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Art X Fashion
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Curated by Elizabeth Way

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Cover: Josh Tafoya, wool coat, spring 2025.

Flap: Hussein Chalayan, "Airmail" dress, 1999.

Interior: Silk robe à la française, 1760–1775.

Koret, silver leather purse, circa 1940. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Schiro.

William Morris, cotton textile, 1885. Gift of Mr. Harvey Rosenberg.

Sonia Delaunay, hand colored print, 1925. © Pracusa 20251024

Pablo Picasso for Bloomcraft Inc., *Toros Y Toreros* textile, 1959. Gift of Laura Sinderbrand.

Boris Lurie, illustration for *Art and Fashion* magazine, circa 1952. Courtesy of the Boris Lurie Art Foundation.

The Campbell's Company, "The Souper Dress," 1966–1967.

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ART X FASHION

FEBRUARY 18–APRIL 19, 2026



Is fashion art? Opinions differ, but fashion's relationship with art is undeniable. *Art X Fashion* explores this relationship in the Euro-American context. Drawing mainly from The Museum at FIT's permanent collection, the exhibition begins with a 200-year aesthetic timeline that places fashion in conversation with artworks—not pieces that *inspired* the clothing but works emanating from the same cultures of creativity. Euro-American art eras exceeded the visual realm, influencing music, literature, and even manners and attitudes. Therefore, one could not say that the paintings of Jean-Antoine Watteau or François Boucher inspired



a floral brocaded silk *robe à la française*. All these pieces of visual culture grew from the same fertile ground of late 18th-century French rococo. At certain points in Euro-American history, the “fine” visual arts, defined as painting, sculpture, and sometimes architecture, were closely aligned with the “decorative” arts of textiles and fashion design, as well as ceramics and interior design. The rococo period is one example of this synthesis, and others include the turn-of-the-20th-century Art Nouveau and the Art Deco style that followed. These art eras are as well represented by fashion as by paintings. An exquisitely embossed silver clutch purse, designed by Koret at the end of the 1930s, “says” Art Deco as clearly as Tamara de Lempicka's stylized portraits or the Chrysler Building.

Late 19th-century industrialization and urbanization also pushed art and fashion together, but in an uneasily complex way. The Realist and Impressionist painters of Paris wanted to capture modern life, and so contemporary fashion was a significant part of the work of Gustave Courbet, Edouard Manet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and many others. Whereas painting and sculpture were perceived as expressing freedom, intellect, and

the rejection of bourgeois values, fashion—rapidly increasing in volume and availability thanks to mass production and expanded retailing—was solidified as the ultimate symbol of the commercial, corporeal, frivolous, and *feminine*. This idea led other artists to completely reimagine fashion and textiles. William Morris of the Arts and Crafts movement, Josef Hoffmann of the Vienna Secession, and Walter Gropius of the Bauhaus were among those who broadened their repertoires to textile and clothing design as parallel expressions of their artistic ethos. They rejected the cheap, ugly products of mass production and collapsed the barriers between high art and decorative art with the hope that thoughtful, artistic design for everyday life could save the human soul. In doing so, they mirrored other cultures with established aesthetic practices, such as in Asia, where fashion and textiles had long been appreciated as art.

Fashion maintained a close visual relationship to fine art during the early 20th century. Surrealism, for example, famously brought Salvador Dalí into collaboration with Elsa Schiaparelli during the 1930s. Dalí was keen to explore fashion as one medium, among many, for his creative practice, later intermittently designing ties and textiles for fashion and interiors. Conversely, Sonia Delaunay, working from the 1910s through the 1970s, consistently considered fashion and textile design an important part of her art practice. For Pablo Picasso, transferring his work to fabric in 1959 was a lucrative commission from the textile company Bloomcraft Inc. Textile producers were keen to capitalize on



public interest in modern art during the 1950s and 1960s, following the precedent set by fashion magazines that commissioned avant-garde artists throughout the 20th century. Multimedia, activist artist Boris Lurie, for example, produced both fashion illustrations and textile designs that were presented to the public in magazines, such as *Art and Fashion*. These adhered to the visual culture of fashion, while also conveying Lurie's own gestural and symbol-laden art style.

The introduction of Pop Art inverted the idea of reproducing fine art as a motif on commercial products. Instead, Andy Warhol famously reproduced commercial products to make fine art. The 1966 “Souper” dress, made by The Campbell's Company, took Warhol's commentary on American consumerism even further than his original screen-printed work. The dress was made of disposable paper, and at \$1 (plus two soup can labels), it was an accessible piece of art for everyone.

These artists all blurred the line between the creative practices of art and fashion, and designers have ventured across that line just as frequently. Zandra Rhodes, Fabrice Simon, and Ralph Rucci, for example, are all painters as well as fashion designers. Applying their artwork to textiles results in unique and beautiful designs that innately complement their silhouettes. The rise of conceptual fashion from the 1960s onward has produced styles that are understood as art, even by the art world. In 1982, *Artforum* (somewhat apologetically) featured Issey Miyake's work on its cover, acknowledging his innovative and sculptural designs as art. The influence of art schools as a prestigious source of fashion training has also produced designers, such as Martin Margiela, Hussein Chalayan, and Iris van Herpen, who are hard to categorize as either designer or artist. They are both. Yet, the porous borders between the creative practices of fine art and fashion design have not merged the worlds of fashion and art. They are each systems with their own discourses, operations, and identities, and neither is eager to relinquish itself to the other.

Therefore, the question “Is fashion art?” persists, particularly when art museums present fashion exhibitions.



MFIT Director Valerie Steele observes that such exhibitions can be viewed as “art-ification”—an elevation or legitimization—of fashion, yet she also contends that fashion is valuable outside of the language of art. Fashion's communicative power, creativity, and beauty are equated with art, “because art is shorthand for meaningful symbol-making phenomena.” *Art X Fashion* addresses this debate through the framework developed by art and fashion scholar and curator Christopher Richards. When his doctoral examiners questioned the validity of studying fashion as art history, he proposed three criteria to judge fashion as art: novelty and innovation in design, extraordinary artisanship, and significant social, historical, and cultural impact. Whether you agree or disagree that fashion can be art, it is obvious that its popularity in museum galleries has brought it closer to art's prestige in contemporary Euro-American culture. *Art X Fashion* does not make a definitive claim that fashion is art. But by exploring fashion's relationship to art, the exhibition illustrates fashion's comparable importance as a cultural phenomenon.

Dr. Elizabeth Way, curator