

## **The Colour of Fashion at the *Salon du Goût Français*: a virtual exhibition of French luxury commodities 1921-3**

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*This article investigates the use of the Autochrome, an important photographic process invented by the Lumière brothers that produced the most accurate representation of colour between 1907 and the early 1930s, in a government-backed exhibition of French luxury commodities, the Salon du Goût Français. Between 1921 and 1923 the exhibition showed in Paris and undertook two international tours, first to North America and then to Australasia, China, Vietnam, Japan and India. Thousands of objects were displayed, from automobiles to umbrellas, including couture, ready to wear, lingerie, menswear, children's wear and accessories. By reducing the objects to two dimensions on the glass Autochrome plates, the exhibition could be shown in a relatively small venue in Paris, transported to America in a trunk and voyage on a decommissioned battle cruiser to the Far East. Using the trope of Western fashion as a form of soft power mediated by the global reach afforded by the Autochromes, the article proposes that the Salon du Goût Français offered a kind of roving virtual art gallery, a vividly colourful encyclopaedic display of over 2,000 images of luxury manufacturing deployed to restore France's imperial and cultural hegemony as supreme arbiter of taste after the trauma of the First World War.*

Keywords: Autochrome, French couture, fashion, colour photography, luxury, French imperialism, colonialism.

### INTRODUCTION

The *Salon du Goût Français* (hereafter the *Salon*) was one of several industrial and trade fairs mounted in France to boost manufacturing after the First World War at a time of economic

instability, government debt, inflation, low productivity and falling exports. Part commercial enterprise, part imperial propaganda, diplomatic and ‘civilizing mission’, it was organized on behalf of the French government by publisher Maurice Devriès (dates unknown). Several such events took place in Paris in the same year as the first *Salon*, 1921, including the thirteenth *Foire de Paris*, the largest product fair in Europe. These were followed in 1925 by the celebrated *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes*, in which French couture played a major part, significantly boosting export sales.<sup>1</sup> Yet, with the exception of several Autochromes depicting Paul Poiret’s (1879-1944) barges moored on the banks of the Seine and some colour plates from the exhibition catalogues, the visual history of the *Art Deco Expo* (as it came to be known) can only be traced through monochrome images. In contrast, thanks to the Lumière brothers’ (Auguste Lumière 1862-1954, Louis Lumière 1864-1948) invention of the Autochrome process that produced the most accurate representation of colour in photography available at the time, the little-known *Salon* archive provides a wealth of evidence of a similar range of products and especially of fashion in colour.

On a global scale, international exhibitions and world fairs had exhibited dress as a form of industrial production or decorative ‘art’ since the Great Exhibition of 1851 in Hyde Park, London.<sup>2</sup> In France in particular the increasing use of contemporary and historical dress in subsequent universal exhibitions in 1878, 1889 and 1900 that prominently featured displays of fashion propelled the integration of the Paris fashion industry into the historical imaginary of France so that it became firmly embedded in the notion of *patrimoine* (cultural heritage). Popular interest in fashion directly benefitted the French economy in turn engendering better systems and organization within the French fashion manufacturing industries.<sup>3</sup> In 1925, as the struggle for independence from French imperial rule began to gain ground amongst its colonies, the *Art Deco Expo* fore-grounded fashion as a signifier of modernity (despite the current prevalence of oriental influence) and superiority over non-industrialized countries and colonies. Six years later, at the 1931 *Exposition Coloniale Internationale de Paris*,

orientalism and *le style moderne* merged into the *coloniale moderne*, a fashionable aesthetic that: ‘... reflected a deliberate campaign by the French government to justify their colonizing activities at a time when the rationale behind imperialist expansion was increasingly being questioned’.<sup>4</sup> But several years before this, the strategic deployment of fashion as cultural paradigm and mediator of imperial benevolence directed at the French colonial *outré-mers* (overseas) was an approach used by the *Salon*.

The plethora of goods displayed in the colourful images at each of the *Salon* exhibitions included a huge range of objects, with clothing and accessories in the majority. Out of over 2,000 Autochrome plates now in the archive of the *Musée des Arts et Métiers (CNAM)* Paris, France, the collection comprises 441 images of women’s fashions, thirty two of menswear and thirty eight of children’s wear, plus around 360 of accessories, including hats, gloves, umbrellas, parasols, plumed aigrettes and boas, perfume bottles, lace, lingerie, fancy dress costumes, wigs, hair dye colour samples and jewelry.<sup>5</sup> All the products were available to order from the manufacturers listed in the catalogues accompanying each exhibition.

For three consecutive years the *Salon* took place in the circular *Palais de Glace*, Paris, France, built in 1893 at the south end of the Champs Elysées to house the panorama ‘*Le Vengeur*’ that later became an indoor skating rink or *patinoire* in the winter months, as its name suggests. Today, as the *Théâtre du Rond Point*, it has changed little since it was built (Figure 1). The circularity of this venue and the corresponding interior scheme within mirrored the *Salon*’s near complete circumnavigation of the globe on two international tours, made possible by its unique ability to be easily, safely and economically transported. The first tour, described in the catalogue in military terms as a ‘crusade’ to North America, was essentially a hard commercial sales drive to promote trade. The second tour, described more diplomatically as a ‘cruise’, ostensibly to thank France’s allies for their aid in the War, was in fact a soft-sell campaign intended to promote luxurious

commodities to new audiences in Asia and Australasia and crucially, along the way, to reinforce relations (and boost exports) with France's colonies in North Africa, the Pacific and Indochina.

The *Salon's* Autochromes afford an invaluable primary source of evidence of the assumed cultural supremacy of France and of the colour of the objects on display, fixed in time and space. Like another better-known global travelling exhibition twenty-five or so years later, the *Théâtre de la Mode* in 1946, Paris fashion was deployed to re-establish France's reputation after the hiatus of war.

#### THE LUMIÈRES' AUTOCHROME

Photographs are both evidence of history and history themselves.<sup>6</sup> Autochromes have been called some of the most beautiful photographic images ever taken, occupying a liminal space between photography and painting.<sup>7</sup> Viewed against a source of light like its predecessor the lanternslide, the Autochrome's aesthetic quality exceeded that of any other colour process, was the first commercially viable colour process and remained the best medium for the representation of colour in photography between 1907 and the early 1930s, until the introduction of cheaper and more practical celluloid-based colour film such as the Lumières' own Filmcolor (1931) and Lumicolor (1933).

The Autochrome was a technological leap forward in the long-standing race to develop an accurate colour process and was launched to great acclaim at the Paris offices of *L'Illustration* magazine in June 1907, by which time the plates were already in production at the Lumières' Lyon factory. It was an additive process that exposed light filtered through microscopic coloured granules of potato starch onto a glass plate, registering a negative image. A reversal method took place inside the camera obtaining a translucent, colour positive image on the glass plate within, that once exposed could not be modified – each was a one-off, ready-made, unique and unrepeatable like a Polaroid.<sup>8</sup> The quality of the images produced does vary enormously: experience and skill were

necessary to judge long exposure times and manage light, humidity, temperature conditions and technical elements in the development process, so that in some the colour is muted while in others it is saturated, but when successful, they are spectacular and unlike other examples of fashion imagery in printed media or even painting, represent colour as accurately as was then possible. Yet, despite the Autochrome's attributes and recent digital technology enabling the images on the fragile glass plates to be safely preserved, they remain an underused resource by fashion historians.<sup>9</sup>

### THE SALON DU GOÛT FRANÇAIS

*PARIS, PALAIS DE GLACE: 1921 MAY – SEPTEMBER; 1922 MAY – AUGUST; 1923 MAY - AUGUST*

On 19 May 1921 Maurice Devriès inaugurated the first of the three annual *Salon* exhibitions in Paris. The title of the show aligned the enterprise with the highest levels of aesthetic appreciation: the annual *Salon de Paris*, since its inception in the late seventeenth century, was the most prestigious showcase of the fine arts in France, if not the world. The glass Autochrome plates mounted into partition walls and lit from behind by Philipps' bulbs chosen for their bright white light (SDGF 1921) resembled a gallery of paintings whose jewel-like radiance and sumptuous colours mesmerized their viewers. On 3 June 1921 French newspaper *L'Excelsior's* reporter likened the experience to that of entering a cathedral: 'The crowd that gathered each day in these small mysterious chapels lit by coloured glass was seized by real emotion.'<sup>10</sup> The allusion to light filtered through ancient stained glass windows such as those in Nôtre Dame, Sainte Chapelle and Chartres, among the greatest surviving treasures of medieval France, evoked a sense of national pride, in *patrimoine* and the: 'notion that France reigned supreme in art, that art dominated culture, culture evoked civilization, and hence, civilization meant France'.<sup>11</sup>

The *Salon*'s alignment with the art world is a feature of its promotional material and the catalogues accompanying each show: for example, in 1921 Devriès emphasized that the exhibits were passed by a 'Jury of Artists' and an entire page of the catalogue was devoted to the *Autochromists* who were required to compose the scene and orchestrate the colours, light and shade like painters (SDGF 1921). The same catalogue describes the exhibition as: '*une galerie de tableaux*': artistically arranged *tableaux* or scenes staged like paintings of the latest fashions mounted on wax mannequins and later, *tableaux vivants* with live models, were already familiar to American and French audiences from the late nineteenth century until replaced by the catwalk show and film newsreels in the early twentieth century.<sup>12</sup> The technological advance of the *Salon*'s Autochromes presents another paradigm shift in the exhibition and dissemination of fashion, as the best images of colourful garments modelled by fully accessorized professionals, framed against studio backdrops, attest.

Devriès engaged the modernist architect Robert Mallet-Stevens (1886-1945), listed as '*Decorateur Moderne*' in all three catalogues, to design the scheme for the *Salon*, consisting of an octagonal hall following the circular form of the *Palais de Glace* with a raised central feature of potted plants and a fountain. Two large rectangular openings faced each other across the hall and on either side six smaller arched doorways gave access to small *salles* (rooms) radiating out from it in which the Autochromes were displayed. Above each doorway a paned section was surmounted by a decorative roundel, the entire space was roofed by a tent-like cloth hanging from a central point above from which a large lantern was suspended.<sup>13</sup> A postcard of the second 1922 *Salon* (Figure 2) shows the hall decorated with floral garlands and roundels, a design credited to '*La Maîtrise des Galeries Lafayette*' and described as in grey, gold, black, purple, violet and red. Some Autochromes can be seen through the arch on the right of the fountain, shining out from one of the darkened *salles*.<sup>14</sup> A series of images taken from the curved wrought iron balcony of the *Palais de Glace* interior, encircling the central hall of the *Salon* below, shows the smaller rooms radiating out from

it, each with custom made wooden partitions (ventilated by openings at the top) into which the backlit framed glass plates were mounted and arranged into sections with the designer or manufacturer's name given in a *cartouche* above. The lower sections of the partitions were draped in heavy velvet curtains.

Each *salle* was dedicated to a different category of commodity listed in the *Programme* in the 1921 catalogue and on a different page, the names of the *Présidents* of the corresponding *Chambres Syndicales* for each category are given. Added attractions for visitors were an exhibition of provincial crafts presented by artisans in appropriate regional costume, a puppet theatre and display of costumed dolls embodying twenty centuries of French history, an orchestra and a tearoom. The 1922 catalogue also celebrates the work of '*Les Artisans de nos Provinces*' and their coming together through the *Salon* with the '*artistes de la cité*'. The inclusion of provincial artisanal crafts over these two years may be seen as a response to criticism from decentralists who were currently challenging the cultural supremacy of Paris.<sup>15</sup>

The 1921 catalogue lists 257 exhibitors, each given a trade category and designation, of which approximately 100 were associated with the fashion industry and its satellite businesses. Fourteen couturiers were included: Aine-Montailié, Gustave Beer (c1890-1928), Berthe Hermance (dates unknown), Clé (dates unknown, designated as *couture et modes*), Georges Doeuillet (1865-1929), Jenny (Jeanne-Adèle Bernard 1909-1940), Jeanne Lanvin (1867-1946), Martial et Armand, André Melnotte-Simonin (dates inknow), Mme Paquin (1869-1936, then Honorary President of the *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture*), Poiret, Prémet, Redfern, and Worth. The women's wear, both *couture* and *modes*, included models for town and for sport, evening dress and furs, the category determining designation rather than the label, so for example, Chanel's (1883-1971) name in this year is listed under the Compagnie Sibérienne, (designated *Fourrures*) at 217 Rue Saint Honoré. She did not take part in 1922 but in 1923 she is listed under her name at 31 rue Cambon and with J-L. et M. Perrier (*Successeurs, Fourreurs*) at 217 Rue Saint Honoré. All except one of her seven models

are made of or trimmed with fur but it is not clear whether they were exhibited in 1921 or 1923 (Figure 3).<sup>16</sup> There seems to have been a distinction between the designations of *couture* and *couturier*, with Lanvin, Paquin and Poiret all designated as *couture* whereas Beer, Redfern and Worth are all *couturier*. In addition to *couture*, *couturier*, *couture et modes* and *modes*, other designations include *tailleurs* and *tailleur-couturier*, underlining the complexity of terminology prevalent in the fashion industry.<sup>17</sup> Notable jewellers included Boucheron, Radius & Cie designated as *Bijoutiers-Joilliers* and Cartier, Chaumet and Van Cleef & J. Arpels, all designated as *Joilliers*. Louis Vuitton is listed as a maker of *Maroquinerie, Articles de Voyage*.

Several reports in the newspaper *L'Excelsior* throughout May, June and July of 1921 attest to the *Salon's* success: on 3 June a photograph depicts a Sunday morning queue waiting outside the *Palais de Glace* for the doors to this '*curieuse Exposition*' to open and on the 19 June it attributes its success to: '*...l'exactitude du procédé, la richesse et la vivacité des couleurs, la gamme des tons qui chantent*' (the accuracy of the process, the richness and liveliness of the colors, the vivid range of tones).<sup>18</sup> An Autochrome featured in an advertisement for Henri à la Pensée (designated *Nouveauté pour Dames*) on the back cover of French *Vogue* 15 July 1921: taken by Jean Desboutin (1878-1951), one of the *autochromists* featured in the catalogue, it shows Mademoiselle Yolande Laffon (1895-1992) of the *Théâtre de Paris* modeling a vivid red silk Spanish style fringed shawl as she poses on a Persian rug against a dark grey-green scumbled backdrop with a decorative border piled up on the floor behind her (Figure 4). A similar setting is used for a black crêpe de Chine dress by Poiret, cut in one piece, embroidered with polychrome Chinese-style flowers, birds and butterflies with long tassels hanging from the loose, open sleeves and tied at the waist with a turquoise sash (Figure 5). This dress, now in the collection of the *Musée des Arts Décoratifs*, Paris, France, featured in Yvonne Deslandres' 1987 book on Poiret where it was described as the '1922 "Exotique" or "Colibri" (Humming Bird) afternoon dress'.<sup>19</sup> The attribution of the date to 1922 may have been made because the dress featured in *Femina* magazine on 1 July 1922, but as Poiret only



took part in the 1921 Salon (showing 5 models altogether) this date may need to be reassessed. This dress provides an early example of the *coloniale moderne*, a style typified by a fusion of orientalism, streamlined construction and modernist silhouette, embodying Poiret's appropriation of exoticism and reinforcing the construction of the Other in support of France's colonial domination.<sup>20</sup>

The 1922 *Salon* catalogue lists 270 exhibitors, sixty-eight of them new that year, including Joseph Paquin (designated as *couturier*) and Drecoll (Christoph Drecoll 1851-1939, designated as *couture*), whereas Clé, Doeuillet and Poiret had dropped out. Neither the *Compagnie Sibérienne* nor Chanel exhibited, but other notable newcomers included Godde, Bedin & Cie. publishers of the fashion magazine *Art, Goût, Beauté*, photographers Manuel Frères' *Galleries d'Art* and fashion newsreel makers Pathé Consortium Cinéma *Direction*.

In 1923 261 exhibitors took part in the third and final iteration of the *Salon* in its Paris venue. Chanel returned as mentioned above: her only model not trimmed with or made of fur was a short-sleeved, square-necked, low-waisted dress of black embroidered tulle lined with a black underslip, a matching cape attached at the back of the neck and a sash of black satin tied at the hip. This could be described as a precursor of the 'little black dress' of 1926, the so-called 'Chanel Ford', an oxymoron that expressed the all-consuming problem for many couturiers of maintaining exclusivity whilst simultaneously generating profit. As noted, Poiret did not take part in the 1923 *Salon* although his sister, Nicole Groult (1887-1967) designated as *couture*, did: the Autochromes of her three models are some of the most decorative, with props and accessories setting the scene (Figure 6), although these images are now somewhat faded.

American trade newspaper *Women's Wear* in its *News of the Foreign Markets* reported on the opening of the third *Salon* in Paris on 25 May 1923, noting that there had been: 'a slight falling-off in the number of deluxe houses, jewelers and dressmakers of the Rue de la Paix ... in favor of the smaller, less well-known concerns, many of them situated in the commercial part of the city and doing wholesale business'.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, the high quality of Parisian manufacture is evident across

the board in garments from well-known houses such as those mentioned above, to less well-known labels such as Martial et Armand's shimmering silver lame and red velvet, coral-beaded and tasselled evening dress (Figure 7) and the brilliant scarlet bathing costume with matching parasol and *espadrilles* by Calvayrac (Figure 8). Accessories are superb: from Nicolet's pearl grey gloves embroidered with blue ivy leaves to Rosa Pichon's exquisite ostrich feather boa tipped with turquoise and Poulet's colourful striped knitted ties for men. The *Salon* archive is particularly significant here as it includes nearly fifty images of lavishly trimmed hats and accessories, usually relegated to secondary spreads in fashion magazines and rarely illustrated in colour.

*'LA PREMIÈRE CROISADE: LA TOURNÉE DE PROPAGANDE DU SALON DU GOÛT FRANÇAIS EN AMÉRIQUE' OCTOBER 1921- MAY 1922*

From its inception the *Salon* was expected to return government investment by acting both as propaganda and commercial sales drive abroad. As *Excelsior* reported on 20 May 1921 : *'Ces clichés feront le tour du monde, car...toute cette exposition tient dans un malle. Nos services de propagande a l'étranger sauront utiliser...ce merveilleux instrument de diffusion, qui peut rendre de réels services à la cause française.'* (These images will tour the world because they can all fit inside a trunk. Useful as propaganda abroad, they will make a real contribution to the French cause).<sup>22</sup>

Despite consternation caused during the War when American manufacturers had threatened French couture exports by promoting home-grown designers, by the mid-1920s America was the second most important consumer of French clothing after Britain.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps assuming that British consumers could relatively easily see the *Salon* in Paris, its first venture overseas was to America in October 1921 when a selection of Autochromes that displayed the 'cream of French industrial art' was packed into a single trunk and put onboard the *SS Paris*, a newly-launched luxury ocean liner.<sup>24</sup> Destined for New York, Philadelphia and Chicago, regarded as the three main centres of commerce and industry, the *Salon's* inauguration took place at the New York Wanamaker store on 30

November 1921.<sup>25</sup> In his speech, the French Consul declared that the exhibition would not only demonstrate, through the scientific invention of the Autochrome, that France was back at work renewing its worldwide reputation as leader of industry and the arts, but that it would also allow the smile of France to shine for a month over the city with ‘...*un incomparable éclat*’ (an incomparable brilliance).<sup>26</sup>

In Philadelphia the French Consul spoke in similar terms when he opened the subsequent *Salon* on 9 January 1922 in Wanamaker’s flagship store where it was displayed in the Egyptian Hall, a vast space used for exhibitions and fashion shows since 1908.<sup>27</sup> Next the *Salon* travelled to Chicago (*‘l’une des plus inexpugnables forteresses de l’élément germanophile’*) (one of the most entrenched fortresses of pro-German sentiment).<sup>28</sup> No mention is made of the Chicago venue but *American Art News* and *Women’s Wear* both reported that the *Salon* was showing on the tenth floor of Mandel Brothers’ store.<sup>29</sup>

Amid the elaborate language in the American tour report in the 1922 catalogue, the aim of the *Salon’s croisade* is baldly acknowledged: *‘Mais le but précis de la tournée de propagande du “Salon du Goût Français” en Amérique n’était pas seulement d’impressionner l’opinion publique américaine par l’éclat et la vitalité des industries d’art françaises; c’était aussi d’amorcer des affaires’* (the precise aim of the propaganda tour in America of the *Salon* is not only to impress on the American public the brilliance and vitality of French industrial art, but also to promote business).

To this end and to ‘yield maximum profit’ various publicity initiatives were mounted, including sending special invitations to 1000 ‘individual clients, wholesalers, personalities on the Social Register (*Le Bottin Mondain de New York*), representatives of important European manufacturers, professional buyers based in New York and multi-millionaires interested in the arts’. Each inauguration was preceded by a banquet for 100 guests ‘notables and members of the press’ while top-class magazines (*somptueux magazines techniques*) featured the Autochromes with descriptions of the models and the names of the exhibitors.<sup>30</sup>

This catalogue also features French transcriptions of the speeches made at the New York inauguration: Maurice Devriès fulsomely thanked those who had helped to organize the exhibition including Rodman Wanamaker (1863-1928) who because of his: ‘...*devouément à la cause française*’ was about to be made a commander of the *Legion d’Honneur*. Rodman’s father John Wanamaker (1838-1922) was regarded by the end of the nineteenth century as the greatest merchant in America whose stores set the bar in display, merchandising and service, offering a vision of an aspirational consumer paradise.<sup>31</sup> The commercial aesthetic deployed by the Wanamakers and other merchandisers to convey this paradise is of significance here as Leach credits its evolution to the: ‘...visual materials of desire ... by 1910, American merchants...took command over color, glass and light, fashioning a link so strong between them and consumption that, today, the link seems natural’.<sup>32</sup> These elements, colour, glass and light, all integral to the Autochrome process, made it the perfect medium to sell fashion, considered by the Wanamakers to be ‘the keystone of our business’.<sup>33</sup> The breathtaking moment in the Egyptian Hall is described when the electricity was switched on and thousands of Autochromes were brought to life: ‘out of the depths of the *salles* streaming with light and color, oohs and ahs of admiration could be heard’.<sup>34</sup>

A photograph of the Philadelphia exhibition in the 1922 catalogue shows the partitions in grid formation corresponding with the angular shape of the Egyptian Hall (Figure 9): some visitors gaze intently at the Autochromes while some look straight at the photographer above. An orchestra and grand piano are visible at the side of the room, the *mise en scene* completed by an array of potted ferns on top of the ‘gallery’ walls and tricolor flags attached to the surrounding pillars. Two mannequins pose on the stage at the back, their awkward gestures leaving no doubt that they are not living models. Behind them hang two portraits in circular frames, possibly from the Wanamakers’ own extensive art collection purchased each year from the Paris Salon and frequently deployed by them as a marketing tool, blurring aesthetic

appreciation with material desire as the arts were increasingly co-opted and integrated into consumer culture.<sup>35</sup>

The only reference to the *Salon* in the John Wanamaker archive at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia is an undated book on open shelving titled *Wanamaker Firsts* in which the *Salon* is indexed between ‘Rolling chairs’ and ‘San Francisco Relief’ as an ‘exhibition of the most characteristic work of French industrial art, shown in color by the Lumière process...’<sup>36</sup> Wanamaker’s also published a catalogue of the *Salon*, in English, in which the list of exhibitors varies considerably from the 1921 Paris show: neither Paquin nor Poiret are included while Drecol, Margaine-Lacroix and Molyneux (Edward Molyneux 1891-1974) are. The English translations of the exhibitors’ designations can be surprising, for example, Jenny, Lanvin, Molyneux and Worth are all designated as manufacturers of ‘gowns’ while Beer, Martial et Armand and Redfern, all described as *couturier* in the French catalogues, are listed as ‘dressmakers’.<sup>37</sup>

Some reports on the *Salon* in the American press are brief, focusing more on the Autochromes’ technical and artistic novelty than on the fashions they featured, but a lengthy article in *Women’s Wear* describes in detail several models, such as: ‘The quaint type of dance frock’ shown by Lanvin, as well as Molyneux’s: ‘... distinctive model in yellow velvet heavily embroidered in crystals and draped at one side with a long train. The waist is combined with silver metal cloth and the whole effect is brilliant.’<sup>38</sup> The reporter also hinted at the inevitable haptic limitations of the Autochromes noting that while the colour and detail of the garments in them was excellent, it was impossible to gain an impression of their tactile qualities. In 1922 a report on the Chicago show at Mandel Bros stated: ‘The new frocks from Paris attracted much attention, as did also the mannequins wearing them. Frocks are decidedly décolleté and mannequins wear their hair oiled and flat in a turban shape...the frocks are for the most part of the type that would be considered for stage wear in America.’<sup>39</sup> This remark highlights the cultural differences in attitude towards fashion on each side

of the Atlantic, the ‘art/industry dichotomy’ as Nancy Green describes it, whereby the French regarded fashion as an artistic endeavour while America regarded it as an industrial enterprise.<sup>40</sup> Combined with the perception that there were different ideals of style and taste in each country, these ‘reciprocal visions’ as Green calls them, sometimes led to the belief that French designers were mocking American consumers (as Poiret discovered in 1913) despite the claim made by the *New York Times* in 1912 that: ‘It was America that made Paris.’<sup>41</sup> However, the *Salon’s* second overseas venture to the other side of the world, apparently met with no such difficulty.

*‘LE SALON DU GOÛT FRANÇAIS À TRAVERS LE MONDE: SA PREMIÈRE CROISIÈRE’*

*OCTOBER 1922 - 1923*

While the trip across the Atlantic was described as a crusade, the expedition to the East was couched less forcefully as ‘*une croisière de propagande commerciale, artistique et économique à travers le monde*’ (a world cruise of commercial, artistic and economic propaganda).<sup>42</sup> After returning from America in May and closing the Paris show in August, a selection of Autochromes from the *Salon* set sail from Brest in Brittany, France, on 8 October 1922 in a convoy of two decommissioned battle cruisers, the *Jules Michelet* and the *Victor-Hugo*, under the command of Admiral Gilly (1868-1946) a much-decorated veteran of the French navy. The initiative for this ‘*navire-musée*’ came from Monsieur Lucien Dior (1867-1932), Minister of Commerce and Industry, previously President of Honour of the *Salon’s* American tour. Overseen by the Ministry of the Navy, the partitions inset with the Autochrome *vitrines* were loaded onto the *Jules Michelet* where they were installed in long rows below decks. The catalogue records in a statement indicative of the underlying nature of this ‘civilising mission’ that in this makeshift gallery: ‘*Les rajahs hindous, les mandarins chinois, les businessmen australiens qui rêvent de visiter nos joailliers, nos antiquaires, nos décorateurs les ont vus venir à eux en miniature*’ (The Hindu rajahs, Chinese mandarins and Australian businessmen who

dream of visiting our jewellers, antique dealers and decorators were able to come and see them in miniature).<sup>43</sup>

The convoy's first stop was at the naval base of Bizerte in French Tunisia, the second eight days later at Ismailia, an Egyptian port on the west bank of the Suez Canal built by the French to facilitate international trade and on 2 November it arrived at Djibouti, then in French Somaliland. Although these stops had been intended only for provisioning and refuelling, the *Salon* proved such a draw that they were prolonged to accommodate visits from wealthy Tunisians, Egyptians and the Prince Regent of Abyssinia whose royal court, having travelled from Addis-Ababa, was able to '*se parisianiser*' (Parisianize itself) thanks to the brief delay.<sup>44</sup> Heading south, the squadron landed at Tamatave in Madagascar and Réunion in the Indian Ocean (both French colonies) on the way to Australia where it docked at Fremantle, Albany and Melbourne before arriving in Sydney, where it remained for Christmas. The ships then briefly parted company: the *Jules-Michelet* headed for Wellington in New Zealand while the *Victor Hugo* visited Adelaide. At the end of January, they reunited in Auckland and set off for Japan, stopping at Noumea in the French colony of New Caledonia, where a busy programme of: 'banquets, race and sports meetings, balls and entertainments of all kinds' was arranged.<sup>45</sup>

Having visited the Japanese ports of Yokohama, Kobe and Nagasaki, the ships docked at Takou and Shanghai in China, Hong Kong (then a British Crown Colony), Tourane (now Da Nang) and Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City) in Vietnam, then part of France's largest and most prized imperial asset, *Indochine*, that included Laos and Cambodia. Of these colonial possessions, Vietnam was the most developed, at that time enjoying a thriving (albeit unequal) economy whose benefits inevitably favoured its French colonizers.<sup>46</sup> Singapore, Colombo and Bombay (now Mumbai) were the final ports of call before the convoy returned through Suez to France (Figure 10).

According to the 1923 catalogue the convoy's arrival caused such '*événements*' that in Noumea a day's holiday was declared, in Tunisia special trains were laid on to bring in visitors and in Australia

the French naval officers were given free travel on trains, trams and ferries and honorary membership to clubs where fêtes, excursions and picnics were organised.<sup>47</sup> In Sydney Admiral Gilly reciprocated with a reception on board the *Jules Michelet* where: ‘...guests spent a happy afternoon jazzing on the deck and admiring the illuminated photographs’ and two days later an eagerly anticipated ball was held on the same ‘... fairy ship that blazed with myriads of fairy lights. Every spar was silvered and at the companionway the word Welcome blazed forth, while the flag that hung astern was illumined with a searchlight to point to the glory of France’.<sup>48</sup>

So great was the popularity of the exhibition that additional copies of the catalogue had to be requested from France to satisfy the demand of the ‘*belles visiteuses lointaines*’ (the beautiful foreign visitors) and it was proposed that the *Salon du Goût Français* should become known as the ‘*Salon du Goût de toute la terre*’.<sup>49</sup>

#### FASHION AND COLONIAL TIME

The commercial nature of the *Salon* was heavily disguised under a veil of diplomacy and promoted not as a sales drive, but as a travelling art exhibition. The *Japan Times* observed:

The report in some vernacular papers that the French cruisers, which arrived in Yokohama a few days ago, were carrying many French businessmen and a large collection of commercial specimens are erroneous...The squadron has come rather on a mission of political significance to express the appreciation of the French government of Japan’s participation in the European war on the side of the Allies. The cruisers do not carry any collection of commercial samples. On board the flagship *Jules Michelet* there is fitted up a salon characteristically French, wherein are exhibited 275 natural color pictures showing the principal artistic products of French luxuries...<sup>50</sup>

Yet the *Salon* was undoubtedly intended to boost trade with France’s colonial empire, at this time second only in size to the British Empire and consisting of around 100 million citizens and subjects.



Its tour was partly aimed at colonies that provided raw materials and captive markets for the consumption of manufactured French goods, markets that could ultimately restore France's economy.<sup>51</sup> Having won the military war with the aid of its allies, France needed to recoup its economic losses with the aid of its vast and productive empire. Inaugurated in Paris, the epicentre of the French empire, culture and fashion, the *Salon's* cruise metaphorically transported the capital to the colonies: those who 'had fashion' (according to Simmel) would show those who were 'without fashion' how to clothe themselves like Europeans and thus become civilized.<sup>52</sup> For the ultimate 'owners' of fashion, the Autochrome's ability to blur art with fashion, afforded the ideal medium by which to fulfil France's imperial agenda: 'the crafted perfection of elite metropolitan fashions was accorded a status equal to art ... setting fashion up as a marker of "civilized" values' to those who were excluded from the Western discourse of fashion.<sup>53</sup>

Two years later, by the time of the *Art Deco Expo* in 1925, a small but significant reversal in these relations becomes apparent with the *coloniale moderne* mentioned above, a style that appropriated exotic influences into Western decorative arts, including fashion, reflecting a slight shift in the balance of power from: '... the *assimilation* of the colonies into the French nation to the *association* of the colonies to France'.<sup>54</sup> This shift was presaged in the final 1923 Paris *Salon* that featured displays of artisanal crafts from Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia: '*Hier, la France provinciale: aujourd'hui, la France coloniale*' (Yesterday, provincial France: today, colonial France) and included a '*souk vivant*' pictured in the catalogue (SDGF 1923). Yet despite this ostensibly inclusive approach, the *Salon* was instrumental in 'Othering' France's colonial subjects further by reinforcing the lag between 'real time' and 'colonial time' whereby the geographical distance between colonizer and colonized became a metaphor for the cultural distance between them. Fashion and time are closely linked: 'Time is crucial to the economy of fashion; success in the fashion world is dependent on being up to date in the present and on predicting the tastes of the next season.'<sup>55</sup>

With the duration of the *Salon's* journey from the centre of the fashion world to the colonies taking nearly a year, the garments featured were months out of date/time when they arrived and by ordering them from the Parisian manufacturers (orders that would take weeks to arrive), the '*précieuses poupées de la Chine et du Japon*' (precious dolls of China and Japan) as the 1923 catalogue put it, rendered themselves even more out of date and out of touch, confirming their status as the primitive Other, a position underscored by the racialized undertone of the catalogue. The configuration of the *Salon* and its promotion as a museum or gallery in which the luxury commodities on sale were displayed as if they were artworks for contemplation, disassociated the desirable objects from the temporal tyranny of fashion, distancing the colonial outsider even further.

## CONCLUSIONS

The rich intersectionality of the *Salon du Goût Français Autochromes* affords fertile ground for further research to identify unattributed garments and verify the provenance and dates of those attributed to known designers: this will require collaboration with couture house archives and museum collections as well as forensic investigation into contemporary fashion reportage. Similarly, with deeper research into local reports of the *Salon's* reception abroad, the impact of Paris fashion abroad and its deployment as a form of soft power to reinforce imperialism in the early twentieth century could be more precisely situated within a global context.

The *Salon's* mode of display was far more innovative than that of the *Art Deco Expo* that belonged in the realm of the spectacular *expositions* that had taken place since the mid-nineteenth century, involving the construction of vast arenas of display. By reducing thousands of bulky objects to two dimensions, the *Salon* could be easily and economically mounted in one small exhibition space and transported safely overseas for '*la clientele mondiale*'. Its accessibility and global reach therefore played a part in the dissemination and democratization of high fashion by bringing the

exclusive world of French luxury and Paris fashion to an international audience in a similar way to early film newsreels by Pathé and Gaumont shown in cinemas after 1910.<sup>56</sup>

By introducing audiences to a new means of consuming luxury goods through images exhibited in a gallery setting, the *Salon* reflects contemporary convergences in commodity culture and the structural relations between art and fashion as well as epitomizing the instability and tension between: ‘originality and reproduction... the relationship between elite and popular culture, the unique art object and the mass-produced commodity’.<sup>57</sup> By imitating a collection of objects or an exhibition of paintings (a *Salon*) the *Salon*’s Autochromes replicate the dichotomous relationship between exclusivity and accessibility that Nancy Troy describes, the problematic oscillation between the designer as artist/genius and profit-making garment manufacturer that confounded designers such as Paul Poiret and Madeleine Vionnet (1876-1975) during this period.<sup>58</sup>

The delicate nature of the Autochrome plates mirrors the materiality of the garments they depict: they are fragile, ephemeral objects with limited capacity for reproduction that, like fabric, will fade in the light. The garments represented in them are intangible, trapped in space and time but unlike the Autochromes in which they are represented, they cannot be put back into circulation. Digital technology has enabled Autochromes to be preserved, yet most of the *Salon*’s examples have not been seen since the early 1920s; they are unseen markers of a short moment in fashion history that give us valuable primary visual evidence of French high fashion and robust documentation of the colour of clothes and accessories at this period.

On its two international tours, the *Salon* arrested fashion’s time, illuminating France’s imperial, colonial and cultural power and the authority of French taste in its colourful images to confirm that French culture was unparalleled on the global stage. The relationship between photography, fashion and time was evoked by German theorist Siegfried Kracauer (1889-1966) in the 1920s (just after the *Salon*’s three years of existence), who described the photograph itself as a ‘representation of time’ in which the image is embalmed and the

subject's 'arrested smile' is like that of an 'archaeological mannequin ... The photograph becomes a ghost because the costumed mannequin was once alive'.<sup>59</sup> The journalist Maurice Prax (1881-1962) in the final entry of the 1923 catalogue invokes the ghosts within the Autochromes by expressing his desire to return to Paris in the year 2023 to see a retrospective show of the *Salon*: '*...un Louvre tenant dans une malle...roulant, voguant, volant*' (a Louvre contained in a trunk...rolling, "voguing" and flying' around the world). To paraphrase Prax in translation:

History cannot not be disguised (*maquillé*) (masked/made up) as so many historians try to do, because the luminous glass windows of the *Salon* will not permit error; despite changes in style, French taste will always remain the same, preserving the same spirit, character, purity, heart and instinct so closely linked to the soil of France. The proof of this everlasting, infallible *goût* will be found in the *Salon du Goût Français*, the most vibrant, elegant and ravishing French exhibition in the present, that will remain so in the future and become France's academy, museum and conservatory of taste.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Maude Bass-Krueger, 'Fashion Collections, Collectors, and Exhibitions in France, 1874–1900: Historical Imagination, the Spectacular Past, and the Practice of Restoration', *Fashion Theory*, 22 (2018), 4-5, 405-433. Valerie Steele, 'Paris, Capital of Fashion' in *Paris: Capital of Fashion*, ed. by Valerie Steele (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2019), pp. 11-48 (p.32).

<sup>4</sup> Michelle Tollini Finamore, 'Fashioning the Colonial at the Paris Expositions, 1925 and 1931', *Fashion Theory*, 7: 3-4 (2003), 345-360 (p.346).

<sup>5</sup> Catherine Depouey, 'Les autochromes du Salon du goût Français: une collection unique au Musée des arts et métiers.' *Musée des arts et métiers: La Revue* (1993), 53-60, p.56.

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<sup>7</sup> Pamela Roberts, *A Century of Colour Photography: from the Autochrome to the Digital Age* (London: Andre Deustch, 2007) p. 24.

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<sup>8</sup> For a detailed account of the technical aspects and history of the Lumières' Autochrome process see Bernard Lavandrine and Jean-Paul Gandolfo, *The Lumière Autochrome: History, Technology and Preservation* (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> 2,045 Autochromes from the Salon exhibitions were donated in 1929 by Devriès to the *Conservatoire des arts et métiers* (CNAM) in Paris where the collection remains in an off-site store. All the images have been catalogued and numbered (according to type of manufacture rather than name of maker or date of exhibition) and can be viewed in low resolution via a digital database at CNAM. Only a few (approximately ten) are available in high resolution for use in publication, although several other images from the collection can be found on the web.

<sup>10</sup> Depouey, 1993, p. 54. In his initial enthusiasm for the process, Steichen wrote: 'Personally, I have no medium that can give me color of such wonderful luminosity as the Autochrome plate. One must go to stained glass for such color resonance, as the palette and canvas are a dull and lifeless medium in comparison.' Edward Steichen, 'Color Photography', *Camera Work*, 22 (1908) p. 24.

<sup>11</sup> Greenhalgh, 1988, p. 117.

<sup>12</sup> Caroline Evans, *The Mechanical Smile: Modernism and the First Fashion Shows in France and America, 1900-1929* (London: Yale University Press, 2013), p.13.

<sup>13</sup> SDGF 1922. An Autochrome taken by Emmanuel Ventujol (one of the 1921 catalogue's featured photographers) shows Mallet-Stevens' *maquette* (model) of the central hall (Inv: A16711-A001-038). The completed hall can be seen in three other undated Autochromes (16711-A001-037; 16711-B011-008; 16711-A013-001). Mallet-Stevens' design for the first Salon is confirmed by a (monochrome) version of one of these Autochromes published in the Wanamaker catalogue, dated 1921; the 1922 scheme is illustrated by the dated (monochrome) postcard version of one of these Autochromes, Fig. 2, enabling the third and final 1923 scheme to be established by a process of deduction.

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<sup>14</sup> The Autochrome of this image (16711-A013-001) from which this postcard is reproduced confirms the colour scheme, but contradicts the attribution of the decorator who is cited as Maurice Dufren e, listed in the catalogue as ‘*Artiste-Decorateur*’.

<sup>15</sup> ‘Paris was the show-piece which drained resources in order to tell the world what it was to be French, much to the annoyance of many other French cities and areas.’ Greenhalgh, p. 119. The location of the 1922 *Exposition Coloniale* in Marseilles was an attempt on the part of the government to appease this faction and deflect such criticism from the forthcoming *Exposition Coloniale Internationale* planned for Paris in 1931 (Rydell, 1993, p. 63).

<sup>16</sup> While not a good example of Autochrome technique, this image is included because it shows a surprisingly orientalist aesthetic for Chanel at this time.

<sup>17</sup> Didier Grumbach, *History of International Fashion* (Northampton, MSS: Interlink Books, 2014), pp. 31-40.

<sup>18</sup> *L’Excelsior* 19 June 1921, p.5. <gallica.bnf.fr / Biblioth eque nationale de France > [accessed 16 April 2018].

<sup>19</sup> Yvonne Deslandres, *Poiret: Paul Poiret 1879-1944* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1987) p. 180.

<sup>20</sup> Victoria Rovine, ‘Colonialism’s Clothing: Africa, France and the Deployment of Fashion’, *Design Issues*, 25 (2009), 44-61 (p.57). <<http://www.jstor.com/stable/20627816>> [accessed 20 April 2018].

<sup>21</sup> *Women’s Wear*, 5 June, 1923, p.18.

<sup>22</sup> *L’Excelsior* 20 May 1921, p.4. <gallica.bnf.fr / Biblioth eque nationale de France> [accessed 16 April 2018].

<sup>23</sup> Nancy Troy, *Couture Culture: a Study in Modern Art and Fashion* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2003), p. 275 and Stewart, 2008, p. 80.

<sup>24</sup> Wanamaker catalogue 1921, p. 4.

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<sup>25</sup> SDGF catalogue 1922.

<sup>26</sup> SDGF catalogue 1922.

<sup>27</sup> Evans, 2013, p.78.

<sup>28</sup> SDGF 1922.

<sup>29</sup> *American Art News*, 1 April 1922, vol. 20, no. 25 <<https://archive.org/stream/jstor-25589950/25589950>> [accessed 21 November 2019]; *Women's Wear*, 25 February 1922. It is possible the *Salon* was also exhibited in San Francisco but I have not been able to find evidence of this.

<sup>30</sup> SDGF 1922

<sup>31</sup> William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994) p. 32.

<sup>32</sup> Leach, 1994, p. 9.

<sup>33</sup> Leach, 1994, p. 100.

<sup>34</sup> SDGF 1922

<sup>35</sup> Troy, 2003, pp. 228-229.

<sup>36</sup> HSP Collection 2188.

<sup>37</sup> This catalogue is not in the Wanamaker Archive at HSP.

<sup>38</sup> *Women's Wear*, 1 December, 1921. None of the Autochromes in the CNAM archive is attributed to Molyneux but the description closely matches an unattributed model shown in Inv. No.16711-A029-101

<sup>39</sup> *Women's Wear*, Vol. 24, No. 46, 25 February, 1922.

<sup>40</sup> Nancy Green, *Ready-to-wear and Ready-to-work: a century of industry and immigrants in Paris and New York* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1997).

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Evans, 2013, p. 69. See also Marlis Schweitzer, 'American Fashions for American Women: The Rise and Fall of Fashion Nationalism', in *Producing Fashion:*



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Commerce, Culture and Consumers, ed. by Regina Lee Blaszczyk (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), pp. 130-149.

<sup>42</sup> SDGF 1923

<sup>43</sup> SDGF 1923

<sup>44</sup> SDGF 1923

<sup>45</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 January, 1923 <<https://trove.nla.gov.au>> [accessed 24 June 2015].

<sup>46</sup> Robert Aldrich in *The Age of Empires*, ed. by Robert Aldrich (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2007) pp. 188-191.

<sup>47</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 January 1923.

<sup>48</sup> *Sunday Times*, 14 January, 1923 <<https://trove.nla.gov.au>> [accessed 24 June 2015].

<sup>49</sup> SDGF 1923

<sup>50</sup> *Japan Times*, 8 March, 1923.

<sup>51</sup> Aldrich 2007, pp. 157-171.

<sup>52</sup> Giorgio Riello and Peter McNeil, *The Fashion History Reader: Global Perspectives* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010) p. 358.

<sup>53</sup> Christopher Beward, 'Paris, London, Shanghai: Touring the Fashion Imaginary' in *Paris: Capital of Fashion*, ed. by Valerie Steele (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2019) pp. 51-71 (p.52).

<sup>54</sup> (Morton, P. 1998, "National and Colonial: The Musée des Colonies at the Colonial Exposition, Paris, 1931." *Art Bulletin* 80(2): 357-77 (p. 359), quoted in Tollini Finamore, M. 'Fashioning the Colonial at the Paris Expositions, 1925 and 1931', *Fashion Theory*, 7 (2003), 3-4, 345-360 (p.346). DOI: 10.2752/136270403778051943

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<sup>56</sup> Evans, 2013, p. 58.

<sup>57</sup> Troy, 2003, p. 5.

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<sup>58</sup> As Florence Brachet-Champsaur has shown, *couturière* Madeleine Vionnet collaborated with the French department store Galeries Lafayette during the interwar years (quoted in Steele 2019, p. 36).

<sup>59</sup> Caroline Evans, 'Antilinear Time' in *Time in Fashion: Industrial, Antilinear and Uchronic Temporalities*, ed. by Caroline Evans and Alessandra Vaccari (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2020) pp. 73-104 (p.82).

<sup>60</sup> SDGF catalogue 1923.

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### Illustration captions

**Cover?** Poster for the 1922 Salon du Goût français, Autochrome, Inv. No. 16711-A001-028

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**Figure 1:** Théâtre du Rond Point, Paris, postcard, date unknown, (14x9cm).

*Author's collection.*

**Figure 2:** Interior scheme Salon du Goût Français, postcard, 1922 (14x9 cm).

*Author's collection.*

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**Figure 3:** Chanel evening cloak 1921 or 1923, Autochrome. SDGF Inv. No. 16711-A 29 31

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**Figure 4:** Advertisement for Henry à la Pensée, back cover, Paris *Vogue* July 15th 1921.

*Courtesy Diktats.*

**Figure 5:** Colibri dress by Paul Poiret 1921-2, Autochrome. SDGF Inv. No. 16711-A 29 323

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**Figure 6:** Town dress by Nicole Groult 1923, Autochrome. SDGF Inv. No. 16711-A 29 298

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**Figure 7:** Evening dress by Martial et Armand 1921 or 1923, Autochrome. SDGF Inv. No.

16711-A029-45

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**Figure 8:** Bathing costume by Calvayrac , Autochrome. SDGF Inv. No. 16711-A029-45

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**Figure 9:** The Salon du Goût Français exhibited in the Egyptian Hall at Wanamaker's,

Philadelphia, 1922, Autochrome. SDGF Inv. No. 16711-B001-004

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**Figure 10:** Map showing the route of the cruise 1922-23 SDGF Catalogue 1923.

*Author's collection.*