William Packer
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Fashion Drawing in VOGUE

Thames & Hudson

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To Clare and Charlotte, Claudia and Katherine

This classic study, spanning seven decades in the art of fashion illustration in *Vogue* from the 1920s to the 1980s, is reprinted unchanged in this edition.

First published in the United Kingdom in 1983 by Thames & Hudson Ltd, 181A High Holborn, London WC1V 7QX

First paperback edition 1989
Reprinted 2010

Designed by Elizabeth Wickham

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On the cover: (front) René Bouché, American *Vogue*, September 1949; (back) Lambarri, British *Vogue*, February 1928

Edna Woolman Chase (1877–1957), Editor-in-Chief of American, British and French *Vogue* (BV May 1957)

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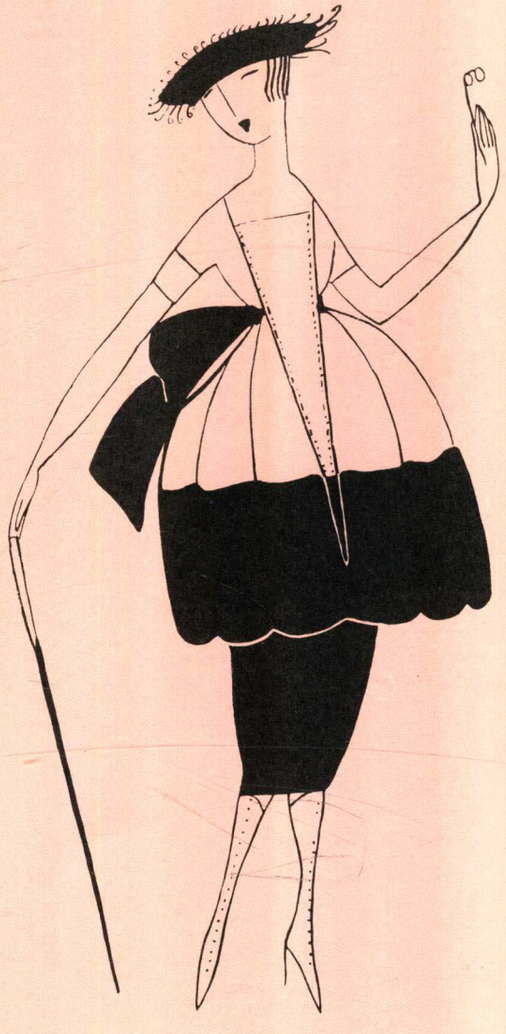

301 illustrations, 90 in colour

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This is, before all else, a book of drawings, just drawings; and I think it is beautiful. I love books of drawings anyway, and what I like here is that they are drawings of a kind that is no longer familiar, and that we are not used to seeing collected in this way. They are marvellously fresh and alive. But even so, towards the end of the book we can see clear evidence of a decline, both in the skill of drawing itself, and in the use to which it is put. The artists who made those drawings in the twenties and thirties and forties could draw better than a lot of so-called serious artists working today – they could simply draw better: and it is particularly interesting that theirs was drawing done not for its own sake, but to be useful. It had a use. It was telling you all kinds of things – things about clothes, Paris, fashion, a whole way of life. The best drawings are never just blank faces but clearly carry the personality of the real figure, the live and active model.

It is easy to see what happens when people are not taught to draw – in fact it is visible everywhere else too, in one way or another, though perhaps rather harder to see. Certainly it is bound to be reflected in design, in the environment, in the way things are built, in the things we use and are forced to have around us. The serious study of looking, which is what drawing is, affects far more than we might casually think it does. Indeed it goes far beyond the limits of art itself, in the conventional sense, and is all the more serious for that, and should be treated more seriously by everyone. Even in a field as narrow and specialized as that of fashion, we can see the power drawing has to sharpen our eyes, and therefore the rest of our senses, to the world at large; and I would think that any reasonable and sensitive eye looking through this book would recognize this. And if there has been a decline, it is not at all wrong to point it out, even in this book, for it must help the future. The awareness of decline is the first and most necessary step

towards stopping that decline. I think the point should be made over and over again.

Those artists were doing a specific job, the artist's job; and that too has now changed. Far fewer commissions are given than before: it seems not to occur to people that artists can have a job to do, a part to play. But we do not quite know which comes first. The editor of a famous Sunday newspaper once told me he had wanted to use artists, but was disappointed by those he saw and was put off. Perhaps he should have persevered with one or two and brought them on – most of the artists in this book began quietly before flourishing over many years. But it is a spiral, I suppose, with poor drawing discouraging its own use, and lack of encouragement depressing it further. Drawing is something that can be taught, after all, and I would have thought that exciting drawing would still be used if it were there.

Photography is not the answer, and anyway it has become very boring, repetitive and limited, especially in the fashion magazines. I cannot easily tell one cover from another – the girls the same, the lighting the same. Preparing the model, the make-up, the lights: it is all related to the theatre really, in a way that drawing never is. You can train yourself to observe and remember, to absorb and recreate, but the camera can only deal with what is in front of it at the time. Whether from memory and experience or from the model, the artist works in his own time, simplifying and transforming what he sees and knows into something of his own.

Nothing will change unless these things become clearer to people; and this book will help to achieve that in its way. I would like my criticisms to be taken in that spirit. The best of these artists were artists first and fashion artists second. They were simply taught to draw: and if any young artist is serious enough in wishing to follow them, he too will see that drawing is the right priority.

David Hockney

Introduction

A wider tradition and a particular discipline

Meidias, red-figure hydria, 5th century BC

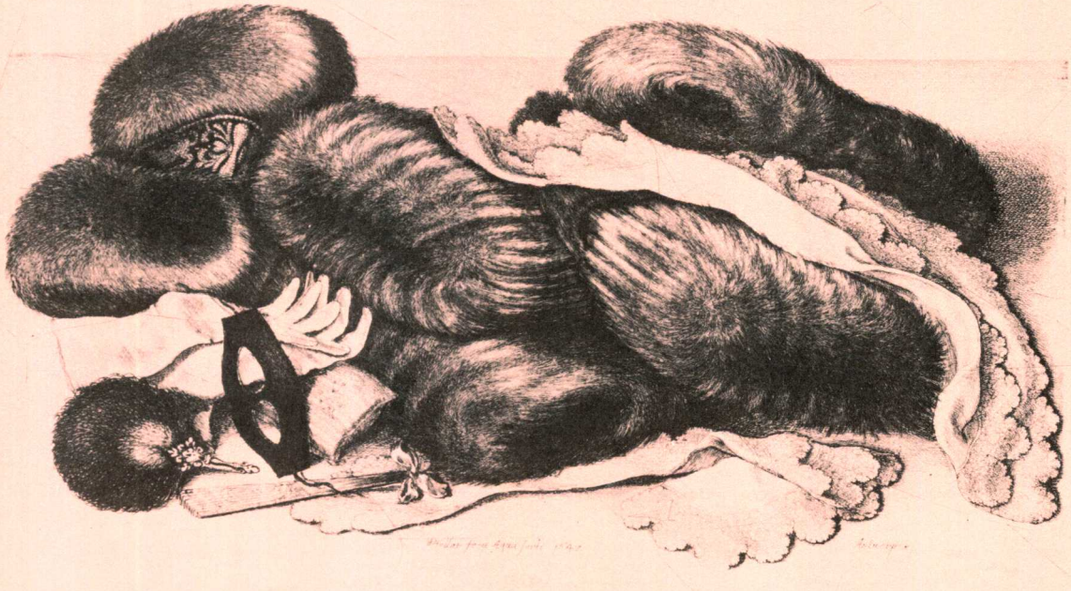
Artists have always been moved to draw and to paint beautiful women. From the beautiful to the fashionable, and on to fashion itself, there are not big steps. The good, the great, the rich and the powerful have always sought to leave to posterity the image, if not quite of how they see themselves, most certainly of how they would wish to be remembered; and the fashionable gloss on the picture that art of any period paints is as old as painting itself. The great masters were never too proud to add, even to their most consciously important and ambitious work, all the cockades and ribbons, ruffles and furbelows that their patrons required as no more than their due. And it is evident that the likes of a Velázquez or a Veronese, a Rembrandt, Gainsborough, Ingres or Degas took the keenest notice of whatever their subjects chose to wear – or, in fashionable caprice or fantasy, rather wished to be thought to have worn. Even the more private work – the immediate and perfunctory note hastily registered within the artist's sketchbook, the more elaborate and considered preparatory study, or the personal record of friend or family – confirms that artists have always had a general visual interest in the clothes a subject wears, in why or how they are worn, and in what they say of his or her place in the world.

The evidence is everywhere, in every age; from the Greek vase painter, with the delicate touch and fall of the diaphanous skirt across a thigh, to Watteau under the trees of Versailles, and the rustle and fold of silk and brocade upon the grass. We feel with our own eyes, with the direct *frisson* of a common experience and understanding, the young man's velvet cap, that Holbein so deftly describes, and the cold fall of the jewels at the Queen's throat. A hundred years later, and again we readily share in Hollar's careful enjoyment of his lady's long kid gloves, and her fur muffs and tippets. And then, later, there is the rich fall of silk at the waist of Ter Borch's courtesan, Gainsborough's lace, and the rough-and-tumble of Rowlandson petticoats. Degas's young dancing girls, stretching and pointing, get ready in the wings; Toulouse-Lautrec's rush stridently onstage.

Society in all its aspects has always been freely available to the artist as primary reference and material. Today, however, it seems that the happy conspiracy of natural vanity with creative energy and vision has somehow failed. Portraiture has suddenly become a self-conscious profession. The passing domestic comedy of manners is no longer the material of ambitious attention. It is left to the sophisticated mechanisms of photography to commit current dreams and vanities, styles and manners to posterity. But the artist cannot have changed in potential, for human nature is much as it was, and the eye is as likely as ever to be caught by the swing of a hip or the chance turn of a head and the fall of hair across the face. It seems that we have become the prisoners of our prejudices and expectations, and, taking the supposed answer as our excuse, would scarcely dream of asking an artist of independent reputation to paint or draw anything to do with fashion, for example, or indeed with any other special study. This is the age of the specialist, and it is believed that one must be bred to one's discipline: the artist, not having had cause to extend himself or stray into another field, is not asked in because he has not himself come forward. To see what is lost by such narrowness, it is necessary only to look back across a generation to a time when even the most distinguished and secure of artists might be set on his mettle by being asked, as it were, to step across. That is not to say that artists of the first rank are invariably fashion illustrators *manqués*. However, artists, if approached, will accept the commissions which interest them, and, if they need the money, even some which do not. All that is needed is a patron with the imagination to see the possibilities in such an enterprise and the courage to effect the connection.

Hans Holbein, *Cecily Heron*, 1526–28

Vogue, for the greater part of a distinguished existence, protagonist for more than seventy years in its special, self-set field of fashion and the civilized life, did just that, using artists straightforwardly for whatever they had to offer in terms



Wenceslaus Hollar, *Muffs and Lace*, 1647

of particular style and vision. The principal defining condition was only a demonstrable practical effectiveness, either in describing the close and characterizing details of the current mode, or in conveying that more general, encompassing and equally characteristic aura of refinement, elegance and chic. If the two approaches could somehow be combined, so much the better.

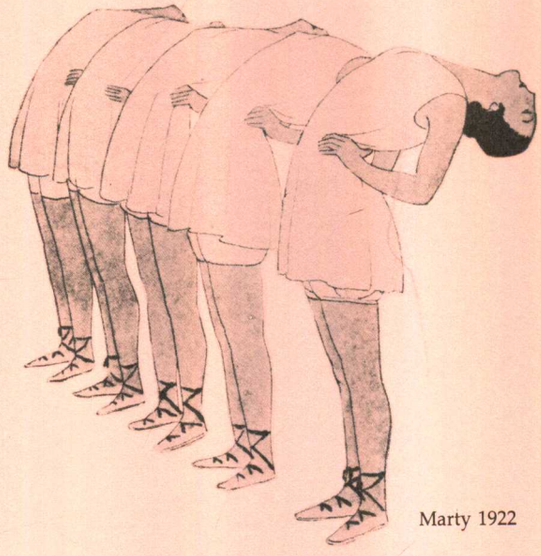
From 1909, when Condé Nast took over *Vogue*, the magazine's record of engagement with current developments in modern art, even if it amounted at times to little more than curiosity, was in general much better than might have been expected. Reviews and feature articles were regular items, and distinguished guests would appear occasionally within the editorial pages as contributors. But all this was bonus to the underlying policy, unstated and assumed as it was, that the graphic arts should hold a useful and rightful place in the natural scheme of things. Young, promising and interested artists were thus given the chance to prove themselves. Many of them turned out to be ordinary enough, competent draughtsmen supplying usable material reliably and in quantity; but even they, should they strike form, were given the opportunity to test and extend themselves, growing in confidence and practice over the months and years. Most of *Vogue*'s stars proved themselves in just this way, over an extended period, and so grew into the privileged freedom to do with the fashion what they could, or would, so long as the fashion itself was in essence described.

Sustained support, if at times dispensed somewhat arbitrarily, was the generous stimulant. Consequently the abundance of material thereby procured for *Vogue* over many years, even without reference to comparative and supplementary sources, is almost beyond collation and assimilation. This collective contribution – sophisticated, openly ambitious or experimental perhaps in the individual case, or orthodox, discreet, modest, even obscure – was the decisive influence upon the physical appearance of the magazine. It is easy to acknowledge the substantial effect upon *Vogue* of the work of its more conspicuous and celebrated illustrators, Eric and Willaumez, Benito and Mourgue, Bouché and Bérard; but even the drawings, the marginal *croquis* and vignettes supplied by minor, perhaps anonymous artists, often point the mood and spirit of the particular moment with a poignancy which photographs could never match. There is no more potent agent of recall than the illustrated magazine which, designed only to catch the passing moment on the wing, thus unselfconsciously, almost absently, stores it away to mature as it may. And where it is the artist who supplies its images, the substance is more particular, more personal, more piquant; for he or she cannot just accept, but must absorb and process it all, through the senses and imagination, and every mark becomes a kind of declaration.

Benito 1921

This book celebrates that collective achievement of many decades. Perhaps it is not yet too late to call into question the absolute sway of the photograph,

powerful and evocative though it undoubtedly is, and great artists though so many of *Vogue*'s photographers were and are. The drawn or painted image may be at least as effective, in describing all we need to know of any particular technicality or detail; and from the right pen it is infinitely more adaptable and subtle in its evocation of style and gesture. The camera, with its beady single eye and all its tricks and chemicals, rarely gets any nearer to the truth than the hand with its pencils, line and colour.



Marty 1922

It is not, of course, a competition. Photographs were always deployed comfortably in harness with drawings, their natural complement. This is the story of those drawings as used by *Vogue* in these years: from Nast's earliest days, when the cover was the principal graphic feature of the magazine and there was a mass of comparatively undistinguished material inside, through the days of graphic maturity and excellence, to the present, when the appearance of a drawing at all is something of a treat.

In human affairs of every kind, all periods, even those apparently most settled and secure, are times of transition, of shifting states, attitudes and interests. It is natural, when we look back, to try to recognize a pattern; but nothing can be quite as simple or as clear as we might wish, and it is important not to attach too much significance to those dates, events, conspicuous individuals, that have been singled out perforce to mark each period. No thunderbolt ever comes out of a clear sky; and though the artist may seem to set himself positively against the times, he remains inescapably of them and must tacitly accept them. He must take things as they come, working and waiting for the opportunities of exposure, criticism, patronage and support. In the arts expression is never truly spontaneous, born of the moment out of nothing, and achievement comes long and hard. Just when did the work, upon which the epoch would appear to turn, first take effect: at conception perhaps, or completion, or publication, or long afterwards, even decades later? Such retrospective acknowledgment may be significant only to those who live to see it.

This survey of the editorial use of drawing by *Vogue* begins in the early twenties with a decidedly variegated bag of contributors, both gifted and mundane, and continues to the present, following first the rise to a spirited and varied excellence of performance and then the decline to the withdrawal of consistent editorial support in the early sixties and on to the present policy of sporadic and spontaneous commissions.

It is reasonable, therefore, to concentrate upon the middle period, which embraces the greater achievement, but to define that period as beginning in the late twenties may well occasion a certain surprise. There have, after all, been major critical revivals and reassessments in recent years, first of Art Nouveau, and then of the Art Deco that grew out and away from it. Both movements had been more than adequately monitored by *Vogue*, and many of the covers of the magazine in Nast's first twenty years still stand among their more spectacular

George Plank 1927

and decorative popular examples. With the monopoly of those drawn and painted covers unbroken by the photograph until the summer of 1932, the received wisdom is that *Vogue*'s golden age of illustration must surely have been a little earlier.

This is the story, however, not of the cover, but of what was used within the editorial body of the magazine. It is not to demean the graphic gifts and achievements of the stars who shone through those earlier times and phases, so publicly upon the bookstall counter with *Vogue* itself as yet unopened, to point the distinction. Condé Nast may have valued the artists he brought to *Vogue* from the pages of *La Gazette du Bon Ton* – Georges Lepape, André Marty, Pierre Brissaud, Edouard Benito and their colleagues – and relished the decorative fantasies of George Plank and Helen Dryden; but only on the cover was any one of them allowed fuller scope. It was only with the access of colour reproduction for editorial use, at the opening of the thirties, which coincided with Eric's own first cover and his first more tentative colour plates inside, that illustrators came into their own within the magazine. By then most of that earlier generation had had their day. *Vogue* entered its most adventurous period, not only in illustration, but in layout and design, at just the time when those artists who had been among its most radical spirits appear to have fallen away.

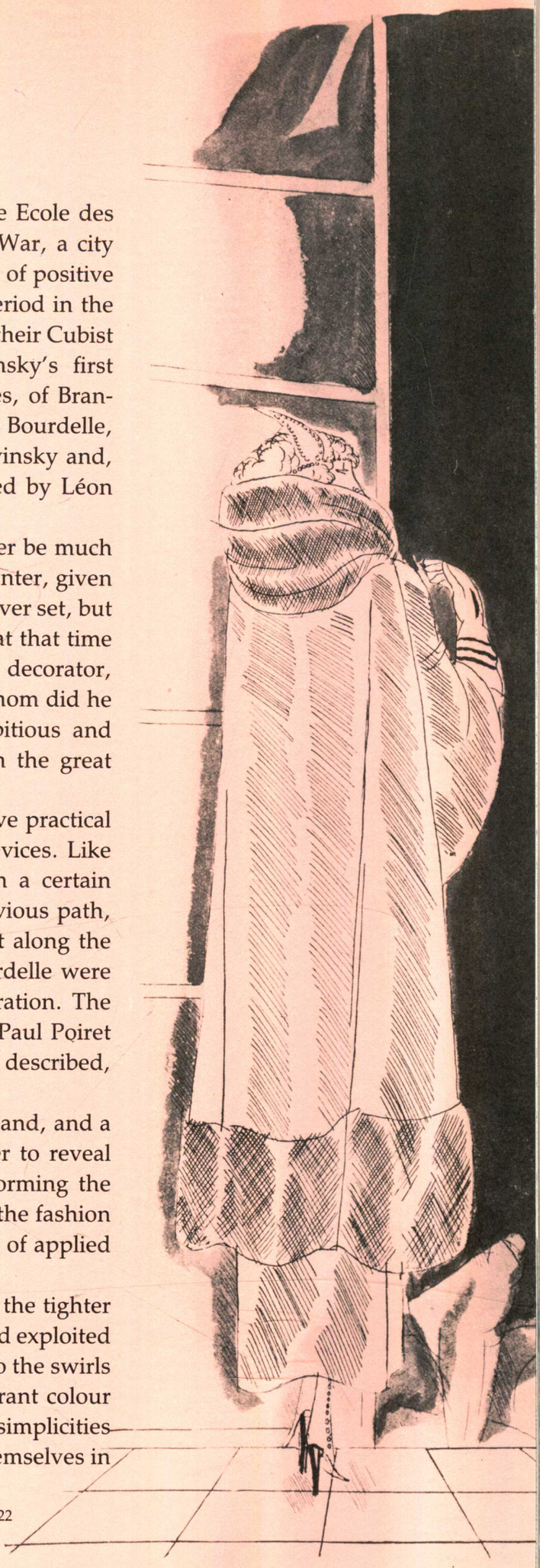
Most of the *Gazette* group had been young artists, fresh from the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in the Paris of those years just before the First World War, a city highly charged with creative energy, excitement and the stimulation of positive achievement and advance. In perhaps the single most important period in the history of modern art, it was the Paris of Picasso and Braque deep in their Cubist adventure, of Fauvism and emergent Expressionism, of Kandinsky's first Expressionist abstractions, of Mondrian's early reductive geometries, of Brancusi's infinitely refined simplicity, of Matisse at full stretch, of Léger, Bourdelle, Modigliani, Laurens and Duchamp. It was the Paris of young Stravinsky and, most especially, of Diaghilev and his *Ballets Russes*, set and dressed by Léon Bakst with a wonderfully extravagant and influential exoticism.

No art world, not even in the greatest of modern capitals, can ever be much more than a kind of village of the mind, that anyone may choose to enter, given the will and a little luck; and the bounds of the several parishes are never set, but always moving and blurring against each other. There was in Paris at that time the most natural intercourse between poet and painter, composer, decorator, designer, couturier. Paul Iribe knew Jean Cocteau, who knew . . . whom did he not know? It is unthinkable that the *Gazette* group of alert, ambitious and committed young men should not have felt positively involved in the great things being done so close at hand.

But influences must also be assimilated, perhaps deflected, to serve practical ends, as they become absorbed into the common stock of visual devices. Like water coming through the roof, they may reveal themselves with a certain obvious directness, but they are quite as likely to follow a more devious path, turning up who knows when, or where, or having picked up what along the way. Thus the elegant elongations of Matisse, Modigliani and Bourdelle were not slow to affect contemporary Parisian graphic design and illustration. The heady atmosphere of the *Ballets Russes* lay across Parisian couture, Paul Poiret especially, and since much of that was what the artists of the *Gazette* described, it, too, was added to the brew.

The graphic and decorative possibilities of Cubism, on the other hand, and a little later of Constructivism, the Bauhaus and De Stijl, took longer to reveal themselves. Eventually they did, if at a certain remove, when informing the bobs and shingles, the straight lines, the clean tubes and spheres of the fashion of the later twenties and equivalent qualities in the other disciplines of applied design – architectural, industrial, domestic and graphic.

Expressionism took even longer to declare itself, possibly because the tighter conventions in the first place of Art Nouveau and then of Art Deco had exploited its peculiar properties, the freely cursive and expressive line fixed into the swirls and arabesques of the one, and the bold, directly stated and exuberant colour generously indulged by the other. Again it is curious that the Fauve simplicities and directness of Van Dongen or Matisse should begin to register themselves in



Mario Simon 1922