



LESSON PLAN: A VISIT TO

A Queer History of Fashion

From the Closet to the Catwalk

VISUAL ARTS 12 GRADE STANDARDS

Developing Literacy

Making connections through visual arts

OBJECTIVES | VISUAL ARTS (GRADE 12):

- Students develop observation skills and discuss works of art
- Students interpret artwork while providing evidence to support assertions.

From this analysis, students should be able to:

1. Identify issues raised by an art work.
2. Recognize the power of art to challenge and provoke the viewer.
3. Establish connection with social studies curriculum, specifically, pertaining women's and men's changing roles in early twentieth century.
4. Discuss historical events' effects on gender and sexual identities.

FOCUS OF LESSON PLAN

STUDENTS ANALYZE ACTUAL GARMENTS FROM THE EXHIBIT
A QUEER HISTORY OF FASHION.

From this analysis, students will be able to recognize how:

- a) Gender differences are expressed through clothing.
- b) Fashions considered problematic in the past, such as pants for women, have become accepted in the present.
- c) The meaning and perceptions of fashion change over time.

After this analysis, students will analyze the ensembles in the show that they have previously selected.

Students will observe and comment their own clothing and discuss why other people might perceive them as controversial.

MATERIALS

VISIT *A QUEER HISTORY OF FASHION* EXHIBITION AND/OR
EXHIBITION WEBSITE AND OBSERVE THE FOLLOWING GARMENTS:

Black evening suit worn by Marlene Dietrich, 1954.

Madeline Vionnet black velvet evening dress, c.1933.

INTRODUCTION

(2-3 minutes)

The teacher or educator guides students through the introductory gallery and briefly explains that in the exhibition the students will learn about how sexual identities have influenced fashion. The teacher then guides the group to the main gallery.

ACTIVITY

(5-10 minutes)

In front of Marlene Dietrich's black evening suit, the educator asks what students think about women wearing pants. The educator then explains why this ensemble was controversial in the 1930s.

The teacher points out how and why the ensemble worn by Dietrich was considered polemic in terms of gender differences by comparing it to a dress designed by Madeline Vionnet. Teachers should stress how Dietrich's "masculine" outfit suggested ideas of gender-bending clothing and functionality. This tension between genders expressed through clothes should be linked to the question of woman's changing roles in society.

(5-10 minutes)

The educator asks students to find a garment in the show that is or was controversial and provides forms where students can elaborate on their observations. Students individually, or in pairs, walk around the exhibition to select an outfit.

(10 minutes)

The group reconvenes and students explain why the garments they have chosen are, or were, controversial and how these clothes are perceived by contemporary society.



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

MARLENE DIETRICH

Marlene Dietrich was a bisexual German actress. Her androgynous look was part of her appeal and she wore men's clothing in both films and real life. Dietrich was a sex symbol in an epoch of sexual restraint. In the film *Morocco* (1930) she wears a man's evening suit and kisses a woman. The suit displayed in the museum is not the actual garment that Dietrich wore in the film, but it is almost identical, and was worn later by Dietrich.

Dietrich's outfit inspired French designer Yves Saint Laurent to create his own female tuxedo in the 1970s. Saint Laurent was famous for creating androgynous looks in the 60s and 70s, which contributed to the relaxation of female dress codes and the popularization of pants for women.

EVENING SUIT WORN BY MARLENE DIETRICH

Dietrich notoriously wore a tuxedo in the film *Morocco* (1930), which advertised its star as "the woman all women love to see." Since that tuxedo is currently traveling with the exhibition *Hollywood Costume*, we have borrowed another one, which Dietrich wore when she performed at the *Café de Paris*.

Wool, cotton, and silk
1954, USA

Lent by *Deutsche Kinemathek-Marlene Dietrich Collection Berlin*



MADELINE VIONNET

Madeleine Vionnet (1876-1975) was a fashion designer who created glamorous gowns for tall, slender women, whose beauty appealed to her. She cut fabrics on the bias, making them drape seductively around the female body. Women wearing Vionnet's designs looked like Grecian goddesses.

In the 1930s, fashionable women wore ultra-feminine evening dresses made out of luxurious fabrics such as silk and metallic lamé embellished with sequins and glass beads.

VALENTINA DRESS WORN BY KATHERINE CORNELL

Certain professions, such as fashion and costume design, were relatively welcoming to LGBTQ people. So were the performing arts. The actress Katherine Cornell, for example, was a lesbian married to a gay man, who was a theater director. Several important books have been written about gay men and lesbians in the theater and in Hollywood.

Chiffon
1947, USA

Lent by the Museum of the City of New York, Gift of Katherine Cornell, 1965

ASSESSMENT

The teacher asks students to compare what they have learned during their visit to the exhibit/website with an item of clothing chosen from their own wardrobe that they think someone (parent, relative, friend, people on the street) would consider problematic. Students then prepare an oral presentation explaining why they wear the selected garment and how their parents, relatives, friends, or people on the street react when they see them sporting such an item. The oral presentation (5 min) will be accompanied with an object (i.e. image of the garment, the garment itself) and should be presented either in pairs or in small teams.

IN PREPARATION

IDENTIFY GARMENTS THAT HAVE BEEN EXCLUSIVELY CONSIDERED MASCULINE AND FEMININE IN WESTERN HISTORY.

What is gender-bending clothing?

What are the stereotypes of femininity and masculinity?

How and why did women's roles change over the course of the 20th century?

Why were pants for women so polemic in the 1930s?

When did pants begin to be widely worn by women? Why?