

Hong Kong Palace Museum
Special Exhibition



香港故宮文化博物館
Hong Kong Palace Museum



MUSÉE
DES ARTS
DÉCORATIFS

THE ADORNED BODY

French Fashion and Jewellery 1770–1910
from the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris

26.06 – 14.10.2024

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THE ADORNED BODY:

French Fashion and Jewellery 1770–1910
from the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris

26.06–14.10.2024

Gallery 9, Hong Kong Palace Museum

Spanning from the late 18th to the early 20th century, nearly 400 stunning pieces of French costumes, jewellery, and fashion accessories demonstrate the power of clothing and adornment to transform the body and define social status. The exhibition is divided into five sections: Court Splendour (1770–1790), Sense and Sensibility (1810–1830), Tradition and Innovation (1850–1860), The Birth of Luxury (1880), and The Belle Époque (1890–1910). It highlights the fascinating stories about the evolution of fashion and jewellery in France and the interplay of cultures that shaped French fashion.

This exhibition is jointly organised by the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, and the Hong Kong Palace Museum.

About the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris

Founded in 1864, the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, houses one of the world's largest and most important collections of design and decorative arts. A source of inspiration for artists and craftspeople, the collection now contains more than 1,400,000 works, including fashion and textiles, the world's largest collection of wallpaper, Art Deco and Art Nouveau treasures, and the oldest French collection of non-Western art.

1770 – 1790

COURT SPLENDOUR

In the 18th century, French taste reigned supreme across Europe, and French products were considered the most fashionable and the best in quality. The textile industry, including silk production in Lyon, thrived as high society's demand for fine clothes soared. Men and women decorated their bodies to convey their rank and status at court. Male court outfits are heavily embroidered, the ornamentation created by highly specialised designers and embroiderers. Trendsetting womenswear of the period tends to be pastel and decorated with lace, ribbons, and even flowers. In 1770, Marie Antoinette (1755–1793), archduchess of Austria, married the Dauphin, the future Louis XVI (1754–1793). As queen of France, she was deeply invested in the fashion culture at court and popularised a variety of styles, including those on display in this section.

Court dress (mantle, skirt, and stomacher)

France, about 1778

Silk, metal

Purchase, 1886

Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris

Inv. 3370.ABC



Sword

Thomas Gray

England, 18th century
Gold, biscuit, shagreen, iron
Gift of Félix Doistau, 1922

Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris
Inv. 22902



Suit (*habit à la française*: jacket, breeches, vest)

France, about 1785–1790

Silk, cotton, metal

Purchase, 1890

Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris
Inv. 6081.ABC



Stays

Probably France, about 1740–1760

Silk, linen, leather, whalebone

Deposit of UFAC, 1995

Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris

Inv. UF 70-52-4



1810 – 1830

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

The French Revolution, which began in 1789, ushered in a radically subdued aesthetic that contrasted with courtly extravagance. However, when Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821) was emperor of the French, he eschewed plain fabrics and brought back ornate court costumes, notably the *habit à la française* (ancestor of the modern three-piece suit), thereby reviving the failing textile industry. Empress Joséphine (1763–1814), his wife, enjoyed wearing the neoclassical high-waistline dress, which became a defining characteristic of women's fashion in the early 19th century. After Napoleon first abdicated in 1814, the Bourbon monarchy was restored, and Louis XVIII (1755–1824) became king. During the Bourbon Restoration (1814–1830), romanticism took hold. The puffed sleeves, corseted waist, and expressive full skirts typify the fashionable female silhouette of this era.

Dress

Probably France, about 1815–1820

Silk, lace

Purchase, 2006

Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris

Inv. 2006.106.1



Fan

France, about 1815

Bovine horn, metal, silk

Bequest of Alice Babette Heymann, 1925

Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris

Inv. 24884



Dressing gown

Great Britain, about 1830–1840

Silk

Purchase, 1995

Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris

Inv. 995.84.1



1850 – 1860

TRADITION AND INNOVATION

The spectacular decade of the 1850s was fuelled by economic prosperity. In the Second Empire of Napoleon III (1852–1870), there were lavish celebrations, such as the emperor's wedding in 1853, which dazzled spectators with traditional court magnificence. A festive spirit filled the City of Light, with department stores and shopping arcades opening one after another, making fashionable clothes and accessories more accessible to the growing middle class. Women's garments were brightly coloured with the newly invented synthetic dyes, and the innovation of steel-hooped crinolines lightened the weight of their skirts. The crinoline craze that spread from France to Britain and across Europe is attributed to Empress Eugénie (1826–1920), whose status as a fashion icon helped promote French manufacturing and international trade in consumer goods.

Crinoline

Probably France, about 1860

Cotton, metal

Deposit of UFAC, 1995

Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris

Inv. UF 92-010-6



"Skull" tie pin

Paris, after 1838

Gold, enamel, diamond

Bequest of Baroness Mathilde de Rothschild, 1927

Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris

Inv. 25784



Dress (bodice, skirt)

France, about 1855–1858

Silk

Deposit of UFAC, 1995

Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris

Inv. UF 49-32-47 AB



1880

THE BIRTH OF LUXURY

As the foreign trade of France skyrocketed between 1860 and 1880, the market for luxury goods boomed. Great demand came from upper-class women, who had to change dresses and accessories several times a day for different social activities according to the dictates of late 19th-century etiquette. The bustle, an undergarment at the back of the skirt below the waist, was essential to shaping the female silhouette in the 1880s.

The most desired dresses were designed by Charles Frederick Worth (1825–1895), often credited as the “father of haute couture”. His devoted clientele were royals and socialites throughout Europe and across the Atlantic. The House of Worth was located on the rue de la Paix, near the bejewelled Place Vendôme—the epicentre of French luxury even today.

Dress

France, about 1883–1885

Cotton, silk, whalebone

Purchase, 1995

Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris

Inv. 995.85.1.1-2



Chapeau
E. Gauthier

Probably France, 1887
Silk, cotton
Deposit of UFAC, 1995

Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris
Inv. UF 54-69-67



Dress

Charles Frederick Worth (1825–1895)

France, about 1885

Silk, whalebone

Gift of Mrs Franklin Gordon Dexter, 1920

Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris
Inv. 22014.E.1-2



Neck pendant
Maison Boucheron

Paris, 1878
Gold, pearl, silver, diamond, enamel
Gift of Mrs Georges Petit, 1909

Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris
Inv. 15444.A



1890 – 1910

THE BELLE ÉPOQUE

At the turn of the century, as railway networks expanded, the speed of life increased further with the invention of the automobile and the airplane, and other new technologies, like the radio, added to societal change. The operas, theatres, café-concerts, and even the streets of Paris were electrified, and the cityscape was charged with exuberance by the swirling designs of Art Nouveau. Fashionable women adorned their sinuous silhouettes with flowing silk dresses and with jewellery that was often inspired by the natural world. Artists, musicians, dancers, and writers came to France from all over Europe and across the world, generating new forms of creative expression. Conventions began to loosen, as men preferred the three-piece suit during the day and the tuxedo in the evening. As the social status of women changed, so did their wardrobe. The modern woman wore blouses, skirts, and jackets that suited their active lifestyle.

Walking suit

Probably France, about 1910

Wool, linen

Deposit of UFAC, 1995

Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris

Inv. UF 76-18-2 AB



"Two roosters" pendant

René Lalique (1860–1945)

Paris, about 1901–1902

Gold, star sapphire, diamond, cast iron, enamel

Gift of Laura Dreyfus-Barney in memory of her
sister Nathalie Clifford-Barney, 1966

Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris

Inv. 40103



Corset
Mme Rompard

France, about 1900–1905
Silk, metal
Gift of Viscountess de Pelacot, 1971

Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris
Inv. 42964.A



Dress (bodice, skirt)
Clergeat

France, about 1898

Silk, wool, metal

Deposit of UFAC, 1995

Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris

Inv. UF 66-40-3 AB



Corsage ornament

France, late 19th century
White gold, diamond, pearl
Gift of Brigitte de Malleray, 2020

Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris
Inv. 2020.37.1



About the Exhibition

The special exhibition “The Adorned Body: French Fashion and Jewellery 1770–1910 from the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris” is on view to the public in Gallery 9 of the HKPM from 26 June to 14 October 2024.

As one of the four major exhibitions in the West Kowloon Cultural District in 2024 to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and France, the exhibition marks the first time the prestigious Paris museum’s comprehensive collection of historical French costume and jewellery is displayed in Asia.

Learning Programme - Behind the Glamour

Try on different looks at the conclusion of the exhibition and learn more about the French fashion spanning from the late 18th to the early 20th century!

Audio Guide

The audio guide developed by the Hong Kong Palace Museum for this exhibition is narrated by the artist Karen Mok.



For more exhibition-related programmes and activities, please visit the Hong Kong Palace Museum website.
<https://www.hkpm.org.hk/en/home>

