

## News Release

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### ***Asian Americans in New York Fashion: Design, Labor, Innovation***

The Museum at FIT, March 2-27, 2022

**Free and open to the public**

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The Fashion Institute of Technology's (FIT) School of Graduate Studies, in collaboration with The Museum at FIT (MFIT), presents [\*Asian Americans in New York Fashion: Design, Labor, Innovation\*](#). Conceived and organized by graduate students in the Fashion and Textile Studies program, the exhibition celebrates the Asian American community's significant contributions to the fashion industry—and fashion in New York—through a selection of garments, textiles, video footage, and photographs. The exhibition provides recognition of the need for greater support for Asian Americans and their continued significance to the fashion industry, especially following the recent rise of racially motivated attacks.



Ruben Toledo, "The Tug of War Continues..." illustration in Paper Magazine, December 1997, private collection. Courtesy of Ruben Toledo.

***Asian Americans in New York Fashion: Design, Labor, Innovation*** is divided into two sections, the first of which focuses on fashion production, labor, and the use of materials in the design process from the 1980s to the 2010s. The second section explores design narratives from the 1950s to the present, which exemplify a variety of Asian American fashion aesthetics.

The exhibition opens with an illustration by Ruben Toledo titled “The Tug of War Continues...,” featuring designers Anna Sui, Vivienne Tam, and Zang Toi acting as pillars supporting one another and the American fashion industry as a whole. Their positions in the industry have been recognized by the Council of Fashion Designers of America, with all three receiving honors and awards.



Yeohlee Teng, jacket, gold metallic and black silk with gold sequins and sable; brown silk satin, fall 1997, gift of Yeohlee New York. © The Museum at FIT



Harvey Wang, “Chinese Garment Workers,” photograph, circa 1983. Courtesy of Harvey Wang.

The exhibition then considers the invisible labor that Asian American garment workers contribute to the fashion industry. A fall 1991 jacket by Yeohlee Teng includes the designer’s label but also a label with “Sue” identified as the seamstress who sewed the garment. A 1983 photograph by Harvey Wang depicts garment workers in a New York City factory, highlighting the work of individuals that often goes unrecognized. This section concludes with video footage and newspaper stories that highlight Asian American labor activism in the New York Garment District.



Riazaee Boutique by Naeem Khan, evening dress, 1992-1994, loan from Adnan Ege Kutay Collection.



Jean Yu, lingerie set, silk chiffon and grosgrain ribbon, spring/summer 2005, museum purchase. © The Museum at FIT.



Mary Ping, bag, unbleached cotton canvas, brass, fall 2002, gift of Mary Ping. © The Museum at FIT.

The exhibition shifts to focus on the importance of materials in the design process, illustrating the techniques of three Asian American designers. Naeem Khan's dress features an embroidered bodice; embroidery is a key feature in many of his designs, stemming from the legacy of his parents' embroidery company in India. Jean Yu's silk chiffon bra and panty set, and Mary Ping's canvas bag (an interpretation of a Balenciaga motorcycle bag) use different materials and techniques to speak to both sustainability and minimalism.



Shail Upadhyia, jacket, cotton denim and paint, 1988, gift of The Estate of Shail Upadhyia. © The Museum at FIT.



Gemma Kahng, jacket, fall 1991, gift of Linda Tain. © The Museum at FIT

***Asian Americans in New York Fashion: Design, Labor, Innovation*** concludes with a section that considers the range of Asian American designers' roles in the industry, sources of inspiration, and clientele through a series of juxtaposed object pairs. Jackets by Shail Upadhyia and Gemma Kahng show contrasting design roles. Upadhyia acts as a creative facilitator bridging fashion and art by commissioning the painting of his one-of-a-kind blazer from a local artist. Kahng is a ready-to-wear designer embedded in the New York industry, and her coat is designed for a wider audience.

In conjunction with the exhibition, a virtual panel titled "Asian Americans in New York Fashion: A Conversation with Mary Ping and Christina Moon" will take place on March 10. The panelists will discuss the impact of Asian Americans on the New York fashion industry, focusing on their own contributions through their work as a designer and scholar respectively.

Part of FIT's School of Graduate Studies, the Fashion and Textile Studies: History, Theory, Museum Practice MA program builds knowledge in fashion and textile history, object conservation, and exhibition theory over the course of two years. During their second year, students utilize the interdisciplinary skills they have acquired through the program to collaborate with The Museum at FIT, developing and installing an exhibition of fashion objects from MFIT's collection.

The museum will be open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays from noon to 8 pm, and Saturdays and Sundays from 10 am to 5 pm. Admission is free. It is mandatory that all visitors, regardless of their vaccination status, wear a face mask while in the museum. All visitors are requested to review the latest safety guidelines and protocols, [available here](#).

For more information and the latest MFIT updates, click [here](#); register for the newsletter [here](#); and follow us on [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), and [Facebook](#).

**The School of Graduate Studies** at FIT provides advanced professional education in seven distinctive areas, promoting excellence in the post-baccalaureate study of fashion, business, art, and design. The school offers programs leading to the MA, MFA, and MPS degrees and is dedicated to advancing research in the creative industries and fostering innovative collaborations that link students and faculty with industry and professional partners worldwide.

#### **About The Museum at FIT (MFIT)**

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. Like other fashion museums, such as the Musée de la Mode, the Mode Museum, and the Museo de la Moda, The Museum at FIT collects, conserves, documents, exhibits, and interprets fashion. The museum's mission is to advance knowledge of fashion through exhibitions, publications, and public programs. Visit [fitnyc.edu/museum](http://fitnyc.edu/museum).

The museum is part of the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT), a State University of New York college that has been an internationally recognized leader in career education in design, fashion, business, and technology for more than 75 years. Providing an uncommon blend of practical experience and theory on a foundation of arts and sciences, FIT offers a wide range of affordable programs that foster innovation, collaboration, and a global perspective. FIT draws on its New

York City location to provide a vibrant, creative environment for learning, exploration, and research. The college offers nearly 50 degree programs and grants AAS, BFA, BS, MA, MFA, and MPS degrees, preparing students for professional success and leadership in the creative economy. Visit [fitnyc.edu](http://fitnyc.edu).