Joset Walker fashion design scrapbooks, circa 1932-1988
KA.0045

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard
French-born Joset Walker (1902-1999) graduated from the New York School of Fine and Applied Art (later, Parsons School of Design) in 1928, and soon became a leading designer of ready-to-wear clothing for Saks Fifth Avenue's Theatrical Department. In 1932, Walker served briefly as head costume designer for RKO Pictures, working under the name Josette De Lima. She returned to New York and began designing for
wholesale manufacturer David M. Goodstein in 1940, before leaving the company to found Joset Walker Designs. Often incorporating Mexican and Guatamalan textiles, colors and styles into her designs for the American market, Walker reached the pinnacle of her career in the 1940s and '50s as a designer of casual, feminine clothing for women. The Joset Walker collection includes pages from Walker's scrapbooks, largely comprised of clippings of advertisements for her designs, but also including publicity, photographs of department store window displays, and ephemera documenting Walker's career.

Preferred Citation note
[Identification of item], [date (if known)], Joset Walker fashion design scrapbooks, KA.0045, box __, folder __, New School Archives, The New School, New York, New York.

Biographical note
Joset Walker was born Josette Georgette Legouy in France in 1902, and was educated in a convent school. She immigrated to the United States at age 14, and lived with friends in Chicago before studying at the New York School of Fine and Applied Art (later, Parsons The New School for Design), where she befriended future fashion designers Claire McCardell (KA.0082) and Mildred Orrick (KA.0067).

In 1930, after opening the bridal department at Stern's department store in New York, Walker began working for Saks Fifth Avenue's Theatrical Department. In 1932, she followed her Saks' boss, designer Margaret Pemberton (wife of producer Brock Pemberton), to Hollywood, where she served as assistant and then head costume designer for RKO Pictures during David O. Selznick's brief tenure there as chief of production. Working at RKO under the name Josette De Lima, she created Katharine Hepburn's costumes for Hepburn's debut film, Bill of Divorcement, among other high-profile productions. Walker left RKO after one year there, claiming to detest Hollywood.

Back in New York, Walker turned to designing activewear. She enjoyed a long affiliation with the Seventh Avenue manufacturer David M. Goodstein, Inc., designing what Walker described as “American active life clothes.” She often adapted textiles, colors, and design concepts inspired by South American and Carribean clothing into her sportswear. Later, Walker designed under her own label, "Joset Walker Clothes," reaching the height of her acclaim in the 1940s and '50s.

In the 1970s, Walker retired from fashion design to concentrate on restoring an 18th century house in Flemington, New Jersey. She died in 1999.
Scope and Contents of Collection

The Joset Walker collection consists of the contents of two scrapbooks kept by Walker. While largely consisting of news and magazine clippings of advertisements for Walker's designs in the 1940s and '50s, the scrapbooks also include photographs of actresses and models wearing Walker's designs, department store window displays, publicity materials, and biographical clippings about the designer.

Scrapbook 1 covers the years 1932 through 1936, documenting Walker's costume design work for RKO Pictures, with costume stills of Danish-born actress Gwili Andre (autographed), Irene Dunne, Constance Bennett, and Katharine Hepburn in Walker's costumes for Hepburn's film debut, "Bill of Divorcement," as well as photographs of Walker alone and at work with colleague Kate Lawson in RKO's wardrobe department. Some of the RKO photographs are by Ernest A. Bachrach. Also included in this scrapbook are clippings advertising Walker's early activewear for women, which feature models engaged in activities such as hunting, archery, boating, and tennis (Walker designed a line of tennis wear for Amelia Earhart); and several programs for events featuring Walker's designs.

Scrapbook 2 consists predominantly of department store advertisements for Walker's activewear designs clipped from regional newspapers, as well as fashion features from national magazines such as Harper's Bazaar, Life, Mademoiselle, and Vogue. The scrapbook also includes merchandise reports from the Retail News Bureau and print promotional materials from textile manufacturers. While most of the scrapbook covers the years 1952 through 1955, clippings from the 1940s are found in the second half of the scrapbook, as well as biographical clippings about Walker dating from the 1960s through the '80s.

The scrapbooks have been dismantled, and certain materials, including all photographs, are housed separately from the scrapbook pages. The scrapbooks do not contain materials pre-dating Walker's work for RKO in 1932, with the exception of an advertisement for the Stern Brothers department store bridal department.

While all of the materials in the collection deal with Walker's professional career, a small number of clippings document her life in the 1950s and afterwards. Of note is a complete sample issue of a magazine, Suburbia Today, featuring an interview that profiles Joset Walker's efforts to design for the American suburban housewife.

Organization and Arrangement

The pages are arranged in the order of the original scrapbooks, except where clippings and photographs have come unglued or have been purposefully detached from scrapbook pages. In these cases, loose clippings, photographs, and other materials are in folders following the numbered pages.
Administrative Information

Publication Information
Kellen Design Archives July 15, 2011

Conditions Governing Access note
Collection is open for research use. Please contact archivist@newschool.edu for appointment.

Use Restrictions
To publish images of material from this collection, permission must be obtained in writing from the New School Archives. Please contact: archivist@newschool.edu.

Immediate Source of Acquisition note

Keywords for Searching Related Subjects

Corporate Name(s)
• Lord & Taylor.
• RKO Pictures.

Genre(s)
• Clippings (information artifacts).
• Photographs.
• Scrapbooks.

Occupation(s)
• Costume designers.
• Fashion designers.

Personal Name(s)
• Andre, Gwili, 1908-1959

Subject(s)
• Advertising -- Fashion.
• Bathing suits -- United States -- 20th century -- Pictorial works.
• Costume design.
• Display of merchandise.
• Fashion design.
• Motion picture industry.
• Show windows.
• Women's clothing -- United States -- 20th century -- Pictorial works.

Other Finding Aids note

For selected item-level description and images from the Joset Walker fashion design scrapbooks, see The New School Archives Digital Collections at http://digitalarchives.library.newschool.edu/index.php/Detail/collections/KA0045.

Collection Inventory

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