



PRADA DRESS SPRING 2011;  
(INSET) SCHIAPARELLI'S  
SHOE HAT, 1937

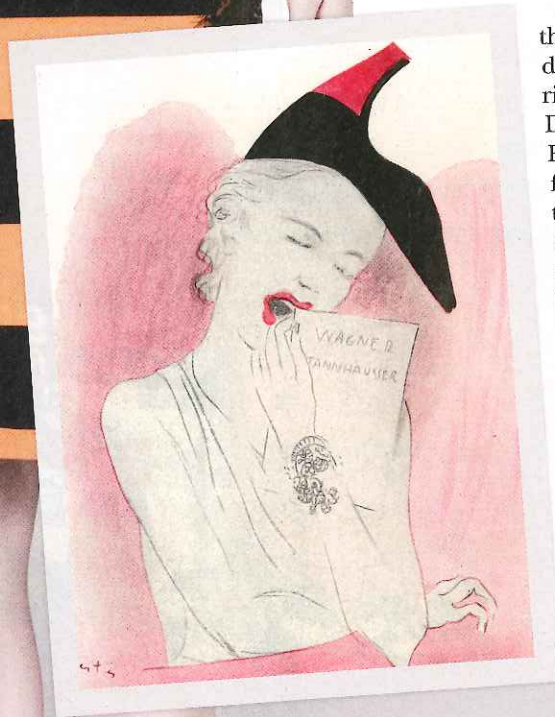
# LEADING LADIES

How do organizers at the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute in New York follow up the phenomenal worldwide acclaim of *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty*? Easy, celebrate not one but two groundbreaking fashion visionaries.

Miuccia Prada and the late Elsa Schiaparelli will be crowned together as the museum's leading ladies in *Schiaparelli and Prada: Impossible Conversations*. Open until August 19th, the exhibit is presented as fictive conversations between two of fashion's most surreal provocateurs and features approximately 90 designs ranging from Schiaparelli's playfully influential looks (lobster dress, anyone?) beginning in the late '20s to Prada's contemporary creations.

While much has been made about the differences between the two, who are separated by era and aesthetic (Prada herself went so far as to call them "total opposite"), putting these nimble minds together makes sense, and not simply because both are educated Italian feminists. "Prada seemed like the perfect pendant to Schiaparelli," says the Costume Institute's curator in charge, Harold Koda. "They are both intellectual, but invest their work with a strong sense of their own experience. If there is one thing they share in common, it is fearlessness in confronting the status quo [and] a desire to disrupt prevailing conventions and taste."

An affinity for the art world is something else they share. Schiaparelli, who died in 1973, collaborated with a coterie of creative friends such as Salvador Dalí and Jean Cocteau, while Prada's Fondazione Prada continues to push fashion and art ever closer. Exploring the inventiveness of these grand creatives is perfectly timed for the crazy and uncertain world we live in—as Bill Cunningham, the *New York Times*' peerless street-style photographer, stated recently. "I'm steadily amazed at what fashion could be if someone would take the corral off it and let it run free," he said. "It's become so predictable and so cookie-cutter that it's time to invite the art world in for collaboration." Indeed, that time has come. —Aya McMillan



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