


TZIPORAH SALAMON





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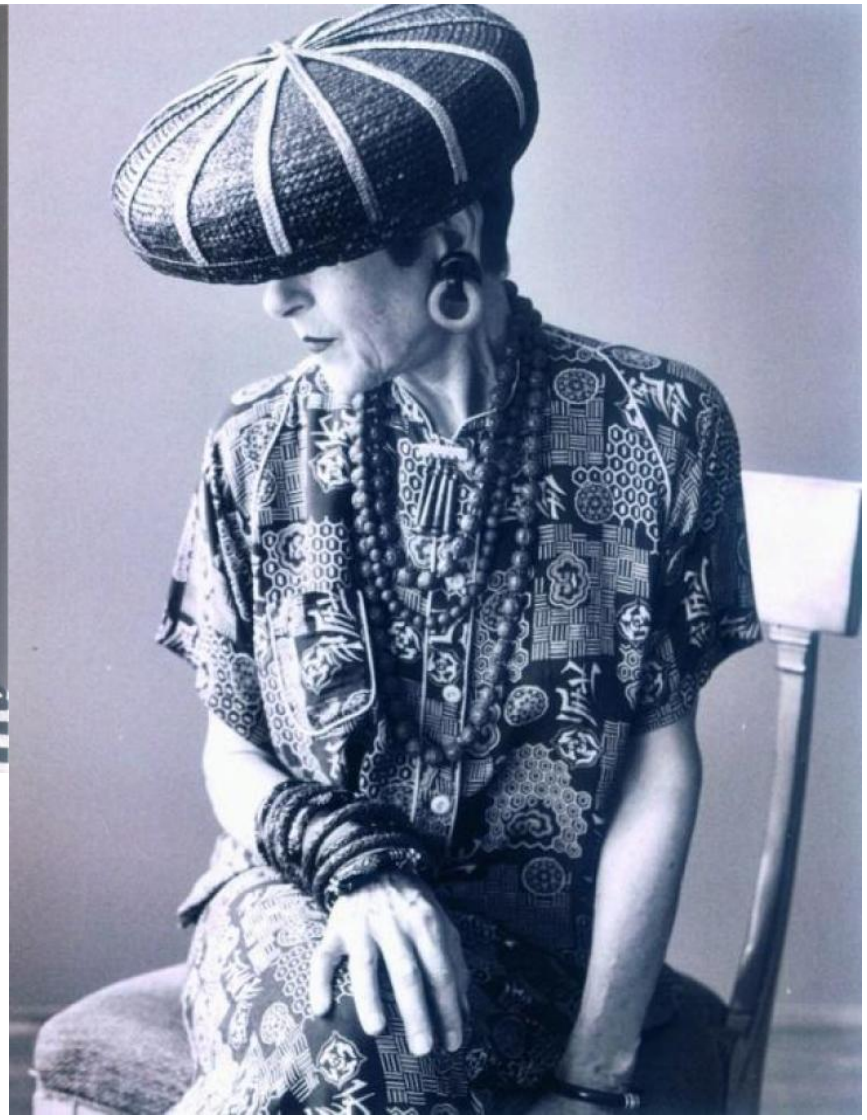

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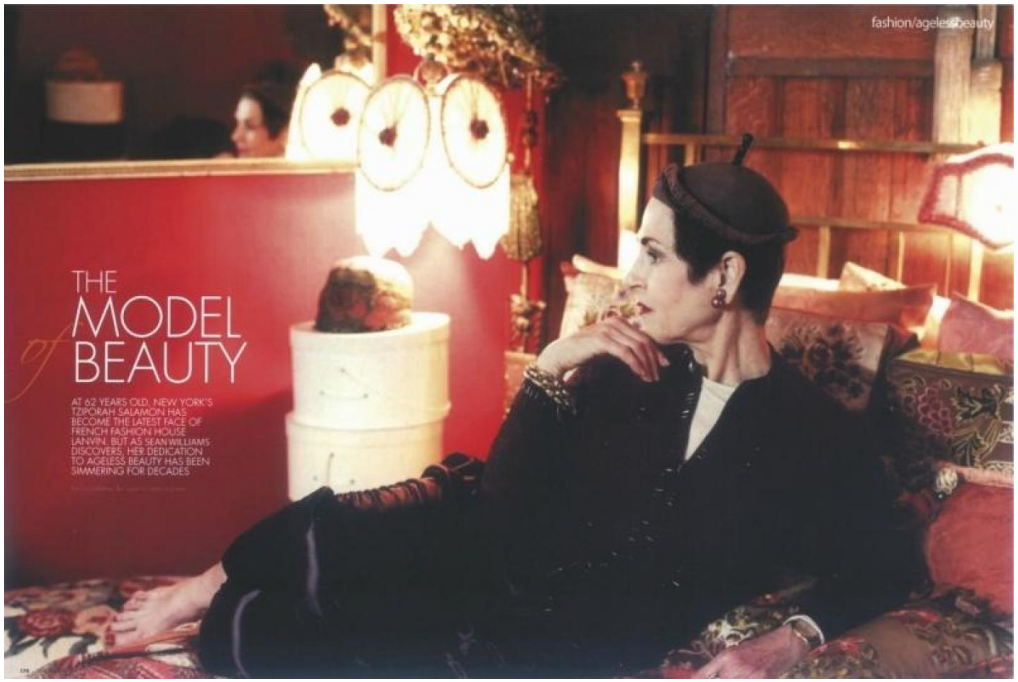







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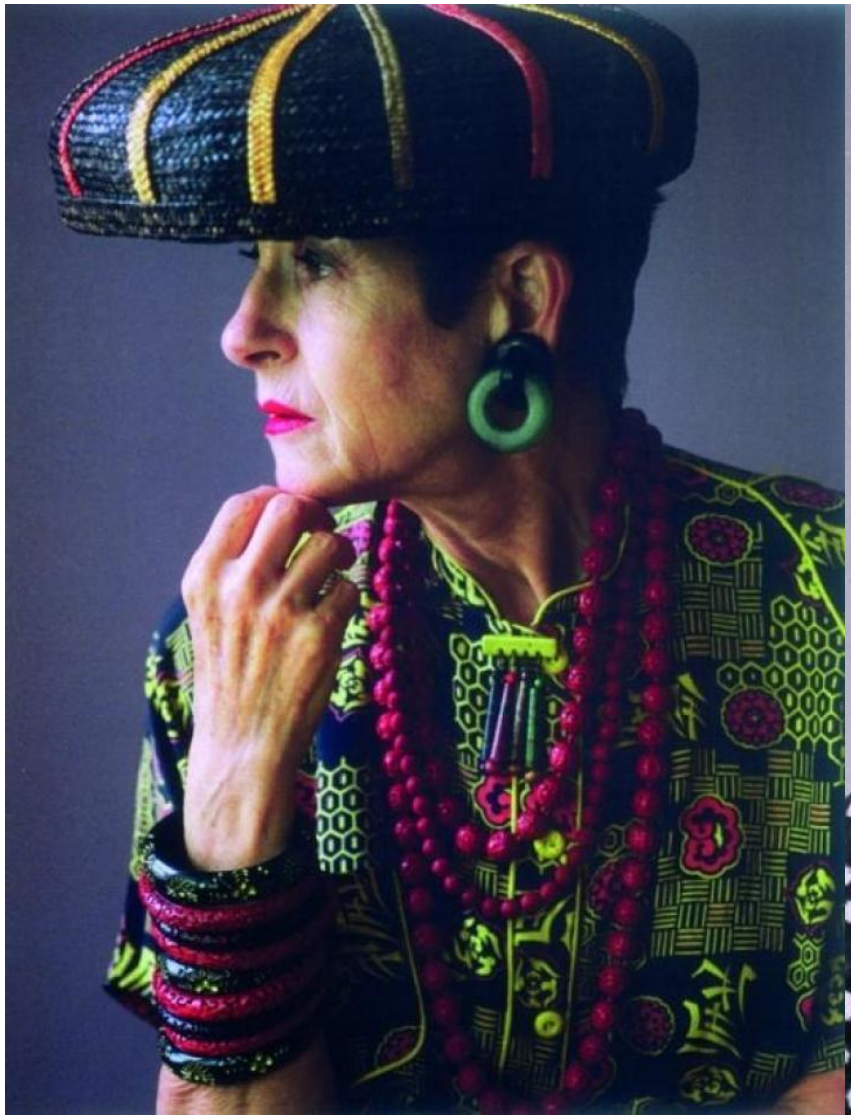

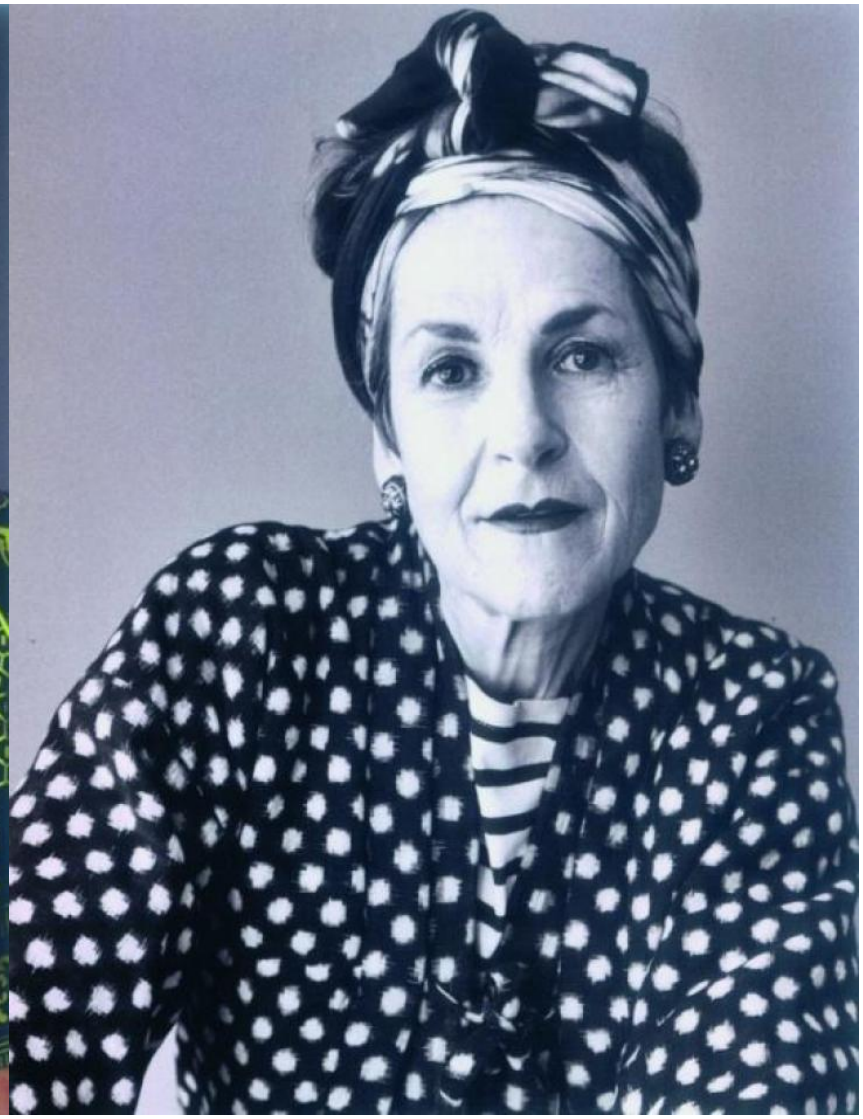

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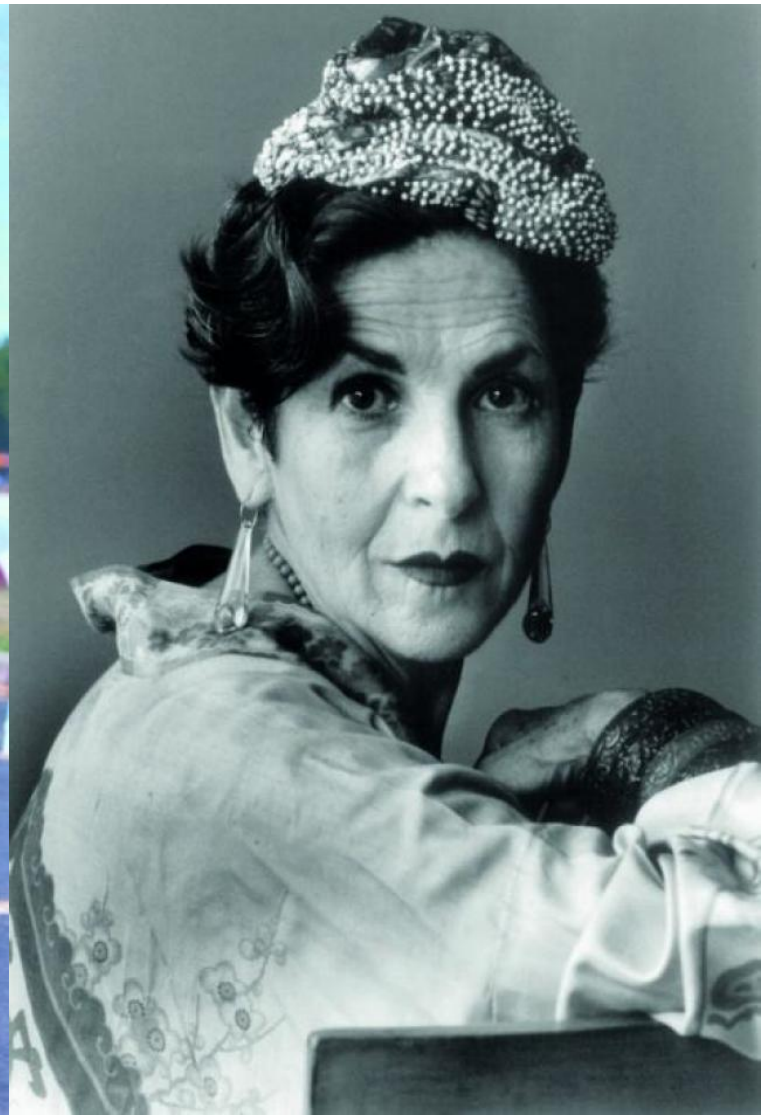

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do the cleaning, all of it. And there was room for one tailor. My father was chosen, which means he sewed the Nazi uniforms and the slaves' overalls. That's what saved his life."

After surviving the camps and fleeing to Israel, Salamon's family spent nine years with their young daughter in the fledgling state, where she learned to dress lavishly almost immediately. "My parents made all the clothes," she says. "My dad would make little boys' coats, and my mom made the skirts, the blouses, jumpers and dresses.

"When I was a little girl I used to love going to my dad's tailoring shop and I would see the fabric on the table; flat, one-dimensional stuff," she adds. "The next day I'd go and it would be on the dummy as a suit. I thought, 'How did he do that?' I thought my father was a magician – that he blew life into something flat."

She pulls out a pile of old photographs from a dresser drawer: Salamon as a Persian princess, Snow White, Arab girl, even an oversized dunst. The androgyny has followed her to this day, influencing the quirky outfits she's become famous for, at least within her adopted hometown of New York. But it has been a long road from the Middle East to Lanvin; one which saw Salamon complete a PhD in psychotherapy and become a teacher before realising her calling in style, ripping sticks and moving to the States to spend years waiting tables and working in retail stores. At first she was worried her passion was too shallow, but she slowly realised that it could be her unique gift to the world. "Obviously brain surgery's more important but there was no way I was going to be a brain surgeon. We all have our calling, whatever it is, and that calling is right."

Today Salamon uses her teaching skills to educate young women across New York in the art of dressing, and parades her amazing wardrobe in a one-woman show called *The Fabric Of My Life*, which has attracted something of a cult status. She is also the darling of legendary New York Times street-style photographer Bill Cunningham, optimising the skillfulness of growing old gracefully, and beautifully.

But it was the advent of the internet that propelled Salamon from underground hero into fully-fledged style icon, appearing regularly on sites like fashionista.com and expoundtipper.com. "Salamon always looks absolutely fabulous," says Ari Seth Cohen, creator and author of Advanced Style, a blog-cum-book about






New York's growing troupe of sartorially savvy older women. It was from Cohen's pictures on the streets of Manhattan that Salamon got her big break as a model, snapped up by Lanvin Artistic Director Alber Elbaz.

"I had seen Advanced Style and shooted Alber," says Katy Reiss. "It was by coincidence or fate that at the same time the model scout came across Salamon. The essence of the campaign was to work with real people. But we did not want to end up with a Rosettan ad with one person from each corner of the world. It was not about multi-culture or equality: it was more about individuals who already possess a strong identity in wearing Lanvin in their own way."

This individuality is what drives Salamon each day – an individuality she feels is desperately lacking in an age where fashion, and life, is dependent on mass consumerism. "Even in 2012 women really do need help, because we're so bombarded. There are so many lines out there and it consumes women. "We throw away everything," she adds. "We throw away relationships and we throw away clothes. A skirt might cost you US$20 at the store, but it'll only last you six months. Instead of buying it, have it made.

"I love that I can travel with my clothes my whole life," she continues. "In the old days women didn't get fat. They got thicker as they got older but it wasn't like today when everyone ever 50 is obese. That's because of haimon and the foods we eat. It's overconsumption on every level."

Salamon is similarly unenthused by the image of beauty perpetuated by today's Hollywood stars. "Back in the day they would dress really well. Now it's all kind of the same look: whatever's 'in' is very predictable. Every Academy Awards now, it's just the strapless dress. Fashion is becoming too predictable: big bosoms as opposed to individual expression."

She reveals her ultimate goal is to dress the red carpet with the lessons she learned growing up – especially in the Middle East, a region whose traditional styles she cows ever frequently. "I lived in Egypt for a year and tutored one of the daughters of a Saudi prince," she says. "The farmers in Egypt, the men in their galabiyas, they're gorgeous and elegant and they're peasants, workers. The beautiful clothes that they make themselves that isn't fashion, it's fabulous.

"To put a star in a black galabiya or an Indian sari: that's a fabulous look," she adds. "Head covers are gorgeous, mysterious and evocative. In the Western world we rarely think anything loose and fluid could ever be beautiful."

So what does Salamon think of her new-found fame? Could it spur a new generation of older women to re-evaluate their perceptions of beauty? She certainly eyes a trend in the fashion world towards catering for older women, alluding to shifting perceptions about who holds the purse strings these days. "There are so many baby boomers and we're really the ones who have the buying power," she says. "Designers are realising that it behoves them to have older models.

"Who can really afford designer clothes these days? Of course, some can," she adds. "But for the most part it's older women who have had careers and worked, and are on top of their game. And why not? They – we – look great." Looking at the pictures on these pages, it's hard to see otherwise. ■



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