



# FASHION AND TEXTILES

IN THE INTERNATIONAL COLLECTIONS OF THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA



Robyn Healy

assisted by

Susan Dimasi

Paola Di Trocchio

**Dior**  
**Christian**  
**HAUTE COUTURE**  
**PARIS**

FASHION AND TEXTILES

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**Cover:** THE ROYAL SCHOOL OF ART NEEDLEWORK, London est. 1872  
William Morris designer 1834–1896 Edward Burne-Jones designer 1833–1898  
*Poesis* c. 1880 wool, cotton 210.0 x 180.0 cm (framed) Purchased through The Art Foundation of Victoria with the assistance of Miss Flora MacDonald Anderson Founder Benefactor and Mrs Ethel Elizabeth Ogilvy Lumsden Founder Benefactor, 1992 (CT1-1992) (with detail)

**Title page:** CHRISTIAN DIOR, Paris couture house est. 1947 John GALLIANO designer since 1996 Gibraltar born 1960, emigrated to England 1966, worked in France *Dress, hat and boots no. 39* design 2000 spring–summer, made 2003 silk, paint, lacquer, metal, leather, couture no. 333 381 Presented through the NGV Foundation by Norma and Stuart Leslie, Governors, 2002 (2002.417 a–d) (detail)

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## FOREWORD

This handbook is one of a new series of publications that celebrates the opening of our refurbished galleries at St Kilda Road, NGV International. Each of these volumes explores a different aspect of the National Gallery of Victoria's international collections, highlighting not only the richness and diversity of our holdings, but also the extraordinary generosity of the patrons and supporters who have presented so many masterpieces to the NGV over the years.

The first group of textiles was acquired by the National Gallery of Victoria in 1895, and consisted of a small group of Indian block-printed textiles; however, it was not until 1948 that the first major group of fashion-related clothing came into the collection, with the presentation by the Misses Butler of a collection of nineteenth-century garments.

Originally part of the Decorative Arts Department, the costume and textiles collection became a separate collecting area in 1981, in recognition of its increasing importance. It was renamed Fashion and Textiles in 1995 to reflect the nature of the clothing acquired.

This handbook presents a selection of more than seventy European, American and Asian fashion-related items from the collection. Works have been selected for this publication to illustrate the strengths of our holdings and to express its exciting diversity, with examples dating from antiquity to the present day. A select group of textiles has also been integrated into this volume; examples that broaden our understanding of key stylistic moments and reflect important synergies within our holdings.

Throughout the twentieth century, the collection has developed through significant acquisitions and gifts. The addition of key collections such as the following have enriched our holdings: the Gibson-Carmichael collection of embroidery (1911), Dr. G. E. Morrison collection of Chinese costume and textiles (1920), Mr and Mrs Ernest S. Markower collection of fans (1927), the Una Teague collection of Eastern European costumes and textiles (1942), the costume collection of William Nicholson (1951), the Pollen collection of lace (1963), the Schofield collection (1974, 1978) of nineteenth- and twentieth-century costumes and accessories, and the Mavis Powell wardrobe (2000, 2001).

The Fashion and Textiles collection has relied on the generosity of many local donors and supporters. This has resulted in the unique character of our International collection, with many of our works represented in this publication bearing a Melbourne or Australian provenance. The collection has developed through the support of many individual donors, who are too numerous to name here.

Individuals and organisations who have donated works or provided funds for the works illustrated in this publication have included: Dr Ronald Milton Alder; Miss Flora MacDonald Anderson and Mrs Ethel Elizabeth Ogilvy Lumsden; the Balenciaga archives; Sarah Bostock; Chanel; Roger Evans; Mrs Kerry Gardner; Mary Lipshut; Mr and Mrs E. S. Markower; Lady Nicholson and her daughter, Georgina Weir; Mrs Robert Power; Janet Purves; The Versace archives; Lucinia Pinto; Angela Wood; Jennifer Phipps; David Syme & Co. Ltd; Vogue Australia; and Andrea Ziegler.

The Department of Fashion and Textiles (International) has received generous ongoing financial assistance and support from the Felton Bequest, the National Gallery Women's Association, the NGV Foundation (previously known as The Art Foundation of Victoria), and Norma and Stuart Leslie, Governors.

A purpose-built permanent gallery for International Fashion and Textiles was a significant inclusion in the brief for the NGV redevelopment. This space will contain aspects of the permanent collection presented in a regular exhibition program, with items on display rotated every nine months to give the public the opportunity to be constantly stimulated by the richness of our holdings. In addition to this impressive display area, fashion and textiles will be integrated into the Decorative Arts galleries at various times, following a chronological sequence of various materials and media, thus providing the opportunity for works to be viewed in a variety of contexts.

Gerard Vaughan  
Director













The Coptic tribes lived in the period after the birth of Christ, and were the indigenous people of Egypt. Known for their production of textiles, the Copts developed sophisticated weaving and dyeing technologies.

Coptic textiles have been enthusiastically collected since the late eighteenth century. Finely woven in wool and linen, these textiles were often decorated with colourful motifs that represented human figures, plants, animals or intricate geometric patterns. Unearthed during archaeological digs, early costume examples survived either as burial wrappings or grave goods. Some famous and well-documented excavations were made during Napoleon's Egyptian campaign in 1788–89, when French archaeologists recovered many important pieces.

Although it was standard burial practice for the dead to be dressed in garments, it is rare to find examples of complete tunics among museum collections. Unfortunately it was common practice in the late nineteenth century for antique dealers to cut up garments acquired from archaeological digs, as they could generate larger profits by simply selling fragments that featured coloured patterns, discarding all the plain sections of the clothing. Many museums today work at piecing together fragments when matches are found.

The burial tunic provided protection for a person's journey into the next life. This example displays influences from Greek, Roman and Christian cultures. The Coptic weavers, although predominantly Christian, continued to use ornamentation derived from pagan culture. A motif's association with protection from the 'evil eye' involved intricate patterning and powerful symbolic motifs to ward off the wearer's enemies, either alive or dead. Dancers and musicians with their hands held up, animals chasing each other and twisting vine borders all acted as powerful symbols to drive away evil forces and protect the wearer from chronic illness. The colourful ornamentation was strategically positioned at the wearer's most vulnerable spots, such as the shoulders and knees.

Woven in wool and linen, the *Tunic* is made from one continuous piece of cloth. It is simply a large rectangle with a slit for the neck, like a poncho. Originally the main cloth was whiter and offset with lively ornamentation in bright colours. Age and changing environmental conditions have altered the true colour of this piece.

#### **EGYPT, Coptic**

*Tunic* 5th–7th century AD  
 wool, linen  
 119.0 x 148.0 cm (folded);  
 235.0 x 148.0 cm (flat)  
 Felton Bequest, 1964 (1296–D5)









Coptic textiles were created by professional weavers based in workshops dispersed across Egypt. Various new weaving and dyeing techniques were invented during this time. Fabrics were made on a type of drawloom. The warp (the thread running lengthwise) was made up of linen threads, and the weft (the yarn worked horizontally) was usually wool. Wool was not used during the earlier Pharonic period because it was an animal product, and considered ritually unclean.

The introduction of wool was significant because unlike linen it could easily be dyed. Wool was prepared and spun, and then the yarns were coloured using specialist recipes involving lichens, berries and insects to produce a vibrant palette. Purple was the most expensive and difficult colour to produce. Initially sourced from shellfish, it was a colour reserved for members of the upper classes, a tradition possibly derived from the Romans.

Worked in a tapestry weave, a tunic was often made in one continuous piece. Ornamented tunics were highly valued because their production was labour-intensive. The patterned areas were woven by men, the plain by women. Tunics were decorated with coloured strips called 'clavi', and squares and roundels of pattern known as 'segmentae'. The patterns were skillfully woven, maze-like, geometric motifs, dancing figures, chasing animals and shaded detailing, sometimes highlighted by embroidery.

This *Fragment* from a tunic is only a small section of a larger design scheme. The coloured motifs were originally purple or a deep red, but have degraded over time to become a dark brown. A naked warrior holding a shield is framed in a square panel, which possibly represents a spiritual battle between the forces of good and evil. Perhaps the most interesting aspects of the piece are the textured areas of pile-like early 'terry-towelling', formed by looping sections of the weft around a rod. The depth of the pile was altered by changing the size of the rod.

#### **EGYPT, Coptic**

*Fragment* 5th–7th century AD  
wool, linen  
20.5 x 46.0 cm  
Felton Bequest, 1964 (1307–D5)





# FLANDERS, Brussels

*The Flight into Egypt* c. 1510  
 wool, silk, metallic threads, linen  
 270.4 x 302.4 cm  
 Felton Bequest, 1953 (1344–D4)

In medieval and Renaissance times, tapestry was one of the most important forms of artistic expression. Tapestries were a major feature of interior furnishings, gracing the walls of churches and the stately homes and castles of royalty and the rich. They acted as decorative devices like wallpaper, as well as providing an efficient form of insulation. Easily transportable, tapestries were rolled up and taken on journeys, seized during battles as highly prized items of booty, and popular gifts for visiting dignitaries. Major centres of tapestry production existed in Flanders, Germany and France.

Tapestries were commonly decorated with scenes from everyday courtly life or the Bible. Well-known religious stories and characters were interpreted in a rather imaginative manner, with the people and events often set in contemporary times.

The costumes represented in early Flemish tapestries were rarely depicted accurately. Even humble figures in religious scenes wore lavish costumes. *The Flight into Egypt*, c. 1510, tapestry relates the biblical story of the Holy Family – Jesus, Mary and Joseph – fleeing Bethlehem to seek asylum in Egypt. The tapestry depicts aspects of fashionable dress from medieval times through to the early Renaissance, reflecting the magnificent textiles and courtly clothing styles of the day. Luxurious fabrics are used for the costumes worn by Mary, Joseph and the angels. Figured velvets, damask, shot silks and taffeta – favoured fabrics of the time – have been fashioned into simple robes and cloaks that ornately drape across the figure or are sculpted to form elaborate headdresses. King Herod's soldiers, who are searching for the Holy Family, are resplendently clad in armour. This significant item, worn by knights and noblemen, was made from a number of pieces of steel joined together, and included jointed gloves, known as gauntlets.



