09 October 2021 till 16 January 2022

Global Wardrobe

THE WORLDWIDE FASHION CONNECTION

Kunstmuseum Den Haag's fashion collection was developed with a West European focus. But delve into our repository and you will soon discover common threads with other cultures all over the world. Hand-painted cotton from India, soft Chinese silk, imaginative batik designs from Indonesia and colourful variations on the Japanese kimono: each of these garments represents the world, and tells a story of inspiration and connection. Lovely but also painful stories, for many of these textiles were made during the age of colonialism and unequal power relations. Our topical exhibition *Global Wardrobe - The Worldwide Fashion Connection* comes at a time when ideas about fashion as a global phenomenon and about cultural appropriation in the fashion world are in the spotlight. Kunstmuseum Den Haag will invite visitors to look beyond the splendour and see clothes as part of the world history they represent. Special attention will be focused on makers who design with an open view of the world, bringing their own cultural background to the fore.

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Film: Ruben van Esterik

Non-European influences on the museum's West European fashion collection will be divided chronologically into three phases: the 18th and 19th centuries, the 20th century and the present day. They represent the phases of imitation, inspiration and innovation. We have deliberately chosen not to explore this subject by region, but by period, in order to show how the prevailing view of 'the global fashion connection' constantly changes, and can be seen in an historical context.

Imitation: 18th and 19th centuries

Thanks to global trade and colonisation, for centuries textiles and clothes were imported to Western Europe from distant lands. These 'oriental' textiles prompted new insights, materials and techniques that enriched and broadened West European fashion. They were then copied, imitated or adapted to European tastes. The exhibition will for example feature the '*Japonse rock*', a housecoat which made its way into Dutch gentlemen's wardrobes through trade relations with Japan in the 17th century. In Europe this garment, based on the kimono, was made of silk or the colourful cotton fabrics (chintz) which the Dutch East India Company (VOC) imported from India. Wealthy men wore these Japanese housecoats as a status symbol, and liked to have their portrait painted in them. In the second half of the 18th century the 'oriental style' became a real trend in West European fashion, for both men and women. 'Oriental dress' was seen as an expression of admiration for non-European cultures, but could also signify a 'rebel spirit' - the Bohemian who dared to stand out from the crowd. In neither case was there much regard for the original function or meaning of the fabric or the symbolism that these fashions encapsulated. Sometimes clothes even switched sexes, with garments worn by men in India attracting the interest of European women. This was true, for example, of the Kashmir shawl, the turban and (somewhat later) the fashion for pyjamas.

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with clothes from Afghanistan, Europe etc., 1960s. Kunstmuseum o: Alice de Groot.
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Dresses of chintz (painted and printed cotton) from India in European fashions, c. 1780-1795. Kunstmuseum Den Haag. Photo: Alice de Groot.
More information

Empire dresses with embroidery in paisley motifs, inspired by the paisley motifs on Kashmir shawls, and Kashmir shawls with the paisley motifs. The origin of the Kashmir shawl is India, early 19th century. Kunstmuseum Den Haag. Photo: Alice de Groot.
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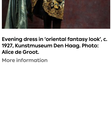

Evening dress in 'oriental fantasy look', c. 1927. Kunstmuseum Den Haag. Photo: Alice de Groot.
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Evening dresses and a and coat in 'oriental' s velvet cloak is a design Monaci Gallenga; the e evening coat has a kim Kunstmuseum Den Ha de Groot.
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'Inspiration': 20th century

With the emergence of great couturiers in the 20th century, 'inspiration from the East' became a theme on the catwalk, as designers turned to the culture of countries like China, Japan, Egypt and India. In the 1920s designers like Paul Poiret, Coco Chanel, Jeanne Lanvin and their contemporaries drew a lot of inspiration from non-European cultures. Interestingly, West European couturiers generally used 'oriental' references to depict a fantasy, producing creations that would never be worn in the country of origin, but which grew out of a homespun orientalism. 'Oriental' also contained an element of sexual fantasy, which was regarded as licence to take things one step further than would generally we regarded as the 'norm' in the west.

Authentic non-western garments were also used for 'new' designs. Couturiers took their scissors to them and used parts of the original garment in their creations. Some even went so far as to sew their own label into an original Chinese jacket. They were not alone. In the roaring twenties men's jackets from China were repurposed as fabulous evening coats by many fashionable West-European women, who prized them for their handiwork, decoration and magnificent colours, but almost certainly had no understanding of the symbolism in the Chinese embroidery. The same thing happened in the era of the hippies, who liked to wear clothes from Afghanistan, for example. The designers of the hippie chic style in the 1960s and 70s, such as Yves Saint-Laurent, and the later 'storytellers' John Galliano, Alexander McQueen and Jean-Paul Gaultier, again 'quoted' non-western fashions. Eurocentric fashion that adopted elements of or quoted other people's culture drew almost no critical remarks when shown on Paris catwalks and in museums into the 1990s. Though barely twenty years ago, this now feels like an entirely different world.

Cultural appropriation: a topical issue

Over the past couple of decades actual 'copying' from other cultures, particularly when it occurs without correct acknowledgement of the source, has come to be known as 'cultural appropriation'. The kind of copying that occurred for decades in the guise of appreciation and inspiration is now regarded much more critically. Cultural appropriation is closely monitored, with social media playing a key role. The whole world is watching, and this has brought the fashion world to a turning point. A number of large fashion houses, plus other less well-known designers, are now keen to be accountable for their use of other people's heritage. Or they opt for connection and collaboration on an equal footing, having their designs made locally (for fair pay).

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Documentary Global Wardrobe. Production: Together & Dedicated

...n Chinese skirt with S kim wool ...

Mr Ainy Kumar, India, summer 2020, Disc Organza Bomber jacket with Fireboy Projective ...

Rich Mnisi, Collision City trousers ...

Kirsten Ashcroft ...

on the Tsonga culture, made in Africa, Hiya Kaya '21 collection, Courtesy Rich Mnisi. Photo: Zander rman.

nformation

theme, and Eric Blue Striped trousers, lycra. Courtesy Mr Ajay Kumar.

More information

patterned with half zebra/half lava motifs, made in South Africa, Hiya Kaya '21 collection, 2021. Courtesy Rich Mnisi. Photo: Zander Opperman.

the Caged Bird 2016. Courtesy K

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Innovation: today's makers

Publication

A lavishly illustrated catalogue (in Dutch and English) will be published by Waanders & De Kunst for Kunstmuseum Den Haag.

The exhibition is sponsored by Nationale-Nederlanden.

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