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Chemical fibres in couture

Forty years ago, no woman who prided herself on her elegance would have dreamt of wearing lingerie, stockings or clothes made of the fibre known at the time as «artificial silk». Its chemical origin, its unfortunate name, which made it sound like some cheap substitute, and a number of early defects — which were soon remedied however — prevented it from being able to compare with the noble textiles of the day. A few years later however the new material, whose prestige had been enhanced by a wise change of name, made its first modest entry into couture. Then came the second world war, by which time it was no longer rayon that was relegated to the rank of «ersatz» — this fibre now being firmly established on the market — but the newly produced staple fibre; this was the period too of the sensational launchings of synthetic fibres, the first of which was nylon. The advent of synthetic textiles, which brought completely new solutions to problems of upkeep, as well however as fresh difficulties to the field of dyeing and production, encouraged a few zealots to prophesy the eclipse of natural fibres. A new battle of the ancients and the moderns, the «war» between the new fibres and traditional textiles, gradually changed to peaceful coexistence, which subsequently developed into the most fruitful co-operation.



Au cocktail de la presse à l'hôtel Crillon, à Paris; de dr. à g. Colonel Sasson (Centro), Milan; M. H. de Watteville, (Service de presse du Syndicat suisse des exportateurs de l'industrie de l'habillement, Zurich); M. W. Muller. (Société de la Viscose Suisse, Emmenbrücke). Photo André Causse

Chemical fibres — both artificial and synthetic — underwent remarkable improvements, which not only facilitated their use for traditional purposes but also opened up the way for them into the world of high fashion. Today, haute couture uses chemical fibres both alone and mixed with natural fibres, which they have in no way ousted but which they usefully complement. Introducing completely new characteristics to the range of textile products, chemical fibres when properly used go extremely well with silk, wool, and cotton, to which they add not only practical qualities such as resistance to wear and friction, permanent pleating, etc., but also characteristics of drape, handle and lightness, which make possible the creation of novelties whose existence was undreamt of a bare twenty years ago.

In order to call attention to this victory on the part of chemical fibres in the field of haute couture, the International Committee for Rayon and Synthetic Fibres organised an exhibition in Paris, at the end of last January, featuring fabrics in artificial and synthetic fibres of French origin, reserved by Parisian haute couture for its spring/summer 1961 collections. This exhibition, which was honoured by the presence of Mr. Jacques Heim, president of the Syndical Chamber of Parisian Couture, displayed a large number of fabrics made either wholly or partly of chemical fibres and used by some twenty-five couturiers.

It should be added that Swiss fabric manufacturers have not been left behind but regularly launch novelties that are not only used for the mass production of clothing but have also been widely used in Parisian couture, as borne out by the many photographs of haute couture models regularly published in this periodical.



Deux-pièces en crêpe de rayonne et acétate.
MODÈLE MICHEL GOMA
Photo Alfredo deMolli

Ensemble printanier en toile
 fibranne jaune.
 MODÈLE JACQUES HEIM
 Photo Vogue Studio



Robe en frais lainage d'été,
 rayonne, laine et nylon.
 MODÈLE CHRISTIAN DIOR
 Photo Vogue Studio