

Black silk faille beaded
evening jacket, ca. 1930s.
Toronto Metropolitan
University FRC1988.02.020A.
Donated by Shelagh Stewart.



EMBELLISHED SILK CREPE EVENING JACKET, LATE 1930s

This black silk crepe evening jacket (FRC1988.02.20A) has long sleeves, padded shoulders and a keyhole neckline with a three inch cream band around the neckline. The jacket is heavily embellished with blue, gray, and silver sequins and beads in leaf motifs. There is no label. It was donated to the Toronto Metropolitan University Fashion Research Collection by Shelagh Stewart in 1988 along with a dress, which is missing from the collection.

The following description and analysis was written by fashion student Kristina McMullin and was revised and edited by Collection Co-ordinator Ingrid Mida.

**By Dr. Ingrid Mida &
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Black silk faille beaded evening jacket, ca. 1930s. Toronto Metropolitan University FRC1988.02.020A. Keyhole neckline. Donated by Shelagh Stewart.

DESCRIPTIONS

The long-sleeved beaded evening jacket sits just above the natural waist and has a keyhole front opening with a closure of two hook and eyes at the neckline. The waistline has a U-shaped edge, meaning the bottom of the jacket curves up to create the U-shape, then back down to the waistline. The bottom of the jacket has the same shape as the keyhole neckline; the two curves reflect one another. The sleeves each have keyhole openings at the top of the arm in a similar shape to the keyhole opening in the front; they are approximately 4.5 inches long and 3 inches wide. The sleeve openings would fall from the shoulder to above the elbow. The sleeve openings have the same three-inch cream band around them. The bottoms of the sleeves have an opening with 3 snaps on them. The jacket has shoulder and waist darts in both the front and back to create shape for the wearer. The elbows have seams to allow the wearer to move their arms, specifically elbows, freely. The jacket is fully lined in the cream silk crepe. Around the both neckline and the armholes, there is beading and sequin detailing. The beads and sequins are in a blue colour family - icy bright blue, to deep navy blue, as well as white and grey. The beading is in an abstracted leaf pattern, with many leaves and vines to create depth around the openings of the garment.



REFLECTION

The beading tells a story about the jacket and its owner, since the beading is all hand done, and is still perfectly intact, eighty years after it was created. This shows that this jacket was well crafted, and was likely worn very little. What makes this jacket interesting and unique is that it has several paradoxes; it has a weightless quality about it, due to the light nature of the silk, however it is weighted down with a pair of weights in the back, at the base of the two back darts, to lay it flat on the wearer. It has an inherently timeless quality about it, while still remaining true to the 1930's aesthetic.

This jacket also contains unspoken messages about the enduring nature of fashion and art. Even though the 1930s was a time of poverty and despair for many people as a result of the Great Depression, artists and designers were still creating beautiful objects. It speaks to human nature that the designer of this silk crepe jacket chose to embellish it with lavish hand beading and reiterates that if you have the ability to look beautiful, you will, no matter what is going on in the surrounding world. When I look at this jacket, I am both inspired and disturbed. I am inspired because of its inherent beauty, and the craftsmanship behind it. However, I am disturbed that during a time when fashion should have been considered most trivial, it was a highlight for some people.

Black silk faille beaded evening jacket, ca. 1930s. Toronto Metropolitan University FRC1988.02.020A. Keyhole detail. Donated by Shelagh Stewart.



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The beauty of this jacket also offers an argument against fast fashion. Fast fashion clothing we consume today lasts a season or two at best, and yet this jacket has withstood the span of time, both stylistically and in its construction. This jacket is in perfect condition; there are no runs in the silk crepe, and no noticeable missing sequins or beads. This jacket would be considered couture quality, due to the hand made techniques, the attention to detail and the fact that the construction has held up over time. There are slight signs of wear on the inside lining, some colour imperfections and signs of fabric disintegration. This is expected, as crème is a colour that shows imperfections and silk is a delicate fabric. The signs of wear are minimal and relatively invisible. With the condition of this jacket, it can be surmised that it was not worn a lot.

SPECULATION

It can be speculated that the wearer of this garment was very wealthy and would likely have had help around the house, since this jacket is all one piece with no full opening and the wearer may have needed assistance in getting it on. It can also be speculated that this jacket would have been worn over top of a dress. The keyhole opening is too low and wide to be worn without another garment underneath, and the wearer would have had another silk crepe piece, most likely a long black sheath dress, very popular in the 1930s. In the absence of a label, it is likely that this jacket would have been a one of a kind piece.



Black silk faille beaded evening jacket, ca. 1930s. Toronto Metropolitan University FRC1988.02.020A. Beading detail. Donated by Shelagh Stewart.

CURATOR'S NOTES BY INGRID MIDA

This garment was donated in 1988 and records indicate that there was also a black sleeveless cocktail dress accepted into the collection at that time. Unfortunately, the matching dress (FRC1988.02.020B) has gone missing and is assumed lost. Nevertheless, the beauty of the beadwork on this garment is characteristic of the romantic and glamorous looks of the 1930s. During this period of economic crisis and political instability, Hollywood offered an escapist fantasy, and those that could afford it emulated the dress silhouettes of the stars of Hollywood, adopting bias cuts that clung to the body as well as romantic and feminine silhouettes. These looks continued into the early 1940s and a similar style of jacket with sequin detailing around a keyhole neckline can be found on page 132 of *Vogue* March 1, 1940 by Capri. Fashion does not always change to correspond with the end of the decade, making the exact dating of garments without provenance information a challenge. Even though the matching dress is missing, this evening jacket offers the opportunity to study the artistry of sequin and beaded embellishments, and consider how the zeitgeist of the times becomes embodied in the garments of a period.