

## Article

## Fashioning and selling the American Look: Dorothy Shaver and modern art



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## ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the pioneering efforts of Dorothy Shaver of Lord & Taylor department store in New York to promote American design and designers from the 1920s to the 1950s. With archival and periodical evidence, this article first situates her within a longer tradition of American fashion nationalism. It then argues that Shaver succeeded when others before her failed because she embraced the rising tide of modernism. This article examines her three major marketing promotions: modern decorative art in 1928, American designers in 1932, and finally, a cohesive “American Look” in 1945. No previous study has linked the three together to identify the common thread of modernism behind her long, well-known campaign for American design. With her success, Shaver built reputations for herself and her store as leaders in promoting American fashion, and in 1945, she ascended the last rung of the store’s corporate ladder to the presidency.

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### Diseñando y vendiendo el American Look: Dorothy Shaver y el arte moderno

## RESUMEN

Este artículo analiza los esfuerzos pioneros de Dorothy Shaver en los grandes almacenes Lord & Taylor de Nueva York para promover el diseño y los diseñadores americanos entre las décadas de 1920 y 1950. Basándose en la prensa y documentación de archivo, el artículo primero la sitúa dentro de una larga tradición de nacionalismo en la moda de los Estados Unidos. A continuación sostiene que Shaver tuvo éxito cuando otros antes habían fracasado gracias a que se abrazó a la creciente ola del modernismo. El artículo examina sus tres principales promociones de marketing: el arte decorativo moderno en 1928, los diseñadores norteamericanos en 1932 y, finalmente, un cohesivo “American Look” en 1945. Ningún estudio anterior ha ligado las tres juntas para identificar el hilo conductor del modernismo tras su larga y bien conocida campaña a favor del diseño norteamericano.

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### 1. Introduction

Dorothy Shaver was a leading American businesswoman who built a long (1921–1959) and successful career at Lord & Taylor department store in New York City.<sup>1</sup> She worked her way up the

<sup>1</sup> From the 1920s into the early 1970s, Lord & Taylor enjoyed a reputation for selling stylish, high-quality merchandize in an atmosphere that catered to the delights of upper middle-class female customers. Under Dorothy Shaver and her

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corporate ladder to become store president in 1945 and served in that position until her untimely death in 1959. Sales dramatically rose during her nearly forty years at the store, more than tripling under her fourteen-year presidency alone “from \$30 million to over \$100 million” (Leavitt, 1985, p. 248).<sup>2</sup> Throughout her career, what distinguished her and her store from competitors was Shaver’s passion for art, specifically modern art. The New York Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) recognized Shaver’s strong connection to the art world in November 1950 by inviting her to speak at the opening of the Good Design exhibition, which displayed over 100 objects from everyday life that embodied both beauty and function. Shaver told the crowd of modern art aficionados that her success in the business world could be attributed to “art and its universal appeal.” She declared: “I have learned from dollars and cents returns that art is neither remote nor esoteric nor removed from everyday life, but that it touches the heart and spirit of all people”.<sup>3</sup> Shaver acknowledged that many people were not interested in art in its traditional forms of painting and sculpture, but a chair, dress, or window display could affect them. These forms of creative expression might be called “design” rather than “art”, but Shaver argued: “to me, good design is simply art applied to living”.<sup>4</sup> In defining art broadly to include all forms of design, from architecture to furniture, fashion, and advertising, she did not distinguish between the cultural value of a painting and a dress. In this way, she disregarded what she saw as artificial hierarchies of modern art and promoted art and design in all aspects of her store, from the window and floor displays to the print advertising, and most importantly, to her tireless promotion of typically “American” design and style that she would term “the American Look”. These artistic efforts shaped Shaver’s career and led to her greatest business successes.

Shaver built a reputation for herself and her store from the 1930s to the 1950s as leading promoters of American fashion designers who were creating what was seen as a distinctly American style. Before this period, fashion designers in the United States often labored anonymously in the shadow of the great Parisian designers, whose work was then copied, reproduced, and sold around the world. Yet Dorothy Shaver, and several others before her, sought to break this historic reliance on Paris and allow American fashion designers to create a style particularly suited to American women and their increasingly active, modern lives. Shaver began her career at Lord & Taylor during the “machine age” of the 1920s, when the United States was pioneering a new mass-produced consumer culture. She saw potential in the ideals of modern art to provide American designers, such as Claire McCardell, with a unique esthetic to put an American stamp on fashions, furniture, and any number of consumer products. While others before her had tried to stimulate domestic fashion design by looking for inspiration from the American landscape and history, Shaver realized that rather

than looking to the past, Americans must look to the future. Shaver passionately believed that what could define “American” design was a combination of efficient mass-production with beauty. In creating more artistic mass-produced goods, American designers would also be democratizing the culture of consumption, in which beauty was no longer a luxury reserved for the leisure class. Instead, Shaver believed that all classes of consumers were entitled to good design – form, as well as function. Twentieth-century Americans, Shaver argued in a 1928 *House & Garden* magazine article, were no longer “satisfied to live in mere physical comfort”.<sup>5</sup> In modern art, Shaver believed that Americans would finally have a design esthetic to express their unique identity in consumer goods that she hoped would one day be sold around the world.

During Shaver’s long tenure at the store, Lord & Taylor marketed itself as embodying American style. She applied her modern art expertise and passion to develop new methods of fashion and style marketing. Most importantly, she nurtured American designers when few others were doing so, and in turn became an authority on modern design, playing a prominent role in the larger art community of architects, industrial designers, advertisers, museum personnel, publicists, and department store executives who created and promoted the look of American modernity. Shaver’s work to foster a homegrown fashion and design industry would help transform New York into a global fashion center and create a genre of “American” style that successfully applied modernism to the consumer culture of everyday life.

## 2. Modernism in art and design

In the years preceding the cataclysmic outbreak of World War I in 1914, modernism was revolutionizing the European art and fashion worlds. Department stores were some of the first institutions to display modern fine art in America. In the mid-1910s, the Gimbel brothers bought Cézannes, Picassos, and Braques to display in their stores in Cincinnati, New York, Cleveland, and Philadelphia (Leach, 1993, p. 136). Similarly, in 1915 the cosmetics maven Helena Rubenstein opened her New York salon where she displayed her modern fine art collection for her female customers to see (Clifford, 2003, p. 86). In exhibiting works of modern fine art and in selling modernist-influenced *couture*, department stores in the 1910s and 1920s were critical to introducing and popularizing modernism with American audiences, thus shaping middle and upper class tastes. The artwork helped to create a modernist atmosphere to sell the new fashions of Paris couturiers like Paul Poiret, who was credited in 1908 with transforming the fashionable silhouette from a voluptuous S-shape to a cubist-inspired, long, slender cylinder (Steele, 1988, p. 232; De Marly, 1980, p. 83).<sup>6</sup>

However, some major players in the American fashion industry abhorred the new modern look. After Poiret’s designs were popularized stateside in 1910, Edward W. Bok, longtime editor of *The Ladies’ Home Journal*, quickly emerged as the most visible crusader against Parisian fashions (Schweitzer, 2008; Hill, 2004; Nystrom, 1928, pp. 180–181).<sup>7</sup> Bok argued to his middle-class female readers that thanks to modernism’s influence, the historic French artistic genius had degraded to madness. Thus, in Bok’s estimation, Paris fashions no longer embodied the high culture of European civilization, to which Americans had so long aspired, and were now

immediate successors, the store moved further upscale from volume-based competitors like Bloomingdale’s, Gimbel’s, and Macy’s, while remaining more accessible to the middle-class than high fashion stores like Saks Fifth Avenue or Bergdorf Goodman (Perkins, 1947, p. 125). In the late 1920s, Macy’s was the largest New York store, with a sales volume at \$70–\$75 million, while Lord & Taylor rivaled newly opened Saks Fifth Avenue at about \$18 million in sales (“Another Record Christmas Trade,” *Wall Street Journal*, Dec. 24, 1926, Proquest; “An Old Business,” *Wall Street Journal*, Mar. 29, 1927, Proquest; and “New Store Will Aid Gimbel Profit,” *Wall Street Journal*, Sept. 13, 1924, Proquest). Lord & Taylor was the jewel in the crown of Associated Dry Goods Corporation, which held several other stores, including James McCreery & Co., Hahne & Co., J.N. Adam & Co., Stewart & Co., and Powers Mercantile Co.

<sup>2</sup> These gains well exceeded Shaver’s goal when she became president of simply doubling annual sales (Perkins, 1947, p. 128).

<sup>3</sup> Dorothy Shaver, no date c. November 1950, qtd. in “Dinner to Open First Good Design Exhibition at Museum,” Press Release, The Museum of Modern Art, Dorothy Shaver Papers (hereafter DSP), Box 8, Folder 11, National Museum of American History, Washington, D.C. (hereafter NMAH).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Dorothy Shaver, February 1928, “Principles and Practice in the Decorating Service of a Retailer,” *House & Garden*, DSP, Box 15, Folder 3, NMAH.

<sup>6</sup> Poiret was especially sympathetic to the cubists and was an art collector himself (Troy, 2003, p. 42).

<sup>7</sup> Bok himself discussed his efforts in Chapter XXIX, “An Excursion into the Feminine Nature,” in his 1921 autobiography (Bok, 1921, pp. 327–332).

“grotesque and freakish”.<sup>8</sup> In turn, Bok campaigned for the creation of distinctly “American” fashions, free of influence from Paris and its modern art. Bok’s crusade culminated in 1912 when he partnered with the editors of *The New York Times* to sponsor an American fashions design contest to discover unknown American talent.<sup>9</sup> Over \$500 in cash prizes for hat and dress designs was awarded. Contestants were encouraged to look to the American past, culture, and landscape for inspiration. Irma Campbell, a designer for Lord & Taylor, adapted a Quaker dress, winning second prize in the afternoon gown competition, while three of the winning hats made use of a cotton boll, pine needles, and an American Beauty rose to produce their “American” designs.<sup>10</sup>

Three years later, *Women’s Wear* (later *Women’s Wear Daily*) followed Edward Bok’s lead. From 1916 to 1920, the fashion industry’s trade “bible” inaugurated a series of “Designed in America” contests (Whitley, 1994). Under the leadership of the new design editor, Morris de Camp Crawford, the contest was meant to bring additional attention to American design talent who labored anonymously in Paris’s shadow. Crawford’s passion was textiles, and in his spare time, he studied Peruvian examples as a Research Associate at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH). Through his connection to the AMNH and later to the Brooklyn Museum and its director, Stewart Culin, Crawford worked to open the museums’ caches of artifacts to American industrial designers, in an effort to turn designers’ attention away from Parisian modernism (Leach, 1993, p. 169; Hamburger, 1939, pp. 137 and 141). In 1917, the Brooklyn Museum started a design studio for American industrial designers and manufacturers, where they could actually handle the artwork. Five years later, Stewart Culin worked directly with Estelle Hamburger, a rising executive at Bonwit Teller, who was thrilled with the “loot” Culin had brought back from the Belgian Congo, including “spears, drums, masks, strange wood carvings and bronzes, sacrificial brass bowls caked a half inch thick with dried human blood – the art of savage Africa” (Hamburger, 1939, p. 139). Bonwit Teller collaborated with the American manufacturer, Edward L. Mayer, to translate the African artifacts into ready-to-wear. Clearly Culin and Hamburger saw no irony in fashionable white women wearing clothes inspired by African culture during the era of Jim Crow in the American South. Stewart Culin was so pleased with Bonwit Teller’s window displays that he transferred them to the Brooklyn Museum to show off the commercial fruits of the creative collaboration.

While the efforts of Edward Bok, Morris Crawford, and Stewart Culin all brought more attention to American fashion designers, none dislodged Parisian dominance in fashion and the growing lure of modernism, which spread to the decorative arts by the mid-1920s. In 1925, Paris staged one of the most important decorative art exhibitions of the twentieth century, the *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes*. The expo played a key role in popularizing modern decorative and industrial art for the machine age. Planned for 1915 but delayed because of the war, the massive exhibit brought sixteen million visitors from around the world to Paris to see furniture, textiles, glass, carpets, and all manner of household objects coordinated together in the modern style.

Although the French section occupied two-thirds of the exhibit, many other countries took part. The United States, however, declined to participate. After consulting with leaders in the American art community, Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover

concluded that the U.S. would not be able to follow the exhibition’s requirement that works be entirely original, new, and show no signs of copying past styles. Even in 1925, the U.S. had yet to make major contributions to modernism’s development, as modern art’s reputation in the U.S. was still tenuous. An American delegation of arts administrators, department store executives, representatives of the textile and furniture industries, architects, and designers attended the show, including Richard Bach from the Metropolitan Museum, Edward Bernays, the public relations guru, Earnest Elmo Calkins, a pioneering advertiser, and Ely Jacques Kahn, a modernist architect. The group’s official report warned: “a ‘distinct advantage’ in trade would go to that ‘nation which most successfully rationalizes’ the ‘modern movement’” (Meikle, 2005, p. 95). Thus, by the 1920s, it was clear that modernism’s influence and spread could not be stopped.

Dorothy Shaver, then a young executive at Lord & Taylor, also attended the exhibition and well understood the potential to harness the new style’s commercial power. She later said that she was “stuck by the scope, the vigor, the sophistication of [the] Modern Exposition”.<sup>11</sup> She returned to the states “fired with the idea of doing something similar for America in Lord & Taylor – a showing of the Decorative Arts in the modern tempo”.<sup>12</sup> Soon after, she created a modernist room in her Bureau of Fashion and Decoration that she had just established at Lord & Taylor to coordinate styling in the store (Leach, 1993, p. 315). A year later, she pushed store president Samuel Reyburn to purchase expensive painted screens by the modernist French fashion illustrator Étienne Drian to use in millinery window displays.<sup>13</sup> As Shaver suspected, the screens and the displays were extremely popular. Otto Kahn, a wealthy New York investment banker for Kuhn, Loeb, & Co., later bought them.<sup>14</sup> One of the screens pictured a fashionably dressed young woman being carried away by her parasol, like a stylish 1920s Mary Poppins, with hats on stands in the foreground, giving the impression that they were floating as well. Thus as the influence of French modern art expanded in the 1920s, Dorothy Shaver began increasing its exposure in Lord & Taylor.

Yet, Shaver was not the only retailer to realize the merchandizing possibilities of modernism’s growing influence in the mid-to late-1920s on American consumer culture. Museums and other department stores staged modernist exhibits after the 1925 Paris exposition. At the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Richard Bach hosted a showing of Ruhlmann furniture and Lalique glassware in 1926. Soon after, the museum opened a small gallery of French Art Deco pieces (Meikle, 2005, p. 96). In May of the next year, Macy’s collaborated with the museum to stage a weeklong “Exposition of Art in Trade” that displayed both European and American modern works, drawing 50,000 visitors (Leach, 1993, p. 313). In December of 1927, Wanamaker’s in New York opened several model rooms of modern furniture, and three months later in February 1928, two Brooklyn stores, Abraham & Straus and Frederick Loeser & Co. opened their own modern rooms. Abraham & Straus had asked the designer, Paul T. Frankl, a recent Viennese immigrant famous for his “skyscraper furniture,” to create the rooms. Saks Fifth Avenue, Macy’s, and Franklin Simon all hired new window display designers who helped develop a modernist approach emphasizing simplicity to highlight the goods. Raymond Loewy, Norman Bel Geddes, and Donald Deskey, who all went on to successful careers as industrial designers in the 1930s, started out as window display men in the 1920s (Leach, 1993, p. 306; Porter, 2002, p. 22). This type of modern

<sup>8</sup> Edward Bok, “The Coming of American Fashions,” *Ladies Home Journal*, Feb. 1913, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> “Prizes for American Fashions,” *New York Times*, Dec. 4, 1912, Proquest.

<sup>10</sup> Edward Bok, “Names of the Nine Prize Winners and Descriptions of Their Designs,” *New York Times*, Feb. 23, 1913, Proquest.

<sup>11</sup> Dorothy Shaver, no date (ca. early 1950s), “Speech to Members of the Fashion Group, Chamber of Commerce, Honored Guests,” DSP, Box 7, Folder 34, NMAH.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> S.W. Reyburn to Stanford Briggs, October 27, 1926, DSP, Box 7, Folder 4, NMAH.

<sup>14</sup> Elsie Shaver, no date, DSP, Box 17, Folder 5, NMAH.

industrial design fully divorced department stores in interwar period from their nineteenth-century dry goods roots, transforming them into twentieth-century style and fashion palaces.

Since New York City in the late-1920s was a hotbed of modernist activity as never before, Lord & Taylor sought to capitalize on the trend. Indeed, Dorothy Shaver believed that 1928 was the right “psychological moment” for a grand exhibit of modern design.<sup>15</sup> She convinced Lord & Taylor’s president, Samuel Reburn, to spend \$125,000 on importing and exhibiting the best of modern French decorative art.<sup>16</sup> Shaver spent six months in France personally selecting the pieces that she believed would most likely meet the American public’s approval. The exposition occupied the store’s entire seventh floor and featured “salons” by Émile-Jacques Ruhlmann, Jean Dunand, Vera Choukhoeff, Louis Süe and André Mare, Pierre Chareau, Francis Jourdain, René Joubert and Philippe Petit. Most had shown at the 1925 Paris expo, and some were also featured in the Metropolitan gallery and at the Macy’s exhibit.

Although other stores like Macy’s and Wanamaker’s had previously shown modern decorative art, Lord & Taylor’s contribution was distinct in several ways. Shaver explained that the exhibit displayed the two schools of French Art Deco, the traditionalists like Ruhlmann and Süe et Mare who created sumptuous luxury, and the rationalists like Pierre Chareau and Francis Jourdain who emphasized an avant-garde simplicity and logic. For example, one Chareau room featured a desk stripped to its essential parts, but with ingenious features that served multiple purposes, such as a swinging shelf that could be used for typing or stenography then stored (Friedman, 2003, p. 62). Lord & Taylor was the first to show Chareau and Jourdain in America, and was also the only location in New York at the time where the public could see modern paintings by Picasso, Braque, Raoul Dufy, and Fernand Léger.

For Shaver, her role in selecting the works and directing the exhibition was essential in establishing her connections to the design community and her reputation for impeccable taste. She received prominent credit in the exhibition program and media coverage. The exhibit also had remarkable longevity, as nearly every subsequent article about her cited it as her first great triumph. It was a career-making event that many New Yorkers remembered and that would forever associate Shaver with art promotion. This legacy continues into the twenty-first century in the Party of the Year annual fundraising gala for the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Costume Institute. Along with Eleanor Lambert, whose career as the leading fashion publicist was also built on an early recognition of the importance of American designers, Dorothy Shaver was a founder of both the Institute that promotes fashion as an art form and the gala that funds its work.

The exhibit also showcased Shaver’s talent for showmanship that defined her approach to advertising and merchandizing throughout her career. Lord & Taylor hosted a private reception to open the exhibit on February 23, to which over a thousand prominent New Yorkers from the art world and social elite were invited. The French Ambassador, Paul Claudel, came from Washington as the guest of honor.<sup>17</sup> *Life* magazine remembered nearly twenty years later that the event was “presented with the flourish of a Theatre Guild premiere – red carpets on the sidewalk, blazing floodlights and Miss Shaver floating about in a white evening dress – it was a sensation” (Perkins, 1947, p. 120). One observer told Shaver shortly afterwards that she had effectively educated

the Lord & Taylor executives in the practice of “retail drama,” which would surely double their investment in publicity returns.<sup>18</sup> Looking back on her career after her promotion to the presidency, *Vogue* claimed that when Shaver started her career at Lord & Taylor in the 1920s, it was indeed a leading store, but it had “no more showmanship than a high school play; it was busy selling clothes and furniture, but not fashions and living and ideas . . . That night Lord & Taylor arrived as part of New York’s social life, a mover in the arts, and a battler for the improvement of taste”.<sup>19</sup> Dorothy Shaver realized that both showmanship and an appeal to culture and class were essential parts of the formula to sell modern consumer goods.

Shaver masterfully paired showmanship with social and cultural status in securing an impressive array of sponsors from the art world and social elite to lend their names to the advisory committee with twenty-six members and the list of “Patrons & Patronesses” with forty-eight. Lord & Taylor’s advisors included art critics, architects, and museum directors among others, while patrons included Norman Bel Geddes, Otto Kahn, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Condé Nast. Lucien Vogel, the Paris fashion editor of *La Gazette du Bon Ton* and *Vogue*, and Ely Jacques Kahn, who designed twenty modern commercial buildings in the Garment District during the 1920s, were also collaborating organizers with Shaver.<sup>20</sup> Inviting the French Ambassador to attend the opening elevated the exposition’s status to a prestigious social and cultural event. Shaver thus established her own cultural and promotional credentials within the modern design community and a circle of powerful New Yorkers.

In addition to an impressive list of sponsors, the exhibition’s cultural value was emphasized in other ways as well. The floor plan called the rooms, “galleries” and “salons”, to give the exhibit a more museum-like character. In addition to the decorative art, the exposition displayed modernist paintings and decorative accessories including glass, silver, textiles, and rugs.<sup>21</sup> Above all, officially none of the French artists’ works were for sale, although interested visitors could still obtain prices for individual articles and entire rooms.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, Émile-Jacques Ruhlmann refused to allow his famed Chariot sideboard of Makassar ebony with ivory inlay to come to America unless it was exhibited in an educational, rather than commercial setting.<sup>23</sup> Ruhlmann thus sought to disassociate his creations from commerce to protect their artistic value and his own reputation as a creator of exclusive luxury. At the turn of the century, modern art emphasized originality over the old artistic practice of imitation. Thus, modern decorative artists as well as fashion designers struggled to strike a “precarious balance . . . between an allegedly disinterested commitment to high culture and the demands of an increasingly complex, sophisticated, and diversified commercial enterprise . . .” (Troy, 2003, p. 193).

For Dorothy Shaver and others in the consumer sphere, the balance between art and commerce would always be decidedly tilted toward commerce. She used the exhibit to launch a new Department of Modern Decoration in the store. Along with the French artists’ “salons”, the display also included five smaller rooms by Lord & Taylor, with pieces manufactured in the United States. Visitors marveled at the talent and taste of the Lord & Taylor decorators. One told Shaver that those rooms “stimulated” and “thrilled” her

<sup>15</sup> Dorothy Shaver, no date (c. early 1950s), “Speech to Members of the Fashion Group,” DSP, Box 7, Folder 34, NMAH.

<sup>16</sup> “Modern Art Applied to Varied Merchandize to be Shown in Exhibition at Lord & Taylor,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, February 16, 1928, DSP, Box 15, Folder 3, NMAH.

<sup>17</sup> “Reception Tonight Will Open Modern French Art Show,” *New York Sun*, February 23, 1928, DSP, Box 7, Folder 4, NMAH.

<sup>18</sup> Priscilla Whiley to Dorothy Shaver, no date c. 1928, DSP, Box 15, Folder 4, NMAH.

<sup>19</sup> Allene Talmey, “No Progress, No Fun,” *Vogue*, February 1, 1946, p. 159, DSP, Box 16, Folder 2, NMAH.

<sup>20</sup> Lord & Taylor, “An Exposition of Modern French Decorative Art Program,” February 1928, DSP, Box 7, Folder 4, NMAH. On Kahn’s work in the Garment District, see Stern and Stuart (2006, pp. 70–91).

<sup>21</sup> Friedman, *Selling Good Design*, 59.

<sup>22</sup> “Modern Art Applied to Varied Merchandize to be Shown in Exhibition at Lord & Taylor,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, 16 February 1928, Box 15, Folder 3.

<sup>23</sup> “Exposition of Modern French Decorative Art,” *The American Architect*, 5 March 1928, Dorothy Shaver Papers, NMAH, Box 15, Folder 2.



most of all.<sup>24</sup> Lord & Taylor sold \$50,000 of its American-made modern furniture during the exhibit.<sup>25</sup> That amount was less than half of the initial outlay to mount the exhibit, but Shaver argued that the point of “a well-planned and well-executed prestige-event” was “awakening in the public a greater interest in Lord & Taylor.”<sup>26</sup> Indeed, it was so popular that it was extended to a month and a half from the initially planned two weeks and counted a final attendance of 362,000 people, seven times more than the previous Macy’s exhibit. V.E. Scott, the director of publicity for the exposition, declared: “until this Exposition the general feeling was that modern art was quite mad – now the public knows that this is not so.”<sup>27</sup> Dorothy Shaver thus bridged the modern art world and the “dream world” of consumer culture as she brought modern French culture to the glamorous American commercial sphere (Williams, 1982).

The exhibit also established Lord & Taylor’s reputation as a leader in promoting modern art. Museums across the country asked the exhibit’s publicity director, V.E. Scott, to give lectures on modern art for the public and museum personnel. The Encyclopedia Britannica also asked Scott to write five articles on the topic for its new edition, and manufacturers sought his opinion on “how important modern art had become.”<sup>28</sup> Meanwhile, other department stores not only in the U.S. but also in Canada and Cuba wanted to bring the Lord & Taylor exhibit to their stores.<sup>29</sup>

Additionally, Dorothy Shaver’s own reputation as an expert on modern art and its incorporation into consumer goods was solidified with the exhibit. Just eight months after it closed, the American public relations guru, Edward Bernays, solicited Shaver to be part of a proposed consulting business called Art in Industry Associates that would serve a growing demand from American manufacturers for modernist expertise.<sup>30</sup> Two years earlier, Bernays had helped the well respected, but staid, New England silk manufacturers, Cheney Bros. to inject modernism into their products and market them as “inspired by modern French art” (Błaszczuk, 2006, p. 235; Bernays, 1965, p. 300). In high fashion magazines such as *Vogue* and *Harper’s Bazaar* that targeted the upper class and in direct-mail campaigns, Cheney’s ads featured reproductions of French modernist paintings. Shaver’s masterful exhibit of modern French decorative art clearly demonstrated to Bernays that she would be a powerful ally.

In addition to Shaver, Bernays also wanted to include other well known supporters of modern art, including Richard Bach from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the modernist architects Raymond Hood and Ely Jacques Kahn, Joseph Platt, the art director of *The Delineator* fashion magazine, and Leon Solon, the art director of the American Encaustic Tile Company and a writer for *Architectural Record*. Kahn had recently collaborated with Solon on the Art Deco masterpiece, 2 Park Avenue, which featured innovative polychromatic terra cotta exterior tiles glazed in bright colors (Stern and Stuart, 2006, p. 103 and 111). After the 2 Park Avenue project with Kahn, Solon then designed much of the color scheme for Raymond Hood’s massive and iconic Rockefeller Center (Błaszczuk, 2000, p. 136). Art In Industry Associates would have provided complete

art direction for its clientele, consisting of manufacturers and retailers that would pay a yearly retainer fee ranging from \$10,000 to \$50,000.<sup>31</sup> Although Bernays’s business venture never did become a reality, by the end of the 1920s, there was a clear commercial opportunity in the movement to incorporate modern art into industrial products, including interior decoration and soon, women’s fashion.

While Bernays and Shaver were seeking to profit from this trend, they also believed that it could serve a larger goal of American cultural nationalism. In the 1920s, many Americans believed that they continued to lag behind Europe in cultural productions, as the U.S. absence at the 1925 Paris expo acutely demonstrated. Indeed, the voluminous industrial output of consumer goods was seen as too banal to serve as a cultural foundation for twentieth-century America. Edward Bernays claimed: “social commentators were deploring the ugliness of machine-made products and were enthusiastically discussing Europe’s new art movements” (Bernays, 1965, p. 300). In the 1920s and 1930s, American cultural critics and business people alike saw potential in the marriage of modern art and industry to create a distinct American culture and finally achieve the “artistic independence” that Edward Bok, Morris Crawford, and Stewart Culin had strived for in vain (Smith, 1993, p. 359). In a favorable review of the Lord & Taylor exhibit in *The New Republic*, the writer Lewis Mumford argued that Americans still needed to find an art to express themselves. Color was key, and in contrast to the “dull” modern French palette, American artists, such as Georgia O’Keeffe, favored “high and intense” colors that represented “the dominant American feeling”, which Mumford argued was also clear in American architecture like Kahn’s 2 Park Avenue building and even Louis Sullivan’s Golden Door of the Transportation Building at the 1893 World Columbian Exposition in Chicago.<sup>32</sup> To account for this American “feeling” for vibrant color, Mumford cited an exceptionalist discourse of unique American nature and built environments, including “brilliant sunlight”, “clear air”, and “the sharp forms of mountain and building.”<sup>33</sup>

Dorothy Shaver shared Lewis Mumford’s hope for the coming of an American identity in art and design, and she worked hard throughout her career to turn her hope into reality. Indeed, her purpose in mounting the 1928 French exhibition was not solely to create consumer demand for European modern decorative art. Instead, she hoped that the show would spark a distinctly American design. In a *New York Times* ad to remind the public of the exhibit’s closing, Lord & Taylor also issued a call to American artists and producers to “find expression in something original, artistic, and typically American. To live is to look and move forward. We must have something besides copies to represent our Age in the museums of the future.”<sup>34</sup> Lord & Taylor promised that it would mount a similar exhibition of American work the next year if American artists responded. Thus, the 1928 exhibit was meant to spark similar innovation in American designers, especially the young generation. Shaver believed that they would respond well to inspiration from modernism since they would see it as “a cheaper and easier way to attain beauty than in the collection of genuine antiques.”<sup>35</sup> Moreover, they would want to create designs that were relevant to the times. Specifically, Shaver claimed in the exhibition program that the “frankness and directness” of modernism were

<sup>24</sup> Dorothy Mines Waters to Dorothy Shaver, February 29, 1928, DSP, Box 15, Folder 4, NMAH.

<sup>25</sup> “Lord & Taylor Exhibit Sells \$50,000 American-made Modern Furniture,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, March 17, 1928, DSP, Box 15, Folder 3, NMAH.

<sup>26</sup> Dorothy Shaver, 1928, qtd. in *Modern Art in Industry: An Attempt to Find Out Whether We Should Point with Pride or View with Alarm*. The Blackman Company, New York, p. 6. DSP, Box 7, Folder 4, NMAH.

<sup>27</sup> V.E. Scott, 1928, qtd. in *ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8, 10, and 11.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11; and Jose Just Martinez to Dorothy Shaver, March 4, 1928, DSP, Box 15, Folder 4, NMAH.

<sup>30</sup> Dictation by Edward L. Bernays, December 1, 1928, “Art in Industry Associates,” pp. 5–6, DSP, Box 7, Folder 18, NMAH.

<sup>31</sup> Dictation by Edward L. Bernays, December 1, 1928, “Art in Industry Associates,” pp. 10–11, DSP, Box 7, Folder 18, NMAH.

<sup>32</sup> Lewis Mumford, “Modernistic Furniture,” *The New Republic*, March 21, 1928, reprinted in Blackman, 1928, p. 13, DSP, Box 7, Folder 4, NMAH.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> “Display Ad 52 – No Title,” *New York Times*, April 6, 1928, Proquest.

<sup>35</sup> Dorothy Shaver qtd. in “Young Woman Store Director Finds French Decorative Art Far in Lead,” no publication information, no date, c. February 1928, DSP, Box 15, Folder 3, NMAH.

“most characteristic of America”.<sup>36</sup> When modernism was mixed with American industry, Shaver believed that the result would be the defining style of the twentieth century that the rest of the world would imitate.

### 3. “American fashions for American women” in the 1930s

Not long after Lord & Taylor’s modern decorative art exhibit, the global economy screeched to a halt with the stock market crash in October 1929 and the ensuing Great Depression. Demand for consumer goods dropped drastically as many Americans were forced to prioritize their spending on necessities. Indeed, *The New York Times* reported that during the low point of 1933, national retail sales were just over half of what they had been in 1929.<sup>37</sup> It was precisely during this period of the Depression that Dorothy Shaver chose to mount her next major design promotion, this time specifically for American fashion designers. As with her 1928 exhibit, her core purpose was always sales, and the idea for “American Fashions for American Women” came as she was “wrestling with the problem of what to do to stimulate business” during the Depression.<sup>38</sup> Conditions had drastically changed for Shaver’s customers, and promoting expensive French fashions and furniture clearly no longer made business sense. Indeed, Elizabeth Hawes, one of the American fashion designers whom Shaver would promote, bluntly characterized the American Designers campaign as a Depression-era “press stunt” to drum up business, nothing more (Hawes, 1938, p. 194).

While driving sales was clearly a key factor, Shaver still aspired to the same larger goal that she had with the 1928 exhibit, namely, supporting the development of a homegrown design industry to produce what was clearly an “American” style. Both were part of the same plan to solidify Lord & Taylor’s reputation as an innovative leader in modern American design. Although Shaver had not been able to immediately follow up the French decorative exhibit with an American one as she had hoped, she later stated: “Back in my mind was still the nagging desire to show the world, to show this country what American designers could do. The idea kept nibbling at my subconscious”.<sup>39</sup> By the early 1930s, American fashion designers had honed their craft to be able to compete with Parisian couturiers, and during the cash-strapped Depression, Shaver felt that her customers would be receptive to her efforts.

Yet, in the early 1930s, Paris still remained the long reigning fashion leader, in addition to being an Art Deco epicenter. In her new campaign, Dorothy Shaver argued that while French decorative artists were innovators, couturiers, on the other hand, had been lulled into complacency by the prosperity of the booming twenties, when American women blindly purchased anything with a Paris label or pedigree. Only the very wealthy could afford to buy the official reproductions of French fashion designers’ models, but such was the American public’s mania in the first three decades of the twentieth century for “Parisian” clothes and hats that American manufacturers placed fake couture labels in their garments to satisfy demand and to charge higher prices (Troy, 2003, pp. 233–238).<sup>40</sup> Although French decorative artists like the rationalists Chareau and Jourdain responded to the needs of modern life by including so-called “Yankee notions” of space and labor saving innovations in their design; Shaver claimed that French fashion

designers still did not create for modern American life. In comparison to the French, Shaver declared: “We live our lives at a quicker pace. We live in a more mechanical civilization, a more modern civilization. We are a young nation, swinging to the faster tempo of our Western World. Naturally, our fashions must be different from those of people living a completely different sort of life”.<sup>41</sup> This nationalist and exceptionalist strain of Shaver’s campaign for American fashions was not original, as Edward Bok and Morris de Camp Crawford had employed similar rhetoric to argue that Paris couturiers had no business designing for the modern American woman. Shaver even repurposed Bok’s slogan of “American Fashions for American Women” for her new campaign. But she believed that she would succeed where he had tried and failed because now, at the depth of the Depression in 1932, she told the press, “the time was ripe for such an event, which it was not in 1912 when Edwin Bok tried it and had to give it up”.<sup>42</sup> Twenty years’ time and the Depression had transformed consumer demand so that American women would be willing to buy domestically designed and produced American fashions in 1932 when they had not been interested in 1912.

Moreover, unlike Bok and Crawford whose nationalist campaigns were built on a reaction against modernism, Dorothy Shaver recognized that this new movement was precisely what would allow Americans to depict their way of life as the leading industrialized nation. By the 1920s and 1930s, modernism had spread to many aspects of American cultural production from music and literature to art, advertising, industrial design, and the built environment. While older fashion nationalists like Bok and Crawford sought to dam modernism’s rising tide, a younger generation of Americans, like Shaver, saw in it an opportunity to create a new design esthetic that embodied both modernity and what was seen as unique about life in twentieth-century America (Corn, 1999, p. xv).

A key aspect of this American modernity was the redefinition of gender roles that industrialization brought to society and culture. The death knell of nineteenth-century style domesticity and notions of “separate spheres” was sounding as women in industrialized countries around the world took part in public life on an unprecedented scale. Since the late nineteenth century, activity in sports was one of these venues where women began participating as never before. Dorothy Shaver argued that physical activity was something that defined the fast-paced lifestyle in modern American culture, especially for women. Because of American women’s purportedly unique athleticism, Shaver told the press: “We must have sport clothes which fit in with our needs”.<sup>43</sup> While Paris couturiers continued to make beautiful clothes, they lacked the practicality for the active lives of modern American women. Instead, American designers were responding to these shifts and creating clothes that were both beautiful and functional, at affordable price points for Depression-era consumers. In her campaign for “American Fashions for American Women”, Dorothy Shaver effectively provided American designers with two stages for their work, both in her store and on her female customers, who themselves became key actors in the scene of modern American life.

After a two-year search for the best American designers, in the spring of 1932, Shaver launched a coordinated promotion of three: Elizabeth Hawes, Annette Simpson, and Edith Reuss. The store purchased several models from each and then had them manufactured.

<sup>36</sup> Dorothy Shaver, “An Exposition of Modern French Decorative Art,” Lord & Taylor, 1928, p. 5, DSP, Box 7, Folder 4, NMAH.

<sup>37</sup> “Retail Sales Rose 3 ½ Billion in 1934,” *New York Times*, February 20, 1935.

<sup>38</sup> Dorothy Shaver, no date (ca. early 1950s), “Speech to Members of the Fashion Group,” DSP, Box 7, Folder 34, NMAH.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Even those who did not buy ready-made clothing could still follow the trends from Paris since American pattern manufacturers incorporated the new styles into their products (Hoganson, 2007, p. 64).

<sup>41</sup> Dorothy Shaver, no date (ca. 1933), Speech of unknown origin, archivist suggests Symposium on Vocational Guidance, DSP, Box 4, Folder 7, NMAH.

<sup>42</sup> “Store Executive Stresses Merits of U.S. Designers,” *New York American*, October 4, 1934, DSP, Box 4, Folder 6, NMAH.

<sup>43</sup> Dorothy Shaver, no date (ca. 1933), Speech of unknown origin, archivist suggests Symposium on Vocational Guidance, DSP, Box 4, Folder 7, NMAH.

Elizabeth Hawes produced six models for the store and received \$1200. Since the Depression was affecting their business as well, the designers were glad to have the promotional attention (Hawes, 1938, p. 195). On April 13, Lord & Taylor hosted an invitation-only luncheon for the press, executives in the fashion industry, artists, and museum professionals to present the designers' models. The designs were sold in three of the store's departments: the Young New Yorkers Shop, the moderately-price dress department, and the more exclusive Salon. In this way, Shaver offered American designs to her customers at a range of prices, from \$10.75 to \$125 (Shaver, 1933, p. 1).

The coordinated promotion included window displays and advertisements in newspapers and fashion magazines that featured each designer, introducing them to the public in a more casual and accessible way than the elite French couturiers (Arnold, 2009, p. 112; Webber-Hanchett, 2003; Rennolds Milbank, 1989). Window displays included large photographs of the designers, so customers could see that they were women just like them who understood their needs. The training staff also provided the sales force with instruction on how to sell customers on American fashion. Indeed, customers could even meet the designers for one day at the store, a privilege usually reserved for the wealthy woman who patronized couturiers directly. The advertising campaign threw the full weight of Lord & Taylor's fashion authority behind these designers and brought them the name recognition that American designers had so long labored without. In just the first two days alone, the store sold 200 models (Shaver, 1933, p. 1).

Overall, the media reception of the American Designers campaign was quite positive. Many newspapers nationalistically heralded Lord & Taylor's "revolt" from long-time Parisian domination, praising Shaver as a "general" leading the charge.<sup>44</sup> However, those with a vested interest in maintaining the current fashion system and keeping Parisian designers happy were more restrained. *Vogue*, the world's leading fashion authority, offered a measured response to the Lord & Taylor campaign. In its issue from April 15, 1933, *Vogue* editors noted that while nationalism was the "fetish of the day", it was their belief that "politics had best be left out of Art—and we consider clothes a Fine Art".<sup>45</sup> *Vogue* conceded that the current difficult circumstances of the Depression had made American designers more important than ever, and it praised Dorothy Shaver and the specific designers she was promoting and several others. But even in the throes of global economic collapse, *Vogue* maintained: "Let us admit that Paris sets the mode, and that the majority of American designers interpret it".<sup>46</sup> The magazine would strive throughout the 1930s to walk a fine line of upholding the long tradition of following Paris, while also acknowledging that clearly a new trend in design and consumption was emerging thanks to American designers.

In May 1933, just one month after *Vogue's* insistence that Paris still ruled American fashion, Lord & Taylor promoted another crop of fashion designers: Clare Potter, Alice Smith, and Ruth Payne (Arnold, 2009, p. 111). The designers that Shaver chose for her follow-up campaign were well known for their sportswear, and their pieces were sold in Lord & Taylor's Sports Shop department. Indeed, Shaver told the *New York Evening Post* that American designers should focus on sportswear since it was "indigenous" to America, and also it was a fashion trend that the French had

ignored.<sup>47</sup> American Sportswear was a fashion genre that emerged in the 1930s (Arnold, 2009; Campbell Warner, 2005; and Clemente, 2007). It not only adapted British tailored country clothes but also incorporated modernism's simple lines and emphasis on minimal decoration. Most distinctively, sportswear was characterized by separate pieces that would allow American women the versatility to alter their outfits to suit their diverse environments, be it the home, office, street, store, meeting, or party (Arnold, 2009, p. 7 and 88). Indeed, designer Elizabeth Hawes explained that she thought about her clothes in motion as she created them (Strassel, 2008, p. 60). Unlike the elite Paris couturiers who often created avant-garde pieces for individual clients, Hawes always had in her mind the mass of American women who would wear their clothes for everyday activities. Sportswear needed to be comfortable to wear all day and also adaptable for many levels of social formality. Although the style had roots in the outdoor activities of the European leisure class, in the U.S., it would become a fashion that was marketed to all classes of consumer, thanks especially to its use of cheaper fabrics like wool and cotton, rather than silk and satin (Arnold, 2009, p. 106; Glier Reeder, 2010, p. 117). American sportswear applied modernism's simple lines and ingenuity to the realities of modern American life to create a distinctly American design esthetic that would be the United States' "most important contribution to twentieth-century fashion" (Glier Reeder, 2010, p. 117).

Sportswear was particularly popular with young women. Shaver launched a College Shop within the store in the early 1930s, in addition to the Young New Yorkers Shop and the Sports Shop. College-age consumers were on the vanguard of popularizing the more casual look of sportswear (Clemente, 2014). Lord & Taylor's advertisements for American designers in the 1930s reiterated the appeal to youth over and over again. One ad featured an artistic rendering of a fictional interaction between a young couple. The woman told her tuxedo-clad companion that her clothes were "designed by young people like me who know what Americans are and what they want".<sup>48</sup> Print advertisements also always referred to the American designers as "young American designers." For Dorothy Shaver, the energy and vitality of youth defined American fashion.

From fashion, Shaver then expanded her American design ad campaign to include American decorative artists. In October of 1933, Lord & Taylor also advertised the American textile designs of Tom Lamb, Emma Brown, and Donald Deskey, who had designed the lavish Art Deco interiors of Radio City Music Hall that had opened ten months previously. Like the window displays for the fashion designers, the print ad included photographs and signatures of the designers, introducing them by name and face to the consuming public.<sup>49</sup> Lamb, Brown, and Deskey designed ten boldly colorful fabrics for Lord & Taylor, which described the work of each designer as "modern." Shaver's customers could thus outfit both their persons and their homes in the best that modern American design had to offer. After the initial promotions of 1932–1933, the store would continue to promote over 75 American designers into the 1940s and beyond.<sup>50</sup> Other stores and the fashion media at large also followed Lord & Taylor's lead in actually naming American designers in advertisements and articles, thus bringing additional recognition and publicity to the American fashion industry at large.

<sup>44</sup> "Revolt From Paris, 'American Fashions for American Women,' Shouts Revolution Led by Miss Shaver," *New York Evening Post*, May 3, 1932, DSP, Box 4, Folder 6, NMAH. See also "Opportunities for Designer In Store Cited," *Women's Wear Daily*, April 13, 1932, DSP, Box 4, Folder 6, NMAH; and "U.S. Styles Now on Par with Paris," *The World Telegram*, April 22, 1932, DSP, Box 4, Folder 6, NMAH.

<sup>45</sup> "Fashion: New York Couture," *Vogue*, April 15, 1933, p. 33, Proquest.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> "Shopping Post scripts" *New York Evening Post*, May 15, 1933, DSP, Box 4, Folder 6, NMAH.

<sup>48</sup> "Display Ad 14 – No Title," *New York Times*, May 8, 1932, Proquest.

<sup>49</sup> "Display Ad 26 – No Title," *New York Times*, October 1, 1933, Proquest.

<sup>50</sup> "Dorothy Shaver was First Person to Realize Vitality of Work Done by American Designers of Dresses," no publication or date information, c. 1937–1945, DSP, Box 14, Folder 12, NMAH.



In addition to the in-store promotions, Shaver expanded her publicity for American design through the annual Lord & Taylor American Design Awards gala. She began the awards in 1937, with the first prizes given the next year, honoring fashion designers Nettie Rosenstein and Clare Potter, textiles designer, Dorothy Liebes, and rug designer, Stanislav V'Soske.<sup>51</sup> For the next three years, Shaver added industrial design to fashion, honoring the renowned Walter Dorwin Teague, Raymond Loewy, and Henry Dreyfus among others. The store continued the awards program for twenty years, though their focus shifted with the outbreak of war to military designs. Once peace came in 1945, Shaver continued the awards, but broadened their scope to honor American creativity and innovation generally.

#### 4. The postwar “American Look”

Dorothy Shaver's efforts at promoting American design culminated in her last major advertising campaign called the American Look, announced to the public in January 1945 as the war continued to rage. Since 1940, when Americans were cut off from Nazi-controlled France, American fashion designers had a new opportunity to shine outside of Paris's shadow. Indeed, in the early 1940s, American fashion designers finally received widespread attention, from even the mayor of New York, Fiorello LaGuardia, who sought to turn New York into the new global fashion capital (Webber-Hanchett, 2003, p. 104). Unlike Shaver's 1930s campaign for American designers that focused on individuals, the American Look promotion more broadly touted the concept of American fashion and its connection to American women. Indeed, advertisements and window displays boasted that its key feature was actually American women themselves, who were “America's own product – the successful business woman” or the “girl striding across a thousand campuses” (Webber-Hanchett, 2003, p. 124). In press interviews, Shaver reiterated that what was different about American society was the increasing prominence of young college women and career women, both of whom wore sportswear.

In addition to the store's window displays, print ads in *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, the *New York Times*, and others, the campaign's focal point was a multi-page photo-essay in the May 21, 1945 issue of *Life* magazine. The title asked: “What is the American Look”, and pictured seven attractive young white women, who were the main characters of the piece. Yet, the answer to the question came from Dorothy Shaver, who was also pictured in the article presiding over her art directors and several models. Each of the models was featured in a different vignette to embody supposed characteristics of all American women, including Cleanliness, Confidence, Agelessness, Domesticity, Naturalness, Good Grooming, Glamor, and Simplicity. While in some ways the campaign reinforced notions of traditional gender roles, that the ad campaign also singled out young businesswomen and college women as typically American demonstrates both the degree to which women's social roles had transformed by 1945 and the continuing tension surrounding them (Rosenberg, 1999, p. 497).

Of the designers who Shaver and Lord & Taylor supported during the “American Look” years of the 1940s and 1950s, Claire McCardell was the most important. Fashion historians widely agree that she was the most influential of American fashion designers in this period, and her name is synonymous with both sportswear and the

“American Look” (Breward, 2003, p. 198; Glier Reeder, 2010, p. 128; Martin, 1998, pp. 90–91). McCardell's design philosophy embodied modernism's appeal that “form should follow function,” and in this way, fashion historian Christopher Breward notes, it was the “antithesis to the Parisian New Look” (2003, p. 199).<sup>52</sup> What most characterized her straightforward design was her commitment to versatility, comfort, and design innovations. Her work featured simple lines, interchangeable and sometimes-reversible pieces, easy to wear fabrics like cotton, wool, and even denim, and “ingenious wraps, hoods, fasteners, and belts” that were both functional and visually enticing (Breward, 2003, p. 198). McCardell designed for modern women like herself, whose lifestyles demanded both style and smart functionality. She strove for democracy in her designs as well, and in working for ready-to-wear manufacturers, often was able to offer her work for affordable prices – another tenant of the “American Look.” For example, one of McCardell's bestselling designs was her “popover” dress from the early 1940s that sold for just \$6.95 (Arnold, 2009, p. 147).

McCardell's designs and design philosophy dovetailed perfectly with Dorothy Shaver's longstanding belief that American fashion should embody both form and function for the modern American woman. In this way, Claire McCardell developed a nearly two-decade long relationship with Lord & Taylor, from 1940 until McCardell's death in 1958, just a year before Shaver's. McCardell had been an anonymous designer for a New York ready-to-wear manufacturer, Townley Frocks, when a Lord & Taylor buyer, Marjorie Griswold, saw her work. Griswold immediately recognized the ingenuity and originality in McCardell's designs, and purchased McCardell's models for the store. While other stores were unsure if their customers would be willing to buy McCardell's sportswear separates, Griswold and Shaver were convinced that in McCardell they had found a designer who clearly was producing the “American Look” that Lord & Taylor was so long committed to promoting (Yohannan and Nolf, 1998, p. 80).

When Shaver announced the American Look to the press in 1945, she envisioned a broad-based, worldwide “style leadership” for the U.S. after the war's end. While she was targeting American women with her “American Fashions for American Women” campaign, with the “American Look” promotion, she sought an international audience. She optimistically predicted: “The American look will be copied widely . . . Just as our movies and jeeps are distinct contributions, our casual pretty clothes will exert international influence.”<sup>53</sup> Although Lord & Taylor itself did not sell internationally, Shaver saw how American fashions would contribute to the spread of American style around the world. The war had given American designers a new opportunity to shine, and she wanted to make sure that the spotlight was not dimmed now that Paris had been liberated. Indeed, the historic fashion capital actively sought to reassert its leadership role in the global fashion industry after the war, especially through Dior's “New Look”. While Paris did make an impressive comeback, it never eclipsed American fashion as it had before the war. In supporting designers like Claire McCardell while they were still unknown, Dorothy Shaver and Lord & Taylor clearly demonstrated that they were leaders in American fashion. Consumers desiring the best in American fashion, namely sportswear, knew without doubt by the early 1940s that they must go to Lord & Taylor.

<sup>51</sup> For more on Liebes, especially her consulting work for DuPont, see Blaszczyk (2008). Blaszczyk notes that Liebes used her friendships and “professional networks among retailers, journalists, editors and designers within the Fashion Group, the American Society of Industrial Designers (ASID) and the American Institute of Decorators (AID) to promote DuPont synthetics as complements to natural fibers such as cotton, wool and silk” (Blaszczyk, 2008, p. 76).

<sup>52</sup> Christian Dior's 1947 “New Look” was a seminal event in twentieth-century fashion history, as it reintroduced a romanticized, ultra-feminine silhouette, characterized by small waists and very large skirts – quite the opposite of the practical “American Look.” It was a bold rebuke to the years of wartime austerity, fabric rationing, and blurring lines of gender differentiation (Breward, 2003, pp. 172–177).

<sup>53</sup> “Style Leadership for America Seen,” *New York Times*, January 12, 1945, Proquest.



## 5. Conclusions

Thus, American fashion emerged as a distinct genre in the 1930s and 1940s in the form of sportswear, which applied modernism's design principles to create functional, adaptable clothing. While others like Edward Bok and Morris Crawford had advocated for a typically "American" fashion earlier in the century, their efforts were avowedly anti-modern, and failed to make a lasting impression. Conversely, Dorothy Shaver was an early believer in modern art's ability to capture the spirit of American life in the 1920s and beyond. Although modern art originated in Europe, she saw in its emphasis on rationality, simplicity, but also beauty, the potential for American designers to sketch out a new esthetic that was clearly "American". This esthetic would be applied not only in fashion, but also in many aspects of design, from architecture, to decorative art, to advertising, thereby marrying American industry with an appropriate art form that could speak its language of functionality and efficiency. In this career-long endeavor, she successfully built reputations for herself and her store as leaders in modernism and American design. Both saw impressive returns on Shaver's long-term bet on modern art. At the end of 1945, after the successful deployment of the "American Look" campaign, Shaver received her final promotion to the presidency and a place on the board of the Associated Dry Good Corporation, the firm that owned Lord & Taylor and seven other stores in New York and the Midwest. Under Shaver's presidency, the store experienced its golden age, as it expanded into the postwar suburbs and more than tripled its profits (Leavitt, 1985, p. 248). Similarly, the American garment manufacturing industry, centered on Seventh Avenue in New York, also reached its zenith at midcentury (Green, 1997, p. 65). After her untimely death in 1959, American fashion and fashion designers would gain the international influence that she had predicted in 1945, while New York City has become a global fashion capital.

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