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Alexis Carreño

We, the dissertation committee for the above candidate for the

Doctor of Philosophy degree, hereby recommend

acceptance of this dissertation.

Dr. Adrienne Munich– Dissertation Advisor
Professor of English, Art and Gender Studies
Department of English, Stony Brook University

Dr. Elizabeth Patterson- Chairperson of Defense
Assistant Professor, Contemporary Art and Digital Media
Art department, Stony Brook University

Dr. Sohl Lee
Assistant Professor, Contemporary East Asian Art and Visual Culture, Critical Theory and Globalization
Art Department, Stony Brook University.

Dr. Drake Stutesman
Adjunct Professor
New York University, Cinema Studies
The Pratt Institute, Fashion Studies

This dissertation is accepted by the Graduate School

Charles Taber
Dean of the Graduate School

Abstract of the Dissertation

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This dissertation describes the conceptual framework and the materialization of the exhibition I guest-curated at the American Folk Art Museum, *Folk Couture: Fashion and Folk Art.* Based on the tradition of artists using fashion to produce artworks, (for instance, Sylvie Fleury's installation *Poison*, which commented upon issues of consumerism); couturiers appropriating images from art to create garments (such as Yves Saint Laurent's *Mondrian Dress*, in which the designer replicated a painting made by the Russian constructivist artist), and collaborations between fashion designers and artists (for example, designer Marc Jacobs's and artist Yayoi Kusama's collaboration for Louis Vuitton), thirteen New York fashion makers were invited to create ensembles inspired by the American Folk Art Museum's collection. Both fashion—associated with the feminine and corporality in Western Culture—and folk art—made by the self-trained and not preoccupied with conceptual discourses—have been peripheral to mainstream narratives of art. In the last decades, however, scholars and curators have begun to rethink the artistic "status" of both fashion and folk art. The blockbuster exhibition *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which is considered crucial in the current phenomena of showcasing fashions in art museums, demonstrated the relevance of fashion in contemporary culture. Likewise, folk art has recently become more accepted in the contemporary art sphere. In 2013, curator Massimiliano Gionni included a work called the *Palazzo Enciclopledico*, (The Encyclopedic Palace) by the self-taught artist Marino Auriti as the centerpiece of the 55th Venice Biennale. It is in the spirit of such developments that the exhibition *Folk Couture* operated. This dissertation postulates that by echoing the move of fashion and folk art from "periphery to center" in contemporary cultural practices, and exploring the boundaries between artistic disciplines, the major contribution of the exhibition Folk Couture was to exhibit together two 'outsiders' of mainstream art—namely fashion and folk art.

Dedication Page

This dissertation is dedicated with endless love to my mother, Nidia Sanhuez

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Preface

A cold day of December 2012, I went to my first job interview at the American Folk Art Museum. The museum was looking for a guest curator for an upcoming exhibition on fashion and folk art. I wore a very unusual red pea coat —a men's jacket of such color was something rare to see even in New York City; and carried with me a special issue of *Kaleidoscope* magazine on fashion and art. My interviewers were particularly curious about my interest in fashion; before moving to fashion studies, I was an artist and had studied contemporary art and gender theory.

Fashion has always interested me. I used to sketch dresses when I was a child. But fashion was not considered 'important' in Chile where I was born. When I came to New York on a Fulbright scholarship, however, I realized that fashion could be taken seriously without apology. Alexander McQueen's retrospective at the Met, *Savage Beauty*, literally changed my mind. McQueen's powerful aesthetic heavily resonated in me. I decided to change my field of study and explore the relationship between fashion and art.

I got many compliments on my red jacket the day of my interview. But, I left the museum with a sense of anxiety. The potential work was the "dream project": the museum would invite a group of talented New York based designers to create a new ensemble based on its collection. Three days later, I was appointed the guest curator of *Folk Couture.*

Acknowledgments

I'm grateful to the many people who provided support and advice for the exhibition *Folk Couture: Fashion and Folk Art.* I owe a particular debt to Stacy C. Hollander, who believed in me for this project. My sincerest appreciation goes to Patricia Mears, Dr. Anne-Imelda Radice, Fred Sharf, Dr. Valerie Steele and Elizabeth V. Warren.

I'm profoundly thankful to the designers who participated in *Folk Couture*: John Bartlett, Michael Bastian, Chadwick Bell, Fabio Costa, Creatures of the Wind (Shane Gabier and Christopher Peters), Gary Graham, Catherine Malandrino, Bibhu Mohapatra, Ronaldus Shamask, Yeohlee Teng, threeASFOUR (Gabi Asfour, Angela Donhauser, and Adi Gil), Koos van den Akker, and Jean Yu.

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Permission has been granted for the use of text and images from the publication *Folk Couture Fashion and Folk Art* in this dissertation by the American Folk Art Museum. Permission was also granted to use installation photography of the exhibition *Folk Couture Fashion and Folk Art* as well as photography of the following American Folk Art Musuem objects not included in the Folk Couture catalogue: *Lady on Red Sofa*, *Fancy Chest with Drawer*, *Possum Trot Figures* and *Sunburst Quilt*. The American Folk Art Museum also grants permission to Stony Brook University to reproduce American Folk Art Museum material in the aforementioned dissertation, for non-commercial study and teaching purposes only, via photocopies and microfilm. These reproductions may be created on a one-at-a-time basis. American Folk Art Museum text and images may not be reproduced outside the context of this dissertation without further permission from American Folk Art Museum. Any additional use or reproduction will require further permission and a separate agreement.

Introduction

Overview

Fashion is cannibalistic. In its attempt to capture the essence of the present—a moment in permanent flux—fashion *steals* images and concepts from a varied range of disciplines: psychoanalysis, cinema, literature, music, mass media, politics—and art. What does fashion have to say about folk art? How can folk art be seen through the lens of fashion? These questions were addressed by the American Folk Art Museum exhibition *Folk Couture: Fashion and Folk Art*.

The American Folk Art Museum invited thirteen fashion designers to explore the permanent collection: John Bartlett, Michael Bastian, Chadwick Bell, Fabio Costa (NotEqual), Creatures of the Wind, Gary Graham, Catherine Malandrino, Bibhu Mohapatra, Ronaldus Shamask, Yeohlee Teng, threeASFOUR, Koos van den Akker, and Jean Yu. The designers were asked to create a garment that would reference the richness, the spontaneity, and, in some cases, the appealing strangeness of folk art. The ensembles created for *Folk Couture* and the inspirational artworks they were based on were exhibited together in the museum's space with an innovative exhibition design that enhanced the creative dialogue between artistic disciplines. These included concrete pedestals and platforms that resembled folded fabric.

The exhibition *Folk Couture* investigated the creative process of thirteen designers who used fashion to create works of art. This dissertation, divided into three sections and one appendix explains both the conceptual framework and the materialization of the exhibition *Folk*

Couture. The chapter arrangement of this dissertation paralleled the development of the show, from the historical antecedents to the concepts considered for the exhibition, to its materialization and press reviews. Chapter one explains the framework of the exhibition *Folk Couture* and contextualizes the show in terms of the relationship between fashion and art. There exists a large tradition of fashion designers appropriating images from art to create garments and artists using fashion to produce artworks. Collaborations between fashion designers and artists are numerous and museums have prominently featured fashion in the last decades. The exhibition *Folk Couture*, however, distinguished itself from previous fashion exhibits focused on a theme or the work of one designer. *Folk Couture* displayed original pieces of couture specifically commissioned for the show to explore the relationship between fashion and folk art.

Chapter one gives several examples of how fashion designers have made quotations to art history in their collections, artists becoming fashion designers and collaborations between fashion designers and artists. For example, this section considers the work of Japanese avant-garde designers Issey Miyake, Rei Kawakubo and Yohji Yamamoto, who revolutionized Western fashion in the 1980s with oversized, tattered clothing often in a dark palette with linings, seams and hems on the outside. These fashions were immediately linked to art and the existing discourse on deconstruction. This conceptual design approach was taken by several experimental designers who working in the 1990s revolted against the luxurious fashion world and explored notions of deathliness and illness through deconstructive garments presented in runways shows akin to performance art. These creations were defined as conceptual, radical or avant-garde fashion; and these terms, applied to the work of designers such as Vicktor & Rolf (Viktor Horsting; Rolf Snoeren), Hussein Chalayan and Alexander McQueen. These designers' works exemplify the diverse forms of linking design and art in contemporary fashions.

Another concept chapter one considers is couture, which is referred as art because of its artistry and uniqueness. Arguably, couturier Charles Fredrick Worth (1825-1895) is credited with the invention of the concept of couture in 1858. Quintessentially considered as a French practice, couture is an art form extremely regulated and often regarded as a laboratory of dressmaking innovation. A couture gown is a handmade garment crafted out of luxurious materials in long fitting sessions, which not necessarily serves a functional purpose. As this chapter explains couture declined in the mid-1950s with the advent of mass-produced clothing; today the time-consuming artisanship and inventiveness of couture are highly appreciated and the press prominently covers couture week as well as the gowns paraded by celebrities in public events. As fashion historian Alexandra Palmer stated, " The salons garner fantastic international press and prestige for the house name, which fuels lucrative licensing agreements for ready-to-wear collections, perfumes, accessories, and domestic products." [1] The industry of couture is viewed as expensive; its luxuriousness attests to and maintains the idea of France as the global taste setter. Even so, couture represents less than 10% of the French clothing industry.[2]

The garments created for *Folk Couture* were referred to as couture because of the nature in which they were produced: they are handmade, one-of-a-kind ensembles. However, the author acknowledges that couture is defined within the industry as unique custom-fitted clothing crafted by seamstresses and couturiers of a fashion house recognized by the Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture in Paris, France.

Furthermore, as the exhibition *Folk Couture* was inspired by the current phenomena of exhibiting fashions in museums, chapter one investigates dress and fashion in the context of

[1] Alexandra Palmer, "Haute Couture," in *The Berg Companion to Fashion* , 393-396 (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2010). 396.

[2] Ibid.

museums. Fashion exhibitions have explored (among other topics) the artistic dimensions of fashion and have enticed the contemplation of a dress as a work of art. Although displaying fashion in museums may seem quite a contemporary practice, the relationship between fashion and museums is an old one. Chapter one underlines that such relationship began with the sixteenth-century European cabinet of curiosity, which preserved ecclesiastic garment, regional costumes and royal gowns, continued with the textiles and garments collected in the textile departments of museums, and extended to the foundation of costume departments and fashion museums proper. Traditionally museums regarded fashion as ethnographic or anthropological objects and centered on the changes of dress styles through history. Today, the efforts made by pioneers such as Cecil Beaton and Diana Vreeland and later by fashion curators such as Richard Martin, Harold Koda, Valerie Steele, and Andrew Bolton crystallized in museums collecting modern clothing and addressing fashion in a much broader sense; one that includes the social, political and cultural impact of the dressed body. Several exhibitions celebrated in New York and Paris during 2013, which provided inspiration for the exhibition *Folk Couture*, are analyzed in chapter one.

This chapter also examines the evolution and definition of folk art and addresses the 'peripheral condition' that both folk art and fashion have had in mainstream narratives of art. European modern artists were among the first to find inspiration in folk and Non-Western art. Artists such as Pablo Picasso and Henry Matisse, who wanted to return to the roots of the creative act, idealized "the primitive." This return to the primitive was also strategic, as they wanted to trump avant-garde movements such as Impressionism and Neo-impressionism. Because so many early twentieth-century avant-garde artists looked at folkloric expressions and nonwestern cultures to renew the language of academic art, the art made by the self-trained

posed significant question about the ultimate origin of modern art. Art critic Roberta Smith wrote that the answer to such question is, "often in the doings of various "others'—children, the woodcarvings sculptors of Central Africa or people leaving on the margins of Western Society, sometimes in psychiatric hospitals." [3]

Echoing the European avant-garde, in the first decades of the twentieth century, American artists explored and collected eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries folk art expressions; and exhibited their works with European modern and indigenous art. Immediately museums appropriated this new trend. In the 1930s the first exhibitions on folk art were held at the Newark museum and MoMA. In the 1940s several studies on folk art were published, notably *They Taught Themselves* (Sidney Janis, 1942) and *American Primitive Painting* (Jean Lipmann, 1942). In the 1950s folk art was regarded as separated from modern art as the abstract expressionist movement, which focused on the medium of painting itself seemed to be uninterested in an art centered on narratives and human experiences such as folk art. However, the interest in folk art arose in this decade, as in its initial development, abstract expressionist art did not draw the attention of many art collectors and the general public. A key figure in the appreciation of folk art was collector Herbert, W. Hemphill (1928-1998), who was appointed the first curator of the American Folk Art Museum in 1964. The American Folk Art Museum, founded in 1961, is the nation's premier institution devoted to the exhibition, study, and preservation of folk art and the work of contemporary self-trained artists. Hemphill expanded the concept of folk art and was instrumental in the appreciation of the aesthetic value of vernacular expressions. In the 1960s and 1970s the group of artists known as The Chicago Imagists who gathered around the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, collected and promoted folk and outsider art in part as a reaction

[3] Roberta Smith, "A Strange and Wonderful View of Outsider Art ," *The New York Times* , March 26, 2015. Accessed April 16, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/27/arts/design/review-a-strange-and-wonderful-view-of-outsider-art.html?_r=0

to the conceptual art made in New York, which dominated the art scene at that time. Likewise, later, in the 1980s and 1990s, several artists created paintings, assemblages and installations that inspired by folk art sharply contrasted to conceptual and minimal art.

Chapter one also looks at the definition of folk art. Three concepts have been linked to folk art: art brut, outsider art, and art made by the self–trained. While French artist Jean Dubuffet coined the term art brut, which means 'crude' as opposed to refined; psychiatrist Roger Cardinal defined the term outsider art as the art produced by people in the margins of Western society, such as prisons or mental hospitals. On the other hand, art historian Sidney Janis applied the concept "self-trained artist" to those creators who have received little or no artistic training. As this chapter contends, there exists several definitions of folk art, but this dissertation considers folk art as any expression created by the self-trained. Folk art is characterized by its strong inventiveness and individuality, the use of unorthodox materials and techniques, the 'deviations' from academic rules of representation, and the use of 'visions' as inspiration to create art. Folk art significantly contributed to the tradition of image making in America, through the early tradition of portraits and landscapes painted by the first settlers and the utilitarian objects they crafted with techniques brought from Europe adapted to the necessities and materials of the new land. In general, folk art is not intended to be exhibited; it is art made for the sake of itself alone. There exists several fairs and events and most certainly museums devoted to folk art, but often the art is exhibited 'outside' high art spaces. As folk artists have not been concerned with the latest artistic movements and seldom exhibited their works in 'high' art museums, folk art is often considered inferior or marginal.

Like folk art, fashion has also been peripheral to mainstream narratives of art. For decades the artistic status of fashion was denied because it was considered ephemeral, associated

with appearance and related to the feminine and corporality. Thought as lacking social value, fashion failed to reach intellectuals, had no place in the academic discourse, and was often invoked to be punished (because it was irrational and superficial), to exemplify human stupidity or to attack the evilness of the fashion business. As sociologist Gilles Lipovestky wrote "Fashion is always other people."[4] From philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who thought that fashion destroyed virtue, masked vice, and brought about the corruption of taste, to feminist theorists who were against fashion because, they believed it distracted women from social, cultural and intellectual concerns, fashion has been deemed as futile, linked to appearance and related to stereotyped femininity.[5] Since fashion restlessly changes, it has been considered irrational, lacking content and having no intellectual components. Although fashion writing dates back to 1575,[6] only in the twenty-first century fashion theory has been properly articulated. The explosion of museums exhibitions, and the cultural relevance of fashion globally have increased the interest and numbers of publications on fashion. However, as sociologist Yuniya Kawamura stated: "Almost all writers of fashion mention the academic devaluation of fashion as a topic in their introductory chapter before they begin."[7] This author is not an exception.

By examining the marginal condition of fashion and folk art, chapter one argues that the major contribution of the exhibition *Folk Couture* was to exhibit together these two 'outsiders' of high art: folk art and fashion. Nevertheless, this chapter points out that in the last years this marginal position of folk art and fashion is changing as these two realms have been placed at the center of the cultural debate. The Alexander McQueen's exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum

[4] Gilles Lipovetsky, *The empire of Fashion: Dressing Modern Democracy* (Princeton, New Jersey : Princeton University Press , 1994).3.

[5] See, Yuniya Kawamura, *Fashion-ology. An Introduction to Fashion Studies* (Oxford-New York: Berg, 2005).

[6] Abby Lillethum, "Introduction ," in *The Fashion Reader* , 117-123 (Oxford; New York : Berg , 2011).117.

[7] Kawamura, 2005: 7.

of Art broke record of attendance; thus, demonstrating the relevance of fashion in contemporary culture. On the other hand, the last Venice Biennial was inspired by *Palazzo Enciclopedico,* a monumental structure made by self-trained artist Marino Auriti, which is in the American Folk Art Museum's holdings. The biennial aimed to blur the distinction between folk and contemporary art. As chapter one underscores the exhibition *Folk Couture* contributed to this shifting in cultural paradigms.

Having explained the conceptual framework of the exhibition *Folk Couture*, the next chapter unravels the selection of artworks from the American Folk Art Museum's collection offered as inspiration to the fashion makers invited to the show. This selection explored the relationship between fashion and folk art from three perspectives, 1) the representation of historic fashion in early American portrait paintings; 2) the similar materials employed by both fashion designers and folk art artists—namely thread and cloth; and 3) the common 'path' of some garments and utilitarian folk art objects that initially serving a practical function today are collected and exhibited as art in museums. In this chapter, each category is explained through the artworks culled from the American Folk Art Museum's holdings. Chapter two also elucidates how the selection of the fashion designers invited to *Folk Couture* was made. Several people provided advice for this selection: Dr. Valerie Steele and Patricia Mears both director and deputy director at the museum at FIT; Jaz Hernández, philanthropist; and the American Folk Art Museum. The designers were selected because they had referenced art in their collections, collaborated with artists, musicians and choreographers, and (some of them) had exhibited their works in art and design museums. The chapter also looks at the particular aesthetics of this select group of creators by placing special emphasis on how they had engaged fashion and art in their past collections.

One of the topics of *Folk Couture,* the relationship between fashion and art was represented, for instance in the work of Ronaldus Shamask who had collaborated with choreographers Lucinda Child, dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov, and architect Frank Gehry. As folk art holds remarkable information about national identity, designer Gary Graham; who had drawn inspiration from folk art techniques such as quilting was a natural choice for the show. Meanwhile Koos van den Akker's bold combinations of colors created in appliqué (a technique widely used in quilt making) perfectly synthesized the independent spirit and the drive to create handmade works of the self-trained.

The contrast between avant-garde and mainstream designs, the two opposite faces of the fashion system, was embodied in the works of threeASFOUR, a design collective that experiments with innovative techniques and silhouettes; and Catherine Malandrino, who has successfully placed their wearable dresses in the fashion market. As in many fashion exhibitions menswear is underrepresented, Michael Bastian and John Bartlett were invited to produce men's clothing for the show. On the other hand, *Folk Couture* introduced the talent of emerging designer Fabio Costa, who presented his first collection in New York Fashion week in 2011; and celebrated the work of consolidated designer Yeohlee Teng, the work of whom has been the subject of numerous exhibitions in museums. Finally fulfilling the museum's request of presenting the whole fashion scope; Jean Yu was invited to create one of her celebrated minimal garments; Bibhu Mohapatra, was asked to conceive an evening dress—his trademark; Chadwick Bell, because of his extreme attention to dress construction was invited to craft refined prêt-a-porter; and Creatures of the Wind, because of their reputation as designers who create contemporary street style were chosen to reference the 'look' of youth subcultures. This diverse, eclectic group of designers represented a significant part of the current New York fashion

scene—they regularly present their collections during the annual fashion calendar. Their particular aesthetic would be either reinforced or subtly reformulated in this project.

The subsequent chapter explains the artworks the designers choose as inspiration—the designers picked twenty-three artworks from the almost one hundred identified for their consideration; and the new garments they inspired through the four categories used to organize the show: *Pattern, Disembodiment Playfulness, and Narrative.* These categories were based on the concepts and formal characteristics of the ensembles created for the show along with the conversations I had with the designers and the American Folk Art Museum. These categories should be considered as templates guiding the appreciation of the artworks and the fashions crafted for the show. *Pattern* centers on motifs taken from the artworks, which were reworked in the new garments through different techniques and conceptual perspectives. *Playfulness* encompasses ensembles that addressed the whimsical dimension of both fashion and art. *Disembodiment* explores the definition of fashion as an embodied practice through garments that defied wearability. And *Narrative* centers on dresses that explored fashion and folk art as carriers of stories.

Unlike exhibitions organized around existing artworks, the garments to be exhibited in *Folk Couture* were conceived during the time of the project. The tight schedule we worked with—the exhibition was conceived in ten months—did not allow for having the ensembles completed in advance. We had to be flexible because the designers made changes as garments evolved. To organize the show, we conceived broad categories capable of accommodating to such changes but specific enough accurately to describe the particularities of each garment. For this reason, there existed some overlapping among the ensembles. When the characteristics of a garment made it suitable for more than one category, a conversation between the American Folk

Art Museum and I decided the category that better represented the designer's concept. Such overlapping, nonetheless, allowed for nice transitions among the categories developed for the show and added freshness to the curatorship, which mirrored the spontaneity of the sketches the fashion makers provided to explain their designs.

Chapter three also offers a critical appraisal of the couture created for the show based on how the designers rethought the fashion/ folk art connection through cutting-edge designs, textile innovations, and complex approaches to fashion design. This part of the chapter also draws more extensive connections between the ensembles and the history of fashion and art, which were not included in the previous section to avoid the reader's distraction from the discussion of the four categories that structured the show.

Since the emphasis in more conventional art exhibits is usually placed on artists and artworks, the story behind them is rarely told; visitors just see the final 'product.' Narratives that run parallel to exhibitions are crucial to the understanding of a show. Like a couture gown several hands 'stitched' the exhibition *Folk Couture*: trustees, curators, fashion designers, reporters and fashion commentators. Where did the idea for a fashion show at American Folk Art Museum come from? What events the museum held around the exhibition? What was the concept for the exhibition display? How did the press review the show? These questions are addressed in *Appendix: The Biography of Folk Couture.* [8]

[8] I drew the concept of this chapter from Amy de la Haye and Judith Clark, *Exhibiting Fashion: Before and After 1917* (London : Yale University Press, 2013).145. In this book, de la Haye and Clark dealt with the hsitory and staging of the show *Fashion: An Anthology by Cecil Beaton* (V&A, 1971).

Literature Review

Scholars and curators have consistently discussed the relationship between fashion and art; however, little attention has been paid to the links between fashion and folk art.[9] My study aims to constitute itself as the first instance of scholarly research entirely dedicated to analyzing the links between these two realms by using as a case study the exhibition *Folk Couture*. Because none of the seminal books and influential exhibitions I will mention in the next paragraphs dealt with the relationship between fashion and folk art, they should be regarded as a general frame to open up the fashion/folk art discussion this dissertation aims to tackle.

For example, in *Art and Aesthetics in the Fashion Society*[10] sociologist Gilles Lipovestky argued that in the past the art/fashion boundaries were clearly delimitated: art was for eternity, fashion for the present; art was for an elite, fashion for the masses. However, such boundaries have become confusing. Commerce, desire and the 'now' are the cultural values in a contemporary society that has been completely restructured by the logic of fashion, which is based on the attractive and the ephemeral. Fashion occupies a strategic place in free societies, where, according to Lipovesky, "fashion is no longer an aesthetic embellishment, a decorative accessory to collective life [rather] it is the key to the entire edifice."[11]

[9] For a complete list of books and exhibitions on fashion and art see, Nienke van Hijum, "Publications and Exhibitions ," in *Fashion and Imagination: About Clothes and Art* , 376-396 (Arahem: ArtEZ , 2009)

[10] Gilles Lipovestky, "Art and Aesthetic in the Fashion Society ," in *Fashion and Imagination: About Clothes and Art* , 70-89 (Arhem : ArTEZ, 2009).

[11] Lipovetsky, 1994: 6.

From the perspective of fashion history in *Tigersprung: Fashion in Modernity*[12] art historian Ulrich Lehmann stated that, "Abstract analysis of fashion, on par with attempts to construct a philosophy of art, of music, or of literature, remains largely absent."[13] Lehmann centered his fashion analysis in (among others) philosopher Walter Benjamin's idea of the 'tiger leap.' Fashion quintessentially embodies the present and influence the future, but it does so by paradoxically referencing the past. Through the tiger leap, fashion is capable of moving from the contemporary to the past and come back to the present without staying in just one temporal or aesthetic configuration. This particular characteristic of fashion forges the notion of novelty in the context of historical development. Benjamin regarded fashion as a social force—a stylistic revolution—sharing the same cultural features with political transformation.[14] Ulrich argues that this capacity of fashion designers to predict what is yet to come makes fashion a central discipline to understand the changes in culture, art, and the avant-garde.[15] Fashion designers sense the changes before anyone else because of the total proximity of fashion to the human body. Lehmann stated, "Clothes are closer to the spirit than intellectual contemplation or analysis is, and in the hand of a truly progressive designer, they can operate on an equally fundamental level."[16] For instance, the references to past fashions made by Paul Poiret, Elsa Schiaparelli (1890-1973) or Yves Saint Laurent anticipated the postmodern quotation before philosopher and sociologist Jean François Lyotard postulated it.[17] Or, that by creating couture that revealed the

[12] Ulrich Lehmann, *Tigersprung: Fashion in Modernity* (The MIT Press , 2002)

[13] Ibid. xiv.

[14] Ibid. xviii.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid. xix.

[17] Ibid.

principles of its own construction Spanish designer Cristobal Balenciaga (1895-1972) predicted philosopher Jacques Derrida's ideas of deconstruction.[18]

From a philosophy point of view, in *Fashion: A Philosophy*[19] Lars Svendsen devoted a whole chapter to the fashion/art connection. Svendsen argued that the relationship between fashion and art began when couture was born around 1860s with couturiers Charles Frederick Worth and Paul Poiret. He also explained how fashion and art became closer by the development of avant-garde movements such as Futurism, Surrealism and later Pop Art. Svendesen contended that fashion had always been more interested in engaging visual arts than the other way around.[20] Fashion—sometimes—has said relevant things, but tends to repeat itself. Svendsen concluded that fashion that resisted art is the type of fashion that became closer to being 'art.'[21]

Another seminal book exploring the links between fashion and art is Caroline Evan's *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity and Deathliness*.[22] Evans made connections with the visual arts to analyze the work of conceptual designers active since the 1990s such as John Galliano, Hussein Chalayan, and Alexander McQueen, who referenced "dark' topics (such as death and illness) in their collections. Evans regarded the 1990s conceptual fashion as "a form of catharsis, perhaps a form of mourning and a copying stratagem [it is] the dark side of a free market economy, the loosening of social controls, the rise of risk and certainty as key elements

[18] Ibid.

[19] Lars Svendsen, *Fashion: A Philosophy* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006).

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Caroline Evans, *Fashion at the Edge* (New Heaven and London: Yale University Press, 2003).

of 'modernity' and 'globalization.'"[23]

Numerous exhibitions and exhibitions catalogues have tackled the connection between fashion and art. Trained as art historian, fashion curator Richard Martin presented fashion as an art in many exhibitions, first at the Fashion Institute of Technology, and later at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the 1980s and 1990s. In *Fashion and Surrealism* (1987*)*, for example, Martin spent three hundred images to explain how surrealism influenced fashion.[24] Martin contended that fashion achieved a higher cultural status as influenced by surrealism; and, that contemporary designers such as Vivienne Westwood and Jean-Paul Gaultier continued to reference surrealism in their collections, which testified to the close relationship between fashion and surrealism. Similarly, in the exhibition *Cubism and Fashion* (1998) Martin explored the influence of cubism on fashion from the early-twentieth century to the modern period. In it, paintings by Pablo Picasso were compared to dresses by French couturier Madeleine Vionnet (1876-1975) famous for popularizing the bias cut. [25]

In 1996, fashion exhibitions in museums reached a zenith (only surpassed later by Alexander McQueen's retrospective) with the *Biennale di Firenze: Looking at Fashion*, curated by Gianni Sischy and Germano Celant, a version of which was presented as *Art/Fashion* at the Guggenheim museum in Soho a year later. " Fashion is a multilayered, multipurpose medium, subject for both aesthetic and social consideration," the curators wrote in the exhibition catalogue's introduction.[26] The show included sections on futurist utopian fashions,

[23] Ibid. 308.

[24] Richard Martin, *Fashion and Surrealism* (New York : Rizzoli , 1987).

[25] Richard Martin, *Cubism and Fashion* (New York : Metropolitan Museum of Art , 1998).

[26] Germano Celant, Luigi Settembrini and Ingrid Sischy, "Looking at Fashion, with art ," in *Looking at Fashion: Biennale di Firenze*, 18-20 (Milan : Skira editore, 1996). 19.

collaborations between surrealist artists and fashion designers, and 1960 art couture made by artist Andy Warhol, for instance. The Biennial also centered on artists employing fashion to create works of arts such as Joseph Beuys's *Felt Suit* and Beverly Semen's oversized garments (which were referenced by designer John Bartlett in the suit he made for *Folk Couture*). In addition, the show presented collaborations between contemporary artists and designers (such as British artist Damien Hirst and Italian designer Miuccia Prada).

Folk art and fashion may look as opposite even antagonist realms. As chief curator Stacy C. Hollander wrote in the introduction of the *Folk Couture* exhibition catalogue, "At first, the dialogue between fashion and folk art seemed tenuous, an unlike conversation."[27] Indeed, the compelling stories behind folk art, which has often been made in isolated places such as mental hospitals and were not intended to be exhibited or sold, sharply contrast to the glamorized world of the fashion industry, which emphasized beauty stereotypes and ideas of perfection, success and fame. Similarly, the materials employed in folk art—to name a few, recycled paper, soot, chicken bones, and saliva—could not be more opposite to the luxurious fabrics used in couture, such as chiffon, brocades, and satin. However, as this dissertation will explain, the 'unlike conversation' between fashion and folk art originated as early as the first settlers began painting portraits and quilting textiles in Colonial America. More importantly, this study contends that the radical freedom of self-trained artists, who often create for the sake of art outside the margins of society, heavily resonates to the independent spirit of fashion designers who every season defy notions of taste and beauty through eccentric style and the artistry of dressmaking. Both fashion and folk art celebrate individuality, liberty, and the freedom from social conventions as the

[27] Stacy C. Hollander, "Introduction ," in *Folk Couture: Fashion and Folk Art* , 13-15 (New York : American Folk Art Museum).13.

essence of the creative act. [28]

Methodology

My investigation relies upon scholarship from fashion studies and material culture, but overall it is essentially grounded in art history. In this sense, I am indebted to the work of art historian Ann Hollander (1931-2014), who, in her seminal book, *Seeing Through Clothes*,[29] stated that the study of dress must be linked to the representations of clothing in art. She argued that clothes should be studied as paintings and connected to a "creative tradition of image making."[30] Hollander's believed that fashion as a visual form had the capacity to make "its own truth apart from linguistic reference and topical illusion."[31] Echoing Hollander's ideas about fashion this dissertation focuses on the way fashion operates aesthetically and discusses fashion as a form of artistic expression. It concentrates on the concepts behind a designer's vision and the artistry of dressmaking. Although I agree with fashion scholars Linda Welters and Abby Lellethun that "fashion means business,"[32] my study does not center on the commercial dimension of fashion or its production systems. In this investigation, my major concerns are the

[28] Smith: 2015.

[29] Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes* (Berkley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 1993).

[30] Ibid. xvi.

[31] Ibid. 13.

[32] Linda Welters and Abby Lillethun, "Introduction ," in *The Fashion Reader* , ed. Linda Welters and Abby Lillethun, xxv-xxx (Oxford; New York : Berg , 2011). xxvii.

formal and conceptual characteristics of the ensembles exhibited in the show and the folk art pieces that inspired them.

My investigation also draws from research developed in the field of fashions studies. Most certainly, garments are worn for functional reasons (for example to stay warm) and social demands (such as the fulfillment of social prescription of modesty) but wearing a garment is a much more complex phenomenon that widely exceeds any definition of fashion solely centered on functionality. In part as a response to the need for a much inclusive, interdisciplinary approach to clothing, fashion studies emerged in the 1980s to provide a broad understanding of dress and adornment.[33] The field of fashion studies addresses fashion as "the cultural construction of the embodied identity."[34] It encompasses disciplines (among others) such as art history, anthropology, gender and queer theory, visual and cultural studies. The influential publication *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body, and Culture* (created in 1997) has strongly contributed to legitimate the ground of fashion studies. The journal has published research and methodologies on fashion for an increasing academic audience interested in deciphering how people "fashion" their identities through clothing. [35]

On the other hand, methodologies derived from the realm of material culture are used in this investigation to address both the artworks chosen from the American Folk Art Museum's holdings as well as the garments they inspired. In his influential article *Mind in Matter*,[36] historian of American art Jules David Prown defined material culture as "the study through

[33] Valerie Steele, "Preface," in *The Berg Companion to Fashion* , xvii-xviii (Oxford, New York: Berg , 2010).

[34] Ibid. xvii.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Jules David Prown, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Mehtod," *Winterthur Portafolio* 17, no. 1 (Spring 1982): 1-19.

artifacts of the beliefs—values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions—of a particular community or society at a given time."[37] Material culture as a form of inquiry employs objects as primary data and is used by art and decorative art historians, cultural geographers, among others. Material culture assumes that a man-made object presupposes the existence of a human intelligence articulating the conception and fabrication of an artifact. Objects made by men mirror (un) consciously the ideas of the people who commission, create, use and buy them; and by extension, the cultural values of the society where these objects were made. The vast range of objects material culture studies includes (among others) paintings, sculptures, photographs, textiles, clothing, hairstyles, cosmetic, tattooing, piercing, furniture, etc. Prown argued that because objects provide a wider understanding of culture, several folk art scholars have come from the realm of material culture and centered on the study of vernacular objects. He stated that the study of folk art has "required a considerable amount of scholarly innovation," and that "[v]ernacular objects pose interpretative difficulties because our scholarly tradition and experience, especially in regard to art, architecture, and decorative art, have focused on high style objects."[38] However, Prown continued, "[folk] objects can make accessible, especially non-elite aspects, of culture that are not, always present or detectable in other modes of cultural expressions." [39] For this dissertation, the notion of folk art and fashion as non-elite art will be useful to understand the value of these expressions and the peripheral position they have occupied in Western culture.

In terms of the relationship between art and fashion, which is at the core of this investigation, my study parallels the ideas that fashion scholar Vicki Karaminas and artist Adam

[37] Ibid. 1

[38] Ibid. 4.

[39] Ibid.

Geczy developed in the book *Fashion And Art: Critical Crossovers.*[40] Like art, fashion is a medium that has its own discourse (history and theory of fashion) timing (i.e. fashion weeks), forms of presentations (live models, runway shows, shop windows, advertisement, magazines, etc.) and place of interchange (department stores, boutiques, etc.) The differences between fashion and art are less about the objects themselves—fashion and art are aesthetic creations—than the places of social, symbolic, and economic exchange they inhabit. This dissertation explores the points at which art and fashion collide. Like artists, designers use fashion to express complex ideas about the subject.[41] Artists and fashion designers have worked with similar themes in the last decades—such as progressive ideas about gender, sexuality and the politics of bodies; which demonstrated the breakdown of boundaries of the disciplines. [42] The incredible industrial aspect of fashion has positively nurtured the artistic side of the discipline.[43] Collaborations between fashion designers and museums have pushed the traditional museological concepts to new territories.[44] In this context, what is relevant today is how art sees fashion. "Art is looking for an edge and fashion delivers it, and it is highly transient and based on a lot of money," fashion curator Pamela Goblin stated, "Maybe fashion does not need art as it is already moving on to the next thing, but art might not be ready to give up on fashion so easily," she concluded. [45] Fashion has an incredible capacity to appropriate art, and also to quickly spit it out.[46]

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[40] Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas, "Fashion and Art: Critical Crossover ," in *Fashion and Art* (London, New York : Berg , 2012).

[41] Bolton quoted in, Mitchell Oakley Smith and Alison Kubler, *Art/Fashion in the 21st. century* (Thames and Hudson , 2013)160.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Goblin quoted in Smith and Kubler: 187.

[44] Ibid. 192.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

This investigation assumes that fashion is a field in the process of artistic legitimization. Studies such as this dissertation and exhibitions like *Folk Couture* will crucially contribute to the appreciation of fashion as a form of art. "It seems to me useful to think of fashion as potentially another of the arts in the process—still very much contested—of legitimization," contended fashion historian Valerie Steele. [47] In addition, according to Steele, "Only a field of restricted production, involving images and objects relating to high fashion and/or avant-garde fashion, is ever likely to be considered art. Not every T-shirt will qualify [as art]."[48] In the 1980s and 1990s, the advent of avant-garde or radical fashion triggered a new analytical debate in the field of fashion studies. As fashion historian Christopher Breward stated, "the self constructed role of radical fashion design seems to present a very specialized commentary on the vicissitudes of contemporary taste and aesthetics, everything to do with internal fashion debate about genre, hierarchy, presentation and style" to be 'showcased rather than sold."[49] Following Steele and Breward, in this investigation the ensembles created for the *Folk Couture* exhibition are considered avant-garde/ radical fashion as they were based on a complex approach to design and were intended to be showcased in a museum—they were not meant to be worn or mass-produced.

In the end, by offering the work of self-taught artists as a source of inspiration to contemporary fashion makers, the American Folk Art Museum embarked on an unprecedented journey while playing a crucial role in reimagining how art institutions perceive fashion and designers today. The exhibition aimed to blur the distinctions between artistic categories such as

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[47] Valerie Steele, "Fashion ," in *Fashion and Art* , 13-27 (London; New York : Berg , 2012). 23.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Breward quoted in Lou Taylor, "Conceptual Fashion ," in *Berg Companion to Fashion*, 320 (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2010). 320.
Chanel News, "Interview with Karl Lagerfeld. Spring-Summer 2014. Ready-to-Wear ," *Chanel News* , October 2, 2013.

fashion and art, and to demonstrate how inherently connected they have been as both disciplines has been built as elite art's other. "Designer fashion and folk art aren't exactly natural fellows," *Women's Wear Daily* reporter Marc Karimzadeh said.[50] Of course, the sophistication of couture, sharply contrasts to the directness in conception of folk art. Fashion is produced to be sold and eagerly reviewed by the press. In contrast, folk art has been created in isolation with no intension to be exhibited or sold. In other words, while fashion is "in", folk art is 'out.' However, the freedom of the self-train artist, who creates art outside fashionable art movements, heavily echoes the independent spirit of couturiers, who defy taste and beauty through eccentrics creations and celebrates individual style. Moreover, although "fashion is on fashion" in contemporary culture, for many decades, it was placed in an inferior, marginal domain—just like folk art. Fashion was regarded as frivolous, superficial and feminine. Ultimately, this dissertation contends that by exhibiting together high art's "outsiders" such as fashion and folk art, the exhibition *Folk Couture* placed itself at the forefront of discourse on contemporary fashion and art.

[50] Marc Karimzadeh, "Fashion Folk: Beyond the Quitl ," *Women's Wear Daily* , January 21, 2014: 7.

CHAPTER I

Fashion and Art

Fashion is a medium that involves serious artistry: inspiration, color sense, composition, and conceptual analysis. In its initial stage—when it is envisioned with the creativity and skills of the designer—fashion is praxis similar to any other artistic manifestation. One of the topics of *Folk Couture*, the interplay of fashion and the aesthetic realm, can be demonstrated in artworks over the past few centuries; painters like Goya and Velázquez, for instance, carefully depicted the elaborate gowns of their sitters to indicate high status .[1] Like the participants in *Folk Couture*, designers often borrow from art history. Yves Saint Laurent based his Mondrian day dresses (1965) on the artist's abstract geometric paintings, thus transforming a canvas into a garment (and likewise into a "canvas" again), and Alexander McQueen drew inspiration from the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch, among others, for his fall/winter 2011 collection, which included ensembles that bore replications of *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, *The Last Judgment,* and *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* (c. 1500) in woven silk Jacquard. More recently Karl Lagerfeld made the environment of the contemporary art scene the central theme of his spring/summer 2014 collection for Chanel: the runway evoked a minimalistic art gallery, with cement floors and stark white walls hung with seventy-five artworks of his own creation. "Designers want to be part of the art world, but the art world does not want to be taken for fashion . . . but that's ridiculous because art is also something recycled . . . only [sic] who really

[1] Michael Boodro, "Art and Fashion," in *The Fashion Reader*, ed. Linda Welters and Abby Lillethun (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2011).

understood this was Andy Warhol who really got the right idea that both things can live together," Lagerfeld stated in an interview.[2]

Artists have also appropriated the *language* of fashion. In the late nineteenth century, painter Gustav Klimt and architect Josef Hoffmann each created artistic dresses in the reform—or "rational"—style for a select clientele. Italian futurist Giacomo Balla and Russian Constructivists Varvara Stepanova and Aleksandra Ekster created utopian anti-fashions in the 1910s and twenties. Painter Sonia Delaunay collaborated on fashions with couturier Jacques Heim, and they presented *Boutique Simultané,* a simulation of a clothing boutique, at the 1925 International Exposition of Modern Industrial and Decorative Arts, in Paris. In 1966 Andy Warhol embellished two paper dresses on a live model (Nico, a singer with the rock band the Velvet Underground) as part of a promotional event at the department store Abraham & Strauss: the *Fragile dress,* on which he silkscreened the word *FRAGILE* multiple times, and the *Banana dress*, on which he glued four silkscreened images of his signature oversized yellow fruit to the front and back. [3] In 2007 artist Sylvie Fleury addressed pathological consumerism with her installation *Poison*, a collection of luxury brand shopping bags she had amassed. And more recently, the 2012 Whitney Biennial included an installation by artist K8 Hardy, who presented a collection of thirty eclectic ensembles made of found and recycled garments in a runway show with professional models in one of the museum's galleries.[4] Hardy's approach, which verged on parody, was experimental theater or performance art, and derives from her opposition to the

[2] Chanel News, "Interview with Karl Lagerfeld Spring–Summer 2014 Ready-to-Wear," Chanel News, October 2, 2013. Accessed April 26, 2015. http://chanel-news.chanel.com/en/home.page.2.html.

[3] "The Painting on the Dress said 'Fragile,'" *New York Times*, November 11, 1966. Accessed April 27, 2015. http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1966/11/11/82953522.html

[4] Eric Wilson, "Art's Turn on the Catwalk," *New York Times*, May 17, 2012, E-4. Accessed April 27, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/17/fashion/arts-turn-on-the-catwalk.html

production, labor, and environmental harms that result from some fashion manufacturing practices.

Fruitful collaborations between artists and fashion designers have also occurred. Salvador Dalí and Elsa Schiaparelli created a number of joint works including the *Shoe Hat* (1937), inspired by a picture of the painter wearing a shoe on his head, *The Tears Dress* (1938), the motif of which gave the illusion of numerous holes torn in the fabric, and the *Woman's Dinner Dress,* a white organza gown featuring a gigantic red lobster on the front of its skirt (which was worn by Wallis Simpson).[5] Contemporary artists and designers continue to explore such collaborations: in 2012 Yayoi Kusama and Marc Jacobs produced a line of accessories for Louis Vuitton based on Kusama's famous polka dot paintings, and in 2013 Damien Hirst and Miuccia Prada collaborated on a limited-edition line of Plexiglas women's handbags decorated with real insects embellished with crystals, feathers, and beads (which were displayed at a pop-up juice bar the pair created in the middle of the desert in Qatar).

At the beginning of the 1980s, Japanese designers Issey Miyake, Yohji Yamamoto, and Rei Kawakubo, of Comme des Garçons, revolutionized Western fashion by proposing a new relationship between clothing and the body; their avant-garde designs were immediately linked to art and architecture.[6] Yamamoto's and Kawakubo's ensembles had a powerful impact on Paris fashion at the time. Characterized by the use of dark colors, asymmetrical shapes, and ripped fabrics with torn and tattered edges and hemlines, they deconstructed the Western notion of fit and tailoring and challenged the idea of traditional beauty. Miyake's work has been organized into museum exhibitions, with the ensembles displayed hanging from the ceiling. One of his

[5] Alice Mackrell, *Fashion and Art: The Impact of Art on Fashion and Fashion on Art* (London: Batsford, 2005)

[6] ibid.

creations, a black evening dress with a rattan bodice, was featured on the cover of the February 1982 issue of *Artforum*.[7] The editors of that issue, Ingrid Sischy and Germano Celant, noted that fashion was not art, but that fashion's use and reuse of historic styles was similar to the contemporary art practices of appropriation that were developing at that time. The existing discourse on deconstruction and decay was elaborated to explain the work of these designers and was instrumental in the development of the connection between fashion and art.[8]

In the 1990s, conceptual fashion—garments produced within the realm of fashion but based on complex approaches to design—strengthened the growing relationship between the two disciplines.[9] Designers Viktor & Rolf, Martin Margiela, and Hussein Chalayan all pushed the boundaries of fashion beyond trends and wearable clothing and staged runway shows akin to performance art. Other designers have exploited the theatrical dimension of the fashion parade. John Galliano and Alexander McQueen, for example, each produced runway shows in the form of short plays with characters, plots, settings, and music that ushered in a new type of spectacle.[10]

As fashion entered museums, fashion stores have been conceived and designed as art galleries. The recently opened Dover Street Market New York (DSMNY) displays the work of a select group of fashion designers along with site-specific art works commissioned and curated by Rei Kawakubo. Multiple art expressions of highly individual creators interact in the retail store impregnated with the spirit of outsider art .[11] For instance, artist Magda Sayeg (b.1976), known for wrapping public monuments, architecture and buses with knitted materials, created a 60-foot sleeve of yarn by hand for one of the store's columns.

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[7] Ibid.

[8] Valerie Steele, "Fashion,' in *Fashion and Art* ed. Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas (London and New York: Berg, 2012), 13–27.

[9] Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas, "Fashion and Art: Critical Crossovers," in *Fashion and Art*, 1–12.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Bridget Foley, "Rei Kawakubo Speaks," *WWD*, December 20, 2013.

Like fashion exhibitions in museum, shows devoted to fashion photographers also have proliferated in the last decades. In 2008, *Fashioning Fiction in Photography since 1990,* held at MoMA, featured the work of thirteen fashion photographers; the first time the institution showed fashions pictures. In it, all the images were previously commissioned by and reproduced in magazines. Similarly, in 2009, The International Center of Photography (ICP) examined the relationship of fashion and cultural phenomena in six exhibitions featuring the work of photographers such as Richard Avedon and Edward Steichen, who was the first curator of photography at MoMA.

Finally, fashion illustration–-used to disseminate fashion before the 'invention' of fashion photography around 1911——is another praxis related to fashion not considered high art. Today, however illustrations by French artist George Lepape (1887-1971), who collaborated with Paul Poiret; or by Antonio Lopez (1943-1987) whose drawings appeared in Vogue magazine and Harper's Bazaar, are aggressively collected, exhibited in galleries and published in books.

Couture

Couture has usually been regarded as art, because of its exquisite craftsmanship and uniqueness. "Couture constitutes a mode of self-expression, which can be compared to architecture and painting," declared Christian Dior in the 1950s.[12] The long hours spent on fittings forged intimate relationships between couturiers and clients, whose measurements were

[12] Dior quoted in Christopher Breward, "Intoxicated on Images. The Visual Culture of Couture," in *The Golden Age of Couture. Paris and London. 1947-57*, ed. Claire Wilcox (London : V&A, 2007). 179.

carefully noted and kept in secrecy. For months, sewers (*petites mains*) worked in secluded rooms putting together gowns and suits. The couture industry was based on a division of activities split into in-house workshops for dressmaking (*flou*) and tailoring (*tailleur*). Specialist ateliers over France provided exquisite trimmings and accessories. As a handmade creation, couture is intrinsically imbued with a sense of touch.[13] "Couture is a research laboratory that serves a fluid, multidimensional form of poetry," said curator Olivier Saillard.[14] Names such as *Sous le Ciel de Paris* (Under Paris Skies) or *Junon* (Juno) were given to the creations that launched every January and July in Parisian fashion houses and *grands hôtels* told histories like chapters in a book. Chanel, always a rebel, mocked these names and gave just numerals to her gowns.[15]

Unlike prêt-a-porter presented all over the world, couture has always been exclusively shown in Paris and regarded as solely a French Industry. When German occupiers tried to transplant couture houses to Berlin during WWII, couturier Lucien Lelong, president of the Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisiene, defiantly declared, "It's in Paris or it is nowhere." [16]

The fantasy of the couturier takes unexpected flights, sometimes. Yet couture is an art form extremely regulated. Hand-made gowns must be designed by the head of fashion houses and entirely produced in ateliers where at least twenty seamstresses work. Only the Chambre

[13] Claire Wilcox, "Introduction ," in *The Golden Age of Couture* (London : V&A, 2007). 12

[14] Olivier Saillard and Anne Zazzo, *Paris Haute Couture* (Flammarion , 2013).14

[15] Ibid.

[16] Lelong quoted in Wilcox: 14.

Syndicale can set the dates for couture parades and the collections, in the past, might include seventy-five original models entirely made from fabric.[17]

Because of the strict system of rules that regiment couture and the advent of prêt-á-porter–anonymous and generic mass-produced clothing –haute couture declined inexorably in the mid-twentieth century. The long fittings and the intricate techniques employed in dressmaking were attributes not relevant to fashion industry anymore. Garments are now accessible to anyone who can buy mass-produced fashions. Today the majority of brands just want to boost sales and produce massive amount of disposable clothing. Perhaps for this reason, garments handcrafted either in a couture studio or the sewing rooms of a house have achieved a new value that lies in the time devoted to its creation. As fashion curator Claire Wilcox has stated, today couture remains as a "commitment to personal aspiration, national identity and extraordinary and time-consuming handcraft."[18] Based on an elite system of production and consumption with privative prices, couture remains unattainable for most people, but the couture creations paraded by celebrities in movie awards, gala fundraisers or political events still engage and seduce larger audiences.[19] Couture week in Paris is eagerly awaited every season, and prominently covered by magazines, newspapers and fashion bloggers. Couture has also become the subject of important academic treatises. For instance, in *Haute Couture & Haute Couture,*[20] Pierre Bordieu discussed the links between high-end fashion and elite culture. Bordieu analyzed why although both realms are luxury items; couture was not regarded as subject of academic inquiry. Moreover, using as a case study couturier André Courréges's works, Bordieu

[17] Ibid. 13.

[18] Wilcox: 171.

[19] See Adrianne Munich, *Fashion in Film* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press , 2011).

[20] Pierre Bordieu, "Haute Couture & Haute Culture ," in *Sociology in Question* , 132-138 (London: Sage , 1993).

demonstrated that changes in couture, as changes in other art forms, occurred when mainstream parameters of beauty and taste are challenged. In addition, he examined the idea of "magic" associated to luxury brands and how it operates in the fashion system by taking as point of departure the Chanel fashion house. Another book exploring the world of couture is Nancy Troy's *Couture Culture: A Study in Modern Art and Fashion.*[21] Troy analyzed the art/fashion connection in the early-twentieth century through a model based on the notions of originality and productivity. She argued that couturier Paul Poiret and artist Pablo Picasso bridged the elite worlds of couture and avant-garde with that of popular culture by taking advantage of mass-production techniques, commerce and the disappearance of class divides. Troy extended this model to contemporary fashions and contended that; for instance, Ralph Laurent used the same marketing strategies Poiret and Picasso employed at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Fashion exhibitions

The exhibition *Folk Couture* was inspired by the bourgeoning phenomena of showing fashions in art museums. Attracting multitudes, increasing the revenues and popularity of art institutions, and traveling all around the world, fashion exhibitions have exploded in the last decades.[22] Organized by prominent fashion curators such as Andrew Bolton, Valerie Steele and Pamela Goblin,[23] fashion shows reveal designers' career, educate audiences about the history of

[21] Nancy Troy, *Couture Culture: A Study in Modern Art and Fashion* (Cambridge : The MIT Press , 2002).

[22] Suzy Menkes, "Gone Global: Fashion as Art," *The New York Times* , July 4, 2011. Accessed April 22, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/05/fashion/is-fashion-really-museum-art.html

[23] Smith and Kubler, 2013: 155.

a brand, and investigate the artistic dimension of fashion. More importantly, these exhibitions place designers as artists and promote the contemplation of a dress as a work of art. They have also positively affected the way designers treat their own work. Before curators required clothes for exhibitions, modern designers rarely archived their collections. Thus, fashion shows have propelled both garment preservation and the constitution of fashion archives, which, in turn, have been instrumental in the appraisal of fashion as cultural heritage. Furthermore, the scholarly approach used in writing for exhibitions catalogues has contributed to bill fashion as a field worth study.

Internet with its instant access to diverse forms of leisure; and the massive worldwide tourism industry developed in the last decades have produced audiences that demand forms of sophisticated entertainment with both aesthetic and intellectual content. [24] Partly, in response to this demand, museums have opened their doors to fashion. As fashion commentator Suzy Menkes wrote, "With the force of technology, instant images, and global participation, fashion has developed from being a passion for a few to a fascination–and an entertainment–for everybody."[25] Supported by the fashion industry along with spectacular design exhibitions and the capacity to attract larger audiences, fashion shows are strongly shifting the hierarchy of the art world in the twenty-first century.[26]

[24] Ibid. 154. For an analysis of the function of marketing regarding people in the arts and cultural organizations see, François Colbert, *Marketing Culture and the Arts* (Montréal : HEC Montréal, Carmelle and Rémi Marcoux Chair in Arts Management , 2012).

[25] Menkes 2011.

[26] Ibid. 159

Dress and Fashion in the context of the museum

Items of cloth mirror the society or culture where they were produced and worn. As repositories for cultural artifacts, museums traditionally have collected ethnic, religious and court dress; and treated clothing design as craft. From the sixteenth and eighteenth-centuries, secular and ecclesiastic garments were collected in European cabinet of curiosities, which housed rare or strange objects.[27] Both the eighteenth-century antiquarian movement and the mid-nineteenth century World's Fairs stimulated acquisition and preservation of garments.

The first exhibition of dress was held at the Royal Armory in Stockholm, Sweden in the early-seventeenth century when King Gustaf II Adolf, who was wounded on a campaign in 1627, mandated his blood stained uniform to be exhibited in the museum.[28] In 1862, the Musée Historique des Tissus in Lyon, France, began collecting and exhibiting fashionable dresses, notably, those made from Lyonnais silks.[29] The popular show *Four Hundred Years of Fashion* (1884) held in London at the International Health Exhibition displayed ensembles on wax figures made by Madame Tussaud's.[30] In 1908, the Société de l'Histoire du Costume organized an exhibition of historic fashions at the Musée de Arts Decoratifs–the garments exhibited constituted the basis of the current Musée de la Mode de la Ville de Paris, Palais Galliera.[31] In 1919, the Brooklyn Museum hosted a show that juxtaposed contemporary fashions along with

[27] Jean L. Druesedow, *Dress and Fashion Exhibits* , Vol. 10, in *Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion* (Berg , 2010)pp. 304-310. 304.

[28] Ibid. 305

[29] ibid.

[30] ibid

[31] ibid.

artworks that had inspired them,[32] and The Victoria and Albert museum organized the first exhibition devoted to modern fashion in 1924. [33]

In 1937, The Costume Institute was created in New York City. Its first director Francis Henry Taylor (1903-1957) became the head of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and annexed the Costume Institute to the Met in 1944.[34] Garments previously preserved in the textile department of the museum were transferred to the new Costume Institute. Today, the institute houses thirty five thousand costume and accessories from the fifteenth century to the present. Five continents are represented in the museum's holdings.[35]

The Museum at FIT–created in 1961–presented its first fashion exhibitions in the 1970s.The museum's collection, which includes garments, textiles and accessories from the eighteenth century to the present, has an emphasis on contemporary, avant-garde fashion. Fashion historian Valerie Steele was named director of the museum in 2003. Steele, dubbed "the high-heeled historian," has organized exhibitions with 'piquant subjects' that rival the Costume Institute. *The Corset: Fashioning the Body* (2000); *Love & War: The Weaponized Women* (2006) and *Gothic: Dark Glamour* (2008), are among her more popular exhibitions. [36]Steele is also the editor of *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture,* which has helped to consolidate fashion as valid fields of academic inquire. The interdisciplinary publication, launched in 1997, critically analyzes the 'dressed body,' including not only garments but also body modifications such as tattooing and piercing

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Suzy Menkes : 2011.

In the late-twentieth century, two crucial moments that changed the relationship between fashion and museums were: 1) the exhibition *Fashion: An Anthology by Cecil Beaton* (1971) and 2) Diana Vreeland's appointment at the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1972). [37] Cecil Beaton's *Anthology* exhibited modern fashions, notably, couture gowns, which became the basis of the V&A's collection of modern fashions. Before Beaton's exhibit, the museum collected dresses for its textile significance rather than for its cut or style. The garments were presented in a Plexiglas and chrome structure on fiberglass mannequins that revolved around shop windows to songs like *The Lady is a Tramp.* Regarding the set design, Beaton declared, "It's quite modern in feeling."[38] The installation also included scents, which enhanced the experience of the more than 90.000 visitors who saw the show.[39] *Anthology* was the first major exhibition of contemporary mode held at the V&A and its innovative approach and exhibition design changed the way of collecting and displaying garments in Britain and abroad.

Like Beaton, Diana Vreeland revolutionized the concept of fashion shows. Former editor of *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*, Vreeland put the Metropolitan Museum in the map with spectacular exhibitions that mixed art, fashion and popular culture. *Eighteenth-Century Women* (1981), for instance, displayed historic gowns on mannequins painted of yellow, mauve, coral and red along with tapestries and painting of the period. A nine-foot-high portrait of Marie Antoinette painted by Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun (1780) came directly from Versailles. Guerlain's *Nahema* was sent through the ventilation system, as Vreeland believed the fragrance to be evocative of the floral motifs used on furniture, walls, dresses and accessories. "There are critics

[37] Clark and de la Haye, 2013: 6.

[38] *The New York Times* , "He Speaks for Fashion's 'Perverse Truth'," December 19, 1971. Accessed April 27, 2015. http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1971/12/19/91316756.html

[39] Clark and de la Haye, 2013: 72.

who find her razzle-dazzle too Broadway like and who claim she is too loose with historical accuracy," reported Andre Leon Tally in 1981.[40] However, Vreeland made the Met the center of fashion for New York City and the world, and its popularity spurred other art institutions to consider fashion and costume as an important field. [41]

Fashion historian Richard Martin succeeded Vreeland at the Costume Institute in 1993. Martin's exhibits were less spectacular than Vreeland's—the Costume institute's space was shrunk after her tenure and the institution demanded for conservation reasons that clothes be shown inside vitrines. Martin brought the scholarly approach missing in his predecessor. He believed that fashion had a richness of content that could be analyzed like any artwork. *The Ceaseless Century: 300 Years of Eighteenth-Century Costume*, and *Fashion And Cubism*, are among Martin's most celebrated exhibits at the Met.

The Costume Institute has often been the subject of suspicious questions regarding its close relationship with the fashion industry. Saint Laurent's retrospective, organized by Vreeland in 1983, caused controversy as it was linked to the economic interest of the Yves Saint Laurent's company.[42] Perhaps for this reason, the Institute was very open in terms of Alexander McQueen brand's sponsorship for the legendary British designer's exhibition. McQueen's retrospective is widely recognized as key factor in the explosion of museum fashion exhibitions in the twenty-first century.

[40] Andre Leon Talley, "Fashion; Vreeland's Show ," *The New York Times* , December 6, 1981. Accessed April 27, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/1981/12/06/magazine/fashion-vreeland-s-show.html

[41] Bernadine Morris, "Review/Fashion; Celebrating the Flair that was Vreeland ," *The New York Times* , December 7, 1993. Accessed April 27, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/1993/12/07/news/review-fashion-celebrating-the-flair-that-was-vreeland.html

[42] Steele, 2012.

Savage Beauty recreated McQueen's theatrical runways by displaying approximately one hundred garments and accessories culled from his archive in London.[43] Andrew Bolton, who organized the exhibit around the topic of romanticism, argued that, like the work of romantic artists, McQueen's fashions triggered emotional responses on his followers. [44] "What was unique about McQueen was that he used fashion to channel, convey and evoke emotions," Bolton declared. [45] The curator worked closely with the house of McQueen to get involved in the creative process of the designer. "He was shamanistic about his work; the materials he would use were outside of fashion, like shells and enormous feathers, which had a fetishistic quality about them."[46]

Sam Gainsburry and Joseph Bennett, producers of McQueen's runways shows, created the exhibition's design, a dramatic presentation never seen before in a museum. Walking through the exhibition was akin to be inside McQueen's head. "The set design combined the look of baronial halls and meat lockers," New York Time's reporter Holland Cotter wrote in his review of *Savage Beauty*. For the catalogue, Norwegian photographer Sølve Sundsbø took pictures of the ensembles on mannequins, that were actually live models, disguised as dummies: the bodies were painted on white with black lines draw on writes and ankles suggesting the articulated members of dolls. The models' heads were "guillotined" with digital retouching.

[43] Jonathan Akeroyd, "Sponsor's Statement ," in *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* (New York : The Metropolitan Museum of Art , 2011).

[44] Calvin Tomkins, "Anarchy Unleashed ," *The New Yorker* , March 25, 2013: 60-69. However, although he treated McQueen's fashion as art, Bolton did not place it in the context of artists such as Demian Hirst and the Chapman Brothers, who share with McQueen the violent and dark aesthetic of 1990s.

[45] Bolton quoted in Smith and Kubler: 174.

[46] Ibid.

Savage Beauty closed with a final attendance of 661, 509 visitors, making it the eighth biggest exhibition at the Met. [47] The show sent precedents as for the first time the Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibited fashion in the main galleries reserved to display 'fine arts;' thus solidifying the relationship between fashion and art museums. This exhibition heavily influenced the exhibition *Folk Couture*. In her prologue for the show, trustee and folk art curator Elizabeth Wilson acknowledged *Savage Beauty* as inspiration for the exhibit.

Fashion exhibitions held in 2013

A series of exhibits exploring the multiple dimensions of fashion were held in New York City and Paris during 2013. Like McQueen's retrospective at the Met, these shows inspired the concepts and aesthetic behind the exhibition *Folk Couture*.

In September, The Brooklyn Museum opened *The Fashion World of Jean Paul Gaultier*. Originally presented at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, the show highlighted the message of tolerance that Jean Paul Gaultier has communicated through couture. "Any size, any skin color, any gender; you are all welcome in his world,"[48] wrote curator and former model Thierry-Maxine Loriot in the catalogue. Loriot organized the exhibit by collections and period, showing the influences of Punk, New Wave, gender politics and mass media, particularly TV, in

[47] Eric Wilson, "McQueen: The Final Count," *The New York Times* , August 8, 2011. Accessed April 27, 2015. http://runway.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/08/08/mcqueen-the-final-count/

[48] Eric Wilson, "Thierry-Maxime Loriot, Curator of the Jean Paul Gaultier Exhibition ," *The New York Times* , October 16, 2013. Accessed April 27, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/17/fashion/thierry-maxime-loriot-curator-of-the-jean-paul-gaultier-exhibition.html

Gaultier's work.[49] The show made couture available to a large audience and stressed the importance of looking at fashions without the mediation of photography or video. In doing so, the exhibit equated the direct contemplation of couture to that of a work of art. The show has been successfully received by diverse audiences and traveled from Montreal to Dallas, San Francisco, Madrid, Rotterdam, Stockholm, Brooklyn and London.

Paris Haute Couture, which opened at Hôtel de Ville, Paris, investigated couture and the life of ateliers.[50] The exhibit taught to appreciate couture techniques and highlighted the unfettered freedom that couturiers had in the past.[51] Curator Olivier Saillard devoted the main sections to contrasting the past and present of the highest form of fashion. For instance, a beaded Scheherazade gown by John Galliano for Dior (1998) was placed along with an ensemble by Poiret (1923).[52] Saillard also curated, *Alaïa*, fashion designer Azzedine Alaïa's retrospective, which opened in the Museé Galliera's renovated galleries in September. The exhibition showcased seventy iconic dresses on invisible, headless mannequins enhancing Alaïa's sculptural and austere silhouettes. [53] Like Madeleine Vionnet, Cristóbal Balenciaga, Charles James and Madame Gres, Alaïa is known as the "architect of dress."[54]

Interestingly, Saillard has explored innovative forms of presenting couture. In *The Eternity Dress*, a performance about the art of dressmaking, Saillard played the role of couturier (he took measurement and cut patterns); while actress Tilda Swinton, the role of model-muse

[49] Martha Scwedendener, "Originator of the Man-Skirt and Corset Revivals," *The New York Times* , November 7, 2013. Accessed April 27, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/08/arts/design/jean-paul-gaultier-from-the-sidewalk-to-the-catwalk.html

[50] Cathy Horyn, "Holding Hands Across the Years," *The New York Times* , February 2013, 2013. Accessed April 27, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/28/fashion/exhibition-in-paris-links-couture-across-the-years.html

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Miles Socha, "Azzedine Alaïa Retrospective Opens in Paris ," *WWD* , September 25, 2013.

[54] Ibid.

(she even took a moment to sew the dress on herself, recited a list of collar styles in French and finally draped herself in furs and velvet). Swinton's completed outfit, a long sleeve black dress with open back, synthesized a century of fashion from Paul Poiret to Comme de Garçon. Reinforcing the historic references to fashion, Swinton stroke a series of poses reminiscent of (among others), the houses of Chanel, Dior, and YSL. *The Eternity Dress* transformed simple materials, (chalk and tape); and elevated them to a new form of art, which poetically revealed the artistry involved in couture.

Back in New York*, Front Row* (Museum of the Chinese in America) traced the meteoric rise of Chinese Americans in fashion.[55] Young designers such as Jason Wu, who made Michelle Obama's first inaugural gown in 2009, and Alexander Wang, named creative director of Balenciaga in 2012; were featured with pioneers such as Vera Wang, Anna Sui and Yeohlee Teng.[56] Similarly, from a multicultural perspective, *Stephen Burrows: When Fashion Danced*, (Museum of the City of New York) paid homage to Burrows's career; the first Afro-American designer to gain international recognition. Burrows created body conscious dresses in vibrant colors and metallic fabrics. He received a Fashion Coty award (1974) and participated in the historic Battle of Versailles fashion show (1973), the event that confronted French and American fashion designers. Burrows along with Oscar de la Renta, Anne Klein, Halston and Bill Blass stole the show by including an unprecedented number of Afro-American models clad in innovative designs. As not many pieces of Burrow's early collections exist—they either wore

[55] Eric Wilson, "Documenting a Growing Force in Fashion ," *The New York Times* , April 25, 2013: E2. Accessed April 27, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/25/fashion/exhibitions-highlight-range-of-asian-american-designers.html

[56] *Front Row* considered the social and cultural forces that triggered the development of these designers' careers, namely: the prominent number of Chinese manufacturers working in the Fashion District, the garment production subcontracting to Chinese industries, and the growth of New York based fashion companies centered on the creative dimension of fashion rather than the production of cloths. See, Ping, Mary. *Front Row: Chinese American Designers.* http://www.mocanyc.org/exhibitions/front_row_chinese_american_designers

out or were stolen—illustrations and photos helped to recreate the lost ensembles in the exhibition.

Two exhibitions examined the relationship between margins and institutions from a fashion point of view in 2013. *Queer Style: From the Closet to the Catwalk,* curated by Valerie Steele and Fred Denis, explored the LGBTQ subculture's major impact on fashion, from the costumes of 'mollies' and 'macaronis,' who cross-dressed to socialize in the eighteenth century; to the wedding suits and gowns worn by gay couples in New York in the present. The breaking point of the show was the AIDS section exhibiting T-shirts with political slogans.[57] On the other hand, *Punk: Chaos to Couture*, held at the Met, inquired the influence of punk on mainstream fashion. Punk's democracy sharply contrasts to fashion's autocracy, but the show explained how designers continue to borrow punk's visual symbols. *Punk Chaos to Couture* reflected upon the materials (leather), techniques (D.I.Y) and embellishments (safety pins, razor blades, studs) associated with the anti-establishment style, and featured ensembles, among others, of Ann Demeulemeester, Martin Margiela and Rodarte.

Folk Couture was inspired by these exhibitions–which were mostly thematic, centered on both garment construction, and designer's careers, and displayed existing fashions. However, unlike these shows, *Folk Couture* explored the relationship between fashion and folk art by commissioning original pieces of couture inspired in the American Folk Art Museum's collection.

[57] Suzy Menkes, "Out of the Closet," *The New York Times* , September 11, 2013. Accessed April 27, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/12/fashion/out-of-the-closet-queer-fashion-exhibit.html

American Folk Art

Folk art has been created in a wide variety of media, employing non-traditional techniques and unconventional materials that defy academic categorizations. As a genuine expression of human creativity, the themes of folk art reverberate around universal experiences. Folk artists have quintessentially contributed to the American tradition of image making along with the art made by ethnic and gender minorities. The perception of folk art in America has dramatically changed in the last decades due to the explosion of collectors and galleries devoted to the subject. Moreover, the decline of modernism with the collapsing of distinction between high and low culture and the raise of cultural anthropology have all helped to both frame and elevate the cultural status of folk art. But although Folk Art collectors and scholars have been instrumental in generating discourses about the artworks, the concept of folk art is still debated in academia. How and why American folk art is different from (just simply) art?

Evolution of American Folk Art

Folk and native art fascinated some European artists of the early twentieth century. For instance, Paul Gauguin (1848-1903) referenced in his paintings folk sculptures of Brittany and the vernacular art of Polynesia in his search for an immaculate culture free of Western mores.[58] African and Oceanic tribal mask, sculptures, costumes and magical objects attracted Pablo

[58] See Star Figura, *Gauguin Metamorphoses* (New York : MoMA, 2014).

Picasso (1881-1973),[59] who saw in this type of art a magical and irrational element that salon painting had lost–Picasso wanted to come back to the roots of creation and art.

Like the eighteenth-century fashion for *chinoiserie* (Chinese porcelain) and the nineteenth-century trend for North Africa and the Middle East, exotism returned to modern Europe in the early twentieth century in the form of Primitivism. These avant-garde trends usually followed historic conquest (Napoleonic campaign in Egypt in 1789, and the opening of Japan to foreign trend in 1853) and colonial byways (French artists tended to move to French colonies). As Edward Said affirmed, Asia and Africa constituted 'imaginary geographies' for artists who projected psychological ambivalence and political ambitions on these exotic geographies.[60] Orientalists depicted the Middle East as both a cradle of civilization but also as corrupt and feminine, in need of rules; meanwhile, Japan was seen through Western conventions of representations as old innocent landscapes stamped in prints, fans and screens. Likewise, primitivism projected a primordial origin divided into pastoral or noble savage (mostly the eroticism of tropical Oceania) and the ignoble savage (usually connected with the 'sinful' sexuality of Africa). These modernist artists attempted to defy European conventions, which they felt as repressive; and, in turn, idealized the primitive as an exotic place where style and self could be substantially transform. Primitivism became a fantasy related to a returning to origin, nature, and liberation of sexuality; ideas it projected in tribal cultures of Oceania and Africa. This fantasy-construction had effects on the endeavor of European imperialism and the local project of the artistic avant-garde. As art historians Hal Foster has stated, "these primitivist *soujourns* outside Western art were strategic: they appeared to offer a way not only to exceed old academic conventions of art but also to trump recent avant-garde styles (e.g. Realism,

[59] See, Douglas C. McGill, "What Does Modern Art Owe to the Primitives? ," *The New York Times* , Spetember 23, 1984.

[60] Said quoted in Half Foster, "1903," in *Art Since 1900. Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* , 64-69 (New York , 2004). 66

Impressionism, neo-impressionism) that were deemed to be too concerned with strictly modern subjects or purely perceptual problems."[61]

In the United States, modern artists who wanted to develop a nationalistic art were among the first, to look at the nineteenth and eighteenth-century folk art, and exhibited their own works along with modern European paintings and indigenous sculptures. Alfred Stieglitz exhibited African art his gallery in 1914, for example. Museums immediately absorbed the new trend, and in the early 1930s, art historian and curator Holger Cahill (1887-1960) organized two exhibitions of folk art at the Newark Museum: *American Primitives: An Exhibit of the Paintings of Nineteenth-Century Folk Artists* and *American Folk Sculptures: The Work of Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century Craftsmen.*

These two exhibitions presented paintings and objects made by artisans and self-trained artists that Cahill himself bought on trips to New England, Pennsylvania and Maryland.[62] Cahill also curated the influential show *The Art of the Common Man in America 1750-1900*, which opened at MoMA in 1937. The exhibition featured Abby Aldrich Rockefeller's folk art collection that Cahill and Edith Halpert (1900-1970) —the owner of Downtown Gallery and co-founder with Cahill of the American Folk Art Gallery in NYC—personally assembled. [63] *The Art of the Common Man in America* installed folk art as part of the artistic cannon and discussed the role of craftsmen and amateurs in the development of American Art History. Cahill identified New England and Pennsylvania as the major center of folk art production; and, the seventeenth

[61] Ibid.

[62] Wendy Moonan, "ANTIQUES. Collectors See a Flury of Folk Art," *The New York Times* , February 16, 2001.
[63] Ibid.

and nineteenth century as the great period of folk art.[64] His exhibition essay is considered the standard for all subsequent writings in the field.[65]

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, several publications helped to establish interest in contemporary folk art. Robert Goldwater's *The Primitive in Modern Painting* (1938) clarified the term primitive itself and its influence in modern art; and differentiated what it was truly archaic from the modern art based on aboriginal objects. Art dealer Sidney Janis (1896-1989) brought the 'primitive' concept up to date in his book *They Taught Themselves* (1942), a critical and biographical studies of thirty self-taught American painters from Joseph Pickett (1848-1918) [to Horace Pippin (1888-1946).[66] In *American Primitive Painting* (1942) arts patron and collector Jean Lipman dealt with one of the American identity characteristics in the intuitive work of the nineteenth-century primitives. [67]

In the 1950s, American folk art was considered separated from modern art. Abstract expressionist believed folk art to be strongly centered on themes, while in contrast modern art might deal just with painting itself (that is, unconcerned with narratives). The public was skeptical about avant-garde art, however, and abstract expressionism interested few collectors. Perhaps, for this reason, some self-trained painters, such as Grandma Moses (1860-1961), began to gain national and international recognition.

One of the key figures in the study and promotion of folk art was Collector Herbert W. Hemphill (1928-1998), who was appointed first official curator of the American Folk Art

[64] *The New York Times* , "Miscellaneous Brief Reviews. Folk Art in America," March 26, 1933.

[65] Moonan: 2001

[66] Picket painted the landscapes of New Hope, Pennsylvania with a solid sense of color and design. Flat fields of colors are prominent in his work. Pippin's work gravitated toward the topic of slavery. His subjects are among others, childhood memories, war experiences (he served infantry in WWII, where he lost the use of his right hand) and biblical themes.

[67] Christopher Lazare, "Four Studies of Painters and Painting," *The New York Times* , January 23, 1944. Accessed, April 27, 2015. http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1944/01/23/88593678.html

Museum in 1964. [68] Hemphill exhibition's *Twentieth-Century American Folk Art and Artists* and accompanying book, strongly contributed to legitimate the work of contemporary autodidact artists. Hemphill's exhibition build up on the tradition of Cahill and Janis, who had argued that 20th c. self-taught painters continued a lineage established by anonymous artists in seventeenth-century New England. The show included unconventional materials (such as a neon fish trade sign) and demonstrated that contemporary folk art had aesthetic merit.

Hemphill's curiosity could also be seen in two provocative exhibitions: *Tattoo* (1971) which displayed historical Japanese tattoo sketches, tattoo designs, advertisements, and even, a reconstructed early-twentieth-century tattoo parlor; and *Occult* (1973) which assembled palm readers' trade signs, an electric fortune-telling machine, phrenological heads, and voodoo dolls. *Tattoo* and *Occult* displayed objects that were far beyond the conventional definition of folk art, and for this reason conservative critics and collectors received the shows with skepticism. However, the exhibitions broke records of attendance (twelve thousand people visited *Occult*), expanded the boundaries of folk art, and changed the museum's image as something more than "old fusty stuff from grandma's attic." [69]

A similar attempt to challenge aesthetic definitions is found in a group of artists called The Chicago Imagists, who gathered around the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, began collecting contemporary American folk art in the 1960s and 1970s. In response to the dominance of New York City art scene, The Chicago Imagists created grotesque and fantastical artworks inspired by surrealism, exotic cultures and urban folk art. They promoted the works of, among

[68] In his exhibitions, Hemphill usually recreated the baroque aesthetic of his own apartment—he lived in an uptown brownstone flat packed with more than two hundred objects. Half of his collection was devoted to folk art. See, Lynda Roscoe Hartigan, *Made with Passion* (National Musuem of American Art; Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990).

[69] Hemphill quoted in Hartigan, 1990:34.

others, visionary artist Joseph Yoakum (1889-1972) who painted landscapes inspired by his dreams and Mexican immigrant Martin Ramírez (1895-1963) who diagnosed with schizophrenia began drawing in a mental hospital in Sacramento. Catholic *Vírgenes*, horseback riders and tunnels along with obsessive concentric lines that take the form of landscapes, amphitheaters or a simply motif proliferated in Ramirez's work .

In the eighties, Soho artists referenced indigenous and outsider art in sharp contrast to conceptual and minimal art. Folk traditions and aboriginal iconography also inspired paintings and multimedia assemblages. In the 1990s exhibitions and publications devoted to the self-trained artist continued to flourish. The show *Made with Passion: The Hemphill Folk Art Collection* held at the National Museum of American Art (1990) was notably remarkable in that it highlighted the inclusiveness and diversity of folk art. [70] "Folk Art is an elaboration, a metamorphosis of social and personal expression, from decorating a functional object to reinterpreting popular idioms, contemporary mores or discarded objects, " curator Linda Hartigan stated in the exhibition catalogue.[71] Hartigan contended that folk art taught "to appreciate the different, the variegated; and it is a matter of diversity, of being open to see different objects and realities."[72]

Also organized around a private collection, *Driven to Create; The Anthony Petullo Collection of Self-Taught Artists and Outsider Art* (Milwaukee Art Museum, 1993) made visible similarities between the work of folk and trained artists. For instance, the drawings of

[70] According to influential critic Roberta Smith, the show vociferously argued the various qualities attributed to folk art, " High art versus low art, or kitsch, or craft? Major versus minor? Skillful finish or mastery of forms versus intuitively slapped-together crudeness? Every point of view has a voice here." Roberta Smith, "Art View. Operating in the Gap Betwen Art and Not Art. ," *The New York Times* , December 23, 1990. Accessed April 27, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/1990/12/23/arts/art-view-operating-in-the-gap-between-art-and-not-art.html

[71] Hartigan: 70.

[72] Ibid.

Rosemarie Koczy (1939-2007)—which deal with her experience as a Holocaust survivor— was considered as sharing a likeness with art made by the self-taught. However, Koczy did receive academic training.[73] Finally, both The American Visionary Museum, created in 1995 in Baltimore and devoted to visionary and outsider art; and John Maizels's book *Raw Creation: Outsider Art and Beyond* (1986) have contextualized the work of folk creators in the international circuit.

Definition of American Folk Art

Originally regarded as primitive and simplistic, and later, as sophisticated and refined, the definition of folk art has undergone significant transformations. For instance Holger Cahill, the director of MoMA in 1932, defined folk art as an "expression of the common people, made by them and intended for their use and enjoyment."[74] This definition, which dominated for decades, was revisited in the 1970s when magazines such as *Art in America* and *Antiques* attempted to reconcile notions of craftsmanship with more contemporary ideas centered on the aesthetic merits of folk art. However, the differences compounded at that time. Art historians considered folk art a new artistic category, while folklorist regarded folk art as material culture and emphasized the cultural context where folk art was produced. The different perspectives regarding the appreciation of folk art lead to a debate concerned with the definitions, descriptions, and spaces of exhibition.

[73] See Holland Cotter, "Review/Art. Visions of Outsiders and the Self-defined ," *The New York Times* , October 29, 1993. Accessed April 27, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/1993/10/29/arts/review-art-visions-of-outsiders-and-the-self-defined.html

[74] Cahill quoted in Elizabeth Manley Delacruz, "Outside In: Deliberations on American Contemporary Folk Art ," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 34, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 77-86. 81.

Folk art is generally described in the literature as "art forms created by self-trained artists who, working with ordinary and recycled materials and mostly outside of the art-world establishment, create functional and nonfunctional objects and environments for themselves or for members of their immediate social group." [75] The widely accepted definition has raised issues, however. Some contemporary folk artists work inside the art circuit and are successful creators whose work is exhibited in museums, art fairs, and galleries. In turn, their success has dramatically changed the reasons and the way they create art. [76] For instance, some contemporary folk artists produce pieces targeted to a specific market. Moreover, the hyper connectivity of modern society makes untenable the notion of isolation; highly valued in the case of the art made by the self- trained. Some characteristics of self-taught art are its strong inventiveness, the lack of interest in representing reality (as it is conveyed by realistic art), and the representation of "visions" in the artworks. [77] Unlike 'professional artists,' self-trained artists do not attempt to create the 'new art movement' and, therefore, they potentially have uninhibited freedom.[78]

American folk art has been linked to three concepts: art brut, outsider art, and art made by the self-trained. Influenced by art historian and psychiatry Hans Prinzhorn's book *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*: *A contribution to the Psychology and Psychopathology of Configuration* (1922),[79]

[75] Ibid. 81

[76] ibid. 82

[77] Anthony Petullo, "A Collector's Perspective." Accessed April 23, 2015. www.petulloartcollection.org/the_collection/collectors_perspective.cfm.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Trained as an art historian, Hans Prinzhorn turned to psychiatry and psychoanalysis, and worked in the Heidelberg Psychiatric Clinic beginning in 1915, where he collected and studied the work of his schizophrenic patients. *Artistry of the Mentally Ill* is composed of 187 paintings and drawings, a theoretical section, a part dealing with schizophrenic masters and a one analytic chapter with results and problems. Prinzhorn seemed to be interested in expressionist art, and the psychology of expression—his art history and philosophical model testify to these two inclinations. The six 'drives' he identified were, drives to expression, play, ornamental elaboration, patterned order, obsessive copying, and symbolic systems. The interaction of these drives articulated the images he studied. Yet here as Half Foster noted, seemed to be a contradiction as drives toward play

French painter Jean Dubuffet defined *art brut* as the artistic production created outside the aesthetic cannon. Dubuffet conceived his own art—mostly made with oil paint thickened with sand, tar or straw—as free of intellectual concerns.[80] Dubuffet collected, among others, the work of artists Aloïse Carbaz (1886-1964) who diagnosed with schizophrenia, painted voluptuous women with long hair surrounded by men dressed up in uniforms; and, Adolf Wölfli (1864-1930) who suffered from psychosis—for instance, Wölfli filled every empty space of his images with complex figures, and, in some cases, with music notations that the artist performed with a paper trumpet.

During the 1930s and 1940s Dubuffet corresponded with doctors and visited mental institutions in Switzerland. The encounter with the psychotic art collection of Geneva psychiatrist Charles Ladane prompted the artist to collect tribal, naïve and folk art. Dubuffet baptized his holding under the rubric of 'art brut.' According to Dubuffet, 'art brut' means "'crude' or 'raw' as opposed to 'refined' or 'cultural.'"[81] In his seminal text *Art Brut Preferred to Cultural Art* Dubuffet wrote that art brut was composed of:

> Those works produced by persons unscathed by artistic culture, where mimicry play little or no part (contrary to the activities of intellectuals). These artists derive everything—subjects, choice of materials, means of transpositions, rhythms, styles of writing, etc.—from their own depths, and not from the conceptions of classical or fashionable art. We are witness here to a completely

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and expression suggests an individual open to the world, whereas those of compulsive ordering or copying evoke subjectivity in 'rigid defense to the world.' See, Half Foster, "1922" in *Art Since 1900. Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*, 180-184 (New York : Thames & Hudson , 2004) 180. Although Prinshorn proposed the drives toward play and ornament as correctives to the latter; he recognized the difference between artists and schizophrenic. He wrote, "The loneliest artist still remains in contact with reality…The schizophrenic, on the other hand, is detached from humanity, and by definition is neither willing nor able to reestablish contact with it" (Ibid. 181). The art made by the insane feature a 'solipsism' that exceeds the boundaries of psychotics alienations, which constitutes the essence of 'schizophrenic configurations.' Early modernists used this treatise to make connections with the artistic avant-garde; and later, enemies of modernism used the book to attack the work of Klee associated with the mad in the infamously Nazi exhibition "Entartete Kunts" ("Degenerate Art") (Ibid. 180)

[80] Ibid. 81

[81] Dubuffet quoted in Half Foster, "1946," in *Art Since 1900. Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* , 337-342 (New York : Thames & Hudson , 2004) 339.

> pure artistic operation; raw, brute, and entirely reinvented in all of its phases solely by means of the artists' own impulses.[82]

In 1946, Dubuffet exhibited his iconic paintings called "haute pâtes," which, in turn, paved the way for a new scatological trend in postwar French art that would be known as *informel*. In the exhibition catalogue, Dubuffet wrote that any gift preceded the making of these paintings; he just worked on them with fingers and spoons. Furthermore, although he denied any attempt to provoke his audience, he appropriated confrontational tactics of early modernism and took them even further in paintings dreamed as made just of "monochromatic mud." [83] The paintings featured brown and grey hues and figures incised on thick impastos.

On the other hand, the term "outsider art" became popular in the 1980s with Roger Cardinal's book *Outsider Art*. [84] This flexible term embraces not only the art produced in the context of mental dysfunction but also the works made by individuals who recoil at conventional art norms. As Cardinal said "Outsider art is an art of unexpected and often bewildering distinctiveness, and its outstanding exemplars tend to conjure up imagined private worlds, completely satisfying to their creator yet some remote from our normal experience as to appear alien and rebarbative." [85]

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[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid.

[84] The text proper refers to *art brut* but the term outsider art was used in the cover of the book as the editor was fearful that *art brut* might not go well with English readers. See Roger Cardinal, "Outsider Art and the Austic Creator ," *Philosophical Transactions: Biological Sciences* 364, no. 1522 (May 2009): 1459-1466. 1459

[85] Ibid. 1460.

Although, Cardinal's concept of outsider art has been rejected because it implies ideas of marginality, it is still used to describe the work of many folk artists who paradoxically are successful and well established in the mainstream art scene.

Another term related to folk art is self-trained artist. Coined by Sidney Janis, the term refers to the work made by creators who have received little or none artistic training. It has been indistinctly applied to artists such as Grandma Mosses and Bill Traylor. Moses often painted landscapes—graphic, semiabstract representations of mountains, houses, and meadows inhabited by human figures that resemble child art. [86] Her work drew public attention after the Depression when the nation was looking for a stabilizing image to build on. Subsequently, she became an icon of patriotism during WW II. Moses's work was profusely reproduced in cards, dishes and curtains. The artist gained fame and recognition; dressed in antique style, she posed with film starts and politicians for magazines and newspapers. Friend of illustrator Norman Rockwell, both artists quintessentially represented the American art for the general public. In contrast, Traylor, born a slave in Alabama, worked as a laborer and lived in the street, sometimes sleeping in a funeral parlor's storage. Traylor mainly depicted geometric silhouettes inspired, with few exceptions, by black people in movement— they dance, argue and walk; and animals such as dogs, birds and horses. He worked completely outside art history cannon, and; paradoxically today his works are counted among the most relevant pieces of modern art .

As this section has explained, folk art encompasses numerous concepts and techniques, but, in essence, it is any expression created by a self-trained artist. American Folk Art Museum chief curator Stacy C. Hollander declared in an interview, "Folk art isn't coming out from a

[86] See Holland Cotter, "The Fenimore Art Museum Reconsiders ans American Idol Named Mostly, Grandma Moses," *The New York Times* , August 4, 2006. Accessed April 27, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/04/arts/design/04mose.html

single ideology, a single artistic community or group of artists adhering to a specific philosophy." [87] A key characteristic of folk art is the power of the hand-made. According to Hollander, "In every age, when there's some technological explosion, there's always a need for an antidote, or something that reminds people of their humanity and the touch of the hand."[88] Interestingly, young artists looking for hand-made objects are strongly interested in folk art. Hollander declared, " In our society with things moving so quickly, the pressure is even greater to be the next thing, rather than allowing them [artists] to delve and explore something and see where it takes them over a year or even a lifetime of work,"[89] Folk art does not respond to a social pressure: it is the output of a long hand-made process sparked by an individual spirit.[90]

American folk art evolved from the craftsmanship of European colonizers who brought techniques and aesthetics to the new land.[91] They adapted their traditions to the needs, materials, and temporalities; and forged the objects today considered as the first folk art manifestations. Folk art is the repository of cultural values and a material expression of national identity—a flexible materiality shaped by the evolution of social structure through time.[92] In postindustrial society, folk art took the form of decorative expressions and the art created by the self-trained—either in the domesticity of the new modern house or in the isolation and confinement of hospitals and mental asylums.[93] In the latter case, folk art may become a prophetic vision or even

[87] Chappell Ellison, "The Problem with Folk Art," *www.etsy.com*, Oct. 24, 2012. Accessed, April 21, 2015. http: www.etsy.com/blog/en/2012/the-problem-with-folk-art/

[88] Ibid.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Stacy C. Hollander and Brook D. Anderson, "American Anthem: Masterworks from the American Folk Art Museum. Two Perspectives.," *Folk Art* (American Folk Art Museum) 27, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 34-44.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Stacy C. Hollander and Brooke David Anderson, "Folk Art Revelaed ," *Folk Art* 30, no. 1 (Spring 2005);29-37.

hallucination. This vision or image, which is at the center of the artistic production, is the element that differentiates folk art from contemporary art.[94] But at the same time, the visionary component of folk art unifies all artistic praxes—including fashion.

Folk Art and Fashion

Both fashion (associated with superficiality, the decorative and the feminine in western societies) and art made by the self-trained (not preoccupied with conceptual discourses or art movements) have been peripheral to mainstream narratives of art. This section explores diverse ideas related to how folk art and fashion have been constructed as the 'other' of high art by drawing from the perspective of art and fashion historians as well as art critics. It also argues that the marginal position that folk art and fashion have occupied is changing in the twenty-first century as these two 'outsiders' are being given central stage in the current cultural debate.

"The question of fashion is not a fashionable one among intellectuals", Gilles Lipovestky wrote in his seminal book *The Empire of Fashion*.[95] Although fashion has 'invaded' new fields and involved people of all ages and classes, fashion failed, for many decades, to reach intellectuals. "Fashion is celebrated in museums but it has virtually no place in theoretical inquires of our thinkers," Lipovesky stated.[96] Because fashion was regarded as an inferior

[94] See, Massimiliano Gioni, "Is everything in My Mind?," in *55th International Art Exhibition* , ed. Massimiliano Gioni (Marsilio Editori spa, 2013).pp.23-28. 23.

[95] Gilles Lipovetsky, *The Empire of Fashion: Dressing Modern Democracy* (Princeton, New Jersey : Princeton University Press , 1994).3.

[96] Ibid.

domain—it was believed that fashion lacked social or ontological value; fashion was considered unproblematic and undeserving of investigation. As fashion was considered a superficial activity (fashion is preoccupied with appearance) it seemed to resist conceptual analysis. Detractors of fashion invoke fashion to punish it, to exemplify human stupidity or to denounce the evil essence of the fashion business.[97]

Traditional views considered that art was serious because it dealt with the mind, while fashion was frivolous since it was concerned with superficies, the body and sexuality and also associated with women, femininity and frivolity. Besides this mind/body divide, the 'eternal' component of art (art is meant to last forever) was regarded as opposed to the shifting characteristic of fashion (it changes seasonally). Art is usually defined as a restricted field of high cultural production, which includes painting, sculpture, and music. In contrast, fashion is viewed primarily as an industry with a creative edge, and as part of daily life. As fashion historian Valerie Steele said, " Historically, fashion has tended to be dismissed as superficial, ephemeral, and material, By contrast, art has been valorized as significant form, eternally beautiful, and spiritual nature."[98] Although these ideas have been questioned in recent decades, they still heavily influenced the perception of fashion and art. As fashion is essentially change, it is viewed as lacking the characteristics of truth and ideal beauty associated with elite art. Although fashion does feature an artistic component, it is inherently understood as commodity, while art is regarded as a higher aesthetic field. Indeed, art is also a commodity but it is perceived as 'transcending' its commercial side.[99] The marginal position of fashion is also

[97] Ibid.

[98] Valerie Steele, "Fashion ," in *Fashion and Art* , 13-27 (London; New York : Berg , 2012). 13.

[99] Ibid.

related to the fact that fashion is worn on the body, which causes it to be linked to corporality and sexuality. Moreover, fashion has also been primarily linked to femininity even when men wore clothing as extravagant as those of their female counterparts in the past. Robert Radford observed that fashion has always been defined as art's other because it "conflicts absolutely with those concepts of permanence, truth and authenticity, and is regarded as being particularly dangerous when it insidiously enter the citadels of art...as though virginal art were at constant risk of defilement."[100]

On the other hand, according to art historian Ann Hollander clothing as 'shifting ephemera on the surface of life' is often considered trivial and instead intellectuals concentrate on "the seriousness of what [clothes] mean."[101] Both psychologists and sociologists have acknowledged the importance of clothing, but Hollander said, "unlike art and sex dress usually fails to qualify as serious *itself*."[102] To be serious about clothing is to center the attention on the meaning that garments have in relation to something else. "But," Hollander argued, "just as with art, it is in their specific aspect that clothes have their power."[103] Hollander stated that analyzing dress from the perspectives of economic or politic history, or from the point of view of the history of technology or social behavior was critical to understand how those realms inflected the symbolic meanings of dress. However, Hollander pointed out "to do only this, is to limit dress to the status of an elevated craft, as if it had the same aesthetic scope as pottery, tapestry, or furnishings."[104] A garment might be considered as an aesthetic and functional object sharing a

[100] Radford quoted in Steele, 2013: 14.

[101] Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes* (Berkley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 1993).xv.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Ibid.

[104] ibid. xiv

likeness with a car, a house or a teapot; and mirror the taste and attitudes of a particular culture. Hollander professed that "a dress, like a Chinese bronze […] would be seen as an accomplishment in the most refined realm of design, but this view is insufficient for Western dress."[105] Hollander's contention is that the primary function of Western dress is "to contribute to the making of a self-conscious individualized image linked to all other imaginative and idealized visualizations of the human body."[106] From this point of view, a garment "has more connection with the history of pictures than with any household objects or vehicles of its own moment–it is more like a Rubens than like a chair." [107]

In *Mind in Matter* Jules David Prown stated that man's increasing understanding and mastery of the physical environment characterized the conception of Western history. In other words, the civilization process was achieved through the "progressive triumph of the mind over matter." [108] The development of human history has confirmed that intellectual elements are regarded as superior to material things. Prown elaborated, "This has lead inevitably to a hierarchical ordering that informs our apprehension and judgment of human activities and experiences."[109] For example, philosophy, an abstract subject; is more highly regarded as engineering, a concrete, practical activity. In the realm of art the same scheme is replicated. Since the Renaissance, a divide was made between works of art, which involve mental activity; and, craft, which are products of greater physical work. This hierarchy continued during the eighteenth century, where separation of arts from crafts placed tailoring very much in the latter

[105] Ibid.

[106] Ibid.

[107] Ibid.

[108] Jules David Prown, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Mehtod," *Winterthur Portafolio* 17, no. 1 (Spring 1982): 1-19. 2.

[109] Ibid.

category. As philosopher Lars Svendsen stated, “Clothes were placed in an extra-artistic sphere– where for the most part they have remained.”[110]

As artifacts offer a wider comprehension of culture, many folk scholars have centered on the realm of material culture to study vernacular objects. The study of folk art requires significant amount of scholarly innovation because these type of art defies scholarly tradition and experience, which often center on fine arts. Yet the diversity of folk art, which has been made with unorthodox techniques and materials unfolds relevant cultural aspects that are not detectable in ‘elite’ art expressions. According to folk curator Stacy Hollander, the relevant cultural clues that American folk art holds became elusive when the pieces are removed from the context of their production. However, this has been the form folk art has been presented and perceived for the better part of the twentieth century, when “a museum model was applied to organize material that was then outside the art historical mainstream.”[111] Hollander contends that in the early twentieth century, exhibitions “were arranged by fine arts, or divided into thematic categories such as work, play, landscape and home.”[112] This ‘useful and reliable framework’ helped to appreciate the development of form with in each medium and even to understand folk art’s reflection of human concerns. Yet, Hollander added, “ the artworks were largely divorced from their own history and the myriad forces that imbued them with deeper meanings.”[113]

Although the interest and scholarship on folk art has increased, “the isolation of folk art

[110] Lars Svendsen, *Fashion: A Philosophy* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006). 90.

[111] Stacy C. Hollander, "Synchronicity. Temporal Aesthetics in American Folk Art ," in *American Anthem: Master Works from the American Folk Art Museum* , 15-17 (New York : American Folk Art Museum , 2001). 15.

[112] Ibid.

[113] Ibid.

from academic art is still the norm," Roberta Smith wrote in the New York Times.[114] Smith stated that in the National Gallery of Art in Washington or the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, "folk art is largely relegated to separate quarters and granted only a fraction of the wall-space."[115] Smith professed that: "Whatever the rationale for this segregation, it cannot help conveying a sense that folk art is marginal or inferior."[116] Smith contended that the strength of folk art, 'lies not in its adherence to reality but in its *enlivening deviations* from it."[117] She added that the "so called naïve efforts convey the raw desire for art that prevailed in the early years of [America], when museums and art academies were virtually non-existent. They exemplified an insistent sense of American can-do, the instinctive pursuit of art and, in a way, happiness."[118] Smith argued that the examples for the integrative approach to folk art she proposed—a radical one that would place " equals numbers of folk art and academic works in shared galleries—"[119] are found in the modern art galleries of MoMA where, for instance, the work of self-trained artists such Henry Rousseau hangs along with paintings by modern artists. The same integrated position can be found at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where Horace Pippin's work is exhibited with those of early American Modernists such as Georgia O'Keefe. The result of this integration is visual richness; a "by-product of flouting the boundaries."[120] According to Smith, some early and contemporary folk creators are among the greatest American artists and although the work is admired, it is often done with an "almost kind of guilty pleasure, even if their works

[114] Roberta Smith, "Curator, Tear Down These Walls ," *The New York Times* , Janurary 31, 2013. Accessed April, 20, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/03/arts/design/american-folk-vs-academic-art.html?_r=0

[115] Ibid.

[116] Ibid.

[117] Ibid.

[118] Ibid.

[119] Ibid.

[120] Ibid.

demands a rewriting of the twentieth-century cannon."[121]

Although constructed as the 'other' of high art, both fashion and folk art have been placed at the center of the cultural debate in the last decades. The blockbuster exhibition *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which is considered crucial in the current phenomena of showing fashions in art museums, demonstrated the relevance of fashion in contemporary culture. *Savage Beauty* presented approximately one hundred ensembles and objects in an innovative display that recreated McQueen's runway shows. Likewise, folk art has recently become more accepted in the contemporary art sphere. In 2013, curator Massimiliano Gionni (b. 1973) included a work called the *Palazzo Enciclopledico*, (The Encyclopedic Palace) by the self-taught artist Marino Auriti (1891-1980) as the centerpiece of the 55th Venice Biennale. *Palazzo Enciclopedico* is an architectural model crafted out of wood, plastic, metal, hair combs and model kit parts. The monumental structure, which stands at 136 stories, aimed to "hold all the works of man in whatever field […] from the wheel to the satellite."[122] Ultimately, in placing contemporary pieces made by professional artists that "looked" like folk art alongside "real" art made by self-trained artists, according to Gionni the biennale "blur[red] the line between professional artists and amateurs, insiders and outsiders, reuniting artworks with other forms of figurative expressions–both to release art from the prison of its supposed autonomy and to remind us of its capacity to express a vision of the world." [123]

It is in the spirit of such developments that the exhibition *Folk Couture* operated. By echoing the move of fashion and folk art from "periphery to center" in contemporary cultural

[121] Ibid.

[122] Gioni, 2013: 23

[123] Ibid.

practices, and exploring the boundaries between artistic disciplines, *Folk Couture* exhibited together two outsiders of mainstream art, fashion and folk art.

Chapter II

The Selection of Artworks and Designers for the exhibition *Folk Couture*

Artworks

For the exhibition *Folk Couture* ninety-six works were selected from the American Folk Art Museum's collection and offered as inspiration to the participating designers. This selection, made with significant impute of American Folk Art Museum chief curator Stacy C. Hollander, was organized around three categories: 1) paintings depicting fashions; 2) artworks made with the material of fashion (cloth and thread); and 3) functional objects that like garments are now considered art because of their aesthetic value and their cultural impact. These categories are explained by using artworks included in the selection. From this selection, the designers invited to the exhibition Folk Couture picked out twenty-three artworks, which served as inspiration for their new designs.

Several early American portraits depicting historic fashions in the museum's holdings were chosen as a way to mirror the historical connections between fashion and folk art. For instance, one of the paintings selected entitled *Lady in Red Sofa* (attributed to John S. Blunt, 1831) represents a young woman clad on a fashionable black silk gown with leg-of-mutton sleeves (puffed at the shoulders and skintight at the arms)[1] [Fig. 1]. As can be seen in this portrait, the 1830's silhouette grew wider at the shoulders; and the waistline relocated under the rib cage, to achieve the hourglass figure that was in trend at that time. The gown depicted in this

[1] Lee Kogan, "Lady on Red Sofa," in *American Anthem. Masterworks from the American Folk Art Museum* , 326 (New York : American Folk Art Museum , 2001).

painting sharply contrasts with the high waist plain dresses inspired by Greek and Roman tunics wore in the early-nineteenth century. [2] The sitter's elaborated hairdo– flat on top, parted in the center and looped with short curls on both sides "to frame a Madonna oval face"–demonstrated that the woman was aware of the latest trend. [3] As jewelry was profusely worn at this time, she wears earrings, a brooch, a ring on the middle finger of her left hand, and a gold chain supporting either a watch, a locket or little bottle of perfume.[4] The artist carefully depicted the sitter's outfit, hairdo, and accessories in order to represent her high social status.

The interchanges between fashion and folk art can also be found in a number of artworks selected for *Folk Couture* made with the materials of fashion–namely thread and cloth. That is the case of *the Possum Trot Figures* (c. 1953-1972), a group of outdoor dolls who are dressed in torn, faded garments revealing the effects of long exposure to the desert sun, wind and sand. [Fig. 2] The *Possum Trot Figures* were part of a roadside attraction operated by Calvin (1903-1972) and Ruby Black (1915-1980). Born and raised in the Deep South, the Blacks moved to a parcel of land they bought near Yermo, California in 1953. The land they purchased turned to be on a desolated portion of Highway 15 in the Mojave Desert, where the Blacks opened a rock and mineral shop. To draw the potential costumers' attention, Calvin came up with the idea of making an entertaining environment with dolls, a carousel and other wooden artifacts. While Calvin carved and painted the figures, Ruby crafted their dresses out of discarded clothing and fabrics. Calvin set the "Fantasy Doll Show" in a ruined building and even composed songs for the dolls that he performed in a high-pitched voice. Tape recorders and moving rods were attached to some dolls, so that they could move and sing. As folk scholar Cheryl Rivers pointed

[2] Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes* (Berkley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 1993). 128

[3] Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (London : Virago , 1985). 30.

[4] J. Laver, *Costume and Fashion: A Concise History* (London : Thames and Hudson , 1995). 168.

out " With their layers of tattered clothes, the dolls evoke the Black's persistence in the pursuit of the American dream."[5]

Like some garments exhibited in art and design museums, many folk pieces originally conceived as functional objects such as furniture and quilts are now considered art because of their innovative design or the arresting techniques employed in their construction. For instance, the fancy *Chest over Drawer* selected for *Folk Couture* (artist unidentified, New England, 1825-1840) features a vibrant, energetic surface of autumnal colors in a fun like design. [Fig. 3]. The imaginative effect–a departure from the realistic representation of natural wood graining– is perhaps a rural version of the popular trend in decorative art known as *Fancy* or imagination. Fancy relates to the movement popular between 1790 and 1840 that promoted the employment of playfulness and imagination to delight the eyes. The overlapping pattern of fans in this chest was created by treating the pigment while wet with brushes, combs, leather and putty; a procedure that represents a whimsical variation of the traditional graining technique. Curator Stacy Hollander wrote about this type of furniture: "The American Folk Art Museum's collection is particularly rich in these bold expressions on furniture that transcend utility through the masterful application of colorful paints and pigmented glazes in visually dynamic patterns."[6]

Like the piece discussed above, quilts served a utilitarian function but also represent major creative expressions on the part of the quilt maker. A quilt consists of two layers of fabrics sewn together frequently with the filler in between. The first colonizers of the seventeenth century brought with them plain quilts often adorned with embroidery. Because of the lack of textiles and the increasing popularity of chintz patchwork technique appliqué quilts and pieced

[5] Cheryl Rivers, "Possum Trot Figure; Helen, Blond Girl, Genny," in *American Anthem. Masterworks from the American Folk Art Museum* , 381-2 (New York : The American Folk Art Museum , 2001).

[6] Stacy C. Hollander, "Surface Attraction. Painted Furniture from the Collection. ," *Folk Art* (American Folk Art), Winter 2005/2006: 56-61. 52.

quilts became more and more used by the first setters. Today quilts are appreciated for the laborious handwork involved in their making and the mastery of color, construction, and composition. The color schemes of some quilts, such as those selected for *Folk Couture*; rival abstract paintings of modern artists such as Josef Albers (1888-1976) and Mark Rothko (1903-1970). That is the case of *Sunburst Quilt*, (1835-1845, probably Rebecca Scattergood Savery, Philadelphia, 1770-1855) one of the several textiles included in *Folk Couture*. In this quilt, the technique known as English template was used to piece the 2900 diamonds that compose its patterned surface. In this technique, which is more-time-consuming method than the "running stitch technique," paper templates are used to line each piece in the quilt. [7] Then, fabric patches are basted over the paper templates; and once all the pieces are overstitched by hand, the paper templates are removed. Often, the English template technique was used for quilts crafted in all-over-mosaic-type patterns instead of those constructed in blocks. The diamonds emanating from the center of *Sunburst Quilt* create a mesmerizing effect in its surface. [Fig. 4]

Examples of the use of quilting and patchwork techniques, and its association with folk art, abound in fashion history. Ralph Lauren (b.1939) famously showed pieced-quilt skirts and jackets as well as knit sweaters with patterns based on needlework samplers in his fall/winter 1982 collection.[8] Jean-Paul Gaultier's fall/winter 2005 couture show, with its emphasis on decorative trimming and embellished velvet, can be said to reflect the influence of the nineteenth-century American show quilt. But while quilts are deeply associated with folk art in both fashion history and the public imagination, folk art encompasses expressions in a variety of media by both early American folk artists and contemporary self-taught artists that are far less

[7] Elizabeth V. Warren, "Sunburst Quilt," in *American Anthem: Masterworks from the American Folk Art Museum* , 325 (New York : American Folk Art Museum , 2001). 325.

[8] Jesse Kornbluth, "Ralph Laurent: Success, American Style," *Vogue* , August 1982: 262-307.

explored by fashion designers.[9] The section of artworks offered to the designers invited to *Folk Couture* revealed this diversity of expressions.

The selection of artworks identified for the designers invited to *Folk Couture* explored the relationship between fashion and folk art through three categories, namely, the representation of fashion in early American portrait, the use of fashion materials (cloth, yarn, etc) by both fashion designers and folk art artists; and the 'common' path of some garments and folk art pieces that being originally conceived as functional objects they are now collected and exhibited as art in museums. From the selection of artworks offered to the designers, they chose a group of exciting paintings, textiles, sculptures and a photograph as inspirations for their new designs. The next part of this chapter explains the selection of designers as well as their singular aesthetics.

Designers

The American Folk Art Museum set two conditions for the selection of designers invited to the show: 1) they should live and work in New York City; and 2) they must create garments ranging from couture to ready-to-wear in order that the exhibition represent diverse fashion expressions. Several people provided guidance and advice in the selection: Dr. Valerie Steele, director and curator at the Museum at FIT, Patricia Mears, deputy director at the same institution, Jaz Hernández, philanthropist and the American Folk Art Museum. The group of designers chosen were Michael Bastian, John Bartlett, Chadwick Bell, Creatures of the Wind, Gary Graham, Catherine Malandrino, Bibhu Mohapatra, Fabio Costa, Ronaldus Shamask,

[9] See Brooke Davis Anderson, "The Contemporary Collection through the Lens of Language ," in *American Anthem: Masterworks from the American Folk Art Musuem* (New York : American Folk Art Museum, Harry N. Abrams , 2001).

threeASFOUR, Koos van den Akker, Yeohlee Teng, and Jean Yu. These creators were selected because they had explored the relationship between fashion and art from multiple perspectives in past collections. They had often collaborated with artists and, some of them, had exhibited their work in art and design museums. These designers regularly present their work at New York Fashion Week, a fact, which underscores the relevance they have in the current fashion scene. The following section looks at the designers' particular aesthetics with an emphasis on how they have engaged fashion and art in their collections, which was the central theme of the exhibition *Folk Couture.*

The aesthetic of the designers invited to *Folk Couture*

This section describes relevant biographic details of the designers invited to *Folk Couture* as well as their aesthetics and ideas about fashion. As the exhibition *Folk Couture* inquired the relationship between fashion and folk art, this section emphasizes how these designers had linked fashion and art in their past collections.

Designer Ronaldus Shamask (b. 1945, Amsterdam) has collaborated with painters, musicians and dancers and presented his collections in art institutions in multiple occasions. Shamask moved to London at age twenty-one to start a career as painter and fashion illustrator for the *London Times* and *Observer.* In 1998, Shamask designed ballet and theater costumes for the multimedia artist organization *The Company of Man* based in Buffalo, NY. A decade later, he opened his retail studio on Madison Av.; and presented his first women's couture collection. The critical acclaim led Shamask to receive a Coty Fashion Award in 1981. In 1985, he created his

first menswear collection; and, two years later, the Council of Fashion Design of America (CFDA) chose him Outstanding Designer. In 1996, he founded his own company, Shamask.

Shamask's work has been the subject of several art exhibitions: *Ronaldus Shamask: Form, Fashion, Reflection* (Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2012); *Goddess* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2003); *Cubism and Fashion* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 1999); *Art and Fashion* (The Guggenheim Museum, 1997); *Japonism in Fashion* (Kyoto Fashion Institute, 1996); *Infra Apparel* (Met, 1989) and *Intimate Architecture: Contemporary Clothing Desig*n (MIT. 1982). The designer has collaborated with dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov in *The Good Army* (Tokyo, 1995); and with choreographer Lucinda Child in the pieces *Impromptu* (Cannes, 1993); *Portrait in Reflection* (New York, 1986) and *Available Light* (Brooklyn Academy of Music's Next Wave Festival).

As a self-trained designer, Shamask has invented his own methods of tailoring, which consist of life-size blue prints to cut garments. "You can learn a technique and do something with it. Or you can have a horizon in sight and find the tools to get there," Shamask explained to the *New York Times* in 1981.[10] Nonessential details are eliminated in his designs; the minimal shapes of which resemble Japanese kimonos.[11] The simple creations have been liked to 'wearing art.'[12] The iconic *Spiral Jacket* (1981), cut from one piece of fabric curved and structured by one single spinning seam—like a lemon peel—featured in the permanent collection of the Smithsonian Institute, the Costume Institute at the Met and the Museum at FIT. The extreme simplicity of Shamask's *Spiral Jacket* is also mirrored in his 1982 collection, which comprised

[10] John Duka, "Fashion. New Architects of Fashion ," *The New York Times* , August 16, 1981. Accessed April 27, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/1981/08/16/magazine/fashion-new-architects-of-fashion.html

[11] Ibid.

[12] Carrie Donovan, "Fashion. The Spirit of New York ," *The New York TImes* , April 18, 1982. Accessd April 27, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/1982/04/18/magazine/fashion-the-spirit-of-new-york.html

robes and chasubles made out of leather and wool,[13] and the 1989 collection composed of jackets with dropped shoulders, cotton shirts with oversized collars, and box pleated trapezes that looked 'monastic.' Moreover, the simple construction of origami inspired the 1995 collection, which included zipped ensembles made out of single pieces of fabrics that were only altered with darts. The unzipped garments placed on the floor formed flat, rectangular shapes, which became sculptural when they were zipped and worn.[14]

Shamask's 1998 collection exemplified the close relationship between fashion and art in his work. The collection was staged at the abstract artist Jennifer Bartlett's studio in Greenwich Village,[15] where fluorescent lights outlined Shamask's runway. The models walked in front of the artworks clad on Shamask's designs mirroring Bartlett's paintings' color palette: black, white, lime green, yellow, and deep blue and red. Moreover, bass player Robert Black recited and performed the piece *Failing*; thus, creating an atmosphere that involved words, music and fashion akin to performance art. The collection included pleated pieces in trapezoidal silhouettes and bias-cut ensembles with spiral seams. Plaid patterns recalling Bartlett's graphic art were made with thin rubber.[16]

Like Shamask's clothing the work of designer Yeohlee Teng (Malaysia, 1955) has been inspired by art, notably architecture in multiple occasions. The designer, graduated from the

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[13] Amy M. Splinder, "The Cut of One Seam Coiling," *The New York Times*, August 12, 1997. Accessed April 27, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/1997/08/12/style/the-cut-of-one-seam-coiling.html

[14] Amy M. Splinder, "Review/Fashion; What a Difference a Zip Makes," *The New York Times*, October 3, 1995. April 27, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/1995/10/03/style/review-fashion-what-a-difference-a-zip-makes.html

[15] Jennifer Bartlett (American, born 1941) is an installation artist, painter, print-maker and sculptor. She employs systems to both set and oppose order in artworks. Bartlett experiments with materials, concepts and the process of image making. For example, *Rhapsody* (1975-1976) is made out of 988 steel plates with grids that work either as individual parts or as a group. The monumental work (2.28 x 47.68 mts.) is a graphic mixture of screen-print, woodcut and lithography
See, http://www.moma.org/collection/browse_results.php?criteria=O%3AAD%3AE%3A357&page_number=&template_id=6&sort_order=1#bio

[16] Anne-Marie Schiro, "Review/Fashion: For Dancing the Night Away," November 10, 1998. http://www.nytimes.com/1998/11/10/style/review-fashion-for-dancing-the-night-away.html. Accessed April 26, 2015.

fashion program at Parson School of Design, and founded her fashion brand YEOHLEE in 1981. She is recipient of the Smithsonian's Cooper Hewitt National Design Award for Fashion Design in 2004. Richard Flood, chief curator of the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York wrote about her work, "Yeohlee manages to synthesize style into poetry about the possibility of fabrics."[17] Yeohlee's sarongs and capes with references to ancient cultures, notably Eastern civilizations, appear timeless. But her selections of fabrics—high-performance Teflon-coated wool and quilted nylon, for example—lend to the garments a functional, even aggressive, quality.[18] Serpentine seams and the exposed finishing of textiles are frequently the dresses' only adornments. "I believe in using the selvage rather than cutting it off, in allowing the fabrics to be what they are," the designer observed in an interview for the New York Times.[19] Harold Koda, curator of the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art said about the designer's clothing, "In Yeohlee's work there is a kind of richness, despite its apparent simplicity […] they are the kind of garments that end by revealing more of themselves over time." [20] In 1997, Yeohlee coined the term "urban nomad" to explained her collection. "Urban nomad" referred to the life style of professionals who travelling all around the world needed garments that function under diverse climatic conditions (warm and cold weather), social events (outfits that can be worn both at work and a business party); and psychological needs (clothing that provide a sense of protection while traveling).[21]

[17]Flood quoted in, http://yeohlee.com/pages/about-the-company. Accessed April 29, 2015.

[18] Ruth La Ferla, "Sober Yet Sleek, To Match the Times," *The New York Times* , December 2, 2001. http://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/02/style/sober-yet-sleek-to-match-the-times.html. Accessed April 27, 20015.

[19] Yeohlee quoted in La Ferla.

[20] Kodak quated in La Ferla.

[21] www.yeohlee.com. "About Yeohlee Teng." Accessed April 20, 2015.http://yeohlee.com/pages/about-yeohlee-teng

Numerous art exhibitions have featured Yeohlee's work. The show entitled *Energetic: Clothes and Enclosures* (East Gallery, Berlin, Netherland Architecture Institute, Rotterdam, 1998) displayed her clothing along with the work of architect Ken Yeang, a pioneer of ecology-based green design. [22] Meanwhile, *Skin and Bones: Parallel Practices in Fashion and Architecture* (MOCA, 2006) looked at the relationship between the works of designers such as Yeohlee, Viktor and Rolf, and Junya Watanabe; and architects such as Frank Gehry and Jean Nouvel.[23]

The concepts and shapes of modern architecture have often inspired Yeohlee's fashions. For instance, the using of monochromatic palette and streamlined silhouettes for Pre-Fall 2014 derived from the *King Road House* made by architect Rudolph Schindler (1887-1953). Schindler's capacity to work with tight budgets and ability to manage complex shapes, warm materials and vivid colors made him a prominent figure among early-twentieth century modern architects. [24] The floor plan of *The King Road House,* the point of departure of Yeohlee's 2014 collection, was organized around several L-shapes with tilt up concrete panels, which are Schindler's trademarks.[25] Yeohlee freely reinterpreted Schindler's *King Road House* through jodhpurs, kaleidoscopic prints on jersey shift dresses and wide-leg trousers cut from repurposed microfiber.[26]

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[22] Architect Ken Yeang (b. 1948, Malaysia) is known for his eco-architecture. Pioneer of ecology-based green design, Yeang creates bioclimatic-responsive architecture. These buildings features, for instance, platforms that work both as solar-filters and shading roofs; or, pools that serve for swimming and also to cooling the air. See, Ken Yeang, *Eco Skycrapers* , ed. Lucy Bullivant, Vol. II (Victoria, Australia : Images Publishing , 2011).

[23] See, Brooke Hodge and Susan Sidlauskas Patricia Mears, *Skin+Bones: Parallel Practices in Fashion and Architecture* , 1st Edition (New York : Thames & Hudson , 2006).

[24] See, Elizabeth A. T. Smith and Michael Darling, *The Architecture of R.M. Schindler* (Los Angeles : Museum of Contemporary Art , 2001).

[25] Ibid.

[26] Brittany Adams, "Yeohlee Teng. Pre-Fall 2014 ," *Style.com* , December 17, 2013. Accessed April 26, 2015. http://www.style.com/fashion-shows/pre-fall-2014/yeohlee.

Yeohlee often follows what the material dictates and is fond of abstraction; mistakes become revelations in her process. Her designs serve functional purposes; the materials characteristics—weight, texture and color—command garment conception. Fabric possibilities are explored in shapes allowing the human body to easily move. As the label is inspired in sustainability, each seam is meticulously placed to create zero waists, and; prints are painfully engineered to employ as little fabric as possible. Yeohlee has creatively responded to the challenges of sustainability by recycling textiles from thrift shops or factory floors; incorporating durability to her design concepts, and using materials from her own storerooms. In line with sustainability principles, Yeohlee's collection is entirely produced at the District Garment in New York.

Like Yeohlee, emergent designer Fabio Costa (b. 1983, Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil) also draws from art to create his designs. Costa presented his first collection in NYC Fashion week in 2011, and three years later, he founded the label *Not Equal* with partner Rebecca Diele. "We explore creative innovation though fashion and art. Our artisanal garments challenge traditional tailoring," Costa explained in a statement.[27] Costa's unisex ensembles are based on the golden ratio; particularly, the golden rectangle. According to the principles of the golden ratio, a beautiful work is the result of the application of proportions that are present in nature and determine the organization of earth and the cosmos—harmony is found in the symmetrical relationship between the parts. The golden ratio is expressed in mathematics as the numeral 1.6180339887 or by the decimal fraction 0.6180340.[28] "I have two rulers that I made,"

[27] Costa in conversation with the author. May 20th, 2013.

[28] Mario Livio, *The Golden Ratio: The Story of Phi, the World's Most Astonishing Numbers* (Paw Prints , 2008).

Costa explained, "They are based on proportions that are perfect, beautiful, and harmonic."[29] Using these two rulers Costa traces squares and rectangles that become the patterns for dresses, shirts and pants. "It goes back to a more organic way of fitting, organic way of dressing."[30] In this respect, only two clothing sizes are created (one and two), which fit all body types. The designer explained, "Different body types will give the shape to the garments created with this measurement." [31]

Usually linked to art, the work of the avant-garde collective threeASFOUR, encompasses complex imaginaries, innovative silhouettes and intricate techniques. Gabi Asfour (1966), Angela Donhauser (1971), and Adi Gil (1974)—who hail from Lebanon, Tajikistan, and Israel, respectively—first met in 1997. At that time, Donhauser and Gil were already a team, having worked for magazines and on music videos, while Asfour was producing a clothing line for Kate Spade, the fashion brand created by former editor of *Madmoiselle* magazine Kate Brosnahan. The design collective drew the attention of the art circuit almost immediately. "We had our first show in 1999 down here in Chinatown and then we started being part of New York fashion. We also had offers from the art world to do exhibitions, and we got involved in art," Asfour explained in an interview.[32] threeASFOUR attracts customers with a highly individual sense of style, such as the singer Björk—who, in the video *Moon* (*Biophillia*, 2011), wore the harp belt sculpture/ instrument from Fall 2001 collection, which explored links between music and fashion through accessories made out of used violins and dresses fettered like harps.[33] For

[29] Costa in conversation with the author. May 20th , 2013.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Costa in conversation with the author. May 20th, 2013.

[32] threeASFOUR in conversation with the author. July, 27th, 2013.

[33] Maya Singer, "threeASFOUR. Fall 2011 ," *Style.com* , February 11, 2011.Accessed April 20, 2015. http://www.style.com/fashion-shows/fall-2011-ready-to-wear/threeasfour.

threeASFOUR, fashion is both wearable art and platform to convey ideas. "At the end of the day, there's too many dresses around. Nobody really needs more clothes in this world," Gil explained to *Vogue Daily.* 'We want there to be more than just making a dress that will be in today and out tomorrow."[34]

Curving seams and spherical construction often appear in threeASFOUR's collections; each time generating new variations of the spherical form. For instance arcs, swirls and whorls inspired garments embellished with tri-dimensional spirals and curlicues of leather (Fall 2012).[35] Curves appeared again on the seams of coats embroidered with tiny mirrors (Fall 2013). On the other hand, threeASFOUR have explored the similarity among antagonist parties by, for example, mixing iconography from Jews, Arabs, Israelis and Palestine. Spring 2012 collection entitled *InSHALLOm*[36] included printed dresses with Kaffiyeh[37] motifs, the evil eye and the hamsa; [38] as well as accessories created with knotted strings of tallism[39] and a necklace made of two shofars.[40] Similarly, in 2014 the designers exhibited the art installation *Mer Ka Ba* at the Jewish Museum in New York. *Mer Ka Ba,* which alluded to mystical forms of Judaism and Islam, included a mirrored structure in the shape of a flower, 3D-printed textiles and video projections of the five platonic solids (the ancient figures composed of regular polygons). Spring

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[34] Katherine Bernard, "threeASFOUR's fashion Week Exhibition at the Jewish Museum is One of a Kind," Vogue Daily. Accessed April 22, 2015. http://www.vogue.com/vogue-daily/article/threeasfours-fashion-week-exhibition-at-the-jewish-museum-is-one-of-a-kind/#1

[35] Maya Singer, "threeASFOUR Fall 2012 ," *Style.com* , February 15, 2012. Accessed April 22, 2015. http://www.style.com/fashion-shows/fall-2012-ready-to-wear/threeasfour

[36] Matthew Schneider, "threeASFOUR. Spring 2012 collection ," *Style.com*, September 15, 2012. Accessed April 20, 2015. http://www.style.com/fashion-shows/spring-2012-ready-to-wear/threeasfour

[37] Keffiyeh is a traditional Middle Eastern headdress. Fashioned from a square scarf, and usually made of cotton, this turban is worn mostly by Arabs and some Turkish.

[38] Hamsa is the palm-shaped amulet popular in the Middle East and North Africa.

[39] Tallism is a fringed shawl of wool or silk that Orthodox Jewish men wear on their shoulders during morning services.

[40] Shofar is a musical instrument made of a horn played for Jewish ceremonies.

2014 collection was presented in the same location. The collection sent a message of unity among Islam, Judaism and Christianity through the superposition of symbols representing each of these religions and philosophies in laser cut dresses.

Perhaps Spring 2009 runway show, which recreated Yoko Ono's performance *Cut Piece* (1965), was threeASFOUR's fashion presentation that further pushed the boundaries of traditional fashion parades. In *Cut Piece*, Ono enticed the audience to cut away her dress with a pair of scissors while she passively seated on the floor. Art historian Benjamin H.D. Buchloh considered that *Cut Piece* was 'resonant with some antiwar protest of the time," in that, "vulnerability was here transformed into resistance, as [Ono's] audience was forced to confront its own capacity for violence, both actual and phantasmatic."[41] threeASFOUR's recreation of *Cut Piece* included twenty-two models who walked out the catwalk carrying stools, which they placed along the stage and seated on. Then, each model stood up, walked the runway and snipped away the spiraling dress of one model holding two pairs of scissors, who replaced Ono's role in the original performance.[42] threeASFOUR's signature curvilinear construction was applied on tank body suits, a black unitard with inserts of mesh, and a chiffon dress embellished with three-dimensional curlicues of horsehair.[43] The designers appropriated Ono's piece and re-performed it in the context of a fashion parade. In doing so, they explored the ambivalent fashion/art divided and expanded the idea of a traditional runway show.

While threeASFOUR has centered on experimental fashions, designer Catherine Malandrino (b. 1963, Grenoble, France) has focused on ready to wear clothes. Malandrino

[41] Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "American Performance Art. 1974," in *Art Since 1900. Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* , 565-569 (New York, New York: Thames&Hudson , 2004).566.

[42] Nicole Phelps, "threeASFOUR. Spring 2010. Ready-to-Wear," *Style.com*, September 17, 2009. . Accessed april 20, 2015. http://www.style.com/fashion-shows/spring-2010-ready-to-wear/threeasfour

[43] Ibid.

started her career in Paris designing for Emanuel Ungaro (b.1933). In 1996, she moved to New York City where she began working for Diane von Furstenberg (b.1946). Two years later she presented her first signature collection. Malandrino's iconic *Flag Dress*, a garment featuring the American flag, won her much acclaim and put her on the fashion map in 2001.[44] The dress was created six weeks before 9/11 and took special meanings after the events. [45]

Malandrino has referenced traditional Amish quilting techniques through dresses made out of diamond-shaped pieces of indigo fabric (Spring 2006);[46] and the intricate techniques employed in nineteenth-century traditional bedcovers and wall hangings through embroidered and crocheted pieces (Fall 2006 collection).[47] In addition to these references to folk art, the designer has referenced modern art and design in several collections. For example, the figurative sculptures representing flora and fauna made by French artists Claude (b. 1924) and François-Javier Lalanne (1927-2008) inspired the open work on hems, textured leaf prints, and foliaged organza of the Fall 2008 collection.[48] Similarly, the furniture of Émile-Jacques Ruhlmann (1879-1933)[49] was the catalyst for the elongated silhouette for Malandrino's Fall 2013 collection.[50] The rounded edges and thin chair legs of Ruhlmann's luxurious furniture; which mixing wood and

[44] Marc Karimzadeh, "Q&A," *Women's Wear Daily* , September 2, 2008.

[45] Lizerre Alvarez, "A New Museum Crowns a Career ," *The New Museum Crowns a Career* , May 27, 2003. http://www.nytimes.com/2003/05/27/nyregion/a-new-museum-crowns-a-career.html

[46] Laird Borrelli, "Catherine Malandrino. Spring 2006," *Style.com* , September 2005, 2006. Accessed April 26, 2015. http://www.style.com/fashion-shows/spring-2006-ready-to-wear/catherine-malandrino

[47] Nichole Phelps, "Catherine Malandrino. Fall 2006," *Style.com* , February 10, 2006. Accessed April 20, 2015. http://www.style.com/fashion-shows/spring-2006-ready-to-wear/catherine-malandrino

[48] Meenal Mistry, "Catherine Malandrino. Fall 2008," *Style.com* , February 4, 2008. Accessed April 20, 2015. http://www.style.com/fashion-shows/fall-2008-ready-to-wear/catherine-malandrino
See also, Daniel Abadil and Christian Fayt, *Les Lalanne (Sculptures by François-Xavier & Claude Lalanne)* (New York : Art Gallery (Knokke-Heist) , 1984); Claude Lalanne and François-Xavier Lalanne, *Les Lalanne on Park Avenue* (New York : Paul Kasmin Gallery , 2009).

[49] See, Emmanuel Bréon and Emile-Jacques Rhulman, *Jacques-Émile Rhulmann: the designe's archive* , Vol. 1 (Paris: Flammarion , 2004).

[50] Lauren Sherman, "Catherine Malandrino. Fall 2013," *Style.com* , February 10, 2013. Accessed April 20, 2015. http://www.style.com/fashion-shows/fall-2013-ready-to-wear/catherine-malandrino
Pulse. Fashion and Style., "Slide Show ," *The New York Times* , August 10, 2008.

ivory epitomized the French Art Deco of the 1920's, were translated into curved-hems jackets, funnel-neck coats and the scalloped embroidery of a dress.

Like Malandrino designer Gary Graham (b. 1969, Wilmington, Delaware) has employed quilting, embroidery, and patchwork techniques in several collections. Graham studied painting at the Maryland Institute College of Art and graduated of the Art Institute of Chicago with a degree in costume and textile design. In 1999, he launched his first collection, and, in 2006 opened his first boutique at ABC Carpet & Home in New York. Two years later, Graham established his own flag store in Tribeca. In 2009, he was honored as a CFDA/ Vogue finalist; and, in 2010, won the prestigious school of the Art Institute of Chicago's Legend of Fashion Award. Graham has designed textiles and assisted the costume design for the musical *The Lion King* and the film *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*. He often collaborated with American performance artist Meredith Monk, who has incorporated singing, acting, filming, choreography, and fashion into a vast experimental body of work.[51] Graham's work was included in the exhibition *Medialism: Fashion's Romance with the Middle Ages* (Phoenix Art Museum, 2009). His coat inspired by a late-eighteenth Spanish-Flemish engraving is part of the Rhode Island School of Design Museum's permanent collection. In 2013, Graham declared to Women's Wear Daily, "I'm always focused on the idea of isolation and how that has to do with fashion."[52]

Graham's richly-textured, battered garments have a vintage appereance. The fabrics he employs look like recycled or reporposed material. In general, the dresses he designs are deconstructed, frayed and shreded, while print fabrics are rubbed out or flecked. Concepts such

[51] *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s. v. "Meredith Monk", accessed December 30, 2014, http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/389553/Meredith-Monk.

[52] Brittany Adams, "Fall 2013. Ready to Wear. Gary Graham," *Style.com*, February 15, 2013. Accessed, april 22, 2015. http://www.style.com/fashionshows/review/F2013RTW-GGRAHAM

as the soft and the hard are explored by mixing leather and gauze or matching seaquined textiles with heavy opaque fabrics. Ancient patterned textiles are often re-produced through digital techniques. For instance, the pattering of turskish rugs and Byzantines tapestries from the textile collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Art inspired saturated color prints employed on silk tops and slim leggings (Fall 2014). [53] Frequently Graham draws from historic silhouettes in his collections. For instance, Middle Age T-shaped tunics[54] have been translated in gold-flecked tapestry jacquard skirts, and sheer puff-sleeve T-shirts (Fall 2013 collection). Or, nineteenth century Empire dresses have been transformed in to high-waist garments with leather bodice and satin linen skirts (Spring 2014).[55]

Designer John Bartlett (b. 1963, Cincinnati, Ohio), who graduated with a degree in sociology from Harvard in 1985, "burst onto the fashion scene" in 1992 with "witty" and "hard-edged" designs.[56] Emphasizing male physicality and staging provocative runway shows, Bartlett broke with the tradition of mainstream menswear designers such as Ralph Lauren and Tommy Hilfiger. He deliberately celebrated gay culture in his designs.[57] As New York Times' reporter Bob Morris stated, "[Bartlett's style was] notable for its frank homoeroticism."[58] For instance the gay Clone, a visual imitation and emulation of the 'macho' that originated in S&M subcultures of San Francisco in the late 1970s, inspired black leather jackets and pants for Fall/Winter 2000-

[53] Style.com, Ready-To-Wear collection, "Gary Graham. Fall 2014. Ready-to-Wear collection ," *Style.com* , February 4, 2014. Accessed April 20, 2015.http://www.style.com/fashion-shows/fall-2014-ready-to-wear/gary-graham

[54] Brittany Adams, "Gary Graham. Fall 2013. Ready-to-Wear," *Style.com*, February 15, 2013. Accessed April 20, 2015. http://www.style.com/fashion-shows/fall-2013-ready-to-wear/gary-graham

[55] Brittany Adams, "Gary Graham. Spring 2014. Ready-to-Wear. ," *Style.com* , September 4, 2013. Accessed April 27, 2015. http://www.style.com/fashion-shows/spring-2014-ready-to-wear/gary-graham

[56] Cathy Horyn, "John Bartlett Is Stepping Off the Runway ," *The New York Times* , November 19, 2002. Accessed April 22, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2002/11/19/nyregion/john-bartlett-is-stepping-off-the-runway.html

[57] Constance C. R. White. "John Bartlett: On the Fringe No More" in *The New York Times* February 17, 1998. Accessed April 27, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/1998/02/17/style/john-bartlett-on-the-fringe-no-more.html

[58] Bob Morris, "From Bad Boy to 'Good Dog'," *The New York Times* , November 17, 2011: E11.

1 collection. In the same vein, the abbreviated erotic clothing by Nikos brand—jock straps, ergonomic T-Shirts and tank tops—inspired the black velveteen wrestler's gear with a crystal stripe worn by a muscled male model at the 2006 collection runway show. [59] Fashion critic Cathy Horyn stated that Bartlett's runway shows "received luminous praise."[60] Indeed, one of Bartlett's most commented runway show, which paid homage to the style of Pauline Trigère (1912-2002),[61] featured men gazing up at the catwalk as if at a gentlemen nightclub. Likewise, barely dressed, whitewashed men served as backdrop for the Spring 2000 collection's runway show.[62] Rope, the element that 'tied' the story for the season, appeared as a military sash, and a golden knot on a jacket. About the concept for the collection Battled said, "erotic, sacred tightening, the knot that frees our duality."[63]

Another influence in Bartlett's aesthetic is the traditional Ivy League or preppy style of dressing, which emerged from the campuses of East Coast elite universities during the 1950s. Ivy League style comprised sack suits, cuffed pants, button-down shirts and loafers. Inspired by the Ivy League style, Bartlett's has created crisp fit suits in acid colors such as pink and orange (Spring 2005 collection), traditional gray flannel coats, and corduroy pants with bold stripes of Swarovski crystals (Fall 2005).[64]

Designer Michael Bastian (b. 1965, Lyons, New York) has also been inspired by Ivy

[59] Tim Blanks, "John Bartlett. Spring 2006 Menswear ," *Style.com* , September 9, 2005. http://www.style.com/fashion-shows/spring-2006-menswear/john-bartlett

[60] Horyn: 2002.

[61] French-American fashion designer known for innovative concepts and tailored cuts

[62] Armand Limnander, "John Barttlet. Spring 2001 ," *Style.com* , September 21, 2000. Accessed April 22, 2015. http://www.style.com/fashion-shows/spring-2001-ready-to-wear/john-bartlett/

[63] Ibid.

[64] Tim Blanks, "John Bartlett. Fall 2005 Menswear ," *Style.com* , February 4, 2005. Accessed, April 22, 2015. http://www.style.com/fashion-shows/fall-2005-menswear/john-bartlett/

League style. Bastian, who mixes formal and casual clothing in lighthearted ensembles, first worked as an assistant buyer at Abraham & Strauss; and later, for Sotheby's, Tiffany & Co., Polo Ralph Lauren, and Bergdorf Goodman, where he directed the men's fashion department for five years. This experience prompted Bastian to launch his own men's wear line. "It became clear to me that there was a real need for a new American voice in the men's designer word."[65] Winner of The Council of Fashion Designers of America Menswear Designer of the Year award in 2011, Bastian has been nominated for that prize in four occasions. Reporter David Colman summarized the designer's aesthetic in the following terms, "Bastian cut for real men, and the style is really classic, just put together in a way that's fashion forward."[66]

Bastian's pays extreme attention to details. For instance, the lining in his jackets could be surprisingly made out of silver fabric (Spring 2008),[67] feature an alphabet with the letter L-O-V-E highlighted (Fall 2008), or be printed with an image of Bastian's own eyes (Fall 2008). [68] Frequently, he included humorous elements in his collections such as 'bulky koala' motifs randomly woven on sweaters (Fall 2008).[69] Moreover, he creates body conscious garments like tight shorts and bathing suits (Spring 2011); [70] or luxurious suits with boutonnieres crafted out cashmere, camel hair, silk and shantung (Fall 2012).[71] In some cases, the humor and sparkly surfaces of Bastian's clothes turned into opaque darkness in collections that have referenced the

[65] Bastian quoted in David Colman, "Michael Bastian: That Thing He Does," *The New York Times* , June 3, 2009. http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/04/fashion/04BASTIAN.html?_r=0

[66] ibid.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Style.com, "Michael Bastian. Fall 2008," *Style.com* , February 4, 2008. Accessed April 20, 2015. http://www.style.com/fashion-shows/fall-2008-menswear/michael-bastian

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Matthew Schneider, "Michael Bastian. Fall 2012 ," *Style.com* , February 13, 2012. Accesed April 20, 2015. http://www.style.com/fashion-shows/fall-2012-menswear/michael-bastian

work of American painter Andrew Wyeth, notably, the pastorals he painted in Pennsylvania and Maine. Based on real landscapes, Wyeth's paintings depict a surreal, uncanny atmosphere, which, in Bastian's personal interpretation of Wyeth's artworks, relates to a gothic aspect of American identity.[72] Based on his singular understanding of Wyeth's paintings, Bastian, for instance, wove black birds and wolf motifs on sweaters accessorized with fur scarves and black gloves (Fall 2013).[73]

While Bastian designs exclusively for men, designer Bibhu Mohapatra (B.1972 Rourkela, Orissa, India) centers entirely on women's wear. Mohapatra earned a Master in economics at Utah State University in 1996 and enrolled in the Fashion Institute of Technology in 1997. After graduating from fashion school, he worked as assistant designer for the house of Halston; where he learned the basis of creating luxury clothes. [74] In 1999, Mohapatra was appointed design director of J. Mendel, the French furrier, under Creative Director Gilles Mendel.[75] In 2008, he established his own label, Bibhu Mohapatra. Four years later, his costumes for *Aida* debuted at the Gimmerglass Opera in Cooperstown, NY.

Mohapatra's signature are beaded and embroidered garments; hand-pleated bustling from where draped fabric usually fall; and the mixture of layers of color, materials and silhouettes. In his collections, Mohapatra has explored contrasting pairs such as fantasy/reality, through, for

[72] See, Beth Venn, Adam D. Weinberg, Andrew Wyeth and Michael G. Kammen, *Unknown Terrain: The Landscapes of Andrew Wyeth* (New York : Whitney Museum of Art , 1998).

[73] Matthew Shneider, "Michael Bastian. Fall 2013 ," *Style.com* , February 12, 2013. Accessed, April 20, 2015. http://www.style.com/fashion-shows/fall-2013-menswear/michael-bastian

[74] American fashion designer Roy Halston (1932-1990) became famous in the 1970s for his long dresses made out of the synthetic fabric Ultrasuede. See, Elaine Gross and Fred Rottman, *Halston: An American Original* (New York : HarperCollins , 1999).

[75] Originally a fur atelier created to dress the aristocracy in St. Petersburg, J.Mendel relocated in Paris after the Russian revolution. Today J. Mendel is a global luxury fashion house directed by fashion designer Gilles Mendel. See, Emma Sloley, "Bibhu Mohapatra Rises Through the Ranks." *Gotham Magazine.* Accessed April 26, 2015. http://gotham-magazine.com/personalities/articles/bibhu-mohapatra-rises-through-fashions-ranks#F5IsepTtQHqxthfV.99

instance, an imaginative peacock feather-loomed wool coat.[76] He has also been inspired by both the armature of the body and the notion of visibility; concepts he has represented through a blazer with a spine-like lace up and a cropped jacket trimmed in layers of sheer organza (Spring 2010).[77] Mohapatra has also referenced nature in his design through prints of a butterfly's metamorphosis applied to peplums (Spring 2013);[78] or, a digital prints of a *palash*, the Indian red tree flower, employed on shirtdresses, blouses and pencil skirts (Spring 2014). Photography frequently weaves the narrative of Mohapatra's collection. For instance, Helmut Newton's erotic pictures of nude models have been translated into dresses with slits, cut outs, crisscross bondage, and chain-link prints that referenced Newton's S&M photos (Spring 2012).[79]

Recently folk art nurtured the collection of designer Chadwick Bell (b. 1981, Southern California). In an interview to the website *Style.com* Bell explained, "I used native pottery from the pueblos to create embroidery on a few pieces. The collection was called *Nirvana*." [80] Bell launched his eponymous fashion brand in 2007, and, just one year later, presented his first collection in New York City Fashion Week. Duality (tailoring vs. draping; the masculine and the feminine) is a theme that permeates his work. For instance, men's wear fabrics (such as Donegal tweed) are employed in feminine garments and mixed with luxurious textiles (such as sponged silk georgette and wool jersey). Or, silk faille is treated like denim in simple evening dresses with a relaxed shape (Spring 2012). On the other hand, jersey dresses and skirts, tulle

[76] Meenal Mistry, "Bibhu Mohapatra. Fall 2009," *Style.com* , February 12, 2009. April 20, 2015. http://www.style.com/fashion-shows/fall-2009-ready-to-wear/bibhu-mohapatra

[77] Romney Leader, "Bibhu Mohapatra. Spring 2010," *Style.com* , September 14, 2009. Accessed, April 20, 2015. http://www.style.com/fashion-shows/spring-2010-ready-to-wear/bibhu-mohapatra

[78] Alison Baenen, "Bibhu Mohapatra. Spring 2013 ," *Style.com* , September 12 , 2012. Accessed, April 20, 2015. http://www.style.com/fashion-shows/spring-2013-ready-to-wear/bibhu-mohapatra

[79] Maya Singer, "Bibhu Mohapatra. Spring 2012 ," *Style.com* , September 13, 2011. Accessed, April 20, 2015. http://www.style.com/fashion-shows/spring-2012-ready-to-wear/bibhu-mohapatra

[80] Bell quoted in Kristen Bateman, "Folk Couture: Fashion and Folk Art ," *Harper's Bazaar* , January 24, 2014. Accessed, April 20, 2015. http://www.harpersbazaar.com/fashion/designers/a4471/folk-couture-fashion-and-folk-art-2014/

frocks and blazers with embroidered sleeves are cut in simple lines (Spring 2012);[81] and, unnecessary buttons, lapels and pockets flaps are often stripped away (Fall 2011).[82]

Bell has been inspired by art in many occasions. For instance, both Pablo Picasso's *Boy with a Pipe* (1905),[83] a painting depicting a young man wearing an oversized blue shirt and jacket; and Arlene Gottfried's *Midnight,*[84] a book of photography documenting the life of a paranoid schizophrenic man, were freely referenced in pieces such as a silver fox coat, a backless printed jumpsuit and a tuxedo jacket with embroidery (Fall 2012).[85] Another book, this time Nicholas Alan Cope's *Whitewash*,[86] which depicts modern Los Angeles architecture in contrasting black and white pictures, inspired the monochromatic palette and loose clothing for Spring 2015 collection. Furthermore, inspired by subcultures; Bell's high-end fashion have created rich crosspollinations between couture and street style. For instance, surfers, skaters and *cholas*—Mexican-American girls who influenced by hip-hop music wear loose pants and flannels accessorized with gold chains—[87] triggered the baggy silhouette for Spring 2014. The interiors of cuffs and hems of the pieces, which seemed to float off the body, were lined with

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[81] Alison Baenen, "Chadwick Bell. Spring 2012," *Style.com* , September 13, 2011. Accessed, April 20, 2015. http://www.style.com/fashion-shows/spring-2012-ready-to-wear/chadwick-bell

[82] Alison Baenen, "Chadwick Bell. Fall 2011," *Style.com* , February 2011. Accessed, April 20, 2015. http://www.style.com/fashion-shows/fall-2011-ready-to-wear/chadwick-bell

[83] Painted during Picasso's Rose Period, Boy with a Pipe depicts a boy sitting against a wall. He wears a loose blue button down shirt, a pair of pants and a wreath of flowers. He holds a pipe with his left hand and looks at the spectator.

[84] During two decades, Arlene Gottfried documented her friend Midnight's painful cycles of lucidity and madness. See, Arlene Gottfried, *Midnight* (New York : powerHouse , 2003).

[85] Jessica Minkoff, "Chadwick Bell. Fall 2012. ," *Style.com* , February 9, 2012. Accessed April 22, 2015. http://www.style.com/fashion-shows/fall-2011-ready-to-wear/chadwick-bell

[86] Nicholas Alan Cope, *Whitewash* (New York : Power House Books, 2013).

[87] In the 1990s, the term *chola* referred to the subculture of first-and second- generation of Mexican-American girls influenced by hip-hop music. Sometimes, *cholas* were associated with gangs. They worn loose Dickies denims or khakis, oversized flannels buttoned up to the top, gold chains with cruxes or images of saints. Distinctive elements were long bangs and dark lip liner. See, Julianne Escobedo Shepherd, "Chola Style-The latest Cultural Appropriation Fashion Crime? ," *The Guardian* , August 15, 2014 . Accessed April 22, 2015. http://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2014/aug/15/-sp-chola-style-cultural-appropriation-fashion-crime

horsehair to prevent them collapsing from the body.[88]

While Bell's garments are divested of ornaments, Creatures of the Wind's designs are richly embellished. [Fig. 38] Designers Shane Gabier (b. 1973, Chicago) and Christopher Peter (b. 1984, Chicago) met in the fashion department at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where Gabier was a teacher and Peter a fine-art student. They started collaborating in pattern making; and together, they launched Creatures of the Wind in 2007.[89] Creatures of the Wind's collection gravitates toward opposite concepts: while Peter embraces graphic and experimental silhouettes, Gabier is fond of structure and practicality. Handmade detailing and non-traditional mixing of fabrics are distinctive elements of Creatures of the Wind's collection.[90] "There is a kind of outsider quality we like," Peters told *W Magazine* in 2009.[91] Creatures of the Wind's innovative treatment of fabrics and use of elaborated embellishment have been regarded as "folksy but with a couture touch."[92] In their collections the designers have combined simple ecru canvas with silver python-print lame, treated micro-thin plastic to make it look as tweed; or have woven brocades with holographic stars.[93] In addition, they have employed fabrics such as poly film and vinyl with shinny stripes made of microscopic shards of crystals.[94] On the other hand, the themes of the collection have reverberated around mid-1960s psychedelic art—which was

[88] Alison Baenen, "Chadwick Bell. Spring 2014 ," *Style.com* , September 6, 2013. Accessed April 20, 2015. http://www.style.com/fashion-shows/spring-2014-ready-to-wear/chadwick-bell

[89] The name of the label references a lyric from *Wild is the Wind*, a song first recorded by Johnny Mathis in 1957, and later by Nina Simone, David Bowie and Cat Power. David Colman, "No One Forgets a Name When It is Strange," *The New York Times* , February 6, 2013.

[90] Ibid.

[91] *fashiontribes.com*, "Creatures of the Wind Blow out of Chicago & onto the Fashion Map ," March 11, 2009. Accessed April 22, 2015. http://fashiontribes.typepad.com/fashion/2009/03/creatures-of-the-wind-blow-out-of-chicago-onto-the-fashion-map.html

[92] Nicole Phelps, "Creatures of the Wind. Fall 2012," Style.com, February 9, 2012. http://www.style.com/fashion-shows/fall-2012-ready-to-wear/creatures-of-wind. Accessed April 27, 2015.

[93] Nicole Phelps, "Creatures of the Wind. Spring 2013 ," *Style.com* , September 6, 2012 . Accessed April 20, 2015. http://www.style.com/fashion-shows/spring-2013-ready-to-wear/creatures-of-wind

[94] Nicole Phelps, "Creatures of the Wind. Fall 2013 ," *Style.com* , February 7, 2013. Accessed April 20, 2015. http://www.style.com/fashion-shows/fall-2013-ready-to-wear/creatures-of-wind

characterized by distorted images in bright-saturated colors, often produced by artists under drug effects;[95] and books such as *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies*, by the Scottish Episcopalian Minister Robert Kirk (1644-1692),[96] which is considered the most relevant treatise on the topics of fairies and second sight.

Unlike Creatures of the Wind, designer Yean Yu (b. 1968, South Korea) focuses exclusively on garment structure and dressmaking techniques. Yu declared in a statement, "A quiet focus and discipline was developed to master the scarce language of *flou,* and it was where I found my design signature." [97] In 2001, the designer launched a collection of lingerie—her trademark—along with her freestanding retail store called *37=1*. In it, the designs were hung from invisible wires and illuminated from behind on different opacities of white and cream acrylic to reveal the construction.[98] In 2004, Yu began creating made-to-measure lingerie in edgy styles. Translucent fabrics and revealing cuts, which lend to the pieces a sense of femininity, complement the simple lines used in the construction. She avoids ornaments and employs no padding or underwire. As the designer explained in a 2005 interview for the *New York Times*, "Traditionally, lingerie constricts and control, but mine feels as close to nothing as possible."[99] The undergarments, made from silk chiffon, charmeuse and georgette, are layered to vary transparency. The design process often began by choosing the fabric, the integrity of which she seeks to maintain. The material is cut as little as possible and is folded or manipulated to craft the

[95] Nicole Phelps, "Creatures of the Wind. Spring 2012," *Style.com* , September 2011. Accessed April 20, 2015. http://www.style.com/fashion-shows/spring-2012-ready-to-wear/creatures-of-wind

[96] Minister and Folklorist Robert Kirk is best known for The Secret Commonwealth, a collection of supernatural tales. See, Stewart Sanderson, "A Prospect of Fairy Land ," *Folcklore* (Folclore Enterprise) 75, no. 1 (Spring 1964): 1-18.

[97] Personal statement provided by the designer.

[98] Colleen Hill, *Exposed: A History of Lingerie* (Yale University Press , 2014).

[99] Yu quoted in Jennifer Tung, "Unmentinables You Want to Mention ," *The New York Times* , December 5, 2005.

pieces. For instance, Yu may use the fabric's selvedges to make a V-shaped décolletage.[100] Emphasizing structure and proportion, every detail is carefully executed to fit and accommodate the human body. The designer may revise the construction of a piece multiple times, for instance, by removing extraneous pieces or patterns. The collection becomes alive through sketching, drawing, and fitting in muslin.

Yu's minimal garments stand in sharp contrast to designer Koos van den Akker's (1939-2015, New York City) ornamented clothing. In the foreword of the book *Koos Couture Collage: Inspiration and Technique*, the designer wrote, "There is no label that fits, what I do is original, almost organic. Not fashion, not art—just inspired, modern collage with a lot of details."[101] Van den Akker was born to a working class family in The Hague, Netherlands. He showed his interest in fashion since early age. When he was eleven years old, Van Den Akker taught himself to use the sewing machine and made his first garment—a dress for her sister—out of a white bed sheet embellished with pearls from his mother's necklace. [102] At age 20, he moved to Paris and worked as window dresser at the popular Galleries Lafayette. In 1963, while attending *L'Ecole Guerre Lavigne*, van den Akker was offered apprenticeship at Christian Dior, where he learned the technicalities of sewing.[103] After three years at the French couture house, he moved back to The Hague, and, in 1965 opened his first couture salon, where he created designs influenced by American movies such as *Carousel* and actress Audrey Hepburn dressed by Givenchy. These early designs mirrored his fascination with New York City, where he moved after the death of his father in 1968. Van den Akker explained in an interview, "One day I took the boat and I

[100] Hill: 2014.

[101] Koos van den Akker, "Foreword," in *Koos. Couture, Collage.* , 6-11 (Worhington; Ohio : Dragon Threads , 2002). 11

[102] Linda Chang Teufel, *Koos. Couture. Collage* (Worthington: Ohio : Dragon Threads , 2002).

[103] Ibid.

came here. I was twenty-seven. And I knew how to make clothes from A to C."[104] The designer made a simple shift dress for his first American costumer. "I had a portable sew machine. Then it was all Courrèges. You could make that in 3, 4 hours and so I did."[105] Since then, van den Akker did not stopped making clothing. "I'm a craftsman. I'm a seamstress. I really sit in front of my sewing machine every day from 6 in the morning until 4 o'clock in the afternoon and I make clothes," he emphatically declared.[106]

Van den Akker developed a signature style that resisted fashionable trends. " The home sewing industry is one which I heartily endorse, as it allows women and men to express themselves with fabric–free from fashion constraints," he professed.[107] Like a painter, the designer explored the notion of the body as a canvas through juxtapositions of contrasting patterns and textiles. He used appliquéd techniques to extend the possibilities of mixing patterns; thus creating visual and tactile appeal. Although the fabric arrangements formed integrated whole designs, narrow ribbons or biding often individualized each swatch of fabric employed in the garments. The pictorial effects of mixing fabrics can only be fully appreciated in 360 degrees. Fashion curator Harold Koda wrote about Van den Akker's singular aesthetic,

> Formalist descriptions of [Van den Akker's] work associated him more with the intensions of early-twentieth-century avant-garde movements than to the methods of his peers in the fashion world. Therefore, it is perhaps inevitable that his loyal coterie of clients collected each van den Akker design as a work of art. [108]

[104] Koos van den Akker in conversation with the author. September , 18th , 2013.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Ibid.

[107] Van den Akker, 2002: 11.

[108] Harold Koda, "Foreword ," in *Koos. Couture, Collage*, 6-7 (Worthington, Ohio: Dragon Threads , 2002). 7.

One staple of Van den Akker's designs was a jacket that closed in the front with a stand-up collar. With the base of the jacket on the table, he often rolled out fabric on top and cut the shapes free hand to create a collage without any preconceive idea. The designer stated, "The idea is to paint with fabric, letting the imagination fly—there are really no rules."[109]

As I have explained in this section, the designers invited to *Folk Couture* had referenced painting, photography, design and literature in their creations from multiple perspectives and through diverse design approaches. Some of them had literally reproduced works of arts in their collections; in other cases, shapes, colors and concepts behind artworks had loosely inspired the collections. Some of the fashion makers had exhibited their creations in museums; and several designers had collaborated with artists, musicians and dancers. They had presented collections at New York City Fashion Week seasonally, which testified to the relevance they have in the contemporary fashion scene. As it was requested by the American Folk Art Museum, the chosen designers' works represented the diversity of fashion; from functional clothing to avant-garde designs. The particular aesthetics of the designers would be either reinforced or challenged by the American Folk Art Museum's invitation to create a piece of new couture inspired by folk art. The next chapter of this dissertation analyzes the artworks they chose as inspiration and the dresses they inspired.

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[109] Van den Akker, 2002: 8.

Chapter III

The Exhibition *Folk Couture*

Interestingly, most of the thirteen chosen designers gravitated toward the same ten to fifteen artworks from the almost one hundred identified for their consideration. Some of the designers immediately asked if their new designs should be pieces of wearable clothing, perhaps alluding to the notion that fashion becomes art when it is not wearable. Others expressed uncertainty at not having a customer to please. Fashion, unlike art, is a field framed by many commercial restrictions (such as seasonal trends, clients' preferences, functionality, etc.), which often restrain designers' creativity. For this reason, I encouraged designers to take risks and unleash their creativity for this project, which stimulated experimentation (such as experimental silhouettes, textile innovation, etc.), and emphasized the artistry of fashion (such as artisanal techniques). In terms of the question about wearable clothing, we answered that we needed a garment to dress a mannequin with, but that were not looking specifically for functional ensembles.

From May to September 2013, I made studio visits during which the designers presented sketches and swatches of fabrics pinned on board to illustrate their concepts. All of the designers interpreted the original works of art in personal ways and linked them to multiple forms of mediums (such as drawing, photography and digital techniques). In this amalgamation of images and ideas, the boundaries between the disciplines of art and fashion became irrelevant, which was one of the purposes of the exhibition. I observed that during this initial stage when a designer was conceiving his new design, there was really no difference between the creative process for fashion and any other artistic medium.

I conceived this project as a conversation/collaboration with the participating designers. Based on the conversations I had with the designers along with the concepts and formal characteristics behind the ensembles, the four categories used to organize the show emerged: *Pattern*, *Disembodiment*, *Playfulness and Narrative*. *Pattern* focuses on motifs, geometries, and repetitions taken from three quilts, a coverlet, and a papercut. *Disembodiment* explored the conventional definition of fashion as an embodied practice through garments that defy wearability. *Playfulness* encompassed fanciful garments that emerged from the study of a selection of whimsical figures. Finally, *Narrative* presented two gowns developed around the story inherent in the inspirational artworks.

At the end of this chapter a critical appraisal of the new couture is provided. This analysis measures the different kinds of success the designers invited to show achieved in the new ensembles. The designers were asked to create a new garment that based on one or more than one piece from the American Folk Art Museum's archive would make significant contributions to the current discourse on fashion and art through cutting-edge designs, innovative textile designs, and rich conceptual articulations between fashion and folk art. In addition, this section also draws extensive connections between the garments and the art and fashion history to complement the ensemble analysis. These connections were not previously made in the chapter to avoid the reader's distraction from the discussion of the four categories shaping the exhibition.

Pattern

Perceived by direct observation, visual patterns are repetitions of a form in nature or design. Artists and designers repeat patterns to organize surfaces and create a sense of visual rhythm that could either alter or delight the viewers' perceptions. Designer William Justema wrote, "Although the essence of pattern is repetition, variation makes rewarding to look at patterned surfaces. Variation relieves the starkness, spottiness or mechanical regularity of a pattern." [1] Acting reciprocally, repetition and variation activates plain surfaces through the use of patterns.

The properties of patterns are structure, scale, and coverage. Structure is the underlying framework that organizes a pattern distribution.[2] Scale relates to size of a pattern, which is determined by the complexity and quantity of the motif employed to cover a surface.[3] Coverage indicates the amount of pattern configuration in a given space. [4] Patterns are composed of motifs, which might be repeated one or several times in a design or composition.

The designers included in the *Pattern* section—Chadwick Bell, Fabio Costa, threeASFOUR, Gary Graham, and Catherine Malandrino—centered their attention on the patterns of the artworks chosen and interpreted the motifs through their own particular aesthetics while using different techniques. Although in fashion, pattern relates to the template used to cut a

[1] William Justema, *The Pleasure of Pattern* (New York, Amsterdam, London : Reinhold Book Corporation , 1968). 25

[2] Ibid. 29

[3] Ibid. 30

[4] Ibid.

garment the designers that this section featured focused exclusively on the notion of pattern as decorative or conceptual device.

Designer Chadwick Bell centered on the patterning of the piece entitled *Cornucopia and Dots Whitework Quilt* (artist unidentified, United States, 1800-1820) to create a simple, flat-silhouette *gillet* that served to accentuate its quilted patterns, primarily a repeated paisley shape modeled on the cornucopia present in the quilt. [Fig. 5 y 6] *Cornucopia and Dots Whitework Quilt* (composed of three parts: a top layer, backing fabric and batting) features cornucopia, flowers, leaves and dots motifs symmetrically distributed over its surface, which were created with stuff work and cording technique (which is sometimes called 'trapunto' work in reference to a probable Italian origin for the tradition).[5] In the stuff work technique, the patterns are outlined through quilting stitches to create shapes like 'pockets.' Then, the threads of the fabric behind the stitched pockets are opened with a sharp tool to allow the placement of padded material from the back. After the pockets are filled with the material, the threads in the bottom layer are pushed back into place.[6] In the cording technique, channels are stitched over the upper layer of the quilt that then are filled with cotton cord. Dense background quilting is applied to flatten the areas between the raised motifs; thus emphasizing the sculptural effect in the textile surfaces. [7] Embellished with intricate designs, the white cotton and bleached linen employed in quilts such as *Cornucopia and Dots Whitework* represented a sign of both modernity and of luxuriousness for women who could afford the amount of thread needed to craft these pieces, and to keep them

[5] Elizabeth W. Warren and Sharon L. Eistenstat, *Glorious American Quilts: The Quilt Collection of the Museum of American Folk Art* (New York : Penguin Studio in association with MAFA , 1996).

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

clean at a time when laundering was an expensive activity.[8]

Cornucopia and Dots Whitework mirrored the neoclassical taste that was on fashion in the nineteenth century. Neoclassicism, an artistic and aesthetic style, drew inspiration from the art and culture of ancient Greek and Rome; and, the cultural movement known as Enlightenment, which centered in reason and individualism rather than tradition and faith.[9] Neoclassic art, a reaction against the opulence of the Baroque and Rococo style, [10] was decisively influenced by both the writings of German art historian Johan Joachim Winckelman (1717-1768); who praised the harmony and serenity of Greek idealized forms; and, the Grand Tour—a standard itinerary taken by upper class Europeans, which providing exposure to classical and Renaissance art contributed to the revival of classical art and made the collecting of antiquities a new trend in Europe.[11]

The cornucopia or horn of plenty quilted in the textile chosen by Bell is a sign of wealth and nourishment and is usually represented through a horn-shaped urn copiously filled with fruits and flowers. The symbol of the horn originated from classic antiquity; and, since then it has been employed in Western painting, sculpture and architecture. [12] While conceptualizing his design, Bell noticed that the cornucopia motif in the quilt, a horn shaped symbol, bored a

[8] Stacy C. Hollander, "White on White (and a little gray) ," *Folk Art* (American Folk Art Museum) 31, no. 1-2 (2006): 33-41.

[9] Hugh Honour, *Neo-Classicism* (Ringwood, Victoria, Australia : Pinguin Books , 1973).

[10] Ibid.

[11] See, Estelle Lingo, *Francois Duquesnoy and the Greek Ideal* (New Heaven and London : Yale University Press, 2007); and , Stephen L. Dyson, *In Persuit of Ancient Pasts: A History of Classical Archeology in the 19th and 20th centuries* (New Heaven; London : Yale University Press , 2006).

[12] One of the most popular explanations of the origin of the cornucopia relates to the nurturance of infant Zeus. Hidden from his father Crones, Zeus was fed with the milk of several attendants, among them, the goat Amalthea (Nourishing Goddess). While playing, Zeus, who had extraordinary force, unintentionally broke of one of Amalthea's horns, which, then, magically became an endless source of nourishment for the infant god. See, David Leeming, *The Oxford Companion to World Mythology* (New York : Oxfrod University Press , 2005).

resemblance to paisleys, the twisted teardrop shape of Persian origins. [13] The designer explained in an interview, "There was a lot of trading happening at the time and a lot of [materials] from India coming over, so you have the paisley motif that was being dispersed around the world, and that had an influence on this quilt."[14] Indeed, the paisley motif became fashionable during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when Kashmir shawls with paisley designs were imported from British India.[15] Based on the similarity between the cornucopia motif in *Cornucopia and Whitework Quilt* and the paisley motif, Bell machine quilted a paisley pattern all over his white *gillet* (robe); a calf-length garment made on cotton with oxford cloth trim that resembled a sleeveless kimono. The paisley designs were applied all over the dress; thus, creating a dense ornamented surfaces. The uncomplicated silhouette of this dress mirrored the simple lines of the neoclassical quilt. At the same time, in its simplicity the white garment echoed the minimal shapes of contemporary fashions, which emphasized functionality.

While Bell centered on the formal properties of the pattering to create his dress, designer Fabio Costa focused on the symbolic dimension of the repeated motifs. Costa was inspired by two pieces: *Tree of Life Quilt* (artist unidentified, United States, 1796) and the monumental *Sacred Heart of Jesus* (artist unidentified probably Fallon, North Dakota, c. 1900). [Fig. 7 and 8] *Tree of Life Quilt*, which was influenced by hand painted and mordant-dyed bed covers called

[13] In Iran the paisley motif evolved from the convergence of floral spray and a cypress tree during the Sasanid Dynasty (AD 224 to AD 651). The paisley motif represented life and eternity. Since then, the paisley motif has been employed to embellish royal garments, crowns and also the textiles worn by the general population. Today the pattern is popular in Iran and South and Central Asia. In Iran and Uzbequistan the motif is applied not only to textiles, but also to paintings, jewelry, ceramics and gardening. The French world for paisley is *palme*, which refers to the palm tree. Pine tree and cypress tree are other botanical sources that influenced the shape of the paisley motif. In India and Pakistan, the term paisley relates to the world mango. American quilters call this pattern "Persian Pickles." See, Reilly, Valerie (1987), *The Paisley Pattern: The Official Illustrated History*, Glasgow: Richard Drew.

[14] Bell in conversation with the author. May, 9th 2013.

[15] The town of Paisley in Renfrewshire, Scotland (from where the motif's Western name derived) became the most important center for the production of paisleys patterns, which were either adapted for looms or printed in fabrics. See Reilly: 1987.

palampore or Jacobean embroidery,[16] features a central serpentine tree growing from an undersized urn that is flanked by two flower-and-fruit bearing cornucopias and framed by scrolling vines. The date 1796 was corded at the base of the quilt. A white cotton fringe adorned the quilt; a traditional finish for whitework bedcovers.[17] As I explained before, the production of all-white textiles such as *Tree of Life Quilt* mirrored the neoclassical style in art and featured the elaborated stuffing and cording techniques that are the trademarks of this type of textiles.

The tree design reproduced in the quilt originated in China; employed in England in the mid-seventeenth century, then presented by English Indian Company traders to textile painters in India.[18] Several world theologies and philosophies feature the tree of life motif. This sign refers to the interconnection of all forms of life on Earth and symbolizes the common descent in the human evolutionary chain. In folklore, culture and fiction, the tree of life relates to immortality and fertility and it is connected to the motif of the world tree, which links heaven, the earth and the underworld. As bearer of substance, the world tree is interpreted as a feminine sign; meanwhile, as a vertical union of earth and heaven, it becomes a phallic-masculine sign.[19]

The second inspirational artwork chosen by Costa is *Sacred Heart*, a monumental religious wood carved representation of the heart of Jesus with a series of arrows emanating from its center. German Russian immigrants brought to America an artisanal tradition of highly

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[16] The term palampore derived from the Hindi word for bed cover, *palangposh*. Made in India for the European market of the late 17th c. and 18thc. *palampore* often feature a central meandering tree with flowers and fruits coming out from a small hill with peaks or rocks. The Metropolitan Musuem of Art, *Bed Cover (Palampore. 1982.66)* (New York : The Metropolitan Museum of Art). Accessed April 22, 2015. http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/453160?rpp=30&pg=1&ft=palampore&pos=2

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Palampore (2010.337)* (The Metropolitan Musuem of Art). Accessed, April 22, 2015. http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/75909?rpp=30&pg=1&ft=palampore&pos=1

[17] Stacy C. Hollander, "Tree of Life Quilt ," in *American Anthem: Masterworks from the American Folk Art Museum Collection* , 301-302 (New York : American Folk Art Musuem in Association with Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers , 2001).

[18] The Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Chinese Palampore. 47.63* (New York : The Metropolitan Museum of Art). Accessed April 22, 2015. http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/69860?rpp=30&pg=1&ft=palampore&pos=3

[19] Ibid.

decorated wrought-iron grave markers mostly made in the form of crosses. These grave makers, which can be seen in German Russian cemeteries in the upper Midwest; usually feature a heart at the center with arrows. Although the *Sacred Heart* is made out of wood, it recalls the sculptural tradition in religious folk art brought from Europe to America.

Sacred Heart of Jesus is attributed to an anonymous artist member of the German Russian community settled in Fallon, North Dakota in 1892. The members of this community were descendent of colonists who migrated from southwestern Germany to the Black Sea region of Southern Russia and Ukrania in the eighteenth century. These German peasants were offered free land, the preservation of their language, and the liberty to practice Christian religions by the Russian government. However, since authorities began withdrawing such privileges in the 1870s, some of them moved to the United States, where they settled German-speaking communities and farms in the upper Midwest. Black Sea Germans from Russia, who were served by preachers from Saint Anthony until they built their place of worship in 1907, were devoted to the Sacred Heart. [20]

The Christian motifs of the tree of life and the sacred heart immediately drew Costa's attention to the objects; he grew up surrounded by colonial expressions of the Catholic baroque in his native Belo Horizonte, Brazil, where these signs were prominently figured on the facades and interiors of Catholic cathedrals. Introduced by Jesuits missionaries in the seventeenth century, Baroque style throve in the state of Minas Gerais, where the designer was born.[21] References to Catholic culture often appear in the way Costa designs dresses; basically, they are

[20] Gerard C. Wertkin, "Sacred Heart of Jesus," in *American Anthem: Masterworks of the American Folk Art Musuem*, 360 (New York : American Folk Art Museum).

[21] The foremost proponents of the style were sculptor Aleijadinho (1730 o 1738-1814) and painter Master Ataíde (1762-1830). See, Bury, John, *Arquitetura e Arte no Brasil Colonial* (São Paulo,: Editora Nobel, 1991).

garments inspired by clergy and traditional catholic gear, a style that was mirrored in the monastic ensemble he envisioned for *Folk Couture.* Costas's ensemble inspired by the *Tree of Life Quilt* and the *Sacred Heart of Jesus* consisted of a wide brimmed hat, a *capelet*, a split-front skirt, and a pair of pants. [Fig. 9] The outfit was made out of nylon, raw silk mesh, cotton fiber, Japanese raw silk yarn, and Japanese bamboo yarn. The tree of life pattering, which was symmetrically applied on both the *capelet* and the skirt, has a deliberately unrefined finishing that sharply contrasted to the motifs delicately applied in the quilt. The pattering was created with stuff work made visible by Costa's choice of fabrics—nylon and raw silk mesh.

The interplay between religious iconography and geometry is also at the core of the multilayered dress created by threeASFOUR. The design collective centered on the six-pointed star repeated in the nineteenth-century Quaker *Friendship Star Quilt* (Elizabeth Hooton, 1808-1851, and others. Philadelphia, 1844) and interpreted this sign as the Jewish star, the association the pattern bears today. [Fig. 10] Also known as "single-pattern albums" or sometimes "single-pattern friendship quilts," friendship quilts are composed of blocks made of the same designs. [22] The *Friendship Star Quilt* comprised of forty-nine pieced six-pointed stars, each with either a cursive or printed signature. The quilt was discovered in a barn near Philadelphia and its name has been linked to the Scattergood–Savery families of Quakers. Dated 1844 the textile is part of a group of Delaware Valley Quaker-made signature quilts made from 1840 to 1860. Quakers preferred single-pattern friendship quilts instead of the more complex sampler album quilts (which feature different types of motifs). The unity and simplicity of these quilts was suitable to the Quaker beliefs in equality and communicated the notion of a cohesive community. The

[22] Warren and Sharon, 1996: 23.

importance that Quakers attributed to family, men, women and children, was represented in Quaker quilts.[23]

The fashion for signature-quilts was probably triggered by the development of permanent ink in the 1830s.[24] As writing in ink was not a technique easily to master, often one or two skilled writers would sign the names. The fifty different names on *Friendship Star Quilt* were written in either printed or cursive letter by probably no more of 3 or 4 people. Twenty of the stars feature pen-and-ink motifs (such as a small stacks of books) applied by a person who was well skilled in the technique. Stamp or tin stencils were also employed to make the motifs. [25]

For the sashing and the border of *Friendship Star Quilt,* a single chintz was chosen; while for the stars several roller-printed cottons were used. [26] The fabrics were probably imported from England as the Scattergoods and the Copes, family names that were featured in the quilt, were seafarers with access to English items and fashions. Moreover, as Quakers avoided American cottons because they were produced by slave labor, using English fabrics represented a protest against slavery.[27]

Friendship quilts were made to honor a distinguished member of a community, as a gift for a departing family member or friend, or simply as a way to strengthen family bounds as people began to migrate in search of employment or new opportunities. That might be the case of *Friendship Star Quilt,* which remained in the Delaware Valley where it was made for several

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid. 25.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

decades until it was discovered. Mostly, the designs employed on these quilts were the popular patterns of the day, such the six-pointed stars used in *Friendship Star Quilt.*[28]

The six-pointed star, hexagram or Star of David has been identified and employed by Jewish, Christian and Arabic cultures. It was widely employed as decorative motif in Christian churches before the design began appearing in Jewish synagogues.[29] In the seventeenth century the term Star of David or Shield of David was identified with the six-pointed star. During the nineteenth-century efforts to imitate the influence of the Christian cross triggered the use of the Star of David by the Jewish community of Eastern Europe.[30] Jewish communities also employed the six-pointed star in talismanic amulets.[31] In such cases, the symbol is known as the seal of Solomon; which is also the name given to this sign in Arabic. According to the Qur'an Muslims should respect David and King Solomon, as they were both prophets and kings.[32] The six-pointed star appears on several pre-Ottoman and Ottoman flags (such as the Karamanid flag) and is also found in mosques, Arabic rugs and carpets. In 1897 the hexagram was chosen to represent the worldwide Zionist community at the first Zionist's Congress.[33] Later, the Nazis used a yellow-colored Star of David during the Holocaust to identify the Jews. [34] In 1948, a blue Star of David against a white background was employed in the flag of Israel for the first time. [35]

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[28] Ibid.

[29] Scholem, Gershom, "The Curious History of the Six-pointed Star" (1949). Accessed April 22, 2015. http://www.erolsadiku.com/DOWNLOAD/FREEMASONRY%20(SLOBODNO%20ZIDARSTVO)/Books-3/Gershom%20Scholem%20-%20The%20Curious%20History%20of%20the%20Six-Pointed%20Star_www.ErolSadiku.com.pdf

[30] www.mfa.gov.il Alec Mishory, "The Flag and the Emblem ." (2003). Accessed April 22, 2015. http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/aboutisrael/israelat50/pages/the%20flag%20and%20the%20emblem.aspx

[31] Scholem: 1949.

[32] Stephen F. Dale, *The Muslin Empires of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press , 2009).

[33] Mishory: 2003; Sholem: 1949.

[34] Jacob D'Ancona, *The City of Light* (New York : Citadel , 2003).

[35] Mishory: 2003.

Inspired by the six-pointed star in the *Friendship Star Quilt,* threeASFOUR made a futuristic dress composed of three laser-cut foam layers. [Fig. 11] Each layer was pierced with one of three religious symbols: the Jewish star, (based on the six-pointed star quilted in the *Friendship Star Quilt*.), the Christian pattern (four-pointed star), and the Islamic one, (five-pointed star). The juxtaposition of the three symbols—Catholic, Islamic and Jewish stars—was intended to demonstrate that, through history, these cosmogonies have employed the same symbol (the star). More importantly, the designers wanted to send a message of unity between antagonist religious and philosophies through the dress. Significantly, both threeASFOUR and the Quaker women who crafted the quilt worked collectively and employed the six-pointed star as a sign of friendship and unity. In terms of the silhouette, the futuristic A-line dress had round, oversized sleeves that expanded the shoulders to the neck, thus, recalling the gauze wings worn by women at the back of their heads during the Elizabethan period. In addition, the pierced layers looked like *mashrabiya*, an ornate screen characteristic of North African homes that can be considered the architectural equivalent of a veil.

The star motif forms a link between threeASFOUR's ensemble and designer Gary Graham's coatdress, which was inspired by the blazing star and snowballs patterns featured in the *Ann Carll Coverlet,* an early nineteenth-century loom-woven textile (attributed to the Mott Mill, active 1810–c.1850. Westbury, New York, 1810). [Fig. 12] In the first quarter of the nineteenth emigrants from England, Scotland, Ireland and Germany introduced sophisticated loom technology into the United States.[36] They brought complex techniques of carpet weaving that were adapted to 'bed carpets' or 'carpet coverlets,' which are characterized by two layers of

[36] Stacy C. Hollander, "Ann Carll Coverlet: Blazing Star and Snowballs ," in *American Anthem: Masterworks from the American Folk Art Musuem* , 307 (New York : American Folk Art Musuem , 2001).

cloth woven simultaneously. Double-cloth coverlets with abstract patterns are found in Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, some areas of New England, and Eastern Canada. However, coverlets with names and dates woven in the borders (like Ann Carl Coverlet) are typical of New York's Long Island.[37]

Ann Carl Coverlet is the earliest American coverlet named and dated.[38] The textile is attributed to the Mott family of artisans, who were Quakers from the Long Island town of Westbury. Twenty-one named and dated coverlets produced between 1810 and 1825 exist; the Mott weavers crafted several of them.[39] The name "Ann Carll" was woven at the center and the bottom of a single border; meanwhile, the date March 31, 1810, runs at the center and at the top. In between, both the name and date seem to be stretched out and are unreadable. The way the threads were tied together to make the blocks for the lettering and the numerals caused this deformation. [40]

Graham wove the fabric for the coatdress on a jacquard loom in Providence, Rhode Island. [Fig. 13] For this design, each individual pattern piece was woven separately. Achieving the right size and scale of the blazing start and snowballs patterns to create depth was one of the biggest challenges. The result was an innovative pattern of stars and snowballs that decreased in size as the eye traveled upwards from the hem of the coatdress. The effect gave the garment an ascendant trajectory, like a comet or spaceship. Graham employed both sides of the textile (positive and negative) in the sleeves of the coat to mirror the reversible construction of the

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

coverlets, which were meant to be used on both sides. In terms of its shape, the garment evoked the eighteenth-century frock coat (knee length coat with tight bodice and long sleeves), while its unfinished hems and collar lend to the piece a modern de-constructed element.[41] In this design, Graham centered exclusively on the formal properties of the motifs (such as scale) and the technical challenges to reproduced the pattering in the coverlet.

In contrast to Graham's literal replication of the pattering, designer Catherine Malandrino loosely referenced the patterns in *Papercut: Odd Fellow Symbols*, (Joseph G. Heurs, dates unknown. Probably, Pennsylvania, 1919) to create her delicate white handkerchief dress. [Fig. 14 and 15] The Independent Order of Odd Fellow was formed in early-nineteenth century America by members of the Society of England. Dating back to the seventeenth century these types of lodges were created by American and Europeans living in rural, isolated areas to provide spaces where they could socialize.[42] The central principle of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows was that, as God would take care of human beings after death, the members of the order might look after each other during their terrestrial existence.[43] The Order was among the first in providing grant insurance to the members and building orphanages and retirement homes. *Papercut: Odd Fellow Symbols* features several lodge symbols: the hourglass, which stands for the limited time of humans being on earth; the three-link-chain symbolizing the central trinity (friendship, love, and truth); and the bundle of twigs, which visualizes the notion that unity is strength.[44] Also represented in the papercut piece is the scales of justice, which stands for fairness and

[41] In fashion, the term deconstruction is applied to ensembles that exhibit the process of dressmaking. Often elements such as undone hems or visible stitches are the only 'ornament' of a deconstructed garment.

[42] Mareike Grover, "Conversation with Mary Evans, collector of Odd Fellows Objects ," *Folk Art* (American Folk Art Museum), no. Fall (2008): 28-31.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

righteousness; the snake representing wisdom; and, finally, the casket, which was considered a reminder of death.[45]

Alluding to the principles of the fraternal organization, which were the inspiration for her garment, Malandrino wrote in a statement, "The spirit of the papercut means to me to elevate the character of mankind by promoting friendship, love, truth, faith, hope, and charity."[46] The designer transformed the textured surface of the paper cut into a white cotton handkerchief dress; whose abstract pattering can be said to amalgamate the multiple signs in the inspirational artwork. In terms of the silhouette, the spherical construction of the garment evoked the circular distribution of motifs in the artwork chosen. In contrast to that design principle, the asymmetric ensemble played with the exposure of one shoulder and leg.

The *Pattern* section comprised a group of designers who make the repetition and variation of a motif the starting point for the new designs. The fashion makers dealt with the notion of pattern from different perspectives. Designer Chadwick Bell's transformed the cornucopia motif in his neoclassical quilt into a paisley motif to underscore the intense cultural interchange among India, Europe and America in the 19th c. Moreover his white ensemble mirrored both the simplicity of neoclassicism and the functionality of contemporary fashion. Fabio Costa was attracted to the religious dimension of the tree of life motif quilted in his inspirational textile to create an austere yet dramatic outfit, which was in conversation with monastic vests. The six-pointed start motif was the catalyst for threeASFOUR's futuristic dress. Comprised of laser cut layers pierced with Jewish, Catholic and Islamic stars, the dress sent a message of unity and friendship among antagonist philosophies and cultures. Gary Graham made

[45] ibid.

[46] Satement provided by the designer.

an intricate new pattering based on a coverlet to play with scale, depth and movement in his ensemble. Finally, Catherine Malandrino turned the pierced surface of a paper cut into a white crocheted dress, which alluded to the different signs represented in the artwork.

Patterning in the shape of a blown up polka dot motif was also found in the suit designer John Bartlett created for *Folk Couture*. [Fig. 16] Because Bartlett's ensemble primarily explored the relationship between corporality and clothing, it was included in the *Disembodiment* section, which is the next category this chapter discusses.

Disembodiment

"Fashion is about bodies: it is produced, promoted, and worn by bodies. It is the body that fashion speaks," sociologist and fashion theorist, Joanne Entwistle wrote.[47] Clothing is meant to be worn. Fashion designers follow the anatomical structure of the human body to create forms and silhouettes. Fashion, as the expression of the latest trends, provides "material" to dress a body. Fashion articulates and produces discourses on the body that individuals translate into everyday day dress by wearing clothing.[48] Dress 'civilizes' the body making corporality (the flesh) something recognizable and significant for a determined culture. Every day dress, an intimate side of the practice and unfolding of the self, is so close to the notion of identity that the body, the dress and the self are perceived all together as a whole.[49] As Quentin Bell stated, "our

[47] Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body* (Cambridge, UK Polity 2000).1.

[48] Ibid. 4

[49] Ibid.

clothes are too much a part of us for most of us to be entirely different to their condition: it is as though the fabric were indeed a natural extension of the body, or even of the soul." [50] Designers Ronaldus Shamask and John Bartlett challenged the intimate relationship between fashion and bodies. In the creation of their garments for *Folk Couture,* they shifted the attention away from the body to the item of clothing itself.

A mid-twentieth-century drawing of an empty blue jacket by James Castle (1899-1977) served as inspiration for Ronaldus Shamask's three tunics that resembling kites hung from the American Folk Art Museum's ceiling. [Fig. 17 and 18] Castle, who was born profoundly deaf and lived in a rural area of Boise, Idaho; produced drawings, assemblages, and books using recycled materials.[51] He made his own tools and paints from sticks, soot, and saliva; and obtained color by compressing pigment from saturated crepe paper. In his works, Castle experimented with perspective, size, composition and shading. Although Castle did not participate in the art system (he was a self-trained artist who never attended art schools, or exhibited his work in art galleries or museums), his work nevertheless employed strategies related to twentieth-century modern art movements (such as abstraction and expressive use of paint).

It is unknown whether Castle could read, although, his artworks reveal a strong interest in written or engagement with language. For more than sixty years, Castle created hundreds of books organized with framed or bordered illustrations, numbers, texts, and symbols carefully placed within grids or patterns.[52] The sources for the layout of the books might be found in his

[50] Quentin Bell, *On Human Finery* (London: Allison & Busby , 1992) 19.

[51] Tom Trusky, "Found and Profound: The Art of James Castle ," *Folk Art* (American Folk Art Museum), Winter 1999/2000: 38-47.

[52] Ibid.

sister Nelly's photographs and albums (Nelly was a talented photographer); the album stamps, magazines and newspaper that he saw at the parent's post office, or the books he received at school (Castle attended the Gooding School for Deaf and Blind in Southeastern Idaho for five years).[53] Castle's books have been classified in different categories such as (among others): album books, containing realistic illustrations; codebooks, composed of symbol systems; and calendar books, featuring grids to indicate days and half-days.[54]

Several drawings by Castle's depict clothing. In the drawings, garments appear folded, lying flat on the floor (resembling patterns employed to cut fashions), or represented in an extreme close up. When the human figure appears in the drawings, it is, for instance, represented from the back, with the garments displayed on both sizes of the figures wearing them—as if the artist were redirecting the viewer's attention towards the clothing itself. In other cases, the figures' heads are cut out, which reinforces the idea that apparently Castle was not concerned with the representation of the human body in these drawings.

A highly simplified drawing depicting a buttoned blue coat with pockets in the American Folk Art Museum by Castle inspired Shamask to created three serape dresses that were akin to light, translucent panels. The garments were made out of paper, linen/silk organza, and Lurex/nylon. While the see-through materials Shamask employed in the dresses recalled the transparent layers of pigment Castle used in his drawing; the simple construction of the tunics echoed the almost abstract rendition of the coat in the artwork. By crafting delicate garments that were not meant to be worn—because they were made of paper and see-through fabrics, with a long train at the front or back—Shamask contested the traditional definition of fashion as

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ann Percy, *James Castle: A Retrospective* (New Heaven; London : Yale University Press, 2008).

wearable clothing. Floating over the museum's space the dresses seem to have left the body and acquired their own independence. Cloth took central stage in Shamask's designs. Like Castle, Shamask appeared unconcerned with the human figure.

Designers produce different types of bodies according to the techniques and silhouettes employed in dressmaking. For instance, a robe by Japanese designer Rei Kawakubo for Comme des Garçon hides the natural contour of human anatomy through the use of draping and layering. In contrast, a corset by British designer Vivienne Westwood contrives the body emphasizing the curves and angles of the female figure to achieve an erotic effect. For *Folk Couture*, designer John Bartlett also transformed the shape and proportions of the human body through a quilted, oversized garment that defied the notion of wearable clothing.

Bartlett was attracted to the attenuated flatness of a wood figure of a man wearing a green shirt, black trousers, and white suspenders. [Fig. 19] The sculpture belongs to a group made by an anonymous artist around the late-nineteenth century. Tin was used to craft the ears and the tongue of the inspirational figure, while dark glass composed his eyes. The rigidity and extreme slenderness of the figure was mirrored in the flatness and exaggerated scale of Bartlett's design; the long sleeves and legs of which attained fairy tale proportions. [Fig. 20] The paint colors on the figure inspired the all-over pattern of black and white polka dots on a green ground in the ensemble, which is a fabric usually employed on children's garments as well dresses, swimsuits and lingerie.[55] Bartlett quilted together the front and back of his garment—the suit recalled the flat quilts that were often used as wall hangings—thus creating a suit that was not wearable. He reversed the common practice of designers who have historically worked with volume and mass

[55] The name of this pattern derived from the polka dance fashionable during the late 19th in the UK. John Peacock, *Fashion since 1900: the complete sourcebook*. (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2007).

weight to compensate the flatness of fabric in pieces such as farthingales (bell-shaped underskirts), which framed the wearer on negative space; or pannier hoops, which turned the lower half of the dress into a cage.

Exhibition designer Judith Clark wrote, "Disembodiment seems strange when talking about dress, which is so aligned with the body."[56] Indeed, the *Disembodiment* section challenged the definition of fashion as a corporeal practice by presenting dematerialized garments, which inspired by a drawing of an empty coat and a slender figure of a man, existed independently from the body. These garments reversed the conventional definition of fashion as functional clothing and subtly denied the corporal dimension traditionally linked to fashion design. These designs emphasized the flatness of the fabric, which took central stage in these ensembles. In addition, these garments defied the proportions of wearable clothing through extremely oversized flat silhouettes, which conveyed a sense of humor and wonder reminiscent of fairy tales and child imaginary. The whimsicality of these garments introduces the next section entitled *Playfulness*, which explores garments that celebrated fashion and folk art as expressions of play, spontaneity and individuality.

Playfulness

Play is a voluntary practice that it is performed outside everyday life. It is purposeless; and produces nothing but illusions.[57] Although play is by essence a not serious activity it is

[56] Judith Clark, "Disembodiment ," in *Hussein Chalayan* , ed. Robert Violette, 171-172 (New York: Rizzoli , 2011). 171.

[57] Robert Anchor, "History and Play: John Huzinga and his Critics," *History and Theory* (Wiley for Wesleyan University) 17, no. 1 (Febrero 1978) 63-93. www.justor.org/stable/2504901. Accessed March 16, 2015.

experienced with strong intensity and utter absorption.[58] Play lasts for a very determined period of time and has its own rules. In *Homo Ludens* Dutch historian Johan Huizinga (1872-1945) wrote, "In play we may move below the level of serious as the child does, but we can also move above it—in the realm of the beautiful and sacred." [59]

In the realm of folk art conventional rules of art do not apply. Entering this world means to accept the contradictory and sometimes the humorous.[60] One of the most compelling aspects of folk art is directness in conception and execution. Created often with little regard to the rules of the art academy, perspective and representation are sometimes freely re-imagined. These artworks, in some cases, feature an emphasis on minute details that recall child art. *Folk Couture* designers Yeohlee Teng, Jean Yu, Michael Bastian and Koos van den Akker translated the appealing artworks they selected into whimsical outfits that explored both the fantastical component of folk art and the fanciful dimension of fashion. Playfulness—either as the characteristic of the chosen artworks, the creative process behind the designs, or the message that the garments communicate—was at the core of the ensembles these fashion makers envisioned for *Folk Couture*.

Designer Yeohlee Teng was inspired by four fanciful animal carvings—a ram, a coyote, a Jackalope, and a dog made in New Mexico in the late 20th c. [Fig. 21, 22, 23 and 24] The Spanish *conquistadores* and Franciscan monks brought the woodcarving technique to New Mexico in the sixteenth century. [61] Later, *santeros*—makers of saints—carved animals as integral

[58] Ibid.

[59] Huizinga quoted in Anchor: 1978: 80.

[60] Harold Pearse and Nick Webb, "Borderline Cases: A Philosophical Approach to Child and Folk Art ," *Art Education* (National Art Education Association) 37, no. 4 (July 1984): 20-27. www.justor.org/stable/3192743. Accessed March, 17, 2015.

[61] Elizabeth Wecter, "Animal Carvers of New Mexico ," *The Clarion* , Winter 1986: 22-31.

feature of certain saints. For instance, San Francisco was often depicted surrounded by birds and lambs. Some carvers specialized in producing small animals; usually, representing specimens they saw on ranchos and woodlands. Animal carving reached its zenith in the second half of the twentieth century, when Felipe Benito Archuleta (1910-1991) began carving larger figures after a "vision" in which God told him to sculpt animals. Inspired by the Hispanic-Indian heritage, love for the land, and affection for animals Archuleta and the younger artisans who followed him created a "new animal kingdom" out of wood—a truly expression of contemporary folk art.[62] The woodcarvers favored imaginative representation of animals, which resemble children toys. They expressively apply paint over the surfaces of the woodcarvings to depict eyes, mouths and furs; the representation of which frequently took the form of highly decorative abstract patterns.

"These animals are very magical and you know they are handmade, so I'm celebrating the woodcarving," Teng explained in an interview.[63] The figures she selected were photographed in the informal setting of the museum's storage facility at specific angles, deliberately forcing the viewer to look at these artworks through the designer's perspective. The images were printed on sheets of paper, which she tiled together as layers to compose the dress. [Fig. 25]. In essence, she took three-dimensional objects, flattened them into two dimensions, and added back dimensionality. Three eccentric circles compose the structure of the garment, which is entirely crafted out of brown Kraft paper, a material that is in constant use in Yeohlee's design room. All the seams were made by machine except the final side seam that was hand stitched over the mannequin that displayed the dress in the exhibition space, where it was exhibited surrounded by the animal carving. In this way Yeohlee created a whimsical installation that mirrored the joyous

[62] Ibid. 31.

[63] Yeohlee Teng in conversation with the author. June 15th, 2013.

spirit she wanted to convey with this garment. "It would be really good if [the dress] appeals to the child inside everyone," she explained in an interview.[64]

Another twentieth-century animal carving, this one of a porcupine made by David Alvarez (b. 1953. Santa Fe, New Mexico, c. 1981) served as the catalyst for designer Jean Yu, who made an abbreviated black chiffon dress with a surprising straw adornment at the back, which she christened *The Animal Human Dress*. [Fig. 26 and 27] The playful quality of the museum artwork influenced her selection. As the designer explained, "It is something that I'm attracted to, because it brings an interplay. Let's do playful things, sexy things. It brings people closer to you."[65] For her ensemble, the designer used the softness of chiffon, an engaging material, and the contrasting coarseness of the straw to represent the mischievous quality she finds in *Porcupine*. "With the porcupine, you want to touch because it is such soft fur, but it also has this defense mechanism: 'not too close,'" she observed.[66]

In Yu's aesthetic, "modern," another element of the dress, relates to a process of distilling and capturing the essence of a certain element. "To take everything away except that which you want to focus on— that, for me, is modern," she said.[67] Yu's modern approach to fashion is linked to the works made by early twentieth-century avant-garde artists, who in their attempt to modernize academic art, found inspiration in the simplified forms of folk and child art.[68] The

[64] Ibid.

[65] Jean Yu in conversation with the author, July, 23 2013.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid.

[68] As psychiatrist and art historian Roger Cardinal wrote, "Child art was hailed by an artist as distinguished as Kandinsky who contrasted the 'effect of inner harmony' conveyed by the untrained hand and the pre-rational mentality of the child with the corrected by lifeless art of trained academic painters." See, Roger Cardinal, *Outsider Art* (New York : Praeger , 1972). 14.

polar notions of civilization and barbarism are represented in the softness of the chiffon and the roughness of the straw adornment that juts from the back of the gown, respectively.

Similarly, designer Michael Bastian was inspired by a series of amusing artworks in the American Folk Art Museum holdings—references to these artworks were mixed in his ensemble in different forms. The outfit was modeled after a late nineteenth-century countertop shop figure of a man in a black suit and top hat, the c. 1840 *Archangel Gabriel Weathervane*, and two items of anniversary tin in the shape of a man's top hat and eyeglasses. [69] [Fig. 28, 29, 30 and 31]

Man in Top Hat with Cane (artist unidentified, Northeastern United States, c. 1890) is a small trade figure probably designed as counter display. The painstaking depiction of his high-buttoned boots, narrow pant legs jacket and top hat suggests that the figure graced a men's haberdashery shop.[70] In Bastian's ensemble, the influence of the *Man in Top Hat with Cane* can be seen in the silhouette, a suit reminiscent of nineteenth-century menswear. The exaggerated posture and rounded belly of the figure humorously contrasted to the idealized proportions of Bastian's ensemble. The designer employed black-and-gray striped fabric for the jacket and pants; as for the designer, this fabric captures the essence of the 1860s in America.

The second artwork Bastian chose was *Archangel Gabriel Weathervane,* a sheet-iron silhouette probably made around 1940 in the northeastern United States.[71] Unlike paintings, there existed few academic models to shape folk art weathervanes. The motif for this piece possibly

[69] Stacy C. Hollander, "Anniversary Tin: Top Hat, Eyeglasses, Slippers, Bonnet with Curls, and Bow Tie. ," in *American Anthem: Masterworks from the American Folk Art Museum* , 352 (New York : American Folk Art Museum , 2014).

[70] Stacy C. Hollander, "Man in Top Hat with Cane," in *American Anthem. Masterworks from the American Folk Art Museum* , 356 (New York : American Folk Art Musuem , 2001).

[71] Gerard C. Wertkin, "Archangel Gabriel Weathervane," in *American Anthem. Masterworks from the American Folk Art Museum* , 331 (New York : American Folk Art Museum , 2001).

derived from the angels found in medieval altarpieces.[72] On the other hand, as vanes were silhouettes to be seen against the sky the addition of decorative borders, backgrounds and letterings was very restricted. As art historian Ken Fitzgerald wrote, "Perhaps this accounts for the comparative rarity of figure folk art vanes and the primitive effect of those that are seen."[73] In the Christian tradition, Gabriel is the interpreter of dreams and the messenger of great tidings. In the popular belief, the angel also announces the Last Judgment and the Second coming of Christ. Inspired by *Archangel Gabriel* Bastian's created a sweater with a replica of the vane on a piece of metallic suede appliquéd to its front.

The tin top hat and eyeglasses Bastian selected are part of a single tenth anniversary celebration gift discovered in Michigan (artist unidentified, c.1880-1900).[74] In America, gifts crafted out of tin were given to couples in their tenth—or tin—anniversary during the second half of the nineteenth-century. In 1881, the custom was widely practiced. The invitations to tin weddings were even covered with tin foil or had a tin card enclosed. Tinners provided lists with the articles—mostly oversized replicas of everyday objects—from where guests bought the gifts. Sheet tin was cut following templates and the cut outs soldered together with tight seals to craft these objects. In Bastian's outfit, the tin hat and eyeglasses were translated into the vintage top hat and modern 'shades.' Moreover, as Bastian was fascinated by the way the tin artists approached their mediums—particularly the metal, as this is not a material fashion designers commonly embrace; the wool-possum blend sweater, globes and balaclava all have a shiny metallic black thread woven into the black wool yarn.

[72] Ken Fitzgerald, *Weathervanes & Whirligigs* (New York : Bramhall House , 1968).

[73] Ibid. 88.

[74] Hollander, 2001: 352.

In addition, Bastian's ensemble also linked to the Goth subculture, notably through the use of a dark palette and accessories such as the vintage top hat and the glasses. The Goth sub culture, which emerged with the development of punk during the 1980s, is recognized by a glamorous dark appearance. Goth focused primarily around music, fashion and club culture.[75] By the mid-1980s, black clothes, long coats and dark 'shades' characterized the look of Goth rock bands, which shared a likeness with the ensemble Bastian created for *Folk Couture*.[76]

Like Bastian designer Koos Van den Akker was jointly inspired by several artworks: a mid-eighteenth crewelwork picture, two nineteenth-century portraits of women, a twentieth-century bird's-eye perspective of an industrial cityscape, and a small contemporary art quilt constructed from vintage and antique kimonos. The artist who stitched *Crewelwork Picture* is unknown, but its small size suggests a very young girl made it. [Fig. 32] The delightful scene depicted in this work features a red horse that standing below the branches of a flowering tree looks at a giant carnation, while above them a gargantuan butterfly is represented close to coral-colored berries. In addition, slithering creatures with white collars are about to eat the scattered fruit on the ground. The form of needlework shown here is often described as a crewelwork picture. According to Betty Ring, the word 'crewel,' " [is] applied to slackly twisted two-ply worsted yarn, and pictures worked in tent stitch used the same yarn." [77]

The first painting Van den Akker selected, *Woman in Veil* (attributed to Emily Eastman, 1804-c.1841, London, New Hampshire, c. 1825), is part of a group of watercolors representing

[75] The direct founders of Goth subculture were bands such as Siouxie and the Banshees and Bauhaus, which emphasized macabre sounds and somber imaginary. Films such as Brain Strockers's *Dracula* (1992) and *Interview with the Vampire* (1994) were the major influences for the Goth subculture in the 1990s. See, Paul Hodkinson, "Goth ," in *The Berg Companion to Fashion* , ed. Valerie Steele, 376-377 (Oxford; New York : Berg, 2010).

[76] Ibid.

[77] Betty Ring, "Crewelwork Picture," in *American Radiance: The Ralph Esmerian Gift to the American Folk Art Museum* (New York: The American Folk Art Museum in association with Harry N. Abrams, 2001).

ladies wearing nineteenth-century fashions. [Fig. 33] Apparently, these artworks were based on European fashion plates distributed through periodicals such as Ackerman's *Repository of Arts, Literature, Commerce, Manufacturers, Fashion and Politics*, which circulated in London from 1809 to 1829.[78] *Woman in Veil* represents a lady with her head slightly tilted to the side. Gauze veil with embroidered flowers conceals half of her face, which is framed by ringlets. Little more is known about Emily Eastman, the artist who painted this watercolor. She was born in Loudon, New Hampshire, and married Dr. Daniel Baker in 1824.[79] Based on the dress and hairstyles depicted in Eastman's watercolors, it is believed that she worked through the 1820s.[80]

Similarly, the second painting the designer chose, *Woman in Rose Dress* (artist unidentified, Vermont c. 1805-1815); depicts a lady wearing a pink dress with Vandyke collar embroidered with blackbirds.[81] [Fig. 34] Pearly buttons and deep cuff hand-netted lace embellished the sleeve of the gown that was probably a rural version of the Persian robe, which made of pink satin ornamented with black lace and drops of pearls was fashionable in Paris in1810.[82] Most likely, the unusual long bangs hanging across the sitter's face were a modified version of the hairstyle documented in early nineteenth-century portraits.[83]

In contrast to these nineteenth-century portraits, the modern painting Van den Akker picked, *Industrial Cityscape/Jim Thorpe Pennsylvania* (1968) represents a urban scene. [Fig. 35] The painting was made by self-trained artist Justin McCarthy (1892-1977). McCarthy was born

[78] Stacy C. Hollander, "Woman in Veil ," in *American Radiance: The Ralph Esmerian Gift to the American Folk Art Museum* (New York: The American Folk Art Museum in association with Harry N. Abrams, 2001).

[79] Ibid.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Stacy C. Hollander, "Woman in Rose Veil ," in *American Radiance: The Ralph Esmerian Gift to the American Folk Art Museum* (New York : The American Folk Art Museum in association with Harry N. Abrams, 2001).

[82] Entry provided by Stacy C. Hollander

[83] Ibid.

to a well-to-do family in the small town of Weatherly, Pennsylvania. His father, John, was the editor of a local newspaper; while his mother, Floretta Musselman, was a teacher. The death of McCarthy's father and brother along with the loss of the family fortune in the 1908 stock market panic marked the artist's adolescence.[84] Unable to complete law school and after several years in a mental hospital—McCarthy suffered a nervous breakdown—he returned to his family's decayed mansion to live with his mother. The artist had different jobs; one of them was peddling vegetables to the local town people. Finding solace in art, McCarthy painted images that mirror the dramatic changes the advent of technology advances such as the automobile, cinema, and T.V. produced in his native Weatherly.[85] Depicting an urban scene landscape, *Industrial Cityscape/Jim Thorpe Pennsylvania* features large, flat areas of color, mostly in green and blue. Some color fields representing houses turn into ornamental patterns in the upper right side of the canvas. The almost abstract rendition of the scene and the decorative treatment of the paint create an effect similar to a tapestry.

The last artwork Van den Akker chose, *Kimono Hanging* (1988), was quilted by fiber artist Kumiko Sudo (dates unknown), who was trained in a variety of textile art techniques in Japan.[86] [Fig. 36] Sudo began quilting after she saw American antique quilts in her first visit to New York City. While the quilt was made out of silks from the kimonos and obis the artist had been collecting for years; the inspiration for this piece came from Sudo's memories of the Cherry Blossom Festival in her home country and the family preparations for the festivities, including the kimonos they would receive. As the artist explained, "Here I have depicted in an exaggerated manner a fashionable kimono with long ribbons on the cuff and scattered layers of appliquéd

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Warren and Eistenstat: 1996.

flowers enhancing its beauty."[87] The calligraphy featured at the bottom of the quilt evoked the prayer a young girl would offer at a shrine during the Festival. [88]

Van den Akker arranged the images of the disparate artworks he selected into a collage that then was printed onto cotton and embellished with a layer of translucent sequins. [Fig. 37] Released from their original context, the images of the artworks reproduced in the textile seemed to float in a sheer space. The fabric was employed to cut an evening dress, the bustle of which expanded the skirt at the rear, emphasizing the posterior from where train of moderate length emerged, thus representing a play on mid-nineteenth-century ball dresses. Van den Akker explained the use of the sequined textile in the following terms, "I really wanted to show the artworks in the most glamorous way. That's why I chose the fabric with this shiny finish."[89] In the 1950s the concept of glamour was linked to Hollywood cinema along with studio portraits and stills of the stars, which disseminated the idea of glamour thorough the actors and their luxurious clothing. Art historian Elizabeth Wilson stated that the origin of the world glamour is related to "gramarye" a term that has the " sense of casting sheen, that is to say dazzling or blinding the spectator, and this led to it having the additional meaning of having a shiny surface."[90] The shiny finishing of Van den Akken's gown engaged the notion of play to glamour, an elusive term that is associated with fashionable dress in Western culture.

The essence of play is amusement. The intensity and absorption experience in play has no rational explanation, however, in this "power of maddening" rests its essence.[91] Play is the exact

[87] Ibid. 143.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Van den Akker in conversation with the author.

[90] Elizabeth Wilson, "A Note on Glamour ," *Fashion Theory* (Berg), 2007: 95-108. 96.

[91] Huzinga quoted in Anchor, 1978: 78.

opposite of seriousness, which is governed by causality.[92] Against the seriousness of some contemporary fashions—"Sweetness is considered an obscene word in fashion" said Italian designer Miuccia Prada—[93] the *Playfulness* section featured lighthearted ensembles that put at the forefront the imaginativeness and inventiveness of fashion and folk art. For example, Yeohlee Teng's paper dress aimed to convey the joyous component of a series of animal carvings that resemble children toys. Michael Bastian's outfit mixed several references to folk art that surprisingly gestured to the contemporary gothic sub-culture. In contrast, Koos van der Akken collaged several images of the artworks in a gown that engaged the notion of play to the intangible concept of glamour. And, inspired by a wooden porcupine Jean Yu created a dress that in its simplicity echoed the modern forms of early-twentieth-century avant-garde artists who found inspiration in child and non-western art.

The straightforward style of folk art, which rejects academic rules and, in some cases, shares a likeness to child art, is often referred to as naïve and innocent.[94] Innocence is the content of many folk art expressions that represent Eden-like paradises.[95] This theme has its antecedents in Paul Gauguin's journey to the South Seas and Pablo Picasso's attraction to African and Polynesian Art, for instance. These artists, who manifested the need and desire for a return to the essence of the creative act, projected on exotic places ideas of 'pure' cultures free of Western conventions. Included in the next category entitled *Narrative* are two garments that inspired by

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[92] Anchor, 1978: 79.

[93] Miuccia Prada quoted in Andrew Bolton and Harold Koda, *Schiaparelli & Prada: Impossible Conversation* (New York : The Metropolitan Museum of Art , 2012). 88.

[94] Pearse and Webb: 1984.

[95] Ibid.

fantastical locations—the ocean, a tropical paradise and a mythical land—explored the theme of fashion and folk art as carriers of stories.

Narrative

'The narratives of the world are numberless. Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed among different substances—as though any material were fit to receive man's stories," Roland Barthes wrote in *Image, Music, Text.*[96] Carried by oral or written language, still or moving images; and the mixtures of these 'substances,'[97] narrative is found in literature, art, cinema and fashion. Designers often construct narratives when they conceive of a garment, a collection, an editorial presentation or a runway show. Each collection is a medium to represent dreams and create fantasies. Perhaps, costume design is the practice engaged to dressmaking that better represents the narrative power of fashion design. As scholar Drake Stutesman put it, "Costume designers have to tell a story […] they create an emotional *feel* in the costume through minute details such as moving a shoulder seam further from or closer to the neck."[98] The cut of a jacket or the length of a skirt subtly set cinematic temporalities, communicate characters' personality and evolution; and mark climatic moments in a plot. Designers Bibhu Mohapatra and Creatures of the Wind, designers Shane Gabier and Christopher Peters, based their ensembles for the exhibition on artworks that allude to exotic locales: the sea

[96] Barthes quoted on Wolfgang Kemp, "Narrative," in *Critical Terms for Art History* , 62-75 (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003). 63

[97] Ibid.

[98] Druke Stutesman, *Costume Design, or, What is fashion in Film?* (Bloomington & Indianapolis : Indiana University Press , 2011). 22.

and an island paradise. The scenes provided a starting point for their own narratives. Their garments obliquely reference the original artwork by allusion, not in form but in concept.

For this project, Bibhu Mohapatra found inspiration in the rare *Tattoo Pattern Book* (Artist unidentified, New York City 1873–1910). [Fig. 38] This unique book, made of thirty-five waterproof pages, was probably used by seamen to trace ballast or tank readings and measurements.[99] It features images of nautical themes, religion, patriotism, and popular culture.[100] For instance, several anchors designs with dates 1873-1899, perhaps the artist's years of service, are depicted in one page. Another page represents a sailor standing in front of an American flag and a tombstone with the inscription "Remember the Maine." The background of this image depicts the American battleship Maine before and after its destruction. Spanish conquistadores sunk the Maine in the harbor of Havana, Cuba, in February 15, 1898 where 260 American sailors died. The national rallying crying, "Remember the Maine" helped incite President William McKinley (1843-1901) to declare the war against Spain on April 25th , the same year.[101]

One of the drawings in *Tattoo Pattern Book* entitled *Sailor's Dream,* which depicts a marine lying on a hammock, dreaming of embracing a woman; prompted Mohapatra to craft a narrative of a sailor whose only companion is a sketchbook in which to draw his dreams of company when faced with the incommensurability of the ocean. The designer explained, "As a result, this woman appears who is a sort of loved one but also part of his reality, this vast body of water." Mohapatra's vision was of an aquatic creature dressed in blue organza drapery akin to

[99] Lee Kogan, "Tatto Pattern Book," in *American Anthem: Masterworks from the American Folk Art Musuem* , 357 (New York : American Folk Art Musuem , 2001).

[100] Ibid.

[101] Ibid.

the flux of waves. Under this garment was a black lace bodysuit that loosely resembled tattoo patterns. [Fig. 39].

Tattooing dates back to the Neolithic period. Earlier human groups modified their bodies with inscriptions that signaled identity and delineated phases of human life—birth, grown and death.[102] European sailors believed tattooing protected them from the dangers of the sea; and prisoners adopted the tattoo practice to reclaim possession of their 'controlled' bodies. Heavily tattooed people performed as oddities in the nineteenth-century dime museums. [103] During WWII, Christian motifs, daggers, dragons, eagles black panthers; and the traditional heart and banner were profusely tattooed on the skins of sailors and soldiers. [104] Today tattooing has reinvented itself and accommodates to the demands of postmodern tribes: punks, rappers and hipsters.

In terms of the silhouette of Mohapatra's gown recalled a sari—the Indian female garment wrapped around waists and shoulders—that is worn over a petticoat and a fitted upper top with short sleeves; which is similar to the lacy top of Mohapatras's evening dress.

In *Illuminations*, philosopher Walter Benjamin wrote that the nature of a story is different from information.[105] The value of information is on the moment and the new. Information has to explain itself and do it quickly.[106] It lives and dies in just moments. A story is of a different character. It transcends time and continues releases its strength even after long time. [107] The

[102] Michael McCabe, "Flash & Flashbacks: The Enduring Art of Tattoo ," *Folk Art* (AFAM) 19, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 34-41.

[103] Ibid.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York : Schocken Books , 1968).

[106] Ibid.

[107] Ibid.

singular story behind the ensemble Creatures of the Wind envisioned for *Folk Couture* referenced a photographic portrait by Eugene von Bruenchenhein (b. Marinette, Wisconsin, 1910-1983) [Fig. 40] and the Greek myth of Hyperboria. "As we avoid direct visual reference, the link from the original work to the final garment can be found in the atmosphere and feeling," the designers explained in an interview. [108] [Fig. 41]

Eugene Von Bruechenhein was a prolific creator in a wide variety of mediums: photography, painting, ceramics, sculpture and poetry. Among the unusual techniques and materials he employed, were fingerprints, pottery fired in his kitchen oven, and sculptures made out of leftover chicken and turkey bones. The visionary artist mirrored in his work the fears of war and modern technology, and his fascination on outer worlds. Von Bruenchenhein was exposed to art and nonconventional ideas since early age. His father was a sign painter and his grandfather an amateur painter who believed in reincarnation and evolution. After his mother died, Von Bruenchenhein 's father married Elizabeth Mosley, who had returned to the United State from Panama where she had worked as a schoolteacher. Mosley, a chiropractic who painted floral still life and wrote booklets on issues such as reincarnation; probably, nurtured Von Bruenchenhein's interest in art and nature, which was mirrored on the numerous portraits he took of his wife Marie. In 1939, von Braunchenhein met Eveline Kalke, when she was 19 and he was 29. [109] They married four years later (the artist called her wife Marie in honor of his favorite aunt).[110] Curator Lisa Stone wrote that, "What started as an amorous past time evolved into

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[108] Statement provided by the designers.

[109] Kristin M. Jones, "Eugene von Brunchenhein ," *Frieze* , April 2011, 20. http://folkartmuseum.org/sites/folk/files/EVB_FriezeMagazine.pdf

[110] Lisa Stone, ""..made for love of creation", Thoughts on the Art of Eugene Von Bruenchenheim"," *Folk Art* 32, no. 3 (Fall 2007).

serious pursuit, resulting in many thousands staged portraits of his wife and muse."[111] In the pictures, Marie appears in several states of undress sometimes accessorized with heavy shoes, stockings, plastic pearl necklaces and flowers.[112] When she sports a dress, this is usually a flower print garment. Often, Marie is depicted as seated over patterned textiles against tree or floral curtains or chenille bedspread while she impersonated several roles such as Hollywood actresses, pinup girls, or exotic princess.[113] Von Bruenchenhein's inventiveness was pivotal in the conception of the pictures: he created fantastical stages in his living room out of precarious and found materials. The images testify to Von Bruenchenhein's profound interest in fantasy and outer worlds, which are topics he would continue representing in the tentacle plants made on clay in the late-1960s, the bone towers and the visionary skyscrapers emerging from a "tropical greenness" painted in the late 1970s.[114]

While exploring the American Folk Art Museum's archives Creatures of the Wind came upon the work of Von Bruenchenhein. "It was a serendipitous moment, as we were both already very familiar with his work. It seemed natural, if not predetermined, that we should work from his photographs to develop our piece for *Folk Couture*," the designers explained in a statement. The setup of the chosen picture (untitled, c. 1940s-mid-1950s) is suggestive of a tropical scene: Marie wears a floral strapless dress and sits casually, as though reclining in a garden, against a printed backdrop featuring bold tropical flowers. She wears a crown made of a coffee can and embellished with Christmas tree ornaments.[115] In another picture of the same series, Marie's

[111] Ibid.

[112] Roberta Smith, "Meager Means, Rich Imagination," *The New York Time*, November 4, 2010. Accessed April 27, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/05/arts/design/05eugene.html.

[113] Ibid.

[114] Ibid.

[115] Jones: 2011.

dress has loosened to expose her nude breast. [116]

The fantastic aesthetic of the picture also coincided with Creature of the Wind's vision for the spring/summer 2014 collection, which was based on the Greek myth of Hyperborea, a paradise where the sun perpetually shined and everyone lived forever.[117] According to Greek mythology, the Hyperboreans inhabited a region far the north of Thrace, where Boreas the good of North Wind lived.[118] Greeks thought that descendants of Boreas and the snow-nymph Chione created the first Hyperborean monarchy. Meanwhile, the Hellenes believed that Apollo spent his winters in *Hyperborea*, where the god alone was worshiped. Pliny, Pindar and Herodotus along with Virgil and Cicero informed that Hyperboreans lived to the age of one hundred in complete happiness.[119] Today it is believed that Hyperborea was probably located in some region at the Arctic Circle.[120]

Creatures of the Wind articulated the fantastical component of von Brunchenhein's picture and the myth of Hyperborean in a black dress printed with palm motifs in a warm brown hue that hints at the sepia undertones of the gelatin silver print. The dress is made out of cotton nylon crepe film, 3-D polyester mesh, and screen-printed silk polyester mesh. While the tight bodice is reminiscent of the strapless dress Marie wears in the photograph; the skirts loosely resemble the period flower-print backdrop. The overt sensuality conveyed by Marie's portrait sharply contrast with the unassuming and straight lines of Creatures of the Wind's dress.

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[116] Ibid.

[117] Timothy Bridman, *Hyperboreans: Myth and History in Celtic-Helenic Contacts, Studies in Classics* (New York; London : Routledge , 2005).

[118] Ibid.

[119] Ibid.

[120] Ibid.

A narrative is a story about connected events told in a particular order through oral, written or visual language. Both Mohapatra and Creatures of the Wind used the medium of fashion to tell stories based on the chosen artworks and highlighted storytelling as one of folk art's richer and more inspiring characteristics. The dresses along with their inspirations (a book and a picture) comprised a 'textual space' where concepts and mediums blend and separate at the same time like in a collage. The designers avoided both linear narratives and direct references to the artworks; and, instead suggested meanings through fabrics, motifs and silhouettes. The fantastic locations the dresses evoked—the ocean, a tropical paradise and a mythical land—echoed the exotic places that fascinated modern artists in the early-twentieth century. As art historian Half Foster explained, "almost all modernists projected onto tribal people a purity of artistic vision that was associated with the simplicity of instinctual life."[121] Modernist attraction to the 'primitive" lead some artists to travel to new lands looking for cultures 'untouched' by Western society. Conceptually this modern zeitgeist is linked to the garments the *Narrative* section presented.

Critical appraisal of the designs

For the exhibition *Folk Couture*, designers were expected to make significant contributions to the current discourse on fashion and art through cutting-edge silhouettes, innovative textile designs and rich conceptual articulations. We also expected the new designs to

[121] Half Foster, "Psychoanalisis in Modernism and as Method ," in *Art Since 1900. Modernism, Antiposmodernism, Postmodernism,* , 15-21 (New York : Thames & Hudson , 2004). 16.

exemplify couture characteristics such as uniqueness, inventiveness, and time-consuming techniques. This section offers a critical analysis of the garments created for the exhibition *Folk Couture* based on how the designers addressed the relationship between folk art and fashion in their designs and the different kinds of successes the final ensembles achieved.

Fabio Costa created one of the most accomplished pieces in the show. The designer centered on the religious meanings of the symbols in *Tree of Life Whitework Quilt* and *Sacred Heart of Jesus*; and transformed them into an avant-garde design, the shape of which resembled Roman Catholic vestments. In Western Contemporary society Roman Catholic dress is often represented through a simple vest that recall those of the early Christian era.[122] The vests are characterized by sparseness of patterning (crosses or stylized floral patterns with little background ornamentation) and the use of natural materials (silk, wool, cotton, and linen).[123] The aesthetic principles of Roman Catholic wear were mirrored in the austerity of Costa's outfit, which in its simplicity, the use of religious motifs such as the tree of life and the sacred heart, and the natural fibers employed in the outfit communicated the 'splendid sobriety' the religious vestments seek to convey.[124] Uncannily, the shape of this ensemble also echoed Christian Dior's 1950 *New Look*—wide hat, rounded shoulders, cinched waist and voluminous skirt—which the French designer created as revival of the nineteenth–century hourglass figure. In this sense, it can be said that Costa contrasted the sophistication of 1950s Parisian high fashion with the 'raw' aesthetic that characterized folk art through his ensemble. The designer made visible the artisanal techniques he employed to quilt the motifs by using translucent textiles and deliberately left

[122] The making of objects used in divine service is regarded in itself a form of worship. These vestments communicate "a certain splendid sobriety," which according to the reform of the Roman Catholic Church associated with the General Instruction of 1962 derives from "the excellence of their material and the elegance of their cut" rather than from their elaborated embellishment or color. See, Elisha P. Renne, "Ecclesiastical Dress ," in *The Berg Companion to Fashion* , ed. Valerie Steele, 239-241 (Oxford; New York : Berg , 2010).

[123] Ibid.

[124] Ibid. 239.

unfinished the edges of the headpiece. These elements sharply contrast with the polished finishing of traditional couture. Moreover, Costa's outfit paralleled Japanese designer Yohji Yamamoto Fall/winter 1998 collection, notably the bridal gown paraded that season, which consisted of a crinoline matched with an extremely oversized hat. According to fashion historian Amy de la Haye, Yamamoto's bridal gown was 'paying up to mass-market perception that fashion was extravagant." [125] In this collection, Yamamoto, as Costa did in *Folk Couture*, played with notions of space (in the skirt) and scale (in the wide brimmed hat) to explore mainstream fashion silhouettes.

Perhaps, the most creative accessory in Costa's hybrid outfit was the hat, which, like a mask, blinded the eyes of the wearer. It was inspired by those used by *Candomblé* priests when a high deity embodies present form on earth.[126] Such headpieces often covered the priests' eyes to represent the practitioners' detachment from earthly pleasures. *Candomblé* is a syncretic religion developed on beliefs brought from to Brazil by West African slaves.[127] It includes elements from Roman Catholicism and Indigenous American traditions.[128] Finally, the 'hairy' texture of Costa's hat, which suggested human hair, lent a surreal characteristic to the outfit—in the 1930s surrealist artists combined found objects in unusual arrangement that defied logical thinking and enticed unconscious and poetic meanings.

Designer Jean Yu also provided a thoughtful re-interpretation of *Porcupine;* the prickly carapace of which was transformed into a straw adornment placed at the back of the dress. The

[125] Amy de la Haye, "A Dress is No Longer a Little, Flat Closed Thing: Issey Miyake, Rei Kawakubo, Yohji Yamamoto & Junya Watanabe ," in *Radical Fashion* , 29-31 (London : V&A Museum Publications , 2001). 32.

[126] Stefania Capone, *Searching for Africa in Brazil. Power and Tradition in Candomblé* (Durham, North Carolina : Duke University Press , 2010).

[127] Ibid.

[128] Ibid.

tactic Yu employed—the use of an everyday material as straw to create a work of art—brought to mind the displacement of quotidian objects made by artist Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), who selected everyday items and then exhibited them in museums or galleries to question notions such as artistic craftsmanship, authorship, and the nature of the artistic judgment.[129] Moreover, by employing an everyday material Yu also gestured to the punk DIY; notably, the use of studs, spikes, safety pins, and draped lavatory chains to embellish garments. However, unlike these 'adornments' that imbued the punk look with an aesthetic of violence and cruelty,[130] Yu's straw embellishment was playful and childish. Indeed, in 'spirit' Yu's lighthearted design reminded the ensembles decorated with elephants, clowns, and horses by Elsa Schiaparelli (*Circus* collection, 1937); the print and embroidered monkeys and bananas of Prada's 2011 collection (inspired by Carmen Miranda and Josephine Baker), and Franco Maschino's irreverent dresses covered with teddy bears. These designers highlighted the playful component of fashion design. Lastly, the use of straw in the ensemble also spoke to the democratization of couture (couture, made with luxurious materials, is targeted to elite consumers) instantiated by designers such as Jean Paul Gaultier, who have accessorized couture gowns with bracelets replicating food cans, for example. Yu's ensemble can be said to mirror the collapsing of artistic categories such as high and low art, couture and prêt-a-porter, which in turn, have been instrumental in the perception of fashion and folk art as singular artistic forms.

Designer Yeohlee Teng was also attracted to the playful component of a series of animal woodcarvings. She created a paper dress that featuring images of the artworks she took from the museum's storage facility drew a 'conceptual arch' between two separate places: the exhibition

[129] Rosalind Krauss, "1918," in *Art Since 1900. Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* , 154-159 (New York : Thames & Hudson , 2004).

[130] Andrew Bolton, "Introduction ," in *Punk: Chaos to Couture* , 12-17 (New Haven; London : The Metropolitan Museum of Art , 2013).

gallery and the storage facility of the American Folk Art Museum. Furthermore, as Teng used recycled paper to cut the garment, the new design was linked to many folk art expressions, which crafted out of repurposed material represent the spontaneity and unconventionality of the art made by the self-trained. In addition to this reference to folk art, through the use of paper, Teng underscored the fact that both the pictorial work of art and the couture dress are conveyed from a paper template to the canvas and the toile respectively.[131] Teng's tactic however, was more radical as she presented the paper template as the final dress. In this sense, the design is aligned with the deconstructive work of Belgian avant-garde designer Martin Margiela (b. 1957), who proposed the paper template to be worn as the ensemble proper in his 2000 collection.

The paper dresses, which appeared in the late 1960s, were simple; above-the-knee length garments featuring bold printed designs (such as daisies, stripes or animal prints) that evoked Pop Art. [132] Fun and fashion forward the paper dresses could be hemmed with scissors, colored with crayons, and discarded after use. The dresses embodied the 1960s zeitgeist; a time when according to fashion historian Kathleen Paton, "Consumers accepted the notion of cheap, throwaway clothing as they embraced disposable cutlery, plates, razors, napkins, lighters, and pens."[133] In the late 1960s paper dresses had lost their popularity as wearers found them uncomfortable and their novelty decreased due to overexposure. However they continue to influence contemporary experimental fashions such as those of Yeohlee Teng.

Correspondingly, designers Koos van den Akker and Michael Bastian proposed an interesting reading of a common marketing tool used by museums, which consists of reproducing

[131] Ulrich Lehmann, "Art and Fashion ," in *The Berg Companion to Fashion* , ed. Valerie Steele, 30-35 (Oxford; New York : Berg , 2010). 32.

[132] Kathleen Paton, "Paper Dresses ," in *The Berg Companion to Fashion* , ed. Valerie Steele, 550-551 (Oxford; New York : Berg , 2010).

[133] Ibid. 550.

images of iconic artworks in T-shirts, scarves or ties, for example. Van den Akker and Bastian replicated images of the American Folk Art Museum's collection on their garments, which displayed inside the museum's space ambivalently looked as commodities (like the items sold in museums stores) and/ or work of art (like the art pieces museum exhibit). This tactic subtly underlined the double status of fashion as both commercial enterprise and creative endeavor. Furthermore, the reproduction of images in these garments remembered the use of appropriation made by artists in the late 1970s and early 1980s, who responded to a visual saturated environment produced by commodity culture. [134] Building on the developments of Pop and Conceptual art, these artists appropriated images from the popular media; thus, questioning both the notions of creative ability and the limits between high and low art. Artists such as Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger, Victor Burgin, to name a few, radically re-contextualized images taken from art, television, film and advertising to suggest that the meanings of those images were culturally constructed and determined by the context in which they were exhibited.[135] In the same vein, Bastian and van den Akker played with the notion of fashion as both commodity and work of art by appropriating images of art and reproducing them in the garments; thus transferring the symbolic value of art into the new fashions.

In terms of textile innovations, Gary Graham exceeded in his interpretation of the nineteenth-century coverlet he chose as inspiration to create a jacquard coatdress. Graham employed a sophisticated digital loom technique to reproduce the pattering in his ensemble. He played with scale and movement in his garment. The result was an innovative pattern of stars and snowballs that decreases in size as the eye travels upward from the hem of the coatdress. The

[134] Rosalind Krauss, "1977," in *Art Since 1900. Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* , 580-583 (New York : Thames & Hudson , 2004).

[135] Ibid.

garment paralleled the work made by artist Sonia Delaunay (1885-1979), who translated abstract paintings into textile designs that (like in Graham's coat) suggested movement by simultaneously juxtaposing abstract forms (in the 1920s Delaunay created her iconic 'Simultaneous Dress').[136] Likewise, Graham's coat resembled the textile investigations developed by futurist artists, who aimed to show successive stages of an object moving through space. [137] Fashion, as a practice closely related to the active body, was a medium highly suitable to the futurist manifestos and experiments.[138] For instance, Italian artist Giacomo Balla (1871-1958) aimed to decompose the body's structure into fractions and lent movement to even weighty and static cloth. Futuristic artists, who designed clothing that featured repeated patterns suggesting movement, can be said influenced Graham's design, who aptly called it a form of 'folk futurism.' This concept synthesizes the mixture of folk and futurist references informing the conception of his coat.

In terms of silhouette, Graham's garment was based on the nineteenth-century frock coat, which was transformed into contemporary fashion through deconstructive elements, such as the unfinished drape collar and hems applied to the design. The deconstruction trend became fashionable in the 1990s, when designers began reversing sewing techniques and turning garments construction inside out.[139] Tattered dresses and slashed tailoring derived its name from philosopher Jacques Derrida's concept of deconstruction, which described a new way of reading

[136] Ulrich Lehmann, "Italian Futurist Fashion ," in *The Berg Companion to Fashion* , ed. Valerie Steele, 357-359 (Oxford; New York : Berg , 2010).

[137] In 1909; Filippo Tommaso Marinetti defined Futurism as an artistic movement aimed to engage all forms of artistic practice (art, literature, design) into life. Futurist artists emphasized principles such as speed, novelty, and violence though art and manifestos (prior formulated declarations). As they celebrated the primacy of speed, the depiction of objects in movement became paramount. The fashion manifestos aimed to directly intervene into culture by changing bourgeois dress through a utilitarian form of dressing, which would express communal principles through decorative costumes and nationalistic dress. As XXX stated, "Fashion in futurism was often conceived as decorated surfaces of fabrics and textiles, where the introductions of color functioned as a novel element. An actual change in the cut and construction of clothes was comparatively rare." (ibid. 358)

[138] Ibid.

[139] Bradley Quinn, *The Fashion of Architecture* (Oxford: Berg, 2003).72

canonical texts by dissecting them.[140] Graham employed deconstructive tactics in his ensemble to disrupt the expectation of perfection and glamour associated with mainstream fashion; and make visible the techniques and process employed in garment construction (pattering, stitching, lining, etc.)[141] In short, Graham's futuristic coatdress ingeniously balanced textile experimentation, and historic quotations in a modern silhouette.

Equally successful was threeASFOUR's dress, which comprised a superposition of Jewish, Catholic and Islamic symbols. The ensemble conveyed a message of union among opposites parties, which the designers have explored in past collections, notably the one presented at the Jewish museum, where additional inspiration for the dress presented in *Folk Couture* originated (that collection included several laser cut dresses). The pattering of this garment, a type of 'chaotic' arabesque composed of laser cut layers, sharply contrasted to the grid organizing the pattern in the quilt that served as inspiration. The new pattering recalled a circulatory system; a 'feeling' reinforced by the red-pink colors of the dress that made the textile to look like thin human veins. On the other hand, the pierced textile also resembled lace, which indirectly insufflated threeASFOUR's piece with femininity and eroticism as this material is often employed in evening dresses and lingerie. Moreover, the laser cut layers brought to mind the undulating vegetal curves and graceful floral swirls of Art Nouveau, which influenced modern and decorative art in Europe from 1885 to 1905.[142] Parisian couturiers profusely referenced the swirls of Art Nouveau through the lavish use of lace, silk brocade, appliqué and

[140] ibid.

[141] ibid.

[142] Lesley Ellis Miller, "Art Nouveau and Art Deco ," in *The Berg Companion to Fashion* , ed. Valerie Steele, 36-45 (Oxford; New York : Berg , 2010).

embroidery in evening dresses.[143] The multiple references to fashion and art history articulated in threeASFOUR's design made this eclectic ensemble an extraordinary piece of wearable art.

Likewise, Bibhu Mohapatra throve in the technical manipulation of chiffon, a material extremely difficult to work with because of its light and slippery texture. Mohapatra's aim was to suggest the changing surfaces of the ocean through this material—appropriate to his inspiration in a story of sailor inspired by a tattoo book. However, Mohapatra's dress, felt conservative partly because of his use of ruffles, which the designer could have employed in a much conceptual way. To be fair, Mohapatra took some risks with his gown, which is more extreme and less realistic than the dresses he presents every season; but, here it was missed the avant-garde approach to fashion that is seen in threeASOFUR's silhouette, for instance.

Designer Chadwick Bell succeeded in translating the intricate artisanship of the quilt he chose as inspiration. The stitching technique he applied in his creation mirrored the elaborate cording and stuff work techniques employed in the inspirational textile. Moreover, the use of pattering by Bell shared a likeness with other artworks centered on the repeated motif. That is the case of the diptychs on graph paper made by folk artist and mathematician Martin Thompson (New Zealand, b.1956), which look like embroidery patterns or pixilated photos; the obsessive repetition of concentric patterns becoming landscapes, buildings or a decorative motif itself in the work of self-trained artist Martin Ramirez;[144] and the alliterated, lines found in the minimalistic drawings made by Sol LeWitt—by the sixties, LeWitt began drawing matrix of

[143] Ibid.

[144] Stacy C. Hollander, "Self-taught Artists of the 20th c. : An American Anthology and Perspective on Pattering," *Folk Art Magazine* (American Folk Art Museum) 23, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 44-51.

lines on walls that commented on how industrialized technology such as computer graphics changed handcraft techniques and rendered drawing as obsolete.[145]

Furthermore, by cutting a simple robe Bell linked the neoclassical style that informed the quilt's aesthetic to contemporary minimal fashions. In fashion, minimalism stands for austere clothing created with elaborated techniques, in some cases, employing luxurious textiles. The sartorial reduction began with revolutionary designer Coco Chanel (1883-1971), who stripped away unnecessary elements that impaired function; continued with Spanish designer Cristobal Balenciaga (1895-1972), who in 1957, presented his signature *sacque dress,* a comfortable form that freed the movements of women's bodies; and reached its apex with the 1980s androgynous streamlined pieces by Giorgio Armani (b.1934) and Calvin Klein. The minimal garment Bell presented in *Folk Couture* was aligned with the work of these designers who simplified the shapes of fashion by responding to the dictates of function and the inherent properties of materials.

Likewise Ronaldus Shamask and John Bartlett offered insightful articulations of fashion, art and architecture through their ensembles. They hung flat garments from the museum's ceiling and wall. Shamask's site specific installation—the designer conceived these dresses for the American Folk Art Museum's atrium—were in conversation with designer Issey Miyake's art installations composed of airy garments, which according to costume historian Alice Mackrell seemed to "dance around the exhibition space."[146] Building on Miyake's heritage, Shamask's

[145] Rossaline Krauss, "1994b.," in *Art Since 1900*, 650-653 (New York : Thames & Hudson, 2004).

[146] Alice Mackrell, *Fashion and Art: The Impact of Art on Fashion and Fashion on Art* (London : Batsford , 2005). 154.

kite dresses subtly reminded the ancient link between textiles and architecture, as walls in some cultures were fashioned with woven textiles.[147] His garments looked like translucent panels.

On the other hand, Barttlet's suit paralleled artist Joseph Beuys's iconic *Felt Suit* (1969, edition of 100), which the German artist modeled after his own clothing. *Felt Suit* can be considered as a self-portrait that when exhibited without its wearer, invoke a "surrogate presence."[148] In the same vein, Bartlett's piece echoed the art installations of Beverly Semmes (b.1958), who creates 'gargantuan' dresses (some are twelve feet high) that, when hung on walls, cascade onto the floor. Semmes's dresses like Bartlett's suit engaged cloth with architecture and evoked the absent body by exhibiting long, empty garments. [149] Unlike Semmes's dresses, nonetheless, Bartlett's suit invoked a male figure. This design marked a point of departure from Bartlett's past work, which emphasized masculine corporality. Gone is the sexual component that made Bartlett's designs so popular in the 1990s.

However, not all of the designers invited to *Folk Couture* achieved the same level of accomplishment in their designs. For instance, Creatures of the Wind did not propose a significant variation of the shapes and aesthetics of commercial fashion. Neither did they provide a relevant innovation in terms of textile manipulations. The designers could have created a more extreme silhouette to represent the fantastic picture of Eugene von Brunchenheim that served as inspiration for the dress. The surreal atmosphere of the picture was partially captured by the color palette and vegetable print motif in dress, but the garment lacked the strangeness that makes Von Bruenchenheim's image so appealing. On the other hand, Catherine Malandrino

[147] Gottfried Semper, *The Four Elements of Architecture* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[148] Nancy Spector, "Freudian 'Slips': Dressing the Ambiguous Body," in *Looking at Fashion: Biennale di Firenze* , 103-115 (Milan : Skira editore , 1996). 105.

[149] Ibid.

could have made a much more complex interpretation of the symbols represented in the cut paper piece chosen–several signs representing the principles behind the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. Or, she might have used a more inventive shape or textile designs for her garment. Malandrino's handkerchief crocheted dress was too aligned to her ready-to-wear collection; which although is the designer's strength, in this case, it was detrimental to the appreciation of the ensemble as a work of art. [150] It might have been smarter for Malandrino to adapt the pop art aesthetic she employed in her iconic *Flag Dress* to the design she presented in *Folk Couture*— the impact and content of her dress would have been much different.

In the end, the designers who participated in the exhibition *Folk Couture* transformed the artworks culled as inspiration in different ways. A group of fashion designers centered on systems of marks and geometries repeated on textiles to craft garments that emphasized patterned surfaces (Pattern). Others defied the meaning of fashion as a practice intimately engaged with corporality to create dresses that existed independently from the body (Disembodiment). While several ensembles evoked the naïveté of folk art along with the whimsical dimension of design (Playfulness); two dresses inspired by stories based on the chosen artworks highlighted the narrative component of art and fashion (Narrative). Some designers emphasized the formal characteristics of the artworks by replicating quilted surfaces in their new ensembles or making whimsical translations of the materials employed in the artworks into the new ensembles. Others centered on the meanings of the artworks and made conceptual references to the inspirational pieces in the designs. In some cases, the designers literally reproduced images of the artworks; while in others, they figuratively referenced the art pieces chosen. Employing artistic tactics such as appropriation and historical quotation, in general, the

[150] Malandrino was not able to meet me during the time of garment production, so I could not advise or explain the nature of this project to her.

ensembles illuminated new connections between fashion and folk art filtered through the personal aesthetic of the designers.

Conclusion

This dissertation has investigated the conceptual framework and materialization of the exhibition *Folk Couture*, which explored the complex relationship between fashion and art. The exhibition was based on the long tradition of fashion designers appropriating images and tactics from art to create dresses (such as Yves Saint Laurent's *Mondrian Dress*, in which the designer replicated a painting made by the Russian constructivist artist), artists creating artworks based on elements taken from fashion (for example, Sylvie Fleury's installation *Insolence* which commented upon issues of consumerism), and collaborations between fashion designers and artists (for instance, designer Marc Jacobs's and artist Yayoi Kusama's collaboration for Louis Vuitton).

As this dissertation demonstrated, fashion is becoming a legitimated form of art, as film, dance or photography once were; in the process of which fashion exhibitions such as *Folk Couture* have played a crucial role. For decades, fashion exhibitions were reluctantly accepted in museums. Paradoxically, today museums are eager to showcase fashions. Although fashion exhibitions have been criticized because they may become marketing tools for fashion brands, notably those shows devoted to living designers, displaying fashion in museums has contributed to the appreciation of fashion as a form of art; has educated audiences about the historic, social and aesthetic relevance of fashion; and has elevated the figure of the fashion designer as a singular artist. Furthermore, these types of exhibitions have encouraged design houses to systematically document and preserve their collections; which in turn, has contributed to appreciate fashion as cultural heritage. Before museum curators began requiring garments for

exhibitions, fashion houses had rarely documented and preserved their collections. Moreover, fashion exhibitions have led museums to question the notion of art exhibitions. The allure of fashion and the exhibition designs through which fashion is presented have ushered a new form of art shows that mixing music, video, art, and fashion brings to mind a more expanded, integrated concept of art; one that includes several mediums interacting inside the museum space. Moreover, the spectacular dimension of fashion exhibitions has significantly increased the number of visitors attending museums and drawn new audiences that not often visit cultural institutions. Fashion exhibitions widen audiences and increase museums revenues. As fashion has an overwhelming presence and popularity in contemporary culture (T.V.; newspapers, art galleries) museums have responded to this public interest showcasing fashion.

In *Folk Couture*, a show that presented fashion in an art museum, fashion was treated as a singular form of art and its artistry was emphasized. Unlike fashion exhibitions centered on a fashion maker (such as *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty)* or a topic related to fashion (such as *A Queer History of Fashion: From the Closet to the Catwalk*), the exhibition *Folk Couture* displayed original pieces of couture created specifically for the show. In *Folk Couture*, the fashions and the artworks were displayed with equal artistic status. The innovative exhibition display (inspired by draped fabrics) reinforced the interdisciplinary curatorial approach employed in the exhibition, which aimed to blur distinctions among artistic mediums.

Folk Couture looked at the points where fashion and art collided. The exhibit was based on a model that treated fashion and art as part of the same contemporary visual culture, with points in common. By exploring the creative process of the participating designers and the boundaries between disciplines, *Folk Couture* submitted a unique and groundbreaking thesis into discourse around the relationship between fashion and art. For the first time, the others of high

art's, fashion and folk art, were exhibited together in a museological context. For decades the artistic status of fashion was denied because its changing nature was thought as radically opposed to the eternal essence of art. Similarly, fashion was not considered the subject of serious academic inquiry because as it was related with the feminine and corporality and thus it was regarded as frivolous and superficial. (Paradoxically it has been demonstrated that fashion was born when young men began wearing fanciful garments during the Middle Ages, which in turn triggered faster changes in clothing style, that then were imitated and followed by women). Like fashion, the definition, artistic status, and aesthetic relevance of folk art have been the subject of debate in academia. Because folk art is made by artists with no formal training and made for its own sake rather than for sale or as a career; it defies the categories traditionally employed to analyze academic art. Furthermore, the unusual topics as well as the unorthodox techniques and materials employed by self-trained artists sharply contrast with the themes addressed and materials used in high art. As this dissertation explained, the art made by self-trained artists has crucially contributed to the American tradition of image making (American folk art retains relevant cultural information about the identity formation of the nation) and has an intrinsic value related to the basic human need to create objects (outside the 'professionalization' of the current art system).

Western knowledge built on the divide body/mind has privileged mental activities (such as philosophy and the arts) above practices linked to manual labor (such as dressmaking). However, efforts put to dismantle this structure notably through feminist and cultural theories, deconstructive philosophy, and psychoanalysis triggered a new postmodern paradigm that has been instrumental in rethinking the role of the body in western culture and to break down the modern categories used to organize art as a 'pure' discipline. The collapsing of binary pairs such

as (among others) body/ mind; masculinity/ femininity; high culture/ low culture; and center/ periphery experienced in contemporary culture at least since the 1960s has contributed to appreciate and elevate the status of 'marginal' disciplines such as fashion and folk art. The exhibition *Folk Couture* instantiated this cultural paradigm change.

Philosopher Walter Benjamin assigned to fashion a crucial role in the *Arcades Project*. Fashion more than any other practice helped Benjamin to understand the birth of modernity in the nineteenth century. Benjamin explained the paradigmatic role of fashion in modernity through the concept of the 'tiger leap.' According to Ulrich Lehmann, "Through fashion's ferocious leap, Benjamin brought together various splintered parts of modernity to form a new concept of history, a political ideal, and an aesthetic credo." [1] Through the tiger leap, fashion is capable of moving from the contemporary to the past and come back to the present, but it does not stay in just one temporal or a single aesthetic configuration. Echoing the 'tiger leap,' the designers invited to *Folk Couture* actualized past expressions with the language of art, and opened up previously unknown connections between folk art and fashion. The designers acknowledged history as inspiration to shape contemporary fashions and modeled their new designs in the examination and transformation of the folk art works. The exhibition allowed, for instance, to a coverlet hand loomed in the nineteenth century to be actualized and transformed into a garment digitally woven; or a group of animal carving made by New Mexico artisans in the 1970s to serve as inspiration for a New York fashion designer in the twenty-first century. Appropriation, historic borrowings, conceptual revivals, and playful quotations emerged from the mixture of disparate topics and mediums. Through these ensembles, folk art was morphed to become fashion.

[1] Ulrich Lehmann, *Tigersprung: Fashion in Modernity* (The MIT Press , 2002). xvii.

Avoiding commonplaces, the fashion designers researched and chose as inspiration not only textiles (most commonly associated in the public imagination and fashion history with folk art) but also paintings, tri-dimensional objects, and a photograph that exemplified the diversity and richness of folk art. Notions of pattern (the use of repeated motifs to organize surfaces); narrative (stories woven from the artworks chosen), playfulness (the whimsicality of fashion and art) and disembodiment (the presence/ absence of corporality) were explored in bespoke works of art that emerged from the direct observation of folk art expressions. The garments demonstrated the way in which powerful expressions in a wide variety of media by self-taught artists spanning three centuries could invigorate a disparate group of thoughtful, articulate designers to create equally vivid, singular objects of couture.

For the designers invited to *Folk Couture*, the themes and materials of folk art constituted a new source of inspiration, which perhaps was not among the topics that they usually explored when they conceived of a new collection. The luxurious materials employed to cut a couture gown–brocade, satin, chiffon, lace– could not be more opposite to those used to craft folk art– recycled paper, soot, saliva, chicken bones, coffee cans, and so forth. Besides, the sophistication and exquisiteness of high fashion stand out against the 'raw' aesthetic and directness in conception that makes folk art so singular. Similarly, the ideas of glamour, success and popularity associated to the fashion industry stand in sharp contrast to the compelling stories behind some folk art expressions, some of which have been made by people with disabilities, mediums, and mystics and crafted in isolated places such as mental hospitals and prisons with no intention to be exhibited. However, the freedom and radical individuality of the art made by the self-trained heavily resonate with the fashion world, which celebrates unique style through clothing design. Moreover, the strange appeal of folk art is not so different from that of couture,

which every season pushes the boundaries of taste and beauty through unconventional silhouettes. Both fashion and folk art, heavily depend on craftsmanship, celebrate inventiveness, and expand our appreciation of eccentricity as not only essential to individuality but to freedom and democracy. [2]

Folk Couture closed on May 24th having had an attendance of 30,438 visitors. [3] An average of 375 people per day visited the museum. The exhibition not only increased the museum audience[4] but also attracted younger and more diverse spectators—people interested in fashion who had never been to the American Folk Art Museum before. Influential newspapers (*The New York Times*) as well as art and fashion publications (*Art News*, *Women's Wear Daily*), and a T.V. program (NYC Arts)[5] prominently reviewed the exhibition. The American Folk Art Museum made *Folk Couture* the topic of its fundraiser gala (the museum's most import annual event) and held several workshops in the museum galleries for young students who, for the first time, could directly appreciate couture without the mediation of video, photography, or the digital screen. The American Folk Art Museum chose fashion as a topic to revitalize its exhibition programming, which testified to the importance and popularity of fashion in contemporary culture.

As I was closely involved in all the stages of the exhibition development; at times, it was difficult to judge the ensembles and the measures of success of this show. For this reason in this dissertation I have followed a descriptive rather than interpretative approach. This investigation nonetheless did provide a critique of both the garments exhibited and the exhibition *Folk*

[2] See, Roberta Smith, "A Strange and Wonderful View of Outsider Art ," *The New York Times* , March 26, 2015. Accessed April 16, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/27/arts/design/review-a-strange-and-wonderful-view-of-outsider-art.html?_r=0

[3] Statistic provided by the American Folk Art Museum.

[4] The previous show *alt_quilts* had 356 people per day.

[5] http://video.pbs.org/video/2365203319/

Couture, but I truly believe that scholars not directly involved in the show should conduct further research about *Folk Couture*. This study seeks to become a platform to discuss the relationship between fashion and art in general and the exhibition *Folk Couture* in particular. Ultimately, this dissertation postulated that the major contribution of the exhibition *Folk Couture* was to join together high art's outsiders—namely fashion and folk art.

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Appendix

The Biography of *Folk Couture*

Fred A. Sharf and his wife Jean began collecting design–cars, architecture, fashion and jewelry–in the late 1990s. The couple became particularly close to the fashion department in the Museum of Fine Arts of Boston. In 2009, Mr. Sharf helped the institution acquire more than one hundred dresses by American designer Arnold Scaasi (b.1930); some of them exhibited in the show *Scaasi: The American Couturier* (2010).[1] After the success of the Van Cleef & Arpels jewelry exhibition at the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum (2011) and the Alexander McQueen show at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (2010), the avid collector challenged trustee and folk art curator Elizabeth V. Warren to bring fashion into the American Folk Art Museum. Mrs. Warren and his husband shared with the Sharfs a passion for folk art; together, they usually travel to visit relevant art collections. "Why not ask fashion designers to look at the museum's collection and see what they could create?" Mrs. Warren wrote in the prologue of the *Folk Couture* exhibition catalogue.[2] Drawing on the historic convergence between fashion and folk art yet based on a contemporary model *Folk Couture* centered on the creative process of thirteen designers, who responded to a cross-section of the museum's collection in innovative and unexpected ways. "Among the many surprises in *Folk Couture* is the inclusion of ensembles that ask the viewer to imagine a wondrously diverse array of wearers, some of whom may even be

[1] Geoff Edgers, "The Art of the Deal," *Boston.com*, August 9, 2009. Accessed April 27, 2015. http://www.boston.com/yourtown/newton/articles/2009/08/09/collector_donor_writer_networker____now_curator_mfa_trustee_fred_sharf_does_it_all/

[2] Elizabeth V. Warren, "Sponsors Statements," in *Folk Couture: Fashion and Folk Art,* 11 (New York: American Folk Art Museum, 2014). 11.

positively otherworldly," American Folk Art Museum executive director Anne-Imelda Radice stated. [3]

Folk Couture Gala Benefit

As a warm-up for its Folk Couture gala benefit, the American Folk Art Museum threw a party for patrons and designers on September 18, 2013 at the *Minton's*, Richard Parsons' club at West 118th Street.[4] Philanthropist Yaz Hernandez, the director and chief curator of the Museum at FIT Dr. Valerie Steele and Tim Gunn, from *Project Runway* along with designers Gary Graham and Koos Van Den Akker attended the cocktail party. When *Women's Wear Daily* asked if he had any favorite young designers, Van Den Akker declared, "Hell no. They all look alike […] Fashion is very commercial now. It's lot of words and very little deeds. I just like making clothes. It's very simple." [5] A month later, the Folk Couture Benefit Gala was held at the Tribeca Rooftop. (October 16, 2013). Hosted by Tim Gunn, the event honored fashion director of Rent the Runway Lucy Sykes and Dr. Steele. A picture of Van den Akken's gown for *Folk Couture* in the process of being constructed was used for the printed invitation. The more than 300 guests, among them fashion icon Daphne Guinness, *Calvin Klein*'s designer Francisco Costa, and *Vanity Fair* special correspondent Amy Fine Collins were allowed a sneak peek of the show— a video

[3] Anne-Imelda Radice, "Foreword ," in *Folk Couture: Fashion and Folk Art* , 9 (New York : AFAM, 2014).9

[4] "This has been a longstanding dream of mine to have a jazz club where I can take my wife [chairman of the AFAM's board of rustees Laura Parson]— to have good music, a nice ambience and good food instead of what they have nowadays downtown," Parson said to *Women's Wear Daily* . See, Tack.com, "Folk Couture Benefit Gala ," *Tack.com* , October 28, 2013. Mailyn Kirshner, "The American Folk Couture Gala ," *DailyFashionReport.com* , October 17, 2013.Rosemary Feitelberg, "Richard Parson Opening Jazz Club in Harlem ," *Women's Wear Dayly* , September 19, 2013.http://www.wwd.com/fashion-news/fashion-scoops/richard-parsons-opening-jazz-club-in-harlem-7169557?module=Fashion-Fashion%20Scoops-bullet. Accessed April 26, 2015.

[5] Ibid.

with the ensembles was screened during the dinner— and also heard from the speakers. "Many people hear the name 'American Folk Art Museum' and picture only quilts, but the museum encompasses an incredible variety of art forms," [6] said American Folk Art Museum's board of trustees Laura Parsons in her speech. John Hays, representative of Christie's Action House, lead a live auction featuring a stay in a Tuscany Villa. The approximately $500.000 raised would enable the museum to preserve part of the art collection.[7]

Mise-en-scène

Displaying fashions in museums is a much-contested praxis. [8] Clothing can not just hang to be fully appreciated. Without a body cloth is perceived as "drained of life."[9] Usually museums use mannequins to display garments. Although commercial mannequins exist in different styles and sizes, sometimes padding out or carving are needed to dress the forms on couture.[10] As modeled after prevailing ideals of beauty, the use of retail mannequins in museums often raises issues regarding body stereotypes and consumption.[11] On many occasions, clothed mannequins became lifeless inside the museum. Carefully styling and the adequate placement of forms along

[6] Parson quoted in Tack.com. "Folk Couture Benefit Gala," October 28, 2013. Accessed April 26, 2015. http://www.tackmag.com/folk-couture-benefit-gala/

[7] Kirshner, Marilyn, " The American Folk Art Museum Gala," in *DailyFashionReport.com.* October, 17, 2013 http://blogger.lookonline.com/2013_10_01_archive.html

[8] Amy de la Haye, *Introduction: Dress and Fashion in the context of the Museum* , Vol. 10, in *Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion* , 285-87 (Oxford; U.K.: Berg , 2010).

[9] Ibid.287

[10] Jean L. Druesedow, *Dress and Fashion Exhibits* , Vol. 10, in *Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion* , 304-310 (Oxford; U.K. : Berg , 2010).

[11] De la Haye: 2010

with the use of new technology (video and holograms) help to avoid static installations.[12] As garments are made of multiple materials, and created with techniques and aesthetics parameters that respond to specific periods of history, preparing dresses for exhibitions is a laborious task. [13]

As the emphasis was placed on the garments rather than the human body, and to resist any distraction from the dresses; the 'conceptual' mannequins selected for *Folk Couture* had a neutral, abstract feeling (no face, wigs, or make up). The forms–borrowed from The Costume Institute and previously used in the exhibition *Punk: Chaos to Couture*–had a white powder finishing and were 5.9 feet tall. Most of the participating designers preferred forms with straight arms and legs; few selected dolls with bended limbs

Once finished, the ensembles for *Folk Couture* were sent to the museum storage facility in Dumbo, Brooklyn; where Mete Ozeren photographed them [Fig. 42 and 43]. For the photo shoot, some designers dressed their own mannequins; in other cases, the guest curator Alexis Carreño and register person Ann-Marie Reilly put the clothes on the forms. All the ensembles, save for Bartlett's polka dot suit, were shot on mannequins against a white background (as it is not wearable, the Bartle's suit was photographed hanging against white background).

Exhibition designs not only communicate the aesthetic philosophy behind fashion shows but also protect the garments on display.[14] Situ Studio, a Brooklyn based design firm, produced the display system of *Folk Couture*. Situ was asked to create furniture capable of unifying the diverse mediums presented in the show–sculpture, paintings, quilts, photography and fashion. In terms of the aesthetics, the exhibition design should have a theatrical component—an idea

[12] Druesedow: 2010.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

inspired by Alexander McQueen's dramatic retrospective at the Met.

Situ developed custom pedestals crafted for each artwork or ensemble it held [Fig. 44, 45 and 46]. The pedestals appeared to defy gravity, as they were built to actively support the artworks and garments in the museum's gallery. The draping of a dress inspired partner Aleksey Lukyanov-Cherny to work with concrete impregnated fabric. He chose concrete because, "it provided an opportunity to explore the properties of this unique material in both its fluid and solid states, and it allowed us [Situ team] to work with a flexible system that could be customized to respond to different objects while providing a tactile and visual continuity to the show." [15] Situ built a series of armatures where the concrete canvas was suspended upside-down and impregnated with water. [16] The outlet was a series of structurally sufficient forms that seemed to hover and undulate upwards, brought down only by the weight of the objects they held up. [17] "Situ's minimal design kept the often-fantastic clothing grounded," Anna Fixsen reported for *Architectural Record*, adding that the series of 20 white enclosures looked like "yoga mat thin, or [in other cases like] billowing cascades of concrete."[18]

The museum's facility at 2 Lincoln Center is composed of one central space flanked by two smaller exhibition rooms. Based on the categories guest curator identified, the garments and artwork placement was organized into four sections: *Pattern* was set on the larger room; *Playfulness* occupied the two smaller lateral galleries; and *Disembodiment*, the museum's atrium. *Narrative* was split in two parts: Mohapatra's gown was staged in the *Pattern* section; and

[15] Statement provided by Situ.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Anna Fixsen, "Concrete and Couture ," *Architecturalrecord.com*, January 2014. Accessed April 27, 2015. http://archrecord.construction.com/news/2014/01/140123-situ-studio-folk-couture-at-american-folk-art-museum.asp

Creatures of the Wind's was put in the *Playfulness* category. A fifth section called *Process* was added during installation time. It consisted of a wall with the sketches, swatches of fabrics, and photos the designers provided along with two videos. One video showed Van den Akker working in his studio; the other, screened the digital loom waving Graham's jacquard. The *Process* section faced Teng's paper dress and the animal carvings in the *Playfulness* section.

The textiles, paintings, the photograph and weathervane selected by the fashion designers hung behind the couture; whereas, pedestals held the volumes—animal carvings, tin objects and wood sculptures–around the garments. Shamask's kite dresses were suspended on plastic threads from the atrium, and Bartlett's polka dot garment hung on a wall; part of its pants lay over a thin concrete platform. The main title wall had vinyl wallpaper with a blown up detail of *Tree of Life Quilt.* Overall, the exhibition color palette was monochromatic. *Perspective* and *Pigeon* grey were used to paint the walls of the museum's gallery; except for two walls painted in *Venetian Rose* to represent the *Playfulness* section [Fig. 47].

Designed by Linda Florio, the exhibition catalogue is a 96-page fully illustrated book divided into two parts. The first section includes the sponsors' statements (Frederic A. Sharf and Elizabeth V. Warren), the foreword by Honorable Anne-Imelda Radice, Ph.D.; the introduction by Stacy C. Hollander, and the exhibition essay by guest curator, Alexis Carreño. The second part of the catalogue features a portrait of each of the participating designers shot in their studios; pictures of the ensembles; and short entries further explaining both the designers' aesthetics and the garments they created. For some of the dresses, frontal, back, profile and 3/4 views were combined in a single image; thus, achieving a fully appreciation and vivid documentation of each garment. The simple yet modern style of the catalogue mirrors the minimalistic aesthetic of the exhibition design of *Folk Couture.* [Fig. 48].

The museum held two openings: the VIP preview event (January 20th, 2013) and the member's party (January 21st, 2013). The invite for the VIP's preview featured Gary Graham's coatdress [Fig. 49]. For the members party's invite a detail of Costa's dress was chosen [Fig. 50]. Legendary photographer Bill Cunningham attended the reception and took pictures of ensembles by Mohapatra, Shamask, Van Den Akker, Teng, threeASFOUR, Costa, and Bastian; along with their respective portraits (expect for Bastian's who did not attended the party).

Press Reviews

"Designer fashion and folk art aren't exactly natural fellows," *Women's Wear Daily* reporter Marc Karimzadeh said.[19] "But the American Folk Art Museum is making an statement that the two can cohabitate quite naturally."[20] In the interview, chief curator Hollander pointed out that few designers, surprisingly, were attracted to the museum's textile collection (closely related to the fashion industry). "In many cases, it was an extremely abstract and conceptual connection that the designers were making," she clarified.[21] Designer Yeohlee Teng said that her dress was made in such a way that "the attention would be fully shared between the inspiration [carving animals] and the result,"[22] and John Bartlett explained that he "added padding [to his ensemble] so it's more like a quilt hanging,"[23] Regarding his quilted bed robe, Chadwick Bell

[19] Marc Karimzadeh, "Fashion Folk: Beyond the Quitl ," *Women's Wear Daily* , January 21, 2014: 7.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

declared that "the piece translate[d] into the idea that she [Bell's muse] could have cut–up an old quilt and made this herself."[24] Shamask sharply commented on the artist he selected as inspiration. "[James Castle's] attention to detail, texture, color shape, form, materials, proportion and not to forget, function, would have made him a CFDA standout."[25] Finally, the reporter extensively quoted guest curator's exhibition statement regarding the use of quilting technique and its association with folk art in fashion history.

Roberta Smith wrote in the *New York Times* section *Week Ahead,* "The resourceful American Folk Art Museum continues to explore new ways of using its collection, and in particular to involve living artists in its exhibitions."[26] She added, "It will be interesting to see how the new creations stack up against their inspirations."[27] Smith briefly described the designs of and artworks selected by Shamask, Mohapatra and Malandrino. On the other hand, *New York Times* journalist Karin Rosenberg stated, "As its former home on West 53rd Street faces MoMA's bulldozers, the American Folk Art Museum is making some bold decisions." Rosenberg stated that the idea behind the show, "may sound like a cynical premise for an exhibition, a bid to capitalize on the museum's proximity to Fashion Week;"[28] but, " [the exhibition] comes off like one of the better challenges from 'Project Runway,' which is to say it's about creativity flourishing under constraints, and will appeal to an audience much broader than the one in the tents."[29] According to Rosenberg, the garments complemented rather than

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[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Roberta Smith, "Clothes Inspired on Demand," *The New York Times* , January 19, 2014: AR4.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Karen Rosenmberg, "Hemmed In by Art, Designers Garments Still Shine. In 'Folk Couture,' Fashion Designers Back Constrains ," *The New York Times* , February 28, 2014: C27.

[29] Ibid.

distracted from the folk museum's collection "and though fashion may be the lure, the art shines."[30] Significantly, she wrote "*Folk Couture* also proves that museums can explore fashion on a budget, without the need for celebrity designers, brand sponsorships and elaborate set pieces. Not every show has to be McQueen at the Met or Gaultier at the Brooklyn Museum."[31] The reporter highlighted both the wise use of technology in the exhibition's mobile-friendly website and the curators' selection of artworks offered to the designers. [32]

ArtNews magazine reporter Lamar Anderson wrote, "Designer Jean Yu wanted to repurpose the bristles [of a broom] as reference to David Alvarez's porcupine,"[33] when Yu broke the casing apart, "the broom opened up and spread out in this really beautiful globe."[34] Lamar referred to the group of garments in the exhibition as a 'wardrobe of new ensembles,"[35] and stressed, "there was not a literal translation of the inspiration into the new designs."[36] She highlighted Malandrino's off–the-shoulder dress;[37] the "hokey-chic, flamingo-hued fronds on a maxi dress by Creatures of the Wind;"[38] Shamask's kite dresses inspired by a "childlike drawing of a coat by James Castle;"[39] and the "powerfully puffed-up shoulders and an allover pattern of angular cutouts" of threeASFOUR's dress, which was constructed within a "sculptural approach

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[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

[32] See http://fashionandfolkart.tumblr.com/exhibition

[33] Lamar Anderson, "Folk is the New Black," *ArtNews* 113, no. 1 (January 2014): 16.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

[39] ibid.

to dressmaking."[40]

Both *Vogue Daily.com* and *Magazine Antiques* focused on Gary Graham's coatdress. "Among NewYork–based designer Gary Graham's haunts is the American Folk Art Museum near Lincoln Center," said Emily Holt in *Vogue Daily.*[41] The article explained that making the coverlet coat was labor intensive, but Graham's team had fun in the process.[42] "We are doing similar technique for the fall. That's how fashion is. You are always moving forward."[43] The article included a picture of model Hanne Gaby Odiele wearing Graham's coat coupled with a black wool hat, turtle neck sweater, a pair of jeans; a dark leather purse and thick-soled leather shoes. In the photo, Odiele stands against a mural mosaic (which, apparently, is map of New York City) in ultramarine blue, light orange, and brown. The mosaic's texture loosely resembles the coatdress's pattering. The inclusion of the photo in *Vogue Dayly.com* made an interesting counterpoint to the premise behind *Folk Couture.* The American Folk Art Museum strongly discouraged the use of live models wearing the garments created for *Folk Couture* as a way to emphasize the artistry over the functionality of clothes. On the other hand, *VougeDaily.com*, a fashion website linked to the fashion industry, ultimately understood fashion as wearable and commercial items. For this reason, the website included a photo of a model clad in Graham's indigo coat in the note.

"Among the many discussions that are not worth anyone's time is the one about whether

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[40] Ibid.

[41] Emily Holt, "Gary Graham Turns a Coverlet into a Coat at the American Folk Art Musuem ," *Vogue Daily* , January 2014. Accessed, April 26, 2015.
http://www.vogue.com/vogue-daily/article/gary-graham-turns-a-coverlet-into-a-coat-for-a-new-exhibit-at-the-american-folk-art-museum/#1

[42] ibid.

[43] ibid.

fashion should be considered art or not," *Magazine Antique* reported.[44] In the article, it's stated that, the idea behind *Folk Couture* was not to prove that "fashion designers are artists too" but to see the American Folk Art Museum's collection with a "different eye."[45] The reporter underlined Creature of the Wind's "lush" ensemble, which "was not an appropriation but so much an appreciation;" and the delicacy of Malandrino's dress that "reinvigorat[ed] the vexed notion of femininity."[46] But, it was Graham, "the most historically minded" of the designers in the show, who received much attention that any other dressmaker in the article.[47] The reporter stressed that the steps Graham took in creating his piece "were many and painstaking; a process that was undoubtedly a lot more labor intensive than the one that went into the coverlet [Graham's inspiration] itself."[48]

Building on the idea that fashion is cannibalistic (stated in the exhibition catalogue), *The Brooklyn Rail* reporter Oona Haas affirmed that, "*Folk Couture* digests and appropriates the museum's permanent collection and—discarding its obligation to function and form—creates works that are entirely new."[49] Haas observed that threeASFOUR's gowns looked like a "cage-like contraption," and Bartlett's polka dot suit "resemble [d] a hanged, invisible giant." The journalist claimed that, "These newly designed garments simply become a celebration of the imagination, an earnest undertaking producing complex and absorbing work."[50]

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[44] The Magazine Antique, "Couture at the Folk Art Musuem ," *The Magazine Antique* , January 2014: 26. http://www.themagazineantiques.com/news-opinion/current-and-coming/2014-01-21/couture-at-the-folk-art-museum/

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Oona Haas, "Folk Couture: Fashion and Folk Art ," *The Brooklyn Rail* , March 4, 2014. http://www.brooklynrail.org/2014/03/artseen/folk-couture-fashion-and-folk-art

[50] Ibid.

Harper's Bazaar columnist Kristen Bateman stated, " Folk Art gets fashionable at the American Folk Art Museum's *Folk Couture*."[51] Bateman interviewed both Chadwick Bell and threeASFOUR about their ensembles. Bell defined his *gile*t as 'worldy, modern and chic,"[52] while threeASFOUR stated that by using symbols from catholic, Islamic and Jewish cultures, the ensemble aimed to demonstrate '"the common origin of these conflicting religions."[53]

Bloggers Jean and Valerie of *Idiosyncratic Fashionistas* posted, "Unbound by the usual strictures imposed by the market, however, it is clear that the designers [in *Folk Couture*] took advantage of the opportunity to let their imagination wild."[54] In addition to reviewing the entire show, *Idiosyncratic Fashionistas* remarked "the Museum astutely collected a variety of the draft work of the designers and pinned it to this board near the entrance so visitors could see a bit of the creative process in action." [55]

On Thursday March 20th WNET/Channel 13 NYC Arts program featured a nine-minute segment on *Folk Couture,* with an interview with chief curator, Stacy C. Hollander and a walk through the exhibition with Alexis Carreño, the guest curator.[56] The segment, featuring all of the imagery in the exhibition, may be submitted for an Emmy Award (Fig. 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, and

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[51] Kristen Bateman, "Folk Couture: Fashion and Folk Art ," *Harper's Bazaar* , January 24, 2014. http://www.harpersbazaar.com/fashion/fashion-designers/folk-couture-fashion-and-folk-art-2014?click=main_sr

[52] ibid.

[53] ibid.

[54] Idiosyncratic Fashionistas, "Folk Couture Fashion And Folk Art," *Idiosyncratic Fashionistas* , March 2014.Accessed April 26, 2015. http://idiosyncraticfashionistas.blogspot.com/2014/03/folk-couture-fashion-and-folk-art.html

[55] Ibid.

[56] For the *Folk Couture* segment see, http://www.nyc-arts.org/showclips/95367/american-folk-art-museum-i-curators-choice

56).

Illustrations

Fig. 1. *Lady on Red Sofa*. Attributed to John S. Blunt (1798-1835). Probably Maine, Massachusetts, or New Hampshire, c. 1831. Oil on canvas. 33 ¼ x 28 ¼ (sight). Collection AFAM.

Fig. 2. *Possum Trot Figures.* Calvin Black (1903-1972) and Ruby Black (1915-1980). Yermo California, c. 1953-1969. Paint on redwood and pine with fabric and tin.

Fig. 3. *Chest over Drawer*. Artist unidentified. New England, 1825-1840. Painted wood. 35 x 40 ¼ x 19". Collection American Folk Art Museum.

Fig. 4. *Sunburst Quilt*. Probably Rebecca Scattergood Savery (1770-1855). Philadelphia, 1835-1845. Cotton, 125 ½ x 118 ½''. Collection American Folk Art Museum.

Fig. 5. *Cornucopia and Dots Whitework Quilt*
Artist unidentified
United States
c. 1800–1820
Cotton
95 x 89"
Collection American Folk Art Museum, New York
Gift of Cyril Irwin Nelson, 2005.11.1
Photo by Gavin Ashworth, New York

Fig. 6. Chadwick Bell. *Bedrobe or Gilet*. Machine-quilted cotton with oxford cloth. Photo by Mete Ozeren.

Fig. 7. *Tree of Life Whitework Quilt*
Artist unidentified
United States
1796
Cotton and linen with cotton fringe
92 1/4 x 87 3/4"
Collection American Folk Art Museum, New York
Gift of Cyril Irwin Nelson in honor of Joel and Kate Kopp, 1997.16.1
Photo by John Parnell, New York

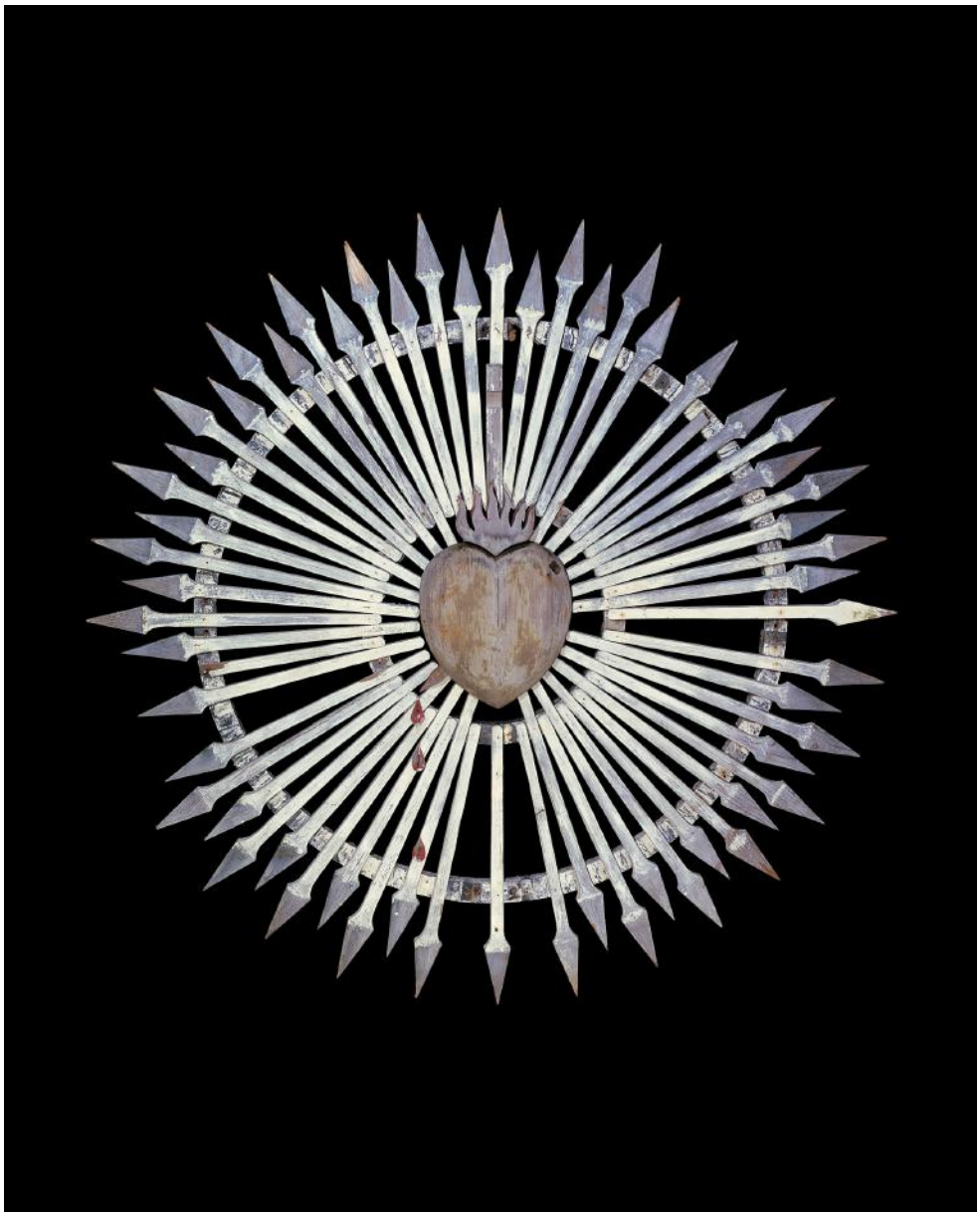

Fig. 8. S*acred Heart of Jesus*
Artist unidentified
Probably Fallon, Morton County, North Dakota; c. 1900
Paint on wood
65” diameter x 4"
Collection American Folk Art Museum, New York
Museum purchase, 1992.30.1
Photo unidentified

Fig. 9. Fabio Costa. *Agnus Dame*. Hand-quilted nylon, raw silk mesh, cotton fiber, Japanese raw silk yarn, and Japanese bamboo yarn, with stuffwork. Photo by Mete Ozeren.

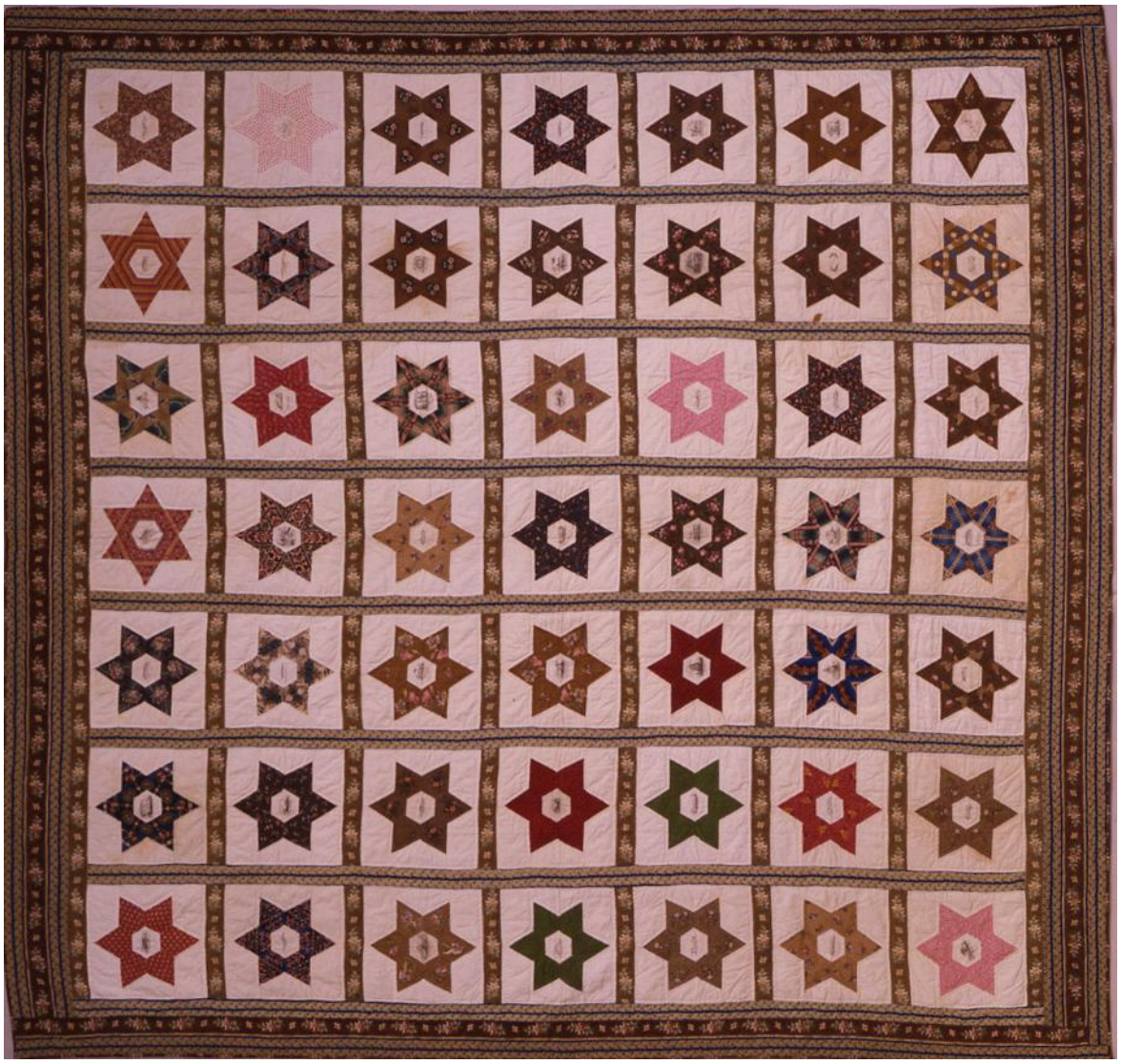

Fig. 10. *Friendship Star Quilt*
Elizabeth Hooton (Cresson) Savery (1808–1851) and others
Philadelphia
Dated 1844
Cotton and linen with ink
83 1/4 x 80"
Collection American Folk Art Museum, New York
Gift of Marie D. and Charles A.T. O'Neill, 1979.26.1
Photo by Matt Hoebermann, New York

Fig. 11. threeASFOUR. *Untitled.* Laser-cut patent leather, silk organza, and foam. Photo by Mete Ozeren.

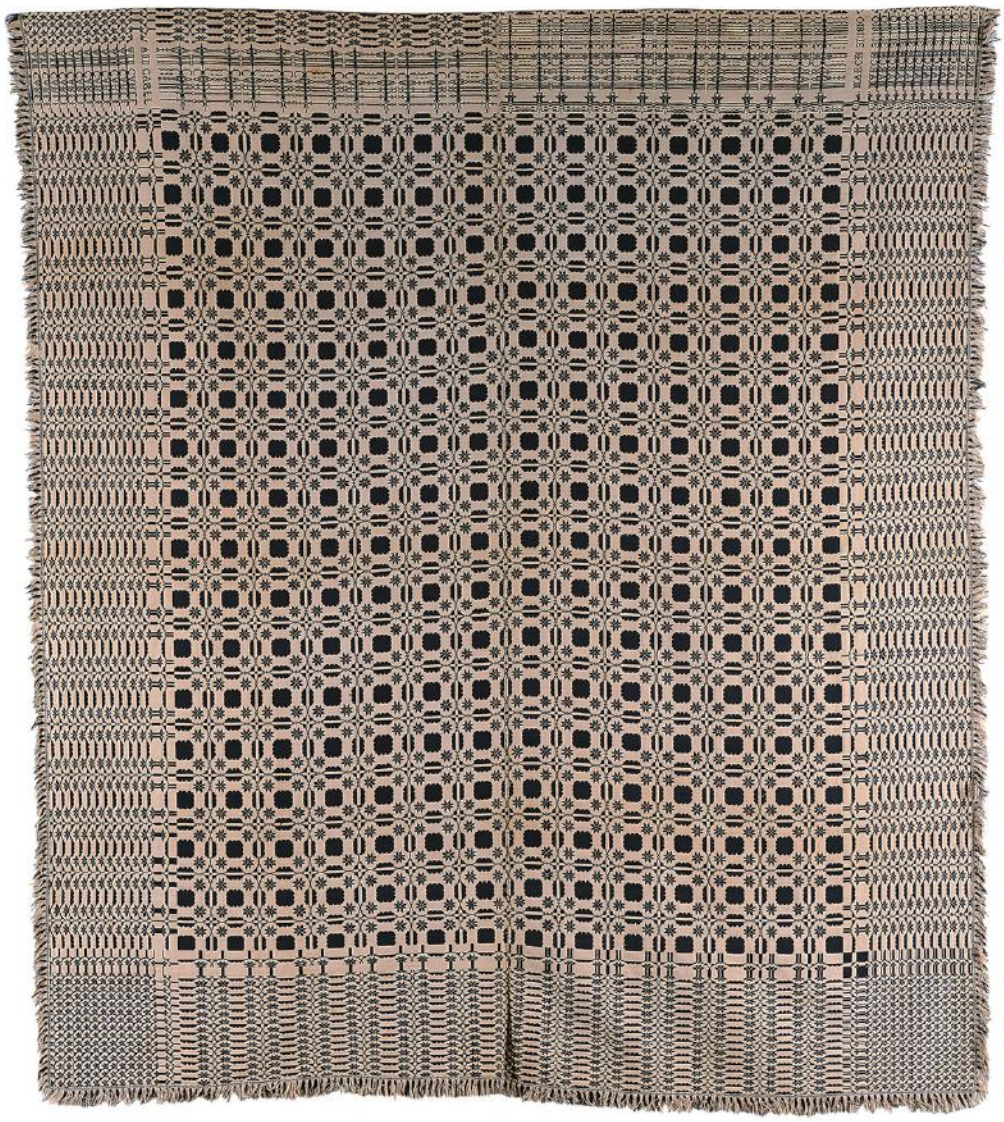

Fig. 12. *Ann Carll Coverlet: Blazing Star and Snowballs*
Attributed to the Mott Mill (act. 1810–c. 1850)
Westbury, New York
1810
Indigo-dyed wool, natural cotton
93 x 79"
Collection American Folk Art Museum, New York
Gift of Margot Paul Ernst in memory of Susan B. Ernst, 1989.16.11
Photo by Schecter Lee, New York

Fig. 13. Gary Graham. *Untitled*. Coat: wool and cotton engineered Jacquard; leggings: digitally printed cotton twill and Lycra; shoes: suede, wood, metal, and paint. Pattern designer: John Dana Palermo; textile designer: Gina Gregorio. Very special thanks to the Rhode Island School of Design Textile Department, Ana Codorean, and Pointcarré software. Photo by Mete Ozeren.

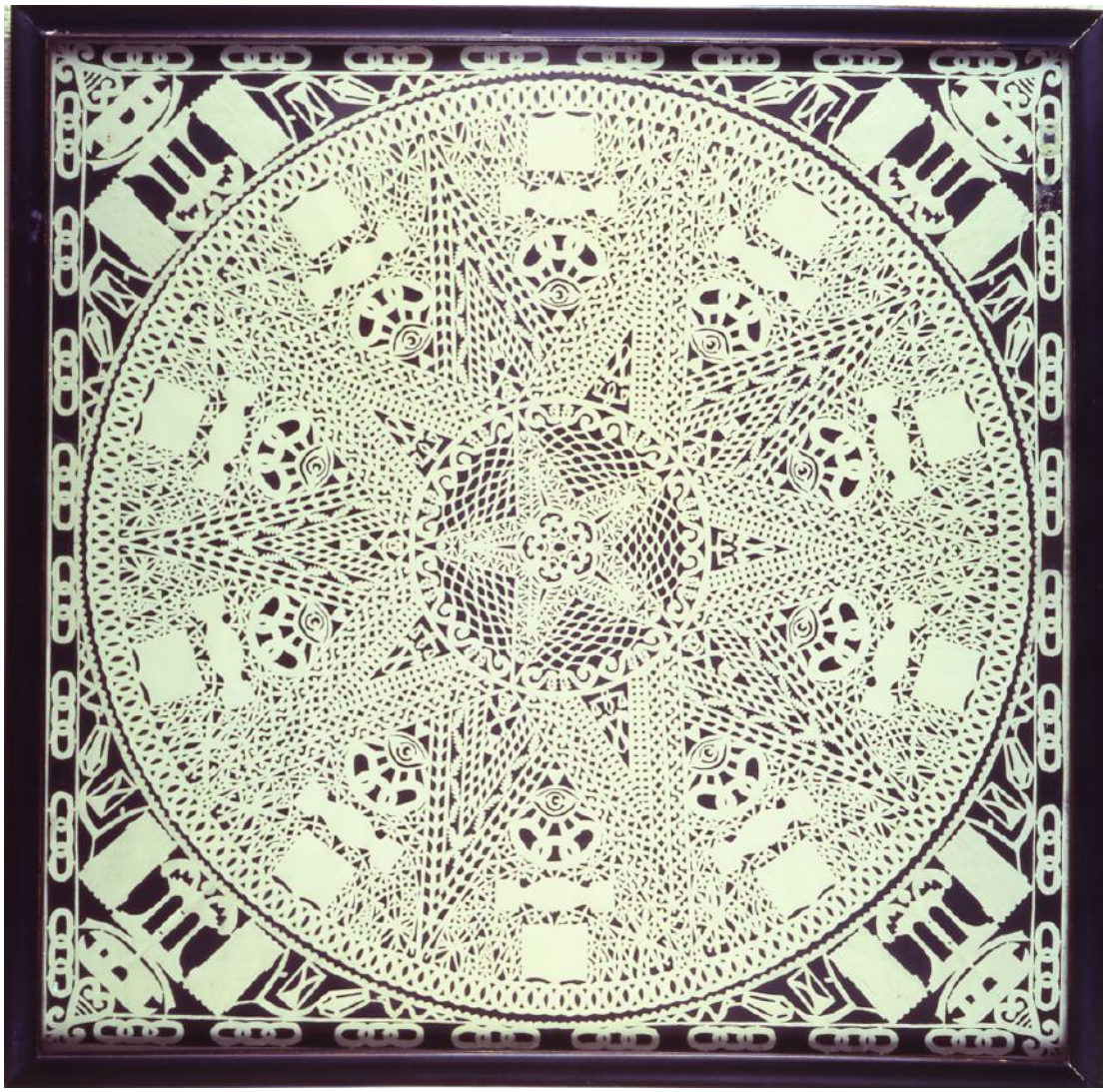

Fig. 14. *Papercut: Odd Fellows Symbols*
Papercut: American Protective Association
Joseph G. Heurs (dates unknown)
Probably Pennsylvania
1919
Paper
28 1/2 x 28 1/2" each
Collection American Folk Art Museum, New York
Museum purchase, 1985.40.2
Photo unidentified

Fig. 15. Catherine Malandrino. Handkerchief Dress. Hand-crocheted cotton. Photo by Mete Ozeren.

Fig. 16. John Bartlett. Elongated Shirt/Pant Two-dimensional Wall Hanging
Machine-quilted digitally printed cotton sateen and cotton canvas with Poly-Fil and metal buttons. Photo by Mete Ozeren.

Fig. 17. *Untitled* (Jacket)
James Castle (1899–1977)
Garden Valley, Idaho
Early to mid-twentieth century
Colored pencil on cardboard
6 3/4 x 4 3/4"
Collection American Folk Art Museum, New York
Gift of Dorothy Trapper Goldman, 2005.17.1
Photo by Gavin Ashworth, New York

Fig. 18. Ronaldus Shamask. Black Paper Kite Serape Top Paper with cardboard buttons. Serape Dress: Iridescent Lurex/nylon with plastic buttons. Long Serape Dress: Linen/silk organza with hand-beading. Photo by Gavin Ashworth.

Fig. 19. *Man with Suspenders*
Artist unidentified
Canada or United States
Late nineteenth/early twentieth century
Paint on wood with metal, glass, and tape
29 1/2 x 5 1/2 x 4"
Collection American Folk Art Museum, New York
Gift of Leo and Dorothea Rabkin, 1988.20.1
Photo by John Parnell, New York

Fig. 20. Exhibition *Folk Couture*. General view. On the right, John Bartlett's polka dot Suit and *Men with Suspender*. January 2014. American Folk Art Museum, New York. Photo by Gavin Ashworth

Fig. 21. *Ram.* Johnson Antonio (b. 1931). Lake Valley, New Mexico
Paint on wood with sheep hide
1988
33 x 21 x 23"
Collection American Folk Art Museum, New York
Gift of Elizabeth Wecter, 1989.7.2

Fig. 22. *Seated Coyote*
Max Alvarez (b. 1952)
Santa Fe, New Mexico
1985
Paint on cottonwood
45 x 24 x 19 1/2"
Collection American Folk Art Museum, New York
Gift of Elizabeth Wecter, 1985.20.9
Photo unidentified

Fig. 23. *Seated Jackalope*
Alonzo Jiminez (b. 1949)
Chupadero, New Mexico
1983
Paint on cottonwood with antelope antlers
33 x 11 1/2 x 27"
Collection American Folk Art Museum, New York
Gift of Elizabeth Wecter, 1985.20.24
Photo by Joseph McDonald

Fig. 24. *Seated Dog*
Sam Doyle (1906–1985)
St. Helena Island, South Carolina
1976
Paint on wood with tar and tin
19 x 23 x 8"
Collection American Folk Art Museum, New York
Blanchard-Hill Collection, gift of M. Anne Hill and Edward V. Blanchard, Jr., 1998.10.20
Photo by Gavin Ashworth, New York

Fig. 25. Yeohlee Teng. *Shamanistic Printed Prayer Flag Dress of Brown Kraft Paper*. Snapshots printed on hand-cut brown Kraft paper, machine-stitched and hand-finished. Photo by Mete Ozeren.

Fig. 26. *Porcupine*
David Alvarez (b. 1953)
Santa Fe, New Mexico
c. 1981
Paint on cottonwood with straw, marbles, and plastic
19 x 13 x 35"
Collection American Folk Art Museum, New York
Gift of Elizabeth Wecter, 1985.20.4
Photo by Gavin Ashworth, New York

Fig. 27. Jean Yu. *The Animal Human Dress.* Straw on chiffon. Photo by Mete Ozeren.

Fig. 28. *Man in Top Hat with Cane*
Artist unidentified
Northeastern United States
c. 1890
Paint and smoke decoration on wood
23 1/2 x 7 1/2 x 7 1/2"
Collection American Folk Art Museum, New York
Joseph Martinson Memorial Fund, Frances and Paul Martinson, 1981.12.5
Photo by John Parnell, New York

Fig. 29. *Archangel Gabriel Weathervane*
Artist unidentified
United States
c. 1840
Paint on sheet metal
35 x 32 1/2 x 1 1/4"
Collection American Folk Art Museum, New York, gift of Adele Earnest, 1963.1.1
Photo by John Parnell, New York

Fig. 30. *Man in Top Hat with Cane*
Artist unidentified
Northeastern United States
c. 1890
Paint and smoke decoration on wood
23 1/2 x 7 1/2 x 7 1/2"
Collection American Folk Art Museum, New York
Joseph Martinson Memorial Fund, Frances and Paul Martinson, 1981.12.5
Photo by John Parnell, New York

Fig. 31. Michael Bastian. *Untitled***.** Jacket, shorts, shirt, and long johns: cotton; sweater, balaclava, and gloves: hand-knit anthracite wool/cashmere/opossum/metallic thread (Josh Bennett for Michael Bastian) with applied leather patch; antique beaver top hat: leather belt; sunglasses (Randolph Engineering for Michael Bastian); necklace (G. Frost for Michael Bastian); 100% Italian wool pocket square; custom leather boots (*Quoddy* for Michael Bastian)

Fig. 32. *Crewelwork Picture*
Artist unidentified
New England, probably Massachusetts
c. 1750–1760
Wool on linen
9 x 7 3/8"
Collection American Folk Art Museum, New York
Gift of Ralph Esmerian, 2005.8.52
Photo courtesy Sotheby's, New York

Fig. 33. *Woman in Veil*
Attributed to Emily Eastman (1804–c. 1841)
Loudon, New Hampshire
c. 1825
Watercolor and ink on paper
14 9/16 x 10 5/8"
Collection American Folk Art Museum, New York
Gift of Ralph Esmerian, 2013.1.4
Photo by John Bigelow Taylor, New York © 2000

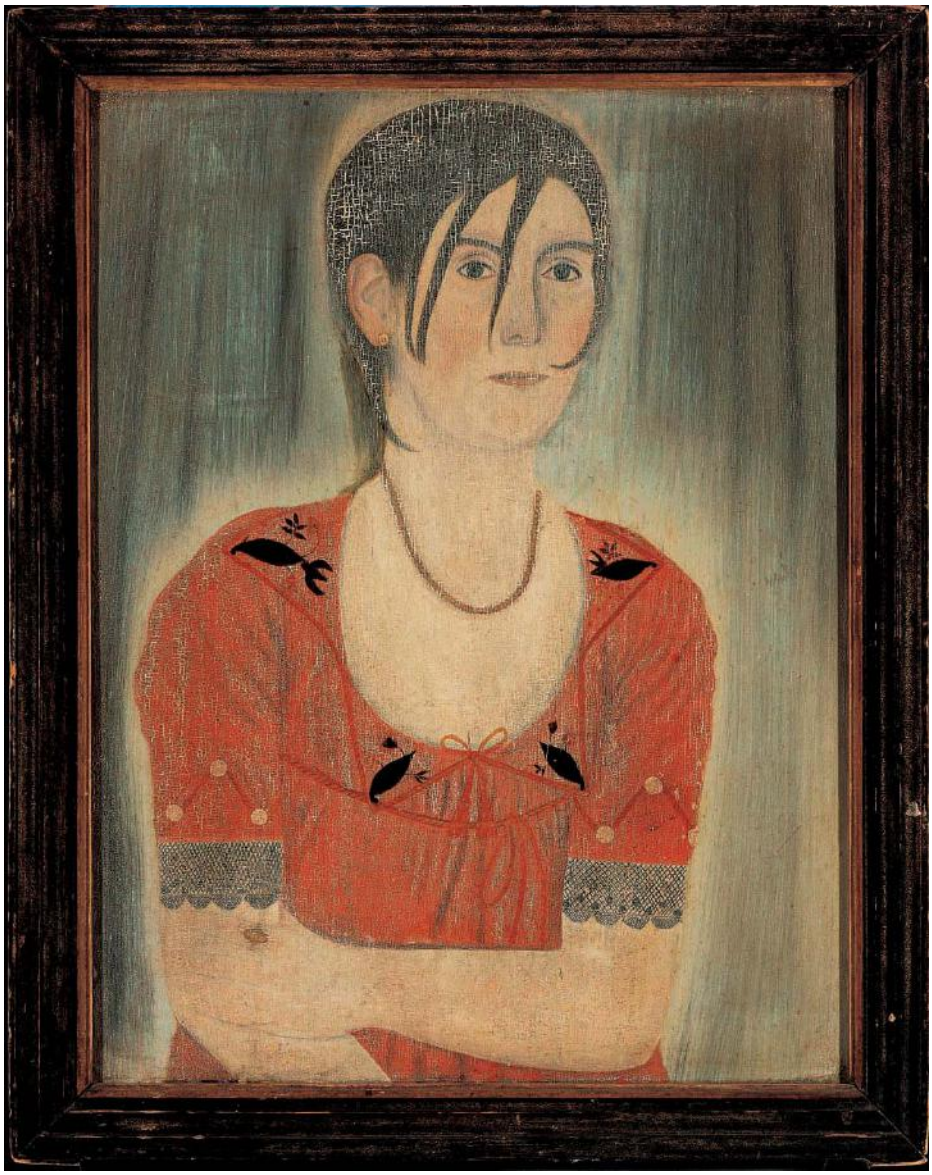

Fig. 34. *Woman in Rose Dress*
Artist unidentified
Vermont
c. 1805–1815
Oil on pine panel
26 5/8 x 24 5/8 x 1/2"
Collection American Folk Art Museum, New York
Gift of Ralph Esmerian, 2005.8.2
Photo by John Bigelow Taylor, New York © 2000

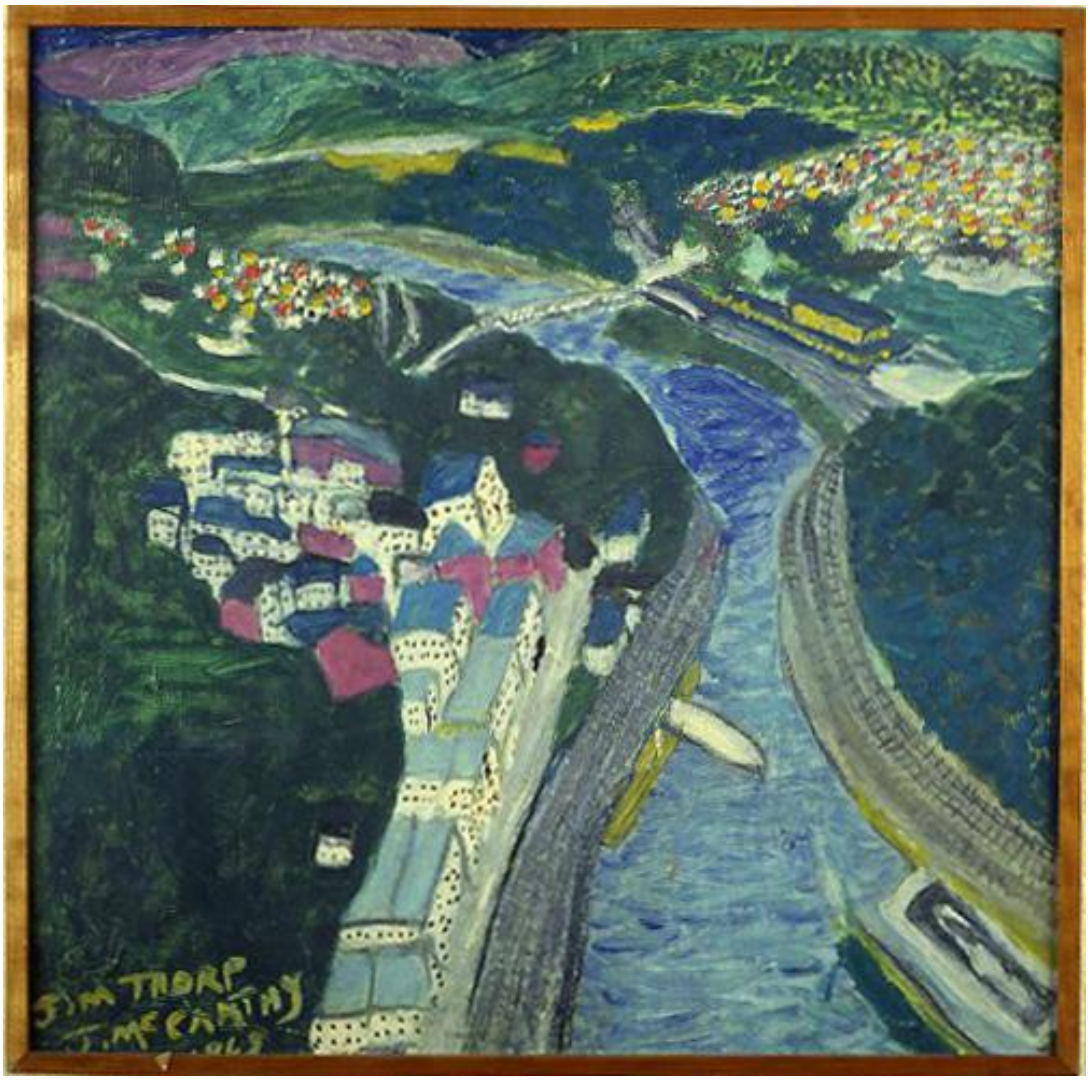

Fig. 35. *Industrial Cityscape/Jim Thorpe Pennsylvania*
Justin McCarthy (1892–1977)
Weatherly, Pennsylvania
1968
Oil and tempera on Masonite
24 3/4 x 24 3/4" framed
Collection American Folk Art Museum, New York
Gift of Elizabeth Ross Johnson, 1985.35.31
Photo unidentified

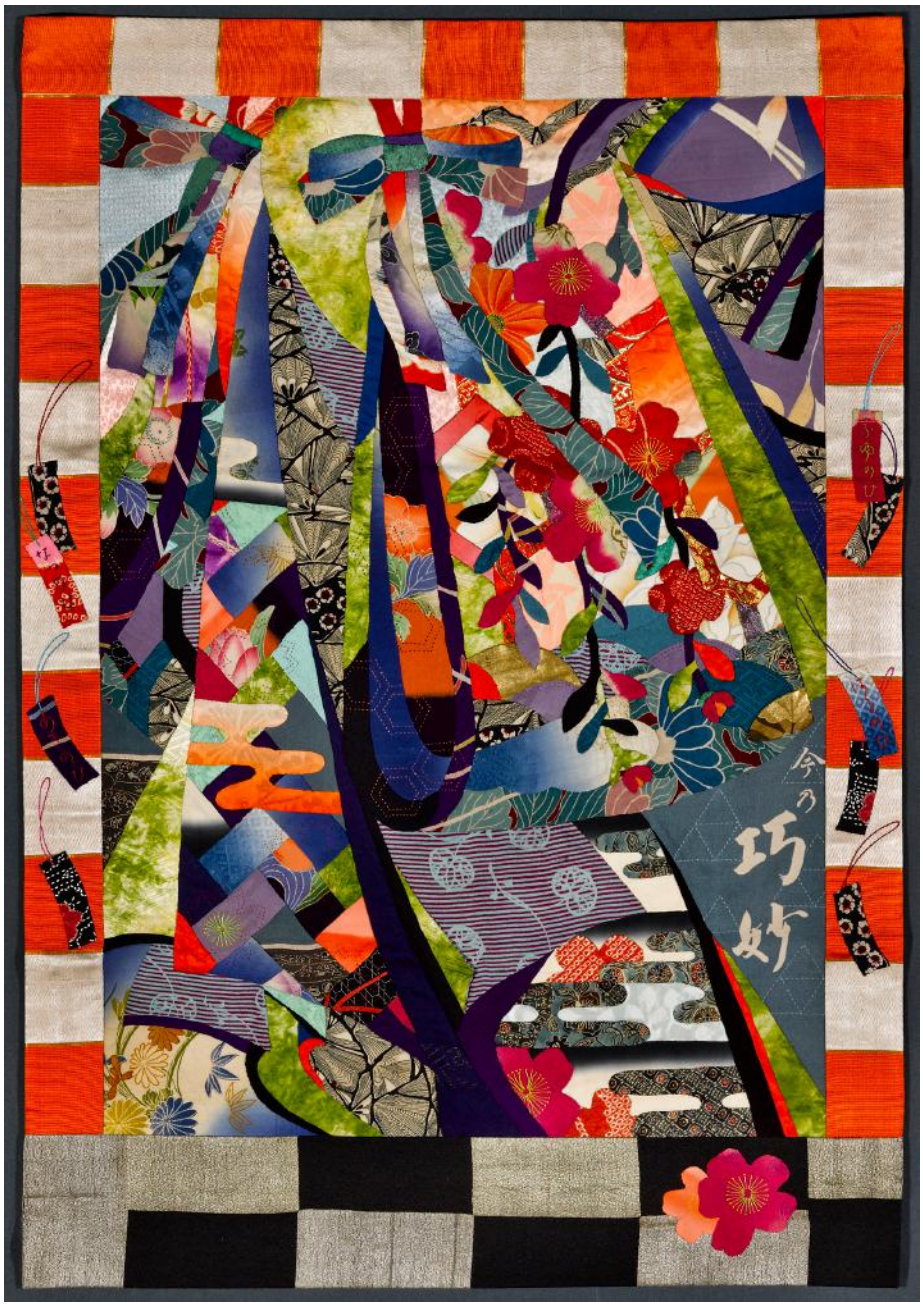

Fig. 36. *Kimono Hanging*
Kumiko Sudo (dates unknown)
Berkeley, California
1988
Antique and vintage kimono silks with silk embroidery
37 3⁄4 x 25 3⁄4"
Collection American Folk Art Museum, New York
Gift of the artist, 1989.11.1
Photo by Matt Hoebermann, New York

Fig. 37. Koos van den Akker. Gown. Embellished cotton collage with stripped and sewn plastic sequin surface.

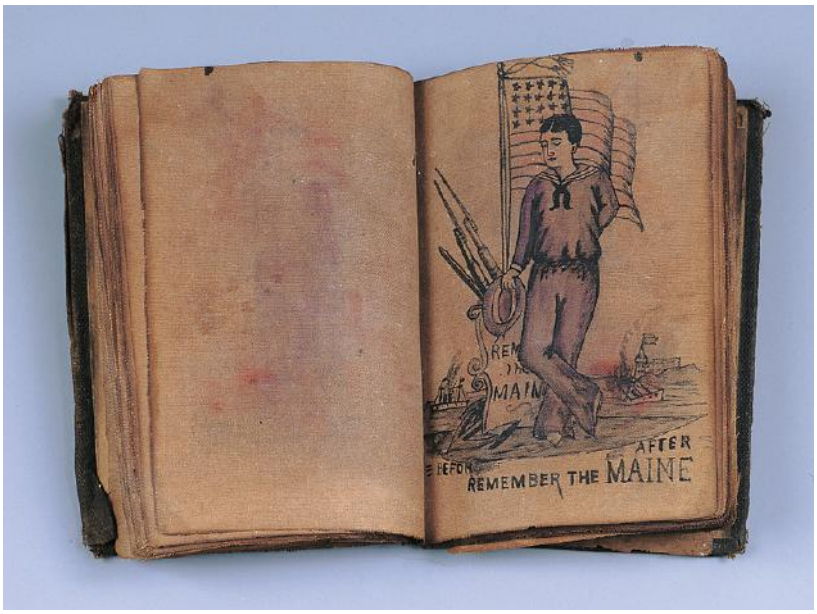

Fig. 38. *Tattoo Pattern Book*
Artist unidentified
New York City
1873–1910
Ink on oiled cloth, with buckram binding
4 1/2 x 3 1/4 x 3/4" (closed)
Collection American Folk Art Museum, New York
Anonymous gift, 1995.29.1
Photo by Gavin Ashworth, New York

Fig. 39. Bibhu Mohapatra. *Untitled*. Silk chiffon, organza, cotton lace, and oil-slick lace

Fig. 40. *Untitled*
Eugene Von Bruenchenhein (1910–1983)
Milwaukee
c. 1940s–mid-1950s
Gelatin silver print
10 x 8" 17 1/4 x 13 3/4" framed)
Collection American Folk Art Museum, New York
Gift of Lewis and Jean Greenblatt, 2000.1.4
Photo by Gavin Ashworth, New York

Fig. 41. Creatures of the Wind. Cotton nylon crepe film, 3-D polyester double mesh, rubberized and screen-printed silk polyester mesh, and silk habotai.

Figure 42 John Bartlett's Polka Dot Garment Hung on White Background.

Figure 43 Designer Jean Yu Preparing her Mannequin for the Photo Shoot. Photo by Alexis Carreño.

Figure 44 Concrete Pedestals Developed by Situ. Photo by Alexis Carreño

Figure 45 Concrete Pedestals Developed by Situ. Photo by Alexis Carreño.

Figure 46 Concrete Platforms Developed by Situ. Photo by Alexis Carreño

Figure 47 Folk Couture exhibition. General view. Photo by Gavin Ashworth

Figure 48 Folk Couture Exhibition Catalogue. Photo by Alexis Carreño.

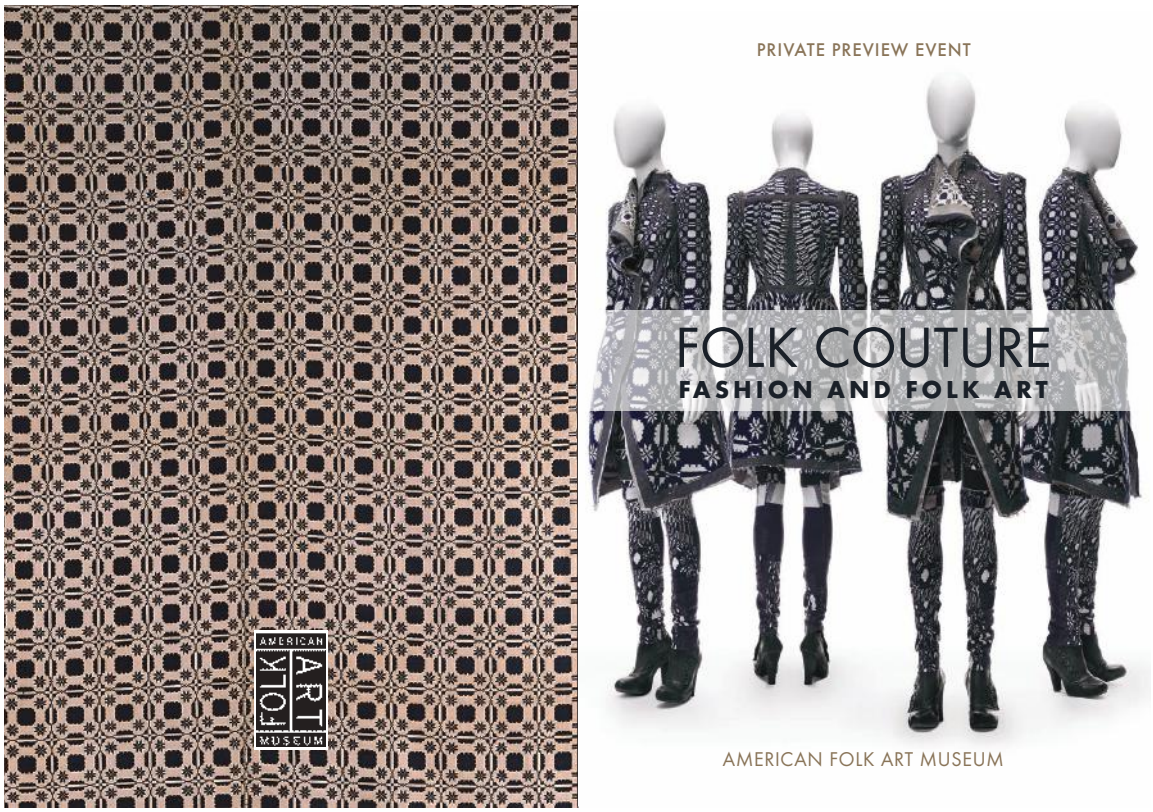

Figure 49 Private Preview Event invite.

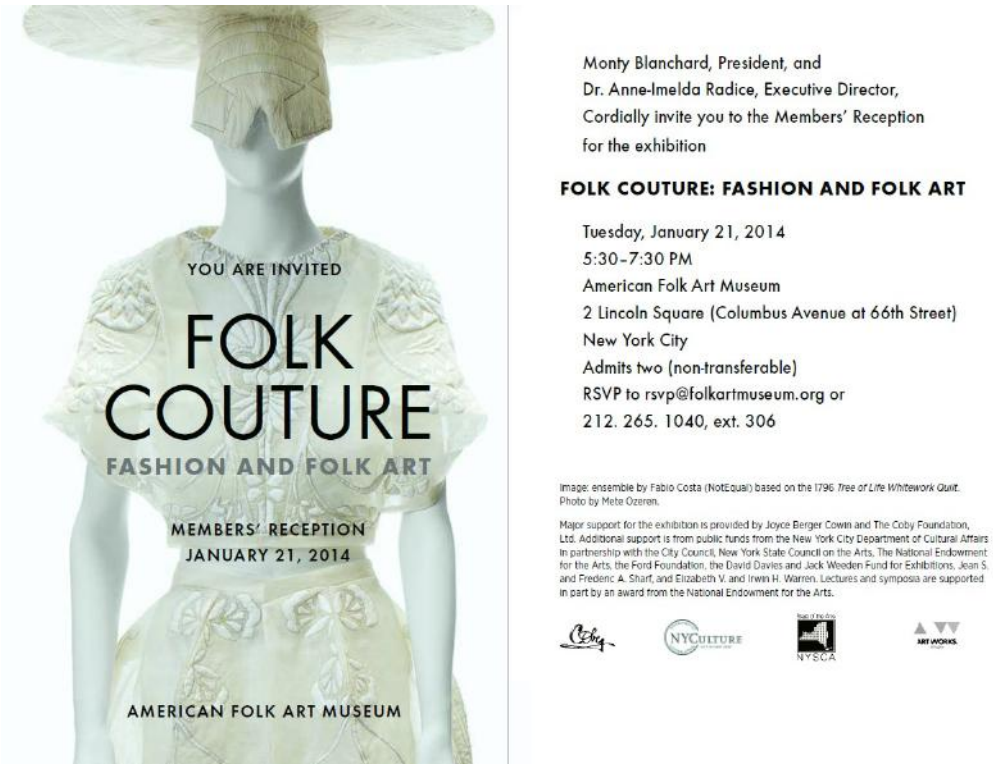

Figure 50 Members' Reception Invite

Figure 51 Folk Couture exhibition. General view. Photo by Gavin Ashworth

Figure 52 Folk Couture exhibition. General view. Photo by Gavin Ashworth

Figure 53 Folk Couture exhibition. General view. Photo by Gavin Ashworth

Figure 54 Folk Couture exhibition. General view. Photo by Gavin Ashworth

Figure 55 Folk Couture exhibition. General view. Photo by Gavin Ashworth

Figure 56 Folk Couture exhibition. General view. Photo by Gavin Ashworth