



## NEWS

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### ***Pockets to Purses: Fashion + Function***

March 6–31, 2018

The Museum at FIT

The Fashion Institute of Technology’s School of Graduate Studies and The Museum at FIT present ***Pockets to Purses: Fashion + Function***. Organized by graduate students in the Fashion and Textile Studies program, the exhibition explores pockets and purses as both fashionable and functional objects by tracing both their history and evolution to accommodate the demands of modern life. Displaying objects from the collection of The Museum at FIT, the exhibition analyzes the interplay between pockets and purses in both men’s and women’s wardrobes from the 18th century to the present. In addition to garments and accessories, the exhibition features photographs, advertisements, and film clips that demonstrate how pockets and purses have been utilized throughout history and the ways that lifestyle changes have affected their design and use.



Reticule of a man’s waistcoat,  
embroidered silk,  
circa 1800, France, The Museum  
at FIT, gift of Thomas Oechsler.



*Galerie des Modes et Costumes  
Français*, circa 1779-1787, FIT  
Special Collections and College  
Archives, Fashion Plate 162.

***Pockets to Purses: Fashion + Function*** begins with 18th-century examples of men’s and women’s pockets. Men’s pockets were built into jackets or waistcoats so that men could carry a variety of objects, including books. Problematically, the lines of a man’s tailored ensemble were often disrupted by bulky items. Alternatively, women’s pockets began as separate accessories that were tied to the body and worn

underneath a skirt. These pockets were completely hidden, allowing a woman to carry items while maintaining privacy.



Bodice, silk taffeta, circa 1878, France, Gift of Bernice Margulies. The Museum at FIT.



Bodice, silk taffeta, circa 1878, France, The Museum at FIT, gift of Bernice Margulies.

Changing fashions and evolving roles in society led to women carrying their possessions in handheld bags. A reticule—a small handbag typically made with a drawstring closure—displayed in the exhibition illustrates the evolution of pockets into handheld purses. The shape, ornamentation, and pocket flap of this example from circa 1800 indicate that it was fabricated from an 18th-century man's waistcoat, an example of which can be seen in the rendering on a fashion plate dating from 1778 to 1787.

A blue bodice from circa 1878 that features a small watch pocket on the left hip reveals a fashionable approach to practical design. The pocket has embroidered decoration, but the easily accessible location and convenient shape of the pocket are function driven.



Evening bag and contents, wool and metal, 1920–1930, France, The Museum at FIT, gift of Charles Enders.

A needlepoint bag dating from 1920-30 contains three small cases that demonstrate the prevalence for ensemble dressing that arose during the 1920s. The coordinating containers for cigarettes and face powder testify to a growing acceptance of women smoking and wearing makeup in public.

The tension between fashion and function continued into the 20th century. The exhibition includes an ad for Elsa Schiaparelli's "Cash and Carry" suits, which featured large pockets on the hips for carrying supplies, demonstrating the desire for functionality that prevailed at the outbreak of World War II. After the war, designers deemphasized functionality and began to feature pockets primarily as design elements. A Molyneux dress from 1948 has eight strategically placed pockets on the hips that make the waist appear smaller, a silhouette that dominated postwar fashion.



Molyneux, wool houndstooth dress, circa 1948, France, The Museum at FIT, gift of Mrs. Ephraim London, Mrs. Rowland Mindlin and Mrs. Walter Eytan in memory of Mrs. M. Lincoln Schuster

American designers such as Claire McCardell and Bonnie Cashin incorporated pockets that were as playful as they were practical. A bright green raincoat by Cashin circa 1965 features a pocket designed to look like a shoulder bag—making her raincoat a visual fusion of fashion and function. Made from leather, canvas, and the twist-lock closures that were typical of Cashin's work, the coat's large, practical pocket allowed the wearer to go hands-free while keeping her possessions close.



Bonnie Cashin, raincoat, cotton canvas and leather, circa 1965, USA, The Museum at FIT.

Novelty bags demonstrate the whimsy of fashion, though they also convey wealth and status. A 1950s Lederer purse shaped like a clock has a built-in lipstick compartment and utilizes traditional elegant materials in a novel design. Additionally, Judith Leiber's 1994 Swarovski crystal-encrusted minaudière in the shape of a tomato was designed to be a display of glamour and imagination. Both examples present the handbag as an objet d'art and show how designers sometimes perform more as artists, focusing on form rather than functionality.



Lederer, novelty bag with cosmetics case, black suede with brass, 1950s, France, The Museum at FIT.



Judith Leiber, pavé rhinestones with gold metal, 1994, USA, The Museum at FIT, gift of Judith Leiber, Inc.

Other iterations of the status bag, specifically those of the late 20th century, are also on display. An Hermès "Kelly" bag from 2000 demonstrates the longevity of the bag's design, which set standards for the luxury market when it was introduced as a saddle bag in 1892. Alternatively, a Louis Vuitton purse from 2003 shows a trendier kind of status bag. Its colorful take on the traditional Vuitton "Speedy" bag played into passing fashion trends during the early 2000s.



Hermès, Kelly bag, leather and brass, 2000, France, The Museum at FIT, gift of Laura Solomon in memory of Sally Solomon.



Takashi Murakami for Louis Vuitton, Speedy bag, multicolor monogram canvas, 2003, France, The Museum at FIT.

Various menswear items are also included, such as a 1990 sport coat by Jean Paul Gaultier. With layers of cargo pockets, velcro flaps, and heavy-duty zippers, this jacket is a take on the functional pockets in conventional men's sportswear. Similarly, a bowler hat designed by Rod Keenan in 2006 subverts the traditional bowler by including, at the crown, a pocket made to hold a condom.





Jean Paul Gaultier Homme, man's jacket, wool, spring 1990, France, The Museum at FIT, gift of Richard Martin.



Rod Keenan, hat, wool, grosgrain, and synthetic satin, fall 2006, USA, The Museum at FIT.

The final section of the exhibition focuses on pockets that allude to historical embellishments. Included are a Bill Blass knit dress from fall 1986 and a man's Versace suit from 1992. Shown alongside a reproduction of an 18th-century man's embroidered coat, these objects are reminders of the pocket's fashionable use throughout history.



Detail reproduction of man's suit, velvet with silk embroidery, c. 1785, France, The Museum at FIT.



Bill Blass, evening sweater dress with belt, cashmere and satin, fall 1986, USA, The Museum at FIT, gift of Mrs. Savanna Clark.

Museum hours: Tuesday–Friday, noon–8 pm; Saturday, 10 am–5 pm. Closed Sunday, Monday, and legal holidays.

Admission is free.

### **Fashion and Textile Studies: History, Theory, Museum Practice Master of Arts Program**

In their second year of study, students in the Fashion and Textile Studies: History, Theory, Museum Practice Master of Arts program in FIT's School of Graduate Studies work in collaboration with The Museum at FIT to create and install an exhibition. This year-long course prepares students to enter the

workforce as curators, conservators, registrars, or museum educators. The class handles every aspect of the exhibition process from concept to completion, including research, design, publications, and related events. The students draft proposal ideas in the spring of the previous year, and the museum selects the most viable topic. In-depth research begins in the summer, and the class formally begins to review and refine their exhibition thesis collectively in the fall. They are then divided into groups with specific roles and responsibilities.

The editorial team consists of writers, editors, and researchers. They drive the final object selection and generate the bulk of the written materials for the exhibition. This group works closely with the design and education teams to ensure the narrative of the topic is properly represented.

The design team is responsible for the exhibition and graphic design, as well as serving as the conservation consultants. Their goal is to create a visitor experience that reinforces the curatorial focus, while ensuring that the objects are shown in a manner that addresses consideration of appropriate conditions. They work closely with the other teams to create a unified vision for the exhibition.

The public team crafts the public message for the exhibition through educational programs, publications, and press coverage. This group also acts as the class support team, assisting with research, image rights, and budgeting. They work closely with the curators to ensure that the public has a richer experience and understanding of the exhibition topic.

This process is a unique experience and a key feature of the Fashion and Textiles Studies graduate program at FIT.

The School of Graduate Studies at FIT provides advanced professional education in seven distinctive areas, promoting excellence in the post-baccalaureate study of fashion, business, art, and design. The school offers programs leading to the MA, MFA, and MPS degrees, and is dedicated to advancing research in the creative industries and fostering innovative collaborations that link students and faculty with industry and professional partners worldwide.

### **Fashion Institute of Technology**

The Museum at FIT, which is accredited by the American Alliance of Museums, is part of the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT). It is the only museum in New York City dedicated solely to the art of fashion. Best known for its innovative and award-winning exhibitions, the museum has a collection of more than 50,000 garments and accessories dating from the 18th century to the present. Like other fashion museums, such as the Musée de la Mode, the Mode Museum, and the Museo de la Moda, The Museum at FIT collects, conserves, documents, exhibits, and interprets fashion. The museum's mission is to advance knowledge of fashion through exhibitions, publications, and public programs. Visit [fitnyc.edu/museum](http://fitnyc.edu/museum).

The Fashion Institute of Technology, a part of the State University of New York, has been a leader in career education in art, design, business, and technology for more than 70 years. With a curriculum that provides a singular blend of hands-on, practical experience, classroom study, and a firm grounding in the liberal arts, FIT offers a wide range of outstanding programs that are affordable and relevant to today's rapidly changing industries. Internationally renowned, FIT draws on its New York City location to provide a vibrant, creative community in which to learn. The college offers nearly 50 majors and grants AAS, BFA, BS, MA, MFA, and MPS degrees, preparing students for professional success and leadership in the global marketplace. Among notable alumni in fashion are Calvin Klein, Michael Kors, Amsale Aberra, Reem Acra, Brian Atwood, Dennis Basso, Francisco Costa, Norma Kamali, Nanette Lepore, Bibhu Mohapatra, Ralph Rucci, John Bartlett, and Michelle Smith. Other prominent graduates include Leslie Blodgett, creator of bareMinerals; international restaurant designer Tony Chi; and Nina Garcia, creative director, *Marie Claire*. Visit [fitnyc.edu](http://fitnyc.edu).