

PINK

THE HISTORY OF A PUNK, PRETTY, POWERFUL COLOR

Pink provokes exceptionally strong feelings of both “attraction and repulsion.” Indeed, pink has been called **“the most divisive of colors.”** When a journalist for the *Washington Post* learned that tens of thousands of protesters were planning to wear pink “pussy hats” at the Women’s March of 2017, she warned: **“Please, sisters, back away from the pink.”** The issues facing women are “serious stuff,” she wrote, and “cute” pink hats risked trivializing those issues.

Pink has been a recurrent theme in women’s fashion, where it has often implied different types of femininity – from sweet and innocent to edgy and erotic. Consider the names for different shades: **Baby pink, Ballet-slipper pink, Barbie pink,** Blush pink, Bordello pink, Bubble-gum pink, Candy pink, Flesh pink, Hot pink, Lingerie pink, Peach pink, Petal pink, Porcelain pink, Pompadour pink, Princess pink, and Shocking pink.

This exhibition begins by exploring the history of pink in Euro-American fashion from the 1850s to 1990s, when the dominant paradigm could be described as “Pretty in Pink.” A diorama of pink toys, many from the 1950s, reinforces the message. Yet the stereotype of pink-for-girls versus blue-for-boys is surprisingly recent. As late as 1927, American department stores were still arguing about which color went with which gender.

In reality, the symbolism and significance of pink have varied greatly across world history, as visitors will see when they enter the second gallery. During the eighteenth century, for example, pink was the most fashionable color for both gentlemen and ladies. By the nineteenth century, color was feminized, as Euro-American men adopted black suits. But in many other parts of the world, pink continued to be a unisex color. As Diana Vreeland said, **“Pink is the navy blue of India.”**



Dress, 18th century.



Dress, circa 1857.



Evening dress, circa 1954.



Christian Dior, dress, 1960.

Pink has played an especially important role in the African diaspora and, by extension, in many genres of popular music. **“Pink is the only true rock and roll color,”** argued Paul Simonon, bass guitarist for The Clash. Sugar Ray Robinson’s pink Cadillac influenced Elvis Presley, and when the Harlem rapper Cam’ron wore pink mink to New York Fashion Week in 2002, he launched a lasting trend for this sign of masculine confidence.

Fast forward to 2016, when Véronique Hyland proclaimed the birth of **Millennial pink**, “ironic pink, pink without the sugary prettiness.” Pink was no longer “déclassé.” It was “cool and androgynous.” The name has disappeared, but pink continues to be fashionable, in part because it is no longer regarded as an exclusively feminine color. Yet it remains

highly eroticized. Janelle Monáe’s single “Pynk” emphasizes the color’s association with “pink parts” of the body, such as lips, nipples, and genitals.

“Color is a natural phenomenon, of course, but it is also a complex cultural construct,” writes the great color historian Michel Pastoreau. “There is no transcultural truth to color perception... It is society that ‘makes’ color, defines it, gives it meaning.” Once associated primarily with negative stereotypes of femininity, today, as *i-D* magazine puts it: pink is **“punk, pretty, and powerful.”**

Dr. Valerie Steele, Director, The Museum at FIT



Zandra Rhodes, ensemble, 1978.



Céline, dress, spring 2017.



Gucci, dress, spring, 2016.



Comme des Garçons, ensemble, 18th-Century Punk collection, fall/winter 2016.

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Enjoy the audio tour narrated by Dr. Valerie Steele.
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September 7, 2018 - January 5, 2019

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September 7, 2018 - January 5, 2019

Hours:

Tuesday - Friday, noon - 8 pm, Saturday, 10 am - 5 pm

Closed Sunday, Monday, and legal holidays

Admission is free.

fitnyc.edu/museum

Museum information line: (212) 217-4558

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Photos: Front cover and back: Moschino, ensemble, spring 2015. Photograph courtesy of Moschino. All other photographs © The Museum at FIT.

The Museum at FIT

Seventh Avenue at 27th Street, New York City

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(From left) Jean Patou, evening gown, circa 1923; evening dress, 1925-1928; Chanel, evening dress, circa 1925; evening dress, circa 1927.

