

Objects Of Desire

The second sex just got a whole lot sexier.

Hips are practically vestigial on models, like fingers on whales. Ditto for busts, although implant technology has occasionally produced runway bodies resembling cantaloupes on stilts. But the fall 2010 shows from Marc Jacobs for Louis Vuitton, Prada, Miu Miu and others were all about the womanly clothes of the 1950s and early '60s. Cleavage spilled. Full skirts flared. Women's Wear Daily labeled the trend "the voluptuous model moment" and virtually hailed it as an affirmative-action program for the curvy girls who usually only get to work the lingerie catalogs.

It isn't surprising that we're nostalgic for an era when women wore plunging halter tops, cinch belts, crinolines and poodle skirts, says the fashion historian Valerie Steele. "It seems like a safer time, and it was certainly a richer time for Americans." Nonetheless, she adds, "if we were really into a superskinny moment right now, we might not be so into the clothes."

There is a sheep-in-wolf's-designer-clothing aspect to all this, of course; in the fashion world, a model who is a size 6 rather than a subzero is considered daringly Amazonian, even though she's far from the typical American size 12. But there is also a new buzzlet of interest in what stylists and fashion editors tend to call "real women." Several



Bird watching Miroslav Tichy stalked Czech women with his homemade cameras after the war.

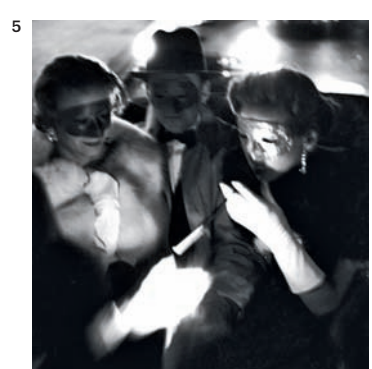
socialite nonmodels were invited to strut the catwalks, as were older models like Stella Tennant (39) and Kristen McMenamy (43) at Calvin Klein; a buxom Elle Macpherson (46) at Louis Vuitton; and the 81-year-old Daphne Selfe, who sported a Brandoesque motorcycle jacket at Sykes.

Not so coincidentally, there are some photography books currently floating around that also pay homage — or maybe femmage — to the midcentury look and the lust that actual women can inspire. Jerry Schatzberg's riveting retrospective "Women Then: Photographs 1954-1969" (Rizzoli, October) thrusts us back to a time when it was ladylike to wear a hat in public and glamorous to accompany it with a cigarette. The Dutch photographer Gerard Petrus Fieret's 2007 collection (Deborah Bell Photographs & Paul M. Hertzmann Inc.) features chunky anonymous nudes from the '60s, exuding (off center)fold confidence.

Creepier but undeniably real are the voyeuristic photos by Miroslav Tichy (Steidl) of women of all builds caught unawares in the streets and swimming pools of postwar Czechoslovakia by Tichy's hidden camera.

Finally there is the reissue of Diana Vreeland's "Allure" (Chronicle Books, November), documenting the late Vogue editor's sensibility as seen through the lenses of Avedon, Beaton, Man Ray and others. The focus is on women — from Josephine Baker to Maria Callas — whose beauty stemmed more from being interesting than from being conventional. In the new foreword, Marc Jacobs praises Vreeland's ability "to have an almost perverse passion for things that weren't common or typical. Or conversely, to have a passion for something exactly because it was so very common and typical."

Clearly this is a movement with legs. Possibly even thighs. **LINDSY VAN GELDER**



1. Elle Macpherson at Louis Vuitton. 2. Curves at Prada. 3. Gloria Vanderbilt pictured in "Allure." 4. One of Gerard Petrus Fieret's women. 5. From Jerry Schatzberg's "Women Then."

TOP: MIROSLAV TICHY; MT, NO. 1-30. COURTESY OF FOUNDATION TICHY OCEAN. BOTTOM, FROM LEFT: GORUNWAY.COM (2); LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, PRINTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS DIVISION, CARL VAN VECHTEN COLLECTION, FROM "ALLURE"; CHRONICLE BOOKS (2010); © ESTATE OF G. P. FIERET/COURTESY OF DEBORAH BELL PHOTOGRAPHS, NEW YORK, & PAUL M. HERTZMANN INC.; SAN FRANCISCO; JERRY SCHATZBERG/TRUNK ARCHIVE.