

Edwardian Elegance: Art, High Society and Fashion

'These are the people, or a sample of them, who ordain the London season, glorify Ascot, make or unmake the fortune of small continental watering places, inspire envy, emulation, and snobbishness – well, thought Anquetil with a shrug, they spend money, and that is the best that can be said for them'.

Vita Sackville-West, The Edwardians



Writing retrospectively in 1930 about the radical social and cultural changes at the beginning of the century, Vita Sackville-West thus describes “high society” in the Edwardian period. Focusing on the sumptuous society portraits of John Singer Sargent, Philip de Laszlo, Giovanni Boldini and other artists and designers who defined the “look” of the period, we will look at paintings, photographs, interiors and fashion designs to recreate the opulent lifestyle of the artists’ aristocratic and nouveaux riches international patrons.

What were the main society events of the London ‘season’? What role did art play in social acceptance as a person of refinement and culture? Who were the key players? As a newcomer, how did one know what to wear and how to wear it? What role did King Edward VII and the Marlborough House set play in changing the rules of the game?

This period of radical and exciting social change, convention and etiquette includes the effects of female emancipation and important influences from America. Extracts from contemporary writers such as Henry James and Edith Wharton, and the diaries of Lady Duff Gordon, Elinor Glyn, and Maurice Baring will be used to bring the players to life.





