



Lady in Red

Leading textiles auctioneer Kerry Taylor explains why this fabulous frock is a sure-fire showstopper

Made in rich silk faille fabric, this gorgeous dress includes integral corsetry, so its wearer could slip it on without thinking about underwear. It sold at auction on 24 June for £4,250



WHY IS THIS SPECIAL?

This sumptuous silk faille Christian Dior cocktail dress dates from the Autumn/Winter collection of 1958 and was designed by Yves Saint Laurent, who was then just 22. Dior died in 1957, so this would have been Saint Laurent's second collection as head designer of the fashion house.

HOW IS IT TYPICAL OF YVES SAINT LAURENT?

The raised waistline is a feature of his designs from this era, while the sash first appeared in his 1956 collection. Its integral corsetry is exquisite too – it even includes suspenders.

WHO WORE IT?

A woman who was very confident in her own style – and who had plenty of money! It's the colour that's so striking. Most would have gone for safe black, so imagine the impact this deep raspberry shade would have made. This dress was part of a collection in Germany – we know that Dior was very popular there in the 1950s. Women everywhere in Europe were fed up with the dress restrictions imposed by the war.

WHO WOULD YOU EXPECT TO BUY IT?

Our clients range from private individuals looking for something exceptional to wear, to collectors, museums and galleries.

I SPY...

This piece is in very good condition, but generally, look out for damage – and sweat stains, of course. This dress has an estimate of £3,000, but an absolutely perfect piece would be worth around £8,000 to £12,000.

MAY I TRY IT ON?

I'm afraid not! We see ourselves as custodians of these dresses and many of them are of museum quality. We just can't take the risk. We might let you slip into some of the more modern pieces we auction, though – perhaps a Thierry Mugler jacket.

WHERE CAN I SEE ONE LIKE IT?

Try the V&A's Textiles & Fashion collection, which has a very similar Christian Dior number tucked away in a corner. Fabulous. ■