



Elegance in an Age of Crisis, an exhibition at The Museum at FIT, in New York

Description

This show is about the revolution that took place in the way people dress during the Thirties. While it's about the clothes worn by men and women here I'm only concerned with the men's wear. G. Bruce Boyer, surely the English speaking world's best style journalist, co-curated the show, which features beautiful period pieces by famous Neapolitan tailoring establishment London House (now better known as Rubinacci), H. Harris and James & James. The latter two are now defunct, but were tailors to the Duke of Windsor.

The clothes cover the spectrum of activities that made up the elegant lives lead by the upper echelons of Thirties society (for most people it was sadly a decade characterized by the trauma of the great depression), from a midnight blue herringbone dinner jacket from Viennese tailors Knize to a cream-coloured tussah silk double-breasted jacket by London House, and a country suit with plus-fours by Anderson & Sheppard. However, the point of the show isn't merely to remind us that the decade was one of singular elegance, but that the vision of elegance that developed during the Thirties retains its currency.

That development, according to Boyer, took place simultaneously but separately in London and Naples. In London a tailor called Frederick Scholte developed a jacket silhouette based on the cut of a guardsman's coat. This meant softly structured but slightly extended shoulders, a full sleeve-head going into a smaller armhole and a shaped waist to give an idealized masculine form. The way the fabric hangs (particularly when the cloth is substantial) at the sides of the chest, and beneath the shoulder, was said to resemble the folds of curtains, and gave the silhouette the name 'The Drape Cut'.

In Naples, meanwhile, cloth merchant and arbiter of taste Gennaro Rubinacci had employed a tailor, Vincenzo Attolini, and between them they radically de-constructed the jacket to better suit both the lifestyle and climate of Naples. The result of their innovation continues to provide the blueprint for the modern lightweight tailoring of today, which makes the exhibition as relevant as it is fascinating.

Until 19th April

Fitnyc.edu/21912.asp

Category

1. Bespoke Suit
2. The History of Bespoke Tailoring

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