

# Salvatore Ferragamo

## GRETA GARBO. THE MYSTERY OF STYLE

La Triennale di Milano

28 February – 4 April 2010

Greta Garbo, the Swedish Sphinx, and Salvatore Ferragamo, *The Shoemaker of Dreams*, as his autobiography is titled, met in what was to be a small chapter in these two great figures' historic lives. Their first encounter lasted just long enough for Ferragamo to create a pair of custom-made shoes. The year was 1927 and the place was Hollywood, before Salvatore returned to Florence to found his company in Italy. The star continued to buy her shoes at the Hollywood Boot Shop while it remained under Ferragamo's ownership and later she went to Saks Fifth Avenue in New York. In August 1949, the pair met again in Florence. As young as when I first met her Greta Garbo entered the shop with an old pair of cord sandals. "I don't have any shoes," she said. "And I want to walk". In five sittings, Ferragamo designed a series of low-heel shoes, including a red calfskin sandal with an ankle strap that she particularly liked. She left the store with 70 pairs of shoes, most of which differed only in color.

Two years ago, Garbo's great-nephew, Craig Reisfield, was passing through Florence and stopped to visit Ferragamo and its fascinating museum dedicated to the founder's history and his revolutionary shoes, located in the historic Palazzo Spini Feroni, the company's headquarters since 1938. While speaking with Museum Director Stefania Ricci, Craig (a direct descendent of the actress, as he is the son of her only niece, Gray Reisfield) mentioned the extensive collection of dresses, hats, scarves, gloves, countless pairs of pants and shirts that her family has carefully kept –Greta Garbo's entire personal wardrobe, as no one has ever seen or studied it before.

### THE LOOK OF NON-CONFORMITY

This is how the idea first came about for an exhibit on the legend of Greta Garbo beyond the silver screen, a show on one of the most mysterious icons of an era when the new art of film was just beginning to experiment with its ability to seduce and influence the masses. In 1929, Metro Goldwin Meyer assigned costume designer Adrian Adolph Greenberg to work with her, and the relationship they forged gave life to her unmistakable style which, even on set, embraced her personal taste for comfort and ease, and which, above all, drew attention to her stunning face. Draped cowls, stand-away collars and very high necklines became the signature elements of the Garbo/Adrian look, with resounding success. All over, her fans covered up, rather than baring themselves, creating a generation of Mata Haris in cinched-waist trench coats. Although Adrian's tireless toil was meant for film, with magnificent costumes for movies like *Queen Christina* and *Anna Karenina*, the two influenced each other, as could be seen in Garbo's personal wardrobe, which subtly changed when she decided to retire after the new look for *Two Faced Woman* (1941) proved a disappointment from the dresses to the perm mandated by Director George Cukor and Hairdresser Sydney Guilaroff.

After Adrian (who ended his long career, famously stating "When glamour ends for Garbo, it ends for me"), Greta Garbo turned to Valentina, the famous New York designer who, although she followed the actress's strict rules of design, put a fresh and original spin on them, working with loose, sophisticated shapes and favoring white, beige, black and navy. But the uncompromising star also loved the warm hues of pink, and even bougainvillea, and the green-blue of the Mediterranean, which can be seen in the clothing that Gray Horan, Garbo's great niece and author of the catalogue's introduction has so graciously provided.

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**GRETA GARBO. THE MYSTERY OF STYLE** portrays the actress from a standpoint that, beginning with her films and moving beyond them, the authentic Garbo behind the mysterious woman, occasionally captured by a lucky paparazzo who happened to be at the right place at the right time, as she walked by wrapped up in a raincoat, the brim of her hat low on her head, wearing dark sunglasses. Despite her decision to withdraw from Hollywood, Garbo was never forgotten. It is through her personal style, which was once considered so simple as to be unassuming, and which today would be called minimal, that we glimpse the strong will and originality that makes her such a contemporary figure.

## THE EXHIBIT

The show begins with a selection of film costumes recovered from the institutes, museums and private collections that have preserved them since the dispersion of the MGM warehouses. The recovered pieces include a stunning dress with embroidered neckline worn in *Inspiration*, on loan from Drexel University in Philadelphia, and the dress worn in *Queen Christina* (from the Museum at FIT).

One section is devoted to Garbo's face, which Roland Barthes called *an idea*. Garbo was photographed by the portrait photographer Clarence Sinclair Bull, among others, and Cecil Beaton shot Garbo's celebrated passport photo.

**Everyday elegance** brings together never before seen clothing and accessories that belonged to the star. The collection includes her Louis Vuitton suitcases, one of which was entirely intended to hold shoes, as well as Valentina, Pucci and Givenchy models, and Ferragamo shoes, including one of the creations that she was the very first to wear: a shoe with a stitchless upper, soft toe and simple clasp. The show also includes an incredibly glamorous, yet simple sandal with a small round heel, a velvet ballerina shoe for the evening and lovely lace-up shoes whose small details – one pair has a slightly raised toe, the other a special closure – underscore Ferragamo's creativity in the custom designs for one of his favorite customers. All the shoes were created with simplicity and comfort in mind, the epitome of Garbo glamour.

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28 February - 4 April 2010

Opening hours 10:30am - 8:30pm, closed on Mondays

Thursday and Friday 10:30am -11:00pm

Free entrance

Curator: Stefania Ricci

Architectural design: Maurizio Balò

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