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Fashion History

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DESIGNS BY CHARLES JAMES: SCULPTURED POISE

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## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Charles James.....	1.2
Swan Gown.....	1.3
Butterfly Gown.....	1.4
.....	2
Diamond Gown.....	2.2
.....	2.3
Lobster Gown.....	2.4
Evening Gown.....	2.5
Clover Leaf Gown.....	2.6
Conclusion.....	3

The designer I have chosen to represent the fashion show is Charles James. The theme will be Sculptured Poise. This theme is dedicated to Charles James designs as it refers to the artistic side of his designs and the way it beautifully framed the women's silhouette. He specialized in extravagant gowns and was a big name in the 1950's. His designs continue inspiration for the haute couture today.

Charles James is an English American designer and I have chosen him because he loves high end fashion and his creativity has brought many beautiful designs into haute couture. He created the strapless dress and brought zippers into fashion. His designs are elaborate but distributed the weight in the gowns evenly to make it easier to balance and not feel so heavy. He was passionate in his work and made the dresses for artistry and not for the money. Charles James was born in London and moved to Chicago. From there he moved to New York then Paris and travelled between London, Paris and New York before settling down in New York in 1939. He was an entrepreneur and had shops in all 3 cities. His first shops in Chicago underwent succession but that didn't stop him from continuing his work and eventually creating a name for himself. His clientele was very specific as he dressed the aristocratic ladies and socialites. These women were willing to wait past the deadlines to own these gowns because he was considered one of the top designers. His gowns were considered sculptures of art by many and gave the women the perfect silhouette. This show is to admire his designs and draw inspiration for the audience.

The fashion show will be held in the metropolitan museum in a dimmed room with the runway lit up and spotlights on the models. The audience is seated with chairs along the runway in rows of four. Slow jazz will be playing lightly in the background creating a romantic atmosphere. The first model to walk down will be in James swan gown made of pink silk contrasted with lighter and darker tones in tulle and chiffon. It is a strapless gown slightly angled down in the back structured to the torso and chest. It expands at the hips with a bustle in the back. It is floor length with the chiffon and tulle as a bottom layer, the front a little longer and pinned shorter in the back highlighting the bustle. The model will give a light smile as she half twirls down the runway showing movement in the lower part of the dress. The model to follow her is in the butterfly dress. The gown is also strapless with a "V" shape down the back that zips up. The silk fabric is clung to the body to ankle length and is contrasted with different tones of brown

copper and grey. Tulle and chiffon pinned in the back of the dress starting at the lower back and expands in a triangle behind the silk part of the dress and falls to the floor. A thin piece of silk ribbon hung in an upside down “U” shape over the chiffon and tulle and behind the legs up to her hips. To finish the look the model will wear long black gloves up to her elbow. This scene will show the inspiration he got from animals and insects.

The next set of models will show the tight-fitting dresses, the diamond and lobster gowns. The diamond dress has shoulder straps and “U” shaped neckline. He used matte and luminist materials to create a texture for this dress. The upper half made of white silk clings to the body and the front stops at the lower belly with a black rayon velvet strap attached following to the back where it highlights the rear and dips into a “V” shape stopping at the back of the knees. Under the “V” the silk twill is pinned giving it a mermaid effect. The rest of the dress is beige silk twill and has a slit in the front of the foot. The other model wearing the lobster dress made of beige silk also has shoulder straps and a deeper “U” plunge neckline. It is wasp waisted and clings to the body down to the floor. Starting under the chest down to the shin a thin middle piece has horizontal folds and slanted billowed folds along the middle down to the bottom and around the back. The back has a zipper to down to the the upper thighs were the folds take over the rest of the dress.

Six models are featured in the runway. The next model is wearing one of Charles James evening gowns. The straps are off the shoulder criss-crossing along the upper back, two connecting pieces at the waist leaving most of the back bare including a cut out above the lower waist. This part is made of black velvet and the front of the torso covered and clung to the body as well connected to the straps. The bottom half is created of black silk satin that poofs out and is tucked in at the knee giving it volume. Than continues down to the floor. The silk satin has vertical folds all through out. This model is also wearing long black gloves that go past the elbow and to her upper arm. The last model features James favourite creation the clover leaf gown. This dress is made of silk and rayon. It is strapless with structured cups with a sweetheart neckline. It is form fitting around the torso and fans out at the hips in a 4-leaf clover dimensional shape. It falls to the floor and has black near the bottom following the clover shape and

expands in the back. From the lower back of the dress zips up. This model will sway and twirl showing the range of motion in this dress.

Charles James designs were works of art that he articulated with dimensional shapes and framed the female body in a variety of different ways giving her different figures. Many of his designs I would wear today as they are about elegance and uniqueness. He is known as a genius in design and his work shows that. His perfectionism may have delayed him, but the outcome was always above expectations. Charles James influenced the fashion world and more inspiration continues to draw from his designs.

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