

Food & Fashion Special Audio Feature Transcript

Dive deeper into some of the objects on display in *Food & Fashion* with curators Melissa Marra-Alvarez and Elizabeth Way.

1. Haute Couture/Haute Cuisine: Vivienne Westwood

Learn more about how Vivienne Westwood draws on the French legacy of luxury through food and fashion.

1 minute, 5 seconds

This t-shirt from Vivienne Westwood’s “Vive La Cocotte” collection reproduces a 1778 engraving called “Elegant Woman in a Dress à l’Anglaise Drinking Coffee” by Pierre Thomas Le Clerc. It was one of many engraved plates at the time that depicted the fashionable dress of the French. The woman is shown wearing a candy-pink, open-front gown with a blue bow on the stomacher—the triangular panel at the front of her bodice—with matching delicate blue slippers. She also wears a wide brimmed hat trimmed in feathers. The extreme elegance of the woman’s dress would have indicated that she was French. She is enjoying a light meal of pastries and coffee—an expensive drink that originated in Ethiopia and imported from South America. The combination of food and fashion in this illustration exudes modern luxury and sophistication in Europe, attributes that French rulers purposely associated with their country at this time. Westwood draws on this pairing more than two centuries later for a collection that explores feminine power. Westwood focused on sophisticated, well-educated, and influential women, personified by the figure on her t-shirt who wears and eats the very best.

2. Dressing to Dine: Silk crepe cocktail dress and jacket

How did the cocktail dress change women’s lives in the 1920s? Learn more!

1 minute, 8 seconds

The 1920s saw a radical change in how women dressed. During the previous century, elite Euro-American women tended to change clothes several times of day for different activities. A lady might don a breakfast jacket for her first meal, change to go for a walk or ride a horse, and change again to pay calls on acquaintances. At tea time, she could relax in a looser-fitting gown to receive guests for tea, but she changed into a fancier dinner gown for the evening. The formality of these meal-time ensembles depended in part on whether she was eating at home or dining out. By the 1920s, however, much of this dress etiquette seemed outdated as increasing numbers of middle and upper class women gained higher education and white-collar employment. The fashionable silhouette also became straighter and looser with fewer layers of undergarments. This modern turn in fashion was matched by new kinds of food consumption, including

cocktails which ironically gained popularity during the prohibition of alcohol in the United States between 1920 and 1933. All of these factors gave rise to the cocktail dress, which began as a versatile ensemble that could take a woman from afternoon activities, including work, to cocktail hour and then dinnertime by removing a matching jacket, such as the one in this ensemble.

3. The Eye has to Eat: Agatha Ruiz de la Prada, Fried Egg Menina dress

Can you guess which artists inspired Agatha Ruiz de la Prada's Fried Egg Menina dress? Learn about these inspirations and how they influenced the designer.

1 minute, 7 seconds

The Fried Egg Menina dress was part of Agatha Ruiz de la Prada's Fall-Winter 2009, Tribute to Surrealism collection. Two fried eggs appear splattered across the dress. They are a nod to the Surrealist artist Salvador Dalí, for whom eggs were a recurring leitmotif. Food was an important subject for the surrealists who used food imagery to express themselves and merge imagination with the everyday.

Agatha Ruiz de la Prada is the daughter of a famous art collector from Madrid and an aristocrat from Catalonia. Art has had a strong influence on her designs since the inception of her fashion label in 1981. For example, her Fried Egg Menina dress also incorporates references to the work of Diego Velázquez. Over the course of her career, de la Prada has designed several Menina dresses. These are a tribute to the 17th century Spanish painter Diego Velázquez and his notable 1656 painting Las Meninas, which depicted a group of women, including the five-year-old Infanta Margarita, wearing dresses with fitted bodices and wide pannier skirts echoed in the shape of this dress.

4. The Fashion Cookbook: Christian Dior, Silk ottoman ball gown

Did you know Christian Dior was a great gourmet? Explore the parallels between Dior's love of cuisine and couture.

1 minute, 4 seconds

Christian Dior was committed to producing luxurious and exquisitely crafted fashion such as the silk ballgown seen here. Perhaps then, it should come as no surprise that he was an equally passionate gourmet. In fact, he once mused that if the couture business didn't work out for him, he could make a living in haute cuisine, peddling Dior Roast beef or ham. In fact, it is believed that one of the reasons Dior chose to have his headquarters on the Avenue Montaigne, is because it was also home to the Plaza Athénée, where he liked to go to eat.

According to Dior, the ingredients used in cooking were just as noble as the materials used in haute couture. This synergy was commemorated by the House of Dior posthumously in 1972, with the release of the cookbook, *La Cuisine Cousu-Main*, which translates to “tailor-made cuisine.” The silver book featured Dior’s favorite recipes alongside artwork by the fashion illustrator Rene Gruau, who worked with Dior throughout his career. The cookbook capitalizes on Dior’s reputation as a both couturier and a gourmet whose expectations demanded the highest caliber of luxury and quality.

5. We Eat What We Are: Dolce & Gabbana, pasta print silk dress

Learn about how Dolce and Gabbana use pasta as a metaphor for Italian excellence in their pasta-print dress.

1 minute, 10 seconds

Food culture is central to the way that Italians mark their national identity. When Italy was unified as a nation in 1861, food became an important means of forging solidarity between the former nation states to project a consolidated image of Italian culture. Similarly, later in the nineteenth century, food became a strong symbol of identity among the Italian diaspora. In the post second world war society, food, along with textiles and automobiles, became a form of soft power signifying Italy’s cultural prestige as it sought to rebuild after the war.

It may not be surprising then, that Dolce & Gabbana’s spring 2017 collection paid homage to Italian foodstuffs, featuring dresses printed with pasta and cans of tomato sauce as well as desserts such as gelato and cannolis, celebrating Italian cuisine’s internationally recognized status. That same year, the pair partnered with the Italian Pasta company Pastificio di Martino, on a limited edition packaging for their product. The partnership capitalized on Italy’s reputation of producing world-renowned food and fashion, in turn, promoting what they called two “made in Italy excellences.”

6. We Eat What We Are: Reckless Ericka

Travel to Singapore through Reckless Ericka’s delicious designs featuring unique delicacies.

53 seconds

Reckless Ericka is a Singapore-based brand, and in their Singapore Food Series, they pay tribute to the unique food culture for which the nation is well known. Located in south-east Asia, Singapore is made up of people of Chinese, Malay, and Indian descent, as well as many others of different cultural backgrounds. This mix has given

rise to a unique food culture that is best experienced in the city-state's food hawker centers where hawkers have been refining their dishes over generations. Specific Reckless Ericka designs reference world-famous offerings like chili crab or tropical fruits like durian, seen in the ensemble here. This design also incorporates patterns from the colorful ceramic Peranakan tiles that adorn nineteenth-century Singaporean buildings—another renowned feature of the culture. The Reckless Ericka brand describes their Food Series as “reflective of our ‘rojak’ society where Singapore is a melting pot of cultures, identity and ethos.”

7. We Eat What We Are: Post-Imperial, Jollof Collection

Learn how Niyi Okuboyejo mixes ethical production, his Nigerian roots, and the aesthetics of jollof rice into this 2020 ensemble.

51 seconds

The cultural importance of jollof rice and its role in representing the diverse peoples of West Africa makes it a ripe subject for exploration. Niyi Okuboyejo, the Nigerian-born, New York City-based designer of the brand Post-Imperial, draws inspiration from the dish, but instead of illustrating the rice or other ingredients on his ensemble, he conjures the jollof's soft texture and warm, rich colors through the textiles. His 2020 Jollof collection pays tribute to the West African rice dish that includes tomatoes, spices, and meat. Jollof rice is popular throughout Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, and the West African diaspora, and is fiercely claimed by all of these groups, making it the subject of heated debates over who produces the best version of the dish. Designing for Post-Imperial, Okuboyejo focuses on ethical, craft-based production on the continent of Africa as well as African Diasporic mythologies and storytelling.

8. Activism & Protest: Patrick Kelly, denim overalls dress

Explore the ways in which Patrick Kelly advocated for Black southern American agricultural workers through his designs.

47 seconds

The industries of food and fashion have long histories of monumental impact on the lives of their least protected workers, from enslaved laborers who grew cotton and sugar in North and South America to contemporary agricultural and apparel workers who labor in unsafe conditions all over the world. The fashion designers and makers in this section explore these issues through their creative work. Patrick Kelly was an American designer based in Paris during the 1980s, but he continually drew from his upbringing and roots in a Black community in Mississippi. Kelly's denim overalls dress pays tribute to the Black sharecroppers who suffered grossly uneven power dynamics with

landowners while they worked hard to produce cotton and food crops. Over the 1960s, denim overalls became the uniform of protest for members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, a group of young activists fighting for racial equality in the United States.

9. Fashion from the Fridge: Marina Hoermanseder, Piñatex strap skirt ensemble

Fabric from food waste? Find out more about the Piñatex material used in Marina Hoermanseder’s pineapple trap skirt.

1 minute, 10 seconds

For her Spring 2020 collection, Austrian designer Marina Hoermanseder sent a model down the runway wearing the designer’s signature “strap skirt” while carrying a sign reading, “My skirt is made out of pineapple.” Indeed, Hoermanseder’s design was made from Piñatex®, a vegan leather alternative made from cellulose fibers extracted from the leaves of pineapple plants.

Piñatex was developed by Carmen Hijosa, a former leather accessories consultant who was inspired by Philippine textiles made from pineapple fibers. To make one square meter of Piñatex fabric requires approximately 460 pineapple leaves, which are otherwise considered agricultural waste. No harmful chemicals are used in the production process, nor is the use of extra water or land required. Repurposing agricultural waste such as pineapple leaves has an added social impact, bringing new jobs to rural areas, and establishing a second stream of income to pineapple farmers. Today, Piñatex is but one of many innovative food-based materials that seek to introduce sustainable and ethical practices to the fashion industry.

10. Growing Alternatives: Mimi Prober, “Garden and Plate” collection ensembles

Learn about, FIT Alumni, Mimi Prober’s “farm-to-fashion” design ethos

1 minute, 14 seconds

The Slow Food movement emerged in an effort to counteract the prominence of fast food in contemporary society. Originating in Italy, this movement renewed societal interest in local farming practices, seasonal ingredients, and farm-to-table cuisine. Influenced by Slow Food, the Slow Fashion movement similarly prioritizes local resources, ethical labor practices, and direct links between production and consumer.

A farm-to-fashion ethos permeates the work of the New-York based fashion designer and FIT alumna, Mimi Prober. Since establishing her label in 2015, Prober has allied

with slow production methods that honor the individuals involved in the creation of her collections. In support of sustainability in fashion, she repurposes antique textiles, works with regional fiber farms and textile mills, and employs natural dye processes. The designer's spring 2021 collection highlights the connections between the "garden and plate." The ensembles shown here include hand-dyed looks using natural dyes derived from avocado and pomegranate. Overall, her creations evoke a utopia where clothes are handcrafted, the land that yields the natural resources for our food and clothing is respected, and a community spirit prevails.

11. Consuming Bodies: Moschino, chocolate bar gown

Good enough to eat? Discover Jeremy Scott's inspiration for his 2014 Moschino chocolate bar dress.

51 seconds

In his first collection for the Italian fashion house Moschino the American designer Jeremy Scott referenced American popular culture from McDonald's fries to an elegantly wrapped Hershey's chocolate bar. Scott described the collection as "taking something trashy and making something that you'll treasure forever." By adorning his model in a ballgown that resembled a candy bar wrapper, Scott drew on the popular association between women and chocolate that conflates the two as sweet, desirable, and indulgent, thereby turning the wearer's body into a consumable. By specifically referencing an accessible brand like Hershey's—a price of twenty-five cents is printed on the dress—Scott implied that every woman could embody these attributes. The pop singer Lizzo was drawn to these ideas when she wore this style to the 2020 BRIT Awards, taking the high fashion-meets-mass culture look and using it to promote body positivity in a fun, humorous way.

12. "Sugar, Spice, and Everything Nice?" Junya Watanabe for Comme des Garçons, Dessert-print white dress

Explore the symbolism of sweets in Junya Watanabe's dessert print dress.

1 minute, 31 seconds

Junya Watanabe's designs typically present an experimental approach to fashion. The designer is known for pairing utilitarian materials or techno fabrics, with complex patterning and avant garde shapes. For his spring 2001 collection, however, Watanabe explored the dynamics of fashion design through a different lens. Shown here, Watanabe's dessert dress features layers of chiffon each printed with color-saturated photographs of pastries, fruit tarts, and cakes, which appeal to our visual and gustatory

preferences for these sugary confections. In turn, strands of lady-like pearls, gnarled and twisted at the neckline, accentuate long standing connections between sweets and complex idealizations of femininity.

Historically, Western society has associated sweets with conventional feminine ideals. This connection gained prominence during the Victorian era when a perceived preference for sugary foods among middle-class and elite women was seen as an expression of their “daintiness.” Meanwhile, scholars have contended that in inter-war Japan a fondness for Western-style confectionery conflated sweets both with women's bodies and modernity. Sweets are also a recurring theme in *shoujo manga*, a comic genre popular with young girls, imbuing these confections with a sense of fantasy, in turn influencing feminine aesthetics. Watanabe’s design embraces these connotations and their multi-layered meanings.

These audio recordings were created for The Museum at FIT’s exhibition, *Food & Fashion* (September 13–November 26, 2023). For more information, visit fitnyc.edu/museum.