

Creativity of Fashion Design:  
An Economic Creative Lifecycle Analysis of Three 20<sup>th</sup>  
Century Fashion Designers

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**Abstract**

Innovations and inventions are often cited as sources of economic growth. These drivers can be thought of as functions of creativity. To study creativity is therefore to study aspects of economic growth. This paper builds upon research on creativity done by Professor David Galenson of the University of Chicago, who has found that innovators can be categorized into two groups: conceptual and experimental. Conceptual innovators often produce their most innovative works early in their careers while experimental innovators dedicate their careers towards perfecting their craft and create later innovations. This paper analyzes the artistic and creative careers of three 20th century haute couture fashion designers in order to better understand what drives innovation in the fashion industry. Each artist's career is systematically measured by three key metrics including museum exhibition records, auction price data and museum collection dates. Essays and reviews written by notable critics of the era further support claims derived from the data. This paper finds that Cristóbal Balenciaga and Madame Grès are experimental designers while Yves Saint Laurent is conceptual.

## 1 Introduction

Innovation is the diffusion of an idea. Innovative art changes a discipline by shifting practices, altering preconceived notions, and establishing new styles or methods by which the work is made. Prior empirical studies on creativity have found that artistic innovations tend to occur in two distinct patterns: sudden, specific, and precise; or gradual and steady (Galenson, 2009). The first type of innovations, those that are sudden and specific, are conceptual. Conceptual innovators tend to work deductively, using ideas as the foundation for their innovation, and make their greatest contributions earlier in their careers (Galenson, 2009). The second type of innovations, those that occur more gradually over time, are experimental. Experimental innovators tend to work inductively, forming their innovations through observation, and produce their innovations later in their careers (Galenson, 2009).

This paper will analyze innovations specific to fashion design. This paper will use museum exhibition checklists and auction price data to empirically study the creative lifecycles of three fashion designers. This paper will also refer to criticism and interviews by designers and museum curators to further study each designer. By analyzing the lifecycles and contributions of major 20th century fashion designers, this paper will define what it means to be a conceptual or experimental innovator in the context of the discipline and come to understand which 20th century fashion designers were conceptual and which were experimental. The designers studied include experimentalists Cristóbal Balenciaga and Madame Grès and conceptualist Yves Saint Laurent (see Table 1).

## 2 Couture Fashion Design

Haute couture is the term used to define the high-end fashion industry of the 20th century (Martin & Koda, “Haute Couture”) The origins of haute couture can be traced to the House of Worth in Paris during the mid-19th century. The term refers to the construction of clothing for individuals from start to finish by a designer or couturier. The creative ability and artistic independence of the designer makes this discipline particularly relevant for the study of innovation. In high-end fashion design, a designer creates a finished, signature product that becomes part of a larger body

of work over the course of a designer's career. Analysis of the complete body of work can lead one to determine unique characteristics of the designer, which works were most innovative, and what influence the works had on other designers. By doing so, this paper looks to lead to a new understanding of creativity in the context of haute couture.

Among the many notable artists in the history of fashion design, the designers studied in this paper were chosen because of their innovative contributions to couture as a form of art. Many famous designers, such as Charles Frederick Worth and Paul Poiret of the early-20th century or Ralph Lauren and Calvin Klein of the late-20th century, are well known today because of their significant contributions to fashion as a business. (Martin & Koda, "Haute Couture") This paper differentiates between fashion as a business and fashion as an art and studies the designers who made their most important contributions to fashion as a form of art. By focusing on the art rather than the business, one can determine what techniques, styles, sources of inspirations, and final products correspond with conceptual or experimental innovations in the art of fashion design.

### **3 Selection Criteria**

Cristóbal Balenciaga, Madame Grès, and Yves Saint Laurent were selected by comparing lists of designers who have the most number of items in the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Met) and the list of retrospective exhibitions hosted by the Costume Institute. These lists can be seen in Table 2 and Table 3, respectively. The Costume Institute was founded in 1937 and contains over 35,000 costumes dating back to the 15th century. In 2009, the Brooklyn Museum joined its costume collection with the Met, creating the "largest and most comprehensive costume collection in the world" ("Costume Institute"). The historical and geographical span of the Met's costume collection makes for a thorough and objective process of selecting the most important fashion designers to study.

In addition to holding many of the world's most important costume items, the Costume Institute also hosts retrospective exhibitions that are useful to study the career path of major fashion designers. According to Andrew Bolton of the Costume Institute, the museum criteria for hosting an

exhibition on an individual designer is “whether the designer changed the course of fashion history” (Menkes, 2011). Given that innovations are pieces of art that diffuse and significantly change a discipline, the designers featured in monographic retrospectives must have made at least one major innovation over the course of their career. Using both the number of items in the collection and the list of individual retrospectives will ensure selecting designers with significant, innovative careers.

## 4 Measurement

Retrospective museum exhibitions offer a unique opportunity to examine the important pieces and periods of an artist’s career. Prior studies have found that museum exhibitions serve as a way for curators to “tacitly reveal their judgments of the importance of an artist’s work at different ages” (Galenson, “Old Masters and Young Geniuses”). Thus, the most important ages of an artist’s career will tend to have the most works in an exhibition. However unlike painting or other forms of art, monographic fashion retrospectives are a relatively new phenomenon. The Met hosted their first monographic exhibition in 1973 with “The World of Balenciaga” and their second in 1983 on Yves Saint Laurent (see Table 2). This raises an issue concerning the validity of these early exhibitions on accurately measuring the career of an artist. Since the concept of these types of shows is new, there is perhaps a gap in the scholarship when compared to other artistic disciplines that would lead to the same quality of exhibitions painters receive. To overcome this issue, the paper will analyze multiple exhibitions of each artist from other museums to obtain a larger sample size to overcome any idiosyncrasies of a given museum.

The 1983 Met exhibition on Yves Saint Laurent was particularly unique for the purposes of this study because it occurred while Saint Laurent was still designing. In a 2011 New York Times article, Katell le Bourhis of the Met stated that at the time of the exhibition Yves Saint Laurent’s couture house had only “a single brown lace dress available” for the exhibition; the museum had to find donors to lend their personal collections to the museum for the exhibition (Menkes, 2011). However, Saint Laurent’s partner Pierre Bergé established a foundation soon after to preserve Saint Laurent’s work. The foundation hosted an exhibition after Saint Laurent’s death in 2002 with the

Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco and Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. This is the exhibition used in this study. Nathalie Bondil of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts stated she “insisted on having an independent curator and expert” on the team preparing the show because she believed in the importance of freedom from commercial branding of exhibitions (Menkes, 2011). This increases the usefulness of the 2002 exhibition as evidence for measuring Saint Laurent’s career path. John E. Buchanan Jr., director of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, makes an argument that further supports the use of exhibitions as a tool for measuring a fashion designer’s career:

In considering a monographic exhibition, we look for the genius factor.’ We want the designer who is seminal - who has created a singular vision, silhouette, technique or style unlike that which came before and who has a broad-reaching oeuvre that inspires and influences successive generations of designers (Menkes, 2011).

Therefore, this paper will analyze the number of items and the year of each item produced across several individual retrospective exhibitions as a way of measuring the career of innovative fashion designers. The Victoria and Albert Museum in London, Musée Gallarllia in Paris, and National Gallery of Victoria in Australia have also hosted exhibitions pertinent to the designers studied this paper.

In addition to using exhibitions, this paper will also look at auction price data from several different auctions over the past ten years to study each designer’s career. This data will be used in conjunction with the criticism analysis and exhibition profiles. Prior studies on creativity have shown auction markets to be an accurate predictor of a designer’s most innovative works, as the most important works tend to be the most expensive pieces of an artist’s collection (Galenson, “Old Masters and Young Geniuses”). While the selection size of the auction data might not be large enough to do a complete analysis, the range of the years gathered for each designer will contribute to the analysis from the exhibitions and critical essays.

## 5 Conceptual Designers

Conceptual fashion designers tend to create a single design or style that breaks away from current trends. Like other conceptual artists, conceptual designers often find inspiration for their designs from their ideas or dreams. Furthermore their designs serve as a means to convey the artist's ideas. Conceptual designers often plan their work ahead of times with sketches and then work in teams or groups to produce their designs. They typically receive recognition more for the concept or idea behind the design than the craftsmanship or tailoring elements of the work. Their designs tend to be radical and controversial, as well. Conceptual designers also tend to be more public figures with louder, more outgoing personalities. Yves Saint Laurent is the archetypal conceptual designer studied in this paper.

## 6 Experimental Designers

Experimental designers tend to be committed to a specific style of design and pursue complete perfection within his or her style. They are known primarily for their extremely strong craftsmanship and tailoring skills. Like experimental painters, experimental designers tend to be committed to creating beauty and grace in their designs. Like architects, experimental designers tend to use nature as a source of inspiration. Experimental designers also often return to their finished products, repairing and reworking their designs because of their strong tailoring skills. Experimental designers tend to work in solitude and remain away from the public sphere, often letting their work speak for itself. Cristóbal Balenciaga and Madame Grès are the two experimental designers studied in this paper.

### 6.1 Cristóbal Balenciaga (1895-1972):

“The master of us all” - Christian Dior

Cristóbal Balenciaga is a famous Spanish experimental designer who transformed the couture industry with his unparalleled tailoring and craftsmanship abilities. His contemporary Gabrielle

Coco' Chanel once said, "Of all twentieth-century designers, the only one who could create a garment from beginning to end was Balenciaga" (Healy, 1992). Balenciaga was born in 1895 in a small town in the Basque region of Spain. He worked from the age of 12 as a seamstress for his mother. Using what he learned from his mother, he opened a small house in San Sebastian in 1919 where he began to develop his talents. In 1931 Balenciaga opened a second house, and by 1937 he had become well known and had sold a dress to the Duchess of Westminster the following year. He led one of the most successful and prominent couture houses in Europe until he retired in 1968 (Healy, 1992).

Balenciaga is most recognized for his tailoring skills and knowledge of fabrics. For the Balenciaga exhibition hosted by the National Gallery of Victoria, critic Robyn Healy stated, "Balenciaga's extraordinary tailoring skills and knowledge of fabrics set him apart from all other designers" (Healy, 1992). His skills were so strong he was often described as being like a sculptor: "Balenciaga uses fabric like a sculptor working in marble. He can rip a suit apart with his thumbs and remake or alter his vision in terms of practical, at-hand dress making" (Healy, 1992). This skill is commonly associated with experimental artists in other disciplines. Prior studies on creativity have shown experimental artists tend to be known for their craftsmanship abilities (Galenson, 2009). Developing mastery of fabric and tailoring requires patience and needs to be developed over the course of a career, which is consistent with experimental artists of other disciplines.

Balenciaga's main innovation was in the style and technical aspects of couture. As one exhibition curator wrote, his "style and technical innovation became part of fashion's everyday vocabulary he represented the best in design and construction" (National Gallery of Victoria). Balenciaga used his tailoring skills to create a new silhouette for women. This silhouette combined geometric principles with high-end fabrics to create a garment that flowed freely over a woman's body in a simple yet complex manner. His specific innovations include: "boxy, semi-fitted suits; tunic dresses; 7/8 length sleeves; stand-away collars; voluminous evening coats with dolman sleeves; and magnificent ball gowns" (Kellogg, 2002). The stand-away collars and 7/8 length sleeves represent his technical innovations while the semi-fitted suits and ball gowns represent his stylistic innovations.

Balenciaga's inspiration came from his travels and homeland. In a book by fashion professor

Noel Palomo-Lovinski titled *The World's Most Influential Fashion Designers*, the author describes how Spanish history and painters inspired many of Balenciaga's works. Palomo-Lovinski highlights Balenciaga's "clear connection with historical Spanish painters, such as Francisco de Zurbarán, Francisco Goya, and Diego Velázquez," which can be seen by Balenciaga's use of lace and embroidery in many of his works. In particular, she displays a 1951 Balenciaga dress that is reminiscent of Francisco Goya's paintings. Palomo-Lovinski also describes the innovative shape of the 1951 dress: "The shape of this Balenciaga gown is innovative for the time, with the skirt being cut away at the front with a long back." This is representative of the type of style Balenciaga brought to couture (Palomo-Lovinski, 2010).

Balenciaga was also inspired by earlier couturiers including Madeline Vionnet, Coco Chanel, and Edward Molyneux. According to Palomo-Lovinski, Balenciaga admired Molyneux's slow development of technique over time, learned the importance of cutting and draping from Vionnet, and developed his emphasis on comfort from Chanel (Palomo-Lovinski, 2010). Although a complete analysis has not been conducted, preliminary studies on Chanel and Vionnet suggest that two were experimental. If this were true, this would be consistent with prior theory on creativity, for experimentalists tend to work with and learn from experimentalists and vice versa (Galenson, 2010).

Balenciaga's reserved, quiet nature and methodical process of creating is similar to that of other experimental artists. Like other experimentalists, Balenciaga relentlessly pursued perfection in his work and would often revisit designs years after they were completed. His shy personality allowed his work to speak for itself. Diana Vreeland of the Met describes how an "aura of mystery" developed over the course of his career as a result of his reserved disposition (National Gallery of Victoria). He rarely gave interviews and stayed out of the public life. When offered the opportunity to meet Picasso, Balenciaga apparently replied, "He is always wearing disguisethe man is a clown."

In true experimental fashion, Balenciaga's style grew and developed over the course of his career. Charlotte Seeling writes in her book *The Century of the Designer* that "from year to year his technique became more refined and his designs simpler" (Seeling, 2000). Claire Wilcox, curator of the exhibit on couture at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, describes how Balenciaga



developed his skills over his career:

This supreme ability, comparable to perfect pitch in a musician, allowed him technical and aesthetic freedom, the importance of which has perhaps never been properly gauged, but which took him many years to achieve. In fact, if only his pre-war designs had remained, the designer would barely have stood out from his fellows (Wilcox, 2007).

That his designs only became great later in his career further supports the claim that he is experimental. This pattern of late development appears in his exhibitions as well. For the National Gallery of Victoria exhibition, the curator writes that “by looking at various basic suit types over a ten-year period, one can clearly see the ideals he was moving towards and the dominant features of his work” (National Gallery of Victoria). In the introduction to the 2011 Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco exhibition on Balenciaga, curator Hamish Bowles writes that Balenciaga’s career path was unique among designers of the time: “Indeed, in many ways he reversed the designer’s traditional career trajectory, producing some of his most thoughtful and even provocative designs in the twilight of his career” (Bowles & De Young, 2011). Between Wilcox’s and Bowles’ descriptions of the growth and development of Balenciaga’s skills and influence over the course of his career, it becomes clear that the reason for this late success is because he was an experimental designer.

Tables 4.1 through 4.3 each support this conclusion. Each table represents the distribution of the designer’s age and the number of items in exhibitions hosted by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, and National Gallery of Victoria. In the case of the Metropolitan’s exhibition (Table 4.1), 57.3% of his designs occur from the years 1960-1968, when Balenciaga was aged 65-73. In contrast, only 7.3% of the work came from the 1940s (ages 45-54). In Table 4.2, the San Francisco exhibition contained 45.2% of items from 1960s. In Table 4.3, the number is 58.3%. Table 4.4 shows the age distribution of Balenciaga’s work in the complete collections of the Fashion Institute of Technology Museum in New York and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. The median ages of these collections are 58 and 65, respectively. Each of these profiles is consistent with that of an experimental designer. Because Balenciaga was known for his tailoring skills, these were most strongly developed at the end of his career.

The auction data further support this conclusion. His most expensive item sold was a 1960 (age 65) cape that sold in 2014 for a Christie's auction for over 57,000. *His next most expensive item was also from the 1960s and so* As prior studies have shown on creativity, the most expensive work is the most important, which corresponds with what the exhibition and museum collection data show: Balenciaga was most successful at the end of his career.

By the end of Balenciaga's career, his influence had spread across most of the couture world. The designers Balenciaga influenced directly include André Courrèges, Christian Dior, Emanuel Ungaro, Francisco Costa, and Hubert de Givenchy. Courrèges was "influenced by Balenciaga's structural and architectural forms" while Costa was influenced by Balenciaga's use of "shape, simplicity, and structure" (Palomo-Lovinski, 2010). Ungaro remembers the first time he saw Balenciaga: "When I saw Balenciaga for the first time, it was a discovery something so important for my life and my mind" (Healy, 1992). Balenciaga's commitment to simplicity and elegance continues to inspire fashion designers today. Rather than sacrificing his values and changing his style to meet the demand of consumers of the day, Balenciaga remained committed to couture and chose to retire rather than change. As Carmel Snow, editor of Harper's Bazaar, wrote upon his retirement, "Nothing is so mysterious as simplicity As always we may expect to see Balenciaga's influence sink deeply, noiselessly, until it pervades the whole world of fashion" (Palomo-Lovinski, 2010).

## 6.2 Madame Grès (1903-1993)

### Sphinx of Fashion

Madame Grès was a French experimental designer often unknown by the public but extremely well respected and admired by practitioners and critics. Over the course of her 50-year career, Grès inspired the many designers who followed her to pursue pure beauty and simplicity in their designs. Grès dedicated her career to perfecting her Grecian gown, which became the unequivocal model for beauty for the fashion world. Madame Grès was born to a bourgeois family in Paris as Germaine Krebs. She began her career as a sculptor but did not find success in the field. She changed her name to Alix Barton and opened her first design house in 1934 but was soon forced to close because of the War. In 1942, she opened another house named Grès where she achieved much of the fame

for which she is known today. Curator for the Costume Institute's exhibition on Madame Grès Richard Martin wrote, "we tender our highest esteem for this designer of exceptional vision, whose work is untrammelled by commerce or compromise" (Martin &Koda, 1994).

Madame Grès' innovation for the fashion industry was in creating free-flowing, beautiful evening gowns. Known for her strong, self-taught craftsmanship abilities, Madame Grès would often design her gowns directly on the wearer or mannequin. In experimental fashion, she would "drape dresses directly on her customers, and like Nina Ricci she cut straight out from the material without making a pattern first" (Seeling, 2000). The concept of creating the material directly on the wearer without designing prior to creating is an experimental practice. Experimental painters, for instance, often do not plan their work prior to painting (Galenson, 2010). Richard Martin describes Grès' face-to-face method of design as "a Rodinesque practice that exudes a feeling of tangible proximity to flesh and a sense of surety in rendering the body that are similar to that modern sculptor's works" (Martin &Koda, 1994). Curator of the Fashion Institute of Technology's exhibition on Madame Grès Patricia Mears also writes on Grès' hand-tailoring capabilities: "Her unique, self-taught methods of construction may lack mathematical precision, but their technical consistency and graceful aesthetics come undeniably from the hand of a master couturier" (Mears, 2007).

Like other experimental artists, Grès primarily found inspiration for her main work from her travels and life experiences. For example, Grès's 1935 "Pagoda" jacket represents a combination of Eastern and Cubist influence, while her sari dress embodies her travels 1958 travels to India and her "lifelong interest in dominoes, caftans, and other untailed constructions that affected the liquid softness of her 1970s world" (Martin & Koda, 1994). In addition to her travels Grès was inspired by other fashion designers, including Madeleine Vionnet and Balenciaga. According to Palomo-Lovinski, although Vionnet was more "mathematical" in her draping while Grès was more natural, Grès observed the difference between the two styles and formed her own innovations as a result of learning from other designers (Palomo-Lovinski, 2010).

Madame Grès' personality was also consistent with that of an experimental artist. Like Balenciaga, she was a mystery to the public: "Madame Grès is an enigma whose life was shrouded in mystery, and whose persona defied the typical characteristics of a couturier" (Palomo-Lovinski,

2010). She frequently changed her name and remained out of the public sphere for most of her career. Her exact day of birth is unknown and her death was kept hidden by her family for almost a year until after she died. Like Balenciaga, she let her work speak for itself and did not resort to marketing or commercialization to promote her designs. Professor of fashion Ann Kellogg writes, “A perfectionist, she was not concerned with the functionality of dress, rather in sculpting fabric into exquisite pieces of art” (Kellogg, 2002).

Grès’ most innovative decade was the 1970s, when she was between the ages of 67 and 75. Tables 5.1 and 5.2 support this conclusion. In the Metropolitan’s exhibition of Madame Grès, 31% of the designs come from this time span. The next highest decade by percentages is the 1960s, which included 25.7% of the designs. Again, this is consistent with experimental innovation. Because Madame Grès worked to perfecting her specific style of the Grecian, pleated gown, she had the most success with this later in her career. The most reliable data for Madame Grès comes from Table 5.2, the Musée Galliera exhibition, which had 119 items. The Met’s exhibition was relatively smaller (only 35 items) and the collections held by the Fashion Institute of Technology and Victoria and Albert Museum are not that large either (33 and 24 items, respectively) but still are useful in determining the most important time period for the designer.

The auction data in Table 5.4 also supports the conclusion that Madame Grès was most successful later in her career. The most expensive dress sold was from when she was 57 years old and sold for 9,020. *The second most expensive was from when she was 62 and sold for 8,450.* While these numbers are not nearly as high as the other designers’, Madame Grès was still respected by critics and other designers as the critical literature demonstrates. The auction data also shows that of the 31 dresses observed, only 4 items came from before the age of 47. This is consistent with the fact that experimental designers produce their best work later in their careers.

Madame Grès has inspired many designers today. One of her most prominent followers is Doo-Ri Chung who creates a similar type of draping jersey dress shown on runways today. Contemporary Japanese designer Yohji Yamamoto also includes the pleated techniques in his designs. Costello Tagliapietra, Alber Elbaz, Isabel Toledo, Ralph Rucci, and Halston are other designers who have incorporated Grès’ free-flowing, graceful style into their collections.

Madame Grès embodies a pure experimental designer. As Richard Martin writes, “Grès invented one model that she practiced, polished, perfected, and purified.” Her self-taught skills and beautifully graceful dresses are innovations in the fashion industry that remain today. Her persistent devotion to her work makes her an experimental artist that has had a tremendous impact on the history of couture.

### **6.3 Yves Saint Laurent (1936-2008)**

“For Yves - and herein lies his uniqueness - each collection is a means of bringing dreams to life, expressing fantasies, encountering myths, and creating out of them a contemporary fashion.” - Pierre Berge, fellow designer and partner (Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco).

Yves Saint Laurent was a French conceptual designer. At the young age of 17, he won third place in the prestigious International Wool Secretariat competition for design sketches. The next year, at the age of 18, Saint Laurent won. The award is an international recognition given to outstanding fashion designers as judged by the top designers in the field and served as the launching point for Saint Laurent’s career. Saint Laurent was born in Algeria to a wealthy French family. His family exposed him to the theater and arts at an early age where he developed an interest in design (Kellogg, 2002). Saint Laurent went on to apprentice for Dior after winning the International Wool Secretariat prize, and at the age of 21 became the lead designer for Dior upon his sudden death in 1957. It is from this young age, 21, that Yves Saint Laurent began his career continuously redefining fashion for women.

Saint Laurent’s innovation was establishing the idea that women could be empowered by the clothing he designed. Saint Laurent had a specific idea behind his designs; his clothes served a purpose other than to make women look graceful, like Balenciaga and Madame Grès. His idea was that he wanted women to feel powerful wearing his clothes, and he designed accordingly. As he once stated in an interview, “My dream is to give women the basis of a classic wardrobe, which, escaping the fashion of the moment, will give them greater confidence in themselves” (Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco).

His creative process was entirely conceptual. Saint Laurent would sketch out his designs in

great detail prior to designing. Like conceptual architects, Saint Laurent could hand the designs to his team and step back from the work. This is possible for conceptual artists because the creation of the final product is not what is important. What is important is the idea behind it. This would not have worked for Balenciaga or Madame Grès because their technical skills and abilities were unmatched by fellow designers. One of Saint Laurent's contemporaries remembers the thousands of drawings Saint Laurent would produce and the high quality of each sketch: "When he began, Yves Saint Laurent would produce up to one thousand drawings but what makes Yves Saint Laurent's sketches of such amazing quality are their closeness to their final destination." Saint Laurent himself even acknowledged his sketching capabilities: "When I give the ateliers a sketch they can immediately recognize the direction of the fabric they can read it like a road map" (Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco). This occurs for conceptual designers because the concept for the design is complete before it is even drawn; it is an idea conceived of by Saint Laurent himself and finished before he writes it down.

Palomo-Lovinski highlights the years from 1966-1968 as the most important years of Yves Saint Laurent's career. In 1966 he created the Mondrian line. In 1967 he created Le Smoking, his tuxedos for women. Also in 1967, he created his African collection. In 1968 he introduced the safari line. Each of these collections was as independent as it was radical. The frequent change in style is common for conceptual innovators, as style is a means for expressing ideas. For Saint Laurent, the idea he wished to express was empowering women. His long-time partner and fellow designer Pierre Berge describes this goal:

Much like Dior gave women the feeling of beauty, YSL gave women power. He gave them masculine dress "sliding masculine shoulders onto those of women, dressing them in tuxedos, reefer jackets, blazers, sport coats, and trench coats" - Saint Laurent, in his own way, transferred power to women.

This pattern of drastic, sudden change continued for Saint Laurent. In 1977 he created the Ballets Russes collection inspired by the Russian ballet. Kellogg describes this collection as being a "dramatic departure" from his prior work. This work was conceptually innovative, as it was well defined, immediate, and spread quickly to other designers: "Shortly thereafter, ethnic fashions at

every price point proliferated on the fashion scene” (Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco).

When looking at Tables 5.1 and 5.2, Saint Laurent’s most important years become clear. To begin, the exhibitions for Balenciaga and Madame Grès featured almost no work from either designer before the age of 40. For Saint Laurent’s 2002 exhibition, over 35% of the work comes from before the age of 40. His 2010 exhibition contains nearly 40% from before the age of 40. What is most important in these tables though are the years from 1966 through 1971. During this 5-year time span, Saint Laurent created each of the individual collections described above. This 5-year span also contains the most designs in a concentrated period over his entire career.

The auction data from Table 5.3 also demonstrates this phenomenon. This creative time period started with the Mondrian dress in 1966. The Mondrian dresses were a direct link to Piet Mondrian’s geometric patterns of design. In an interview reprinted for his 2002 exhibition, the couturier states clearly in regard to the Mondrian collection: “I understood that until then, the world was rigid and that the time had come to make it move” (Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco). One of these dresses sold for \$46,980 in a 2011 Christie’s auction. The most expensive item out of the auction data was a 1967 dress with ostrich feathers he personally designed for model Danielle Luquet de Saint Germain. This year matches with the year with the most number of designs in his two exhibitions. The dress sold for \$154,375. The second most expensive item comes from his 1977 Ballets Russes collection. His Picasso-inspired Cubist dress from this year was the second highest selling item on the list. This also was a unique, radically different type of dress from his other work.

Saint Laurent brought haute couture to the common woman. The elegance and exclusivity of Balenciaga and Grès was no longer possible as both giants had retired, and Saint Laurent was there to bring in the new wave. One could not separate Saint Laurent’s clothes from Saint Laurent the person and his ideas: “For twenty-five years, Saint Laurent has fully exemplified Jean Cocteau’s phrase: In every landscape or still life, a painter always portrays himself” (Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco). Berge continues to say, he “extended the realm of aesthetics to embrace social issues, using in a certain way the approach of a moralist.” One does not find such strong ideas in the work of Balenciaga and Grès. This is the difference between conceptual and experimental innovation in design.

## 7 Conclusion

Experimental fashion designers make their best work late in their careers. This phenomenon occurs because experimental innovations are most often made as a result of strong tailoring and craftsmanship skills. These skills are honed and perfected over the course of a career. As a result, one's best designs occur later. These designs tend to be graceful and beautiful, often appearing simple when in fact they are quite complex. Cristóbal Balenciaga was an experimental designer most well known for his gowns while Madame Grès was an experimentalist who invented the pleated, Grecian jersey gown. Both designers' styles are seen on runways today. Conceptual fashion designers tend to make their best work earlier in their careers. Conceptual designs often embody an idea that is captured by the design and style of the clothing or fabric. Conceptual designers sketch their designs in advance, producing nearly complete sketches before the designs are prepared. Yves Saint Laurent was a conceptual designer who brought the idea of empowering women to couture. He is most well known for putting women in pant suits and creating dresses inspired by other artists' work like Mondrian and Picasso.

The difference between the two forms of creativity is consistent with the dichotomy that exists in other disciplines. Couture as a form of museum art is a relatively new phenomenon when compared with other forms of art. Yet over the last 40 years there has been a significant movement among museums collect designs that transformed the discipline. Within the discipline itself, further studies on creativity should explore the change in fashion design over the latter half of the 20th century to determine if the conceptual revolutions that occurred in painting and songwriting also occurred in fashion design. It is possible that the rise of ready-to-wear collections has made it easier for designers to impart their ideas on consumers. Regardless, the study of creativity is essential towards better understanding the history and nature of fashion design.

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## 8 Appendix

Table 1: 20th Century Fashion Designers

	<b>Designer</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b># of Items</b>	<b>Met Exhibition</b>
<b>Experimental</b>	Cristóbal Balenciaga	1895-1972	Spain	450	The World of Balenciaga
	Madame Grès	1903-1993	France	326	Madame Grès
<b>Conceptual</b>	Yves Saint Laurent	1936-2008	France	404	Yves Saint Laurent

Source: The Costume Institute, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY

Table 2: Top 10 Designers by # of Items in Metropolitan Museum of Art

<b>Designer</b>	<b># of Items</b>
Charles James	727
House of Dior	668
House of Balenciaga	497
Cristóbal Balenciaga	450
Yves Saint Laurent	404
Yves Saint Laurent, Paris	352
Madame Grès	326
Elsa Schiaparelli	317
House of Chanel	304
Christian Dior	282

Source: The Costume Institute, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY

Table 3: Monographic Exhibitions

<b>Selected Met Exhibitions</b>	<b>Date</b>
The World of Balenciaga	3/23/73 - 6/30/73
Yves Saint Laurent	12/14/83 - 9/2/84
Madame Grès	9/13/94 - 11/27/94
Christian Dior	12/12/96 - 3/23/97
Gianni Versace	12/11/97 - 3/22/98
Adrian: American Glamour	5/14/02 - 8/18/02
CHANEL	4/5/05 - 8/13/05
Paul Poiret: King of Fashion	5/7/07-8/6/07
Alexander McQueen	5/4/11-8/7/11
Charles James: Beyond Fashion	5/8/14-8/10/14

Source: The Costume Institute, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY

Table 4.1: The World of Balenciaga (1973)

Year	Age	# of Items (n=191)	% Distribution	% by Decade
1938	43	1	0.5%	
1939	44	2	1.0%	1.6%
1940	45	1	0.5%	
1941	46	0	0.0%	
1942	47	0	0.0%	
1943	48	0	0.0%	
1944	49	0	0.0%	
1945	50	2	1.0%	
1946	51	4	2.1%	
1947	52	3	1.6%	
1948	53	1	0.5%	
1949	54	3	1.6%	7.3%
1950	55	10	5.2%	
1951	56	3	1.6%	
1952	57	5	2.6%	
1953	58	5	2.6%	
1954	59	6	3.1%	
1955	60	9	4.7%	
1956	61	4	2.1%	
1957	62	12	6.3%	
1958	63	5	2.6%	
1959	64	5	2.6%	33.3%
1960	65	15	7.8%	
1961	66	11	5.7%	
1962	67	10	5.2%	
1963	68	15	7.8%	
1964	69	15	7.8%	
1965	70	17	8.9%	
1966	71	10	5.2%	
1967	72	11	5.7%	
1968	73	6	3.1%	57.3%
<b>31</b>		<b>191</b>		

Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art. (1973). The World of Balenciaga. New York

Table 4.2: Balenciaga and Spain (2011)

Year	Age	# of Items (n=191)	% Distribution	% by Decade
1938	43	1	0.7%	
1939	44	3	2.2%	3.0%
1940	45	2	1.5%	
1941	46	1	0.7%	
1942	47	0	0.0%	
1943	48	1	0.7%	
1944	49	0	0.0%	
1945	50	2	1.5%	
1946	51	2	1.5%	
1947	52	2	1.5%	
1948	53	6	4.4%	
1949	54	1	0.7%	12.6%
1950	55	8	5.9%	
1951	56	11	8.1%	
1952	57	5	3.7%	
1953	58	7	5.2%	
1954	59	6	4.4%	
1955	60	1	0.7%	
1956	61	3	2.2%	
1957	62	6	4.4%	
1958	63	4	3.0%	
1959	64	2	1.5%	39.3%
1960	65	6	4.4%	
1961	66	7	5.2%	
1962	67	8	5.9%	
1963	68	2	1.5%	
1964	69	11	8.1%	
1965	70	7	5.2%	
1966	71	6	4.4%	
1967	72	10	7.4%	
1968	73	4	3.0%	45.2%
<b>31</b>		<b>135</b>		

Source: Bowles, H., & M.H. De Young Memorial Museum. (2011). Balenciaga and Spain. San Francisco

Table 4.3: Balenciaga: Masterpieces of Fashion Design (1992)

Year	Age	# of Items (n=191)	% Distribution	% by Decade
1938	43	0	0.0%	
1939	44	1	1.4%	1.4%
1940	45	1	1.4%	
1941	46	2	2.8%	
1942	47	0	0.0%	
1943	48	0	0.0%	
1944	49	0	0.0%	
1945	50	0	0.0%	
1946	51	0	0.0%	
1947	52	0	0.0%	
1948	53	0	0.0%	
1949	54	0	0.0%	4.2%
1950	55	5	6.9%	
1951	56	3	4.2%	
1952	57	3	4.2%	
1953	58	2	2.8%	
1954	59	3	4.2%	
1955	60	2	2.8%	
1956	61	2	2.8%	
1957	62	3	4.2%	
1958	63	1	1.4%	
1959	64	2	2.8%	36.1%
1960	65	5	6.9%	
1961	66	4	5.6%	
1962	67	4	5.6%	
1963	68	3	4.2%	
1964	69	7	9.7%	
1965	70	2	2.8%	
1966	71	7	9.7%	
1967	72	9	12.5%	
1968	73	1	1.4%	58.3%
<b>31</b>		<b>72</b>		

Source: National Gallery of Victoria. (1992). Balenciaga: Masterpieces of Fashion Design. Melbourne

Table 4.4: Balenciaga Museum Collection Age Distributions

Age	Fashion Institute of Technology (n=19)	Victoria and Albert Museum (n=129)
30s	0	0
40s	2	1
50s	8	21
60s	7	76
70s	2	31
Mean age:	58.89	64.74
Median age:	58	65

Source: Fashion Institute of Technology Collection, New York. Victoria and Albert Museum Collection, London.

Table 4.5: Balenciaga Auction Prices and Age Distributions

Designer Age	Price (\$ USD)	Item (n = 26)	Year of Sale	Auction House
55	3,126	Dress	2009	Christie's
55	2,709	Dress	2009	Christie's
55	1,700	Dress	2012	Christie's
55	1,250	Suit	2009	Christie's
56	4,584	Dress	2009	Christie's
59	2,244	Dress	2009	Christie's
60	3,126	Dress	2009	Christie's
60	1,667	Ensamble	2009	Christie's
60	1,346	Dress	2008	Christie's
64	3,116	Dress	2010	Kerry Taylor
65	4,902	Suit	2007	Christie's
<b>65</b>	<b>57,464</b>	<b>Cape</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>Christie's</b>
66	1,320	Dress	2010	Augusta
67	1,140	Ensamble	2010	Augusta
67	1,571	Ensamble	2008	Christie's
65	6,888	Dress	2013	Kerry Taylor
69	3,141	Suit	2008	Christie's
65-75*	11,745	Dress	2011	Christie's
65-75	5,418	Dress	2009	Christie's
65-75	5,418	Gown	2009	Christie's
65-75	4,039	Coat	2008	Christie's
65-75	3,320	Jacket	2008	Christie's
65-75	1,795	Dress	2008	Christie's
65-75	1,188	Suit	2007	Christie's
65-75	3,000	Dress	2011	Augusta
65-75	1,800	Dress	2012	Augusta

Source: <http://www.christies.com/results/>; [www.invaluable.com](http://www.invaluable.com); [www.augusta-auction.com](http://www.augusta-auction.com)

\*Ages listed "65-75" correspond with items listed as designed in "1960s" since this was the age range for Balenciaga during those years and exact date of clothing was not provided

Table 5.1: Madame Grès (1994)

Year	Age	# of Items (n=35)	% Distribution	% by Decade
1935	32	2	5.7%	
1937	34	1	2.9%	
1938	35	1	2.9%	11.4%
1946	43	1	2.9%	
1947	44	1	2.9%	5.7%
1950	47	1	2.9%	
1952	49	1	2.9%	
1954	51	1	2.9%	
1956	53	2	5.7%	14.3%
1961	58	1	2.9%	
1965	62	4	11.4%	
1968	65	2	5.7%	
1969	66	2	5.7%	25.7%
1970	67	3	8.6%	
1971	68	1	2.9%	
1974	71	2	5.7%	
1975	72	2	5.7%	
1976	73	1	2.9%	
1978	75	2	5.7%	31.4%
1980	77	3	8.6%	
1985	82	1	2.9%	11.4%
<b>21</b>		<b>35</b>		

Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art. (1994). Madame Grès. New York



Table 5.2: Madame Grès, La Couture à L'œuvre (2011)

Year	Age	# of Items (n=119)	% Distribution	% by Decade
1933	30	4	3.4%	
1934	31	1	0.8%	
1935	32	2	1.7%	
1936	33	1	0.8%	
1937	34	3	2.5%	
1938	35	3	2.5%	
1939	36	3	2.5%	14.3%
1940	37	1	0.8%	
1942	39	1	0.8%	
1943	40	1	0.8%	
1944	41	2	1.7%	
1945	42	4	3.4%	
1946	43	5	4.2%	
1947	44	3	2.5%	
1948	45	5	4.2%	
1949	46	5	4.2%	22.7%
1950	47	4	3.4%	
1951	48	4	3.4%	
1952	49	3	2.5%	
1953	50	2	1.7%	
1955	52	2	1.7%	
1956	53	2	1.7%	
1958	55	1	0.8%	15.1%
1960	57	2	1.7%	
1962	59	1	0.8%	
1963	60	1	0.8%	
1964	61	1	0.8%	
1965	62	2	1.7%	
1966	63	1	0.8%	
1967	64	1	0.8%	
1968	65	1	0.8%	
1969	66	2	1.7%	10.1%
1970	67	11	9.2%	
1971	68	3	2.5%	
1972	69	3	2.5%	
1973	70	1	0.8%	
1974	71	2	1.7%	
1975	72	4	3.4%	
1976	73	5	4.2%	
1977	74	5	4.2%	
1978	75	2	1.7%	
<b>1979</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1.7%</b>	<b>31.9%</b>
1981	78	3	2.5%	
1982	79	1	0.8%	
1985	82	1	0.8%	
1986	83	1	0.8%	
1989	86	1	0.8%	5.9%
<b>47</b>		<b>119</b>		

Source: Musée Galliera - Musée Bourdelle. (2011). Madame Grès, La Couture à L'œuvre. Paris

Table 5.3: Madame Grès Museum Collection Age Distributions

Age	Fashion Institute of Technology (n=33)	Victoria and Albert Museum (n=24)
30s	9	1
40s	10	3
50s	1	5
60s	8	10
70s	5	5
Mean age:	52.24	61.76
Median age:	47	65

Source: Fashion Institute of Technology Collection, New York. Victoria and Albert Museum Collection, London.

Table 5.4: Madame Grès Auction Prices and Age Distributions

Designer Age	Price (\$ USD)	Item (n=31)	Year of Sale	Auction House
37	4,100	Dress	2013	Kerry Taylor
44	5,576	Dress	2013	Kerry Taylor
45	1,937	Dress	1998	Christie's
52	6,778	Dress	1998	Christie's
54	3,873	Dress	1998	Christie's
55	3,873	Dress	1998	Christie's
56	968	Dress	1998	Christie's
56	1,937	Dress	1998	Christie's
57	1,937	Dress	1998	Christie's
<b>57</b>	<b>9,020</b>	<b>Dress</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>Kerry Taylor</b>
58	6,560	Dress	2013	Kerry Taylor
58	968	Dress	1998	Christie's
58	1,937	Dress	1998	Christie's
59	1,937	Dress	1998	Christie's
59	968	Dress	1998	Christie's
59	1,937	Dress	1998	Christie's
60	1,646	Dress	1998	Christie's
<b>62</b>	<b>8,450</b>	<b>Dress</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>Gros-Delettrez</b>
64	3,300	Dress	2011	Augusta
72	2,905	Dress	1998	Christie's
81	1,937	Dress	1998	Christie's
81	1,937	Dress	1998	Christie's
37-47*	2,214	Dress	2013	Kerry Taylor
47-57	5,676	Dress	2007	Christie's
47-57	6,197	Dress	1998	Christie's
47-57	1,549	Dress	1998	Christie's
57-67	1,549	Dress	1998	Christie's
<b>57-67</b>	<b>8,134</b>	<b>Dress</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>Christie's</b>
57-67	1,937	Dress	1998	Christie's
67-77	1,937	Dress	1998	Christie's
67-77	1,549	Dress	1998	Christie's

Source: <http://www.christies.com/results/>; [www.invaluable.com](http://www.invaluable.com); [www.augusta-auction.com](http://www.augusta-auction.com)

\*Ages listed "37-47" (etc.) correspond with items listed as designed in "1940s" (etc.) since this was the age range for Madame Grès during those years and exact date of clothing was not provided

Table 6.1: Yves Saint Laurent (2002)

Year	Age	# of Designs (n=160)	% Distribution	% by Decade
1958	22	1	0.6%	
1962	26	5	3.1%	
1963	27	1	0.6%	
1964	28	2	1.3%	
1965	29	5	3.1%	8.8%
1966	30	6	3.8%	
<b>1967</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>6.9%</b>	
<b>1968</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3.1%</b>	
<b>1969</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4.4%</b>	
<b>1970</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3.8%</b>	
<b>1971</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3.1%</b>	
1973	37	1	0.6%	
1975	39	1	0.6%	26.3%
1976	40	7	4.4%	
1977	41	7	4.4%	
1978	42	2	1.3%	
1979	43	6	3.8%	
1980	44	7	4.4%	
1981	45	5	3.1%	
1982	46	2	1.3%	
1983	47	3	1.9%	
1984	48	3	1.9%	
1985	49	1	0.6%	26.9%
1986	50	3	1.9%	
1987	51	2	1.3%	
1988	52	9	5.6%	
1989	53	3	1.9%	
1990	54	10	6.3%	
1991	55	6	3.8%	
1992	56	3	1.9%	
1993	57	3	1.9%	
1994	58	1	0.6%	
1995	59	2	1.3%	26.3%
1996	60	1	0.6%	
1997	61	4	2.5%	
1998	62	1	0.6%	
1999	63	4	2.5%	
2000	64	6	3.8%	
2001	65	3	1.9%	11.9%
<b>44</b>		<b>160</b>		

Source: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. (2002). Yves Saint Laurent. San Francisco

Table 6.2: Yves Saint Laurent (2010)

Year	Age	# of Designs (n=160)	% Distribution	% by Decade
1958	22	7	2.3%	
1959	23	0	0.0%	
1960	24	1	0.3%	
1961	25	0	0.0%	
1962	26	8	2.6%	
1963	27	1	0.3%	
1964	28	2	0.7%	
1965	29	3	1.0%	7.2%
1966	30	9	2.9%	
<b>1967</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>7.5%</b>	
<b>1968</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>4.2%</b>	
<b>1969</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>3.6%</b>	
<b>1970</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>3.6%</b>	
<b>1971</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>6.2%</b>	
1972	36	1	0.3%	
1973	37	2	0.7%	
1974	38	3	1.0%	
1975	39	5	1.6%	31.6%
1976	40	11	3.6%	
1977	41	17	5.5%	
1978	42	7	2.3%	
1979	43	11	3.6%	
1980	44	9	2.9%	
1981	45	10	3.3%	
1982	46	8	2.6%	
1983	47	10	3.3%	
1984	48	11	3.6%	
1985	49	6	2.0%	32.5%
1986	50	2	0.7%	
1987	51	2	0.7%	
1988	52	11	3.6%	
1989	53	3	1.0%	
1990	54	9	2.9%	
1991	55	5	1.6%	
1992	56	2	0.7%	
1993	57	1	0.3%	
1994	58	4	1.3%	
1995	59	6	2.0%	14.7%
1996	60	2	0.7%	
<b>39</b>		<b>307</b>		

Source: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. (2002). Yves Saint Laurent. San Francisco

Table 6.3: Yves Saint Laurent Auction Prices and Age Distributions

Designer	Age	Price (\$ USD)	Item (n=33)	Year of Sale	Auction House
	20	7,439	Gown (Dior)*	2011	Christie's
	21	4,698	Dress (Dior)	2011	Christie's
	22	3,900	Trapeze (Dior)	2013	Kerry Taylor
	23	7,800	Dress (Dior)	2012	Augusta
	23	4,800	Dress (Dior)	2010	Augusta
	23	4,500	Dress (Dior)	2011	Augusta
	24	4,698	Dress (Dior)	2012	Christie's
	26	3,132	Tunic	2011	Christie's
	29	3,320	Gown	2008	Christie's
	<b>30</b>	<b>46,980</b>	<b>Mondrian Dress</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>Christie's</b>
	31	12,724	African Dress	2011	Christie's
	32	16,600	Safari suit	2008	Christie's
	32	4,698	Suit	2011	Christie's
	<b>32</b>	<b>154,375</b>	<b>Ostrich Dress</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>Gros-Delettrez</b>
	34	3,141	Dress	2008	Christie's
	37	5,090	Gown	2011	Christie's
	41	2,640	Jacket and skirt	2011	Christie's
	42	19,500	Suit	2013	Gros-Delettrez
	43	12,350	Suit	2013	Gros-Delettrez
	<b>43</b>	<b>71,500</b>	<b>Picasso Dress</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>Gros-Delettrez</b>
	44	4,980	Evening wrap	2008	Christie's
	46	780	Dress	2013	Gros-Delettrez
	48	1,300	Dress	2013	Gros-Delettrez
	49	1,680	Dress	2011	Augusta
	50	780	Dress	2013	Gros-Delettrez
	51	4,750	Suit	2011	Christie's
	51	4,000	Suit	2011	Christie's
	53	1,170	Dress	2013	Gros-Delettrez
	53	1,560	Dress	2013	Gros-Delettrez
	23-33**	27,500	Suit	2011	Christie's
	34-44	2,760	Dress	2009	Augusta
	45-55	40,000	Coat and Gown	2011	Christie's
	56-66	2,501	Jacket	2009	Christie's

Source: <http://www.christies.com/results/>; [www.invaluable.com](http://www.invaluable.com); [www.augusta-auction.com](http://www.augusta-auction.com)

\* Items with a (Dior) indicate that he designed for the House of Dior during these years after Christian Dior died

\*\*Ages listed "23-33" (etc.) correspond with items listed as designed in "1960s" (etc.) since this was the age range for Yves Saint Laurent during those years and exact date of clothing was not provided