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Book Review

Paris Fashion and World War Two: Global Diffusion and Nazi Control, edited by Lou Taylor and Marie McLoughlin, London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2020.

Bethan Bide

Paris couture has been the subject of more research, exhibitions and books than any other place or sector in the field of fashion history. It can be tempting to think that we know its whole story. But in *Paris Fashion and World War Two: Global Diffusion and Nazi Control*, Lou Taylor and Marie McLoughlin bring together a wealth of refreshingly original research covering a range of countries in Europe and the Americas to challenge our understanding of Paris and its fashionable influence during the Second World War. In doing so, they demonstrate what can be gained by looking beyond the narrow group of places that tend to dominate anglophone fashion histories.

Although Paris is the focus of this rich edited collection, over its 14 chapters by 10 different contributors it looks to a number of other locations – including Lisbon, Denmark and Brazil – to challenge the prevailing mythology that Paris was cut off from global fashion networks during the city's occupation by Nazi forces. These contributions employ compelling visual and material research to expose the networks and methods through which Paris fashion was diffused. Furthermore, by revealing how Paris fashion was shaped by the political environment internationally and in these locations, the collection demonstrates that Paris fashion during this period can only be fully understood by looking far beyond French borders.

Much of what makes this highly illustrated book such an interesting read is its use of fashion objects and images as tools to connect global events and individual histories in a way that highlights how personal tragedy is part of the story of national and international fashion industries. The in-depth material and visual research apparent throughout *Paris Fashion* provides numerous examples of fashion's all too rarely exploited ability to shine light on darker sides of history, such as themes of Jewish migration and displacement. It also highlights the moral complexity of conflict. Lou Taylor makes effective use of Lyon textile designs to demonstrate how fashion provided both a useful political tool for promoting populist ideas of nationality and belonging, and a visual language through which to subvert and resist those same ideas. Sophie Kurkdjian's chapter on fashion publications highlights the thin line between collaboration and compromise for those working in Paris fashion under the occupation, noting that what one French fashion editor described as an act of resistance was labelled as traitorous by a British publication.

Elsewhere, war is shown as both an opportunity and an obstacle for fashion. Sandra Stansbery Buckland argues that the Second World War offered new opportunities for New York fashion, and Marie McLoughlin describes how London's fashion industry similarly sought to capitalize on the conflict. Alexandra Gameiro and Lou Taylor's chapter on Lisbon merits particular praise for its use of objects from Museu Nacional do Traje to show how Portugal's position as a neutral country benefitted the city's fashion cultures.

Cumulatively, the chapters in *Paris Fashion* open up new perspectives on a familiar subject by providing a comprehensive and convincing account of how Parisian styles continued to be desired, demanded and diffused not just throughout occupied and neutral countries but in those such as Britain and the United States that were actively at war against the fashion city's

Nazi occupiers. This raises significant questions about why the mythologies about Paris fashion being cut off during the Second World War persist and who they benefit. Taylor and McLoughlin argue that the emphasis on telling histories focused on resistance activities related to fashion and textiles in the aftermath of the war can be attributed, at least in part, to the fact it has been a commercially useful myth for the Parisian fashion industry. Indeed, this mythology has power and capital beyond France, and it has also been useful for the construction of nationalist narratives in Britain, where histories of fashion in the Second World War largely focus around ideas of rationing and collective sacrifice. This book uses fashion to reveal the cracks in these narratives. It provides a reminder that, even in times of acute nationalist rhetoric and closed borders, fashion is simultaneously international and local, and it is a tool for both exerting political control and resisting it. In doing so, *Paris Fashion* highlights the importance of fashion history as an essential means to disrupt and reimagine cultural narratives.