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!Moda Hoy! Latin American and Latinx Fashion Design Today
May 31–November 12, 2023
Curated by Tanya Meléndez-Escalante and Melissa Marra-Alvarez
Spanish translations by Pamela Bautista García

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!Moda Hoy! Latin American and Latinx Fashion Design Today has been made possible thanks to the generosity of the Couture Council of The Museum at FIT and by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature.

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Cover: The Ballroom Chino presented in Willy Chavarria's SS22 runway show in New York.
Photographer: Selwyn Tungol, courtesy of Willy Chavarria.

Interior image: *Amantes Encontrados*, 2019, for *Vogue Italia*. Photographer: Paola Vivas.
Fashion: Sánchez-Kane. Styling: Chino Castilla. Models: Emiliano and Samuel for Güerxs Agency MX

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For decades, fashion designers of Latin American descent such as Carolina Herrera, Oscar de la Renta, and Haider Ackermann have been central figures of the fashion industry. Their successes have paved the way for new generations of talented designers, including Gabriela Hearst, Willy Chavarria, and Kika Vargas. These names represent only a few of the emerging designers who are making their mark on the fashion scene by creating for famous fashion houses, winning prestigious awards, and dressing celebrity clients. The English-language media has often viewed Latin American fashion from an outsider's perspective—as an exoticized other—presenting the region as a homogenous entity. However, there is no singular Latin American style but rather a diversity of talent that continues to shape contemporary fashion.

¡Moda Hoy! Latin American and Latinx Fashion Design Today

includes creators from Latin American countries, as well as designers of Latin American heritage living and working in the United States who are often referred to as *Hispanic*, *Latino/Latina*, or the gender-neutral term *Latinx*. The exhibition takes a decentering approach to fashion studies, shifting perspectives away from a single cultural viewpoint. The region, with its shared histories of colonialism, globalism, imperialism, industrialization processes, and local modes of modernity, has historically been dismissed by dominant Eurocentric fashion voices as underdeveloped. However, Latin American fashion is a powerhouse.

During the 20th century, a number of Latin American and Latinx designers gained global recognition while the region served as an inspiration for designers from Europe and North America, functioning as a background in fashion publications and becoming a source of talent. In the exhibition, the work of Adolfo, Víctor Alfaro, María Cornejo, Oscar de la Renta, Luis Estévez, Carlos Falchi, Carolina Herrera, and Isabel Toledo exemplifies this era.

The exhibition is organized thematically into sections that address issues such as Indigenous

heritage, sustainability, art, gender, politics, elegance, craftsmanship, and popular culture. **Indigenous heritage** highlights the influence of native cultures on Latin American fashion of today. Emphasizing collaborations between designers and Indigenous artisans, it features work by Guillermo Vargas of 1/8 Takamura and artisan Paula Pérez Vásquez who together created the Blusa Cuadro Tlahui. Also featured in this section are Ricardo Seco, Nalimo, Carla Fernández, Casilda Mut, and artisan Mauricio Carrillo.

Gender explores how ideas about femininity and masculinity are expressed, challenged, and celebrated through fashion design. For instance, with her pink embossed leather *Mamado* pantsuit, Mexican artist and fashion designer Bárbara Sánchez-Kane satirizes the physique of the male bodybuilder. Other designers featured in this section are Víctor Barragán, Suki Cohen, Narciso Rodriguez, and Elena Velez.

Women's rights, immigration, and geo-political relations are topics central to the section on **politics**. A fashion film by designers Juan Carlos Pereira and Andrés Jordan of the Bolivian fashion label Juan de la Paz, comments on the rumored "Black Legend," which brought Great Britain into conflict with Bolivia, leading to Queen Victoria allegedly crossing out that country on her world map. This legend notoriously underscores the asymmetry of power in North-South relations. Designs by Apartamento 03, Alexandre Herchcovitch, and Yliana Yepez are also included.

The section on **sustainability** examines the ways in which Latin American and Latinx designers are integrating cultural knowledge, traditional craft, natural resources, and novel materials into their ethically responsible designs. A dress by Gabriela Hearst highlights how partnerships with women's cooperatives in Latin America are shaping a holistic view of sustainable production with social, cultural, economic, and environmental implications. Also included are Caralarga, Jonathan Cohen, Escvdo, Nous Étudiants, Osklen, and Zero + María Cornejo.

Artisanal techniques are explored in the section devoted to **craftsmanship**. Numerous designers incorporate handmade processes into their work, thereby preserving local artisanal techniques. Designs by Aurelia, Julia y Renata, Carlos Miele, Johanna Ortiz, and PatBo are featured.

Another section focuses on **elegance** as a social construct that varies depending on mores, geography, and cultures, using the work of Haider Ackermann, Edmundo Castillo, PTRA, Proenza Schouler, and Yakampot as examples.

Art presents the fluid boundaries that exist between artistic practice and fashion. A look by Rick Owens celebrating his Mexican heritage was inspired by pre-Hispanic architecture and modern art. Other designers in this section are Andreia Chaves, Francisco Costa, Jorge Duque, Laura and Kate Mulleavy of Rodarte, and Isabel Toledo with artist Rubén Toledo.

The exhibition also features an investigation into the ways in which Latin American and Latinx designers have incorporated **popular culture** into their work. Brenda Equihua's *Devotion* coat plays homage to the blankets used in her Chicana childhood home in Los Angeles. Additional designers contend with music, sports, and even cultural icons. Brands featured include Barragán, Willy Chavarria, Esteban Cortázar, Gypsy Sport, Luar, and Opening Ceremony.

In order to incorporate diverse perspectives, we collaborated with an advisory committee and campus focus groups. In October 2022, we held a pre-exhibition symposium that enriched the exhibition narrative on Latin American and Latinx fashion by incorporating opinions from diverse communities. We hope to continue to decenter the study of fashion by looking beyond the traditional Eurocentric narrative.

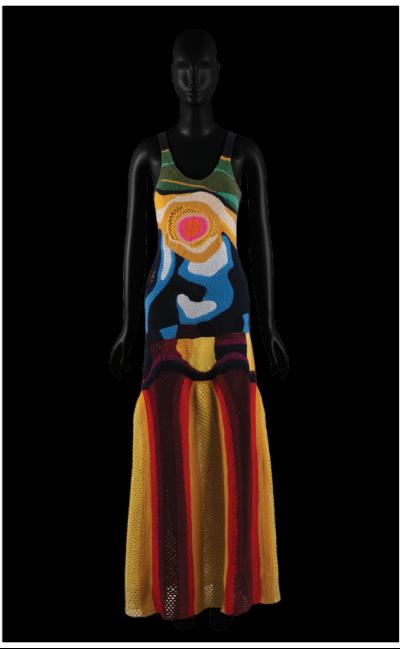
Tanya Meléndez-Escalante and Melissa Marra-Alvarez, co-curators



1/8 Takamura x Artesanía Textil Arte-Fer, Cuadro Tlahui blouse, 2020, Mexico.



Apartamento 03, suit, *Ouro Collection*, Summer 2023, Brazil. Gift of Apartamento 03.



Gabriela Hearst, dress, spring 2022, USA. Gift of Gabriela Hearst.



PTRA, suit, fall 2019, Mexico. Gift of PTRA.



Rick Owens, ensemble, Spring 2021, France.



Esteban Cortázar, vestido *Flamenco*, otoño 2019, France. Gift of Tanya Meléndez Escalante.