

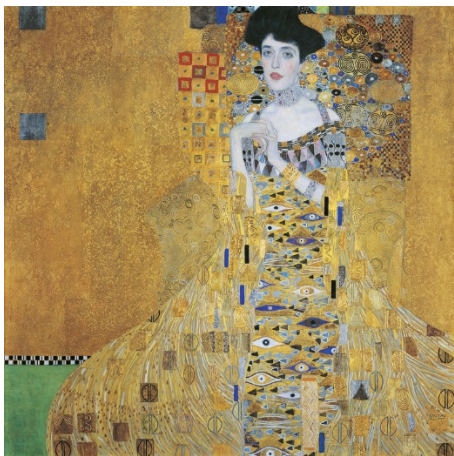
Fashion in (As) Art

Is Fashion Art? An interesting question. In *Defense of Fashion as a True Art Form*, Georges Berges, owner of the Georges Berges Gallery, said, “Historically, fashion has rarely been elevated to the same stature as painting, music, sculpture or architecture. But fashion is one of the purest expressions of art because it is *art lived* on a daily basis.”

Certainly, fashion has a place **in** art. One need only look at the 1884 Portrait of Madame X by John Singer Sargent. The painting, which now hangs at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, is not the original painting exhibited by Sargent. The original showed one of the straps suggestively falling off the shoulder. Given the mores of the day, the painting created a great scandal.



Then there's the dress that dominates *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer* (also known as *Woman in Gold*), by Gustave Klimt (completed 1907).



Klimt said he was influenced by the Ravenna Mosaics when he painted this portrait, commissioned by Adele's husband, an Austrian sugar industrialist.



Chiesa di San Vitale, Ravenna, Italy

The portrait was stolen by the Nazis in 1941, and eventually placed in a gallery in Austria. Bloch-Bauer's niece, Maria Altmann made a claim against the gallery, which ultimately made its way to the US Supreme Court. An arbitration committee in Vienna agreed that the painting had been stolen and it was returned to Altmann. She sold it in 2006 for \$135 million to Ronald Lauder, who placed it in his Neue Gallery in NYC. The story of the painting is the subject of the 2012 book *The Lady in Gold* by Anne-Marie O'Connor; the struggle for the restitution of the painting is the subject of the 2015 film *The Woman in Gold*, starring Helen Mirren as Maria Altmann.

It would take more than a coffee table sized book to adequately represent the range of fashion that has graced portraits, particularly of women, over time. For some reason, I was particularly struck by this one, partly because of the extraordinary life of the subject:



This is a portrait of Luisa, Marchesa Casati Stampa di Soncino by Giovanni Boldini (1908). Luisa was known as a patron of the arts, a muse and a legend. Click on the link to get a taste of her eccentricities and her influence. http://self.gutenberg.org/articles/eng/Luisa_Casati.

The work of well-known visual artists has found its way into fashion and costumes. Pablo Picasso's sets and costumes, for example, were used by Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. Below are two photos of costumes designed by Picasso for the 1917 ballet, *Parade*.



Click on this link to read more about Picasso (and other artists) and the Ballet Russe. The article also includes a 3 minute video of Parade, showcasing the costumes. <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-ballets-russes-showcased-picassos-matisse-experimental-work>

Elsa Schiaparelli, Italian designer and rival of Coco Chanel, collaborated with Salvador Dali to create several dresses, including the Lobster Dress (1937). Wallis Simpson, wife of Edward VIII, was famously photographed by Cecil Beaton wearing the Lobster Dress.



Yves St. Laurent paid homage to the artist, Mondrian, with a collection of cocktail dresses with black lines and blocks of primary colors (1965).



St. Laurent also created two jackets in his 1988 collection inspired by Van Gogh paintings, *Sunflowers* and *Iris*.



Each jacket took over 600 hours of work. One of the sunflower jackets sold at auction in 2019 for \$574,000.

In December 2019 and again in February 2020, I visited the Anna Wintour Costume Center in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which was featuring *In Pursuit of Fashion: The Sandy Schreier Collection*. The Costume Center has a collection of over 35,000 pieces, one of the most extensive in the world. The Sandy Schreier Collection, a promised gift to the museum, represents the more than half a decade efforts of a pioneer collector of 20th/ 21st century fashion. *Fashionista* described this exhibit “as good as a Willy

Wonka factory for fashion buffs”. The following link will take you to a series of slides with highlights from the exhibit. ¹<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/online-features/metcollects/schreier>

One example from the collection: Evening Dress by Jean Dessès, Winter, 1953-54²



Dessès (1904-1970), of Greek parentage, born in Egypt, specialized in draped evening gowns in chiffon and mousseline based on early Greek and Egyptian robes.

I was also fortunate to visit the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, Australia in December 2019 and see the *Jenny Kee and Linda Jackson: Step into Paradise* exhibit. Jenny Kee and Linda Jackson were honored as Officers in the Order of Australia for their contributions to Australia's fashion industry.

Kee and **Jackson** transformed the nation's fashion and cultural heritage with their pioneering style inspired by Australia's cultural and natural landscape, melded with their global influences.

Below are two of the costumes created for the opening ceremonies of the 2010 Sydney Olympics. The first is an homage to Frida Kahlo. The second, entitled “Tree of Life”, was part of the Africa float in the Arrivals segment of the ceremonies.

¹ For those of you who read the piece on Hats, you may recognize among the slides the Phillip Treacy hat worn by Princess Beatrice. There are a lot more crazy Treacy hats on his website at: <https://www.philipptreacy.co.uk/en>

² Jennifer Lopez wore a vintage moss green Dessès to the 2006 Oscars made with 50 yards of chiffon.



This link will allow you an approximately 3 minute walk through of the *Step into Paradise* exhibit.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=noWg6TKNBkc&list=PLoGEvYPXmpoj_UyZ5wkjEBuJMk2Ji-1_k&index=2&t=57s

Another fashion designer who deserves mentioning in the context of “Art” is Alexander McQueen (1969-2010). Early on, McQueen cultivated a reputation as Britain’s baddest bad-boy designer. The Metropolitan Museum of art hosted a posthumous exhibit of McQueen’s work, entitled *Savage Beauty*. Here’s one example from that exhibit.



This link takes you to an approximately 8 ½ minute narrated video of the 2011 McQueen exhibit.

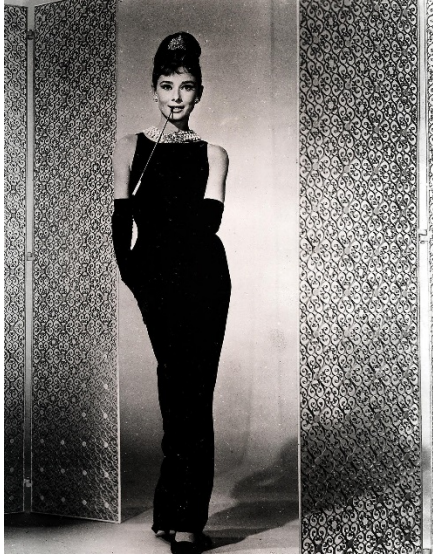
<https://www.metmuseum.org/metmedia/video/collections/ci/mcqueen-savage-beauty>

Harkening back to the piece I did on Art Made From Unusual Things, here's a dress made of pieces of broken crockery.



The dress was created by the Chinese designer, Li Xiaofeng (b. 1965). Considered one of the most original artists in China, Li makes wearable costumes from ceramic shards from the Song, Ming, Yuan and Qing dynasties, which are sewn together on a leather undergarment.

Not to be forgotten are iconic dresses from films. Who could forget Audrey Hepburn in Givenchy in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*?



For more iconic dresses from film: <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/film-tv/g32447915/best-movie-dresses/>

And last, if all of this makes you want to see fashion for yourself, here's a link to two articles on the top fashion museums in the world, including SCAD.

<https://www.galeriemagazine.com/10-best-fashion-museums-world/>

<https://www.cntraveler.com/galleries/2013-10-12/fashion-designer-museums-italy-spain-south-korea>