

FASHIONING *fashion*

EUROPEAN DRESS IN DETAIL 1700-1915



Ff

Sharon Sadako Takeda and Kaye Durland Spilker

PREFACE BY
John Galliano

ESSAY BY
Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell

AND CONTRIBUTIONS BY
Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell
Clarissa M. Esguerra
Nicole LaBouff

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IN DETAIL 1700-1915

LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM OF ART

DELMONICO BOOKS • PRESTEL
MUNICH BERLIN LONDON NEW YORK

THIS PUBLICATION IS DEDICATED TO THE GENEROUS DONORS LISTED
BELOW, WHOSE MUNIFICENT CONTRIBUTIONS MADE THE MUSEUM'S
RECENT ACQUISITION OF A MAJOR EUROPEAN COSTUME COLLECTION
POSSIBLE. ALL ILLUSTRATED DRESS AND ACCESSORIES PRESENTED
IN THIS VOLUME, EXCEPT WHERE OTHERWISE NOTED, ARE PART OF
THIS MAGNANIMOUS GIFT.

Suzanne A. Saperstein

Michael and Ellen Michelson

WITH ADDITIONAL FUNDING FROM

Costume Council, LACMA

Edgerton Foundation

Gail and Gerald Oppenheimer

Maureen H. Shapiro

Grace Tsao

Lenore and Richard Wayne

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DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD

F*ashioning Fashion: European Dress in Detail, 1700–1915* is the first project to highlight a major collection of European men's, women's, and children's dress and accessories acquired by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 2007. Selections from this important recent acquisition have been skillfully integrated with objects from the holdings of LACMA's internationally respected Costume and Textiles Department to produce *Fashioning Fashion*. The exhibition, and this accompanying book, concentrates on the details of creating fashionable dress from the Age of Enlightenment to World War I.

Organized by senior curator and department head Sharon Sadako Takeda and curator Kaye Durland Spilker, with the collaboration of research scholar Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell, curatorial assistant Clarissa Esguerra, and Wallis Annenberg curatorial fellow Nicole LaBouff, *Fashioning Fashion* is arranged in four thematic sections: Timeline, Textiles, Tailoring, and Trim. Addressing the fundamentals of making fashion, the sections include objects that illustrate the ever-changing stylish silhouette: a rich assortment of textiles, expert tailoring techniques, and decorative trimmings utilized in European dress from 1700 to 1915. These same elements continue to motivate contemporary haute couture designers, including John Galliano, who in the preface of this publication eloquently writes about the process of creating fashion.

In today's world, where the lines between paintings, sculpture, media, and design are blurring, it is a great moment to be considering the enormous importance of dress, especially within the context of an encyclopedic art museum. This is why there was no hesitation in making the new European costume collection—expertly assembled over fifty years collectively by Martin Kamer and Wolfgang Ruf—one of my first major art initiatives after arriving at LACMA in April 2006.

This landmark acquisition catapults LACMA's holdings of European costume to the highest category of quality. I am proud of this decision and privileged that Suzanne A. Saperstein and Michael and Ellen Michelson had the conviction and passion to make possible the most ambitious initiative for the Costume and Textiles Department in LACMA's history. We are extremely indebted to them and grateful for the additional support from the Costume Council, the Edgerton Foundation, Gail and Gerald Oppenheimer, Maureen H. Shapiro, Grace Tsao, and Lenore and Richard Wayne.

Finally reaching a level of maturity worthy of a major art museum after decades of steadfast support from the museum's Costume Council and numerous individual donors, LACMA now becomes an important destination for European costume studies. We are indebted to all of our benefactors for ensuring that intellectually stimulating projects such as *Fashioning Fashion* can draw from a world-class permanent collection and inspire future generations.

Michael Govan

CEO AND WALLIS ANNENBERG DIRECTOR
LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM OF ART



PREFACE

I was very excited when I visited the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in April 2009 for a sneak preview of its upcoming exhibition *Fashioning Fashion: European Dress in Detail, 1700–1915*, and I am honored to write this preface. When researching or creating a collection, it is the details, the stories, and the history behind the work that never cease to inspire me. In the process of design, it is that tiny nip, or tuck, or invisible hook and eye that can magically transform an entire silhouette. Those are the ingredients I care about. You see, I always want to know every single detail and idea, right down to the very last stitch. Every detail matters, whether you are telling a story or creating a collection or starting a revolution. This exhibition will take you through fashion and time with the sumptuous variety of an extraordinary collection. I promise, it cannot fail to inspire you.

I was particularly taken with a gentleman's vest (left and p. 154–155); it is simply *charmant* (charming), to quote the coquettish collar. The piece dates back to the eighteenth century and the time of the French Revolution, an era I have always found to be a rich source of inspiration. You can spend hours studying this vest. It gives many clues about the turbulent time, weaving style with politics, rebellion, and the *tricolore*. Here fashion speaks its owner's mind through intricate needlework and beauty rather than through the violence of the day. As well as the collar, other clues can be found on the pockets. One is the phrase, "L'HABIT NE FAIT PAS LE MOINE" ("The habit does not make the monk"), a caution to never judge a book by its cover or, indeed, take things, such as fashion, and its wearer, on face value alone. The other pocket reads, "HONI SOIT QUI MAL Y PENSE," a motto I recognized from the English Order of the Garter, which originally comes from the Old French saying, "Shame upon him who thinks evil of it." Powerful messages to carry on your person! It is genius. I love the hidden messages and use of heroic symbolism and dandy analogy to, quite literally, wear your loyalties on your chest. For me fashion is there to empower, but you can also play with it, and use it to disguise and conceal. This vest is a brilliant example of all this. It also serves as a strong visual reminder to always look past the frosting and seek the person within.

So, why don't you look even closer at that vest? There are still many clues to unravel. Through its design and embroidery it tells how the wealthy once dressed like caterpillars by day, ostentatious butterflies by night, but then had to remember their loyalty to the state, to the blue, white, and red. This wearer is, as the collar hints, a bit of a charmer and seems to play it safe and profess both loyalties. Take the tiny lapels: they are embroidered, one with a shorn caterpillar, the other with a butterfly with its wings cut. Does this mean the wearer's wings have been cut? Or is he glad that the rich, with their decadent ways, have been stopped? Well, this he can debate whichever way the company prefers....

I wish I had been commissioned to design this vest; it is a masterpiece of fashion and function as well as showing sadness, sympathy, beauty, and wit. The vest is both a political and a fashion statement that captures the mood at the beginning of a new era. It also shows how style reacted, like a fickle mirror, and instantly rejected the gaudy finery so beloved before. This vest says so much more than a first glance can glean, and it is just one example of what you will find in this exhibition. It is objects like this that make my job so exciting.

Fashion's spirit is ever changing and ever challenging you to keep up. The constant shift is what fascinates and inspires me, and adds color and character to the narrative of the pieces. Fashion exists to capture a moment, to transcend language, culture, class, and time. But fashion must also guard secrets: of the figure, of hopes and dreams. It is the ultimate barometer of the then and the now. Eras can be defined by what we wore as much as by who we were, so we must design pieces as inventive as this vest to capture every chameleon and butterfly.

I want to inspire and push fashion forward, to celebrate the beauty of the past as much as the beauty of today. I hope that you enjoy this exhibition as much as I have.

John Galiano



INTRODUCTION

Sharon Sadako Takeda

Fashioning a collection of European dress and accessories began in 1915 at the Los Angeles County Museum of History, Science, and Art, a year before the fledgling institution acquired its first painting and a half-century before the art division splintered off to create the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). Since the formation of the Costume and Textiles Department in 1953, several generations of curators have strategically expanded and exhibited its permanent collection, which now represents more than one hundred cultures and two thousand years of human creativity in the textile and fashion arts.

At the end of 2005, LACMA received documentation on a major European fashion collection assembled by two of the foremost dealers in the field: Martin Kamer of London, England, and Wolfgang Ruf of Beckenried, Switzerland. Both have dealt in historic textiles and dress for more than twenty-five years, each building an impressive international client list of museums, including LACMA, while often reserving select pieces for their own private collections. Competitors for many years, Kamer and Ruf in the twilight of their careers found it more and more challenging to locate high-quality historic fashionable dress. The two decided to merge their respective costume collections and offer it as one to select international museums. Representing a total of fifty years of acquisitions through active bidding at auctions and estate sales as well as through purchases and trades with other dealers, their collaboration resulted in a stellar collection of fashion and accessories for men, women, and children that would be difficult, if not impossible, to replicate today.

The addition of the Kamer-Ruf Collection to any museum would be a coup simply for its breadth and depth, but even more significantly for its overall quality and number of extremely rare pieces, including a man's vest intricately embroidered with powerful messages relevant to the French Revolution (pp. 8, 154–155) and a feathered, bejeweled turban by the famed French fashion designer Paul Poiret worn by his wife and muse, Denise, at his legendary “Thousand and Second Night” party in June 1911 (p. 176). For LACMA the acquisition of this extraordinary collection—with strong examples of fashion from France, England, the Netherlands, and the Iberian Peninsula, as well as Asian

exports for the Western market—instantly strengthened the museum's already respectable European dress collection, which had been built, almost piece by piece, by the generosity of the museum's Costume Council and individual donors.

Soon after his arrival at LACMA in April 2006, CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director Michael Govan challenged curators from every department to be fearless in their pursuit of possible art acquisitions and to find objects or collections that would greatly alter the museum's permanent collection and art-world profile. The Costume and Textiles Department presented the Kamer-Ruf Collection for the Director's consideration. Govan understood the importance of costume for an encyclopedic art museum such as LACMA: not only did it enliven and add dimension to paintings and sculpture, but the relatively recent elevation of the role of fashion among art historians and contemporary art curators also made its place in the museum essential. After examining the collection in Basel, Switzerland, he made the Kamer-Ruf Collection one of his first major art-acquisition initiatives.

This impressive agenda was bolstered by a munificent gift from Michael and Ellen Michelson immediately after Ellen's viewing of the collection in Basel with Govan. Additional generous contributions followed from the museum's Costume Council, the Edgerton Foundation, Gail and Gerald Oppenheimer, Maureen H. Shapiro, Grace Tsao, and Lenore and Richard Wayne. A final grand contribution from Suzanne A. Saperstein secured the collection for LACMA, instantly raising the museum's European fashion collection to a significantly higher level.

Fashioning Fashion: European Dress in Detail, 1700–1915 is the inaugural presentation of this newly acquired gift. The exhibition and this publication celebrate the acquisition milestone and, by integrating key examples collected over the life span of the museum, also acknowledge the enduring legacy of generous donors who have actively participated in fashioning a world-class collection for LACMA.

In deciding which objects to exhibit, pieces were thoughtfully chosen for their respective roles in the story of fashion's aesthetic and technical development from the Age of Enlightenment to World War I. Organized in four thematic sections—Timeline,

Textiles, Tailoring, and Trim—the exhibition examines the sweeping changes that occurred in fashionable dress from 1700 to 1915 (the period of time represented by the art objects in the new acquisition), providing an in-depth look at the details of luxurious textiles, exacting tailoring techniques, and lush trimmings.

The Timeline section offers a chronological panorama of female and male fashions. The women's visual timeline is illustrated with dresses in various shades of white in order to focus attention on the evolving fashionable silhouette—how each successive era emphasized a different part of the human anatomy and changed the position of waistlines and hemlines. By contrast, the men's timeline begins with colorful examples that showcase how eighteenth-century aristocratic men rivaled their female counterparts in the desire to impress with dress, and concludes with a subdued 1911 pinstripe suit, a harbinger of the business suit that has remained relatively unchanged for a century.

The fashioning of fashion begins with the choice of fabric by medium, weight, color, and occasionally pattern. An assortment of textiles—from silk to cotton, gauze to velvet, plain to printed—is highlighted in the Textiles section. The simple interlacing of a vertical warp in one color and a horizontal weft in another color creates an iridescent plain-weave fabric that, when made into a garment, appears to change color as the wearer moves. Eighteenth-century aristocratic garments made from such “changeable” or “shot” silks (pp. 48–49, 74–75) were particularly striking as courtiers maneuvered around candlelit rooms. After the French Revolution, the craze for fashions that mimicked the flowing and revealing drapery characteristic of ancient Greek and Roman statues resulted in a huge demand for gossamer cotton muslin. Raw cotton from various European colonies that had become widely available in the second half of the eighteenth century helped meet the growing demand for cotton yardage. Similar in transparency yet more complicated and time-consuming to produce, cotton gauze (pp. 52–53) was an understated lavish expenditure for the most discerning fashion-conscious consumer. Equally thin and lightweight, exotic cashmere shawls woven of the finest goat-fleece underdown (pp. 37 left, 53) provided both warmth and luxury to diaphanous neoclassical dresses. Imported woven silks from China (p. 58) and printed, resist-dyed, and mordant-painted cottons from India constructed into stylish European creations demonstrated exotic subdued elegance appreciated by the cognoscenti. Exoticism in the form of the imagined Far East is seen in “bizarre” (p. 54), chinoiserie (pp. 57–58), and Japanese-inspired (pp. 46, 51) patterned silks produced in Europe. Sumptuous silk velvets were perennial fashion favorites for both men and women. Some well-dressed nineteenth-century men owned hundreds of richly patterned silk and silk-velvet vests that added colorful expression to their somber suits (pp. 60–61).

Throughout the eighteenth century, new designs for dress fabrics emerged with each change of season. The fabrication of lavish textiles by hand on drawlooms was labor intensive and therefore expensive. Even with technical innovations, such as the perfection of the Jacquard loom attachment in 1801 (which allowed for increasingly complex patterns to be woven semi-mechanically), fabric often remained the costliest feature of high fashion. Textiles were treasured—and made into stylish clothing

that was passed down to loved ones and often refashioned into more updated styles.

The manipulation of textiles through cutting, stitching, and padding in order to sculpt three-dimensional garments that conformed to the idealized shape or fashionable silhouette of each era is explored in the Tailoring section. In the eighteenth century, lengths of expensive fabric were used efficiently with little waste. Cut into few pattern pieces, garments were hand-stitched. Suit jackets for men were unpaddinged, while dresses were given volume with the aid of wide hoop petticoats known as *paniers* (p. 77). During the nineteenth century, with the advancement of tailoring tools and techniques, styles changed in dramatic ways, accentuating or minimizing different body parts—shoulders, breasts, waist, hips, *derriere*—in ongoing attempts to keep up with fashion.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the invention and widespread use of the sewing machine permitted a faster method of assembling the growing number of multiple pieces of fabric, and spawned the creation of more complicated three-dimensional forms. Men's suit jackets were cut short in front but gave way to long tails; lapels were strategically cut and stitched to ensure a smooth transition from the collar; and the body of the jacket was padded in various key locations—shoulder, underarm, and chest. Female garments composed from myriad shaped fabric pieces fit over a variety of understructures from corsets to cage crinolines and bustles that gave rise to correspondingly exaggerated fashionable silhouettes.

The decoration of a garment enhanced the beauty and appreciation of fashion. The combination of rich materials and time-consuming hand techniques often contributed to making the cost of trimmings higher than the price of the garment's textile or tailoring. And, like expensive jewelry, elaborate trimmings indicated wealth and social position.

The artistry of embroiderers, quilters, and lace makers is undeniable when examining the details of the elegantly embellished garments in the Trim section. Eighteenth-century examples, such as the realistic depiction of flowering plants embroidered on a man's velvet suit (p. 128), the subtle texture of white-on-white corded quilting punctuated with embroidered knots on a woman's stomach (p. 139), and the delicate handmade linen lace accessories (pp. 156–157), surely delighted the wearers while enticing members of their aristocratic circles to draw near for a closer look. In the nineteenth century, as inventive manufacturing techniques successfully imitated hand techniques, trimmings as well as fashionable dress became more affordable to the growing European middle class.

Fashioning Fashion offers a wonderful opportunity to examine the transformation of fashion over a span of more than two centuries, as well as providing historical context to show how political events, technical innovations, and global trade often profoundly affected style. Because eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fashion moved more slowly than the lightning-speed pace of contemporary fashion, great attention could be paid to the smallest of details. It is little wonder that many of today's top haute couture designers often look to the past in order to find meaning in the present. The intriguing and inspiring examples of historic dress found in *Fashioning Fashion* are as captivating today as they were centuries ago.



