



Following the Second World War in France two men helped re-establish the nation's image as the fashion capital of the world. One was Christian Dior, couturier, whose 1947 'New Look' fashion silhouette changed high fashion; the other was graphic designer and illustrator René Gruau, whose draughtsmanship, graphisme and matchless élan set a standard for the haute couture world of the 1940's and 50's that hasn't dated a day. As much as Dior's dresses, Gruau's elegant ink and brush renderings transformed notions of feminine beauty. He brought fashion to life by bringing life to fashion and imbuing each artwork with chic, sophistication and frivolity. Fabric or perfume, Dior designed it, Gruau drew it and a down-trodden post-war generation aspired to this tantalising and newly-elevated world of branding by brushstroke.

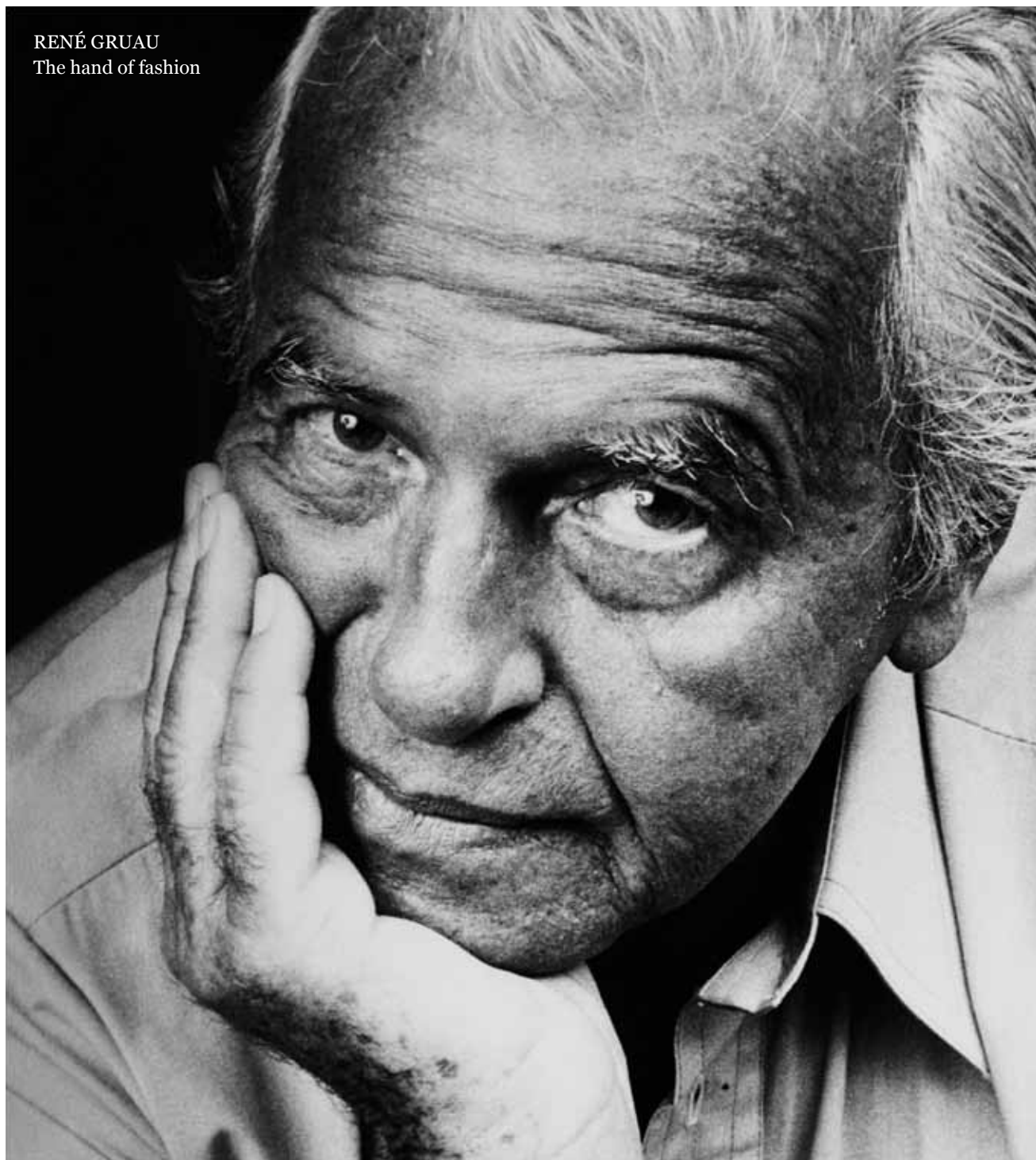
RENÉ GRUAU SIGNATURE 'G' AND THE STAR. © SARL RENÉ GRUAU. COLLECTION PARTICULIÈRE

Anew



RENÉ GRUAU FOR DIORELLA, 1981. © COLLECTION DIOR

RENÉ GRUAU
The hand of fashion



RENÉ GRUAU BY D'ADOLFO TOMELUCCI, 1999. © SARL RENÉ GRUAU COLLECTION PARTICULIÈRE. OPPOSITE: ÉLÉGANTE, MARKER PEN AND INK ON PAPER, 1980. © SARL RENÉ GRUAU COLLECTION PARTICULIÈRE.

“To be inspired by Dior is to be inspired by René Gruau,” writes current Dior couture king John Galliano in the preface to *Le Premier Siècle de René Gruau*, a lavishly illustrated chronicle of Gruau’s work, written by Sylvie Nissen and Vincent Leret, published by Thalia, from which this story’s illustrations are taken. “His sketches capture the silhouette and spirit of Dior and a new era of fashion and femininity. His illustrations are timeless, ever youthful, ever faithful to the moment he saw; they capture the energy, the sophistication and daring of Dior.”

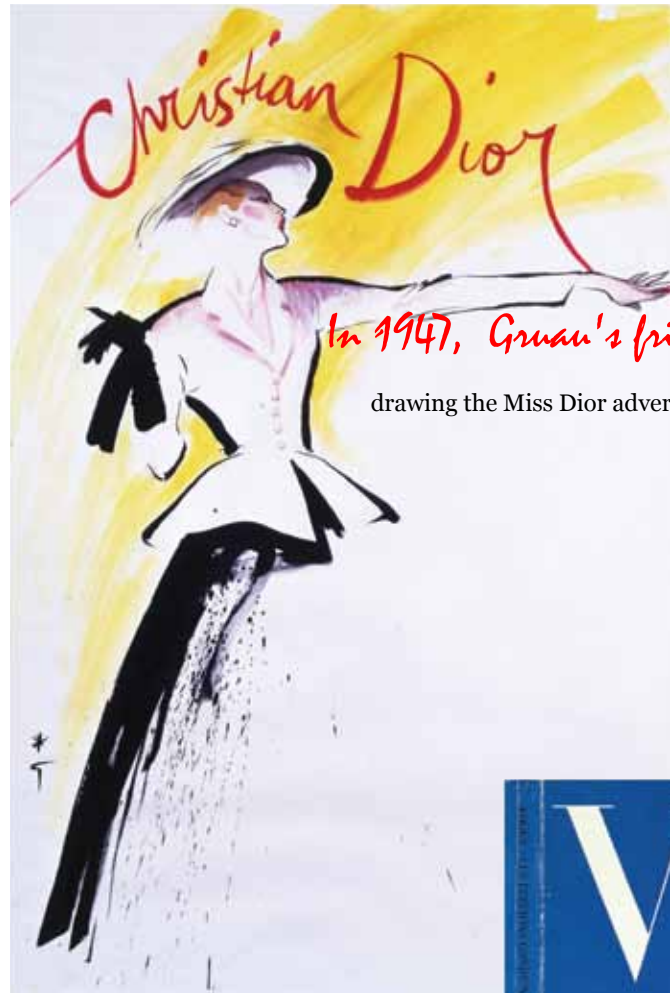
Those moments and many more he helped create for clients like Balmain, Balenciaga, Givenchy, Schiaparelli, Fath, Air France, Lanvin and Jaeger are back in the spotlight courtesy of three exhibitions currently showcasing Gruau’s work in London; *Dior Illustrated: René Gruau and the Line of Beauty* at Somerset House until 9 January, William Ling’s Fashion Illustration Gallery’s *René Gruau Cover Art/International Textiles Magazine* at the Mayor Gallery; and *Drawing Fashion* at the Design Museum, a comprehensive treatment of fashion illustration during the 20th and 21st centuries, organised by Joelle Chariou of Galerie Bartsch & Chariou, until March 2011. “Gruau

was the best known of all the fashion artists,” Chariou told ISBN on the eve of the exhibition. “His drawings are minimalist and very sensuous at the same time. His style is recognisable immediately.” Fashion illustration – an art form often neglected in artistic and commercial circles – is enjoying a resurgence and Chariou has watched the value of Gruau’s work “sensibly going up” to the point where Christie’s in New York sell his paintings for upwards of US\$200,000 and drawings for US\$100,000. Gruau died in 2004. He was 95 and still drawing.

Gruau was the illustrator’s illustrator and belonged to the world he depicted. Born Renato Zavagli-Ricciardelli, Count delle Caminate in Rimini, Italy in 1909, his father was an Italian count and mother a Parisian aristocrat. They split up when he was three and Gruau was raised by his mother, who later became his muse. He studied architecture briefly but dropped it for drawing’s sake, and some of his early work was published in magazines in Italy, Germany and England.

By the 1930s he was in Paris freelancing for titles such as *Femina*, *Marie Claire*, *L’Officiel* and *Le Figaro*. He downsized his signature from Gruau to “G”, and surmounted it with a star.





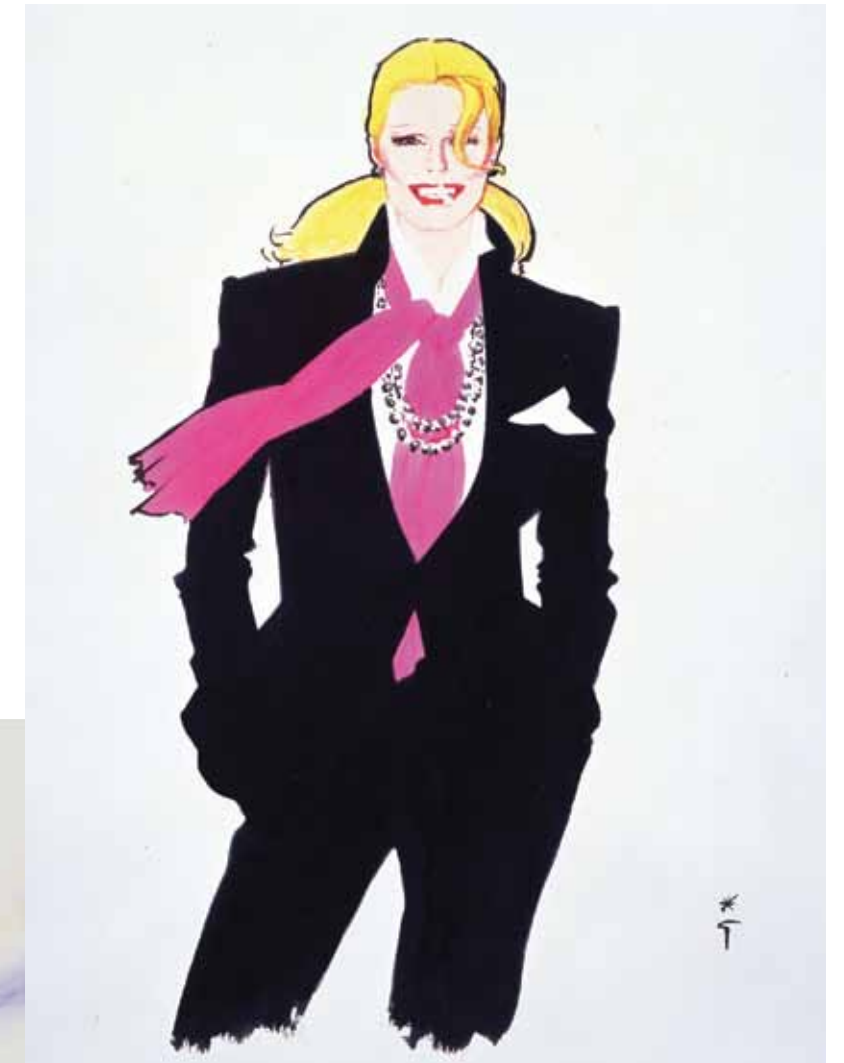
In 1947, Gruau's friend Christian Dior entrusted him with drawing the Miss Dior advertisement and the famous Bar dress. The New Look was born.



ABOVE: DRAWING BY GRUAU. © COLLECTION DIOR; HOMMAGE A PARIS. COVER FOR VOGUE PARIS. JUNE/JULY 1986. © SARL RENÉ GRUAU. COLLECTION PARTICULIÈRE.



ABOVE: DRAWING BY GRUAU FOR MISS DIOR. © COLLECTION DIOR; PARIS. POSTER PAINT, 1986. © SARL RENÉ GRUAU. COLLECTION PARTICULIÈRE.



Gruau spent 38 years from 1946 to 1984

creating eye-catching covers for *International Textiles* magazine, the world's first international title concerning the fashion industry.

From 1935 to 1939 Gruau worked for Femina, Marie Claire, L'Officiel, and L'Album du Figaro magazines. His feminine universe made luxury, frivolity, and narcissism seem the most natural thing in the world.



DRAWING BY GRUAU FOREAU SAUVAGE © COLLECTION DIOR.



RELAX ... ADVERT FOR THE MARITIME COMPANY CHARGEURS REUNIS. 1961. © SARL RENÉ GRUAU. COLLECTION PARTICULIÈRE. BELOW: DRAWING BY GRUAU FOREAU FRAICHE. © COLLECTION DIOR.

Following in the footsteps of Toulouse-Lautrec

in the 19th century, René Gruau was responsible for creating the image of the great cabaret shows of the 20th century at the Moulin Rouge and the Lido.





Gruau was born Renato Zavaagli-Ricciardelli in Rimini,

Italy in 1909 to a family of aristocrats. His father was an Italian count and his mother Maria Gruau de la Chesnais, an artistic French woman, whose name he later took.

ABOVE: ADVERTISEMENT FOR JULES. © COLLECTION DIOR. ADVERTISING POSTER DRAWING BY GRUAU FOR EAU SAUVAGE. © COLLECTION DIOR.

In 1948 he left for the United States

to work for *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue*, before becoming the exclusive artist for *Flair*.



ABOVE: DRAWING BY GRUAU FOR DIOR. © COLLECTION DIOR. BAL DU MOULIN ROUGE. REVUE FRISON. CHALK ON PAPER. 1955. © SARL RENÉ GRUAU. COLLECTION PARTICULIÈRE.

As much an illustrator, Gruau was known for

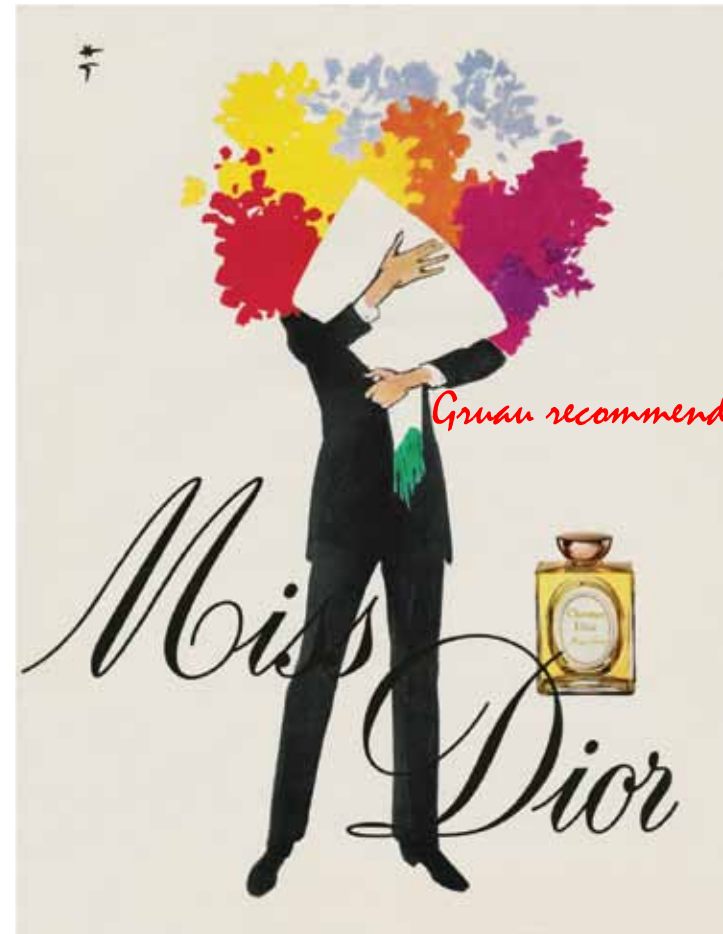
his graphic design skill. He produced multiple advertising campaigns for luxury brand names including Maserati, Pirelli, Cinzano, Air France, Omega, Dubonnet, Lindt, Van Cleef & Arpels, Fiat and Gaumont.



The largest respect of his work was organised by

the Advertising Museum in Paris in 1999. It was simply called *Passionately Gruau*.

ABOVE: DRAWING BY GRUAU FOR DIORISIMO, 1981. © COLLECTION DIOR; DRAWING BY GRUAU FOR MISS DIOR. © COLLECTION DIOR.



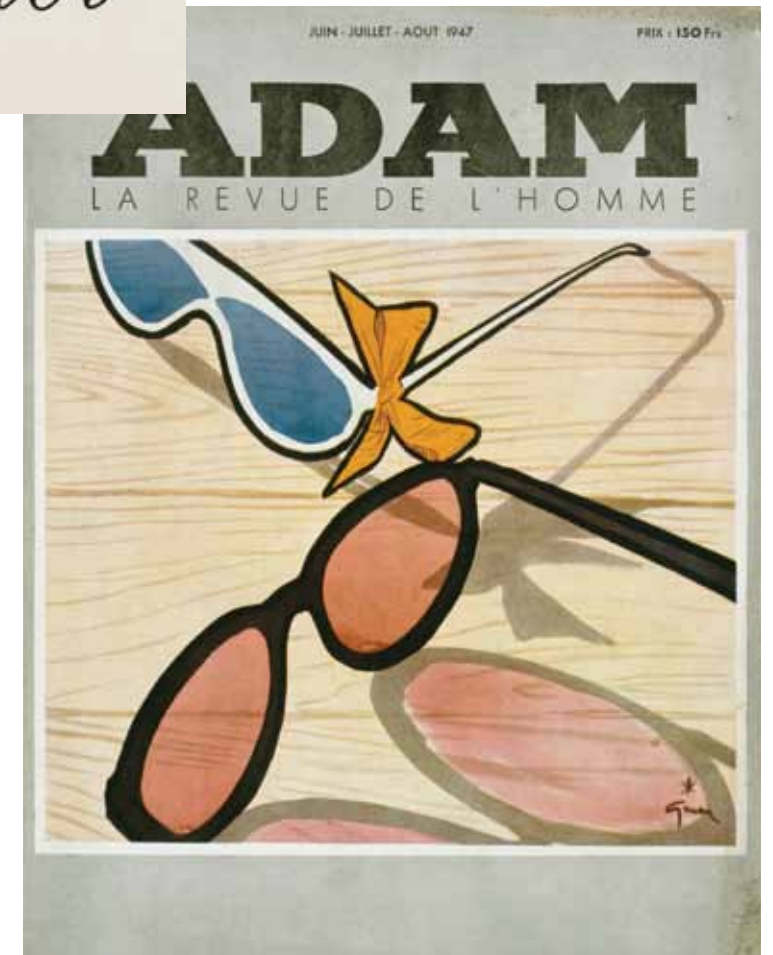
Gruau recommended a 20-year-old Hubert de Givenchy

to Italian fashion designer Elsa Schiaparelli, who made him an assistant then director of her celebrated boutique. He left four years later and struck out on his own.

ABOVE: MISS DIOR ADVERTISEMENT BY GRUAU. © COLLECTION DIOR; COVER FOR ADAM, 1947. © S.M.L. RENÉ GRUAU. COLLECTION PARTICULIÈRE.

Gruau brought fashion to life by bringing life to fashion

and imbuing each artwork with a spirit we now call lifestyle. His was a newly elevated world of branding by brushstroke.



Gruau was suddenly discovering his style, comprising heavy charcoal outlines and more powerful palettes than those prevalent in illustration from 1910-30, and redolent of Parisian artists like Toulouse-Lautrec. Chariou claims Gruau always maintained Lautrec's influence had not been conscious in his work, but that "it was in the air" and he "just caught it".

Gruau first met Christian Dior in the early 1940's while doing freelance illustration for couturier Lucien Lelong. Dior had also been working as an illustrator for *Le Figaro* and then as designer for Lelong, who counted Pierre Balmain among his designers and boasted a lustrous clientele including Greta Garbo, Gloria Swanson, French novelist Colette and Rose Kennedy [mother of president John F. Kennedy]. Gruau began another famous partnership in 1946 when he did his first job for *International Textiles* magazine whose covers he designed until 1984.

But Gruau's influence wasn't confined to the drawing board; he persuaded Dior to accept sponsorship from French textile magnate Marcel Bousac, which made possible the house of Dior in 1947. That year, Gruau also recommended the then 20-year-old Hubert de Givenchy to Italian fashion designer Elsa Schiaparelli, who made Givenchy an assistant

and then director of her celebrated boutique, before he struck out on his own four years later.

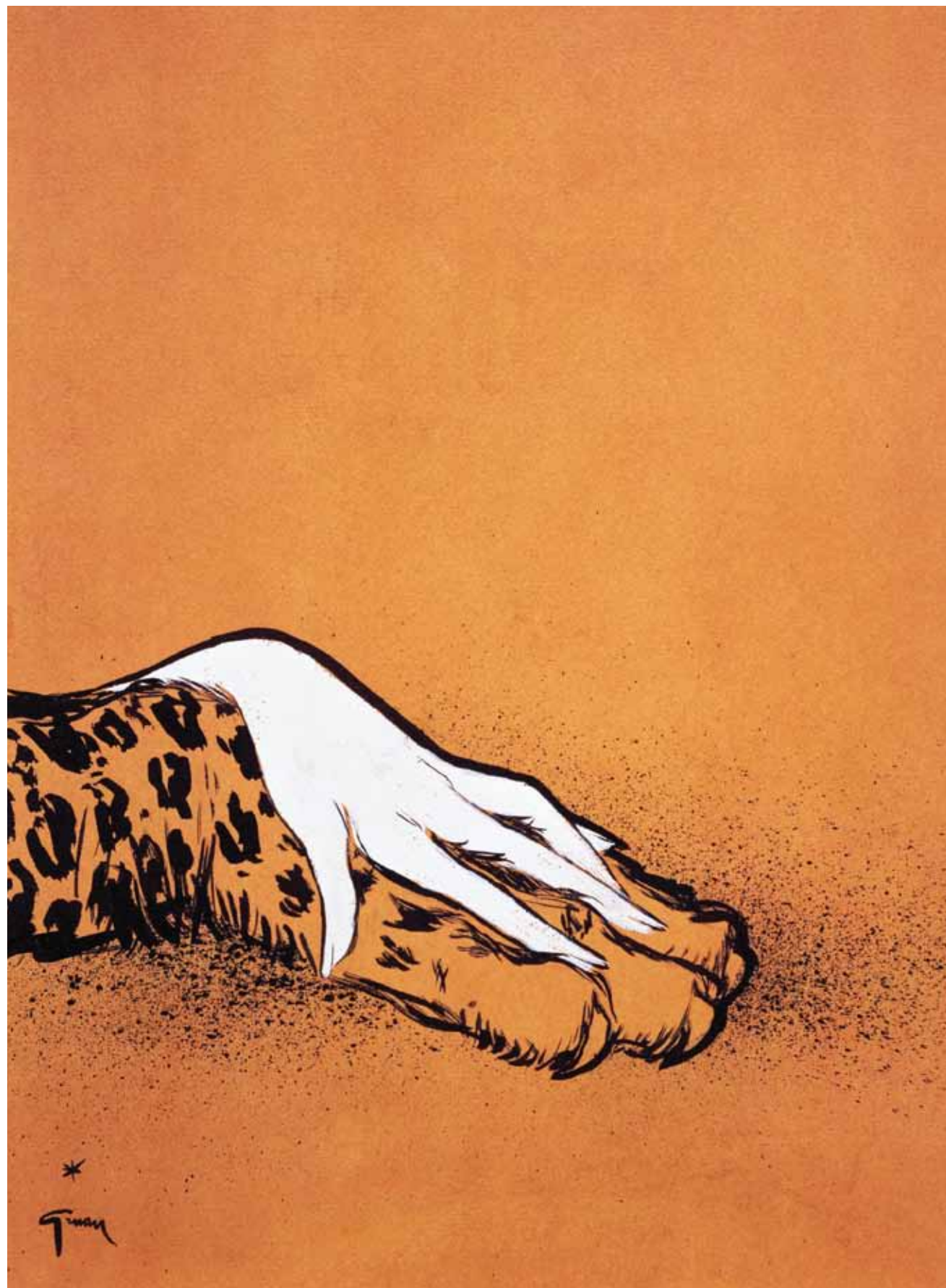
Dior set up and appointed Gruau his artistic director for advertising. The series of drawings Gruau created for the New Look and perfumes were ecstatic moments that made their way into aesthetic eternity. Dior and Gruau became close friends and would spend weekends together with a small group of peers at La Pace at Montecatini [the hotel in which Dior died in 1957].

Despite his 1947 success, Gruau left for the United States the following year to work for *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue*, before becoming exclusive artist for *Flair* magazine and devoted much of his time the following year to advertising for Rouge Baiser, Bemberg and Blizzand.

For a man whose muse was women, Gruau preferred *femmes du monde* to celebrities; his mother was one, and so too Dior milliner Mitza Bricard. She could be found only "at home, at the Ritz, or at Dior". Gruau's famous illustration with the leopard paw (page 58) was inspired by Bricard. And then there was Susan Train, American *Vogue's* editor in Paris for 50-plus years. Train, who still lives in Paris today, remembers the effect of first meeting Gruau in 1952. "He was living in a large Paris apartment and, the height of chic in my eyes, owned a



BEMBERG, POSTER PAINT AND INK ON PAPER, 1968. © SARL RENÉ GRUAU COLLECTION PARTICULIÈRE.



DRAWING BY GRUAU FOR MISS DIOR ©COLLECTION DIOR

Rolls-Royce with his signature “G” like a coat of arms emblazoned on the door and the faithful Oscar drove the car,” she recalls, the memory still as vivid and spirited as any Gruau image. “By the time I met him, René had tired of the chic social whirl of Paris and little by little had become elusive, avoiding smart cocktail parties and dinners, preferring bistro evenings with a few friends or even a home-cooked chicken at my house.”

Gruau was able to combine work and leisure, with trips to Switzerland and Italy, and bought an apartment on a hill just outside Cannes with a large terrace overlooking the Mediterranean. Train recalls how idyllic those post-war days seemed in the 50’s: “I remember vacations in Cannes, going out on a boat or to the beach with him and our regular group of friends, Alice Chavane, beauty editor of *Elle* and her friend James de Coquet, a writer for *Figaro*, Michael Brodsky, a White Russian émigré and Roger Vivier [shoe designer at that time working for Dior] and cosy evenings dining at the Blue Bar in Cannes or Chez Felix in the port of Antibes. As the years went by he spent more and more time in the south of France. He had a relaxed elegance even in Paris.”

But the world was changing and elegance was no longer fashion’s greatest aspiration. Hollywood came calling asking Gruau to design countless promotional film posters, but he declined. Instead, he kept his cinematic illustrations European, realising Jean Renoir’s *French Cancan* in 1954 and five years later fashioning his most famous piece of film art, the poster for Federico Fellini’s *La Dolce Vita*, the inspiration for many cinematic artworks during the swinging sixties that derive from it. He revered cabaret as a magically nostalgic world and created posters for the Moulin Rouge and Lido for more than 30 years. He also designed productions for Les Ballets Roland Petit and the Opéra Comique.

By the 1960’s fashion illustration was becoming less visible in magazines and increasingly used for adver-

tising campaigns, as magazines put their money into photography. Gruau always maintained that a good photograph was better than a good illustration, but that a great illustration always bettered a great photograph. He went on to produce multiple advertising campaigns for luxury brand names including Maserati, Pirelli, Dubonnet, Lindt, Omega, Van Cleef & Arpels, Fiat and Gaumont.

The more Gruau put his graphic design skill to work for prestigious clients, the more they wanted and the more he gave. He was still drawing for Dior into the 1980’s. Advertising gave him free rein to create rather than just record. Train elaborates: “He enjoyed the total creative freedom of advertising work and he was unique in that he conceived and executed his own ideas – no marketing managers or art directors were necessary – and after countless sketches had finished in the wastepaper basket, the result was a few pure and simple lines that went straight to the heart of the matter and fixed the image in one’s memory.”

Chariou, who became friends with Gruau, remembers vividly her first meeting with the 73-year-old in 1982: “I was surprised because he couldn’t understand why I was interested in his fashion drawings and why I thought other people might be,” she says. “He had been a star comparable to the star photographers of today, but he was in his own eyes, just somebody who executed commands.”

Train thinks the enduring power of Gruau’s work resides in the playfulness and humour with which he approached life: “When he described working on a drawing he would say getting the right idea was ‘like waiting for a sneeze’. His comments were as graphic and as visual as his drawings.” Sylvie Nissen places Gruau in context in her book: “Even if his name is not on everyone’s lips, his drawings, his posters and artwork have deeply impacted upon us without our knowing it.” Ever surprising and uplifting, every look is a new look, with the sublime René Gruau. - STEPHEN SHORT

