



NEWS

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From

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Force of Nature

May 30–November 18, 2017
The Museum at FIT

The Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology presents *Force of Nature* (May 30–November 18, 2017), a unique exhibition that explores how the beauty and complexity of nature have inspired fashion designers for centuries. More than a survey of decorative flora and fauna, this exhibition reveals the natural world as a source of ideas and symbolism in fashion design. Approximately 95 objects are presented in a manner that demonstrates the deep interconnectedness between fashion and the natural sciences. Spanning the 18th century to the present, *Force of Nature* features garments, accessories, and textiles from the permanent collection of The Museum at FIT.



Alexander McQueen, dress, *Plato's Atlantis* collection, spring 2010, England, museum purchase.



Alexander McQueen, *Irere* collection, spring 2003, England, museum purchase.



Rick Owens, ensemble, *Mastodon* collection, fall 2016, USA, gift of Rick Owens Studio.

The exhibition opens with two dresses by Alexander McQueen, a fashion designer for whom nature was a recurring theme. The dresses, including one from his acclaimed final collection in 2010, present meditations on Charles Darwin's theory of evolution and McQueen's concerns about climate change.

Next, a striking selection of garments, including a one-of-a-kind *Crystallization* “water” dress by Iris van Herpen, introduces visitors to some of the basic elements of the natural world that are included in the exhibition. Another dress by McQueen meticulously reproduces the magnificent plumage of the scarlet macaw, while a look from Rick Owens’ fall 2016 collection contemplates the extinction of the mastodon and provides commentary on environmental change.



Charles James, *Tree* evening dress and *Petal* stole, 1955, USA, museum purchase.



Pierre Hardy, shoes, summer 2015, France, gift of Pierre Hardy.



Alexander McQueen, evening dress, *Pantheon as Lecum* collection, fall 2004, England, museum purchase.

A section titled “The Language of Flowers” addresses the importance of flowers in plant reproduction and how this informs the meaning of flower images in dress, particularly roses, lilies, and orchids. Featured is a Charles James evening gown, with a petal-like stole that sensuously transforms its wearer into a flower.



Yves Saint Laurent Rive Gauche, suit, circa 1972, France, gift of John Karl.



Mme. Pauline, hat, circa 1955, USA, gift of Mrs. Otto Grun.

“The Science of Attraction” section delves further into the theory of evolution and its lasting impact on modern society with a look at how ideas about sexual selection relate to aspects of male and female dress. A bright green suit by Yves Saint Laurent highlights the 1960s Peacock Revolution, which brought a colorful, flamboyant look back to men’s fashion. This aligns with patterns in the natural world, where it is often the male of the species—for example, the peacock—that is more visually arresting. On the other hand, a 1950s woman’s hat adorned with a bird of paradise serves as an example of how feathers used by male birds for sexual display have been appropriated to emphasize female allure.



Dolce & Gabbana, evening dress, spring 1998, Italy, gift of Dolce & Gabbana.



Alexander McQueen, dress, *Horn of Plenty* collection, fall 2009, England, museum purchase.



(Left) Saks Fifth Avenue, cocktail dress, fall 1953, USA, gift of Sophie Gimbel. (Right) Evening coat, circa 1920, France, gift of John J. Sasek.

The concept of metamorphosis, from biological to symbolic, is explored through garments such as a dress by Dolce & Gabbana adorned with butterflies. In “The Aviary,” a selection of pieces by Alexander McQueen, Comme des Garçons, Cristobal Balenciaga, and other designers, further addresses the symbolism of birds and feathers. The section called “Physical Forces” highlights the impact of theoretical physics and space exploration, demonstrating the cultural significance of these scientific endeavors.

Throughout *Force of Nature*, digital media allow visitors to learn in greater detail about many of the concepts presented. Interactive iPads and a related website provide supplemental information about historical figures such as Albert Einstein and Rachel Carson who revolutionized the way we see our world. Important inquiries into nature are also addressed, such as the meaning behind the astonishing colors and patterns we see among birds.



Valentino Couture, coat, 1974, Italy,
gift of Mary Russell.



Jean Paul Gaultier, top and skirt, 1988
and 1987, France, museum purchase.

Historically, the dynamic between fashion and nature has alternated between harmful and responsible. However, fashion's impact on plants, animals, and the environment has been largely detrimental. The final section of the exhibition examines this complex relationship. It highlights ways in which designers and companies today are working toward creating a responsible and sustainable relationship with the natural world, encouraging a vital discussion about future directions in fashion.

Force of Nature is organized by Melissa Marra-Alvarez, associate curator of Education and Public Programs, The Museum at FIT.

The Museum at FIT

The Museum at FIT, which is accredited by the American Alliance of Museums, is the only museum in New York City dedicated solely to the art of fashion. Best known for its innovative and award-winning exhibitions, the museum has a collection of more than 50,000 garments and accessories dating from the 18th century to the present. The museum's mission is to educate and inspire diverse audiences with innovative exhibition and projects that advance the knowledge of fashion. Visit fitnyc.edu/museum.

The museum is part of the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT), a State University of New York (SUNY) college of art, design, business, and technology that has been at the crossroads of commerce and creativity for over 70 years. With programs that blend hands-on practice, a strong grounding in theory, and a broad-based liberal arts foundation, FIT offers career education in nearly 50 areas, and grants associate, 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. Visit fitnyc.edu.

The Couture Council is a philanthropic 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.

Force of Nature is made possible by the support of the Couture Council.

couture council