



Halston, floor-length dress, sequinned polyester, 1974, USA.

The Museum at **FIT**

Seventh Avenue at 27th Street
New York City

Yves Saint Laurent + Halston: Fashioning the 70s

February 6–April 18, 2015
#YSLhalston

Hours:

Tuesday–Friday, noon–8 pm
Saturday, 10 am–5 pm
Closed Sunday, Monday, and legal holidays
Admission is free.

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YVES SAINT LAURENT
+ HALSTON FASHIONING
THE 70s

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“By chance, I took over the ‘Feminine Fashions’ column of *The New Yorker* at the very moment that feminine fashions ceased to count. Women’s refusal to lengthen their hemlines in 1970 may not have been the grand gesture of feminist independence that some chose to claim, but it is a convenient watershed in the history of fashion. After that, there was no longer any unabashed accepted, universal fashion authority . . .”

Writer Kennedy Fraser’s quote captures the idea that the 1970s was a time of momentous change in fashion. This dichotomic decade—sandwiched between the countercultural 1960s and the opulent 1980s—witnessed the demise of haute couture’s majestic reign and the ascendance of designer-led conglomerates. Furthermore, the “shifting sands” of high fashion included the dramatic relaxation of dress codes, the incorporation of vintage and “ethnic” clothing, and adaptations of historic modes, from Art Nouveau to Art Moderne.

The two designers who most brilliantly defined and dominated the 1970s were Yves Saint Laurent (born in Algeria, 1936-2008) and Halston (born Roy Halston Frowick in Des Moines, Iowa, 1932-1990). Not merely the decade’s most influential and celebrated clothing creators, Saint Laurent and Halston are among the best known fashion designers in modern history. They have been the subjects of countless books, documentaries, and exhibitions, yet their creations have never been directly compared in any in-depth, significant manner—until now. *Yves Saint Laurent + Halston: Fashioning the 70s* is the first exhibition to analyze and juxtapose their aesthetic developments at the peaks of their respective careers, from the late 1960s to the early 1980s.

During the first few years of the 1970s, Saint Laurent and Halston held remarkably similar ideas. This aesthetic overlap was a by-product of how the designers responded to the era’s fragmented styles, and it was crucial to their maturation as designers. By the middle part of the decade, their work diverged and came to represent the two defining looks of the period. At one end of the spectrum was Saint Laurent’s broad range of creativity, which encompassed his brilliant use of color, drama, and fantasy. At the other end was Halston’s mastery of modernism and minimalism. This exhibition traces their parallel developments and highlights the distinctive creations unique to each designer.

The exhibition also presents less well-known but vital aspects of their design careers. Saint Laurent’s ready-to-wear Rive Gauche line, for example, was the starting point for his legendary couture during this period, a fact that, over time, has become obscured. Halston, who was dismissed by some as a maker of simple, overpriced clothes and a purveyor of licensed products, was in fact a prodigious innovator of couture-quality construction methodologies. Their hallmarks are displayed by identifying three themes both designers embraced and popularized: menswear, “ethnic” (or non-Western) styles, and historic revivals of the not-so-distant past.

Another element of the exhibition is a timeline that delineates the designers’ parallel careers, beginning during the 1950s and concluding at 1984. It traces Saint Laurent’s early rise to fame as chief designer at the venerated couture house of Christian

Dior when he was only 21 years old, and Halston’s beginning as a milliner in Chicago, before his foray into clothing design in New York during the 1960s. The timeline includes important milestones, such as the growth of their respective businesses and their transformations from designers into celebrities, when both Halston and Saint Laurent became as famous as the clients they dressed.

All the objects on display in the galleries were drawn exclusively from The Museum at FIT’s permanent collection. With such narrow parameters—two designers and one museum’s holdings—the exhibition is neither a survey of 1970s fashion, nor a retrospective of either designer’s work. *Yves Saint Laurent + Halston: Fashioning the 70s* is instead a curatorial exploration that offers a re-evaluation of Saint Laurent and Halston, set within the larger cultural landscape of the dreamy, indolent, sexy 1970s.

Patricia Mears,
deputy director

Emma McClendon,
assistant curator



1. Saint Laurent Rive Gauche, pantsuit, burgundy wool gabardine, circa 1970, France.
2. Halston, shirtdress, tan Ultrasuede, 1972, USA.
3. Yves Saint Laurent, ensemble, multicolor printed silk, 1977, France.
4. Halston, evening caftan, red beaded nylon, circa 1977, USA.
5. Yves Saint Laurent, evening dress, off-white silk satin, 1978, France.
6. Halston, full-length evening dress, blue sequined jersey, 1972, USA.