

INTERNET

Chanel delves into founder's history within imagined biopic

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Image from Chanel's "Once and Forever"

By SARAH JONES

French fashion label Chanel is building on its cinematic past with the release of a short about the filmmaking process.

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Premiered during Chanel's Mtiars d'Art runway show Dec. 1 in Rome, "Once and Forever" is a film within a film telling the story of the making of a biopic about the house's founder Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel. With the life of Ms. Chanel consistently explored by the brand's current creative director Karl Lagerfeld, finding new angles through which to tell her story ensures that the audience does not tire of the content.

"The very nature of Chanel as a brand was created out of ambition and empowerment, it is a reflection of the state of the world for women and fashion of the times," said Paul Farkas, co-founder/CEO of [Accessory 2](#), New York.

"The film format well-portrays the complex pioneer behind the statements about war, politics and women's rights and team behind here," he said. "It's genius is a lens that captures and balances the simple and complex."

Mr. Farkas is not affiliated with Chanel, but agreed to comment as an industry expert.

Chanel did not respond by press deadline.

Film on film

Once and Forever stars Kristen Stewart and Geraldine Chaplin, who portray actresses hired to play the role of Ms. Chanel at different stages of her life in an imagined biopic.

Mr. Lagerfeld directed the film, as he has done on numerous Chanel films since 2008.



Behind-the-scenes of Once and Forever

At the beginning of the film, Ms. Stewart is seen dressed as Ms. Chanel in her early years, singing in French. The film cuts back and forth between the actress and her producer, who explains in French to her director that Irys is a "gem," but she may be difficult.

This proves to be the case, with the actress pushing back against casting decisions and the choice to have press on hand before a film is made. She is also shown sighing on set and erupting into giggles when she has to film a dance scene with her love interest.



Video still from Chanel's Once and Forever

Irys' exacting ways carry over to the makeup chair, where she helps guide the aging process that is turning her into a 40-year-old Ms. Chanel. In this way, she mirrors the demanding yet effective Ms. Chanel.

Throughout, tidbits about Ms. Chanel's life emerge, such as the story of the "unknown lover," who she supposedly met in 1922 in St. Moritz. When Irys asks if they are going to include anything about Ms. Chanel's time during World War II involving German spies, her producer retorts that they will only focus on the "years of happiness and success."

The relationship between the actress and her director evolves following a series of conversations on set, leading to a high point as she delivers a monologue.

"Once and Forever," film by Karl Lagerfeld starring Kristen Stewart & Geraldine Chaplin - Chanel

Starting as early as the 1930s, Ms. Chanel acted as costume designer on a number of films, a participation in cinema that has continued to this day.

"Interpretations of personal growth and difficult times are seen in the pitted roles and perspective of Chanel looking at the younger actress playing herself leading to the overall brilliant heritage of the house of Chanel," Mr. Farkas said. "The brand today continues to exemplify strong, clear collections coveted around the world for bold women to tell their stories through her and their style. It is all about leaving your own mark on the world."

For continuity, Ms. Stewart will also be the face of Chanel's Mtiers d'Art advertising campaign, a role she has taken on previously. For the label's 2013/2014 Mtiers d'Art collection, the actress modeled the Americana-inspired apparel in front of Mr. Lagerfeld's lens ([see story](#)).

Fashion film

Chanel frequently focuses on its iconic founder in film. Each biopic has focused on a different period of her life, exploring the time in detail.

In 2013, Chanel debuted a film focusing on Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel's return to fashion in the 1950s following World War II, directed by the brand's creative director, Karl Lagerfeld.

The film, aptly titled "The Return," is more Hollywood than other typical fashion films, with a run time of 30-minutes and big budget production. By creating a longer length film, Chanel was able to educate fans on its story on a deeper level ([see story](#)).

Chanel extended its relationship with New York-based Tribeca Enterprises, the organizer of the annual Tribeca Film Festival, to support women in film.

Chanel's "Through Her Lens: The Tribeca Chanel Women's Filmmaker Program" was a three-day workshop in collaboration with Pulse Films and Tribeca Film Institute and was designed to support emerging United States-based female writers and directors. While Chanel has maintained a relationship with Tribeca Film Festival for a number of years, establishing a support network for budding women in film authenticates its involvement ([see story](#)).

"Fashion film is special in showing unique heritage with strong cast and sophisticated cinematic production quality," Mr. Farkas said. "Chanel's films increasingly impress through the years and are a pleasure to enjoy and share. Once and Forever is indeed an apt title for the iconic impact of Coco Chanel."

Final Take

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