

Fairy Tale Fashion
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Fairy Tale Fashion, consisting of over eighty garments and accessories, was shown as an exhibit at the Museum at FIT from January 15 to April 16, 2016. This exhibit displayed clothing showing how fairytales affect fashion as well as the importance that fashion, clothing, and detail have in fairytales. Fairy Tale Fashion was curated by Colleen Hill, who also co-authored the book *Fairy Tale Fashion* which offers a more in-depth insight into the idea of fashion in fairytales and the important role fashion plays in fairytales. This collection, Fairy Tale Fashion, features garments from a variety of designers over many decades, spanning from 1800 to 2015, that were inspired by fifteen fairytales written by authors such as The Brothers Grimm, Hans Christian Anderson, Lewis Carroll, and Charles Perrault. Designers such as Miuccia Prada, Alexander McQueen, Giorgio di Sant'Angelo, Charles James, Noritaka Tatehana, and Edward Molyneux had their own fairytale-inspired pieces exhibited.

The exhibit contains four sections that group garments together that are inspired by similar fairy tale settings, each fairytale having its own separate garments that are a part of a larger collection. The collection of garments are displayed by mannequins while footwear are displayed in glass casing. The entire Fairy Tale Fashion exhibit is in one large room with the different fairy tale collections grouped together in the same area by thematic setting and each are separated by a cloth backdrop. The groups of collections includes The Forest, The Castle, The Sea, and Parallel Worlds. The Forest contains garments inspired by Rapunzel, Little Red Riding Hood, The Fairies, Snow White, and *Snow White and Rose Red*.

The *Little Red Riding Hood* display was a part of *The Forest* and contained various interpretations of Little Red Riding Hood's distinguished red cloak. These pieces are illuminated by minimal overhead soft lighting. The backdrop is a simple forest scenery that immerses the viewer and brings out the forest setting of the story. There are six pieces in this display, five of

which are cloak interpretations, and one design is based on the plain white nightgown worn by the grandmother wolf. The first cloak displayed is a simple red cloak and is an original era cloak that was commonly worn in the late 1700s. Another notable design in this collection was from Rei Kawakubo in Japan for the Comme des Garçons fashion house in 2015. This piece takes a modern and new outlook on the famous cloak making the hood a peaked shape and out of leather. The rest of the cloak is made up of varied pieces of fabric hanging down the body, such as polyurethane resin, red polyester crepe chiffon, polyester, and nylon.



Another display in this exhibit is *The Wizard Of Oz*. *The Wizard of Oz* display collection is a part of the Parallel Worlds displays. This collection has checkered blue dresses, dresses for the Wicked Witch, a dress inspired by the emerald city, shoes based on Dorothy's iconic ruby slipper. The backdrop is a black and white jewel towers design that causes the dresses on display to stand out. Edward Molyneux was the designer of the emerald green evening dress and was made in 1930, this dress on display shows an interpretation of what the people of the Emerald City would wear. A contrast of Dorothy's ruby red slippers are also on display. One pair of shoes,



designed by Noritaka Tatehana in 2014, offers a more modern and fresh outlook on the ruby red slipper design. Tatehan's shoes are a heel-less wedge shoe that is studded with ruby red crystals over the entire shoe with gold studded spikes on the back. Dresses for Dorothy that are a simple checkered blue and white gingham are also displayed.

The other collection in *The Parallel Worlds* display is *Alice in Wonderland* and is my favorite collection because of the detail and wackiness of the Wonderland aesthetic in all of the designs. This collection has seven garment designs inspired by the setting of Wonderland and its inhabitants as well as a pair of Wonderland shoes, it includes unique mannequins wearing the designs for characters such as the Mad Hare and the Queen of Hearts. The display background is a black and yellow, black-hole-like vortex that is meant to convey Alice's descent from the rabbit hole and into Wonderland. One of the most prominent pieces in



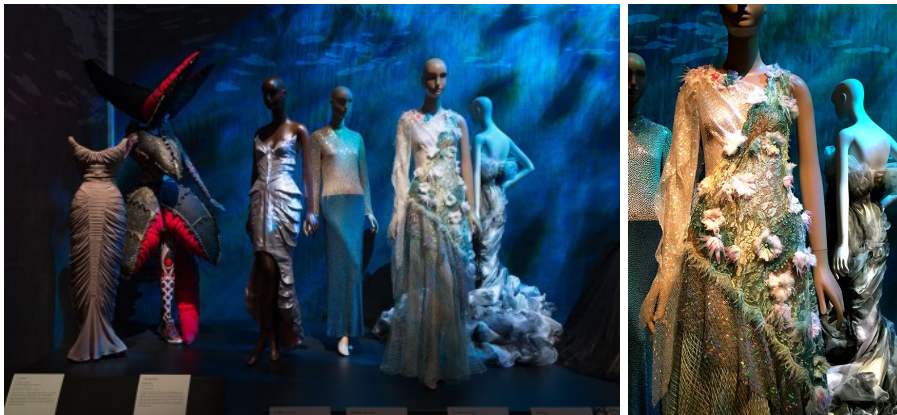
this collection is by Manish Aurora and was made because of the release of Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland*. Aurora's design is a blue dress with contrasting black and white checkered tights, the main staple being the playing cards on the front of the dress as well as the cards that make up the spiky shoulders of the dress. Another piece is a dress by Hideki Seo who created the piece *Heart* in 2014 from the inspiration of the Queen of Hearts, modeling the dress after

the queen seen on a deck of cards, using vinyl Seo created this heart-shaped dress. The beauty of this collection is that the story is expanded through clothing and the story and Wonderland are very present in the designs and display.

Shown as part of *The Castle* collection the *Cinderella* display has many pieces that relate to different parts of her story and character. This display includes different outlooks on Cinderella's ball gown that has already been reimagined many times. There are also shoes inspired by her glass slippers and the rags she wears as a maid. Designers Shelley Fox, Yoshiki Hishinuma, and Giorgio di Sant'Angelo took the creative design of Cinderella as a maid, with both Hishinuma and Sant'Angelo making their dresses out of rags. Shelley Fox's Fall 2000 collection includes the piece *Rags to Riches*, which is a part of the exhibit, where she took a sequined skirt and lit it with a blowtorch causing the skirt to be threadbare in places as a symbol of what Cinderella came from and who she became. There are four dresses in this display that are interpretations of Cinderella's ball gown, all four being either silver or gold. Vivienne Westwood designed a dress for her 1988 *Time Machine* collection that is a contemporary outlook on an 18th century dress that Cinderella would have worn. This dress has a metallic silver corset stomacher with a dusty pink belt and a grey-brown tulle skirt.

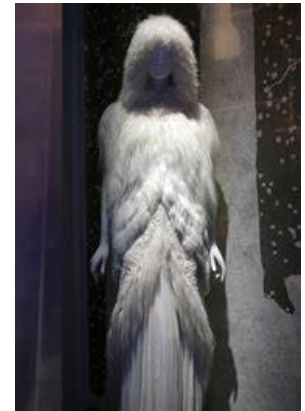


The Seas collection in the exhibit contains displays based on fairy tales such as *The Little Mermaid* and *The Swan Maidens*. *The Little Mermaid* display has blue overhead lighting and an underwater backdrop, giving the display the look as if it is underwater. There are six pieces in this display, five of which are full-length mermaid-style dresses. These mermaid gowns were made by designers such as Charles James, Rodarte, Thierry Mugler, and Norman Norell. Many of these dresses age back from decades ago showing how fashion styles never go away. Charles James made his piece *La Sirène* in 1956 and the silhouette is based on that of a mermaid. This dress has a main panel of fabric down the middle with ruching along the panel on both sides. Rodarte founders two sisters, Kate and Laura Mulleavy, designed a dress in their Spring 2015 collection that was inspired by the ocean and natural beauty of the ocean as well as the lure of mermaids that it will “poetically capture the spirit of the sea” (Kate and Laura Mulleavy). It is made of varying layers of contrasting fabrics and has materials such as pearls, feathers and Swarovski crystals as the detailing on the front of the dress.



The main theme of Fairy Tale Fashion is that fairy tales are expanded through fashion and that these stories can be told through fashion. Many of these garments reflect different aspects of their stories such as scenery or characters but they also reflect themes of fashion. As

well as having themes and inspirations from fairy tales, these displays contain garments that have been created with societal themes, themes associated with history, and themes of art. The Cinderella display has themes related to society through her social class throughout her fairytale. When at first she is a maid she dresses in rags, seen in the designs of Giorgio di Sant'Angelo, Shelley Fox, and Giles Deacon. These garments were either made to look scorched or burnt from fire and labor, like Fox's and Deacon's dresses who did this to show she is low on the social class and works for a living, and Giorgio di Sant'Angelo who made his dress by sewing swatches of fabric together to create a rag look. The other dresses in this display show wealth and elaborate designs and fabric that common people would not be able to afford. These dresses also show more skin and arms, common among the wealthy to show off their pale skin. In *The Snow Queen*, two of the dresses of the display are made of fur, one made of entirely white fur, which symbolizes wealth and high status by having clean bright white fur. Gender roles are another aspect that influences dress, especially the roles of women. Charles James' dress *La Sirène* was made in 1956 and is an evening gown for women, this dress has a



mermaid silhouette and is very tight around the legs, making it difficult to walk and was a way to remind women of their proper role, a housewife, after World War II. Most of the female characters this exhibit has displays inspired by are royalty and have monarchical power. Their dresses reflect this theme of power, this is seen in the dress of the Queen of Hearts which has strong shoulders to make her look more like a man and have respect. In a similar dress, Alexander McQueen's evening dress of his fall 2007 collection made from emerald silk velvet with amber-colored beads, made to look like Rapunzel's long golden

locks falling down the dress like a waterfall and it symbolizes the power and allure of hair, which is seen as a very feminine attribute.

Fairy Tale fashion contains displays based on fairy tales that have been written throughout various times in history, therefore there are pieces inspired by the time period. The use of technology takes an interesting turn on design based on what is available in Wonderland. Louis Féraud's 1989 *Dress* mixed his current mediums, using synthetic fibers, as well as glass and metals, and foil to make this dress. Metal cords and thread are used all over the bodice.

Trade is another part of the themes of history because materials and places had been dependent



on who they traded with. In the exhibit in the *Parallel Worlds* display, there are a pair of red slippers made of Moroccan leather from the early 19th century. Through the use of trade, the leather was exported to Eastern Europe and then made into slippers,

because leather was not easily dyed red

because the natural materials needed were not in abundance. Politics also played an important role in determining fashions. The French Court during the middle of the 18th century was very focused on fashion in order to take away their focus on King Louis XV and the unrest in France. A new style that became popular was the robes à la Française which were worn by aristocratic women. An original version of robes à la Française is shown in *The Beauty and the Beast* display as a part of *The Castle* collection and this is a period-accurate

representation of what Belle would have most likely worn while she was with the beast in the fairy tale.



There are so many inspirations out there and one that is very prevalent in this exhibit is themes related to art. Revival of earlier styles is a concept that is seen many times because designers made garments that reflected the era that the fairy tale takes place. In the *Cinderella* display Vivienne Westwood's dress contains a stomacher as the bodice, these were worn in the late 17th century. Taking inspiration from the past, a golden dress and matching hood piece adorned with gold thread and red and green rhinestones, by Dolce and Gabbana. These pieces were inspired by the uniform of medieval castle guards and are part of the *Sleeping Beauty* display. Revival of another earlier style with a modern twist is displayed in *Furry Pelts*. From designer Zandra Rhodes in 1981, designed a gold dress with a pleated skirt and made a redesign of the classic English styles from the 16th century, such as the pleated waist, high collar and large sleeves at the shoulder. Some art themes in fashion relate to using other artists' works and making them a part of clothing designs. This is what Miuccia Prada did with a piece in their 2008 spring collection where she worked with illustrationist James Jean, and used his artwork of fairies to create a two-piece ensemble. This dress is a part of *The Fairies* display and Jean's artwork is of, "fairies were simultaneously beautiful and sinister" (FIT website), this description expresses the notion in Charles Perrault's story of the two sides, good and evil, of fairies.



Fairy Tale Fashion exhibit's purpose was to retell fairy tales through fashion and to show how fashion is used in fairytales. In my opinion, Colleen Hill did achieve her goal, and the pieces were all very different and unique to the fairy tales they were telling. The lighting and backgrounds also furthered the tale and transformed the display and made it look like the setting where the story takes place, whether that be the forest, in a castle, or under the sea. However, these backgrounds are made of a light fabric and with all the lights flashing on them they become

see through and you can see other collections through them. This exhibit definitely immerses the viewer however, the layout is not the most effective, some garments are placed towards the back and in a display of five or more pieces along with the soft lighting, it makes it difficult for the viewer to see the pieces in the back. Some of the collections are also not altogether in one display, such as *Sleeping Beauty* and *Snow White and Rose Red* which are displayed as end displays. One thing that was creative about this exhibit was the use of different mannequin sculptures, some even being used were made to look like characters from fairy tales which was a very unique detail. This exhibit expanded stories that everyone knows and retold them in a new and entertaining way.

Citations

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