



NEWS

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Exposed: A History of Lingerie

June 3–November 15, 2014

The Museum at FIT

The Museum at FIT presents *Exposed: A History of Lingerie*, an exhibition that traces developments in intimate apparel from the 18th century to the present. *Exposed* features over 70 of the most delicate, luxurious, and immaculately crafted objects from the museum's permanent collection, many of which have never before been shown. Each piece illustrates key developments in fashion, such as changes in silhouette, shifting ideals of propriety, and advancements in technology.

The concept of underwear-as-outerwear is most commonly associated with the 1980s, but the look of lingerie has long served as inspiration for fashion garments. *Exposed* opens with several pairings of objects that underscore that connection. For example, a 1950s nylon nightgown, made by the upscale lingerie label Iris, is shown alongside an evening gown by Claire McCardell, also a 1950s garment, created in a similar fabric and silhouette. McCardell was one of the first designers to use nylon—a material typically marketed for lingerie—for eveningwear. A 2007 evening dress by Peter Soronen features a corset bodice, the construction of which is highlighted with bright blue topstitching. It is flanked by two 19th-century corsets, one made from bright red silk, the other from peacock blue silk.



Iris, nightgown, printed nylon, circa 1950, USA, gift of Mrs. A.S. Guimares.



Corset, silk, circa 1770, Europe, museum purchase.



Corset, silk and wool, circa 1880, France, museum purchase. Bustle, polka-dot cotton, circa 1880, USA, museum purchase.

The exhibition then continues chronologically. The earliest object on view is a sleeved corset (then called stays), circa 1770, made from sky-blue silk with decorative ivory ribbons that crisscross over the stomach. Stiffened with whalebone, 18th-century corsets straightened the back and enhanced the breasts by pushing them up and together. While they were essential to maintaining both a woman's figure and her modesty, corsets also held an erotic allure.

Women's undergarments were generally modest in the first half of the 19th century. This is exemplified by a dressing gown from circa 1840, made from white cotton. Although the dressing gown was simply designed and meant to be worn within the privacy of a woman's boudoir, its full sleeves and smocked, pointed waistline mimic fashionable dress styles of the era.

Underwear became more colorful by the late 19th century, with the fashionable silhouette sometimes necessitating an elaborate understructure. A corset in cherry red wool and silk, circa 1880, helped its wearer achieve the ideal hourglass silhouette. This corset is shown with a bustle from the same period, constructed from bands of metal and brown polka-dot fabric. Bustles were essential under the skirts of the 1880s, which were heavily draped in back.

By the early 20th century, intimate apparel was often as beautiful and alluring as it was functional. For example, tea gowns were at-home garments, but because they could be worn to receive visitors, many were lavishly embellished. A tea gown from circa 1900, made by Parisian designer Fernande Burel, is created from layers of delicate, printed silk chiffon and lace.

The slender, youthful silhouette of 1920s fashion demanded more streamlined undergarments. Many women turned to a modernized version of the corset to enhance their figures. An example in brocade silk, from circa 1920, features elastic panels that slim the wearer's waist and hips while also providing flexibility. Bras were often made from delicate materials that simply covered and contained the breasts. Featured is a mid-1920s bandeau bra of yellow silk chiffon and ivory lace, with a decorative silk appliqué. This filmy style bears little resemblance to the structured bust supporters that were introduced during the late 19th century.



Fernande Burel, tea gown, chiffon, silk, and lace, circa 1900, France, museum purchase.



Strouse, Adler Company, corset, brocade satin and elastic, circa 1920, USA, gift of the Strouse, Adler Company.



Bra, silk and lace, circa 1923, USA, gift of Leigh Bantivoglio.

Clothing of the 1930s demanded a slender but shapely silhouette. Many girdles from this decade acted as “all-in-one” foundation garments that supported the breasts, cinched the waist, and smoothed the hips. An example from circa 1930 in peach silk satin, made by the French luxury lingerie brand Cadolle, also includes a lace skirt that acts as a slip. The early 1940s is represented by a diaphanous nightgown in yellow silk crepe by Juel Park, a Hollywood-based designer of couture lingerie whose high-profile clientele included Marlene Dietrich, Marilyn Monroe, and Elizabeth Taylor.

By the 1950s, the hourglass silhouette was back in fashion. In addition to a variety of heavily structured foundation garments, petticoats made from layers of net were often worn under skirts, giving them the desired fullness. One featured example, made to be worn under a couture gown by Christian Dior, is constructed from intricately layered tiers of tulle, taffeta, and horsehair to maintain its flaring shape. This petticoat is paired with a strapless, overwire bra in pink lace and stretch satin.

Rudi Gernreich’s lingerie designs epitomized the free spirit of the 1960s. *Exposed* includes an example of Gernreich’s “no-bra bra” from the mid-1960s, a wireless, padding-free design that adapted to the natural form of the breasts. It is paired with a zebra print half-slip in pink-and-white nylon, also by Gernreich. In 1976, Valerie Porr emphasized the natural body in a different way with green silk lounging pajamas printed with the motif of a nude woman gazing in a mirror.



Cadolle, girdle, satin, lace, and elastic, circa 1930, France, gift of Mrs. Bartle Bull.



Poirette, bra, nylon lace, 1949, USA, gift of Bestform Inc. Christian Dior, petticoat, nylon net, taffeta, and horsehair net, 1951, France, gift of Despina Messinesi.



Rudi Gernreich, “no bra” and half slip, sheer nylon, printed nylon, circa 1965, USA, gifts of Mitch Rein.

Continuing into the 1980s, the exhibition includes a silk teddy, designed by Patricia Fieldwalker. Although the combination of camisole and panties originated in the 1920s, Fieldwalker’s version, with its especially high-cut leg and deep V-neck, is decidedly new. Erica Tanov’s sleepwear set from 1993 includes a pajama top and bottom, paired with a simple bandeau bra. The supple linen fabric and oversized fit of the pajamas makes them comfortable, but also sensual.

The exhibition concludes with examples of high-end, contemporary lingerie. Highlights include a custom bra and panty made from nude silk chiffon by Jean Yu, as well as a retro-style lingerie set with provocative cut-outs by Chantal Thomass. Also featured is a L.A.M.B. x Hanky Panky long-line bra and panty from the exclusive design collaboration between Gwen Stefani’s fashion brand and Hanky Panky. This L.A.M.B. designed camouflage print on Hanky Panky signature stretch lace is fun, sexy, and fluorescent.



Valerie Porr, lounging pajamas, printed silk, 1976, USA, gift of Valerie Porr, designer.



Patricia Fieldwalker, teddy, silk charmeuse, lace, circa 1985, USA, gift of Leigh Bantivoglio.



Jean Yu, bra and panty set, silk chiffon, grosgrain ribbon, spring 2005, USA, gift of Jean Yu.

Exposed: A History of Lingerie is organized by Colleen Hill. The exhibition will be on view from June 3 through November 15, 2014, in the Fashion and Textile History Gallery at The Museum at FIT. The Fashion and Textile History Gallery presents biennial exhibitions examining aspects of the past 250 years of fashion. Exhibitions are curated exclusively from The Museum at FIT's extensive collection.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a book, also titled *Exposed: A History of Lingerie* (Yale University Press, summer 2014). Written by Colleen Hill, with an introduction by Valerie Steele, director and chief curator of The Museum at FIT, the book will examine approximately 50 of the objects in the exhibition and include full-color photographs of each.

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. 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 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 nearly 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 more than 45 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.