Crinolines Encyclopedia Article

Crinolines

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In 1859, French writer Baudelaire wrote that "the principal mark of civilization … for a woman, is invariably the crinoline." The crinoline, or horsehair ("crin") hoop, allowed women of the 1850s and 1860s to emulate Empress Eugénie in ballooning skirts supported by these Crystal Palaces of lingerie. From Paris to Scarlett O'Hara, women moved rhythmically and monumentally during "crinolineomania" (1856-68), assuming some power if only by taking up vast space. A culture of boulevards and specatorship prized the volume of crinolines. In the 1950s, crinolineomania recurred: prompted by Christian Dior's New Look, any poodle skirt or prom dress could be inflated by nylon crinolines as if to become the female version of mammoth 1950s cars and automobile fins. A culture of big cars valued the crinoline as well.

Further Reading:

Calzaretta, Bridget. *Crinolineomania: Modern Women in Art, 1856-68* (exhibition catalogue). Purchase, New York, Neuberger Museum, 1991.