



Inside flap: Cover of Harper's Bazaar, January, 1946.  
Photograph by Louise Dahl-Wolfe of model Sabina Weber wearing a ski ensemble,  
gift of Louise Dahl-Wolfe.

## S U P P O R T     T H E     M U S E U M

### COUTURE COUNCIL

An elite membership group, the Couture Council helps to support the exhibitions and programs of The Museum at FIT. Members receive invitations to exclusive events and private viewings. Annual membership is \$1,000 for an individual or couple and \$350 for a young associate (under the age of 35).

For more information, write to [couturecouncil@fitnyc.edu](mailto:couturecouncil@fitnyc.edu) or call 212 217.4532.

### DESIGN MEMBERSHIP

Through the Design Membership program, designers and other industry professionals gain unique access to the Museum's holdings for the purposes of research and inspiration. Current members include fashion and home furnishing designers, manufacturers, merchandisers, and forecasters. The benefits of Design Membership include: assisted appointments to view objects from the costume, textile, and accessory collections; access to view and photograph approximately 100,000 textile swatches; and access to the Françoise de la Renta Color Room. Individual and corporate memberships are available at \$425 and \$1,250, respectively.

For more information, call 212 217.4578.

### TOURS AND DONATIONS

Every six months, a changing selection of garments, accessories, and textiles from the Museum's permanent collection is put on display in the Fashion and Textile History Gallery, located on the Museum's ground floor. Tours of the Fashion and Textile History Gallery and of the Special Exhibitions Gallery may be arranged for a sliding fee of approximately \$350. Donations of museum-quality fashions, accessories, and textiles are welcomed.

For more information about tours, call 212 217.4550; about donations, call 212 217.4570.

## The Museum at FIT

Seventh Avenue at 27th Street  
New York City 10001-5992  
[fitnyc.edu/museum](http://fitnyc.edu/museum)

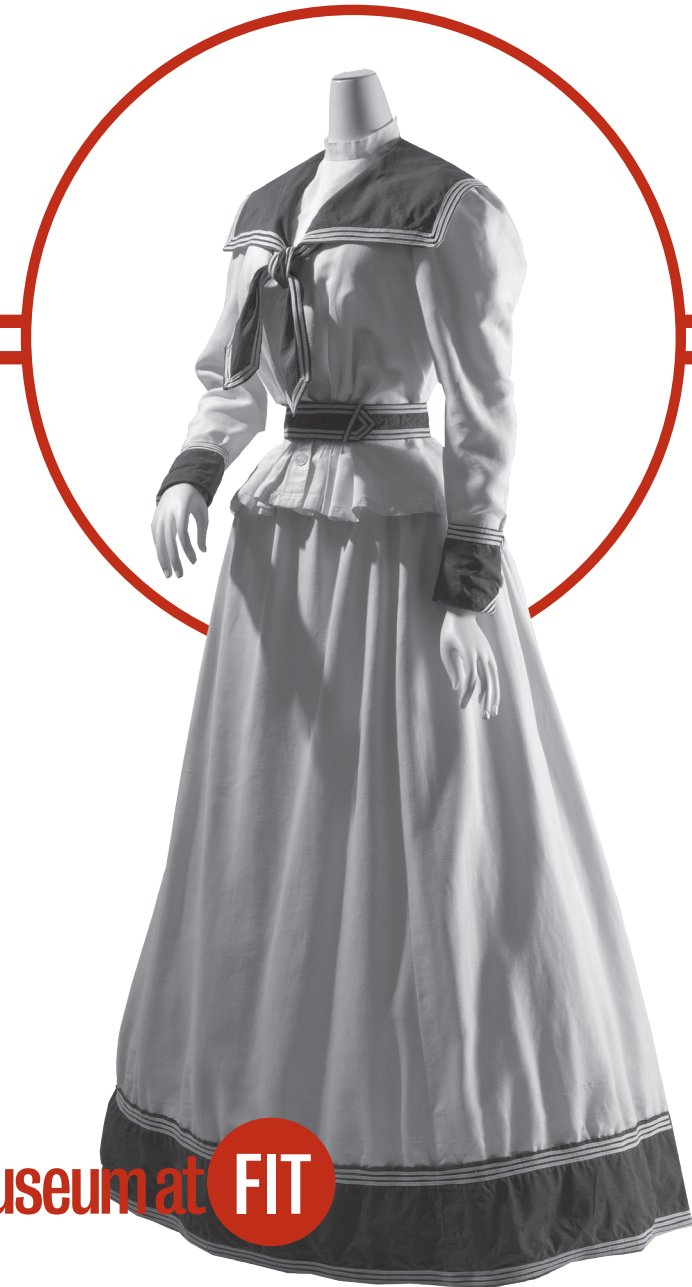
Museum information line:  
212 217.4558.

Hours:  
Tuesday–Friday, noon–8 pm  
Saturday, 10 am–5 pm  
Closed Sunday, Monday,  
and legal holidays

Cover: Haas Brothers, two-piece dress, red and white cotton, circa 1894, USA,  
museum purchase.

# SPORTING LIFE

MAY 25 - NOVEMBER 5, 2011



The Museum at FIT

THE FASHION AND TEXTILE HISTORY GALLERY



# SPORTING LIFE

Modern sports garments are designed to enhance athletic performance and to provide protection from physical injury. They are also expected to complement their functionality with elements of fashion—in other words, to look good. Conversely, fashionable attire often draws inspiration from specialized sports clothing. “The fact that casual everyday clothing is called ‘sportswear’ in the apparel industry is a testament to how comprehensively the development of specialist sports clothing has shaped our ideas about clothing,” observes fashion writer Jennifer Craik. Today, the give-and-take between sporting attire and fashion is greater than ever.



Stephen Jones, sailor hat, blue and white cotton gingham, mid-1980s, England, gift of Barbara Jakobson.

***Sporting Life*** examines the history of sports clothing from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. The exhibition is divided into sections devoted to



Gucci (Tom Ford), ski jacket, pink polyester/nylon/spandex, circa 1995, Italy, gift of Dorothy Schefer Faux.

particular sports, such as bicycling and swimming. It uses clothing from the permanent collection of The Museum at FIT to highlight changes, over time, in silhouette and construction, as well as to discuss technological advancements that have improved the function of athletic garments. Active sportswear garments are juxtaposed with the fashionable ready-to-wear styles they have inspired.

During the nineteenth century, light exercise was recommended for the improvement of physical well-being, beauty, and grace. Calisthenics and gymnastics found adherents, especially at educational institutions, while bicycling became wildly popular in both the United States and Europe. A *New York Times* article from 1893 describes the “craze” for bicycling in Paris: “Young, old, thin,



Christian Lacroix, beachwear ensemble, multicolor nylon/spandex, silk, metallic synthetic straw, plastic, metallic leather, 1990, France, museum purchase.

lean, long, lank, stout, very stout, pretty and ugly—every woman must, does or will mount the iron horse.” For bicycling and gym exercise, some women wore bifurcated bloomer trousers or divided skirts, but these styles were often accompanied by strict rules: in Paris, women risked arrest for wearing trouser-style garments while not in the presence of a bicycle.

However, some garments worn for other categories of sport strongly resembled casual daywear—skating jackets and golf and tennis ensembles, for example. During the 1920s, the knitwear and sporty dresses of Gabrielle Chanel, Jane Régny, and Jean Patou also blurred distinctions between active sportswear and fashionable dress. With a loose fit and pleated skirt, a simple Chanel dress, though rendered in *crepe de chine* as opposed to white cotton, looked remarkably like a garment worn for tennis. In 1927, Elizabeth Hawes, as Paris correspondent for the *New Yorker’s* fashion column, advised that fashionable clothing could be suitable for sports.

“For all afternoon occasions, including golf,” Hawes noted, “you wear your luncheon costume.”

Active wear had become a fundamental component of a person’s wardrobe by the mid-twentieth century. But according to designer Claire McCardell, rules of propriety for sports fashions still held sway. “Imagine ski pants on the beach, jodhpurs on skis, a pink coat on a bicycle, skirts at a field trial, blue denim on ice—all the other nightmares,” wrote McCardell.

Many early active sportswear garments were made from heavy wool, including clothing designed for the gym, bicycling, and even swimming. These items may have lacked the high-performance functionality of today’s active wear, but the hydrophilic properties of wool served to pull moisture away from the body, just as many contemporary “techno” textiles are designed to do.

Left: Stephen Sprouse, man’s t-shirt and leggings, neon green acrylic, spandex, metal, 1985, USA, gift of Stephen Sprouse, Inc.

Right: Raleigh/Giordana Sport, man’s bicycling ensemble, multicolor polyester knit, nylon/spandex blend, chamois, 1985, possibly Italy, gift of Raleigh Cycle Co.



New textile technologies became a driving force in the active sportswear market during the twentieth century. Increasingly sophisticated solutions addressed athletes’ needs for each specialized sport. In the

1930s, clothes for skiing and other outdoor sports were often treated with a water-resistant finishing solution called “Neva-Wet,” a primitive approach compared to the astounding range of technical properties found in active sportswear today. Patagonia’s “Super Alpine” nylon ski ensemble is not only waterproof, but also wind resistant, with durable ripstop construction to resist tearing. Some textiles are designed to make the body more aerodynamic, while others shield the skin from UV rays, help regulate body temperature, or even monitor heart rates.



Gym suit, blue cotton twill, 1896, USA, museum purchase.

The development of stretch materials has had a profound impact on both active wear and fashion. These include Lastex yarn in the 1930s and, at the end of the 1950s, spandex (also known by the brand name Lycra). Their suitability for swimwear quickly became obvious. By the 1980s, spandex could be found not only in specialized sportswear (for competitive bicycling, for instance) and in exercise and dance clothing, but also in similarly body-conscious fashions.

“Exercise clothes seem to be everywhere,” wrote fashion journalist Allison Kyle Leopold in 1986. “Sneakers, sweatpants, leggings and tank tops—gear that is meant to be worn in the gym—have become a standard part of everyday dressing for exerciser and nonexerciser alike.” Examples of active sportswear as mainstream style proliferated: Norma Kamali’s 1980s sweatsuit fashion separates, for instance, and in the 1990s, Manolo Blahnik’s high-end high heels modeled on utilitarian duck boots.

Recent collaborations between fashion designers and sports brands emphasize the connection between fashion and sport. A case in point is Y-3, Yohji Yamamoto’s partnership with athletic shoe brand Adidas. *Women’s Wear Daily* reported in March 2011 that some companies are consulting with doctors and engineers in their efforts to make performance apparel that has “comfort, lightness, and style.” Meanwhile, recent runway collections have featured adaptations of classic sports attire, such as the varsity baseball jacket, demonstrating that fashion designers continue to be motivated by the sporting life.

*Jennifer Farley, Curator, The Museum at FIT*



Manolo Blahnik, boot, tan and hunter green leather, rubber, circa 1994, England, gift of C. Hooper.