



# La Mode retrouvée

Les robes trésors  
de la comtesse Greffulhe

du 7 novembre 2015  
au 20 mars 2016

**Palais Galliera**

10, avenue Pierre 1<sup>er</sup> de Serbie  
75116 Paris  
[www.palaisgalliera.paris.fr](http://www.palaisgalliera.paris.fr)

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**PRESS CONTACTS**

**Palais Galliera**

Anne de Nesle

Caroline Chenu

Tel: + 33 (0)1 56 52 86 08

presse.galliera@paris.fr

**PRESS VISUALS ON REQUEST**

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PRESS RELEASE

For the first time ever, the Palais Galliera is displaying the fabulous wardrobe of Élisabeth, Countess Greffulhe\*, née Élisabeth de Caraman-Chimay (1860-1952). She was the cousin of French dandy and poet Robert de Montesquiou and was immortalised for posterity by Marcel Proust as the Duchess of Guermantes in *In Search of Lost Time*. 'There is no single part of her to be found in any other woman,' Proust wrote to Montesquiou, 'or anywhere else for that matter. The entire mystery of her beauty is in the glow, above all in the enigma of her eyes. I have never seen a woman as beautiful as she.'

The divine Countess was born at the end of the Second Empire, saw two Republics and two world wars. She lived through the Belle Époque and the Roaring Twenties, and was the acknowledged leader of Paris Society (*le Tout-Paris*) for half a century. She became particularly influential after her marriage to the extremely wealthy Count Henry Greffulhe. **The most beautiful woman in Paris – to behold and to hear speak** – held a *salon* in her Paris townhouse in the Rue d'Astorg, and also received guests at the Château de Bois-Boudran and her villa in Dieppe. She was an early adept of 'fundraising'. As founding president of the *Société des Grandes Auditions Musicales*, she turned charity work into public relations. With tremendous practical acumen, she raised funds and produced and promoted operas and shows, which included Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* and *Twilight of the Gods*, Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes*, and Isadora Duncan. In addition to this, she was a political animal – a fierce supporter, for example, of Captain Dreyfus, Leon Blum, and the 'Popular Front'. She was also a passionate sponsor of science: she helped Marie Curie to finance the Institute of Radium, and Edouard Branly pursue his research into wireless telegraphy.

Countess Greffulhe was the epitome of elegance, with glorious outfits to match. **Her public appearances were highly theatrical**, with a sense of their being rare, fleeting and incomparably fascinating, in a cloud of tulle, gauze, chiffon and feathers, or in her kimono jackets, her velvet coats, with her oriental patterns, her shades of gold and silver, pink and green. The outfits were carefully chosen to emphasise her slim waist and her slender figure.

On display at the Palais Galliera there are **some fifty models bearing the labels of grands couturiers such as Worth, Fortuny, Babani, and Lanvin**. There are coats, indoor clothes, day dresses, evening dresses, and also accessories, portraits, photographs and films. Every item is an invitation to go 'in search of lost fashion' and to become acquainted with this great figure of Paris Society, whose image was inescapably bound up with her wardrobe.

\*Since 1964, the heirs and descendants of Élisabeth, Countess Greffulhe have donated many items from her wardrobe to the Palais Galliera. These pieces constitute one of the most important historical collections in the museum. The successive donations have been brought together for this exhibition.

This exhibition will be presented at the Museum at FIT, New York in September 2016.

CURATOR:

**Olivier Saillard**,  
director of the Palais Galliera

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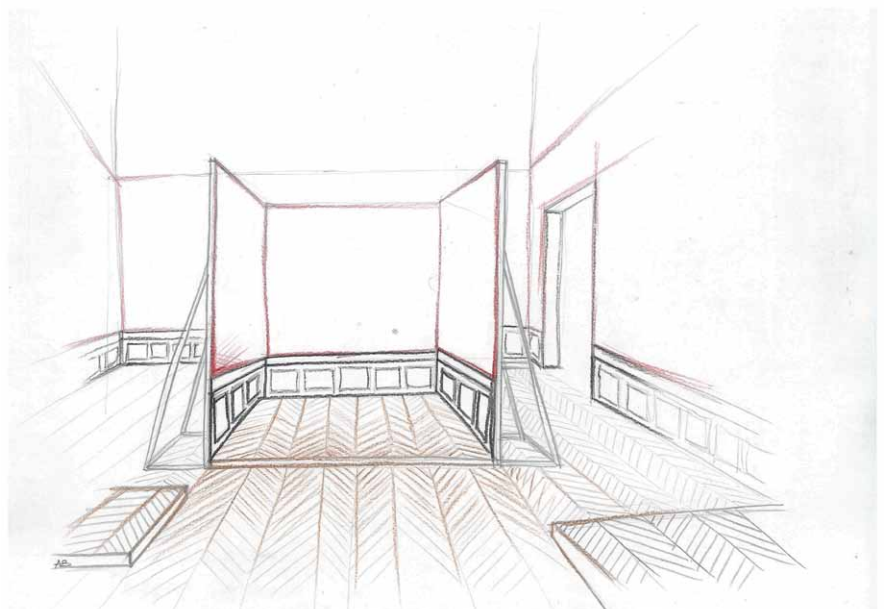
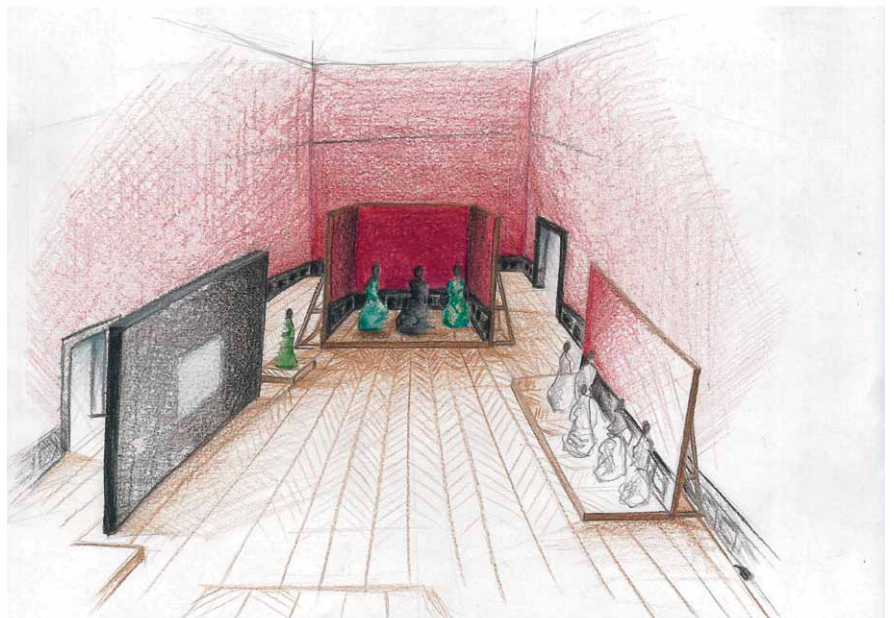
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SCENOGRAPHY

A mise en abyme of priceless dresses that belonged to Countess Greffulhe in a trompe-l'œil scenography at the Palais Galliera

SCENOGRAPHER:  
Béatrice Abonyi

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EXHIBITION LAYOUT



Paul-César Helleu, *Portrait of Countess Greffulhe*, 1891  
Dry pastel on papier.  
Private collection

*Letter from Proust to Robert de Montesquiou, dated Sunday 2 July 1893*

“I have at last (yesterday at the home of Mme de Wagram) seen the Countess Greffulhe. And the same feeling that decided me to impart to you my emotion on reading *Les Chauves-souris* compels me to choose you as the confidant of my emotion yesterday evening. Her hair was dressed with Polynesian grace, and mauve orchids hung down the nape of her neck, like the floral hats that Monsieur Renan describes. It is hard to judge her, because to judge is to compare and because there is no single part of her to be found in any other woman, or anywhere else for that matter. The entire mystery of her beauty is in the glow, above all in the enigma of her eyes. I have never seen a woman more beautiful. I did not ask to be introduced to her and I shall not even ask you, for, apart from the indiscretion that might imply, it seems to me that speaking to her would agitate me rather painfully.

But I would like her to know what an enormous impression she has made on me, and since, as I believe, you see her often, would you tell her so? I hope I displease you less in admiring her whom you admire above all others; I shall admire her henceforth through you, according to you and, as Malebranche would say “in you”.  
Your respectful admirer,  
Marcel Proust.”

SALON D'HONNEUR

Countess Greffulhe was closely followed by newspaper columnists and authors alike; with exquisite nonchalance, she controlled her apparently unpredictable entrances and exits. Marcel Proust borrowed her wardrobe, her manners and her style for his Duchess of Guermantes. Her veils, her gauze dresses, her embroidered lilies and orchids became the motifs with which Proust constructed his great work. Her image was immortalised in words.

Montesquiou wrote: “She would go to the top couturiers and have them show her all their latest fashions. Then, when she was sure they had shown off everything they could come up with, she would stand up and take her leave. The creators, who were confident of having enlightened her and managed the proceedings with skill, were addressed with this disconcerting instruction: “Make me whatever you think fit – as long as it is not that!”

Whether she had them made by Worth, Fortuny, Babani, Callot Soeurs, or Lanvin, Élisabeth Greffulhe’s dresses were the books she never wrote, the canvases she never painted. They were in façonné silk with a satin slip, in the threatening green that she favoured, or cut from tragic black crêpe or chiffon, trimmed with mirrors.



### 1 Maison Soinard, day dress, circa 1887

Antique pink silk satin, brown silk velvet appliqués  
© Julien Vidal/Galliera/Roger-Viollet

Countess Greffulhe remained faithful to certain couturiers. This elegant day dress, in the faded colours that she was fond of – particularly antique pink – shows her taste for Maison Soinard. The fashion house is no longer remembered but it was the main supplier of her trousseau, a bill for which, dated November 1878, is kept in the Greffulhe fund in the French National Archives.

### 2 A. Félix, housecoat, circa 1895

Green shot silk taffeta, braided trimmings in black, medium green and dark green silk thread and twisted gold wire  
© Galliera/Roger-Viollet

Robert de Montesquiou, who was both fascinated and intrigued by the aesthetic choices of his niece the Countess Greffulhe, mentioned a number of extraordinary outfits, including “a shot silk piece in a mixture of green and violet which gave her the appearance of a Lorelei.” His description recalls the piece presented here, which was made by Maison A. Félix, a very well-known couturier at the turn of the century that the Countess had patronised since her wedding in 1878.



### 3 Worth, evening cape described as a “Russian Cape”, circa 1896

Embroidered maroon silk velvet with a rosette pattern, machine lace, metal yarn, loom woven braid with patches in multi-coloured silk thread, gold lamé taffeta weave, cotton tulle  
© Patrick Pierrain/Galliera/Roger-Viollet

On a visit to France in 1896, Tsar Nicolas II gave Countess Greffulhe a sumptuous ceremonial cloak known as a “khalat”, from Bukhara (present day Uzbekistan). The Countess had the luxurious gift altered into an evening cape by her couturier, Jean-Philippe Worth. She wore it, looking sacred and magnificent, in a photo portrait by Otto in which she looked like a Madonna. Eight years later, having modified the garment to bring it into fashion, she created a sensation, as reported in *Le Figaro* of 15 April 1904, at a gala evening in aid of wounded Russians held at the Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt, “wearing a heavy Russian, gold fabric coat, which she had had brought over from Turkistan.”





#### 4 Worth, housecoat or tea-gown, circa 1897

Dark blue cut voided velvet on green satin ground, Valenciennes lace  
© Stéphane Piera/Galliera/Roger-Viollet

Acting both as a reception dress and a private outfit, this dress was worn by the Countess when she received her close friends in the late afternoon – hence the name *tea-gown* that is often given to this kind of garment. The Countess liked to wear vivid green clothes to set off her auburn hair. With its huge spectacular motifs, this dress is typical of the work of Jean-Philippe Worth, who in 1895 succeeded his father, Charles Frederick, the inventor of *haute couture*. The son was fond of historical fabrics; this cut voided velvet, which imitates the Renaissance velvets from Genoa, is a glorious example.

#### 5 Worth, Byzantine dress, 1904

Lamé taffeta, silk and gold yarn, silk tulle, sequin appliqué  
© L. Degrâces et Ph. Joffre/Galliera/Roger-Viollet



Wearing this remarkable dress, Countess Greffulhe was the centre of attention at her daughter Elaine's wedding on 14 November 1904. A fascinated press reported every detail of the Countess's outfit, while the bride's dress was hardly mentioned at all. Not without irony, *La Vie Parisienne* noted this unusual discrepancy: "This wedding will always be remembered as the apotheosis of a woman with a willpower that people these days have forgotten ever existed [...] that golden dress embroidered with silver, and laden with beads and gems, that sheath that seemed to have been made for the image of an icon, with its appliques of beads and its latticework of gemstones. [...] Luck, if it is given a little help, manages things with all the science and the scheming of a strategist [...] and, as luck would have it, Madame Greffulhe reached the top of the steps a long time before her daughter and was able to remain there for about a quarter of an hour, in full view of everyone."

#### 6 Vitaldi Babani, housecoat, circa 1912

Grey silk taffeta stencilled in white and mauve, black silk trimmings, glass buttons  
© Julien Vidal/Galliera/Roger-Viollet



Maison Vitaldi Babani, specialists in the sale of art objects, silks and kimonos imported from the Far East, set up in Paris in 1894. They were an outlet for the creations of Mariano Fortuny as well as for Liberty fabrics. They then began to sell their own models under the label Babani. These were inspired to a great extent by those of Fortuny. This dress, with its stencilled vegetable motifs evoking Kamares-style Minoan pottery, was inspired by Mariano Fortuny's famous printed white silk Knossos scarf, which he designed in 1906. The frieze of animals and geometrical patterns shows classical Greek influence.





### 7 Mariano Fortuny, jacket, circa 1912

Bronze green silk velvet printed with gold, belt to match  
© Julien Vidal/Galliera/Roger-Viollet

A Spaniard, living in Venice, Mariano Fortuny, painter scenographer and engraver, moved into fabrics in 1906. His timeless creations showed multiple influences. A skilful printing process that imitated gold and silver threads generated a subtle play of light.

Fortuny occupies an important place in the work of Marcel Proust. In the second volume of *In Search of Lost Time*, Elstir describes the Venetian revels depicted by Veronese and Carpaccio to Albertine in these terms: "You may, perhaps, before very long, be able (...) to gaze upon the marvellous stuffs which they used to wear. Hitherto one has seen them only in the works of the Venetian painters (...) But I hear that a Venetian artist, called Fortuny, has recovered the secret of the craft, and that before many years have passed women will be able to walk abroad, and better still to sit at home in brocades as sumptuous as those that Venice adorned, for her patrician daughters, with patterns brought from the Orient."



### 8 Attributed to Vitaldi Babani, evening coat, circa 1912

Gold printed green silk velvet, glass button  
© Julien Vidal / Galliera / Roger-Viollet

This coat, attributed to Vitaldi Babani, is strongly imbued with the style of Mariano Fortuny. Fortuny used printing rather than weaving as a means of recreating the brightness and luxury of the antique textiles that he was a collector of. There was a strong Renaissance influence in the symmetry of composition and the vegetable and floral patterns. The Green of the silk velvet is set off here by the red of the lining, while a Murano glass button introduces a discreet touch of fantasy.



### 9 Attributed to Vitaldi Babani, day dress, circa 1925

Black silk satin, embroidered with green and ivory silk thread and gold wire, gold wire appliqués  
© Julien Vidal/Galliera/Roger-Viollet

The organic patterns with geometrical border, inspired by Kamares-style Minoan pottery, are an embroidered retake of the painted patterns on a 1912 Vitaldi Babani day dress. They show Countess Greffulhe's constant predilection for that style of decoration.

## GRANDE GALERIE

“She would arrive with an elegant vivacity that was at the same time the delicate majesty of a gazelle that had found a piece of black velvet and was trailing it behind itself with infinite grace.” - Robert de Montesquiou, *La Divine Comtesse*.

From the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century up to 1914, the colour of the Countess's evening gowns and ball gowns was predominantly a funereal black. Archive papers describing the 1878 trousseau, even then, mentioned dark toned clothes. The use of black, the colour of mourning, was carefully codified in 19<sup>th</sup> century books of etiquette. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Countess was over sixty years old and this black increasingly dominated her wardrobe. A press article in 1943 paid tribute to her immortal elegance: “Countess Greffulhe, sheathed in black satin, revives all the splendour of the Duchess of Guermantes (...) she is as supple and slender as the writing of the author who used her as his model.” *Carrefour*, 23 juillet 1943.

Whether it was for daytime or evening wear, Élisabeth Greffulhe remained true to her taste for unusual models. Typical is that Jeanne Lanvin evening gown with its sleeves embroidered in a latticework of taffeta, or the two-toned, black and ivory evening outfit by Nina Ricci. Then there is the “Jupiter” coat by Jeanne Lanvin with its brick-like arrangement of silk satin rectangles, giving this haute couture garment the appearance of a surrealist manifesto. Other items in the Countess's wardrobe were made by Callot Soeurs, Redfern, Philippe et Gaston, Jenny, Louiseboulanger, Maggy Rouff, Caroline Reboux. She was a demanding customer at a time when the excellence of the world of haute couture reigned supreme.



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### 10 **Beauchez, transformable evening gown with two bodices, circa 1900**

Midnight blue and brown silk velvet, machine lace, ecru silk chiffon and tulle, embroidered with beads and sequins  
© Julien Vidal/Galliera/Roger-Viollet

### 11 **Jenny, grand evening gown, circa 1924-1925**

Ivory silk satin, flesh-coloured silk chiffon, embroidered with paste glass and silvered tubes  
© Julien Vidal/Galliera/Roger-Viollet



12

### 12 **Evening outfit (unlabelled), circa 1925**

Bolero: gold and green lamé, gold thread lace.  
Dress: gold and silver thread lace, beige silk tulle embroidered with gold threads  
© Julien Vidal/Galliera/Roger-Viollet

The discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb in 1922 sparked off a fashion for ancient Egypt. The geometry and graphics of the hieroglyphics on the metallic lace of this garment are part of the vocabulary of Art Deco.



13 **Evening coat (unlabelled), circa 1925**

Silver lamé entirely embroidered with blue and gold beads, tubes and sequins  
© R.Briant et L.Degrâces/Galliera/Roger-Viollet

Fashion in the 1920s saw the triumph of ethnography and exoticism as an influence on clothes design, decor, and textiles, as well as on the names given to the models. Chinese inspiration was everywhere. Traditional organic motifs, clouds and pagodas, sometimes highly stylised, in the embroidery could turn an article of clothing into a landscape painting.

14 **Jeanne Lanvin, coat, 1936**

Black silk satin, black wool appliqués, black and gilded metal, corozo nut buttons, black braided straps, fur  
© Julien Vidal/Galliera/Roger-Viollet

Jeanne Lanvin coat, paved all over with a black satin staggered brick pattern; it gives a surrealist tone to haute couture that reflects the bold effrontery of the Countess's taste.



15 **Nina Ricci, evening outfit, circa 1937**

Cream and black twill and silk chiffon, ostrich feathers  
© Julien Vidal/Galliera/Roger-Viollet



## PETITE GALERIE EST

On a sheet of paper headed “Travelling 1900” taken from her manuscript archive, Countess Greffulhe made a careful list of accessories that she considered indispensable:

“Large hat necessary – light and halo-like. Summer veils – choose them before departure – light ones – dark ones are stifling if they are made of silk. Have nine different thicknesses – light – slightly thicker – thick. This is how to fix them. 4 centimetres pinned straight through. First you pin the bottom at the neck, then in the middle of the head, then on the hat. Bring 50 metres of each rolled up (people always fold them, it’s awful). We need 2 black hats, 1 navy blue, 1 cream, 1 fancy, 1 fur hat for travelling.” On an extra list further down she added: “For the journey; front buttoned blouse, rubber corset, belt with buckle. Tissue paper, fabric collar with fasteners, laced boots.”

The attention Countess Greffulhe paid to her appearance is clear from the writings she left, and it applies to her accessories to: fans, hats, gloves, etc.

Several garments from the Count’s wardrobe, certain dresses worn by her daughter, as well as servants’ liveries feature in the collection, too. They give a good idea of the social status of the Greffulhe.



### 16 Folding fan (unlabelled), 1878

White and brown curled and dyed ostrich feathers, brown tortoiseshell frame, rivet and loop, guard stick decorated with a silver coronet set with diamonds, rubies and emeralds.

© Julien Vidal/Galliera/Roger-Viollet

Fan given to Élisabeth de Caraman-Chimay, on the occasion of her wedding to Viscount Henry Greffulhe on 25 September 1878, by the Count and Countess de Montesquiou-Fezensac.



### 17 Lagel-Meier, pair of low-fronted shoes, circa 1905

Red cut voided velvet

© Galliera/Roger-Viollet

“Mme de Guermantes advanced resolutely towards the carriage [...] and, lifting her red skirt, she set her foot on the step. She was just getting into the carriage when, seeing this foot exposed, the Duke cried in a fearsome voice: ‘Oriane, what have you been thinking of, you wretch? You’ve kept on your black shoes! With a red dress! Go upstairs quick and put on red shoes, or rather,’ he said to the footman, ‘tell the lady’s maid at once to bring down a pair of red shoes.’”

Marcel Proust, *Le Côté de Guermantes (In Search of Lost Time, vol. 3)*.



### 18 Caroline Reboux, pair of long evening gloves, 1930s

Black silk satin

© Julien Vidal/Galliera/Roger-Viollet



On the previous page:  
Otto (Otto Wegener), *Portrait of Élisabeth Greffulhe wearing an evening gown and coat lined with Mongolian lamb*, circa 1886-1887  
Albumen print  
© Otto/Galliera/Roger-Viollet

## PETITE GALERIE OUEST

Countess Greffulhe started taking photography lessons in 1883 with Paul Nadar, the son of Félix Nadar. This developed into a hobby that was widespread in aristocratic circles in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, on a par with amateur music making and drawing. Apart from her friendship with Paul, the decision to commission most of her portraits from the Nadar studio was a deliberately elitist move; it linked her with the mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century artistic and bohemian clientele of Nadar père. Élisabeth Greffulhe went along to the studio regularly between 1883 and 1901 to pose for photographs. She also had portraits made by Otto Wegener, a Swedish photographer who lived in Paris and had opened a studio in the Place de la Madeleine in 1883. Otto was also a favourite for society portraits.

The Countess's transformation into a charismatic young woman was helped by photography. Her fleeting appearances at society parties were immortalised in the studio. The care she took over her appearance was evident in the way she held her head, her figure, and her extremely slim waist.

She limited distribution of her portraits to family and close friends and hung them on the walls of her various residences as icons of self-worship. Photography rather than painting crystallised her powers of seduction and her narcissism. It was she herself who wrote, "Mirror [...] may my gaze be like a curtain that I lower over your glass in order to enclose for ever the dearest treasures of my being and thus become immortal!"



### 19 Worth, garden-party dress, 1894

Crimped pink silk chiffon, silk taffeta printed with orchid flower motifs  
© Julien Vidal/Galliera/Roger-Viollet

The pinky mauve of this dress and its diaphanous aspect are characteristic of Countess Greffulhe's taste. She wore it on 30 May 1894 to an outdoor party organised by her uncle, Robert de Montesquiou, at his home in Versailles. The aristocratic and artistic elite of Paris were all present to hear Sarah Bernhardt, Julia Bartet and Suzanne Reichenberg recite poems by Chénier, Verlaine, Hérédia, amongst others, and, of course, the master of the house. A fascinated Marcel Proust had obtained an invitation and, under the pseudonym 'Tout-Paris', described the gathering in an article in *Le Gaulois*, "Madame la Comtesse Greffulhe was deliciously attired in a pink lilac silk dress printed all over with orchids and covered in silk chiffon of the same colour; her hat a mass of orchids surrounded by lilac coloured gauze."



Paul Nadar, Portrait of the Countess wearing "La Robe aux Lis", circa 1896  
© Nadar/Galliera/Roger-Viollet

## SALLE CARRÉE

As he did for many of the people he admired, Marcel Proust tried for a long time to obtain a photograph of Countess Greffulhe. Shortly before he died, he renewed his request one last time, "I am too sick to write a long letter but I am taking the liberty of reminding you of my request for a photograph (even if it is of the Laszlo portrait). Your very bad reason for refusing it to me before was that a photograph immobilises and freezes a woman's beauty. But, surely, it is a beautiful thing to immobilise, or rather to perpetuate a dazzling moment. It becomes the effigy of eternal youth. I would add that a photograph I once saw at Robert de Montesquiou's house struck me as more beautiful than the portrait by Laszlo."

In the picture that Proust coveted so, Élisabeth Greffulhe wears an exceptionally fine, black velvet evening gown by Worth with appliqués in the shape of lilies. The lily became Élisabeth's emblem after the poem that Robert de Montesquiou wrote for her:

"Like a beautiful silver lily with black pistil eyes  
You flower, deep and lilywhite (...)."



### 20 Worth, evening gown known as "La Robe aux Lis", circa 1896

(label lost, dress subsequently altered)

Black velvet, ivory silk appliqués in the form of lilies embroidered with beads and metal sequins

© L. Degrâces et Ph. Joffre/Galliera/Roger-Viollet

This dress, which was made by Worth, her regular couturier, is primarily one of the Countess's own creations. The cut is "princess" line with, unusually for the period, no seam at the waist, in order to show off the slimness of the person wearing it. The Bertha collar, which could be folded into bat wings, alluded to the bats in the title of one of her uncle Robert de Montesquiou's poetry collections, while the lily motifs are a reference to a poem which her uncle wrote in her honour.





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**CATALOGUE**

*La Mode retrouvée. Les robes trésors  
de la comtesse Greffulhe*

Exhibition catalogue (in French)

Olivier Saillard, editor

Authors: Olivier Saillard, Claude Arnaud, Laure  
Hillerin, Sylvie Lécallier, Valérie Steele

Hardback, 160 pages, 75 colour illustrations

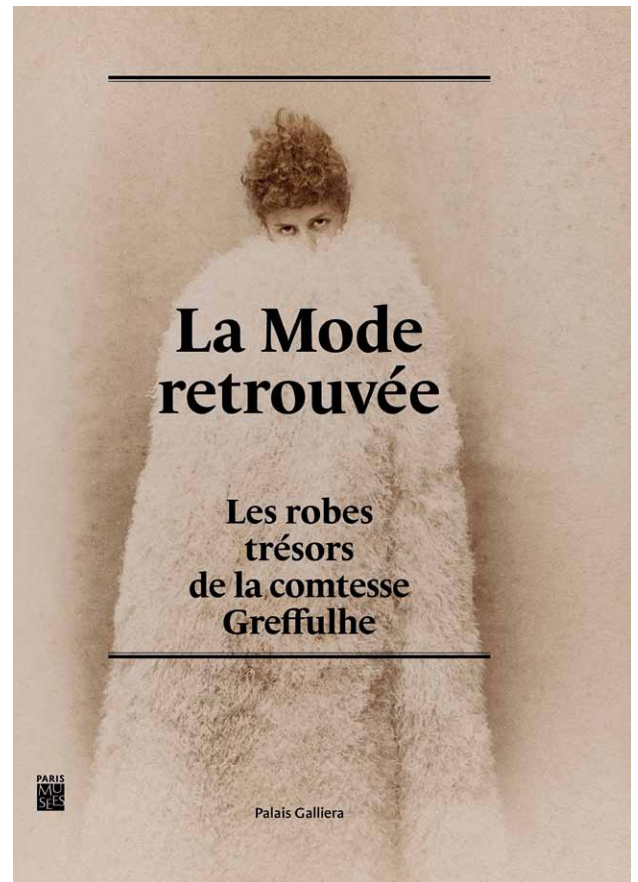
Éditions Paris Musées

Price : 37 €

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EXTRACTS FROM THE CATALOGUE

***“She did not follow fashions; she was made to create them.”***

Alexandra Bosc

When one reads the society columns which were in all the newspapers during the Belle Époque the name Élisabeth de Caraman-Chimay, Countess Greffulhe recurs like a leitmotif. Her charisma and her singular elegance ensured her a special place in the minds of her contemporaries. In a famous text, Baudelaire proclaimed the “indivisible totality” of a woman and the clothes she wears. Novelist and journalist Albert Flament was saying much the same thing when, in talking about the Countess, he referred to “[...] a dress which cannot be described, since the way she wears it makes it impossible to know what the dress itself is like [...]” To speak of the Countess Greffulhe’s wardrobe, then, means that one cannot simply confine oneself to the tastes of a person with an elegant sense of fashion; one needs to get right into the personality of this woman. The question that needs to be asked is, Who was Élisabeth Greffulhe?

Very quickly, in the years that followed her marriage in 1878, the young Viscountess became one of the leaders of fashion in Parisian society. In 1891, a pen portrait was published in the *Figaro*. We learn that she was “beautiful and pretty; very elegant. [...] started the fashion for high hairstyles, ‘les petits Greffulhe’, as they are known in the best society. Has the most dazzling smile in Paris [...]”

“Unique”, “incomparable”, “uncontested sovereign” are typical of the descriptions penned by her contemporaries. Her cousin Robert de Montesquiou went so far as to call her a “historical beauty” – in the sense of a “historical monument” that one could imagine as a tourist attraction in the future. Marcel Proust, whose fascination for the beautiful Countess is well known, had this to say about her, “It is difficult to pass judgement on her, probably because to judge is to compare, and there is no particle of her that has ever been seen in any other woman, or anywhere else.” Her clothes were one of the elements, and not among the least, that she could use to differentiate herself from others. Referring to her as early as

1882, a journalist observed this about her, “What she hates is the commonplace. Original in every way, her styles, her fashions, even her ideas, have a touch of eccentricity about them. Her dresses, which are created for her or by her, resemble those of no one else. She would rather they were bizarre than similar to anyone else’s.” She was well aware of the aura that her outfits gave her. In an unpublished manuscript text in which she imagines herself in the guise of “the woman who sets the fashion”, she writes, “She concerns herself with fashion in order not to follow it, since she is the one who sets it. [...] She surprises everyone, astonishes them as a rare flower does. Eyes and hearts, and both love and hatred, fly towards her, because she is unique, peerless.” The urge not to “dress like everyone else” went against her husband’s wishes as well as the traditional rules of society.

Nevertheless, those personal choices of hers were in keeping with a contemporary ideal that was increasingly vaunted by the fashion press. In 1900, fearing that a democratic uniformity of fashion was developing, the arbiters of elegance advocated “more personality, more individual originality and distinctive cachet – things which represents the true aristocracy of taste.” Élisabeth Greffulhe’s style choices sometimes raised eyebrows among philistines. At the inaugural session for Edmond Rostand at the Académie Française in June 1903, she “made a sensational entrance wearing that notorious wide-brimmed hat, whose creator no-one could ever discover [...]. The women who did not know her began to whisper; those with little or no artistic sense were shocked by the hat fixed at the back of her neck and encircling her head like a wheel.” But we can be sure that the cognoscenti were full of admiration.

Although Countess Greffulhe’s outfits were seldom reproduced in the fashion press, they were nonetheless described with great regularity and in great detail on the society pages of the newspapers. Her suppliers, on the other hand, were practically never mentioned. Even so, the names of Morin and Blossier and Félix crop up in the eighteen eighties and nineties. For later periods, we need to study the items of her wardrobe kept in the Palais Galliera. The accounts for her trousseau in 1878 mention Félix, Soinard and Laferrière, and Hellstern for shoes. The Countess seems to have been faithful to her first suppliers. Amongst the pieces kept, there is a dress with Soinard’s label and another by Félix. But

the majority of the outfits from the Belle Époque are from Maison Worth. Those from the 1910s through to the 1930s were made by Babani, Fortuny, Callot, Jenny or Lanvin.

Élisabeth was very close to her cousin Robert de Montesquiou, who had devoted his whole existence to seeking out beauty and aesthetic feelings. In keeping with Baudelaire's ideal of dandyism, Montesquiou refused to be "considered part of the mass, the odious unifier of all sensations", and this was evident in the originality of the clothes he wore. At first, the Count helped his cousin choose her outfits at the couturiers, but very soon she learned how to set herself apart. She would reject the models her couturiers showed her, preferring to have them make up models of her own devising. These "sometimes somewhat fantastic combinations", as her cousin described them, were spectacular. And it can be seen in the pieces kept at the Palais Galliera: in, for example, the collar made from embroidered flaps – designed to transform the Countess into a living flower –, or the finely embroidered evening gown, not to mention those masterpieces by Worth, the «Robe aux lis», the tea-gown in cut voided velvet, the Russian Cape, and the Byzantine dress. While the magnificent decoration of all those outfits says a great deal about the unique character of the woman who wore them, there is a subtlety of ornamentation in other outfits which commands respect. The transformable evening gown by Beauchez, for example, is made up of delicate inlays of midnight blue and brown silk velvet whose colours merge and shimmer with the changing light. And the Worth garden party dress that she wore to Montesquiou's on 30 May 1894 is made of silk taffeta printed with a delicate pattern of orchids under a silk chiffon in the same shade of pink. One is tempted to wonder whether the pattern on the fabric was created by the Countess herself, since a year later she exhibited, as if it were work of art, a dress where she had painted directly onto the fabric. There are, in fact, several sketches of dresses in the archives, but the "*album unique*" mentioned by one of her biographers, which contained her "most successful outfits", seems to have disappeared, if it ever existed.

As a general rule, Élisabeth Greffulhe differed from her contemporaries in that she had a style that was genuinely personal, combining spectacular outfits and inventive fashion. Take, for example, her completely new way of handling a long string of pearls; she would wear it hanging down her back to the waist. She also seemed to favour certain colours, like the vivid green to be found in various pieces from her wardrobe. Her cousin had noted this, too. Shades of mauve pink were another constant that struck observers who regularly met the Countess; they described her as being "in a cloud of pink". She seems

to have been fond of that colour from the beginning of the 1880s and to have given it up in about 1902-1903 when her daughter Éleine made her debut in society. The outfit in the Palais Galliera collection, which she wore to the famous party given by Robert de Montesquiou at Versailles on 30 May 1894 seems typical of this very personal taste: "She was disguised as a cattleya, covered from head to toe in the hue of the mauve orchid, a shade that was not particularly becoming, but which she liked. To overcome the difficulty, she had enveloped her face in a veil of the same colour, through which her eyes shone softly like two black fireflies." That veil was another touch that was peculiar to the Countess. We learn from a journalist that "it was she who first had the idea for those coils of tulle that women wrap themselves in to go to the opera or out to dinner." Around 1900, Élisabeth regularly commissioned "princess" line dresses, with an untailed waist, which was the opposite of the dominant fashion of the time. By doing this she emphasised her slim waist and distinctive figure. The fact is that Countess Greffulhe was not a slavish follower of fashion: she preferred to impose her own style and personality, a style redolent of that "vestimentary individuality" peculiar to Mme Swann.

Élisabeth Greffulhe was completely aware of the admiration that she aroused in everyone she met. As she once wrote, "I don't think there is any pleasure in the world to compare with that of the woman who senses that she is the object of everyone's gaze [...]." Her garments were the key item in a tactic, a long thought-out strategy. Indeed, her watchword was: "Always consider the other person as someone whom you want to leave with the memory of a prestige unlike any other." Like an actress in a show, she was always on display. What counted for her was the image that her "audience" would take away with them. And so, in photographs, she often chose to be portrayed from the back, in order to show off her waist. At society parties, she would make the briefest of appearances in order to be the centre of attention and to leave people wanting more; of course, her garments would make her the focal point, anyway. This was the case in 1889, at the wedding of her brother Pierre, where "she made a mediaeval entrance into the cathedral, enveloped in a cloth of gold which completely eclipsed the dalmatics of the acolytes and the chasubles of the officiating clergy." And even more so at Éleine's wedding at the Madeleine on 14 November 1904; la Comtesse famously and unforgettably repeated the feat by arriving, perhaps not totally by chance, before the bride and thus leaving herself exposed to everyone's gaze in a dazzling Byzantine dress by Worth.

Quite clearly, the Countess's outfits, at least some of them, were instrumental in bolstering her prestige. The *Russian Cape* by Worth occupied a special place

in her wardrobe. Sometime around 1896, she had had herself photographed to look like a Madonna in this prestigious garment. Eight years later, after having it altered, she created a sensation at a party in aid of wounded Russian soldiers, “wearing a large Russian coat, cut in golden fabric, brought especially from Turkistan.” Similarly, the evening gown by Worth, the *Robe aux lis*, in which she also had herself photographed, could be said to constitute a manifesto for her exclusively different taste: the lily patterned appliqués, which were highly fashionable at the turn-of-the-century, were an allusion that only the cognoscenti would have noticed to a poem composed in her honour by Robert de Montesquiou. And the Bertha collar that could be folded into bat wings was also a reference to her cousin’s tutelary creature, the bat. That dress could be described as “programmatic” in that it announced to the world that Élisabeth Greffulhe was not only a supremely elegant woman, but also an aesthete and a woman of wit.

To that end, she really did use her clothes as dandies did – it has to be remembered that Robert de Montesquiou was her cousin and that he admired her particularly. It is probable that, like all dandies, Countess Greffulhe attached a metaphysical value to her elegance, seeing in the “cult of self” the manifestation of her deepest being; a woman who had an “ardent need to create for [herself] a personal originality.” Charles Baudelaire, *Le Peintre de la vie moderne: IX. Le Dandy*, 1863.

## The Trajectory of a Forgotten Star

Laure Hillerin, Author of *La comtesse Greffulhe – L'ombre des Guermantes*, Flammarion, 2014

“She lived her life, but perhaps I alone dreamed it.”  
– Marcel Proust, *Les Plaisirs et les Jours*

### Legendary origins

Élisabeth de Riquet de Caraman-Chimay was born in 1860 during the Second Empire. The string of surnames bespeaks a colourful family history. Her father was Joseph, Prince of Caraman-Chimay and the future 18th Prince of Chimay. On that side, Élisabeth was descended from a great family of builders and soldiers, a dynasty of Lords of the Holy Roman Empire that went back to the 11th century – patrons, musicians and lovers of music. Her mother was Marie de Montesquiou-Fezensac, first cousin of Robert de Montesquiou. On her mother’s side, she could trace her ancestry, through the Dukes of Aquitaine, to the Merovingians.

In her father’s family, contemporaries were fascinated by more recent ancestors. Her great grandfather had married Terezia Cabarrus, ex-wife of Tallien (a participant in the 1794 coup d’état, the Thermidorian Reaction), and their eldest son Joseph married Émilie de Pellapra, the illegitimate daughter of Napoleon I. Thus Élisabeth was a direct descendant of “Notre-Dame-de-Thermidor» and, on the other side, of Napoleon Bonaparte himself.

Both families were as prestigious as they were peniless, for, although the Chimays’ status in Belgium was almost royal, their fortune was no more than a memory. Élisabeth was the second of six children. Her parents travelled a great deal because of their father’s various appointments in the Belgian diplomatic service. After Paris, Rome, St Petersburg, and Berne, they ended up in Mons, where Prince Caraman-Chimay, who had numerous offspring and a gigantic family castle to maintain, was only too pleased to accept the governorship of Hainault. For their visits to Paris, they still owned the old Hôtel de Bouillon on the Quai Malaquais, which they had inherited from Émilie de Pellapra. They rented the first floor to the Singer family.

### An “ideal” marriage?

Marie de Montesquiou had the soul of an artist and was a highly talented musician. She had studied piano with Camille O’Meara, Chopin’s favourite pupil, then with Clara Schumann, and had become friends with Liszt, with whom she had played in a concert when she was living in Rome. The Chimay family tended not to indulge in the social round but had a genuine family life that was warm and happy and entirely devoted to music and culture. They all played an instrument – in Élisabeth’s case the piano.

Marie was a great believer in mind over matter and devoted herself to giving her children a spiritual education. Élisabeth's education was very unusual for her time and her social class. In those days, a girl from a good family was expected to confine her studies to such accomplishments as drawing, dancing and music, for fear of being considered a blue-stocking. She read a great deal and even studied for a teaching degree. But, as her mother noted ruefully, she had "nothing but her looks to offer a husband". A rich husband needed to be found.

A stay in Paris saw the matter settled. After two meetings, the girl had conquered Viscount Henry Greffulhe, a wealthy, 19-year-old heir, sought after by all the mothers in Parisian high society. The Greffulhe family were Protestants from the Cévennes region, who had converted to Catholicism. They were not a very old family but they had made excellent marriages. Above all, the Greffulhes had made a fortune in banking. In addition to the domain of Bois-Boudran – a castle with an estate of thousands of hectares in Seine-et-Marne, Henry was due to inherit colossal fortunes and valuable properties from his father and his uncle. He was therefore little concerned by the meagre dowry provided by his fiancée. What he "acquired" was her prestigious background and her great beauty: a slim figure, a mass of auburn hair, and the soft and already fascinating brightness of her dark eyes. "As delicate as amber, more intelligent than she was delicate, with the deep glistening eyes of a sprite, and the laugh of a shepherdess", was how Octave Feuillet described her.

"Greffulhe asked her to marry him because she was the beautiful daughter of a prince and was of noble blood – he could not have guessed what wit and intelligence lay hidden behind her modest, girlish composure. She said yes to him, because he had everything a girl could want, and all the mothers had their eyes trained on such a good catch," was the terse verdict of his friend Henri de Breteuil.

The "ideal marriage", which was celebrated on 25 September 1878 at the church of St Germain-des-Prés, quickly turned out to be a fiasco at a personal level. After a short honeymoon, Henry shut up his young bride in the gloomy family castle and returned to his favourite pursuits of women and hunting. Élisabeth was only 18 years old and soon realised that she was caught in a deadly trap, sentenced to live with a selfish, irascible man who thought of her as the most beautiful mare in his stable. Between the Château de Bois-Boudran – "like a barracks" –, where they lived from September to spring for the hunting and shooting, and the four townhouses in the Rue d'Astorg, known as "the Vatican", where the Greffulhes lived as if in a monastery, she was stifled by the heavy atmosphere of a tentacular family where piety and materialism lived side-by-side under

the iron rod of her all-powerful mother-in-law. She was expected to produce a male heir to perpetuate the family name; she gave birth to a daughter, Elaine, who was her only child. The death of her mother, her beloved "Mimi", on Christmas Day 1884, cast her into the depths of despair. The daily letters that she exchanged with her had been her one breath of fresh air. When Marie died, she lost her soul sister, her confidante, her spiritual guide. She felt very alone, "a swan among ducks", in a foreign family.

### **The conquest of freedom**

At the end of the winter, the Parisian "season" brought her out of purdah. With a jealousy that matched his own unfaithfulness, Henry was torn between an urge to hide his young and beautiful wife from male concupiscence, and the desire for her to be admired. She was a key ingredient of his social standing – you don't hide away a flattering work of art in a safe. He was proud to show her off at the opera, at the Longchamp races, at the Princesse de Sagan's famous masked balls, or to the select circle of guests invited to the Château d'Eu by the Comte de Paris or to Chantilly by the Duc d'Aumale. "I am gaining a reputation as a pleasant and witty woman", the young Élisabeth commented philosophically, not blinded by her early success. "I allow myself to be flirted with a little. Having a husband who leaves me to my own devices, I deal with it happily. There is only one thing to do and that is, in the first place, not to look insignificant to others, and secondly to organise my life and my amusements for myself. It works very well because he loves to see me the centre of attention; that way people will not say that he married a duffer."

Élisabeth very soon realised the extent of people's admiration for her on the rare occasions she appeared in society. Henry Greffulhe was happy to finance her expensive outfits – they flattered his vanity, and Robert de Montesquiou, the uncle only five years older than her, took on the role of her Pygmalion in that department. Fashion journalists already considered her to be the arbiter of all elegance and constantly talked about her looks and her outfits: "For example, what she hates is the commonplace. She is original in everything; there is always a touch of eccentricity – in her dress, her style, even her ideas. Her outfits, which are created for her or by her, must look like no others..." The first signs of what was to become a "strategy for prestige" were already there.

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a woman's place in society was still dictated by the system of common law inherited from Napoleon: like children and lunatics, a woman was considered irresponsible and subordinate to her husband, who alone managed her property – if she had any. Reading, writing, playing music or being seriously interested in art were judged to be "posing"

or “wasting time” – mortal sins in the Greffulhe family, whose attitudes were those of the manuals of social etiquette: “The most respectable woman is she of whom people talk the least, and the most perfect is she of whom people do not speak at all.” Outside the social round, the only admissible occupations for a high society wife were charitable works.

But Élisabeth had inherited a deep love of music from her mother, a genuine talent for painting and above all a sincere desire to be useful to society. And she was shrewd enough to take up the cause of charity as a means of escaping from her gilded prison. Mixing profit with pleasure, and with the blessing of her mother-in-law, she organised a large concert in aid of the Philanthropic Society, one of the charities financed by the Greffulhe family. Handel’s *Messiah*, performed in June 1889 at the Trocadéro, was a sell-out and brought in Fr.25,000. It was then that the young lady discovered her talent as a concert entrepreneur.

As time went by, she gradually achieved a degree of independence. She found her freedom in Dieppe, where Charles Greffulhe, her father-in-law, had bought her an enormous villa on the cliffs at Pourville. Henry abandoned this retreat, finding it boring to be so far from his mistresses and his hunting grounds. His wife took advantage of this to invite her friends in the summer – Prince Edmond de Polignac, a delightful man and an accomplished musician, whom she would marry off later to the wealthy heiress Winaretta Singer, Robert de Montesquiou, Gabriel Fauré, whom Robert had introduced to her and who was still an obscure organist at the Madeleine. Among the habitués of the Villa La Case, there was a cohort of admirers, most of whom were in love with her, as well as many musicians and painters whom Henry referred to scornfully as the “Japanese”. On holiday here, Parisian proprieties were relaxed: Élisabeth would take bicycle rides with the Prince de Sagan, converse in the moonlight with Lord Lytton, the English ambassador to Paris, stride along the clifftop in the company of the future president of France Paul Deschanel or Charles Ephrussi, a great art collector and owner of the *Gazette des beaux-arts*. Down on the beach, where crowds of them would go for a swim, she would meet the Duchess of Chartres in a corset and the Duke in shirt sleeves. She would visit her neighbours M<sup>me</sup> Standish or M<sup>me</sup> Lemaire, and take an easel to paint watercolours outside with painters like Jacques-Émile Blanche, Paul-César Helleu, Walter Sickert, and Eugène Lami.

### Working for music and science

By exploiting this strong network of artistic friendships, Élisabeth Greffulhe conceived a more ambitious project. Her idea was to create *La Société des*

*Grandes Auditions Musicales de France*, the stated objective of which was to have forgotten works by old composers played in their entirety, and to support young contemporary musicians. The first subscriptions were launched in April 1890, with enthusiastic help from *Le Figaro*, where the countess had devoted support in the person of Gaston Calmette. She involved her dearest friends in the venture – Polignac and Hottinguer – and the most influential too, like the Prince de Sagan. Thanks to her strategic and organisational skills, she set up a very professional structure with a serious artistic programme and a solid administrative and financial base. As musicologist Myriam Chimènes wrote, “In a symbolic way, she was the first person to go beyond the limits of her own salon and organise public concerts, thus breaking the rule which required that a woman of her rank should confine her activities to her home.”

As president of the *Société des Grandes Auditions*, she played a key role in French musical life for more than 20 years. She went on a Wagnerian crusade to produce *Tristan* and then *The Twilight of the Gods*. She actively supported Diaghilev in the launch of his first concerts of Russian music, then the Ballets Russes, which enchanted and captivated Paris every year until the outbreak of war in 1914. Working with Gabriel Astruc, she promoted the *Italian Seasons*; she programmed Mahler’s second Symphony with the composer himself conducting, and brought Richard Strauss over to conduct *Salomé*. She organised a series of festivals: Gounod, Berlioz, Beethoven, Mozart, and Grieg. She brought Schoenberg and Elgar to the attention of the French public; she took part in the *Chorégies d’Orange*; and created an international music competition to promote young composers. She exhumed Rameau’s *Anacreon*, sponsored Fauré, Saint-Saëns, the Capet String Quartet, Caruso, Chaliapin, Arthur Rubinstein, Isadora Duncan, and many more, including the young Italian composer Roffredo Caetani, who for 10 years was her secret, and apparently platonic, lover. With Raoul Gunsbourg she organised music festivals in the Versailles Gardens and the Bagatelle Gardens, which attracted the whole of Paris Society.

At the turn-of-the-century, Countess Greffulhe reigned alone over Parisian artistic life and high society. She had an eclectic interest in everything that was new and was untiring in the service of causes which interested her.

It was she who arranged finance to enable Marie Curie, after years of struggle, to open the Institut du Radium. She did this by suggesting a simple yet brilliant idea to the Institut Pasteur. The Institut Pasteur were executors of the will of financier and philanthropist Daniel Iffla, known as *Osiris*. The latter, who had bought the Château de Malmaison

and donated it to the state, had wanted Fr.400,000 to be donated to the École des Beaux-Arts to create a museum at the school for his art collections. Countess Greffulhe, who was a friend of Pierre and Marie Curie, suggested that it would be more useful to redirect the sum towards setting up the Institut du Radium. The idea was suggested through the intervention of her friend Denys Cochin, parliamentary deputy for Paris, and was accepted. On 15 December 1909, the board of the Institut Pasteur voted to share the cost of building the Institut du Radium with the University of Paris. The Institut du Radium became the Fondation Curie in 1920 and, half a century later, the Institut Curie.

Similarly, it is doubtful whether Édouard Branly could have completed his research into radio conductivity, telemechanics and wireless telegraphy without her help. She arranged for him to obtain half the Prix Osiris, which he shared with Pierre Curie; she organised a public demonstration of his work to an audience of five thousand people at the Trocadéro, and an experiment in radio transmission at Bois-Boudran. She arranged with highly placed political friends for him to be allowed to keep his laboratory at the Catholic Institute, the lease of which was due to be terminated because of the law of separation between church and state.

“A mind like yours is capable of creating the circumstances that lead to the realisation of your ideas,” she once wrote to Pierre Curie. Creating the circumstances, exploring all possible solutions – and never giving up – was the secret of the “Greffulhe method”, in all the fields she operated in.

### **“The most glittering political and diplomatic salon in Paris”**

She also used her genius as a go-between and facilitator in politics. With her open-mindedness, her pragmatism and instinct, she stood above political squabbles. She played the role of an unofficial queen in her sumptuous receptions for the diplomats and crowned heads of Europe, both in Paris and at hunting parties at Bois-Boudran. This “queen *in partibus* of the Third Republic” was passionate about politics. She had no hesitation in having the flower of the aristocracy rub shoulders with radical or socialist ministers and parliamentary deputies at her salon. She was by nature a mediator, a supporter of Dreyfus and keen for social progress and equality of rights for women; her devout hope was to reconcile the different points of view that had fractured society and divided France: Catholicism and secularism, patriotism and pacifism, and the establishment of income tax. Her salons were neutral ground, a discreet and informal place where things could be discussed without antagonism. And they bore fruit, if we can trust the memory of a contempo-

rary: “Countess Greffulhe showed me the little office leading off her salon, where she had locked away the Prince of Wales, the future King Edward VII, with Théophile Delcassé, the French Foreign Minister, and out of which had come the Entente cordiale.”

Her friendships and the people she admired extended beyond national and political boundaries. They included Grand Duke Vladimir, favourite brother of Tsar Alexander III of Russia, Joseph Caillaux, Clemenceau and Léon Blum. Eclecticism was the mark of the Greffulhe salon, the only one of its kind. It was described as “the most glittering political and diplomatic salon in the whole of Paris” by a radical minister in Clemenceau’s government. It was excoriated by the “uppercrust”, who could not forgive the countess for inviting “a mixed society” into her house. At a more violent level, she attracted the spite of Léon Daudet, who attacked her virulently in the press for her Dreyfusism and her friendships with Jewish artists.

With the First World War, the society in which Countess Greffulhe was an emblematic figure fell apart. But this was another chance for Élisabeth to spring into action, albeit at a more prosaic, although highly useful, level. She applied her creative instincts, the strength of her convictions and her organising talents to the task at hand: she followed the government to Bordeaux, where she took personal charge of designing and ordering new uniforms for the soldiers. Back in Paris, she created the *Union pour la Belgique et les pays alliés et amis* (Union for Belgium and Allied and Friendly Countries) as an administrative tool for numerous war charities. Untiringly, she organised concerts and events to raise funds. “She gets everybody moving and can obtain whatever she wants, particularly the impossible, because in actual fact that’s the only thing that interests her,” wrote her admiring sister. On the “home front”, she was even more of a star.

### **Ghost ship**

1918 was a bitter year for Élisabeth. Her marriage turned into a nightmare and, at the same time, Léon Daudet unleashed a virulent press campaign against her on account of her support for Joseph Caillaux, accusing her of being a pacifist in the pay of Germany.

With the end of the war, the world around her had changed. The roaring twenties danced on the ruins of old Europe. In that great ballet, the Countess Greffulhe was still feted and sought out, but she was no longer its star. She spent more and more time as a recluse in the country, where she directed her need for activity towards breeding borzois, and introduced greyhound racing into France. She took refuge in art – pastels, miniatures and stained-glass. The death of Count Greffulhe in 1932 provided her

with new trials: a lawsuit for contested inheritance rights brought by Henry's former mistress M<sup>me</sup> de La Béraudière. The public sitting, after three years of hearings, was devoured by the press, who devoted column after column to the conjugal misery of the woman they described as "the most deceived wife in Paris". The Countess reacted with panache. She continued to go to receptions in Paris, dressed with her customary elegance, with her inimitable knack of adapting passing fashions to her personal style. In a world where individuality was gradually dying out, she continued to remain "unique", haloed by her wide-brimmed hats and wrapped in the soft folds of her long black dresses. Her salon, which had been supplanted by that of the Beaumonts, was no longer the "top" one. But it still remained a kind of international, eclectic academy of good taste, art and intelligence, where in the company of the old guard, the rising stars of literature and the arts and the pioneers of science and industry could rub shoulders with diplomats and exotic sovereigns.

Countess Greffulhe was nearly eighty when the Second World War broke out. Still at the helm of the "ghost ship" in the Rue d'Astorg, she withdrew into the tiny servants' quarters, which were easier to heat, and had a wooden cabin with an electric radiator installed in her vast drawing room. There she received her dearest friends, who included Abbé Mugnier and the Queen of Belgium. Jacques-Émile Blanche wrote to her, "I hear from friends that you have been seen in the metro, where you are as beautiful as ever [...] You were the only one to foresee the catastrophe, the humiliation of your two countries, Belgium and France; the only woman of your class who had the sincerity to confess that, now you have nothing, you are not nostalgic for your past glories." In 1947, she was the guest of honour at an exhibition devoted to Marcel Proust at the Bibliothèque Nationale. Admirers of *La Recherche* and early biographers of the author paid deferential visits to her, hoping to be treated to her memories of him. But she was annoyed to have been the model for the shallow Duchess of Guermantes and claimed she had hardly known Proust – it was not true but people took it at face value.

She died in August 1952 at the age of ninety-two. A few months before her death, one of her admirers described her thus, "Countess Greffulhe provided our astonished eyes with the sight of a young woman's figure. When she bent over in her salon to light up one of her paintings, the movement was so supple and of such incomparable grace that one was inclined to kneel in adoration before her."





## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

**1860:** Élisabeth de Riquet de Caraman-Chimay born on 11 July. Her mother, Marie de Montesquiou, and her father, Prince Joseph de Chimay, diplomat in the Belgian legation then governor of Hainault, provide their children with a solid literary and musical education, which was avant-garde at that time.

**1878:** Élisabeth marries the wealthy Viscount Henry Greffulhe on 25 September. The young couple live in two main residences belonging to the Greffulhe family: the Château de Bois-Boudran in Seine-et-Marne, and a townhouse in the Rue d'Astorg in Paris. During the 1890s, she opened a salon in this house, where politicians of all colours as well as artists and writers all rubbed shoulders.

**1882:** birth of Elaine, their only daughter, on 26 December

**1884:** Marie de Montesquiou dies on 26 December

**1886:** Élisabeth Greffulhe meets Gabriel Fauré through her cousin Robert de Montesquiou. Fauré dedicated his Pavane to her in 1888.

**1889:** organises her first large public concert at the Trocadéro. Handel's Messiah raises substantial funds for the Greffulhe Philanthropic Society

**1890:** founds the *Société des grandes auditions musicales de France* with the objective of promoting little-known works by French composers. Berlioz's *Béatrice et Bénédicte* is performed at the Odéon the following year

**1891:** Painter Paul-César Helleu makes about a hundred sketches of the Countess

**1892:** death of the Prince de Chimay in April.

**1894:** meets Marcel Proust at a party organised by Robert de Montesquiou on 30 May.

**1896:** Paul Nadar makes a photograph of Élisabeth wearing the "Robe aux Lis".

**1899:** Countess Greffulhe declares the innocence of Captain Dreyfus and becomes the target of savage criticism by anti-Dreyfusards and the anti-Semitic press.

Produces the French premiere of Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* with the Concerts Lamoureux at the Nouveau Théâtre. The opera is a triumph with Parisian audiences.

**1902:** Élisabeth Greffulhe draws a high society audience to the French premiere of *The Twilight of the Gods* at the Théâtre du Château-d'Eau.

Meets Roffredo Caetani, a young Italian composer, whose work she promotes and with whom she keeps up a correspondence throughout her life.

**1903:** as a patron of science, she enables Albert Branly to continue his research into radio conductivity and telemechanics.

Meets Pierre and Marie Curie, helping the latter with her work on radioactivity; she played a key role in creating

the Institut du Radium in 1909 (now the Institut Curie)

**1904:** Elaine Greffulhe marries the Duc de Guiche at the church of La Madeleine on 14 November; the Countess wears the emblematic Byzantine dress to the wedding.

**1906:** with Robert de Montesquiou, Élisabeth organises the first retrospective of painter Gustave Moreau. The same year, she meets Serge Diaghilev at the autumn Salon d'automne.

**1907:** portrait of Élisabeth by Philip Alexius de Lazlo.

**1908:** as president of the *Société des grandes auditions musicales*, she organises a memorable evening in the gardens of the Château de Versailles.

**1909:** Diaghilev launches the Ballets Russes with support from the Countess.

**1914:** as an ambassador for French art, she visits the London Exhibition in the company of Auguste Rodin

**1919:** having been an adept of occult science since her youth and being naturally of a profoundly mystical bent, Élisabeth Greffulhe helps found the *Institut métapsychique*. A few years later she became interested in parallel medicine and methods of personal development

**1932:** death of Henry Greffulhe on 31 March

**1947:** 18 November, opening of the Marcel Proust exhibition at the Bibliothèque Nationale, in the presence of the Countess.

**1952:** death of Élisabeth Greffulhe on 21 August, on the banks of Lake Geneva.



Paul Nadar, 1886

Portrait of the Countess Greffulhe and her daughter Elaine

© Nadar/Galliera/Roger-Viollet

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**EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES**

**FOR YOUNG PEOPLE**

**Le petit explorateur de mode** (Young fashion explorers), workshop 4/6 years  
A treasure hunt through the exhibition, designed to help children discover the sumptuous wardrobe of the Countess.

**Mes gants fantaisie** (Fantasy gloves), workshop 7/12 years  
After visiting the exhibition, participants are given a selection of ornaments (ribbons, beads, sequins, buttons, etc.) to be used to customise a pair of black gloves.

**Apprenti styliste : les costumes d'époque** (Apprentice couturier), workshop 7/13 years  
Taking inspiration from dresses seen in the exhibition, the apprentice couturiers dream up new outfits worthy of a Countess or a Princess: day dresses, ball gowns, hats, and more.

**Mon truc en plume** (Feathery things), workshop 7/13 years  
After visiting the exhibition, the young participants make a brooch to go perfectly with a garment, a bag or a hat.

**Le sautoir petite comtesse** (Beads for a Countess), workshop 8/12 years (also open to adults and teenagers over 13 years old)  
Taking inspiration from the exhibition, participants make a long necklace or a fashionable piece of jewellery.

**Les mitaines bijoux** (Jewelled mittens), workshop 13/16 years  
Taking its inspiration from the Countess Greffulhe's wardrobe, this is a workshop where participants will make felt mittens and decorate them with ribbons, beads, sequins and buttons.

**FAMILY ACTIVITIES**

**Visite-contée** (Storytime), 5 years and over  
Taking inspiration from the artistic tastes of Countess Greffulhe and her elegant wardrobe, the Museum's storyteller will talk about music, singing, painting and a treasure dress.

**Visite-contée et atelier de calligramme** (Stories, and a calligram poetry workshop), 7 years and over  
After the visit, parents and children get down to the business of writing a calligram on the theme of the arts.

**Guided tours of the exhibition**  
Our lecturer retraces the history of the museum and guides you through the exhibition.  
Various Saturdays at 2.00 pm. Reservation unnecessary but limited to 20 people per visit.

**HANDICAP & SOCIAL SPHERE**

The Museum offers activities, related to this exhibition, that are suitable for handicapped people. These include: visits in French sign language (LSF) for hearing-impaired people; visits with an "image describer" for blind and partially sighted people; and workshops for people with mental handicaps

There are also exhibition visits for people with little access to cultural events.

Information & reservations:

. Activities for young people and families:

Marie-Jeanne Fuster, + 33 (0)1 56 52 86 21

. Activities for the handicap and social sphere:

Laure Bernard, + 33 (0)1 56 52 86 20

These activities are only offered in French.

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PRACTICAL INFORMATION

**Palais Galliera**

Musée de la Mode de la Ville de Paris  
10 avenue Pierre I<sup>er</sup> de Serbie, 75116 Paris  
Tel. + 33 (0)1 56 52 86 00  
www.palaisgalliera.paris.fr

**Getting there:**

**Métro** 9 Iéna or Alma-Marceau

**RER** C Pont de l'Alma

**Bus** 32, 42, 63, 72, 80, 82, 92

**Vélib'** 4 rue de Longchamp, 1 rue Bassano,  
2 avenue Marceau

**Autolib'** 1 avenue Marceau,  
33 avenue Pierre-I<sup>er</sup>-de-Serbie, 24 avenue d'Iéna

**Opening times:**

Tuesday to Sunday 10.00 am – 6.00 pm

Late opening Thursday till 9.00 pm

Closed on Mondays and public holidays

Ticket offices close 45 minutes before the museum  
closes

**Admission:**

Normal 8 €

Reductions 6 €

Free to people under 18 years

The Palais Galliera only presents temporary  
exhibitions. The collections are not on permanent  
display.

Join us on  and 

#ExpoGreffulhe - @PalaisGalliera

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**PARIS MUSÉES,  
ÉTABLISSEMENT  
PUBLIC DU RÉSEAU  
DES MUSÉES  
DE LA VILLE DE PARIS**

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**The Palais Galliera is part of the network  
of Paris Musées.**

The fourteen museums that make up this network,  
administered by Établissement Public Paris Musées,  
contain collections of exceptional diversity and qual-  
ity.

In a gesture of outreach and an urge to share this fabu-  
lous heritage, new policies have been put in place for  
welcoming visitors. These include affordable charges  
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paid to visitors ordinarily deprived of access to cultural  
amenities. The permanent collections and temporary  
exhibitions therefore include a varied programme of  
cultural activities.

There is also an Internet website giving access to the  
complete programme of museum activities and to  
online details of the collections. It is a wonderful way  
to prepare your visit.

**PARIS MUSÉES SEASON-TICKET  
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A card can be bought from Paris Musées, which gives  
unlimited access, ahead of the queue, to the  
temporary exhibitions in all 14 of the museums of  
Paris\*, as well as special tariffs for activities. It  
entitles the holder to reductions in the bookshop-bou-  
tiques and the cafe-restaurants, and to receive  
prior information about events in the museums.

\*Except the Crypte archéologique du Parvis de Notre-  
Dame and the Catacombs of Paris

[www.parismusees.paris.fr](http://www.parismusees.paris.fr)