

This season's conflicting trends

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THIS time, it was all very difficult. As a general rule — and we have often remarked on the fact — almost all the couturiers seem to have the same ideas at the very same moment, giving a certain unity to the new fashions; it only remains for fashion writers to gather their impressions into a bouquet giving a more or less true picture of the predominant lines and colours.

But really this time we had every reason to be disconcerted. Some designers favoured longer skirts, others raised them above the knee; one created suits with long basques, another made his ultra-short; we saw huge asymmetric collars almost hiding the face, side by side with small collars as severe and austere as a parson's dog-collar, and one could go on like this until the ink in one's ball-point pen ran dry. In vain, as I watched the sad, fashionably emaciated mannequins strutting up and

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down before me, did I look for a common feature, a link between all the silhouettes that I had seen and was seeing, when suddenly on the grey carpeting, clad in tartans, bouffant at the top, the skirt drawn tight at the knees like a clown's trousers, a tiny bat perched saucily on her head, appeared a creature with long slender calves whose muscles flexed visibly with every nervous prancing step. And I understood at once that this season the couturiers had conspired together to turn women into charming circus horses.

Don't think I am trying to ridicule the new fashions; by necessity the collections must be based on exaggerations that are conspicuous, that shock. Otherwise there would be no more couture, no more scope for talent or renewal. With a few notes or a few square inches of canvas, musicians and painters can capture and reproduce the magic of their most astonishing dreams. On a woman's body, the couturier creates new worlds or revives past centuries, adding a few modern touches of his own. Thus the year 1925, the Dolly Sisters and the Charleston are all revived in certain dresses, while the turned back panels of another are 1913 in inspiration, and Poirier's favourite themes, with shades of the Ballets Russes, reappear in the tunics and heavy, gaudy fabrics — yes, but all with an unmistakably 1959 touch.

We have already seen these little bats, and yet they couldn't look more up-to-date, perched on top of the head like William Tell's apple or the headbands of the gleaming piebald horses that give an air of glamour to circuses — Saint-Laurent and Castillo, Balenciaga and Cardin are perfect ring-masters. And there is no insult intended if we liken the pirouettes of these tall slender young women with their controlled, well-disciplined movements to a graceful equestrian act.

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However we ought at least to say what particularly struck us at the showings that began about the end of July, no matter how lacking in uniformity they were. Let us therefore begin

with what could be called the classical, the Chanel style for example. It is well known that Chanel is not afraid of copyists; she even welcomes them, which leads her to break union rules by allowing photographs and sketches of her collections to be published without the customary delay. In this supple fashion freed from all artificial restrictions, Chanel has found her element again; her collections exude charm and femininity, and most successfully too. There is also the classicism of Maggy Rouff, famous for her evening gowns, and I might almost add the classicism of Balmain. Pierre Balmain is a mixture of youth and reason. He may lengthen his suits, slenderise and stylise his silhouettes, but he always remains the Balmain of the Pretty Woman, who flatters women and dresses them up in glorious evening gowns. There is also the classicism of Grès and of Madeleine de Rauch, or Lucile Manguin, the chief exponents of this trend in fashion. As for Nina Ricci, she once again lives up to the good reputation her collections enjoy, by creating very personal lines, suits with low shoulders and large sleeves or bulky coats.

There is Jean Dessès with his subtle enveloping creations and Jacques Griffe who plays on the Gothic theme. There is Patou, still favouring dressy simplicity.

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In a realm apart, there is Jacques Heim with his calculated eccentricity, not to mention Carven, as young as ever and still creating for the younger woman.

And then there is the clique that regularly provides fashion writers with the material for their sensational headlines — Dior, where Saint-Laurent has set out to launch a very personal fashion, suits with very short coats, kneelength skirts and disconcerting evening dresses — Castillo who advocates long suits, skirts nearer to the ground and coats with gigantic collars — Guy Laroche who flirts with chasubles or Russian blouses and who, like most of his colleagues, has a partiality for seven-eighths models which only just reveal the skirt — Balenciaga whose collection looks quite simple when viewed at spectator distance, but is in reality the height of intricacy, each dress being a monument to his skill — Givenchy, as gifted as ever — Michel Goma about whom everyone is talking — and lastly, the one who is most in the news this season, Pierre Cardin, whose little bloused dresses are all the rage, as are his soft coats and slender suits...

I have left out many in this too brief list and beg those I have unwittingly omitted to forgive me.

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A mass of conflicting styles, this new fashion? Certainly, but it is like those music hall prisms that reflect the coloured beams of light projected onto them, giving a « pointillist » effect. It is gay, it is amusing, it is very Parisian.

It will be liked. It is already liked.

Gala