



NEWS

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Paris, Capital of Fashion

September 6, 2019–January 4, 2020

The Museum at FIT

Paris is widely regarded as “the most glamorous and competitive of the world’s fashion capitals” (to quote *The New Yorker*). But how and why did Paris acquire this reputation? The history of Paris fashion is usually presented, simplistically, as a genealogy of genius, dominated by “the great designers,” “kings,” or “dictators of fashion.” *Paris, Capital of Fashion* (September 6, 2019, through January 4, 2020) will be the first exhibition to explore the cultural construction of Paris as the capital of fashion.

Curated by Dr. Valerie Steele, director of The Museum at FIT, it will feature approximately 100 objects, dating from the 18th century to the present. The exhibition will be accompanied by a scholarly book, *Paris, Capital of Fashion* (Bloomsbury, 2019), edited by Steele, who is also the author of *Paris Fashion: A Cultural History*. In addition, there will be a free symposium on October 18, 2019.



Robe à la française, 1755–1760,
France. © The Museum at FIT.



Christian Dior (John Galliano) haute couture,
fall/winter, 2000-2001. Photograph © Guy
Marineau.

Paris, Capital of Fashion opens with an introductory gallery that places Paris within a global context, presenting it in dialogue with other fashion capitals, especially New York. By presenting an original couture suit by Chanel together with a virtually identical licensed copy sold by Orbach’s department store, for example, the exhibition demonstrates how the idea of Paris fashion “works” across fashion

cultures, appealing to elite American women and making money for American manufacturers and retailers.

Entering the main gallery, visitors are immersed in the mythic glamour of Paris fashion as the exhibition traces a trajectory from royal splendor at Versailles to the spectacle of haute couture today. An 18th-century *robe à la française* is juxtaposed with a haute couture creation for Christian Dior, which was inspired by Marie Antoinette. Clothing and accessories will be drawn from museums in Europe, Britain, and North America, as well as from couture archives and private collections.

The development of the haute couture transformed women's fashion from an artisanal craft into big business and high art. In the late 19th century, Charles Frederick Worth praised his American clients, saying they had "the faces, the figures, and the francs." Among his dresses on display is the famous "Electric Light Dress" worn by New York's Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt II. After World War II, the haute couture entered a new golden age from 1947 to 1957 and, by the 1980s, the haute couture was recognized as part of the unique patrimony of France.



Gabrielle Chanel, evening cape, 1927, France. © The Museum at FIT.



Jacques Fath for Joseph Halpert, cocktail dress, 1952, USA. © The Museum at FIT.



Christian Dior (Stephen Jones), top hat, fall 2000, France. © The Museum at FIT.

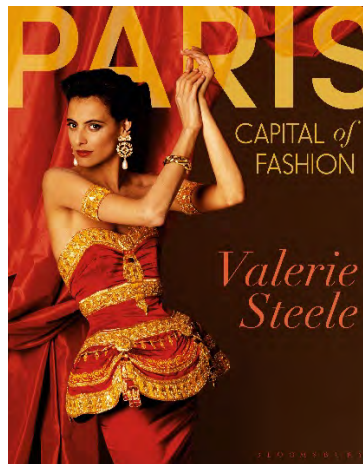
In today's era of globalization, foreign designers often choose to show their collections in Paris, home to luxury conglomerates such as LVMH and Kering. In a world with many fashion cities, Paris defends its title of world capital of fashion by producing and maintaining the aura of Paris fashion.



(L) Suit by Gabrielle Chanel, 1966, France. (R) Licensed copy of a Chanel day suit, c. 1967, USA. © The Museum at FIT.

Publication

The publication, *Paris, Capital of Fashion* (Bloomsbury), was edited by Valerie Steele with additional contributions by Christopher Breward, Grazia d'Annunzio, Antonia Finnane, David Gilbert, Sophie Kurkdjian, and Agnès Rocamora. The book will be released in September 2019.



Paris, Capital of Fashion
by Valerie Steele (Bloomsbury, 2019)

Symposium

In conjunction with the exhibition, *Paris, Capital of Fashion*, The Museum at FIT will hold a symposium on October 18, 2019. Confirmed symposium speakers include all of the contributors to the catalog, among others.

MFIT at 50

The Museum at FIT (MFIT) celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2019 with a series of events that explore the institution's contributions to fashion, culture, and scholarship. Over the past 50 years, MFIT has

educated and inspired audiences with more than 200 innovative, award-winning fashion exhibitions, accompanied by free public programs. Accredited by the American Alliance of Museums in 2012, MFIT is New York City's only museum dedicated solely to the art of fashion. The museum, with a collection of more than 50,000 garments and accessories dating from the 18th century to the present, was founded in 1969 by the Fashion Institute of Technology. Its mission is to educate and inspire diverse audiences with innovative exhibitions and projects that advance the knowledge of fashion. Visit fitnyc.edu/museum.

Fashion Institute of Technology

The museum is part of the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT), a State University of New York (SUNY) college of art, design, business, and that fosters innovation, collaboration, and a global perspective. With programs that blend experiential learning, a strong grounding in theory, and a broad-based liberal arts foundation, FIT offers career education in nearly 50 programs, and grants associate's, bachelor's, and master's degrees. FIT provides students with a complete college experience at an affordable cost, a vibrant campus life in New York City, and industry-relevant preparation for rewarding careers.

Couture Council

The Couture Council is a membership group that helps support the exhibitions and programs of The Museum at FIT. The Couture Council Award for Artistry of Fashion is given to a selected designer at a benefit luncheon held every September. For information on the Couture Council, call (212) 217-4532 or email couturecouncil@fitnyc.edu.

Museum hours: Tuesday–Friday, noon–8 pm; Saturday, 10 am–5 pm. Closed Sunday, Monday, and legal holidays.

Admission is free.

Paris, Capital of Fashion

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couture council



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