



**DESKS, DRAWERS AND DILEMMAS:
THE HIDDEN MEANINGS BEHIND
SCHIAPARELLI'S DESK SUIT**

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Between 1936-1939, Elsa Schiaparelli and Salvador Dali collaborated on a series of Surrealist-inspired fashions. One of the more thought-provoking but perhaps most neglected in terms of detailed investigation and elaboration has been Schiaparelli's "Desk Suit." In 1936, Dali drew "The City of Drawers," an agonised nude with a torso composed of a series of half-open drawers. There is little doubt that this drawing was the source of artistic inspiration behind Schiaparelli's now-famous Desk Suit. However it is yet to be determined whether this specific collaboration was anything more than another instance of a fashion designer "borrowing" from an art style in an attempt to legitimize an artistic pursuit, often viewed as frivolous and superficial in comparison to the "fine arts."

In this paper, the concerns of artistic inspiration and hidden meanings are examined in relation to Freudian psychoanalytic theory and Lacan's concept of the "Mirror Stage," specifically the notion of "corps morcele." Rather than focus on materialistic analysis, it seeks to explore the dialectics of fragmentation and wholeness since these themes are clearly articulated in the Desk Suit. This garment linked Dali's obsession with drawers as metaphors for the orifices of the woman's body with Schiaparelli's fondness for pocket as "props" with which to play upon the surface of a woman's body.

At a time when there has been a renewed fascination with Surrealism and art historians to cultural critics have been exploring the gamut of its influence, it is not surprising that Schiaparelli and her involvement with the Surrealist movement in general, and with Dali in particular, has created much interest. Such interest warrants a scholarly and comprehensive investigation. However this paper explores the complex issues and hidden messages surrounding one collaborative episode, the Desk Suit.