

ARTH-1204  
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Essay #1  
Analysis of a Fashion Museum Exhibition

### **The Birth of New Fashion: England 1970's/1980's**

The fashion museum I had the honor to browse at was the virtual online Fashion Museum Bath. The original museum is located in Bath, England, the specific exhibit I was able to browse online was the fashion of the 1970's and 1980's. The main designers that were featured in this exhibit were Bill Gibb, Ossie Clark, Laura Ashley and Gina Fratini. This particular exhibit focuses on all the styles that were developed in the 1970s and 1980s, advertising all the different types of ready to wear clothing after World War II. During this time, it started becoming more of a norm for women to wear pants or trousers, introducing the first gender neutral clothing statement. When this first originated, it was mostly more of a hippie, ethnic style of dressing. After the war, women's fashion typically focused on the comfortability clothing can bring, while still looking youthful and fashionable.

The setting is designed in this museum from everything with colors and statement pieces, to a simple black velvet dress. The museum depicts a clear image of what England's fashion looked like in the 70's and 80's, showing intrinsic styles created by some of the top fashion designers in Europe, and even the Western World at that time. This particular exhibition shows a modern style on the fashion-historical time period of the 70's and 80's, broadcasting different themes during the two decades. The narrative that ties everything together in this exhibit is the similar styles throughout it, while incorporating, (and not leaving out) **all** styles during the time period.

The 1970's overall silhouette was an upside down Y shape, including slim tops, long maxi skirts, wide pants and certainly dresses. Since this exhibit focuses on England's fashion, women often didn't start wearing pants as "norm" until closer to the 80's. The majority of this exhibit depicts styles that were worn in the 70's/80's that were highly influenced from the Renaissance. The dresses in this exhibit included a collared neckline, flowy bottoms, long (to the knee or past it), puffed out sleeves, and cinched in waists. After browsing this online museum, England's fashion in the 70's compared to the 80's, tended to be more modest and full coverage. While in the 80's, sleeves got shorter, dresses got shorter, necklines started becoming lower, and less fabric seemed to be used for the entirety of a piece.

Having a parent that was born in England, I believe this museum shows a great way to learn about a culture's fashion background during a time where some amazing designers came from, and some trends that we still use to this day. The garments that are included in this exhibition were truly amazing to view and learn more about. The garments included were evening gowns, jacket/long skirt combos, pinafore skirts/dresses, kimono-style dresses, tailored suits, sleeveless dresses, ball gowns, trousers and waistcoats. The fabrics that were used in the 70's/80's that the exhibition shares are silk, cotton, velvet, satin, lace, and silver woven metal thread.

The garment I chose from this exhibition is from Bill Gibb created around the years of 1970-1977, introducing his women's jacket and skirt ensemble. His specific design included petrol blue, dark chestnut brown, black and cream cotton woven with velvet in a brick pattern design, having an open collar, cinched in waistline, and  $\frac{3}{4}$  sleeves, paired with a mid-calf length skirt. The most interesting part about this

particular piece is that the embroidery throughout it includes bees and ears of corn. This specific garment stuck out to me because of the beauty of the jacket/skirt combo, portraying the significance of the 70's fashion on women, leaving them with more room to be comfortable, yet stylish at the same time. The jacket/skirt suit was important to women in the 70's because it gave them freedom with less heavy, body-constricting fabrics and materials that they were used to in the past. The suit also was introduced to later be replaced with pants, which at the time, were just starting to become normalized for women to wear. I thought this skirt suit was relevant in this exhibition because as we just finished discussing Dior's era in class, I learned he really introduced something revolutionary in the fashion world during his time by creating "The New Look," which was altered with their own twist, by different designers such as Bill Gibb, decades later.

To conclude, I found browsing the virtual online Fashion Museum Bath to be very insightful and intriguing. I loved browsing all the different styles and garments that were projected from Britain's fashion in the 1970's and 1980's. I learned a lot from viewing the different styles, while also looking up different designs from the specified designers on the webpage. I gained knowledge of various garments and materials that were used in England at the time, while also creating an image in my head of the time period. I also discovered that fashion in the United States was a bit different than it was in England at the time. I would love for someday to visit this museum in person in England.



### **Bibliography**

*Fashions from the 1970s and 1980s*. Fashion Museum Bath. (n.d.). Retrieved November 20, 2022, from <https://www.fashionmuseum.co.uk/galleries/fashions-1970s-and-1980s>