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Africa's Fashion Diaspora Exhibition

The African fashion diaspora expresses a cultural heritage, shaping a vision of artistry and creativity that spans from traditional garments to contemporary design. Kevan Hall, as the curator of the Safari collection, "Serengeti" comes from his admiration of Africa's landscape leading to the creation of a line that captures the beauty, vibrant textures, and raw elegance of the African wilderness through earthy tones, fluid fabrics and intricate patterns. Hall's creativity was inspired by his travels through Africa, particularly his exploration of the Tanzanian landscape, which led to the creation of his silk chiffon evening gown that captures the region's natural beauty and elegance. Kevan Hall gifted the evening gown to the Museum at FIT to honor the diversity and cultural impact of African fashion, celebrating the heritage and creative influence that African designers contribute to the global fashion landscape (The Museum of FIT, 2024). Hall's significant contribution to the fashion industry lies in his ability to create Africa's natural landscape incorporating rich cultural symbolism, craftsmanship, and reimagining his inspirations. His work evolves into modern designs, creating wearable art that deeply resonates with and celebrates Africa's rich cultural heritage. The designer has drawn inspiration and significantly shaped by Black cultures and incorporates elements from various diasporic communities. His collection shows the interconnectedness of Black experiences including aesthetics of African animal motifs, tribal prints, and tribal influences (PinkVixen, 2007). This is urban Black culture showing its influence on global fashion and celebrating African and diasporic aesthetic with diverse cultural perspectives through nature and lived experiences.

Line establishes a structure creating a sense of direction in visual presentation. The deliberate placement of the costume display invites viewers to fully immerse themselves in the garment's artistry and historical context, enhancing their understanding and appreciation of its cultural significance. The arrangement of elements is a fundamental aspect of composition, significantly influencing the presentation's effectiveness and visual impact (Bell and Ternus, 2017). In visual merchandising, there are several lines to see how the garment is lined in position like vertical lines, horizontal lines, diagonal lines, and curved lines. The silk chiffon evening gown is displayed by elongating the mannequin's body to fully show the flow of the dress, with one leg forward and arms convey a sense of motion creating a natural and elegant posture. The lines used in the dress exhibit are curved lines with its fabric draping smoothly creating fluidity and movement. The forcible arrangement of subtle diagonals in the pattern of the dress creates an interest of color shift symbolizing the sunset in Africa which powerfully captures and holds the viewer's attention. The silk chiffon evening gown, with its showcase of flowing lines, captivates viewers by creating harmonious waves that flow effortlessly from top to bottom. Flowing seamlessly from the neckline to the hem, it leaves a lasting impression of elegance.

Rhythm, a strong composition guides the viewer's eye smoothly from the main focal point to supporting elements, creating a cohesive visual flow (Bell & Ternus, 2017). The "Serengeti" silk chiffon evening gown captures a sense of rhythm in its design through draping and flowing fabric, enhancing the garment's movement when worn. The gentle folds and pleats

create fluidity contributing to this *dynamic* evoking the landscape of the Serengeti. The flowing strokes of color in the gown create rhythmic patterns, seamlessly blending through a paintbrush effect that enhances its visual continuity. The thickness and direction of strokes uses *repetition* by creating motion. The evening gown captures the viewer's attention to detail by guiding the eye throughout the garment.

Form is a structure and silhouette of an object that creates a visual identity establishing its shape and functionality. By viewing the "Serengeti" silk chiffon evening gown, it follows the natural curves of the body creating a fluid silhouette. The beaded halter neckline accentuates the shoulders, while the fabric flows elegantly creating a sophisticated drape. The design emphasizes sleek and elegance, with its smooth contours and the triangular open-back. When the chiffon silk evening gown is worn, it exudes sleekness and fluidity, gracefully contouring the body. Its design embodies a delicate, feminine perspective, seamlessly guiding the eye from one detail to the next (Bell & Ternus, 2017). The form of the evening gown highlights the wearer's figure with its smooth lines draping.

Balance in design can be created using formal symmetry, where both sides reflect each other, or informal asymmetry, where elements differ but maintain equal visual impact (Bell & Ternus, 2017). When viewers study the balance of the evening gown, its asymmetrical shape creates a sense of dynamism, drawing the eye and maintaining visual interest with its unexpected design elements. The "Serengeti" silk chiffon evening gown's pattern and flow of the fabric are seen unlike in both sides and displayed as a harmonious blend of contrast and balance as well as the bead placements on the neckline. The triangular open-back design breaks the symmetry of the back, enhancing the gown's asymmetrical balance. The bead and rhinestone placements around the neckline are intentionally asymmetrical, adding a unique and dynamic touch to the design. The draping and folds of the gown flow effortlessly to one side, creating a fluid aesthetic that draws the viewer's eye to its intricate details.

Contrast/Juxtaposition convey distinct meanings whereas contrast focuses on the object's sharpness and highlights the visual tension. Juxtaposition allows two objects side by side to let viewers identify the contrasting qualities (Bell & Ternus, 2017). The soft-pink contrasts with the coral pink and brown making it stand out. The colors mimic the Serengeti sunset, with the rich brown tones subtly dominating the lighter shades, resulting in a warm and visually captivating composition. This is associated with the juxtaposition of the gown, the smoothness and flowy fabric encapsulates the sharpness, blending soft and bold elements into a cohesive design throughout the garment.

Dominance is one part of the display, usually the mannequin, should take center stage and draw the most attention (Bell & Ternus, 2017). The dominance of the dress instantly catches the viewer's attention on the distinctive modern motif and flowy silhouette. The use of blended colors and dramatic triangular open-back emphasizes the main focal point of the evening gown. Additionally, the dynamic flow of the silk chiffon evening gown's train toward the display surface draws the viewer's eye, creating a sense of movement and sophistication that elevates the visual appeal. Overall, the flow of the silk fabric indicates the sun's vibrant hues transitioning below the horizon blending seamlessly with the land.

Proportion refers to the relationship between the size, scale, and perceived "weight" of various elements in a display. Simpler designs often result in a more cohesive and visually balanced presentation (Bell & Ternus, 2017). The proportion of the silk chiffon evening gown is well-balanced with a slightly flared skirt creating an elongated silhouette. The vertical length of

the gown, paired with its soft draping at the hem adds a sense of balance. The halter neckline holds some of and creates fluidity in the garment.

Repetition involves consistently using a specific idea, pattern, or motif throughout a design to create harmony and reinforce its visual impact. It helps guide the viewer's eye and establishes a consistent theme (Bell & Ternus, 2017). The silk chiffon evening gown features a repetitive brushstroke pattern, creating a sense of rhythm and artistic fluidity that enhances its visual appeal. Beyond that, the gown features soft, flowing lines that capture the essence of the Tanzanian landscape and sunset. Its blended color pattern creates a sense of movement, drawing the viewer's eye seamlessly across the garment.

While observing the details of the silk chiffon evening gown, it is essential to consider the fabric's texture, influencing how it drapes and reflecting the light. On first impression, the evening gown features its silky texture and soft satin finish enhancing its graceful and fluid silhouette. The silk chiffon evening gown made from natural fibers of silk and polyester is lightweight, sheer, and evenly woven fabric. The silk satin finish of the gown conveys a feminine aesthetic made from organic protein fibers and smooth filament threads; this fabric features a balanced, lightweight, and opaque plain weave (The Textile Kit, 2021). The evening gown evokes sophistication and luxury, with its soft natural sheen capturing and reflecting light to create an air of refinement, while the glossy, sleek finish of satin enhances its lustrous appeal.

As one views the Africa's Fashion Diaspora exhibition, the story, and message unfold, offering viewers an understanding of the cultural richness and global influence of African fashion. This exhibition uniquely examines how 20th- and 21st-century fashion designers use visual storytelling to explore and contribute to conversations about Black identity in the contemporary world, a topic previously explored through music, literature, art, and philosophy (The Museum of FIT, 2024). Kevan Hall's "Serengeti" silk chiffon gown from his Africa: A Safari collection beautifully shows how fashion can reflect and honor different cultures. Inspired by the Serengeti sunset in Tanzania, the dress uses soft, earthy colors and flowing fabric to capture the beauty of the African landscape. The evening gown is a tribute to Africa's natural beauty and artistic spirit. This dress demonstrates how clothing can carry cultural meaning, connecting people to the rich heritage and visual style of Africa.

In the African diaspora, traditional clothing has long been a way for people to show pride in their roots. According to the New York Times, styles and symbols in African dress have helped people of African descent express their heritage and identity, even in new places (Jacobs, 2021). Hall's dress, though part of Western fashion, uses colors and patterns inspired by African landscapes, connecting viewers with a sense of African identity and beauty. It shows how African-inspired fashion can influence mainstream trends in a way that respects its origins.

The popularity of African-inspired designs also raises important issues about respecting cultural sources. The Washington Post points out that African styles are becoming more common in global fashion, but it is important for designers to recognize and honor where these styles come from (Smith, 2022). Hall's gown is a good example of respectful cultural inspiration, blending African elements into high fashion in a way that celebrates African culture. This costume shows how fashion can both reflect and influence society, helping different cultures be seen and appreciated around the world.

Hall's work reminds us that fashion is not just about style—it is also about storytelling and connection. When designers like Hall draw on specific cultures for inspiration, they have the power to bring those cultures into the global spotlight in a respectful way. This gown shows that when done thoughtfully, fashion can promote cultural appreciation rather than appropriation,

encouraging people to see the beauty and depth in traditions from around the world. Through this gown, Hall connects fashion to a broader social purpose, using his work to celebrate diversity and promote understanding.

Museum of FIT Africa's Fashion Diaspora Exhibit



Figure 1 & 2: Africa: A Safari Collection, "Serengeti" silk chiffon evening gown, spring 2008

Proof of Attendance



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