Mary Quant and models at the launch of ‘Quant Afoot’ footwear in 1967, © PA Prints 2008

Press images are available to download: www.vam.ac.uk/dundee/info/press-images
“Clothes are a statement about oneself or what one wants to be.”

“All the way through life women had to dress...the way the man in her life saw her.”

“She was never allowed to dress the part of being her. I wanted to design clothes for real people.”

“Fashion is for now. If you’re still enjoying living and you’re still enjoying being a woman, one wants, surely, to wear the clothes of today.”

– Mary Quant

V&A Dundee will celebrate the spirit of 1960s rebellion with its first major fashion exhibition, *Mary Quant*, from 4 April to 6 September.

This exhibition is the first international retrospective on the iconic British designer who disrupted the fashion establishment, captured the spirit of London in the 1960s, and started a fashion revolution that a whole generation wanted to take part in – and still continues today.

Mary Quant designed clothes that made people feel good. She made quality designer fashion affordable through licensing her youthful and playful brand, creating dressmaking patterns, make-up and accessories that all showcased her iconic daisy logo.

Mary Quant encouraged a new age of feminism, inspiring young women to rebel against the traditional clothing worn by their mothers and grandmothers. Her shop Bazaar opened in 1955, the year after World War Two food rationing ended, and her colourful designs were a reaction against the austerity and drabness of post-war London.

Mary Quant is famous for popularising the miniskirt, but her designs offered many different versions of femininity and challenged the conventional gender stereotypes of post-war Britain.

Key objects featured within the exhibition include the pioneering ‘Wet Collection’ PVC rainwear, a jute miniskirt, and designs that playfully subverted menswear at a time when women were still banned from wearing trousers in formal settings such as restaurants.

The exhibition in Dundee will also feature the stories of women who made outfits from Mary Quant’s dressmaking patterns, gathered through V&A Dundee’s #SewQuant campaign, as well as a new film looking at contemporary female designers who, like Mary Quant, are forging their own way through today’s rapidly shifting fashion industry.

The exhibition is part of V&A Dundee’s Fashion 2020 season, led by Curator Meredith More.

*Mary Quant* was curated by Jenny Lister and Stephanie Wood of the V&A and shown at V&A South Kensington from 6 April 2019 to 16 February 2020.

*Mary Quant* at V&A Dundee is supported by Barclays Private Bank.

#QuantDundee #fashion2020

vam.ac.uk/dundee/maryquant

For more information, please contact the V&A Dundee press office | press@vandadundee.org | +44 (0)1382 411 655
Bazaar and the early days

“We knew we had to do things ourselves, or nothing would happen at all.”

Mary Quant, her future husband Alexander Plunket Greene and friend Archie McNair invest in Quant’s fashion sense and become business partners in a shop in Chelsea’s King’s Road. They strip out the Victorian windows, replacing them with a modern shop front.

Quant combs wholesale warehouses and art schools sourcing quirky garments and jewellery to create Bazaar, “a bouillabaisse of clothes… and peculiar odds and ends”.

The shop opens with a party. The stock sells out. Exhausted but exhilarated, Quant makes dresses in her bedsit, buying fabric from the grand department store Harrods each morning. Bazaar transforms the formal experience of shopping.
Subverting menswear

“Borrowing from the boys.”

Quant takes tailoring cloth intended for city gents’ suits or military uniforms and camps it up into fun, relaxed garments for women, using fashion to question hierarchies and gender rules. Her designs reflect the appetite for satire in the media, mocking traditional British institutions and attitudes, from religion to snobbery. Plunket Greene concocts witty and irreverent names for outfits, taking inspiration from renowned male figures, professions and establishments such as ‘Byron’, ‘Barrister’ and ‘Bank of England’.

Trousers and jeans are popular with students, beatniks and subcultures outside mainstream fashion. They are considered inappropriate for women and are even banned for them to wear in formal settings such as restaurants. Quant’s trousers are smart and practical, and she wears them anywhere she wants.

**Waistcoat and tie dress, 1962 (V&A)**

With its tailored waistcoat, pinstriped shirt and spotted tie, this ensemble features a number of familiar masculine motifs that Quant consistently returned to in her designs.

It is a key example of her playfully rebellious approach to established gender norms in fashion.

It featured in one of the few Mary Quant advertisements, probably commissioned to promote the brand’s new wholesale venture, modelled by Celia Hammond.


Taking a natty striped twill normally used for formal tailoring, Quant makes a striking dress with enlarged collar and cuffs.

Like other dresses in the same collection, named after august British institutions, the title ‘Bank of England’ as a dress for a woman seems especially ironic, considering that most women could not open a bank account without a male relative’s written permission.

*Jill Kennington wearing Bank of England dress by Mary Quant*

© John Cowan Archive
Ginger Group

“Quant clothes at budget prices to buy a piece at a time.”

Quant strides into new territory with her Ginger Group collection of 1963. The name is a political term for a pressure group, derived from the use of ginger as a verb to pep things up. In this case, Quant’s aim is to change the course of fashion by producing fun, edgy clothing for a wider clientele.

The first Ginger Group collection is based on the American sportswear principle of interchangeable separates. Promoted with a typically high-energy fashion show, the clothes are notable for their unusual colour palette of ‘prune’, ‘ginger’ and ‘putty’. With a new graphic identity and a lower price point, the range provides countless mix-and-match possibilities combined with the cachet of Quant, available in 75 outlets across the UK, which included Lilian’s in Dundee, Lewis’s and House of Fraser in Glasgow, and Darling & Co. in Edinburgh.

Striped-top pinafore, 1963 (Mary Quant Archive)

This boldly striped knee-length pinafore, made from thick double-jersey fabric, was an early version of the easy, stretchy minidresses which Quant later turned into her trademark look.

Quant found a fabric sample in the USA and her assistant, Shirley Shurville, tracked down a British supplier.

The graphic, almost op art effect of the outfit lent itself to the cartoon line drawings for the Ginger Group branding and advertising.

The Wet Collection

“Bewitched… with this super shiny man-made stuff and its shrieking colours… its gleaming liquorice black, white and ginger.”

Quant launches her ‘Wet Collection’ in April 1963 at the Hôtel de Crillon, Paris. The collection features a relatively new material called polyvinyl chloride (PVC), a shiny plastic-coated cotton which reflects increasing fascination with modernity.

The show is attended by influential fashion editors and Quant achieves her first magazine cover for British Vogue. Although many store buyers place orders, issues with sealing the PVC seams in mass-production delay the collection’s launch on the high street. It takes another two years before a collaboration with British manufacturer Alligator Rainwear results in a commercially viable range of Mary Quant PVC raincoats.
PVC tabard raincoat and hat, 1963 (Fashion Museum, Bath)

Seen here submerged in water to the knees, wearing a PVC white tabard raincoat and matching sou’wester hat, Jill Kennington was one of five models who first presented the ‘Wet Collection’ at the grand Hôtel de Crillon, Paris. The original programme lists 60 looks which Quant recalled were presented in just 15 minutes.

The show was in Quant’s signature high-energy style, set to jazz music and needing a manically-fast rate of outfit-changes when compared with conventional, often sedate Parisian couture fashion shows.

Jill Kennington wearing white PVC rain tunic and hat
Courtesy of Fashion Museum Bath. © John Cowan Archive
The miniskirt

“The Shock of the Knee.”

Quant’s ‘knee-skimming’ outfits are first noticed by the media in 1960. An emerging street style, shorter skirts develop in tandem with teenage dance crazes. Quant’s designs, often based on practical schoolgirl pinafores, adapt the look for grown-ups with hemlines gradually rising to well above the knee. Although exclusive Paris couturier André Courrèges achieves international publicity for higher hemlines in 1964, Quant, as a female celebrity designer, becomes recognised as inventor and ambassador for the style.

By 1966, many young metropolitan women are wearing very short skirts and the term ‘miniskirt’ is widely used. Despite attracting outrage from the older generation, the mini eventually becomes an accepted part of fashion as well as an international symbol of London’s youthful look and of women’s liberation.

Topless, 1965 (Fashion Museum, Bath)

Architect Alison Smithson wore garments by Quant and other modern young designers such as Foale & Tuffin. Along with her husband Peter, she was a key proponent of the Brutalist school of architecture, reshaping the urban landscape of post-war Britain in the 1960s.

This dress design advanced the move towards bold graphic outlines and shorter skirts.

The choice of utilitarian jute for a fashionable garment made a striking statement. The jute was probably woven by Don and Low, Dundee.

The jersey dress

“I want free-flowing, feminine lines that compliment a woman’s shape... I want relaxed clothes, suited to the actions of normal life.”

Quant discovers a new type of wool jersey that is heat-bonded to an acetate backing and available in the brightest, deepest colours. Previously used in underwear and for rugby or football kit, jersey’s smooth, fluid qualities are perfectly suited to Quant’s signature sporty minidresses produced in many different permutations, worn with matching berets, tights and shoes – giving a total top-to-toe block of colour.

Machine-knitted jersey is revolutionising the textile industry. From America, Quant brings to Britain the idea of ‘intimate apparel’ and jersey loungewear, to be worn only at home. Pushing at traditional boundaries of taste, she designs minidresses with matching undershorts, to be worn on the streets.
Quant’s quest for fun, simplicity and comfort reached its ultimate expression in the ‘Footer’ jersey shift dress, available in several bold bright colours with contrasting white details, like the team strip worn by footballers.

**Home dressmaking**

“Mary Quant home patterns come to town!”

An army of home dressmakers can make their own Mary Quant designs when she signs a deal with Butterick. Costing little more than a copy of Vogue, the sewing patterns make it possible to stitch Quant’s shift dresses in either cheap and cheerful or luxury fabrics, depending on taste and budget. Just ten years earlier, Quant adapted Butterick patterns for home-made dresses to fill the rails of Bazaar.

For home knitters, Quant designs patterns for skinny jumpers and socks to promote Courtelle, an acrylic yarn produced by textile company Courtaulds. Later, she produces a range of Crimplene dressmaking fabrics with chemical company ICI. Such high-profile collaborations ensure that Mary Quant targets more consumers, while enabling traditional manufacturers to keep their products relevant in a competitive, globalising market.

**Miss Muffet, 1964 (Sheila Hope)**

‘Miss Muffet’ was one of Quant’s most iconic designs and the first to be adapted for her range of Butterick dressmaking patterns.

Sheila Hope made this version for her 21st birthday and recalled, “I used the finest quality Liberty wool. At the time I was at Bournemouth College of Art and with only my grant to support me, I made all my clothes the entire time and for many years afterwards. This dress is my prized possession!”
A paintbox of ideas

“I aim to create a total look but one with so many variations that each girl can select and reject, to find her own permutation.”

In a fortuitous meeting of minds, Quant finds a manufacturer to develop an expanding range of stockings and tights in quirky colours to complement her clothes. These are sold alongside new products like plastic-moulded shoes and PVC bags. She even joins forces with the thriving toy industry to create Daisy, a doll with miniature Quant outfits at pocket-money prices.

After years of research, Quant launches a range of cosmetics, enabling customers from Surbiton to San Francisco to buy into the Mary Quant brand with a daisy-logoed eyeliner brush or silver-cased lipstick. In 1973, Quant Crayons were launched in 20 colours. They were, Quant claimed, “the best idea” she’d ever had.

Using clever marketing and high-visibility packaging, Mary Quant becomes one of the first and most varied lifestyle brands to inspire a generation of shoppers.

Liberated fashion

“I didn’t have time to wait for women’s lib.”

In this time of growing activism and struggle for equal rights, Quant has a visionary take on the role of women, leading by speaking out, working hard and taking risks. Her assertive, liberating minidresses express the changes of post-war Britain, giving women a strong, independent style of their own.
Her designs in the later 1960s and early ’70s continue her favourite theme of challenging traditional stereotypes, while Quant herself wears increasingly androgynous, gently feminised and casual versions of masculine tailoring, as if to prove the point.

However, she credits her King’s Road customers as her inspiration and the ones leading the feminist rebellion. In 1967, she describes the young as, “prototypes of a whole new race of women... It’s their questioning attitude that makes them important and different”. Quant designs fun, wearable clothes for this new race, with fashion that enables free movement and self-expression.

**Penny Wise, 1966 (Deborah Cherry)**

With romper-suit straps, round collar and a patch pocket, this minidress is a literal expression of Quant’s borrowing from children’s garments.

Worn while a schoolgirl, Deborah Cherry later said, “these were clothes for a young generation: bold, striking, easy to wear – they had a really strong feel-good factor for young women ‘walking tall’, with a style of our own”.

**Dress with epaulettes and tie, 1966 (V&A)**

With striped tie and epaulettes, this simple shift dress shows Quant using fashion to play with masculine and military conventions at a time when the Vietnam War was being fought.

Quant wore a dress of this style, as did her cosmetics consultants in shops like Selfridges, until the ties proved impractical, getting in the way of make-up demonstrations.
Style evolution

“Switching to the sounds of the seventies.”

Having created the minimal look which defined the 1960s, Quant’s style becomes eclectic and retrospective amid the economic and political uncertainties of the 1970s. Still combining Victorian details with bright colours and a clean, modern finish, Quant’s designs retain her characteristic sense of fun. As well as reinvented Liberty prints, Quant exploits new patterned synthetics and launches a range of platform shoes to complete her outfits.

She applies her designer’s eye to home furnishings, helping to popularise duvet covers, with industry collaborations that capitalise on her celebrity and flair for marketing. Changes in UK manufacturing lead to the closure of the Ginger Group label in 1975, but Mary Quant designs continue to sell through boutiques and department stores, acting as a banner for the lucrative cosmetic and hosiery markets.

Two models wearing striped ensembles, Spring 1973
Image courtesy Mary Quant Archive / Victoria and Albert Museum, London