

**Large print
exhibition text**



SLEEPING BEAUTIES
Reawakening Fashion

**THE
MET**

Sleeping Beauties Reawakening Fashion

When an item of clothing enters The Costume Institute's collection, its status is irrevocably changed. What was once a vital part of a person's lived experience becomes a lifeless work of art that can no longer be worn, heard, touched, or smelled.

Sleeping Beauties: Reawakening Fashion endeavors to resuscitate garments from the collection by reactivating their sensory qualities and reengaging our sensorial perceptions. With its cross-sensory offerings, the exhibition aims to extend the interpretation of fashion within museums from the merely visual to the multisensory and participatory, encouraging personal connections.

The galleries unfold as a series of case studies united by the theme of nature. Motifs such as flowers and foliage, birds and insects, and fish and shells are organized into three groupings: earth, air, and water, respectively. In many ways, nature serves as the ultimate metaphor for fashion—its rebirth, renewal, and cyclicity as well as its transience, ephemerality,

and evanescence. The latter qualities are evident in the “sleeping beauties,” garments that are self-destructing due to inherent weaknesses and the inevitable passage of time, which ground several of the case studies.

Sleep is an essential salve for a garment’s well-being and survival, but as in life, it requires a suspension of the senses that equivocates between life and death. The exhibition is a reminder that the featured fashions—despite being destined for an eternal slumber safely within the museum’s walls—do not forget their sensory histories. Indeed, these histories are embedded within the very fibers of their being, and simply require reactivation through the mind and body, heart and soul of those willing to dream and imagine.

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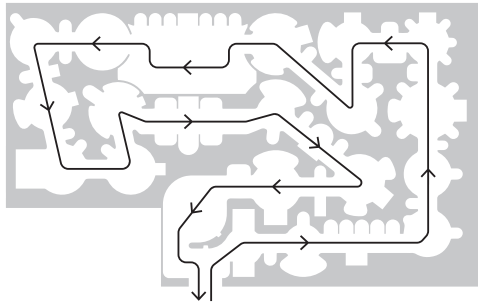
Read, watch, or listen to stories about these works on The Met website.


metmuseum.org/SleepingBeauties
#Reawakening Fashion



Sleeping Beauties is an immersive exhibition that presents multiple sensory experiences, including video animations, soundscapes, and smell experiences.

Visitors travel in a single circuitous path in one direction.



Assistive listening 

metmuseum.org/SleepingBeautiesListening



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Technological activations by Nick Knight and SHOWstudio

Smell displays designed by Sissel Tolaas

Exhibition design by Leong Leong

Constantin Brancusi (French, b. Romania, 1876–1957)

Sleeping Muse, 1910

Bronze

Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 1949 (49.70.225)

House of Worth (French, 1858–1956)

Charles Frederick Worth (French, b. England, 1825–1895)

Ball gown, ca. 1887

Bodice of pale green and ivory silk satin trimmed with polychrome silk chiffon and edged with gold silk-and-metal lace; skirt of pale green silk satin overlaid with ivory silk satin appliquéd with cream silk tulle and embroidered with gold sequins, opalescent and gold glass beads, and silver silk-and-metal thread in a cloud-and-sunbeam pattern, and trimmed with polychrome silk chiffon and white cotton lace

Gift of Orme Wilson and R. Thornton Wilson, in memory of their mother, Mrs. Caroline Schermerhorn Astor Wilson, 1949 (49.3.28a, b)

Promising to captivate at any ball, this dazzling gown combines glittering beadwork with shiny satin and diaphanous chiffon. Sadly, the pale green satin has

suffered catastrophic loss of its ultrafine vertical threads, resulting in large swaths where only the sturdier horizontal threads remain. In contrast, the ivory-colored embroidered satin is still robust despite similar wear and exposure. This disparity underscores the unpredictable nature of textile deterioration and suggests that there is an inherent weakness in the green fabric. No current conservation treatment can fully stabilize the satin. Instead, the decision has been made to refrain from intervention and limit handling of this vulnerable ensemble.

The spotlit area on each “sleeping beauty” highlights a detail of the object that is particularly fragile due to its inherent weaknesses and the inevitable passage of time. The spotlight moves in and out of focus, so as not to cause further harm to the slumbering garment.

“The Sleeping Beauty, Op. 66” (1889),
composed by **Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky**
Running time: 2 minutes, 22 seconds

Assistive listening 

metmuseum.org/SleepingBeautiesListening



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Gucci (Italian, founded 1921)

Alessandro Michele (Italian, b. 1972)

Cape, autumn/winter 2017–18

Seafoam silk satin embroidered with polychrome plastic sequins, plastic pearls, clear glass crystals, black glass bugle beads, and bronze glass seed beads in the pattern of a dove, a cloud, and flowers

Gift of Gucci, 2024 (2024.54a, b)

PAINTED FLOWERS

Floral imagery was the most popular source of patterning for dress in the eighteenth century, exemplified by the two hand-painted silk gowns in this gallery. Both reveal the era's penchant for Orientalism: the 1780s *robe à l'anglaise* is made from silk woven and painted in China for export to Europe, while the 1740s *robe à la française* is of European manufacture in imitation of Chinese export silks. In addition to the stylistic differences in the depiction of the flowers—the former's are delicate and naturalistic, the latter's large-scale and fantastical—there are also technical variances: Chinese export silks are typically underpainted in lead white and outlined in black paint, both of which are absent in the *robe à la française*.

Orientalism remained popular in the nineteenth century, as evidenced by the reception gown by Mme Martin Decalf. Although its hand-painted silk is European in manufacture, the design elements and coloring technique reflect the influence of Chinese export silks. In a couture flourish, the painted wisteria—indebted to Japonisme—is hand

embroidered with glass and metal beads that accent the flowers' centers and define select areas of the leaves and branches, transforming the two-dimensional into the three-dimensional.

Mary Katrantzou (British, b. Greece, 1983)

“Digitalis” evening dress, spring/summer 2018

White synthetic faille digitally printed with lilies, daisies, dahlias, peonies, petunias, amaryllises, chrysanthemums, and foxgloves, embroidered with polychrome sequins, seed beads, bugle beads, and cannetille, and pieced with white neoprene trimmed with gray scuba knit and digitally printed with black lilies, daisies, dahlias, peonies, petunias, amaryllises, and chrysanthemums

Gift of Mary Katrantzou, 2024 (2024.50a, b)

Mary Katrantzou’s evening dress combines several elements of the three painted silk gowns opposite. Stylistically, the bold scale, color palette, and arrangement of the floral motifs resemble the 1740s *robe à la française*, while the techniques of outlining the pattern in black and embroidering the flowers and leaves with beads recall the 1780s *robe à l’anglaise* and the 1870s Mme Martin Decalf gown, respectively. Katrantzou’s design inspiration, however, is decidedly contemporary: the children’s activity paint by number, which involves filling in numbered sections of a picture outlined in black with corresponding colored pigments.

LEFT TO RIGHT

Mme Martin Decalf (French, act. ca. 1875–81)
Dress, 1878–80

Ivory silk plain weave woven with gold silk-and-metal thread and overlaid with cream silk satin hand painted with polychrome wisteria, trimmed with lavender moiré faille and cream cotton lace, and embroidered with green glass tubular beads, polychrome glass seed beads, and polychrome glass beaded fringe

Gift of the Estate of Jane Curtiss Breed, 1946, through James McVickar Breed (46.88.1)

British

Robe à la française, 1740s

Cream silk moiré faille hand painted with polychrome fantastical flowers and trimmed with cream silk cordwork, polychrome silk flowers, and gold silk-and-metal gimp and cord

Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1995 (1995.235a, b)

French

Robe à l'anglaise, ca. 1780

Ivory silk taffeta hand painted with wisteria, cherry blossoms, and asters

Purchase, Mr. and Mrs. Alan S. Davis Gift, 1976 (1976.146a, b)

BLURRED BLOSSOMS

The muted pattern of blurred flowers on the 1750s–60s *robe à la française* achieves its subtle painterly effects through a labor-intensive technique known as *chiné à la branche*. Perfected in Lyon, France, during the first half of the eighteenth century, *chiné* silks were created by dyeing groups of warp threads known as “branches” before the fabric was woven. During the weaving process, the slight pulling of the threads created a soft, hazy appearance resembling a watercolor, an effect approximated by the lenticular wall, which features a detail of the “sleeping beauty.” Like other silks, when in motion *chiné* silks produced a rustling sound known as “scroop,” a combination of the words “scrape” and “whoop,” audible in this hallway.

The 1860s evening dress and the 1950s ball gown were produced by the easier and cheaper technique of warp printing, or *chiné à la chaîne*, which had all but replaced the more laborious *chiné à la branche* by the 1840s. In the dresses by Jonathan Anderson and Miuccia Prada and Raf Simons, the *chiné*-like patterns were created with digital printing, which emerged in

the late 1980s. Anderson's sheath is printed with a fuzzy image of an archival garment that follows the pattern of the dress, a trompe l'oeil effect that the designer dubbed a "ghost" of the house's past. "The blurry aspect looks like a glitch," Anderson explained, which he saw as a metaphor for fashion's temporality.

TO LEFT, LEFT TO RIGHT

French

Robe à la française, 1755–65

Pink silk taffeta woven with polychrome warp-dyed floral vines, bowknots, and flowers

Gift of Fédération de la Soierie, 1950 (50.168.1a, b)

French

Evening dress, 1860–65

Light blue silk taffeta woven with polychrome warp-printed roses, bluebells, buttercups, and other flowers, and trimmed with polychrome silk fringe

Gift of Mrs. Stirling S. Adams, 1978 (1978.310.1)

French

Ball gown, ca. 1957

Ivory silk taffeta woven with warp-printed pink and green roses on a blue ground

Promised Gift of Sandy Schreier (L.2018.61.34a)

LOEWE (Spanish, founded 1846)

Jonathan Anderson (Irish, b. 1984)

Dress, autumn/winter 2023–24

White duchess silk satin digitally printed with flowers

Gift of LOEWE, 2024 (2024.60.2)

Prada (Italian, founded 1913)

Miuccia Prada (Italian, b. 1949)

Raf Simons (Belgian, b. 1968)

Coat, spring/summer 2021

White silk taffeta digitally printed with red flowers

Courtesy Prada

TO RIGHT

House of Worth (French, 1858–1956)

Jean-Philippe Worth (French, 1856–1926)

Evening dress, 1902

Bodice of cream silk plissé chiffon overlaid with cream cotton lace appliquéd with cream silk taffeta woven with polychrome warp-printed hollyhocks, and trimmed with green silk satin; skirt of cream silk taffeta woven with polychrome warp-printed hollyhocks

Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Mrs. C. Oliver Iselin, 1961 (2009.300.2009a, b)

The large expanses of silk with minimal trim allow the elegant fabric to take center stage in this dress. Small splits pervade the silk, which has become so weak and brittle that it fractures when flexed. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, silk—taffeta in particular—was often treated with a bath of metallic salts to impart stiffness, add glossiness, improve dyeability, and enhance scroop (the characteristic rustling sound). Over time, the salts react with the silk and break it down on both a chemical and a physical level, resulting in this very fragile condition.

DIOR'S GARDEN

Christian Dior's fashions were greatly influenced by Impressionism. This inspiration is especially evident in his embrace of nature's harmony and his advocacy for an idealized and ornamental femininity, both palpable in the "Miss Dior" dress. Bearing the same name as the designer's first perfume, its millefleur embroidery—executed by Barbier—suggests the scent's floral notes of iris, rose, jasmine, gardenia, narcissus, carnation, and lily of the valley (Dior's favorite flower).

The House of Dior has repeatedly returned to "Miss Dior" as an emblem of its founder. The dress shown here is a miniature version of the original, inspired by the touring exhibition *Le Théâtre de la Mode*, organized to demonstrate the continued vitality of the haute couture following World War II. It was produced with the same virtuosic, artisanal exactitude as its full-scale sister, with silk flowers hand embroidered by Maison Lemarié. A 3D-printed plastic replica is displayed in the adjacent niche, allowing visitors to feel its form and the shapes of the flowers. Visitors

are also encouraged to touch the surrounding urethane panels, which were cast from the flowers embroidered on Raf Simons's interpretation of the "Miss Dior" dress and executed in black leather to allude to the eponymous perfume's muskier base notes of leather, patchouli, and oakmoss.

IN CASE IN CENTER OF GALLERY

House of Dior (French, founded 1946)

“Mini-Miss Dior,” 2014, edition 2024

Dress of pink nylon net and pink silk plain weave overlaid with cream cotton bobinette embroidered with polychrome silk plain-weave daisies, violets, narcissus, poppies, lilacs, forget-me-nots, and other flowers; overskirt of pink silk plain weave overlaid with cream cotton mesh embroidered with silk plain-weave daisies, violets, narcissus, poppies, lilacs, forget-me-nots, and other flowers; dress form of cardboard, polyester, cream cotton plain weave, and black painted steel

Gift of Christian Dior Couture, 2024 (2024.146.2a–f)

To feel the form of the flowers on this dress, visitors are invited to touch the 3D-printed plastic replica in the adjacent niche.

House of Dior (French, founded 1946)

Raf Simons (Belgian, b. 1968)

Dress, autumn/winter 2013–14, edition 2020

Black silk faille overlaid with black cotton mesh embroidered with black leather daisies, violets, poppies, lilacs, and other flowers and black glass seed beads

Gift of Christian Dior Couture, in celebration of the Museum's 150th Anniversary, 2021 (2021.68.1)

To feel the flowers on this dress, visitors are invited to touch the 3D-printed urethane wall surrounding the adjacent niche.

Conner Ives (American, b. 1996)

“Couture Girl” dress, autumn/winter 2021–22

White deadstock silk organza embroidered with polychrome deadstock plastic seed beads and polychrome recycled polyethylene terephthalate sequins of daisies, peonies, dahlias, and sunflowers

Purchase, Friends of The Costume Institute Gifts, 2022
(2022.378a, b)

Nature and artifice coalesce in Conner Ives’s “Couture Girl” dress from the designer’s 2020 graduate collection “The American Dream,” which was inspired by the women with whom he grew up in Bedford, New York. The garment’s bulblike shape parodies the pneumatic silhouettes of mid-twentieth-century fashion. The dress took five months to complete and is a testament to Ives’s commitment to sustainable practices: the silk organza is deadstock fabric donated by Carolina Herrera’s creative director, Wes Gordon, and the paillettes—made from recycled polyethylene terephthalate (PET)—were designed and produced in collaboration with Rachel Clowes of the Sustainable Sequin Company. Ives embroidered the more than ten thousand sequins by hand, basing the six shapes on his four favorite flowers—daisies, peonies, dahlias, and sunflowers.

VAN GOGH'S FLOWERS

“Clothes that will stun the crowds in museum exhibitions in the future” was how *New York Times* fashion critic Bernadine Morris summarized Yves Saint Laurent’s spring/summer 1988 haute couture collection. A highlight was the “Irises” jacket shown here, a simulacrum of Vincent van Gogh’s 1889 painting. The jacket echoes the original’s cropped composition, zooming in even further on the curved and twisting lines of the irises. More remarkably, the embroidery amplifies the luminosity of Van Gogh’s colors and enhances the materiality of his thick, short, wavy brushstrokes, as the animation demonstrates.

According to Maison Lesage, who executed the embroidery, this artistic and technical tour de force involved 600 hours of handwork, 250 meters of ribbon, 200,000 beads, and 250,000 paillettes in 22 colors. Nine female artisans worked on it in sections, a technique emulated in the dress from Maison Margiela’s autumn/winter 2014–15 artisanal collection. Unlike Saint Laurent’s jacket, sewn seamlessly to create a unified “canvas,” Maison Margiela’s dress

reflects its founder's deconstructivism by appearing as a collage or patchwork of *échantillons* (samples)—an exquisite corpse formed from the detritus of the couture atelier.

IN CASE IN CENTER OF GALLERY

Yves Saint Laurent (French, b. Algeria, 1936–2008)

“Irisés” jacket, spring/summer 1988 haute couture
Blue silk organza embroidered with polychrome plastic sequins, seed beads, bugle beads, and pearls, and polychrome hand-dyed silk grosgrain ribbon in the pattern of Vincent van Gogh’s painting *Irisés*

Purchase, Friends of The Costume Institute Gifts, 2019 (2019.93a)

TO RIGHT

Maison Martin Margiela (French, founded 1988)

Ensemble, autumn/winter 2014–15 artisanal
Dress of black silk charmeuse embroidered with polychrome plastic pearls, plastic sequins, glass bugle beads, glass seed beads, cannetille, and rayon-cord-knotted chain stitch in the pattern of Vincent van Gogh’s painting *Irisés*; skirt of beige silk chiffon

Courtesy Maison Margiela

Rodarte (American, founded 2005)

Kate Mulleavy (American, b. 1979)

Laura Mulleavy (American, b. 1980)

Dress, spring/summer 2012

White cotton-viscose satin woven with silver cotton-and-metal thread and digitally printed in the pattern of Vincent van Gogh's paintings of sunflowers

Gift of Rodarte, in honor of Maria Bell 2024 (2024.147)

This dress was inspired by Vincent van Gogh's paintings of sunflowers. Known for their esoteric high-low references, Kate and Laura Mulleavy arrived at Van Gogh through Walt Disney's animated feature film *Sleeping Beauty* (1959). In keeping with the popular medium of animation, the siblings elected to digitally print their design, choosing a textural metal, cotton, and viscose material to evoke Van Gogh's dimensional brushwork. While at first glance the print seems to be a faithful likeness of the artist's paintings, closer inspection reveals that some of the sunflowers are pixelated and others are based on photographs and solar-flare imagery that the designers witnessed while looking through a telescope at Mount Wilson Observatory in California.

POPPIES

The poppy—like most flowers—has had dynamic and mutable meanings. Its association with mortality, however, has been a constant, as visualized in the animation. This symbolism was reinforced by John McCrae’s 1915 poem “In Flanders Fields” (read aloud in this gallery by Morgan Spector), which lauds the courage and laments the sacrifice of soldiers who died on the Western Front during World War I. Ana de Pombo’s dress evokes McCrae’s verses through its print: poppies in a field of wheat stain the dress like drops of blood that coagulate into appliqués over the chest and around the feet. Created just two years before the outbreak of World War II, the garment’s imagery is not only poignant but also prophetic.

Isaac Mizrahi’s dress makes explicit the poppy’s associations with blood and death. Sarah Burton achieves a similar effect in her dress, but she has replaced the poppy with its doppelganger, the anemone, another fragile and ephemeral blood-red flower. With its dreamlike sensibility, Viktor & Rolf’s ensemble references a different long-standing

symbolic association of poppies—sleep—to which Ronald van der Kemp also alludes in his dress made from “dormant” vintage and leftover materials that he has reawakened.

IN CASE IN CENTER OF GALLERY

Viktor & Rolf (Dutch, founded 1993)

Viktor Horsting (Dutch, b. 1969)

Rolf Snoeren (Dutch, b. 1969)

Ensemble, spring/summer 2015 haute couture

Dress of white waxed cotton block printed with red, green, and black poppies, trimmed with white cotton poplin and black silk satin, and appliquéd with laser-cut red, green, and black block-printed waxed cotton, white synthetic tulle, blue cotton organdy poppies, and blue cotton embroidered lace; headpiece of straw and carbon fiber rods

Purchase, Friends of The Costume Institute Gifts, 2024
(2024.10a, b)

LEFT TO RIGHT

John Galliano (British, b. Gibraltar, 1960)

Stephen Jones (British, b. 1957)

Hat, spring/summer 2007, edition 2024

White painted wire trimmed with black plastic discs and red nylon knit and black plastic net in the form of a poppy

Purchase, Alfred Z. Solomon-Janet A. Sloane Endowment Fund, 2024

House of Paquin (French, 1891–1956)

Ana de Pombo (Spanish, 1900–1985)

Evening dress, spring/summer 1937

White silk plissé chiffon printed with a pattern of red, green, and gray poppies and appliquéd with red, gray, and green silk plissé chiffon poppies

Purchase, Gould Family Foundation Gift, in memory of Jo Copeland, 2019 (2019.131a, b)

Ronald van der Kemp (Dutch, b. 1964)

Evening dress, autumn/winter 2021–22 demi-couture

Red, green, and pink deadstock cotton-polyester poppy- and daisy-patterned lace pieced with white deadstock cotton floral-patterned lace and appliquéd with red silk organza flowers

Gift of Ronald van der Kemp, 2024 (2024.52)

Jasper Conran (British, b. 1959)

Philip Treacy (British, b. Ireland, 1966)

Hat, 1992

Light red glazed silk chiffon and black coq feathers burned and stripped into the form of a poppy

Gift of Jasper Conran, 1996 (1996.131)

Alexander McQueen (British, founded 1992)

Sarah Burton (British, b. 1974)

Dress, autumn/winter 2021–22

Pale pink synthetic faille digitally printed with red, black, and white anemone

Purchase, Friends of The Costume Institute Gifts, 2024 (2024.14)

A. Fanet (French, act. ca. 1877–1905)

Dress, ca. 1885

Gray and black figured silk compound weave woven in a pattern of poppies and trimmed with cream silk tulle, and gray silk satin trimmed with black jet and crystal beads

Gift of Miss. Bell B. Gurnee, 1942 (42.82a, b)

While the exterior of this dress is in relatively good condition, the interior exemplifies an extremely common and challenging issue with garments from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: shattered silk. The skirt is constructed on an integral petticoat of cream taffeta that has become critically brittle, splintering into pieces. Silk taffeta, a fabric used extensively for linings, was at the time routinely treated in a chemical process called “weighting” to

improve its behavior and appearance. The chemicals used, however, eventually destroy the fibers.

Conservators have yet to find a means of preserving shattered silk, making many garments from this era too fragile to handle.

TO RIGHT

Isaac Mizrahi (American, b. 1961)

“Exploded Poppy” dress, spring/summer 1992

White cotton piqué screen printed with a red, black, and white poppy; sash of black silk satin

Gift of Isaac Mizrahi & Co., 1992 (1992.259a, b)

Morgan Spector reading “In Flanders Fields”
(1915) by **John McCrae**

Running time: 58 seconds

Assistive listening 

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French

Court suit, 1774–93

Coat and breeches of cut velvet with stripes of brown pile on voided red silk ground, embroidered with white, yellow, and green silk in a pattern of daisies; waistcoat of ivory silk satin embroidered with green, yellow, pink, brown, and white silk in a pattern of daisies, leaves, and stylized floral sprigs

Rogers Fund, 1932 (32.40a–c)

House of Balmain (French, founded 1945)

Pierre Balmain (French, 1914–1982)

“Oriane” evening dress, autumn/winter 1954–55

Cream silk satin appliquéd with taupe silk taffeta and embroidered with faux pearls, clear plastic bugle beads, mother-of-pearl beads, discs, and shells, iridescent plastic sequins, gold silk-and-metal thread, and brown and beige silk chenille thread in a pattern of daisies

Gift of Mrs. David Rosenthal, 1960 (C.I.60.30a, b)

Daisies and other wildflowers were popular designs for men’s formal suits in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Typical of the period’s prevailing

Neoclassical influences, the daisies embroidered on the court suit are small in scale and arranged along the front edges of the jacket, on and around the pocket flaps, and around the single vent of the skirts. Pierre Balmain's evening dress, with its dazzling embroidery executed by Maison Lesage in a hybrid of Baroque and Rococo styles, is indebted to men's court suits of the eighteenth century. The daisies of faux pearls and gold thread adorning the corselet and front panel of the skirt evoke William Wordsworth's description of the daisy in his poem "To the Same Flower" (1802): "a silver shield with boss of gold."

GARTHWAITE'S GARDEN

Anna Maria Garthwaite was an unlikely textile revolutionary. With no formal training, she arrived in the English silk-weaving capital of Spitalfields at age 40 in 1729 and quickly gained a reputation for her innovative approach to design. Until this point, the French were the acknowledged leaders of silk design, but Garthwaite helped usher in a recognizably English style by the 1740s. Airy, naturalistic, and realistically colored, this style was a far cry from the complex, overblown aesthetic that had predominated in the previous decade, represented by the “sleeping beauty” in this gallery.

Garthwaite was nearly sixty years old—but at the height of her pioneering powers—when she created the watercolor design incorporating sprigs of poppy, honeysuckle, and carnations that was then woven into the men's waistcoat, a process detailed in the projection. Other designs shown here were inspired by her quintessentially English floral idiom, from Vivienne Westwood's gender-swapping tribute to Felix Chabluk Smith's deconstructivist reinterpretation

of her idyllic florals, which have been invaded by weeds and spiders. Nicolas Ghesquière's ensemble, inspired by eighteenth-century French menswear in The Costume Institute's collection, exemplifies the type of Gallic gaudiness that Garthwaite opposed.

RIGHT TO LEFT

Vivienne Westwood (British, 1941–2022)

Ensemble, autumn/winter 1995–96

Jacket of black and gray silk damask brocaded with polychrome silk thread in a pattern of carnations, poppies, honeysuckles, and other flowers; breeches of blue silk damask appliquéd with black and white silk satin and gold silk lamé bows; collar of white silk organza

Courtesy Vivienne Westwood Heritage

British

Textile designed by Anna Maria Garthwaite

(British, 1690–1763)

Textile manufactured by Peter Lekeux (British, 1716–1768)

Waistcoat, 1747

Light blue self-patterned silk brocaded with polychrome silk thread and silver and gold silk-and-metal thread in a pattern of carnations, poppies, honeysuckles, and other flowers and pieced with dark blue wool-silk twill

Purchase, Irene Lewisohn Bequest, 1966 (C.I.66.14.2)

Felix Chabluk Smith (British, b. 1988)

Ensemble, 2013

Coat of polychrome silk jacquard in a pattern of carnations, poppies, honeysuckles, lilies, cat's-ears, and spiders trimmed with black wool broadcloth; shorts of polychrome silk jacquard in a pattern of carnations, poppies, honeysuckles, lilies, cat's-ears, and spiders

Purchase, Gould Family Foundation Gift, in memory of Jo Copeland, 2014 (2014.5a, b)

British

Robe à l'anglaise, ca. 1765

Light gray self-figured silk brocaded with polychrome silk thread in a pattern of pomegranates, poppies, and other flowers

Rogers Fund, 1934 (34.108)

Although the construction of this dress dates to the 1760s, its brocaded textile was likely woven thirty years earlier. The dress is made up of numerous large and small fabric panels, exemplifying the long tradition of altering or completely remaking garments to adapt to new trends. A notable example is on the back of the skirt, where two smaller pieces of fabric have

been joined by a discreet seam. This practice, born of necessity due to the high cost of textiles, is now an inspiration for contemporary designers and artists who seek to use materials and resources more sustainably.

Louis Vuitton (French, founded 1854)

Nicolas Ghesquière (French, b. 1971)

Ensemble, spring/summer 2018, edition 2024

Coat of light blue silk damask brocaded with gold silk-and-metal thread, embroidered with polychrome silk thread, and appliquéd with heat-pressed polychrome synthetic film in a pattern of carnations, cornflowers, and other flowers; blouse of polychrome printed silk charmeuse; shorts of white synthetic knit

Courtesy Collection Louis Vuitton

TO LEFT, LEFT TO RIGHT

House of Worth (French, 1858–1956)

Charles Frederick Worth (French, b. England, 1825–1895)

“Tulipes Hollandaises” evening cloak, 1889

Black silk satin brocaded with polychrome silk thread in a pattern of tulips and trimmed with black cotton lace and gold silk-and-metal passementerie tassels

Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of the Princess Viggo in accordance with the wishes of the Misses Hewitt, 1931 (2009.300.1708)

Dries Van Noten (Belgian, b. 1958)

Ensemble, spring/summer 2014

Coat of black silk satin brocaded with polychrome silk thread in a pattern of tulips; belt of black silk satin; blouse of white silk-cotton batiste; skirt of beige cotton-linen twill

Gift of Dries Van Noten, 2024 (2024.57.3a–d)

Dries Van Noten (Belgian, b. 1958)

Ensemble, spring/summer 2014

Sleeveless tunic of black silk satin worn inside out and brocaded with polychrome silk thread in a pattern of tulips; blouse of white silk-cotton batiste; trousers of beige cotton-linen twill

Gift of Dries Van Noten, 2024 (2024.57.4a–c)

Charles Frederick Worth's evening cloak is made from a textile called "Tulipes Hollandaises," which was displayed at the 1889 Paris Exposition Universelle. At the time it was one of the most costly fabrics to produce because of its pattern repeat, which was more than 3 feet long and required 31,000 cards on the jacquard loom. The cloak's minimal seaming exploits the visual impact of the large repeat, which is enhanced by the

garment's loose fit and trapezoidal silhouette. Dries van Noten commissioned a reproduction of the "Tulipes Hollandaises" fabric for his spring/summer 2014 collection, which featured the coat with a self-fabric belt tied casually around the waist to downplay the textile's preciousness. This nonchalance is heightened in the sleeveless tunic from the same collection, worn inside out with the excess silk threads hanging loosely.

TO RIGHT

LOEWE (Spanish, founded 1846)

Jonathan Anderson (Irish, b. 1984)

Ensemble, autumn/winter 2024

Tuxedo coat of black wool plain weave and black silk satin embroidered with polychrome hand-dyed feathers in a pattern of tulips and leaves; dress of white silk satin appliquéd with iridescent vinyl and embroidered with white vinyl sequins, bugle beads, and pearl seed beads in a pattern of poppies and leaves

Courtesy LOEWE

As a special commission for the 2024 Met Gala celebrating the opening of this exhibition, Jonathan Anderson reinterpreted Charles Frederick Worth's cloak opposite. The tulips on the tuxedo coat are embroidered with hand-dyed feathers, amplifying the dimensionality of the brocaded versions on the original textile. The white dress worn underneath features a pattern of drooping poppies inspired by A. Fanet's dress on view in the "Poppies" gallery.

THE RED ROSE

“Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose.” In this tautological line from her 1913 poem “Sacred Emily,” Gertrude Stein materializes the red rose through repetition, giving it form, shape, and substance. There are few flowers that have been more lauded by poets and painters than the red rose, which has been invoked as a symbol of love, beauty, romance, passion, and sexuality. The rose has been equally embraced by designers, as represented here by garments that are sartorial sonnets and sculptures in and of themselves.

Philip Treacy’s startlingly lifelike headpiece evokes the flower’s fragility, as visualized in the animation and as also realized in the “sleeping beauty,” whose smell molecules, along with those of Yves Saint Laurent’s evening dress, emanate from the tubes on the wall. Saint Laurent’s lyrical confection as well as Pierpaolo Piccioli’s pay homage to their respective houses’ founders, who both shared a passion for roses and the color red.

For Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana, roses hold personal memories. For Dolce, they remind him

of the Palermo Botanical Garden, and for Gabbana, they recall his mother, who wore red lipstick infused with the flower's smell.

THIS GALLERY CONTAINS A SMELL EXPERIENCE.

IN CASE IN CENTER OF GALLERY

Philip Treacy (British, b. Ireland, 1966)

“The Upside-Down Rose” hat, spring/summer
2000 haute couture

Red silk satin and green silk-polyester satin in the
form of a rose and stem trimmed with acacia thorns
and mounted on white painted copper wire

Gift of Philip Treacy and Stefan Bartlett, 2024

TO RIGHT

House of Lanvin (French, founded 1889)

Jeanne Lanvin (French, 1867–1946)

“Roseraie” evening dress, spring/summer 1923

Beige silk tulle embroidered with red ombré silk plainweave ribbon and red ombré silk plain weave ribbon rosettes

Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Anonymous gift, 1964 (2009.300.1318a)

Adorned with meticulously handsewn ribbonwork embroidery, this dress showcases the exquisite craftsmanship synonymous with Jeanne Lanvin’s designs. Unfortunately, over time the delicate tulle supporting the ribbons has yellowed and degraded, rendering it unable to sustain their weight. The tulle is fragile and prone to tearing, and certain sections have fragmented entirely. To prevent further deterioration and ensure preservation for future generations, the dress is stored flat in a shallow drawer, facilitating observation and study without the need for movement or lifting.

Peak smell molecules

Isobornyl acetate: found in plants and herbs used in food and drinks in the 1920s; **carvone**: found in spearmint used in dental products; **limonene**: found in sprays used to cover up body odors on garments

The chromatograph for this dress shows hundreds of smell molecules, some of which can be smelled using the tubes to the left.



Smell but do not touch the tubes.

LEFT TO RIGHT

Valentino S.p.A. (Italian, founded 1959)

Pierpaolo Piccioli (Italian, b. 1967)

Jacket, autumn/winter 2022–23 haute couture

Red silk taffeta appliquéd with self-fabric roses

Courtesy Valentino S.p.A.

House of Dior (French, founded 1946)

Yves Saint Laurent (French, b. Algeria, 1936–2008)

“Rose Rouge” evening dress, spring/summer 1958

Red silk taffeta appliquéd with a self-fabric rose

Purchase, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, 2023 (2023.535)

Peak smell molecules

Diphenyl oxide: found in rosy fragrances; **methyl salicylate**: found in acidic fruits when in contact with human skin and pharmaceutical products used for muscle aches; **decanoic acid**: found in acidic food and body fats

The chromatograph for this dress shows hundreds of smell molecules, some of which can be smelled using the tubes to the right.

Dolce & Gabbana (Italian, founded 1985)

Domenico Dolce (Italian, b. 1958)

Stefano Gabbana (Italian, b. 1962)

Dress, 2024 Alta Moda

Red silk satin

Courtesy Dolce & Gabbana

Garments in this gallery have been reawakened by reproducing their smell molecules. The process involved extracting the molecules using a microfilter to trap air and moisture drawn through a glass barrel with a pump. The molecules were adsorbed and then analyzed using gas chromatography-mass spectrometry, allowing for their identification and replication.

The ten molecules in the tubes, listed below, were found in both the Yves Saint Laurent for House of Dior “Rose Rouge” evening dress to the left and the Jeanne Lanvin “Roseraie” evening dress to the right.

Smell display designed by Sissel Tolaas Studio, with support from Symrise



Smell but do not touch the tubes.

Overlapping smell molecules

Benzaldehyde: found in almonds and honey;
benzothiazole: found in sulfurous food, especially meat; **caprylic acid:** found in oily and rancid animal products; **coumarin:** found in tobacco and hay;
diethyl phthalate: found in bitter drinks and rubber;
Isodragol: found in fruits, plants, and high-end skin products; **methyl salicylate:** found in acidic fruits when in contact with human skin and pharmaceutical products used for muscle aches; **octane:** found in gasoline and motor oil; **phenoxyethanol:** found in faint rose smells and polluted environments;
tetracosane: found in toothpaste and other dental products; **undecane:** used as a mild sex attractant for moths and cockroaches

TO LEFT

French

Evening coat, ca. 1912

Ivory silk gauze embroidered with clear glass seed beads and black and white glass bugle beads in a pattern of roses

Isabel Shults Fund, 2001 (2001.374.1)

French

Evening dress, 1912–14

Black silk chiffon with cut pile of black silk velvet in a pattern of roses trimmed with jet and black glass bead fringe and jet and black glass beaded cord belt, and pieced with ivory silk chiffon overlaid with ivory silk net embroidered with silver silk-and-metal thread

Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of the estate of Mrs. Arthur F. Schermerhorn, 1957 (2009.300.3180)

The black rose does not exist in nature, which makes it an ideal vehicle for sartorial fantasy. Designers have capitalized on the motif's inherent elasticity to pattern garments with references ranging from the historical to the modern. In Jean-Philippe Worth's grand evening

coat opposite, Tudor-style roses of black velvet reinforce the silhouette's allusion to late sixteenth-century English styles, while the graphic, stylized black roses that appear on two anonymous French garments from the early twentieth century emphasize their modernity. The cut-velvet roses that rise from a ground of black chiffon on the evening dress resemble woodcuts as well as the Fauvist paintings of Raoul Dufy, a close collaborator of couturier Paul Poiret, whose relationship with roses suffuses the following gallery.

TO RIGHT

House of Worth (French, 1858–1956)

Jean-Philippe Worth (French, 1856–1926)

Evening coat, ca. 1900

White silk satin with cut-and-uncut pile of black silk velvet in a pattern of roses appliquéd with black silk lace, trimmed with black and cream silk mousseline, and embroidered with black sequins

Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Mrs. William E. S. Griswold, 1941 (2009.300.94)

The black rose does not exist in nature, which makes it an ideal vehicle for sartorial fantasy. Designers have capitalized on the motif's inherent elasticity to pattern garments with references ranging from the historical to the modern. In Jean-Philippe Worth's grand evening coat, Tudor-style roses of black velvet reinforce the silhouette's allusion to late sixteenth-century English styles, while the graphic, stylized black roses that appear on the two anonymous French garments from the early twentieth century, opposite, emphasize their modernity. The cut-velvet roses that rise from a ground of black chiffon on the evening dress resemble

woodcuts as well as the Fauvist paintings of Raoul Dufy, a close collaborator of couturier Paul Poiret, whose relationship with roses suffuses the following gallery.

THE SPECTER OF THE ROSE

The ghostly remains of perfumes past that remain embedded in the dresses on display have been translated into scented paint applied to the wall opposite. Paul Poiret's "Rose d'Irbe" day dress—worn by his wife and muse, Denise—is emblazoned with a repeating pattern of calligraphic roses similar to the one by illustrator Paul Iribe that appears on Poiret's label, which is dramatized evanescing into the ether in the animation. Scattered staining suggests a liberal application of scent to the dress, perhaps Poiret's own "La Rose de Rosine" of 1912, among the first perfumes launched by a couturier.

The wearer of Marguerite de Wagner's dress enhanced her toilette with a sachet shaped like a sealed envelope, which remains inside the front neckline. While the pouch is marked with the name of the D'Orsay perfume company and that of their scent, "Les Roses d'Orsay," Christoph Drecol's dress has a more modest, possibly homemade sachet at the bust containing remnants of aromatic powder. Although the latter's fragrance has all but vanished, vibrant roses of

THE SPECTER OF THE ROSE

printed chiffon bloom through the black lace of the bodice, suggesting its elusive contents.

THIS GALLERY CONTAINS A SMELL EXPERIENCE.

IN CASE IN CENTER OF GALLERY

Paul Poiret (French, 1879–1944)

Textile designed by Raoul Dufy (French, 1877–1953)

Textile manufactured by Bianchini-Férier
(French, founded 1888)

“La Rose d’Iribe” dress, 1913

Purple blotch-printed silk twill with a pattern of white roses trimmed with navy silk velvet; sash of navy linen-wool basketweave with white twined cotton tassels

Millia Davenport and Zipporah Fleisher Fund, 2005 (2005.198a, b)

1 The chromatograph for this dress reveals hundreds of smell molecules, with the strongest reproduced on the scented wall in this gallery.

LEFT TO RIGHT

House of Drecol (French, 1902–1931)

Marguerite de Wagner (Belgian)

Dress, ca. 1912

Yellow silk charmeuse overlaid with ivory silk net, ivory silk net embroidered with ivory silk thread, and yellow, blue, and white silk taffeta, and trimmed with blue silk velvet, ivory silk net embroidered with ivory silk thread, and polychrome silk roses, poppies, and forget-me-nots

Purchase, Irene Lewisohn Bequest, Isabel Shults Fund and Millia Davenport and Zipporah Fleisher Fund, 1998 (1998.253.3)

3 The chromatograph for this dress reveals hundreds of smell molecules, with the strongest reproduced on the scented wall in this gallery.

House of Christoph Drecol (German,
1912–1937)

Dress, ca. 1912

Black silk charmeuse trimmed with brown squirrel fur and clear crystals, and ivory silk tulle appliquéd with polychrome printed silk chiffon in a floral pattern and overlaid with black cotton lace embroidered with clear crystals

Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Mrs. Francis Lenygon, 1975 (2009.300.2611)

2 The chromatograph for this dress reveals hundreds of smell molecules, with the strongest reproduced on the scented wall in this gallery.

Garments in this gallery have been reawakened by reproducing their smell molecules. The process involved extracting the molecules using a microfilter to trap air and moisture drawn through a glass barrel with a pump. The molecules were adsorbed and then analyzed using gas chromatography-mass spectrometry, allowing for their identification and replication.

The peak molecules from the three garments in this gallery listed below can be smelled on the corresponding numbered section of this wall.

Smell display designed by Sissel Tolaas Studio, with support from Symrise

To release the smell, rub the wall gently.

1. Paul Poiret, “La Rose d’Iribe” dress, 1913
(2005.198a, b)

2. House of Christoph Drecoll, Dress, ca. 1912
(2009.300.2611)

3. House of Drecoll, Marguerite de Wagner, Dress, ca. 1912 (1998.253.3)

SCENT OF A MAN

The ensembles displayed here were featured in Francesco Risso's spring/summer 2024 collection for Marni, which centered on scent and its connections to memory. Each dress in the collection was sprayed with a scent by perfumer Daniela Andrier that was inspired by Risso's memory of a chance encounter with a young man on a visit to Paris at the age of fourteen: "They rested their chin on my knee—for just a moment—then disappeared, leaving only their scent behind."

The decoupage-like appearance of the ensembles references an elaborate nineteenth-century scrapbook found by the designer at a flea market in London. Both dresses are made of a cotton canvas base digitally printed with a floral pattern onto which hand-cut flowers from the same pattern have been glued to the surface, with some curled with a steam iron and others stitched with black thread. The ensemble opposite also features hand-painted aluminum flowers on wire stems that can only be fully appreciated in movement, when they resonate with fugitive vibrations that are difficult to pinpoint. Neither natural nor

mechanical, the indeterminate noises (heard in this hallway) remind us that sound is no less pivotal in the recovery of memory than smell.

Marni (Italian, founded 1994)

Francesco Risso (Italian, b. 1982)

Ensemble, spring/summer 2024

White cotton canvas printed with polychrome roses, morning glories, tulips, petunias, poppies, orchids, dahlias, carnations, daffodils, marigolds, and other flowers, appliquéd with polychrome printed cotton-canvas roses, morning glories, tulips, petunias, poppies, orchids, dahlias, carnations, daffodils, marigolds, and other flowers, and trimmed with polychrome painted copper and silver aluminum flowers

Courtesy Marni

Marni (Italian, founded 1994)

Francesco Risso (Italian, b. 1982)

Dress, spring/summer 2024

White cotton canvas digitally printed with polychrome roses, morning glories, tulips, petunias, poppies, orchids, dahlias, carnations, daffodils, marigolds, and other flowers and appliquéd with polychrome printed cotton-canvas roses, morning glories, tulips, petunias, poppies, orchids, dahlias, carnations, daffodils, marigolds, and other flowers

Courtesy Marni

SMELL OF A WOMAN

The garments and accessories in this gallery were owned and worn by the singularly chic Millicent Rogers, granddaughter of Henry Hutton Rogers—who cofounded Standard Oil with William and John D. Rockefeller—and an heiress to his fortune. In *The Glass of Fashion* (1954), Cecil Beaton describes Rogers as “extravagantly beautiful,” noting that “whatever the time or place, Millicent Rogers always left her imprint upon it” because her “originality was manifest even in the way she wore a bow or a scarf.”

Much has been written about Rogers’s inimitable sartorial aesthetic—how she would dress in styles that reflected her surroundings and how she would combine haute couture with regional dress. This gallery, however, focuses on a more elusive and intimate aspect of the socialite’s highly studied self-presentation: her scent. Smell molecules taken from the objects on display have been replicated with the intention of discovering her individual olfactory imprint. These smells derive not only from Rogers’s choice of fragrance but also from her natural body odors and

SMELL OF A WOMAN

her singular habits and lifestyle, including what she ate, drank, and smoked. They also carry the aromas of her environments, which ranged from Austria and Jamaica to Virginia, New York, and New Mexico.

THIS GALLERY CONTAINS SMELL EXPERIENCES.

IN CASE IN CENTER OF GALLERY

House of Schiaparelli (French, founded 1927)

Elsa Schiaparelli (Italian, 1890–1973)

Dress, autumn/winter 1937–38

Light blue cotton plain weave appliquéd with beige cotton plain-weave patches printed with polychrome asters, dianthus, impatiens, ornithogalums, rose of Sharon, and tropical hibiscuses

Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Millicent Huttleston Rogers, 1951 (2009.300.146)

Use the tubes below to smell the peak molecules from each object.



Smell but do not touch the tubes.

Smell display designed by Sissel Tolaas Studio, with support from Symrise

LEFT TO RIGHT

House of Schiaparelli (French, founded 1927)

Elsa Schiaparelli (Italian, 1890–1973)

Evening blouse, ca. 1938

Black silk crepe embroidered with polychrome plastic sequins, seed beads, and bugle beads, appliquéd with cream and pink cotton plain-weave roses with metal wire stems, sepals wrapped in pink and green silk thread, and green starched cotton plain-weave leaves, and hemmed with black silk chiffon

Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Arturo and Paul Peralta-Ramos, 1954 (2009.300.3961)

Peak smell molecules

Dibutyl phthalate: used to make synthetic fabric elastic;

ambroxide: found in animal sweat and in fragrance;

cymene: found in acidic sweat

Attributed to Mainbocher (American, 1890–1976)

Evening apron, 1944

Black wool crepe and black silk guipure lace trimmed with pink and white silk plain-weave dogwoods and cotton plain-weave roses and green waxed cotton plain-weave leaves

Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Arturo and Paul Peralta-Ramos, 1954 (2009.300.1867)

Peak smell molecules

Butyric acid: found in animal fat and human body odor; **heptane:** found on stained organic materials, such as cotton, silk, and paper; **propanone:** produced by the human body under stress

Attributed to Mainbocher (American, 1890–1976)

Cocktail apron, 1943

Black wool crepe trimmed with white cotton plain-weave camellias, green starched cotton plain-weave leaves, and green cotton plain-weave-covered metal wire stems

Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Arturo and Paul Peralta-Ramos, 1954 (2009.300.1866)

Peak smell molecules

Butyl buty: found in fabric surfactants when in proximity to skin; **isopropyl palmitate:** found in skin products; **hexamethyl cyclotrisiloxane:** found in skin pharmaceuticals

Attributed to Mainbocher (American, 1890–1976)

Cocktail apron, ca. 1943

Navy blue silk broadcloth trimmed with lavender cotton plain-weave violets and other flowers, green starched cotton plain-weave leaves, and green cotton plain-weave—covered metal wire stems

Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Arturo and Paul Peralta-Ramos, 1954 (2009.300.1868)

Peak smell molecules

Orinox: found on human skin; **osyrol**: found on many animals, primarily dogs; **stemone**: found in food, such as meat and fish

House of Schiaparelli (French, founded 1927)

Elsa Schiaparelli (Italian, 1890–1973)

Hat, autumn 1939

Navy blue silk mesh trimmed with polychrome synthetic acorns, berries, and other fruits, light brown silk pile-weave oak leaves, and navy blue silk velvet

Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Millicent Huttleston Rogers, 1951 (2009.300.1447)

Peak smell molecules

Texanol: found in latex paints and enamels;
kodaflex: found in resins; **hexadecyl**: found in unwashed human hair

House of Schiaparelli (French, founded 1927)

Elsa Schiaparelli (Italian, 1890–1973)

Cocktail hat, autumn 1939

Brown silk net trimmed with polychrome wax-coated plastic grapes, green cotton plain-weave leaves, and burgundy silk velvet

Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Arturo and Paul Peralta-Ramos, 1955 (2009.300.1871)

Peak smell molecules

Benzaldehyde: found in almond hair products from the 1930s and 40s; **benzothiazole**: found in some natural dyes; **isooctanol**: found in the hat's mineral wax

American

Cocktail hat, ca. 1942

Dark red and olive green silk taffeta roses and leaves and green starched cotton plain-weave leaves

Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Millicent Huttleston Rogers, 1951 (2009.300.4625)

Peak smell molecules

Auralava: found in fabric exposed to extreme heat; **grisalva**: found in natural pigments; **delphphone**: found in hair oil

Mainbocher (American, 1890–1976)

Evening hat, 1940

Black silk satin and pink, peach, and green cotton plain weave shaped into the forms of roses

Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Arturo and Paul Peralta-Ramos, 1954 (2009.300.6802)

Peak smell molecules

Decane meth: found in hair-pin metal;

propylcyclohexane: found in fruit hair treatments;

benzaldehyde: found in almonds and honey; **myristic**

acid: found in nutmeg body products

House of Schiaparelli (French, founded 1927)

Elsa Schiaparelli (Italian, 1890–1973)

Dinner hat, 1939

Polychrome cotton sateen shaped into the forms of morning glories and trimmed with a black silk grosgrain bow

Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Millicent Huttleston Rogers, 1951 (2009.300.3932)

Peak smell molecules

Toluene: found in paint thinner and textile glue; **sinfonide**: found in human hair; **isobutavan**: found in rice, potatoes, and alcohol

House of Schiaparelli (French, founded 1927)

Elsa Schiaparelli (Italian, 1890–1973)

Cocktail hat, autumn 1939

White and beige cotton plain-weave lily of the valley, narcissus, rose, and tuberose, black silk moiré ribbon, and brown silk grosgrain

Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Arturo and Paul Peralta-Ramos, 1955 (2009.300.3986)

Peak smell molecules

Isobutyl: found in hair fat and rancid oil; **palmityl oleate**: found in hair wax made of olive or fish oil; **prismylate**: found in coffee-based drinks; **hexenyl isobutyrate**: found in closed environments and stale air

House of Schiaparelli (French, founded 1927)

Elsa Schiaparelli (Italian, 1890–1973)

Hat, autumn 1939

Cream starched silk mesh trimmed with polychrome cotton plain-weave tuberoses, carnations, and other flowers, and brown silk grosgrain

Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Millicent Huttleston Rogers, 1951 (2009.300.3931)

Peak smell molecules

Isopar H: found in some wine, fruit, and plants; **butyl isovalerate**: found in strawberries and some acidic flowers; **stearic acid**: found in shampoo and candles

House of Schiaparelli (French, founded 1927)

Elsa Schiaparelli (Italian, 1890–1973)

Hat, summer 1940

Black plaited straw and black starched silk net trimmed with polychrome cotton muslin and silk plain-weave daisies, cornflowers, and other flowers, green starched cotton plain-weave leaves, and black silk grosgrain

Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Millicent Huttleston Rogers, 1951 (2009.300.1446)

Peak smell molecules

Propionic acid: found in human body odor;

acetophenone menthol: found in toothpaste and chewing gum; **oleic acid**: found in grape seeds and seaweed;

pelargonic acid: found in plants, fruits, lacquers, and plasticizers

House of Schiaparelli (French, founded 1927)

Elsa Schiaparelli (Italian, 1890–1973)

Evening dress, autumn/winter 1938–39

Blue silk crepe embroidered with polychrome silk floss cornflowers and carnations and trimmed with polychrome plastic sequin and paillette flowers and green cellulose acetate and cellulose nitrate leaves

Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Millicent Huttleston Rogers, 1951 (2009.300.1166a, b)

This evening dress, from Elsa Schiaparelli's "Pagan" collection, draws inspiration from the floral garlands and dresses worn by mythological figures in Italian Renaissance artist Sandro Botticelli's paintings. The once blue silk crepe, however, has deteriorated from overexposure to light, which has affected both the color and the structural stability of the dress. In areas such as the cap sleeves, the embrittlement of the textile is so severe that the dress can no longer be safely displayed on a mannequin. Costume in general is sensitive to light exposure, and The Costume Institute seeks to prevent this type of damage by displaying garments at a low light level.

Use the tubes on the right to smell the six peak molecules from this dress.

Peak smell molecules

- 1. Hexadecyl 2-ethylhexanoate:** found in cosmetics, emollients, and coconut oil
- 2. Palmitic acid:** found in animals, plants, oils, and microorganisms
- 3. Butyl Cellosolve:** found in surfactants when mixed with body sweat
- 4. Mentadien-1-ol:** found in decaying natural materials
- 5. Beta-Phellandrene:** found in food and products containing pepper
- 6. Dodecane:** found in plants, such as ginger

TO RIGHT OF THE GALLERY ENTRANCE

THE GARDEN

“It is the hat that matters the most,” notes Rezia, the Italian milliner in Virginia Woolf’s novel *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). Rezia’s observation was echoed by Christian Dior in his 1954 *Little Dictionary of Fashion*: “[A hat] is really the completion of your outfit and in another way, it is very often the best way to show your personality. It is easier to express yourself sometimes with your hat than it is with your clothes.”

If, as Dior believed, a hat “can make you gay, serious, dignified, happy,” then the wearers of the blossoms in this Edenic gallery would have felt not only lighthearted but also lightheaded, as many of the hats were designed to be worn to dinner and cocktails. They bloom with a wide variety of flowers, including lilacs, roses, violets, clovers, pansies, poppies, carnations, and geraniums, rendered with a verisimilitude as if freshly plucked from the garden. This surrealist interchange between nature and artifice, reality and illusion extends to the glass orbs containing granules that reproduce the smell molecules of several of

the hats on display, challenging our olfactory expectations and, in the process, our powers of reception and perception.

CASE IN CENTER OF GALLERY, LEFT TO RIGHT

Clara Hats (American, act. early–mid-20th century)

Hat, 1938–40

Deep pink straw trimmed with green waxed cotton leaves, light pink silk plain-weave clovers, and pink silk net

Gift of Marion Du Maurier, 1979 (1979.234.1a–c)

American

Hat, ca. 1955–59

Light pink silk net trimmed with pink silk plain-weave rose and green starched synthetic plain-weave leaves

Gift of Margot Grace Hartman, in memory of her mother, Gertrude Keating Grace, 1978 (1978.235.8)

Attributed to Sally Victor (American, 1905–1977)

Hat, 1955

Green plastic-coated wire trimmed with light pink and red silk roses and green silk plain-weave leaves

Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Sally Victor, 1955 (2009.300.4852)

House of Givenchy (French, founded 1952)

Hubert de Givenchy (French, 1927–2018)

Hat, 1958–63

Black silk satin trimmed with magenta, cream, and pink silk plain-weave carnations and green starched cotton plain-weave leaves

Gift of Janet A. Sloane, 1979 (1979.87.15)

American

Hat, 1943

Black cotton buckram trimmed with pink cotton plain-weave lilacs and green waxed cotton plain-weave leaves

Gift of Ralph Ingersoll, in memory of his wife, Elaine Keiffer Ingersoll, 1948 (C.I.48.40.32)

American

Hat, ca. 1868

Natural straw trimmed with cream and lavender silk velvet morning glories, purple and pink silk velvet violets, light yellow and green cotton plain-weave stems, pale green starched cotton leaves, and purple silk velvet

Gift of Mrs. Frederic P. Chapman, 1966 (C.I.66.52)

Bette and Lee (American, act. mid-20th century)
Hat, ca. 1958

Light pink cotton mesh appliquéd with light blue silk velvet and polychrome cotton plain weave, silk plain weave, and silk velvet violets, daisies, cornflowers, roses, lilies of the valley, narcissus, lilacs, and other flowers, green starched cotton plain-weave leaves, and gold metal beetle

Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Dorothy Haase, 1983 (2009.300.2621a–c)

American

Hat, 1955–57

Light green cotton mesh edged with green silk velvet and trimmed with polychrome silk plain-weave poppies, daisies, cornflowers, and other flowers and white nylon tulle and silver metallic wire butterflies

Gift of Margot Grace Hartman, in memory of her mother, Gertrude Keating Grace, 1978 (1978.235.5)

Hattie Carnegie (American, b. Vienna, 1889–1956)

Hat, late 1950s

Green silk mesh trimmed with red silk plain weave and silk velvet poppies, green starched cotton plain-weave leaves, white starched silk plain-weave flowers, and green silk-velvet-covered metal wire

Gift of Mrs. Herman Seid, 1978 (1978.246.4)

American

Hat, 1956–58

Blue starched silk net trimmed with red silk organza carnations, green cotton basket-weave leaves, and red-and-black coated foam composite ladybug

Gift of Marion Du Maurier, 1978 (1978.68.1)

American

Hat, ca. 1900

Red and pink silk plain weave and silk velvet flower petals and red silk velvet bow

Gift of Vassar, Experimental Theater, 1946 (C.I.46.14.5)

Milgrim (American, act. 1927–90)

Miss Sally Milgrim (American, 1898–1994)

Hat, ca. 1940

Red straw trimmed with red and coral silk velvet geraniums, green waxed cotton leaves, black silk grosgrain, and black starched silk net

Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Mrs. Myles Friedman, 1960 (2009.300.1987)

OTHER SIDE OF CASE, LEFT TO RIGHT

Probably American

Toque, spring/summer 1965

Pale green synthetic mesh trimmed with yellow, orange, and red silk velvet pansies, green synthetic plain-weave leaves, and yellow silk organza

Gift of Mrs. Charles Townsend, 1978 (1978.79.6)

Madame Pauline (American, act. ca. 1915–50)

Turban, 1941

Yellow silk jersey trimmed with silk velvet dark red African violets, orange and yellow silk velvet pansies, green waxed cotton plain-weave leaves, and pale green cotton plain-weave stems

Gift of Charles Hollerith, in memory of his wife, Helen M. Hollerith, 1982 (1982.419.5)

House of Schiaparelli (French, founded 1927)

Elsa Schiaparelli (Italian, 1890–1973)

Hat, spring/summer 1951

White silk mesh edged with light pink silk grosgrain and trimmed with red, pink, light pink, and ivory silk plain-weave roses and green cotton plain-weave leaves

Gift of Mrs. Byron C. Foy, 1953 (C.I.53.40.24e)

Guy Laroche (French, 1921–1989)

Hood, early 1960s

Pale green starched silk net trimmed with magenta, orange, yellow, and pink silk plain-weave flowers with dark red silk chenille pistils

Gift of Glady Whitfield Solomon, 1977 (1977.412.30)

Sally Victor (American, 1905–1977)

Hat, ca. 1958

Black starched silk net trimmed with polychrome silk plain-weave poppies with purple and green plastic pistils and pale green starched cotton plain-weave leaves

Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of the artist, 1964 (2009.300.5386)

John-Frederics (American, act. 1929–48)

Hat, 1934

Natural Milan straw trimmed with polychrome cotton plain-weave poppies, cornflowers, and other flowers overlaid with navy blue starched silk net dotted with navy blue silk chenille thread

Gift of Mrs. Maxime L. Hermanos, 1959 (C.I.59.37.3)

Sally Victor (American, 1905–1977)

Hat, 1955

Natural straw with yellow rayon-velvet-covered brim, trimmed with polychrome cotton and silk plain-weave butterfly, leaves, daisy, poppies, cornflowers, forget-me-nots, and other flowers and red silk velvet sweet peas

Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Sally Victor, 1955 (2009.300.4853)

House of Schiaparelli (French, founded 1927)

Elsa Schiaparelli (Italian, 1890–1973)

Hat, summer 1940

Brown cotton net trimmed with polychrome silk plain weave, cotton plain weave, feather down stems, daisies, poppies, cornflowers, and other flowers, and purple silk grosgrain

Gift of Mrs. Edna Woolman Chase, 1940 (C.I.40.101)

American

Hat, ca. 1948

Lavender metallic horsehair net edged with lavender silk thread and trimmed with purple, blue, and mauve silk velvet violets, green cotton plain-weave stems, and green starched cotton plain-weave leaves

Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Mrs. Cuyler T. Rawlins, 1959 (2009.300.5058)

American

Hat, 1939

Black silk mesh trimmed with white, pink, and lavender silk plain-weave geraniums and green starched cotton plain-weave leaves and overlaid with black starched silk net

Gift of Miss Isabel Shults, 1949 (C.I.49.24.6)

Mainbocher (American, 1890–1976)

Hat, 1944

Light brown cotton basket weave trimmed with pink and white silk plain-weave roses, pink paper rosebuds, and green waxed cotton plain-weave leaves

Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Arturo and Paul Peralta-Ramos, 1954 (2009.300.6809)

American

Hat, ca. 1960

Green silk-velvet-covered wire overlaid with green starched silk net and trimmed with magenta, pink, and cream silk organdy roses and green starched cotton plain-weave leaves

Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Mrs. Morehead Patterson, 1972 (2009.300.2604)

ON WALL NEXT TO GALLERY ENTRANCE

Garments in this gallery have been reawakened by replicating their smell molecules. The process involved extracting the molecules using a microfilter to trap air and moisture drawn through a glass barrel with a pump. The molecules were adsorbed and then analyzed using gas chromatography-mass spectrometry, allowing for their identification and replication.

The peak molecules from the objects in this gallery listed below can be smelled in the corresponding numbered orb on this wall.



Smell but do not touch the tubes.

Smell display designed by Sissel Tolaas Studio, with support from Symrise

1. Clara Hats, Hat, 1938–40 (1979.234.1a–c)

Peak smell molecules

Chlorobenzotrifluoride: found in fabric dye; **aldehyde**

C-8: found in citrus fruits and champagne;

dihydrocarveol: found in green grass and apples

2. American, Hat, ca. 1960 (2009.300.2604)

Peak smell molecules

Methyl benzoate: found in hairspray; **valeric acid:** found in cheese and fermented fatty dairy; **caprylic acid:** found on the human body

3. Mainbocher, Hat, 1944 (2009.300.6809)

Peak smell molecules

Phenoxyethanol: found in faint rose smells and polluted environments; **geosmin:** found in humid and damp closed environments; **pelargonic acid:** found in fruits, plants, cheese, and lacquers

4. Attributed to Sally Victor, Hat, 1955 (2009.300.4852)

Peak smell molecules

2-Ethyl-1-hexene: found in small amounts on the human body; **dodecane:** found in essential oils including ginger; **amyl salicylate:** found in sweet, herbaceous, and balsamic hair products

5. American, Hat, 1939 (C.I.49.24.6)

Peak smell molecules

Gelsone: found in hair wax made from jasmine oil; **ethylene glycol monobutyl ether:** found in scalp powders with mild odors; **limonene 2-epoxide:** found in orange peels

6. American, Hat, ca. 1948 (2009.300.5058)

Peak smell molecules

Abhexone: found in lovage and roasted coffee; **butyl butyryl lactate:** found in cooked butter and buttery sweat; **decamethyl cyclopentasiloxane:** found in hairspray and sunblock

7. House of Dior, Christian Dior, “Vilmorin” ensemble, spring/summer 1952 (C.I.55.76.20a–g)

Peak smell molecules

Diethyl adipate: used as a plasticizer; **propylene glycol:** found in foods, drinks, antifreeze, and fragrances; **isoclinol:** found in closed environments and stale air

8. Deirdre Hawken, “Cauliflower” headpiece, 2013 (2013.193)

Peak smell molecules

P-Cymene: found in citrus fruits in an outdoor environment; **menthol C:** found in certain types of cigarettes; **methoxycinnamaldehyde:** found in various foods such as tarragon, potato, basil, and anise

House of Dior (French, founded 1946)

Christian Dior (French, 1905–1957)

“Vilmorin” ensemble, spring/summer 1952

Bodice and skirt of white silk organza embroidered with green, pink, yellow, and white silk thread in a pattern of daisies; belt of white leather overlaid with white silk organza

Gift of Mrs. Byron C. Foy, 1955 (C.I.55.76.20a–g)

“A passion for flowers inherited from my mother,” Christian Dior wrote in his autobiography, “meant that I was at my happiest among plants and flower-beds.” This passion began in the gardens of his family home in Granville, Normandy, where he memorized the names and descriptions of flowers in the Vilmorin-Andrieux catalogues. This childhood memory prompted Dior to name this dress after the seed company. The epitome of the designer’s vision of springtime, “Vilmorin” is embroidered with daisies by the master embroiderer René Bégué. Rébé, as he was known, depicted the flowers as buds and in full bloom, with the application densest at the waist and fading in number toward the neckline and hemline to simulate nature’s variegation.

IN CASE TO RIGHT, LEFT TO RIGHT

Deirdre Hawken (British, b. 1945)

“Borlotti Bean” headpiece, 2018

Black suede, pink and white painted leather, brown and red painted plastic, and green silk taffeta arranged in the forms of borlotti beans on vines

Gift of the artist, 2019 (2019.377.1)

Deirdre Hawken (British, b. 1945)

“Vegetables” headpiece, 2022–23

Dark green straw trimmed with green leather-covered and pink silk-knit-covered buckram in the forms of peas, green and dark red leather-covered buckram in the form of asparagus, beige and brown leather and silk plain weave in the form of a mushroom, black plastic beads in the forms of berries, green leather and polychrome stiffened silk leaves, white silk organza pea flowers, and metal wire vines wrapped in green silk thread

Courtesy Deirdre Hawken

Deirdre Hawken (British, b. 1945)

“Pea” headpiece, 2022–23

Dark green straw trimmed with green-leather-covered buckram peas with white painted plastic in the forms of peapods and green and brown silk plain-weave leaves

Courtesy Deirdre Hawken

Deirdre Hawken (British, b. 1945)

“Peppers” headpiece, 2022–23

Natural straw trimmed with red, orange, and green leather in the forms of peppers, white glass and synthetic beads, and green stiffened silk leaves

Courtesy Deirdre Hawken

Probably American

Hat, 1960–65

Green synthetic basket-weave-covered wire trimmed with green silk plain-weave leaves and red plastic cherries

Gift of Mrs. Charles Townsend, 1978 (1978.79.5)

Deirdre Hawken (British, b. 1945)

“Cauliflower” headpiece, 2013

Dark green, light green, and yellow silk satin and silk chiffon and white synthetic seed beads shaped and embroidered into the form of a cauliflower

Gift of Deirdre Hawken, 2013 (2013.193)

Stephen Jones (British, b. 1957)

“Costermonger” headpiece, autumn/winter 2008

Black calf leather and green sheep wool felt edged with red, yellow, and light green twisted cotton yarn and trimmed with raffia, green acrylic chenille, and polychrome polymer clay in the forms of apples, clementines, bananas, pears, onions, leeks, potatoes, rhubarb, asparagus, broccoli, celery, cabbage, and lettuce heads

Courtesy Stephen Jones Millinery

LOEWE (Spanish, founded 1846)

Jonathan Anderson (Irish, b. 1984)

Ensemble, spring/summer 2023

Top of polychrome painted metal 3D printed into the shape of an anthurium; briefs of beige viscose-polyester knit

Courtesy LOEWE

Herbert Levine Inc. (American, founded 1949)

Herbert Levine (American, 1916–1991)

Beth Levine (American, 1914–2006)

Shoe, 1966

Clear plastic and green plastic cut and arranged in the form of grass

Gift of Beth Levine, 1976 (1976.166.7a)

LOEWE (Spanish, founded 1846)

Jonathan Anderson (Irish, b. 1984)

Coat, spring/summer 2023 menswear

Coat of navy blue wool broadcloth and real oat-, rye-, and wheatgrass

Courtesy LOEWE

Jonathan Anderson's verdant display of organic embroidery negotiates the paradox of nature and artifice while serving as a living (and dying) metaphor for fashion's ephemerality. Featured in Anderson's spring/summer 2023 menswear collection for LOEWE, the "grass" coat was a collaboration with Paula Ulargui Escalona, a bio-designer whose sustainable practices involve cultivating plants to grow on clothes in order to "raise awareness of our need to reconnect with nature," as the designer has explained. For her work with LOEWE, Escalona grew oatgrass (*Avena sativa*), chia (*Salvia hispanica*), wheatgrass (*Triticum aestivum*), and ryegrass (*Lolium perenne*) on jeans, hoodies, sweatpants, coats, and sneakers in a polytunnel greenhouse over the course of twenty days. This coat replaced a living version installed at the opening of the exhibition that slowly perished. The accompanying time-lapse video captures its complete cycle from germination to death.

Herbert Levine Inc. (American, founded 1949)

Herbert Levine (American, 1916–1991)

Beth Levine (American, 1914–2006)

Shoe, 1966

Clear plastic and green plastic cut and arranged in the form of grass

Gift of Beth Levine, 1976 (1976.166.7b)

LOEWE (Spanish, founded 1846)

Jonathan Anderson (Irish, b. 1984)

Ensemble, spring/summer 2023

Top of polychrome painted polyethylene terephthalate
3D printed into the shape of an anthurium; briefs of
beige viscose-polyester knit

Gift of LOEWE, 2024 (2024.60.3a–e)

American

Hat, 1953–55

Green palm leaves

Gift of Mrs. Alan L. Corey Jr., Mrs. William T. Newbold, and Mrs. A. G. Paine II, 1980 (1980.126.36)

American or European

Hat, 1940s

Green synthetic net overlaid with crinkled pale green silk plain weave molded into the forms of lettuce leaves

Gift of Estate of Lillian Gish, 1995 (1995.28.24a)

Germaine Vittu (American, founded 1936)

Hat, 1942

Green silk plain weave molded and gathered into the form of a head of lettuce and trimmed with black silk net

Gift of Mrs. Alexander P. Morgan, 1972 (1972.193)

Stephen Jones (British, b. 1957)

Walter Van Beirendonck (Belgian, b. 1957)

“Creepy Crawley” headpiece, 1999

Green and blue silk organza shaped with wire in the form of a leaf and trimmed with green polyester-lamé-covered polystyrene dotted with polychrome plastic beads in the form of a caterpillar

Courtesy Stephen Jones Millinery

Stephen Jones (British, b. 1957)

“Cenhinen” headpiece, spring/summer 2024

Light green and white starched silk net overlaid with light green and white cotton organdy and trimmed with clear plastic beads and twisted natural straw

Courtesy Stephen Jones Millinery

House of Balenciaga (French, founded 1937)

Hat, 1957

Green silk plain weave molded into the forms of cabbage leaves

Gift of Natalie Lieberman, 1979 (1979.333)

Garments in this gallery have been reawakened by replicating their smell molecules. The process involved extracting the molecules using a microfilter to trap air and moisture drawn through a glass barrel with a pump. The molecules were adsorbed and then analyzed using gas chromatography-mass spectrometry, allowing for their identification and replication.

The peak molecules from the objects in this gallery listed below can be smelled in the corresponding numbered orb on this wall.



Smell but do not touch the tubes.

Smell display designed by Sissel Tolaas Studio, with support from Symrise

9. American or European, Hat, 1940s (1995.28.24a–c)

Peak smell molecules

Dibutyl phthalate: found in synthetic flexible material and older cosmetics; **squalene:** found in human hair, skin oils, and on human skin most likely in contact with a dog;

Trimofix: found in dry tobacco and smoke

10. House of Balenciaga, Hat, 1957 (1979.333)

Peak smell molecules

Acetophenone: found in resins and chewing gum;

benzothiazole: found in tea, whiskey, and some dyes;

palmitic acid: found in animals, plants, microorganisms, oils, soaps, cosmetics, and many foods

11. American, Hat, 1943 (C.I.48.40.32)

Peak smell molecules

Menthone laevo: found in menthol cigarettes; **nonane**: found in human body odor, altering with age; **oleamide**: found in fatty oil from animals

12. American, Hat, 1955–57 (1978.235.5)

Peak smell molecules

Ketone: found in bad breath; **reseda**: found in decaying organic materials; **anther**: found in roses when in contact with human skin

13. John-Frederics, Hat, 1934 (C.I.59.37.3)

Peak smell molecules

Butyl n+: found in oily hair, shellacs, and gums; **costasid**: found in millinery wiring; **dimethyl anthranilate**: found in body butter

14. Guy Laroche, Hood, early 1960s (1977.412.30)

Peak smell molecules

Alpha-pinene: found in plant oils and turpentine; **diisooctyl phthalate**: found in milk, butter, and meat; **chlorobenzene**: found in tranquilizers and pharmaceuticals

15. American, Hat, ca. 1900 (C.I.46.14.5)

Peak smell molecules

Hydroxyol: found in air and ozone; **iritone**: found in starch; **xylene**: found in car motor oil

16. House of Dior, Christian Dior, “May” ball gown,
spring/summer 1953 (C.I.60.21.1a, b)

Peak smell molecules

Squalene: found in human hair, skin oils, and on human skin most likely in contact with a dog; **caprolactam:** indicates the presence of nylon in the dress; **hexadecyl 2-ethylhexanoate:** common in cosmetics in the 1950s

17. Probably American, Toque, spring/summer 1965
(1978.79.6)

Peak smell molecules

Hexyl Cellosolve: found in adhesives and glue; **XI aldehyde:** found in garbage; propylbenzene: found in sweet petroleum and plastic

House of Dior (French, founded 1946)

Christian Dior (French, 1905–1957)

“May” ball gown, spring/summer 1953

White net overlaid with white silk organza embroidered with light green, green, pink, and purple silk thread in a pattern of red clovers and grass

Gift of Mrs. David Kluger, 1960 (C.I.60.21.1a, b)

Christian Dior’s “May” ball gown was featured in his spring/summer 1953 “Tulipe” line and comprises a fitted strapless bodice and full dome-shaped skirt embroidered with summer grasses and red clovers in silk floss. Dior’s “rare broidery of the purple clover”—to quote poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson—was executed by René Bégué, known as Rébé, whose patterning of a meadow gone to weed is strewn with the red clover’s distinctive trifoliate leaves and a few rarer quadrifoliate leaves. Deeply superstitious, Dior carried an assortment of lucky talismans, including a four-leaf clover in his pocket and a lily of the valley in his buttonhole. His seamstresses would delicately incorporate a sprig of the flower into his dresses’ hemlines.

TO RIGHT

RESEDA LUTEOLA

Yellow is a notoriously divisive color in fashion. Located in the center of the visible spectrum, it may tend toward orange-red or green-brown, lending it a reputation for indeterminacy. For philosopher Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who tackled the emotional implications of color in his 1810 *Theory of Colours*, yellow was “the colour nearest the light,” which, in its purest state, “has a serene, gay, softly exciting character,” but which is also “extremely liable to contamination, and produces a disagreeable effect if it is sullied.”

These fourteen garments testify to the enduring appeal of pure, unadulterated yellow over the past three centuries, suggesting a garden of sunny blooms. Indeed, the Latin word for yellow, *flavus*, likely derives from the root *flos*, meaning flower. This connection is reinforced in the sunlike disc featuring the adjacent dress by Alber Elbaz that presides over the gallery.

The chemical structure of each dye determines the spectrum of visible light that it absorbs and reflects,

as seen in the graphs paired with each object. Employing this analysis to identify the dyes used for each garment reveals the transition from natural to synthetic dyes. For thousands of years, the truest yellows were provided by the weld plant (*Reseda luteola*), sometimes in concert with spurge flax (*Daphne gnidium*). Synthetic dyes—invented in the mid-nineteenth century—took over from these natural sources, although recently, sustainability-minded designers such as Phoebe English have returned to weld as a source for vibrant, joyous yellows.

LEFT TO RIGHT

ABOVE

House of Balenciaga (French, founded 1937)
Cristóbal Balenciaga (Spanish, 1895–1972)
Evening dress, ca. 1967

Yellow silk gazar

Gift of Mrs. Claus von Bülow, 1971 (1971.79.5a, b)

The majority of synthetic dyes belong to the “azo” dye class, including this colorant. Azo dyes contain two nitrogen atoms connected by a double bond.

Acid Yellow 76 graph

BELOW

Phoebe English (British, b. 1986)
“Sunray” dress, spring/summer 2024

Yellow silk charmeuse

Purchase, Friends of The Costume Institute Gifts, 2024 (2024.24)

Concerned about the environmental impact of the synthetic dye industry, designers such as Phoebe English have returned to natural and more sustainable dyes like weld.

Luteolin graph

ABOVE

Jean Dessès (French, b. Egypt, 1904–1970)

Ball gown, autumn/winter 1953–54

Yellow silk georgette

Promised Gift of Sandy Schreier (L.2018.61.35)

Most early synthetics such as azoflavine have been replaced by colorants with superior light- and washfastness properties.

Acid Orange 1 (Azoflavine) graph

BELOW

Issey Miyake (Japanese, 1938–2022)

Ensemble, autumn/winter 1986–87

Polyester self-patterned weave

Purchase, Friends of The Costume Institute Gifts, 2024
(2024.154a, b)

Used here with Disperse Yellow 64, Disperse Red 60 is a synthetic dye, though its chemical structure was inspired by natural colorants found in madder dyes.

Disperse Red 60 graph

ABOVE

Gilbert Adrian (American, 1903–1959)

Evening dress, 1944

Yellow silk crepe

Gift of Joseph S. Simms, 1979 (1979.432.2)

The invention of synthetic fabrics such as polyester and rayon created a need for chemically compatible dyes, leading to the development of colorants such as Disperse Yellow 3.

Disperse Yellow 3 graph

BELOW

Madame Grès (Germaine Émilie Krebs) (French, 1903–1993)

Ensemble, 1965–87

Yellow silk crepe de chine

Gift of Mrs. Ahmet Ertegün, 1997 (1997.478.3a–c)

Some modern dyes are considered trade secrets, which may be why this molecule, present in the commercial dye Lanaset Yellow 4G, is not listed in the official Colour Index. CAS 72479-28-8 graph

ABOVE

House of Lanvin (French, founded 1889)
Alber Elbaz (Israeli, b. Morocco, 1961–2021)
Evening dress, spring/summer 2008
Pleated yellow polyester chiffon

Gift of Lanvin, in honor of Harold Koda, 2016 (2016.301)

Patented in 1935, the bright and stable Disperse Yellow 64 is still one of the most important yellow dyes for polyester. Disperse Yellow 64 graph

IN CASE

Fortuny (Italian, founded 1906)
Adèle Henriette Elisabeth Nigrin Fortuny
(French, 1877–1965)
Mariano Fortuny y Madrazo (Spanish,
1871–1949)
“Delphos” evening dress, ca. 1920
Pleated yellow silk charmeuse

Gift of Miss Irene Lewisohn and Mrs. Alice Lewisohn Crowley,
1946 (C.I.46.9.82)

Fortuny’s pleated silk gowns were produced for more than forty years in a wide range of colors and several simple style variations. The fine, precise pleating was

created by a secret process that required the dress to be returned to the workshop to be repleated when it became stretched out. The springy pleats make the tubular gown cling sinuously to a body of almost any size and shape, but unfortunately they also lead to splits on the sharp folds. This can be seen particularly at the shoulders and hem of this garment, where it was subject to the most weakening from movement and soiling.

Fortuny is known for using natural dyes, even after the industry fully transitioned to synthetics. The detection of the synthetic Orange II in this dress is therefore surprising.

Acid Orange 7 graph
Orange II graph

ABOVE

French

Ensemble, ca. 1780

Caraco and skirt of yellow silk satin trimmed with yellow silk passementerie and yellow chenille thread

Gift of Irene Lewisohn, 1937 (C.I.37.57a, b)

The major components of weld, including luteolin, are flavonoids. These molecules play critical roles in flowering plants, such as attracting pollinators with color and scent. Luteolin graph

BELOW

Attributed to Liberty & Co. (British, founded 1875)

Evening dress, 1880s

Yellow silk plain weave

Purchase, Gifts from Various Donors, 1985 (1985.155)

The combination of synthetic alizarin and natural weld represents a transitional period in the industry from the domination of natural dyes to that of synthetics. Synthetic alizarin graph

ABOVE

British

Banyan, ca. 1775

Yellow silk damask in a pattern of roses, irises, peonies, pomegranates, and other flora

Catharine Breyer Van Bomel Foundation Fund, 1978 (1978.135.1)

Many yellow dye plants, including weld (used here), spurge flax, and dyer's broom are chemically similar, with only subtle compositional differences to identify them.

Luteolin 7-O-glucoside graph

BELOW

American

Dress, mid-19th century

Bodice of yellow silk plain weave trimmed with yellow silk ribbon; skirt of yellow silk plain weave

Gift of Lydia Bond Powel, 1967 (C.I.67.13a, b)

First synthesized in 1771 using natural indigo, picric acid is considered semi-synthetic. Though short-lived as a dye, it was repurposed as an explosive during World War I.

Picric acid graph

ABOVE

British

Robe à la française, ca. 1760

Yellow silk taffeta

Purchase, Arlene Cooper and Polaire Weissman Funds, 1996
(1996.374a–c)

Luteolin is one of the main components of weld (*Reseda luteola*), the dominant natural yellow dye in Europe.

Luteolin graph

French

Evening dress, ca. 1810

Yellow silk plain weave trimmed with white silk lace

Rogers Fund, 1937 (37.116a)

Professional dyers used the natural dye weld to produce a range of shades, from “lemon yellow” to “cinnamon” and “rotten olive green.”

Luteolin 7-O-glucoside graph

GARDEN LIFE

Gardening and embroidery were closely allied in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, with each discipline borrowing from the other to create intricate works of human artifice that both reflected and perfected nature's untamed beauty. A style of gardening known as "embroidered" became popular throughout Europe, imitating the needlework seen on garments such as the women's waistcoat—a type of informal jacket—from about 1615–20 displayed in this gallery. Its embroidery depicts an English garden seething with vitality: strawberries ripen, peapods burst open, and birds snatch at dragonflies and caterpillars, a dynamic arcadia brought to life by the animation on the domed ceiling. Some of the tactile experience of wearing such a densely embroidered garment—which combines braided gold threads, glass beads, silver wire, and metallic lace—is made available on the walls of the gallery.

Karl Lagerfeld's evening gown is inspired by the embroidery style of the waistcoat and demonstrates his perpetual dialogue with the past. While

appropriating the lavishness of the English Renaissance prototype, the designer also cleverly references one of the House of Chanel's most recognizable icons: the coiling embroidery of sequins, faux pearls, and crystals forms the interlocking C's of the house's logo.

British**Waistcoat, 1615–20**

White linen plain weave embroidered with polychrome silk thread and gold silk-and-metal thread in a pattern of flowers, vegetables, insects, and birds and edged with gold silk-and-metal lace and gold spangles

Rogers Fund, 1923 (23.170.1)

To feel the embroidered motifs on this waistcoat, visitors are invited to touch the textured walls in this gallery.

House of Chanel (French, founded 1910)**Karl Lagerfeld (French, b. Germany, 1933–2019)****Evening Dress, autumn/winter 2006–7 haute couture, edition 2024**

White silk organza embroidered with polychrome sequins and paillettes, polychrome crystals, simulated pearls, gold silk-and-metal thread, and gold bugle beads in a pattern of camellias, leaves, snails, and insects

Courtesy CHANEL, Paris

TO LEFT

Undercover (Japanese, founded 1990)

Jun Takahashi (Japanese, b. 1969)

Dress, spring/summer 2024

Reinforced 3D-printed clear resin containing pink silk plain-weave roses, green silk velvet leaves, and polychrome silk plain-weave butterflies overlaid with white nylon tulle and trimmed with white embossed leather

Purchase, Friends of the Costume Institute Gifts, 2024 (2024.159a)

Roses and insects animate these two dresses from Jun Takahashi's "Deep Mist" collection, a title that references fading memories. In this dress, the designer reinterprets the terrarium, a glass enclosure that provides a microclimate for plants, invented by Nathaniel Bagshaw Ward in 1829. Ward hoped his case would bring the natural world indoors as a means of moral, physical, and spiritual uplift for urban dwellers.

Takahashi's illuminated terrarium with silk flowers and butterflies was no less therapeutic, as he has explained: "About 20 years ago, I lost my grandmother. At the funeral, I went to a river nearby, and a white butterfly flew by and didn't leave my side. This experience

made me feel very happy, thinking that my grandmother was coming closer to me.”

TO RIGHT

Undercover (Japanese, founded 1990)

Jun Takahashi (Japanese, b. 1969)

Dress, spring/summer 2024

White silk satin trimmed with pink rayon plain-weave roses and pink synthetic pleated organza and overlaid with white nylon tulle embroidered with black plastic sequins and crystal, bugle, and seed beads in the forms of spiders and trimmed with white silk satin

Purchase, Friends of the Costume Institute Gifts, 2024 (2024.156a)

INSECTS

Compelled by the spirit of the Enlightenment, illustrated natural history publications in the eighteenth century sparked an increase not only in scientific knowledge but also in the aesthetic appreciation of animal species, including insects. Bees, flies, mosquitoes, and beetles crowd the surface of the men's waistcoat displayed here, creating a glossy carapace—itsself made from the spoils of another “lowly” insect, the silkworm—that announced the wearer's entomophilia as well as his allegiance to fashion, which had begun to embrace all manner of faunal subjects.

Waistcoats and buttons were the components of male attire most adaptable to momentary fads in the late eighteenth century, allowing stylish men to display their taste as well as their knowledge of current events and recent discoveries. At the center of the gallery, three sets of buttons offer an anthology of techniques used to represent insect forms, from painting on glass to using actual “specimens” collected from nature, such as feathers (substituting for moth wings) and seaweed,

shells, and dried insect bodies to suggest tidal ecosystems. Magnifying the buttons on the domed ceiling—as if through a microscope—allows for a greater appreciation of the materiality and workmanship of these miniature, wearable cabinets of curiosity.

*IN CASE IN CENTER OF GALLERY***French****Buttons, ca. 1770**

White paper painted and overlaid with dried seaweed, insects, and sand, clear glass, and bronze metal frames

From the Hanna S. Kohn Collection, 1951 (50.231.213–.218, .220)

French**Buttons, ca. 1800**

White silk rep with polychrome feathers shaped into the forms of moths, clear glass, and bronze metal frames

From the Hanna S. Kohn Collection, 1951 (50.231.221–.226)

French**Buttons, ca. 1775**

Clear glass hand painted with a polychrome beetle, mosquito, and moth among plant life, with bronze metal frames

From the Hanna S. Kohn Collection, 1951 (51.47.143–.145)

**American or European
Waistcoat, 1795–1800**

Cream silk satin embroidered with polychrome silk thread in a pattern of bees, beetles, flies, mosquitos, cornflowers, and flower buds

Gift of Mr. Lee Simonson, 1939 (C.I.39.13.150)

Jeanne Hallée (French, 1870–1924)

Evening dress, 1913–14

White silk satin brocade woven with gold silk-and-metal thread trimmed with white cotton and gold silk-and-metal lace, and black silk velvet

Isabel Shults Fund, 1981 (1981.328.8)

The so-called “hobble skirt”—tightly bound at the knees and narrowing to a miniscule hem—emerged around 1910, popularized by couturiers like Paul Poiret. When combined with a contrasting tunic-style bodice, the hobble skirt created a distinct segmented silhouette, as seen in this example by the house of Jeanne Hallée. It also obliged its wearer to adopt a clipped, mincing gait, often ridiculed by the press and critics like caricaturist Georges Goursat, known as Sem. In the 1914 album *Le vrai et le faux chic*, he decried Poiret’s “Modomanie,” which he claimed had transformed the fashionable Parisienne into a race of poisonous insects, “like a swarm of monstrous mayflies in a ray of sunlight,” a fear brought to life in the *Pepper’s Ghost* opposite.

BEETLE WINGS

When asked if his study of nature had yielded any insights about the character of the divine, British Indian evolutionary biologist J. B. S. Haldane is famously said to have answered that God, if he exists, displayed “an inordinate fondness for beetles.” Indeed, beetles account for roughly one quarter—four hundred thousand—of all described animal species on earth. Charmed by their kaleidoscopic coloring and iridescence, humans have displayed a similar fondness for these insects, particularly as a form of ornament. Indigenous cultures throughout the world—from Southeast Asia and India to the Americas—have for centuries made use of the outer wing casings, or elytra, of so-called jewel beetles as a form of bodily and sartorial embellishment. In the nineteenth century, as colonial empires expanded intercontinental trade links, these curiosities entered the Western fashion system as markers of novelty and dominance.

The garments displayed here engage with this legacy of adornment in a variety of ways, ranging from the hyperreal, as with Olivia Cheng’s organza dress

covered with sustainably harvested jewel beetles, to the abstract, as in Dries Van Noten's ensemble decorated with artificial beetle-wing sequins. The latter was inspired by a 2002 installation in the Palais Royal in Brussels, in which the artist Jan Fabre covered the ceiling of one room with over 1.5 million actual elytra (an effect simulated in the animation), offering a synthetic vision of the dazzling play of light on the real thing.

IN CASE IN CENTER OF GALLERY

Brazilian

Fixed fan, 1865–75

Carved ivory, white feathers and down, and metallic wood-boring beetles and metallic wood-boring-beetle wings

Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Lucie and Mary Stevenson, 1948 (2009.300.3087)

LEFT TO RIGHT

House of Schiaparelli (French, founded 1927)

Elsa Schiaparelli (Italian, 1890–1973)

Jean Clément (French, 1900–1949)

Necklaces, autumn/winter 1938–39

Clear Rhodoid and polychrome painted pressed-brass beetles, flies, dragonflies, bees, and ladybugs

Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Arturo and Paul Peralta-Ramos, 1955 (2009.300.1234); Purchase, Friends of The Costume Institute Gifts, 2018 (2018.752)

Elsa Schiaparelli was skilled at recognizing the creative potential of newly developed materials such as the clear cellulose acetate (Rhodoid) employed in the construction

of these two necklaces. This early plastic, however, is unstable and vulnerable to temperature, moisture, and the combination of light and oxygen. While both necklaces will continue to yellow and degrade over time, it may be possible to reduce the deterioration of one example by limiting its exposure to the conditions known to accelerate aging. With two necklaces in the collection, the preservation strategy has been to designate one for exhibition and the other for permanent storage, with the exception of this rare occasion.

House of Lanvin (French, founded 1889)

Alber Elbaz (Israeli, b. Morocco, 1961–2021)

Dress, autumn/winter 2013–14

Dark green synthetic double-faced twill embroidered with polychrome plastic beads, plastic paillettes, glass beads, plastic film, and synthetic organza in the forms of dragonflies, butterflies, and other winged insects

Gift of Lanvin, 2024 (2024.56a)

Alexander McQueen (British, founded 1992)

Sarah Burton (British, b. 1974)

Ensemble, autumn/winter 2018–19

Corset and belt of black leather; skirt of black nylon tulle embroidered with polychrome silk-and-viscose thread, polychrome plastic sequins, polychrome glass crystals, and polychrome plastic beads in a pattern of beetles

Gift of Alexander McQueen, 2023 (2023.287.1a–c)

Dries Van Noten (Belgian, b. 1958)

Ensemble, autumn/winter 2015–16

Top of black silk-wool-polyamide compound weave embroidered with iridescent plastic sequins and paillettes resembling jewel-beetle wings; skirt and detachable peplum of black and opalescent polyester-acetate-polyamide jacquard; necklace of pale pink cotton velveteen, pale pink silk habutai, black feathers, and black rayon velvet

Gift of Dries Van Noten, 2024 (2024.57.1a–d)

TO LEFT

Dauphinette (American, founded 2018)

Olivia Cheng (American, b. 1998)

Dress, autumn/winter 2022–23, edition 2024

White silk organza with brooches of gold metal and jewel-beetles

Purchase, Friends of The Costume Institute Gifts, 2024 (2024.65)

BUTTERFLIES

“Literature and butterflies are the two sweetest passions known to man,” novelist Vladimir Nabokov once professed. Butterflies have fluttered onto the pages of poets through countless metaphors, but perhaps the most enduring and universal is transformation, stemming from their unique life cycle—from caterpillar to chrysalis to butterfly—which figuratively embodies life, death, and rebirth.

Charles James reflected and realized the insect’s ephemeral beauty in his “Butterfly” ball gown, comprising a narrow, body-hugging “chrysalis” sheath of pleated brown silk chiffon over a cream silk satin ground, and an exuberant “winged” bustle skirt of nylon tulle in layers of brown, rust, and lavender that effect a butterfly’s multilayered coloration. As its “sleeping beauty” doppelganger reveals, however, the fragility of the dress’s materials combined with the volatility of its construction makes its destruction inevitable.

Sarah Burton’s dress was featured in her debut collection for Alexander McQueen, after its eponymous founder—and Burton’s mentor—took his own life eight

months earlier. The dress is veneered with turkey feathers cut, dyed, and painted to emulate the iconic pattern of the monarch butterfly, which symbolizes hope, resilience, and endurance. These qualities are encapsulated in the butterfly's annual three-thousand-mile migration across North America, a journey evoked in the animation filling the gallery.

IN CASE IN CENTER OF GALLERY

Alexander McQueen (British, founded 1992)

Sarah Burton (British, b. 1974)

Dress, spring/summer 2011

Black silk organza appliquéd with orange, black, and white dyed and painted feathers in the forms of monarch butterflies

Purchase, Friends of The Costume Institute Gifts, 2015 (2015.69a)

LEFT TO RIGHT

Collina Strada (American, founded 2008)

Hillary Taymour (American, b. 1987)

“Meadowsweet” dress, spring/summer 2023,
edition 2024

White deadstock silk organza digitally printed with
polychrome chrysanthemums

Purchase, Bob and Renee Parsons Foundation Fund, 2024
(2024.161)

Milkweed, the only plant on which female monarch butterflies can lay their eggs and from which their caterpillars can feed, provides critical fuel for the insect’s annual migration. Hillary Taymour celebrated this unique relationship in her Collina Strada spring/summer 2023 “Got Milkweed?” collection, which featured this dress made from deadstock silk organza. The collection was shown at the Brooklyn Greenway Initiative’s Naval Cemetery Landscape, designated a Monarch Waystation by the organization Monarch Watch due to the amount of milkweed varieties planted in the meadow.

Charles James (American, b. Great Britain, 1906–1978)

“Butterfly” ball gown, ca. 1955

Cream silk satin overlaid with brown silk chiffon and light brown nylon tulle, brown silk satin, and polychrome nylon tulle

Purchase, Friends of The Costume Institute Gifts, 2013 (2013.591)

Charles James (American, b. Great Britain, 1906–1978)

“Butterfly” ball gown, 1955

Cream silk satin overlaid with brown silk chiffon and light brown nylon tulle, tan silk satin, and polychrome nylon tulle

Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Mrs. John de Menil, 1957 (2009.300.816)

Structure and fabric are stretched to their limits in these dramatic ball gowns. Delicate chiffon has been pleated, stretched, wrapped, and tacked over a heavy, rigid foundation that reinvents the wearer’s contours. While one gown retains its original appearance, the other displays the inevitable result of exposing the stressed construction and the vulnerable chiffon to

wear, abrasion, handling, soiling, and aging. While the damaged garment was used as a showpiece—by both the designer and, later, museums—the other has evaded similar injury by slumbering some sixty years in the original owner's closet.

THE BIRDS

Alexander McQueen once declared, “Birds in flight fascinate me.” One of his favorite films was Alfred Hitchcock’s 1963 thriller *The Birds*, which inspired his spring/summer 1995 collection, including the jacket displayed at the center of this gallery. Made from orange wool twill, it features a swarm of swallows screen printed by Simon Ungless and Andrew Groves and brought to life in the animation. Individual birds gradually materialize from the ominous black cloud of swallows at the exaggerated shoulders, swooping around the body of the jacket and increasing in size but decreasing in number toward the hem.

Despite their delicacy, the swallows depicted on the evening dress by Madeleine Vionnet are no less menacing. Hand embroidered with both matte and shiny sequins on a black silk tulle overdress, the raptors ominously encircle the body of the wearer. The dress formed part of Vionnet’s autumn/winter 1938–39 collection, launched just one year before the outbreak of World War II. Against this backdrop, the menacing sensibility of the swallows is supplanted by an intense melancholia and sense of deathliness.

IN CASE IN CENTER OF GALLERY

Alexander McQueen (British, 1969–2010)

Jacket, spring/summer 1995

Orange wool twill screen printed and hand painted
with black swallows

Millia Davenport and Zipporah Fleisher Fund, 2013 (2013.33)

LEFT TO RIGHT

Madeleine Vionnet (French, 1876–1975)

Evening dress, autumn/winter 1938–39

Black silk tulle embroidered with black sequins in a
pattern of swallows

Gift of Mrs. Harrison Williams, Lady Mendl, and Mrs. Ector Munn,
1946 (C.I.46.4.4a–c)

Alexander McQueen (British, 1969–2010)

Jacket, spring/summer 1996

Orange nylon plain weave with blue resist
photographic emulsion in a pattern of feathers

Gift of Trino Verkade, 2024 (2024.53.2)

The feather images on this jacket were made by Simon Ungless, Alexander McQueen's friend and collaborator, who worked on the designer's earliest collections. To produce the images, Ungless laid feathers onto a nylon silkscreen coated with a light-sensitive emulsion. The screen was then exposed to ultraviolet light, which caused the uncovered areas of the emulsion to harden and bind to the screen. Printmaking screens have a degree of flexibility but are not intended to be adapted into tailored garments. Consequently, due to the textile's limitations, areas of the jacket have begun to split, such as the section along the upper sleeve.

THE NIGHTINGALE AND THE ROSE

While birds have served as fashion's muse, they have also been its victims. Never was this truer than in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when millinery ornamented with the bodies of taxidermy birds enjoyed a cruel vogue, resulting in hundreds of thousands of birds being killed annually. Sacrificed for the love of fashion, these avian casualties find a melancholy correlative in the nightingale at the center of Oscar Wilde's fairytale "The Nightingale and the Rose" (1888), an excerpt from which is read aloud in the gallery by Elizabeth Debicki. In Wilde's story, the titular bird pours out its lifeblood by piercing its breast on the thorn of a rosebush in order to produce a perfect red rose for a lovesick boy, a tragedy brought to life (and death) by Simon Costin's necklace.

Encircling the gallery is an amphitheater of taxidermy millinery spanning the time of Wilde's tale through the early twentieth century, when the activism of conservationists began to curtail the trend. Ryunosuke Okazaki's avian ensemble stands sentinel amid this macabre index of both brutality and creativity. X-rays

reveal the bones, wires, glass beads, and stuffing used by taxidermists to stop time and make these ornithological specimens—typically comprised of parts from different birds—appear ready to take flight.

Elizabeth Debicki reading from “The Nightingale and the Rose” (1888) by Oscar Wilde

Running time: 3 minutes, 52 seconds

Assistive listening 

metmuseum.org/SleepingBeautiesListening



Join our Wi-Fi network (MetMuseumFreeWiFi) to access. First-time users, please scan again after downloading the Listen Everywhere app.

Access the audio transcription on The Met website.
metmuseum.org/TheNightingale



THE NIGHTINGALE AND THE ROSE

IN CASE IN CENTER OF GALLERY

Simon Costin (British, b. 1963)

“The Nightingale and the Rose” necklace, 1989

Brass and preserved nightingale (*Luscinia megarhynchos*)

Alfred Z. Solomon-Janet A. Sloane Endowment Fund, 2024
(2024.116a,b)

LEFT TO RIGHT

Probably French

Evening bonnet, ca. 1880

Black dotted silk tulle with brim of black jet beads and trimmed with brown feathers, black jet beads, and black taxidermy parakeets with black glass eyes

Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Mrs. Frederick H. Prince, Jr., 1967 (2009.300.2103)

American

Hat, ca. 1890

Black dotted silk tulle and black and brown straw-and-metal cord trimmed with brown straw beads, black silk grosgrain bow, and black taxidermy bird with black glass eyes

Gift of Mrs. Ernest D. Roth, 1940 (C.I.40.167.8)

Knox (American, founded 1838)

Mourning hat, ca. 1895

Black silk taffeta trimmed with black feathers, black silk satin bow, and black taxidermy bird head with polychrome glass eyes

Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Mrs. Robert S. Kilborne, 1958 (2009.300.1960)

American

Tricorne, 1905–6

Black wool and rabbit fur felt trimmed with black taxidermy bird wings and black silk grosgrain

Gift of Estate of Annie-May Hegeman, 1950 (C.I.50.40.20)

François, Inc. (American)

Hat, ca. 1915

Black silk tulle trimmed with black and red feathers in the shape of bird wings

Gift of Susan Dwight Bliss, 1935 (35.134.28)

Hattie Carnegie Inc. (American, 1918–1965)

Esther Klepper (American)

Headpiece, 1943

Black silk velvet trimmed with black feathers in the shape of bird wings and black silk velvet bow

Gift of Mrs. Esther A. Klepper, 1945 (C.I.45.53)

American or European

Aigrettes, early 20th century

Black bird of paradise tail feathers

Gift of Leafie Freda, 1975 (1975.16.1a, b)

Ryunosuke Okazaki (Japanese, b. 1995)

Ensemble, spring/summer 2024

Black polyester-polyurethane knit, polyester bone tape, plastic rods, and steel rods

Purchase, Friends of The Costume Institute Gifts, 2024
(2024.28a, b)

As a counter to fashion's history of avian violence, Ryunosuke Okazaki's sculptural garment seemingly captures a spirit of reconciliation between human and bird, its contours forming an exoskeleton that both embraces and shields the wearer. Working without sketches or a preformed concept of the finished product,

the Hiroshima-born designer—informed by a lifelong interest in the animist philosophy of Shintoism—likens his improvisational approach to prayer. While its swirling black curves and jagged passages suggestive of thorns may recall Simon Costin's chilling materialization of Oscar Wilde's fable in the nearby necklace, Okazaki's creation evokes an aura of protection and transcendental communion with nature rather than danger and death.

American or European

Ornament, early 20th century

Polychrome taxidermy bird of paradise with transparent glass eyes and off-white tail feathers

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Wm. Ufland, 1978 (1978.391.9)

American

Ornament, 20th century

Polychrome taxidermy bird of paradise with cream and light brown tail feathers

Gift of Mrs. Vera Maxwell, 1949 (C.I.49.17)

American or European

Aigrettes and ornament, early 20th century

Polychrome taxidermy bird of paradise with black glass eyes and brown and cream tail feathers

Gift of Mrs. Emanuel Roth, 1975 (1975.253a–c)

American

Toque, ca. 1910

Black plaited straw and black silk satin trimmed with yellow and brown taxidermy bird of paradise with yellow and black glass eyes and cream, ivory, and brown tail feathers

Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Helen Tyler, 1964 (2009.300.2038)

American

Toque, ca. 1913

Black silk velvet trimmed with yellow and brown taxidermy bird of paradise with orange and black glass eyes, brown and black tail feathers, and light brown and green ostrich feathers

Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Stephen J. Griswold, 1950 (2009.300.1834)

American

Cloche, ca. 1922

Black silk satin trimmed with polychrome taxidermy pheasant head, polychrome pheasant feathers, and brown silk net

Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of George F. Hoag, 1959 (2009.300.1971)

William J. (American, 1948–1962)

Bill Cunningham (American, 1929–2016)

Hat, 1950s

Black wool felt trimmed with polychrome taxidermy bird head with transparent glass eyes and polychrome pheasant feathers

Gift of Laura Johnson, 2003 (2003.256.22)

Simon Costin (British, b. 1963)

“Memento Mori” necklace, 1986

Black synthetic tulle embroidered with jet beads, rock crystals, and rabbit skulls trimmed with hematite and linked with turkey talons and carved black wood beads

Alfred Z. Solomon-Janet A. Sloane Endowment Fund, 2006
(2006.354a)

Simon Costin constructed his “Memento Mori” necklace from an assortment of macabre materials that include the talons of a bird and the skulls of three rabbits. These animal components were cured in a limited capacity that has only succeeded in slowing their decay. When the necklace was acquired by The Costume Institute, mold had bloomed on the surfaces of the skulls. It was evident that without intervention the object would degrade to a point where it would no longer be exhibitable. To extend the displayable life of the necklace, it is stored in an oxygen-free environment, which inhibits the natural processes of decay.

MARINE LIFE

“Everyone knows meditation and water are wedded forever,” Herman Melville exclaimed in *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* (1851), a sentiment echoed in the garments in this gallery—sartorial seascapes connected by the poetics of science. Iris van Herpen’s vaporous creations were inspired by Santiago Ramón y Cajal’s intricate drawings of the central nervous system, which she relates to Hydrozoa, a class of small, delicately branched marine organisms that “embroider the oceans like aqueous fabrics, forming layers of living lace.” Alexander McQueen’s dresses express his concerns over global warming, which he merged with Charles Darwin’s theories of evolution.

Environmentalism also underlies the dresses by Richard Malone and Rushemy Botter and Lisi Herrebrugh. The former is made from ECONYL—a yarn regenerated from nylon waste, including industrial ocean plastic and fishing nets—and the latter from a fabric comprising 70 percent biodegradable polyamide and 30 percent SeaCell, a mix of cellulose and seaweed. Botter and Herrebrugh describe their

fashions as “aquatic wear,” a term equally applicable to the Olivier Theyskens evening ensemble. Like the “sleeping beauty” from the 1860s, whose silhouette it emulates, Theyskens’s ensemble is made from moiré silk taffeta, its distinctive rippled appearance suggesting sunlight reflecting on water, an effect captured in the animation.

TO LEFT, LEFT TO RIGHT

Iris van Herpen (Dutch, b. 1984)

“Nautiloid” dress, spring/summer 2020 haute couture

Beige silk cotton net and white silk organza circles heat bonded to transparent laser-cut polyethylene terephthalate glycol and hand painted with a polychrome pattern of sea life

Anonymous gift, 2024

Iris van Herpen (Dutch, b. 1984)

“Physalia” dress, spring/summer 2020 haute couture

Beige silk cotton net overlaid with gray silk organza hand painted with a polychrome pattern of sea life

Anonymous gift, 2024

Probably French

Dress, ca. 1864

Blue moiré silk faille appliquéd with ivory silk plain-weave ribbon overlaid with black cotton lace and trimmed with jet beads

Gift of Mrs. Dorothy H. Johnston, 1940 (C.I.40.183.2)

The lustrous, wavy appearance of moiré silk can be achieved through a process called “calendering,” in which the fabric is folded in half and passed through high-pressure rollers that irregularly compress the threads, changing the way they reflect light. While this method was used to produce this dress’s beautiful, shimmering textile, the friction involved also weakened the silk fibers, especially where they are bent along the central fold. Over time, wear, display, and natural degradation have resulted in splits along these creases. This fragility prevents safe dressing on a mannequin and highlights the unintended preservation challenges caused by the manufacturing technique.

Richard Malone (Irish, b. 1990)

Ensemble, autumn/winter 2020–21, edition 2024

Light blue nylon knit from recycled ocean waste

Purchase, Friends of The Costume Institute Gifts, 2024 (2024.144)

Richard Malone (Irish, b. 1990)

Ensemble, spring/summer 2020, edition 2023

Blue nylon knit from recycled ocean waste

Purchase, Friends of The Costume Institute Gifts, 2024 (2024.64)

OTHER SIDE, LEFT TO RIGHT

Botter (Dutch, founded 2017)

Rushemy Botter (Dutch, b. Curaçao, 1984)

Lisi Herrebrugh (Dutch, b. 1989)

“Black Heart” dress, spring/summer 2023

Black nylon and recycled polyester knit

Gift of Botter, 2024 (2024.148.1)

Botter (Dutch, founded 2017)

Rushemy Botter (Dutch, b. Curaçao, 1984)

Lisi Herrebrugh (Dutch, b. 1989)

“Second Skin Fish” dress, spring/summer 2023

White polyamide-SeaCell jersey digitally printed with a polychrome pattern of sea life

Gift of Botter, 2024 (2024.148.2)

Olivier Theyskens (Belgian, b. 1977)

Evening ensemble, autumn/winter 2000–2001

Blue moiré silk taffeta

Gift of Olivier Theyskens, 2024 (2024.49a–g)

Alexander McQueen (British, 1969–2010)

Dress, spring/summer 2010

Gray wool-synthetic broadcloth pieced and underlaid with white synthetic knit digitally printed with a pattern of jellyfish

Gift of Alexander McQueen, 2014 (2014.634.6)

Alexander McQueen (British, 1969–2010)

Dress, spring/summer 2010

White silk charmeuse digitally printed with an abstracted pattern of sea life and embroidered with blue enamel hexagonal stones in a pattern of fish scales

Purchase, Friends of The Costume Institute Gifts, 2024 (2024.13)

VENUS

“New spangles, luminous, iridescent, like jewels drowned in the sea.” This is how *Harper’s Bazaar* editor-in-chief Carmel Snow described the two ball gowns by Christian Dior displayed here when they made their debut as part of his autumn/winter 1949–50 collection. Their mythological nomenclature—referencing the Roman deities Venus, goddess of love, beauty, and passion, and Juno, goddess of marriage—is mere pretext for an exuberant demonstration of material abundance, in the form of glistening aquatic embroidery from the firm of Rébé.

Dior’s iteration of Venus evokes the froth of her legendary birth from the sea with a cascading trained peplum of soft gray tulle, each undulation embroidered by hand with crystals and iridescent paillettes (given life in the animation). With “Junon,” the blue-green sequins that edge the individual sections of the scalloped skirt also impart an undeniably aqueous effect, despite nominally referencing the feathers of Juno’s traditional animal attendant, the peacock. Maria Grazia Chiuri’s 2017 reinterpretation retains the

scalloped skirt construction but eliminates the embroidery, opting instead for soft, fan-pleated mother-of-pearl shades to enhance the allusion to shells. Meanwhile, H&M's pink goddess dress was quite literally born from the waves—it is made from shell-pink BIONIC, a woven polyester produced from recycled ocean waste.

LEFT TO RIGHT

House of Dior (French, founded 1946)

Christian Dior (French, 1905–1957)

“Venus” ball gown, autumn/winter 1949–50

haute couture

Gray silk taffeta overlaid with gray silk tulle appliquéd with gray silk tulle and horsehair petals and embroidered with opalescent, gold, and silver gelatin sequins, feather paillettes, synthetic pearls, and clear crystals

Gift of Mrs. Byron C. Foy, 1953 (C.I.53.40.7a–c)

House of Dior (French, founded 1946)

Maria Grazia Chiuri (Italian, b. 1964)

“New Junon” evening dress, spring/summer

2017 haute couture, edition 2024

Ivory, lavender, yellow, and pink pleated synthetic tulle

Gift of Christian Dior Couture, 2024 (2024.146.1a, b)

House of Dior (French, founded 1946)

Christian Dior (French, 1905–1957)

“Junon” ball gown, autumn/winter 1949–50

haute couture

Pale blue silk taffeta embroidered with opalescent, blue, green, and orange gelatin sequins and overlaid with pale blue silk tulle appliquéd with pale blue silk tulle and horsehair and embroidered with opalescent gelatin sequins

Gift of Mrs. Byron C. Foy, 1953 (C.I.53.40.5a–c)

H&M (Swedish, founded 1947)

“Serpentine” dress, spring/summer 2017

Light pink polyester chiffon recycled from shoreline plastic waste

Gift of H&M Conscious Exclusive collection team, 2024
(2024.59.1)

SEASHELLS

The enduring appeal of seashells stems in part from their ability to amplify ambient noise. Alexander McQueen exploited this inherent resonance in his “razor clamshell” dress, which can be heard in this hallway. The dress was featured in his “Voss” collection, which related Victorian depictions of insanity to the sublime beauty of nature. On the runway, it was modeled by Erin O’Connor, who simulated a nervous breakdown, clutching fistfuls of shells and violently shattering them on the floor.

Fossiliferous limestone is evoked in Iris van Herpen’s 3D-printed top, with its strata of fine lines mirroring bands of calcified shell deposits at the bottom of the ocean. Ammonites—ocean-dwelling mollusks that died out about 66 million years ago—are re-created in Bea Szenfeld’s tunic. Individual paper discs in graduating sizes have been threaded onto nylon filaments, with each layer separated by small beads, emulating the tightly wound shells of the cephalopods.

Functional as an encasement, the seashell has often been incorporated into handbag designs. Judith

Leiber's twentieth-century versions recall a tradition of shell purses that surged in popularity during the previous century. The mother-of-pearl coin purse from the earlier period is hand painted with pink and yellow roses, drawing on the splendor of the seashell while alluding to its symbiotic relationship with nature's earthly wonders.

LEFT TO RIGHT

Iris van Herpen (Dutch, b. 1984)

Ensemble, autumn/winter 2011–12 haute couture, edition 2015

Top of 3D-printed white polyamide in the forms of spiraling shells; skirt of white cow leather trimmed with clear acrylic fringe

Purchase, Friends of The Costume Institute Gifts, 2016 (2016.16a, b)

Alexander McQueen (British, 1969–2010)

Dress, spring/summer 2001

White cotton canvas embroidered with stripped, bleached, and varnished razor clamshells

Gift of Alexander McQueen, 2014 (2014.634.1)

Bea Szenfeld (Polish, b. 1972)

“Ammonite,” spring/summer 2014

White paper, white polyester thread, and white plastic pearls

Courtesy Bea Szenfeld

OTHER SIDE, IN CASE, LEFT TO RIGHT

Judith Leiber Couture (American, founded 1963)

Judith Leiber (American, b. Hungary, 1921–2018)

Evening bag, 1981

Pale orange shell and gold metal

Gift of Judith Leiber, 1981 (1981.384.19)

Judith Leiber Couture (American, founded 1963)

Judith Leiber (American, b. Hungary, 1921–2018)

Evening bag, spring/summer 1976

American clamshell and gold metal

Gift of Judith Leiber, 1978 (1978.38.12)

Judith Leiber Couture (American, founded 1963)

Judith Leiber (American, b. Hungary, 1921–2018)

Evening bag, spring/summer 1978

Melon shell, gold metal, and malachite

Gift of Judith Leiber, 1978 (1978.38.9a, b)

Judith Leiber Couture (American, founded 1963)

Judith Leiber (American, b. Hungary, 1921–2018)

Evening bag, spring/summer 1976

White coral and red sea-urchin shell and gilded brass

Gift of Judith Leiber, 1978 (1978.38.10)

American**Minaudière, 1966**

Natural chambered nautilus shell and vermeil

Gift of Mrs. Virginia Rosen, 1984 (1984.600)

Judith Leiber Couture (American, founded 1963)**Judith Leiber** (American, b. Hungary, 1921–2018)**Evening bag, 1981**

Nautilus shell and gold metal

Gift of Judith Leiber, 1981 (1981.384.1a, b)

Judith Leiber Couture (American, founded 1963)**Judith Leiber** (American, b. Hungary, 1921–2018)**Evening bag, spring/summer 1976**

Nautilus shell and gold metal

Gift of Judith Leiber, 1978 (1978.38.11)

American**Coin purse, ca. 1865**

Mother-of-pearl seashell hand painted with pink and yellow roses, and silver

Gift of Miss Clara Alexandra Weiss, 1950 (C.I.50.103.2)

THE SIREN

In her original incarnation, the mythological siren was portrayed as a bird-woman. By the seventh century she was depicted with a fish tail, and by the Middle Ages her reputation as a deadly sea-dwelling seductress was firmly established. In much of Africa and the African diaspora, the archetype of the siren finds a correlation in Mami Wata (Mother Water). Her regional analog, Mongwa Wa Letsa (Someone of the Lake) inspired Thebe Magugu's "Shipwreck" ensemble. Its print derives from a French engraving depicting the Great Hurricane of 1780, a scene evoked in the film projected in this gallery, which is accompanied by N'gadie Roberts's 2022 poem "Mami Wata," read by Cynthia Erivo. Mami Wata's incorporeal form is realized in Torishéju Dumi's ensembles made from deadstock offcuts pieced together on the bias and finished with overlock stitchwork, creating a rippling effect that manifests a human-teleost (bony fish) hybrid.

The archetype of the siren is embodied in sensual form in Charles James's and Daniel Roseberry's

evening dresses, which emphasize the wearer's waist and hips while obscuring her legs in a graceful fish tail. Roseberry enhances this surrealistic transmogrification through an outsize fish-skeleton necklace of lacquered wood—a playful reference to Elsa Schiaparelli's iconic and iconoclastic “Lobster” dress, which she created with Salvador Dalí in 1937.

Cynthia Erivo reading “Mami Wata” (2022) by N’gadie Roberts

Running time: 1 minute, 19 seconds

Added sound of waves

Assistive listening 

metmuseum.org/SleepingBeautiesListening



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IN CASE IN CENTER OF GALLERY

Thebe Magugu (South African, b. 1993)

“Shipwreck” ensemble, autumn/winter 2023–24

White triacetate-polyester satin printed with a black-and-white pattern from Louis Le Breton’s engraving *L’ouragan des Antilles en 1780 (Hurricane of the Antilles in 1780)*

Purchase, Bob and Renee Parsons Foundation Fund, 2024
(2024.86a–e)

LEFT TO RIGHT

Torishéju (British, founded 2021)

Torishéju Dumi (British, b. 1992)

“Mami Wata” ensemble, 2023

Black deadstock cotton jersey

Purchase, Friends of The Costume Institute Gifts, 2024
(2024.25a, b)

Torishéju (British, founded 2021)

Torishéju Dumi (British, b. 1992)

“Mami Wata” ensemble, 2023

Black deadstock cotton jersey

Purchase, Friends of The Costume Institute Gifts, 2024
(2024.27a, b)

Norman Norell (American, 1900–1972)

Evening dress, spring/summer 1968

Dress of white cotton organdy trimmed with red silk faille and blue linen hopsack; belt of blue linen hopsack

Gift of Mrs. Lyn Revson, 1975 (1975.53.34a–c)

While this nautical-inspired ensemble remains in good structural condition, its visual appearance no longer represents the clean aesthetic of Norman Norell's original design. Scientific analysis of the organdy has revealed that the discoloration is occurring not in the cotton fibers themselves but in a starching agent (polysaccharide gum) added to the cotton to provide sheen and stiffness. Although it is not unusual for starched cotton to yellow over time, the severity and the unevenness of the discoloration has made this dress unsuitable for display, as it distracts too much from the designer's intention.

Charles James (American, b. Great Britain, 1906–1978)

“La Sirène” evening dress, 1939

Black silk peau de soie

Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Erik Lee Preminger in memory of his mother, Gypsy Rose Lee, 1993 (2009.300.588)

House of Schiaparelli (French, founded 1927)

Daniel Roseberry (American, b. 1985)

Evening ensemble, spring/summer 2024

Dress of black viscose crepe jersey pieced with black double-faced viscose crepe jersey; necklace of gold metal and brown lacquered-wood in the shape of a fish skeleton

Courtesy Maison Schiaparelli

SNAKES

While Mami Wata is usually depicted with a woman's upper body and a fish's or serpent's lower body, she sometimes also sports a snake around her neck, an effect replicated in the evening dress from about 1905. Possibly worn for fancy dress, the serpent is partially camouflaged against the second-skin-like sequined sheath, a prototype of Norman Norell's "mermaid" dress on display in the following gallery. In contrast, Iris van Herpen's writhing mass of multiple serpentine bodies capitalizes on the uncanny appeal of the swarm to conjure a state of psychological ambiguity. The designer described the dress as an expression of her thoughts before a skydiving jump, when "all my energy is in my mind and I feel as though my head is snaking through thousands of bends."

While the garments employ vastly different materials—gelatin sequins on the Edwardian gown and molded thermoplastic sheets on Van Herpen's dress—both evoke the reptile's contorted locomotion and glossy, scaled body, as a cipher for seductive femininity and for psychological slipperiness, respectively. Each also

offers the elongated frame and writhing motion of the snake as an alternative to our own mammalian physique, an idea captured directly in the animation below Van Herpen's dress.

TO LEFT

Iris van Herpen (Dutch, b. 1984)
"Snake" dress, autumn/winter 2011–12, edition 2024

Black cotton twill trimmed with black acrylic sheet coils

Gift of Lauren Amos, 2024 (2024.145)

TO RIGHT

American or European
Evening dress, ca. 1905

Black silk tulle embroidered with black gelatin sequins and clear and red crystals

Gift of Miss Irene Lewisohn, 1937 (C.I.37.46.97)

THE MERMAID

The mermaid was a subject of fascination for Romantic artists, who often portrayed her as an enchantress whose beguiling powers and emotional depth saw her straddling fantasy and reality. This dualism is expressed sartorially in Norman Norell's sequined "mermaid" dress, which epitomizes the designer's concept of streamlined glamour. Individual sequins were attached by hand with two stitches to ensure they lay flat, maximizing light reflection. The dress's simple silhouette and the intricacy of its surface decoration marry American practicality and French haute-couture finesse.

Marc Jacobs and Michael Kors both reprised Norell's mermaid design, extending his lineage of relaxed opulence. The shimmering surfaces of all three dresses are reflected in the film shown here, which depicts sequins—the same type used by Norell—suspended in water. Joseph Altuzarra explored the mermaid's sonic allure in a dress embroidered with metal paillettes, which in movement resound like gentle waves, the sound of which fills this gallery. An

even softer sound emanates from Thom Browne's evening ensemble. Though not directly inspired by Norell's dress, Browne's design expands its predecessor's demi-couture sensibility through its complexity and refinement of technique.

IN CASE IN CENTER OF GALLERY

Thom Browne (American, b. 1965)

Evening ensemble, spring/summer 2019

Jacket of gold silk lamé embroidered with gold sequins, gold bugle beads, gold silk-and-metal thread, and red, white, and blue cannetille; dress of white nylon tulle overlaid with cream nylon tulle embroidered with gold sequins, gold paillettes, gold beads, gold and silver silk-and-metal thread, gold and silver silk-and-metal fringe, gold tinsel, gold metal strip, gray cannetille, and light and dark gray silk tulle

Gift of Thom Browne, 2024 (2024.61a, b)

LEFT TO RIGHT

French

Evening dress, 1902

Lavender silk satin and gray silk chiffon overlaid with black silk tulle embroidered with purple gelatin paillettes

Gift of Miss Irene Lewisohn, 1937 (C.I.37.44.2a, b)

The dressmaker of this resplendent garment increased its lively sparkle by using sequins with off-center holes that dangle off the surface and create a glittering effect. The soft, layered fabrics would have moved fluidly around the sinuous S-shape of the corseted body of its wearer, Alexandra of Denmark, queen of the British Empire. While the gelatin sequins are very lightweight, the fragile silk net on which they are stitched is badly disintegrated and the slightest movement causes the sequins to tear out small pieces of the fabric. This has led to larger allover holes, destabilizing the entire garment.

Altuzarra (American, founded 2008)

Joseph Altuzarra (French, b. 1983)

Evening dress, autumn/winter 2022–23

Light brown silk charmeuse embroidered with gold metal paillettes

Gift of Joseph Altuzarra, 2024 (2024.51.1)

Michael Kors (American, b. 1959)

Evening dress, autumn/winter 2021–22

Gold viscose matte jersey embroidered with gold sequins

Gift of Michael Kors Collection (2021.353a)

Marc Jacobs (American, b. 1963)

Evening dress, spring/summer 2020

Beige viscose-silk matte jersey embroidered with gold sequins

Gift of Marc Jacobs, 2024 (2024.55)

Norman Norell (American, 1900–1972)

Evening dress, 1967

White silk matte jersey embroidered with gold polyester sequins

Gift of Norman Norell, 1968 (C.I.68.35a, b)

LEFT TO RIGHT

Phillip Lim (American, b. 1973)

Charlotte McCurdy (American, b. 1989)

Textile manufactured by Pyratex (Spanish, founded 2014)

“Algae Sequin” dress, 2021

Biodegradable beige rayon mesh derived from bamboo and seaweed embroidered with green bioplastic sequins derived from algae, mother-of-pearl discs, and clear crystals

Gift of 3.1 Phillip Lim, 2024 (2024.58)

Stella McCartney (British, b. 1971)

Sequins manufactured by Radiant Matter (British, founded 2018)

“BioSequin” dress, 2023

White deadstock silk tulle embroidered with iridescent cellulose sequins

Gift of Stella McCartney, 2024 (2024.149.2a)

Despite their shimmering allure, plastic sequins are environmentally hazardous: they do not break down naturally and they contaminate oceans, destroying marine life with their toxic chemicals. Phillip Lim and

Stella McCartney are at the vanguard of designers experimenting with plastic alternatives. Produced in collaboration with Charlotte McCurdy, Lim's "Algae Sequin" dress features bioplastic paillettes derived from algae. The frond-like spangles, which recall seaweed tendrils, sequester carbon from the atmosphere, rendering them carbon negative. McCartney's dress is embroidered with naturally renewable cellulose BioSequins developed by Elissa Brunato of Radiant Matter. Typically, the color of plastic sequins is achieved through toxic dyes and nonbiodegradable coatings, but the hue of BioSequins arises naturally from light reflecting off their cellulosic structure, a phenomenon known as "structural coloration."

THE MERMAID BRIDE

The bridal ensemble in this gallery was worn by New York socialite Natalie Potter for her wedding to financier William Conkling Ladd on December 4, 1930. Its dramatic, cathedral-length train features interlocking scallops that recall undulating ocean waves and the concentric circles of seashells. Designed by Callot Soeurs at the dawn of the Great Depression, it is devoid of lavish surface embellishment and is made of a blend of silk and cellulose acetate, an emerging synthetic fiber that provided an inexpensive alternative to silk. While the basque-style overblouse recalls the waistless, androgynous silhouette of the youthful 1920s *garçonne*, the sleek skirt with its elongated hemline anticipates the more mature, disciplined, and feminine aesthetic of the 1930s.

Potter posed in her wedding ensemble for a portrait by legendary photographer Adolf de Meyer, published in *Harper's Bazaar* in January 1931 and displayed on the adjacent screen. Although the ensemble's sweeping train is out of the frame, the photograph reveals a detail that is now missing from the

overblouse: a cascading cluster of white artificial carnations falling over the left hip.

For more information about Potter, her wedding, and her ensemble, scan the QR code to converse with her using artificial intelligence (AI) from anywhere in the Museum.



metmuseum.org/ChatNataliePotter

Image caption:

Mrs. William C. Ladd (née Natalie Potter), *Harper's Bazaar*, January 1931

Photograph by Adolph de Meyer (American, 1868–1946)

IN CASE

**American
Fan, 1869**

Cottonwood with handwritten graphite

Gift of Catharine M. Hitchcock, 1967 (C.I.67.45.3)

This type of brisé autograph fan was prevalent during the latter half of the nineteenth century, but its use as a diary may be unique. Flora Miller was nineteen when she wrote the entries that chronicle three weeks of her life beginning the day after she was married. Sections of the diary, however, have faded over the intervening years. To reveal the missing text, conservators in The Costume Institute collaborated with colleagues in the Department of Paper Conservation to use multispectral imaging, which made the text that appeared faded or lost emerge as clear and legible.

Callot Soeurs (French, act. 1895–1937)

Attributed to Pierre Gerber (French)

Wedding ensemble, 1930

Overblouse of white cellulose acetate–silk satin
trimmed with white linen lace; skirt of white cellulose
acetate–silk satin

Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan
Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Mrs.
Russell Davenport, 1963 (2009.300.1300a–c)

PLEASE DO NOT SIT OR STEP ON THE STAIRS.