



Passion for Fashion (81)

Tue, 3rd Dec 2013 GMT+1/BST

Lot 70

Estimate: £40000 - £60000 + Fees

A fine and important Elsa Schiaparelli couture Zodiac jacket, the Astrology Collection, Winter, 1938-39, Paris labelled and numbered 64010, of midnight blue velvet, with twelve magnificent Lesage couched and embroidered gilt strip signs of the zodiac (or glyphs) to the front opening and neck, edged with rhinestones and crimped metal strip, the front panels and rear hips sprinkled with miniscule glass bugle beaded stardust, rhinestone and gold thread embroidered planets and constellations, glass shooting stars with embroidered comet tails, the left shoulder and hip panel embroidered and beaded with the Big Dipper (part of the Ursa Major constellation and Schiaparelli's good-luck emblem), the fabric gently gathered over the hips and held in a vertical band at the centre back, invisibly fastened by gilt hooks and silk-wrapped eyes and lined in blue silk, bust 86cm, 34in, waist 71cm, 28in

This is arguably one of the most beautiful of all Schiaparelli's creations with its glittering embroidery, shimmering star-shaped beads and rhinestones set against a midnight blue velvet ground. It would have been worn over a matching bias-cut evening gown. Marlene Dietrich, a huge fan and client of Schiaparelli, ordered numerous pieces from her. She was photographed in her Beverly Hills residence in 1938 wearing the zodiac ensemble with matching dress.

The collection was first presented in Paris in August 1938. Schiap was fascinated by the night sky that she used to view as a child through her uncle's telescope - the renowned astronomer Giovanni Schiaparelli, director of the Brera Observatory in Milan. He inspired in her a lifelong fascination with the celestial realm. He commented that the moles on her cheeks reminded him of the Big Dipper which she adopted as her 'lucky star', incorporating it into printed fabrics, the fabric lining her salon, her own personal jewellery as well as on this magnificent jacket.

Schiaparelli's press agent Hortense MacDonald stated that the Astrology collection was defined by Euclid's famous geometric treatise - 'Elements'. The lustrous embroidery and superb condition of this jacket, make it one of the most important and beautiful Schiaparelli garments ever to come onto the market.

Literature: 'Elsa Schiaparelli' by Palmer White, p.90;
'Shocking: The Art and Fashion of Elsa Schiaparelli' by Dilys Blum pp.188-9.