

**IN AMERICA**



**A LEXICON  
OF FASHION**

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# IN AMERICA A LEXICON OF FASHION

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**Andrew Bolton and Amanda Garfinkel**

with Jessica Regan and Stephanie Kramer

Photographs by Anna-Marie Kellen

THE  
MET

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## Sponsor's Statement

—  
**EVA CHEN**  
VICE PRESIDENT OF FASHION  
INSTAGRAM

Instagram has been a longtime supporter of The Met and The Costume Institute, and this year we are especially excited to sponsor the two-part exhibition *In America: A Lexicon of Fashion* and *In America: An Anthology of Fashion*.

From its earliest days, Instagram has been a home for fashion—a place for people to get inspired, discover new brands, launch businesses, and build community. As a platform, we have helped democratize the fashion industry, as we believe in supporting all designers, from the emerging to the established. Over the last year, Instagram has also been a venue for real-time conversations related to activism and global movements for social and racial justice. We were inspired to see that this year's exhibition—with garments by a group of young, diverse designers—highlights many of the issues at the core of our culture.

We are honored to be part of this historic exhibition and hope it helps spark a global conversation on what fashion in America means today and tomorrow.

## Director's Foreword

—  
**MAX HOLLEIN**  
MARINA KELLEN FRENCH DIRECTOR  
THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

The Metropolitan Museum of Art is proud to present this publication, *In America: A Lexicon of Fashion*, which both celebrates The Costume Institute's 75th anniversary and explores a modern vocabulary of American fashion. It accompanies the exhilarating first part of a bipartite exhibition that opened in the Anna Wintour Costume Center on September 18, 2021. The second part, *In America: An Anthology of Fashion*, which opens in the Museum's American Wing period rooms on May 5, 2022, uncovers complex sartorial narratives as they relate to the histories of those spaces, bringing to light questions about race, class, and gender in American culture.

Fashion is both a harbinger of cultural change and a record of the forces, beliefs, and events that shape our lives. *In America: A Lexicon of Fashion* features garments created by designers working in the United States from the 1940s to the present, selected for their emotional resonance. Organized into categories that include Nostalgia, Belonging, Exuberance, Joy, Sweetness, Fellowship, Optimism, Strength, Desire, Spontaneity, Comfort, and Reverence, they show how feelings infuse a broad range of designs, each defined by its own expressive qualities.

Andrew Bolton, Wendy Yu Curator in Charge of The Costume Institute, conceived of and organized the exhibition and this catalogue with the support of Amanda Garfinkel, Assistant Curator. They selected the over one hundred objects featured in these pages that represent a new rhetoric of American fashion, giving special attention to designers who are often overlooked in the canon of fashion history. The organizing principle underlying the show—a patchwork quilt, itself a metaphor for American culture—is reflected in the diversity of the designers and their creations. Well-known works by established designers are interwoven with ones by emerging talents, many of whom are included in an exhibition at The Met for the first time.

The exhibition was designed by production designer Shane Valentino, working with cinematographer Bradford Young and The Met's Design Department to create a three-dimensional patchwork quilt. Milliner Stephen Jones designed the arresting "word bubble" headpieces on the exhibition mannequins. Eminent book designer Willem van Zoetendaal, aided by Maud van Rossum, created the stunning design for this publication, which features new photography by Anna-Marie Kellen, Associate Chief Photographer in The Met's Imaging Department. I would also like to thank the staff at The Costume Institute and other departments at The Met as well as the many freelancers who worked through challenging conditions during the ongoing pandemic.

I am profoundly grateful to Instagram for its support and sponsorship of both parts of this multifaceted exhibition, the related Costume Institute benefits, and this accompanying publication. Special thanks to the head of Instagram, Adam Mosseri, and to Eva Chen, Vice President of Fashion, for the company's extraordinary generosity. I am also thankful to Condé Nast for its continued support, and to Met Trustee Anna Wintour, who oversees The Met Gala, the primary fundraising source for The Costume Institute. For this two-part exhibition, she chaired the event celebrating the opening of *In America: A Lexicon of Fashion*—the first gala to be held since the pandemic and a signifier for us of the reemergence of this great city—and will do so again for *In America: An Anthology of Fashion*.

As you turn the pages of this book, I hope you will delight in the emotions evoked by the varied designs. This expressive dimension is sparking a renaissance of American fashion, with designers spearheading social, political, and philosophical conversations that are moving culture toward greater plurality and diversity. This revival highlights the importance of fashion and its ability to both reflect and represent the zeitgeist.



for both the design and organization of the exhibition and the catalogue. In the exhibition, single garments were enclosed within fabric-wrapped cases—like three-dimensional quilt squares. Here, they are likewise presented individually and shown alongside details that highlight key design elements. Dating from the 1940s to the present, garments are organized into twelve categories that explore defining emotional qualities of American fashion, including: Nostalgia, Belonging, Exuberance, Joy, Sweetness, Fellowship, Optimism, Strength, Desire, Spontaneity, Comfort, and Reverence. Within each of these sections, individual costumes reflect various expressions of these sentiments, and the accompanying text enriches the connection between the garment and the word chosen to represent it. While each of these words is distinct to the associated design, as a whole, they are stitched together through their emotional resonance, resulting in a richly textured quilt of American fashion that is as diverse as the nation itself.

*Lexicon* begins with a section anchored by the sentiment Nostalgia, which presents a series of patchworked garments that reflect connections to the past through their use of—and reference to—antique textiles, garments, and craft traditions. United by their patchwork composition, these fashions underscore the central metaphor of the quilt. The term “Nostalgia” is itself highlighted through an ensemble by Ralph Lauren from his autumn/winter 1982–83 collection comprising a skirt made from an antique quilt paired with a sweater inspired by nineteenth-century needlework samplers depicting a house and letters of the alphabet. Other designs include an ensemble by Tristan Detwiler for his label Stan constructed from a late nineteenth-century one-patch pattern quilt and a jacket by Emily Adams Bode composed of a crazy-pattern quilt, characterized by the haphazard arrangement of fabric patches in various shapes and sizes. The word “Togetherness” was chosen to represent Detwiler’s ensemble, reflecting the camaraderie of the quilting circle that he belongs to and that influenced his collection. “Sentimentality” is used to describe Bode’s design, as her use of vintage fabrics is intended to evoke a sense of connection to—and longing for—the past.

The following sections reveal the broad spectrum of sentiments conveyed by American fashion and the expressive power of American design—past and present. To reflect fashion’s continuing and fundamental commitment to sustainable practices, *Lexicon* ends with the sentiment Reverence and includes the work of designers who place ethical processes at the center of their creativity. Most of the pieces are one-of-a-kind, customized garments made from deadstock fabric or recycled and repurposed clothing. One design by Miguel Adrover, associated with the word “Authenticity,” is made from a vintage Burberry trench coat that has been turned inside out and dressed back to front. Another design, by Sophie Andes-Gascon and Claire McKinney for their label SC103, consists of interlocking strips of deadstock leather. Its affinity with the emotion Gratitude is a nod to the influence of Susan Cianciolo, an early exponent of upcycling and recycling who taught Andes-Gascon and McKinney at the Pratt Institute in New York and whose work is also featured in this section under the word “Permanence.”

The curators selected the term specific to each garment by considering several criteria, including interviews with the designers or reviews of their collections. Sometimes the words reflect our own personal opinions or emotional responses to the fashions. While curators usually strive for a certain level of objectivity in their endeavors, we felt justified on this occasion to indulge in such a subjective exercise given that our aim was to arrive at a modern vocabulary of American fashion based on its expressive qualities. Fashion is so familiar, so accessible, and so ubiquitous to our experience that it is open to a wide range of interpretations. Indeed, since its power lies in its complete integration in our lives, fashion inspires confidence in the essential aptness of our judgments. It is our hope, therefore, that visitors to the exhibition and readers of this catalogue engage with and reflect upon their own emotional reactions to the garments, facilitating an expanded vocabulary—or lexicon, if you will—of the defining qualities of American fashion that fully encompasses its vitality, diversity, richness, and complexity.

Installation view, *In America: A Lexicon of Fashion*,  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,  
September 18, 2021–September 5, 2022

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## NOSTALGIA

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*A wistful or sentimental yearning  
for a return to or the return of some real  
or romanticized period of the past*



For his autumn/winter 1982–83 collection, Ralph Lauren referenced American folk art and crafts. Nineteenth-century needlework samplers, which often featured the letters of the alphabet and the motif of the home, inspired the design of this hand-knit sweater. Lauren's use of antique patchwork quilts to construct the accompanying skirt reflects his appreciation for handwork. Speaking to a journalist in 1982, Lauren said, "Folk art, for me, represents the integrity that is America."

**Ralph Lauren** (American, born 1939)

**ENSEMBLE, AUTUMN/WINTER 1982–83**

Sweater of polychrome wool intarsia knit;

skirt of patchwork quilted, polychrome printed cotton plain weave;

blouse of white linen plain weave and cotton lace



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## EXUBERANCE

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*The quality or state of being exuberant  
(joyously unrestrained and enthusiastic)*



Christopher John Rogers has described his design philosophy as creating fashions that are both emotional and transformational, features that become tools for self-expression through vibrant color and dramatic volume. This dress from his autumn/winter 2020–21 collection exemplifies the expressive nature of his designs, conveying a sense of unrestrained enthusiasm with a vividly colored plaid silk and an expansive, nine-foot-wide skirt. The design amplifies the patterning, intense colors, and extravagant silhouettes of mid-nineteenth-century gowns for a more emphatic statement.

**Christopher John Rogers** (American, born 1993)

**ENSEMBLE, AUTUMN/WINTER 2020–21**

Polychrome plaid silk taffeta





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## APPRECIATION

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*Expression of gratification and approval, gratitude,  
or aesthetic satisfaction*



Christian Siriano closed his spring/summer 2018 runway presentation with seven models wearing versions of a single dress. Transcending body and gender stereotypes, this modern, inclusive group exemplified Siriano's democratic fashion and beauty philosophy: "There is no correct size, shape, color, or age. As a creator of fashion, I celebrate the body that wears my work. What an honor to be chosen, to be appreciated, and to be seen. That honor extends in both directions."

**Christian Siriano** (American, born 1985)

**DRESSES, SPRING/SUMMER 2018**

Black silk satin



—  
**FLUENCY**  
—

*Fluent quality;  
smoothness, ease, and readiness*



Halston's shirtdress, introduced in 1972 and made of supple and washable Ultrasuede, became a staple item for the many women who appreciated its effortless quality. His adaptations of the basic construction of a man's shirt included slimmer sleeves, a slight A-line flare, the addition of a self-fabric belt, and the elimination of a collar-height button, subtly revealing the décolletage. Although one journalist called it "the suede uniform," the dress facilitated individual styling—the collar could be worn up or down, the sleeves straight or rolled up, and the belt tied as the wearer chose.

**Halston** (American, 1932–1990)

**DRESS, CA. 1974**

Camel Ultrasuede



—  
RENEWAL  
—

*The quality or state of being renewed*



Johnson Hartig's designs for Libertine typically feature elaborate prints and embroideries that cite popular culture and art historical references. Due to necessity and an appreciation of punk's do-it-yourself aesthetic, his earliest designs included applied decoration on used and vintage garments. Hartig customized this tailcoat with heat-applied rhinestones in the shape of a skull. It was bought by Karl Lagerfeld, who—fearful of death—veiled the image with a tulle overlay embroidered by the House of Lesage.

**Libertine** (American, founded 2001)

**Johnson Hartig** (American, born 1970)

**COAT, 2004**

Gray wool gabardine appliquéd with silk tulle and embroidered with black and clear crystals, beads, and sequins

