

**Fig. 1.** Emilio Pucci dress, ca. 1969. Toronto Metropolitan University FRC2014.07.430. Photo by Bianca Zanotti.



# TAKING FLIGHT: EMILIO PUCCI AND HIS INFLUENCE ON CLASS AND THE JET AGE

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November 20, 2020

The 1960s were a decade of great social change, particularly for women. The United States approved the first oral contraceptives and the start of the fight for equal workplace opportunities took full force (Napikoski). These changes, in turn, influenced fashion; hemlines returned to shorter, above-the-knee silhouette and colourful prints emerged, signalling a shift from the gloomy post-war decades to a more youthful and liberated society. Leading the trend was Italian designer Emilio Pucci who, through his psychedelic prints, paved the way for a youthful and newly-independent group of women to express their style. Using a material culture approach to analyse an Emilio Pucci dress, I aim to explore how his designs represented a new, emerging class and culture of women in the 1960s, specifically with a focus on jet-set culture.



**Fig. 2.** Invisible zipper and collar button detailing.



**Fig. 3.** "Emilio" signatures. Emilio Pucci dress, ca. 1969. Toronto Metropolitan University FRC2014.07.430. Photo by Bianca Zanotti.

### VISUAL ANALYSIS

Nothing epitomizes Pucci's place in fashion liberation more than this 1969 dress from Toronto Metropolitan University's Fashion Research Collection (see fig. 1). This long-sleeve shift dress features a fluid and floral print in shades of periwinkle, purple and royal blue, consistent with the popularity of ethnic-inspired patterns (Skov; Nelson Best) and deep shades of the '60s. An above-the-knee hem emphasizes the wearer's legs above all else. Without lining, it allows for a sexy see-through look or, for those so inclined to wear a slip, bra holders in the shoulders which could secure the undergarment. The dress is seamlessly held together by a lilac invisible zipper and a series of lilac back buttons that close the turned down collar (see fig. 2). In what became figurative signature Pucci style, literal "Emilio" signatures can be found throughout the design, proving its authenticity and status in the fashion world (see fig. 3). The jersey knit fabric has a crepe-like feel and is made of 100% silk, making it resistant to wrinkles and allowing for increased mobility of the wearer. This fabric detail, in fact, is most crucial to Pucci's fashion influence on the Jet Age and its corresponding culture.

Fifty years after this dress was made, few would debate it remains a vibrant, fashion-forward piece, even though it shows some signs of wear. The seams on the back zipper are loose, and an attempted re-hem of the internal right-side darting is in a tan thread rather than the original blue. Additionally, there are faint perspiration marks under the arms, potentially signalling this dress was not worn often and was a fancier item. Overall, there are many details and features of this dress that signal its status as a luxury item and speak to Pucci's experiences leading him to be influential on Jet Age culture.



**Fig. 4.** Pucci. Jumpsuit. Late 1960s. Kerry Taylor, Bermondsey, London, SE1 4PR. *Bloomsbury Fashion Central*. Web. 08 Nov. 2020. [www.bloomsburyfashioncentral.com.ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/products/berg-fashion-library/museum/kerry-taylor/jumpsuit-65643](http://www.bloomsburyfashioncentral.com.ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/products/berg-fashion-library/museum/kerry-taylor/jumpsuit-65643).

**Fig. 5.** Emilio Pucci. Ensemble. c. 1963. The Museum at FIT, New York. *Bloomsbury Fashion Central*. Web. 08 Nov. 2020. [www.bloomsburyfashioncentral.com.ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/products/berg-fashion-library/museum/the-museum-at-fit/ensemble-29691](http://www.bloomsburyfashioncentral.com.ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/products/berg-fashion-library/museum/the-museum-at-fit/ensemble-29691).

### **HISTORY OF PUCCI — THE MAN AND THE BRAND**

Emilio Pucci, also known as the *Marchese di Barsento*, was born into Florentine aristocracy in November 1914 and lived in Florence’s Palazzo Pucci. He studied for a career in politics with degrees from the United States’ University of Georgia and Reed College, as well as a doctorate from the Università di Firenze. From a young age, Pucci was exposed to worldly destinations and the phenomenon of flight. When World War II began, Pucci returned to Italy from the United States to be part of the Italian Air Force – the common military role for aristocrats (Collins). As a result of his time in the air, Pucci was able to experience the kaleidoscope of colours of the world around him. This wartime experience proved a strong influence on his future designs, evident through the psychedelic prints that are a staple of the Pucci brand.

The first notable acknowledgement of his fashion talent was in 1947 while skiing in trendy Zermatt, Switzerland, where Pucci designed colourful ski clothes for himself and a friend. Pucci’s fresh take on skiwear – including spindle pants and bright colours – attracted the interest of *Harper’s Bazaar* photographer Toni Frissell (Kennedy). From there, Pucci’s designs gained traction and the likes of iconic fashion editor Diana Vreeland and Lord & Taylor’s top buyer. Here is where Pucci’s foray into the international fashion world began.

According to author Shirley Kennedy, the mid-1960s saw the height of Puccimania (581) – women around the world were being redefined in a more youthful, sensual way with the help of Pucci’s lively, kaleidoscopic designs (see fig. 4 and fig. 5). Stanley Marcus of Neiman Marcus once said, “Because... Americans were so colour-starved after the war, viewing his work for the first time was like seeing fireworks” (Collins).

### **PUCCI, FASHION AND THE JET AGE**

In her book *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*, Elizabeth Wilson states that 1960s style was about style itself – “style as a way of life, style as the self, and yet also style as fun” (178). Through his playful and youthful prints, Pucci’s designs married Wilson’s statement of ‘60s style and the concept of the “Italian look,” which incorporated casual aesthetics and aristocratic elegance (Steele and Carrara). Pucci’s fabric patterns were inspired by the vibrancy of international destinations such as Bali and Africa, and the historic, aesthetic features of his home country (Collins) – a direct result of his privileged upbringing and aristocracy.

After WWII, people returned to travelling for pleasure. The wealthy and notable – for example the Onassis and Grace Kelly – were migrating to resort destinations like Capri for their holidays and Pucci took note. He quit the Air Force in 1950 to open the Emilio of Capri boutique, where the jet set could buy their most colourful resort apparel.

As his designs became more popular, the 1960s also started gaining traction as the Jet Age. Commercial flights became more accessible and people could travel anywhere in the world at a faster speed than ever before. As a result of the increase in travel, clothes needed to be lightweight, durable and stylish, ultimately leading to the notion that weightless and fashionable clothing meant the wearer lived a modern and luxurious lifestyle (Brownie). Magazine articles were written to show women how to plan their travel wardrobes and some airlines even offered sartorial services, which included “what to wear to board a plane or on a plane, night flight clothes, [and] how to retain an uncrushed look for the long journey” (Maynard 115), only further proving that fashion and travel were synonymous with status during this time.

To cater to the jet setter’s lightweight wardrobe, Pucci made the majority of his dresses and shirts from silk jersey – a material that was light, wrinkle-free and had the ability to roll tightly and pack easily (Ward). Even more, the silk jersey fabric kept the wearer cool in hot temperatures, making it perfect for resort wear. Taking inspiration from Chanel’s use of silk jersey in the 1930s, Pucci favoured the ease and comfort that came with the fabric and its ability to fall gracefully on the female form. “The Pucci dress was both a symbol and passport of the new era,” said author Marilyn Bender. “Fragile-looking but indestructible, chic and sexy, it was the capsule wardrobe for the mobile woman” (qtd. in Tiemeyer 76).



**Fig. 6.** Braniff Airway stewardesses in Emilio Pucci designed uniforms, 1960s. Societytexas. *Pucci Flight Uniforms for Braniff Airlines Archives*. 30 Apr. 2019, [societytexas.com/tag/pucci-flight-uniforms-for-braniff-airlines/](https://societytexas.com/tag/pucci-flight-uniforms-for-braniff-airlines/).

### **THE PUCCI UNIFORM AND FEMININITY**

Throughout the height of his career, Pucci's love for fashion, travel and the female form established itself not only in resort wear, but also in uniforms. In 1965, in an attempt to bring life to airplane stewardesses' fashion, Pucci designed a set of uniforms for Texas' Braniff Airways in his signature style (see fig 6). A few years prior to this collaboration, Helen Gurley Brown published her controversial book *Sex and the Single Girl*, which brought attention to the young, single women entering the workforce and planning to establish careers. While airline stewardesses at this time weren't actually able to aspire to life-long careers due to marriage bans (Tiemeyer 75), these women embodied Gurley Brown's 1960s icon of femininity – single, and financially and sexually independent (Nelson Best).

At the time, stewardess uniforms were very stark and lacked colour. As a result, Braniff's advertising team wanted to take advantage of the colourful fashion of the '60s which represented youth, playfulness, and all the tropical destinations the airline would take its passengers. Even more, Braniff advertising executive Mary Wells wanted these colours to cater more to the sophisticated, elite demographic that would fly to these destinations. To execute this, Wells hired Pucci and top American interior designer Alexander Girard to design the clothing and plane interiors, respectively. This, as a result, assured "Braniff's colours had a patina of elitism" (Tiemeyer 72). The images were published in *Life* magazine and Pucci's collection was deemed one of "the most successful airline marketing campaigns ever" (Black).

## **CONCLUSION**

Through his love for travel and women, Pucci helped define the 1960s Jet Age and, ultimately, the new icon of femininity. His vibrant colours and avant garde prints complemented the feminist social movements that took shape in the '60s, fighting for more equality and liberation. Even more so, his designs spoke to the luxuriousness of resort wear, creating a divide between classes with the simple weight of a dress and contributing to the growing popularity of the fashion industry's resort collections, which can be dated to the 1920s (Schmidt). Just as the jet-set culture changed post-WWII, it will be interesting to explore the impact of COVID-19 on travel, fashion and elitism. If current trends continue, the global pandemic will only deepen income inequality, making luxury brands and travel even more exclusive. At a time when a majority were able to travel globally and afford some luxury pieces pre-COVID, a post-pandemic world may usher in an era of elitism, albeit temporarily, of jet-setting comparable to the 1960s, truly for the rich and famous. It is in moments like this, as was the case decades ago with Pucci, that another innovative mind may emerge with an iconic design for the ages – a design that decades from now will find a home in Toronto Metropolitan University's Fashion Research Collection as an icon of the post-COVID era.

## **CREATIVE COMPONENT**

For my creative component, I chose to create three Pucci-esque fabrics inspired by current popular travel destinations – Mykonos (see fig. 7), Japan (see fig. 8) and Miami (see fig. 9). Using images found on Google as well as my own to establish the colour palette (see "Creative Component Process Work"), I created designs using Apple's Keynote program that incorporated local features and psychedelic shapes as a nod to Pucci's influence on 1960s jet-set culture. To determine my three locations, I referenced CN Traveller's city guides and 2019 top destination lists for a better idea of the most popular travel locations and iconic areas in each. This creative component helped me better understand the creativity that goes into creating designs like Pucci's – balancing the line between luxury and avant garde colours and shapes.

# MYKONOS



Fig. 7. Pucci-style fabric inspired by Mykonos. Created by Bianca Zanotti.

# JAPAN



Fig. 8. Pucci-style fabric inspired by Japan. Created by Bianca Zanotti.



# MIAMI

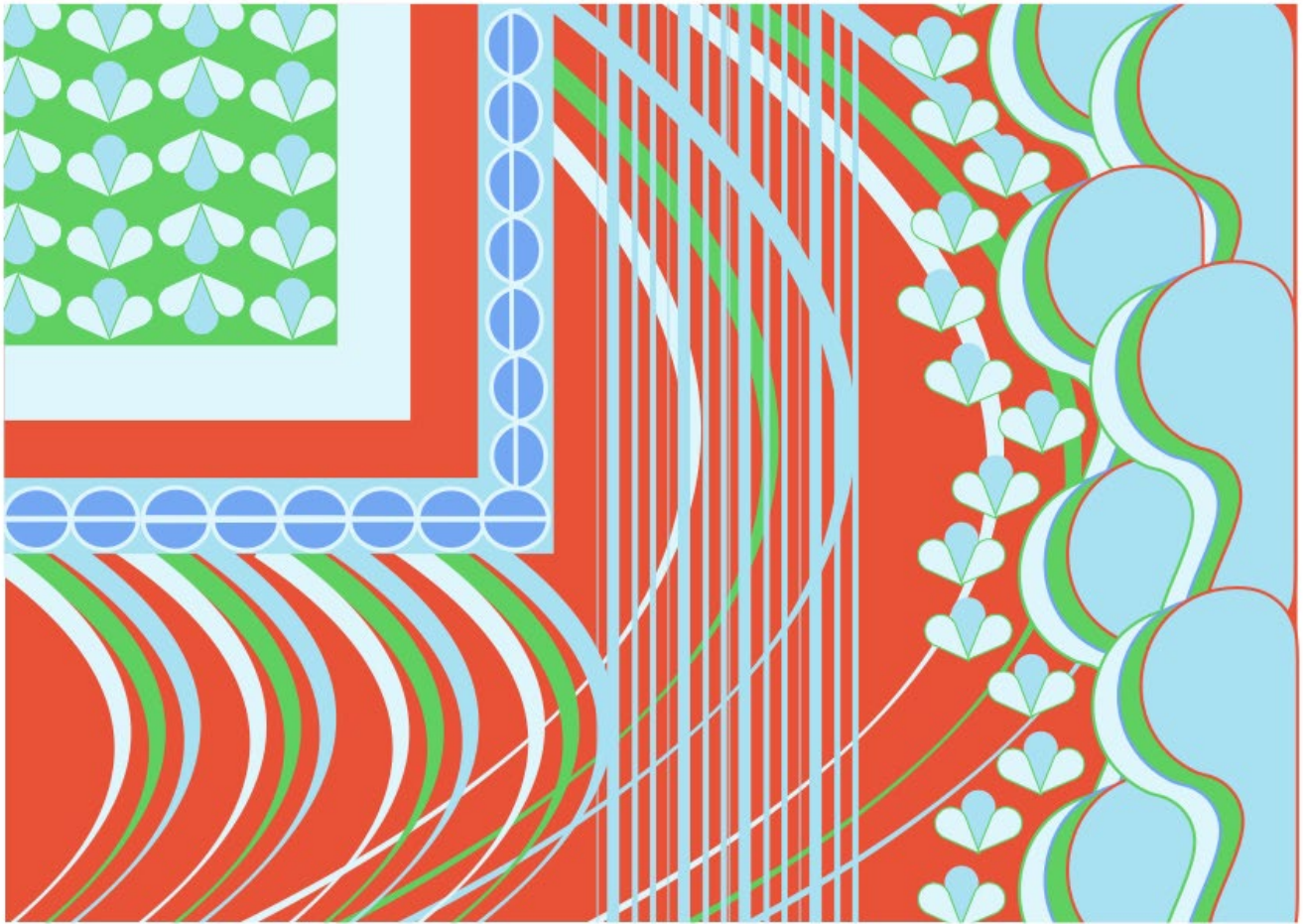


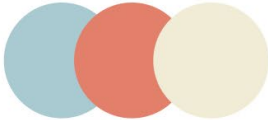
Fig. 9. Pucci-style fabric inspired by Miami. Created by Bianca Zanotti.

**CREATIVE COMPONENT PROCESS WORK**

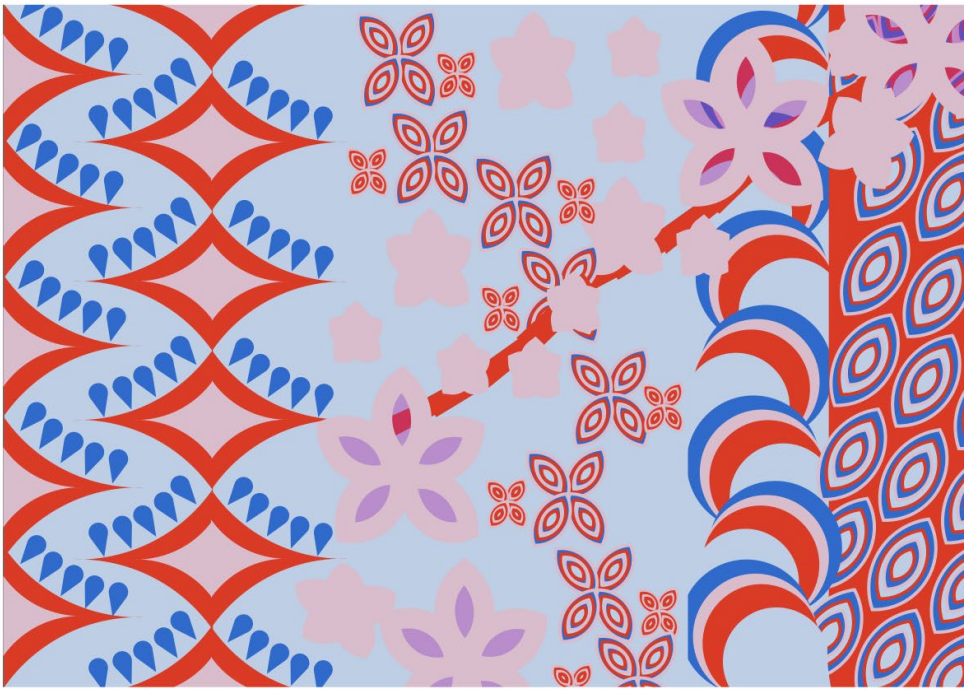
MYKONOS



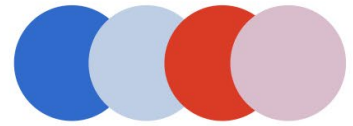
Mykonos 2018. Photo by Bianca Zanotti.



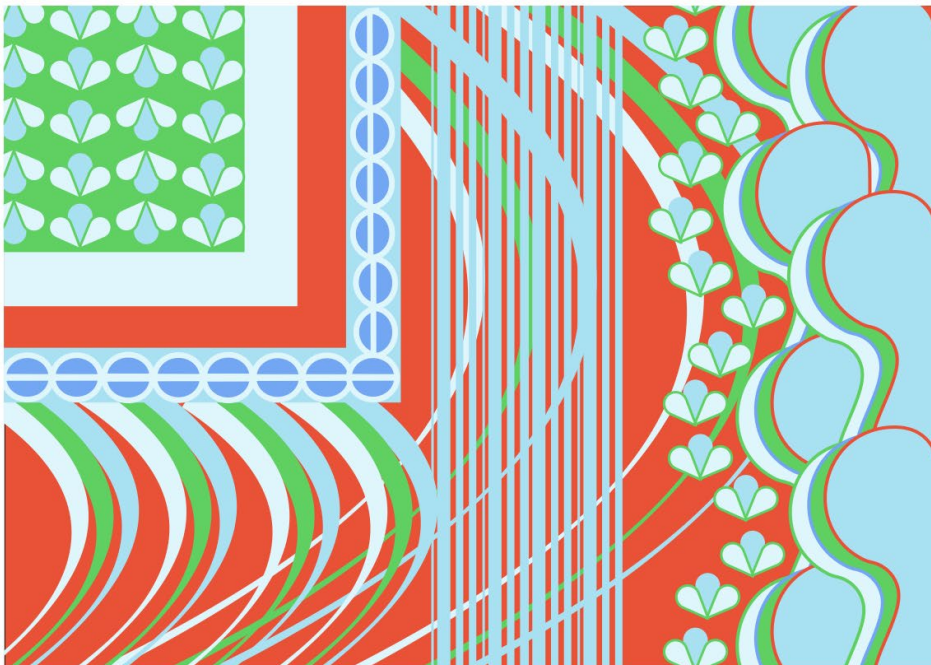
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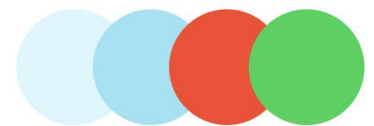
Himeji, Japan at Himeji Castle in spring season. Image from Shutterstock by Sean Pavone, <https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/himeji-japan-castle-spring-season-776445706>.



# MIAMI



Fendi store exterior in the Miami Design District. Image from Miami Design District, <https://www.miamidesigndistrict.net/listing/461/fendi/>



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