

# Salvatore Ferragamo

## GRETA GARBO. THE MYSTERY OF STYLE

Museo Salvatore Ferragamo

13 May – 9 August 2010

IN THE WAKE OF ITS RESOUNDING SUCCESS WITH THE PUBLIC AND PRESS AT THE MILAN TRIENNALE, THE GRETA GARBO. THE MYSTERY OF STYLE EXHIBIT OPENS IN FLORENCE AT THE MUSEO SALVATORE FERRAGAMO ON 12 MAY 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' extraordinary 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' as long as it was under Ferragamo's ownership, and later she went to Saks Fifth Avenue in New York, until August 1949, when 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 colour. 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 Goldwyn Mayer 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, and were a huge hit. 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.

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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 favouring 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.

**GRETA GARBO. THE MYSTERY OF STYLE** portrays the actress from a standpoint that, beginning with her films and moving beyond them, reveals 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 careless, 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 shoes that Salvatore Ferragamo designed for Garbo. They include the “Greta”, with a seamless upper, soft toe and simple clasp. The collection also includes a pair of incredibly glamorous, yet extremely simple, sandals with a small round heel, velvet ballerina shoes 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 favourite customers.

Next come the film costumes recovered from the institutes, museums and private collections that have preserved them since the dispersion of the MGM warehouses. One section is devoted to Garbo’s face, which Roland Barthes called a myth today, and includes a portrait by Clarence Sinclair Bull.

Everyday elegance ends the exhibit with never before seen clothing and accessories that belonged to the star. The collection includes Valentina, Pucci and Givenchy models.

All the pieces combine nonchalance with ease, the epitome of Garbo glamour.

## **GRETA GARBO. IL MISTERO DELLO STILE**

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13 May - 9 August 2010

Opening hours 10.00 - 18.00

Closed on Tuesday

Entrance 5 euro

Curator: Stefania Ricci

Architectural design: Maurizio Balò

Catalogue: SKIRA