Audio Guide Transcript

ROARING

ART, FASHION, AND THE AUTOMOBILE IN FRANCE, 1918–1939

April 12–July 27, 2025
Ticketed Exhibition Galleries

SAINT LOUIS ART MUSEUM

Stop 1
Taylor Hall
Introduction

Speakers

Min Jung Kim
The Barbara B. Taylor Director
Saint Louis Art Museum

Genevieve Cortinovis
Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Associate Curator of Decorative Arts and Design
Saint Louis Art Museum

[Min Jung Kim]
Hello, I am Min Jung Kim, Barbara B. Taylor Director of the Saint Louis Art Museum.

I am delighted to welcome you to the audio guide for *Roaring: Art, Fashion, and the Automobile in France, 1918–1939*. This exhibition explores the golden age of automobile design in France between the world wars—a period of remarkable creativity and innovation as well as social turbulence. Featuring 12 exemplary French cars alongside paintings, photographs, sculpture, furniture, fashion, and ephemera, *Roaring* spotlights the automobile's transformative influence on modern life.

To tell you more, I'd like to introduce the exhibition's curator, Genevieve Cortinovis, Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Associate Curator of Decorative Arts and Design.

[Genevieve Cortinovis]
Thank you, Min.

Roaring takes us to France from 1918 to 1939—the interwar period. As creatives from across the globe flocked to Paris, the automobile became a provocative new expression of the modern age. Drivers and passengers gained access to the thrill of speed and the freedom of mobility. Magnificent coachbuilt auto bodies reflected the luxurious materials, avant-garde designs, and dazzling spectacles cultivated by French tastemakers and craftspeople. A car could be a work of art, a private sanctuary, a technological marvel, or a fashion accessory.

As you move through these galleries, consider how the French automotive industry has influenced and absorbed facets of art and design: from Cubist paintings to Art Deco furniture to Hermès handbags. Vital works from the Saint Louis Art Museum's collection and from lenders in Europe and the United States converse with brilliantly conserved and restored period automobiles. Throughout, a rich assortment of fashions traces the diverse, evolving lifestyles of women in this automotive age.

This exhibition guide offers commentaries from several individuals. In addition to my voice, you will hear from other scholars and historians, including Ken Gross, the exhibition's curator of automobiles. We encourage you to experience this guide in any order you like. You may follow it in numeric order or pick and choose. Each featured object can be located by following the floorplan on the webpage or by identifying the audio icon on the object's label in the exhibition. Whether you're listening from home or in the Museum's galleries, I hope you enjoy this audio guide and your visit to *Roaring: Art, Fashion, and the Automobile in France, 1918–1939*.

Stop 2
Gallery 247
Tissu simultané no. 186, coloris 4

Speaker

Genevieve Cortinovis
Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Associate Curator of Decorative Arts and Design
Saint Louis Art Museum

Sonia Delaunay is often described as a "total" artist—moving easily and purposefully across media. However, she remained devoted to textiles throughout her long and productive career. Not only did fabric design offer an endless vehicle for her experiments in color and optical vibrations, as demonstrated by the sheer variety of these samples, but when translated into clothing on bodies in motion, they quite literally moved.

As scholar Dr. Sherry Buckberrough has stated, Sonia Delaunay herself was a woman "on the move." She was born Sara Stern in Odesa, a port city in Ukraine, to a working-class Jewish family. When she turned five, she was informally adopted by a wealthy uncle in Saint Petersburg, becoming Sonia Terk. In the cosmopolitan Russian imperial capital, she received a top-notch education and traveled widely. She initially studied at an art school in Germany, but Paris, the exciting, turn of the century European art capital, was calling her name, and she moved there in 1906. After a short-lived first marriage, probably motivated by stipulations around her inheritance, Sonia wed the young avant-garde artist Robert Delaunay, thus beginning a lasting creative partnership. Stranded during WWI on the Iberian Peninsula, the Delaunays returned to Paris in 1921, and in 1923, Sonia moved toward commercial production of textiles, developing 50 designs for the Lyon-based manufacturer J. B. Martin.

A skilled marketer and technology enthusiast, at the 1924 *Salon d'automne*, Delaunay presented eight printed silk textiles sewn together into bands that continuously rotated in a kind of drive belt. One year later she presented models dressed in her and Jacques Heim's fashions next to a coordinating custom-painted car for a canny photo op. Kineticism, whether achieved by the energy of the body or the hum of a motor, became synonymous with Delaunay's holistic vision, where art was integrated into all aspects of modern life.

Of his wife's fabrics, Robert Delaunay declared, "How natural it will be to see a woman get out of a sleek new car. . . . Fashion, by definition, is always moving forward. Simultaneous fabrics are the materials to be used for future ensembles. . . . Because they are responsive to the painting, to the architecture of modern life, to the bodies of cars, to the beautiful and original forms of airplanes—in short, to the aspirations of this active, modern age, which has forged a style intimately related to its incredibly fast and intense life."

Stop 3
Gallery 247
The Windshield, On the Road to Villacoublay

Speaker

Daniel Marcus
Curator of Collections and Exhibitions
Columbus Museum of Art

Hi, I'm Daniel Marcus, curator of collections and exhibitions at the Columbus Museum of Art.

The Windshield, On the Road to Villacoublay is among Henri Matisse's strangest and most uncharacteristic paintings. It dates to a transitional period in his career during World War I. By this time, Matisse and his family had moved out of Paris to take residence in the suburbs, and in 1917, he purchased his first car: a secondhand 6-horsepower Renault. Matisse hadn't yet learned to drive, so the task of operating the car fell to his son Pierre, who accompanied him on the excursion that yielded *The Windshield*.

One afternoon, Pierre and his father were headed toward the aviation fields at Villacoublay when Matisse had them park on the side of a busy roadway. Sitting in the rear of the vehicle, he sketched his view of the landscape framed by the car's windowed interior. Matisse was lucky to have found a used car with fully enclosed coachworks—still a rarity in the 1910s—which allowed him to travel in relative comfort and to use the car as a portable studio. *The Windshield* might seem to depict the landscape as seen by the driver, but it really shows us the passenger's view. The car is stopped, and Pierre seems to have wandered off, leaving Matisse alone in the back seat—free to paint as he pleases, but still dependent on his son, the chauffeur, to get back on the road.

Stop 4
Gallery 246
C28 Aérosport

Speaker

Daniel Rust
Associate Professor of Transportation & Logistics Management
University of Wisconsin-Superior

Hi, I'm Daniel Rust, associate professor of transportation and logistics management at the University of Wisconsin-Superior.

The 1937 Voisin Type C28 Aérosport Coupe was designed by aviation pioneer Gabriel Voisin, who made his first glider flights in France in 1904. Two years later, Gabriel and his brother, Charles, established the world's first commercial aircraft factory in a suburb near Paris. The Voisin brothers became leading aircraft manufacturers in the years leading up to the first World War, and more than 10,000 Voisin aircraft participated in the global conflict. In 1919, Gabriel Voisin turned his attention to designing automobiles, which possessed many aviation-inspired design features. For instance, the overall profile of the Voisin Type C28 was an airfoil, mimicking the shape of an aircraft wing. Uninterrupted air flowed from the rounded front bumper up the sloping hood, slipping beyond an angled windscreen before continuing over the teardrop roofline and down to the rear bumper. This improved the vehicle's aerodynamics while exemplifying streamlined styling. The shape had the benefit of providing added stability to the vehicle, thanks to a low-pressure area formed underneath the car when traveling at higher speeds.

The headlamps are another streamlined feature. Unlike most automobiles of the era, this Voisin's headlamps were nestled into nacelles, reflecting the engine placement on aircraft such as the contemporary French Bloch MB 160 airliner.

Observing the sides of the vehicle, notice the absence of running boards or distinct bulbous fenders over the front and rear wheels. The Voisin C28, instead, sported pontoon fenders, enclosing the entire vehicle width and giving an uninterrupted visual line of the length of the car.

Fender skirts over the rear wheels of the C28 served similar aerodynamic function as the fairings over fixed landing gear on aircraft developed during the interwar period. For example, the Dewoitine D.33 low-wing monoplane featured large wheel fairings, commonly called “wheel spats” or “pants,” to smooth the air flow around its tires.

In an era of rapid technological innovation, form followed function in streamline styling as aviation and automobile pioneers, including Voisin, developed *monocoque*, a French term meaning “single shell,” aircraft and automobile bodies using lightweight aluminum.

During the interwar period, aviation symbolized freedom, power, escape, and glamour. The motorcar designs of Gabriel Voisin reflected this streamlined aesthetic as wheeled symbols of modernity, speed, and prestige.

Stop 5
Gallery 244
A Still from the film "Ballet mecanique"

Speaker

Genevieve Cortinovis
Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Associate Curator of Decorative Arts and Design
Saint Louis Art Museum

These links will take you to two distinct versions of the *Ballet Mécanique*. One, in the Museum of Modern Art's collection, is silent, black-and-white, and around 11 minutes long. The other includes a crashing score, color, and comes in at around 16 minutes. In both cuts at the 3.5-minute mark of this film, Dudley Murphy, captured in this still, slides onto the screen.

Dudley's contributions to *Ballet Mécanique*'s conception and execution are marked by historical debate. In MoMA's cut, only Léger, who gave the film to the New York museum, is credited as the director. However, film scholars have since attested that it was undoubtedly a group effort. Some attribute more agency to Léger, and others Murphy. The Dada and Surrealist artist Man Ray likely worked with Dudley to film several key scenes of *Ballet Mécanique*, particularly those featuring Kiki de Montparnasse, who was the American expat's lover and muse. American writer Ezra Pound probably brought Léger, a neighbor and friend, and American composer and pianist George Antheil to the project. Pound was part of the vorticism movement, an avant-garde London-based group of artists and writers who aimed to connect art with industry, promoting a kind of severe geometric abstraction and cult of the machine. Man Ray, Murphy, and Pound had all been experimenting with prismatic lenses, which were used throughout the film.

Antheil's score, which you can hear in this second iteration of this film, was conceived separately and was not paired until much, much later. Its unconventional, technically complex instrumentation included 16 player pianos, 2 regular pianos, 3 xylophones, 7 electric bells, 3 propellers, 1 siren, 4 bass drums, and a tam-tam. Future St. Louis Symphony conductor Vladimir Golschmann was the first to tackle the ambitious score at its June 19, 1926 premier at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris. The *Brooklyn Eagle* reported that the competing "howls and catcalls and handclapping and cheers" nearly drowned out Antheil's composition, which hummed and ringed like a possessed machine.

Even without Antheil's score, [the film] met similarly divided reviews throughout its cascade of global premiers. Some audience members at New York's Cameo Theatre booed and hissed at the film, prompting the organizers to shorten its scheduled run. *New York Herald Tribune* writer Richard Watts Jr. more thoughtfully concluded that although "disturbing and downright silly" *Ballet Mécanique* was also "undeniable arresting . . . Pushing back the borders of camera possibilities."

Stop 6
Gallery 246
Woman's Green Evening Coat

Speaker

Sarah Berg
Research Assistant, Decorative Arts and Design
Saint Louis Art Museum

Hello, I'm Sarah Berg, research assistant for decorative arts and design at the Saint Louis Art Museum.

Let's take a look at this draped evening coat with brocade sleeves by the French designer Paul Poiret. Vivid green silk is gathered at the wearer's side by a neat row of gold-toned buttons, which repeat on the high collar and the cuffs. This subtle swoop of fabric at the midsection accentuates Poiret's signature uncinched silhouette. Leading to the dawn of the 20th century, fashions favored tightly corseted waists. In response, Poiret promoted straight and roomy styles in dazzling colors and with minimal but experimental tailoring.

Touted as the "King of Fashion," Poiret was widely credited for this new silhouette, though other couturiers also produced unstructured designs before 1910. This movement to liberate the body in women's clothing stemmed in part from a craze that was sweeping France: Orientalism. Against a backdrop of French colonial conquests in Africa and Asia, turbans, tunics, robes, and pants came to represent an imagined, exoticized Eastern style. Poiret's draped, rectilinear garments, including wide coats meant to protect the clothing while driving, were especially inspired by the Japanese kimono and North African abaya.

The coat in front of you belonged to the Polish American cosmetics mogul Helena Rubinstein, who was an avid collector of art and fashion. Her books and lectures on skincare, diet, and beautifying techniques drove sales of Helena Rubenstein–branded lipsticks, powders, and creams and solidified her public image as an early beauty guru. She frequently wore Poiret's creations and even solicited the designer, who promoted fashion and interior decoration as equal parts of one's personal expression, to furnish her beauty clinic in Paris.

Stop 7
Gallery 244
Type 41 Royale Convertible

Speaker

Ken Gross
Guest Curator

Hello, I'm Ken Gross, guest curator for *Roaring*.

Although Bugatti specialized in sports-racing and grand-touring cars, the design for the Royale and its enormous engine served the small French company in many ways.

It may be apocryphal, but at a posh dinner in 1927, a British woman reportedly remarked to Ettore Bugatti, “Your cars are fast and beautiful, but for true elegance, one must turn to Rolls-Royce or Bentley.” Le Patron, as Bugatti was known, began developing a luxury car that would rival Rolls-Royce and Hispano-Suiza.

The Royale's engine was a 12.7-liter, 300-bhp, in-line, single overhead camshaft straight eight, cast in aluminum as a single block. With its engine's boundless torque, multiple gears weren't needed. A three-speed transaxle with the top gear as an overdrive ratio smoothly transferred power. Bugatti hoped European royalty, like King Michael of Romania, would buy one of the 25 cars planned, but that never happened.

Just six Type 41 chassis were built, all bodied by prominent European coachbuilders. After the market for expensive luxury cars plummeted in the Depression, modified Royale engines—in pairs or quad setups—powered self-propelled railcars called *automotrices*. Jean Bugatti tested one of these *wagons rapides* at over 100 miles an hour and, in the process, blew out all the glass windows of a train station.

Dr. Joseph Fuchs, a German Jewish physician, ordered a Royale chassis to be bodied by Ludwig Weinberger of Munich. Delivered in 1931, the cabriolet had a folding top and landau irons. It was black with a yellow stripe. But the rise of Nazi Germany precluded Fuchs from enjoying his new car. He relocated to Long Island, where in the winter of 1937, the engine block froze and cracked. The Royale ended up in a junkyard. It was purchased in 1943 by then–GM Engineering VP Charles Chayne, and restored but not to its original colors.

All six Bugatti Type 41 Royales survive. They were reunited at the Pebble Beach *concours d'elegance* in 1985, and there are plans to have them again in Monterey in 2026.

Stop 8
Gallery 244
H6 Skiff Torpedo

Speaker

Ken Gross
Guest Curator

Swiss engineer Marc Birkigt established Hispano-Suiza, literally “Spanish-Swiss,” a luxury automobile company in Spain. Early competition successes attracted the attention of King Alfonso XIII, who purchased a chassis and raced an eponymous sports roadster, helping to ensure the fledgling firm’s success. When France proved to be the strong market, Hispano built a factory near Paris.

During World War I, Birkigt—working with his chief engineer, Louis Massuger—turned to the development and manufacture of advanced aircraft engines, developing an overhead camshaft aluminum block V8 with steel liners; most aircraft engines used individual cylinders bolted to a common crankcase. This was a stronger, simpler, and lighter way to go. The Hispano V8 engine powered the famous SPAD S.VII, the fighter plane used by the legendary French ace Georges Guynemer, who shot down 54 enemy aircraft before he was killed in action. His *Escadrille Cigogne* (Stork Squadron) emblem became the enduring symbol for Hispano-Suiza.

After the war, Hispano resumed auto production, introducing the all-new H6 in 1919. It featured a light-alloy, four-wheel drum-braking system that was amplified by a gearbox-driven brake booster that used the car’s momentum to drive the brake servo for sure, four-wheeled stopping in an era when most cars only had two-wheel brakes. Rolls-Royce used it for years under license.

Hisso's splendid H6 chassis attracted the finest coachbuilders in Europe and in America. Hispano clients included Indian Maharajahs and aperitif distiller André Dubonnet, who had aircraft engineer Jean-Edouard Andreau design a torpedo-shaped, aerodynamic coupe with gull-wing windows built by Saoutchik.

This car was invoiced in 1925 to a Prince Cito" in Milan, Italy. When Judge John North bought the car in 1966, it had been stored outside and had been in a fire. The original body by Million-Guiet was beyond saving. A new “skiff” body after the style of Labourdette was designed and constructed of Spanish cedar over white ash by Maryland artisans Don Loweree and John Todd.

Stop 9
Gallery 244
Side Chair

Speaker

Genevieve Cortinovis
Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Associate Curator of Decorative Arts and Design
Saint Louis Art Museum

Émile-Jacques Ruhlmann's House of the Collector was one of the most popular pavilions at the 1925 Paris International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts. Glamorous and harmonious, the imagined villa of a refined and urbane collector would come to epitomize French Art Deco. Imagine yourself on a sunny summer day in 1925, entering a formal garden with parterres, the soft spray of fountains promising respite from the bustling streets of Paris. After passing through the single-story building's entrance, you moved through a small central gallery lined with built-in shelves displaying ceramics by Émile Lenoble and Émile Decoeur, lacquer work by Jean Dunand, and modernist book bindings by Pierre Legrain, the likes of which can be seen across this gallery. A huge wrought iron gate by Edgar Brandt offered tantalizing glimpses into the monumental grand salon topped by a cupola painted with scenes from Beethoven's symphonies in yellow ochre and violet. Lit by crystal chandeliers and sconces, the raspberry-colored birds and garlands of Henri Stephany's textile before you provided a lush backdrop for furniture veneered in American burr walnut. A dining room painted in a warm reddish brown adjoined the salon. An office, boudoir, bedroom, and bathroom occupied the rest of the building, their ceiling height varying according to their degree of intimacy. Inside and out, classicizing sculptures—including works by Charles Despiau, exemplified by this bust of Line Aman-Jean—punctuated doors and windows and topped furniture.

Ruhlmann oversaw some 40 artists, designers, and craftspeople who contributed to the pavilion. While he proudly celebrated his family's roots as artisans—he inherited his father's painting, wallpaper, and mirror business at the age of 27—Ruhlmann was not a trained cabinetmaker. After subcontracting his designs to makers in Paris's Faubourg Saint-Antoine, he finally established his own workroom in 1923. Ruhlmann's devotion to luxury craft did not preclude him from utilizing the latest technologies and materials or from regarding himself as a progressive designer. His motto was "rationalism, comfort, progress." He foresaw the move from wood to metal, predicting furniture "will be finished in impeccable and incombustible lacquer." He created a modular bookcase with glass doors on chromium-plated hinges. A chair from 1927 featured a channel-padded back and spring upholstery inspired by automobile seats. In fact, he adored automobiles, submitting drawings for a Delaunay-Belleville limousine illustrated in the catalogue to your left, and he designed the coachwork of his own car. In many ways, he can be compared to the great coachbuilders and car designers of the era like Jean Henri-Labourdette, who adapted craft traditions to the demands of modern life and technology.

Stop 10
Gallery 243
Untitled

Speaker

Eric Lutz
Associate Curator of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs
Saint Louis Art Museum

Hello, I'm Eric Lutz, associate curator of prints, drawings, and photographs at the Museum.

We're looking at eight works by the photographer Germaine Krull. She moved to Paris in the late 1920s to be a part of the avant-garde scene there. She had quite a distinctive eye in composing views, particularly of the new industrial forms made of steel. She made her living primarily as a photojournalist and was actually paid for an assignment with a car in 1929; and she took this for a road trip, with a friend driving, to the south of France in the following year.

As we can see, she was not so much interested in the scenic views of the landscape but in the experience of speed and movement itself. To fully appreciate these images, I think we need to try to put ourselves in her mindset: How exciting it must have felt to be in a car—in a convertible car no less—with the open views and the rush of air. By our standards today, she was not going that fast—maybe 30 miles an hour—but it was fast to her and still dangerous to be driving on unpaved roads and without seat belts or good brakes. She was obviously standing up or leaning outside the body of the car to get different perspectives.

So we have these images with blur and tilted horizon lines which convey the fleeting,

disjointed impressions of being a passenger. What is particularly interesting for me is how Krull draws a parallel between the camera aperture and the car windows – they both frame how we see the world – and are both moving and intersecting with the world in different ways. Parts of the windshield appear at the bottom or sides of her pictures—and in one instance, the windshield and car hood actually frame the entire scene. She wants to place the viewer in the car with her—to see what she sees—but even more, to feel something of what she feels.

Krull's images were some of the first of their kind, and they really anticipated the interest that the road trip held in the postwar period, particularly in the wide-open spaces of the United States, with virtually everyone heading out with a camera in hand to discover something new.

Stop 11
Gallery 243
Chaise Lounge

Speaker

Genevieve Cortinovis
Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Associate Curator of Decorative Arts and Design
Saint Louis Art Museum

In her 1998 autobiography, *A Life of Creation*, Charlotte Perriand recounted her experience designing and prototyping four now-classic chairs, including this one, while working in the office of the architect Le Corbusier. Although remembered decades later, Perriand's account provides an invaluable glimpse into her creative process. So, without further ado, I'll quote at length her description:

> Imagination was of the essence. I worked with Pierre Jeanneret at the atelier on full-scale designs during the day, fine-tuning them with Corbu in the evenings.
>
> Pierre and I were rather small, so we had a tendency to minimize heights and sizes. We once got up on a small bench to see what life was like if you were twenty centimeters taller. Space seemed different. Corbu often laughed at our one-meter-sixty height and how we applied it to furniture.
>
> The base of the chaise longue gave us a lot of heartache. After endless trials and sketches, we adopted the same solution used for our glass-slab table in the Villa Church, thereby lending unity to our designs. This little beauty was an ovoid section in lacquered sheet metal, which we stumbled across in an aviation catalog.

Time passed, but the chair designs we had reworked and refined still yielded no evidence of user-friendliness. Pierre put together impromptu ephemeral armchairs, such as an inflated inner tube of a tire held in place by reinforcement bars. Someone else from the atelier had great fun sitting in the steel-wire trash can that, crushed by his generous imprint, was transformed into both an armchair and a basket.

Corbu finally became fed up with our pointless jokes and I decided to move into action. As the old saying goes, “You have to do what you have to do.” I left the atelier with the designs for as long as it took my craftsmen to produce the prototypes, although they were also very busy with my personal creations. Labadie made the metal frames in his workshop, then together we molded them into the first prototypes and sent them out for their finishings—either chromium plating or lacquering.

I also bought metal springs from the BHV department store (Bazar de l'Hotel de Ville in Paris), and paid a visit to a few furriers, where I picked out some superb pony skin and calfskin. I selected some canvases for the chaise longue, which I asked a saddler to trim with a strip of pigskin, Hermès-style. I discovered English leathers, the best in the world. An upholsterer made the cushions for the *grand confort* armchairs, stuffing them with down lodged into the fabric, a traditional method to keep them more or less in place (foam had not yet been invented).

Everything was assembled in my atelier at Saint-Sulpice: the chaise longue, sculpturally beautiful on its support, the *fauteuil à dossier basculant* for visitors, and the large and small *grand confort* armchairs in natural leather. I added the *fauteuil tournant* (swivel chair) I'd made for my dining room—a different design concept, in that its covering was fastened to the chromed steel structure.

I proudly invited Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret to my atelier, without letting on that the chairs were there, very much alive, ready to be sat on, and faithful to our designs. They were totally taken by surprise. “They're delightful,” Corbu finally said, after several murmurs of approval.

Stop 12
Gallery 242
Josephine Baker

Speaker

Justice Henderson
2023–2025 Romare Bearden Graduate Museum Fellow
Saint Louis Art Museum

Hello, my name is Justice Henderson, the 2023–2025 Romare Bearden Graduate Museum Fellow at the Saint Louis Art Museum.

“A phenomenal woman, that’s [her].” Josephine Baker embodied the famous line from Maya Angelou’s classic poem. Josephine was an international celebrity, actress, performer, and even a spy during World War II. Born in 1906 as Freda Josephine McDonald, her dancing took her from her neighborhood in Mill Creek Valley to the stage doing vaudeville performances in New York and Paris. In 1927, her silent film *Siren of the Tropics* cemented her legacy as the first Black woman to star in a major motion picture.

Her onstage costumes included feather accents and glittery jewels. Those elements extended into her everyday clothes, demonstrated here in Émile Deschler’s depiction of Josephine wearing a dramatic black-and-white feather boa. With her luxurious fashion and assets, like owning coachbuilt automobiles, she became an icon of the modern French woman during the ’20s and ’30s. She broke racial and social barriers, allowing her to express herself in her own way. Her legacy continues to shine not only in the Museum’s collection but also in murals throughout the city. During my fellowship, I’ve had the honor to learn about her and be inspired by her remarkable story.

Stop 13
Gallery 242
Type 35

Speaker

Ken Gross
Guest Curator

The Bugatti Type 35 debuted at the Grand Prix of Lyon in 1924. From its delicate horseshoe-shaped radiator; minimalist alloy coachwork; high-revving 24-valve single overhead camshaft straight eight; distinctive center-lock, flat-spoked alloy wheels with cast-in brake drums. The Type 35 and its variants, including the supercharged Types 35C and 35B, were virtually unbeatable.

Type 35s won Sicily's grueling Targa Florio every year from 1925 through 1929. The Type 35 won the Grand Prix World Championship in 1926 as well as more than 1,000 other races. In addition to factory teams, dozens of privateers had great success with this model. About 635 Type 35/37/39s were built.

This car, chassis no. 4863, was originally delivered to Marco Andriessi in Amsterdam as a 2.0-liter Type 35C. Equipped with a larger 2.3-liter engine and a supercharger, it was sold to Hellé Nice in September 1929 for factory-backed speed work. Born Mariette Hélène Delangle in 1900 near Chartres, France, she became an exotic dancer and a nude model in Paris. A skiing accident in 1929 ended her dancing career.

Using her stage name, Hellé Nice won a ladies race in Montlhéry in an Oméga-Six. Ettore Bugatti loaned her a Type 43A Grand Sport in which she won the ladies category at the Actor's Championship and set the fastest time for both women and men. She set a

197.7 kph women's speed record in this car. At the Bugatti Grand Prix at Le Mans, she finished third.

A sensation in France, she raced Millers on dirt tracks in America, then returned to Europe in 1931, competing in hill climbs and Grands Prix. A fierce competitor, Hellé Nice won races when it was unusual for a woman to compete. She was successful against famous male drivers like Louis Chiron, René Dreyfus, and Philippe "Fifi" Etancelin. Beautiful and vivacious, Nice led an exciting life, taking many lovers and adding to her fame and notoriety.

In 1936 in Brazil, her Alfa Romeo crashed into the stands, killing six people. Thrown from the car, she spent three days in a coma. Back in France, she was implicated in a scandal involving other drivers and the illegal importation of cars. Convicted and fined but undaunted, she won her last race in 1939. After the war, Louis Chiron falsely accused her of being a Nazi collaborator. She was eventually exonerated, but adverse publicity ruined all hope that she had of resuming her career. She died in obscurity in 1984. *Bugatti Queen*, a 2005 biography by Miranda Seymour, helped restore her reputation.

Stop 14
Gallery 243
Coat, Dress and Clutch Purse

Speaker

Pierre-Jean Desemerie
PhD Candidate in Fashion and Design History
Bard Graduate Center, New York

Hello! I'm Pierre-Jean Desemerie, PhD candidate in fashion and design history at Bard Graduate Center in New York.

The ensemble in front of you, composed of a dress and a coat designed by the French house Lucien Lelong and accessorized with a cloche hat and a leather bag, could have been worn for driving. The woolen coat kept the driver warm but also protected her dress from dust if the driver drove a convertible or had a window open. The dress, shortened during the twenties, allowed greater freedom of leg movement—pretty important when driving. Among the many sportswear designers interested in movement, Lucien Lelong stood out as the one who theorized the principle of kineticism in fashion, an idea that met with incredible success in America. But let's leave it to Lelong to describe what kineticism is, shouldn't we?

"What is kineticism? Quite simply," Lelong said, "the theory of the figure in motion. At a time when the pace of life is constantly accelerating, we were making the mistake of creating styles that expressed static attitudes. We need to think of fashion as a living thing. You have to be able to move inside your clothes."

"Kineticism," Lelong added, "is the fashion for the woman on the move, for you, mademoiselle, who [doesn't] stand still, who drives, plays tennis, etc."

This principle of motion was translated in the motifs, pattern, and construction of the clothes themselves. Here, have a look at the construction of the dress: the multiple sections—V or diamond shaped—sewn together keeps your eye moving around the body, an effect Lelong called “kinoptics.” Now, imagine how the skirt part, slightly pleated, was moving when the wearer was walking.

In short: a delightful and apparent simplicity complicated by a skillful cut.

Stop 15
Gallery 241
Torso

Speaker

Genevieve Cortinovis
Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Associate Curator of Decorative Arts and Design
Saint Louis Art Museum

This bronze torso is based on a plaster torso created in 1931, not long after Jean Arp first turned to making sculpture in the round. Working at times with an armature, Arp would begin building up the sculpture, adding and subtracting plaster. As the plaster dried, he would file and sand its surface. Although Arp regarded his plaster sculptures as finished works, he also relished the collaborative process of translating them into more durable materials. Arp commissioned a marble example of the plaster torso and then an edition of three in bronze. In 1957, he enlarged the torso by about 50 percent for another bronze edition of three, which included this example.

Scholars have argued that Arp's embrace of plaster helped him to forge his seductive approach to biomorphism. The English poet and critic Geoffrey Grigson was the first to employ the term *biomorphic* in the context of modern art in 1935. In the opening issue of the journal *Axis*, he posited: "Abstractions are of two kinds, geometric, the abstractions which lead to the inevitable death; and biomorphic. The biomorphic abstractions are the beginning of the next central phase in the progress of art. They exist between Mondrian and Dalí, between idea and emotion, between matter and mind, matter and life."

Grigson's idea that 1930s biomorphism united both "idea and emotion," or even more largely science and art, resonated in contemporary appraisals of coachbuilt automobiles.

Joseph Figoni, who designed the automobile bodies in this gallery, began his process—not unlike Arp—sculpting clay models. In the 1930s, he pushed to extremes the "Goutte d'Eau" (drop of water) shapes captivating the French press since the Austrian engineer Edmund Rumpler's 1921 Tropfenwagen (drop of water car) first made the pages of the *Omnia*. Drawing on experience designing aircraft and wind tunnel testing, Rumpler suggested the teardrop shape, with its curved nose and tapered tail, created less drag, allowing a car to achieve higher speeds without additional horsepower. By the 1930s, it was widely accepted that, according to the principles of aerodynamics, "one of the best profiles is the deformation of a drop of water in the wind." This skilled negotiation between knowledge and intuition distinguished the era's leading coachbuilders, who understood "the practical domain of aerodynamics" but who were first and foremost "artists."

They may have been artists, but was their output art? In a 1951 *New York Times* article, a "Museum Official," widely interpreted as Museum of Modern Art Director Arthur Drexler, responded to a skeptical visitor to his pioneering exhibition *8 Automobiles* with the now infamous quip: "Good Heavens, don't you know automobiles are hollow, rolling sculpture?"

Drexler was not without his detractors. Alberto Giacometti, after thoughtful appraisal, concluded in 1957 that automobiles were in fact not sculptures. They were functional after all, but he also mused on their unsettling biomorphic and anthromechanical qualities:

"It does happen sometimes that I stop in the street to look at a car which reminds me of a toad, a bull, or a grasshopper; in the same way, perhaps, as I will gaze at a cloud, watching it ruffle into the shape of a head; or again, at a tree trunk, seeing there a tiger ready to spring. A car, like every other machine, is a recent discovery. It descends not only from the carriage but from the horse and carriage combined. The resulting product is certainly strange: a complete mechanical organism, having eyes, a mouth, a heart, and

intestines; it will eat and drink and go on working until it breaks—what an odd parody of a living being."

Stop 16
Gallery 241
T150C-SS Teardrop Coupe

Speaker

Ken Gross
Guest Curator

The sporting Talbot-Lago T-150C chassis inspired a series of curvaceous coupes. Sensational in their heyday, streamlined, sleek, and light enough to race competitively, they were called “Goutte d’Eau” (drop of water). They became known as the “Teardrop” Talbots.

Between 1937 and 1939, famed Parisian *carrossiers* Figoni et Falaschi built 12 “New York”–style Talbot-Lago coupes, like this one, so-called because the first was introduced at the 1937 New York Auto Show. Five more cars, built in a notchback teardrop style, were named “Jeancart,” after the wealthy French patron who commissioned the first example. Figoni et Falaschi craftsmen took 2,100 hours of painstaking craftwork to complete each custom body. No two cars were exactly alike.

Antony Lago, Talbot’s president, offered a top-of-the-line Super Sport version with independent front suspension and a live rear axle. For competition, a 4-liter six-cylinder topped with a hemi-head could be fitted with three carburetors for 170 bhp. The optional Wilson four-speed preselector gearbox with a fingertip-actuated shift lever permitted instant shifts without the driver having to take a hand off the steering wheel. In 1938, a race-prepared T150C-SS Coupe finished third at the 24 Hours of Le Mans.

The first of the “New York”–style Teardrops, this is the car that Figoni et Falaschi registered to patent the model’s aerodynamic shape. One of the three known versions

with an alloy body, it was first owned by Freddie McEvoy, an Australian member of the bronze-medal-winning British bobsled team at the 1936 Winter Olympics. A prominent Hollywood player, the fast-living McEvoy had access to celebrities like Errol Flynn, making him an ideal concessionaire for unusual automobiles.

It was then purchased by an unknown buyer in Nice; then sold to one of France's first vintage car dealers; then to a Swiss collector, who owned the car for the next 20 years. Eric Traber bought it in 1991 and brought it to the Historic Races in Monterey, California, in August 2000, where J. Willard "Bill" Marriott admired the car and bought it right off the track.

Stop 17
Gallery 250
"Fusée" Evening Dress

Speaker

Sarah Berg
Research Assistant, Decorative Arts and Design
Saint Louis Art Museum

This pair of embellished gowns bookends a decade of fine evening wear by the French designer Jeanne Lanvin. On the left, a sleek silk dress from her 1929/1930 winter collection signifies the then-approaching end of the boxy, boyish shapes of the '20s. Its relaxed silhouette blooms into a slight flare, and its floor-length skirt marks an elegant departure from previously trendy shorter styles. Lanvin herself acknowledged—and celebrated—this stylistic shift. Speaking to the American fashion magazine *Harper's Bazaar* in August 1929, she proclaimed, "The silhouette at last undergoes transformation. . . . It is curves against straightness, the time women masqueraded as boys being, thank God, at an end."

Madame Lanvin was already well established by the interwar period, when Paris experienced a boom of women designers. She had opened her own hat-making business in 1889; clothing lines for children and women came in the following decade. Her long career speaks to the clarity of her multifaceted identity: She was an artist and a businesswoman, an innovator as well as a devoted mother. This complexity extended to her stylistic fingerprint. She preferred romantic, classicizing designs, but at the same time, she was sensitive to modernity, borrowing colors from Fauvist paintings and executing patterns inspired by art from France's colonies in Africa and Asia.

The evening gown on the right exemplifies the harmony between Lanvin's romanticism and her artistic approach to decoration. The '30s brought back femininity with smaller,

higher waistlines and longer, fuller skirts. Here, crimson loops of georgette ribbon have been densely applied in the shape of feathers, mirroring the silk's printed plumage and exemplifying the bold embellishments Lanvin used to merge art with traditionally feminine fashions.