrait of all time.

To the right of Venus, we have another celebrated beauty from Japanese history: Princess Konohanasakuya, painted by Inshō Dōmoto in 1929.

On the left, with feathers on her head, a smiling young woman painted by the Dutch artist Gerard van Honthorst in 1625 in the style of Caravaggio. Below the Japanese princess, a pair of women are combing their long hair, a work by the French painter Edgar Degas from the late 1800s.

The couple in profile at the bottom left, from the early 1600s, is by Peter Paul Rubens, who lived and worked in Italy where he admired the beauty of Roman art.

The rose is in Frida Kahlo's hair in her 1937 self-portrait. Who, despite the suffering she endured throughout her life, always painted herself as a proud and strong woman.

The Swiss painter Jean-Étienne Liotard created this portrait of a mother and daughter at breakfast in 1754. The artist paid great attention to detail, such as the silver coffee pot and the Chinese porcelain set reflected on the lacquered tray.

Finally, the large face in the top right corner is taken from the 1935 film *Bride of Frankenstein*. We included it to show how cinema, too, has contributed to spreading trends and fashions in hair and makeup.



Lawrence never seen



Sir Thomas Lawrence (1769–1830) dominated the art of portraiture in England. In 1818, the artist was busy with an important royal commission for a series of portraits of European leaders who had gathered in Aachen following the defeat of Napoleon.

"The Red Boy," the boy in the center, is considered one of Lawrence's masterpieces and, as a testament to the portrait's popularity, became the first painting to be reproduced on a British postage stamp in 1967.

On the left, the Duke of Portland, who appears to be observing the scene, wears a velvet suit—a soft, strokeable fabric iconic in art history.

Lotto Tribute



Lorenzo Lotto (1480–1557), a restless and itinerant Venetian painter, failed to find work in his home city due to his highly innovative and original style of painting. He was thus forced to seek employment in smaller towns, where there was less competition and where his style could be expressed more freely.

This portrait highlights another Italian excellence: the art of luxury textiles. This craft involved running a gold or silver thread across the surface of velvet, raised and twisted using a hook to create a raised texture shimmering with gold or silver. In this way, an economy of artisans developed, producing exclusive fabrics that were exported all across Europe.

Macke never seen



Despite his untimely death during World War I in 1914 at the age of just 27, August Macke's impact on modern art remains an important contribution to German Expressionism. Macke, who appears on the right side of our collage in his 1909 self-portrait, had a passion for clothing stores, which inspired a series of his paintings.

"The shop window represents a sort of threshold of desire, linked to the consumer's subjectivity—thus to their tastes, interests, and even changes in mood.

In psycho-cultural terms, we can say that the shop window functions as an anxiolytic and anti-depressant stimulus; it distracts, entertains, and arouses curiosity." (ocula.it)

Mengs never seen



Like many 18th-century artists, the German painter Anton Raphael Mengs (1728-1779) developed his masterful painting skills by studying works from antiquity, the Renaissance, and the Baroque period, before successfully establishing himself as a portraitist.

In 1715, Louis XIV, King of France, called the Sun King because of his personal emblem, a symbol of great power, passed away and with him, the Baroque era in fashion came to an end.

Garments became simpler, more understated, and less ostentatious, making way for a concept of elegance based on subtle details, soft pastel tones, and exotic accents.

"The jacket, always extending past the knee, falls loosely and is worn constantly open to reveal the slightly shorter waistcoat.

This waistcoat is the heart of the so-called *French suit* and is made of silk or precious fabric, adorned with appliqués, small lacquerwork, or a myriad of jewel-like buttons.

The sleeves of the jacket retain the cuffs of the late 17th century, but shed most of their frills, making way for the pastel colors of delicate Chinese porcelain and the refined sheen of silks from the increasingly fascinating East.

A key milestone was the introduction of pockets, which permanently freed men from the need to wear a pouch for personal belongings tied to their belt.

The trousers remained largely unchanged: fitted *culottes* fastened at the knee with a buttoned strap." (Irene Marone)



Rococò Style



Rococo as a trend movement fostered the emergence of new artistic ideas and forms, reflecting the liveliness and optimism of the time.

This was true not only in architecture and art, but also in fashion and design.

Examples of paintings from the period have been gathered in our collage: in the foreground on the left is the self-portrait of the French artist Marie-Gabrielle Capet, painted in 1783 at the age of 22.

The blue satin dress, boldly low-cut at the bust, was fashionable in her time, and the blue ribbons made of the same material reflect the playful lightness of the 18th century.

Women's fashion during the time of Louis XV is well represented by the king's most famous mistress: Madame de Pompadour, a charming bourgeois woman who captivated the king with her elegance and helped spread the Rococo style.

It is said that the king first noticed the lady dressed in blue velvet while she was driving an open carriage by herself.

La Pompadour was made a marquise and introduced to court, where an apartment was prepared for her.

Madame Pompadour (pictured below) became the most important woman in France—not only a model of elegance for all ladies and the arbiter of court taste, but she also influenced the rules of French court etiquette and assumed a strong political role. Winning Louis XV's confidence, she became the king's advisor, receiving ministers and prominent figures and conversing with them as equals.



Renaissance Men



The Renaissance man possesses a personality perfectly suited to the complexity of a world in turmoil.

He might be an artist or a patron; he admires beauty, delights in fine homes, exquisite furnishings, rich clothing, lovely gardens, and the music that woven into his everyday life.

Starting from the left, the main figures in our collage are four famous Italians: the painter Lorenzo di Credi, portrayed by Pietro Vannucci (known as Il Perugino); Borso d'Este, Marquis of Ferrara, painted by Baldassarre da Reggio; and Sigismondo Malatesta, Lord of Rimini, captured by Piero della Francesca—who also painted the final portrait, Federico da Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino.

Men's fashion during the Renaissance, from the 14th to the 17th century, underwent a major evolution compared to earlier periods.

This era saw the introduction of precious fabrics—such as the widespread use of brocades and velvets—which made clothing rich and elaborate.

Colors carried important social meaning: red was reserved for the nobility, while commoners rarely wore red or green. Dark gray was widely popular because it showed stains less easily.

Shoes featured flat, broad toes, low uppers, and ties around the ankles. Crafted from leather, as well as velvet and silk, they were often decorated with embroidery and precious stones.

Towards the end of the 16th century, men also began wearing earrings.



Renaissance Women



The Renaissance was a period of progress for middle- and upper-class women. By contrast, for the vast majority of women, life was extremely hard, offering few opportunities for advancement in a patriarchal society.

Female artists, in particular, had better prospects because they could earn a living through their work. During the 16th century, they began to gain wider acceptance, though they remained an unrecognized minority.

Courtesans could achieve independence, although they were often looked down upon—frequently dismissed as high-class prostitutes, when in reality they were highly educated women who socialized with artists, intellectuals, and scientists.

Starting from the left, the main figures in our collage are four famous Italian women: *Portrait of a Young Woman* (the "Berlin Dame"), painted by Piero del Pollaiuolo; Battista Sforza, Duchess of Urbino, portrayed by Piero della Francesca; Giovanna Tornabuoni, a Florentine noblewoman, painted by Domenico Ghirlandaio—who is also the artist behind the final portrait, Ginevra Cavalcanti, wife of Lorenzo de' Medici.

Women's fashion during the Renaissance reached unprecedented levels of elegance, with dresses crafted from precious fabrics like silk damasks and velvets, decorated with gold or silver threads, lace, and jewels.

Bodices were tight-fitting to emphasize a slender waist, achieved through the use of stiff stays or corsets worn beneath the gowns. Skirts were full and voluminous, often supported by padded bell-shaped petticoats to enhance their shape. Necklines were frequently deep and square-cut to highlight the neck and bust, while sleeves varied in style, ranging from fitted to puffed.



Singer Sargent Tribute



John Singer Sargent (1856–1925). Art meets fashion.

The American artist's technique beautifully enhances the luxurious gowns elegantly worn by 19th-century high society.

Most of these refined portraits are on display today in the galleries of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and Tate Britain in London.

Sargent did not simply paint his sitters; he personally chose the outfits they would wear, paying close attention to fabrics and accessories to achieve highly realistic pictorial effects.

This approach made him not just a painter, but a true stylist capable of turning clothing into key narrative elements within his artwork.

John Singer Sargent takes center stage in our collage, shown here working on his self-portrait. To the right is his famous 1884 portrait of *Madame X*—one of the most celebrated and controversial portraits in art history. The anonymous "X" hid the identity of Virginie Amélie Avegno Gautreau, a young Parisienne renowned for her beauty and free-spirited lifestyle.

Madame X stands tall in a low-cut black gown supported by delicate, jeweled straps. Her pose is bold, revealing bare shoulders and hair swept up into a chignon adorned with a gold crescent-moon ornament. When *Madame X* was unveiled at the Paris Salon of 1884, it sparked an uproar over its explicit sensuality. In particular, the dress strap—originally shown slipping off her shoulder—was deemed far too provocative for the era. Sargent was eventually forced to repaint the strap back in place to appease his critics.

Madame X not only reflects the elegance of the period's fashion, but also showcases Sargent's artistic skill in capturing the rebellious spirit of women who dared to challenge the social conventions of their time.



Sorolla Tribute



Joaquín Sorolla (1863–1923): the master of light.

A delightful white dress of fine cambric sways gently in the sea breeze, as the woman wearing it brushes aside the tulle veil of her wide straw hat.

This and other iconic images form part of the rich legacy left by Joaquín Sorolla.

The Valencian painter was one of the leading figures of modern Iberian art between the 19th and 20th centuries, playing a decisive role in its renewal.

In London in 1908, he was hailed as "the world's greatest living painter."

The color white has been a constant and versatile element in women's fashion—a timeless symbol of purity, elegance, and simplicity. Here are a few of its most iconic interpretations:

- **The Belle Époque:** White was celebrated in dresses rich with detail, featuring ruffles, lace, and airy silk.
- **The Suffragettes:** Activists fighting for women's right to vote in Britain and America chose white as a symbol of purity and innocence during their demonstrations. Wearing white also helped them stand out strikingly in the black-and-white photographs of the era.
- **The Total White Look:** A classic that never goes out of style. Whether it's a dress, a tailored suit, or simply a crisp white shirt paired with trousers, a head-to-toe white ensemble is perfect for formal, refined occasions.
- **Black & White Contrast:** Pairing white with black accessories creates a chic, modern edge.
- **Haute Couture:** High fashion interprets white through both experimental silhouettes and traditional sophistication. Houses such as Balenciaga, Jean Paul Gaultier, and Valentino have all showcased couture collections where white takes center stage.



Toulouse-Lautrec



When newspaper headlines reported the news of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's death, the words dripped with contempt and pity: a strange and deformed artist, miserably dead in an asylum, a victim of his own madness. This relentless narrative completely overlooked the very essence of his art.

In reality, the French artist Toulouse-Lautrec (1864–1901) was a master graphic artist, draftsman, and highly prolific painter during the late 19th century. He is particularly renowned for his posters and advertisements created for the shows at the famous Moulin Rouge nightclub.

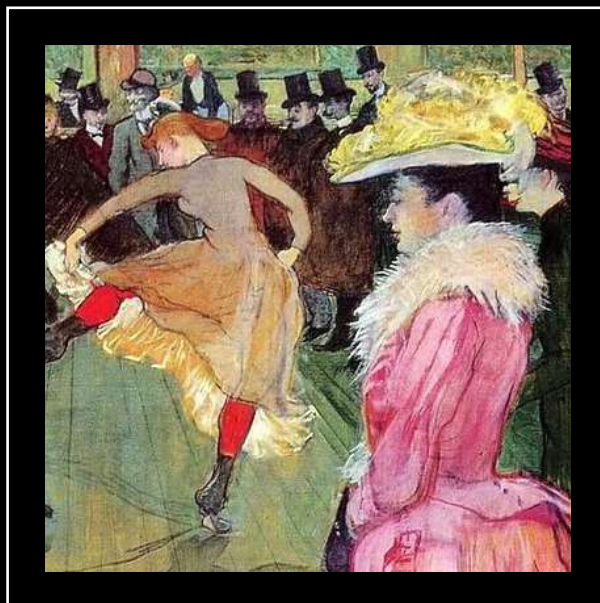
His works depicted the most eccentric scenes of Parisian nightlife during that nostalgic and mythologized era, famously known as the Belle Époque.

Fashion during the Belle Époque—a period spanning from 1871 to 1914—was characterized by significant evolution and innovation. It was an era of social, technological, and artistic transformations that profoundly influenced both lifestyle and clothing.

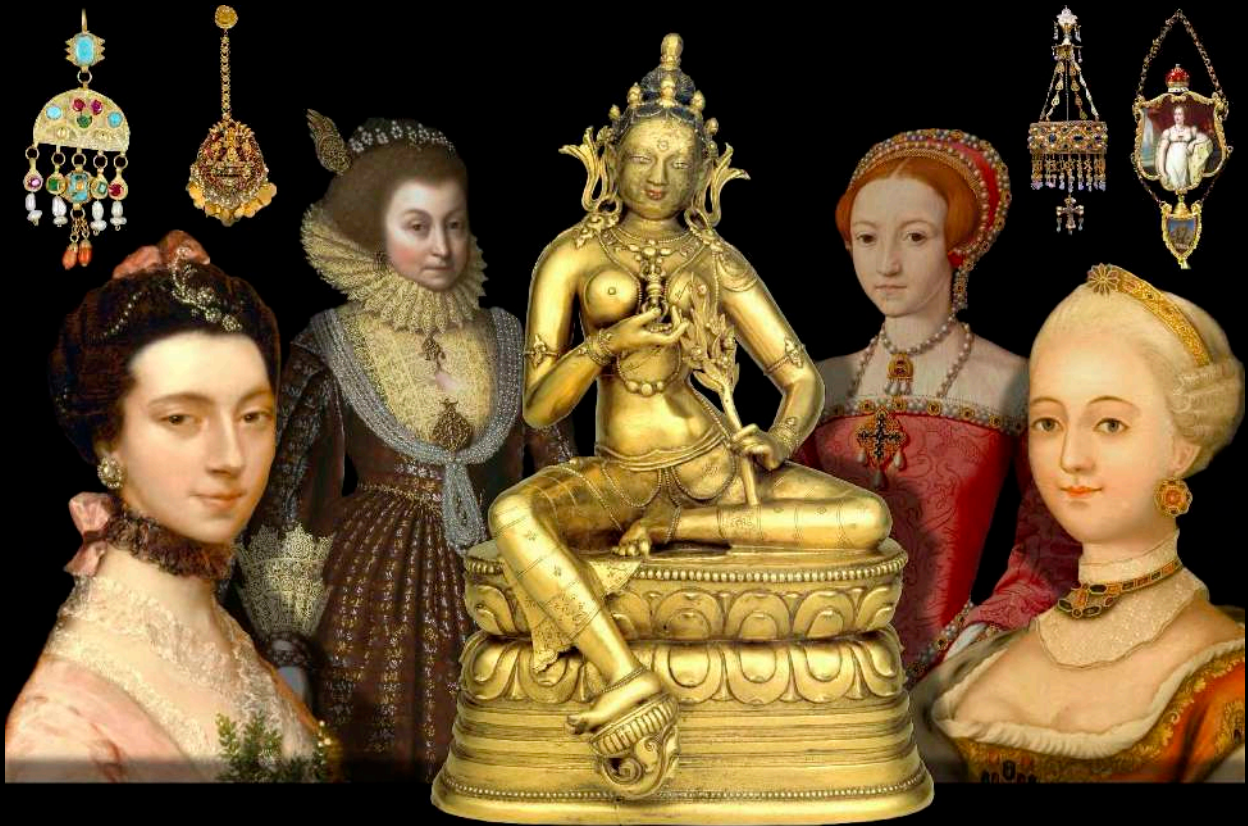
Women's fashion of the Belle Époque featured several distinctive elements: the corset was re-engineered with a rigid front busk that created the famous "S-bend silhouette," pushing the bust forward and the hips back.

Dark colors gave way to softer, muted shades such as pastel pink, mauve, pearl gray, and sky blue. Dresses were designed for specific daily or social occasions (morning, afternoon, and evening wear). Evening gowns featured plunging necklines and lavish embellishments such as sequins and beads.

Men's fashion in the early years of the 20th century was strongly influenced by British taste. Men frequently wore black morning coats or other formal attire inspired by English style.



Sterile Jewelry



Jewelry has been associated with femininity across various historical eras: as early as ancient Greece and Etruscan civilization, women wore elaborate jewelry as a sign of social status and beauty. Earrings, for instance, were particularly popular among Etruscan women around the 6th century BCE.

In Roman times, although jewelry was worn by both sexes, women were especially fond of earrings and other ornaments, such as necklaces and bracelets.

Rings, brooches, and gold crowns, on the other hand, served as symbols of wealth and power among wealthy Roman nobles. There was also an unwritten code dictating which jewelry could be worn according to one's social rank.

During the Middle Ages, jewelry continued to be a symbol of wealth and social status; however, its use was more restrained compared to previous eras, particularly among those who adhered more strictly to religious teachings.

In the Renaissance, pendants grew popular among women thanks to dresses featuring deep necklines.

In the Victorian era (1837–1901), jewelry remained a symbol of feminine elegance as well as an essential fashion accessory.

From the 20th century onward, the use of jewelry became even more widespread; numerous female icons popularized specific types of accessories, helping to shape diverse ideals of femininity.



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