

Daniel Katz Gallery

ANTIQUITY TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



Francesco Toso (Venice - Chicago 1893)

A faun and fauness

181 cm high

Signed on the Faun's pocket 'FT' and inscribed on the Fauness' blouse button 'TOSO / FRANCESCO / VENESIA'

Representing a Faun and Fauness the horned man with the ears of fauna, wearing a jacket and a vest, a lavalier knotted around his neck, stretching his right palmate hand and presenting bovine legs, signed on his pocket ; the woman with the menacing gaze wearing a corset dress and a jacket with a wide hive collar, her body covered with spiders, her face adorned with a wart and a small beard, signed on a button TOSO I FRANCESCO I VENESIA

This pair of extraordinary and highly inventive carved figures - depicting a devilish pair of Fauns - are a wonderfully unique and befittingly surreal pair of sculptures that for a large part of their lives adorned the entrance hall to 'The Queen of Fashion' Elsa Schiaparelli's residence in Paris, at Rue de Berri.

Schiaparelli moved into her luxuriant eighteen-bedroom hotel particulier at number 22 in 1937, collaborating on the decoration with Jean-Michel Frank, the father of the modern interior, and the formidable design firm Maison Jansen. Stylish yet fantastical, the house and its eclectic decor reflected 'the evolution of her style coming into her own. Layered with colour, curvaceous furniture and a mix of classical and modern art, chez Schiaparelli distilled her love affair with the worlds of art and fashion'. The decor was befitting of a house which would host some of the greatest artistic figures of the era, with Christian Berard, Diego Giacometti, Leonor Fini, Salvador Dali, Man Ray, Duchamp and Jean Cocteau all having attended Schiaparelli's salons.

The creator of these fantastical sculptures was Francesco Toso, born in Murano, Venice, into the famous family of glass-makers, but who soon branched out in his own direction, finding great acclaim as much for his manufactured mirrors as for his ebonised sculptures. The mirrors and figures alike were championed at the Italian stand of the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago, where Toso suddenly died while "earnestly striving to make the entire exhibit worthy of Italian art and workmanship" (H. Bancroft, *The Book of the Fair*, v. 1, 1893, pp. 215). Despite this loss, Toso's work was prominently documented at the fair, where it was noted that as "partial to dark-hued woods," displaying figures in this style which "[would] not be soon forgotten" (op. cit., p. 215). His most lauded work at the fair was a pair of figures which recall the present pair but depict the Faustian characters Marguerite and Mephistopheles" ... carved from opposite sides of the same block of wood, their life-like forms reflected in a mirror, so that they seem to be walking together." His other carved sculptures included "guitar players, gondoliers, Punchinello's, etc., illustrative of the gay and the grotesque" (op. cit., p. 215).

Toso's Faun and Faunness fall within a tradition for fanciful and imaginative wooden carved sculptures in Venice dating back to the 17th century - indeed, many of Schiaparelli's guests mistook them for being of 17th century origin (see M. Secrest, 2014). Amongst a group of sculptors working in this style was most notably Francesco Pianta the Younger of Venice (1634-1690), his most famous works being his wooden panels series with allegorical secular figures lining the hall of the Scuola Grande di San Rocco. Further comparison can also be made with Andrea Brustolon (1662-1732) a generation later than Pianta, who also had many imitators both contemporary and later.

Such elaborately carved figures were clearly popular; a similar but less-refined pair can be found in the Smithsonian affiliated Museum of Arts and Sciences in Florida (inv. A5121), and another pair from a Private Collection were illustrated with pedestals hung with fringed drapery in Philippe Jullian's seminal reference book *Le Style Second Empire* (P. Jullian, *Le Style Second Empire*, Paris, 1975, p. 43, figs. 1 et 2). However, of the three examples the present pair are by far the finest quality.

Elsa Schiaparelli recalls in her autobiography fondly finding "Mr and Mrs Satan" on separate occasions, in an old store in Edinburgh in the 1930's on one of her 'Scottish Tours'. Schiaparelli's success had allowed her to open a shop in London in 1932 and subsequently she spent much of the decade in the UK and Scotland. Her Scottish tours were initially for business reasons, as she visited Scotland and places like the Isle of Skye and tweedmaker Duncan Macleod of Skeabow - developing a keen interest in British textiles.[1] However, her journeys soon became much more of an amorous affair as she had a long term relationship with a pair of Scottish brothers, firstly James Allan Horne, and then subsequently, with his younger brother Henry Spence Horne - often visiting the Highlands with them.

Mrs Satan was bought first and taken to her London house at 6 Grosvenor Street where 'Schiap's social life had taken off with a vengeance' with 'people streaming in and out of the salon all day'. [2] Mr Satan was purchased two years later; when she was in Edinburgh again and saw him outside the same shop, before the pair were permanently moved to her Paris residence, Rue du Berri. It is quite plausible that the pair had arrived in Edinburgh as contributions by Toso to the Italian stand at the International Exhibition of Industry, Science, and Art, Edinburgh in 1886 - although they have not been traced.

Meryle Secrest remembers the carved figures' ...In her travels she [Schiaparelli] had a magpie's eye for whatever was unusual or even slightly sinister, like the seventeenth-century [sic] Venetian statues that greeted guests at the entrance. They were life-size, made of wood, with cloven hoofs and became known as Monsieur and Madame Satan.' Indeed, they became a memorable feature for guests to

Schiaparelli's Parisian home-cum-salon, Schiaparelli herself fondly recalling how they "received guests with enigmatic smiles and snapping eyes ... They both have sinuous bodies shaped like an S - and hoofs instead of feet. As at the Fontana di Trevi in Rome one can put a penny in his hand if one wants to come back. Most people do"

They were a key component of her parties, "One of Schiaparelli's parties that took place ... She decided to do it at home instead, in her spacious garden, at midnight. Platforms and tents were set up, runways built, chairs and tables imported, and the finishing effect was the vast number of pink tartan hangings. There were also the kind of touches only she could invent, such as "strange animals in ball gowns looking out of windows". Guests entering her front door found it festooned with pink tulle, and spotlights were trained on Mr and Mrs Satan, causing their eyes to glow red with menace. Outside a samba orchestra from Rio' played.

'The theme of the collection was grasshopper, the insect that had both frightened and fascinated Dali ...'
(M.Secret, 2014)

Schiaparelli recalled the party and that, "Within three days a cinema firm transformed the courtyard into a fairy scene. A long dais was stretched throughout its length, a glass marquee was covered with shocking pink tartan, and my life-size Chinese animals looked out of the windows against a sky-blue background. When Senor de Chateaubriand heard what was happening he offered me the whole of the Scola de Samba, the foremost orchestra in Rio, which had arrived by Paris on special plane to play at a ball..., The grasshopper leapt into fashion news on this occasion, for my entire collection was under the sign of this lively insect, and the mannequins looked as if they had wings." An unfortunate design buyer from America who arrived late was 'astounded to see her courtyard made up to resemble a drawing room, with strange animals in ball gowns .. and he was equally shocked to be received under the pink marquee by M et Mme Satan."

Elsa Schiaparelli

Elsa Schiaparelli was born in Rome, in her family's apartment in the Palazzo Corsini to a Neapolitan aristocrat mother and a scholarly father - who was the Dean of the University of Rome and an authority on Sanskrit. Schiaparelli's early years were rather peripatetic and adventurous, in some ways anticipating the bold and daring qualities that would become synonymous with the fashion designs that would make her a fashion icon. In 1913 she fled Italy to avoid marriage to a wealthy Russian suitor and went to London, where she met William de Wendt De Kerlor, a paranormal expert. Kerlor, who was Swiss but claimed to be Polish, was a charismatic charlatan who posed as a self-styled count and a psychic detective. Married in 1914, the couple were forced to leave England on account of De Kerlor's conviction of practicing fortune-telling (which was then illegal). In 1916, after a brief period in France they left for America and New York. Here De Kerlor would come under the surveillance of the precursor of the FBI, the FOI, for his dubious professional activities and suspicion about his possible pro-German sympathies. The couple would also have a child, Maria Luisa nicknamed 'Gogo', and born in 1920 but whom would be raised solely by Schiaparelli as she became more estranged from her husband in that same year, following run ins with authorities, eventually divorcing in 1924.

As a result of the breakdown of her marriage Schiaparelli moved back to France and to Paris in 1922. Familial financial support and society connections, through her mother, allowed her to take an expensive apartment and establish herself within Parisian society. It was here that she met the designer Paul Poiret in 1924 and began making clothes for her and her friends. Poiret noticed her sartorial flair

and encouraged her to pursue dressmaking. She opened her firsts mall atelier in 1927. It was an innovative black and white trompe l'oeil design pattern with a square collar and red bowknot that caught the eye of an American buyer and launched her career. By 1932 she employed 400 employees and the House of Schiaparelli was born. In the early 1930's Schiaparelli is credited as one of the first designers to develop the wrap dress, as well as pioneering a swimsuit design which incorporated an interior bra and alluring low cut back. She is also credited with producing the first evening dress with a matching jacket and during the Prohibition in the United States, Schiaparelli's 'speakeasy dress' proved popular with a hidden pocket for a flask.

On her voyage to America in 1916 Schiaparelli had by chance met Gabrielle Picabia, wife of Dadaist painter Francois Picabia, developing a strong relationship with the couple and becoming closely associated with the Surrealist art movement. Her quirky and imaginative aesthetic reflected and complimented Surrealist ideals, and she collaborated on designs with Leonor Fini, and notably in 1937 on two designs with Jean Cocteau- an evening jacket embroidered with a female figure caressing with one hand the waist of the wearer, and a long evening coat featuring two profiles facing each other. However, her most iconic collaborations were those she undertook with Salvador Dali in the late 1930s which included the Lobster Dress, the Tears Dress, the Skeleton Dress, and the Shoe Hat. Other artistic friends included Alberto Giacometti, Meret Oppenheim, Christian Berard, and also, Man Ray - with whom she had a life-long friendship - as well as Giorgio De Chirico, Rene Magritte, Andre Breton, and Pablo Picasso. Indeed, Schiaparelli's legacy on fashion design cannot be understated. As the foremost designer and tastemaker of the interwar years, she constantly challenged the status quo. Incorporating wit and humour into her couture, and melding art with dressmaking. It was these qualities which - despite the success of her greatest rival, the arguably prim by comparison, Coco Chanel - garnered her the title of 'The Queen of Fashion'.

[1] Billyboy, 2014

[2] M Secret, 2014

Exhibitions

EXHIBITED

(Likely) Edinburgh, 'International Exhibition of Industry, Science, and Art', 1886