

THE TULLE: EVOLUTION AND VERSATILITY

The tulle is a textile with a long and impressive history, which started back in the 18th century, in the French commune of ‘Tulle’. It is hard to believe that the fabric renewed itself from a typical ballet costume to an edgy street style trend, nevertheless it actually did.

Molly Goddard, winner of the British Emerging Talent Award in 2016, is the main responsible for this tulle renaissance. The rose pink mini dress from the designer’s latest collection, in fact, was rocked by Rihanna during the women’s march in Washington. Not really a coincidence, as the delicate textile was also the main protagonist of Dior SS 17 collection, by its first female creative director Maria Grazia Chiuri. At the show, feathery tulle skirts were matching slogan T-Shirt with the caption ‘we should all be feminists’.

The tulle trend also caught the eye of the designer Giambattista Valli, who chose it for his SS 17 Haute Couture show. Despite his traditional interpretation of the fabric, with an eccentric and voluminous primrose yellow gown, Valli still managed to add to his design a contemporary twist, through his fresh choice of colour.

In order to better understand this tulle evolution, however, it is first necessary to identify its principle. The tulle, originally made of gauze or silk, owes its origins to the notorious ballerina Marie Taglioni. Her white dress in *La Sylphide* in fact, popularized the romantic style; it consisted of a strained bodice and a sheer above the knee skirt, known today as the tutu.

Christian Dior, however, was the pioneer of ballet inspired dresses, as he often used its typical textile as part of his designs. Tulle crinolines, for instance, were a recurrent choice as they assured the sensation of volume. His dreamy attires won the favour of Princess Margaret, who affirmed:

“My favourite dress of all was my first Dior dress, white strapless tulle and a vast satin bow at the back.”

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From Ballet to Haute Couture, the tulle won’t cease to amaze, by assuming fashionable forms and creating new trends.



Yves Saint Laurent also gave his interpretation of the tulle for the fashion house spring/summer 1958 collection with “L’Eléphant Blanc”; a veiled trapeze knee length gown with metallic threads. Additionally, Saint Laurent, used the fabric in his own spring/summer 1964 collection. He designed a silky beige evening dress with a tulle tunic, emeralds embellishments, daisies appliques and an envy satin ribbon above the breast, inspired by the Spanish artist Goya.

One of the most memorable Dior creations, however, is the black and white mid-calf tulle and chiffon gown wore by Grace Kelly in *Rear Window*, which introduced the textile in Hollywood. Many designers followed his example; Charles James created picturesque tulle gowns, while Adrian designed phantasmagorical costumes, which appeared in movies such as *The Wizard of Oz*.

Today, the wonder surrounding tulle dresses doesn’t come from silver screens anymore. Designers such as Maria Grazia Chiuri and Molly Goddard, in fact, are inspired by everyday women, who wear tulle garments for work, parties or both. The attitude behind the clothes is different:

“We wanted the girls to dance. There’s nothing better than the moment when people have forgotten absolutely everything and are free and dancing” said Goddard.

Molly Goddard designs, in addition, represent a modern version of Degas ballerinas; her mini dresses resemble the cotton candy tutu of the dancer in the painting *Dancer in Her Dressing Room* (1879). Goddard dancers, however, are brave ballerinas, who

aren’t afraid to mix and match their sweet tulle dresses with jeans or customize them whichever way they like.

This bold bon-ton attitude of Goddard’s designs is allowing the audience to dance through life challenges with fearless yet graceful steps. Women in 2017 are empowered by the wearability, as well as by the freedom of choice of this tulle 2.0, which doesn’t have to be a heavy restrictive gown anymore, or strictly associated with a wedding dress. As it happened from 1840 onwards, when the ballet admirer Queen Victoria chose a pearly voluptuous tulle gown as her wedding dress, creating the white tulle tradition. A custom, which has only been broken by Yves Saint Laurent in his fall/winter collection of 1981-82 with a dramatic violet gown and an unusual black tulle veil.

The choice of the tulle in the SS 17 collections of Dior and Molly Goddard, proofed that it is possible for women to make a statement while having fun. Most importantly, their vision changed the meaning of a textile associated with a decorative function of women throughout history. What more could we ask for to fashion, than reinventing an iconic fabric by turning it into a joyful as well as powerful form of expression? Perhaps that reality, once again took inspiration from a magical (or manufactured) moment of illusion, outside time or influences, and focused entirely on the message.

