

This 19th-century jacket was donated to MFIT by Geoffrey Beene. It likely came from his company's reference collection — similar to Traphagen's own study collection. The ensemble beside it shows how Beene may have adapted the detailed seaming, voluminous sleeves, and quilting of the jacket into contemporary fashion. This pairing demonstrates that by the 1980s, design-by-adaptation was a standard practice throughout the fashion industry.

Jacket

Silk

1890-1895, USA

The Museum at FIT, 91.20.3

Gift of Geoffrey Beene

Geoffrey Beene

Coat and dress

Wool, silk

Fall 1983

The Museum at FIT, 2013.29.2

Gift of Sally Kahan

This ensemble from James Galanos's collection of spring/summer 1970 features warrior and lion motifs inspired by ancient Greek pottery. The accompanying fabric is a sample by textile designer Tzaims Luksus from the same collection. It also draws inspiration from classical Greek art and artifacts. Galanos, a first-generation American, practiced design-by-adaptation using his own Greek heritage.

James Galanos

Evening dress and overskirt

Silk

1970

The Museum at FIT, 86.80.1

Gift of Maurice S Polkowitz

Tzaims Luksus

Textile designed for James Galanos

Silk

1970

The Museum at FIT, 114.98.78.2

Gift of Elaine P. Kend

“The Greek Way of Galanos”

Reproduction from *Vogue*, June 1, 1970

The geometric piecework and color-blocking of this ensemble are reminiscent of Hard-Edge Abstraction, characterized by harshly juxtaposed colors.

John Kloss, who shared a studio with contemporary artist Robert Indiana early on in his career, often drew inspiration from various aspects of modern art, such as colors, forms, and techniques.

John Kloss

Dress and coat

Wool

1966

The Museum at FIT, 83.212.4

Gift of Elaine A. Flug

“The Breakaways”

Reproduction from *Vogue*, February 15, 1966

These designs by Carolyn Schnurer and Geoffrey Beene are based on traditional Indian clothing. Schnurer, known for traveling the world for inspiration, used a printed paisley textile in her adaptation of the sari, while Beene transformed the silhouette and gold braid details of a traditional man's sherwani into a mini-dress. Both are examples of American interest in India during the mid-20th century as well as design-by-adaptation.

Carolyn Schnurer

Dress

Cotton

1954

The Museum at FIT, 82.153.80

Gift of Mitch Rein

Geoffrey Beene

Dress

Lurex, brass filigree

1969

The Museum at FIT, 2002.58.1

Gift of Jane L. Rodgers

Luis Estévez chose to use a lightweight cotton fabric to create this evening gown. A silk fabric, such as a full-bodied satin, would have been the more conventional choice for evening wear at the time. Estévez also used nature as his inspiration for this gown, abstracting the image of a rose.

Grenelle-Estévez

(Luis Estévez)

Evening dress and shawl

Cotton

Circa 1959

The Museum at FIT, 92.173.6

Gift of Sylvia Levine

Geoffrey Beene often experimented by juxtaposing two distinct materials in one garment. The transparent fabric and applied sequins of this bodice allude to the monarch butterfly. The orange and black sequins also weigh down the gossamer fabric, referencing the fragility of butterfly wings.

Geoffrey Beene

Evening jacket

Nylon

Winter 1991-1992

The Museum at FIT, 2000.71.1

The lacing detail on the skirt of this ensemble is hidden when paired with its matching tunic, but when the skirt is worn separately, the lacing becomes a unique design element. Klein's fashionable separates offered women an affordable way to create their own style by mixing various versatile pieces.

Anne Klein

Tunic and skirt

Leather

Circa 1968

The Museum at FIT, 88.15.3

Gift of Dorothy Pollack

This cap and top come from a project in which students designed bathing suits and beach accessories using an innovative material supplied by the Goodrich Company. Called Koroseal, it is a waterproof fabric created by coating silk with synthetic rubber. This process allowed the sun's rays to permeate the textile, a benefit for sunbathing. Experimental projects such as this, often in collaboration with American manufacturers, brought cutting-edge student work to the attention of the fashion industry.

Traphagen School Clothing Department

Beachwear top

Silk, Koroseal

1939

The Museum of FIT, P92.5.2B

Museum Purchase

This white evening coat by James Galanos features frayed medallion appliqués. The surface embellishments demonstrate how Galanos — known for his couture-level craftsmanship — often played with the texture of different textiles to create unconventional garments. The intricate construction of the coat conveys the wide breadth of American style beyond mass-produced ready-to-wear.

James Galanos

Evening coat

Silk

1963

The Museum at FIT, 79.197.4

Gift of Ms. Mary Jane Beirn

In this portrait, Ethel Traphagen (1882-1963) sits before an illustration of herself that hung in her school's library. Traphagen worked in the fashion industry as an illustrator, writer, and designer and was one of the first teachers of fashion design in New York City. She taught for twenty years before founding The Traphagen School of Fashion as an institution dedicated solely to educating fashion industry professionals.

This 1910 article helped establish the philosophies of the American design movement, arguing that while all fashion is adapted from the past, the needs of U.S. consumers could best be met by American designers. The *Ladies' Home Journal* ran the first national campaign in 1909 to advocate for original fashion free from Parisian influence.

In 1913, Ethel Traphagen won first prize in a nationwide design contest organized by the *Ladies' Home Journal*. She adapted the colors and forms in Whistler's painting *Nocturne: Blue and Gold, Old Battersea Bridge* into her design. Her win catapulted her to the forefront of the American design movement.

In 1913, the *Ladies' Home Journal* sent Ethel Traphagen to study southwestern Native American culture. These illustrations for the *Journal's* pattern service were inspired by colorful Navajo and Zuni beadwork and embroidery. Copying motifs from Native American culture was seen as an "original" way to break from the dominance of French haute couture. However, these methods of cultural appropriation intensified the ongoing disenfranchisement of Native American peoples and continue to be problematic today.

In *Costume Design and Illustration* by Ethel Traphagen, first published in 1918, sketching is emphasized as a foundational design skill. The Traphagen School was renowned for producing successful fashion illustrators. This seminal text in fashion education has been reprinted continuously, most recently in 2010.

The Traphagen School produced these promotional posters to attract prospective students. One poster features students at work, while the other showcases the school's study spaces and collections of artifacts, books, and fashion plates. The classrooms were filled with these objects to provide students with design inspiration.

Students drew inspiration from artifacts that Ethel Traphagen collected in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1928 to create the shield motif textile for this “Zanbaraza” dress. During the early 20th century, Euro-American artists within the Modern Primitivism movement took a colonialist view of African art and craft as untouched by civilization, making it an attractive new source of inspiration. One way these ideas trickled down to the wider public was through the practice of design-by-adaptation in fashion.

The Silhouette was a yearbook made to celebrate the school’s ten-year anniversary, as well as the success of early graduates. On the cover it features the Traphagen logo — a figure in medieval clothing — that also appeared on other school publications. This use of a logo foreshadowed branding strategies that are standard in the industry today.

Ethel Traphagen is pictured, second from right, instructing students to adapt ancient Greek clothing into modern American fashions. Leaders of the American design movement took the Eurocentric view that the fashions of ancient Greece and Rome were the only truly original styles, and that all clothing was adapted from classical sources.

This quartet of sketches by fashion illustrator Antonio Lopez includes elements from Japanese and ancient Greek sources. At age twelve, Lopez received a scholarship to attend a children's drawing and illustration class at Traphagen. His use of design-by-adaption demonstrates the influence of Traphagen's teaching methods on his later work.

The Traphagen study collection featured hundreds of pieces of historical clothing from cultures all over the world, including this early 20th-century woman's swimsuit. A sketch by Traphagen alumnus Maurice Levin shows an adaptation of similar swimwear. Inspired by the past throughout his career, Levin went on to design swimwear for men and women at Jantzen and Catalina.

This cap and top come from a project in which students designed bathing suits and beach accessories using an innovative material supplied by the Goodrich Company. Called Koroseal, it is a waterproof fabric created by coating silk with synthetic rubber. This process allowed the sun's rays to permeate the textile, a benefit for sunbathing. Experimental projects such as this, often done in collaboration with American manufacturers, brought cutting-edge student work to the attention of the fashion industry.

These articles promote alumni work that utilized new materials, demonstrating the school's emphasis on experimentation.

Fashion Digest named alumna Alice Broomham as the first American to use Lanital, a newly-patented fiber made from a milk protein called casein. *Vogue* featured student designs for Miss America made of Everglaze, a polished cotton with a wrinkle-proof finish.

Fashion Digest (published 1937-1967) was a semi-quarterly magazine produced by The Traphagen School. It highlighted student projects, collaborations with industry professionals, and accomplishments of alumni. It also functioned as a guide for understanding the various philosophies and methods taught by Ethel Traphagen. Selected pages from the Fall-Winter 1947 issue, which promoted alumni Jay Anderson and Carolyn Schnurer and displayed student illustrations of sportswear, are available for view on the iPad.

The Battle of Versailles was a charity fashion show that featured five New York ready-to-wear designers competing against five Parisian couturiers. Following the American presentation, guests celebrated by throwing their programs into the air. Their success was a triumph of the American design movement's — and Ethel Traphagen's — efforts to distinguish American ready-to-wear from French fashion.

Anne Klein's participation in the Battle of Versailles (1973) is discussed in this video clip. Klein was chosen in part because her brand represented the modernity and flexibility of sportswear. For this highly-publicized show, she returned to Traphagen's design-by-adaptation method to create a collection inspired by African prints and motifs.

During his Versailles presentation, Stephen Burrows showed this gown featuring his signature "lettuce" edge hem. His colorful collection highlighted the innovation and creativity of New York style. An alumnus of the Fashion Institute of Technology, Burrows represented a new generation of designers emerging from New York City fashion institutions that embraced the legacy of The Traphagen School.

Portrait of Ethel Traphagen

Reproduction from *The Silhouette*, 1933

Fashion Institute of Technology/SUNY

FIT Library Special Collections and FIT Archives

“What We Mean by ‘American Fashions’”

Ladies’ Home Journal, October 15, 1910

Reproduction

**Ethel Traphagen’s winning “Whistler
Gown”**

New York Times, February 23, 1913

Reproduction

James Abbott McNeil Whistler

Nocturne: Blue and Gold – Old Battersea Bridge,
circa 1872-75

Reproduction

**American Indian dress designs by
Ethel Traphagen**

Ladies' Home Journal, November 1913

Reproduction

Ethel Traphagen

Costume Design & Illustration, 1918

Fashion Institute of Technology/SUNY

FIT Library Special Collections and FIT Archives

“Zanbaraza” print dress

Voided silk velvet

1929-1930

The Museum at FIT, 74.43.1

Gift of June Mayper

**“Glimpses of Interiors at
The Traphagen School of Fashion” &
“Classrooms in the Traphagen School”**

Poster front and back, 1941

Reproduction

Loan from Emily Nissen

**Traphagen students working on
Zanbaraza project in 1929**

Costume Design & Illustration, 1932

Reproduction

The Silhouette

1933

Fashion Institute of Technology/SUNY

FIT Library Special Collections and FIT Archives

**“Lines of Modern Fashion Come from
Early Greek Costumes”**

Photograph

1933

Loan from Chelsea Payne

Antonio Lopez

“Surreal Robe Series”

Ink and paper

1980s

Frances Neady collection of original fashion illustrations

Fashion Institute of Technology/SUNY

FIT Library Special Collections and FIT Archives

Swimsuit

Wool, silk

Early 1900s, USA

The Museum at FIT, P92.5.12

Museum purchase

Maurice Levin

Sketch

1950s

Reproduction

Maurice Levin Archive, FIDM Museum and Galleries

Traphagen School Clothing Department

“Rainbow fish” hat

Silk, Koroseal

1939

The Museum of FIT, P92.5.5

Traphagen School Clothing Department

Beachwear top

Silk, Koroseal

1939

The Museum of FIT, P92.5.2B

“Florida Mermaids”

Fashion Digest, Winter 1939-40

Reproduction

“Milk Fed Fashions”

Fashion Digest, Fall 1938

Reproduction

**“Glamour Wardrobe of Everglaze
finished fabrics worn by Bess Myerson
Miss America 1945”**

Vogue, October 1, 1946

Reproduction

Fashion Digest

Spring 1947; Fall-Winter 1948;

Spring-Summer 1953; Spring-Summer 1954

Fashion Institute of Technology/SUNY

FIT Library Special Collections and FIT Archives

Fashion Digest

Spring-Summer 1959; Fall-Winter 1960-1961;
Spring-Summer 1961; Spring-Summer 1966

Loan from Rachel Potter

Fashion Digest

Fall-Winter 1947

Fashion Institute of Technology/SUNY

FIT Library Special Collections and FIT Archives

Battle of Versailles Program

Eleanor Lambert Collection, 1973

Fashion Institute of Technology/SUNY

FIT Library Special Collections and FIT Archives

Video

Clip from *Battle At Versailles* (2016)

M2M Documentaries

Running time: 2 minutes, 32 seconds

Bill Cunningham

Stephen Burrows gown worn by model Karen
Bjornson at the Battle of Versailles

Photograph

1973

Nancy North Photographs and Sketches, 1973

Fashion Institute of Technology/SUNY

FIT Library Special Collections and FIT Archives

Shield

Leather, wood, pigment, fur

Kenya or Tanzania, 19th–20th century

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection,

Gift of Joseph J. Shapiro, 1972



Sari

Silk, metallic thread

Indian, ca. 1875

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Catharine Breyer Van Bomel Foundation Fund, 1978



Male Wedding Outfit

Designed by Sabyasachi Mukherjee

Sherwani (coat), Kurta (shirt), Churridar (trousers),
shawl, hat, and shoes

Indian, ca. 2015

Victoria & Albert Museum

Gifted by Sabyasachi Mukherjee



Volute-krater (bowl for mixing wine and water)

Attributed to the Painter of the Woolly Satyrs

Terracotta

Greek, ca. 450 B.C.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Rogers Fund, 1907