

## THESIS PROSPECTUS

### Artifact Study of Lilly Dache's Hats

Historic costume collections often contain sizeable numbers of hats. They are small and easier to collect and store than larger costume items. Owners often save hats that have a connection to an event or period of time. Hats may first appear as frivolous and unimportant accessories, but they have actually served as important vehicles of expression for both men and women. Hats served as a symbol of respectability until about 1960 when it became more fashionable *not* to wear a hat.<sup>1</sup>

I have chosen to study Lilly Dache and her hats for my research. Dache is widely recognized as one of the most influential twentieth-century millinery designers. Her name can be found in designer reference books when other milliners are not listed.<sup>2</sup> She worked individually and also cooperatively with other leading designers such as Mr. John and Sally Victor. Her hats were popular and many are still available for study.

Lilly Dache was born in France between 1904 and 1906. She grew up in a farm family, but was always interested in designing. At age six she created and assembled her first wire hat frame and by age thirteen was a milliner's apprentice at her aunts hat shop in Bordeaux. Within another year she began working in Paris.

She arrived in New York City in September 1924 and found a job in a small hat shop. She eventually bought out the owner of that hat shop and by 1926 was in business for herself, following through with her dream of custom—made hats for all women.

Her business steadily grew and she soon hired additional help. She moved her location several times and much to her surprise, her customers followed her. On her twelfth anniversary in the United States, she opened a new, elaborate, nine—floor “house of hats, “ located on 56th street

off Park Avenue. Lilly Dache had well known and famous customers. She worked with movie stars like Carole Lombard, Marlene Dietrich, and Cnaan Miranda. She also worked for many socialite women including Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt and Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt. At the same time, Dache designed for the common everyday working girl and believed these designs and customers were just as important as the more famous ones.

Dache later branched out in her designing. By 1949 she had completed a line of dresses, accessories, and cosmetics to furnish all the fashion needs of the beautiful woman- Her work was widely admired. She was featured on the pages of Vogue and Harper's Bazaar, but could also be found in the listings of the Sears Catalog.

She wrote two books during her career. Talking Through My Hats published in 1946, is autobiographical and gives details of the early portions of her business and her philosophy. The second book, Lilly Dache's Clamour Book, appeared in 1956 and contains *her* suggestions and advice to women on beauty and glamour. She closed her business when her husband retired in 1969.

Among her contributions to the field of design, Dache is best remembered for her draped turbans, hats molded to the head of the customer, and colored snoods. She also influenced other designers including Halston, who designed millinery for her before launching his own successful fashion career, and the hairdresser Kenneth, who first worked in her beauty salon.<sup>4</sup>

Dache had a philosophy about her work. Ideally, she believed that each hat should be custom fit for the woman and the occasion- It needed to enhance the wearer's physical features, so size, style, and fit were important; but the hat also needed to show off each woman's personality and inner beauty.<sup>5</sup> Obviously, Dache had to compromise these ideals when selling to the mass market. She took pride in her work and confidently boasted that, "A Dache hat became sort of a

standard of influence, like a mink coat or a cadillac.”<sup>6</sup> Lilly Dache was a very interesting and many faceted person. She was vocal concerning her ideals of beauty and tried to carry those ideals into her work. She was a significant designer not only due to her millinery work, but also due to her many levels of involvement in the fashion industry.

My goal for this project is to examine Lilly Dache s ideals and philosophy and see how these are reflected in her hats. I want to determine if her hats were distinctive in any way from others designed by her contemporaries. I believe I will mainly focus my research on her early years (1930s and 1940s) when she was most involved with the actual designing of the hats, but the findings of the study will determine the final time frame. I would also like to try to arrange a chronological order for her hat labels, which she changed frequently. This would assist curators and collectors trying to document Dache hats.

To complete this I plan to examine and analyze information from the following sources which are documented in the working bibliography:

1. The two books written by Lilly flache
2. Other books and articles written about her from the period
3. Lilly flache hats in selected Ohio collections, both public and private
4. other hats of the period to compare to her work
5. Background material on hats in general and on styles of the period
6. Interviews with others who are familiar with Lilly flache
7. printed examples of her work, including photographs and advertisements in fashion magazines.
- 8.

This research will use a material culture model for historic study. F. McCinnig Fleming introduced what has become the classic model in his 1974 article, "Artifact Study; A Proposed Model." This model leads the researcher to a cultural interpretation of specific artifacts<sup>1</sup> in this case Dadie's hats. The study begins with a thorough investigation of the artifacts through identification of their five characteristics: construction, design, function, history<sup>1</sup> and materials used. After the artifacts are thoroughly identified, the method proceeds to the next three levels. Level two is for evaluation of the artifacts. At this level, workmanship is considered, as well as their comparison to other similar artifacts. The third level of the model is to concentrate on the cultural analysis of the artifacts. The artifacts are now placed in relationship to their culture and to their functions in that culture. Interpretation of the artifacts is the last step in the model. In this step, the researcher attempts to relate the significance or relevance of the artifacts to our present culture.<sup>7</sup> This type of investigation is especially useful when design and construction details are to be considered in interpreting the artifacts.

Other researchers have adapted and modified Fleming's model. Jules flavid Prawn suggests that stylistic analysis, which concentrates on the artifacts configuration and style, adds to the nonverbal evidence of the artifact) Through stylistic analysis a researcher can better understand both the facts, the feelings of the time period, and the attitude towards the artifact. Prawn advocates a combination of investigative techniques to sort out or determine authentic work of a particular hand, area, or time) Stylistic analysis provides standards that quickly let the *researcher know* what is appropriate for a particular time and place.

Philip U. Zimmerman suggests an extension of Fleming's model which further explains the relationship between one artifact and other similar artifacts.<sup>10</sup> This structural analysis can be applied to any group of objects and produces categories of workmanship that fit the

properties and historical context of the artifacts. The researcher then has a set of mechanical or technical operations to be performed on the artifacts so that they can be compared with other artifacts.’<sup>1</sup>

I believe a blending of these approaches will be useful in my study of Lilly Dache and her designs. Hopefully, this material-culture approach will help to define her importance in the design field and explain her influence on others.

#### NOTES

1. Janey Ironside, A Fashion Alphabet (Great Britain: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1968), 139.
2. Anne Stegemeyer, Who’s Who in Fashion (New York; Fairchild Publications, 1988), 48.
3. Charlotte Mankey Calasibetta, Fairchild’s Dictionary of Fashion. (New York: Fairchild Publications, 1988), 7.
4. Stegemeyer, 48.
5. Lilly Dache, Talking Through My Hats, ed. by Dorothy Poe Lewis (New York; Coward—McCann, 1946), ?.
6. Lilly Dache, Lilly Dache’s Clamour Book, ed. by Dorothy Roe Lewis (Philadelphia and New York: 3. 8. Lippincott Co., 1956), 22.
7. E. McClung Fleming. “Artifact Study: A Proposed Model,” Winterthur Portfolio 9 (1974): 154.
8. Jules David Prown, “Style as Evidence,” Winterthur Portfolio 15 CAutumn 1980); 197.
9. *Ibid.*, 209.
10. Philip D. Zimmerman, “Workmanship as Evidence: A Model for Object Study,” Winterthur Portfolio 16 (Winter 1981): 284.
11. *Ibid.*, 298.

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