

The Cultural Impact of Fashion Exhibitions

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Fashion exhibitions allow for cultural consideration which is significant for fashion designers to use the platform to showcase their creations to the public and make them captivate toward fashion at a more complex level and/or as a form of art. Although individual expression is important through fashion and styling but on a deeper level cultural context made a huge influence in fashion (Yellowbrick, 2023). From traditional garments containing vibrant hues evolved to sleek and modern designs, fashion mirrors and knowledge of culture influence how people are today.

Fashion exhibitions are not runways where people can see only garments worn on by models, fashion exhibitions are cultural events that throw back to a certain mood of an era (Sarker, 2017). Fashion exhibitions are a platform for fashion designers to convey their visions and how their cultural backgrounds impact their designs which allows visitors to gain knowledge and understanding how the creations had become. The exhibition reflects trends and attitudes of society creating the resources to be valuable for comprehending cultural changes (Sarker, 2017). In a historical perspective, fashion exhibitions source how fashion was developed and its relationship to life. They provide an understanding of past life and cultural historical events. One example would be an American photojournalist, Eve Arnold, who created an innovative shoot exhibition showcasing her collection of photos of weekly catwalk events in Harlem during the period of segregation was common (Whitfield, 2023). This shows that Arnold's work shows the importance of culture that highlights the aspect of the norms at that time in the fashion industry. In *Figure 1*, we can see a photograph taken by Arnold that captured two black women fully dressed and checking their makeup in front of a mirror backstage in Harlem. They look to be leaning on a wall-mounted long bathroom towel holder to keep them in an upper position.



Figure 1. One of Arnold's photographs of two black women checking their makeup

Fashion is everywhere from people wearing it minimally to those who wear it extravagantly but no matter how people wear it, fashion is a form of self-expression, shapes their identities, and reflects social change. Non verbally it conveys what others are, where others come from, and what they believe in (Fashion Across Cultures, 2020). Those who dress minimally count as self-expression because they prefer simplicity and functionality which often includes limited hues, designs, and focus more on quality. This way of dressing expresses that they value sustainability. Dressing extravagantly is also another form of non verbal self expression. They prefer to wear unlimited hues, with distinctive designs, and statement pieces. Many have different points of view but may see that they are confident, artistic, and like to stand out from others. In fashion exhibitions culture is expressed communicating on how fashion trends evolved, how social norms influence fashion, and how fashion affected society (Wallenberg, 2020). In *Figure 2*, one can see a mannequin on the left wearing a v-neck long dress in the color light pink. In comparison, on the right, the mannequin is wearing a one-piece of exposed legs with long sleeves that elongate to the knees, wide sleeves, and wide slouching shoulders. The garment contains different materials of fabric that are disorganized.



Figure 2. Two mannequins wearing garments that are minimal and maximal

Culture helps curators design their fashion exhibitions from indigenous materials. designs, themes, and presentations in a particular area to make a powerful neighborhood identity (Wallenberg, 2020). Culture helps curators choose a specific period, place, or social group that is rooted to one's culture in a themed selection. There are many designs and fabrics from different eras that curators can choose from to create local recognition when selecting indigenous designs and fabrics. Culture also influences how fashion exhibitions style their presentation and that incorporates a lot of things from layouts and display. Exhibitions located in different areas of the world showcase a variety of fashion trends that influenced different cultures (Wallenberg, 2020). For example, in the documentary, *The First Monday In May*, directed by Andrew Rossi, Rossi showed the process of how curator Andrew Bolton created the exhibit, *China: Through the Looking Glass*. Based on artifacts and past information, Bolton and with the help of others was able to use those resources as inspirations to create mood boards, layouts, displays, and designs but had to go to an extent to make sure the exhibition does not offend or disrespect the people and their culture. Culture gives inspiration and can be fused in fashion but can lead to cultural appropriation where factors of culture are second hand outside of their culture conditions without proper comprehension or respect (Blazio-Licorish and Anyamwu, 2020). This issue still continues in the fashion industry and fashion exhibitions need to be cautious to make sure they respect the cultures they get inspiration from. Although with a little controversy, the exhibition will gain the attention that Bolton desires. In *Figure 3*, one can see that the garments that the mannequin are wearing are very similar to the Chinese vase, plate, and bowl. The garments and the Chinese vase both have porcelain art with unique designs and the same hues blue and white that shows Chinese history and culture. One can see that this exhibition is a remembrance of the

past with a twist of designers' innovations. This exhibition also makes a connection to the current generation that they should not forget how the designs were created and their culture.



Figure 3. Mannequins at the exhibition China: Through the Looking Glass

Culture may affect fashion exhibitions in many positive ways but can also affect in many other negative ways. Fashion exhibitions main displays are fashion designers and their designs can overshadow the meaning of what the exhibition is actually trying to portray (Wallenberg, 2020). Behind the scenes there is a lot of thought process in making the exhibitions and if a designer's extravagant work overtakes the exhibition's mission, it may lead to creators feeling discredited. People behind the scene experiment with substances and/or in an unsafe workplace to create the exhibitions and these aspects are disregarded when a lavish finished product is finalized. In pop culture, there are provocative garments and are often influencing fashion (Impacts Of Popular Culture On The Society, 2022). This influence can make fashion exhibitions promote sexuality and transform social norms. People worry that fashion exhibitions are a way to promote and commercialize products instead of sticking to the authenticity of representing a culture (Garcia, 2021). Sustainability, color trends, the use of fabric and materials, and accessories is a form of socio-cultural trend that impacts fashion in many aspects (The Impact of Socio Changes on Fashion 2020-2021, 2019). These changes can negatively impact fashion by creating disposable fashion where people consume mass products at a budget price instead of buying clothes at a pricer end that may last longer. Fashion exhibitions are a great platform to help represent a culture and its historical events but it also promotes dangerous practices, overshadowing issues, and changing social norms. In *Figure 4*, one can see scattered clothes and other fabric materials out in the open with other bricks and wires. With the influence of collections haute couture and fashion exhibitions, fast fashion businesses would get inspiration and would replicate the garments in a budget price for consumer to consume but all the garments would not be bought or the trend became a passing fad and others would throw the clothes away which lands on landfills or even in the ocean that may harm the marine life.



Figure 4. Scattered clothes on land

Fashion Exhibitions promote diversity that show designs from different areas, traditions, and subgroups that are not seen or normal to a located museum area. This enhances the museum but also educates others about fashion trends and practices that happen globally. Not only do they cover different cultures, they also mirror social changes. Fashion exhibitions underline how fashion trends progress from historical events to social norms and value (Vilaca and Lopez, 2021). Social and political moments play a significant role in societal change especially in behavior patterns and cultural values. In the 20th century there was an artistic movement which created minimalism to exist because they questioned consumerism (Vilaca and Lopez, 2021). This is an expression that others thought of and some adopt to where it appeared in the fashion industry. In figure 5, one can see multiple mannequin ducks taped with printed words, “Your body belongs to you”, this is subjective but others may see it as symbolizing women empowerment. Feminism is arising at a steady pace towards equality in every aspect in society such as the fashion industry, equal pay to the opposite sex, education, freedom, respect, and safety.

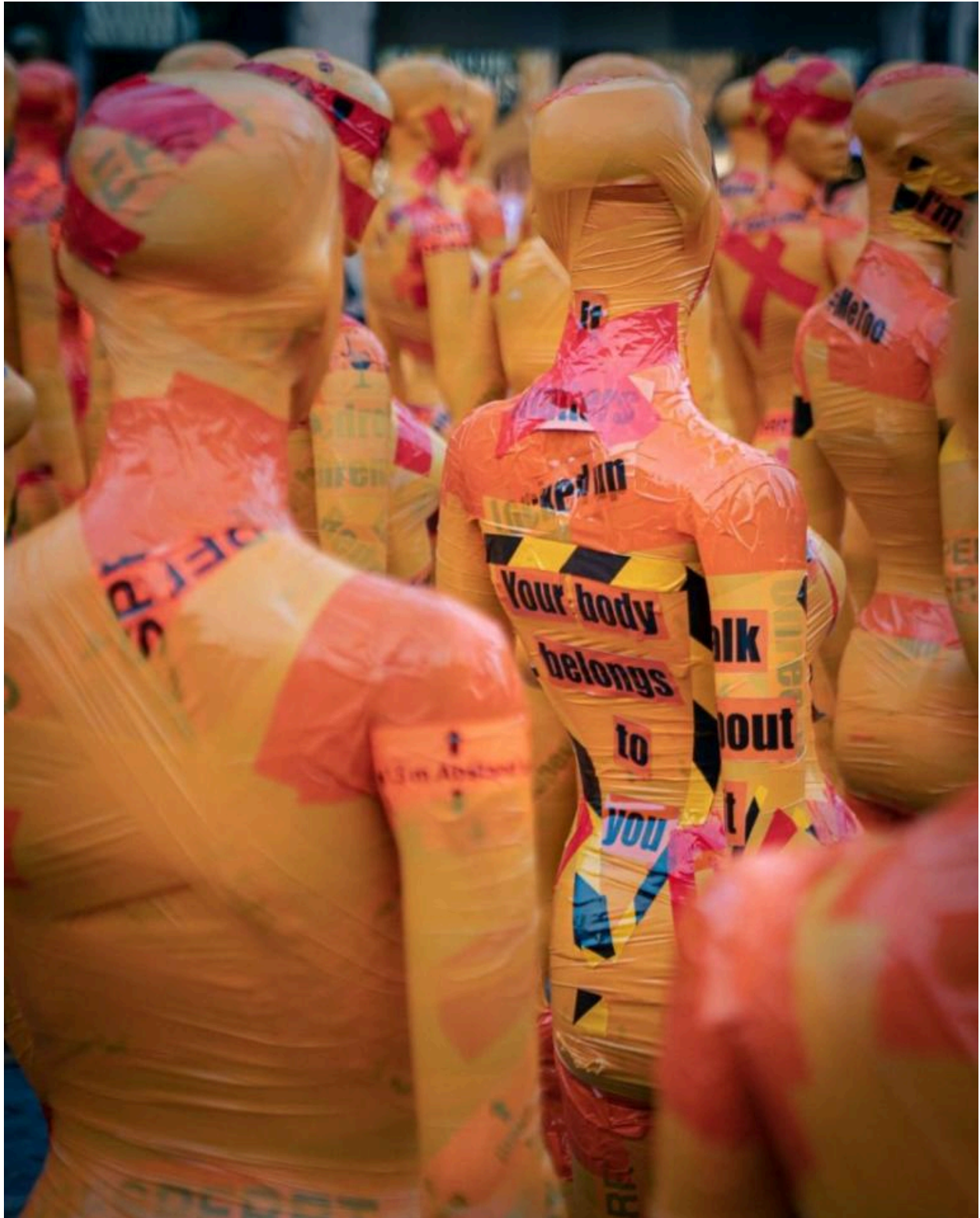


Figure 5. Mannequins in duct tape

Culture significantly impacts fashion exhibitions. From cultural fashion trends evolving, themes, presentation, social change, self-expression, sustainability, and political view culture affect fashion exhibitions continuously. Culture influences how curators present and convey in fashion exhibitions showcasing fashion designers garments and accessories. The garments and accessories also express nonverbally of one's identity, values, subgroups, and civilization. Culture gives many choices to curators from materials, designs, colors, styles, symbols, and patterns. Culture affects how the exhibition should be laid out and represented to the visitors so they can feel the connections and the exhibit communicates to them. There are many cultures that fashion exhibitions can choose from but carefully choosing and understanding one culture is needed to not offend others who came from those cultures. Fashion exhibitions allow other cultures to learn another culture because usually some would not go out of their way to research a culture.

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Figure 1. [How Eve Arnold changed the way we see fashion | CNN](#)

Figure 2. [FIT Museum's New Exhibit Explores the Back-and-Forth Between Minimalism and Maximalism - Fashionista](#)

Figure 3. [Review: In 'China: Through the Looking Glass,' Eastern Culture Meets Western Fashion - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](#)

Figure 4. [How Fast Fashion Is Destroying the Planet - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](#)

Figure 5. [5 Signs To Understand How Fashion Reflects Social Changes \(fashinnovation.nyc\)](#)

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