ELSASCHIAPARELLI

Nationality – Italian
Style – Surrealist / Art Deco
Born : 1890

HISTORY.
Elsa Schiaparelli was one of Europe’s most well known fashion designers. She was most popular in the 1930’s and 1940’s but her witty and stylish clothes are still an inspiration to other designers to this day. Elsa Schiaparelli was born in Rome in 1890. She had a very colourful childhood and did many things to shock her parents, once she attended a high class ball wearing only a piece of material wrapped around her body. Aged 18 she married and travelled around Europe until she gave birth to a daughter, Marisa. Unfortunately her husband then abandoned her and she was forced to find work to support herself and her child. She was interested in fashion and tried to get jobs in Paris fashion houses, eventually she had some luck, she designed a black jumper with a knitted white bow motif at the neck. It was much admired and shown in Vogue magazine. It proved so popular that she had to employ a group of women to make some more, this led to her starting her own fashion business and from then on she stared producing sportswear, day and evening wear and printed scarves.

TECHNIQUES
Schiaparelli was very experimental and often used unusual fabrics and materials, like glass like plastics and cellophane, metallic threads and beads. On one occasion she even used human hair on a jacket. She often used oddly shaped buttons and fastenings such as insects, butterfly, fruit and vegetable shapes- anything in fact that did not look like a button. She was the first designer to use zips as a major part of a design rather than keep them hidden away. She also included motifs such as rabbits’ feet, cupids, ballet designs, drums and astrological symbols. She produced sculptural hats, shaped like lamb chops, inkpots or shoes. Many of her designs incorporated appliquéd or embroidery, she also produced many printed textiles.
**STYLE**

Her style was highly eye-catching. Her imagination ran riot and her amusing designs were very popular with an affluent, adventurous clientele. Many famous actresses wore her designs including Marlene Dietrich, Tallulah Bankhead and Mae West. She loved colour and liked to put together eccentric combinations such as turquoise with purple or lime green with tomato red. She famously used bright pink and the phrase ‘Shocking Pink’ was coined to describe the vivid shade she made popular. She bridged the gap between the expressive arts and design and famously worked with the Surrealist artists of the time Salvador Dali, Max Ernst and Rene Magritte.

![Applique / embroidery](image1)
![‘Tear’ printed dress.](image2)
![Lobster print dress.](image3)

**INSPIRATION & INFLUENCES.**

Schiaparelli is famously known as a member of the Surrealist movement. This was an artistic and cultural movement, which emphasised the use of the imagination, dreams and fantasy in art and design. The subconscious mind was very important and any images which were unexpected or outrageous were used. The psychologist Sigmund Freud inspired artists and designers as he said that “the unconscious motivates human behaviour.” Designers such as Schiaparelli developed this idea and revolutionised the art and design world with their subversive and controversial work. The surrealists believed it was wrong to censor themselves.

**Examples of work.**

- Lobster print dress
- Knitted bow jumper
- Vase / Face Illusion jacket
- Opera Coats.