# Paul Poiret

## La mode est une fête

## Press release



Thérèse Bonney (1894-1978). Paul Poiret and model Renée in the salons of his couture house, 1 rond-point des Champs-Elysées. 1927. Gélatino silver bromide print by ARCP, [198.], from the negative. Bibliothèque historique de la Ville de Paris

**June 25, 2025 — Janv 11, 2026**

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With the support of the Friends of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs and GRoW @ Annenberg.
With special thanks to Regina and Gregory Annenberg Weingarten, as well as Krystyna Campbell-Pretty and her family.
The restoration of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs fashion collection ensembles is provided by Christine and Stephen A. Schwarzman.

MUSÉE DES ARTS DÉCORATIFS

# Paul Poiret
## La mode est une fête

**The Musée des Arts Décoratifs presents its first major monograph dedicated to Paul Poiret (1879-1944), a key figure in Parisian haute couture at the beginning of the 20th century. Paul Poiret, regarded as the liberator of the female body for removing the corset, revolutionized fashion. The exhibition *Paul Poiret. Fashion is a Feast* is an immersive journey into the creator's rich universe, from the Belle Époque to the Roaring Twenties. It explores his creations in the fields of fashion, decorative arts, perfume, celebration, and gastronomy. Through 550 works (clothing, accessories, fine and decorative arts), the exhibition highlights his lasting influence and reveals the extent of his creative genius. It is a fascinating journey into the world of a man whose legacy continues to inspire contemporary fashion designers, from Christian Dior in1948 to Alphonse Maitrepierre in 2024. The exhibition was curated by Marie-Sophie Carron de la Carrière, Chief Curator of Heritage, and designed by Paf atelier under the artistic direction of Anette Lenz.**

1. Georges Lepape —
*Les choses de Paul Poiret vues par Georges Lepape*
Paris, Paul Poiret, 1911
Copy no. 176/300
Stencil-colored phototype
© Les Arts Décoratifs

2. Paul Poiret —
Evening coat
Paris, circa 1910
Gros de Tours edging with brocaded decoration of gold thread and silver blades, changing taffeta, trimmings and silver-plated metal
© Les Arts Décoratifs / Christophe Dellière



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Born in Paris in 1879, Paul Poiret began his career as an apprentice in several fashion houses. From 1898, he trained under Jacques Doucet, and in 1901 he joined the Worth house, then run by the two sons of the founder of haute couture. In these houses, Poiret observed and absorbed the fundamentals of the couture profession: interaction with clients and teamwork. These experiences inspired him to create his own fashion house in 1903. Here, he defined a new aesthetic for the female body, in motion and without restraint, breaking away from the S-shaped silhouette of the early century. His simplified line was highly modern, as exemplified by the *Joséphine* evening gown, a masterpiece from his 1907 "Manifesto" collection inspired by the Directoire style. The waist is raised under the bust and held inside the dress by a lightly boned grosgrain ribbon. Poiret used light fabrics and bright, acid colors, with a palette reminiscent of Fauvism, a movement of the early 20th century.

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3. George Barbier — Cover of *Les Modes* magazine
April 1912
Paris, Manzi, Joyant et Cie, 1912
Gravure
© Les Arts Décoratifs

4. Paul Iribe -— *Étude de rose*
Circa 1910
Graphite and gouache on wove paper
© Les Arts Décoratifs / Cyrille Bernard

He catered to an affluent and cultured clientele eager for novelty. He surrounded himself with innovative artists with whom he collaborated and collected, such as (Paul Iribe, Raoul Dufy, Maurice de Vlaminck, or Georges Lepape). After the First World War, during which he was drafted, Poiret found inspiration in his travels and the lavish parties he threw. The 1920s were marked by excessive spending to support his extravagant lifestyle and the expansion of his businesses (his fashion house, Martine, and Les Parfums de Rosine). In 1925, at his own expense, he participated in the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts: he chartered three barges on the Seine to present his universe. This event turned out to be a financial disaster. He was forced to sell his fashion house in November 1924 and to leave it permanently in December 1929.

The exhibition is both chronological and thematic, immersing visitors in modern Paris at the beginning of the 20th century. It highlights the beginnings of Paul Poiret's career, tracing the foundations of his creative genius at Doucet and Worth. It gradually reveals his relationships and highlights his innovations. Visitors will discover the many facets of the designer, whose practice is closer to that of a conductor than that of a simple couturier. The journey is punctuated by works by artists who accompanied Poiret throughout his life. Among them is the decorator and architect Louis Süe, who designed his fashion house on the Avenue d'Antin. Poiret was a talent scout who supported young artists and often formed lasting friendships with them, as was the case with Raoul Dufy. Their collaboration produced unique creations such as the *La Perse* coat (1911), designed by Poiret and printed by Dufy. In addition to artists, Poiret mingled with wealthy and cosmopolitan members of society, clients of the great fashion houses. This was the case with the American avant-garde collector and gallerist.



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5. Paul Poiret —
*Joséphine* evening dress
Paris, 1907
Silk satin, silk
net and metallic
braid embroidered
in bourdon stitch
© Les Arts Décoratifs /
Christophe Dellière

6. Paul Poiret —
*Mosaïque* evening dress
Paris, circa 1908
Green silk chiffon
embroidered with silk
thread and pearls, gold
braid and mink fur
© Les Arts Décoratifs /
Christophe Dellière

7. Paul Poiret —
Evening dress
Paris, 1910
Silk satin, silk chiffon
embroidered with glass
tubes and silk velvet
© Les Arts Décoratifs /
Christophe Dellière

From 1909, Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes performed in Paris. Poiret attended their performances, which were characterized by a fusion of the arts (music, dance, sets and costumes). He was struck by their modernity, which he translated into his own work. Photographs of the dancer Tamara Karsavina in Scheherazade are displayed next to a drawing by Léon Bakst, the ballet's set designer. Poiret dressed dancers such as Isadora Duncan and Nyota Inyoka.

He was deeply influenced by his many travels in Europe and North Africa. He recounted some of these experiences in his memoirs, *Dressing the Age* (1930), even mentioning his culinary and olfactory adventures. He incorporated fabrics and embroideries brought back from his travels into his fashion designs, often naming his outfits after the places he visited, such as *Marrakech* and *Toledo.*

The exhibition also highlights the spectacular parties organized by the couturier through several costumes. These include *Les Festes de Bacchus* and the famous *La Mille et Deuxième Nuit,* to which Poiret invited his artist friends (Kees van Dongen and Dunoyer de Segonzac) as well as high society. These soirees were social events that were chronicled by the press of the time and served as promotional events for his fashion house.

Poiret's private life is revealed through photographs and family portraits of his wife Denise Poiret, their children, and his sister Nicole Groult. This section highlights precious moments of his private life.

8. Christian Dior
by John Galliano —
*Stourhead* evening coat
and dress set
Paris, spring-summer
1998 haute couture
collection
Made from hand-painted,
quilted, gold-brocaded
silk, antiqued and
embossed silver lamé, silk
chiffon embroidered with
silver metallic threads
and rhinestones
© Les Arts Décoratifs /
Christophe Dellière

9. Schiaparelli —
Evening dress
Paris, "Ligne de face"
haute couture collection
winter 1950-1951
Silk satin, silk velvet,
embroidery by Lesage
of metallic threads,
cordonnet, pearls and
rhinestones
© Les Arts Décoratifs /
Christophe Dellière

The exhibition also presents Poiret's many talents: in addition to being a couturier, he was a painter, actor, writer, restaurateur, and musician. This multidisciplinary approach was evident in the three barges he built at his own expense during the 1925 International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts.
Like a conductor, Poiret sought to create a total work of art. His ability to bring together different disciplines is reflected in the two companies he founded in 1911: Martine, dedicated to interior design and divided into a school and a workshop, and *Les Parfums de Rosine.* To create a perfume, he brought together several talents. For *Arlequinade* (1923), for example, the bottle was designed by the artist Marie Vassilieff and made by the sculptor and glassmaker Julien Viard, while the fragrance was created by the perfumer Henri Alméras.



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The exhibition concludes with a look at Poiret's influence on post-war cinema, for example in *L'Inhumaine* by Marcel L'Herbier. This section is complemented by Poiret's influence on 20th and 21st century designers and couturiers: Christian Lacroix, Yves Saint Laurent and John Galliano. Paul Poiret was the first couturier to hire artists to work on his textiles, decorations, illustrations, and other means of communication. He is thus the pioneer of what we now call "collaborations," a common practice between fashion brands and artists since the early 2000s.



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# Useful informations

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**#Expo_Poiret**

**— Les Arts Décoratifs**
**The not-for-profit organization Les Arts Décoratifs brings together the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, the Musée Nissim de Camondo, the Camondo School, the Ateliers du Carrousel, and the Library.**
Lionel Sauvage, President
Camille Herody, Deputy Chief Executive Officer
Bénédicte Gady, Acting Museum Director

**— Musée des Arts Décoratifs**
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→ Tuesday to Friday, 11 am – 6 pm
→ Open late in temporary exhibition on Thursdays until 9 pm
**Admission**
→ General admission: € 15
→ Concession: € 10
→ Free for under 26

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