Exhibition Exploring the Cultural Dialogue Between Dolls and Fashion Opens This Fall at The Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology (MFIT)

Doll Dressing Features More Than 170 Objects Examining the Influence of Dolls on Fashion from the 18th Century to Today

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NEW YORK, NY (April 21, 2026) — A pioneering exhibition examining the enduring and often unexpected relationship between dolls and fashion opens this fall at The Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology (MFIT). On view from September 16, 2026, to January 3, 2027, ***Doll Dressing*** centers of on the cultural interplay between dolls and dressed appearance in the 20th and 21st centuries. Featuring more than 170 objects—including fashion dolls displayed alongside full-size garments, accessories, videos, and artworks—the exhibition highlights how the influence of dolls extends far beyond childhood play. Curated by **Dr. Colleen Hill**, senior curator of costume at MFIT, ***Doll Dressing*** features designers and labels including Balenciaga, Comme des Garçons, Maison Martin Margiela, Marc Jacobs, Patrick Kelly, Loewe, Louis Vuitton, Moschino, Anna Sui, and Undercover, ultimately showing how dolls aren't just toys—they're muses, canvases, and even prototypes for designers.

Moschino by Jeremy Scott, jacket and skirt with trompe l'oeil print and "paper doll" tabs, spring 2017, museum purchase.

Doll Dressing poses a compelling and previously overlooked question: How have dolls influenced fashion? While dolls such as Barbie are widely recognized as objects of play, these dolls have

historically functioned as powerful transmitters—and even originators—of style. As early as the 14th century, dolls circulated throughout Europe as miniature fashion models, communicating the latest trends in three-dimensional detail. By the early 20th century, dolls were not only reflecting fashion but actively shaping it. Hill defines this phenomenon as "doll dressing," a concept encompassing clothing, accessories, hair, makeup, and even gestures that draw inspiration from dolls. The exhibition ultimately reveals that doll dressing can be both expressive and subversive, offering a means of exploring identity, fantasy, and personal style.

Organized thematically, ***Doll Dressing*** begins by examining the very definition of the fashion doll. The introductory gallery presents key examples, including a 1970s Daisy doll dressed by Mary Quant and an original Black Barbie from 1980 designed by Kitty Black Perkins, situating dolls within broader histories of representation and style. The section "We Can All Be Dolls" explores themes of inclusivity and self-expression, emphasizing how individuals adopt and reinterpret doll-like aesthetics on their own terms.

The exhibition continues with six thematic sections that expand on the relationship between dolls, fashion, and popular culture. "Fashion Doll Foundations" traces the historical role of dolls as conveyors of style, including an 18th-century example, on loan from Colonial Williamsburg, used to disseminate high-end fashion among dressmakers to be translated into full-size garments. "Modes in Miniature" explores designers' fascination with small-scale creation, culminating in pairings of runway looks with miniature versions by figures such as Emily Adams Bode Aujla, Anna Sui, and Jason Wu.

"Playing with Dolls" addresses themes of childhood, nostalgia, and scale. Designers such as Martin Margiela and Jeremy Scott challenged conventional ideas of proportion and construction by using exaggerated sizing and trompe l'oeil effects to comment on the fashion system and its modes of consumption. These works highlight how doll-inspired design can critique the very structures it references. For his fall 1994 collection, Margiela enlarged doll clothing and accessories to 5.2 times their original size, which amplified the garments' disproportionate stitches, imperfect construction, and unconventional fits—which call to mind unrealistic body standards maintained by the fashion industry. Scott's 2017 Moschino collection, created with tabs that protrude from the sides of the skirt as a reference to playing with paper dolls, was also a statement about how we currently consume fashion—primarily via our phone screens.

"The Dollhouse" looks at how fashion connects to ideas of home and interior spaces, bringing together clothing, architecture, and the world of dollhouses. Designs such as Lirika Matoshi's Apartment Coat, which depicts "rooms" in appliqué, evokes the tactile, imaginative qualities of dollhouses and reinforces the connection between craftsmanship, play, and embodiment.

Lirika Matoshi, "Apartment Coat" with faux fur trim, 2024, museum purchase.

"All Dolled Up" examines the concept of the "living doll" through archetypes such as the flapper, the dolly bird, and the 21st-century Lolita. These figures demonstrate how doll-inspired aesthetics have been used to express empowerment, rebellion, and self-definition, even as they are often misunderstood or trivialized. The section also considers the cultural framing of figures such as Twiggy with a contemporary replica of a Twiggy mannequin, the first celebrity mannequin, which models a dress from her own fashion label, Twiggy London Girl.

Finally, "Broken Dolls" investigates the subversive potential of unsettling or unconventional doll imagery. From the Kinderwhore grunge aesthetic of the 1990s to horror-inspired dolls—such as Mattel's Monster High line, which features a doll dressed in a miniature copy of a 2017 runway look by Virgil Abloh's brand Off-White—these works challenge traditional ideals of beauty and femininity. By embracing distortion, fragility, or menace, designers and wearers alike use doll dressing to critique societal expectations and redefine desirability.

Doll Dressing has been made possible thanks to the generosity of the Couture Council of The Museum at FIT.

Public Programming
The museum will host a *Doll Dressing* symposium on November 13, 2026, at FIT's Katie Murphy Amphitheatre. This daylong program, free and open to the public, will feature leading scholars and designers in conversation with Dr. Colleen Hill and others.

Publication
The exhibition is accompanied by the publication *Doll Dressing* (Rizzoli, September 2026). In addition to seven richly illustrated chapters by Dr. Colleen Hill, the book includes essays by leading scholars, such as Dr. Elizabeth Way, MFIT curator of costume and accessories, and Dr.

Valerie Steele, MFIT director and chief curator, interviews designers Martin Margiela, Viktor & Rolf, and Jun Takahashi, offering deeper insight into the role of doll motifs in their work.

About The Museum at FIT (MFIT)
The Museum at FIT, which in 2022 received its second accreditation 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.

The museum is open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays from noon to 8 pm, and Saturdays and Sundays from 10 am to 5 pm. Admission is always free. For more information and the latest updates, visit the museum's website at fitnyc.edu/museum. To subscribe to the Museum's newsletter, register here. Follow MFIT on social media.

About FIT
A part of the State University of New York (SUNY), FIT has been a leader in career education in art, design, business, and technology throughout its history. Providing more than 8,000 students with an uncommon blend of hands-on, practical experience, theory, and a firm grounding in the liberal arts, the college offers a wide range of affordable programs that foster innovation and collaboration. Its distinctive curriculum is geared to today's rapidly growing creative economy, including fields such as computer animation, toy design, production management, film and media, and cosmetics and fragrance marketing. Internationally renowned, FIT draws on its New York City location to provide a vibrant, creative community in which to learn. The college offers nearly 50 majors and grants AAS, BFA, BS, MA, MFA, and MPS degrees, preparing students for professional success and leadership in the new creative economy. Among notable alumni in fashion are Calvin Klein, Michael Kors, Norma Kamali, Reem Acra, Brian Atwood, Stephen Burrows, Dennis Basso, Francisco Costa, Nanette Lepore, Bibhu Mohapatra, Ralph Rucci, John Bartlett, Peter Do, Daniel Roseberry, and Michelle Smith. Other prominent graduates include Leslie Blodgett, creator of bareMinerals; international restaurant designer Tony Chi; and Nina Garcia, editor-in-chief of *Elle*. Visit fitnyc.edu.

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