Wearing the Wunderkammer

A practice-led analysis of cabinets of curiosities, examining the quality of curiosity and applying it to a fashion exhibition

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ABSTRACT

This practice-led thesis examines the philosophical concepts and physical characteristics of cabinets of curiosities to determine how they can be applied to the creation of a contemporary exhibition of fashion. Cabinets of curiosities, also known as wunderkammern, were privately-owned collections and spaces belonging to royals, aristocrats, and affluent scholars—predominantly white, European men—from the late fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries. The cabinets are often considered precursors to the modern museum (Hill, 1986: 148). Objects within them generally fell within one of two broad categories: naturalia (natural objects) and artificialia (man-made artefacts)[1]. Artificialia included items of fashion[2], primarily from non-European cultures. Although the reasons for the collection of fashion are not explicit, sixteenth-century scholar Samuel Quiccheberg (2014 [1565]) implied its use as a marker of history and genealogy, as well as a representation of the ceremonies and customs of diverse cultures.

This study includes the identification and compilation of fashion objects in extant cabinets of curiosities collections and historic catalogues, which I suggest has resulted in a significant contribution to knowledge on this subject. Furthermore, while visual and spatial references to cabinets of curiosities have coalesced with fashion in recent exhibitions,

[1] The use of Latin to categorise the objects is notable. As the universal language of scholars and scientists, Latin underscores the concept of cabinets of curiosities as sites of knowledge.
[2] I have chosen to use the term fashion, rather than dress or another equivalent, throughout this thesis. My reason for this is articulated in a section of the Introduction, 'Terminology'.

retail environments, and advertising, these have not been the subject of critical analysis. My research aims to fill that gap. Although previous studies have demonstrated the relationship between museum experiences and psychology (Uzzell, 1993; Smith and Wolf, 1996; Hein, 1998; Csikszentmihalyi and Hermanson, 1999; Paris, 2002; Bitgood, 2013; Hohenstein and Moussouri, 2018; Meyer *et al*, 2023), the psychological study of curiosity as it might be applied to curatorial strategies has been only scarcely exercised, and its potential links to fashion are absent. This thesis forges new connections between psychological theory, museology, and fashion display, forming an original research framework that can be utilised by museum professionals in other disciplines who aim to stimulate visitors' curiosity. The full result of this research is a theoretical fashion exhibition[3] that proposes tangible concepts for evoking curiosity, encompassing ideas for exhibition design, object selection, textual interpretation, and public programming.

[3] As I will reiterate later in this text, this theoretical exhibition will evolve into a physical exhibition, scheduled at The Museum at FIT in spring 2025.

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During a trip to London in July 2017, my friend and colleague Ellen Sampson introduced me to Amy de la Haye, Rootstein Hopkins Chair of Dress History and Curatorship at London College of Fashion, whose writing and curatorial work I had long admired. Amy generously offered to meet to discuss shared research interests, and we soon began talking about the potential of starting a PhD at LCF—a dream I had harboured, but that I considered nearly impossible as a full-time curator. After learning more about the UAL's programme, I realised that a PhD was, in fact, something I could pursue.

When I returned to New York, I mentioned my meeting with Amy to my long-time mentors and supervisors—Valerie Steele, the director of The Museum at FIT, and Patricia Mears, MFIT's deputy director. They were immediately enthusiastic. Thus began my PhD journey, which I consider an immense opportunity and privilege. I extend my heartfelt thanks to these women—and especially to Amy, who became my director of studies—for setting this thesis in motion and for providing invaluable insights and guidance throughout its completion. Thanks also to the former head of London College of Fashion, Frances Corner, for assisting in my transition to PhD student.

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INTRODUCTION

The idea for this thesis began with an observation: that cabinets of curiosities have proven a recent, recurrent source of inspiration for museum and gallery exhibitions. Their influence has been evident internationally in displays of history, science, art, and fashion. My interest in this concept was piqued by my experiences in three exhibitions: *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2011) and in expanded form at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (2015), both of which featured a 'cabinet of curiosities'; and artist and curator Mark Dion's *The Library for the Birds of New York and Other Marvels* at New York's Tanya Bonakdar Gallery (2016), which included a 'cabinet of curiosities' populated with glow-in-the-dark recreations of specimens.

While the former exhibitions focussed on fashion, the latter did not include examples of dress or adornment. Yet I was attracted to all three, later coming to understand that it was their orderly mode of display, juxtaposed with the unusual or unexpected qualities of the objects themselves, that drew my attention. There was also a feeling of familiarity in the use of the cabinets, rooted in their role in the early history of museums, that I found appealing. Such familiarity, I would later discover through this research, is often integral to an enjoyable museum experience (Hein, 1998: 161; Bedford, 2014: 101). I was motivated to formulate ideas for a theoretical fashion exhibition centred on the concept of cabinets of curiosities—a topic that has proven rich and rewarding in its complexity.

This introduction begins with a brief summary of my professional history as a curator, which has made an impact on the way I have approached the research at hand, in addition to a description of my curatorial practice. I continue with my research aims and objectives. I have also included a section devoted to terminology, which elucidates several key words used throughout this research. I conclude with an overview of the aims of the theoretical exhibition that were shaped by this thesis, and a summary of the thesis chapters.

Professional history

I have worked as a curator at The Museum at FIT (MFIT), New York for more than fifteen years. I started my career immediately after completing a master's degree in Fashion and Textile Studies, and I had previously studied studio art and art history. MFIT is a specialised fashion museum and part of a design college with a population of approximately 8,000 students from around the world. Its exhibitions are free and open to the public. Accessibility (both intellectual and physical) and the creation of programming that centralises creativity are essential to the museum's operations. I have constructed this PhD research as an exploration of concepts for a theoretical exhibition at MFIT, which will evolve into an actual exhibition at the museum (scheduled for spring 2025). As this thesis will demonstrate, the varied and inventive ideas offered by an exhibition inspired by cabinets of curiosities correlates to MFIT's mission statement, a portion of which expresses that the museum 'educates and inspires audiences and advances recognition of the cultural significance of dress and fashion' (The Museum at FIT, n.d.: n.p.).

My pursuit of a PhD is aimed at challenging and enhancing my curatorial practice in ways I have not previously considered, and to position it within a rigorous academic and theoretical framework. I have never been afforded more than two years to curate an exhibition, and this thesis has provided the chance to refine my concepts and methodologies over a longer period of time. I have also benefitted from working with my supervisors, whose complementary expertise in curation, exhibition design, and psychology provided essential feedback.

Although the exhibition I develop in this practice-led thesis is theoretical, I found that its proposed location at The Museum at FIT, as well as my extensive use of its collections to shape my checklist, rendered the research for this thesis and my actual practice as a curator nearly inextricable. As I will demonstrate, I have not crafted a 'dream' exhibition. Instead, I consistently shape my ideas for the theoretical exhibition within parameters that are feasible for MFIT, with a consideration of factors such as budget, the physical exhibition space, and the needs of colleagues. I argue that this mindset, bracketed by years of curatorial work, is not limiting. If anything, working within real-life restrictions encourages practitioners to be even more inventive.

My practice-led research has been crafted through the application of empirical analyses of cabinets of curiosities, as well as an examination of the quality of curiosity and its potential impact on exhibition interpretation and design. The result is not just an exhibition—theoretical or otherwise—but rather a demonstration of how curatorial practice serves as a form of research in its own right.

Curatorial practice

It is necessary to articulate my curatorial practice not only because it has shaped the way that I have approached this thesis, but also because each curator works differently. Curator, writer, and educator Maria Lind likens the curator's role to an editor, and she further stresses that their work is focussed on interconnections: not only between objects, but also between people, places, and histories (Lind, 2010: 63). Daniel Birnbaum, a curator and critic, notes that the curator has not been, and perhaps should not be, a 'well-defined figure' (Birnbaum, 2009: n.p.). As a curator in a small but prolific museum, my day-to-day work involves numerous tasks, including research, writing, education, project management, publicity, collections management, and administration. Although these roles frequently intersect and inform one another, they are not always well defined. I argue that the versatility required of curators allows for greater understanding of the museum as a whole, and ultimately fuels new ideas.

My own curatorial process is changeable, as it is dependent on factors such as time, budget, intended audience, the availability of loans, and whether I am curating independently or with others. Some curators begin with a set of objects and shape their narratives through them. Others start with an idea and select objects that elucidate that topic, which is the process I have utilised for this thesis. I have been trained to work in both ways, and I have not found one to be more effective than the other. As this thesis will demonstrate, beginning with a concept rather than objects does not render the latter less important to the end product—in fact, my

checklist evolved from something I now consider quite ordinary to one that simultaneously evokes cabinets of curiosities and the quality of curiosity itself. As one former colleague said after viewing the object selection, 'You haven't chosen anything uninteresting' (J.H. Clark, 2023: n.p.).

The critical component in my curatorial process is not how an idea is generated, but the extensive empirical and theoretical research that I undertake after deciding upon a concept. In the instance of this thesis, I began with the broad theme of cabinets of curiosities and allowed years of study to continuously reshape and refine my ideas into the product I present here. I began by exploring my topic through written sources, and I identified multiple avenues of related research to determine which are most pertinent to the subject at hand. Although I have incorporated a great deal of theoretical research in this text, its inclusion always leads to ideas for my curatorial practice.

Research provides the building blocks for my practice. As someone who enjoys working with and thinking about physical objects, I craft a preliminary checklist at the genesis of each curatorial project. Yet this is a rough 'sketch'—an early experiment in illustrating a topic through objects. I never feel I can really begin planning my object selections, the exhibition space, or any interpretive elements before I have performed extensive research on my subject(s). Even then, I never stop researching, though it usually becomes narrower in focus (looking into the history of a certain object, for example).

I also analyse other exhibitions—fashion or otherwise—to develop a sense of what might be effective for my own work. This is particularly helpful when thinking about how to organise and display subthemes within an exhibition. In the instance of this study, I had the privilege of developing and implementing a front-end evaluation strategy for the first time, and the results were so successful that I would like to incorporate that idea into future projects.

I have structured this thesis in a way that mirrors my curatorial process. As I will outline shortly, exploring definitions of curiosity was a critical starting point in my work. I then focus on the history of cabinets of curiosities (Chapter 2), which illuminates the importance of the history of collecting fashion within museums (Chapter 3); the criticality of addressing the role of colonialism within my research topic (Chapter 4); and the significance of analysing past modes of exhibition and retail display that may influence my own ideas (Chapter 5).

As a whole, these chapters build the foundation of knowledge necessary for Chapter 6, 'Interpretation and Design'. There, I propose multiple curatorial strategies—a term I use to encompass theories on visitor engagement, participation, and exhibition design, in addition to textual interpretation and object placement. My conclusion, part of which was shaped by informal interviews with several colleagues, outlines how I finalised the ideas I present in this thesis based on their informed feedback.

Throughout this thesis, I have identified distinct, practice-led outcomes of my research as 'Praxis'. These include Praxis A:

Diagram of curiosity and its related terms (Introduction); Praxis B: Front-end evaluation (Chapter 1); Praxis C: Sample wall texts (Chapter 4); Praxis D: Sample chat label (Chapter 6); Praxis E1–E8: Design briefs (Chapter 6); Praxis F: Compendium of curatorial strategies (Chapter 6); and Praxis G: Checklist (Chapter 6; included as a separate document). These sections of the thesis exemplify how research and practice intertwine in a curator's work.

Although this summary does not wholly reflect the complexities of my practice, I hope that the remainder of this text—in which ideas frequently overlap, reference one another, or serve as inspiration for ideas that will be detailed later—will better elucidate my process. To streamline my concepts as much as possible, I have included numerous 'wayfinding' cues throughout my writing that identify chapter sections within the thesis (for example, 'this will be outlined in Chapter 6, "Familiarity and complexity"').

In accordance with University of the Arts London terminology, I use the term 'practice-led research' in the title of this thesis. Creative practice specialist Linda Candy describes such research as leading 'primarily to new understandings about knowledge'. It is distinguished from practice-based research, in which a 'creative artefact is the basis of the contribution to knowledge' (Candy, 2006: 1). My research introduces numerous original curatorial strategies, but the physical exhibition (the 'artefact') is not yet realised. The empirical and theoretical research that constitutes this PhD documents the evolution of an exhibition from a fashion curatorial perspective. The information presented concludes at the point that the exhibition will become 'live' at The Museum at FIT.

Therefore, the work I present here, though based on my past experiences and acknowledging many of the practicalities of organising an exhibition, is theoretical.

In the instance of this thesis, the pursuit of new knowledge has been prioritised. I have utilised only a few of the concepts presented in my past curatorial work, and those that do share some affinity to previous ideas have been adapted or expanded upon. It also bears mentioning that practice-led and -based theses are uncommon within my home country of the United States (where most humanities PhDs are text-based). I found the ability to combine theoretical and empirical research with my curatorial practice to be not only invigorating and sensible for my professional development, but also the means by which to craft my original contributions to knowledge. These contributions, as I will evidence through this text, are threefold. I have added significantly to empirical knowledge through the identification and compilation of fashion objects collected within cabinets of curiosities, thus providing insights into some of the earliest documented examples of fashion collecting; I have utilised theories of decolonisation to devise a framework for a more inclusive and equitable fashion curatorial practice; and I have determined tangible strategies to evoke curiosity within a contemporary exhibition of fashion, which I contend can also be useful to museum practitioners in other disciplines.

Research questions, aims and objectives

As my idea for this thesis evolved, I began to explore the potential connections between the physical, philosophical, and intellectual principles of historic cabinets of curiosities (a

term I use in reference to cabinets dating from the late fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries) and the use of those elements within the display of fashion. My initial research questions, aims, and objectives—all of which were developed at an early stage in discussion with my director of studies, Amy de la Haye—have remained relevant throughout the remainder of my work. They include:

Research questions:

1) What constitutes curiosity among museum visitors, and how
can that quality manifest in fashion curatorial practice?

2) How can cabinets of curiosities be used to develop ideas for critical engagement within a fashion exhibition?

Aims:

- Seek a definition of curiosity that can be used to develop and implement curatorial strategies in fashion exhibitions.

- Devise exhibition concepts that evoke cabinets of curiosities, identifying objects, exhibition designs, and curatorial strategies to engage users.

Objectives:

- Study the psychology of curiosity in order to conceptualise a multisensory experience within a fashion exhibition.

- Establish factors that characterise cabinets of curiosities based on analyses of texts, objects and images.

- Add to empirical research through the documentation and critical evaluation of dress within historic cabinets of curiosities.

- Analyse how museums, galleries, and retail displays have referenced cabinets of curiosities, focussing on dress and fashion.

- Identify examples of fashionable apparel related to cabinets of curiosities and their collecting classifications.

Most publications centred on cabinets of curiosities focus on historical narratives. When the cabinets are included within more general museological texts, they are often confined to brief, contextual descriptions. My initial work on this thesis involved conducting research within secondary, text-based sources and on historic cabinets (or components of them) displayed in public museums. This exploration of the cabinets' history led to multiple avenues of study that were worthy of further research, and thereby expanded my methodologies. Furthermore, in my desire to understand the quality of curiosity and learn how it could be applied within a museum setting, I was guided towards psychology—a discipline that I had not applied to my work prior to this thesis. Through those studies, I was able to forge new connections between psychological theory, museology, and fashion display, eventually crafting tangible strategies for evoking curiosity within a museum setting. A more detailed account of this research is included in Chapter 1, 'Review of methods and methodologies'.

Furthermore, as this research took shape, I began to develop a specific list of aims for the creation of my corresponding exhibition. Because those aims are reliant upon studies of psychological definitions of curiosity (and the ways in which they are interconnected), I have included them following the next section, which is devoted to terminology.

Terminology

Although I have defined or clarified many terms as they arise within this thesis, there are several examples that require

further context and clarification. I have included that information here so as not to raise questions and/or disrupt the narrative of the text at a later point.

Fashion

Throughout this text, I have employed the word fashion in a broad and inclusive manner. I have chosen not to present a single definition of the word, which I find too limiting. In her exploration of the history of the word 'fashion', sociologist Yuniya Kawamura suggests that although there is no consensus on its definition, 'it seems agreed that fashion is never stationary, never fixed and ever-changing' (Kawamura, 2004: 4). Cultures from around the world have developed distinct characteristics of dress, but they are not static.

I have considered sociologist Patrizia Calefato's description of fashion as 'a key cultural tool to represent fluidity, plurality, and the on-going dialectics between global and local' (Calefato and Breward, 2018: 252). Similarly, fashion scholar M. Angela Jansen and fashion professor Jennifer Craik underscore that non-European-American fashion is part of 'an ongoing negotiation of continuity and change, of tradition and modernity, of local developments and global influences' (Jansen and Craik, 2016: 3-4).

Such descriptions provide the space to challenge long held and erroneous presumptions that the garments worn by Indigenous peoples and in cultures outside of North America and Europe are 'fixed', and they support the use of the word fashion to describe everything from the clothing collected in historic cabinets of curiosities to contemporary runway collections.

Western and non-western

There is also a need to address the use of the Eurocentric terms Western and non-Western. Philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah's article on the difficulties with these designations elucidates that common usage of 'the West' typically refers to the North Atlantic—'Europe and her former colonies in North America' ('the global north'). The opposite of Western in this mindset, Appiah explains, means Africa, Asia, and South America ('the global south')[4]. This includes myriad disparate people and cultures and, as Appiah clarifies, also carefully circumvents 'Australians and New Zealanders and white South Africans, so that "Western" here can look simply like a euphemism for white' (Appiah, 2016: n.p.). This is only a fraction of his argument as to why the concept of 'Western civilisation' is both flawed and inherently biased, but it nonetheless provides an argument for why such language should be avoided.

The use of the word Western in reference to fashion largely refers to clothing created in North America (by non-Native people) and Europe. I have excluded the terms Western and non-Western in my own writing (though I have maintained their use in quotes from other scholars). Instead, I have been specific about the parts of the world I am referencing. I have also avoided the use of italics to distinguish non-English, fashion-related words that have not been adopted into the English vernacular. This follows a decision made by Sarah Cheang, Erica de Greef, and Takagi Yoko, editors of the 2021 publication *Rethinking Fashion Globalization*, in which they

[4] Over the course of this five-year research, the terms 'the global south' and 'the global north' have become more standard.

explain that italicising results in 'marking out non-Euro-American fashion terms as unfamiliar and exotic, at one remove from the reader and their assumed vocabulary' (Cheang, de Greef, and Takagi, 2021: 9).

Curiosity

In his 1998 publication *Curiosity in Early Modern Europe Word Histories*, scholar Neil Kenny writes that curiosity 'has never been exhaustively defined. It was, and is, an open-ended, incoherent cluster of the countless meanings and narratives that have been ascribed in different periods' (Kenny, 1998: 32). He also notes the root of the term curious in the Latin word *cura*, meaning 'to care'. If someone was described as curious, they were 'characterized by care, concern, anxiety, fussiness, diligence' (Ibid.: 35). Presumably because of his focus on definitions of curiosity, Kenny does not mention that *cura* is also the root of curate—a clear link between the terms and the idea that care, or attention, is inherent to each.

Although curiosity is a highly variable term, it is critical to interpret some of its definitions within this thesis. Contemporary understanding of curiosity, as it is written in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is 'a strong desire to learn and know something' and 'a strange or unusual object or fact'—both concepts that are explored extensively throughout this text. The Oxford definition also lists one common phrase: 'Curiosity killed the cat' (Oxford Dictionaries, 2022, 'Curiosity': n.p.). The inclusion of this proverb highlights that curiosity carries implications of inappropriate inquisitiveness. It is not always considered a positive quality, even in a contemporary context, yet its past meanings were largely

negative (Kenny, 1998: 52). Curiosity began to take on increasingly positive connotations during the early sixteenth century, the period in which cabinets of curiosities were gaining in popularity (Bowry, 2015: 1). By the late seventeenth century, the concept of the curious as something strange or unusual had developed (Ibid.: 51).

The complexities of curiosity during the early modern period—in addition to a related term, wonder—necessitate a brief historical contextualisation. Returning to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, wonder is described today as 'a feeling of surprise mingled with admiration, caused by something beautiful, unexpected, unfamiliar, or inexplicable' (Oxford Dictionaries, 2022, 'Wonder': n.p.). It is evident that the concepts of curiosity and wonder overlap, with their connections to the unusual or the unexpected, and those associations took shape during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Historians RJW Evans and Alexander Marr observe that 'From Renaissance to Enlightenment [curiosity and wonder] interacted and reinforced each other; and like all really significant concepts, both terms gave rise to an enormous range of usage and versatility of treatment' (Evans and Marr, 2006: xvi).

The connections between curiosity and wonder are further evidenced in the terms that developed to describe collections and the spaces in which they were housed: cabinet of curiosities in English, 'cabinet de curiosités' in French, and 'wunderkammer' (wonder-room) in German (Besson, 2003: 1). In Italy, collections and their spaces were contemporaneously identified by their owners as a 'studio', 'studiolo' (office-like spaces devoted to study, reading, and writing), 'guardaroba'

(wardrobe), or 'museo'—terms that more strongly reflected the Italians' particular emphasis on the cabinets as spaces of learning and care (Laurencich-Minelli, 2017 [1983]: 23).

Both curiosity and wonder could manifest in either the cognitive or the physical. As Evans and Marr explain, 'People could exhibit curiosity and—as a consequence—assemble collections of curiosities; they could wonder at the natural wonders which they experienced' (Ibid.). Literary scholar Barbara Benedict distinguishes between curiosity and wonder by writing that wonder is 'pious, passive, and aesthetic', making it a quality that 'reveres the novelty'. Curiosity in early modern Europe, on the other hand, sought to explain novelty rather than simply admire it (Benedict, 2001: 5). Historians Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park note that during the late seventeenth century, 'wonder sparked curiosity, shaking the philosopher out of idling reverie and riveting attention and will to a minute scrutiny of the phenomena at hand' (Daston and Park, 1998: 304). This emphasis on close looking created a link between curiosity and practices of collecting (Kenny, 2006: 45).

At the start of the sixteenth century, curiosity was considered an impulsive quality that could be thrilling, but it could also lead to uncontrolled behaviour. The 'taming' of curiosity as it occurred over the remainder of the sixteenth century and into the following century was gendered and—appropriately for this thesis—illustrated through dressed appearance. Benedict traces the change beginning with the iconographer Cesare Ripa's 1611 illustration of *Curiosità*, a personification that portrays Curiosity as a wild woman with unkempt hair and a garment adorned with ears and frogs (the latter was a symbol

of human energy). The illustration is accompanied by the caption ‘curiosity is the unbridled desire of those who seek to know more than they should’ (Benedict, 2001: 25).

A similarly themed illustration by engraver Thomas Jefferys in 1772 portrays Curiosity in more favourable light, as a woman with soft facial features and more orderly hair. She also wears a fashionable masquerade gown with decorative trim, sleeve ruffles, and a fichu (shawl) around her neck. Her dress fabric retains its ear motif, but the frogs are replaced by eyes, explained as ‘emblems of [Curiosity’s] eagerness to see and hear’ (Ibid.: 37) (fig. Intro 1 and fig. Intro 2).

Fig. Intro 1 (left): *Curiosità* by Cesare Ripa, 1611

Fig. Intro 2 (right): *Curiosity* by Thomas Jefferys, 1772

Allegorical representations of Curiosity demonstrate a shift in thinking during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The early, largely negative connotations of the concept are demonstrated through Curiosity’s dishevelled appearance and frenzied gesture, whereas the later illustration shows a calm, orderly, and fashionable figure. Public domain.

Psychological definitions of curiosity and related terms

I also explore psychological definitions of curiosity, which were formed from behavioural studies—and it was this aspect of my research that shaped the aims for my exhibition. The American Psychological Association (APA) defines curiosity as

'the impulse or desire to investigate, observe, or gather information, particularly when the material is novel or interesting' (American Psychological Association, 2022, 'Curiosity': n.p.). Although this is a helpful starting point, there is no standardised definition of curiosity. I have embraced this mutability to develop a lexicon of interrelated terms that have informed my studies of how to engender curiosity within a contemporary exhibition of fashion. The definitions below were cited verbatim from the *APA Dictionary of Psychology*, though I have occasionally utilised partial or condensed terms as I have found them to be relevant to this thesis. They include:

Exploratory drive: *the motivation that compels an organism to examine its environment. The exploratory drive may be secondary to other drives, such as fear or hunger leading to exploration.*

Observation: *the careful, close examination of an object, process, or other phenomenon for the purpose of collecting data about it or drawing conclusions.*

Investigatory behavior: *exploration of a new object or other aspect of the environment.*

Learning: *the acquisition of novel information, behaviors, or abilities after practice, observation, or other experiences, as evidenced by change in behavior, knowledge, or brain function.*

Motivation: *a person's willingness to exert physical or mental effort in pursuit of a goal or outcome.*

Object: *an entity in the environment (i.e., a thing, person, or condition) that acts as a stimulus and elicits a response from an organism; that is, a stimulus object; the focal target of attention, perception, or some other psychological process.*

Knowledge: *the state of being familiar with something or aware of its existence, usually resulting from experience or study; the range of one's understanding or information. In some contexts the words knowledge and memory are used synonymously.*

Novelty: *the quality of being new and unusual. It is one of the major determining factors directing attention.*

Attention: *a state in which cognitive resources are focused on certain aspects of the environment rather than on others and the central nervous system is in a state of readiness to respond to stimuli. See: sustained attention, selective attention.*

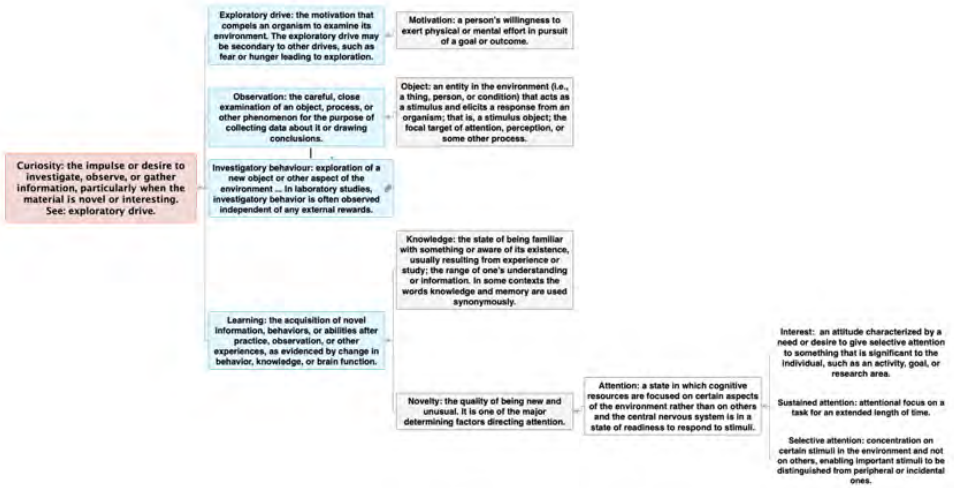
Sustained attention: *attentional focus on a task for an extended length of time.*

Selective attention: *concentration on certain stimuli in the environment and not on others, enabling important stimuli to be distinguished from peripheral or incidental ones.*

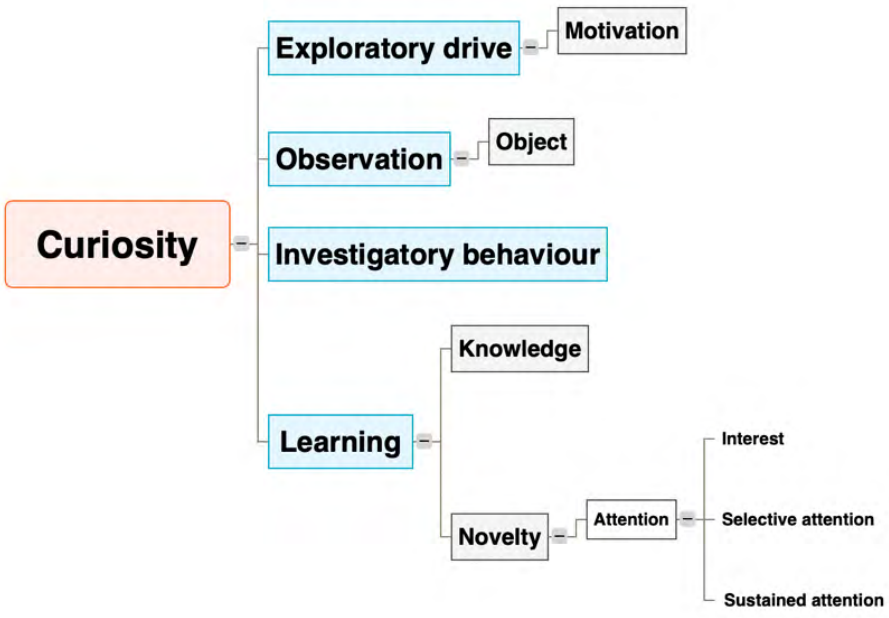
Interest: *an attitude characterised by a need or desire to give selective attention to something that is significant to the individual, such as an activity, goal, or research area.*

To underscore the connections between these terms, I have organised them in a diagrammatic manner, with curiosity as the nucleus:

Praxis A: Diagram of curiosity and its related terms



[full version]



[abbreviated version]

Exhibition aims

This practice-led thesis ultimately contributes to the development of a theoretical exhibition centred on the concept of cabinets of curiosities—and, by extension, the incitement of curiosity among visitors. Through defining curiosity and charting its numerous related concepts, I illuminated several aims for the exhibition: the promotion of exploration, observation, investigation, and learning. Each of these aims—and their adjacency to the concepts of objects, motivation, knowledge, novelty, attention, and interest—are explored through the application of both psychological and museological studies.

Although this list of terms may seem extensive, the above diagram underscores how they are in many ways analogous, and they can be used in combination to evoke curiosity. Furthermore, they acknowledge the multiple ways in which museum visitors engage with information, a concept that will be discussed later in this text (Chapter 6: 'Flow and free-choice learning'). The terms listed above will appear numerous times throughout this thesis, highlighting their potential applications to the planning of my exhibition. To avoid repeating the definition of a term each time it appears, I have included the definitions and the diagrams to Appendix A for ease of reference.

Description of thesis chapters

This thesis contains six chapters. Chapter 1, 'Methods and Methodologies', traces the ways in which my theoretical, empirical, and practice-led research processes have intertwined. It concludes with an analysis of the front-end

research I devised and conducted for this thesis. Chapter 2, 'Cabinets of Curiosities', outlines the history and conceptualisation of the cabinets. In addition to my original findings on the types of objects collected within them (with a focus on fashion items), I analyse a selection of museum and gallery exhibitions that took inspiration from the cabinets. This chapter provides foundational information for the remainder of the thesis and the curation of the related theoretical exhibition.

Chapter 3, 'Collection Studies', further develops the history of collecting practices that were outlined in the preceding chapter. It begins with an overview of collection studies as an academic field, and it offers some general theory on the subject of collecting through the lens of fashion. This is followed by a synopsis of how my own curiosity influenced my selection of objects from The Museum at FIT collection.

Cabinets of curiosities were products of colonialism, and this is a critical matter to address within this research and the theoretical exhibition that it informs. Chapter 4, 'Decolonising: Perspectives on Collecting and Curating', begins with an analysis of the implications of colonialism in the history of cabinets of curiosities. It continues with suggested ways to 'decolonise' the collection and curation of fashion, addressing issues such as exoticism and cultural appropriation.

Chapter 5, 'Fashion Display', examines modes of fashion presentation in museums, galleries, and retail settings that demonstrate a connection to cabinets of curiosities. The chapter begins with a brief review of the history of fashion

exhibitions. It continues with an analysis of exhibitions within four related curatorial themes that I identified specifically for this practice-led research. This chapter concludes with a discussion of fashion retailers that have utilised museum cabinetry for display and/or adopted the aesthetic of a cabinet of curiosities to market their wares.

'Exhibition interpretation and design', the sixth and final chapter, builds upon many of the ideas and inspirations that are presented in previous chapters. I begin with analyses of the psychological theories and museum interpretation studies that shaped this research. I then provide tangible design ideas for a fashion exhibition inspired by cabinets of curiosities, including concepts for the introductory space and seven specialised cabinets designed to evoke curiosity among visitors.

I complete my findings with a brief conclusion, which includes reflections on the evolution of my research, insights on how it contributed to my curatorial practice, a reiteration of my contributions to knowledge, and a summary of avenues for further research. I also include feedback and insights from several colleagues who were asked to consider the ideas presented for my theoretical exhibition as an informal evaluative measure. Their insights have helped to prepare for the exhibition's eventual, physical form postdating this thesis.

CHAPTER 1: METHODS AND METHODOLOGIES

Situating this research

This thesis is broadly positioned within the realm of social research, described as a 'moral act within which the researcher holds responsibility for ensuring that the resulting change is "for the better"' (Clough and Nutbrown, 2012: 4). I did not initially consider my research findings within this context, but I came to realise that my direct interactions with museum visitors through front-end research, in addition to my studies of potential cultural sensitivities within the curatorial process (both of which are outlined later in this chapter), fit within this definition.

I consider this multimethodological research to be closely aligned with the field of fashion studies. In her 2016 edited volume *Fashion Studies: Research Methods, Sites and Practices*, professor Heike Jenss outlines the history of the field of fashion studies, describing its related research as 'interpretive, intersubjective, and interdisciplinary' (Jenss, 2016: 1). Academic fashion research has expanded considerably in the twenty-first century, and fashion studies grew without a defined methodological canon akin to those that serve more established disciplines such as anthropology or art history (Ibid.: 2). 'The field of fashion studies', Jenss concludes, 'owes its formation to a variety of approaches and perspectives that inform the study of fashion and dress, including the work of philosophers, sociologists, art and design scholars, anthropologists, economists, and historians' (Ibid.: 6).

When writing this thesis, the mutability of fashion studies proved beneficial. It allowed me to construct and reassess my methods as the research took shape, rather than feeling it needed to fit into a typical, predetermined set of methodologies. My research took a primarily qualitative approach, and included participatory inquiry, interviewing, and interpretive analysis. It is framed by multiple fields and disciplines, including psychology, museology, material culture studies, dress history, collection studies, art history, cultural history, postcolonial studies, and curatorial studies.

In crafting my methodologies, I was attracted to the concept of the 'bricoleur', which is described by sociologist Norman Denzin and methodologist Yvonna Lincoln in terms related to textiles and sewing. The bricoleur-style researcher, they write, is a 'quiltmaker' who 'stitches, edits and puts slices of reality together' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 3). To consider myself a bricoleur, I must also acknowledge the interactive nature of research, which is shaped by one's positionality, or their 'personal history, biography, gender, social class, race and ethnicity and those of the people in the setting' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018: 12). I found this aspect of the bricoleur to be intriguing for its relationship to museological research. As digital humanities scholar Valentina Vavassori notes, 'Museums act as maps: they encode in their spatiality the background, the history, the agenda, and the biases of the people who created them' (Vavassori, 2020: 79).

Furthermore, experts have noted the significance of a visitor's personal and sociocultural history on their experiences with museum exhibitions (Falk and Dierking, 2013; Bedford, 2014). If one considers the description of bricoleurs as

researchers who 'move beyond the blinders of particular disciplines and peer through a conceptual window to a new world of research and knowledge production' (Kincheloe *et al*, 2018: 244), a connection can also be made to fashion studies and the importance of actively engaging with multiple fields and methods of interpretation (Breward, 1998: 303). According to cultural historian Christopher Breward, fashion is a 'transdisciplinary cultural field, uniting social, material and aesthetic practices' (Calefato and Breward, 2018: 248). The interweaving of those practices throughout this thesis underscores Breward's words.

Organisation of notes and ideas

From the inception of this thesis, I created a physical research journal that contained questions, keywords, lists of interesting objects, sources to be considered, to-do lists, and notes from meetings with my supervisors. This strategy was suggested by Peter Clough and Cathy Nutbrown, authors of multiple texts on methodological processes (Clough and Nutbrown, 2012: xiii). The creation of this journal mirrored my working process as a curator, and it proved to be a highly effective organisational strategy (fig. 1.1).

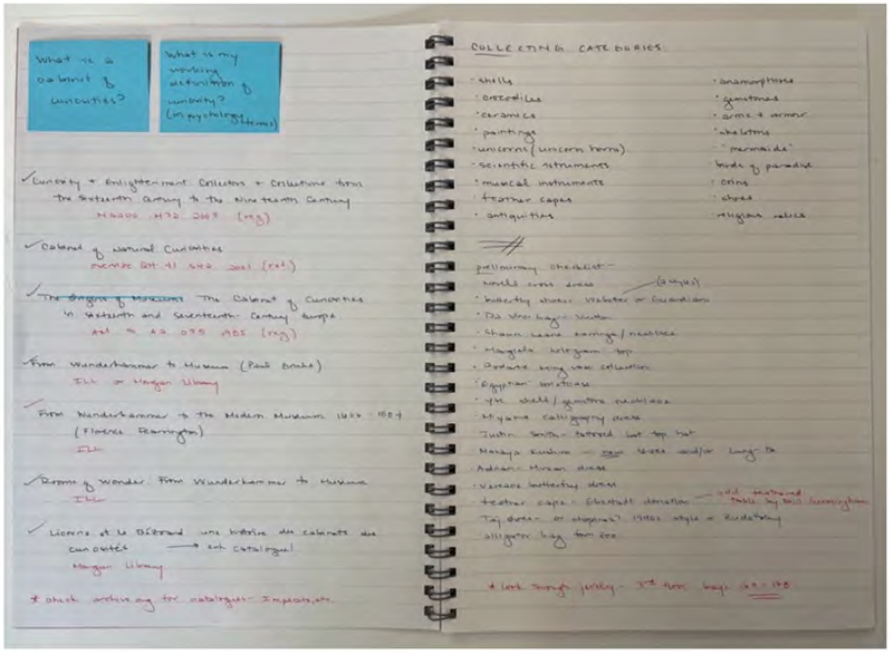


Fig. 1.1

Photograph of the author's notebook in an early phase of research, featuring a preliminary bibliography, checklist, and other notes.

Meanwhile, as my typewritten notes evolved from dozens of pages to hundreds, I began to divide them into categories using Evernote, a notetaking and task management application. My digital notebook expanded to include individual sections devoted to each of the chapters in this thesis, in addition to sections centred on subcategories of research. This note taking process allowed me to organise my final, written thoughts in a more efficient manner.

My usual exhibition planning process includes the creation of a large corkboard with small photographs of potential objects, placed in groupings. This curatorial practice-led methodology allows me to add, subtract, and move images with ease, facilitating the evolution of object selection within the curatorial process (I also photograph the board in various stages of my research, should I want to return to a previous idea) (fig. 1.2). I also utilised a 'mind mapping' software that

was suggested to me by a fellow PhD student. This software, MindView, was critical in the early stages of my research, as it allowed me to track ideas and the interconnections between theory and practice in a visual manner. The example of this process that I have included in fig. 1.3 demonstrates how I was able to add subthemes to an overarching 'big idea'. Thinking through my themes in this way allowed me to constructively organise and reorganise my thoughts. It also created a space to take note of important details, such as an exhibition's date and location, which saved time in the writing process.

Fig. 1.2

A cork board of ideas, author's office. Thumbnail images of potential objects are organised into subgroupings as they would be in the exhibition. Simple push pins allow for the easy movement or elimination of objects as ideas evolve.

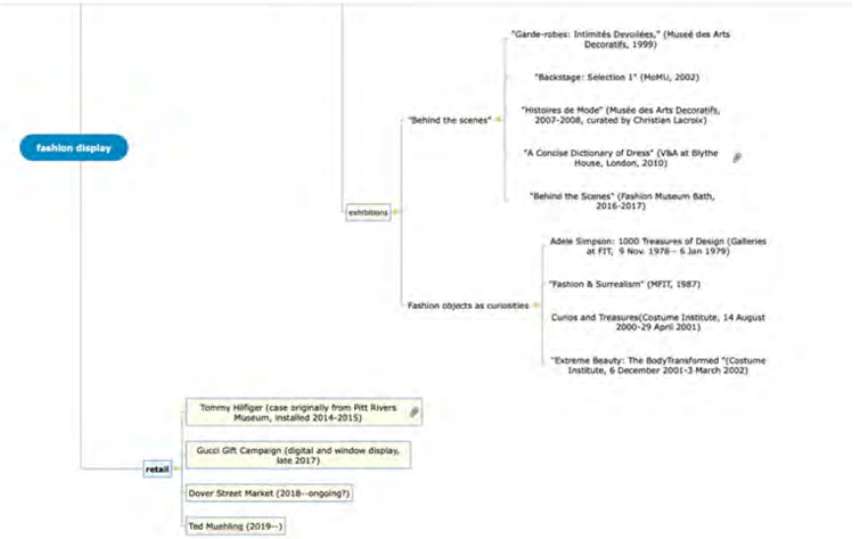


Fig. 1.3

A detail of MindView mind-mapping software, showing ideas for cabinets of curiosities-related exhibitions and retail displays. Organising the myriad references to cabinets in this way helped to develop and define the research themes for this thesis.

Review of methods and methodologies

Historical evidence: documents and artefacts

To begin responding to my research questions, I built a broad foundation of research on the history of cabinets of curiosities, including the collection of fashion. As I noted previously, numerous scholars have published historical analyses of the cabinets, and I began my research by engaging with these secondary sources. I made notes on the physical appearances of the cabinets, the ways in which they functioned privately and publicly, and the types of objects that were collected within them. I extracted all references to fashion that other scholars had included in their research. These were scant but useful: they assured me that although references to fashion did exist, other researchers had not centred their attention on them. This was a significant gap that I aimed to fill. These secondary sources also allowed me

to take note of some trends in early collecting practices, such as the acquisition of shoes above all other types of garments. In addition to references to fashion, I made a list of what historians consider to be the most important examples of cabinets of curiosities, explored which of them are illustrated, and began to record which collections are extant (usually determined through extensive online research), which is not always evident in the ways they are described by historians.

From these initial sources, I was able to create a robust list of existing catalogues, inventories, and travel journals that described cabinets of curiosities. I began my own historical analyses using primary sources, looking specifically for inclusions of fashion objects. Travel to libraries and archives was severely limited due to the Covid-19 pandemic, but I was able to access digital versions of most catalogues I needed using the website Archive.org; others were accessed by purchasing reproduction catalogues online. Although I missed the experience of handling physical objects (which often inspires my most focussed research, and I typically learn something from the librarians and archivists who maintain these objects), Archive.org allowed me to search for key words and phrases, and I was able to translate text from languages that I do not read (primarily Latin and German).

Through this time-consuming but rewarding research, I discovered important examples of fashion objects that I had not seen mentioned in any other sources, and I was also able to gain a sense of why fashion objects were collected and how they were perceived by collectors. Catalogues of cabinets were intended to be shared among collectors internationally (Fearrington, 2013: 12), offering ideas for how a collection

could be organised, what types of objects might be included, and how they might be displayed. I was able to find direct evidence of the connections between collectors (for example, as I will detail later, one collector's catalogue references a pair of shoes in another collector's cabinet). This endeavour allowed me to fulfil one of my main objectives for this thesis: to add substantially to empirical research through the documentation and critical evaluation of dress within historic cabinets of curiosities. To my knowledge, this topic has only been briefly summarised by one other fashion scholar (Taylor, 2004). My contribution to this knowledge is included in Chapter 2, 'Catalogues, inventories and travel journals' and 'Extant fashion objects from cabinets of curiosities'.

Evaluative museum visits

Extant cabinets are exceedingly rare—many of their holdings were subject to later dispersal among museums (where they could take on different meanings) or destroyed (Bowry, 2015: 24). Within this small number, I researched the collections that contained fashion objects, and I was able to organise several site visits—what I term 'evaluative museum visits'—to view them (Lawrenz, Keiser and Lavoie, 2003). These included visits to the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (housing the collection of the John Tradescants, renowned collectors in eighteenth-century Britain); The British Museum, London (founded on a collection amassed by Sir Hans Sloane); and The Gustavianum, Uppsala, Sweden (home to the Augsburg Art Cabinet of 1632, with its original 1,000 objects). I was also able to view the cabinet of Joseph Bonnier de la Mosson, a portion of which is permanently installed in the library at the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris. Although this

cabinet did not contain fashion objects (and is thus highlighted only briefly in this thesis), I was able to gain a sense of scale from this cabinet and admire its arresting Rococo design.

Some of my findings from these visits will be outlined in Chapter 2, 'Extant fashion objects from cabinets of curiosities'. I travelled to each location only once. My research within the British Museum, the Gustavianum, and the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle was entirely self-guided; during my trip to the Ashmolean, I first experienced the exhibition on my own, and was later provided a tour from one of the museum's curators, Eleanor Standley (scheduled in advance). The latter experience was especially enriching, as I was able to ask questions as they arose, answered by the extremely knowledgeable curator. In all instances, the ability to witness the exhibition physically (as opposed to viewing the works online) was beneficial. I was able to notice object details, ponder how objects were positioned in relation to one another, read exhibition text that may not have been published online, and discern my own positionality and personal connections to the topic. I took extensive notes, photographed objects and the exhibition galleries, and observed other visitors.

Had travel not been restricted due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war, I would have also visited Archduke Ferdinand II's collection at Ambras Castle in Innsbruck, Austria; the cabinets assembled by August Hermann Francke in Halle, Germany; and Peter the Great's collection of curiosities at Kunstkamera in St. Petersburg, Russia. I would have further endeavoured to view important

examples of Indian jewellery from two separate cabinets of curiosities that are now housed at the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, as well as rare examples of African fashion from the collection of Christoph Weickmann, now housed in the Museum Ulm in Ulm, Germany. Thankfully, I was able to research these collections remotely, using a combination of historic catalogues, scholarly publications, and museum websites. Seeing objects in real life is always preferable, yet there was no thread of my research that I was unable to explore digitally. I was previously somewhat dismissive of online collections for anything but the most cursory research, but this moment of physical inaccessibility helped me to recognise how important such resources can be to the general public.

Exhibition analysis

In addition to my research on historical cabinets of curiosities, I engaged with methods of exhibition analysis. Firstly, I searched for prominent examples of contemporary museum and gallery exhibitions that referenced cabinets of curiosities. I then began to explore why the cabinets have become models for twenty-first-century modes of display within museums. An understanding of this phenomenon involved reading reviews of exhibitions by journalists and researching within contemporary texts that mention this mode of display (Barrett, 2014; Collet, 2014; Lasser, 2021; Adamopoulou and Solomon, 2016).

I intentionally abstained from contacting curators, exhibition makers, and other museum professionals about the exhibitions I explored with two notable exceptions: the

aforementioned visit to the Ashmolean (which included numerous, especially important fashion objects), and an online interview with the exhibition maker Judith Clark, whose work is fundamental to this thesis in several ways and will be described throughout. Although relying primarily on my own observations could be challenging, as I will outline below, I found that a consideration of the information I could ascertain from extant, related materials allowed me to be more subjective about my findings. It allowed me to consider the exhibitions more from the viewpoint of a potential visitor, rather than a museum professional with access to privileged information. Piecing together this material both piqued and satiated my own curiosity.

At this stage of my research, which is included in Chapter 2, 'Cabinets of curiosities in contemporary exhibitions', I disengaged from examples of fashion exhibitions, exploring instead how other types of exhibitions addressed the topic of cabinets of curiosities more generally. This provided ideas outside of my typical area of focus, which was critical to expanding my curatorial knowledge. My criteria for exhibitions to include was based partly on the curator's (or institution's) description of the exhibition as a 'cabinet of curiosities', but I also worked to identify what types of objects were included in the exhibitions, how the spaces were designed, and what curatorial strategies were employed to engage users (if known) that appeared to demonstrate links to historical cabinets of curiosities.

The difficulty of this process lay in analysing exhibitions that I had not seen first-hand, which was frequently the case. Although there is no consensus on what constitutes a good

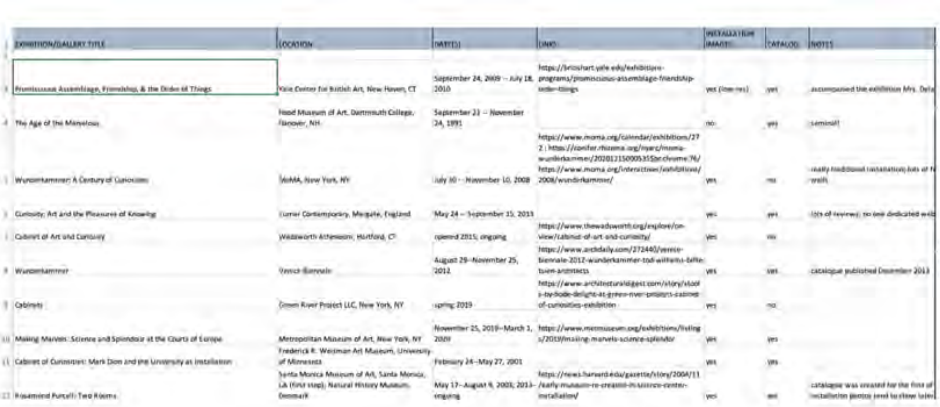
exhibition review, curator Alexandra Palmer contends that reviews must record the visitor experience in order to be considered reviews at all—hence why I have chosen to use the word 'analysis', rather than review, to describe my writing about exhibitions (Palmer, 2008, 'Reviewing fashion exhibitions': 122). Understanding exhibitions is best achieved through direct experience, and their assessment is ideally performed during or just after a visit to the physical space.

Beverly Serrell's book *Judging Exhibitions* centres on the visitor experience, thus appraising exhibitions 'by how it felt to be in them, not what they said about themselves in a review or in a binder or PR materials, or showed in colorful slides' (Serrell, 2006: 5). Serrell's framework for assessment was not designed for the analysis of an exhibition after the fact, using secondary sources, yet that was often the only possible course within my research. In her history of exhibitions at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, art and cultural historian Mary Anne Staniszewski refers to photographs of exhibitions as 'fragmentary representations' (Staniszewski, 1998: xxiii). Although I agree with her observation, historians have often worked with fragments. It is the piecing of these fragments, and reflection on the spaces between them, that forms a more robust picture.

Much of this work, therefore, required the creation of methods that were based on archived exhibition materials. To obtain as much information about each exhibition as possible, I tracked the type of content available (exhibition websites; catalogues; reviews in newspapers; magazines and journals in addition to installation and/or object photographs) about each exhibition within a spreadsheet and systematically

reviewed each of those elements to begin my analysis (fig. 1.4). My frequent lack of personal experience in an exhibition, in addition to the occasional absence of pertinent information from other sources, has resulted in analyses that are admittedly incomplete. Nevertheless, each of the exhibitions I include provided something significant to my research framework and ideas; if I explored an exhibition that I did not find to be applicable through the materials available to me, it was eliminated from this thesis.

I employed the same strategy in my later analyses of fashion exhibitions, which are included in Chapter 5, 'Curatorial themes'. Some examples that I did not personally experience, such as Judith Clark's *Spectres: When Fashion Turns Back* (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2005), have a breadth of materials about them. Other exhibitions, such as *Adele Simpson: 1,001 Treasures of Design* (The Museum at FIT, 1978–1979), are discernible through only a small sampling of materials. I determined not to let this inequality in knowledge stop me from including material that offered something of importance to my studies.



EXHIBITION/GALLERY TITLE	LOCATION	DATE(S)	URL(S)	INSTALLATION IMAGES	CATALOG	NOTES
Promiscuous Assemblage, Friendship, & the Order of Things	Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, CT	September 24, 2009 – July 18, 2010	https://britishart.yale.edu/exhibitions-programs/promiscuous-assemblage-friendship-order-things	yes (low-res)	yes	accompanied the exhibition Mrs. Delany
The Age of the Marvelous	Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH	September 21 – November 24, 1991		no	yes	seminal!
Wunderkammer: A Century of Curiosities	MoMA, New York, NY	July 30 – November 10, 2008	https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/272 ; https://conifer.rhizome.org/nyarc/moma-wunderkammer/20081215000935/https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2008/wunderkammer/	yes	no	really traditional installation; lots of text
Curiosity: Art and the Pleasures of Knowing	Turner Contemporary, Margate, England	May 24 – September 15, 2013		yes	yes	lots of reviews; no one dedicated exhibition
Cabinet of Art and Curiosity	Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT	opened 2015, ongoing	https://www.thewadsworth.org/explore/on-view/cabinet-of-art-and-curiosity/	yes	no	
Wunderkammer	Venice Biennale	August 29–November 25, 2012	https://www.archdaily.com/272440/venice-biennale-2012-wunderkammer-tod-williams-billie-tsien-architects	yes	yes	catalogue published December 2013
Cabinets	Green River Project LLC, New York, NY	spring 2019	https://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/stool-by-bode-delights-at-green-river-projects-cabinet-of-curiosities-exhibition	yes	no	
Making Marvels: Science and Splendor at the Courts of Europe	Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY	November 15, 2019–March 1, 2020	https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listing/2019/making-marvels-science-splendor	yes	yes	
Cabinet of Curiosities: Mark Dion and the University as Installation	Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum, University of Minnesota	February 24–May 27, 2001		yes	yes	
Frozenmind Purcell: Two Rooms	Santa Monica Museum of Art, Santa Monica, CA (first stop); Natural History Museum, Denmark	May 17–August 9, 2003; 2013–ongoing	https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2004/11/early-museum-re-created-in-science-center-installation/	yes	yes	catalogue was created for the first of installation photos used to show later

Fig. 1.4

A screenshot of the Excel file created to track related exhibitions, including information on their locations, dates, affiliated websites, installation images, and catalogues.

My research expanded to discern types of fashion display that relate to my focus on cabinets of curiosities, beginning with a review of texts centred on fashion curation (Clark and de la Haye, 2014; Riegels Melchior and Svensson, 2014; Vänskä and Clark, 2017; Petrov, 2019). These provided a foundation for the history and analysis of fashion exhibition practice. Rather than adhere to exhibition types as they were previously outlined by other curators (Steele, 1997; Petrov, 2019), I explored exhibitions through the lens of their potential connections to cabinets of curiosities.

I devised four 'curatorial themes' that are original to this research: 'Fashion objects as curiosities'; 'Fashion display as cabinets of curiosities'; 'Behind-the-scenes'; and 'The gigantic and the miniature'. I arrived at these categories by exploring past exhibitions on the website *Exhibiting Fashion*, an online archive administered by the Centre for Fashion Curation at University of the Arts London (University of the Arts London, 2021: n.p.). I reviewed installation photographs and exhibition descriptions, making note of those that seemed to bear a connection to some aspect of cabinets of curiosities, and later analysing them in greater depth. In addition to my searches within that database, I explored print publications about fashion exhibitions (general and specific), made visits to fashion exhibitions, engaged with museum websites, and studied exhibition reviews in newspapers and academic journals.

I did not limit myself to fashion exhibitions—although those were especially informative—but also expanded my research to include examples of fashion retail display and advertising. Professors Annamari Vänskä and Hazel Clark note how

museum curatorial strategies overlap with fashion retail, especially in the luxury sector (Vänskä and Clark, 2017: 10). Further research led to my specific interest in high-end fashion retail establishments that have utilised museum-like cabinetry (especially wood vitrines) to display garments. I was able to analyse the use of such furniture and its potential associations to the appearance of cabinets of curiosities.

Collection studies

Fashion historian Lou Taylor notes the connection between cabinets of curiosities and fashion, directly attributing the 'birth' of fashion collections to the cabinets (Taylor, 2004: 1). Taylor's work was published nearly two decades ago, and nothing of length has been written on the topic since[5]. Taylor's work led to my own research into collection studies. Within this large field of study (in which fashion is a subfield of focus, evidenced by publications such as Taylor, 2004; Eicher and Ross, 2010; Clark and de la Haye, 2014; Riegels Melchior and Svensson, 2014; and Petrov, 2019), I narrowed my investigation to two subjects: private collections of fashion that have become part of public museum holdings, and fashion collections that were established for study purposes. These subjects were decided upon because of their direct links to cabinets of curiosities. Numerous cabinets were established as private collections, later becoming founding collections for public museums, and many cabinets were created to promote hands-on learning. These foci led to my own curiosity-driven exploration of The Museum at FIT

[5] Art historian Lisa Skogh makes meaningful but specific connections between cabinets of curiosities and the work of Alexander McQueen, which will be mentioned later in this text. Her essay, though informative, covers only three pages of an exhibition catalogue (Skogh, 2015).

collection, which resulted in novel ideas for object selection and display. This element of my practice is outlined in Chapter 3, 'Analysing The Museum at FIT collection through the lens of curiosity'.

Decolonising the museum and fashion studies

My overview of the existing work on collecting fashion also underscored a significant oversight within collection studies: most texts centre on North America, Britain, and Europe, which mirrors collecting practices more generally. This fact—along with the links between cabinets of curiosities and colonialism—led to my critical engagement with theories of decolonising.

Clough and Nutbrown argue that any form of social research is inherently political (Clough and Nutbrown, 2012: 14), and fashion is increasingly understood within a political context (Bartlett, 2019). Like fashion studies, decolonising relies on an aggregation of methodologies from more established disciplines, including psychology, feminism, and Indigenous studies (Barnes, 2018). An expanding body of research on decolonial thinking highlights the implications of colonialism within the history of museums (Kreps, 2011; Kassim, 2017; Muñiz-Reed, 2017), and it suggests ways in which museums can simultaneously acknowledge and eliminate harmful and exclusionary practices. My own methodology involved exploring theories on decolonising the museum, which led to the consideration of more equitable strategies for the collection, display, and interpretation of fashion objects.

This research, which is the subject of Chapter 4, was shaped by numerous, recent publications that take an expansive, global, and critical view of fashion (Eicher and Evenson, 2016; Welters and Lillethun, 2018; Gaugele and Titton, 2019; Cheang, de Greef and Takagi, 2021; Breward, Lemire and Riello, 2023). Many of the ideas asserted by this literature are only just being applied to the ways that some museums are acquiring and displaying fashion. This research inspired me to reconsider my own curatorial practices. It provided insights into how to introduce the topic of colonialism within my theoretical exhibition, in addition to potentially problematic objects for viewers. My ideas were further fuelled by significant current events at my time of research and writing, which included the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement (founded in 2013) and the further revelation of social inequalities related to the Covid-19 pandemic. The result of this research, which highlights how decolonial theory and principles of social justice can be applied to fashion curatorial practice, comprises another element of my original contribution to knowledge.

Psychological theory

As my research evolved, I began to seek a definition of curiosity that could be used to develop and implement curatorial strategies within fashion exhibitions. Although I quickly learned that there is no unanimously adopted definition of curiosity, I also discovered that curiosity is a quality that has been studied in the social science of psychology since the late nineteenth century, with research becoming more prominent during the 1970s (Voss and Keller,

1983)[6]. Some of the first academic articles I accessed about curiosity were written by current, leading psychologists in the field, including Jordan Litman and Todd Kashdan. Yet I have no formal training in psychology and was therefore uncertain how to proceed with this research without professional guidance. My director of studies suggested that we add a psychologist to my supervisory team. Dr Soljana Çili, a psychologist and a senior lecturer at London College of Fashion, agreed to work with me.

Under Çili's supervision, I engaged with research on psychological theories of curiosity. I also explored related subtopics, including aesthetic experience and emotions, cultural psychology, novelty seeking, emotional intelligence, and essentialism[7]. Most of my readings were, however, focussed on curiosity and its place within one of the 'Big Five' dimensions of personality[8]. The clarity of articles written by psychologists allowed me to understand their findings even without a background in the subject, though I regularly consulted with Çili to ensure that my interpretations of the readings were accurate. Through this research, I was able to make my own connections between the arts (including fashion), museums, and psychology that add significantly to

[6] The psychology of fashion—centred on the relationship between clothing and the self—is an established topic of study (Horn and Gurel, 1981) that has evolved in more recent years to be addressed by trained psychologists (Mair, 2018), but it has not previously been the focus of my research.
[7] This term is defined by the American Psychological Association: 'in philosophy, the position that things (or some things) have essences; that is, they have certain necessary properties without which they could not be the things they are. In Marxism, postmodernism, poststructuralism, and certain feminist perspectives, essentialism is the rejected position that human beings have an essential nature that transcends such factors as social class, gender, and ethnicity' (American Psychological Association, 2022, 'Essentialism': n.d.).
[8] For readers not familiar with psychological theory, this concept will be explained in Chapter 6, 'The psychology of curiosity'.

my original contribution to knowledge. I include some psychological research in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, but I engage with it most prominently in Chapter 6.

Exhibition strategies

My studies of psychology expanded my curatorial thinking. My ideas for exhibition interpretation and design within this thesis were primarily informed by my studies of museology and psychology. Numerous museological writings cite curiosity as a goal within exhibition making (Rounds, 2004; Bitgood, 2013; Falk and Dierking, 2013), yet few of them offer tangible strategies for its development. My methodology, therefore, focussed on the interweaving of museological research with psychological theories on curiosity. Through this process I was able to devise specific exhibition strategies centred on engendering curiosity among museum visitors. These strategies, which are most thoroughly detailed in Chapter 6, 'Exhibition interpretation' and 'Exhibition design', include ideas on object selection and textual interpretation, in addition to approaches to visitor engagement, participation, and exhibition design. These strategies are not intended solely for a fashion exhibition and may be used as a framework for other curators and museum professionals seeking to incorporate curiosity into their work. As museum educator Leo Casey writes, 'We cannot manufacture curiosity; the best we can do is create the conditions that facilitate it' (Casey, 2014: 511), and that is what I have intended to do within my research.

Praxis B: Front-end evaluation

My exhibition strategies were further informed by the creation of a front-end evaluation study, described as a form of highly exploratory research undertaken with museum visitors in advance of an exhibition's completion (Bolander, 2019: n.p.). It allows researchers to gain a sense of their audience, which includes participants' pre-existing knowledge of or interest in a topic, as well as their expectations for an exhibition (Serrell, 2015: 246).

My desire to conduct front-end research for this thesis (and by extension, my theoretical exhibition) centred on two primary goals: to discern how much information potential visitors may already have about cabinets of curiosities, and to determine what elements within an exhibition (with a focus on objects) might pique their curiosity.

Method

After obtaining ethical approval from the University of the Arts London and the Fashion Institute of Technology, I recruited volunteers for the study using The Museum at FIT's monthly e-newsletter (August 2022 edition). Participants had to be at least eighteen years of age (the age of legal adulthood in the United Kingdom and the United States) and have spent time in a museum exhibition (so that participants could consider the questions with some context). Potential participants emailed me regarding their interest. I did not turn anyone away, but several respondents ceased communication after my initial response. Of thirty-seven confirmed participants (whose time slots I tracked using an Excel

document), the final sample consisted of twenty-nine participants. Due to ongoing safety concerns related to Covid-19, all of the interviews were conducted online, using Zoom.

Participants were asked to fill out a consent form and demographics information using Qualtrics prior to our meeting; everyone complied. The demographics of the participants are outlined in the chart below (they are also included in Appendix B):

Front-end evaluation: demographics

Location:
The Americas: 94%
Europe: 6%

Age:
Average age: 55
Youngest participant: 22
Oldest participant: 74

Race/Ethnicity:
White: 94%
Asian/Asian British/Asian American: 3%
Hispanic or Latino/a: 3%

Gender Identity:
Female: 87.5%
Male: 9%
Gender-queer/Gender-fluid: 3.5%

Native language:
Native English speaker: 94%
Non-native English speaker: 6%

Highest degree attained:
2-year degree: 6.5%
4-year degree: 34%
Advanced degree (MS, MSc, MA, JD, MD, PhD, etc): 56.5%
High school degree or equivalent: 3%

Do you work in the arts?
Yes: 56%
No: 44%

Evaluative measures were achieved using a questionnaire devised and developed for this research, as well as 'object

interviews' (Wood and Latham, 2013: 105) about a series of seven objects from The Museum at FIT collection (both strategies will be detailed shortly). I audio-recorded each of the participants and took extensive notes on their responses.

The interviews lasted from twenty minutes to over an hour, depending on the participant's knowledge of the cabinets and their interest in sharing thoughts on the objects presented. Although I devised the questionnaire and object interviews as two separate parts of the front-end evaluation, I found that the responses to each portion were frequently interconnected. I have chosen to outline the strategies separately below, but my later discussion pertains to the whole of the evaluations and their implications to this research.

Questionnaire

The front-end evaluation process began with a series of open-ended questions that allowed for personalised responses. The goals I established for this portion of the research were shaped by the work of museum educator Christina Parsons (Parsons, 1994), who suggests that evaluators first determine what they want their audience to know, feel, or do after visiting the exhibition. This internal assessment should be followed by the development of a line of questioning that gauges what the audience already knows or feels about a topic[9].

[9] I acknowledge that a publication from 1994 could be considered out of date; however, more recent publications that discuss front-end evaluation, such as Falk and Dierking's *The Museum Experience Revisited* (2013) present highly similar—though not as well articulated—ideas.

Based on my intent to provide a necessary (but not needlessly extensive) history of cabinets of curiosities and its connection to fashion within the exhibition—in addition to my aim to create an environment that promotes curiosity and encourages learning—I determined that I would like my visitors to know, feel, or do the following after seeing the exhibition:

-**know:** …when, where and why cabinets of curiosities originated.
…what types of objects were collected in the cabinets (including fashion items).
…that the cabinets have a colonialist history.

-**feel:** …as though they have stepped inside a cabinet of curiosities.
…that their curiosity is piqued by the objects on view.
…that they can make an emotional connection to one or more objects on view[10].

-**do:** …consider their own collecting practices (if any).
…imagine what they might put in a personal cabinet of curiosities (fashion-related or otherwise).
…encourage others to experience the exhibition.

To obtain this knowledge, I posed the following questions. They were highly specific to my research, a decision based on

[10] This point is meant to engage with visitors' affective and personalised experiences within museum exhibitions, which is an aspect of free-choice learning. As museologist Sandra Dudley warns, 'museums' preference for the informational over the material, and for learning over personal experience more broadly and fundamentally conceived, may risk the production of displays which inhibit and even preclude such affective responses' (Dudley, 2010: 8).

museum educator George Hein's assertion that 'evaluations can be successful even though they have no application beyond the particular exhibition or program that is their subject' (Hein, 1998: 56).

1. Do you have any familiarity with cabinets of curiosities? (If yes, follow up with the below. If no, provide the participant with a brief description of the cabinets before moving on to question 3.)

> 1a. Do you know when and where cabinets of curiosities were generally kept, and why they were considered important?
>
> 1b. Can you think of any examples of what was collected in the cabinets? (If fashion items are not mentioned, follow up with the below)
>
> > 1i. Were you aware that there were fashion items in some of the cabinets?

2. Are you familiar with the general appearance of a cabinet of curiosities? (If yes, follow up with the below)

> 2a. Can you describe them?
>
> 2b. If you were entering a fashion exhibition designed to look like a cabinet of curiosities, what might you expect to see?

3. Cabinets of curiosities were products of colonialism, defined as 'the process of European settlement and political

control over the rest of the world, including the Americas, Australia, and parts of Africa and Asia'[11]. Do you think this exhibition topic is appropriate if its colonialist history is addressed?

4. Are there certain object types within museum exhibitions that tend to pique your curiosity? (For example: objects that are very large; unfamiliar or perplexing; tell a personal history; or can be recognized from film, television, or another form of popular culture.)

5. Can you think of a particular type of object you tend to skip or overlook in exhibitions, even if the exhibition is on a topic that interests you?

6. Have you ever felt a strong emotional connection to a museum object? If so, can you explain why or how that object made an impact on you?

7. Do you collect anything? (If yes, follow up with the below):

    7a. Is there a particular way you display your collection?

8. If you were to build a cabinet of curiosities, what sorts of objects might you put in it?

9. If you enjoy an exhibition, do you recommend it to others? If so, how? (For example, through social media, word of mouth, planning a return trip with friends or family).

[11] Kohn and Reddy, 2017: n.p.

Object interviews

Art historian Bruce Robertson notes the 'need to open up the control of knowledge production and let the visitor in'—a strategy to create some transparency within the curatorial process that has developed over the past few decades (Robertson, 2014: viii). Front-end evaluation centred on reactions to specific objects helps curators to step away from their own, often personal interpretations to better understand visitor responses. As curator and educator Nina Simon writes:

> One of the challenges for cultural professionals is remembering that visitors don't come in the door with the same emotional investment and history with artifacts that professionals have and may not see them as obvious conversation pieces (Simon, 2010: 130).

For this reason, I concluded my front-end evaluations with what museologists Elizabeth Wood and Kiersten Latham refer to as 'object interviews' (Wood and Latham, 2013: 105). These took the form of a presentation of seven[12] fashion objects from The Museum at FIT collection that were in consideration for the exhibition. The objects ranged in age, type, and materials, and I included three obsolete objects (the miser's purse, the bustle, and the patch box) that would perhaps be unfamiliar to nonexperts. The same selection of objects, in the same order, was presented at each interview. The presentations included only a photograph of the object and general information (object name, maker, date, dimensions, and materials).

[12] The selection of seven objects is based on psychometric literature, which suggests that the number seven used in a survey 'tends to be a good balance between having enough points of discrimination without having to maintain too many response options' (Sauro, 2010: n.p.).

Although some of the physical nuances of each object were undoubtedly lost through the use of images, this method was the safest manner in which to conduct this research. As I mentioned previously, Covid-19 was a public health concern, and viewing images of the objects also prevented damage from too much physical handling. Interpretation of the objects was eliminated, based on museologist Sandra Dudley's observation that 'In the standard emphasis on meaning, important though it is and integral to it as the object may be, the object per se often seems lost' (Dudley, 2010: 3). Participants were encouraged to ask questions, and those who did often centred their enquiries on the size or materials of an object.

All the objects selected were fashion accessories, chosen because their size allowed them to be more easily comprehended in photographs, but perhaps also in viewer's imaginations (they could imagine holding a pair of earrings in their hand, for example). Furthermore, accessories such as shoes, jewellery, and headdresses were regularly collected within cabinets of curiosities (specific examples will be described in Chapter 2, 'Publications' and 'Extant fashion objects'). I explained this before beginning this portion of the evaluation.

Participants were invited to consider the photographs of the objects for as long as they liked, alerting me when they were ready for the next slide. The final slide showed all of the objects, lettered A through G, and participants were asked to rank them in order of their curiosity about them based on the image and the information presented. Their rankings ranged

from one (I am most curious about this object) to seven (I am least curious about this object). Participants were asked to briefly explain their rankings, including how any pre-existing knowledge of an item may have affected their curiosity about it. This exercise was used to assess potential patterns in an object's power to attract viewers without extensive context, whether that attraction was based on its obscurity, unusual materials, age, or other factors.

The items selected for the object interviews were presented as follows:

Object 1

J. Smith Esquire
Top hat
Tattooed pigskin, metal
2007, England

Dimensions:
length: 30.5 cm (12 in.)
width: 28 cm (11 in.)
height: 19 cm (7.5 in.)

Object 2

Miser's purse
Striped silk knit, metallic gold yarn, cut steel beads, brass
1820-1830, USA

Dimensions:
length: 25 cm (9.8 in.)
width: 7.5 cm (3 in.)
height: 2 cm (.75 in.)

Object 3

Bustle
Wire net, cotton tape
1888, USA

Dimensions:
length: 22 cm (8.6 in.)
width (with tape): 78 cm (30.7 in.)
width (without tape) 37 cm (14.5 in.)
height: 10 cm (3.9 in.)

Object 4

Shaun Leane for Alexander McQueen
Earrings
Pheasant claws, black Tahitian pearls, silver
Autumn 2001–2002, England

Dimensions:
length: 15 cm (6 in.)
width: 4 cm (1.6 in.)
height: 5 cm (2 in.)

Object 5

Masaya Kushino
Lung-ta ('Wind Horse') shoes
Leather, Leavers lace, lacquered cypress wood, human hair
2008, Japan

Dimensions:
length (shoe): 21 cm (8.25 in.)
length: (ponytail) 89 cm (35 in.)
width: 9.5 cm (3.75 in.)
height: 27 cm (10.6 in.)

Object 6

Patch box
Hand-painted ceramic, metal
18th century, England

Dimensions:
length: 2.5 cm (1 in.)
width: 2.5 cm (1 in.)
height: 1.5 cm (.6 in.)

Object 7

B. Altman
Evening gloves
Fuchsia rayon, black jet beads, black sequins
1941, USA

Dimensions
length: 45 cm (17.7 in.)
width: 10 cm (3.9 in.)

Discussion and results

After completing the front-end evaluations, I assessed the interviews corresponding to Parsons's (1994) suggestions for the final analysis of front-end evaluation, paraphrased below:

> -Is there a gap between what we want them to know or feel about the exhibition, and what they already know or feel?
> -How receptive are they to the topic? How do they seem to feel about gaining new knowledge of or attitudes toward it?

I encouraged participants to share any knowledge or ideas they had about cabinets of curiosities, emphasising that 'all answers are good answers'. Of the twenty-nine participants, I categorised eight as having a strong knowledge of the cabinets (defined by knowing when, where, and by whom the cabinets were kept, as well as knowledge of what was collected and displayed); ten as having limited knowledge of the cabinets (this knowledge usually related more to the types of objects collected and the appearance of the cabinets than to specific, historical facts), and eleven as having no knowledge of the cabinets.

Only two participants, both in the strong knowledge category, had any awareness of fashion items being collected in the cabinets. Five of the participants I categorised as having limited knowledge equated the cabinets with the Victorian era. Participants with strong or limited knowledge of the cabinets were usually able to describe how they looked in a general sense, with shelves, drawers, and glass doors frequently mentioned. Overall, this information makes a case for including information about and imagery of the cabinets in the exhibition (I plan to include this in the introductory gallery, the details of which will be outlined in Chapter 6, 'The introductory gallery').

Participants who understood the topic reacted favourably to it; it was harder to gauge the feelings of those who did not demonstrate existing awareness of cabinets of curiosities. None of the twenty-nine participants felt that curating a fashion exhibition about the cabinets was inappropriate, even after I explained their colonialist history. In fact, most participants felt strongly that colonialism was an entirely necessary topic to address (though two warned that I should take care not to make its discussion a focus of the exhibition).

Two participants felt that mentioning colonialism within the exhibition should be avoided. The first cited that she is uninterested in the crossover between fashion and politics, and that referring to colonialism would open a 'Pandora's Box'. The second acknowledged the importance of addressing colonialism more generally but did not feel that a fashion museum was the right venue for that conversation. The reactions to this question informed my work for Chapter 4,

‘Decolonising: perspectives on collecting and curating fashion’.

The question regarding what type of objects participants tend to skip in exhibitions often led to highly specific responses—such as modern paintings and mirrors—that were not immediately relevant to this research. Two participants noted that they did not like to see taxidermy or ‘dead’ things, but only one reflected that dislike during the object interviews (which included the pig skin top hat and the Shaun Leane earrings made from pheasant claws). This small percentage of distaste for the overt use of animal products underscored that although I do not wish to censor my object selections, there may be a need to alert visitors to potentially sensitive content within the exhibition.

Eighteen participants collected things, and four of them mentioned collecting fashion (or fashion-adjacent objects, such as cosmetics compacts). Few had unusual means of displaying their objects—they were often stored or worked into their home décor using cabinets or shelves. When the participants were asked what they would put in their own cabinets, many mentioned objects from their personal collections, often combined with family heirlooms or souvenirs. This underscored the significance of attempting to include objects with which visitors might make personal connections within museum exhibitions (Falk and Dierking, 2013: 79). Later in this thesis (Chapter 5, ‘Fashion exhibitions in context’), I will explain how fashion objects seems especially well-positioned to foster such connections.

After transcribing the notes from the first few participants, I began to notice common words, many of which came up during the question about which objects pique their curiosity. The same words were sometimes repeated in the object interviews. This led to the development of a 'keywords' document that I developed throughout the course of the evaluations. For example, fifteen participants (fifty-two percent) mentioned their curiosity about objects that demonstrated a high level of craftsmanship; and fifteen people referred to interest in materials. An object's functionality was the next most common word, indicated by fourteen participants (forty-eight percent). A full list of key words and their frequency are included below and again in Appendix B; I will make further reference to some of them later in this thesis, as they support ideas for curatorial strategies such as object selection, label copy, and exhibition design.

Keyword	**Frequency**
Craftsmanship	15 (52%)
Materials/materiality	15 (52%)
Utility/functionality (questions about)	14 (48%)
Small objects	13 (45%)
Aesthetic detail	12 (41%)
Personal histories	10 (34%)
Construction/fabrication	9 (31%)
Unusual objects	8 (28%)
Never seen before	7 (24%)
Bright color	6 (21%)
Repurposed	3 (10%)
Handmade	3 (10%)
Designer/artist inspiration	3 (10%)
Sculptural	3 (10%)
Immersion	3 (10%)
Flow	3 (10%)

The object interviews provided important and unexpected insights. From an early stage in the interview process, I noticed that most participants equated the idea of 'curiosity' with 'interest'. For example, when I asked them to tell me which object most piqued their curiosity, they often responded with 'the object I am most interested in is…'. Curiosity is related to interest, and the definition of the latter term— 'an attitude characterised by a need or desire to give selective attention to something that is significant to the individual, such as an activity, goal, or research area' (American Psychological Association, 2022, 'Interest': n.p.)— corresponds well to the discussion of museum objects and exhibitions. The nuances of language that arose during these object interviews have broadened my own understanding of curiosity and its potential applications to my curatorial practice.

Object	Ranking by interest/curiosity
Masaya Kushino shoes	2.85
Miser's purse	3.73
J. Smith Esquire top hat	3.77
Patch box	4.3
Shaun Leane for McQueen earrings	4.35
Bustle	4.46
B. Altman gloves	4.54

The ranking of each object is noted in the chart above; to maintain a more concise narrative within this chapter, I have included some of the comments about each object in Appendix B. There was a clear standout as the most 'curious' object— the 'ponytail' shoes by Masaya Kushino, which received an overall score of 2.85 (note: since the number one was assigned to the most curious object, a low score is

better). The use of human hair (which frequently led to the mention of an interest in materiality), the juxtaposition of materials, and the craftsmanship of the shoes lent them a favourable rating, although they also received criticism: three participants ranked them poorly for reminding them of Lotus (bound feet) shoes or fetish footwear, which were not to their liking.

There is a considerable discrepancy in rating between the shoes and next most favourably ranked object, the miser's purse (3.73). The purse, in turn, ranked very near the top hat (3.77). These were followed by the patch box (4.3); earrings (4.35); bustle (4.46); and gloves (4.5). The functionality of the purse intrigued numerous participants, though it was frequently mistaken for a bow tie because of its shape. This recommends the inclusion of such a purse in the exhibition, but perhaps mounted and displayed in a manner that mimics how it would have been held in the hand. Although I selected this object because I assumed it would be unfamiliar to most people (and it was), I do not want it mistaken for another type of object. While the top hat's visible elements of craftsmanship (e.g., the leather whip stitching) were mentioned frequently and admiringly, several participants felt that its details (especially the bat tattoo) read more as a theatre costume than a fashion object. Nevertheless, the relatively high score of this object encouraged me to include it on my checklist.

The patch box elicited questions about its use and admiration for its small size and detail, but it was also regarded as difficult to display in a manner that would attract attention. The earrings, by Shaun Leane for Alexander McQueen, were

often considered peculiar and sometimes beautiful, but three participants mentioned that they had seen their fill of McQueen objects in recent years. The gloves received praise for their bright colour, and several respondents felt a nostalgia for the B. Altman department store where they were sold. Ultimately, however, the poorer rankings of both the gloves and the bustle were often related to their status as mass-produced objects, with the gloves in particular reading as too 'face value' and thereby less intriguing. The bustle was also regularly mistaken for a handbag or a fishing basket, based on its materials and shape, with two participants mentioning that they did not like its 'industrial' appearance.

A significant takeaway from the object interviews was the interest expressed by numerous participants in an object's materials, craftsmanship, and/or details. This information was useful in making object selections for the theoretical exhibition. It also relates directly to one of the collecting interests within historical cabinets of curiosities—the demonstration of supreme skill and virtuosity (Kenseth, 1991: 48-51), and has directly inspired an idea for the design of the exhibition, to be discussed in Chapter 6, 'The main gallery: "Craftsmanship" cabinet'.

All but one participant said they would recommend an exhibition to others; their means of doing so was overwhelmingly word-of-mouth, followed by texting photos to specific, interested parties. Social media (Facebook, Instagram) was mentioned by only four participants, playing a much smaller role than I expected. This can perhaps be correlated to the limited demographics of the participants. The average age (mean) of my participants was fifty-five; the

youngest participant was twenty-two years of age, and the oldest seventy-four.

The participants largely corresponded to the demographics from previous MFIT in-gallery questionnaires, which ascertained that the museum's visitors are largely white, female, college educated, and middle aged or older. These demographics are consistent with the means by which I recruited participants—through MFIT's e-newsletter—and it is acknowledged that this narrow group is not representative of the population as a whole. Yet I was interested in observing who was naturally attracted to assisting an MFIT curator on this project, rather than targeting participants who might widen my demographics, and I did receive valuable and varied feedback.

Another limitation of the study was the inability to share the physical objects with the participants. Objects read differently on a screen than in real life (Fischer, 2022: n.p.), and I hypothesise that certain details—such as the beaded and sequined flies on the B. Altman gloves, or the design of the miser's bag—would have been more clearly 'understood' had the participants viewed the actual objects. Although health and safety precautions due to Covid-19 prevented me from scheduling physical meetings with participants, the importance of seeing the 'real thing' will be taken into consideration for the future.

MFIT has not previously undertaken front-end research in this individualised manner; a particularly active schedule of four major exhibitions per year generally precludes that exercise. Yet I found that the information I received from these

interviews was invaluable—for example, it allowed me to understand that the history of cabinets of curiosities is not widely known. Many participants expressed their pleasure in being part of the research. Their responses were highly beneficial to shaping and/or confirming my proposed exhibition concepts. As I mentioned previously, additional, specific findings from these evaluations will be mentioned throughout the remainder of this text.

Conclusion

Although I fully acknowledge the importance of outlining my methodologies from the onset of this thesis, I am also influenced by a statement from Clough and Nutbrown, in which they emphasise that 'a "good methodology" is more a *critical design attitude* to be found always at work throughout a study, rather than confined to a chapter called "Methodology"' (Clough and Nutbrown, 2012: 39; emphasis in original). This chapter, therefore, summarises how my methodologies have formed the strategies and ideas that are applied and further explicated throughout the remainder of this text.

CHAPTER 2: CABINETS OF CURIOSITIES

This chapter foregrounds historical research on cabinets of curiosities, aiming to establish a conceptual foundation for a fashion exhibition inspired by the cabinets. The knowledge presented here has shaped many of the ideas I will reference in later chapters, including object selection and interpretation, plans for visitor engagement, and exhibition design. This portion of my research begins with an overview of the history and conceptualisation of cabinets of curiosities. It includes information on the types of objects that were collected within them, with an emphasis on fashion. I then outline some of the secondary sources on cabinets of curiosities that led to further research, including an exploration of essential primary sources.

The chapter continues with an analysis of extant catalogues, inventories, and travel journals dating from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, providing new, detailed empirical research on the collection of fashion objects. I expand upon that research with a study of extant fashion objects from cabinets of curiosities, highlighting important examples in the Ashmolean Museum in the United Kingdom, the Augsburg Art Cabinet in Sweden, and several other institutions. This historical content laid the groundwork for the last section of this chapter, in which I identify and analyse contemporary exhibitions and art installations that reference cabinets of curiosities.

Description and history

Cabinets of curiosities were primarily privately-owned, European collections dating from the late fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries. Florence Fearrington, a rare books expert who specialises in early catalogues of cabinets of curiosities, notes that cabinet collectors could generally be divided into two classes: 1) the nobility and 2) physicians, apothecaries, and students of natural history, both professional and amateur (Fearrington, 2013: 11). I was able to identify the use of the words 'collector' and 'collections' in English and Italian, as they are used today, by the early- to mid-seventeenth century (Patrizi, 1618; Tradescant, 1656).

The cabinets belonged predominantly to men, though there were some prominent female collectors[13]. According to historian Adeline Gargam, the number of female collectors is often underestimated by other scholars (Gargam, 2016: 198), paralleling the profound exclusion of women's contributions to history more generally (Salam, 2019: n.p.). As Cesare Ripa's aforementioned female personification of *Curiosità* evidences, women were advised against seeking too much knowledge. Those who were able to publicly convey their interest in learning were often wealthy and titled, which is demonstrated by my later descriptions of the collections of Margaret of Austria, Duchess of Savoy, Margaret Cavendish

[13] Prominent female collectors from the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries include Marchioness Isabella d'Este (1474-1539); Margaret of Austria, Duchess of Savoy (1480-1530); Catherine de' Medici (1519-1589); Mary Stuart, Mary Queen of Scots (1542-1587); Alethea Howard, Countess of Arundel (1585-1654); Mme Dubois-Jourdain (d. 1766); Marie-Anne Bigot de Graveron (1709-1787), Mme de la Présidente (Marchioness) de Bandeville (1709-1787); Margaret Bentinck, Duchess of Portland (1715-1785); Elizabeth Percy, Duchess of Northumberland (1716-1776); and Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, Queen Charlotte (1744-1818).

Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, and Elizabeth Percy, Duchess of Northumberland. The types of objects they collected, including fashion objects, revealed no remarkable differences from their male peers.

Although interest in collecting began to expand in Europe during the sixteenth century, author Amy Boesky observes that 'the accumulation of valued objects has a distinct history in every country and period' (Boesky, 1991: 311). Some scholars trace European practices of collecting to the medieval Catholic church, which had a history of acquiring and displaying relics and other sacred objects (Fearrington, 2013: 21)[14]. Although collections and displays of relics and other 'marvels' were prevalent during the medieval era, they functioned differently from cabinets of curiosities. Whereas churches acted as 'repositories of wealth and magical and symbolic power', cabinets of curiosities were 'microcosms, sites of study, or places where the wonders of art and nature were displayed for the enjoyment of their proprietors and the edification of scholars and amateurs' (Daston and Park, 1998: 68).

Beginning in the sixteenth century, collections were enhanced by what archaeology professor Stephanie Moser explains as 'the rediscovery of the classical world, the growth of modern

[14] The 2011 book *Collections in Context*, edited by historians Karen Fresco and Anne Hedemen, provides insights into medieval collecting practices. Art historian Charlotte Bauer writes in the book's introduction: 'the history of collecting often begins with the *Wunderkammer* […] Serious consideration of the activity or impact of collecting prior to the sixteenth century is usually neglected as scholars grapple with how to understand collections without known collectors acting as agents in the process' (Bauer, 2011: 1).

science, travel to the New World[15], the proliferation of international trade, and the rise of an art-consuming public in Europe', all of which 'contributed to the desire to possess and display objects' (Moser, 2006: 12)[16]. Historian Philipp Blom summarises these happenings, writing that 'the expansion of knowledge in the sixteenth century necessitated new responses, new approaches to new phenomena' (Blom, 2003: 20). Although relics found a place within cabinets of curiosities, they were supplemented by many other kinds of objects. Newly forged connections to parts of the Americas, Africa, and Asia offered a greater variety of natural specimens and cultural artefacts and transformed the ways in which Europeans saw the world (Impey and MacGregor, 2017 [1985]: 2). The number of objects within the cabinets varied, but the largest examples contained tens of thousands of items.

Objects within the cabinets were categorised within two broad categories: *naturalia* (natural objects) and *artificialia* (man-made artefacts). Within collections of natural objects, birds of paradise, puffer and trunk fish (which could be dried, their bodies forming rigid cases), coral, petrifications, fossils, and 'unicorn' horns (usually the tusks of narwhals) were among the most prized possessions. Favoured categories of man-made artefacts included classical antiquities, Egyptian objects, engraved gems, tools and machines, arms and armour, weapons, and clothing. Many collections also featured works of art, especially drawings and paintings (MacGregor, 2007:

[15] The New World is used to describe the Americas 'as they were considered by the Europeans after Christopher Columbus traveled there' (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022: n.p.). The term the New World appears throughout this text when used by other scholars, but I refer to this part of the globe as the Americas in my own writing.
[16] The links between global exploration and colonialism will be referenced in Chapter 4, 'Decolonising: Perspectives on Collecting and Curating'.

44–52). The objects related to fashion and adornment, primarily from non-European cultures, are the focus of my research. During the sixteenth-century, Belgian scholar Samuel Quiccheberg (2014 [1565]) implied fashion's use as a marker of history, genealogy and representation of the ceremonies and customs of diverse cultures. These concepts and Quiccheberg's seminal contribution to the history of cabinets of curiosities will be described in more detail later in this chapter.

The use of the word 'cabinet' could refer to a single, freestanding piece of furniture, an entire room, or a series of rooms. It was also used to describe the collections themselves (Bowry, 2015: 46). The word 'encyclopaedic' is often employed to express the breadth of a cabinet's holdings (Feest, 1995: 325; Evans and Marr, 2006: 169; Kuwakino, 2013: 303; Rosenberg, 2010: n.p.), but this is misleading. As historians Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park note, several early catalogues of cabinets of curiosities more accurately used the term 'microcosm' to describe their intent. They cite the cabinet of French physician Pierre Borel, which bore the inscription 'it is a microcosm or Compendium of all rare and strange things' (Daston and Park, 1998: 272). Most cabinets excluded the commonplace—whether specimens or artefacts—and were therefore not truly encyclopaedic.

Historian Krzysztof Pomian summarises the primary intentions behind the types of objects collected in cabinets of curiosities: they provided aesthetic pleasure, or they offered historic or scientific knowledge. These aims could also overlap. In addition, collections were used to convey prestige, insomuch as they offered evidence of their owners' 'good

taste, of their considerable intellectual curiosity, or even of their wealth and generosity, if not all these qualities simultaneously' (Pomian, 1990 [1987]: 10).

Cabinets of curiosities are perceived as precursors to modern museums (Hill, 1986: 148)[17], and several factors led to their evolution during the late seventeenth century. Collections from numerous cabinets were used to form public museum holdings (some examples of which will be outlined later in this chapter)[18]. This prevented the dispersal of objects after a collector's death, 'thus offering a potential guarantee to indefinite continuity and growth for collections vested in them' (Hunter, 2017 [1985]: 159). Other collections became more specialised, devoted solely to pursuits such as medicine or paintings (Fearrington, 2013: 57), and extraneous objects were dispersed among other collections. Furthermore, colonial expansion rendered some formerly 'wondrous' objects more readily available and commonplace (Olalquiaga, 2005–2006: 8). By the mid-eighteenth century, scientific advancements provided greater understanding of many objects (McClellan, 2008: 120).

[17] Some historians dispute the relationship between cabinets of curiosities and museums (Bann, 2003: 118; Lord, 2006: 148). Art historian Douglas Crimp writes that 'This late Renaissance type of collection did not *evolve* into the modern museum. Rather it was *dispersed*' (Crimp, 1993: 225; emphases in original). I argue that use of the term 'precursor' indicates that cabinets of curiosities were related to—yet distinct from—modern museums.

[18] 'Public' is a misleading term by contemporary standards. At the British Museum (founded 1753), visitors were only allowed in groups of fifteen and had to submit suitable academic or social credentials for entry (Bennett, 1995: 70). The John Tradescants allowed anyone from the public view their collections for a small fee, but such a practice was unusual (Impey and MacGregor, 2017 [1985]: 150).

Secondary sources on cabinets of curiosities

Extant catalogues and collections provide the most detailed sources of information on cabinets of curiosities, but I will first outline several secondary sources for the general context they provided to this research. *Art and Curiosity Cabinets of the Late Renaissance*, published by Julius von Schlosser in 1908, is considered by many scholars to be a seminal text for its broad look at collecting, its expansive take on the study of art history, and its role in the formation of material culture studies. Von Schlosser was an art historian and a curator at the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, which was partly founded on the cabinet of curiosities collection of Emperor Rudolf II (Bowry, 2015: 59), one of the collections he discusses in his text[19].

Von Schlosser's attention to and respect for non-European art and artefacts positioned him as somewhat of an outsider during his time (Kaufmann, 2021: 3), and his work remained one of few publications to focus on cabinets of curiosities for decades. Author Patrick Mauriès refers to von Schlosser as the modern 'reinventor' of the cabinet of curiosities, writing that he provides 'a perspective that bridges the gulf between the sixteenth century and our own' (Mauriès, 2011: 24). In a recent English translation of von Schlosser's text, art and archaeology professor Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann credits him with helping to 'initiate the discussion of what was to become museology' (Kaufmann, 2021: 2). Von Schlosser makes connections between the spaces used to house treasures in Greek temples, churches with reliquaries, and cabinets of

[19] Emperor Rudolf II's collection, now largely dispersed, did not include significant holdings of fashion; it is therefore not highlighted in this chapter.

curiosities, offering important context for the history of collecting and curiosities (von Schlosser, 2021 [1908]: 62, 64).

Additional scholarly histories of cabinets of curiosities were published regularly beginning in the late 1970s (Scheicher, 1979; Lugli, 1983; Impey and MacGregor, 2017 [1985]; Pomian, 1990 [1987]). These predate the advent of 'new museology' (Vergo, 1989), which museum educators Jill Hohenstein and Theano Moussouri describe in their book *Museum Learning* as a shift towards 'the intellectual and moral merits of visiting museums, and their social and political significance' (Hohenstein and Moussouri, 2018: 274). They may relate to the 1970 founding of the first museum studies program at the Université de Paris and the increasing standardisation of museum practices (Soares, 2019), a result of discussions and publications about the professionalisation of museum practices that began during the 1950s (Morse, Rex and Richardson, 2018: 112).

Among the late-twentieth-century texts on cabinets of curiosities, *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe* has proven particularly beneficial to this research. Edited by historians Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor, the book includes essays by international scholars whose work describes numerous major cabinets of curiosities. It was based on a week-long symposium held at the Ashmolean Museum (where Impey and MacGregor were curators) in July 1983, an event that corresponded to tercentenary celebrations of the museum's opening to the public (Impey and MacGregor, 2017 [1985]: xiii). The presentations and

their subsequent published papers covered the various forms the cabinets took (as personal collections and professional or academic endeavours that also varied by location), the types of objects collected, and their significance (Ibid.: xiv). The result is one of the most comprehensive overviews of cabinets of curiosities in print, and several of its essays are referenced throughout this text.

Although scholarly works on cabinets of curiosities have been published during the twenty-first century (Findlen and Smith, 2002; Evans and Marr, 2006; MacGregor, 2007), a greater number of recent texts tend toward the pictorial, indicating considerable interest in the cabinets' appearances (Demeulemeester, 2007; Davenne, 2011; Mauriès, 2011; Carciotto, 2020). These publications rarely mention fashion, though MacGregor significantly notes that '[a]long with clothing, the weapons of newly discovered primitive[20] peoples formed part of the currency of the collector' (MacGregor, 2007: 50–51).

Additional secondary sources that draw parallels between cabinets of curiosities and the development of fashion collections are scant. An important exception is Lou Taylor's book *Establishing Dress History* (Taylor, 2004). Taylor writes that the development of museum collections of dress had generally been disregarded—an oversight addressed by her

[20] I acknowledge the problematic nature of the term primitive to describe a group of people. As the human rights organisation Survival International explains, 'Describing tribal peoples as "primitive" suggests they are "backward" and this has real and dangerous implications for their welfare. Governments regularly exploit the false notion that Indigenous peoples are "primitive" in order to remove them from their land and open it up to outsiders, thereby freeing up access to its natural resources' (Survival International, 2024: n.p.).

publication. She relates the 'birth' of dress collections to cabinets of curiosities (Ibid.: 1) and writes that Europeans' interest in publications on dress—which featured styles of dress and adornment from around the world, in addition to European clothing worn by people from a variety of classes, ranks, and professions—'paralleled their early collections of bizarre and curious artefacts, their Cabinets of Curiosity, and their acquisition of early *Bestiaries* on curious beasts' (Ibid.: 6). She further notes that while representational illustrations of dress were being developed and disseminated, collectors were adding actual fashion objects to their holdings that paralleled the types of garments and accessories seen in print (Ibid.: 66). Taylor's writing includes brief references to several cabinets of curiosities that housed fashion objects. My research expands upon this foundational text.

Publications: treatises, catalogues, inventories, and travel journals

This portion of my research is devoted to analyses of catalogues and inventories of cabinets of curiosities, which were becoming more common during the early seventeenth century. The development of these texts was partly due to advancements in the printing and distribution of books within Europe that began during the late fifteenth century[21]. The publications were intended to highlight the status of the cabinets' owners, acting as 'effective public propaganda' (Olmi, 2017 [1985]: 13), but they were also meant for study (MacGregor, 2007: 60). Furthermore, they provided a

[21] Historians frequently cite Johannes Gutenberg as the inventor of the printing press during the fifteenth century, but the Chinese introduced a printed newspaper as early as 713 (Gunaratne, 2001: 459). Nevertheless, Gutenberg was integral to the development of printed materials in Europe during the Renaissance, which made an impact on the publications I have researched for this thesis.

structure on which other collectors based their selections of objects and they offered ideas for modes of display (I will return to modes of display and how they have influenced my own work in Chapter 6, 'Visual codes within cabinets of curiosities'). They were also used to disseminate information on the cabinets to international audiences (Fearrington, 2013: 12).

In his publication *From Wunderkammer to Museum*, antiquarian bookseller Paul Grinke describes a 'surprising uniformity' in the types of objects that historic catalogues and inventories of cabinets of curiosities listed, noting the frequent inclusion of taxidermic animals, shells and fossils, ancient coins, and garments from around the world (Grinke, 2006: 15). Today, the texts Grinke describes provide important (albeit imperfect[22]) documentation of many collections that have been dispersed, lost, or destroyed.

I begin by describing two historical treatises written on how to establish a cabinet of curiosities, both of which mention fashion. I continue with my findings of fashion objects within catalogues, inventories, and travel journals, which are ordered chronologically. My research makes a significant contribution to the study of fashion history as well as cabinets of curiosities, and it provides a sense of the ubiquity and types of fashion and (fashion-adjacent) objects documented within them. Footwear features often, corresponding to MacGregor's

[22] As MacGregor notes, 'the declared agendas of early catalogues can be deceptive if we try to use them as guides to the physical arrangement of the cabinet, for it is a commonplace that quite different strategies might be adopted in ordering the collection within the catalogue from that followed within the museum space' (MacGregor, 2007: 62).

observation that '[e]xotic[23] shoes were also much sought after, or perhaps were in particular supply, by virtue of being easily preserved and transported' (MacGregor, 2007: 51).

Treatises

Samuel Quiccheberg

The framework for many cabinets of curiosities and their corresponding catalogues was provided by Quiccheberg's 1565 publication *Inscriptiones*. It was written as a treatise on how to build a cabinet and it is the earliest known text of its kind. Although Quiccheberg's description of a cabinet is strictly hypothetical, *Inscriptiones* represents a lifetime of research and study on the part of its author, and it 'provides us with significant information on the intellectual ambience of the period' (Kuwakino, 2013: 304). *Inscriptiones* is of particular significance for its references to fashion and its elucidation of fashion's role within cabinets of curiosities[24].

Quiccheberg's idealised collection includes 'foreign garb' from 'Indians[25], Arabs, Turks, and the more exotic peoples'.

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[23] The term 'exotic' is problematic. It can refer to something that is rare or different, but also to 'otherness' and the objectification of marginalised cultures. This word will appear throughout this text in reference to fashion and other types of objects and is explored more fully in Chapter 4, 'Exoticising global fashion and cultural appropriation'.

[24] The historians Mark A. Meadow and Bruce Robertson published a translation of *Inscriptiones* (originally in Latin) and an analysis of the text in 2014, making it accessible to a wider audience.

[25] The term 'Indian' was used indiscriminately to describe fashion and other objects within cabinets of curiosities, often in reference to items from the Americas and Asia (Skelton, 2017 [1985]: 274). The use of the term in quotation marks throughout this text highlights this imprecision. Art historian Daniela Bleichmar identifies 'four practices of geographical and cultural indeterminacy' in relation to non-European objects within the cabinets: empty attribution (characterised by vagueness); misattribution; unstable (mutable) attribution; and complete lack of attribution (Bleichmar, 2021: 436).

The origins of the word garb can be traced to the Middle French word *garbe* (gracefulness, comeliness) or the Middle Italian *garbo* (grace, elegance) (Merriam-Webster, 2021: n.p.), indicating esteem for such clothing. Examples include clothing made from parrot feathers and 'diversely sewn leather' (Quiccheberg, 2014 [1565]: 108), the latter possibly describing patchwork garments made from hides dyed in multiple colours. Other references to fashion include the collection of garments worn by historically and/or politically significant people, such as an emperor's military cloak or 'priestly garb of some kind', in addition to a variety of other adornments (including necklaces, girdles and hats) deserving of preservation 'because of some gratifying memory' (Ibid.: 69).

Furthermore, Quiccheberg bestows attention upon dolls dressed in replicas of historic court dress and the fashions of non-European cultures. As historian Mark A. Meadow explains, interest in these dolls negates any notion that collectors cared little about the cultures tied to the objects they acquired (Meadow, 2014: 16). In fact, Quiccheberg writes that the figures, which often wore ensembles appropriate for varying seasons, festivities, and rites of passage, were of particular interest to female nobles so they could 'examine the foreign garments of distant peoples in fine detail. And sometimes the very customs of peoples present themselves for observation' (Ibid.). Quiccheberg further notes that some dolls wore the fashions of the noblewomen who collected them[26], thus preserving a record of their own attire

[26] There is evidence that Isabella d'Este (1474-1539), Catherine de' Medici (1519-1589) and Mary Queen of Scots (1542-1587) owned such dolls (Pearce, 2019).

(Quiccheberg, 2014 [1565]: 85)[27]. There is no hierarchy of objects in Quiccheberg's work, meaning that fashion items were viewed in equal standing with all other suggested acquisitions.

Leonhard Christoph Sturm

A 1707 treatise written by German architect and mathematics professor Leonhard Christoph Sturm, though less frequently referenced than Quiccheberg's, is also noteworthy for its inclusion of fashion (Sturm, 1707; explicated in Feest, 1995). In writing about this publication, ethnographer Christian F. Feest specifically mentions fashion objects, which can be matched to one of the book's engravings (fig. 2.1).

Fig. 2.1

Objects illustrated in Sturm, 1707: plate iv, *Der Geöffneten Ritter-Platzes (Dritter Theil).* These include numerous fashion objects, perceived by Sturm to be essential to a collection. Their stylised representation underscores that Sturm's work was theoretical: his discussion of objects was based on general types (e.g., a Brazilian feather crown and skirt), rather than specific examples. Public domain.

[27] Further mentions of dress by Quiccheberg in *Inscriptiones* relate to my research on the significance of miniatures and interest in clothing worn by notable persons. They are outlined in Chapter 5, 'Appearances Can Be Deceiving: The Dresses of Frida Kahlo'.

Within Sturm's 'ideal cabinet', it is suggested that dress be situated within a collecting category of foreign rarities. These objects include:

> [A] Brazilian feather crown and feather skirt, a Floridian feather crown, and a Mexican women's skirt, next to Cairene women's shoes, Egyptian women's shoes and bonnet, an Ethiopian sun shade, a Chinese Mandarin hat, a Japanese sun shade and women's bonnet, Japanese seals and writing implements, a Muscovite hat and whip, and a Laplander's skis (Feest, 1995: 336)[28].

It is unknown how influential Sturm's text was to collectors, and it post-dated the publication of catalogues about numerous important collections. Nonetheless, the engraving underscores the significance of fashion objects within cabinets of curiosities, even if these were once again presented as part of a hypothetical collection.

Catalogues, inventories, and travel journals

Actual collections were best represented by catalogues or inventories, and they were sometimes accompanied by engravings depicting the spaces and collections they detailed. Although I will reference several of these images, it is critical to note that they are not necessarily reliable sources; the imagery does not always align with the text that described it (MacGregor, 2007: 62). Nonetheless, I consider these images to be significant. As Moser argues, they 'provide an important source of information on the style and manner of display and on the general display conventions that were being adopted at

[28] Numerous secondary sources reference geographical regions as they were known at the time the cabinets were assembled. In this instance, 'Muscovite' refers to a person from Moscow, and Lapland refers to present-day Finland.

the time' (Moser, 2006: 15), and they offer an understanding of what collectors wished their spaces to be. These have also informed some of my ideas for exhibition design, which will be presented in Chapter 6.

Margaret of Austria, Duchess of Savoy

The earliest known cabinet that is pertinent to my research on fashion was owned by Margaret of Austria, Duchess of Savoy (1480–1530). The Duchess was part of the first generation of Europeans with knowledge of the Americas, and she was the Spanish Infanta during Columbus's voyages (MacDonald, 2002: 651). She was, therefore, one of the first collectors of objects from the Americas. The items she acquired reflected the excitement of the 'Age of Exploration'[29] but art historian Deanna MacDonald explains that during Margaret's lifetime, 'European attitudes towards the New World had changed from wonder, with a focus on trade and diplomacy, to imperialism, with paternalistic views of domination and subjection'. The first known inventory of her possessions dates to 1516. The perception of the objects as treasures and the considered ways in which they were shown characterise this collection as a prototypical example of a cabinet of curiosities (Ibid.: 662).

The 1516 inventory of the Duchess's objects lists cloth and 'a pair of ladies' shoes from the Indies'. Her holdings were later expanded with several important acquisitions given to her by her nephew Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor and Archduke of Austria. These were part of a group of objects presented to

[29] This time period, also referred to as the 'Age of Discovery', is used to describe European exploration and conquests largely centred in the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Australia from the second half of the fifteenth century through the mid-sixteenth century.

Charles V by the explorer Hernando Cortés, which were likely gifted to Charles V to curry favour (Vandenbroeck, 1992: 99). The items that Cortés obtained were important enough to merit their exhibition in Brussels, as well as Toledo and Valladolid, Spain. Charles V later culled the collection and retained only the objects with significant monetary value, sending a substantial number of ancillary items to the Duchess in 1523 (MacDonald, 2002: 654).

The Duchess's new acquisitions may have warranted the publication of a second catalogue, prepared between 1523 and 1524 (Michelant, 1871 [1523]). The newly added items include Aztec ceremonial costumes (used to impersonate four Aztec gods) that Emperor Montezuma had provided to Cortés. The costumes included silver leg guards and sandals. Other fashion-related objects from the Americas included twelve garments for men and women sewn with fur, feathers, and gold; more leg guards embellished with precious materials; seven elaborate headdresses; four feather fans; and three bracelets. In her study of this second inventory, MacDonald also notes the existence of an impressively embellished chasuble intended for the Pope. This was likely Pope Adrian V, who died in 1523 and therefore never received this 'exceptional' object (MacDonald, 2002: 658).

Cosimo I de' Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany

Many inventories or catalogues of collections made only brief references to objects—fashion and otherwise. The origins of the items are sometimes unknown or, even when mentioned, confounding. Historian Adriana Turpin's analyses of inventories of the collections of Cosimo I de' Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany (1519–1574), the first of which dated to

1539, revealed two feather gowns and three robes that were not further detailed; these existed in addition to four 'Moorish' feather-covered breast plates and six 'Indian' costumes of black cloth. There were also numerous Aztec feather costumes that were so unusual or valuable that they were listed under their own category. By 1533, four 'Indian' feather capes had been added to the collection. Turpin's research demonstrates that the same objects were categorised differently over the course of the sixteenth century. The Aztec garments, for example, had been moved to a more general 'historical objects' category by the 1560s. Turpin attributes this apparent demotion to their loss of novelty nearly thirty years after their acquisition (Turpin, 2006: 75)—an interesting observation on the potential for objects to shift in status within their cabinets.

Antonio Giganti and Ulisse Aldrovandi

Historian Laura Laurencich-Minelli outlines the connections between the cabinets of two prominent Bolognese collectors, scholar Antonio Giganti (1535-1598) and botanist and zoologist Ulisse Aldrovandi (1522-1605). Giganti's collection, inventoried in 1586, is notable for the 'exceptional nature' of several items from the Americas, which included a pre-Columbian map, two parts of a pre-Columbian codex and, most important to this research, two feathered headdresses (Laurencich-Minelli, 2017: 17). Giganti maintained a close relationship with Aldrovandi. Their collections were housed within the same group of buildings, and Aldrovandi wrote about significant items in Giganti's collection.

These include a ‘Floridian’ headdress made from red feathers—perhaps depicted in Aldrovandi’s late-sixteenth-century engraving ‘Wild Man of the New World’. It appears that the two men also exchanged items; Laurencich-Minelli conjectures that a yellow feathered headdress Aldrovandi used to illustrate ‘Regina Insulae Floridae’ (Queen of the Island of Florida)[30] is another example collected by Giganti (figs. 2.2 and 2.3). It is probable that Giganti gave or sold the headdresses to Aldrovandi during the late sixteenth century (Ibid.: 20-21). Furthermore, Feest speculates they were from Brazil rather than Florida, underscoring the need to approach catalogue entries with a degree of scepticism, as items are not always accurately described (Feest, 1995: 340).

Fig. 2.2 and fig. 2.3

‘Wild Man of the New World’ (left) and 'Regina Insulae Floridae' wearing feather wigs, in Aldrovandi (1599), *Ornithologiae*. These images provide a sense of how fashion objects in cabinets of curiosities were viewed as a means to learn about non-European cultures. Public domain.

[30] This image and that of ‘Wild Man of the New World’ are printed on adjacent pages in Aldrovandi’s 1599 publication *Orinthologiae*, as part of a chapter about parrots.

Thomas Platter

In addition to catalogues, travel diaries sometimes included descriptions of visits to important cabinets. One of the most notable examples was written by the Swiss physician Thomas Platter (1574–1628), who saw the well-known collection of Sir Walter Cope (1553–1614) in London in 1599. Platter made a list of fifty of the most intriguing objects he witnessed; importantly, eleven of them fall under the category of fashion and adornment. These include a 'curious' Javanese costume, a felt cloak from Arabia, a 'handsome' Chinese cap made from goosefoots, and 'shoes from many strange lands' (Platter, 1937 [1599]: 172–173).

Lodovico Moscardo

A 1656 catalogue documents the collection of the Veronese nobleman Lodovico Moscardo (1611–1681). In his analysis of the collection, museologist Giuseppe Olmi writes that 'Amongst all the seventeenth-century collections, Moscardo's is definitely the most encyclopaedic and the most confused. It contains antiques, mummies, paintings, clocks, musical instruments and natural products' (Olmi, 2017 [1983]: 14). It also includes 'Indian' shoes that were considered important enough to merit an illustration (fig. 2.4). Although this book features an unusually high number of images (115 in a 348-page catalogue), most of them are devoted to coins, sculpture, and natural history objects. The shoes are the only ethnographic objects represented by an image.

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ri virtuoſi, che meritò eſſer honorato, e ricompenſato da quello. Teſtimonij reſtano delle ſue rare virtù le marauiglioſe opere, che tutt'hora vediamo nel coro del Monte Oliueto di Chiuſuri: in quello di San Benedetto di Siena, nella Sagreſtia del Monte Oliueto di Napoli, in quella di Santa Maria in Organo di Verona, & in due Tauole di Proſpettiue, che nel Muſeo ſi trouano: onde meritò, che non ſolamente dalla ſua Religione foſſe honorato, ma da qualunque ſtrettua il ſuo nome, la doue il Vaſari, mentre diſcorre di quello nelle vite de Pittori, gli dà nome di gran Maſtro di Commeſſi. Viſſe nel tempo di Rafael d'Vrbino, e morì l'anno MDXXXVII. nell'età d'anni LXVIII.

SCARPE DELL'INDIANI, CAP. CLXXIII.

AVanti, che dal Colombo foſſero ſcoperte l'Indie, alcuni di quei popoli andauano ſcoperti in tutte le parti; altri vſauano di veſtire, e portare ſcarpe fatte di alcune ſcorze d'alberi, come dice Aleſſandro da Aleſsandri, altri le faceuano della pelle del Peſce Tonina, accomodando quella con il ſuo proprio graſſo, come narra Giouanni Boe-

Fig. 2.4

'Indian' shoes in the collection of Lodovico Moscardo, 1656. Shoes were prevalent within cabinets of curiosities, as they were easy to transport and display. The depiction of this shoe's upper and sole seems designed to highlight its delicate construction. Public domain.

Moscardo's catalogue is notably narrative rather than purely descriptive. In the instance of these shoes, he references earlier styles made from tree bark worn by Andean peoples, information he attributes to the Neapolitan scholar Alessandro Alessandri (1461–1523). Moscardo further writes about shoes made from the skin of Tonina fish. He also cites the work of Giovanni Boemo, likely the co-author of the 1585 publication *I Costumi, le Leggi, et l'Usanze di Tutte le Genti: Divisi in Tre Libri*[31] with Aubano Alemano. Moscardo goes on to say that advancements in design resulted in shoes such as those in his collection, whose craftsmanship surpassed that which 'any diligent Italian' was capable of creating (Moscardo,

[31] *Costumi* translates to both 'costumes' and 'customs' (or 'manners'). *Usanze* can mean both 'customs' and 'fashion' (as in the 'fashion for'). Although Boemo and Alemano reference dress in their text, it is infrequent, and it therefore seems unlikely that 'costumes' is the correct translation.

1656: 304). Although the text lacks information about the exact origin of the shoes and their materials, his respect for their quality is noteworthy.

Lodovico Settala

Milanese physician Lodovico Settala (1550–1633) founded a cabinet that was expanded upon by his son Manfredo (1600–1680). A 1666 catalogue of the collection, written by Paolo Maria Terzago, categorises fashion objects within a section devoted to various artefacts from India and other counties. Descriptions of fashion include Peruvian mantles made from tree bark; mantles from East India made from fine cotton wool 'as light as feathers'; Turkish shoes (which include a note stating that Turkish shoes are very different from Indian shoes); Polish high-heeled shoes (possibly chopines); shoes attributed to Spain, which were seemingly designed as drinking vessels; and two pairs of shoes from Moscow, one with very high heels (Terzago, 1666: 242–243).

At least two catalogues featuring Settala's collection include an etching by Cesare Fiori, showing a vast space in which objects were suspended from the ceiling, hung on the walls, and housed within glass-fronted cabinets. The top right corner of the image may depict an object that is likely a Brazilian feathered cape now in the collection of the Pinoteca Ambrosiana, Milan (fig. 2.5). Yet historians Antonio Aimi, Vincenzo de Michele, and Alessandro Morandotti warn that this engraving did not follow the classifications of the catalogue, and 'should be regarded as a stylized arrangement rather than a realistic depiction of the disposition of the objects' (Aimi, Michele and Morandotti, 2017 [1985]: 27).

Fig. 2.5

An engraving by Cesare Fiori of Manfredo Settala's cabinet, featuring what appears to be a feathered garment in the top right corner. The use of perspective in this image allows the cabinet to appear particularly vast and densely populated. From Paolo Maria Terzago (1664), *Musaeum Septalianum: Manfredi Septalae.* Public domain.

Marchese Ferdinando Cospi

Lorenzo Legati's publication on the collection of Marchese Ferdinando Cospi (1606–1686), known as the Museo Cospiano, features a Greenlandic hooded garment made from sealskin, which is accompanied by an illustration (Legati, 1677: 297). It also includes significant entries on shoes. These include two Turkish wooden shoes that were used as drinking vessels; Moroccan shoes made from yellow leather and lined with red leather; 'Indian' leather clogs, Turkish slippers in red leather with a pointed toe, manufactured 'in such a way that the seam cannot be seen from the outside'; a narrow, pointed Ethiopian shoe; and Italian chopines made of white leather from Montone (Ibid.: 288–301).

These objects appear to be like those housed in other collections, but the ways in which some of the shoes were documented is remarkable. When writing about the construction of a pair of Indian black leather slippers, Legati compares them to the example illustrated in Moscardo's

catalogue—and he includes a citation to that publication (Legati, 1667: 300). This provides direct evidence that collectors were referencing and learning from each other's collections. There is a similar occurrence in an entry about a pair of Indian clogs. Their high quality is correlated to a passage written about Indian shoes in the Museo Calceolari (the collection of Veronese apothecary Francesco Calceolari, 1522–1609), about which Benedetto Ceruti and Andrea Chioco published a catalogue in 1622 (Ceruti and Chioco, 1622: 714).

Levinus Vincent

The cabinet owned by Levinus Vincent (1658–1727), based in Amsterdam, contained a large collection of natural specimens, porcelain, lacquerware, coins, archaeological finds from the Netherlands, prints and drawings, and ethnographic objects (Vincent, 1706; Stafford and Terpak, 2001: 149–150). The latter included fashion objects from the Americas, such as a wampum belt that is featured alongside several other items of dress in a 1706 engraving of the collection (fig. 2.6). Although the objects themselves were impressive, their display, the ways they were experienced, and their subsequent depictions in engravings are of particular interest.

Fig. 2.6

One of the engravings depicting Levinus Vincent's cabinet of curiosities, featuring objects from the Americas such as a wampum belt (lower middle), a beaded bag, and a feather belt. The objects shown 'strewn about' in this image emphasise the cabinet's function as a place to explore and learn. In Vincent, *Wondertooneel der nature* (1706). Public domain.

Vincent was a wealthy textile merchant and designer whose religious fervour prompted him to collect what he perceived as God's creations and share them with others. Unusually, he opened his cabinet to a broad public that included lower-class Dutch families (Stafford and Terpak, 2001: 150). Of note is the display of his large collection of insects, which converged with fashionable textiles. Vincent's wife, Johanna van Breda, meticulously arranged the insects in orderly patterns and stitched them onto a silk backing, using a needle and thread that was garnished with bits of coral. The results were meant to resemble embroideries (van de Roemer, 2004: 57). The engravings featured in the 1706 catalogue of Vincent's collections provide a sense of the quantity,

orderliness, and symmetry of their display that may have been true to life.

In her work on the exhibition of natural specimens during the eighteenth century, historian Emma Spary notes that symmetrical arrangements became common during the last decade of the seventeenth century, particularly among Dutch and French collectors, and that their appearance was linked to tastefulness and the display of luxury (Spary, 2004: 6). In his analysis of the travel diary of the German scholar Zacharias Conrad von Uffenbach, cultural studies professor Bert van de Roemer writes that upon his visit to Vincent's cabinet, von Uffenbach 'wondered what was cause for more astonishment, the objects themselves or the novel manner of their presentation' (van de Roemer, 2014: n.p.)[32].

Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland

The collection of Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, United Kingdom (1715–1785) was captured in a 1786 auction catalogue following her death. Organised by the naturalist John Lightfoot, the catalogue features more than 4,000 objects. Despite Bentinck's overarching interest in natural specimens—particularly shells, rare plants, and animals (Tobin, 2016: 219)—the collection includes numerous fashion objects, including a lady's head dress and slippers from China and several wampum belts from North America. Many of the fashion related items came from the 'Sandwich

[32] I have relied on van der Roemer's translation and analysis of this text, which was published in German and nearly 900 pages, rather than endeavouring to make my own translation.

Islands'[33], also referred to 'O-why-ee!' (or Owhyhee, an early spelling of Hawaii). These objects include necklaces and ornaments made of shells, bones, seeds and grass; two 'elegant' feather ruffs; a 'curious' helmet-shaped cap; and two 'beautiful' feather cloaks (Lightfoot, 2018 [1786]: 58-59).

Bentinck's collection was extraordinary, but not solely because of its female proprietor. As historian and English professor Beth Fowkes Tobin explains, 'Her personal wealth and high social rank exempted her from the kinds of critiques that were lodged at women who took an interest in natural history collecting'[34] (Tobin, 2016: 221). Furthermore, the concept of a female collector had become less rare by the late eighteenth century (Dietz and Nutz, 2005: 64). Rather, it seems to be the breadth of objects and the depth of knowledge that Bentinck possessed that made her collection so famous. An example of her expansive interest in learning is exemplified within the catalogue; it contains silk objects from China in addition to a Chinese book about how to order silkworms and manufacture silk (Ibid.: 58). Bentinck is also important to this research because her collection inspired a 2009-2010 installation organised by the artist Jane Wildgoose at the Yale Center for British Art, to be outlined later in this chapter.

[33] This was the name given to the islands by Captain John Cook upon his encounter with them in 1778; they were named in honour of Cook's friend John Montagu, the 4th earl of Sandwich.
[34] Tobin explains in a 2009 essay that 'Women have often been characterized as accumulators since proper collecting involves organization, system, and arrangement, cognitive capabilities sometimes thought to be beyond women's abilities' (Tobin, 2006: 249). In fact, Bentinck was skilled at Linnaean taxonomy.

Elizabeth Percy, Duchess of Northumberland

The Duchess maintained a friendship with another prominent female collector, Elizabeth Percy, the Duchess of Northumberland, United Kingdom (1716–1776). Percy's collecting and organisational practices were likely informed by those of the British Museum, where her husband, Hugh Smithson, served on the museum's first board of trustees—a position left to him in 1753 in accordance with the will of the museum's founder, Sir Hans Sloane (Aymonino, 2021: 104). Art historian Adriano Aymonino's archival research within the nine-volume *Musaeum Catalogue*, organised by Percy in the 1770s[35], reveals the existence of fashion items in volume IV, 'Arms, Habits, Utensils, Ornaments, Curiosities of Different Nations'. However, these have largely gone missing over time (Ibid.: 116).

Percy maintained a group of 'many costumes of European religious orders' that were stored in a large glass and mahogany case (Aymonino, 2012: 111). Other fashion objects of note are listed in Volume VI of the catalogue, 'Artificialia'. These include gloves that were purportedly worn by Queen Elizabeth I and a cap made from the hair of Mary Queen of Scots, both of which were purchased from the collector and antiquary Ebenezer Mussel in 1765 (Ibid.). The catalogue further lists 'The Coronation gloves of King Edward ye 6th' and Oliver Cromwell's nightcap, both of which, alongside Queen Elizabeth I's gloves, remain at Alnwick Castle (fig. 2.7) (Ibid.: 120–121).

[35] This unpublished catalogue is housed within the Archives of the Duke of Northumberland, Alnwick Castle.

Fig. 2.7

These are believed to be Queen Elizabeth I's gloves, sixteenth century, collection of the Duke of Northumberland, Alnwick Castle. Objects worn by famous figures are often of interest not only for their provenance, but also for their craftsmanship. Photograph © Alnwick Castle

Extant fashion objects from cabinets of curiosities

Many early cabinets of curiosities were subject to later dispersal or destruction, meaning that examples left intact are unusual (Bowry, 2015: 24). Here, I begin by presenting research on four collections that are largely extant and housed in their original cabinets. I continue with descriptions of surviving fashions from cabinets of curiosities that later became incorporated into museum collections. Within these two categories, I have organised my discussion of the collections in chronological order.

These findings have proven interesting for several reasons. They provide a sense of what some of these objects really looked like—in particular, they highlight their quality of craftmanship. This is a subject that, as I will explain later in this thesis, remains important to contemporary visitors to fashion exhibitions. Furthermore, many of the fashions included in the cabinets, both global and European, were fairly contemporaneous to the date of the cabinet itself. This

reminded me of the prevailing interest in modern and contemporary fashion that I have often witnessed in my encounters with visitors to The Museum at FIT. Finally, the inclusion of fashions that were collected from locations recently discovered by Europeans can perhaps be linked to the twenty-first-century fashion media's persistent interest in finding the 'next big thing'—a designer or an idea that stands out from the commonplace.

Extant cabinets and their collections

Ambras Castle

During the 1570s, Archduke Ferdinand II of Austria (1529–1595) purpose-built a space for his collections at Ambras Castle (Schloss Ambras) in Innsbruck, Austria. The 'lower castle' comprised four rooms—three of which housed his extensive collection of armour, and the fourth his other rarities (Scheicher, 2017 [1985]: 29). The collection is displayed in its original space[36]. It includes a combination of family heirlooms, such as objects made from silver, and objects like clocks, which were among Ferdinand's personal preferences [Ibid.: 36].

Ferdinand demonstrated a clear logic in the way he organised his objects. The silver was housed together in one case, and he categorised another case by 'objects made from feathers', which included Aztec artefacts juxtaposed with birds of paradise (Demeulemeester, 2007: 4). This 'Chamber of Art

[36] This space has, of course, been renovated since its initial conception. Knowledge of the objects and their arrangement was gleaned from inventories published in 1596 and 1611 (Scheicher, 2017 [1985]: 32).

and Wonders' retains fashion objects from the founding collection. Known objects include a Malaysian palm leaf fan from the second half of the sixteenth century; two similar pairs of chopines from Milan or Spain, circa 1540; an Indo-Portuguese cape from the mid-sixteenth century made from silk and cotton; an Ottoman turban from the second half of the sixteenth century; an 'Indian' fan (undated); an unidentified silk and linen tunic; and a particularly intricate 'chainmail' necklace made in Innsbruck between 1570 and 1591, crafted from tiny links of glass. These objects can now be found in the Schloss Ambras's online database.

Augsburg Art Cabinet

Within the small group of documented extant cabinets, the Augsburg Art Cabinet, currently housed at Sweden's Uppsala University Museum, is a particular rarity. It is the only known standalone cabinet that retains most of its original objects, numbering more than 1,000. The Uppsala University Museum emphasises the cabinet's completeness, but historian and museologist Stephanie Bowry notes that while is it largely intact, there are 'some damaged and missing parts and objects, and some later additions to its collection' (Bowry, 2020: 127). The imposing structure stands 240 cm high and 120 cm wide, and it is extensively veneered in ebony. It is topped with a 'mountain' crafted from animal and mineral specimens that celebrate the artistry of nature, the crown of which is a Seychelles nut transformed into a drinking vessel by an encasement of gilded silver (Gustavianum, 2022).

The cabinet was presented to Swedish king Gustavus Adolphus (Gustav II Adolf) in 1632, after he and the Swedish

army occupied Augsburg, Germany. Augsburg was a Protestant city, and Gustavus was 'welcomed as a liberator' (Uppsala Universitet, 2021: n.p.). The city was a centre for skilled handicraft, and the cabinet necessitated the work of thirty artisans for six years, irrespective of the many impressive objects it contains. The creation of the cabinet was designed (though not crafted) by the diplomat and merchant Philipp Hainhofer, who had it made to house specific objects from his large collection. As Bowry observes, 'the cabinet is both its own container and object' (Bowry, 2015: 126).

Inside the cabinet, 'the very best of contemporary artistic skill and technological knowledge lay alongside rarities from exotic countries[37] and useful everyday objects' (Uppsala Universitet, 2021: n.p.). Minerals, shells, fossils, taxidermy animals, scientific instruments, miniature paintings, medals, books, musical instruments, games and numerous other specimens and artefacts, including items of fashion, comprised its holdings. All the objects were concealed beneath the cabinet's exterior, neatly organised within drawers and behind panels. When I visited this museum in June 2019, the cabinet and eighty-two of its objects were on display[38]. Although each object was identified, its particular purpose within the cabinet, if known, was not elaborated upon. Overall, Hainhofer's aim was to include objects that demonstrated how 'Art and Nature play with one another' (Boström, 2004 [1985]: 551), a concept that could be created

[37] The video from which this phrase was cited did not clarify what they meant by 'exotic', but they were from non-European locations such as China, Turkey, and West Africa.
[38] The museum subsequently closed for renovation on 29 September 2019.

through juxtaposition and through hybrid objects, such as the Seychelles nut-cum-drinking vessel.

The fashion-related objects on view included a Turkish bag made from red velvet with embroidery in gold and silver; a German, black leather shoe with a severely upturned toe; spectacles with gilded silver frames; spectacles from glass, leather, and silver; German gloves made from hide; pontifical gloves in ivory silk with gold and silver threads from Italy; and a German copper ring with enamel paintings of scenes from Golgotha. It also contained a pair of 'illusion' gloves, which looked conventional but did not have an opening—a type of object that was intended to vex visitors (Blom, 2003: 36). All items dated to the early seventeenth century. A complete inventory of this collection is not available[39].

John Bargrave (Canterbury Cathedral)

Librarian, traveller, and collector John Bargrave (1610-1680) was also a canon at Canterbury Cathedral, United Kingdom, where his collection remains. Despite its rarity as an extant collection, it was little studied until the 1980s, primarily because it was, according to art historian Stephen Bann, unexceptional in its contents (Bann, 1994: 4). Yet even within this seemingly unremarkable seventeenth-century collection, there are fashion objects. The study of an online inventory of Bargrave's holdings revealed several examples of jewellery; a

[39] The museum does not have an inventory of the contents of the Augsburg Cabinet, though an email from curator Greger Sundin on 7 February 2022 informed me that is it a work in progress.

‘blue and yellow knit purse full of High German money’; a macramé drawstring purse; and ‘gloves in walnuts’[40].

Most striking within Bargrave’s collection of fashion objects—and perhaps to his collection overall—was the inclusion of a neck piece, sash, and bracelets made from porcupine quills (attributed by Bargrave to the ‘West Indies’ but likely produced by the Cree tribe of present-day western Canada). Bargrave describes these objects in his collection catalogue, explaining that they had been given to him by a merchant named Tymothy Couley—an Englishman who had been held captive in Algiers (Bargrave, 1867 [1676]: 137). Following his promotion to canon at Canterbury Cathedral, Bargrave and an Archdeacon, John Selleck, had succeeded in a mission on behalf of the Church of England to free Couley and 161 other captives, offering the sum of 10,000 pounds to the Dey of Algiers (Bann, 1994: 127). The interest in collecting objects from the Americas has already been made evident, and these fashions must have also held sentimental value for Bargrave.

The Francke Foundations

The Francke Foundations in Halle, Germany preserves a cabinet of curiosities assembled by clergyman and scholar August Hermann Francke (1663-1727) beginning in 1698. This collection is remarkable in that it was founded solely for scholastic purposes—Francke had built an orphanage and was keenly interested in educating impoverished local children

[40] This is likely an example of what became known as ‘Limerick’ gloves during eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Originally produced in Limerick, Ireland, the exceptional fineness of the gloves was demonstrated by folding them and presenting them in two halves of a walnut shell (Foley, 2015).

(Carciotto, 2020: 106). Following Francke's death, the objects were arranged by type and housed in cabinets specially designed and painted by Gottfried August Gründler (1710–1775) with friezes that demonstrated their groupings. The collection expanded over the course of the eighteenth century. As art historian Anja-Silvia Goeing notes, acquisitions to the cabinet 'were usually part of negotiations between Francke and his successors and personally known sponsors, often parents, who had sent their children to school in Halle, or colleagues at other institutions' (Goeing, 2018: n.p.). Today, this is 'perhaps the most complete survival of a cabinet of curiosities' (Mauriès, 2011: 25). It is on view (following a restoration during the 1990s) in the former dormitory of the Francke Foundations orphanage.

Fig. 2.8

Mid-eighteenth-century cabinet of dress designed and painted by Gottfried August Gründler at the Francke Foundations in Halle, Germany. The cabinet contains an array of shoes, hats, and dolls; it is unknown if the current, jumbled look of this display is similar to the original. Additional fashion objects, such as fans, are housed in other cabinets. Photograph © Massimo Listri

Within this collection, cabinet XIV is entirely devoted to fashion, as indicated by the frieze painting of what is likely meant to portray a headdress, shirt, and boots from the Ottoman Empire (present-day Turkey) (fig. 2.8). The contents are primarily shoes, with some additional identifiable examples from the Ottoman Empire and China, as well as dolls and puppets dressed in fashions recognisable from the Kingdom of Hungary, India, and the Ottoman Empire. Goeing highlights a specific acquisition:

> In 1741, Andreas Wedel enrolled as a student in the Latin school of the Francke Foundations. He brought with him a gift to the cabinet that his father had manufactured during his office as a pastor at the German North Frisian Island Amrum. It consisted of puppets sculpted from live models that were dressed in ceremonial clothes from the North Frisian Islands Sylt and Föhr. Four of his puppets are still in their original place at closet XIV (Goeing, 2018: n.p.).

Despite the existence of a cabinet devoted to clothing, it did not house all of the collection's fashion objects. For example, cabinet XI, which contains objects from India, includes a leather shoe and a painted fan. Nevertheless, the existence of a cabinet centred on fashion underscores its significance as a tool to teach about other cultures.

Dispersed fashion objects and founding museum collections

The Museum Ulm

The Museum Ulm in Ulm, Germany is a modern institution—it opened in 1925 as a descendant of the city's Museum of Applied Arts, founded in 1882. Despite its more recent

history, the museum houses approximately eighty important artefacts from the cabinet of curiosities of Christoph Weickmann (1617–1681), a merchant, cultivator of several hundred species of tulips, and telescope designer. Although Weickmann's collection of taxidermic animals, shells, and other natural specimens were dispersed or destroyed, some of his collection of 'foreign art and curiosities' survives in Ulm (Taylor, 2004: 68).

These artefacts include two indigo-dyed cotton robes acquired in Allada (located in what is now the Republic of Benin, West Africa). Both are men's, dating to before 1659. They are particularly significant as two of the oldest-surviving intact garments from sub-Saharan Africa (Jones, 1994: 35) and 'must be included amongst the most precious of surviving West African garments in museum collections' (Taylor, 2004: 69). They are featured in Weickmann's 1659 catalogue of his collection, entitled *Exoticophylacium Weickmannianum*, the long subtitle of which included a reference to 'curious clothes' (Weickmann, 1659). Other African fashions from Weickmann's collection housed at the Museum Ulm include intricately carved ivory bracelets, a comb case made from red straw, and a straw shoulder bag, the latter of which African Studies scholar Adam Jones notes as an unusual example based on its large size and fine texture (Jones, 1994: 39).

Jones further explains that the collection of artefacts 'made in Africa for African use' was not prevalent until the seventeenth century, and that Weickmann's artefacts were some of the most substantial among these (Ibid.: 28). Although the indigo robes are significant for their rarity and age, they also

underscore the complexities and ambiguities that surround some of the items collected within cabinets of curiosities. In her writing on the robes, historian Colleen E. Kriger writes that they were acquired in Allada in the 1650s by a German man named Haintzel, but further details are unknown. Although one of the robes is described as a king's garment in Weickmann's catalogue, it is unclear which example is being referred to, or from where that information originated (Kriger, 2006: 135). Neither robe shows evidence of wear. Kriger notes that 'gift exchange between European traders and local officials was an important key to commercial relations', further explaining that:

> It is quite possible that these robes once belonged to the rich collections of textiles and other goods—foreign and locally made—that accumulated in and around the courts of African kings, coming in and going out as gifts via diplomatic and commercial channels (Ibid.: 136).

Finally, Kriger challenges the attribution of the robes, highlighting that their construction and patterning are anomalous to the region of Allada. Since the robes would have been made in a series of specialised workshops, it is entirely possible that the manufacture of the fabric and the garments' tailoring took place outside of Allada (Kriger, 2006: 137). These examples demonstrate not only how difficult it can be to determine the precise history and/or biography of an object, but also the dangers of applying a shorthand description or provenance to them—in this instance, stating that they are from Allada, while perhaps true in some sense, is over simplistic.

The Ashmolean Museum

Many curiosities have been disjoined from their original modes of display, but some surviving objects that formed the founding collections of major museums can be traced. Oxford's Ashmolean Museum opened in 1683 with objects from Elias Ashmole, many of which came from the collection of John Tradescant (1570–1638) and his son, John Tradescant the Younger (1608–1662)—collectively known as the John Tradescants. Ashmole was a government official and antiquarian, whereas the Tradescants worked as botanists and gardeners for British nobility.

The Tradescants referred to their vast, acclaimed collection as 'The Ark', in reference to Noah's Ark and their desire to create 'a microcosm of the three kingdoms of nature (animal, vegetable, and mineral) and also a summary of human knowledge' (Grinke, 2006: 13). A 1656 catalogue includes basic descriptions of the objects in the collection, with five pages dedicated to fashion. Like many catalogues, numerous objects lack provenance (such as 'A linen Shirt woven without either seam or stitch, 2 yards long') but are were occasionally more specific entries (a 'Match coat from Greenland of the entrails of fishes') (Tradescant, 1656: 49, 47). The Tradescants' collection housed many examples of shoes, including twenty pairs of chopines (no origins noted) and footwear from numerous parts of the world, named in the catalogue as: Peru, Canada, Mogull, China, Japan, Cormandell, Barbery, Turky, Venice, Rhode, Malta, Greneland, Poland, Portugall, Spaine, Russia, and East India[41] (Ibid: 50).

[41] In present-day geography, Mogull refers to the Mughal Empire in South Asia; Cormandell is Coromandel, New Zealand; Barbery is the Barbary

Although this catalogue was published after the elder Tradescant's death, his interest in clothing was evident by at least 1618, when he describes the leather and fur garments worn by groups he encountered during a trip to Russia and Finland in a travel diary (MacGregor, 1983: 18). It is unclear if Tradescant collected any garments during that trip, though the 1656 catalogue includes boots, shoes, and stockings from Moscow and Lapland (Tradescant, 1656: 48). In 1635, the elder Tradescant was gifted a cap and stirrups worn by Henry VIII, as well as gloves and a comb case that belonged to Henry VII. Additional items in the Tradescants' collection with a royal connection, including 'Anne of Bullens Night-vayle embroidered with silver' and her 'silke knit gloves', may have also been gifts (MacGregor, 1983: 21).

Historian Prudence Leith-Ross contends that Georg Christoph Stirn, a twenty-four-year-old German traveller, wrote the best description of 'The Ark' upon his visit in 1638. This contains a list of more than fifty objects that he recalled, including many shoes and boots from Turkey and other foreign lands; the robe of the King of Virginia; 'a girdle such as the Turks wear in Jerusalem'; and a hat band made from snake bones. Stirn writes that despite the impressiveness of the collection, only a fraction of the objects owned by the Tradescants were on view (Leith-Ross, 2006 [1984]: 164); the fact that he notes several fashion objects among them indicates their significance to visitors during this time period.

Coast, which included coastal regions in present-day North Africa or Maghreb; and Rhode is likely Rhodes in the Dodecanese Islands of Greece.

In 1983, MacGregor published an inventory of extant objects at the Ashmolean Museum that could be traced to the Tradescants. These include more than a dozen shoes that were analysed by historical footwear expert June Swann, and several garments evaluated by fashion historian Valerie Cumming. At the time of this writing, *The Ashmolean Story*, an exhibition on view on the lower level of the museum, is devoted to the display of some of these objects. When I visited this exhibition in November 2019, it included shoes believed to be from (present day) Afghanistan, Britain, China, Germany, Iran, Italy, Malaysia, North Africa, and Spain, all of which were in MacGregor's publication (fig. 2.9). It also displayed chains made from beads fashioned from the teeth of large cats from South or Central America; purses with Indigenous North American leather and beadwork; and a caribou-hide tunic, embellished with dyed porcupine quills and pendants made from beaver claws, that was worn by Indigenous people in Canada. Leith-Ross underscores that 'All the surviving North American specimens are the earliest known of their type' (Leith-Ross, 2006 [1984]: 166).

Fig. 2.9

The Ashmolean Story gallery at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. This portion of the display showcases fashion items that were originally part of the cabinet of curiosities owned by John Tradescant. They have been well cared-for and researched, making this an extraordinary resource. Photograph by the author, November 2019.

The exhibition also featured what MacGregor deems 'the most important item surviving in the Tradescant collection' (Impey and MacGregor, 2017 [1985]: 150): a mantle owned by Chief Powhatan[42], the leader of a group of Indigenous Americans united by their use of the Algonquin language. English sea captain Christopher Newport acquired the mantle in Werowocomoco (Chief Powhatan's political centre in the colony of Virginia) in 1608, as a gift to King James I. By 1638, it had become part of the Tradescants' collection. The significance of this exchange will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, 'Collecting early fashion objects through the lens of colonialism'.

A visitor to the Ashmolean in 1694 described some of the objects he found most impressive, which included 'the

[42] Although many histories of Chief Powhatan refer to him as such, his proper name was Wahunsenacawh.

portrait of a one-hundred-and-fifty-two-year-old man, the iron cradle of Henry VI, Anne Boleyn's straw hat, and a bishop crook of Augustine', in addition to 'earrings of dried straw, the size of a nut and shaped like pearls such as women are said to have worn in Spain in by-gone years' (cited in Welch, 1983: 62). In 1710, several fashion objects housed at the Ashmolean were significant enough to merit a passage in a diary kept by von Uffenbach:

> Further on we saw all kinds of Indian weapons, and articles of clothing. In a cupboard were all manner of foreign costumes, amongst them curious caps made of different kinds of very beautiful grey-coloured feathers, such as the upper classes in India wear for protection against the sun. On the wall next to this cupboard were hanging many more dresses in particular foreign fashions in shoes (von Uffenbach translated in Welch, 1983: 66).

These historical accounts of visits to the Ashmolean underscore that fashion related objects were notable from the museum's inception.

The Kunstkamera

The Kunstkamera in St. Petersburg, founded in 1714, was built on the collections of Tsar Peter the Great (1672-1725). Its online catalogue, accessed in late 2021, identifies 817 objects from Peter's founding collection. These were almost exclusively specimens in glass jars that were prepared by the Dutch anatomist Frederik Ruysch (1638-1731), who was known for his innovative methods of preservation (Fearrington, 2013: 87), which I argue also extend to his methods of display. Peter's holdings did not include fashion objects proper, but the fashionable presentation of his

specimens from Ruysch is striking. Some glass specimen jars were adorned with beads and lace collars made by Ruysch's daughter Rachel (1664–1750), a painter. Likewise, numerous examples of the specimens themselves—many of which were from the bodies of infants and young children—were adorned and strategically concealed with pieces of cotton and lace. As Grinke writes about these objects:

> The urge to make art is never far behind the instinct to collect, and one has only to look at the collection of the Amsterdam anatomist Frederick Ruysch (1638–1731) … to see how the need to embellish and create something new from natural objects strikes a chord through the centuries (Grinke, 2006: 11).

Grinke's argument could be extended to the 'need' to dress the body. Sir Hans Sloane, whom historian James Delbourgo describes as 'a cautious, sober, and doggedly unimaginative' Protestant and man of science (Delbourgo, 2017: 261) had purportedly rejected an offer to purchase some of Ruysch's specimens for this own collection— 'perhaps because of their highly stylized character as works of *nature morte*' (Ibid.: 267). I view the fashionable adornment of these specimens as a means of humanising and beautifying an otherwise grisly, scientific endeavour.

The British Museum

The British Museum originated in 1753 with the collection of physician Sir Hans Sloane (1660–1753), which included more than 71,000 objects left to the nation following his death the same year. Sloane compiled at least fifty inventories of parts of his collections during his lifetime, though they were unpublished. Fortunately, a digitisation project has made

these documents accessible to researchers (Sloan and Nyhan, 2021). One of Sloane's inventories, entitled 'Miscellanea', documented an array of objects collected between the 1680s and the 1750s, and it features entries on approximately 200 objects related to dress and adornment. These include many shoes, most of which were housed together in the collection: they were from Coromandel, the Barbary Coast, North America, Turkey, Persia (present-day Iran), France, Spain, Russia, Egypt, Greenland, China, Japan, Senegal, Ireland, and Mexico. There are also two pairs of shoes worn by nuns (Caygill, 2012: 129). Other items of dress include a Scotch Highlander's ensemble featuring a doublet, britches, stockings, garters and a bonnet, and the handle of a feathered fan said to have belonged to Queen Elizabeth I, made with gold that was enamelled by Hans Holbein.

A travel diary written by Finnish explorer and botanist Pehr Kalm documents his visit to Sloane's collection in 1748. While many of his observations centre on natural wonders, including colourful butterflies, coral, crystals, and fishes, he mentions 'several head-dresses of different races of men' as well as 'the shoes of several different races' (Kalm, 1892 [1748]: 101). He was surprised by the absence of Finnish shoes made from birch bark and Russian shoes made from lime bark[43] (Ibid: 105).

Already by 1906, anthropologist David I. Bushnell notes that many of the objects listed in early catalogues could no longer be found among the museum's collections. Bushnell does not

[43] This may be a reference to *Tilia nasczokinii*, also known as Nasczokin's lime, a type of tree found in Siberia.

specify the catalogue he was referencing, but it appears from his writing that he had access to the 'Miscellanea' inventory mentioned above. Numerous lost items were apparel or adornment from the Americas, such as a girdle and two pairs of shoes from Virginia, a fan and an apron from South Carolina, a Cherokee garter, and a buffalo hair girdle from the Carolinas (Bushnell, 1906: 672–673). There is no mention of why or to where these objects might have been lost.

A search of the British Museum's online database in early 2022 revealed nearly 13,500 objects associated with Sloane, the majority of which comprised the founding collection. Although still a substantial number, it is less than twenty percent of the original 71,000 objects. Only a few examples of fashion and adornment remained. 151 items were categorised as 'personal adornment', including bracelets, rings, amulets, and pendants. There were thirty-eight buttons, many with cameos or designs in intaglio. The clothing category featured only twenty objects, including a straw cap possibly from Nigeria, snow goggles and a porcupine quill-embellished belt from the Hudson Bay, and various shoes—some of which are currently on display in the museum's Enlightenment Gallery. Searching under the material heading of 'textile' brought up twenty-one objects, many of which also appeared under the category of clothing.

Despite the modest number of examples, the information provided on these fashion objects was useful. A beaded apron from Suriname is believed to be entry 133 in Sloane's Miscellanea, described as 'An Indian apron from Surinam with which the Indians cover themselves. Made of beads of glass of several colours' (fig. 2.10). The connection to the inventory is

noted in the museum's online database, under the heading 'Curator's comments' (British Museum, n.d., 'Apron': n.p.). It is important to mention, however, that not all founding collection objects—fashion or otherwise—could be traced to an inventory entry. A purse made of moose hair, porcupine quills and hemp, though assuredly from Sloane's collection, could not be linked to an early written description (British Museum, n.d., 'Purse; Pouch': n.p.)[44].

Fig. 2.10

A beaded apron from Suriname (object no. Am,SLMisc.133), part of the collection of Sir Hans Sloane and the founding collection of the British Museum, possibly eighteenth century. Inventories and catalogues of early collections have allowed curators to trace the origins of many founding museum collection objects. Similar to more modern museum collections, however, not everything was well documented. Photograph © The Trustees of the British Museum

The Rijksmuseum

A collection of thirty-three pieces of jewellery from Surat, India, currently in the collection of the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, originally formed part of two cabinets of

[44] Another early donation of ethnographic 'curiosities' to the British Museum came from Captain James Cook (1728–1779), who embarked on three voyages during the latter half of the eighteenth century. Objects from Cook's compatriot, naturalist Sir Joseph Banks, can also be found in the British Museum collection. Items acquired by Johann Reinhold Forster and Johann George Forster, father and son naturalists who accompanied Cook on his second voyage (1772–75), became part of the Ashmolean collection in 1776. In 1886, the Ashmolean transferred 181 of those objects to Oxford's newly established Pitt Rivers Museum (founded in 1884). These objects are not included in the discussion above because they became part of public museum collections only shortly after their acquisition, rather than forming part of privately-owned cabinets of curiosities.

curiosities. An article written by art historian Pauline Lunsingh Scheurleer traces the history of these objects—made primarily from gold and encrusted with rubies, emeralds, diamonds, and pearls—from their integration in the Stadholder's cabinet of curiosities in Hague in 1754[45], to their transfer to the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities founded by King William I in 1816, to their eventual relocation to the Rijksmuseum in 1883 (Lunsingh Scheurleer, 1996: 71).

The original collection included three sets of jewels: one for a Hindu woman, another for a Muslim woman, and one for a Hindu or a Muslim woman. They included accompanying clothing and weapons that have now been lost, but their presence is known through a 1760 inventory of the Stadholder's cabinet (Lunsingh Scheurleer, 1996: 78)[46]. Lunsingh Scheurleer also notes that the location of some other jewellery mentioned in the inventory is unknown (Ibid.: 79). These objects are not only significant because of their strong provenance and high value, but also because of their rarity. There are few surviving pieces of Indian jewellery made prior to the nineteenth century, and jewellery from Surat is even rarer (Ibid.: 85). At the time of this writing, the jewellery is on display, indicating its significance to the museum's collection and, perhaps, to interest in the display of cabinets of curiosities-related objects more generally.

[45] The jewellery was gifted by a high-ranking employee of the East India Trading company, Julius Valentijn Stein van Gollenesse, directly to Princess Anna, mother of the young Stadholder William V. The collector was likely Jan Schreuder, the East India Trading Company's director and a friend of van Gollenesse (Taylor, 2004: 72).
[46] The cabinet originally included full ensembles for a Hindu man and a Hindu woman, as well as Muslim man and a Muslim woman, with stone statuettes that indicated how the clothes were worn.

Cabinets of curiosities in contemporary exhibitions

In 2014, Bruce Robertson noted that cabinets of curiosities 'have proliferated in the last few decades as objects of scholarship'. That resulted in the publications mentioned previously, but also positioned the cabinets as inspiration for 'modes of display practice, and actual installations' (Robertson, 2014 [1565]: vii). The increase in museum exhibitions, gallery displays, and artist's installations referencing cabinets of curiosities during the twenty-first century has been particularly evident in the United States (Lasser, 2021: 238).

In 2010, New York City's Museum of Arts and Design presented the exhibition *Dead or Alive: Nature Becomes Art*, which centred on contemporary artwork that incorporated organic materials such as insects, feathers, and hair. There was no fashion in the exhibition, but it did feature examples of wearable sculpture by Sanford Biggers, Maria Fernanda Cardoso, and Nick Cave. The museum did not directly reference cabinets of curiosities in its text about the exhibition, instead describing its focus on 'a select group of artists from around the world who have turned to once-living things for the raw material from which to make art' (Museum of Arts and Design, 2010: 6).

Nevertheless, *New York Times* reviewer Karen Rosenberg describes the exhibition as an updated cabinet of curiosities, and concludes that 'the 16th-century *wunderkammer*, it seems, is an excellent model for a 21st-century art and design museum' (Rosenberg, 2010: C26). Three years later, art critic Roberta Smith, also writing for the *New York Times*, states that cabinets of curiosities were 'very much a curatorial

vogue'. Smith is describing *Rooms of Wonder: From* Wunderkammer *to Museum, 1599–1899*, an exhibition at the Grolier Club, New York that featured rare books and ephemera related to cabinets of curiosities (Smith, 2013: C27).

Numerous scholars have posited theories as to why cabinets of curiosities have witnessed such a revival. Historian Dominik Collet writes that whereas the practices of modern museums have faced increased criticism[47], cabinets of curiosities 'have acquired the status of universally admired role models' (Collet, 2014: 47). A contemporary display based on the cabinet of curiosities, he argues, is viewed by some museum practitioners as a means to encourage the 'respectful, open-minded and equitable portrayal of different cultures' (Ibid.). Writing about the cabinets nearly ten years later, however, I have found that a more critical eye towards the link between the cabinets and colonialism is essential, as I discuss in the Introduction to Chapter 4.

Visual arts professor Christine Davenne ponders, 'Might the cabinet of curiosities once again be a laboratory that would provide us with basic analytical tools?' (Davenne, 2011: 10). She considers the resurgence of the cabinets to be the result of an increased fluidity within the contemporary art world, which she describes as the 'dilution of borders' between how art and its makers and/or purveyors are categorised. Davenne likens this concept to the ways in which cabinets of curiosities were often loosely organised during the Renaissance (Ibid.: 9).

[47] Although Collet is not explicit, it is inferred that this criticism is related to museums' longstanding methods of collection, interpretation and exhibition that are based on colonial models.

In a 2016 article, art historian Areti Adamopoulou and museologist Esther Solomon make note of a similar concept. They write that the organisational principles within the cabinets, as well as the taxonomies and relationships between objects, do not always appear rational to our contemporary eyes—and this may factor into their intrigue (Adamopoulou and Solomon, 2016: 44). Their observation relates to psychological studies of novelty and its role in piquing curiosity, which will be outlined in Chapter 6, 'Familiarity and complexity'.

Adamopoulou and Solomon further posit that a reason for the resurgence of cabinet of curiosities-inspired displays is their potential to 're-represent or invigorate collections that might seem out-of-date' (Adamopoulou and Solomon, 2016: 39-40). Curator Katy Barrett notes that anyone in the digital age 'can collect and curate online', prompting the need for museums to engage visitors through a focus on eccentricity over rationality (Barrett, 2014: 58). In her review of the 2014-2015 exhibition *Cranbrook Hall of Wonders* at Cranbrook Art Museum in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, artist Sarah Rose Sharp writes:

> With its tendency to display a wide variety of objects, the cabinet of curiosities poses a particularly scintillating gambit to curators, who are typically limited by the artist, period, geographic area, or movement of a particular show. One might say *Wunderkammern* display nothing so much as the perspective of their arrangers (Sharp, 2015: n.p.).

Sharp is referring to the objects featured from both the collections of the Cranbrook Art Museum and the adjacent Cranbrook Institute of Science; she notes that the curators of the exhibition seemed to enjoy a sense of 'playfulness and

real joy in juxtaposing objects of art and nature' (Ibid.). Collet also mentions the significance of play, concluding that contemporary manifestations of cabinets of curiosities embody 'a playful space of investigation and interaction' between objects and their viewers (Collet, 2014: 47).

In his article devoted to the revival of cabinets of curiosities, curator Ethan W. Lasser poses several pertinent questions:

> -How do these spaces [exhibitions inspired by cabinets of curiosities] differ from more conventional modes of display and interpretation?
>
> -What sort of knowledge do they impart?
>
> -What do they ask of the visitor?

In response to these questions, Lasser provides a tangible example[48]. He outlines the ways that two similar teapots, belonging to different museum collections, were displayed. An example at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, was meant to be compared to other teapots, and corresponding text encouraged visitors to assess the formal elements of each object. This is illustrated as a conventional mode of display of the sort developed over the course of the nineteenth century (Lasser, 2021: 247)—described by sociologist Tony Bennett as having 'a rational and pedagogic effect' (Bennett, 2004: 2). A similar teapot was shown in the exhibition *Loca Miraculi: Rooms of Wonder* at the Milwaukee Art Museum, which was referred to in introductory wall text as a 'twenty-first century

[48] Lasser lists several other examples of exhibitions or displays he perceived as contemporary interpretations of a cabinet of curiosities; notably, one of these is *Savage Beauty*, the 2011 survey of Alexander McQueen's work at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. That exhibition will be analysed in Chapter 5, 'Fashion Display'.

cabinet of curiosities'. This example was shown alongside other teapots, but there was no label copy. Instead, visitors were asked to open drawers below the objects, which revealed natural specimens, drawings, and videos that related to the designs of the teapots (Mooney, 2011: n.p.)—a display strategy that is redolent of natural history museums.

Lasser concludes that the arrangement at the Milwaukee Art Museum presented visitors with a problem to be solved, prompting them to ask deeper and more interdisciplinary questions about the exchanges between nature and artifice. 'If the conventional display invites the visitor to look and describe', Lasser explains, 'the cabinet invites the visitor to look and to discern the meaning of an unexpected relationship' as it was conceived by the curator (Lasser, 2021: 247). This correlates to what Mauriès observes in his studies of historic cabinets of curiosities: that 'any apparent opposition between the realms of "art" and nature" was avoided—indeed, the collector often looked for points where the two overlapped' (Mauriès in Desmaziéres, 2012 [2002]: 31). In conclusion, the exhibition design in Milwaukee engaged with the concepts of exploratory drive, observation, investigatory behaviour, and learning—all of which bear a direct connection to curiosity and the aims of my own exhibition.

Several fashion exhibitions have referenced cabinets of curiosities, but I have chosen to outline those in Chapter 5, 'Fashion display'. Here, I outline a few examples from museums and galleries that relate to my research more generally. The exhibitions are ordered chronologically. It is critical to note that my writing about all but one of these

exhibitions is based on sources such as books or catalogues, reviews, and installation photographs, rather than spatial experience. This poses a challenge, since I do not always have full knowledge of the components necessary to form my own review (outlined by Alexandra Palmer as the identification of the curatorial thesis, exhibition successes or shortcomings, and installation techniques) (Palmer, 2008, 'Reviewing fashion exhibitions': 122). Therefore, my selection of exhibitions is based on the information I was able to find and considered important or relevant enough to include. It is also worth noting that my second-hand interpretations of exhibitions mirror the ways that historians are obliged to study many cabinets of curiosities, meaning they must be reviewed using (often incomplete) information and re-framed 'within an approximation of their original parameters' (Bowry, 2015: 24).

The Age of the Marvelous

Curator Joy Kenseth's 1991 exhibition *The Age of the Marvelous* at New Hampshire's Hood Museum contributed significantly to the cabinets of curiosities revival, particularly in the United States (Meadow, 2014: vii). Fortunately, an extensive (though not comprehensive) 485-page catalogue provides a strong sense of the exhibition's aim, organisation, and object selection, as well as the choice to use the word marvellous, a term that was 'marked by an intense fascination with all things rare, exotic, or extraordinary' during the mid-sixteenth century (Cuno, 1991: 10)[49]. However, like many

[49] Today, marvellous is defined as 'causing wonder, surprise, astonishing, or extraordinary; so extraordinary as to be improbable, incredible, or miraculous' (Collins Dictionaries, 2014: n.p.)

catalogues that are prepared for release upon the opening of an exhibition, it does not include installation photographs.

Writing for the exhibition catalogue, art historian James Cuno makes a comparison between the sixteenth and late twentieth centuries, citing both as eras of important scientific development (Cuno, 1991: 9). He further asserts that *The Age of the Marvelous* was 'the first exhibition to address [the marvelous] as central to an understanding of European culture of the Renaissance and Baroque periods' (Ibid.: 10). The approach to the exhibition was historical, providing visitors with information on the history of cabinets of curiosities and the types of objects collected within them. Kenseth opens her catalogue text with words by philosopher René Descartes from 1649:

> When our first encounter with some object surprises us and we find it novel, or very different from what we formerly knew or from what we supposed it ought to be, this causes us to wonder and to be astonished at it (Descartes in Kenseth, 1991: 25).

The inclusion of this quotation makes the clearest link to contemporary notions of curiosity that I was able to discern.

The organisation for the exhibition was clearly outlined in the catalogue: it was divided into five sections, which addressed different aspects of the sixteenth-century vogue for the marvellous. The first section served as an introduction, providing some historical context for the period and introducing the exhibition's major themes. The following section, the 'Wonder Room', focussed on both the appearance and the concept of cabinets of curiosities, described as 'the

most characteristic expression of the period's fascination with the unusual and the extraordinary' (Kenseth, 1991: 13). The final three sections centred on the primary categories of marvels: the natural ('Nature's Wonders and the Wonders of New Worlds'), the artificial ('Marvels of Art'), and the supernatural ('The Christian Marvelous'). Kenseth notes that many of the objects on display were illustrated books, which were not selected as marvels, but instead provided information on how depictions of marvellous objects were disseminated.

That curatorial choice elicited a review stating that visitors had 'to read as much as look' to understand the content. The writer, art critic Catherine Fox, further critiques that *The Age of the Marvelous* was visually underwhelming considering its topic. The exception to that criticism, in her opinion, was the Wonder Room, described as 'the heart and pièce de resistance of the show' (Fox, 1992: B1). A current Hood Museum staff member was only able to locate one photograph of the exhibition installation, but it is undoubtedly of the Wonder Room (fig. 2.11).

This image shows that the room was furnished with tall, open-front cabinets along the walls that contained objects neatly arranged on shelves. Judging by the reflections present in the photograph, the cabinet openings were covered by acrylic. A selection of taxidermic animals and what appear to be a few antiquities were positioned on top of the cabinets, utilising the space from floor to ceiling. A few more objects were placed in vitrines with acrylic lids in the centre of the room. Although the gallery was orderly, the cabinets and cases with their assortment of objects would have

nonetheless stood in contrast to a gallery visible beyond it, which revealed a more restrained installation of a large, central vitrine and framed artwork spaced on the walls.

Fig. 2.11

The 'Wonder Room' in *The Age of the Marvelous*, Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth College, Dartmouth, New Hampshire, 1991. This room effectively conveyed the influence of cabinets of curiosities, though it is orderly and restrained in comparison to many historic engravings of such spaces. Photograph courtesy Hood Museum of Art.

Fox makes a notable distinction in her description of the Wonder Room. She writes about a Peruvian headdress, shown in tandem with antiquities and natural specimens such as walrus tusks, minerals, and shells. She clearly distinguishes those objects from what she refers to as *objets d'art*, exemplified by a cup made from a rhinoceros's horn carved and embellished with ivory (Fox, 1992: B1).

The implication that the headdress and the other objects listed above were 'lesser' and lacking the status of a work of art was underscored within the accompanying exhibition catalogue, from which they are omitted. In fact, though the exhibition included more than 300 objects (sourced from public and private collections), the catalogue includes only 255, and informs its readers that the 'natural specimens, antiquities, and the majority of non-European works' are not

featured (Kenseth, 1991: 215). This imposed hierarchy seems particularly objectionable considering that the Hood Museum holds examples of American, Native American, African, and Melanesian art in addition to European artworks. It also contrasts the previous research presented on historic cabinets of curiosities, in which object hierarchies were not emphasised.

Wunderkammer: A Century of Curiosities

Wunderkammer: A Century of Curiosities (Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2008) offered a reinterpretation of the cabinets using permanent collection works from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries by artists who 'felt the pull of unusual and extraordinary objects and phenomena' (Museum of Modern Art, 2008: n.p.). It included examples by more than sixty artists. Although there were no fashion objects (MoMA does not collect fashion), the exhibition did feature some fashion-adjacent artworks, including Nicola Constantino's *Human Furrier, Nipple Corset* (1999), a corset-shaped sculpture made from silicone and fabric, and Robert Gober's *Untitled* (1992), a shoe-shaped object made from wax and human hair.

The exhibition is well represented online. This is not quite a virtual exhibition—visitors cannot 'walk through' the space, nor is there a comprehensive, interactive gallery of installation images—but individual objects can be clicked on for a more detailed photograph and information (ranging from basic object facts to more extensive contextual copy). Although the exhibition featured work from many prominent modern and contemporary artists, the exhibition design—dark grey walls

and display cases, and a predominance of framed, two-dimensional artworks—was too austere to evoke the appearance of a historic cabinet of curiosities (fig. 2.12).

Art critic Roberta Smith writes that although staging an exhibition about cabinets of curiosities at a modern art museum was 'fairly eccentric', the exhibition was only partly successful. The selection of objects failed to capture the 'capricious' nature of the cabinets, and Smith argues that the inclusion of too many 'greats'—she cites Louise Bourgeois, Lucian Freud, and Cindy Sherman—is predictable (Smith, 2008: E25). Still, my examination of the exhibition revealed that there was a connection between themes present in the artworks and those in the historic cabinets, including animals both real and fantastical, the human body and the grotesque, and interest in the cosmos. The references to these themes provided the strongest links between the exhibition and cabinets of curiosities, but the connections would have required some existing knowledge from the visitor to be fully appreciated. The installation photographs indicate that while every object had an identification label, few had more extensive label copy.

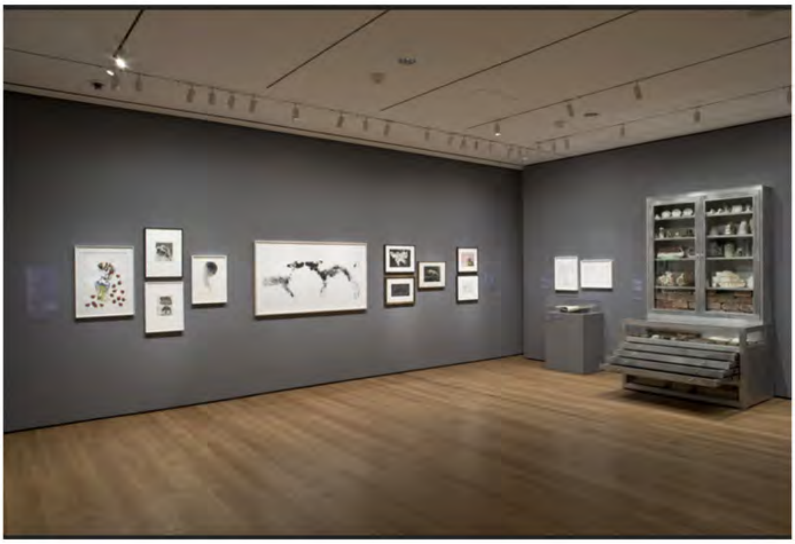

Fig. 2.12

Installation view of *Wunderkammer: A Century of Curiosities* Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2008. The simplicity of the exhibition design belied the sense of wonder that the subject of the exhibition connoted. Photograph © MoMA

Whereas this exhibition is important for its aim to relate historical ideas to contemporary objects, it may also be viewed as a cautionary tale of staying too 'safe' within established ideas of object selection (as noted by Smith) and exhibition design. In *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art*, Staniszewski writes about 'professional formulas' (Staniszewski, 1998: xxiii), which revolve around modes of display that are considered reliable and convenient for curators, designers, and architects when working on an exhibition. In the instance of *Wunderkammer: A Century of Curiosities*, it could be argued that professional formulas influenced the design choices. Walls were grey or white; two-dimensional artworks were neatly framed in white or black metal frames with white mat board; sculptural objects, as well as books and other papers, were placed inside sleek cases with acrylic lids. Although such formulas can be effective,

they are also employed at the expense of experimentation and, in this instance, curiosity.

Curiosity: Art and the Pleasures of Knowing

In *Curiosity: Art and the Pleasures of Knowing*, on view at Turner Contemporary in Margate, United Kingdom in 2013, curator and *Cabinet* magazine editor Brian Dillon took an inquisitive approach to the subject of curiosity and its meaning in contemporary society. In the accompanying catalogue, he writes:

> Can we still talk of curiosities when the contemporary *Wunderkammer* of the online archive or collection gives up so easily objects, anecdotes and images that were once obscure? Is the eclecticism of the cabinet of curiosities now so generalised as to be meaningless, or is it in fact a resonant image and idea by which we might rescue things from their online evanescence? (Dillon *et al*, 2013: 23).

Attempts to answer these questions were made using a selection of objects of different types, time periods, and sizes while also engaging with disparate methods of display. The exhibition's ode to cabinets of curiosities was evidenced by the inclusion of 'John Evelyn's Cabinet' from 1652, a freestanding cabinet veneered in ebony and featuring fruit-wood and ivory marquetry on its interior. A drawing by Leonardo da Vinci, dating to circa 1510–13, was one of the oldest objects in the exhibition. Entitled *A Cloudburst of Material Possessions*, its depictions of objects as mundane as rakes and ladders nonetheless recall the human desire for ownership and collection. One of the newest objects was Aura Satz's *Skyquakes in Ear Trumpets* (2013), a large brass phonograph horn fitted with ten hearing trumpets in its

interior. Using such objects, the exhibition aimed to present 'an eccentric map of curiosity in its many senses' (Cabinet Magazine, 2013: n.p.). Despite being staged in a contemporary art space, this exhibition blended science with art, ultimately appearing to forge a stronger conceptual link to historic cabinets of curiosities than MoMA's exhibition from several years prior.

Dillon chose not to contextualise the objects on view in favour of an exhibition that centred on close looking and making connections between objects (Dillon, 2013: 10). In one of several enthusiastic reviews of the exhibition, *ArtReview*'s Helen Sumpter summarises that 'the considered selection of exhibits here is obviously key; perfectly balanced to highlight how objects and artworks can add context and meaning to each other' (Sumpter, 2013: n.p.). Another reviewer comments on the lack of didactic information in the exhibition, describing it as a show that did 'more to excite and intrigue' than interpret its objects; nonetheless, he expresses that the exhibition successfully conveyed its ideas (Sterling, 2014: 3). Dillon himself contends that 'like the cabinet of curiosities before it, the exhibition refuses to choose between knowledge and pleasure' (Dillon in Barrett, 2014: 58).

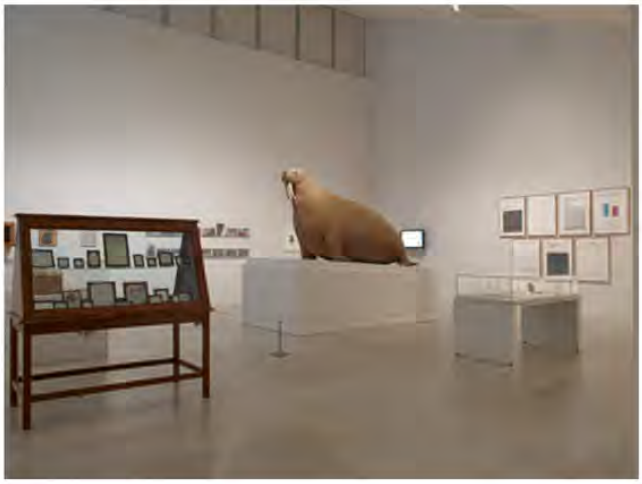

Fig. 2.13

Installation photo of *Curiosity: Art and the Pleasures of Knowing* at Turner Contemporary, Margate, United Kingdom, 2013. Although the exhibition was staged in a 'white cube' and primarily utilised contemporary display techniques, the diversity of objects, casework, and other modes of presentation enlivened the space. Photograph © Stephen White

The Turner Contemporary exhibition was staged within several rooms and its display techniques varied. One space included historical context related to cabinets of curiosities, including a 'unicorn horn' (narwhal tusk) standing vertically in its own tall, narrow vitrine, a large reproduction of the engraving of Danish physician Ole Worm's cabinet, and a wall text that explored varying definitions of curiosity. Other gallery spaces included objects within a mix of vitrine styles, with some contemporary-looking examples lit from within using LED lights. Conventionally framed and wall-mounted artworks were juxtaposed with eye-catching objects such as an enormous stuffed walrus placed on a gently sloping plinth (fig. 2.13). Although this exhibition did not include any fashion objects, its deliberate, varied, and seemingly successful approach to the selection, placement, and interpretation of objects to incite curiosity is useful for consideration within my own exhibition planning.

La Licorne et le Bézoard

La Licorne et le Bézoard (2013–14), organised across two spaces in Poitiers, France—the Musée Sainte-Croix and the Espace Mendès France—endeavoured to provide a comprehensive history of cabinets of curiosities, concluding with a twenty-first-century interpretation[50]. It is notable to this research for several reasons, including its object selections, display techniques, and correlations between historic and contemporary collecting practices. It featured more than 400 objects, including loans that were originally housed in cabinets of curiosities such as the Schloss Ambras. The fashion objects in the exhibition—a dress from the Quapaw tribe in Oklahoma, two pairs of moccasins from the Saint Lawrence Valley or Great Lakes in North America, a necklace made from teeth and a chest piece from the Wayana people of Brazil, and a feather cape from the Tupinambá tribe of Brazil—were from the Musée du Quai Branly – Jacques Chirac in Paris, which contains many objects that were once part of cabinets of curiosities (Marrache-Gouraud *et al*, 2014; Musée du Quai Branly, n.d.).

At the Musée Sainte-Croix, visitors encountered seven rooms. The exhibition traced the history of the cabinets from the fourteenth through the seventeenth centuries, concluding with the contemporary interpretation of a cabinet. The rooms covered numerous subthemes, including the relics and 'monsters' that intrigued early collectors, what they deemed 'Ruysch-like' methods of display (citing the previously mentioned advancements made by Frederick Ruysch in the

[50] This exhibition was organized by a group of around thirty French historians, curators, and other specialists (Aube, 2013: n.p.).

preservation and display of specimens); the ‘European craze’, which highlighted how collectors and interested parties visited and learned from one another; and the apothecary’s cabinet. There was also a replica of a cabinet owned by bookseller Nicolas Chevalier, recreated from his written descriptions. The contemporary cabinet, which included artworks by Marcel Duchamp and Jean-Michel Othoniel, was intended to illustrate the continued questioning of knowledge and our persistent interest in the unknown. Meanwhile, the part of the exhibition shown at the Espace Mendès France was devoted to scientific discovery, highlighting scientific instruments from the collection of the University of Poitiers (Alienor: Conseil des Musées, 2014: n.p.).

The design of the exhibition varied according to theme and was largely conventional. Many objects were housed within acrylic vitrines. This did not extend to the numerous taxidermic animals that populated the exhibition spaces, however—they were, judging by installation photographs, shown without cases. Although photographs indicate that they were placed in ways that made them difficult to access (behind cabinet drawers that were designed to be permanently open), both their inclusion and their openness rendered this method of display particularly evocative of the historic cabinets, in which visitors could engage with directly with objects (fig. 2.14).

Fig. 2.14

View of the 'sixteenth-century cabinet' in the exhibition *La Licorne et le Bézoard*, Musée Sainte-Croix de Poitiers, 2013. Many of the specimens in this photograph are not placed within protective vitrines, but the design for drawers that are permanently open would have prevented visitors from getting too close to those objects. Photograph © Musées de Poitiers, Christian Vignaud

Cabinet of Art and Curiosity

An idea like Kenseth's *The Age of Curiosity* was later employed in a permanent gallery installation, the *Cabinet of Art and Curiosity* at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut[51] (2015–present; I visited this gallery in 2019). The museum staff re-envisioned objects from the permanent collection in a manner evocative of a historic cabinet of curiosities, a strategy that encouraged me to consider the extensive use of The Museum at FIT's collection for my exhibition. The introductory text included a succinct history of the cabinets and the purpose they served, yet neither it nor other exhibition texts explained the Wadsworth's intention behind creating such a display. In a brief interview about the making of the exhibition featured on the museum's website,

[51] In the history of the United States, the Wadsworth Atheneum, founded 1844, is considered by museologist Geoffrey Lewis to have been 'the first art museum of any standing' (Lewis, 1992:12)

curator Linda Roth notes her interest in linking the concepts of interconnectedness and globalism present in the historic cabinets to the present day and described the early cabinets as functioning 'kind of like the seventeenth-century internet' (Wadsworth Atheneum, n.d.).

Housed in a single room, the exhibition included objects that related to the themes of Belief, Antiquity, Exploration, and Artistry (fig. 2.15). There was a strong emphasis on works of art, but the exhibition included some natural specimens, such as butterflies and a tortoise shell. There were no fashion objects. Most of the three-dimensional objects were shown within an assemblage of cases with dark wood bases (varying in shape and size) with acrylic lids. Each object was numbered—a practice that was utilised within historic cabinets of curiosities (Fučíková, 2017: 49)—but there were no labels placed adjacent to the objects to allow 'an uninterrupted viewing experience' (Wadsworth Atheneum, n.d.).

Text about the objects was made available through several methods. The objects deemed most interesting or important, such as a narwhal cup, were referenced in a 'Closer Look' guide. A 'Field Guide' contained basic information such as an object's place of origin and date. An alternate 'Label Book' was also available within the gallery, or in a mobile phone tour, and contained more specific information about each object. Finally, there was a 'Label Book for Families'.

The numerous ways to access didactic information were explained in yet another short guide found within the gallery titled '8 Ways to Explore', which suggested opening the

drawers built into some of the cases, removing the covers that obscured the light-sensitive materials, watching the 'Lion Clock' with its moving mouth and eyes, and reading the quotes that were placed on the walls of the gallery (such as 'Wisdom begins in wonder' by Socrates). This was a lot of instruction to absorb and might have been communicated more effectively by the creation of a single guide with multiple components. Although I am a proponent of written text within exhibitions (as I will explain in Chapter 6, 'Exhibition text'), I found information in this exhibition to be scattered and overwhelming, and it hindered rather than encouraged exploration and close looking.

Fig. 2.15

Cabinet of Art and Curiosity at the Wadsworth Atheneum, demonstrating how display vitrines, specially built cabinets, historic cabinets, and other artefacts and specimens were interspersed within one room of a gallery to evoke a cabinet of curiosities. Photograph by the author, 2019.

The Wadsworth's gallery was notable to this research for its interactive media. Within the gallery, visitors could assemble their own digital cabinets using objects on view. They could not access information about what the object was prior to adding it to their collections, meaning their selections were

based entirely on an object's visual appeal. Depending on the objects they chose, their 'alter ago' was uncovered, identifying them as a prince, merchant, clergyman, princess, or naturalist. Each type of collector was briefly described. Furthermore, in a project funded by the French American Museum Exchange, anyone had to the ability to access the exhibition in an immersive, virtual experience, complete with information on each of the objects. Although this type of experience is not new, the ability to engage with an exhibition in this way could be considered a wondrous facet of twenty-first-century technology.

Cabinets of curiosities in contemporary art installations

Although my research does not focus on contemporary artwork, there are a few artists whose practices simultaneously reference cabinets of curiosities and centre on working directly with museums and their collections. These artists have proven important to my research for the ways in which they simultaneously act as makers, exhibition designers, and curators, staging 'curatorial interventions' by selecting diverse objects from existing collections to assemble a contemporary cabinet of curiosities. I have therefore chosen to highlight a few examples that are especially pertinent to my research.

Stephanie Bowry wrote her PhD thesis on the connections between the aesthetic and conceptual strategies employed in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century cabinets of curiosities and contemporary works of art. She explains:

> Today, not only has the idea of the cabinet been re-appropriated by the museum, an institution which once

> sought to distance itself both physically and intellectually from the early modern collection, but it has also become increasingly prevalent as a subject of study, critical tool and modus operandi for contemporary artists (Bowry, 2015: 13).

Bowry clarifies that her research was not intended to equate historical and contemporary practices of collecting and display. Rather, a study of these distinct time periods can result in a deeper and more nuanced understanding of each and suggest new ideas for contemporary practitioners. This framework has proven influential to my own—I similarly examine the potential for the 'logics, aesthetic dispositions and discourses' of historical cabinets of curiosities to inform contemporary exhibition practices (Bowry, 2015: 17), albeit through the lens of fashion.

Before outlining the practices of contemporary artists, it is pertinent to mention a foundational example of an artist's intervention in a museum's holdings. In 1969, the Museum of Art at the Rhode Island School of Design worked with Andy Warhol on an exhibition entitled *Raid the Icebox 1 with Andy Warhol*. The artist's ideas for selection and display were unusual—he exhibited entire collections of objects (all of the museum's shoes, for example) and asked that they be shown as they were housed within the museum's collections storage. According to Robertson, this exhibition was seminal to the concept of assembling historical museum collections in a manner akin to cabinets of curiosities, providing 'a way of reinvigorating them by startling the visitor with the breadth and variety of the material basis of academic knowledge' (Robertson, 2014: vii), emphasising quantity rather that privileging singularity or rarity as museums often do. This

exhibition will be explained in greater detail in Chapter 5, 'Raid the Icebox 1'.

Cabinet of Curiosities: Mark Dion and the University as Installation

Artist Mark Dion describes the cabinet of curiosities as 'a framework which allows for a discussion of systems of classification [...] a flexible structure in terms of scale, period style, and value' (Dion quoted in Pugnet, 2003: 116). Among his substantial output of cabinet-related artworks, *Cabinet of Curiosities: Mark Dion and the University as Installation* (Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum, University of Minnesota, 2001) is distinguished for its focus on the use of a university museum (I, too, work within a university museum) and its engagement with fashion (fig. 2.16). Dion collaborated with students to utilise objects from the university's collections. They assembled a cabinet in ten themes: a salon wall (introduction), underworld, sea, air, earth, humankind, vision, sound, history and library. Except for 'library', all sections contained at least one item of fashion. The cabinet of the underworld, for example, included a late-nineteenth-century mourning hat with a veil and five examples of Victorian mourning jewellery, three of which were made from human hair. The cabinet of the sea featured undated mother-of-pearl calling card cases and a shell coin purse.

Fig. 2.16

Installation photo of *Cabinet of Curiosities: Mark Dion and the University as Installation*, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum, Minneapolis, 2001. The structure of the cabinet delineated the ten exhibition themes, though some objects spilled over or were placed on top of the shelves. The dress to the right of the image, from the 'Cabinet of the Allegory of History', was an 'H Dress' made for Hubert Humphrey's U.S. presidential campaign in 1968. Photograph © Weisman Art Museum

The cabinet of humankind featured the most fashion. The objects (undated unless specified) included two pairs of Chinese shoes for bound feet, a hat made from leopard and mink furs from circa 1970; a black strapless bra from circa 1950; hand-knitted baby booties from 1901; red leather kid gloves from circa 1950; a black top hat worn by Vice President Herbert H. Humphrey; a white cotton baby bib with lace and embroidery; a silver cigarette case and lighter from 1940–60; high-top button shoes; a corset from circa 1900; a rhinestone tiara; a hat pin; white satin wedding shoes from 1922; and a green knit purse from 1900–1910. Except for the Chinese shoes—which this cabinet's curator, Lisa Arnold, notes were part of a grouping intended to call to mind 'some of our past and present value systems' (Arnold, 2006: 60)—there was little context provided for such a diverse selection of fashions.

In the exhibition catalogue, Arnold acknowledges the challenges in attempting to curate the exhibition: firstly, trying to summarise the concept of humankind within a four-by-nine-foot space, and secondly having to select from what she called the 'universe' as it was created by the university's collection—one that was, like most museum collections, incomplete and certainly not fully representational of humankind (Arnold, 2006: 59). Her choice to include numerous fashion objects seems to indicate a commonality in our desire for self-expression, and many of the choices relate to rites of passage, displays of status, and the control we assert over our own bodies.

Since Dion's work centres on what curator Colleen Sheehy defines as 'the ways in which collection has served as a central base for knowledge in the West, building our notions of how the world works' (Sheehy, 2006: xi), it is significant that fashion is a component within this ideology, and particularly within the cabinet of humankind. Although Dion's cabinet-related body of work is vast, his summary of his overlying artistic motivation is telling: 'I try to create things where the viewer can piece together a narrative, and they have a lot of control over how they come to the piece and how they calculate things' (Dion in Marsh, 2009: 45). Fashion is, perhaps, one of the most universal ways to inspire such a narrative, and its significance to numerous museum collections and exhibitions will be examined throughout this thesis.

Rosamond Purcell: Two Rooms

Beginning in 2003, installation artist Rosamond Purcell made multiple site-specific exhibitions that recreated Ole Worm's seventeenth-century cabinet (fig. 2.17). The first incarnation was part of the 2007 exhibition *Rosamond Purcell: Two Rooms* at the Santa Monica Museum of Art, California[52]. The installation travelled to other sites, including Tufts University and Harvard University, before concluding at the Geological Museum at the Museum of Natural History, University of Copenhagen, in 2011.

Purcell crafted a full-size replica of Worm's cabinet as it was depicted in a well-known engraving, the frontispiece to the catalogue of the collection published in 1655. In contrast to the previous cautioning that engravings of cabinets were often inaccurate, the illustration of Worm's cabinet may be credible, largely because many of the objects it featured can be identified within the catalogue. Furthermore, the unassuming appearance of the space and the display of objects make it seem more reliable (Moser, 2006: 25).

[52] The Santa Monica Museum of Art changed its name to the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles in 2016.

Fig. 2.17

Engraving of the cabinet of Danish physician and antiquarian Ole Worm by G. Wingendorp (1655). Although it is relatively small and modest, the cabinet also provides a sense of the owner's passion for collection and display through its meticulous organisation. Public domain.

King Frederik III of Denmark purchased Worm's curiosities following his death, and a small number of objects—including a miniature shoe carved from a cherry stone—remain in the Danish royal collection (Hoskin, 2015: n.p.). Some objects are currently on view at the Natural History Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen (Ibid.: n.p.), and others were used to form the National Museum of Denmark (Spalding, 2002: 19), but in general, very few survive (Feest, 1995: 333). Nevertheless, it is evident that there was fashion in Worm's holdings. The catalogue mentions examples of garments from Greenland and Finland (Worm, 1655: 376; 388), and there are several items of clothing visible in the engraving—a pair of shoes, a hooded parka made from animal intestines, and a leopard skin coat are identifiable in the left corner of the room[53]. Footwear historian Elizabeth Semmelhack identifies boots on

[53] There is also a figure standing near these objects that is sometimes referred to as a 'mannequin' in texts about Worm's collection. This is in fact an automaton and is therefore not key to this research.

display as originating from Central Asia (Semmelhack, 2019: 310).

A catalogue published to accompany *Two Rooms* elucidates Purcell's interest in Worm's cabinet of curiosities. Museum administrator Elsa Longhauser notes that Purcell herself is a collector whose fascination with Worm's engraving inspired the artist to begin 'systematically planning what would have to be found, created, and concocted to replicate both the letter and the spirit of that room' (Longhauser in Purcell *et al*, 2003: 4). The title *Two Rooms* referenced Purcell's meticulous recreation of Worm's cabinet, which was shown beside a replica of her own studio and its jumble of found objects such as a wall of scrap metal, charred wood, and shards of ceramic. Purcell likened these fragments to Worm's 'curios', and Worm, like Purcell, collected for reasons other than the brandishing of wealth or the display of fine craftsmanship. Rather, as Katherine Park explains, Worm's collections centred on the 'quotidian', foregrounding knowledge over awe (Park in Purcell *et al*, 2003: 17).

After identifying as many types of objects as possible within the engraving, Purcell set about contacting museums to borrow objects that would mirror those in Worm's collection. This proved challenging: many curators were reluctant to loan specimens for an art installation. Naturalist and curator Robert McCracken Peck explains, 'In the end, sympathetic curators from several institutions agreed to provide specimens for display, but only objects lacking in scientific documentation' (Peck in Purcell *et al*, 2003: 28).

Although curators of natural history demonstrated limited interest in or understanding of Purcell's work, the result—which also included objects fashioned by Purcell—was startling in its precision and enhanced by colour and dimensionality that was not present in the engraving (fig. 2.18). Purcell imagined being inside Worm's cabinet when constructing the space (Longhauser in Purcell *et al*, 2003: 4), and the feeling that one is standing within a cabinet of curiosities resonates even within photographs of the installation. Purcell's replicas even included two of the objects previously mentioned: a gut skin parka and a leopard skin coat. This sense of immersion is pertinent to my later ideas for exhibition design, outlined in Chapter 6, 'Exhibition design'.

Fig. 2.18

The recreation of Ole Worm's cabinet of curiosities by Rosamond Purcell in *Rosamond Purcell: Two Rooms* (Santa Monica Museum of Art, 2003). Despite its likeness to Worm's cabinet, Purcell did not have access to his original objects, making the work all the more impressive in its detail. Photograph © Dennis Purcell

Promiscuous Assemblage, Friendship, and the Order of Things

In 2009, artist Jane Wildgoose organised the exhibition *Promiscuous Assemblage, Friendship, and the Order of Things* at the Yale Center for British Art[54]. The site-specific installation, which featured more than 200 objects on loan from public and private collections in the United States and the United Kingdom, accompanied another exhibition at Yale, *Mrs Delany and Her Circle*. The title of Wildgoose's installation and its concept took inspiration from the 1786 catalogue of the Duchess of Portland's collection, in which it was acknowledged that some readers might object to such a 'promiscuous assemblage' of objects (Lightfoot, 2018 [1786]: vii). The Duchess was close friends with Mary Delany (1700-1788), a fellow collector and artist best known for her painstakingly detailed and scientifically accurate 'paper mosaiks'. Much of Delany's cut-paper artwork now resides in the British Museum.

Wildgoose researched the lives and collections of both women to create an exhibition organised into three themes: promiscuous assemblage, friendship, and the order of things. A catalogue for the exhibition provides considerable insight into how the project was conceived and designed. The three themes were highlighted on the North, East, and South walls of the gallery space, respectively, and the centre of the room featured an arrangement of furniture and additional objects (Wildgoose, 2009: 1). The North wall, depicting the theme of promiscuous assemblage, was created to evoke the

[54] The exhibition later travelled to Sir John Soane's Museum, London, where it was on view from 19 February until 1 May 2010.

frontispiece of the Portland collection catalogue, which featured ‘a towering arrangement of some of the most important and valuable items in the duchess’s natural-history and fine-art collections’ (Ibid.).

The section on promiscuous assemblage referenced a key object in the Duchess’s collection—a Roman vase dating from 1-25 CE that had come from the Barberini collection (Lightfoot, 1786: 194). This object, known as the Portland Vase, is now in the British Museum. Although Wildgoose was unable to borrow this object for the installation, she created its replica—one that was double the size of the original vase—to convey its importance.

Not incidentally, there was a practice of including inaccurately sized replicas of artefacts within cabinets of curiosities; for example, the obelisks in scholar Athanasius Kircher’s (1602-1680) collection were smaller, wooden copies (de Sepi, 2015 [1678]: 168). If one was intent on creating a microcosm of knowledge, such facsimiles were occasionally necessary. This is also a strategy that piqued my interest—some objects pertinent to my exhibition will inevitably be unavailable to me because of high loan fees or unwillingness of an institution to lend, fragility, or perhaps even the fact that they have not survived. Furthermore, the idea of scale and its potential implications on evoking curiosity will be outlined in Chapter 5, ‘The gigantic and the miniature’ and Chapter 6, ‘Object selection and stimulation’.

The East wall of the exhibition space centred on the theme of friendship, and featured a custom-built, black lacquered cabinet adorned with ‘flowers’ made from shells (another type

of object that Delany was known for crafting). Its design was inspired by a 1739 cabinet of curiosities that belonged to French aristocrat Joseph Bonnier de la Mosson (1702–1744), a portion of which is now housed in the library of the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris (mentioned in the Introduction as one of the cabinets I visited for on-site research). Its Rococo cabinetry marks it as 'a unique manifestation of the intersection between aesthetics and science' (Olalquiaga, 2005–2006: 8). While Mosson's cabinet was pale green, the choice of black lacquer in this installation was partially inspired by a love for japanning shared by the Duchess of Portland and Mary Delany. The objects on view in the cabinet included a mix of artificialia, naturalia, and plaster 'curiosities' made by Wildgoose in collaboration with the artist Geoff Portass (Wildgoose, 2009: 2) (fig. 2.19).

Fig. 2.19

Installation photograph of the East wall of the exhibition *Promiscuous Assemblage, Friendship, and the Order of Things* at the Yale Center for British Art, 2009. The artful, symmetrical arrangement of objects helps to mask the cabinet's position in a contemporary art space. Photograph © Yale Center for British Art

The South wall, devoted to the order of things, featured an arrangement of drawers mimicking those used in museums, particularly for natural history specimens. The organisation of

this space considered the evolution of formal taxonomy within museums and its impact on museum storage and display. Wildgoose also included an arrangement of the types of receptacles in which some specimens had been donated to the Peabody Museum of Natural History at Yale University, which ranged from cigar boxes to biscuit tins. The boxes had been preserved by the museum's collections manager (Wildgoose, 2009: 3), and they formed their own variety of curiosity. Wildgoose also included recent work by the artist Tracey Bush, whose paper sculptures, often referencing natural history, made a link between the eighteenth-century creations by Mary Delany and contemporary artists.

Especially important to this research is the way that Wildgoose worked with specialists to interpret some of the objects in her installation. She asked collections managers from three departments at the Peabody Museum of Natural History to select specimens and then provide information about how they would have been perceived over time: first in the eighteenth century, then in the early- and mid-nineteenth century, the twentieth century, and the twenty-first century (Wildgoose, 2009: 39). I consider this to be a remarkable way to engage with the ways in which objects can change meaning and significance over time, and one that could also perhaps be applied to historical museum artefacts (including fashion—a topic that will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, 'Addressing problematic fashion "inspirations"').

Wildgoose's approach to this installation was complex in its layering of scientific and historical information, yet this complexity was viewed as appropriate for its topic. Rosenberg writes that the exhibition allowed visitors to 'begin to

comprehend the enormousness and variety of the duchess's museum' with its 'dizzying overview of 18th-century tastes and fashions' (Rosenberg, 2009: n.p.), underscoring how the 'methodological chaos' (Mauriès in Desmaziéres, 2012 [2002]: 31) of the historic cabinet of curiosities can be successfully translated into a contemporary setting.

Conclusion

Knowledge of historic cabinets of curiosities provides a springboard from which the remainder of this thesis is formed. My extensive research into the acquisition of fashion objects within the cabinets has not only made a significant contribution to collection studies as well as fashion and museology, but also asserted the ubiquity and significance of such items. The collection of fashion will be further explored in Chapter 3, 'Acquiring, exhibiting, and utilising collections of fashion'.

Furthermore, an understanding of cabinets of curiosities allowed me to identify contemporary exhibitions and art installations that reference them and provide ideas to explore within my own work. They have suggested the importance of a sense of playfulness, unpredictable object selections, and dynamic display techniques. They have also offered insight into how other curators and artists have utilised permanent collections to craft a 'cabinet of curiosities', which is of benefit to work as a curator at The Museum at FIT and my use of its permanent collection. I will conclude by reiterating Dillon's statement that he 'refuse[d] to choose between knowledge and pleasure' in curating *Curiosity: Art and the Pleasures of Knowledge* (Dillon in Barrett, 2014: 58), which

serves as a reminder that education and entertainment need not be mutually exclusive within exhibitions. I have remembered Dillon's words when presenting ideas throughout the remainder of this text.

CHAPTER 3: COLLECTION STUDIES

As Chapter 2 demonstrates, cabinets of curiosities are inextricably linked to practices of collecting. A full survey of collection studies is too vast for this thesis, and I have therefore focussed my research on this subject as it relates to the collection of fashion and/or my curatorial practice. This chapter begins with an overview of the history of collection studies, which serves to contextualise the field and allows me to reflect on elements of my practice. I include synopses of the significance of the incomplete collection, in addition to the potential meaning and value of collected objects. I also articulate arguments for the importance of learning from physical objects and outline the conceptual differences between private and public collections.

This chapter continues with a more detailed study of collecting fashion. In that arena, I have identified publications on the subject and provided information on private collections of fashion, personal wardrobes, and fashion study collections that have comprised a fundamental part of museum holdings[55]. These concepts mirror the trajectory of cabinets of curiosities: as I highlight in the previous chapter, many of the cabinets were created as spaces for the hands-on study of objects, and their once-private collections were frequently incorporated into public museums.

[55] This excludes donations of a designer's archives to a museum collection, such as that from Bernhard Willhelm to the ModeMuseum, Antwerp, or Helmut Lang's dispersal of his work among various museums (including The Museum at FIT) since this process does not relate to the history of cabinets of curiosities.

These studies provide a foundation for an exploration of my own practice, part of which entails working with a permanent collection of approximately 50,000 objects. I begin with a brief history of The Museum at FIT collection and then shift to the potential uses of that collection as they relate to my own curiosity. I include new analyses of MFIT's holdings, with ideas on how they can inform my theoretical exhibition. I also present a description of my curatorial process, from an initial search in the museum's database to physical observations of objects and their selection.

Overview: Collection Studies history and theory

Historian Eva Schulz writes that 'since the sixteenth century, collections have been amassed with the aim of transmitting information by means of a systematic arrangement of objects' (Schulz, 1994 [1990]: 175), specifically referencing cabinets of curiosities. Publications about collections have been prevalent since the same century, as evidenced in the previous chapter, yet collection studies only emerged as an academic field during the early 1990s (Danet and Katriel, 1994 [1989]: 221). This followed several scholarly publications that foregrounded collecting (Saisselin, 1984; Pomian, 1990 [1987]; Pearce, 1992).

Museologist Susan Pearce's definition of the field of collection studies is broad. She writes that it encompasses museum collection policies (what should be collected, how unwanted objects should be dispensed with, types of documentation systems, and the kinds of research conducted), collections history (including provenance research and the tracing of acquisitions and dispersions), and the nature and psychology

of collecting. Pearce explains the need for curators to engage with these concepts, writing that they 'must start to understand the history and nature of our collections … so that we can better understand assumptions about knowledge and the value which they embody' (Pearce, 1994: 193–194). When I began my work as a curator in 2006, my mentors (the museum's director and other curators) fluently demonstrated the significance of these interrelated aspects. It was only upon encountering Pearce's writing during my research for this thesis that I came to realise how critical each aspect has been to my understanding of collections and, in turn, inspired me to include a chapter on collection studies. The evolution of the MFIT collections over the past fifty years—initially intended for study, and currently focussed on the care and preservation of objects for exhibition—has resulted in the consistent revision of collections policies. This knowledge led me to assess some of the museum's earliest acquisitions, which I outline in the second half of this chapter.

Cultural theorist Mieke Bal writes that it is seemingly impossible to define collecting, but that 'a collecting attitude is unmistakable and distinct' (Bal, 1994: 99). In his book *Collecting: An Unruly Passion*, psychoanalyst Werner Muensterberger elucidates this idea, writing that one can observe among collectors 'an unrelenting need, even hunger for acquisitions. The ongoing search is a core element of their personality' (Muensterberger, 1994: 3). He also attempts to define collecting, which he describes as 'the selecting, gathering, and keeping of objects of subjective value'. He further explains that each object must have a distinct meaning for the collector (Ibid.: 7). I found the latter statement to be especially compelling for its potential

application within a curatorial context—when selecting objects for exhibition, I am careful to ensure that each object (or, occasionally a small group of objects) has its own narrative, in addition to considering aesthetic diversity.

In his work on the psychology behind art collecting, psychiatrist and art historian Frederick Baekeland writes that someone who merely accumulates does not amass objects with clear symbolic significance, whereas a collector's objects acquire significance and frequently serve to enhance their self-definition (Baekeland, 1994 [1981]: 206). I argue that this logic can also be applied to a description of museums, whose collections often serve to define the institution in which they are housed. In 1954, fine arts curator W.G. Constable wrote that 'Every collection worthy of the name is to a certain extent a work of art in itself, revealing qualities of proportion and harmony which spring from a controlling idea . . . a true collection manifests a sense of design' (Constable, 1954: 6). Although I acknowledge that this definition is narrow, it is valuable to this research for its link between collecting and aesthetics from a curatorial point of view. My selections are often based on historical, social, and aesthetic significance in tandem, in addition to my own curiosity about the objects.

The incomplete collection

Incompletion—and by extension, impossibility—can define the collection, as they drive the desire to search and to possess. Sociologist Jean Baudrillard implies that a collection can never be completed in a collector's lifetime (Baudrillard, 1994: 23; de la Haye, 2018: 395). In his analysis of Samuel Quiccheberg's *Inscriptiones*, the seminal treatise on cabinets

of curiosities referenced in the previous chapter, Mark Meadow notes that Quiccheberg understood the impossibility of obtaining everything in his theoretical cabinet of curiosities. Meadow explains that 'completeness is not the goal; indeed, it is unattainable' (Meadow, 2014: 6). Art historian John [Jaś] Elsner refers to the act of collecting as a 'cult of fragments' (Elsner, 1994: 155), which is redolent of the literal fragments (including remnants of textiles or clothing) possessed by some collectors and in museum collections. Even the most 'encyclopaedic' collections are fragmentary constructs, and their meaning is afforded through the connections made between objects within them. Furthermore, as I will demonstrate shortly, I have engaged with a particularly fragmented portion of the MFIT collection to inform my theoretical exhibition.

Baudrillard speculates that the process of collecting is never begun with the intention of its completion, particularly since the finalised collection symbolises the death of its subject and ultimately its creator (Baudrillard, 1994: 13). Muensterberger makes a similar statement, writing that the potential for a steady flow of objects to be collected is critical to the maintenance of the collector's interest—and here, it is pertinent to reiterate the link between interest and curiosity. He also asserts that it is not only the acquisition of an object into a collection that is important, but also the process of acquiring it (Muensterberger, 1994: 35)—a statement akin to the adage 'the thrill of the hunt'.

I was drawn to these theories as they made me consider my own practice: although I derive pleasure from curating exhibitions that rely primarily on MFIT's collections (for

reasons I will outline later in this chapter), I rarely organise a show without acquiring a few 'new' (sometimes contemporary, other times historical) objects, which also become part of the museum's permanent holdings. Yet while acquiring objects with historical, contemporary, and/or conceptual significance is an important aspect of my work, it is unlikely that I will ever feel that the museum's collection is 'complete' under my care.

The object that has not yet been attained is particularly desirable. Consumer studies scholar Russell Belk observes that the as-yet-unattained object carries a special significance, and that its absence causes 'an enjoyable state of discomfort or pain'. When the yearned-for object is finally obtained, however, the pleasure derived from its acquisition rarely lives up to expectations, and collectors are driven to find the next object of their fantasy (Belk, 1995: 4). Belk's work centres on consumer studies, possession, and the self—and consumerism is, of course, driven by the desire for personal acquisition. In my experience as a curator, however, I have rarely experienced disappointment in finding an object I have sought. My acquisitions are frequently used in exhibitions I am planning, and the feeling of newly sharing them with others, while also filling a gap in my research and illustrating my curatorial thesis, is perhaps more fulfilling than adding a desired object to a personal collection.

In their edited volume *The Cultures of Collecting*, Elsner and fellow art historian Roger Cardinal write about the 'totalizing collector', defined as someone who displays neither hesitation nor constraint in the effort to acquire what they are missing. This, Elsner and Cardinal determine, 'is not simply to own or

to control the items one finds; it is to exercise control over existence itself through possessing every sample. … It is to be unique' (Elsner and Cardinal, 1994: 146). Such a desire for uniqueness relates to the museum collection—exhibitions can draw visitors by presenting objects that are rare. A 'focus on the rare and exceptional, an interest in objects for their singular qualities rather than for their typicality' is, according to Tony Bennett, also pertinent within cabinets of curiosities (Bennett, 1995: 2). The singularity of objects is also of consideration in my own exhibition selection. This was underscored by my front-end evaluations, in which twenty-eight percent of participants mentioned wanting to see 'unusual' objects, and twenty-four percent wanted to view something they had never seen before (see Appendix B).

Belk writes that the cycle of desire to complete a collection does not extend to the repetition of objects within it. In his 1995 publication *Collecting in a Consumer Society*, he underscores the significance of acquiring 'no two alike', explaining that although collected objects typically share commonalities, they should not be identical (Belk, 1995: 66). Yet this is not always true of collections, and it is a statement that would benefit from clarification. For instance, The Museum at FIT collection includes two examples of a Charles James dress of the same design in slightly different shades of pink silk taffeta (fig. 3.1), and a third in black chiffon. Does their difference in colour render them distinct enough to fit Belk's directive of no two alike? Furthermore, the museum would be likely to maintain all examples even if they were the same colour, based on the rarity and fragility of James's work.

Fig. 3.1

Charles James, evening dress, 1955. This is one of three examples of this style of dress in The Museum at FIT collection; this version is especially similar to another made from pink taffeta. Despite their similarities in design, each is valued as a rare and important example of James's work. Photograph © The Museum at FIT

The meaning of the collected object

Whether in the care of a private individual or an institution, collections are individualistic and developed according to myriad principles. New objects are collected, while others are dispensed with; additional research on a collection's objects may provide fresh perspectives, or a collector's taste or interests may evolve. Within museums, the evolution of a collection is often based on factors such as staff changes or the desire to bring in new audiences. Issues such as budget, storage space, and object availability further shape the collection. Such changes often result in the shifting meaning of objects, both collectively and individually.

The removal of objects from their previous context(s) can be viewed as an act of authority or an assertion of the collector's

(or institution's) influence—a proclamation of 'their owners' power to reserve objects from cultural exchange' (Benedict, 2001: 10). By shifting their context, objects can also become devoid of their ordinary use (Belk, 1995: 66). Baudrillard theorises that a thing is either utilised, or it is possessed (at which point it becomes an 'object')—and he views the two functions as mutually exclusive (Baudrillard, 1994: 8). Later in his writing, however, he acknowledges that there can be a 'discourse' between the concepts of collection and utilitarianism (Ibid.: 14).

The potential fluidity between use and possession is particularly important when considering private collections of fashion, being that it is not uncommon for collectors to wear the clothing they acquire (de la Haye, 2018: 384). When writing about this subject in 1992, curators Richard Martin and Harold Koda note that 'it is extremely difficult to disengage fashion from its social purpose. A garment assumes form from its function of being worn' (Martin and Koda, 1992, *Flair*: 17). They also link the collection (and subsequent wearing) of fashion to cabinets of curiosities, noting that certain objects within the cabinets—silver serving ware, for example—were occasionally taken out of the 'museum' for temporary household use (Ibid.).

In her writing about the transition of private collections into public museums, Lou Taylor observes that objects 'become culturally empowered and altered by the implied "approval" of the elite museum institution' (Taylor, 2004: 281). Taylor's focus is on dress, but her statement could be applied to myriad types of objects collected within museums. Curator

Linda Baumgarten makes specific observations on the acquisition of clothing into museum collections:

> A garment that enters a museum collection acquires new functions. No longer *wearing* apparel, the item of clothing now becomes a 'costume', a museum artifact touched only with white gloves. The garment has become a work of decorative art to inspire today's public, a document of past technology, and a text for teaching history (Baumgarten, 2002: 182).

As the collected clothes become deprived of both their economic and self-expressive powers, they become dependent on the authority, the narratives, and the social position of the institution in which they are housed (Petrov, 2019: 37). This can change both the meaning and the value of an object. If clothing (or any object) can be successfully posited as having cultural or historical value, it may, in the words of humanities professor James Clifford 'be promoted to the status of fine art' (Clifford, 1988: 224)[56].

One of Belk's statements, though not in reference to clothing, is of interest for its reference to fashion (used here in the abstract sense of the prevailing and transitory taste for something). Citing the work of Michael Thompson, author of the book *Rubbish Theory* (Thompson, 1979), Belk writes that obsolete objects, after being removed from their original or intended use, may be more desirable to collectors. He

[56] Clifford provides an example of this phenomenon, explaining that during the mid-nineteenth century, Mesoamerican objects were considered 'grotesques or antiquities'. By the 1920s, however, they were viewed as 'cultural witnesses and aesthetic masterpieces' that established their place within art museums (Clifford, 1988: 228). This shift in understanding was initiated by several early twentieth-century anthropologists, who began to consider Mesoamerican objects through an artistic (rather than evolutionary) lens (Williams, 1993: 130).

concludes that 'collecting differs from most other forms of consumption in being relatively immune from fashion obsolescence' (Belk, 1995: 66). When considering fashionable dress—much of which is traditionally built on a seasonal system designed for near-immediate obsolescence—this is an especially intriguing point. The value of an 'old dress' in its everyday, wearable life may be insignificant. When the same dress becomes part of a museum collection, however, its outmoded quality might serve as an asset—the garment can become an important visual signifier of the (distant or recent) past. My interest in obsolete objects—as items collected and as potential 'curiosities'—will be outlined in Chapter 6, 'The main gallery: '"What is it?" cabinet'.

The value of physical collections

Historian Steven Conn surmises that by the end of the twentieth century, it had become possible to envision a museum that did not contain any objects (Conn, 2010: 41). He cited various other 'functions' that contemporary museums often engage with—such as a café, a gift shop, and live musical performances—which serve as distractions from the time required for visitors to commune with objects. Furthermore, he notes that a diminishing number of objects is often put on display, as museum professionals have learned that their narratives are often better communicated by showing less (Ibid.: 45-46).

The expansion of online and digital media during the 1990s also fuelled concerns that the physical presence of the museum object was no longer essential (Thomas, 2016: 22) Could (or should) objects be eliminated altogether? Ultimately,

Conn's response was in defence of objects—appealing to their physicality, he writes that they are essential to 'giving shape' to knowledge (Conn, 2010.: 17). Similarly, anthropologist Nicholas Thomas emphasises that there is no substitute for witnessing the physical object, with all of its details, textures, scale, and other attributes that are difficult to capture in images (Thomas, 2016: 51).

These statements reflect my own arguments for the importance of using physical objects within Museum at FIT exhibitions. A significant number of the museum's visitors are students who attend exhibitions to inspire their design work. The details inherent to examples of fashion (the production of which nearly always relies on the human hand to some degree) are best appreciated in real life, despite the increasingly dynamic and dimensional virtual replicas of clothing available online. An article in the *New Yorker*, titled 'What a Screen Can't Capture About Fashion', highlights the discrepancy between images of fashion and its reality (Fischer, 2022: n.p.). Although the article is focussed on fast fashion e-retail, I contend that it can also be applied to seeing a garment in a museum exhibition, with all its visual nuances. Curiosity about seeing a garment's detail—a comment made by twelve of the twenty-nine participants in my front-end evaluation research—underscored that seeing 'the real thing' can incite interest, and further underscored the significance of this chapter within my thesis[57].

[57] In a study conducted by psychologist Louise Bunce, museum visitors' engagement with and questions about a taxidermic rabbit (the 'real thing') provides 'evidence about the effects of museum object authenticity on visitors' level of curiosity and engagement' (Bunce, 2016: 237).

Private versus public collections

Numerous texts differentiate between the acquisition of objects by private collectors versus a public museum. Danet and Katriel succinctly summarise the building of a museum collection as 'work, not leisure' (Danet and Katriel, 1994 [1989]: 222). Belk notes that private collectors often see their objects as vessels for their own memories, whereas objects within museums are intended to occupy 'a cell in a taxonomy' (Belk, 1995: 94). The private collector can be openly biased, passionate, or impulsive, whereas someone acquiring objects for a museum is expected to be more objective and disciplined in their selections (Von Holst, 1967: 4; Thomas, 1994: 116).

The International Council of Museums suggests that new acquisitions should: 'a) reflect the museum's collecting objectives; b) fit in with prioritized focus areas where these exist, and c) have good title and provenance' (ICOM, 2020: 3). It is recognised, however, that true objectivity is impossible to achieve even among museum professionals (de la Haye, 2018: 11). For example, in writing about acquisitions for the collection of ModeMuseum, Antwerp (MoMU), former director Linda Loppa writes, 'First, a garment must move, affect and enchant me'—a clear statement about the role that emotions and personal responses can play in a museum's collecting policies (ModeMuseum, 2002: 129).

Muensterberger distinguishes between the collector and the connoisseur, writing that although the latter 'may cherish or admire an object, [they receive] very little emotional support from its ownership. In other words, there is no affective

attachment to the object' (Muensterberger, 1994: 137). I argue that curators fall into their own liminal category of emotional connection to objects. Although they will never possess the collections owned by their institutions, curators often favour certain objects over others within those collections, and some refer to the museum's holdings as though they are their own; e.g. 'I have that dress in my collection'.

In my experience, this attachment to certain objects can result in a desire to include something in an exhibition even where it does not fit. In the instance of my theoretical exhibition, I was keen to include an early twentieth-century 'album jacket' made from a patchwork of tobacco silks (small patches of printed silk that were included in cigarette packets as promotional items). These collectable patches, arranged in a grid in a manner reminiscent of a cabinet display, seemed ideal for the topic. Despite my strong interest in this object, however, it did not fit neatly into the checklist as my cabinet themes developed, and it has thus been eliminated.

As I mentioned previously, both private and museum collections are important to this research, particularly in the ways they overlap. Museums have a history of acquiring private collections of costume since at least the mid-twentieth century (Taylor, 2004: 133), and a summary of my research into these, which leads the following section, will be followed by observations on The Museum at FIT's holdings and a description of my practice-led research within that collection.

Acquiring, exhibiting, and utilising collections of fashion

In 1992, Martin and Koda staged the exhibition *Flair: Fashion Collected by Tina Chow* at The Museum at FIT, centred on the wardrobe of the late model, jewellery designer, and tastemaker. Chow's choice of clothing was notable for its mixture of vintage and contemporary garments[58]. In the accompanying catalogue, Martin and Koda write about a longstanding reticence among collectors of fine art to also collect fashion. They cite numerous, male collectors and patrons of the arts whose money had been made from the fashion industry (such as couturier Jacques Doucet and rayon manufacturer Samuel Courtauld), but who had no interest in acquiring historic textiles or clothing. They explain that the 'wunderkammern' assembled by these men 'only accommodated the hard objects attained through solid success in the boardroom and auction house' of which fashion had not yet become a part (Martin and Koda, 1992, *Flair*: 12).

I begin this portion of my chapter with Martin and Koda's work not only because it references wunderkammern and the collection from which I will work to curate my exhibition, but also because it reflects a time in which views on the collection of fashion—as a personal asset and within museums—were beginning to shift. The pursuit of collecting fashion had been largely dismissed as a frivolous, feminine pursuit well into the twentieth century (Jullian, 1970: 164, Baekeland, 1994 [1981]:

[58] Chow donated eighteen garments from her wardrobe to The Museum at FIT in 1991. An additional ninety-four garments and accessories were donated by her estate in 1992. All of the objects remain in the museum's collection. Not every item on view in *Flair* became part of the museum's collection.

207; Belk, 1995: 41). Martin and Koda argue that the collection of vintage clothing owned by Tina Chow provided fashion with 'credibility as a kind of object for collecting' (Martin and Koda, *Flair,* 1992: 20), also citing the work of earlier enthusiasts such as fashion historian James Laver and fashion editor-cum-curator Diana Vreeland[59] for facilitating this shift in thinking.

Despite the slow ascendance of fashion as a collecting category, there were indications of the increasing value of historic garments throughout the twentieth century. By 1967, curator Zillah Halls observes that eighteenth-century clothing was so valuable that curators should expect to purchase it rather than rely on its donation (Halls, 1967: 297). The establishment of high-end clothing and textile dealers such as Cora Ginsburg in New York (opened in 1982) further indicated the rising status of antique clothing (New York Times, 2003: n.p.). During the twenty-first century, the market for second-hand fashionable dress has expanded significantly, and the prices of the clothes—particularly those made by well-known designers—have increased in tandem (de la Haye, 2018: 391). This has made it more difficult for smaller museums, including The Museum at FIT, to acquire objects that are considered financially valuable. As a result, the use of objects already in the MFIT collection is more pertinent than ever.

[59] The year after the publication of this catalogue, Martin and Koda left The Museum at FIT to work at the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art—one of the oldest and largest fashion collections in the United States—where Vreeland had made a mark crafting fantastical (though frequently historically inaccurate) fashion exhibitions.

Publications on collecting fashion

A small body of texts foregrounds the subject of collecting fashion (Taylor, 2004; Clark and de la Haye, 2014; Riegels Melchior and Svensson, 2014; de la Haye, 2018; Petrov, 2019). Although I have utilised these to frame my knowledge of the subject, it is most expedient to include only a summary here. These publications tend to focus on British, European and North American museums with collections of elite fashion from the same regions, which mirror collecting practices more generally. Museum fashion collections typically lack everyday dress (Clark and Buckley, 2017: 18); this is partly the result of past wearers and owners preserving the 'best' clothes, specifically those for special events, which were imbued with monetary and/or sentimental value (Cumming, 2004: 48). This is a narrow view of collecting in need of expansion by further scholarship and broader acquisitions policies, ideas that are mentioned further in Chapter 4, 'Decolonising fashion studies'.

Of the important texts listed above, I have chosen to highlight Lou Taylor's *Establishing Dress History* (2004). Taylor is one of few scholars to have summarised the collection of global fashion as it began in the sixteenth century (for cabinets of curiosities, as I mention in Chapter 2) and the increase of such collections from the 1850s onwards. These garments largely became part of ethnographic, open-air, and social-history museums. Taylor also notes that during the late eighteenth century and throughout the first half of the nineteenth century—when many art museums were forming across Europe—there was little interest in collecting fashionable European apparel. This was despite what Taylor

recognised as a keen public enthusiasm for fashion, which was demonstrated by dress history publications during the same period (Taylor, 2004: 106). She traces the acquisition of elite Euro-American garments within museums of fine and decorative arts to the late nineteenth century, although it only began in earnest for many institutions well into the twentieth century.

Formerly private collections and/or wardrobes in public museums

Taylor further observes that 'Many dress and textile collections owe their origins or large parts of their collections to the obsessions and expertise of private collectors' (Taylor, 2004: 133). She notices that there is a cycle that repeats itself all over the world: once a private collection grows too large to be manageable, it is often sold, donated, or bequeathed to a museum (Ibid.). The transition from private collection to museum acquisition mirrors the trajectory of objects within many cabinets of curiosities.

Donations or sales of personal wardrobes also constitute significant portions of many museum fashion collections. Sociologist Brenda Danet and ethnographer Tamar Katriel observe that 'The pinnacle of achievement is to have one's collection displayed by a museum' (Danet and Katriel, 1994 [1989]: 222). Curator Julia Petrov underscores that a museum's desire to collect important clothing is bolstered by acquisitions that were worn by fashion tastemakers, which also provides the garments with documented provenance (Petrov, 2019: 55). As I mention in Chapter 2, the idea of displaying clothing worn by prominent people can be likened

to early cabinets of curiosities. Quiccheberg suggests that visitors would be interested in objects such as an 'emperor's military cloak, a duke's mantle, or priestly garb of some kind' (Quiccheberg, 2014 [1565]: 69).

I have chosen to abstain from repeating the extensive history of various museum fashion collections here, though my research process involved identifying and charting significant donations or purchases from private collectors and/or personal wardrobes. The table in Appendix C reflects a sampling of my findings. I focussed on private fashion collections that form(ed) substantial portions of museum collections, in addition to donations from personal wardrobes. Since the latter is common within fashion museums, I further narrowed my findings to wardrobes that have been the subject of a museum exhibition. I used this research as a means to better understand and contextualise The Museum at FIT collection, which I will reflect upon shortly.

Fashion collections developed for study

My research into collections of fashion elucidated a compelling subtheme: the development of those that were assembled for purposes of study among design industry professionals, academics, and students. In a 2019 lecture on the work of Samuel Quiccheberg, Meadow made a comparison between cabinets of curiosities in which objects were 'actively' and frequently handled and contemporary study collections (Meadow, 2019: n.p.).

Although such collections may function differently according to institutional needs, I was drawn to a description proffered

by New York's Bard Graduate Center: its collection is designed to support pedagogy and provide a 'hands-on, close-up examination of objects as part of a classroom experience' (Bard Graduate Center, n.d.). This description is redolent of The Museum at FIT study collection, which comprises more than 1,000 garments and accessories selected for hands-on learning. The grouping was created for and is primarily utilised by FIT faculty and students to support curriculum, and it is separate from the museum's permanent collection objects[60]. Although MFIT's study collection is considered 'expendable', its objects are of high quality, both aesthetically and historically.

My interest in the topic of fashion study collections within museums (with an emphasis on those attached to universities) initially resulted in an extensive literature review. Yet I ultimately determined that providing more space for information about my curatorial practice within the MFIT collection, rather than a review of the research performed by other scholars, proved more fruitful. I therefore include a brief history of The Museum at FIT collection, followed by the ways it has influenced my practice for this thesis.

[60] The development of the study collection is carefully managed according to professors' needs and the college's curriculum. The benefits of learning from the selected objects—many of which were created by leading designers such as Cristóbal Balenciaga, Claire McCardell, and Rei Kawakubo—must be determined to outweigh their hastened disintegration from handling by professors and students (in small, monitored groups, with care that no food, drinks, or ink pens are taken into the study collection classrooms; trying on the clothes is verboten). The decision on what to include in the study collection is agreed upon by the curatorial staff, the conservators, and the registrars.

A brief history of the fashion collection at FIT

What is now The Museum at FIT collection began with the work of Robert Riley, who had previously overseen the fashion and textile study collection at the Brooklyn Museum of Art. Riley was tasked with finding a satellite location in Manhattan during the early 1960s. He came upon a willing home at the Fashion Institute of Technology, a college established in 1944 to prepare students for work in New York's fashion trades. In addition to thousands of objects on loan from the Brooklyn Museum collection—which could be viewed onsite at FIT and, in some instances, borrowed by patrons[61]—Riley collected garments, accessories, and textiles exclusively for FIT. The objects were available to students and design industry professionals. In 1969, the collections and their spaces were officially designated The Design Laboratory and Galleries at FIT. In addition to launching the college's collection, Riley began to organise exhibitions. The first major example was *Paul Poiret: King of Fashion* in 1976, the planning for which resulted in such rare acquisitions as an Arabian Nights-inspired fancy dress costume by the renowned early twentieth-century haute couturier.

The Design Laboratory was renamed The Museum at FIT in 1994, and the usage of its collections evolved. The Museum at FIT was first accredited by the American Alliance of Museums in 2011—a rare occurrence for museums that exist as part of a college in the United States. This change emphasised the collection's evolution from a study or laboratory setting to an institution working within national

[61] This practice relates to some contemporary for-profit fashion archives. Examples in New York include the rental archive at Resurrection Vintage, Helen Uffner Vintage Clothing, and Albright Fashion Library.

standards of best museum practices. The museum staff maintains a permanent collection of approximately 50,000 garments, accessories, and textiles. These objects are under the strict purview of museum staff, and they are intended only for research by qualified academics (typically restricted to study for exhibitions, graduate-level theses, or publications) and for exhibition. The aforementioned study collection of 1,000 objects, though more accessible, is also thoughtfully curated according to the needs of FIT faculty and staff.

In 2005, The Museum at FIT opened its Fashion and Textile History Gallery, a space conceptualised to showcase objects from the museum's permanent collection. The exhibitions change every six months. Although early iterations of History Gallery exhibitions tended to be arranged chronologically from the eighteenth century to the present, later exhibitions have organised objects thematically and included selections from a varying (shorter) time frame, allowing for a breadth of imaginative topics. This gallery is only 'dark' for two, two-week stretches throughout the year.

Collections-related public programming

Although the History Gallery provides a useful and consistent means for visitors to view MFIT's collections, my research for this chapter—and a consideration of the role of cabinets of curiosities as 'study collections'—encouraged me to contemplate hands-on learning initiatives for the museum's visitors. Judy Willcocks, a specialist in object-based learning[62]

[62] Psychologist Scott G. Paris is credited with introducing the idea of object-based learning (Paris, 2002), and it has since been utilised by a multitude of university museums (Willcocks and Lange, 2021: 452).

and study collections, observes that providing participatory opportunities with objects outside of an exhibition setting— and thus beyond the confines of curatorial authority— 'can stimulate curiosity and ongoing interest' (Willcocks, 2015: 45).

Access to permanent collection objects is restricted to staff and qualified researchers (always under supervision and subject to an object's condition)[63], and the museum's study collection is limited to faculty, students, and academic researchers. I am interested in allowing some measure of access to the study collection as a public programming component of my theoretical exhibition. Visitors could be provided with an opportunity to learn about the benefits of a study collection, in addition to information about how fashion is collected, stored, and properly handled (topics about which museum visitors frequently express curiosity).

This could be achieved by allowing limited groups of pre-registered visitors to handle study collection objects[64] under the guidance of museum staff. Willcocks's research on the benefits of art- and design-based study collections found that hands-on interaction facilitated personal reactions, 'as if handling the objects actually brought the participants closer to both the design and the designer' (Willocks, 2015: 49). I find this fascinating and would be intrigued to know if MFIT participants relay similar sentiments.

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[63] These researchers include currently enrolled graduate students conducting research for a thesis or publication, and professional academics who are conducting research for not-for-profit endeavours.
[64] Participants would be required to wear lightweight, nitrile gloves, which strike a balance between object safety and understanding the feel and weight of a garment's materials.

In addition to many original examples of fashion, the study collection includes a selection of muslin copies of rare garments, such as Paul Poiret's 1912 'Sorbet' dress. Only three known versions of this dress are in existence[65], and the example in The Museum at FIT collection has been copied line-for-line, allowing viewers to understand its construction without inflicting damage to the original, fragile garment. Since copies of original objects were also part of cabinets of curiosities (as I mention in Chapter 2), their use in this public program would provide a chance to describe the connections between the cabinets and collections of fashion.

Although the selection of garments offered to participants would still be 'curated'—and this initiative would be limited in its number of attendees—I contend that it would nonetheless be meaningful. If successful, it could also be repeated, without needing to be tied to a particular exhibition. I will return to the idea of hands-on learning—for larger audiences and within an exhibition setting—in Chapter 6, 'The main gallery: "The Senses" cabinet'.

Analysing The Museum at FIT collection through the lens of curiosity

As I considered the concluding sections of this chapter—an analysis of the MFIT collections, in addition the ways I utilise those collections in my curatorial practice—I became interested in conveying how curiosity drives my research and knowledge. Throughout the process of writing this thesis, I was inspired by the words of author Zora Neale Hurston,

[65] Other examples are in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Chicago History Museum.

written in her 1942 autobiography: 'Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose' (Hurston, 1969 [1942]: 182). Although engendering curiosity among visitors to my theoretical exhibition is critical, I argue that maintaining my own curiosity in the process of planning that exhibition is also important. I revisited the aims I devised for the exhibition (outlined in the Introduction), which were conceived in relation to evoking curiosity. These include exploration, observation, investigation, and learning, and I have used these as a framework for detailing and developing my practice in the remainder of this chapter. What was I still curious about, more than fifteen years into working with the museum's collection, and how could I satiate that curiosity through 'poking and prying'?

I had previously performed only cursory research on the museum's collecting history[66]. My research into the cabinets of curiosities that shaped early museum collections incited my curiosity about MFIT's founding collections: what types of objects were being donated, and which remain in the collection today? Utilising the museum's database, I investigated historically significant or large donations from single constituents. Such research demonstrated that many donors were publicly known arbiters of style, signifying that private wardrobes comprised a significant portion of the founding collection. This practice remains common—many contemporary acquisitions to The Museum at FIT were worn by their donors. Some recent, recurring donors, such as model Veronica Webb, are well known public figures. In

[66] MFIT's exhibiting history was explored in the 2019 exhibition and corresponding publication, *Exhibitionism: 50 Years of The Museum at FIT* (Steele and Hill, 2019)

1969—the year in which the collection was officially established—donations came from Janet Chatfield-Taylor (a fashion editor at American *Vogue*); the estate of beauty mogul Elizabeth Arden; actor Lauren Bacall; Millicent Hearst (wife of businessman and newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst Jr); and art director and collector Emily Hall Tremaine. Collectively, these donations included designs from haute couturiers including Balenciaga, Chanel, Fath, Givenchy, James, Molyneux, Poiret, and Worth, the majority of which remain in The Museum at FIT's permanent collection.

This collecting history relates to the interest in clothing worn by important figures within historical cabinets of curiosities (Quiccheberg, 2014 [1565]: 69), but I do not intend for that to be a central point within my planned exhibition. Nevertheless, in my consideration of these foundational donations, I was reminded of a strategy employed within the Enlightenment Gallery at the British Museum, which displays objects from the museum's founding collections. Some items were given additional context through specialised 'Collecting history' labels, which included information on the original collectors and/or makers (fig. 3.2). These were numbered (one through fifteen) and visitors were encouraged to 'follow the trail' of the labels throughout the gallery.

Fig. 3.2

An example of a 'Collecting histories' label in the Enlightenment Gallery at the British Museum, November 2019. In addition to providing facts about the original commissioner and owner of the object, the label included details about the company with which the owner was affiliated. This series of labels was an effective means of providing visitors with additional information about certain objects without being overwhelming in scope. Photograph by the author.

A similar strategy could be used for the planning of my theoretical cabinets of curiosities exhibition. For example, I propose to feature an evening bag donated by Lauren Bacall, and its inclusion could provide information on Bacall's role as a founding and prolific donor to the museum's collection (she donated more than 700 garments and accessories between 1968 and 1986[67]). This bag was selected because of its unusual design rather than its donor, though both features might pique visitors' curiosity (fig. 3.3).

[67] A 2015 exhibition organised by graduate students for The Museum at FIT (as part of their coursework) was entitled *Lauren Bacall: The Look* and included twelve ensembles Bacall had donated to MFIT.

Fig. 3.3

An unlabelled ivory satin evening bag, circa 1965, donated by Lauren Bacall to FIT in 1971. I am considering this usual style—which comprises two separate bags joined by a single chain handle—for its potential relationship to anatomical specimens such as conjoined twins that were featured in cabinets of curiosities. Photograph © The Museum at FIT

I also propose using a similar tactic to highlight early MFIT donors whose names are not well known. For example, research into early MFIT donations highlighted a significant contribution from Peggy Westerfeld, who gave a total of seventy-five garments and textiles in 1969. Although little is known about the donor—and no paper records about Westerfeld's gifts exist—the range of object dates, from the eighteenth century through the 1920s, suggests that they were not worn by Westerfeld or her family. It is more likely that she collected them. I propose including one of Westerfeld's donations, a circa 1880 dolman made by London couturier Kate Reily from embroidered Indian fabric, which could be of interest to visitors for its intricate craftsmanship and its use of a non-European textile (see object number 6.11 in Praxis G, Checklist). Furthermore, Kate Reily is not (to my knowledge) well known among North American audiences,

and the label may be intriguing to them. The dolman's display would also provide an opportunity to discuss the importance of *all* museum donors in building a collection—not only those with familiar names.

Utilising The Museum at FIT collection for curatorial practice

My theoretical exhibition on cabinets of curiosities will be held in the museum's Special Exhibitions Gallery, a space in which loans from private collections, museums, and other institutions are allowed. Nevertheless, I plan to curate this exhibition relying primarily on MFIT's permanent collection. My earliest exhibitions were staged in the museum's Fashion and Textile History Gallery, which, as stated previously, features only permanent collection objects.

Curating ten exhibitions in the History Gallery over the course of my career has provided me with extensive knowledge of and appreciation for the collection—only a fraction of which has ever been on view. It has also trained me to conceptualise exhibitions that do not require loan material. On a purely practical level, my reliance on permanent collection objects is also cost effective. It allows me to focus my limited budget on the acquisition of new objects (with particular focus on diversifying the museum's collection), as well as the design of the space.

The museum is fortunate to house all of its objects onsite, making them immediately accessible. Cabinets of curiosities proves an ideal topic to highlight objects from the MFIT collection that have never been shown, and/or to feature, mount, or juxtapose objects in an unexpected manner. I

argue that an unconventional selection of garments—including many that fall outside of the realm of 'couture culture' (DeGregorio, 2018: 463)—may be what visitors expect in an exhibition about 'curiosities'. Furthermore, I am unbound by time periods, stylistic elements, and object types in developing this exhibition. In a manner similar to my analysis of the MFIT collection, I allowed curiosity to drive the way I utilised the collection for my theoretical exhibition.

I often begin my curatorial practice with an investigation into a novel topic. I complete conceptual and historical research on the subject (demonstrated, in this instance, in Chapter 2), and I consider which MFIT objects may best illustrate the ideas that my research presents. My object selection begins by searching for relevant keywords that have been used to describe objects in the museum's database and making lists of objects that may be of interest. This a useful starting point for any curatorial project, and the database is constantly undergoing improvement—curators, conservators, and registrars regularly add new photographs of objects, revise their written descriptions, make notes about condition, add notations regarding relevant research, and update object locations.

Although some curators prefer to work almost exclusively from the database, I use it as a starting point and, later, a touchpoint for filling perceived gaps in my narrative. I prefer to analyse the physical objects before making selections. After creating a preliminary checklist in the database, I write down the object locations and find them within the collection. I then 'pull' the objects that I consider relevant, often placing them together in a temporary location, so that I can observe

them more closely and analyse their condition, size, and other physical attributes (which are often difficult to discern in database photographs). I juxtapose objects and generally consider how they may work within an exhibition both conceptually and physically. This process also involves the rejection of objects that do not fit the exhibition topic or clash with other objects (a process that is sometimes immediate, and other times occurs after months of planning). New objects are continuously added.

These developments are mirrored on the cork board I mentioned in Chapter 1. I do not discard the small object cut-outs when I remove them from my board, instead placing them in an envelope so that I can reference them (or potentially resurrect them) at a later point. Out of respect for the time of my colleagues in exhibition design and conservation, a checklist is typically finalised four to five months prior to the opening of the exhibition. Until that point, the selection is constantly evolving.

The breadth of potential objects for the planning of this thesis and its subsequent exhibition inspired me to embrace a sense of exploration more fully than I had in previous projects. I have walked every aisle of collections storage (which spans two floors), considering many items that I had previously given little thought. In Chapter 6, 'Designs for evoking curiosity', I consider how specific objects might be paired with the design and/or theme of display cabinets. Here, I have chosen to underscore the significance of collection studies to my curatorial process by highlighting my exploration of costume jewellery—one of the museum's least displayed collections.

Jewellery can be related to several of the keywords that arose during front-end evaluation interviews: it tends to be small, it is often aesthetically detailed, and it is sometimes brightly coloured. Further, the majority of the MFIT jewellery collection has never been on view. Nine of the twenty-nine survey participants mentioned interest in jewellery, which, it turns out, was something collected within historic cabinets of curiosities. The acquisition of jewellery at MFIT has not, to my knowledge, ever followed a clear collecting mission, and these objects are often poorly documented (a rarity among MFIT records). Yet this disparate subcollection proved inspiring in the development of some of my potential ideas for the exhibition.

Returning to my earlier reference of using keyword searches to assemble a checklist, one of my first inquiries was the word 'shell' as a descriptor for permanent collection objects (as I note in Chapter 2, shells were commonly collected in historic cabinets of curiosities). Among the results were three pairs of earrings by Christian Lacroix from his spring 1988 collection, which the museum acquired from haute couture client Susan Gutfreund in 2020. I was part of the selection committee for this donation offer from Gutfreund—and had intentionally chosen these earrings for their potential use in my cabinets of curiosities exhibition—though their arrival at the museum just as it was closing due to the Covid-19 pandemic had caused them to slip my mind. I added two of the pairs to a new working checklist, and their (re)discovery sparked my curiosity about the jewellery collection—which I had not viewed in full in more than a decade. I decided to explore the

totality of the collection to see how I might juxtapose the Lacroix earrings with other objects.

The MFIT jewellery collection, housed in archival boxes of differing sizes, takes up fifty-two shelves in storage. Based on the varying ways that it is catalogued, it is difficult to determine how many pieces of jewellery there are in total, though I estimate 700. My curatorial process involved removing each box from its shelf, surveying its contents, and making notes on anything I found to be of interest before returning the box to its home location. At the end of this process—which took place over several days—I had a cohesive picture of the jewellery objects in the collection, including a number of additional shell-themed designs. I pulled all of these so that I could examine and juxtapose them. One object—an unlabelled 1950s necklace made with a crocheted 'net' of yarn in which small, shell- and fish-shaped trinkets are 'caught'—felt like an aesthetic outlier to the initial selection, but it was also (to my eye) of the most detailed and remarkable objects (fig. 3.4).

I might have been dismissive of this necklace if considering it for another exhibition—there is very little information about it, and there are few leads for further research. Yet in the context of 'curious' objects, its status as an 'unknown specimen' made it more desirable. Rather than eliminate it, I thought about how I might enhance the necklace with another object. I remembered a pair of gold 'fish' earrings that, when added to the grouping, expanded the theme from shells to sea life more generally. Similarly, two pairs of the Lacroix earrings, which feature bits of faux coral, made me recall (and

then pull) a coral brooch and a faux coral necklace, providing some additional colour and variation to the selection.

Fig. 3.4

A 'fishing net' necklace made from crocheted bronze yarn, shells, and metal fish-shaped trinkets, circa 1950s. This was part of a group of objects donated for potential use in the 1990 MFIT exhibition *Splash! A History of Swimwear* (it was ultimately not included). Beyond its donor's name, there is no information about the piece. Although it is unlikely to be a 'high fashion' necklace due to its humble materials, it is unusual and finely crafted. The collection of The Museum at FIT, 89.143.3, gift of Michael Dykeman. Photograph by the author.

I envisioned how these objects might be shown together in a pull-out drawer within the planned exhibition (the details of which are outlined in Chapter 6, 'The main gallery: "The Senses" cabinet'). Although this format would necessitate the use of small objects, it need not be limited to jewellery. A gold, shell-shaped Versace minaudière—another recent acquisition that I recalled from my keyword search—completed my preliminary selection (fig. 3.5). The next step, which will occur after the submission of this text, is to share my ideas with my colleagues in the conservation department and on the exhibitions team, with whom I will collaborate on possible modes of display.

Fig. 3.5

A selection of 'sea life' inspired jewellery and accessories in The Museum at FIT collection. With the exception of the large faux-shell necklace on the left, none of the objects has been utilised in previous exhibitions. Shells were collected within cabinets of curiosities; they are also a common motif in fashion. Photograph by the author.

My explorations of the MFIT jewellery collection led me to investigate additional object themes. My notes on the jewellery collection illuminated the potential for three additional groupings for the cabinet drawers: gold, pearls and mother of pearl, and animals and insects. Each motif is related to collecting categories within the historic cabinets of curiosities. Like the sea-themed objects listed above, they rely primarily on items of jewellery, with a few other small accessories completing the list. Before settling on these three additional themes, I experimented with other concepts, such as jewellery and accessories made in the colour green, crafted from chainmail, or in the shape of hands. Ultimately, I selected the four themes that were most closely related to the cabinets' collecting categories, and that contained what I considered the most varied and compelling selections of objects. I later shared these ideas with several colleagues for

their professional feedback, and my findings from this process are described in the Conclusion to this thesis.

Organising the objects to be included in these drawers marked my first concerted effort in building my exhibition checklist, and it set a parameter I had not previously considered. All of the objects need not only to work within my curatorial ideas (in this instance, fit within pull-out drawers), but they should also bear some connection to historic cabinets of curiosities. This practice-led research resulted in a twofold manner of considering selections, enriching the themes of my theoretical exhibition and helping to create a clearer narrative as I continued my research.

Conclusion

My research into collection studies engaged with the concepts of exploration, observation, and investigation as they relate to curiosity, demonstrating how they can be applied to my work with The Museum at FIT collections. The accumulation of these ideas resulted in learning, defined as 'the acquisition of novel information, behaviors, or abilities after practice, observation, or other experiences, as evidenced by change in behavior, knowledge, or brain function' (American Psychological Association, 2022, 'Learning': n.d.). Utilising a framework of curiosity to reconsider a long-familiar part of a museum collection led me to envision new ways to interpret, select, and display objects. Yet it remained imperative to expand my research into collecting fashion—in both cabinets of curiosities and museums—with a more critical eye.

Museologist Eilean Hooper-Greenhill's concise observation that 'Meaning in museums is constructed in relation to the collections which the museum holds' (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000: 3) is a reminder that many exhibitions depend upon their objects to craft narratives—and that the absence of certain objects can greatly limit or homogenise those narratives. Grout writes about the power dynamics inherent to collecting and interpreting museum collections which, she contends, can never be considered 'neutral' in the ways they convey information (Grout, 2019: 32).

As I mentioned previously, many museum fashion collections are focussed on elite, European and American dress. The need to be more inclusive—though imperative—must also be contextualised and implemented in a thoughtful manner. The following chapter, 'Decolonising: perspectives on collecting and curating fashion', probes more deeply into the concept of representation (or misrepresentation) in museum collections.

CHAPTER 4: DECOLONISING: PERSPECTIVES ON COLLECTING AND CURATING FASHION

Introduction

This chapter demonstrates how research can evolve to reflect important, contemporary concerns. Over the course of my studies, my thoughts on the links between cabinets of curiosities and colonialism developed from a cursory reference to a vital point of consideration. The first reason for this shift was the discovery that some historians consider cabinets of curiosities to be outside of colonialist practices (Ross, 2019: 35; Bennett, 2004: 21). I found this surprising, and I determined that I needed to form my own opinion on this matter based on more extensive research.

Writing about the revival of cabinets of curiosities in a contemporary context, Dominik Collet notes that they are sometimes perceived as having fostered a 'respectful, open-minded and equitable portrayal of different cultures. Early museums seem to offer a model untainted by later colonial national and disciplinary constraints' (Collett, 2014: 47). Art historian Horst Bredekamp asserts that cabinets of curiosities were not merely about the subjugation of other cultures (Bredekamp, 1995: 35), but also about learning from them.

In his expansive research on the etymology of curiosity, Kenny explains that 'curious' objects—many of which were collected by Europeans from global cultures—were equated with the 'uncommon' during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Those terms were, in turn, associated with largely positive concepts such as the unknown, the beautiful, the

new, and the extraordinary (Kenny, 1998: 120). Although these writings were useful to shaping my knowledge, they were also written at a time when points of view might differ from current mindsets.

My examination of extant curiosities catalogues did sometimes indicate admiration for the objects collected, including fashion. Nevertheless, my research guided me to the conclusion that cabinets of curiosities must also be positioned within a colonial framework. Even if the intentions of some early collectors were 'good'—a subjective ascription in any case—they may have still played a role in the 'othering' of non-European cultures. As anthropologist Lizzy van Leeuwen writes, '[the] material aspect of the white man's burden is rooted in the sixteenth century and is closely related [to] the seemingly innocent act of collecting exotic objects and curiosities' (van Leeuwen, 2015: n.p.).

My research has been shaped by a period of pronounced political activism. This chapter was written in the midst of a global pandemic, the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement, and the increasingly devastating effects of environmental degradation. Scholars Toby Slade and M. Angela Jansen, co-editors of a 2020 special issue of *Fashion Theory* centred on decolonising, write that these problems imbue their scholarship with 'extra urgency and meaning', adding that, 'In fashion, the exploitation of the environment, the exploitation of people and labor, and the exploitation of cultures are all interrelated and indeed the first two require the third' (Slade and Jansen, 2020: 810). I, too, felt this urgency when undertaking research for this thesis.

Finally, the need to address colonialism on a deeper level was enhanced by the responses I received from participants in my front-end evaluation interviews. One of my questions explained that cabinets of curiosities were products of colonialism, followed by a definition of the term. I then asked my participants if they thought an exhibition centred on cabinets of curiosities was appropriate if their colonialist history was addressed. The responses were overwhelmingly affirmative. Some of the feedback included:

> 'A lot of times I have this romanticised idea of fashion, not knowing where a particular garment comes from … When you mentioned colonialism, it kind of took me aback. It surprised me in a very good way. We should be brave enough to discuss this history'. [Participant 35]
>
> 'Given the fraught times we're living in, it's important to put [colonialism] in context … You should address the issue before someone else does'. [Participant 16]
>
> 'I don't think we should aim to reinforce the wounds of the past, but I do think that if we deny that it happened, we lose some important insight in terms of how we as human beings move forward'. [Participant 6]
>
> 'It's an academic approach but also a really timely one … There is no way not to address [colonialism] unless [the exhibition] is very superficial'. [Participant 29]
>
> 'I've been having conversations about how this has been handled at different museums. Personally, I think it should be included, but what distracts is when you're being hit over the head with it. … I think that there is a way to [address colonialism] that is really respectful while enhancing the exhibition and not making the entire exhibition focus around colonialism or subjugated people'. [Participant 32]
>
> 'Colonialism has to be addressed [within the exhibition]. I was going to ask about that. What founded museums was … a small slice of life. It was men, it was white, it was wealthy. That became the foundation for what "fashion" should be'. [Participant 11]

Decolonising is not only an important subject, but a particularly complex one. Although I engaged with extensive research on the impact of colonialism on both museums and fashion studies, a full review of that study is, regrettably, outside of the scope of this thesis (it could in fact form a

thesis of its own). Therefore, this chapter presents research that is targeted towards cabinets of curiosities and fashion, leading to how those ideas have informed my curatorial practice. It begins with an examination of terminologies, followed by research on the acquisition of fashion within cabinets of curiosities through the lens of colonialism. The next section focusses on recent approaches to decolonising fashion studies, including changes to language and the expansion of views on collecting and exhibiting fashion. I conclude with research on the implications of exoticising global fashion and cultural appropriation, including strategies for addressing the latter within fashion exhibitions.

Decolonising: definition and description

There are myriad definitions of the term decolonising, but I am drawn to an example written by museologist Christina Kreps for its conciseness and potential application to a wide range of museum collections:

> [Decolonising is] acknowledging the historical, colonial contingencies under which collections were acquired; revealing Eurocentric ideology and biases in the Western museum concept, discourse and practice; [and] acknowledging and including diverse voices and multiple perspectives [Kreps, 2011: 72].

Decolonising is a term that was modelled on postmodernism and emerged during the mid-twentieth century, though it usually refers to colonialist practices that began during the sixteenth century (Bhambra, 2014: 115). It centres on the history and legacy of colonialism; these include its long-term effects on Indigenous peoples, as well as constructs that shaped the thoughts of colonisers about those whom they

colonised (Fiorin, 2019: 48). Many such Eurocentric patterns of thought persist today. Decolonising implies action, focussing on creating strategies that simultaneously diminish structural injustices and bring awareness to colonial oppression. It is intended to advance 'other ways of being, thinking, knowing, theorizing, analyzing, feeling, acting and living for us all' (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018: 10).

Despite (or perhaps because of) its widespread usage, decolonising is a controversial concept. As education scholar Sunny Dhillon explains of its persistence within the realm of higher education (only one example of its frequency within the contemporary lexicon), 'decolonisation as a verb, metaphor, or general catch-all umbrella term to cover anything socially progressive is problematic. Such a reductive reading nullifies the radicalness of the discourse, and instead, renders it as business as usual' (Dhillon, 2021: n.p.). I admittedly struggled with its usage. As a cisgender, white woman, I became concerned that asserting my role in 'decolonising' a narrative could, in fact, be another form of colonising.

Nonetheless, I found this to be the most explicit term for the subject of this chapter. I have strived to use it in a manner that is not colloquial, and I focus on implementing strategies for addressing and mitigating colonialist points of view. Since my research incorporates global fashions and considers their display in a manner that evokes a cabinet of curiosities, it is imperative to consider ways to select and interpret them in a conscientious manner. Without making excuses for the colonialist nature of cabinets of curiosities, putting this information in context can lead to an understanding of how

contemporary notions of collecting and curating can be inclusive and equitable. I argue that all curators should engage with these ideas, and I take care not to claim them as my own.

The research on decolonising that I present below largely foregrounds race and ethnicity for their significant intersection with the history of collecting and displaying fashion (in cabinets of curiosities and thereafter), as well as my position as a curator in New York City, one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the world (Lankevich, 2022: n.p.). Yet I also include information on the environmental impact of colonialism, and I acknowledge that the topic of decolonising encompasses the dismantling of a multitude of unjust political, social, and economic systems, all of which are integral to charting a more equitable future (Belfi and Sandiford, 2021: n.p.).

Collecting early fashion objects through the lens of colonialism

A study of colonialism, museums, and the objects collected within them bridges the disciplines of post-colonial theory, museum studies and material culture studies (Barringer and Flynn, 1998: 2). Many of the links between colonialism and collecting centre on 'ethnographic'[68] materials that were first collected for cabinets of curiosities and later for public museums—and the use of many of these objects has proven

[68] The term ethnographic can be viewed as problematic for its associations with colonialism and its implied 'othering' of cultures outside of Europe and North America (Harris and O'Hanlon, 2013: 9). Although I acknowledge this issue, I will use this word throughout this text, since it remains the primary term employed by the scholars whose work I reference.

to be contentious within a twenty-first-century context. As sociologist Fausto Fiorin theorises, ethnographic collections 'played a central role in shaping the image of the colonised peoples and the relationship with the Other' (Fiorin, 2019: 7).

Grout contends that the objects held within museum collections 'primarily reflect the experience and activities of those who hold, or have held, positions of power in society' (Grout, 2019: 32), and therefore represent a limited demographic. The concept of the museum as an authoritative entity—and the subsequent need to re-examine that authority—is at its most evident within colonial collections (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000: xi). European collectors frequently determined what objects would represent a particular culture, and which were worthy of preservation (Fiorin, 2019: 19). As I mentioned previously, colonial collections—and the global fashions that were part of them—formed the basis of many ethnographic museums during the nineteenth century (Taylor, 2004: 106).

Considering that few scholars have written about fashion objects within cabinets of curiosities in general, it is not surprising that even less has been written about their connections to colonialism. The Ashmolean Museum provides a rare and specific example: in the museum's permanent exhibition, *The Ashmolean Story*, a mantle from the early 1600s—possibly owned by Native American Chief Powhatan and later part of the collection of John Tradescant—is specified as dating to 'the first period of contact between

Indigenous North American peoples and British colonists'[69] (Ashmolean Museum, 2020: n.p.).

In his influential book *Orientalism*, activist and professor Edward Said describes the concept of 'othering' as 'a much worked-over historical, social, intellectual, and political process that takes place as a contest involving individuals and institutions in all societies' (Said, 1979: 353). More recently, fashion theorist Wessie Ling and fashion curator Daan van Dartel note the key role that fashion can play in the process of othering: 'For early ethnographers, it was more important to capture the differences rather than similarities when describing the Other', they write. 'People's garb was an embedded colonial project from which the Other was created for the preservation of a power structure and hierarchical relationship' (Ling and van Dartel, 2019: 77). In his studies of catalogues of cabinets of curiosities, Christian Feest notes that the vague and often incorrect attributions of objects within them—which included numerous fashion items—acted as another means of indicating their otherness (Feest, 1995: 335).

Fashion scholars M. Angela Jansen and Jennifer Craik take a similar point of view, explaining that words such as 'primitive', 'savage', and 'exotic' were applied to early collections of world fashion, later evolving into terms including traditional, folkloric, and ethnic. This, they note, 'mainly allowed Western researchers to initially dehumanize and later depose these fashions as well as differentiate themselves from them' (Jansen and Craik, 2016: 19). Certain

[69] This object is described in greater detail in Chapter 2.

fashion goods were particularly exoticised; fashion historian Susan Kaiser writes that pelts that had come from North America were viewed in this way by Europeans, meaning that fur fashions—part of a lucrative trade in Europe by the seventeenth century—were especially 'powerful symbols of colonialism' (Kaiser, 2012: 62). Furthermore, African art historian Victoria Rovine writes that:

> Clothing has long been an important medium for negotiating differences across cultural divides. Garments provide a means by which to absorb distant cultures into familiar frameworks, or to highlight cultural differences, often in order to reinforce cultural identity through contrast with the "other" (Rovine, 2009: 44).

Ling and van Dartel further explain that there was little to no focus on the makers of the garments collected. Attention was paid almost exclusively to the wearers, who could then be generalised as representative of their cultures. Individuality was of little concern. They contrast this with the attention paid to designers within the European and American canon of fashion (Ling and van Dartel, 2019: 78)—though, I add, even this is often at the expense of the individuals who actually make the clothing.

Acquiring fashion

It is also important to include some information on how objects (fashion and otherwise) were collected within cabinets of curiosities. Daston and Park position the collection of mirabilia (wondrous things) within a broader historical context. They note that the trade in luxury goods between Europe and Asia during the High Middle Ages—which included

drugs and spices in addition to objects of adornment such as jewellery and silks—laid the foundation for the concept of wonders as commodities. These could be 'bought, sold, collected, and sometimes literally consumed' (Daston and Park, 1998: 67). As the market for mirabilia developed during the late sixteenth century, specialised businesses centred on supplying objects for cabinets were established in Europe (Feest, 1995: 333). The suppliers were soldiers, sailors, and other world travellers who would peddle their rarities when they were not intended as gifts (Françozo, 2016: 116).

Research indicates that artefacts were often acquired through barter or trade, while others were gained through ceremonial exchanges (Feest, 1995: 331). Fashion historian Elizabeth Semmelhack notes that by the fifteenth century, 'clothes were frequently elements of diplomatic gift exchange' (Semmelhack, 2009: 36). Powhatan's mantle, mentioned above, is a well-documented example of a ceremonial acquisition. In her research on Brazilian featherwork in early modern Europe, historian Mariana Françozo found that following the Europeans' arrival in 1500, 'featherwork became an element of trade and a vehicle for strategic alliances with colonizers' (Françozo, 2016: 122). When the featherwork (which often included fashion objects such as capes) arrived in Europe, it was viewed as a symbol of America. Of course, the practices of obtaining goods from their makers were not always ethical—but through the Eurocentric lens of history, peaceful exchanges were more readily documented.

Responses from front-end evaluation participants (some of which are quoted earlier in this chapter) assert the significance of addressing colonialism within this PhD

research and suggest how to convey such information within my theoretical exhibition. Although all twenty-nine of the participants felt that addressing colonialism was important, several voiced that it should not be central to my narrative. After conducting the research for this chapter and considering myriad angles, I determined that this subject should be broached in a short wall panel within the exhibition's introductory gallery and further referenced when appropriate within label copy (sample wall text can be found in Praxis C at the end of this section).

My discovery of the open-access publication *New World Objects of Knowledge: A Cabinet of Curiosities* further informed this idea. As its editors Mark Thurner and Juan Pimentel explain, 'from the late 15th century down to our own day, the New World, and in particular that part of it now called Latin America, has been plundered and pilfered for its "treasures" and "wonders"' (Thurner and Pimentel, 2021: 1)—a task that involved a multitude of conquerors, explorers, collectors, and curators. *New World Objects of Knowledge* was written to 'incite critical curiosity about the New World as a key protagonist in the history of modern knowledge' (Ibid.: 2).

Four of the forty topics included in the publication stood out for their potential connections to fashion: birds of paradise, hummingbirds, pearls, and strawberries. These histories can be referenced using objects in The Museum at FIT collection: an enamelled brooch and a woman's mantle with a cut velvet motif of hummingbirds (see Praxis G, Checklist objects 2.34 and 4.26); a selection of accessories made with pearls or mother of pearl (objects 2.44 through 2.52); a straw bag woven to resemble a strawberry (object 3.15); and a hat

adorned with a taxidermic bird of paradise (object I.5; fig. 4.1).

Fig. 4.1

Hay by Madame Pauline, ca. 1955, made from felt and a taxidermic bird of paradise. Although this example postdates the early twentieth-century mania for birds of paradise as millinery trimmings, the use of the entire bird is a powerful reminder of the sometimes-gruesome nature of fashion. The collection of The Museum at FIT, 77.146.2, gift of Mrs Otto Grun. Photograph © The Museum at FIT

I propose displaying the hat within a case in the exhibition's introductory gallery (a space to be explained in greater depth in Chapter 6, 'The introductory gallery') to draw attention to the wall text explaining the cabinets' colonialist history and how birds of paradise (a native species of New Guinea and the Moluccas archipelago) had become highly desirable marvels in Europe by the early sixteenth century (Marcaida, 2021: 155). The birds' feathers continued to be commodities through the early twentieth century, when they rose to the height of

European fashion. As Southeast Asian history professor Leonard Andaya explains:

> From 1905 to 1920, between 30,000 and 80,000 birds were killed annually and exported to feather auctions in London, Paris, and Amsterdam. All efforts to limit the trade in order to prevent the extinction of the bird of paradise were unsuccessful, and only a change in fashion ended this wide-scale slaughter (Andaya, 2017: 376).

Because of the fashion for these feathers, some bird of paradise species remain on the endangered birds list today. This hat, therefore, will not only represent an important collecting category with cabinets of curiosities, but also demonstrate the lingering, devastating effects of colonialism (in this instance, environmental). The other three object themes (hummingbirds, pearls, and strawberries) fit into larger concepts within the exhibition (also outlined in Chapter 6, 'Design ideas for evoking curiosity') and their label copy can be written to further illuminate their colonialist histories. I have included a sample wall text that addresses cabinets and colonialism below; this is followed by a more general introductory panel to provide greater context.

Praxis C

Sample wall texts: ‘A Problematic History’ and ‘Cabinets of Curiosities: An Introduction’

A Problematic History

Cabinets of curiosities were primarily owned by white, European men. Although some collectors procured their objects through travel, many purchased items from explorers who were ‘discovering’—and sometimes colonising—other parts of the world.

This hat reminds us of the enduring impact of colonialist practices, which have resulted in a multitude of unjust political, social, economic, and environmental systems. The hat’s adornment, a taxidermic bird of paradise, is a native species of New Guinea and the Moluccas archipelago. By the early sixteenth century, birds of paradise were among the most sought-after specimens for cabinets of curiosities.

Birds of paradise continued to be commodities through the early twentieth century, when they became the height of Euro-American fashion. It is estimated that anywhere from 30,000 to 80,000 birds were killed annually between 1905 and 1920. This midcentury hat demonstrates that the fashion was slow to fade. Today, some bird of paradise species are still endangered—a devastating, long-term effect of a centuries-old commodification of nature.

Cabinets of Curiosities: An Introduction

Cabinets of curiosities were privately-owned collections and spaces belonging to European royals, aristocrats, and scholars. Dating from the late fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries, they are often considered precursors to the modern museum.

The vast array of objects within cabinets of curiosities generally fell within one of two broad categories: *naturalia* (natural objects) and *artificialia* (man-made artefacts). In addition to items such as shells, minerals, coins, and antiquities, these collections included fashion—especially shoes, headdresses, and jewellery. Fashion was likely considered a marker of history, as well as a representation of the ceremonies and customs of diverse, global cultures.

These early collections and their modes of display inspired this exhibition. Historical and contemporary fashions are organized into seven themed cabinets. You are encouraged to consider what makes you most curious as you explore the space. Are you interested in something you've never seen before, or perhaps by how something is made? What would you include in your own cabinet of curiosities?

Decolonising fashion studies

Lou Taylor's work emphasises the significance of global fashions in anthropological collections, beginning in the sixteenth century with cabinets of curiosities and expanding when anthropology became established as an academic discipline during the second half of the nineteenth century (Taylor, 2004: 67). As fine and decorative arts museums slowly formed their own fashion collections during the mid- to late-nineteenth century, they often focussed on elite clothing made and worn by white individuals in Europe and North America. This was, ostensibly, based on the museums' 'establishment of close working relationships with the design industry' (Druesedow, 2010: 305), but it also implies the 'superiority' of such garments. The way that fashion history has been written about, taught, and otherwise disseminated has largely followed suit. That narrow focus has recently come under public scrutiny. A September 2020 article in the *New York Times* describes the omission of global designers of colour as the 'status quo in the small group of globally renowned high-culture institutions historically charged with preserving and protecting the art of fashion' (Friedman, 2020: n.p.).

Journalist Vanessa Friedman's impetus for writing this article stemmed from a webinar[70] organised by the Costume Society of America, entitled 'Tackling Tokenism and Diversity in Our Museum Collections'. The webinar featured curators Darnell-Jamal Lisby, Susan North, and Georgina Ripley, in addition to

[70] Friedman did not explicitly state this. However, I was in attendance and noted her presence. Her article, which was published six days later, touches upon many of the points brought up in the webinar.

museum director Sarah Rogers, who discussed the need to address fashion collections 'traditionally centered around wealthy, able-bodied, mainstream, Eurocentric ideals' (Costume Society of America, 2020: n.p.). Friedman's article introduces this problem to a wider audience.

The field of fashion studies has become increasingly engaged with theories of decolonising during the twenty-first century. Cultural anthropologist Elke Gaugele and sociologist Monica Titton convey that 'this paradigmatic shift is part of an ongoing process that, over the past two decades, has initiated complex interdisciplinary debates within disciplines such as fashion history, anthropology, sociology, art history, and cultural studies that aim to establish a postcolonial perspective for fashion research' (Gaugele and Titton, 2019: 11). Regardless of this progress, the field of fashion studies remains in need of deeper engagement with theories of decolonising and globalisation (Ibid.: 13).

The language of fashion

Slade and Jansen suggest reframing the 'Eurocentric fashion discourse' (Slade and Jansen, 2020: 811), part of which entails the reconsideration of the word 'fashion', previously reserved for elite European and American women's clothing that underwent frequent (often seasonal) change. As anthropologist Sandra Niessen argues, 'Who has, and who does not have fashion is politically determined, a function of power relations' (Niessen, 2003: 245). My use of the term fashion almost exclusively in this text was acknowledged in my Introduction, but it is pertinent to reiterate that choice as a basic yet important step towards greater inclusivity in my

practice. This broad application of the term will further extend to my exhibition text now and in the future.

Several prescient scholars argue for re-thinking the term fashion to make room for a more inclusive, global point of view. Craik notes this distinction as early as 1993, asking 'So, why has the term "fashion" been used as an exclusive description of western elite fashion? And why is "fashion" distinguished from terms such as "costume", "uniform", "folk" and "ethnic" dress?' Her answer states that the rise of mercantile capitalism in Europe during the Middle Ages established the framework for accelerated changes to dress, which developed into the elitist and authoritarian European (and later Euro-American) fashion system. She continues by asserting that fashion should be 'dissolved and reconstituted', ultimately calling for its expansion beyond Europe and North America (Craik, 1993: ix-x).

Even within Europe, there are biases against certain types of clothing. Lou Taylor makes the argument that European 'peasant dress'—a term used to describe the clothing from 'the isolated, self-sufficient, rural communities of Europe' (particularly Eastern, Southern, and Central Europe)—is often erroneously thought of as static and 'traditional'—a term that is used pejoratively to imply a lack of progress. Instead, such clothing 'developed constantly in reaction to the specific, shifting, political and economic situation of each community' (Taylor, 2004: 200-201). Gaugele and Titton provide some context for the significance of the term 'traditional' within colonialism, making the point that 'in the early twentieth century, at a time when its colonies were at their most expansive, the construction of non-European cultures as

"traditional" was an important element of the colonial enterprise and its support at home' (Gaugele and Titton, 2019: 16). The acknowledgment that even 'traditional' dress is not static is now more widespread among fashion researchers, and my studies for this thesis have encouraged me to eliminate the use of this term within my practice.

Since the mid-1990s, publications that incorporate a global view of fashion (Eicher, 1995, 2010; Niessen, Leshkowich and Jones, 2003; Maynard, 2004; Brand *et al*, 2006; Paulicelli and Clark, 2009; Riello and McNeil, 2010; Kaiser, 2012; Eicher and Evenson, 2016; Welters and Lillethun, 2018; Gaugele and Titton, 2019; Cheang, de Greef and Takagi, 2021; Breward, Lemire and Riello, 2023) have helped to eliminate the 'West and the rest' mentality that 'substantiated the European empires during the nineteenth century' (Gaugele and Titton, 2019: 16). As fashion studies professor Kat Sark notes, there is so far not a comprehensive textbook that will 'teach us fashion studies from a non-white-supremacist or non-Eurocentric perspective', and the authoring of such a book would need to be a collaborative effort (Sark in Niessen, 2020: 973).

Although these publications have undoubtedly expanded the field of fashion studies, they do not come without some measure of reproof. Erica de Greef warns the 'notions of tradition and type are largely perpetuated through museum classificatory constructs, as well as in both historic and more recent publications'. She cites an entry on Nguni, Zulu, and Xhosa clothing and beadwork in Berg Publishers' 2010 *Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion* as one of the perpetrators of this problem for its overly simplistic, 'tribalist'

perspective (de Greef, 2019: 95). The argument against over-classification centres on the premise that ethnic identity—both collective and individual—is constantly evolving (Maynard, 2004: 69).

More recent publications, such as Jansen and Craik's 2016 edited volume *Modern Fashion Traditions*, have addressed the dichotomous model of fashion, meaning that which centres on traditional versus fashionable, traditional versus modern, local versus global, and Western versus non-Western. This is not a simple task, as the editors note: 'Ironically…by trying to transgress these dichotomies, there is a real danger of reinforcing the very stereotypes we set out to critique' (Jansen and Craik, 2016: 16). Despite their imperfections, however, I argue that these publications are critical to a more inclusive view of fashion studies. They indicate progressive thinking that one hopes will continue to expand, and they have raised many questions about equity and inclusivity that can and should broaden from theoretical context to fashion curatorial practice.

Expanding views of collecting and exhibiting fashion

Theorists Wessie Ling, Mariella Lorusso, and Simona Segre Reinach argue that fashion is a particularly ubiquitous—and eminently global—form of visual culture[71]. However, the use of the term 'global' in fashion should not be limited to thinking about widespread interest in particular brands or the

[71] Hooper-Greenhill defines the field of visual culture as one that 'questions of what is made visible, who sees what, [and] how seeing, knowing and power are interrelated. It examines the act of seeing as a product of the tensions between external images or objects, and internal thought processes' (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000: 14).

expansion of European and North American styles of dress around the world. Globalisation should 'imply an understanding of the circulation of technologies, objects, and ideas' around the clothing we make, consume, and wear (Ling, Lorusso and Segre Reinach, 2019: VI). I argue that this also extends to the examples of fashion that are collected and displayed within museums.

Many curators working with fashion collections today recognise the significance of holdings that are increasingly global and inclusive. De Greef notes that strategies for decolonising have largely focussed on ethnographic collections, while the holdings within many fashion collections have not yet been questioned (de Greef, 2019: 16). Ling and van Dartel posit that 'Sitting alongside the current de-colonial movement, global fashion, as outlined by the participants, can decenter the Euro-American system and offer inclusiveness in fashion' (Ling and van Dartel, 2019: 84).

In 'The Incredible Whiteness of the Museum Fashion Collection', the previously mentioned article from the *New York Times*, Friedman mentions the 200,000 fashion objects that are part of the collection of the Palais Galliera, Paris. A mere seventy-seven examples within that total were made by Black designers—an astoundingly low .0385% of the collection. As Friedman notes, 'It's a startling imbalance, but it is effectively the status quo in the small group of globally renowned high-culture institutions historically charged with preserving and protecting the art of fashion' (Friedman, 2020: n.p.). Friedman's article could be viewed as a call to arms for fashion curators to reassess their museum's collection policies.

Numerous professional museum organisations outline best practices for new acquisitions. The J. Paul Getty Museum and Trust, for instance, writes that museums should assess for quality ('involving a variable combination of visual power, inventiveness, strong content, and art-historical importance'); consider an object's condition; determine its ability to display and care for the object; and gauge its relationship to the institution's mission (J. Paul Getty Trust, 2019: 2). The final point—an object's relationship to the museum's mission—is subjective and individual to each institution. It is evident that the interpretation of a mission statement that allows for greater inclusivity is often in order, particularly within fashion collections.

In 1985, Zillah Halls wrote that museum fashion collections built upon a clear collections policy could be suggestive of the ways that people thought and lived at a particular time—more so than any other type of collection (Arizona Costume Institute, 1985: 9–10). This statement emphasises a duty among museum staff to represent history accurately and equitably. More than three decades later, curator Steven Lubar observes a different way of thinking about collection among museum curators, who are paying more attention to the range of narratives that objects can and should convey. '[Curators are] not just collecting objects, they're collecting stories, collecting meaning', he explains, adding that 'Collecting objects for the stories they tell allows museums to make an argument for the value of collections, and to focus collecting' (Lubar, 2017: 34). Nevertheless, the reimagining and rebuilding of collections—assortments of objects which may date back decades, if not centuries—is a slow process. As

curator Christine Checinska astutely notes, 'You can't undo 100 years of miscategorization and undervaluation overnight' (Checinska in Friedman, 2020: n.p.).

What, then, can museums do to rectify the limitations of their holdings? Although art historian Felicity Bodenstein and political theorist Camilla Pagani's writing is about ethnographic museums, their observation that such museums are 'adopting a range of strategies with the aim of cancelling out, neutralising or indeed critically exposing colonial roots' (Bodenstein and Pagani, 2014: 67) can be applied to a range of institutions and collection types, including fashion. The best strategy may be to openly acknowledge a collection's history, and to highlight past (and current) practices of collecting in all their potential deficiencies.

Curators have devised numerous strategies to address the lack of inclusiveness in fashion collections and exhibitions that can be overt or subtle. An example was included in the 2021 exhibition *Ain't Misbehavin': 1920s Richmond*, curated by Kristen Stewart for the Valentine Museum in Richmond, Virginia. The exhibition included wall text with the title 'Who Is Missing Here?', explaining that:

> [L]ike many museums, until the mid-20th century, the Valentine focused primarily on collecting objects and stories from the Euro-American perspective. As a result, even as we seek to continue the important work of expanding the diversity of our collection, we mourn the many extraordinary stories that we've missed an opportunity to preserve, interpret and share (The Valentine, 2020: n.p.).

The missing stories—specifically those of Black women and other women of colour—were represented by life-size

silhouettes of dancing figures adorning a gallery wall. Their gestures corresponded to the exhibition's introductory panel, which began 'The 1920s are remembered as a decade that "roared" across America. Urban expansion, equal suffrage, short hemlines, fast dancing and jazz music swept away established social norms' (Ibid.). This exhibition strategy signified that women of colour, underrepresented but not forgotten, were essential to Richmond's history.

In response to Black Lives Matter protests, Costume Institute curator Andrew Bolton revised the object checklist for his 2020-21 exhibition *About Time: Fashion and Duration* prior to its opening, which was delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic. In an article for *Vogue*, Bolton admits that his work had not previously been motivated by considerations of race, ethnicity, gender, or sexuality. Following a series of social justice movements in the summer of 2020, however, he concluded that it was important to include more work by designers who identify as Black, Indigenous, and people of colour (BIPOC). Bolton promises to continue to address the need for inclusivity in his curatorial work, writing 'The awareness can't go away; this is a lifelong commitment' (Bolton, 2020: n.p.). In 2021 and 2022, his two-part exhibition *In America: A Lexicon of Fashion* highlighted numerous BIPOC designers, many of whom were just beginning their careers[72].

[72] Eighty-seven of the 106 objects and ensembles on view in the exhibition were loans; seventy-seven of those loans were from contemporary designers. Although the inclusion of up-and-coming designers in a major art museum provides them with exposure to a larger public, the number of loans may also indicate a hesitancy to fully invest in less established brands though the acquisition of their designs into the museum's permanent collection.

As a curator at The Museum at FIT, I can remark upon several strategies currently underway there. Although a more inclusive selection of objects has been an important point of consideration among the museum's curatorial staff for more than a decade, the museum also has a history of inclusiveness in its exhibition topics. These include *Tribute to the Black Fashion Museum*[73] (1992); *Latin American Fashion* (2002); *China Chic: East Meets West* (1999) and *Exoticism* (2007–08) (both *China* and *Exoticism* explored Euro-American appropriation of global cultures); *A Queer History of Fashion* (2013–14); *Global Fashion Capitals* (2015); *Black Fashion Designers* (2016); *Fresh, Fly and Fabulous: Fifty Years of Hip Hop Style* (2023); and *Moda Hoy: Latin American and Latinx Fashion Today* (2023).

Advisory Committees

The MFIT exhibition topics noted above fit into what museologists Francesca Lanz and Elena Montanari write about inclusion, which should incorporate 'the implementation of the plurality of voices, identities and points of view which characterise present-day societies', adding that such implementations should also be relevant to the communities that they serve (Lanz and Montanari, 2014: 11). The Museum at FIT is in New York, 'a city of remarkable ethnic and racial

[73] The Black Fashion Museum was an institution in Harlem, New York City, that was devoted to work by African Americans. Designer Lois Alexander founded the museum in 1979. Richard Martin and Harold Koda, then curators at The Museum at FIT, collaborated with the Black Fashion Museum on an exhibition in celebration of their 'mutual commitment to African-American talent in the fashion and design professions' (Martin and Koda, *A Tribute*, 1992: n.p.). The collection of approximately 1,000 objects from the Black Fashion Museum is now part of the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture (Givhan, 2010: n.p.)

diversity' (Foner, 2007: 999), and it strives to make all visitors feel welcome. Many of the most culturally inclusive MFIT exhibitions, including *A Queer History of Fashion* and *Black Fashion Designers*, have benefitted from outside advisory committees.

These committees comprise experts in related fields (often academics and industry professionals), as well as FIT faculty. The exhibition curator(s) recruit the initial committee members, some of whom suggest additional participants. Beginning approximately two years before the exhibition opening, the committees typically meet virtually once a month, which allows for the inclusion of members outside of New York. Curators provide updates on the exhibition content, and committee members offer feedback and suggestions. This process has helped to ensure that the curators adequately address the complexity of their topics, avoiding over engagement with what Hooper-Greenhill calls the 'master narrative', which is 'created by presenting a large-scale picture, by eliminating complicating and contradictory detail, by disguising difference, by hiding elements that don't quite fit, and by emphasising those that do' (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000: 24).

Museologist Luca Basso Peressut argues that there is no way to separate historical museums from their colonialist origins (Basso Peressut, 2014: 153). Nonetheless, he recommends that museums feature comparisons of different points of view (Basso Peressut, 2014: 148). Such an idea should be carefully considered, however, as it becomes easy for museums to rely unfairly on people of colour in attempts to decolonise. As curator Sumaya Kassim writes:

> [O]ur bodies and our "decolonial" thoughts … are exploited, and then discarded. The human cost, the emotional labour, are seen as worthy sacrifices in the name of an exhibition which can be celebrated as a successful attempt by the museum at "inclusion" and "decolonising" (Kassim, 2017: n.p.).

In my own curatorial work, I aim to research and thoughtfully interpret the objects I include in my exhibitions, but I also recognise that my way of reading an object is not the *only* way—nor is it necessarily the most inclusive way. Heeding both Basso Peressut's idea and Kassim's warning, I would benefit from establishing an advisory committee as I move forward with my physical exhibition on cabinets of curiosities. Initial suggestions for members include Darnell-Jamal Lisby, a fashion curator who specialises in Black fashion design and decolonising; Mary Lou Murillo, a world textiles specialist; Ariele Elia, a former curator who developed the course Cultural Awareness, Design Responsibility, and the Law for FIT; and Karen Kramer, co-curator of the 2015-2016 exhibition *Native Fashion Now* at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian. With their advisement, I hope to engage with varying points of view and overcome potential issues of tokenism, cultural appropriation, or other unintentionally insensitive exhibition content. With the exception of Kramer, I have long-term, collegial relationships with my proposed committee members.

Initiatives at The Museum at FIT

MFIT has long been conscientious about collecting and displaying fashion from designers and tastemakers of colour. When a particular exhibition topic does not easily lend itself

to inclusivity, free public programming aims to fill that void. In conjunction with the 2020 exhibition *Ballerina: Fashion's Modern Muse*, for example, curator Patricia Mears and education curator Tanya Melendez-Escalante organised an event entitled 'Pioneering African American Ballerinas', which was attended by more than 200 people.

The museum has also phased out many of its white mannequins since 2015, based on feedback from numerous visitors and members of the FIT community that they read as white people. Instead, the museum has intentionally and consistently purchased male and female mannequins in three shades of brown that mimic natural skin tones. These new mannequins are used in nearly every exhibition. The change has been appreciated by many visitors and has led curators from other museums with fashion collections—including the Victoria and Albert Museum and the National Museums Scotland—to contact MFIT as they consider their mannequin choices.

Although MFIT takes pride in its longstanding efforts to be more inclusive, a significant amount of work is still to be done. As part of an internal diversity, ethics, and inclusion committee, the staff[74] are currently assessing what percentage of the collection holdings were designed by people of colour. The statistics yielded by this survey will permit the museum to collect more thoughtfully and fill important gaps in its holdings. (For example, it was recently acknowledged that very few shoe designers of colour are represented in the collection, and the museum has almost no

[74] At the time of this writing, thirteen of twenty-six MFIT staff members are BIPOC.

work by Indigenous Americans.) The museum is currently focussed on consistently adding to its collection of BIPOC designers, with the guideline that objects are purchased rather than requested for donation.

Academic activist and social worker Gurnam Singh writes that 'perhaps the project of decolonisation is less about seeking out authentic culture as such but more about the opening up of creative spaces to facilitate the production of indigenous culture informed by indigenous thinking and doing' (Singh, 2018: 1). I have given this statement serious consideration in its relation to my curatorial practice and that of others. I was reminded of a 2014 exhibition entitled *Folk Couture: Fashion and Folk Art* at New York's Folk Art Museum. Curator Alexis Carreño pre-selected a group of 100 objects from the museum's collection, then commissioned thirteen designers to create new fashions inspired by one or more of those objects.

Initially, I considered working with a similar concept in my exhibition, with the variation of asking designers to engage with objects from their own cultures or heritage housed in other museums. I was planning to purchase the garments made by the designers for The Museum at FIT's permanent collection at a price agreed upon in advance. After doing more research on the topics of decolonising and inclusivity, however, it occurred to me that this might be problematic. Despite the good intentions of such a collaboration, this project would still involve a strong measure of curatorial authority. I would be requesting that the designers create something quite specific and potentially limiting to their creative processes. Furthermore, the one-off nature of the

clothing created (which would likely not be in the designer's collection) might render it less relevant to MFIT's permanent holdings, since it would not be part of the regular trajectory and evolution of that designer's work.

Most importantly, this tactic would perpetuate Eurocentrism. Jansen writes about how global designers are consistently asked to explain the connections between their work and their cultural identity. 'European designers will rarely be asked to explain or justify their references in regard to their cultural identity (just imagine asking Nicolas Ghesquière to explain his French references in his work for Louis Vuitton)' she writes. Jansen further explains that many global designers feel compelled to reference their cultural heritage in order to set them apart from mainstream European and North American fashion, but that such heritage is often so intertwined with colonialism that true Indigenous fashion risks being erased (Jansen, 2019: n.p.).

I determined that it would be more fruitful to consider designers' respectful and acknowledged collaborations with global artisans, some examples of which already exist in the MFIT collection. For example, designer Ricardo Seco launched his *Yo Soy México* project to promote Mexican artistry. His spring 2015 collection, entitled *Dreams*, featured New Balance sneakers designed in collaboration with Huichol (or Wixáritari) artisans, an Indigenous people of Mexico (fig. 4.2). The Huichol are known for their intricate bead art, which they applied to the sneakers worn on the runway. These shoes were not made for sale (a simplified version was available at retail), making them rare objects.

Fig. 4.2

Custom beaded New Balance sneakers from Ricardo Seco's spring 2015 *Dreams* collection. Seco's work provides an example of a collaboration performed with awareness and equity. By working with Huichol (or Wixáritari) artisans, he paid tribute to his Mexican heritage and his home country's design heritage. The collection of The Museum at FIT, 2015.5.1CD, gift of Ricardo Seco. Photograph ©The Museum at FIT

The narratives surrounding dress are nuanced, and fashions that are 'inauthentic' are inevitable. Authenticity is a challenging concept in fashion, which is 'always a product of cultural encounters as well as processes of hybridization' (Jansen and Craik, 2016: 25). I acknowledge Jansen's thoughtful research and concerns about the discourse between designers and their cultures, and her writing solidified my decision that asking designers to make special designs based on their cultural identity is not the best strategy. Nevertheless, I still feel that including work by designers who speak openly about the influence of their heritage in their own terms—even if that heritage is no longer 'authentic' due to colonialist intervention—could be meaningful for my exhibition, as it may provide the space to reflect upon such complexities.

There are more points to take into consideration. Jansen observes that 'Today a designer can easily be born in

Morocco, grow up in France, study in Brazil and work in Korea. Does this make his or her work Moroccan, French, Brazilian or Korean?' (Jansen, 2019: n.p.). These sorts of categorisations mirror the trappings that museum workers face in their preoccupations with classifications—many of which are increasingly arbitrary in a contemporary context. Fashion has particularly strong 'transcultural dynamics' that must be taken into consideration (Ling and van Dartel, 2019: 80), and this has led to me the decision to exclude a designer's place of origin from exhibition label copy (since I began working at The Museum at FIT in 2006, its labels have included the primary work location of a designer or brand as part of the basic information about an object). Although this is a small measure that will likely go unnoticed by many visitors, I contend that this important step helps to eliminate the problems of over classification and its related stereotypes.

Exoticising global fashion and cultural appropriation

Concerns over the use of the term 'exotic' (in the context of fashion, specifically) are well explained by Craik, who writes that it can 'refer either to the enticing, fetishized quality of a fashion or style, or to foreign or rare motifs in fashion'. The latter, she continues, can be viewed as exhilarating within mundane or conventional (European) fashion styles (Craik, 1993: 17). Exoticisation is another effect of colonialism—as I evidence in previous chapters, exoticness was often a collecting criterion within cabinets of curiosities and subsequent museum collections. In turn, early collections of global fashion at institutions such as the Brooklyn Museum were used for inspiration by North American and European

designers during the early twentieth century (Druesedow, 2010: 306).

The 'exoticness' of other cultures has been a source of fascination and 'inspiration' for many Euro-American designers, many of the results of which we would now consider cultural appropriation. Fashion studies scholars Denise Nicole Green and Susan Kaiser define cultural appropriation within the context of fashion as:

> [T]he taking of aesthetic or material elements from another culture by someone who is not a member of that culture without giving credit or profit. The 'taking' is not unlike stealing or plagiarizing—it is often done without permission and/or acknowledgment (Green and Kaiser, 2020: 153)[75].

They further explain that those who originated the ideas rarely profit from them. The originators may also be 'humiliated, disrespected, or harmed' by those in a position of power (typically white, European and North American fashion designers) (Ibid.). In her 2004 book *Dress and Globalisation*, fashion historian Margaret Maynard writes that 'Designers today, like corporate raiders, source inspiration indiscriminately from distant cultures, usually with scant regard for original context' (Maynard, 2004: 79). Some recent, high-profile examples of misappropriation have centred around the illicit use of Indigenous North American designs in

[75] Yuniya Kawamura identifies six categories of cultural appropriation: 'biological racism and stereotype reinforcement; racial fetishism; reinforcement of hierarchical oppressions; religious and spiritual blasphemy; misuse of indigenous cultural traditions, textile motifs, and artisanal motifs; and exploitation of the economically challenged: class appropriation' (Kawamura and de Jong, 2022: 65). Although I admire Kawamura's more nuanced assessment of this subject, the research I present in this chapter corresponds more closely to Green and Kaiser's definition.

mass-market fashion. Victoria's Secret was publicly criticised for dressing a runway model in a native-inspired headdress (also known as a war bonnet) in 2012, only to repeat the offense in 2017[76]. In 2016, the Navajo Nation reached a settlement in their lawsuit with Urban Outfitters for the retailer's unauthorised use of the Navajo name to describe a style of underwear and a fabric-covered flask (Woolf, 2016: n.p.).

The appropriation of ideas between cultures is especially egregious considering the colonialist extinguishment of many non-European styles of dress. As Craik summarises of 'countless instances of colonisation':

> Along with indigenous languages, local dress codes were suppressed as if the acquisition of a new visible identity worn on the body ensured the acquisition of a new 'modern' cultural identity. Clothes became a weapon in the struggle between colonisers and colonised. First, the colonisers used clothes to impose the authority of 'western' ways; later, local people used indigenous clothes to resist that imposition (Craik, 1993: 26).

In their succinct history of Eurocentrism in fashion, Ling, Lorusso, and Segre Reinach note the establishment of the haute couture industry in mid-nineteenth-century Paris—the birth of the fashionable *Parisienne*—and her British, male counterpart dressed in bespoke clothing from London, as important touchpoints for disrespect and indifference towards

[76] Native American headdresses are ceremonial garments worn almost exclusively by men in the Plains Nations. They are imbued with spiritual and cultural significance. 'Headdresses are something that has to be earned,' explains Adrienne Keene, a scholar, activist, and member of the Cherokee Nation. 'That deep sacred meaning is eclipsed by the desire to just dress up and play Indian' (Keene in Lynskey, 2014: n.p.).

originating cultures (Ling, Lorusso, and Segre Reinach, 2019: VII). Returning to the way that fashions from non-European cultures were frequently categorised, Jansen explains:

> Under (European) colonial rule, colonized societies and cultures were characterized as traditional/ancestral/ authentic to emphasize difference with the colonizing society and culture, defined as modern and cosmopolite, and as such, to justify its oppressive and destructive colonial policies (Jansen, 2018: n.p.).

Yet while European fashion asserted its power, it borrowed freely from the global cultures it dominated (Maynard, 2004: 36). Yves Saint Laurent's spring 1967 'African' collection (from which The Museum at FIT owns a dress), is a powerful example of this. The clothing was made from materials such as straw, raffia, and wooden beads, and took particular inspiration from Malian Bambara sculptures—an aesthetic underscored by (white) models styled with towering hairpieces that further emulated the artwork (fig. 4.3). It is important to note that this is only one example of many in fashion history—I have singled out Saint Laurent, a French haute couturier, in part because his global inspirations were especially pronounced, with other designs inspired by China, Japan, India, and Russia over the course of his career. They are also regularly exhibited, often without reflection. In the instance of Saint Laurent's African inspirations, nuances are especially important.

Saint Laurent was born in Algeria in 1936. Later in life, he owned a home in Marrakech. This information is sometimes used by writers to justify his African inspirations (Jennings, 2011: 12; Phaidon, 2017: n.p.), but Saint Laurent had no significant ties to Mali. Furthermore, it typically goes

unmentioned that Algeria was under French colonial rule for 132 years, from 1830 until Algeria won its war of independence in 1962. I argue that there may be a link between this collection and the newfound independence of Algeria and other African nations during the 1960s (Fiorin, 2019: 7). Certainly, it stands to reason that Saint Laurent would have been thinking often of the continent on which he was born. This wider context is important to consider when discussing or exhibiting the 'African' collection today.

Fig. 4.3

Designs from Yves Saint Laurent's 'African' collection, spring 1967. Photograph by Harold Chapman.

Curators and authors regularly present Saint Laurent's 'exotic' influences with little critical commentary. Although Saint Laurent grew up in French colonised Algeria, his interest in Africa and its art may also be linked to the newfound independence of many African nations during the 1960s.

Furthermore, although Saint Laurent had some knowledge of Africa, he rarely travelled to the other locations by which he was inspired. Instead, he largely borrowed ideas and motifs from books. As fashion curator Florence Müller writes, his 'travels were essentially imaginary ones, those preferred by a

resolutely stay-at-home man' (Müller in Savignon, 2010: 256). A designer's willingness to travel to the location from which they take ideas does not make their work less appropriative, though it might render it somewhat better informed. My interest in this fact about Saint Laurent is based on its connection to historic cabinets of curiosities. Many wealthy collectors received objects and information from third parties (sailors and merchants, for example) rather than engaging directly with the cultures that held their interest. This link between historic and modern engagement with the 'exotic' applies to my theoretical exhibition.

Jansen and Craik note another side effect of cultural appropriation, as it has been enacted by famous designers like Saint Laurent, is the prestige of authorship that such designers are granted. They argue that while European and American high fashion designers took 'inspiration' from places such as Asia, Eastern Europe, and Africa, the fashion designers hailing from those regions have struggled to make a mark on the global fashion industry (Jansen and Craik, 2016: 18).

This only began to shift towards the end of the twentieth century, when designers and creators from around the world began to gain acknowledgement for their creative work. This recognition was made possible through an amalgamation of changes in geographical areas of fashion production and distribution, as well as a larger, global network of design schools (Ling, Lorusso, and Segre Reinach, 2019: VII). Segre Reinach further explains that around the 1990s, a strain developed between the European fashion industry and global sources of inspiration, adding that such tension was 'due to

the increasingly evident contribution of non-Western creativity and the shaping of an increasingly vast receiving market' (Segre Reinach, 2017: 158). Fashion curator José Teunissen argues that during the twenty-first century, the digitisation and the globalisation of fashion offer more opportunities for designers working outside of established fashion capitals to gain recognition for their work (Teunissen, 2021: 209).

Addressing problematic fashion 'inspirations'

Although cultural appropriation and other dubious fashion 'inspirations' are increasingly identified and disparaged today, they have long been part of the history of fashion. As a curator and a fashion historian, I find it important to acknowledge this history and include it in my work. There is no need to make excuses for past designs that prove questionable to current points of view, but as I briefly mentioned above, there are ways to contextualise those objects for museum visitors. In 2022, I curated an exhibition entitled *Reinvention and Restlessness: Fashion in the Nineties* for The Museum at FIT. It was accompanied by a book of the same title. In an attempt to distil an entire decade of fashion into a selection of its most dominant trends, I identified a prominent theme that I called the 'Global Wardrobe'. The way that I approached this topic in the book and exhibition provided a test-run for how to present the topics of colonisation and appropriation within my theoretical cabinets of curiosities exhibition.

The Global Wardrobe referenced an increased interest in fashions from around the world. European and American

designers in particular often made sweeping and jumbled references to other cultures in their work. This trend was part of a heightened awareness of globalisation—and although globalisation is a centuries-old phenomenon, developments in technology, coupled with economic and political changes (including the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the end of the Cold War), helped to establish what journalist Tomas Larsson describes as 'the process of world shrinkage, of distances getting shorter, things moving closer' during the 1990s (Larsson, 2001: 9). Many people—in the fashion world and otherwise—were excited by the interconnectivity that globalisation encouraged. Yet the resulting fashions could be cause for alarm today, as many would be considered cultural appropriation.

The challenge for *Reinvention and Restlessness* was to contextualise these garments for contemporary viewers. Without making excuses for the designers who were 'borrowing' from other cultures, I also had to evidence that theirs was common practice during the decade. An added complication was the inclusion of work by designers who were referencing their own cultures, which was another important facet of the link between fashion and globalisation. Here, I will summarise two examples of fashions I featured in the 'Global Wardrobe' for context.

The first is a pair of blue jeans by Tom Ford (a white, American designer) for Gucci (an Italian brand), dating to spring 1999 (fig. 4.4). The jeans, embellished with feathers and colourful beadwork, sold for $3,800 in 1999[77]. When the

[77] This is approximately $6,885 USD or £5,450 GBP in 2023.

jeans were introduced, many journalists wrote that Ford was inspired by the 'hippy' fashions of the late 1960s (Chaplin, 1999: n.p.; Robins, 1999: C3), rather than acknowledging the style's resemblance to the artistry of Indigenous Americans or Zulu women. This was an oversight I attempted to rectify in the exhibition.

Fig. 4.4

Ensemble by Tom Ford for Gucci, spring 1999. Although the beadwork at the jeans' waistband and pockets, the feathers over the shins, and the ensemble's beaded shoes reference Indigenous North American and South African designs, this style was likened to 'hippy' fashion during the 1990s. Even when pop star Rihanna wore the jeans in 2021, journalists focussed primarily on their high cost. The collection of The Museum at FIT, 2015.7.1, gift of Gucci. Photograph © The Museum at FIT

Another compelling example from the 'Global Wardrobe' was a dress by Vivienne Tam from 1995. Born in China but raised in Hong Kong, Tam frequently uses fashion as a means to explore her Chinese heritage in a multicultural city. She released her *Mao* collection in 1995 (fig. 4.5). In collaboration

with Chinese artist Zhang Hongtu, Tam created clothing with satirical images of Mao Zedong, chairman of the Communist Party of China from 1949 until his death in 1976. Whereas Tam had hoped to represent a new vision of China defined by its warmth and openness, the collection was highly controversial for its playful mockery of a man under whose leadership so many had died (Hill, 2021: 142). In fact, the photograph of this dress I intended to include in the book for *Reinvention of Restlessness* was censored by the Chinese printers with whom my publishers worked. I presented this information to exhibition visitors to underscore that, even when designers are referencing their own cultures, their work can be subject to criticism and censorship.

Fig. 4.5

Dress by Vivienne Tam with artwork by Zhang Hongtu, 1995. Despite her heritage, Tam was criticised by other Chinese people for making light of the rule of General Mao through this design and similar styles. Nevertheless, they are among the designer's best-known work. Some designs were even re-released by the New York boutique Opening Ceremony in 2016. The collection of The Museum at FIT, 95.82.6, gift of Vivienne Tam. Photograph © The Museum at FIT

I relied primarily on written text to make my points in the 'Global Wardrobe' section of the exhibition. I expected some visitors to overlook the wall text and label copy and potentially take offense to some of the designs, but I received no complaints about this material (MFIT frequently receives feedback via direct contact with visitors in tours and via email). FIT students, with whom I was able to interact through numerous tours of the exhibition, reacted positively to the Global Wardrobe. They frequently asked questions; several relayed how they explore their own cultural identities through their work. This response corresponds to what fashion curator Akiko Fukai writes about the role of the twenty-first-century museum, in that it should 'provide opportunities for people to reflect more widely and more deeply on the culture of the dress that they wear' (Fukai, 2010: n.p.).

I considered this section of *Reinvention and Restlessness: Fashion in the Nineties* very carefully. The Museum at FIT includes many examples of past fashions that could be viewed as cultural appropriation and relate to the types of objects that were collected in the historic cabinets—and I have grappled with whether to select such material when creating an object checklist. I am now more confident in the decision to include such material, with appropriate context and interpretation, as I believe it can reflect on both the history of fashion design and that of cabinets of curiosities. For example, the dress from Saint Laurent's 'African' collection could be juxtaposed with Seco's thoughtfully collaborative Huichol beaded sneakers.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented a brief history of the links between colonialism, cabinets of curiosities, and contemporary collections of fashion. Although there is no one-size-fits-all solution to decolonising fashion collections and exhibitions, an overview of decolonial thinking—a topic that has increasingly made its way into fashion studies during the twenty-first century—is critical to addressing and diminishing long-entrenched, colonialist points of view. As I mention earlier in this chapter, I am mindful not to represent the critical theories on decolonising fashion studies as my own. Yet the aggregation of my research into this topic has resulted in a novel framework that outlines myriad ways in which curators of all backgrounds can apply decolonial thinking to their practice, and this framework comprises one of my original contributions to knowledge.

I present several strategies that can be readily undertaken, such as the universal use of the word 'fashion', the cautious application (or complete elimination) of potentially harmful words such as 'traditional' and 'exotic'; and the decision to exclude a designer's place of origin from label copy (the latter may be dependent upon institutional guidelines; I have made a case for its expulsion within my own museum).

Other initiatives to foster a more equitable museum environment are collaborative in nature. These include discussions with potential museum visitors on the extent to which colonialism should be addressed within certain exhibitions, as well as the creation of advisory committees that can help to mitigate the limitations of a curator's

personal and professional experiences. Moreover, an understanding of the line between inclusivity and tokenism or exploitation is critical when considering collaborations with other museum professionals and designers.

Finally, there is the consideration of the objects themselves. Assessments of significant gaps in museum fashion collections are critical to building more expansive holdings, but acknowledging that such gaps exist—and making such deficiencies known to the public—further underscores the importance of greater inclusivity within museums. The impacts of colonialism can and should be addressed using relevant objects. Rather than excluding potentially problematic items, such as those that might be considered cultural appropriation, curators can provide clear, factual information about such objects to educate visitors and contextualise past museum practices.

Ultimately, these strategies may result a stronger understanding of fashion, its exploitative past, and its potential for a more promising future. They provide a response to one of my original research questions: How can cabinets of curiosities be used to develop ideas for critical engagement within a fashion exhibition? The strategies I present may also provide the space for visitors to consider their own cultural heritage and how it has been, or could be, represented in a museum setting. As the popularity of fashion exhibitions continues to rise—a subject that will be touched upon in the subsequent chapter—the creation of exhibitions that are as inclusive and equitable as possible is increasingly critical.

CHAPTER 5: FASHION DISPLAY

Introduction

My research on fashion display examines exhibitions of dress in museums and galleries, as well as modes of retail display, that demonstrate a connection to cabinets of curiosities. Although such relationships are occasionally overt—in the instance of a designated 'Cabinet of Curiosities' in exhibitions about Alexander McQueen, for example—they are sometimes based on my own research and perceptions about the topic. The rationale for each selection will be outlined as it is mentioned later in this chapter.

I begin with an overview of the history of fashion exhibitions, emphasising their rise in popularity over the course of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. This study provides critical context for the specific exhibitions I will analyse later in the chapter. It offers an understanding of the development of fashion exhibitions, as well as the exhibition typologies that I discuss subsequently. Based on knowledge of those typologies, I have devised and defined curatorial themes that are central to my research: 'fashion objects as curiosities'; 'fashion display as a cabinet of curiosities'; 'behind-the-scenes'; and 'the gigantic and the miniature'. I will provide an explanation and examples of each theme, in addition to a consideration of their potential influence on my own exhibition.

My analyses of exhibitions are occasionally supported by studies in psychology and museology. I was unable to experience all of the exhibitions that I have evaluated first-

hand; therefore, my methodology for analysing them is parallel to that outlined in Chapter 2. I have identified the exhibitions I did attend by inserting an asterisk after their titles—but for those I did not see, my observations were based on the information available in books, catalogues, reviews, and installation photographs, which allowed me to gain a sense of an exhibition's content, appearance, and reception. It bears repeating that this methodology is akin to the ways that historians have constructed information on historic cabinets of curiosities, which has enabled the cabinets to be re-framed 'within an approximation of their original parameters' (Bowry, 2015: 24).

The final section of this chapter centres on fashion retail display. There are connections between shopping, museums, and cabinets of curiosities; in 1782, German philosopher Karl Moritz observed that the shop windows along The Strand, London's central street for commerce, appeared like 'a well-regulated cabinet of curiosities' (Moritz in Spalding, 2002: 137). Today, several prominent designers and retailers have utilised museum cabinetry for display and/or adopted the aesthetic of a cabinet of curiosities to market their merchandise, and I will analyse examples of that practice. The intentions behind these modes of display are not often communicated, but it can be reasonably assumed that their creators hope to acquire some of the sense of rarity or singularity that is frequently associated with museums.

Fashion exhibitions in context

During the twenty-first century, scholars have increasingly addressed past and present modes of museum fashion

display. Writings by Taylor (2002) and curator Valerie Steele (2008) have been augmented by more recent publications (de la Haye, 2010; Clark and de la Haye, 2014; Clark and Vänskä, 2017; Geczy and Karaminas, 2019; Petrov, 2019). These are useful resources that provide a range of historic perspectives and methodologies, and though they have informed this chapter, they will not be extensively repeated.

Fashion exhibitions can be traced to the late nineteenth century (Bass-Krueger, 2018: 405), but they did not receive significant attention until well into the next century. The history of exhibiting fashion in museums can be divided into three periods: pre-1970, the 1970s through the 1990s, and the twenty-first century (Fukai, 2010; Riegels Melchior and Svensson, 2014). The second period was influenced by more innovative and theatrical modes of display—specifically, ideas from Cecil Beaton and Diana Vreeland that propelled the rise in popularity of fashion exhibitions. There are several texts that detail and analyse the significance of Beaton and Vreeland's curatorial projects—Beaton for his 1971 Victoria and Albert Museum exhibition *Fashion: An Anthology by Cecil Beaton*, which notably included many examples of contemporary dress, and Vreeland for her numerous, theatrical exhibitions at the Costume Institute (de la Haye, 2006; Clark and Frisa, 2012; Clark and de la Haye, 2014; Idacavage, 2015).

During the twenty-first century, exhibiting fashion has spread beyond museums with fashion collections and, according to Riegels Melchior, also includes 'spectacular visual shows modeled on the less critical high-profile haute couture fashion shows in Paris or more critical art installation-like

displays' (Riegels Melchior and Svensson, 2014: 6). The expansion of the ways in which fashion is exhibited—representing a wide range of venues, scales, budgets, display criteria, and scholarly intent—is viewed positively by Judith Clark, who states 'This is wonderful…as we can start to describe these projects in a more specialized way, and have broader comparisons: more or less commercial, experimental and educational' (Clark in Foreman, 2013: n.p.). Yet a fundamental question remains: what makes fashion exhibitions so attractive to museum audiences?

An answer to this query has been a topic of interest among fashion scholars for decades. A prescient 1949 *Vogue* article argues that fashion exhibitions were 'a radical but logical development', since museums were increasingly focussed on how civilisation was evolving. 'That means the natural inclusion of one of man's preoccupations, fashion' the article concludes (Vogue, 1949: 211).

Following the success of projects by Beaton and Vreeland, practitioners express similar sentiments about the appeal of fashion exhibitions. In 1987, exhibition designer Margaret Hall writes that fashion had the advantage of being 'easily understood and enjoyed'. She adds that visitors could envision themselves wearing the clothing and ponder the implications of wearing fashion that was more restricting than present styles (Hall, 1987: 152). Curator Jean Druesedow argues that an appreciation for clothing on display can extend beyond a viewer's personal experience to 'provide a concrete and human understanding of a specific historical period or foreign place and yield an enhanced appreciation for art and life' (Druesedow, 2010: 305). Alexandra Palmer, citing the

work of curator Suzanne Ramljak, writes that fashion and textile exhibitions allow for intimate experiences that incorporate psychological, physiological, and social elements (Palmer, 2008, 'Untouchable': 32)[78].

Although numerous scholars agree that the familiarity of fashion is a factor in its popularity, that does not explain why fashion exhibitions (and those centred on contemporary fashion, in particular) became more widely accepted and popular from the late 1990s forward. Hazel Clark theorises that the increased esteem for fashion exhibitions 'coincided with and reflected new approaches to fashion studies as an academic field that encompassed history, theory, and criticism' (Clark, 2018: 158). Theatre and costume scholars Greer Crawley and Donatella Barbieri make a similar observation, writing that a new approach to historical narratives—those which show themselves to be outside of 'casual explanations and empirical evidence'—are of interest for their experimentations with 'temporality, spatiality, materiality, and performativity to change the perception of historical dress' (Crawley and Barbieri, 2013: 44). The meaning behind these concepts will become more evident later in this chapter, when I examine the four curatorial themes I mentioned previously.

[78] These statements stand in opposition to writer Elizabeth Wilson's 1985 publication *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*, in which she describes the 'uneasiness and ambiguity' visitors feel about fashion in museums (Wilson, 1985: 2). She later comments on the 'dead, white, sightless mannequins' that were used in a 1991 Pierre Cardin exhibition (Wilson, 1992: 15). Wilson's work on the 'uncanny' qualities of fashion display are regularly cited or restated by fashion historians, but the statements above evidence alternative points of view.

Fashion journalist Suzy Menkes credits the 'explosion' of museum fashion exhibitions to the expansion of technology during the twenty-first century, which allowed images of high fashion to be more widely and easily accessible than ever before. Fashion had shifted from a niche interest to popular entertainment (Menkes, 2011: n.p.). Menkes published her article on this subject in July 2011, in the midst of record-breaking attendance for the exhibition *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty*, curated by Andrew Bolton at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (to be described later in this chapter). When the exhibition closed the following month, it was announced that its 661,509 visitors placed it among the top ten most visited exhibitions in the museum's then-141-year history (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011, 'Press Release': n.p.).

The exhibition's success can be attributed to several factors. Lee Alexander McQueen had died by suicide the year before, aged forty. The tragic and untimely death of a man whose career was thriving made headlines and increased his notoriety. His designs, though often controversial for their dark and macabre themes, were also spectacular—McQueen is described as a 'visionary' (Seth, 2022: n.p.). The exhibition (which later travelled to the Victoria and Albert Museum, where it was revised and expanded by curator Claire Wilcox) was also visually compelling, with *mises-en-scène* that evoked important collection themes and runway presentations. Although the curators chose not to focus on McQueen's biographical information, the exhibition enlightened visitors with information about his career and creativity. *Savage Beauty* encompassed the components of a successful fashion exhibition that Steele had outlined a few years earlier:

> People need to be seduced into seeing and identifying with fashion before they can begin to learn about it. Museum visitors are also becoming ever more visually sophisticated, and exhibition design is increasingly important. At the same time, I believe that a significant percentage of museum visitors really want to learn something when they see an exhibition. There is no reason why exhibitions cannot be both beautiful *and* intelligent, entertaining *and* educational (Steele, 2008: 14).

Steele's words indicate the potential dualities involved in exhibition making. Delacey Tedesco—a professor of politics and international relations who considers herself 'totally out of place' in fashion studies—makes an intriguing, related observation. After attending a week-long professional training course on dress and fashion curation at the Victoria and Albert Museum, Tedesco writes:

> From my time moving through exhibition spaces, I sense that fashion curation suggests ways of working productively with difficult tensions, paradoxes and uncertainties that plague political analysis: between materiality and immateriality; object and concept; esthesis and techné; presence and absence; chronological linear history and the looping temporalities of narrative, nostalgia and conservation; two-dimensional and three-dimensional space (Tedesco, 2021: 331).

Tedesco's words inspired me to think of the dualities, or tensions, at play in the exhibitions I have chosen to outline in this chapter: between the everyday and the exceptional, accessibility and constraint, fiction and reality, and size and scale. I argue that these need not be viewed as 'difficult' but can instead work to a curator's advantage, providing outlets to spark curiosity. I will present my research on specific exhibitions shortly, but I begin by outlining ideas surrounding

the classifications of fashion exhibitions, which helped to frame the creation of my own curatorial themes.

Museum fashion display

The increased prominence of fashion exhibitions[79] has led to a more thorough analysis of them, and several scholars have studied the history of fashion exhibitions to determine common themes and types of display. I start this section with a description of general fashion exhibition typologies as they are determined by fashion curators. These categories were useful in identifying four curatorial themes that inform my studies on cabinets of curiosities, which I will subsequently examine.

In his research on early examples of fashion exhibitions, curator and semiologist Luca Marchetti identifies two typical modes of display: the first focussing on the commercial aspects of fashion, and the second on its aesthetics (Marchetti, 2016: 207). Curator Naomi Tarrant, whose studies of fashion take a material culture approach[80], writes in 1999 that the wider public preferred exhibitions that presented fashion chronologically. The challenge was to do that in a way that allowed an institution to stand out and play to the strengths of its collection (Tarrant, 1999: 19–20).

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[79] Prominence refers to several factors, including recording-breaking attendance, increase in scale and budget, and smaller museums and galleries staging fashion exhibitions for the first time—or more regularly—in response to the popularity of the subject (Pinnock, 2019: n.p.).
[80] A synopsis of Tarrant's 1994 book *The Development of Costume* states that she made meaning from clothing 'not so much from an abstract theory but from the physical reality of the clothes themselves', continuing that she 'sees clothing as fabric, decoration, and above all, shape' (Tarrant, 1994: III).

In 1997, Steele outlines four exhibition categories: the 'thought show' (addressing social and cultural issues); the 'period' exhibition (devoted to a historical era); the 'decorative arts' exhibition (examining 'stylistic variation and historical developments within a particular category of clothing, such as shoes'); and the 'great designer' exhibition (positing the designer as artist) (Steele, 1997: 108–109). By 2008, Steele indicates that more current exhibitions tended to be thematic, concluding that 'At least some fashion exhibitions have also become more conceptual, and more daring in terms of exhibition design' (Steele, 2008: 26), showing an evolution from earlier fashion exhibitions which were 'antiquarian in their approach and chronological in their organization' (Steele, 2008: 10).

In her 2019 publication *Fashion, History*, *Museums: Inventing the Display of Dress*, Petrov eschews a chronological history of fashion exhibitions in favour of a categorical approach. She explains:

> Contemporary fashion exhibitions, while benefiting from more spectacular design and technological interventions, are not innovative but instead use the same core display and narrative strategies, which have been commonly reproduced across most museum exhibitions of historical fashion since at least the early twentieth century (Petrov, 2019: 2–3).

Through the critical analysis of 'trends in museum fashion exhibition practice over the past century' (Ibid.: 2) and the procurement of rare photographs and other exhibition documentation collected by Petrov for more than a decade, she identifies six categories of fashion exhibition: commerce (centred on designers or brands, personal wardrobes, or the imitation of spaces of fashion consumption); social science

(how cloth becomes clothing, geography, design evolution, biology, or social context); art (allying the display of fashion to art historical practices and/or pairing fashion with fine and decorative art); theatre (the creation of mannequin 'actors' used in period rooms and the creation of *tableaux vivants*); living contexts (differing ways in which the human body is represented); and history (the creation of historical narratives).

Although Petrov's book is impressive in its depth of research, I did not find her categories to be universal. For example, my 2016 exhibition at The Museum at FIT, *Fairy Tale Fashion*, does not fit neatly into any of Petrov's groupings (more about this exhibition is included in Chapter 6, 'Design ideas for evoking curiosity'). Furthermore, the fashion exhibition typologies that Steele and Petrov perceive are indicative of their viewpoints as curators and historians.

In his 2012 PhD thesis, exhibition maker Jeffrey Horsley devises his own typology based on analyses of more than 100 exhibitions he visited (Horsley, 2012: 3). He categorises the exhibitions into 'presentation modes': threshold; landscape; object; and the body, which reflect his way of perceiving exhibition spaces and the objects within them. Horsley's work underscores the subjectivity of creating typologies. Rather than focus on exhibition types, therefore, I centred my research on the identification and analysis of what I refer to as a 'curatorial themes', which are specific to this project and described below.

Curatorial themes

My themes developed through research into the history of cabinets of curiosities, and they coincided with some of my questions about the cabinets. How might objects have been shown in historic cabinets of curiosities? Who had access to these spaces? What fashion objects were included in the cabinets, and why? What kinds of objects were considered extraordinary?

I began to identify examples of fashion exhibitions that corresponded to these questions. I was already familiar with several of the exhibitions I will describe in more detail shortly. Of the seventeen exhibitions I have included in this section, I visited six, which I have indicated using asterisks in the heading for each. Information about *Adele Simpson: 1,001 Treasures of Design*, a 1978 exhibition at The Museum at FIT, arose when I was working on MFIT's fiftieth-anniversary exhibition. It initiated my research into the curatorial theme I have designated **Fashion objects as curiosities**. From the outset of this research, I contemplated the 'cabinets of curiosities' in both iterations of *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011; Victoria and Albert Museum, 2015). These were the galleries to which I was most drawn within these remarkable exhibitions, and they were pivotal to shaping the theme **Fashion display as cabinets of curiosities**.

As someone who oversees a study collection of more than 1,000 garments, I was keenly interested in references to historical cabinets of curiosities as multifunctional spaces of storage, study, and display. I was also reminded of *Behind the*

Scenes at the Fashion Museum Bath (2011—2017), which presented a facsimile of collections storage spaces. This installation and several related exhibitions inspired the theme entitled **Behind-the-scenes**. Furthermore, a visit to *Orla Kiely: A Life in Pattern* (Fashion and Textile Museum, 2018), in which clothes were reproduced at very large and very small scales, reminded me of similar preoccupations with scale within cabinets of curiosities. This shaped the foundation for the section **The gigantic and the miniature**.

I continued to build upon these categories, locating additional examples through the study of publications on fashion exhibitions, exploration of museum websites, studies of exhibition reviews, and examinations of corresponding books and catalogues. It should be underscored that these are my own interpretations and categorisations of these exhibitions and their display components. Furthermore, exhibitions are not mentioned in any hierarchical manner, but instead by the date in which they were presented within their respective categories.

Fashion objects as curiosities

This category describes exhibitions that were predominantly comprised of objects positioned as 'curiosities': fashion items that are rare, novel, and/or obscure. While emphasis on certain 'star' objects is common within exhibitions, fewer examples centre on the concept of fashion as curiosities.

Adele Simpson: 1,001 Treasures of Design

An early instance of fashion objects as curiosities was The Museum at FIT exhibition *Adele Simpson: 1,001 Treasures of Design* (1978–1979). The title was misleading: the exhibition featured only 104 fashion and textile 'curiosities' that Simpson (then a leading ready-to-wear designer on New York's Seventh Avenue) had collected in her travels to forty countries[81]. Some of the objects dated back to the eighteenth century, and they included global fashion in addition to dolls, books, military uniforms, and flat textiles. All had been recently donated to FIT's Design Laboratory[82].

Some of the objects which had previously served as sources of inspiration for Simpson were featured alongside the designer's own creations. One article notes the inclusion of a nineteenth-century Chinese vest made from bamboo beads, which was paired with the designer's 'extraordinary glass-beaded bolero' (Piot, 1979: E5)[83]. I have included this exhibition for its clear connection to cabinets of curiosities—it highlighted objects from around the world, acquired by a single collector—and for its use of the word 'curiosities' in the corresponding catalogue (The Museum at FIT, 1978: n.p.).

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[81] It is not known why the number 1,001 was used in the exhibition title. Although it brings to mind the Middle Eastern folk tales known as *One Thousand and One Nights*, the exhibition's connection to those stories is not evident.

[82] The original donation from Adele Simpson included approximately 700 objects. Many were not deemed pertinent to the museum's collecting mission in later years and deaccessioned. Approximately 140 examples remain in The Museum at FIT collection.

[83] The 1979 news article stated that the Chinese garment was worn under a T-shirt to protect factory workers from sparks. Examples of this kind of garment I located date to the Qing and Ming dynasties and were worn as ventilated undergarments in hot weather to prevent outer garments from getting soiled (Garrett, 1994: 79–80). The potential misinformation by Simpson and/or the journalist recalls the ways in which fashion was often misattributed in cabinets of curiosities.

Curios and Treasures

A 2000–2001 exhibition at the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Curios and Treasures*, is clearly of interest for its title. Curated by Myra Walker, it featured nearly seventy permanent collection objects that had been selected as 'a testament to the insatiable desire of people to flaunt their individuality through fashion' (Metropolitan Museum of Art Libraries, 2000: 2). They were described as 'unusual treasures' and 'curiosities', but the curatorial rationale was unclear apart from a preference for objects that had never been on view.

A closer look at the object checklist (made available online through the museum's website) indicates that many items were selected for their rarity. A doublet from the 1620s is one of only two known examples of its kind, the other being housed at the Victoria and Albert Museum. It represented a style that 'existed barely five years' (Metropolitan Museum of Art Libraries, 2000: 5). A poulaine (a man's shoe style from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries) was found in an excavation site on the Thames (Ibid.: 9); it is remarkable as an archaeological object and for its well-preserved state (fig. 5.1). Although Walker's definitions of the words 'curios' and 'treasures' were not made known to visitors, I was able make connections between the objects on view and the types of objects collected within cabinets of curiosities. The poulaine, for instance, could be linked to interest in collecting footwear and archaeological objects, though this was not part of Walker's curatorial thesis.

Fig. 5.1

A brown leather *poulaine* dating from ca. 1300–1450 from the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The shoe was featured in the 2000–2001 exhibition *Curios and Treasures.* Shoes were especially common fashion objects within cabinets of curiosities, and records indicate that sometimes only one shoe—rather than a pair—would be collected, leading one to believe that its mate would have been sold to another collector. Photograph © Metropolitan Museum of Art

Reviews of the exhibition were mixed. Journalist Judy Jeannin writes that it was 'clearly designed to mark the time between blockbusters', meaning that the show was presented in-between the more broadly appealing Costume Institute exhibitions *Rock Style* (1999–2000) and *Jacqueline Kennedy: The White House Years* (2001). Jeannin also acknowledges that the exhibition allowed staff time to reorganise after the untimely death of curator Richard Martin[84], yet she felt that much of it boiled down to 'individual pieces, interesting on their own but without much of a common thread' (Jeannin, 2000: 110). Roberta Smith, writing for the *New York Times*, expresses a similar sentiment, noting that the exhibition was 'little more than a potpourri of items'; nevertheless, she compliments Walker's curatorial selections, which she felt were nicely juxtaposed, well-lit, and given plenty of physical space to be contemplated individually (the last quality, she notes, was rare within Costume Institute exhibitions) (Smith, 2000: E29). This criticism underscores the need for a strong

[84] Richard Martin died from melanoma in 1999, aged fifty-two.

curatorial thesis, which has informed the selections for my theoretical exhibition.

Fashion Detective

The 2014 exhibition *Fashion Detective* at the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne is more loosely related to the theme of fashion objects as curiosities, but the use of the word curiosity in exhibition text recommended its inclusion here. The exhibition featured more than seventy garments from unattributed makers, positioning the clothes as 'mysteries' that needed further investigation. A press release for the exhibition stated that 'These enigmatic objects incite our curiosity and make us question how these objects came to be; who created them, why were they made and who wore them?' (National Gallery of Victoria, 2014: n.p.) In the catalogue for the exhibition, curator Danielle Whitfield mentions curiosity again, writing, 'Anonymous and often inscrutable, these objects have the capacity to excite our curiosity at a time when the world is besieged by brands and logos' (Whitfield, 2014: 5). Although I did not experience *Fashion Detective* first hand, its premise sparked my own curiosity, especially since I enjoy uncovering 'mysteries' in the MFIT collection.

Whitfield further explains that the exhibition was inspired by Victorian crime fiction—a reference she underscores by commissioning several leading Australian crime writers to craft short stories about some of the objects featured. Including these writers highlight the fact that 'clothing, along with other physical data, was pivotal to both crime solving and crime fiction,' during the nineteenth century. Furthermore, several examples of crime fiction written during

the Victorian era incorporated fashion as a clue to solving cases (Whitfield, 2014: 9).

The exhibition explored the concept of investigation, highlighting the 'detective work' that curators and conservators often undertake before exhibiting an object (Whitfield, 2014: 9). The objects were presented in separate vignettes with a palette of black and white (providing some neutrality to what could have been an otherwise overwhelmingly busy space). Material culture methodologies and forensic investigations (X-rays, infrared photography, dye analysis, and microscopy), provided some concrete information about the objects; others were only treated in a 'purposefully speculative' manner, offering more questions than answers.

Fashion Detective offered a rare, tangible approach to the incitement of curiosity using museum objects. Curators and other museum staff often refer to the importance of sparking curiosity, but they tend to provide little information as to how that can be accomplished. Although the exhibition did not engage with typically 'curious' objects—such as examples that are especially unusual, expensive, or aesthetically spectacular—the exhibition was, in my second-hand experience, successful in its mission to inspire curiosity. This was achieved through a mode of interpretation that foregrounded audience engagement and created of an air of 'mystery' around the objects—a concept that will be applied to my theoretical exhibition in Chapter 6, 'The main gallery: "What is it?" cabinet'.

Fashion display as cabinet of curiosities

This category is centred on fashion exhibitions that featured spaces designated as 'cabinets of curiosities', merging elements of exhibition design and object selection in a manner that evokes the historic cabinets.

Malign Muses/Spectres

A seminal cabinet of curiosities in a fashion exhibition is Judith Clark's *Spectres: When Fashion Turns Back* at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2005 (a reinterpretation of her exhibition *Malign Muses: When Fashion Turns Back* at the ModeMuseum, Antwerp, 2004–2005). I perceive this to be the first prominent example of a cabinet of curiosities within in a twenty-first-century fashion exhibition. I did not see either version of the exhibition in person, and therefore relied primarily on the *Spectres* catalogue, exhibition reviews, the feedback of my supervisors (who were able to experience *Spectres* first-hand), and my interview with Clark to inform my arguments.

Clark's exhibition served as an interrogation of curatorial practices. As curator and professor Alistair O'Neill explains in his review:

> Contrary to conventional practice, Clark did not start the project by selecting the exhibits; rather, she ended the process by it. In doing so, she claims the exhibition not as an exploration of the relationship between fashion and history evidenced in the exhibits, but as an exploration initiated by the display structures and viewing mechanisms that support and surround the exhibits (O'Neill, 2008: 258–259).

Although *Spectres* included both historical and contemporary examples of dress, the exhibition was not intended to provide a history of fashion or object analyses. Crawley and Barbieri argue that 'Working outside a chronological time line allows curators to reveal connections between objects, and also to imagine encounters between the designers of those objects' (Crawley and Barbieri, 2013: 57). Fashion studies professor Marco Pecorari categorises the exhibition as an example of the 'new fashion history', which he describes as the development of 'a study of the mechanics of fashion where the past and the present are in constant dialectical dialogue, escaping any form of chronological progression typically associated with dress history' (Pecorari, 2014: 57). Furthermore, Clark elected to eliminate object captions from the exhibition design[85]. As she explains, 'I felt that the traditional list of date, designer, and so on was not the information I wanted to privilege. I instead wanted to highlight the resonance between the objects as staged' (Breward and Clark, 2013: 142). Of the myriad strategies within the exhibition, I mention Clark's omission of a chronology and object analyses because they can be linked to cabinets of curiosities, which similarly refrained from sequential modes of display and the use of individual object labels.

The exhibition design included optical devices such as magnifying glasses, a magic lantern, a telescope, and a 'Pepper's Ghost'[86], offering unprecedented ways to

[85] The exhibition did not lack identifying information; visitors were offered a leaflet with object details at its entrance (Pantouvaki and Barbieri, 2014: 84–85).
[86] A Pepper's Ghost is a nineteenth-century optical illusion technique that involves a hidden room, set behind an angled piece of glass and revealed through a change in set lighting. The result is a 'ghostly' apparition of the

experience and engage with a fashion exhibition while accentuating how the visitor's gaze can be shaped and manipulated. Rooms were built to resemble a labyrinth, a diorama, and a toy theatre. As Christopher Breward describes in the accompanying catalogue, 'The sense of the whole is perhaps most closely related to the nightmarish world of Victorian circuses, fairgrounds or pantomimes, with their transformation scenes, freak-show curiosities and lantern-slide tricks' (Breward, 2004: 15). Notably, both circus side-shows and freak-shows took root from cabinets of curiosities (Grinke, 2006: 7)[87].

Spectres and *Malign Muses* were lauded by some scholars for their inventiveness, but derided by others for treating museum objects as props that were 'trivialised and marginalised' (Taylor, 2006: 17). Lou Taylor's concerns were perhaps related to Clark's broad conception of the term 'objects'. As fashion theorist and professor Caroline Evans explains, the results of Clark's collaborations with artist Ruben Toledo (who illustrated a functional, large-scale 'magic lantern' for the exhibition) and jeweller Naomi Filmer (who designed a custom mannequin) challenged the notion of the 'object' by imbuing them with the 'same status as a dress by John Galliano, Alexander McQueen, or Viktor and Rolf' (Evans, 2004: 43).

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object placed in the hidden room. The technique was named for its creator, John H. Pepper (Christopher, 2016: n.p.).

[87] Cabinets of curiosities often featured human anomalies—typically presented as specimens, but sometimes living people. As sociologist Robert Bogdan explains, living human oddities were regularly absorbed by museums during the mid-nineteenth century, which allowed them some financial stability. They became part of a fashion for dramatic productions hosted by those museums (Bogdan, 1988: 51). This developed into an increasingly harmful exploitation of humans, as proffered by showmen such as P.T. Barnum in the United States (Mansky, 2017: n.p.).

Most important to this research, the exhibition featured a cabinet of curiosities (described as such in the catalogue) (fig. 5.2). Indeed, Clark explains that the exhibition played with ideas surrounding the origins of the museum (Clark, 2023: n.p.). The cabinet featured objects in varying sizes placed in compartmentalised spaces with a backlit display. The pivotal object was a dress by Bernhard Willhelm that looked like an oversized child's garment. Clark then chose the other objects in the cabinet—actual children's clothing; dolls; doll's dresses; and other toys and games—to correspond to Willhelm's design (Ibid.). Although the object selection related only minimally to the types of objects displayed within historic cabinets (which sometimes included dolls), the objects' placement within compartmentalised spaces, the engagement with size and scale, and the incitement to view the display both at a distance and in detail successfully articulated its inspiration.

Fig. 5.2

The 'cabinet of curiosities' in *Spectres: When Fashion Turns Back* at the Victoria and Albert Museum, 2005. The dress by Bernhard Willhelm is placed in the largest compartment to the right of the image. Photograph © Victoria and Albert Museum

A website for *Spectres* explains:

> Age is here associated with scale. The child's and woman's dress are like scaled-up dolls' clothes, speaking of the anxiety of ageing. A giant curiosity cabinet houses a collection of historic games. Childhood is throughout the exhibition a motif for the past, our own past. This section also refers to the past of the museum itself—a curiosity cabinet (Exhibiting Fashion, 'Spectres', 2021: n.p.[88]).

I was intrigued by the reference to 'the anxiety of ageing', which is not a concept I had previously associated with cabinets of curiosities. Yet a connection between interest in collecting and a sense of curiosity in childhood exists—according to psychologists, childhood is a time a when both ideas are at their peak (Baker and Gentry, 1996: 132; Maslow, 1963: 114). Clark's cabinet also invokes two contentious aspects of the fashion industry: its built-in obsolescence, and its focus on youth. As sociologist Julia Twigg explains of the latter, 'Fashion inhabits a world of youthful beauty … Age by contrast is perceived as a time of greyness, marked by retirement from display or engagement with the erotic and style conscious' (Twigg, 2013: 1). Just as Twigg's work emphasises that being fashionable need not be defined by youthfulness, I contend that a sense of curiosity is not limited to childhood.

[88] This text was located on the V&A website but was taken down during the course of my research. I found it reproduced on the *Exhibiting Fashion* site and changed the citation accordingly.

*Gothic: Dark Glamour**

Spectres had a profound influence on future exhibitions, including Valerie Steele's *Gothic: Dark Glamour* in 2008 (an exhibition on which I worked as a curatorial assistant). Steele had a strongly positive reaction to *Spectres*, calling it a 'paradigm-breaking show of great beauty and power' (Steele, 2008: 28). After seeing the exhibition, she returned to New York with fresh ideas for her upcoming exhibition on the influence of the Gothic subculture on high fashion[89], including the creation of a 'cabinet of curiosities' in the introductory gallery. Steele also hired art director Simon Costin, who had previously collaborated with Alexander McQueen on runway shows, to help design the exhibition.

The wall text corresponding to Steele's cabinet of curiosities provided a brief overview of the history of the cabinets and highlighted the human skull that served as its centrepiece: 'The human skull is the type of object once treasured as a *memento mori* (a reminder of death), later collected as a scientific specimen, and now ubiquitous as an inspiration for gothic accessories'[90]. In keeping with the theme of the exhibition, Steele selected the objects for their unusual or macabre qualities—what she describes as themes of 'death, time, and transcendence' (The Museum at FIT, 2008: n.p.). The fifty-one artefacts, dating from the mid-nineteenth century to 2008, included accessories (several of which were skull-themed) and other small items (such as a laudanum bottle and the death mask of nineteenth-century poet Celia

[89]This information is recalled from the author's work with Steele on the *Gothic: Dark Glamour* book and exhibition.
[90] Quoted from unpublished exhibition text archived in The Museum at FIT database.

Thaxter), allowing this substantial number of objects to be housed in a single, relatively small case (fig. 5.3).

Fig. 5.3

The 'cabinet of curiosities' in the 2008 exhibition *Gothic: Dark Glamour* at The Museum at FIT was inspired by Judith Clark's earlier exhibition, *Spectres*. The top hat to the right, by J Smith Esquire, was acquired for *Gothic*, and was also included in the 'object interviews' conducted for this thesis. Photograph © The Museum at FIT

The style of casework allowed the objects to be viewed closely, which was important for particularly detailed items such as a mid-nineteenth-century stick pin featuring a tiny gold skull encrusted with mother-of-pearl and rubies. The objects were not shown in separate compartments—some were positioned in clusters on slanted boards, a few sat atop freestanding shelves, and others were fastened to the back and side walls. This mode of display was chosen for its legibility; in 2008, the museum did not have the ability to light small compartments individually. In my opinion, however, the undivided space took away from the feel of a cabinet of curiosities, with its potential for individual nooks and its sense of exploration. Fortunately, advancements in LED lights have allowed for the illumination of small,

individual cases or compartments in current and future MFIT exhibitions.

*Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty**

I visited the 2011 exhibition *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art three times. The exhibition featured a gallery space that was labelled a cabinet of curiosities and was part of a larger section with the theme 'Romantic Gothic'. A wall text explained that the cabinet: 'Focuses on atavistic and fetishistic paraphernalia produced by McQueen in collaboration with a number of accessory designers', which included Dai Rees, Philip Treacy, and Shaun Leane (Metropolitan Museum of Art Libraries, 2011: n.p.).

The exhibition space was utilised from floor to ceiling, with each object placed in its own, appropriately sized compartment (fig. 5.4). Some of the seventy-four objects—such as feathered headdresses, African-inspired jewellery, and chopines—were akin to types of objects in historic cabinets of curiosities. Others could be construed as more contemporary curiosities, including several examples of Leane's jewellery designs for McQueen's runway collections—a prime example of which was the 'spine corset' ensemble, featuring an aluminium body sculpture cast from the spine of a human skeleton. The object represented Leane and McQueen's mutual 'preoccupation with human anatomy' (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2022, 'Spine corset': n.p.). Curator Andrew Bolton explains that the objects represented 'the breadth of McQueen's imagination…the objects that inspired him from nature, from primitivism, all the major themes you will confront throughout the exhibition are very

much present in this gallery'. He further described the cabinet as the 'heart and soul' of the exhibition (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011, 'Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty': n.p.).

Fig. 5.4

Installation view of the 'cabinet of curiosities' gallery in *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2011. Objects were displayed from floor to ceiling, with videos on screens occasionally occupying their own niches. The cabinet of curiosities gallery at the V&A, though similar in appearance, was larger in scale. Although the latter design may have rendered it less 'intimate', it was better suited to the exhibition's substantial crowds. Photograph © The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Display methods varied and depended on object type: the nine ensembles or total looks on view were shown on full mannequins[91], whereas most of the jewellery, corsets, hats,

[91] Four of the nine examples were from the spring/summer 1999 collection 'No. 13', which emphasised hand craftsmanship and took inspiration from the Arts & Crafts movement (the potential link between craftsmanship and curiosity will be discussed in the next chapter). The selections on view in the cabinet included the dress from the runway show finale, in which model Shalom Harlow was 'attacked' by two robotic paint guns, spraying her pristine white dress and some of her skin with bursts of yellow and black paint. The performance was 'intended as a counterpoint to William Morris's anti-industrial ethic, provoking thought on the interaction between man and machine at the turn of the twenty-

and headdresses were dressed on half-body mannequins with heads (some with arms, some without, depending on what they displayed) or featureless mannequin busts with long necks. Shoes were freestanding on small plinths. Eleven television monitors, each in its own niche, featured footage from noteworthy runway presentations.

In his review of the exhibition, *New York Times* art critic Holland Cotter makes note of the cabinet of curiosities and cites his particular interest in the runway footage, writing: 'For someone who never saw the original productions—I didn't—these are absorbing documents' (Cotter, 2011: n.p.). The objects and the videos, however, were not easy to enjoy or interact with in a concentrated manner. In each of the three times I visited this popular exhibition, the cabinet of curiosities gallery was especially crowded and difficult to navigate.

The version of *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2015 also included a cabinet of curiosities. Although it was visually similar to the Costume Institute design, curator Claire Wilcox revised and expanded the space. Because I attended the V&A exhibition, I could compare the two. The V&A cabinet of curiosities gallery housed 120 objects (including more full ensembles and separate garments) and was generally more spacious and accommodating to visitors. Menkes references this space as the 'bleeding heart of the exhibition' (Menkes, 2015: n.p.)—a viewpoint similar to Bolton's. Yet both the Costume Institute and V&A exhibitions received criticism that centred

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first century' (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2022, 'Encyclopedia of Collections: No. 13': n.p.).

specifically on their cabinets of curiosities. In New York, Cotter derides the Costume Institute cabinet for its 'fancy gift-shop look' but explores that thought no further (Cotter, 2011: n.p.). However, in her review of the V&A exhibition for *The Guardian*, Rachel Cooke writes that:

> Arranging the rooms thematically deprives the show of a narrative. In the end, you can't help but feel you're in a particularly ravishing boutique. This is especially so in the case of a double-height gallery entitled A Cabinet of Curiosities (Cooke, 2015: n.p.).

She further comments that the excitement of seeing McQueen's beautiful garments in life was marred by the inability to examine them in detail, specifically mentioning an embroidered, matador-style jacket that was impossible to appreciate in its place near the ceiling within the cabinet.

Perhaps interpretations of the cabinet as a 'boutique' was due to its immaculate appearance (clean, all-black cabinets) and its devotion to a single, contemporary designer. I did not share this criticism, but these are factors to consider when building my exhibition (which will include myriad designers). Furthermore, although the design of the *Savage Beauty* cabinets was likely intended to maximise space and emulate the floor-to-ceiling look of many historic cabinets of curiosities, the inability to engage with objects more closely was evidently frustrating; this is another criticism to heed, especially considering the interest in seeing an object's detail as noted by twelve of my front-end evaluation participants.

The catalogue for the V&A exhibition is also noteworthy. Whereas the Metropolitan Museum of Art catalogue made only a cursory reference to the cabinet of curiosities, the V&A

publication includes an essay by Lisa Skogh, a specialist on the history of collecting and cabinets of curiosities. She makes tangible connections between McQueen's work and the cabinets:

> [McQueen's] extensive working library reflected a wide range of interests, from the macabre to the wondrous. Amongst numerous volumes on nature, photography, art and film was Patrick Mauriès' *Cabinets of Curiosities* (2002). Research boards compiled by McQueen as a source of inspiration include images taken from this book, such as a monstrous rhinoceros cup with warthog horns and astonishing coral landscapes (Skogh, 2015: 179).

Skogh further analyses several specific McQueen designs and relates them to objects within well-known cabinets of curiosities. She references a quartz bodice McQueen commissioned from designer Kees van der Graaf for the autumn/winter 1999 collection *The Overlook*, relating it to the 'mineral mountain' that sits atop the Augsburg Art Cabinet (Ibid.: 179-180) (figs. 5.5 and 5.6). Although I find this connection to be tenuous (quartz is only one of multiple materials used on the Augsburg Art Cabinet 'mountain'), the approach—linking fashion to objects within the historic cabinets based on their thematic and/or aesthetic similarities—will inform the selections for my own theoretical exhibition.

Fig. 5.5 (left): The Augsburg Art Cabinet, 1632, featuring a 'mineral mountain' at its crest. The history of this important, almost entirely intact cabinet was described in Chapter 2. Photograph © Uppsala University Museum

Fig. 5.6 (right): An ensemble from the runway presentation for the autumn/winter 1999 Alexander McQueen collection *The Overlook*. Although McQueen's influences could frequently be linked to cabinets of curiosities, this bodice bears only a tenuous connection to the Augsburg cabinet. Photograph © Vogue.com

*Appearances Can Be Deceiving: The Dresses of Frida Kahlo**

This exhibition was on view at La Casa Azul, Museo Frida Kahlo from 2012 to 2016[92]; I visited it in its final year. Fashion historian Circe Henestrosa (whose great-aunts were friends of Kahlo) curated the exhibition, which was designed by Judith Clark. Here, Clark revisited the cabinet of curiosities, using a room in the museum's exhibition space to craft a simple yet powerful cabinet display for the artist's clothing and possessions (fig. 5.7). Clark was partially inspired to create another cabinet because of *Savage Beauty* (Clark, 2023: n.p.).

[92] The exhibition has since travelled to three other venues in revised form (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2018; Brooklyn Museum, 2019; Palais Galliera, 2022–2023). With the exception of Paris, I experienced all of the exhibitions. The cabinet of curiosities as a physical space was not replicated in these larger and less intimate venues.

Fig. 5.7

'Cabinet of curiosities' in *Frida Kahlo: Appearances Can be Deceiving* at Casa Azul, Museo Frida Kahlo, 2012. This displayed permitted visitors to see Kahlo's clothing items individually (rather than as part of multi-layered ensembles) and provided a space for seemingly 'ancillary' objects, such as bottles of nail polish, to be positioned as personal 'relics'. Photograph by Miguel Tovar.

Kahlo's fashions and personal ephemera are 'curious' objects in several ways. Part of this centres on their unusual history; following the death of Kahlo's husband, the fellow artist Diego Rivera in 1957 (Kahlo preceded him in death by three years), their possessions were locked away for fifty years (pursuant to Rivera's request). Many of these were items from Kahlo's personal wardrobe. The objects were taken out of confinement in 2003, and the process of research, conservation, and curation began soon afterward. As La Casa Azul director Hilda Trujillo Soto states, the clothes 'allow us to document her personal style, which was colorful, texturally rich and imaginative, yet also defiant, irreverent and authentic' (Trujillo Soto, 2018: 2013).

Kahlo's clothing comprised a blend of styles from various Mexican cultures, her own custom designs, and antique and

contemporaneous high fashion[93]. Several extant garments can be matched to those represented in self-portraits or in photographs of the painter. Kahlo's own, agentic intertwining of her dressed appearance with her painting avoided a significant pitfall within many exhibitions about a woman's style or wardrobe. As Horsley explains, some such exhibitions 'depict women as passive shoppers and patrons or decorative objects defined by their image rather than their achievements' (Horsley, 2017: 136–137).

In the cabinet of curiosities display, curators placed boots, jewellery, a shawl, and colourful huipiles within individual compartments in a floor-to-ceiling display. Many objects, particularly those displayed at eye level, could be appreciated for their detail. In addition to the clothing and accessories, there were several beauty products: a bottle of red nail varnish, a jar of hair wax, and a bottle of perfume. These objects were not of primary interest due to their design or detail, but rather by dint of their personal connection to an important figure in the history of art. As Henestrosa writes, 'As a woman, an artist, an icon, Kahlo has achieved a rare, almost universal, acclaim' (Henestrosa in Wilcox and Henestrosa, 2018: 75).

In my interview with Clark, she explained that presenting these objects in a cabinet of curiosities-inspired display highlighted seemingly miscellaneous objects to make them seem more special. She was also inspired by a photograph that was on view in the same room, in which Kahlo had cut something out in the shape of a square. Clark was led to

[93] Scholars demonstrated interest in Kahlo's personal style—and its influence on contemporary fashion designers—prior to this exhibition and its successors (see Rabinowitz, 2015).

wonder about the framing of objects within exhibitions—is the empty space or the material artefact more important? (Clark, 2023: n.p.).

A consideration of the types of objects on display within Kahlo's designated cabinet of curiosities overlaps with the previously mentioned theme of 'fashion objects as curiosities' (and exemplifies my earlier point that exhibition themes do not always fall neatly into defined categories). The significance of worn dress has interested museum professionals since the late twentieth century; rather than maligning fashion that shows signs of its worn life, many curators have embraced wear as 'evidence of lives lived' (de la Haye, 2018: 15–16). As Amy de la Haye notes, a garment worn by a loved one can 'serve as a surrogate' in their absence (Ibid.). Textile conservator Mary M. Brooks posits a similar idea, writing that such clothing can act as a 'memento mori' (Brooks, 2016: 28).

The concept of the 'memento mori' can also be extended to influential figures. Linda Baumgarten writes that garments worn by a famous person can take on a 'mythological' status (Baumgarten, 2002: 182). When de la Haye asked fashion auctioneer Kerry Taylor which garments were most desirable to her customers, Taylor responded: 'Garments that have been worn by a celebrity and are also important fashion statements are the holy relics of today. They have left their DNA, it is all about the aura and people worshipping at the altar of fame…' (Taylor in de la Haye, 2018: 14). I am especially intrigued by Taylor's reference to relics; as it was mentioned in Chapter 2, relics are considered the foundation of collecting practices in medieval Europe.

Psychological studies substantiate and contextualise the significance of clothing worn by celebrities. Psychologists George Newman, Daniel Bartels, and Rosanna Smith write that 'Individuals are often important to us and our concepts about them inform our beliefs about their uniqueness, our attachments to them, and in certain cases, our assessments of their value' (Newman, Bartels, and Smith, 2014: 647). This offers insight into the elevation of ordinary objects to 'curiosities' based on such associations. This phenomenon was documented as far back as 1785, when historian William Hutton reflected after a visit to the British Museum:

> Should a piece of withered paper lie on the floor, I should, without regard, shuffle it from under my feet. But if I am told it is a letter written by Edward the Sixth, that information sets a value upon a piece, it becomes a choice morsel of antiquity (Hutton, 1785: 191).

In the case of Frida Kahlo—whose image is well known due to her self-portraiture—a bottle of dried nail polish becomes such a 'choice morsel'—a rare relic of Kahlo's carefully crafted appearance. (Nail polish is, significantly, also a form of paint.) What might be equivalent within a fashion museum? The Museum at FIT owns a white sequined evening set by Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel that belonged to her personal wardrobe, purchased by Tina Chow at auction in 1978 (see Praxis G, Checklist, object 6.10). The executors of Chow's estate donated it to MFIT in 1991. The ensemble dates to spring 1970—shortly before Chanel's death in January 1971—and its simplicity represents the restrained style for which the haute couturier was best known. Although Chanel is a

controversial figure in fashion today[94], her influence on fashion persists.

Behind-the-scenes

The curatorial theme 'Behind-the-scenes' encompasses fashion displays that incorporate staged collections and storage spaces, and/or the unveiling or unpacking of museum objects. I was drawn to this type of display for its connection to cabinets of curiosities. Objects in the cabinets were sometimes contained and concealed in drawers or behind doors, but they were housed together in singular, dedicated spaces that were also designed for display—thus blurring the line between showcase and storage in a manner similar to contemporary behind-the-scenes strategies within exhibitions. Although these strategies have been used in varying exhibition types, I have focussed on their use within fashion exhibitions for this thesis.

Fashion curator Rosemary Harden notes that 'the visiting experience [in 'behind-the-scenes' exhibitions] is somewhat voyeuristic, with a feeling that visitors are being given privileged access to something not normally seen' (Harden, 2014: 134). Although such voyeurism can be entertaining for the public, the 'privilege' Harden mentions is largely illusionary. These exhibitions are fictionalised (and often idealised) spaces that are, like all exhibitions, organised and constructed by museum professionals. Decisions about which

[94] Chanel was in a relationship with Nazi officer Hans Günther von Dincklage during World War II. Although fashion historians have been aware of this connection for decades, this fact has faced more scrutiny in recent years and tarnished Chanel's legacy (Pinnock, 2020: n.p.). Despite this, sales at Chanel have risen significantly (The Fashion Law, 2022: n.p.).

objects to include, and how to display them, are still in effect. Yet I argue that there is a potential benefit to this conceit: it can communicate the aspects of labour and care that are integral to many exhibition making processes, which are frequently (and intentionally) erased from other types of displays.

Fashion conservator Sarah Scaturro writes about the 'ghost labour' inherent to her type of work, explaining that, typically, 'the conservator's hand *should not be seen* once the object is put on display' (Scaturro, 2018: 27; emphasis in original). I do not mean to imply that visitors will understand processes of collections management or conservation through the mere suggestion of a museum storage space, and it is important to remember that behind-the-scenes exhibitions are still largely conceptualised by curators. Nevertheless, this mode of display can prompt visitors to think about the inner workings of museums more generally.

Although behind-the-scenes display techniques have been prevalent within fashion exhibitions over the past twenty years, the potential reasons for them have not, to my knowledge, been explored in any depth. My research indicates a link with the relatively recent interest in visible storage[95] within some museums. The development of this storage type can be viewed, in part, as a political act: it is a response to ongoing criticism that it is immoral for museums to maintain

[95] This method of display is sometimes also referred to as 'open storage' or study storage'. I have used the term visible storage throughout this thesis. It is the most frequently used term, and it encompasses a breadth of 'accessible' storage types, from those that only allow visitors to view rows of stored objects through a window, to examples that function more like conventional exhibition galleries.

vast numbers of objects that are rarely (if ever) made accessible to the public they are intended to serve.

In their 2017 book *Museum Storage and Meaning: Tales from the Crypt*, editors and historians Mirjam Brusius and Kavita Singh write about the controversy surrounding comments made by Indian-born, United Kingdom-based artist and author Balraj Khanna, who chastised the Victoria and Albert Museum for displaying only five percent of its Indian art collection. 'Implicit in Khanna's criticisms', Brusius and Singh determine, 'was an assumption about the function of a museum: that it performs its duty only when it puts in objects on display' (Brusius and Singh, 2017: 1). They continue by writing that in recent years, visitors have increasingly expressed 'anger, frustration or suspicions' towards museums that do not have all of their objects on view—despite the near impossibility of this request for many institutions (Ibid.). A response to these criticisms has been to show more objects through visible storage[96].

In a 2011 article on visible storage, curator Kimberly Orcutt notes that although it is considered an innovative practice, its facilities 'ironically evoke an earlier installation and viewing experience of profusion rather than isolation' (Orcutt, 2011:

[96] There are notable examples of visible storage at the Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna; the Museum Aan de Stroom, Antwerp; the Victoria and Albert Museum, London; and the Musée Quai Branly, Paris (the Quai Branly was, notably, also founded on collections from cabinets of curiosities). A building known as the V&A East Storehouse—a ten-minute walk from the forthcoming V&A East Museum in Stratford, east London—is essentially an entire building devoted to the idea of visible storage (McKeown, 2021: n.p.). That space will open after the completion of this thesis. Although recent interest in visible storage is pronounced, the idea has been steadily developing since at least the 1970s in the United States and Canada (Ames, 1977: 65).

210). She is perhaps referencing the abundance of objects often visible within historic cabinets of curiosities and early museums.

The *New York Times* outlines the history and increasing popularity of visible storage in an article titled 'Museums as Walk-In Closets' (Bohlen, 2001: E1)—a heading that caught my eye, since the MFIT staff affectionately refers to its collections spaces as 'the closet'. There are some examples of what could be deemed visible storage that feature costume collections: the Museum at the Rhode Island School of Design has created an exemplary costume and textiles study room that is accessible to the public. A rotating display of objects, many of which are stored within cabinetry with pull-out drawers protected by acrylic, can be explored by visitors at their leisure. Although this room successfully allows (limited) access to the museum's costume collections (embroidered Ukrainian fashions were on view when I visited in June 2022), fashion objects are not generally well suited to this type of display. They require a lot of space, they can be difficult to 'read' as garments without a form, and they are especially sensitive to environmental factors such as light and dust. This may be why several temporary fashion exhibitions have centred on providing a fictionalised impressions of museum storage, which often balance the appearance of collections storage and the inclusion of dressed mannequins.

Raid the Icebox 1 with Andy Warhol

I view the 1969-1970 exhibition *Raid the Icebox 1 with Andy Warhol* as an antecedent to the twenty-first-century 'behind-

the-scenes' exhibitions I will outline shortly[97]. The premise of the exhibition was inspired by a visit from art patrons John and Dominique de Menil to the Museum of Art at the Rhode Island School of Design. Mr de Menil wondered how a contemporary artist might curate an exhibition using the museum's collections, if 'the only organizing principle would be whether or not he liked whatever he saw' (Robbins, 1969: 14). Warhol accepted the suggestion. *Raid the Icebox* is important to this research because of Warhol's particular affinity for the museum's costume collection. In his time organizing the exhibition, Warhol made six visits to the museum's storage facilities (Robbins, 1969: 14). His unusual approach to object selection was immediately apparent. As museum director Daniel Robbins explains:

> The first objects to which he was led was a cabinet of shoes. The curatorial staff knew he would be interested in shoes, but no one quite expected that he would order the whole cabinet for inclusion in his exhibition! We had never before looked at those shoes except as isolated pairs and as a collective problem to maintain. (Ditto for parasols, fabrics, and other accessories.) (Robbins, 1969: 14).

To clarify, Warhol chose to include *all* of the shoes—a motley assortment of 193 pairs of men's, women's, children's and dance shoes in their storage cabinetry—in this exhibition (fig. 5.8). Although *Raid the Icebox* also highlighted non-fashion objects—paintings, sculptures, hatboxes, baskets, chairs, and wallpaper—it is often the shoes and their unusual mode of display that are referenced in later accounts. It can be argued

[97] The exhibition was staged in three locations: at Rice University, Houston, Texas in 1969-70; the Isaac Delgado Museum, New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1970; and the Museum of Art at Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island, later in 1970.

that Warhol's decisions rendered the exhibition somewhat less of a conceit than later examples of behind-the-scenes style exhibitions (including those I will outline below).

As art historian Natalie Musteata describes, 'Because photographs of both the museum's storage and the exhibition's installation survive, we know that the distinctions between the two sets are often so negligible as to be nearly indiscernible' (Musteata, 2016: 225). This was true of the shoes, but not all of the installations; the parasols, for example, were hung by their handles from the ceiling rather than bundled together as they had been in storage (Ibid.: 227).

Fig. 5.8

Raid the Icebox 1 with Andy Warhol (1970), installation view foregrounding cabinets full of shoes. Historians regularly cite this exhibition as an early example of an 'artist's intervention' within the museum, but I contend that it is also an influential prototype for 'behind-the-scenes' style exhibitions. Photograph by Erik Gould © Archives of the Rhode Island School of Design

Historians, curators, and museologists who have written about *Raid the Icebox* mention its significance as a progenitor of the artist-as-curator phenomenon (Robertson, 2014; Molon, 2019), and Musteata argues that the exhibition was an institutional critique that 'disclosed the museum's hierarchical system of evaluation' (Musteata, 2016: 231). To my knowledge, no one has previously made the connection between this exhibition and the development of behind-the-scenes-style exhibitions later in the century.

Several sources also include criticisms (historical and contemporary) of the exhibition's appearance. Curator Anthony Huberman published an essay on the exhibition in 2017, writing:

> Arranged by a storyteller with no story, a tastemaker with no taste, the museum was laid bare and viewers were left only with the rawness of the container itself. On view in *Raid the Icebox* were rarely seen treasures, but with the baby came the bathwater: storage equipment, sloppy maintenance protocols, dubious purchases, spare parts, leftovers—undigested, unadorned, and fully undressed—*just like that* (Huberman, 2017: 97, emphasis in original).

This type of criticism perhaps clarifies why later examples of behind-the-scenes exhibitions tend towards more fully fictionalised and carefully manufactured modes of display, as I will now describe.

Selection 1: Backstage

One early and important twenty-first century example of the behind-the-scenes concept in a fashion exhibition was *Selection 1: Backstage*, curated by Kaat Debo, Linda Loppa,

and Bob Verhelst at the ModeMuseum (MoMu) in 2002. Verhelst also designed the exhibition, which introduced the public to the newly opened MoMu through the creation of a staged archive. The museum staff explain: 'The concept of the collections "depot" [collections storage] as the treasury of every museum served as the point of departure, and the spectator experienced a behind-the-scenes view of the museum, the collection, and their inner workings' (ModeMuseum, 2017: n.p.) Clothing was dressed on forms and presented on stacks of plywood shipping pallets, or shown in archival boxes that had been fitted with acrylic tops, allowing visitors to peer inside (fig. 5.9). Interestingly, the type of boxes displayed were no longer used within MoMu's real collections storage. The exhibition website explains, 'the MoMu storage has been equipped with a modern wardrobe system, so that these boxes are now a thing of the past' (ModeMuseum, n.d.: n.p.). Visitors were also afforded a view of the conservation lab through a glass wall.

Fig. 5.9

Installation photograph of *Selection 1: Backstage* at ModeMuseum (MoMU), Antwerp, 2002, showing some dressed objects placed on pallets and other objects artfully displayed in repurposed archival boxes. Photograph © MoMU

Pecorari writes that the staging of MoMu's archive in exhibition form acted 'as a sort of manifesto' (Pecorari, 2014: 47–48), presenting the archive as an active entity that can foster a dialogue between historic and contemporary dress (Ibid.: 55). In the exhibition catalogue, Debo writes, 'We regard it as a challenge to interpret the MoMu collection as a "living" collection, a work in progress' (ModeMuseum, 2002: 11).

Debo played to the strengths of the (disjointed) collection and its location in Antwerp (rather than London, New York, or Paris), allowing it to blossom in a more innovative manner and 'freeing curators from the pressure to construct an exhaustive, didactic chronological perspective' (Debo in Horsley, 2015: 46). *Selection 1: Backstage* emphasised the idea of exploration; the curators hoped that visitors would be surprised by some of the objects they encountered, 'where an exquisite item might appear out of an unsightly box'

(ModeMuseum, n.d.: n.p.). In my work as a curator, I frequently receive questions about where and how we store the MFIT collections, which are often followed by musings about how exciting it must be to interact with extraordinary objects each day. MoMu's exhibition was perhaps a response to that sense of a visitor's curiosity, and it was reminiscent of the manner in which historic cabinets of curiosities centred on learning, storage, and display simultaneously.

Christian Lacroix, Histoires de Mode

Another example of the behind-the-scenes concept was the 2007–2008 exhibition *Christian Lacroix, Histoires de Mode* at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris. Lacroix curated the exhibition (he had hoped to become a professional curator before focussing on fashion design). He went through the museum's 130,000 garments and accessories, selecting 400 examples that dated from the seventeenth century to the present—many of which had not been exhibited previously (Mauriès and Saillard, 2008: 7).

The exhibition was organised by aesthetic themes, with groupings such as 'patchwork' and 'sculpted shells'. Lacroix's creations were dressed on forms with heads and articulated arms and placed in front of racks full of garments from the museum collection—examples that Lacroix had selected for their relation to his own work. Although the museum garments were suspended from padded hangers, many had been given some sense of shape through the use of interior mounts (fig. 5.10). A paper marked with a large number had been placed around each hanger, which corresponded to an identification label.

Fig. 5.10

The 2008 installation of *Christian Lacroix, Histoires de Mode* at Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris. Lacroix's own designs were distinguished by their placement on dress forms, emphasising their silhouettes and details, whereas objects from the museum's collection were hanging on racks and thus somewhat more obscured. Photograph © Henry Duke/Getty Images.

In his description of the exhibition design, Patrick Mauriès writes that the 'heaped up' nature of the hanging racks resulted in the clothes 'immediately losing their status as unique pieces and becoming nothing but artefacts, images and relics from a long chain of moments' (Mauriès and Saillard, 2008: 14). Yet not even Lacroix's haute couture designs could ever be considered 'unique' objects, and it may be that the 'heap' of designs—the result of myriad inspirations and the designer's decades-long career—was the point. It was, perhaps, his personal version of a cabinet of curiosities.

The Concise Dictionary of Dress

Judith Clark's *The Concise Dictionary of Dress* (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2010) is an especially consequential example of the behind-the-scenes strategy. The London-based

organisation Artangel, which specialises in site-specific installations, commissioned this collaborative exhibition. It was staged at Blythe House, the V&A's off-site, reserve collection store (formerly a Royal Mail building[98]). I was not able to visit this complex exhibition, but I spoke to Clark about its organisation. I also learned about the visitor experience through a *Fashion Theory* article by Petrov. Visitors were allowed into the building in groups of seven (after being identified, photographed, and asked to leave bags and other personal possessions behind), and a guide led them through the spaces to observe eleven installations. The groups started on the building's rooftop—where a resin cast of a woman wearing a bonnet was situated[99]—and continued to traverse normally restricted storage spaces. The access route had been carefully planned by Artangel associate director Michael Morris and Clark, with feedback from Blythe House staff, to be as unobtrusive yet accessible as possible (Clark, 2023: n.p.).

As visitors toured the exhibition spaces, they were provided with cards that had been printed with dictionary-like definitions of words (written by psychoanalyst Adam Phillips) that had inspired the installations. As Phillips explains in the corresponding catalogue, 'In this exhibition, the words and the objects illustrate each other. They bring something out in each other that they can't bring out by themselves' (Clark and Phillips, 2010: 16). Petrov felt that the connections between the definitions and the objects were not obvious, but that they

[98] At the time of this writing, Blythe House is being emptied of its collections, which are being moved to a new facility in London's Olympic Park.
[99] This was an artwork entitled *Breeze*, commissioned and designed by Judith Clark and made by Simon Ings. A late-eighteenth-century fashion plate inspired the work.

fostered an ‘intellectual game’ (Petrov, 2012: 110). Phillips writes about the use of definitions as ‘guidelines, jumping-off points’ rather that concrete explanations (Clark and Phillips, 2010: 18). Guides were able to offer some clarification on the definitions if asked (Petrov, 2012: 113).

The interior spaces contained fashion items and artworks, the latter of which were commissioned—and frequently designed—by Clark and crafted by various artists. They were placed in and around shelves, racks, and archival boxes containing museum artefacts. Yet they were sometimes also positioned in cabinets or drawers that, although they resembled museum storage, had been crafted as sets for the exhibition (fig. 5.11). As Clark explained, she chose and/or crafted settings that ‘performed’ museum storage in various ways (Clark, 2023: n.p.). Through this work, she challenged the placement and definition of the fashion ‘object’, typically reserved for accessioned artefacts in the museum context.

Does something become an ‘object’ as soon as it enters a museum storage or gallery space? In my experience, props and other non-accessioned items (including loans from designers, private individuals, or other collections) are not housed within the museum’s collections storage, which are meant solely for the preservation of items in its permanent collection. The transfer of any such ‘outside’ items into storage would entail a change in status from ‘temporary’ to ‘permanent’, with the resulting implication that they would be cared for according to museum conservation standards.

Fig. 5.11

Installation view of *The Concise Dictionary of Dress*, Blythe House (Victoria and Albert Museum), 2010. This portion of the exhibition featured specially commissioned, sculptural silhouettes covered in Tyvek that replicated the shape of garments in storage. Photograph by Norbert Schoerner.

In this instance, lines were blurred through the inclusion of the artworks, in addition to fashions on loan from designers and collectors. Some of the historic garments, such as a 1910 Poiret night dress, were not part of the V&A collection as I had assumed they were. As a second-hand observer of the exhibition, it was only by reading the detailed information about each installation, available in the back of the exhibition catalogue, that I was able to discern the origins of each object. I was surprised by my own readiness to read something as a museum object so quickly, based primarily on how it was shown—but this speaks to the effectiveness of the installations. Clark's commissioning of 'objects' has also inspired an idea for my own work, to be discussed in Chapter 6, 'Object selection and stimulation'.

The Concise Dictionary of Dress was a rare, singular achievement. The production of any kind of exhibition within the storage spaces of The Museum at FIT would be inconceivable to my colleagues; storage spaces are strictly off-limits to everyone but select museum staff and the

occasional visitor (usually staff from another museum). However, this was an intentionally exclusive experience (Clark, 2023: n.p.), and it remained a highly orchestrated endeavour. It can also be related to cabinets of curiosities, with its semi-private, guided experience and emphasis on personal interpretation and understanding over curatorial authority.

Fashioning Fashion: European Dress in Detail, 1700-1915 & *Masterworks: Unpacking Fashion**

Sharon S. Takeda and Kaye D. Spilker curated *Fashioning Fashion: European Dress in Detail, 1700-1915* at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2010-2011). This exhibition was designed to suggest a work in progress. The curatorial thesis was uncomplicated: the museum wanted to showcase a selection of its new acquisitions (the garments and accessories were purchased from European collectors Martin Kamer and Wolfgang Ruf). The objects were placed on artfully unfinished platforms, with some of their understructure visible, and many were shown emerging (fully dressed on mannequins) from large 'shipping crates' made from grey-blue painted wood (the colour of which was also reminiscent of the archival board used in many museum collections) (fig. 5.12).

Although the exhibition evoked the idea of a museum staff member unpacking a new acquisition, it was highly stylised. Fashion objects are not often dressed on mannequins within their shipping crates (though some are stored on specialised mounts or mannequins for conservation reasons), nor would the containers be devoid of packing materials. I did not

discern that the exhibition was intended to fool visitors into thinking they were witnessing a great reveal, but it did seem to evoke the excitement of exploration within exhibitions and, by extension, within museum storage.

Fig. 5.12

Installation view of the exhibition *Fashioning Fashion: European Dress in Detail, 1700–1915*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2010–2011. The exhibition featured new acquisitions 'emerging from their crates'; the grey-blue colour of the crates is also reminiscent of archival board. Photograph © LACMA

The 2016–2017 exhibition *Masterworks: Unpacking Fashion*, curated by Jessica Regan at the Costume Institute, took a similar approach. In this instance, the exhibition included 'significant' objects that had been acquired over the past decade, which had been selected to demonstrate the museum's policy of amassing 'masterworks of the highest aesthetic and technical quality' (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2016, 'Masterworks': n.p.). The garments and accessories were shown in a gallery space inspired by wooden shipping crates (fig. 5.13). The design was highly polished—so polished, in fact, that I wondered during my visit if other visitors discerned the use of the 'crates', especially if they had not noted the word 'unpacking' in the exhibition title. The

premise of both exhibitions bore some similarity to the previously mentioned *Curios and Treasures* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–2001), for which the thesis was largely defined by objects that had not been shown previously.

Fig. 5.13

Installation photograph from *Masterworks: Unpacking Fashion* at the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2016. The exhibition premise and design echoed LACMA's *Fashioning Fashion.* Photograph © The Metropolitan Museum of Art

*Behind the Scenes**

Behind the Scenes at the Fashion Museum, Bath, was a permanent gallery installation on view from 2011 through 2017. Like several of the exhibitions mentioned previously, it relied on the idea of storage—with stacks of archival boxes, plastic bins, and racks of hanging garments forming the backdrop for a selection of clothing dressed on forms—but the space was intended purely for effect. Curator Rosemary Harden writes about her intentions, first citing that many of the museum's visitors did not have an existing interest in or

knowledge of fashion—rather, they often arrived at the museum as part of a tourist package (Harden in Clark and de la Haye, 2014: 48–49). This necessitated a curatorial approach that would spark curiosity within a particularly broad, non-specialist audience—such as offering some insight (albeit staged) into how a fashion museum functions.

Fig. 5.14

Behind the Scenes at the Fashion Museum, Bath (part of various, rotating objects shown as a part of this installation from 2011 through 2017). Stacks of archival boxes formed the backdrop for a selection of dressed forms and accessories in a performance of museum storage. Photograph © Fashion Museum, Bath

Harden further explains that *Behind the Scenes* alluded to the theatrical sensibility of the museum's founder, Doris Langley Moore. 'Each of the display cases is "blocked", as on a stage in a theatre', Harden writes, 'but the "characters" in this play are piles of storage boxes and trays of colourful shoes' (Harden in Clark and de la Haye, 2014: 48–49). The clothing and accessories shown in the exhibition were primarily historic (fig. 5.14). Dress forms provided a sense of the garments' silhouettes, but they were not accessorised, styled with paper wigs, or otherwise given a distinctive 'character'. This was meant to help create the illusion that that the objects were being viewed in a storage space, rather than a

gallery, particularly since they stood in stark contrast to the fully accessorised, realistic mannequins selected to showcase twentieth-century fashion within the rest of the museum's galleries (Harden, 2014: 134). The long run of this installation (with objects substituted for conservation reasons) attests to its success with visitors.

Cristóbal Balenciaga: Collectionneur de modes

The 2012 exhibition *Cristóbal Balenciaga: Collectionneur de modes* [*Fashion Collector*], held at Les Docks-Cité de la Mode et du Design, Paris, featured fashions by Balenciaga paired with garments, accessories, and other fashion-related objects the designer had acquired for his personal collection, donated to the Palais Galliera in 1979 by the couturier's family (Ballesteros and Martín i Ros, 2012: 14). The exhibition, curated by Olivier Saillard, was staged offsite as the Galliera was undergoing renovation; the Galliera's objects were supplemented by loans from the archives of Balenciaga's parent company, Kering.

Les Docks, located in an old port district near the Gare d'Austerlitz train station, had been recently redeveloped into a centre of art, commerce, and nightlife (stimulated in part by its adjacency to the Institut Français de la Mode). Saillard notes that the temporary use of this alternative exhibition space, repurposed from a warehouse built in 1907, allowed for more experimentation (Menkes, 2012: n.p.). As exhibition reviewer Charlotte Nicklas observes, the industrial feel of the space was echoed in the exhibition design, which used metal cabinetry to mimic the appearance of collections storage (Nicklas, 2013: 439).

The spaces were modelled after the Galliera's actual storage, and visitors were 'invited to discover' these typically 'inaccessible spaces, hidden from view' (Palais Galliera, 2012: 3) (fig. 5.15). The idea for this mode of display built upon a 2004 exhibition at the Palais Galliera, *Ouverture pour Inventaire* [*Open for Inventory*], which evoked the museum's storage spaces on a small scale. The object selection for that exhibition was, according to the museum's website, 'arbitrary' (Palais Galliera, n.d., 'Ouverture pour Inventaire': n.p.), whereas the premise of *Cristóbal Balenciaga: Collectionneur de modes* was more clearly defined.

Balenciaga's creations were juxtaposed with those the couturier had collected for inspiration. Varying modes of display within the metal 'storage bays' were also shown side by side. Some objects hung on padded hangers, while others were dressed on forms. Fragile objects were laid flat within large acrylic vitrines. Accessories were variously placed in smaller vitrines, dressed on specialised forms, or shown in one of the 'storage drawers', which could be viewed through a sheet of acrylic. The lines between modes of storage and display were blurred, and the personal nature of the couturier's collection was reflected in the staged intimacy of the exhibition design.

Fig. 5.15

The installation of *Cristóbal Balenciaga: Collectionneur de Modes* (Cristóbal Balenciaga: Fashion Collector), Musée Galliera at Les Docks, Paris, 2012. Varying types of objects were shown in a setting that replicated collections storage, but some of the modes of display, such as accessories in vitrines, were akin to mounts typically seen only in exhibitions. Photograph Palais Galliera © Pierre Antoine

The numerous 'behind-the-scenes' exhibitions described above proved fascinating to me, even as someone who has near-daily access to a substantial museum collection of fashion. As I mentioned previously, I felt compelled to research this mode of installation for its connection to historic cabinets of curiosities, but I have also used these studies to inform one aspect of my own theoretical exhibition, which will be described in Chapter 6, 'The main gallery: "Behind-the-scenes" cabinet'.

The gigantic and the miniature

The title of my final curatorial theme was inspired by poet and literary critic Susan Stewart's book *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Stewart, 1993 [1984]). This theme focusses on the creation and display of fashion objects at noticeably large or small scales. As psychiatrist John Mack writes, 'both the infinitesimally tiny and the infinitesimally large stretch the

limits of our imagination' (Mack, 2007: 12). Cabinets of curiosities frequently engaged with notions of scale—customary objects within collections included a stuffed crocodile (often suspended from the ceiling) and intricately carved fruit pits. Several fashion exhibitions have prominently engaged with concepts of the gigantic and the miniature (especially with the latter); they were also designer (or brand) retrospectives, perhaps because of the brand's ability and willingness to commission large- and/or small-scale reproductions of their work (which can later be housed in company archives or otherwise utilised to promote the brand).

The House of Viktor and Rolf

Stewart asserts that the doll's house is 'the most consummate of miniatures' (Stewart, 1993 [1984]: 61), and it is therefore fitting that the first exhibition I analyse—*The House of Viktor and Rolf*, on view at Barbican Art Gallery in London in 2008—prominently featured a doll's house. The exhibition was a retrospective of the work by the Dutch design duo Viktor Horsting and Rolf Snoeren[100]. Art historian and architect Siebe Tettero designed the installation, which centred on manipulations of scale. In a literal interpretation of the term 'house' used in the title, a large doll's house—standing six metres tall—dominated the central gallery space. Within it, fifty-four porcelain dolls, each measuring just over sixty centimetres, wore line-for-line replicas of some of Viktor and Rolf's designs (fig. 5.16). The house could be viewed from the floor or by ascending an external staircase.

[100] The exhibition was curated by The Barbican, with no individuals identified.

Fig. 5.16

The 'doll's house' at *The House of Viktor and Rolf*, on view at Barbican Art Gallery in London in 2008. The staircase that offered visitors a more complete look at the installation is partially visible to the left of the image. Photograph © Dezeen

Elsewhere in the exhibition, human-sized mannequins with porcelain doll heads and hands replaced traditional mannequins. They wore the same designs as the smaller dolls. Despite the slender, model-esque proportions of their bodies, the heads gave the appearance of dolls that had been blown up to life-size proportions. Their full, childish faces were unsettling: they were neither the (often abstracted) visage of a display mannequin nor the adult face of a runway model. The faces of both the mannequins and the dolls were a hybrid of ideas, based partly on the appearance of the models who had worn each look on the runway (replicating their makeup and hairstyles), and also on the appearance of French, nineteenth-century baby dolls made from porcelain (Evans and Frankel, 2008: 19).

The mannequins were placed within rooms that resembled the doll's house. According to Graham Sheffield (artistic director) and Kate Bush (head of Art Galleries, Barbican Centre), the intent was to provide visitors with 'an uncanny feeling' that

they had entered the doll's rooms, to disorienting effect (Sheffield and Bush in Evans and Frankel, 2008: 6). They further note that visitors were meant to receive paradoxical experiences: they would feel excluded from the doll's house, as they were only able to view it from the outside, whereas the spaces containing the larger dolls provided the opposite sense—now viewers were immersed in what seemed to be the once-miniature world (Ibid.). Stewart describes a similar experience in her observations on scale, concluding, 'Although the miniature makes the body gigantic, the gigantic transforms the body into the miniature, especially pointing to the body's "toylike" and "insignificant" aspects' (Stewart, 1993 [1984]: 71).

The decision to include dolls and a doll's house in the exhibition was not without precedent in the designers' work. In 1996, when Viktor and Rolf were facing financial difficulties, they staged their new collection in miniature as a way to cut costs (a concept with historical precedence, as I will describe later). The project featured a doll whose world included a rack of clothes, a catwalk, a boutique, a photo studio, and a design studio (Loriot, 2018: 107). For the autumn/winter 1999 season, the duo staged their *Russian Doll* presentation. It began with model Maggie Rizer wearing a mini dress, onto which eight additional layers of clothing were piled, adding bulk and creating a more extreme silhouette as the presentation continued.

Notably, there is a direct link between doll's houses and cabinets of curiosities. Duke Albrecht V of Bavaria, who owned a vast collection of curiosities, commissioned the first recorded doll's house in 1557–58 (Mack, 2007: 146). In her

writing on Viktor & Rolf, Caroline Evans references a well-known doll's house at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, the city where the designers live and work. Petronella Oortman owned the house, which stands two-and-a-half metres tall and dates from 1686 to 1710[101]. The upper storey can only be viewed through a set of external steps, in a manner similar to *The House of Viktor and Rolf* exhibition (Evans and Frankel, 2008: 17).

Dolls, too, are part of the history of cabinets of curiosities—Quiccheberg mentions the significance of collecting dolls that allowed queens and princesses to 'examine the foreign garments of distant peoples in fine detail' (Quiccheberg, 2014 [1565]: 16). Dolls are entwined with the history of fashion. In her book *The Fashion Doll: From Bébé Jumeau to Barbie*, historian Juliette Peers writes that the term fashion doll has typically been used to describe four types of doll from different periods: those dating before the nineteenth century, which were used to disseminate information about the latest French fashions; mid- to late- nineteenth-century French dolls, made from porcelain and styled after adult women; mid-twentieth-century plastic dolls in North America, whose appearance and clothing reflected Parisian high fashion and, since the 1990s, a 'female-styled doll, usually intended for adult collectors' (Peers, 2004: 15).

Viktor and Rolf's work might be viewed as the descendant of one of the best-known presentations of fashion dolls, the *Théâtre de la mode*. The faceless wire dolls—created by

[101] Oortman's doll's house also inspired a best-selling novel, *The Miniaturist* by Jessie Burton (Burton, 2014), and a BBC television show of the same name from 2017. Interest in the book and the show inspired a spate of articles on Oortman and doll's houses more generally.

illustrator Éliane Bonabel and deliberately intended to not look like toys—were fashioned during the winter of 1944–1945, following the liberation of Paris at the end of World War II. The 237 dolls—each standing approximately seventy-six centimetres tall—wore immaculate, miniature versions of new designs by leading couturiers. They were intended to mark the comeback of Parisian haute couture while also saving time and money. As fashion writer Edmonde Charles-Roux details, 'Each [garment] was fashioned with the same precision and perfection as the original: tiny hand-stitched buttons that could really be unbuttoned, pockets that were really pockets, inner construction as meticulously finished as if the dress were to be worn inside out' (Charles-Roux *et al*, 2002 [1990]: 42). The ensembles included detailed accessories, such as hats adorned with tiny feathers, which were perched upon human-hair wigs.

Fig. 5.17

Anne Surger's recreation of a *Théâtre de la mode* set by Christian Bérard. The original set dated to 1945, and the recreation was made during the 1990s. This image gives a sense of the large scale of the sets, which can be difficult to discern in detail photographs of the dolls. Photograph by David Seidner.

The dolls were exhibited around Europe, the United Kingdom, and the United States, first beginning in Paris in 1945. They were displayed in thirteen large sets, created by well-known Parisian designers including André Beaurepaire and Christian Bérard. Although it can be difficult to comprehend the scale of these sets from period photos, a recreation of Bérard's 'Le Théâtre' by production designer Anne Surgers indicates how walking through a room containing the dolls and their sets would have been an immersive experience (fig. 5.17). Today, 172 of the dolls survive (though their original sets do not) and they are housed at the Maryhill Museum in Tacoma, Washington. Although the dolls underwent restoration from 1988 until 1990, they have not been loaned to other museums since 2015 due to their fragile state (Maryhill Museum, 2020: n.p.).

There have been numerous exhibitions centred on fashion dolls[102], but I have focussed here on examples of designers and design houses that have commissioned miniatures expressly for exhibition purposes. The reason for this is twofold. Firstly, I find it interesting to analyse the aesthetic choices made by the design houses. For instance, as Evans notes, typical fashion dolls were modelled after grown women rather than children—and this is what makes Viktor and Rolf's child-like dolls' heads both unique and unsettling (Evans and Frankel, 2008: 19). Secondly, I would like to commission a miniaturist to make small replicas of clothing and accessories from The Museum at FIT to be featured in the exhibition,

[102] Some examples of these include *Fashion in Miniature: Dolls and Their Clothes* (Platt Hall, Manchester, 1971); *La mode et les poupées du 18e siecle a nos jours* (Musée Galliera, Paris, 1981–1982); *All Dolled Up: Dolls' Costume* (Platt Hall, Manchester, 1985–1986); and *Perfect Little Ladies: Fashion Dolls and the Art of Dress* (Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1991–1992).

which would be shown in proximity to their full-size inspirations (psychological research on how miniature objects incite curiosity is outlined in Chapter 6, 'Object selection and stimulation'). This would allow visitors to compare and contrast and provide them with a true sense of the scale of the objects[103]. I also plan to show a miniature handbag already housed in The Museum at FIT collection, which is described in Chapter 6, 'The main gallery: "Craftsmanship" cabinet'.

*Orla Kiely: A Life in Pattern**

In 2018, the exhibition *Orla Kiely: A Life in Pattern* at the Fashion and Textile Museum, London, also engaged with notions of scale and the use of specially made dolls. Curator Dennis Nothdruft and textile historian Mary Schoeser organised the exhibition. Kiely was also involved, allowing specialised access to her work that was likely critical to facilitating its recreation at very large- and very small-scales.

Kiely's direct contribution to a show about her own designs could be criticised for its subjectivity, but it is impossible for any curator, professional or otherwise, to be fully objective. Furthermore, the criticism of creator-as-curator faces less scepticism in the realm of fine art. Museologist and art historian Nadine Murgida observes that exhibitions curated by artists can result in 'an even stronger bond between the artwork(s) and the spectator' (Murgida, 2018: n.p.)—an

[103] Philippe Nuveen, a miniaturist based in New York, alumnus of FIT, and contestant on the 2022 reality television show *Best in Miniature* (CBC), has expressed interest in working on this project. For the physical exhibition, I will consult with him on the best examples from the checklist to miniaturise.

exchange I perceived in Kiely's exhibition. Lastly, I have found that exhibitions at the Fashion and Textile Museum often present lively narratives, rather than critical or theoretical content, which further justifies the benefits of Kiely's role and her creative voice.

Visitors were introduced to the premise of the show—a focus on Kiely's signature graphic prints and motifs—through a gallery that provided an overview of her life and career. Large squares of her patterns formed a patchwork wallpaper, and some of Kiely's home goods and accessories were displayed in vitrines. This vibrant but relatively conventional space led to the main gallery, in which typical products were eschewed in favour of objects commissioned specifically for the exhibition.

The most prominent items in the space were enormous replicas of Kiely's designs, which were hung from the ceiling on wooden hangers (fig. 5.18)[104]. Kiely states that the oversized garments were designed to create an immersive exhibition, where visitors would be 'absorbed into the kaleidoscopic colours and rhythms' of her prints (Kiely in Conlon, 2018: n.p.). The textile patterns had been blown up to a scale proportionate to the size of the clothing. Kiely further explains that the oversized garments were made and utilised in lieu of hanging lengths of fabric. 'I knew in my

[104] Another exhibition—*Azzedine Alaïa: The Couturier* opened two weeks before *Orla Kiely* at The Design Museum, London. It featured replicas of Alaïas's designs that were elongated to unrealistic proportions and shown on invisible mounts, resulting in a sculptural effect (Hitti, 2018: n.p.). Although the fantastical appearance of the garments was awe-inspiring, their slenderness did not render them, in my personal experience, worthy of the term 'gigantic'.

head that it would be this kind of magical thing—that's what I wanted' she states (Kiely in Marfil, 2018: n.p.).

Fig. 5.18 (left): Gigantic dresses on display in the exhibition *Orla Kiely: A Life in Pattern* at the Fashion and Textile Museum, London, 2018.

Fig. 5.19 (right): A small, handmade doll wearing an Orla Kiely-designed dress on display in in *Orla Kiely: A Life in Pattern*. The print of this miniature dress and those in the huge dresses in the adjacent image were sized to scale. Photographs by the author.

The oversized clothes were flanked by dolls measuring approximately twenty centimetres tall. Placed in small acrylic vitrines positioned around the exterior walls, they wore miniaturised versions of the oversize designs. Sarah Strachan, a custom dollmaker, made them especially for the exhibition. Although the clothes were detailed, the dolls were stylised, featuring round heads painted with abstracted faces and yarn wigs (fig. 5.19). They were neither sophisticated fashion dolls nor typical children's toys. The meticulous level of detail embodied a handcrafted quality that made it evident (to my eye) that the dolls were not intended for retail sale. This underscored that both the oversize garments and the dolls were commissioned for the exhibition, and that visitors were experiencing something they would not find elsewhere. Their inclusion provided a sense of the museum as a distinctive space that was separate from the retail environment.

Nothdruft emphasises that the exhibition elements underscored Kiely's sense of humour and attention to detail (Marfil, 2018: n.p.). The latter is evident in the dolls and the oversize dresses—both concepts were meticulously rendered with all details reproportioned to suit their size. Although the upper floor of the museum included traditionally-sized Orla Kiely designs on mannequins, those were not visible from the main space—the visitor's first impressions of the exhibition were of only the very large or very small clothes. Stewart notes that 'the body is our mode of perceiving scale', adding that it is also the place of origin for exaggeration (Stewart, 1993: xxxi). Through their non-human proportions, the objects in *Orla Kiely* transcended the values of use or need that can be inherent to clothing. They also inspired different ways of looking: each of the dolls was easily viewed as a whole, while the hanging garments required visitors to move through and around the space to fully comprehend them.

The approach to *Orla Kiely* recalled an earlier fashion installation in which oversized fashions were commissioned for dramatic effect. The 1996 Florence Biennale exhibition *Il tempo e la moda* featured gigantic crinolines (each approximately three metres wide) designed by Gianfranco Ferré, which were hung from the ceiling of the Medici Chapel. Judith Clark writes about this installation:

> Dress became a prop in a statement about dress—and raised questions as to why the original was not used. Perhaps because exaggeration speaks for itself … it needs to be oversized by contemporary standards, it needs to battle against other images of 'exaggeration'. It was not about dress, but about an ideal (Clark and de la Haye, 2014: 127).

In an interview I conducted with Clark, she clarified her opinion that the oversized nature of the crinolines created a more 'meaningful dialogue' between these 'prop' objects and the large scale of the cupola in which they swayed—the crinolines were simultaneously enormous in scale and lightweight (Clark, 2023: n.p.). The idea of using exaggeration for effect—to create a sense of wonder and awe—may be another idea to incorporate into the planning of my exhibition. In practical terms, it is also unlikely that The Museum at FIT's conservation staff would allow anything but a specialised 'prop' to hang from the ceiling—but both the Orla Kiely exhibition and Ferré's work at the Biennale underscore that props need not be any less meaningful than traditional museum objects. I will include more of my ideas regarding props in the 'Size' section of the subsequent chapter.

*Christian Dior: Designer of Dreams**

Christian Dior: Designer of Dreams, first on view at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris in 2018[105], also featured miniature replicas of clothing designs and accessories (some of which were 3D-printed). More than 600 examples were displayed in the 'Colorama' gallery[106]. A portmanteau of 'color' and 'diorama', the word evokes both the museum and a representation of the world in miniature. (The version of the

[105] The exhibition travelled to the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2019, the Long Museum West Bund in Shanghai in 2020, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chengdu in 2020, the Brooklyn Museum in 2020–2021, and the M7 Museum in Doha in 2021 at the time of this writing. Each iteration included the miniatures I describe. I visited the exhibitions in London and Brooklyn.

exhibition in Shanghai titled this section the 'Diorama', which is interesting for its inclusion of the name Dior.) (fig. 5.20)

Fig. 5.20

The 'Diorama' at the exhibition *Dior: Designer of Dreams* in Long Museum West Bund, Shanghai, 2020. Photograph © Metal Magazine

The Colorama also included full-sized garments, accessories, jewellery, perfume bottles and sketches. Olivier Bialobos, who worked on the exhibition as director of communications at Christian Dior Couture, notes his desire for the variety of objects to resemble a cabinet of curiosities (Christian Dior, 2020: n.p.). They were grouped behind sheets of acrylic in an array organised by colour. The miniature dresses were shown on simple white dress forms with no heads or limbs. This mirrored the way the full-sized garments were displayed, emphasising that the small dresses were also products of the atelier, and they allowed visitors to give their full attention to the garments' details (rather than the dolls they might have been displayed on).

Galerie Dior, an exhibition space in Paris opened by the brand in spring 2022, features a similar display. It includes 1,872 objects, including 452 miniature dresses and a profusion of 3D-printed accessories (Galerie Dior, n.d.: n.p.), once again organised by colour. When visiting this space in May 2023, I also encountered a room designed to resemble a cabinet of curiosities, with objects placed in individually sized and lit compartments on either side of a long, narrow space. More miniature garments and 3D-printed handbags were interspersed with real accessories such as fans, shoes, jewellery, and headpieces. There were no clearly decipherable groupings, though numerous objects demonstrated a connection to naturalia (with flowers and insects being particularly dominant motifs) or they portrayed inspiration from global fashion cultures, such as China.

The accompanying wall text referenced Renaissance cabinets of curiosities, but the gallery's further description as 'an anthology of timeless, colorful and surprising essentials, from yesterday and today, [that were] designed to enhance the silhouette and offer clients around the world a total Dior look' (Galerie Dior, 2023: n.p.) offered little connection to the ethos of the historic cabinets. Although the object selection and the gallery text were insubstantial in their relation to the cabinets, it was nonetheless interesting to see such a reference in this space, underscoring its popularity in contemporary exhibition vernacular.

Dior's consistent use of miniature dress forms is not new within the history of fashion—most famously, couturier Madeleine Vionnet used a half-sized mannequin to craft her designs during the 1920s and 1930s (the Dior miniature

dresses are made at one-third scale). Fashion curator Pamela Golbin explains of Vionnet's process:

> [She] chose to work directly with fabric on an articulated wooden mannequin, measuring eighty centimeters high. This created the necessary distance from the female body, encouraging a more formal vision and greater abstraction. Patiently, Vionnet worked out her design using scaled-down muslins which, being easier to handle, gave her great freedom to experiment (Golbin, 2009: 24).

In July 2020, designer Maria Grazia Chiuri faced the challenge of presenting Dior's autumn/winter 2020-21 couture collection during the Covid-19 pandemic. Rather than stage a traditional show, she asked her atelier staff to make line-for-line versions of the couture collection at one-third their usual size. The thirty-seven miniature creations were shown on dress forms (like those in the Dior exhibitions) and contained in a special wooden 'house' on wheels. Footage of the dresses being made and presented was featured in a film, directed by Matteo Garrone, which seemed designed to satiate fashion lovers' curiosity about the collection (and, of course, help to promote it on a commercial level).

Chiuri used the dresses to introduce the designs over video conference calls; they were also shipped to top clients around the world—an idea wholly evocative of the *Théâtre de la mode*, which was one of Chiuri's inspirations[107]. She also confessed to a lifelong love for dolls, stating: 'I have a playful side and in that [lockdown] moment that was so depressing, it helped me to feel positive' (Chiuri in Menkes, 2020: n.p.). Chiuri began her tenure at Dior in 2016, and it is possible that

[107] The *Théâtre de la mode* dolls were also about one-third of human size (Maryhill Museum of Art, 2020: n.p.).

her love for dolls was part of the decision to include miniatures in the Dior exhibitions[108]. The house's promotion of these small figures—in its exhibitions, its museum, and its autumn 2020 campaign—reinforces popular interest in miniatures.

Cabinets in fashion retail display

Chiuri's use of dolls in commerce segues into my research on the intersections between fashion, retail displays, and cabinets of curiosities. Literature scholar Erin Mackie outlines the historical interplay between cabinets and retail practices:

> There are broad, and deep, connections between the cabinet collections of fine and curious objects and the retail boutique. As historical products of the development of technology and expansion of trade during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, both gather together things from all over the world, operating as visual resorts (Mackie, 1996: 334).

Mackie cites the collection of objects acquired by London's East India Company[109] (1600–1874) as an example. Others have made connections between cabinets of curiosities and/or museums and the development of department stores during the nineteenth century. Art historian Christoph Grünenberg writes that the atmosphere of the department

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[108] Dior's print advertising campaign for the autumn/winter 2022–2023 season featured models and accessories positioned in a cabinet, but Chiuri's inspiration was 'a gallery of female portraits borrowed from the history of painting' (Christian Dior, 2022: n.p.).

[109] The East India Company was a colonialist endeavour—an English company 'formed for the exploitation of trade with East and Southeast Asia and India … Starting as a monopolistic trading body, the company became involved in politics and acted as an agent of British imperialism in India from the early 18th century to the mid-19th century' (Britannica, 2021: n.p.).

store—with its seemingly illogical organisation and flamboyance—created 'a phantasmagoric dream-world of consumerism in which sales were achieved through appealing to the imagination and by transporting the customers to distant places and pasts' (Grünenberg, 2002: 24). It was experience that could perhaps be likened to visiting a cabinet of curiosities.

My interest lies in instances of fashion retail environments that have specifically utilised museum cabinetry for display and/or adopted the aesthetic of a cabinet of curiosities. Moser notes that 'Even display furniture, such as cabinets, shelves, plinths, pedestals, and stanchions can situate objects and cultures within a particular intellectual framework. For instance, historic wooden cabinets can define objects as curiosities' (Moser, 2010: 25-26). Curator James Putman makes a similar observation. In his writing about the origins of the vitrine in the display of saintly relics and other sacred objects, he states that vitrines embody 'a very particular display aesthetic which has a singular ability to transform magically the most humble object into something special, unique and generally more attractive or fascinating' (Putnam, 2009: 14). This description can also help to explain their power within retail display. Vitrines can indicate that there is something of value inside of them; they can help to facilitate close looking as well.

Tommy Hilfiger

A particular style of casework is not necessarily enough to distinguish fashion objects as curiosities. In 2014, the London-based company Lassco—which specialises in

architectural antiques, salvage, and curiosities—acquired a wooden display case from the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford (an institution that is sometimes referred to as a 'cabinet of curiosities' despite its nineteenth-century origins; Kerr-Lewis, 2017: n.p.). This substantial item of furniture was seven metres long and had been used to house objects from two of the voyages undertaken by Captain James Cook (previously mentioned in Chapter 2). The museum had recently received funding to rehouse the artefacts in a new, climate-controlled vitrine, making its original cabinetry redundant.

Lassco purchased the cabinet, which was later sold to Tommy Hilfiger for use in its Berlin flagship store. It is noteworthy that the store's visual merchandising staff contacted Lassco asking for 'a huge mahogany museum cabinet' (Lassco, 2015: n.p.), emphasising their specific interest in that aesthetic. Hilfiger's team renovated and fitted the cabinet with hanging rods and shelves to house men's clothing and accessories (fig. 5.21). Despite this compelling history, I find photographs of this cabinet within the store (which is now permanently closed) to be unremarkable. Without knowing the history of the furniture, I would not assume it had come from a museum. The cabinet's extensive refitting and the goods housed within it—multiples of Hilfiger's signature 'preppy' clothing designs—preclude the impression of a cabinet of curiosities. This is indicative of my own pre-conceptions regarding the appearance of museum displays, which often rely on housing rare or singular objects.

Fig. 5.21

This cabinet was formerly housed at the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, and repurposed by Lassco in London. The cabinet was photographed in its new location at the Tommy Hilfiger flagship store in Berlin in 2015, where it took on a distinctly retail appearance. Photograph © Tommy Hilfiger.

Dover Street Market and Trading Museum

London's Dover Street Market (DSM) has likewise utilised museum-style cabinets. Founded by Comme des Garçons designer Rei Kawakubo and her partner Adrian Joffe in 2004 to showcase work by numerous, innovative designers, DSM—with other locations in New York City, Tokyo, Singapore, Beijing, and Los Angeles as of 2023—was described by the *Los Angeles Times* as a 'cabinet of retail curiosities' (Tschorn, 2018: n.p.). The stores feature an aggregation of distinctive, unconventional displays that demarcate each brand's section within the larger DSM spaces, and such individualised settings provide the items for sale with a more rarefied quality. Curator Thelma Golden, writing for *Artforum* in 2004, explains that the 'recent frenzied spate of museum building' resulted in comparisons between museums and shopping malls—but she expresses her admiration for both establishments. Whereas DSM was being described as the 'ultimate mall', she counters that 'it is actually the perfect

museum', mentioning its carefully 'curated' content and mix of designers (Golden, 2004: 166).

The wood and glass cases situated near the entrance to the London store have housed various types of goods; of particular interest to this research is work by antiques dealer, artist, and taxidermist Emma Hawkins (fig. 5.22), which resembles a display of specimens at a natural history museum. The cases are not solely meant to display art and artefacts, however—the objects within them are also available for purchase. Similar casework, typically housing accessories for sale, is placed throughout the store. These wooden cases provide visual continuity within the space and help to confer the distinction of museum objects to commercial goods. Judith Clark writes that the blurring of galleries and retail spaces 'confuses and fetishizes the idea of looking and buying' (Clark, 2017: n.p.).

Fig. 5.22

Work by Emma Hawkins at the entrance to Dover Street Market, London, October 2022. Although the specimens are for sale, their lack of labelling allows them to appear primarily as display objects. Photograph by the author.

In 2009, Comme des Garçons opened its Trading Museum concept store in Tokyo, followed by a similar endeavour in Paris in 2011. The stores showcase clothing, work by artists in various media, and installations by artists and designers. Although technically a retail establishment (commercial goods are interspersed with the other objects on display), visitors feel no pressure to make purchases—staff encourages an attitude of 'just looking' (Moss, 2009: n.p.). This sensibility is underscored by the use of museum vitrines, specifically mentioned in an article announcing the first store's opening: 'Designed and conceived by Kawakubo, the space features eight expansive display cabinets on loan from the Victoria & Albert Museum'[110].

Fig. 5.23

A view of the Comme des Garçons Trading Museum in Tokyo, 2009, showing the (sometimes deconstructed) use of 'South Kensington' vitrines. The example to the bottom right includes a garment rack that extends beyond the boundaries of the case. Photograph by Yasuo Kobayashi.

The 'curiosities' on view at the Trading Museum upon its opening included glass objects by artist Pieke Bergmans, a

[110] It is unclear if the cases were truly on loan or purchased for the store. References to the historical influence of V&A-style cases—known as 'Kensington' or 'South Kensington' cases—are included in Appendix D.

selection of vintage hats by Stephen Jones, and archival Comme des Garçons designs (Moss, 2009: n.p.)[111]. In some instances, the cases were modified—garment rails extend beyond their parameters, or part of the base was removed so that mannequins could stand with their feet on the ground and their torsos and heads in the cases (fig. 5.23). This environment, which is reminiscent of Kawakubo's signature deconstructed fashion aesthetic, serves as a reminder that retail display can offer creative possibilities outside of the strict parameters of the museum setting.

Ted Muehling

The Manhattan store of jewellery designer Ted Muehling exemplifies the crossover between fashion retail display and cabinets of curiosities. A large canoe suspended from the ceiling recalls the stuffed crocodiles that were often hung in a similar manner within historic cabinets (fig. 5.24). Muehling's work is frequently inspired by the natural world, and his designs are often juxtaposed with objects such as ostrich eggs, crystals, and shells within his store. Wares are displayed within wooden cases with glass vitrines, resembling the casework often used by museums and their predecessors, cabinets of curiosities. For example, a collection of shells is made available to Muehling's shop visitors through a pull-out drawer, further highlighting the designer's inclination toward a museum-like or cabinet of curiosities-like display. A recent donation of Muehling's jewellery to The Museum at FIT helped to inspire a case in my theoretical exhibition, which will be

[111] These are rotating displays, and a parallel concept is employed at the Paris store.

described in a section of the next chapter, ‘Praxis E4-Design brief: Specimen cabinet’.

Fig. 5.24

The interior of Ted Muehling’s New York shop, opened in 2011, in which the designer’s jewellery is interspersed among items such as shells, ceramics, and sculptures in wooden vitrines. Many of Muehling’s designs are inspired by nature, and several are included in my exhibition checklist. Photograph © Huffington Post

Gucci

Artist Ignasi Monreal illustrated a cabinet of curiosities for Gucci’s autumn/winter 2017 gift campaign. It was populated with depictions of Gucci bags among items commonly found within historical cabinets, such as swords, a unicorn horn, and a stuffed bird. In its online rendition, clicking on the cabinet reveals ‘a surreal and spellbinding world’ of ready-to-wear clothing and accessories for sale’ (Gucci, 2017: n.p.). A similar concept materialised in Gucci store windows in Milan, in which a revolving mannequin, placed in the central niche of a three-dimensional ‘cabinet’, was surrounded by accessories. The cabinet was decorated with a sunburst, the Eye of Providence, and a neon ‘Open’ sign (fig. 5.25). The dynamic display might be categorised as ‘experiential retail’, one of

the strategies employed by brands to counteract the so-called 'retail apocalypse' (Chen, 2019: n.p.).

Fig. 5.25

A Gucci store window modelled on the appearance of a cabinet of curiosities, Milan, late 2017. The dressed mannequin in the centre rotated to reveal another group of shelves holding accessories. The objects themselves did not bear a strong relation to the cabinets. Photograph © Alamy

While the bricolage of contemporary and historical references echoed Gucci's design aesthetic, then under the creative direction of Alessandro Michele[112], the motivation behind the brand's choice to evoke the cabinet of curiosities is not clear. There is perhaps a connection between what Bennett describes as 'the secretive and cultic knowledge offered by the cabinet of curiosity' (Bennett, 1995: 41) and what fashion critics deem 'the cult of Gucci' (Gallagher, 2018: n.p.). Michele philosophises about his work and describes the process of creativity as 'a very mysterious voice' (Bowles, 2019: n.p.). The campaign may have also reflected the designer's own interest in collecting. He once maintained an apartment solely for his bibelots and antiques, which included many historic shoes (Ibid.).

[112] Michele resigned from Gucci in November 2022.

Fashion retail professors Sarah Bailey and Jonathan Baker write that visual merchandising should be aimed at enticing customers ‘into a commercial space, and keeping them there are long as possible. Visual merchandising is the crucial link between brand, consumer, product and environment’ (Bailey and Baker, 2014: 130). I perceive this statement as a natural link between fashion retail and museums—one that emphasises why an engagement with modes of retail display are important to this thesis. The museum and its mission could be considered its ‘brand’; visitors its consumers; products the objects on view; and the environment the exhibition itself.

Conclusion

Following a brief contextualisation of public interest in fashion exhibitions from the late twentieth century, in addition to the consideration of fashion exhibition typologies posited by other fashion curators, I conceive of four curatorial themes—'Fashion objects as curiosities’; ‘Fashion display as cabinet of curiosities’; ‘Behind-the-scenes’, and ‘The gigantic and the miniature’—that are distinct to this research. Each relates to aspects of the display and/or collection of objects in cabinets of curiosities. Within each of the themes, I analyse related fashion exhibitions I found to be best suited to each theme. Furthermore, I include examples of fashion retail and display that have demonstrated a similar connection to the cabinets.

These analyses have proven integral to the enhancement of my curatorial practice. With the greater knowledge afforded by my investigation into the theme of fashion display, I was able to uncover not only what I am drawn to in the work of

other museum practitioners and retailers, but also how some of their conceptual and aesthetic ideas may be applied to enhance my theoretical exhibition—and thus potentially incite curiosity among MFIT visitors. This research has provided a critical framework for the proposal of my own ideas in the next chapter, 'Exhibition interpretation and design', which acts as a culmination to many of the ideas and analyses proffered in this text so far.

CHAPTER 6: EXHBITION INTERPRETATION AND DESIGN

Introduction

This chapter centres on tangible curatorial strategies for the creation of an exhibition of fashion inspired by cabinets of curiosities. Each of the concepts I present was informed by elements of my practice-led research, including the results of my front-end evaluation (described in Chapter 1, Praxis B), studies of psychological theories, and visitor studies research conducted by museologists, in addition to material culture studies. It is beneficial to repeat my aim for this research submission and the related, theoretical exhibition that it informs—to incite curiosity through the promotion of exploration, observation, investigation, and learning among museum visitors—since several of these terms will appear again throughout this chapter.

I broadly refer to the ideas I present here as 'curatorial strategies', but as I acknowledge in my Introduction, the role of a curator is mutable and varies according to institutional needs. The curatorial strategies encompassed in this chapter are wide-ranging. They not only include theories on visitor engagement, participation, and exhibition design, but also textual interpretation and object selection and placement. In her studies of pedagogic strategies in museums, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill confirms the interrelationship of numerous exhibition elements, writing that they refer to:

> [T]he style of communication in displays, which includes the way the objects are used or placed, the way the text is written, the provision within the exhibition for various forms of sensory engagement (including

> visual, tactile, auditory senses), the use of light and colour, the use of space, and so on (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000: 5).

I begin this chapter by elucidating my research on the psychology of curiosity. Although psychological studies have been formative to ideas presented throughout this thesis, they have been especially fundamental to shaping my concepts for exhibition interpretation and design. An overview of the history of psychological studies of curiosity is followed by contemporary theories on curiosity, with emphasis on how some psychological concepts overlap with museological research. Although numerous museum professionals have written about curiosity as a goal within exhibition making (Rounds, 2004; Bitgood, 2013; Falk and Dierking, 2013), there are few concrete references to what makes an element of the exhibition experience (such as exhibition design or object selection) worthy of inspiring curiosity. The links I have drawn between psychology and museology aim to fill that gap; they also comprise a significant portion of my methodology, and as such my proposed contribution to knowledge.

The chapter continues with research on museum interpretation, defined as the way museum staff work to 'engage their audience with collections, information, and ideas' (Dobbin, 2019: n.p.). Although my research on interpretation is consistently viewed through the lens of curiosity, it encompasses an array of ideas, including theories on exhibition engagement, suggestions for encouraging visitor participation, strategies for developing written text, and guidelines for the selection and display of objects.

The final section of this chapter, 'Exhibition design', begins with an analysis of the visual codes discerned from historic cabinets of curiosities—some of which can be applied to a contemporary exhibition on the topic. I continue with the presentation of specific ideas for a theoretical exhibition at The Museum at FIT. I explain elements of my working processes and the gallery spaces where the exhibition will be staged, and I proceed with ideas for an immersive, curiosity-driven design. These include concepts for the introductory gallery in addition to seven specialised, differently themed cabinets, each of which is grounded in psychological and/or museological research.

The psychology of curiosity

One of the principal aims of my research is to pair psychological studies of curiosity with museological studies on interpretation and visitor engagement. Stephen Bitgood, a psychologist whose work regularly centres on the museum experience, notes that:

> Curiosity and excitement about the content area are often mentioned as important to the visitor experience, but have not been systematically studied objectively in museums as an independent variable (i.e., one that influences behavior outcomes). These are areas worthy of additional research (Bitgood, 2013: 70).

My research confirmed that Bitgood's statement remains relevant a decade later: museologists often reference the engendering of curiosity as a goal within exhibitions, yet distinct strategies for evoking curiosity are lacking. In an attempt to address this gap, I reviewed primary and secondary sources centred on the museum experience, and I

also engaged with prominent psychological theories on curiosity, finding numerous, previously unexpressed connections between the two.

My studies in psychology were supported by Dr Soljana Çili, a senior lecturer in psychology at the University of the Arts London and co-author of *Autobiographical Memory and the Self: Relationship and Implications for Cognitive Behavioural Therapy* (Çili and Stopa, 2018). I had no experience with the science of psychology prior to this research, and I found that it provided numerous ideas on how to enrich museum visitor experience and my own curatorial practice. While my proposed strategies are evidence-based and foregrounded in extensive psychological and museological research, their effectiveness will need to be investigated scientifically in the future.

Next, I present an overview of pertinent psychological theories of curiosity and their potential connections to museums. These ideas have provided a framework that informs the numerous strategies for museum interpretation and exhibition design, exhibition text, and object selection presented later in this chapter.

A brief history of curiosity within psychological studies

Curiosity has been a subject of psychological research for more than a century. In his studies on education, William James (1905 [1899]) classifies it as a 'native impulse' that motivated better cognition. Some classic studies of curiosity centred on animals. Ivan Pavlov (1927) examines the reactions of dogs to novel stimuli, while Harry Harlow (1950) studies

the exploratory behaviour of monkeys, and William Dember (1956) shows that rats preferred to explore unfamiliar parts of a maze. Jerome Bruner (1966) identifies curiosity as a motivation for learning. Daniel Berlyne, a mid-twentieth-century leader in the study of curiosity, is mentioned in more detail later in this section. The number of studies on curiosity began to grow by the late 1970s (Voss and Keller, 1983: 3), and George Loewenstein introduced his influential 'information gap' theory in 1994, which he describes as 'a cognitive induced deprivation that arises from the perception of a gap in knowledge and understanding' (Loewenstein, 1994: 75).

Contemporary theories on curiosity

During the twenty-first century, 'psychologists and neuroscientists [have] begun widespread and coordinated efforts to unlock [curiosity's] mysteries' (Kidd and Hayden, 2015: 449). The most pervasive theory on the purpose of curiosity is to motivate learning (Ibid.), and its immediate function has been described as 'to seek out, explore, and immerse oneself in situations with potential for new information and/or experiences' (Kashdan *et al*, 2018: 130). Curiosity therefore demonstrates a link to museums when the latter are considered as social and cultural institutions that are intended to collect, display, and elucidate objects (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000: x). More recently, research conducted by museologist Susie Wilkening found that 'Curiosity is a primary driver of inclusive attitudes' (Wilkening, 2020: n.p.), underscoring the importance of fostering curiosity to create a more equitable museum environment.

Increasingly, museums seek to actively engage visitors through interactive and personalised experiences that encourage free-choice learning—a concept described by Bitgood as the visitor's ability to 'choose what to do, where to go, and what to attend to' (Bitgood, 2013: 126). One of the hallmarks of free-choice learning is its ability to allow visitors to feel that they have personal agency within a gallery space (Ryan and Deci, 2000: 65)—a state of mind that is critical to meeting my exhibition goals of fostering feelings of exploration, observation, and investigation.

Several mid-twentieth-century studies (Brown, 1953; Butler, 1957; Harlow, 1953; Hebb, 1958) suggest that humans seek novel and complex situations even in the absence of stimulation. Jordan Litman's research further suggests that curiosity may be aroused to seek stimulation (curiosity as a feeling of interest, or CFI) or to fill a knowledge gap (curiosity as a feeling of deprivation, or CFD). CFI is associated with largely positive feelings. CFD reflects the need to know a specific fact, the answer to a complex question, or the solution to a challenging problem and can result in small amounts of negative affectivity, such as tension, frustration, or dissatisfaction (Litman, 2005). Both CFI and CFD may be useful within a museum setting. While the positive associations of CFI seem immediately preferable, CFD results indicate greater motivation and more intense curiosity, and its eventual elimination through the acquisition of knowledge is rewarding (Ibid.). This suggests that within an exhibition based on cabinets of curiosities, some means of stimulating CFD may be of consideration. The application of deprivation as a strategy within exhibition design will be explored later in this chapter.

Daniel Berlyne was a prolific researcher whose studies of intrinsic motivation and aesthetics remain influential within the field of psychology. I acknowledge the oversights in some of Berlyne's methodologies (Konečni, 1996[113]; Litman, Collins and Spielberger, 2005) yet his work remains valuable and is widely referenced. Berlyne's work introduced the concepts of perceptual curiosity (aroused by novel, surprising, or ambiguous objects or phenomena) and epistemic curiosity (stimulated by the desire for knowledge), both of which can be inspired by and sought in museum experiences. Perceptual curiosity can be prompted by ambiguous or novel stimuli, which can result in the desire for visual inspection (Berlyne, 1957). Research has suggested a link between curiosity and deeper engagement with and/or processing of art, regardless of the viewer's level of expertise (Fayn *et al*, 2015).

These studies are of note in curating a fashion exhibition centred on curiosity, particularly in the selection of objects. I am equating fashion objects with the artworks referenced in psychological studies based on the research of Helmut Leder *et al*, which states 'art is not the only way that we are exposed to aesthetic experiences. Fashion and design, too, give credence to the claim of art historians that we live in an increasing "aesthetisation of the world"' (Leder *et al*, 2004: 490). Although Leder's observation is nearly twenty years old at the time of this writing, I contend that the increased

[113] Berlyne's colleague Vladmir Konečni explains that Berlyne took 'broad brush strokes' based on 'quasi-theoretical intuitions' in his theories on aesthetic experience. Yet he further explains that this part of Berlyne's work was never intended to be a formal proposition, and he underscores Berlyne's legacy within experimental psychology and psychological aesthetics (Konečni, 1996: 131).

interest in exhibiting fashion within museums has only deepened its appreciation as an art form.

The 'Five-Factor Model' of personality domains (Costa and McCrae, 1992) was 'developed to represent as much of the variability in individuals' personalities as possible, using only a small set of trait dimensions' (Soto and Jackson, 2013: n.p.). Many psychologists agree that the model's five domains 'capture the most important, basic individual differences in personality traits' (Ibid.). Within this model, curiosity is associated with the Openness to Experience domain (the other domains include Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism). Other traits within Openness to Experience include intellectual interests, perceived intelligence, imagination, creativity, artistic and aesthetic interests, emotional and fantasy richness, and unconventionality (Kaufman, 2013).

Openness to experience 'sits at the centre of the psychology of aesthetics, creativity, and the arts. People high in openness to experience enjoy aesthetic experiences, live more creative lives, and pursue and support the arts' (Silvia *et al*, 2015: 377). This personality domain is of particular interest to my research. In-gallery surveys suggest that many visitors to MFIT have a keen interest in fashion and the arts. This fact indicates that they are predisposed to curiosity, and concepts for the exhibition can be used to further incite curiosity-driven behaviour.

The 'Five-Dimensional Curiosity Scale' (Kashdan *et al*, 2020) aims to 'integrate the isolated strands of research on curiosity into a single model' (Kashdan, 2018: n.p.). The five

dimensions are identified as Joyous Exploration, Deprivation Sensitivity, Stress Tolerance, Social Curiosity and Thrill Seeking. The dimension most pertinent to my research is Joyous Exploration (again, pertaining to my goal to foster exploratory behaviour within visitors to my theoretical exhibition). Joyous exploration encompasses the following factors, each of which could be applied to learning and exploring in a museum setting:

> - I view challenging situations as an opportunity to grow and learn.
> - I seek out situations where it is likely that I will have to think in depth about something.
> - I enjoy learning about subjects that are unfamiliar to me.
> - I find it fascinating to learn new information (Kashdan *et al*, 2020: 6).

Todd Kashdan and his colleagues further identify four distinct types of curious people, categorised as The Fascinated (highest scores on Joyous Exploration, Stress Tolerance, and Thrill Seeking; lowest scores on Deprivation Sensitivity), Problem Solvers (highest on Deprivation Sensitivity, lowest on Social Curiosity), Empathisers (highest on Social Curiosity, low on Thrill Seeking), and Avoiders (lowest on Stress Tolerance, Joyous Exploration and Thrill Seeking). Their study asked participants to complete the Five-Dimensional Curiosity Scale and provide rated responses about their personality and consumer behaviour, including factors such as the magazines they read and the websites they visit. The study sought to engage with how participants used 'their most valuable, finite resources in everyday life—time, energy, and money'. Fashion was included in the surveys of 'passionate interests' and 'expertise'. In both instances, those categorised as 'The Fascinated' showed the greatest interest in fashion

(passionate interest=21.9%; expertise=23.7%), while 'Avoiders' demonstrated the least interest (passionate interest=10.1%; expertise=12.0%). This indicates that some visitors to a fashion museum could be defined as those who demonstrate 'inquisitive minds and a *joie de vivre'* (Kashdan *et al*, 2018: 145).

Museum interpretation

I have opted to use 'museum interpretation'—a broad term defined as 'the way museums engage their audience with collections, information, and ideas' (Dobbin, 2019: n.p.)—to encompass the numerous concepts that are discussed in this portion of the chapter. My first section, 'Facilitating exhibition engagement', presents an aggregation of theories for fostering visitor engagement as they pertain directly to curiosity and/or its related quality, interest. These include flow and free-choice learning, the creation of 'numinous' experiences, the applications of atmospherics to a museum setting, and museologist Jay Round's theory of 'optimal foraging'.

While exhibition engagement centres on theories to be contemplated during project planning, the subsequent section, 'visitor participation', includes examples of participatory strategies as they were enacted by other institutions, selected for their potential application to my practice. My research into these examples inspired my own strategy for visitor participation, which I have detailed. This is followed by a section on museum text, referring in this instance to written content (especially wall text and object label copy) within an exhibition. It explores the ways in which

this part of the exhibition process can be devised to pique curiosity.

This portion of the chapter concludes with ideas for object selection and display that are driven by research on curiosity. All of these interpretive strategies feed into the chapter's final section, which outlines ideas for the inclusion of seven distinct cabinets designed to incite visitors' curiosity.

Facilitating exhibition engagement

The creation of a positive museum experience—defined by museum educator Kathleen Walsh-Piper as an occurrence that is 'both meaningful and memorable' (Walsh-Piper, 1994: 105)—has been linked to an understanding of 'visitor types'. Museum experience researchers John Falk and Linda Dierking[114] identify five primary groups of voluntary museum visitors. Their first group, Explorers, is described as curiosity driven, with a general interest in the content of museums. The other groups include Facilitators (socially motivated), Professionals/Hobbyists (possess a professional or personal passion for a topic), Experience seekers (perceive the museum as an important destination), and Rechargers (desire a contemplative, spiritual or restorative experience).

[114] Both Falk and Dierking are leaders in free-choice learning research and have written extensively on the museum experience, though their backgrounds are in science. Falk's expertise is in biology and ecology, and Dierking is a professor in free-choice learning, science and mathematics education. Their long-term research on museums has encompassed many types of institutions, including zoos, natural history museums, and art museums. I have cited Falk and Dierking's 2013 book *The Museum Experience* throughout this text for its useful deployment of big-picture concepts, but it should be noted that it often lacks in concrete strategies.

Falk and Dierking explain that one should not attempt to engage with all types of visitors in a single exhibition, but that 'Designing exhibitions and programs that are open-ended and allow for multiple entry points and different outcomes is critical to a future museum world that will require increasingly customized and personalized visitor experiences' (Falk and Dierking, 2013: 270). Although their studies are useful for their acknowledgment of the significance of curiosity within museum exhibitions, they did not engage with specific strategies to invoke it. Furthermore, this particular portion of their research centre on motivations to visit a museum, rather than a visitor's behaviour once they enter an exhibition space.

Deborah Perry, a visual experience specialist, proposes that there are six essential factors to a successful museum encounter. These include confidence (a sense of competence); challenge (the perception that there is something to work towards); control (a feeling of self-determination); play (sensory engagement and enjoyment); and communication (engagement in social interaction). Finally, there is curiosity, described as a feeling of surprise and intrigue (Perry, 1993: 2). Perry's work is beneficial to this research not only in its mention of curiosity, but also in its focus on visitor experience within an exhibition. Yet, as museum educator Leo Casey writes, 'We cannot manufacture curiosity; the best we can do is create the conditions that facilitate it' (Casey, 2014: 511). What are those conditions? Although there is no simple answer to that question, there are numerous theories on how to facilitate exhibition encounters that evoke curiosity and/or interest, which I outline in the following sections.

Flow and free-choice learning

Work by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi centres on flow, or the 'theory of optimal experience … the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter' (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008 [1990]: 4). Flow is both immersive and highly enjoyable, and it concentrates on in-the-moment experiences. In applying the concept of flow to aesthetic experiences (including museum experiences), Csikszentmihalyi and fellow psychologist Rich Robinson identify deep concentration, a sense of control and freedom made possible by a balancing of challenges and skills, and a continuous development of 'meaningful complexity' as pertinent attributes to the stimulation of flow (Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson, 1990: 182).

I have identified connections between Csikszentmihalyi's findings and more recent research on museums, which highlights the importance of self-actualisation and free-choice learning. Self-actualisation is a term identified in psychologist Abraham Maslow's 'Hierarchy of Needs'. It encompasses the idea of peak experience, defined in part as 'the feeling of great ecstasy and wonder[115] and awe, the loss of placing in time and space with, finally, the conviction that something extremely important and valuable had happened' (Maslow, 1970 [1954]: 164).

During the late 1990s, educational theory centred on four 'learning styles'—visual, auditory, kinetic, and

[115] As it was mentioned in Chapter 1, there are links between the words 'curiosity' and 'wonder'.

reading/writing—and these were of interest to museologists (Hein, 1998: 164). In recent years, however, the idea of catering to specific learning styles has been devalued (Furey, 2020: n.p.). Neuroscience scholars Usha Goswami and Peter Bryant explain that 'Learning depends on neural networks distributed across multiple brain regions: visual, auditory *and* kinaesthetic'[116] (Goswami and Bryant, 2007: 4; emphasis in original). Since curiosity and its relationship to learning are central aspects of my theoretical exhibition, it is important to note that neither can be achieved by focusing solely on the visual, or on the creation of intriguing text—multisensory strategies must be considered. I will explore this subject more fully in one of my later strategies for exhibition design.

In the stead of specific learning styles, free-choice learning is considered increasingly important within a museum setting. Although free-choice learning can be encouraged through strategies of design and interpretation, many museums are already suited to this kind of learning—they are not 'like compulsory classrooms' (Falk and Dierking, 2013: 107). Psychologists Richard Ryan and Edward Deci found that self-determined learning depends on recognition of 'the innate needs to feel connected, effective, and agentic as one is exposed to new ideas and exercises new skills' (Ryan and Deci, 2000: 65). Researchers agree that strategies of design and interpretation that promote free-choice learning (and by extension, individual experiences) are critical to a museum experience designed to meet varying needs (Falk and Dierking, 2013: 63), and I will return to the concept of free-

[116] Goswami and Bryant's article centres on development in children, though I perceive that it could also be applied to cognition in adults.

choice learning when presenting my own design ideas later in this text.

Numinous experiences

Museologist Kiersten Latham's work on numinous experiences, described as 'an intense and rare absorption into the object of attention' (Latham, 2013: 13), relates to the theories of self-actualisation and flow posited by Maslow and Csikszentmihalyi, respectively. It also correlates to my exhibition aims of observation (the careful, close examination of an object) and investigatory behaviour (exploration of a new object or other aspect of the environment). Latham describes the numinous encounter between visitor and museum object as:

> (a) a person–document transaction;
> (b) a form of psychological state of flow, or optimal experience;
> (c) a form of mystical experience (Latham, 2013: 11).

The combination of these factors results in 'deep engagement or transcendence, empathy, and awe or reverence, confirming such aspects as losing a sense of time, time-travel experience, empathic conjuring, strongly affective response, and a sense of spiritual communion' (Ibid.: 16).

Latham mentions a twelve-stop travelling exhibition, *America's Smithsonian*, organised by the Smithsonian in 1997 to celebrate the museum's 150th anniversary. It featured objects such as Abraham Lincoln's top hat and the ruby slippers worn in the 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz*. The

inclusion of such 'iconic'[117] objects is a means of creating a numinous experience—visitors were awed by their authenticity (the significance of authenticity, or the 'real thing', will be detailed later in this chapter). In an article about the exhibition, Richard Kurin—a cultural anthropologist who was then a Smithsonian staff member—writes that he was an 'object-speaks-for-itself skeptic'. Nevertheless, he found himself in awe of Lincoln's hat. 'Despite its state of disrepair, its unassuming nature, it was after all *Lincoln's hat*—the real thing', he writes (Kurin, 1997: 37). It is of course notable to this research that Kurin was drawn to a fashion object, perhaps for its clear, physical connection to the original wearer.

Research has shown that awe is, like curiosity, associated with the openness to experience personality domain (Shiota *et al*, 2006; Silvia *et al*, 2015). Furthermore, the terms awe and wonder are related. A scientific study on the differences between the concepts of awe and wonder defined the former as 'a direct and initial feeling when faced with something incomprehensible or sublime', whereas wonder is 'a more reflective feeling one has when unable to put things back into a familiar conceptual framework' (Kruckemyer, 2013: n.p.). Psychologists Dacher Keltner and Jonathan Haidt summarise that 'Awe involves a difficulty in comprehension, along with associated feelings of confusion, surprise, and wonder' (Keltner and Haidt, 2003: 303), but they further state that awe has proven a challenging emotion to understand.

[117] I utilise the word 'iconic' here to imply something that is 'very famous or popular, especially being considered to represent particular opinions or a particular time' (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023).

Keltner and Haidt's research suggested five themes that invoke a state of awe: threat, beauty, ability, virtue, and the supernatural. Of those five, beauty and ability are most closely related to this research. Although beauty is difficult to define, it results in experiences of 'aesthetic pleasure' (Keltner and Haidt, 2003: 304). Ability is related to extraordinary skill or talent for which 'the perceiver feels respect for the other person that is not based on dominance and submission within a hierarchy' (Ibid.: 305) and this relates directly to the collection of objects demonstrating exemplary technical skill within cabinets of curiosities (Kenseth, 1991: 48; MacGregor, 2007: 47). It further corresponds to the fifteen front-end evaluation participants who mentioned their curiosity about an object's craftsmanship, and the twelve participants who were curious about aesthetic detail (I will return to interest in craftsmanship later in this chapter, when I outline my ideas for specific cabinets within my theoretical exhibition). Although this information is useful in creating a framework for awe-inspiring experiences within a museum setting, the selection of corresponding objects—and the individual's response to those objects—will always be subjective.

Atmospherics

Museologist Regan Forrest's work on atmospherics provides additional theories on what attracts a visitor's interest. Atmospherics is described as the study of how 'the environment influences affective, cognitive, and behavioral responses', arguing that 'these responses can be shaped by design cues in the environment' (Forrest, 2013: 201). Although the field of atmospherics was developed for studies

of consumer behaviour, museologists have begun to realise its potential application within the exhibition environment. Forrest's work is thus focussed more on the gallery space than the individual object's role in piquing visitor interest.

Forrest explains that atmospherics research has been heavily shaped by the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model proposed by psychologists Albert Mehrabian and James A. Russell in 1974[118]. This model, she writes:

> [A]sserts that sensory inputs from the environment (stimulus) combine with personality factors to trigger an internal, primarily emotional reaction (organism); this subsequently results in behavioral outcomes (response). Behavioral responses are characterized as either approach or avoid behaviors. Approach behaviors include the desire to explore, work, and cooperate with others, and avoid behaviors include retreating, aversion to others, and desire to leave the situation (Forrest, 2013: 207).

One can understand how the S-O-R model has become of interest to some museologists, who desire to create an environment that encourages approach behaviour. In their research on fostering an exciting retail environment, marketing science scholars Velitchka Kaltcheva and Barton Weitz summarise, 'When consumers have a recreational motivational orientation, high arousal has a positive effect on pleasantness, but when consumers have a task-oriented motivational orientation, high arousal decreases pleasantness' (Kaltcheva and Weitz, 2006: 107).

[118] Forrest also notes that this model is criticised for 'implying a unidirectional environment–behavior relation and for inadequately taking consumers' goals and motivations into account'; nevertheless, it continues to be widely used (Forrest, 2013: 207).

Since the museum is often considered a setting for recreation or leisure (Falk and Dierking, 2013: 56), Kaltcheva and Weitz's findings on pleasurable spaces could be applied to exhibitions. The pleasurable space is obviously one in which people desire to spend more time, yet the qualities of a pleasurable space are not clearly defined, and there are no clear frameworks are suggested for creating such a space. Forrest lists the existence and positioning of directional signage, the use of contextual 'scene setters', and the placement of choice objects and/or ideas as a means of providing visitor orientation and encouraging interaction with a greater number of objects (Forrest, 2013: 203).

Forrest also notes that 'good' lighting (as opposed to low lighting) makes a positive impact on approachability (Forrest, 2013: 203). I found this observation to be noteworthy due to its relationship to some museum objects and their need for low lighting in areas where visitors are present. High light levels (in addition to long display periods) are rarely possible in museum exhibitions of fashion due to clothing's extreme sensitivity to light (Ballard *et al*, 2015: 74).

Many museum visitors are not aware of this aspect of object conservation, however, and The Museum at FIT staff regularly receives complaints that it is difficult to see objects. This issue was mediated in the 2022 exhibition *Shoes: Anatomy, Identity, Magic*, the design for which included individual compartments for pairs of shoes (fig. 6.1). The compartments were lit from above using LED rope lights disguised by panels of frosted acrylic. This allowed each object to be fully highlighted (rather than relying on track lighting from the ceiling, which is often insufficient) while maintaining

conservation standards. A similar technique is of interest for my theoretical cabinets of curiosities exhibition, which will allow for 'good lighting' to be an achievable goal and thus create a more favourable environment.

Fig. 6.1

The installation the 2022 exhibition *Shoes: Anatomy, Identity, Magic* at The Museum at FIT, demonstrating how individual compartments were lit using LED rope lights. Such lights are inexpensive, effective, and can be adjusted to appropriately low wattage. This lighting technique will be utilised again in future exhibitions. Photograph by Eileen Costa ©The Museum at FIT

Optimal foraging theory

Rounds, author of the article 'Strategies for the Curiosity-Driven Museum Visitor', notes that tracking studies indicate museum visitors engage with only twenty to forty percent of the content within an exhibition[119]. While the natural reaction

[119] Rounds mentions that hundreds of tracking studies shaped his research, but he is not specific about the tactics used—probably because they vary according to institution and the era in which they were conducted. In their history of tracking and timing studies within museums, philosopher Steven Yalowitz and museologist Kerry Bronnenkant describe current methods of tracking visitors as 'recording, in a detailed manner, not only where visitors go but also what visitors do while inside an exhibition. It can provide quantitative data in relation to stay times as well

might be to strategise about how that percentage could be raised, Rounds advocates for the acceptance of those numbers, writing that 'partial use of exhibitions is an intelligent and effective strategy for the visitor whose goal is to have curiosity piqued and satisfied' (Rounds, 2004: 389). He views visitors not as 'types' but rather as 'strategic agents' whose behaviour conforms to their attitude at the time of their visit. He minimises the goal of imparting knowledge to the visitor, focussing instead on the idea of maintaining 'interest' and the 'intrinsic rewards that come with piquing and satisfying curiosity' (Ibid.: 394). Most important, in Rounds's view, is that visitors feel the energy they expend in interacting with an exhibition's elements is worth the level of interest they gain from that endeavour.

Rounds assigns a series of 'attention rules' aimed to facilitate maximum interest with minimum effort, also known as 'optimal foraging theory'. These include 'follow your nose' (only give attention to an object that immediately piques interest); 'don't make large down payments' (avoid exhibition elements that look like they will take up a lot of time, or that will be difficult to abandon once started); and 'satisfice' (search the space until an object or exhibition element that appears sufficiently interesting is located). He further adds 'quitting rules', which entail leaving after viewing a certain number of objects; after a fixed time period; if the exhibition has not provided anything of interest after searching for a specified amount of time; or when the feeling of interest begins to drop (Rounds, 2004: 405).

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as other behavioral data' (Yalowitz and Bronnenkant, 2009: 48). This usually entails a non-invasive process of observation by museum specialists.

Although Rounds's theory is compelling, it is difficult to test and validate (Bitgood, 2013: 51). It is also focused on visitors, rather than the creators of an exhibition. Nevertheless, curators and other museum professionals can take Rounds's theory into consideration if they aim to prompt a higher rate of engagement. For example, how can curators and exhibition designers who aim to facilitate greater engagement avoid displays that might read as overly time consuming?

As I outline in Chapter 1, there is a link between curiosity, learning, and knowledge. Although Rounds deemphasises knowledge, there are other aspects of curiosity that his work underscores, in particular those of attention and interest. Within the diagrammatic structure of curiosity that I created (Appendix A), attention and interest are associated with the branches of novelty and learning—demonstrating that Rounds's theory centres on separate yet equally valid paths to evoking curiosity.

Furthermore, his dismissal of knowledge as a goal within exhibitions has been echoed by other researchers. Hein underscores that 'Exhibition making is not displaying truth, but interpretation' (Hein, 1998: 178). Lisa Roberts, author of the 1997 publication *From Knowledge to Narrative*, writes that museums are not intended to be 'a synopsis of wisdom, but a multitude of voices … Indeed, in museums, it has become fashionable to speak of the making of meaning by staff, by visitors, or by anyone who holds a special relationship to museum collections' (Roberts, 1997: 3). Roberts's work presaged an increasingly important topic of discussion within

twenty-first-century museum studies: the significance of visitor participation.

Visitor participation

Nina Simon has written extensively about the potentialities of visitor participation, which she describes as 'the idea that users' voices can inform and invigorate both project design and public-facing programs' (Simon, 2010: 3). Participation can shape exhibition content (what I will refer to as 'advance content creation') and can also be encouraged through in-gallery initiatives. I propose both strategies for my theoretical exhibition. (An idea for advance content creation is outlined below, while in-gallery initiatives are included in the later section on exhibition design). The possibilities for both types of visitor participation are numerous, but they are also dependent on support and enthusiasm from the host institution. Other factors to consider include staff time, sources for funding, and gallery space. In-gallery participatory initiatives should be built around a framework that helps to guide visitors through the space and the exhibition experience, yet they should not be overly prescriptive (Ibid.: 13).

Simon, as well as Falk and Dierking, provide examples of visitor participation that helped to inspire an idea for my theoretical exhibition. In her description of an in-gallery initiative that is not too 'wide open', Simon suggests a comment board that would allow people to vote for their favourite objects and provide the reason for their preference. This, she reasons, would be more effective than 'an open-ended board with blank cards and a question like "What do

you think?"'. Although not every visitor will be interested in participating (either through lack of interest or confidence), Simon concludes that 'a supportive starting point' can bolster participation in myriad ways, encouraging visitors to act 'as creators, critics, collectors, joiners, or spectators' (Simon, 2010: 13).

Falk and Dierking write about the 2011–13 *Curious Exhibition*, organised by Glasgow Museums and on view at St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art, as a prime example of advance content creation. Residents of Glasgow were invited to curate the exhibition using objects that sparked their curiosity from the Glasgow Museums' collections. The final twenty-eight selections from the reserve store included objects such as a typewriter, a tea set, and a butter churn. The exhibition included not only the objects, but the participants' stories behind their selections, which 'ranged from childhood memories to a chance meeting with the maker of one object' (Falk and Dierking, 2013: 268). The stories were represented via label copy and/or in video or audio clips.

However, Ealasaid Munro, a cultural policy expert who had volunteered to work on *Curious Exhibition*, indicates that it was not well attended (Munro, 2013: 243), and the premise of the exhibition proved to be confusing to many visitors (The Social Marketing Gateway, 2013: 19). Despite these issues, a publicly available evaluation report communicates that the exhibition's participants/guest curators, at least, had largely enjoyed the experience (Ibid.: 12).

The findings above led me to ask a simple question: what objects would visitors to The Museum at FIT like to see, and why? Responses to this question centre on the development

of a co-produced exhibition element. Co-production (also referred to as co-creation) as part of a public project is defined by professors Taco Brandsen and Marlies Honingh as something that is 'not only delivered by professional and managerial staff in public agencies but also co-produced by citizens and communities' (Brandsen and Honingh, 2016: 427).

Based on participants' enthusiasm for ranking objects during my front-end evaluations, I was inspired to create a 'viewer's choice' contest (outlined as a proposal in this theoretical text, to be executed closer to the opening date of the actual exhibition[120]). Furthermore, since numerous interviewees equated curiosity with interest (using language such as 'I am most interested in the shoes'), contest participants will be asked to select what they consider the most interesting objects from a pool of options. I propose nominating a selection of garments that have never been exhibited. This choice is again based on the findings from my front-end evaluation studies: eleven participants (thirty-eight percent) mentioned their interest in viewing objects that are unfamiliar and/or that they had never seen before.

The Museum at FIT houses more than 50,000 objects—many of which have never been on view. Presenting participants with too many options could easily fall into Simon's 'wide open' category. To provide additional parameters to a potentially overwhelming selection, I focussed on garments

[120] MFIT's vigorous exhibitions schedule necessitates exhibitions be worked on by the museum staff in chronological order. Asking for the viewer's choice contest to be executed during the writing of this thesis would unfairly divert attention away from my colleagues' more pressing projects.

that MFIT acquired within the past ten years and that are in display-worthy condition.

I also researched recent examples of museums that have prompted followers to vote for the display of their favourite objects, but there is no consensus on how such a strategy should be framed. The 2020 'People's Choice Exhibit' at the Bennington Museum, Vermont, asked visitors to select five favourites from 250 'interesting' objects selected by the museum's collection manager (Bennington Museum, 2020: n.p.). A similar idea at the Penn Museum (at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia) offered only five options to participants, asking them to select one object to be featured in the museum's Spotlight Gallery (Penn Museum, 2020: n.p.).

To further frame my idea, I looked into research reports about the ideal number of questions for online surveys (the closest equivalent literature I could locate for mapping out this viewer's choice approach). Although there are multiple variables involved in estimating such a number, I discerned an important consensus: the higher the number of items in a survey, the more likely participants are to drop out (Cornell, 2022: n.p.; Chudoba, n.d.: n.p.).

Furthermore, several sources concur that the ideal number of questions (or in this case, options) is fifteen to twenty (Taylor, 2018: n.p.; Cornell, 2022: n.p.). Although this may seem like a small (and thus heavily 'curated') number of objects, it might result in a higher number of participants. From a group of twenty objects, I will ask the museum's followers to vote on their five favourites for inclusion in the exhibition. The survey will also allow them the opportunity to explain why a particular object is of interest.

The ‘contest’ can be announced through the museum’s monthly e-newsletter and social media channels. The objects will be professionally photographed and presented on the museum’s website, with information about each intentionally limited to a basic description so that participants are not swayed by curatorial interpretation. A link to an online survey will allow visitors to select their top five choices, with an optional free text field to offer insights on their selections. I will also include an ‘Other’ free text field to allow participants to share their desire to see an object not on the pre-determined list. Even if these ‘other’ objects are not in the MFIT collection—or they are too fragile to be shown—this kind of ‘wish list’ might still provide ideas for the exhibition and/or future acquisitions.

A benefit of this strategy is its accessibility to any of the museum’s followers, not just those who would be able to attend the exhibition in person. For those who can visit, the top five objects will be incorporated into my own curatorial selections, and corresponding exhibition text would include some of the information shared from participants regarding their interest in the objects[121]. This idea for engagement with MFIT’s followers aligns with the idea of the museum as a ‘hybrid space’, described by public policy scholars Pamela Barnes and Gayle McPherson as one in which audiences are allowed ‘to form part of what they see; or participate as co-creators formulating an idea or co-producing an exhibition or performance with the museum staff’. A hybrid space also utilises both physical and digital spaces to engage with

[121] All public-facing initiatives such as this are approved by FIT’s legal counsel; I would ensure that participants are aware that their ideas may be used in the exhibition. They would have the option of being identified by name.

audiences (Barnes and McPherson, 2019: 259). This kind of participation is vital to making many museums relevant to contemporary visitors, and the potential familiarity of fashion—as it was outlined in the previous chapter—proves a strong medium for such an initiative.

Exhibition text

Text—a term I use here in reference to exhibition content written by curators or other museum staff—can take numerous forms within museums, with wall or section texts, object labels, and gallery guides being especially prevalent. For the purpose of this thesis, I will be focussing primarily on wall text—generally used to introduce the exhibition themes—as well as object labels, defined as a concise explanatory or interpretive text about a single object (or a small, related group of objects). Object labels are typically paired with a caption (sometimes referred to as a 'tombstone'), which provides basic descriptive information such as a maker's name, date, and materials used (see examples of past MFIT labels in Appendix E).

My research on exhibition text is aimed at creating copy that lends itself to being widely read and understood, but that also takes an approach suited to curiosity-seeking behaviour. There is relatively little written about wall text, perhaps because it varies so widely according to the structure of an exhibition—but some notable guidelines include the Getty's *Complete Guide to Adult Audience Interpretive Materials* (Getty, 2011) and the Victoria and Albert Museum's *Writing Gallery Text at the V&A* (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2018). In contrast, there is a substantial amount of writing on object

label copy. Curator Ingrid Schaffner writes of the potential for well-written labels to be experiential and act as art forms in their own right (Schaffner, 2006: 167), whereas Rounds concludes that in addition to a visitor's personal history, exhibition content—including written text—is integral to their level of curiosity within in a museum setting (Rounds, 2004). Text aids in the development of an exhibition that simultaneously allows for free-choice learning and provides visitors with some guidance on what they are seeing, both of which were previously outlined for their importance to a positive, exploratory exhibition experience.

Approaches to writing object labels

Several studies outline how curators and other museum professionals can write more widely read and understood object labels. Bitgood cautions that the time it takes for visitors to read a label, which he referred to as the 'workload', often goes unrecognised by those developing the text. He mentions components such as word count, the adoption of a straightforward vocabulary, the placement of text, and the overall layout of exhibition elements as being critical to the creation of successful labels. 'When the workload is low', he explains, 'people are more willing to read (even if interest level is low), presumably because the cost of investing time and effort is low and "worth a gamble"' (Bitgood, 2013: 93-94). The physical implications of reading labels within an exhibition should also be considered—when labels are longer and more prevalent, they require more time to read and can

contribute to museum fatigue[122]. The ability to view them also necessitates navigating around other visitors.

Early in my career, I was trained in label writing by Ward Mintz, a former museum director. Mintz's teachings were largely based on his own experience and the work of Beverly Serrell—author of the 2015 publication *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach*—but they also follow Bitgood's advice above. I always consider factors such as an object label's ideal length (seventy-five words or less; fifty is ideal); number of words in a sentence (ten or less); subject (do not rely on information conveyed in previous labels to make a point; each label must stand on its own); sentence construction (never begin with a dependent clause), and clarity (do not use complex words or jargon, in consideration of non-experts, non-native English readers and younger audiences). The label's appearance—including factors such as font size, typeface, layout, and paper colour—are, in my experience, suggested by a graphic designer and approved by the curator, typically after viewing samples within the gallery space.

I consider exhibition label writing to be critical to my role as a curator, and I often write individual labels for most—if not all—objects in an exhibition. Initially, I planned to do the same in this theoretical exhibition, and had in fact devised a somewhat elaborate, multi-layered strategy for presenting information to viewers. As my ideas for the cabinets and the

[122] Studies of Museum fatigue date as far back as 1916, when curator Benjamin Ives Gilman published an article that pondered the 'kinds and amount of muscular effort [that] are demanded of the visitor who endeavors to see exhibits as museum authorities plan to have them seen' (Gilman, 1916: 62).

corresponding object selections evolved, however, I began to reconsider this practice.

There are several reasons for this. Firstly, the seven cabinets that I outline later in this text are themed, and each will be explained via a wall panel (approximately 150 words) that provides an overview of what is on view and its relationship to curiosity. Furthermore, the inclusion of many accessories and other small objects in the exhibition renders the object count quite high. Writing about each selection—and in some instances including multiple interpretations of an object—would result in an overwhelming amount of text (or 'workload') that may inhibit curiosity and exploration (Rounds, 2004). Overall, I aim to select and juxtapose objects so that they can be appreciated without extensive written interpretation—a strategy that mirrors historic cabinets of curiosities (Schaffner, 2006: 156)[123] and may result in visitors making their own associations, creating the aforementioned 'meaningful complexity' that is associated with flow (and by extension, curiosity) (Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson, 1990: 182). Where I do include labels, their format will be carefully considered based on the research below.

[123] Since early collections were privately owned, their curators often took visitors on private tours, thus relying on spoken narratives rather than the written word. Although individual labels were seemingly uncommon within the cabinets, groups of objects were sometimes identified by type (Schaffner, 2006: 156). Basilius Besler (a German apothecarist and botanist) and the physician Ole Worm emphasised their interest in teaching by labelling parts of their displays in this manner (Moser, 2006: 21). Such labelling is evident in the engraving of Worm's cabinet: numerous trays containing specimens, organised taxonomically, bear headings in Latin.

Interpretive labels: asking questions

Serrell underscores the importance of interpretive labels, which she defines as texts that 'tell stories; they are narratives, not lists of facts. Any label that serves to explain, guide, question, inform, or provoke—in a way that invites participation by the reader—is interpretive' (Serrell, 2015: 19). Hein, who relays that there is substantial evidence that learners discover things even in the most didactic and expository settings, also advocates the use of interpretive labels, which he considers essential to enticing visitors to stay in an exhibition for a longer period (Hein, 1998: 3).

One means of crafting interpretive labels is to ask visitors questions. Simon found that visitors spent twice as much time looking at objects with labels that began with a question, and that such 'provocative' texts were more likely to inspire conversation (Simon, 2010: 161). Curator Ralph Rugoff also writes about the possibilities provided by labels that ask questions, explaining that an effective exhibition:

> …never insinuates that the exciting work of discovery has already been carried out by the curator, and that all that is required of the audience is an ability to read and comprehend the wall labels and point our eyes in the indicated direction (Rugoff, 2006: 46–47)

Serrell directly relates asking questions to arousing curiosity (Serrell, 2015: 182). Psychologist Berlyne's hypothesis that 'the skillful lecturer excites curiosity in his audience by putting questions to them, perhaps about familiar phenomena, which it has never occurred to them to ask themselves' (Berlyne, 1954: 184) provides a correlative psychological theory to these more recent studies by

museologists. Asking questions also encourages visitors to personalise their responses to objects. As museologist Leslie Bedford observes, 'personal interpretation is all' within an exhibition. 'In fact,' she continues, 'treating objects as separate reality unmoored from human interpretation is a waste of time' (Bedford, 2014: 92).

Serrell and Rugoff differ in their thinking about how such questions should be composed, however. Serrell emphasises that every question asked should be answered within the label copy, determining that visitors become frustrated if their curiosity is aroused but not satiated (Serrell, 2015: 182). Yet she also writes that while some visitors enjoy learning information such as 'why a particular piece is in the museum, what makes it famous, what to notice, or why the artist created it' they do not want to be talked down to or told what to feel (Ibid.: 81).

On the contrary, Rugoff feels that questions could be unanswerable (Rugoff, 2006: 46–47). I propose an alternate strategy to both Serrell and Rugoff's thinking. After conducting 'object interviews' with twenty-nine participants, I noticed two trends in their questions about or reactions to the objects I showed them. The first centred on functionality (for example, 'Could someone walk in these shoes?'). The second was based on personal feeling ('I could never walk in these shoes!'), which could be transcribed into the question 'Would you walk in these shoes?'. Asking simple questions along these lines could allow for personal engagement and avoid the potential pitfalls of unanswerable questions.

Praxis D

Sample chat label: asking questions [see fig. 6.13 for an image of this object]

Comme des Garçons (Rei Kawakubo)
Dress in multicolor printed brushed polyester, spring/summer 2018
The Museum at FIT, 2021.33.5
Museum purchase

The unusual portrait reproduced on this dress depicts Rudolf II, ruler of the Holy Roman Empire. Giuseppe Arcimboldo—famous for his fantastical composite images—portrayed Rudolf as Vertumnus, Roman god of seasons. The painting, dating to 1591, was part of Rudolf's remarkable cabinet of curiosities. The curious nature of the image is amplified by its large-scale application to a contemporary dress design.

Which artist would you choose to paint your portrait?

Object selection and display

'Curiosity about an object is naturally described as a hunger or thirst for knowledge of the object', write philosophers Frederick Schmitt and Reza Lahroodi (Schmitt and Lahroodi, 2008: 128). How can curators create such a hunger? Before attempting to respond to that question, it is advantageous to consider the definition of the term 'object' as it relates to exhibition making. In his study on display practices at MoMu, Antwerp, Jeffrey Horsley proposes that the term 'object' could expand beyond the artefact to include processes of selection, framing, and juxtaposition, and could also be used to define non-museum objects. Together, these comprise the factors that 'manipulate the viewer's reading of an object to prioritize a specific narrative or thesis' (Horsley, 2015: 58).

I was taken by this concept because of its perceived connection to cabinets of curiosities. Individual artefacts or

specimens might be considered curious or valuable, but I have come to discern that it was the entirety of the cabinet—the items it contained, its varied means of displaying them, and its considered juxtapositions—that comprised the object. That object projected the desired narrative of its maker, whether that be a representation of wealth, knowledge, scientific learning, or interest in global cultures. This portion of the chapter will consider not only object selection, but also how those objects might be displayed to pique curiosity.

The extraordinary object

Curator Glenn Adamson argues that 'As a profession, curation is premised upon a presumption of extraordinariness' (Adamson, 2021: 254). He references the responsibility and care that curators bestow upon objects once they have become part of a museum collection, and also the selection of those objects. Museums often function as spaces that allow visitors to see rare and precious things that are not part of everyday life (Falk and Dierking, 2013: 190). These ideas can be traced back to cabinets of curiosities: as anthropologist Carol Breckenridge writes, 'The object in a wonder cabinet celebrated nothing but itself as rare, sensational, and unusual … Objects were judged according to the amazement they aroused' (Breckenridge, 1989: 200).

Yet there are innumerable exceptions to the concept that museums are devoted solely to the extraordinary. One example, The Museum of Everyday Life—a small museum housed in a barn in rural Glover, Vermont—celebrates 'mundanity, and the mysterious delight embedded in the banal but beloved objects we touch everyday' (The Museum of

Everyday Life, 2022: n.p.). Historian Gaynor Kavanagh argues that museums are invested in the supposition that objects hold a special power (Kavanagh, 2000: 19), but which objects hold such power—and how it is conveyed—is subjective. The ordinary can be rendered extraordinary through the textual and visual narratives devised by museum practitioners.

I further argue that, like the cabinet of curiosities, it is the cumulation of objects within the museum that most strongly supports its reputation as a remarkable establishment. Additionally, the curatorial process—with its considered inclusions and exclusions of objects—is critical to this narrative. Rugoff remarks that an exhibition 'littered' with wonderful art can be less satisfying to its visitors than a well-curated exhibition with fewer outstanding objects on view. He explains, 'One of the common hallmarks of a well-curated show, in fact, is that it seemingly elevates and enriches our experience of all the art that it presents' (Rugoff, 2006: 44). Rugoff's assessment is reflected in my Checklist (Praxis G), which includes numerous unattributed and previously overlooked MFIT objects that are nonetheless considered ideal for the topic of my theoretical exhibition.

The curious object

As I have mentioned previously, numerous museum studies professionals have written about curiosity as a goal within exhibition making, yet there are few references to what makes an object worthy of inspiring curiosity. This problem was endemic even within historic cabinets of curiosities. Writing about the seventeenth century, Daston and Park observe that, 'Just what excited wonder was a matter of some debate, but novelty, rarity, variety, strangeness, and ignorance of causes

turned up on nearly everyone's list' (Daston and Park, 1998: 314).

Joy Kenseth crafts a more concise list of seven characteristics that defined curious objects. They include novelty or rarity; the foreign or exotic; the strange and bizarre; the unusually large or unusually small; demonstrations of supreme technical skill or virtuosity; vividness and verisimilitude; the transcendent and the sublime; and the surprising and unexpected (Kenseth, 1991: 48–51). These characteristics, in turn, can be linked to studies of the museum experience. The five types of 'object experiences' that most satisfy visitors, as they are identified by museologists Andrew Pekarik, Zahava Doering, and David Karns, include being moved by beauty; seeing rare/uncommon/valuable things; thinking what it would be like to own such things; learning about objects through the lens of professional development; and experiencing the 'real thing' (Pekarik, Doering and Karns, 1999).

All of these factors—some of which have been discussed at other points in this thesis—have been taken into consideration when selecting objects for my theoretical exhibition. Since they can be subjective, however, I have also researched other museological and psychological studies that centre on concepts related to curiosity, with particular attention to the ways in which museum objects can act as stimuli.

Object selection and stimulation: size, familiarity and complexity, and number

Size

Over years of research, Falk and Dierking found that the 'most attractive' museum objects are the largest in size or those that seem the most valuable; such objects also tend to be the most prominently displayed (Falk and Dierking, 2013: 110). Bitgood concurs, writing that some stimuli—including large-size objects—are more enticing by nature (Bitgood, 2013: 67). These assertions are supported in a study by psychologist Michael J Proulx, who concludes that 'irrelevantly large objects can capture attention' in his studies on visual stimuli (Proulx, 2010: 3).

The use of the large scale need not be limited to museum objects—Bitgood writes that immense installation elements within galleries can act as 'landmarks' and help to direct visitor attention (Bitgood, Serrell and Thompson, 1994: 76; Weiss and Barry, 1963: 26). This further relates to the aforementioned research on atmospherics, in which the use of contextual 'scene setters' may create a more favourable environment (Forrest, 2013: 203). One front-end evaluation participant mentioned (entirely unprompted) that she would like to see monumentally sized objects that she could walk around in my proposed exhibition (she mentioned a glove, specifically).

I am considering the use of large-scale design elements within the exhibition, which could be referred to as 'props' or 'attributes' based on work by Judith Clark. Speaking about the

role of an exhibition prop, Clark mentions that it can signal 'an embedding of what we find there into the exhibition material itself' (Clark, 2019: n.p.). In writing about attributes, she cites art historian Guy de Tervarent's 1958 explanation: 'By attribute, one means an accessory that characterises and helps the identification of the central figure: Hercules' club, Jupiter's eagle, Cupid's arrow' (Tervarent in Clark, 2018: 96).

For my PhD practice, I have considered how carefully selected, large-scale design elements could act as both props and attributes. In their role as props, such elements could correspond to an object in the MFIT archive. Meanwhile, if I consider the cabinet of curiosities to be the 'central figure' of my work, their attributes could relate to some of the cabinet's most pervasive specimens or artefacts. These large-scale props or attributes, then, might take the shape of shell seen on a Saint Laurent necklace (fig. 6.2), or the pocket watch embroidered onto a Louis Feraud gown (fig. 6.3). The fashion objects that inspired them would of course be on view[124].

[124] Several members of The Museum at FIT's exhibition team are skilled artists who may be capable of crafting large-scale props; if not, their creation will be outsourced.

Fig. 6.2 (left) Necklace by Robert Goossens for Yves Saint Laurent, 1985. This object was selected for its connection to the popularity of collecting shells in cabinets of curiosities. A large-scale recreation of the large pink and gold shell could serve as an intriguing prop within the exhibition. The collection of The Museum at FIT, 86.91.9, gift of Yves Saint Laurent.

Fig. 6.3 (right) Dress by Louis Feraud, circa 1989. Clocks and other timepieces were regularly collected within cabinets of curiosities. The beaded and embroidered pocket watch at the left side waist of this garment could inspire a large-scale, sculptural prop. The collection of The Museum at FIT, 2014.63.6, gift of Anonymous.

Photographs ©The Museum at FIT

Other scholars have advocated the use of small objects (an interest further underscored by thirteen of my twenty-nine front-end evaluation participants), and these binary stances suggest the need to present both very large and very small objects in moderation. Hooper-Greenhill notes that the scale of objects, and how they relate to the size of our own bodies, affects how we respond to them. Large objects, then, may be more imposing or threatening than they are attractive. Conversely, very small objects might feel special or personal, since they have the potential to be carried or hidden from view (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000: 113).

Anthropologist and sociologist Claude Lévi-Strauss makes a related observation, noting that the miniature 'as a whole seems less formidable … in contrast to what happens when we try to understand an object or living creature of real

dimensions, knowledge of the whole precedes knowledge of the parts' (Lévi-Strauss, 1966 [1962]: 23-24). In her writing on the power of 'intimate objects', curator Suzanne Ramljak writes that small objects attract us because we must give them our full attention to appreciate their detail. The proximity required to view small objects is critical to the creation of an intimate experience (Ramljak, 2004: 191). This recalls a point I made earlier in this chapter, regarding the twelve interview participants who mentioned aesthetic detail as something that ignites their curiosity.

Familiarity and complexity

The familiarity of an object, with its associated ability to provide comfort or stimulation, plays an important role in its perception by museum visitors. Hooper-Greenhill notes that 'Physiological and psychological comfort is promoted when the senses are kept at an optimum level of arousal; mental torpor results from too little stimulation, while too great an arousal is disturbing' (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000: 113). Viewers tend to read unfamiliar visual stimuli as more physically complex than they really are (Forsythe *et al*, 2011), and numerous psychological studies have shown that humans are most attracted to stimuli that demonstrate a moderate level of complexity (Vitz, 1966; Kidd and Hayden, 2015). Psychological studies on the fluency of processing objects determine that only mild pleasure is associated with simple or familiar objects, while understanding of more complex or novel objects is associated with higher exhilaration (Armstrong and Detweiler-Bedell, 2008)—an indication that engagement with less familiar objects results in greater cognitive reward.

Berlyne hypothesises that visual complexity is among the most important factors in the perception of beauty in art (Berlyne, 1971). He summarises that 'too little complexity means insipidity and too much means bewilderment' (Berlyne, 1958: 295). These psychological studies align with research conducted by museologists; Falk and Dierking found that once visitors had viewed the most conspicuous (largest) objects, they gravitated towards objects they expected or hoped to see, leading to the conclusion that 'while a little novelty is great, too much is not' (Falk and Dierking, 2013: 110). Hein theorises that 'the easiest method of allowing visitors to make connections to museum exhibitions is to make sure that at least some aspect of the material on display is familiar' (Hein, 1998: 161). These ideas are once again useful in considering the creation of a framework for evoking curiosity, though it is also important to remember that perceptions of complexity, novelty, and familiarity vary between individuals.

Bedford makes a statement in defence of the known object, writing that 'the concrete—and the familiar—can become the gateway to imagination and story' (Bedford, 2014: 101). This relates to theories about the display of fashion: everyone wears clothing, and that may constitute a significant part of its appeal within the museum setting. While working as curators at the Victoria and Albert Museum, Valerie Mendes, Avril Hart, and Amy de la Haye observed that visitors feel at ease within fashion exhibitions. They can relate the clothing on view to their own bodies and personal preferences and, as de la Haye recalls, the gallery was filled with the voices of visitors who felt confident expressing their observations and

opinions. Although such familiarity could be viewed as an impediment to curiosity, the curators argue that fashion's 'instant familiarity generates curiosity and often precludes the need for a specialist interpreter' (Mendes, Hart and de la Haye, 1992: 1).

Riegels Melchior and Svensson (2014: 5) and Petrov make similar observations. Petrov writes that in her professional experience, visitors find even the most extravagant and fantastical garments to be accessible because they understand how they are meant to interact with the body, thus breeding familiarity (Petrov, 2011: 234–235). Yet I have occasionally experienced the opposite, depending on the objects on view. For example, numerous visitors have expressed aversion to amorphous garments, such as designs by Rei Kawakubo for Comme des Garçons (which, although often unconventional, could also be described as extravagant and fantastical). This indicates that they experience more difficulty relating unconventional clothes to their own bodies and experiences of wear (a quality that I argue is, to some extent, useful within an exhibition centred on curiosity).

The selection of stimulating objects once again seems to rely on balance and mediation, in this instance between the familiar and the complex. The myriad, opposing studies on novelty and stimulation can perhaps be distilled into an argument for displaying fashion that is out of the realm of the ordinary and the everyday, thus allowing visitors some sense of recognition (the familiarity of clothing in a general sense) with the extraordinary (objects that are rare, unusual, and/or unattainable).

Number

In addition to an object's size and novelty, the number of objects on display is of consideration. Bitgood makes an argument for a restrained selection within an exhibition: research has shown that as the number of objects increases, visitors become overly stimulated, and they are therefore more selective about what they view (Bitgood, 2013: 127). I was unable to locate a formula or guidelines for the appropriate number of objects in relation to the size of the gallery in which they are housed, likely because of the variability of each museum's collection and the types/sizes of objects in which it specialises. Referring to the MFIT database, I was able to discern that from 2017 to 2022, exhibitions in the Special Exhibitions Gallery at The Museum at FIT have included an average of 103 objects, including accessories. As I will argue later in this chapter, however, it may be advantageous from the standpoint of evoking curiosity and interactivity to experiment with overstimulation in one portion of the exhibition (what I will detail as the 'Sensory overload' cabinet). Furthermore, this theoretical exhibition includes numerous smaller objects in related groupings, such as jewellery and other accessories, which results in a higher object count (213 objects).

Despite the aggregation of this framework for the selection of potentially 'curious' objects, this is still a subjective process. Returning to the idea of affect and individual experience mentioned earlier in this chapter, Susan Pearce writes about the relationship between a visitor's personal experience and object interpretation, calling attention to the curator's inability to predict such interactions:

> The meaning of the object lies not wholly in the piece itself, nor wholly in its realization, but somewhere between the two. The object only takes on life or significance when the viewer carries out his realization, and this is dependent partly upon his disposition and experience, and partly upon the content of the object which works upon him. It is this interplay which creates meaning; however, the precise convergence can never be exactly pinpointed (Pearce, 1994: 26).

Nevertheless, it was vital within this practice-led PhD research to work directly with potential museum visitors to gain an understanding of their thoughts on 'curious' objects. Referring again to the most prevalent keywords ascertained from front-end evaluation interviews, concepts to consider when selecting objects include craftsmanship, materials, detail, and construction; functionality (particularly in regard to questions thereof); small size; personal histories; unusualness; and bright colours. Several of these concepts will be revisited in the section on exhibition design, and all are reflected in the checklist I have included in Praxis G.

Object placement

The ways in which objects are shown influences how they are understood. Hooper-Greenhill writes that 'Individual objects have shifting and ambiguous relationships to meaning. Being themselves mute, their significance is open to interpretation' (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000: 3). Objects do not 'speak for themselves' but are instead provided with a narrative by curators, whose 'authorship' of an exhibition is biased (Gleadlowe, 2000: 31-32). Rather than implying that such narratives are crafted using language, however, Hooper-Greenhill focusses on how objects 'are placed within relations

of significance' (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000: 50). Making meaning within exhibitions, therefore, centres not only on the inclusion (or absence) of certain objects, but also how they are displayed in relation to one another. Within the framework of an exhibition, object placement and juxtaposition allow for the creation of new stories (Moser, 2006: 2).

Curator Simon Sheikh writes that whereas exhibitions centred on specific time periods or artistic movements can often feel 'fixed' in their formats, themed exhibitions (such as my theoretical exhibition on cabinets of curiosities) lend themselves to more novel interpretations. The selection of objects and their placement, then, follows suit (Sheikh, 2007: 180). As Judith Clark writes, 'Curating is like creating a new grammar, new patterns of time and reference. The readability of objects shifts' (Clark in ModeMuseum, 2002: 147).

There are numerous object placement-related factors to take into consideration within my theoretical exhibition. As previously indicated, objects at large and very small scales will be included. The placement of these—in a manner that allows for juxtaposition and legibility—will be challenging because of their divergent sizes. The need to view small objects is especially critical: these works would need to be displayed at a height optimal for most visitors (including people in wheelchairs); they also might benefit from offering magnifying glasses and/or hi-resolution photographs of the objects, so that their details are not missed. The creation of effective juxtapositions would rely on consideration of size. Within my front-end evaluations, one participant noted that they would like to see objects organised from very small to very large, and that could perhaps be an effective strategy.

Furthermore, although the use of objects in compartmentalised, acrylic-fronted cabinets can hinder the viewing of objects from multiple angles, it could also be beneficial. Writing about the 1971 exhibition *Fashion: An Anthology by Cecil Beaton*, Judith Clark writes:

> [T]here was an unusual proximity created between the objects and the shallow cabinets, which invited visitors to stand right up against them. There was a gain in intimacy with the objects, but also a loss of awe as a result (Clark and de la Haye, 2014: 137).

Without testimony from visitors to Beaton's show, the visitor's loss of awe remains conjectural. Nevertheless, it is worth considering how awe could be maintained (or reinstated) through some of the strategies for visitor engagement (e.g., the use of mirrors within cases or viewing objects through peepholes, to be discussed in the following section on exhibition design). An article by Crawley and Barbieri is enlightening for its research on display strategies within contemporary art exhibitions. Writing about the 1998 exhibition *Addressing the Century: 100 Years of Art and Fashion* at the Hayward Gallery, London—curated by Peter Wollen and Fiona Bradley and designed by architect Zaha Hadid—they describe the 'transitions, gaps, allusions, and suggestions to be explored and made by the willing and engaged spectator' (Crawley and Barbieri, 2013: 47). The exhibition was non-chronological, a strategy that redirected viewers from a linear view of fashion to one that centred on 'sampling, bricolage, montage, allusion, association, and juxtaposition' (Ibid.: 52).

I did not attend this exhibition, and it is important to note that journalist Clare Coulson, in reviewing *Addressing the Century*, felt that the exhibition suffered from an awkward exhibition design and a 'lack of theoretical underpinning' (Coulson, 1999: 123). Nevertheless, I am intrigued by Crawley and Barbieri's descriptions of the space and the interactions between objects. My topic does not naturally lend itself to a chronological placement of objects[125], and I perceive that abstaining from dividing the space into obvious subthemes—naturalia versus artificialia, for example—renders object placement less predictable. A 'bricolage' of object types (full ensembles, single garments, accessories, and the occasional flat textile) would mirror the type of layout used in the *Savage Beauty* exhibitions, which I found to be effective at keeping the eye moving and providing an exploratory feeling.

The use of separate, individually-lit compartments for objects within a larger case is also a strategy I plan to employ for its ability to create the 'spatial equivalent of exclamation marks' between the selections (Clark in ModeMuseum, 2002: 147)—encouraging the eye to move from one object to the other with intentional spaces for the eyes to pause. Something akin to this strategy was devised for the 2022 exhibition *Shoes: Anatomy, Identity, Magic* at The Museum at FIT (see fig. 6.1), which included casework designed so that viewers could easily make connections between adjacent objects and/or focus on an individual style, as they wished. Although these modes of viewing were facilitated through the smaller size of

[125] In her 2008 article 'Museum Quality: The Rise of the Fashion Exhibition', Valerie Steele notes that many exhibitions prior to that date had been either 'antiquarian in their approach and chronological in their organization'; fashion exhibitions have increasingly shifted towards more thematic content (Steele, 2008: 10).

the objects, the design of the cabinets of curiosities exhibition could allow visitors the space to view the accumulation of objects within each cabinet, while also carefully arranging the objects with individual viewing in mind. The MFIT team typically crafts mock-ups of all major design elements, which would allow for testing and necessary modifications of this idea. These are made in the exhibition team's workshop at full scale (using scrap materials with a mind towards re-use and sustainability) and placed within the gallery space(s) between exhibitions or off-hours for the suggestions and approval of the architect and the curator. More specific research that led to ideas for the design of the cabinets—and how objects might be viewed within them—is outlined in the following section.

Exhibition design

Schmitt and Lahroodi emphasise that 'curiosity requires a mutually supportive drawing of attention and desire to know: one desires to know because one's attention is drawn, and one's attention continues to be drawn because one desires to know' (Schmitt and Lahroodi, 2008: 129). Research indicates that an exhibition design that attempts to both invoke and maintain a state of curiosity is essential to a meaningful visitor experience (Ibid.: 125), and Falk and Dierking observe that an 'important source of attraction for visitors is a unique or unusual museum display' (Falk and Dierking, 2013: 46). In their 2010 book, exhibition designers Herman Kossman and Mark de Jong write that not only has exhibition production doubled over the past twenty-five years, but it has also moved outside of the museum to be embraced by other types of organisations. Although they argue that exhibition design

has ‘yet to be seen as a mature cultural discipline’ (Kossman and de Jong, 2010: 7), numerous books on exhibition design published during the twenty-first century indicate that it is becoming a topic of greater interest.

Such publications tend to be positioned as ‘how to’ manuals (Miles *et al*, 1982; Lorenc, Skolnick and Berger, 2007; Hughes, 2010; Bogle, 2013; McKenna-Cress and Kamien, 2013), or they serve primarily as visual records of exhibition design (Dernie, 2006; Kossman and de Jong, 2010; Broto, 2014; Kramer, 2014; Müller and Möhlmann, 2015; Teufel, 2015). Others focus on exhibition design for international expositions or other temporary events (Bonet, 2006; Mostaedi, 2006; Vranckx, 2006). These publications offer general ideas and inspiration for my research (especially through photographs of compelling designs), but they generally do not provide critical context or analysis of the exhibitions they illustrate. I utilised other sources to inspire my strategies for invoking curiosity. Like my studies on museum interpretation, these strategies have largely been ascertained from general museological texts in addition to psychological research. Prior to engaging with this content, however, it is advantageous to consider the physical appearances of historic cabinets of curiosities (to the extent that they are known).

Visual codes within cabinets of curiosities

The identification of visual codes within historic cabinets of curiosities helps to define aspects of exhibition design that could be applied to a contemporary exhibition on cabinets of curiosities. Such visual codes are not easily disentangled,

especially since historians hold conflicting views on how cabinets of curiosities actually looked. Interpretations are typically drawn from extant visual sources such as engravings and paintings. As I explain in Chapter 2, 'Catalogues, inventories, and travel journals', those depictions are not always accurate.

One of the more significant debates regarding the appearance of the cabinets is the sense of disarray and amassment they might have conveyed. Whereas scholar Neil Kenny argues that objects within cabinets 'were not piled up on top of each other or squeezed up against each other' (Kenny, 1998: 169), Marr writes that such a characterisation discounted the 'mass of curious objects' depicted in paintings such as in Jan Brueghel the Elder and Hieronymus Francken II's *The Archdukes Albert and Isabella Visiting a Collector's Cabinet* (circa 1621–1623) (fig. 6.4) (Evans and Marr, 2006: 169). Historians Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park also argue for the significance of a seemingly jumbled appearance within the cabinets:

> If each object itself elicited wonder, all of them densely arrayed from floor to ceiling or drawer upon drawer could only amplify the visitor's grasp of mingled astonishment and admiration. And if the artificialia and naturalia of these collections were wondrous placed side by side in the studied miscellany of the typical cabinet, they were still more wondrous when fused with one another, obscuring the boundaries between the wonder of art and the wonders of nature' (Daston and Park, 1998: 260).

Pearce summarises that the cabinets featured an interplay of 'exposure and hiding, organization and the chaos of infinity' (Pearce, 1994: 256), and hers seems to be the most pertinent

description of these spaces. Just like the differences in ways that objects are stored and/or displayed within museum collections today, cabinets of curiosities likely varied in appearance. Their differences may have corresponded to the message that their creators wished to convey (a process akin to contemporary curatorship). It is believed that some of the costliest collections featured an arrangement of objects that spilled over multiple surfaces—tables, walls, floors, and ceilings—rather than within cabinets (as I mentioned previously, cabinets could range from a single piece of furniture to a series of rooms). This mode was perhaps intended to awe visitors and provide them with an immediate sense of the proprietor's wealth (Bowry, 2015: 78). Other collections, such as the scientific teaching objects owned by Ole Worm, were at once visible and neatly arranged[126].

Fig. 6.4

The Archdukes Albert and Isabella Visiting a Collector's Cabinet by Jan Brueghel the Elder and Hieronymus Francken II, circa 1621–23, oil on panel. Isabella is seated and her husband stands behind her (in black); an unknown Flemish collector stands to her left. The painting is not believed to represent a scene that took place, though its profusion of naturalia and artificialia is repeated in numerous paintings within the cabinets of curiosities genre. Collection of The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore.

[126] As I explain in Chapter 2, the 1655 engraving of Worm's cabinet is considered to be a fairly accurate portrayal of its actual appearance.

In her analysis of an engraving of the cabinet of apothecary Ferrante Imperato (1525–1625), archaeology professor Stephanie Moser writes that 'the effect of crowding so many objects into such a confined space is that the display appears chaotic. In this sense, the visual impact of the arrangement tends to overshadow its intellectual content or its potential to aid in research' (Moser, 2006: 18). This observation was made with a contemporary mindset—late sixteenth-century viewers may have perceived such 'crowding' differently. Nevertheless, opinions such as Moser's are worthy of consideration when planning an exhibition for contemporary audiences. Visitors may be more familiar with the modernist 'white cube'[127] exhibition type, which 'by its very layout communicates and demands specialness of the pieces included within' (Petrov, 2019: 108). I intend to position the appearance of my exhibition somewhere between the 'chaos' of the cabinet of curiosities and spare quality of the white cube, with the point of view that objects need not be placed in modernist spaces to convey their importance. My practice as it pertains to exhibition display strategies will be outlined shortly.

According to Robertson, Quiccheberg's treatise on cabinets of curiosities emphasises that 'the juxtaposition of objects, or groupings of objects—enhances the practical value of any single object' (Robertson, 2014: viii). Quiccheberg did not offer precise ideas for how to arrange objects, but this lack of

[127] The concept of the 'white cube' relates to the development of modern architecture during the 1920s. White walls were proffered by architect Le Corbusier in his 1925 book *L'art décoratif d'aujourd'hui* (The decorative art of today), which resulted in the widespread idea that 'the mark of purity and integrity is the unmarked wall' (Wigley, 1995: xvi). Art critic Brian O'Doherty's serial essay *Inside the White Cube* (O'Doherty, 1999 [1976]) further explicates the correlation between neutral spaces and the display of modern art.

detail—considered by scholars to be intentional—would have provided collectors with the flexibility to order their spaces based on their own preferences (Kuwakino, 2013: 306). Most historians agree that even the most profuse cabinet collections were arranged with some sense of order and a consideration for the overall effectiveness of their display, though the visual impact of this is not always discernible to the contemporary eye.

Symmetrical arrangements of objects

In her identification of prevalent display concepts within non-royal collections, Moser mentions a specific technique: objects arranged in symmetrical patterning (Moser, 2006: 31). Although the juxtaposition of objects appeared to play an important role in making meaning, cabinets of curiosities sometimes featured collections of homogenous objects (e.g., seashells or swords) that were grouped together in ways that highlighted their quantity and comparative differences. Extant engravings of collections demonstrate the visual impact of this method of display. The implications of symmetrical arrangements and their potential application to a contemporary exhibition is worthy of exploration.

Scientific institutions in Italy during the seventeenth century—many of which had been founded on collections from cabinets of curiosities—received visitors for the purposes of both learning and pleasure. According to museologist Giuseppe Olmi, there was a 'desire for symmetry and a pleasing appearance' in the ways that some establishments displayed their specimens (Olmi, 2017 [1983]: 8). Moser argues that symmetrical arrangements allowed viewers to shift their

attention away from individual objects, emphasising instead how they could 'perform' alongside other objects to create intriguing associations (Moser, 2006: 21).

Nevertheless, collectors had a simultaneous tendency to display dissimilar objects that 'were informed by rhetorical strategies of identifying the interconnectedness of [varied] things and creating new constellations of meaning' (Bowry, 2015: 228). Historians Daston and Park argue that the juxtaposition of heterogenous objects was more common within displays of cabinets of curiosities, and that systematic classifications were generally confined to catalogues and inventories rather than physical spaces (Daston and Park, 1998: 267). Similarly, Bowry argues that unexpected juxtapositions were 'key to investing an object with meaning beyond its physicality. Objects were no longer just objects when housed in the cabinet; they were symbols and metonyms' (Bowry, 2015: 154).

These latter observations are more conducive to a contemporary museum setting, as studies have shown that repetition can impede curiosity and learning. Berlyne concludes that 'changing features of the environment will come to attract more visual fixation than recurrent features' (Berlyne, 1958: 290). More complex stimuli inspired greater investigation, as did new stimuli when compared to that which had been present for some time. Similarly, Bitgood's research on attention and learning within museums found that object satiation is reached more quickly when exhibitions display similar objects in unvaried ways (Bitgood, 2013: 163). This indicates that maintaining a visitor's curiosity throughout the exhibition may depend on variance of both object types

and their modes of display. I will return to the idea of object repetition—and a potentially engaging way to apply this concept—later in this chapter.

Physical spaces

In addition to the symmetrical arrangement of objects, Moser identifies several additional display strategies within many cabinets of curiosities, including:

> - the fullest possible use of the space (ceiling, walls, floor, etc.) that allowed for the display of the greatest number of objects;
> - the use of architecture and interior design to enhance the appearance of the objects; and
> -the creation of 'museum spaces' that allowed for greater aesthetic contemplation of certain objects (Moser, 2006: 31–32).

These strategies revolve around the design of the space(s) in which objects were displayed, emphasising its importance. In her study of the cabinet of scholar Antonio Giganti, historian Laurencich-Minelli further highlights the significance of display space. She describes Giganti's large collection of naturalia and artificialia and conveys that his eagerness to fill every space—making no distinction between object categories—meant that the physical structure of the cabinet itself became the unifying framework for the disparate material exhibited (Laurencich-Minelli, 2017 [1983]: 19).

Mauriès ascertains two primary aims within cabinets of curiosities. Although they were intended to 'define, discover

and possess the rare and the unique', the cabinets also served to imbue such objects with meaning. Mauriès considers the physical space as an integral component to meaning making, writing that:

> Display panels, cabinets, cases and drawers were a response not only to a desire to preserve, or conceal them from view, but also to a parallel impulse to slot each item into its place in a vast network of meanings and correspondences. If the object possessed something of the unique, the rare or the unassimilable, plucked from the infinity of atoms that made up reality, the cabinet would become a rare place of inspection (Mauriès, 2011: 25).

As previous chapters have highlighted, several researchers have posited that the evocation of a cabinet of curiosities can be created through specialised casework. In her writing about the significance of display furniture in exhibition interpretation, Moser posits that 'historic' looking wooden cabinets can help to immediately define objects as curiosities among certain visitors (Moser, 2010: 25). A psychological study found that participants associated the use of wood furnishings with the attributes of 'quality' and 'durability' (Rice *et al*, 2006: 656), which may bear some connection to the perception of museum objects and their need for safekeeping.

Lasser determines that the placement of objects in a cabinet 'invites the visitor to look and to discern the meaning of an unexpected relationship' in a manner that relates to historic cabinets of curiosities (Lasser, 2021: 247). Although Rugoff was not writing about cabinets of curiosities specifically, he notes that when people view a work of art, they become susceptible to its 'packaging', or mode of display (Rugoff,

2006: 45). The ‘packaging’ of objects as curiosities, then, may be dependent on the cabinetry in which they are shown.

With this information—and the consideration of engravings of cabinets of curiosities—it is tempting to suggest the creation of a room with towering cabinets full of objects. Yet it is important to consider the preferences of contemporary museum audiences. In her study of modern exhibition design practices, art and cultural historian Staniszewski writes that both museums and department stores implemented significant changes to their display practices during the first half of the twentieth century. ‘Rather than floor-to-ceiling shelving and cabinetry, displays between five and five and one-half feet were adopted’, she writes, adding that the idea of stacking or piling objects or goods was replaced by displays that were sparser and positioned at eye level. Lighting, too, became more advanced (Staniszewski, 1998: 174). Many of these ideas have carried over into the twenty-first century. In particular, the creation of museum displays is often centred on the visibility of objects (in addition to label copy and other exhibition elements), which is critical for accessibility.

My research indicates there are ways to create spaces that are both accessible and evocative. The Special Exhibitions gallery at The Museum at FIT, in which I stage my theoretical exhibition, has high ceilings that lend themselves to the creation of tall cabinets, and for that reason my theoretical exhibition is led by this premise. Tall cabinets could be constructed to help visitors feel immersed in the space, but the objects themselves (particularly those with a lot of detail or at a smaller scale) need not be placed out of the line of

sight. The additional height of the cabinets could be utilised in other ways; one suggestion is to include 'inscriptions', like those used within some of the historic cabinets, in large, legible font. Mark Meadow describes Quiccheberg's suggestion for the inclusion of inscriptions:

> The aphorisms, proverbs, and other wise and witty sayings in inscription rehearse the larger collection … Written, painted, or inscribed on boards, on cabinets and shelves, or directly on the walls themselves, these words of wisdom are to be distributed throughout the theatre, commenting on the objects, providing moral guidance, and stimulating conversations among visitors to the collection. (Meadow, 2014: 22).

I could include fashion-centred quotes or aphorisms as they correspond to aspects of cabinets of curiosities and their collections, creativity, or other related topics. A correlative concept was deployed in the 2016-2017 exhibition *The Vulgar: Fashion Redefined* at the Barbican, London, curated and designed by Judith Clark with Adam Phillips. Large gold emblems punctuated the gallery spaces, each featuring an interpretation of the term vulgar. Examples included 'The Vulgar Exposes the Scandal of Good Taste' and 'The Vulgar is Failure as Success'. As Clark explains in the corresponding catalogue:

> The first view [within the exhibition] is an emblem. Painted gold, it resembles a coin. Emblems are dependent on the interrelationship of image and text. They use the combination not to clarify, but to create a more enigmatic meaning' (Clark in Alison and McCarthy, 2016: 195)

This description suggests the potential inclusion of images (perhaps engravings of objects taken from cabinets of curiosities catalogues) paired with quotes within my

exhibition. Suggestions for quotes to include are couturier Madeleine Vionnet's 'I was schooled in the magnificent' (Manson, 1966: n.p.); tastemaker Iris Apfel's 'Great personal style is an extreme curiosity about yourself' (Apfel in McGowan, 2012: n.p.); and cultural historian Christopher Breward's '[Fashion] demands study in the same way that ancient artifacts are made meaningful by archaeologists: through careful excavation' (Breward, 2016: xviii). The selection, design and placement of such quotes would complement the themed cabinets within the exhibition, the ideas for which are outlined in the following section.

Design ideas for evoking curiosity

Although cabinetry will be a critical part of my exhibition design, there are numerous elements to consider. I regard exhibition design as one of the most stimulating and essential parts of organising an exhibition, but I am not trained as a designer. I therefore collaborate with The Museum at FIT's staff of skilled artists and carpenters (referred to as the exhibition department), as well as with a contracted architect, to design my exhibitions. As the curator of an exhibition, I provide my colleagues with information and research on an exhibition, including book text, a synopsis of thesis and themes, an object checklist, and any ideas for the design of the space. My colleagues use the material I have provided to determine the logistics of design, materials, and execution. We meet weekly, and mock-ups of many ideas are made for my understanding, feedback, and approval[128]. Here, I begin by

[128] Graphic design is also integral to the overall appearance and feeling of an exhibition. In the way that MFIT exhibitions are planned, graphic design is created by a contracted artist after the initial exhibition design has been agreed upon by the architect, design team, and curator. Furthermore, the

providing an overview of how my practice-led approach informs the designs of my exhibitions. I continue with ideas for my theoretical exhibition on cabinets of curiosities, which is presented as a component of my practice for this thesis. It is important to state that these are presented as concepts for exhibition design—not the designs themselves, which are not part of my curatorial practice.

Fairy Tale Fashion, an exhibition I curated at MFIT in 2016, serves as an example of a successful collaboration with my exhibition department colleagues and a contracted architect. The exhibition illustrated fifteen classic fairy tales using examples of fashion, and its creation required a considerable amount of research into the history of the tales, including the ways in which they had been represented visually. I was particularly drawn to the early twentieth-century illustrations by Arthur Rackham. Although his works were often detailed and colourful, one of his specialties was the creation of silhouettes—black outlines of characters or settings on a white background. As I thought through ideas for *Fairy Tale Fashion*, I became wary of settling on a design that was overly theatrical—I did not want sets that would distract from the objects. I suggested using Rackham's silhouettes to inspire minimal but evocative backdrops.

I then positioned the selected fairy tales into several archetypal settings: these included the castle (which I suggested should dominate the centre of the gallery,

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selection of mannequins and the creation of object mounts is determined by the conservation staff, with the approval of the curator, after the objects have been assessed for condition and the exhibition design is well underway. The theoretical nature of the ideas presented here preclude the inclusion of this information.

becoming a space that visitors could walk in and around), the forest, and the sea. I further proposed several specialised settings: a snowy forest for *The Snow Queen*, a patch of thorns for *Sleeping Beauty* (also known as *Briar Rose*), a spiralling 'rabbit hole' for *Alice in Wonderland*, and the skyline of the Emerald City for *The Wizard of Oz*. I detailed to my colleagues which tales and their related objects went into each of these settings through the use of a Word document with thumbnail images of the objects in their groupings.

Fig. 6.5

An installation view of *Fairy Tale Fashion* at The Museum at FIT, 2016. This grouping represented the story *Little Red Riding Hood*. The tale's forest setting was evoked by silhouetted trees, printed at large scale on white scrim that was then coloured with green lights. The overall effect was evocative without overwhelming the garments. Photograph © The Museum at FIT

From these ideas, the architect and MFIT's exhibition department designed appropriate backgrounds (in black silhouettes) and found a lightweight, durable, and affordable white scrim onto which each design was printed to size (wide enough to cover the length of each plinth and standing approximately six metres high) (fig. 6.5). The scrims were

secured within wooden frames so that they were taut and stable, and they could be secured to both the gallery floor and each other. This process—the design and its fabrication—were presented to me in sample form prior to installation. After the scrims were installed, a lighting designer added the final effects, including coloured gel lights (such as green for the forest and the Emerald City and gold for the bricks of the castle). The effect was intended to be dramatic and immersive without distracting from the garments on view.

I consider my collaborations with the exhibition department and our architect (who has worked with MFIT on more than a dozen exhibitions at the time of this writing) to be a noteworthy privilege in the way that I work—even if a curator maintains an interest in exhibition design (which some do not), they may not be provided the opportunity to propose their ideas. I appreciate that my colleagues are enthusiastic about curatorial input, and, as evidenced from the description above, consistently find ways to execute and improve upon my initial suggestions. I recognise from conversations with other museum professionals that such collaborative and collegial relationships can be rare.

For the purpose of this thesis, I have condensed my ideas into design briefs that include a description of the concept and my objective for including it, visual references that serve as inspiration, suggestions for the format the content will take, and any additional notes or selected objects of interest. These briefs, collectively referred to as Praxis E, are included at the end of the description of each section I have outlined as part of my practice-led theoretical exhibition. My suggestions for all aspects of design are only that; details of fabrication are

intentionally lacking, as that information is better left to my expert colleagues. They will ultimately determine what is reasonable for our timeframe and budget, and they are well-versed in the particulars of visitor safety and accessibility.

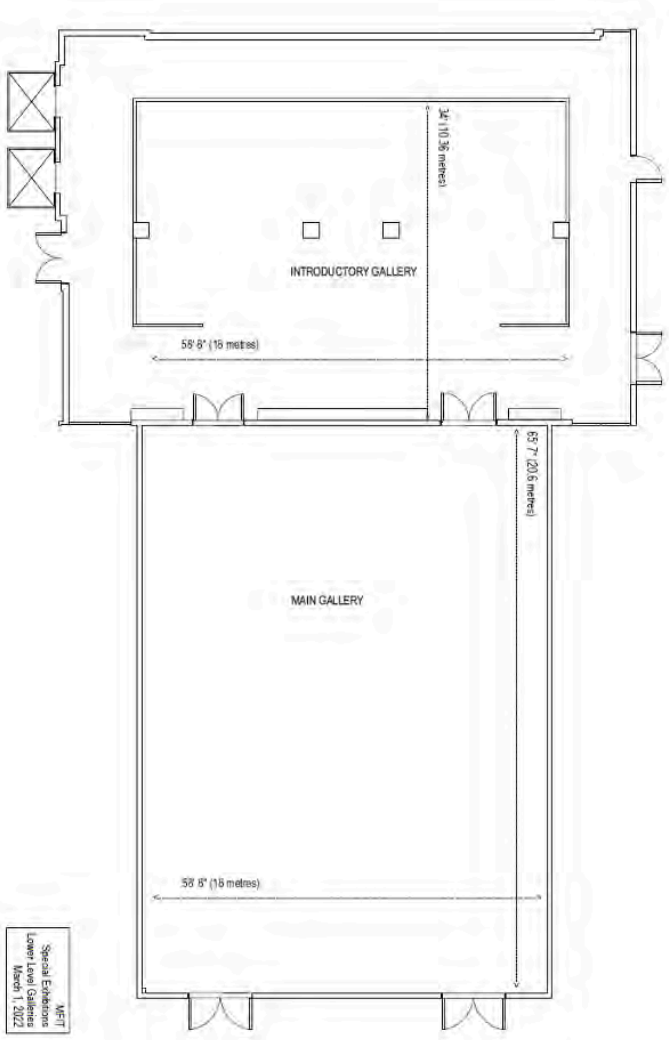


Fig. 6.6

Floor plan of the Special Exhibitions Gallery at The Museum at FIT. I have chosen not to include elevations here, being that the galleries are essentially two large spaces that are undefined by notable architectural details, and they take on a different appearance based on specific exhibition designs. Image ©The Museum at FIT

The gallery where I have staged my theoretical exhibition is one in which I have worked numerous times in real life.

Known as the Special Exhibitions Gallery at The Museum at FIT, it is permanently divided into two spaces. A smaller gallery into which visitors enter is frequently conceived as an introduction to the exhibition. Since I plan to use it as such in my theoretical exhibition, I will reference this space as the 'introductory gallery'. A second gallery is typically referred to by MFIT staff as the 'main gallery' because of its larger square footage and higher ceilings (fig. 6.6). Within the basic architecture of these spaces, there are many opportunities for customisation (through the use temporary walls and plinths, casework, paint, lighting, etc.) according to the exhibition theme.

Before I present elements of my practice as they pertain to concepts for exhibition design, it is important to note that there are certain limitations to the work of a curator in a public, university-based museum in the United States—and, as I mentioned in my introduction, I am addressing such concerns despite the theoretical nature of the exhibition I research and describe in this thesis. Complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a primary concern: this necessitates consideration of elements such as large-print labels, accessible entrances and routes within the exhibition, and the visibility of objects (Americans with Disabilities Act, 2009: n.p.). Curators at MFIT often give their own exhibition tours, resulting in direct interaction with hundreds of visitors each year. Therefore, visitors' concerns that are not directly related to ADA compliance—such as a lack of places to sit, or requests for better lighting on labels—are frequently voiced to me directly. Problems are noted, and hopefully negated, in future exhibitions. Positive feedback is

likewise recorded. My exhibition design ideas and other strategies strive to balance innovation and practicality.

Another pragmatic concern is the security of the gallery spaces and the objects on view. The Museum at FIT has three security staff on duty while the galleries are open: one in the introductory gallery, and two in the main gallery. Although these guards are well-trained and effective, it is imperative that temporary walls and platforms do not seriously impede their view of any doorways or the objects on display. For example, the creation of small spaces that visitors could enter and not be visible by the guards would be considered problematic. This obstacle is worthy of mention since it affects the ways in which an exploratory and/or immersive experience can be crafted within these spaces.

The introductory gallery

Visitors to the museum's Special Exhibitions enter through the smaller introductory gallery. Its size can be adapted according to the exhibition's needs—curators may utilise the full space or ask that temporary walls be constructed, making it narrower. This is possible because of the relatively low ceilings (2.7 metres/9 feet high as opposed to ceilings measuring 6.7 metres/22 feet high in the main gallery). For this theoretical exhibition, I will suggest the creation of a narrower gallery with the goal of imparting a feeling of intimacy in the space. My aim in creating a more intimate setting is that visitors will get the feeling that they are entering a private chamber, akin to a historic cabinet of curiosities.

As I wrote previously, the smaller gallery often acquaints visitors with the exhibition's theme, and that is my intent within this exhibition. Bedford explains that the creation of a 'threshold' in an introductory space:

> Makes [visitors] feel welcome and secure in their knowledge of what follows; this is the liminal space, an anthropologist's term for transitional rites or times. It is the space, real or metaphorical, between the ordinary and the extraordinary, the known and the unknown—that is, the imagined world of an exhibition (Bedford, 2014: 123).

Within my theoretical exhibition, the creation of a threshold at the entrance to the introductory gallery could provide a powerful start to the experience. I propose an architectural feature that surrounds the entry doors into the gallery, providing visitors with the sense that they are walking into a cabinet. The entry doors are typically 'branded' with exhibition graphics so that visitors know they are entering the correct space (fig. 6.7); in this instance, they could be covered in vinyl that is designed to look like the doors of a cabinet (with printed 'moulding' that surrounds the windows, for example). The space around these doors could be built as a three-dimensional structure rather than a representational graphic, setting the stage for the feeling that they are immersed within a cabinet of curiosities.

Fig. 6.7

The entrance to the Special Exhibitions Gallery at The Museum at FIT, with doors covered in printed vinyl graphics. I propose building a three-dimensional structure around this entryway to provide visitors with the sensation that they are entering a cabinet. Photograph © The Museum at FIT

In addition to providing the exhibition with a visual identity, the introductory gallery conveys important content about its theme. A text panel at the entrance to the exhibition is a conventional means of orientating a visitor, providing information on the exhibition's thesis or intent, and setting the tone for the experience (Serrell, 2015: 22; 33). The placement of such a panel immediately to the left or right of the gallery entrance is standard within MFIT exhibitions. For this theoretical exhibition on cabinets of curiosities, however, I have chosen to delay the revelation of the introductory panel, focussing instead on constructing a more complex threshold as it is defined by Horsley: an 'exhibition entrance that exists as a spatial or performative construction and

which, without reliance on text-based information, introduces both key narratives or subject matter and the aesthetic approach taken in the presentation of the exhibition' (Horsley, 2012: 140).

The threshold will allow visitors to pass through a 'portal' upon entrance into the introductory gallery. The portal will be three-sided, including two walls and a 'ceiling' overhead, and will be built and printed with the outline of doors and drawers to resemble a cabinet. A 'ghostly' appearance will be rendered through the use of a diaphanous material stretched over a visible frame—inspired by artist Do Ho Suh's *Passage/s* series, in which he created the illusion of façades in sheer polyester fabric. The use of transparent material within my theoretical exhibition is ideal for reasons of security (as mentioned above[129]), but it may also be understood as a suitable 'preface' to the theme and the more fully realised cabinets that will populate the main gallery. The dimensions of the portal will be determined with consideration for fire exits and egress, but they are estimated at approximately 3 metres in length and 2.5 metres tall (rising nearly to the gallery ceiling).

[129] There is a hallway with a utility closet to the right of the introductory space as visitors enter. Similarly, there is a room used for mannequin storage to the left of the entry doors. Since it is possible for a visitor access those spaces, intentionally or otherwise, concealing them with an opaque wall is not advised.

Praxis E1

Design brief: Threshold & portal

DESIGN BRIEF #1
Threshold & Portal

Concept description

Visitors will enter the exhibition through a 'threshold', a three-dimensional structure built around the gallery entrance doors. This threshold will be designed to evoke a cabinet of curiosities. A 'portal' just inside the doors will lead visitors to the exhibition's introductory content.

Objective

The threshold will provide visitors with an immersive experience, allowing them to feel that they are stepping into 'another world'—the cabinet of curiosities—and setting a visual tone for the exhibition. The portal will prolong the immersive sensation before introducing visitors to the exhibition content.

Content format

Threshold: A three-dimensional structure built around the exhibition entrance, including a cornice and columns.

Portal: Built just inside the doors to the introductory gallery; made to resemble a simple cabinet with a 'ghostly' appearance, rendered through the use of a diaphanous material stretched over a visible frame.

Additional notes

The doors to the gallery entrance could be covered in vinyl that has been designed to look like the doors to a cabinet (e.g. printed 'moulding' around the windows); or, if possible, hand painted.

Other elements (the cornice and columns) should be built as dimensional structures around the door frame.

The portal can be made to resemble a cabinet by printing the fabric with the outline of doors and drawers.

Visual references

Threshold (rendering by C. Hill):

Portal (inspiration from artist Do Ho Suh):

After exiting the portal, visitors will encounter an installation titled ‘Picturing the Cabinets’ that underscores the connections between my curatorial selections and the history of the cabinets. This section will include a series of three niches built into the wall, each housing a dressed mannequin. The back of each niche will be hung with a scrim printed with a related, large-scale illustration from a cabinet of curiosities catalogue (scrim is suggested for its semi-opaque quality, echoing the material used in the portal). The images will depict specific objects that were collected, rather than the cabinets themselves.

Examples of these pairings include a drawing of snakes from the cabinet of apothecary Albertus Seba with a serpent-printed gown by Giles Deacon; a scarlet macaw from the collection of Emperor Rudolf II with a macaw-inspired dress by Alexander McQueen; and Giuseppe Arcimboldo’s painting *Vertumnus* (a depiction of collector Rudolf II; described in Praxis D earlier in this chapter) paired with a Comme des Garçons ensemble printed with the same image (figs. 6.8-6.13). The spaces around these niches will feature three-dimensional structures similar to that built around the entrance, providing visual continuity and creating a feeling of immersion in the ‘cabinet’.

Fig. 6.8 (left): Drawing by Albertus Seba, *Snakes of Asia Guadeloupe and Japan*, 1734. Seba was a Dutch apothecary and collector who commissioned illustrations of his specimens during the mid-18th century. The resulting four-volume set, which was reproduced by Taschen beginning in the late twentieth century, has now seen more than forty editions in numerous languages. Public domain.

Fig. 6.9 (right): A snake-printed dress from Giles Deacon's spring/summer 2015 collection. Deacon's designs for this collection were inspired by the natural history drawings of contemporary artist Walton Ford. Photograph © Vogue.com

Fig. 6.10 (left) Watercolour painting by Anselmus Boetius de Boodt—a scarlet macaw in the cabinet of curiosities collection of Emperor Rudolf II, ca. 1600. De Boodt was a Flemish naturalist and a prominent gemmologist who was also employed as Rudolf's physician. Public domain.

Fig. 6.11 (right) A spring/summer 2003 dress by Alexander McQueen, inspired by the scarlet macaw. The theme of the collection was based, in part, on the Age of Exploration. Collection of The Museum at FIT, museum purchase. Photograph ©The Museum at FIT.

Fig. 6.12 (left) *Vertumnus* by Giuseppe Arcimboldo, 1591, oil on canvas. Arcimboldo was already well known for his fantastical composite portraits when he painted this allegorical image of Emperor Rudolf II. Arcimboldo indicated his respect for the emperor by representing him as the Roman god of growth, seasons, and transformation. Collection of Skokloster Castle, Sweden.

Fig. 6.13 (right) Comme des Garçons, spring/summer 2018. Journalist Sarah Mower described this collection, which featured several ensembles with oversize prints of Arcimboldo's work, as a 'performative expression of human fantasies and childlike longings in a time of gathering darkness and fear' (Mower, 2017: n.p.) Photograph ©Vogue.com; this dress is also in the collection of The Museum at FIT.

Psychological studies have found that the aforementioned concept of flow, which is related to curiosity, corresponds to a feeling of immersion (Harvey *et al*, 1998: 620). Bitgood describes the immersive museum environment as one that provides the sense of being 'in a specific time and place' (Bitgood, 2013: 59), whereas exhibition specialists Polly McKenna-Cress and Janet Kamien are more specific—in their view, immersive experiences are those that museum visitors cannot easily attain elsewhere. 'By suspending a level of disbelief, a high-quality immersive experience can create authentic internal responses and be powerful', they conclude (McKenna-Cress and Kamien, 2013: 138). They further explain the meaning of authentic responses, which are of

interest for their connection to the emotions they can awaken within visitors. These include joy, humour, fear, suspense, sadness, righteousness and—of particular relevance to this research—curiosity (Ibid.: 139).

Kossman and de Jong, whose work centres on immersive exhibition experiences, specifically mention cabinets of curiosities. The complete museum experience, they explain, is one 'where the space is staged as a whole'. They continue by explaining that such experiences are often 'found in the predecessors to museums: wonder rooms and the cabinets of collectors from the Renaissance (the 16th and 17th centuries) and from the Enlightenment (end of the 18th century)' (Kossman and de Jong, 2010: 16). The creation of an immersive experience within my exhibition, therefore, seems an optimal choice.

After visitors traverse the exhibition threshold, they will encounter an introductory panel that will briefly acquaint visitors with the exhibition topic (previously included in Chapter 4, Praxis C; this will be placed next to 'A Problematic History', the panel about cabinets of curiosities and colonialism). MFIT exhibitions do not generally accompany introductory text with objects, but in this instance, I plan to include what Horsley refers to as an 'iconic object or visual marque'. He provides an example of such an object from the 2011 exhibition *Hussein Chalayan: Récits de Mode* (*Hussein Chalayan: Fashion Narratives*) at Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, in which one of Chalayan's 'buried dresses'—an acclaimed, early example of the designer's work—was displayed adjacent to the introductory panel (Horsley, 2015: 48).

I pondered the equivalent of the Chalayan dress to my exhibition theme and recalled Pierpaolo Piccioli and Maria Grazia Chiuri's autumn/winter 2013 couture collection for Valentino. The collection was inspired by cabinets of curiosities; Piccioli states that his interest in the theme was that '[its] pieces are very unique, very one-of-a-kind' (Phelps, 2013: n.p.), which correlates to the exclusivity of couture. The first design from the collection featured images such as coral, a seahorse, and German painter Albrecht Dürer's 1515 engraving of a rhinoceros, printed on silk. The 'objects' are visible through openings in the gown's lace overlay, giving the impression that the wearer is a living cabinet (fig. 6.14). As one of few fashion designs I encountered in my research that was directly inspired by the cabinets, it would serve as an exemplary visual marque[130].

[130] This dress is now in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum; I will either request a loan of this object or pursue borrowing or purchasing another example directly from Valentino.

Fig. 6.14

Dress from the Valentino autumn/winter 2013 couture collection—one of few fashion collections overtly inspired by cabinets of curiosities. Photograph © Vogue.com

Before entering the main gallery, visitors will be provided with greater context on the history of cabinets of curiosities. This is critical, since thirty-eight percent of participants in my front-end evaluation survey expressed limited or no knowledge of the cabinets; several of those who were familiar with the topic equated them with the Victorian era. The far end of the introductory gallery will familiarise visitors with the cabinets, but I also aim to ensure that this space is compelling and informative for those already familiar with the theme.

I have carefully considered the ways in which to do this. In particular, I pondered building a cabinet of curiosities using non-fashion objects, which would help visitors understand

the cabinets' various collecting categories. Ultimately, I decided against that strategy. Since this theoretical exhibition is focussed on fashion objects, I do not wish to confuse its point. Instead, I propose the construction of a section onto which the image of a historic cabinet (taken from a catalogue engraving) is projected. The image could be animated using projection mapping, highlighting various types of objects, and explaining them via a short, projected text and a corresponding audio clip.

The engraving of Ole Worm's cabinet (fig. 2.17) may be ideal for this purpose, as it is an amenable size, includes fashion objects, and is considered to be a fairly accurate representation of a collection. To provide a fuller picture of the cabinets for those who are interested, a series of QR codes mounted on the wall would link to additional engravings of cabinets with short texts on their histories, collectors, and specialities.

I initially conceptualised that the introductory gallery would touch on a brief history of collecting within museums, with emphasis on The Museum at FIT. Knowing that a narrative on collecting would be challenging to cover in such small space, however—and also concerned that it would appear too 'tacked on' to my primary concepts—I coordinated with my colleagues to revise the museum's exhibition schedule. When my ideas for this theoretical exhibition are made manifest in an actual exhibition, we now plan to feature a concurrent exhibition, centred on MFIT's collecting history, in the ground-floor gallery. The latter is the space that many museum goers visit first, before descending to the Special Exhibitions Gallery (the

space in which my theoretical exhibition is housed) on the lower level.

This second exhibition will provide visitors with a history of The Museum at FIT collections. It will also address topics such as the lack of world dress in the collection (and by extension, the exhibition) and current collecting practices devoted to inclusivity. Together, the two exhibitions will provide visitors with a broad understanding of collecting fashion, past and present. As some visitors may be interested in learning more about the research and planning for these exhibitions, I propose offering another QR code that would lead to information about the curatorial strategies that shaped them.

The main gallery

Over the course of three studies, Falk determined that many visitors do not interact with exhibitions in a linear manner. Therefore, he advised against establishing one-way flows in exhibitions (Falk and Dierking, 2013: 108). Although his observations were highly dependent on factors such as the gallery space and exhibition design, I contend that avoiding a prescribed path is nonetheless beneficial to an exhibition such as mine, which will, as stated previously, be designed to encourage free-choice learning. Further, it is invigorating to suggest a freeform path following the Covid-19 pandemic, during which many museums established linear, socially distanced pathways for health reasons.

In a study on the emotional impact of environments, psychologists Albert Mehrabian and James Russell write that an individual's feeling of dominance centres on a sense of

freedom and a lack of restriction in a space (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974: 291). Such dominance can enhance a visitor's feeling of agency and encourage exploration. To help facilitate this feeling, visitors will be able to enter the main gallery through one of two sets of doors from the introductory gallery. Once inside, there will be no intentional wayfinding cues—they will be free to wander the space in any way they wish. This choice correlates to what museum educator Margaret A. Lindauer identifies as a 'laissez-faire' exhibition, which 'maintains that humans are inherently more curious and more engrossed in an educational activity when learning is self-managed and self-motivated' (Lindauer, 2005: 45).

The main gallery is the largest space at The Museum at FIT, yet it could still be considered small compared to many other museums. Serrell, mentioned previously for her work on exhibition texts, writes that 'Smaller exhibitions (less than 2,500 square feet) have the advantage of allowing visitors to get a sense of the whole space at a glance as they walk into it and to decide quickly about their own sequence and pace' (Serrell, 2015: 78). This relates back to Rounds's theory of 'optimal foraging'. As he determines, 'the curiosity-driven visitor should avoid exhibit elements that appear likely to demand a long investment of time—especially ones that are hard to escape once you have started' (Rounds, 2004: 404). Although MFIT's main gallery is larger than Serrell's maximum, at approximately 3,770 square feet, the breadth of the space can be comprehended upon entering. Such a room, therefore, could be considered advantageous to an exhibition designed to evoke curiosity.

A primary concern I have with the main gallery design is giving away too much when visitors enter. If many objects are immediately visible, even from a distance, the impulse for exploration diminishes, and with it the element of curiosity about what is to come. This can be amended in an exhibition about cabinets of curiosities since the objects will be contained in cabinetry and therefore less immediately discernible. This situation leads to several ideas for how this cabinetry will look and how visitors may interact with the cabinets and the objects within them.

Considering the look of the cabinets in engravings—and Laurencich-Minelli's previously stated observation that a cabinet's design can be a unifying framework for varying types of materials exhibited (Laurencich-Minelli, 2017 [1983]: 19)—I propose that they maintain a uniform appearance. The cabinets would vary little in their overall dimensions, colour, and ornamentation (details of which will be determined at a later date, in collaboration with my colleagues). Compartments that are individually sized to suit each object would be cut into the larger cabinet and covered with acrylic for security reasons. Within this general 'formula', however, I suggest numerous ideas for variation. The titles of the cabinets described below would also be used within the theoretical exhibition.

The main gallery: 'What is it?' cabinet

Julian Spalding, author of *The Poetic Museum: Reviving Historic Collections*, theorises that 'Objects from the distant past are often immediately interesting, simply because they are out of place. Museums get away with putting old things

on display because they are curiosities' (Spalding, 2002: 75). The editors of the 2021 publication *Extinct: A Compendium of Obsolete Objects* assert a similar idea, emphasising a link between defunct objects and curiosity. 'A large number of objects simply fall victim to shifting fashions and aesthetics', they write, 'although they may continue to circulate as curios' (Penner *et al*, 2021: 17). In his work on the motivations for learning, psychologist Jerome Bruner links curiosity to 'something that is unclear, unfinished, or uncertain' (Bruner, 1966: 114).

These ideas took physical form in a display I encountered in the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2019, which featured a case of unusual objects with the heading 'What is it?'. Objects within the case were numbered, and doors positioned at either side of the cabinet could be pulled open to reveal identifying information. One of the cabinets in my exhibition, inspired by this display at the V&A, would challenge visitors to identify obsolete fashion objects such as a miser's purse (see Praxis G, Checklist, object number 1.4), a posy holder (object number 1.1), and a calash (object number 1.5). Their identification may be challenging for nonexperts and gratifying to those who recognise some or all the objects. The inclusion of this cabinet was substantiated by my front-end evaluation research, in which eight participants mentioned their interest in 'unusual' objects, and another seven specified their curiosity about items that they had never seen before.

Information about the objects in my cabinet could be made available through the use of 'lift labels', featuring a panel with an image of the object on its surface that can be lifted to

reveal descriptive text beneath[131]. A 2012 study at the Detroit Institute of Arts, which included lift labels as an example of an interpretive exhibition strategy, demonstrated two significant outcomes: learning about or appreciating a work of art and/or the creative process, and gaining an understanding of the object's context or function (Serrell and Adams, 2012: 16). Although these results were shaped by specific factors (such as which objects were shown and where, the design of the labels and their language, and the DIA's audience), I still consider this study to be advantageous to my research. The latter outcome of the DIA's study is particularly intriguing considering that fourteen (nearly half) of the participants in my front-end evaluation mentioned their curiosity regarding an object's functionality.

[131] An alternate solution, if available, would involve touch-screen technology—visitors could tap an image of the object to reveal information about it.

Praxis E2

Design brief: What is it? cabinet

DESIGN BRIEF #2
What is it? cabinet

Concept description

A cabinet devoted to a selection of objects that are deemed 'curious' due to their obsolescence and/or unusual qualities. (To be included in the main gallery).

Objective

Visitors will be presented with a selection of 'curious' fashion objects. Information about the objects will not be immediately visible, encouraging observation and speculation. Visitors will be invited to test their conjectures about the objects using lift labels built into or attached to the cabinets.

Content format

Accessories: Many of the objects selected for this cabinet are small fashion accessories. They may be better highlighted and individuated within niches that are cut to size and shape, similar to the example at the V&A Museum.

Lift labels will include a photograph of the object on the exterior and descriptive information below.

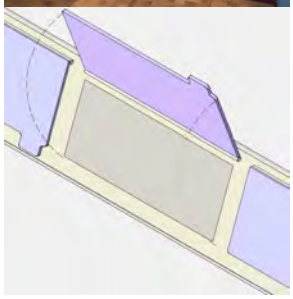
Additional notes

Depending on available technology, lift labels could be replaced by touch screens (visitors could tap the image of an object to learn more about it).

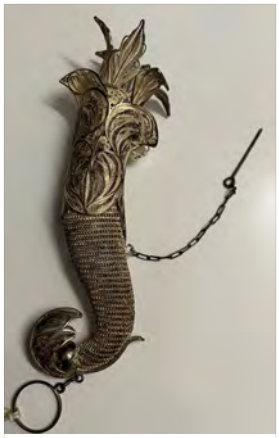
Visual references

Above: What is it? cabinet, Victoria & Albert Museum

Below: a diagram for a lift label (diagram by Port Productions)



Sample objects



Silver posy holder, mid-19th century
MFIT

Green silk calash, ca. 1820
MFIT

The main gallery: 'The Senses' cabinet

Research within 'sensory museology', a relatively new subfield of museum studies, provides further insight on exhibition strategies. In the 2014 publication *The Multisensory Museum*, museologist Nina Levent and neuroscientist Alvaro Pascual-Leone explain that one's 'internal representations of reality' are multisensory. Therefore, they posit, 'museums need to consider the combined and complex interactions between visual, auditory, olfactory, spatial, and other aspects of the visitors' experience' (Levent and Pascual-Leone, 2014: xiii-xiv).

In a study performed within a science museum, psychologists found that the inclusion of 'manipulatable' objects (those that could be experienced using the senses) invoke curiosity and substantially increase visitor interest (Koran *et al*, 1984: 361). Yet Levent and Pascual-Leone acknowledge that engagement with senses beyond sight is challenging for museums, which often focus on the safety and preservation of objects. As Susan Stewart observes, 'As collections or aggregations of art and precious things, museums … are so obviously – so, one might say, naturally – empires of sight that it hardly occurs to us to imagine them being organized around any other sense or senses' (Stewart, 1999: 233). To counteract that problem, I have devised strategies for visitor interaction with objects—in a manner that promotes both object safety and visitor engagement—through the creation of a cabinet titled 'The Senses'.

Based on anthropologist David Howes's observation that 'the rehabilitation of touch' has proved the most 'salient trend in

the new museology' (Howes, 2015: 259), I begin with ideas for the incorporation of touch into this cabinet. I then proceed with ideas for hearing and smell (engagement with taste is, unfortunately, not perceived as a possibility within the exhibition).

Touch

Cultural historian Constance Classen researched the rules of conduct in many early museums, which often included the curator's suggestion that visitors touch objects (Classen, 2005: 275). She relates the importance of touch to several factors: glass display cases were expensive, leaving many objects unprotected, and touching the objects provided a more intimate encounter for the visitor. Touch had the power to provide 'the thrill of coming into vicarious contact with their original creators and users, and even … a sense of what it would be like to *be* an artifact's original owner' (Ibid.: 277). During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, artefacts as precious as the crown jewels could be touched at the Tower of London[132] (Classen, 2017: 16).

In a lecture on Samuel Quiccheberg's work, Meadow mentions that cognition was one of the aims of collections of curiosities. He describes cognition as 'an active practice of study or becoming familiar with something over repeated exposure'—a practice gained not only by viewing objects but also by handling them (Meadow, 2019: n.p.). He further argues that some collections functioned similarly to 'study

[132] A two-volume catalogue of the Tower of London's 'curiosities' (including live animals) was published in 1741 (Boreman, 1741). Since the artefacts were not acquired by a private collector, however, they are not analysed in this thesis.

collections' in museums today, many of which encourage hands-on learning (Ibid.). As museums developed over time, the difficulty in managing larger numbers of visitors, advancements in display techniques (especially lighting, which afforded visitors a better view of objects), and the favouring of sight during the nineteenth century, as proffered by Charles Darwin, Max Nordau, and Sigmund Freud, led to diminished emphasis on the handling of museum objects (Bacci and Pavani, 2014: 17-18).

Neurologists Simon Lacey and K. Sathian explain that some regions of the brain that were considered specific to 'visual input are now known to also be activated during analogous tactile or haptic (passive or active touch, respectively) tasks' (Lacey and Sathian, 2014: 3). In the 2007 publication *The Power of Touch: Handling Objects in Museum and Heritage Context*, David Prytherch (a scholar of haptics and computer interface design) and Marie Jefsioutine (a counsellor and psychotherapist) emphasise that while museums have experienced greater demand to provide options for visitors with low or no sight, 'there is evidence that haptic experience is an important, if neglected, aspect of understanding objects for everyone' (Prytherch and Jefsioutine, 2007: 224). As Stewart emphasises, touch is the sensation most closely linked to emotion and feeling (Stewart, 1999: 31) which connects back to the importance of personal connections to museum exhibitions (Falk and Dierking, 2013: 79).

Touch also relates to fashion. As Alexandra Palmer notes, touch is "a primary means by which we come to understand cloth and clothing. We handle materials, try on garments, and personally experience new shapes and fit … The personal

knowledge of wearing clothing makes museum visitors connoisseurs even before entering a dress exhibition' (Palmer, 2008, 'Untouchable': 32). Although Palmer's argument emphasises how individual experience influences the museum visitor, I contend that pre-existing familiarity with clothing also instils visitors with a desire to touch clothing on display. Yet the delicate nature of fashion objects typically forbids this behaviour. To counteract that problem, I propose several solutions for tactile interaction within my theoretical exhibition[133].

The first is the creation of 3D-printed replicas of objects within the MFIT collection (the originals would also be on view, behind acrylic). Smaller, sculptural objects such as accessories best lend themselves to this replication. Although the facsimiles can mimic an original object's structural integrity, there are limitations to its processes; at the time of this writing, these include the frequent inability to make objects that are identical in weight, material, or texture to the original. Yet this may benefit my proposal: rather than making a near-exact replica of an object—which could be viewed unfavourably by members of the fashion industry (and even the public[134]) as unauthorised copies—these objects would be intentionally distinct from the original. They would be made from white or grey resin in a manner akin to a group of toiles

[133] Although touching objects on display would be new to The Museum at FIT, it is not without precedent. The Tactile Gallery at the Louvre in Paris, as one example, features touchable replicas of numerous artworks from the collection that are occasionally rotated to offer repeat visitors something new (Levent and McRainey, 2014: 71).
[134] Scholars Zimmer, Jefferies, and Srinivasan write about touchable replicas of museum objects, noting that it is a 'surprisingly rare thing to do, perhaps because of the expense and perhaps because of the issues it raises about authenticity and value'. They further explain that when replicas do exist, they are often clearly distinguished in their appearance from the originals (Zimmer, Jefferies, and Srinivasan, 2008: 154).

(samples or copies of garments made from unbleached muslin), numerous examples of which are part of The Museum at FIT study collection. The 3D-printed objects could be absorbed into the study collection following their use in the exhibition, where they could be appreciated by students and other researchers.

The objects selected for 3D printing would serve a particular purpose, offering a better understanding of the unusual shape of the object and allowing visitors to explore how something opens or otherwise moves. Initial suggestions for objects to be replicated include shoes by architect Zaha Hadid for United Nude (selected for their silhouette and seamless construction; Checklist object number 2.1) and a 'knuckle duster' bag by Alexander McQueen (chosen so that visitors can gain a sense of how the bag would be carried; object number 2.2). These would be tethered to the cabinet for security purposes, but in a way that would allow visitors to pick them up.

I further suggest the acquisition of fashion by contemporary labels, selected for unusual or complex materials that inspire touch—an inclination made possible by requesting a swatch of the design's material for the exhibition. The swatch would be placed and secured adjacent to the object's label. The swatches would likely vary in size according to availability, though larger pieces (envisioned around sixty centimetres on each side) that can accommodate simultaneous handlers would be preferred. A similar technique was present in the 2016 exhibition *Iris van Herpen: Transforming Fashion* (a multi-venue exhibition that I visited at the Grand Rapids Art Museum, Michigan in 2016), in which large swatches of the

designer's innovative materials could be touched (fig. 6.15 and fig. 6.16). The Museum at FIT owns several examples of van Herpen's work, including a pair of shoes made from the iron and plastic material illustrated in this thesis (see Checklist object number 2.3). It is possible to request sample materials that correspond to our own holdings.

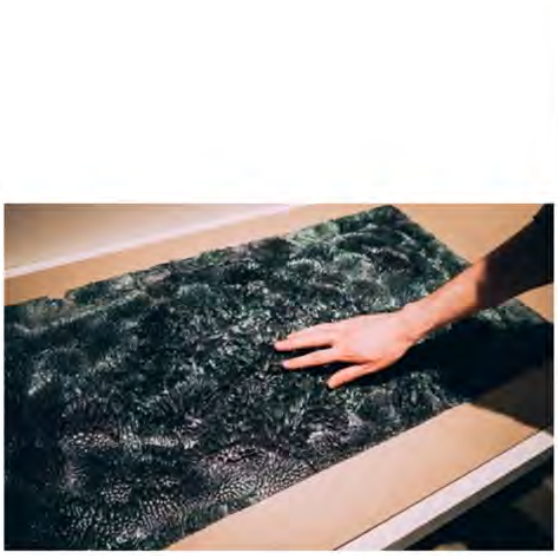


Fig. 6.15 (left): A swatch of Iris van Herpen's iron and resin material on display in the exhibition *Iris van Herpen: Transforming Fashion* at the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, in 2018. Van Herpen created the material with designer Jólan van der Wiel. Its texture can be manipulated by magnets. Photograph © Royal Ontario Museum

Fig. 6.16 (right) An ensemble from Iris van Herpen's autumn/winter 2013 couture collection, made from the material visible in the swatch. The Museum at FIT collection includes a pair of shoes made from this material. Photograph © Michel Zoeter

Another feasible haptic learning strategy for The Senses cabinet is the inclusion of 'storage drawers', mimicking the way that objects are housed within the restricted spaces of museum collections storage (in addition to the way that many objects were housed in historic cabinets of curiosities). Examples of fashion display that featured this strategy were discussed in the previous chapter. Although the drawers would be sealed with a layer of acrylic to prevent direct handling and theft, museologist Sandra Dudley argues that

‘haptic engagement is somehow much nearer as a prospect’ with objects in drawers rather than other forms of display cases (Dudley, 2014: 305). She further emphasises the elements of surprise and revelation that the drawers can elicit in visitors, noting that ‘the process of simply trying the drawers [is] itself a journey of discovery’ (Ibid.: 300).
The inclusion of ‘storage drawers’ is not an unusual technique within exhibitions, though it has not been utilised previously at MFIT. Eight of the twenty-nine front-end evaluation participants (twenty-eight percent) mentioned that they would expect to see objects in drawers within an exhibition on cabinets of curiosities. To draw attention to the drawers, I suggest flanking them with objects placed in individual, lit niches, similar to a design used in the Mark Dion exhibition *The Melancholy Museum* at the Cantor Arts Center at Stanford University (2019—present) (fig. 6.17). This would help to draw visitors’ eyes to the area, and text applied directly to the drawers (such as ‘please open’) would encourage participation.

Fig. 6.17

In-gallery view of *The Melancholy Museum: Love, Death, and Mourning at Stanford*, organised by Mark Dion (2019—) for the Cantor Arts Center at Stanford University, California. The spot lit objects on either side of the lower section of the case help to draw attention to its drawers. Photograph © Cantor Arts Center

As I mentioned in Chapter 3, 'Collection studies', my exploration of the MFIT collection resulted in the decision to curate four themed object groupings for this component of my exhibition, each of which will be placed in its own drawer. The themes include sea life, gold, pearls and mother-of-pearl, and animals and insects. Selections for these drawers can be viewed in the Checklist (Praxis G, object numbers 2.14 through 2.52). Adding an element of sound when visitors open the drawers might encourage further engagement; in accordance with the themes, I suggest waves crashing (the sea); coins jingling (gold); the shaking of a pearl necklace (pearls and mother-of-pearl); and bees buzzing (animals and insects).

Serendipitously, an employee at the organisation Tactile Images, which specialises in creating replicas of artwork for low- and no-vision museum visitors, contacted The Museum at FIT with an idea to replicate a garment in a similar manner[135] (fig. 6.18). Although the pursuit of that concept post-dates the completion of this thesis for reasons of funding and scheduling, I envision the final product to look somewhat like the stone relief carving of a Sofia Kokosalaki dress, made by Simon Ings and commissioned by Judith Clark for *The Concise Dictionary of Dress* (visitors were not able to touch this object) (fig. 6.19). A full-scale rendering of a pleated and structured gown by Madame Grès (see Checklist object number 2.5) might provide both sighted and non-sighted visitors with a sense of the intricacy of the gown's construction. Its Grecian influence would also relate to the interest in collecting Greek and Roman antiquities within the historic cabinets of curiosities. A few Tactile Images incorporate sound and smell, both of which will be discussed as options when this potential collaboration moves forward.

[135] The ways in which tactile images are made vary. As information design professor Yvonne Eriksson explains, 'Owing to the difference between visual and tactile perception, the image to be transferred to tactile form undergoes what is very often a radical transformation. The extent of the necessary reworking will depend on how complicated the original is and for whom the tactile picture is intended' (Eriksson, 2003: 103).

Fig. 6.18 (left) A portrait of Abraham Lincoln rendered by Tactile Images. This example includes six knobs (also identified in braille) that can be turned to provide audio information about Lincoln. Photograph © Tactile Images

Fig. 6.19 (right) A bas-relief style rendering of a draped gown by Sofia Kokosalaki, made by Simon Ings and commissioned by Judith Clark for *The Concise Dictionary of Dress* at the V&A. Although a tactile image has not been made using a garment (to the author's knowledge), it is predicted that the result would look similar to this artwork. A rendering of an intricately pleated dress by Madame Grès would lend itself to information about the designer and her processes, as well as Grecian fashion and the collection of antiquities within cabinets of curiosities. Photograph © Victoria and Albert Museum

Sound

Classen emphasises the role of touch in her article on early museums, but she also notes that practices of scientific inquiry were multisensory, including sound and smell (Classen, 2005: 275). In her writing about sensory perception within exhibitions, museologist Anne Pearson underscores the importance of an integrated experience that offered more than touch (Pearson, 2003: 41). Sound is also used within many museum exhibitions, though it is infrequently employed at The Museum at FIT (with the exception of themed soundtracks for some exhibitions that play softly over speakers in the main gallery).

Rather than merely 'apply' sounds to the exhibition experience (as I have suggested for the storage drawers), I

considered how some fashion objects act as sound makers. Many of our clothes make distinctive, familiar noises, from the closing of a zip to the swish of a taffeta ballgown. I selected a few MFIT objects that were designed to make sound, but that would typically remain mute if exhibited, such as a pair of Courrèges shoes with a large, brass bell over the vamp, a silk umbrella with a cello-shaped music box at its handle, and a textile woven from recycled cassette tapes with previously recorded audio (the textile can still be 'played' using a modified cassette wand). These objects could be exhibited alongside audio clips on iPads in the hope of inciting visitors' curiosity about the sounds each garment makes (see Checklist object numbers 2.6, 2.7, and 2.8).

Smell

In her analysis of the role of perfumes in high fashion, art and design historian Debra Riley Parr theorises that 'At a very primal level, textiles and scent wrap the body in ways that create borders and identities, protection and support' (Riley Parr, 2022: 159). I considered instead how I could use perfume to create something that would incite curiosity-seeking behaviour while relating to historical cabinets of curiosities. Gloves were collected in the cabinets (several examples of which were mentioned in Chapter 2), and I recalled the fashion for perfumed gloves in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe. Historian Anna Green writes that Catherine de' Medici is said to have introduced perfumed gloves to the French court from Florence during the 1550s. From there, they 'quickly spread across Europe among a social elite—both male and female—who could afford such luxuries' (Green, 2021: 50).

Green's mention of Catherine de' Medici, who was an avid collector of art and curiosities (Knecht, 1998: 241), piqued my interest. I then remembered that Santa Maria Novella, the Florentine apothecary founded in 1221, continues to sell 'Acqua della Regina', a perfume that Catherine commissioned in 1533. All of this information evolved into the idea to scent a pair of prop leather gloves with Acqua della Regina[136]. Special 'scent booths' built into The Senses cabinet (offered at two heights for the varying needs of visitors, including wheelchair users and children) will contain the (security-anchored) gloves, allowing visitors to peer in to see them and experience their scent. (Object label copy would include the historical context mentioned above.) The design for this portion of the cabinet was inspired by the 2012-13 exhibition *The Art of Scent, 1889-2012* at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York, where 'scent stations' built into the walls emitted wafts of perfumes when visitors peered inside. Although the gloves would be more 'manufactured' than other objects in The Senses cabinet, I believe this offering for visitors would be original and intriguing.

Smell is not only deeply personal, writes curator Andrea Lipps, but it is also the sense most linked to the evocation of memory. Yet she also cautions that:

> Smell is evasive. It lacks a vocabulary. To describe a smell is to dance around it. We reference its source (cut grass) or a physical property (effervescent). We borrow words from other sensations like taste (sweet), tactility (sharp), or vision (bright) (Lipps, 2018: 110).

[136] I have already experimented with scenting gloves using strips of perfume-saturated silk. The strips are placed inside the gloves, which are then placed in a sealed box for several weeks to absorb the scent.

Lipps's writing inspired the inclusion of an MFIT object, a copy of the 2003 issue of *Visionaire* magazine devoted to scent. Twenty-one perfumers created experimental fragrances for the issue, which were inspired by concepts such as 'cold', 'noise', 'heat', and 'hunger'. As part of a museum collection, the perfumes—housed in glass atomizers—will never be opened. Nevertheless, putting them on display as objects of 'sensory memory' provides an opportunity to ask visitors to consider their own personal, olfactory interpretations of the themes (see Checklist object number 2.12).

Praxis E3

Design brief: The Senses cabinet

DESIGN BRIEF #3
The Senses cabinet

Concept description

A cabinet centred on sensory engagement that will not cause damage to museum objects. (To be included in the main gallery).

Objective

Since museum objects cannot typically be handled by visitors, this cabinet will offer alternative sensory experiences for touch, sound, and smell that will help to incite visitor engagement and curiosity.

Content format

3D-printed replicas: To be placed within open compartments in the cabinet. These will need to be security anchored with enough extension to allow visitors to pick up the objects. The replicas should be adjacent to the original objects (displayed behind acrylic) for easy comparison.

Material samples: To be framed and anchored to the exterior of the cabinet near the object labels (for small samples) or secured to a custom stanchion (for larger samples). All samples will be placed near their corresponding ensembles, which will be behind acrylic.

Storage drawers: To be built into the lower half of the cabinet and functional. The objects inside will be protected by a layer of acrylic, and drawers will light up and make sound when opened. Attention will be drawn to the drawers by flanking them with objects displayed in individual, lit niches.

Tactile images: A touch-friendly replica of a Madame Grès garment will allow visitors to experience the density of its pleated fabric (created for blind or low-vision as well as sighted visitors).

Audio clips: Recordings of the sounds made by a selection of objects on view will be available on adjacent iPads.

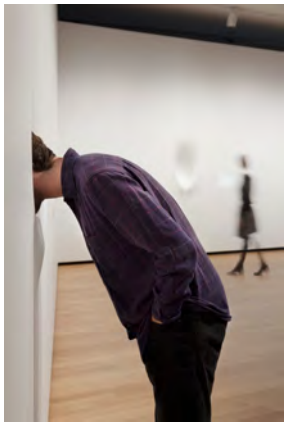
Smell: A pair of perfumed prop gloves will be placed in a specialised niche, allowing visitors to peer in to see the gloves and experience their scent.

Visual references

Above: A large touch sample of Iris van Herpen's iron and plastic material, on display in the exhibition *Iris van Herpen: Transforming Fashion* at the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, 2018.

Centre: A bas-relief style rendering of a draped dress by Sofia Kokosalaki, made by Simon Ings and commissioned by Judith Clark for *The Concise Dictionary of Dress* at the V&A (inspiration for a tactile image of a fashion garment).

Below: A 'scent station' at the exhibition *The Art of Scent, 1889-2012* at The Museum at Arts and Design, 2012, in which visitors positioned their heads within wall portals to experience scents.



Sample objects

Rose gold vinyl and rubber blend shoes by United Nude x Zaha Hadid, 2013
MFIT (to be reproduced using 3D printing)

A finely pleated silk and velvet Madame Grès dress from 1948, MFIT (to be recreated as a tactile image)

An 'audio flag' by Alyce Santoro, 2004, MFIT, made from recycled audio cassette tapes (a clip of the textile being 'played' will be included on an iPad)

The main gallery: 'Specimen' cabinet

Display types and apparatuses for mounting clothing objects must be considered within the exhibition. In her research on early fashion exhibitions, Petrov writes about the use of 'specimen mounts', described as:

> Garments and accessories pinned like entomological specimens [that] divorce the garment from its social context. The lightly padded flattened forms used in the V&A Costume Court throughout the 1970s drew attention to the surface decoration and silhouette of the fashionable carapace (Petrov, 2019: 83).

Petrov's description piqued my interest for its use of 'specimens', a word with scientific implications that recalls the natural history collections within cabinets of curiosities. It is notable that the Victoria and Albert Museum has not entirely eliminated this mode of display—when walking through its European Galleries in 2022, an eighteenth-century robe à la française was wall-mounted inside a narrow case, with only its back and sides visible. Appearing to be 'pinned' to the wall, with its wide, pleated panels of fabric extending downward like wings, this object immediately reminded me of the dress-as-specimen. This underscores the importance of mount-making to the way that a garment is 'read'—my mind was able to quickly transpose the characteristics of a small, entomological specimen onto a garment at human scale, based only on my familiarity of the way in which insects are often displayed. Although it is not assumed that all visitors to a fashion exhibition will possess this reference, the 'pinned specimen' is a non-invasive mode of display that is worth pursuing for those who do.

The Specimen cabinet may also display small objects (I have selected earrings) within glass jars to give the impression that they are 'floating' in formaldehyde. In reality, of course, there would no liquid within the jars, though an effect of condensation could perhaps be achieved with a clear, conservation-grade epoxy. I was particularly attracted to the displays of specimens at the Grant Museum of Zoology, London. The lack of uniformity in the appearance of the jars gave the impression that the specimens had been collected over a long period of time, and their variance in size and shape underscored that they had been individually selected to suit the items they housed. This mode of display within my Specimens cabinet would provide a reference to natural history museums, and it would help some visitors better comprehend the overall theme of the cabinet.

Finally, I am considering other unconventional strategies to display particular objects. For instance, the way that pleated silk Fortuny gowns are stored within the MFIT collection—twisted and coiled inside a tray to maintain their pleats—is reminiscent of a snake or a gastropod shell (fig. 6.21). An example could be displayed in this manner within the exhibition (visitors could also see how the garment looked on the body by accessing more information via a QR code). Other objects divorced from a corporeal context, such as a brown straw bonnet from circa 1850 with a shell-like shape (Checklist object number 3.7), and an 1870s bustle (Checklist object number 3.4, often referred to by fashion historians as a 'lobster tail' style), could be presented to convey a similar specimen-like appeal.

Praxis E4

Design brief: Specimen cabinet

DESIGN BRIEF #4
Specimen cabinet

Concept description

A cabinet featuring objects displayed in varied and unconventional ways, inspired by specimen mounts in natural history museums. (To be included in the main gallery).

Objective

Methods of display will allow fashion objects to be 'read' as specimens, based on their affinity to the types of mounts and/or their resemblance to objects shown in natural history museums. This will create a link between the exhibition and cabinets of curiosities, which often featured specimen collections.

Content format

Fashion specimens: Mounts will de-emphasise an object's relationship to the human body. Large-scale objects are flat-mounted or 'pinned' to the wall like insects, with only minor padding to provide the fabric with some support. Other objects have been selected for their resemblance to specimen types and are mounted to emphasise those likenesses.

Specimen jars: Small objects such as pieces of jewelry are displayed within glass jars, giving the impression that they are floating in formaldehyde. The effect of condensation can perhaps be achieved with a conservation-grade epoxy.

Visual references

Above: An 18th-century gown that appears 'pinned' to the wall like an insect, V&A, 2022.

Below: Jars of specimens on view at the Grant Museum of Zoology, London, 2022.

Sample objects

Fortuny, green silk gown, circa 1927. This dress is stored as pictured to maintain its pleats; it will be displayed as such within the exhibition because of its resemblance to a snake or a gastropod shell. MFIT

'Lobster tail' bustle, 1870-75, with collapsible wire hoops. To be shown with an invisible mount to divorce the object from the context of the body. MFIT

Ted Muehling, 'Moth Wing' earrings, c. 1979. To be suspended in a 'specimen' jar. MFIT

The main gallery: 'Hide-and-seek' cabinet[137]

Experimentation with the concept of deprivation may also encourage stimulus seeking behaviour among visitors. In his studies of curiosity, psychologist Jordan Litman describes the elimination of knowledge deprivation as an experience that is 'substantive, meaningful, and capable of increasing subjective feelings of competence, such as the answer to a complex question, a valuable fact, or solution to a difficult problem' (Litman, 2005: 799). Experimenting with methods of deprivation on a less complex level, and one that differently engages with the senses, could also prove effective for an exhibition design centred on curiosity.

I have devised several ideas for a Hide-and-seek cabinet within my exhibition. In the first concept, some objects would be visible only intermittently, using lights on a timer system that would divest viewers of a consistent or prolonged view. This was a technique used in Valerie Steele's 2008 exhibition *Gothic: Dark Glamour*. I observed visitors standing in front of the cases for unusually long periods, waiting to view the objects within them. Whether this was born of frustration or curiosity likely varied according to the visitor, but the strategy clearly inspired stimulus-seeking behaviour.

As I began to consider what types of objects to include in this part of the cabinet, I was reminded of a previous list I had made in the museum's database of trompe l'oeil designs—a personal interest that overlaps with 'objects of illusion' that were collected in the cabinets (Grinke, 2006: 9). For example,

[137] Although this cabinet centres on the concept of sensory deprivation, a colleague suggested this alternate title in my peer-to-peer evaluations of the theoretical exhibition, to be further explained in the Conclusion.

a Jean Paul Gaultier ensemble from 2002 is printed with what appears to be a pearl necklace at first glance (Checklist object number 4.16), while a cosmetics case from the late 1940s is designed to look like a camera (object number 4.21). I am hoping that the potential amusement proffered by objects that fool the eye—and therefore inspire closer looking—will be even more profound when the time to view them is restricted.

Secondly, restrictions to visual access could be created by placing a selection of objects within a portion of the cabinet with no large openings. Objects would be positioned behind the cabinet's walls and rendered visible only through peepholes, a technique that Clark employed in her *Spectres* exhibition. The peepholes would be located at numerous positions and levels to accommodate the varying sight levels of visitors and allow for differing perspectives of the objects. I aim to create a dramatic mise-en-scène that would be more challenging to create in the other, more compartmentalised spaces within the cabinets. After careful consideration, I decided on an 'aviary' using bird-themed and feathered fashions and accessories, in a nod to the demand for feathered objects, including fashions, within historic cabinets of curiosities (Françozo, 2016) (see Checklist object numbers 4.23–4.42).

The final technique in this cabinet centres on the idea of unveiling, achieved through curtains designed to be parted or moved aside to reveal an object. This idea was inspired in part by the 1822 painting *The Artist in His Museum*, a self-portrait by the American painter Charles Willson Peale, who founded

one of the first public museums in the United States[138] (fig. 6.20). The artist depicted himself lifting a red curtain to reveal the natural history museum he established in Philadelphia during the late eighteenth century. Sizable examples from his collection rest at his feet, and rows of specimens (as well as museum visitors) are clearly visible in the background. Viewers are provided with only a tantalising glimpse of one of Peale's most famed possessions on the middle right: the skeleton of a mastodon, which is still largely concealed by the curtain (Sues, 2020: n.p.). *The Artist in His Museum* is an image of welcoming and revelation, but the curtain also underscores a sense of discovery; it is furthermore evocative of the theatre and performance.

Fig. 6.20

Charles Willson Peale, *The Artist in His Museum*, 1822, oil on canvas. Peale's extensive ornithological collection is visible to the left, and the depiction of visitors (including a woman in fashionable dress) indicates its significance as an early public museum in the United States. Collection of Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia.

[138] The Philadelphia Museum (also known as Peale's Philadelphia Museum), opened in 1784.

The concealment of objects also correlates to conservation techniques: items that are particularly sensitive to light are occasionally displayed within exhibitions behind curtains or black-out panels. The protection of fragile objects reminds viewers that they are seeing something worthy of preservation. This is a centuries-old practice: in the collection of the British Museum, for example, the frame for an Egyptian painting dating to 50-70 CE was likely made with a (now missing) protective cover (British Museum, 'Painting': n.p.]. Concealment is also linked to pornography and voyeurism. The 2019-20 exhibition *Marché et demarché: un histoire de la chaussure* ('Walking and gait: a history of the shoe') at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, presented a history of footwear. One case featured numerous examples of historical and contemporary fetish shoes, revealed to visitors after they parted a curtain.

Although The Museum at FIT has a collection of fetish footwear, I do not intend to replicate that idea in my exhibition. Instead, a consideration of other types of objects that might allow visitors to feel they are seeing something 'prohibited' led to a selection that references human anatomy, such as skeletons and musculature. Yet again, such objects were chosen not only for their relevance to the theme of this cabinet within my exhibition, but also to the history of collections of curiosities, which often included human anatomical specimens (Bleichmar, 2021) (see Checklist numbers 4.1-4.9).

Praxis E5

Design brief: Hide-and-seek cabinet

DESIGN BRIEF #5
Hide-and-seek cabinet

Concept description

A cabinet designed to encourage stimulus seeking behaviour through the use of sensory deprivation techniques. (To be included in the main gallery).

Objective

Curiosity as a feeling of deprivation is triggered by the desire to fill a gap in knowledge. Design concepts have been devised to create feelings of sensory deprivation, with emphasis on sight. The intention is to evoke exploratory behaviour among visitors, while also providing them with a feeling of competency or satisfaction when deprivation is eliminated.

Content format

Lighting: One section of the cabinet features lights on a timer system, rendering objects visible only intermittently and intentionally depriving viewers of a consistent or prolonged view.

Peep holes: A portion of the cabinet has no large openings. Objects are visible only through peep holes placed at the back, front, and sides of the cabinet, located at differing sight levels, which will allow for varying perspectives of the objects on view.

Unveiling: The incorporation of curtains that must be parted or moved aside to reveal the objects inside the cabinet.

Visual references

Above: Fashions as they were visible through peep holes in the exhibition *Spectres: When Fashion Turns Back,* V&A, 2005.

Below: Fetish boots were revealed when visitors parted a curtain in the 2019-2020 exhibition *Marché et demarché: un histoire de la chaussure* at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs.

Sample objects

Arzu Kaprol, spring 2013 dress with cut-out skeleton design, MFIT (to be shown in the 'unveiling' section)

Bouchra Jarrar, autumn 2013 ensemble with rooster feather and rhinestone harness top, MFIT (to be shown in the 'peep holes' section)

Wadsworth, camera-shaped cosmetics case, 1949-50, MFIT (to be shown in the 'lighting' section)

The main gallery: 'Sensory overload' cabinet

Saturation or overload stands in opposition to deprivation. Berlyne suggests that extreme complexity or novelty can activate exploratory behaviour (Berlyne, 1960). Exhibition visitors are often provided with a limited view and/or scope of objects—they are visible only from certain angles, and the repetition of similar objects is often avoided in favour of variety. A 'Sensory overload' cabinet opposes those practices through strategies that offer multiple views of objects, in addition to deliberate duplication. This cabinet could be positioned adjacent to the Hide-and-seek cabinet for maximum contrast.

I suggest that this cabinet include portions that are double-sided, allowing visitors to see objects from the front and the back. Both views were not always available within cabinets of curiosities, nor are they usually seen within fashion exhibitions, which regularly feature mannequins lined up on plinths positioned against the wall. To permit a fuller understanding of certain objects, mirrors could also be placed within the cases. Flanking an object with two mirrors would create an 'infinity effect' that could result in sensory overload. Fashion theorist Flavia Loscialpo writes about mirrors and other optical devices in Clark's *Malign Muses*, and then traces the concept to early- to mid-twentieth-century exhibitions organised on Surrealist art and the Bauhaus movement (Loscialpo, 2016: 235). The overlap between museums and optical devices, however, can be traced all the way back to cabinets of curiosities, in which mirrors, lenses, telescopes, and similar apparatuses comprised their own collecting category (Aimi, de Michele, and Morandotti, 2017 [1985]: 26).

Furthermore, psychologist James J. Gibson writes of the curiosity that illusions can evoke:

> We have a special curiosity about a class of inaccuracies that are called illusions. They are usually not serious enough to be called misperceptions. Often we are aware of the illusion, as we are of the image in a mirror, the bent stick in water, the circular coin that looks elliptical … (Gibson, 1966: 287).

Although I believe that trompe l'oeil-style illusions are better positioned in the Hide-and-seek cabinet, the possibilities of mirrors and other optical tricks inspired a selection of objects that could compound these effects for the 'Sensory overload' cabinet. I have included fashions that may perplex and excite the eye, such as a 1960s silk qipao with an Op Art design (Checklist object number 5.3), as well as a circa 2013 dress by Tom Ford, embellished with mirrored fragments (object number 5.2).

The 'Sensory overload' cabinet also enacts a space to experiment with an idea discussed earlier in this chapter—symmetry and repetition, inspired by the presentations sometimes featured within historic cabinets of curiosities. Furthermore, psychological research suggests that order (or symmetry) plays an important role in processing visual stimuli. As one study determines, 'Processing fluency concerns the notion that although a visually complex stimulus may be difficult to process, when it is ordered in some way, individuals are likely to positively evaluate its aesthetics' (Jang, Baek, and Choo, 2018: 213).

The exhibition *Christian Louboutin—L'exhibition[niste]—Chapter II* (Grimaldi Forum, Monaco, 2022) displayed shoes

that fanned out in concentric circles, similar to the way that insects or minerals are sometimes shown in natural history museums. The significant quantity and dynamic arrangement of shoes presented a lot for the eye to absorb, despite the selection of objects in only neutral shades and their arrangement by type. A similar effect could be achieved with objects from MFIT. Returning to my research on the museum's underutilised collections outlined in Chapter 3, I suggest that a dynamic arrangement be created for a selection of earrings and brooches, inspired by displays at the Hall of Gems in the American Museum of Natural History, New York (fig. 6.21). Interestingly, I found duplicate examples of several styles of brooches, allowing me to position a symmetrical arrangement using nearly identical pairs of objects (fig. 6.22).

Fig. 6.21 (left): Artful displays of garnets at the American Museum of Natural History, New York, July 2023. Photograph by the author.

Fig. 6.22 (right): The author's experimentation with replicating the look of a natural history display using earrings and brooches from The Museum at FIT collection. Photograph by the author.

Praxis E6

Design brief: Sensory overload cabinet

DESIGN BRIEF #6
Sensory Overload cabinet

Concept description

A cabinet designed to create a sense of sensory overload or saturation. (To be included in the main gallery).

Objective

Exhibition visitors will be provided with a comprehensive view of objects. This cabinet is designed to render objects visible from the front and the back and offers additional views through the use of mirrors. A selection of fashions that may perplex and excite the eye through their patterning or materials will enhance optical effects. A sense of repetition will be fostered through the use of multiples of similar objects, such as small pieces of jewellery. The latter strategy mimics historical cabinets of curiosities, which sometimes featured collections of homogenous objects (e.g., seashells) displayed in artistic ways that highlighted their quantity and encouraged comparison.

Content format

Double-sided cabinets: Visitors will be able to see objects from both the front and the back.

Mirrored cabinets: Custom mirrors will be cut and placed inside individual compartments within the cabinet, flanking objects to create an 'infinity effect'.

Symmetry and repetition: Similar objects will be arranged in concentric patterns, referencing the displays of insects or minerals in natural history museums.

Visual references

Above: A display of insects at the Harvard Museum of Natural History.

Below: A detail of the exhibition *Christian Louboutin—L'exhibition[niste]—Chapter II* at the Grimaldi Forum, Monaco, 2022, with shoes arranged like an entomology display.

Sample objects

Qipao, op-art printed silk, 1960s, MFIT

Tom Ford, dress embellished with mirror fragments, ca. 2013, MFIT

The main gallery: 'Craftsmanship' cabinet

The next cabinet I propose did not stem from my research in psychology (though it does overlap with some psychological theory), but rather from my front-end evaluation interviews. Of the twenty-nine participants, eighteen mentioned their interest in learning about the craftsmanship and/or construction of an object, and twelve people expressed their curiosity about objects that are aesthetically detailed (interestingly, those twelve also mentioned craftsmanship and/or construction in their responses). For this reason, I have chosen to include a 'Craftsmanship' cabinet.

I employ the word craftmanship based not only on its usage by my participants, but also because of its associations with skilful construction and production methods (including handcraft) and luxurious fabrics (Aakko, 2019: 532). Sociologist Richard Sennett succinctly describes craftsmanship as 'the skill of making things well' (Sennett, 2008: 8), whereas Glenn Adamson describes craft as 'a way of doing things, not a classification of objects, institutions, or people' (Adamson, 2007: 4). The significance of the 'way of doing things' to our appreciation of an object was echoed in philosopher, psychologist, and educator John Dewey's early and influential writing about the aesthetic experience. He describes an intriguing (hypothetical) scenario: a 'finely wrought object' was discovered to be the product of nature rather than people, changing its status from fine art to natural 'curiosity'. This shift, he explains, was not simply one of classification. 'A difference is made in appreciative perception and in a direct way,' he writes. 'The esthetic experience—in its limited

sense—is thus seen to be inherently connected with the experience of making' (Dewey, 2005 [1934]: 50).

A Craftmanship cabinet also forms a link to historical cabinets of curiosities. Art historian Anthony Alan Shelton observes that artefacts during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance 'were valued for their marvellous or miraculous qualities—their magical reputations—manifested through the use of precious materials and the quality of craftsmanship' (Shelton, 1994: 178). Objects demonstrating technical innovation were also prized (Morrall, 2019: n.p.).

As I mentioned previously, miniature objects were frequently collected within cabinets of curiosities. Part of their ability to inspire awe was based on the precision and detail required for their creation. The Craftsmanship cabinet would provide a space for miniature objects to be appreciated. One example, a promised gift to the MFIT collection, is a miniature (charm-size) replica of a handbag from the spring 2019 'Magritte' collection by the Belgian brand Delvaux. It is made from black leather and emblazoned with the words 'Ceci n'est pas un Delvaux' in white letters across its face[139]. The full version of the bag measures 28 centimetres wide and 35.5 centimetres tall (including handle); its miniature counterpart is 7.5 centimetres wide and 8.5 centimetres tall (see Checklist object numbers 6.25 and 6.26).

[139] This is a play on the 1929 Magritte painting *The Treachery of Images*, which includes an image of a pipe paired with the words 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe' (This is not a pipe). Delvaux is a luxury brand that prides itself on its craftsmanship; the full-size 'Magritte' bag is made from sixty-four pieces of leather and retailed for more than $7,000 U.S. when it was released in 2019.

Despite its small size, the miniature bag demonstrates exceptional attention to craftsmanship (which could be best appreciated by offering visitors the use of a magnifying glass within the exhibition). As psychologist Carly Marie Manly explains, tiny objects 'draw our attention because they are extraordinary; the mind knows that the object is highly unusual in size while being familiar in design' (Manly in Yuko, 2022: n.p.). The juxtaposition of this small object with its full-size counterpart (which is also exquisitely made) would underscore the uncanny quality of the smaller object.

Furthermore, tools were collected in many cabinets of curiosities (Lasser, 2021: 237). A parallel idea could be devised in the Craftsmanship cabinet with an object from a pattern drafting set dating to 1886. The full set comprises five adjustable brass components—four for making bodices and one for making sleeves. The latter has a distinctive sleeve shape that renders it more recognisable to visitors, and I suggest that it be flat mounted against a wall in the cabinet. This tool, like those found in historic cabinets of curiosities, is both functional and aesthetically detailed (see Checklist object number 6.31).

In addition to miniatures and tools, The Museum at FIT collection includes innumerable objects with remarkable craftsmanship. To help frame my additional selections, I referred to the 2016 Costume Institute exhibition *Manus x Machina: Fashion in an Age of Technology*, which examined 'how fashion designers are reconciling the handmade and the machine-made in the creation of haute couture and avant-garde ready-to-wear' (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2016: n.p.). Curator Andrew Bolton organised garments into

categories including toile; tailleur (tailoring) and flou (drapery); pleating and folding; leatherwork and lacework; embroidery; featherwork; and artificial flowers.

I selected garments and/or accessories that I felt to be exemplary of these categories (with the exemption of tailleur and flou, which I felt were overly broad for my small cabinet) and created more specific subcategories focussed on materials (such as sequins or beads) or techniques (such as needlepoint or crochet). I further considered specific ideas that front-end evaluation participants mentioned—aesthetic detail, unusual or luxurious materials, and objects they had not seen before.

A proposed object for the Craftsmanship cabinet is a spring 2012 dress by Marc Jacobs for Louis Vuitton. A new acquisition to The Museum at FIT collection, it features broderie anglaise (a whitework needlework technique) overlaid with pale blue silk organza and a profusion of layered, dimensional plastic flowers embellished with studs and rhinestones (fig. 6.23 and fig. 6.24). The overall effect is dense and heavily detailed, but the large scale of the embellishment is such that it would not rely on strong eyesight and/or magnification of the decoration, offering a welcome break from the miniature items such as the Delvaux bag.

Fig. 6.23 (left): A dress by Marc Jacobs for Louis Vuitton, spring/summer 2012. The dress is crafted from off-white broderie anglaise, horsehair, pale blue silk organza, and layered, dimensional plastic flowers embellished with studs and rhinestones. Although the dress is contemporary in appearance, the detail of its craftsmanship relies on established techniques. Photograph © Yannis Vlamos/gorunway.com

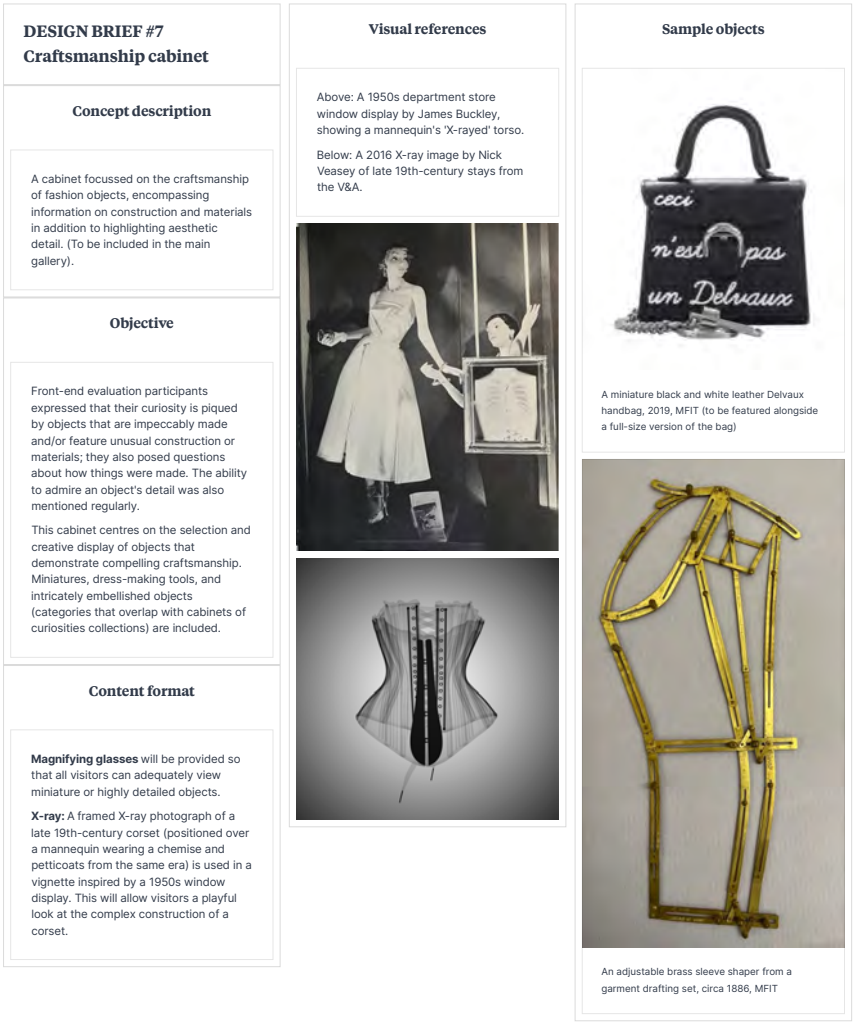
Fig. 6.24 (right): A detail of the embellishment on an example of the dress in The Museum at FIT collection, 2022.21.21, gift of Louis Vuitton. Photograph by the author.

Lastly, I have an interest in X-ray images of fashion, which can be used for conservation purposes (O'Connor and Brooks, 2007) or for aesthetic intrigue (such as the X-ray photography of Nick Veasey) (Veasey, 2007). In this instance, I was inspired by a photograph of a 1950s window display that featured a framed, mock 'X-ray' of a ribcage, positioned over a mannequin's torso to give the impression that viewers could see inside its body. A similar technique could be employed for the Craftsmanship cabinet, but I propose replacing the ribcage with an X-ray image of a boned, late-nineteenth-century corset (the construction of which could be fascinating to visitors) and centring the framed X-ray over a mannequin dressed in a chemise and petticoats from the same era. If this is not possible, I have selected a late nineteenth-century corset made from taupe cotton, onto which black sateen tape

has been applied over each row of boning, highlighting the garment's construction (see Checklist object number 6.1).

Praxis E7

Design brief: Craftsmanship cabinet



DESIGN BRIEF #7
Craftsmanship cabinet

Concept description

A cabinet focussed on the craftsmanship of fashion objects, encompassing information on construction and materials in addition to highlighting aesthetic detail. (To be included in the main gallery).

Objective

Front-end evaluation participants expressed that their curiosity is piqued by objects that are impeccably made and/or feature unusual construction or materials; they also posed questions about how things were made. The ability to admire an object's detail was also mentioned regularly.

This cabinet centres on the selection and creative display of objects that demonstrate compelling craftsmanship. Miniatures, dress-making tools, and intricately embellished objects (categories that overlap with cabinets of curiosities collections) are included.

Content format

Magnifying glasses will be provided so that all visitors can adequately view miniature or highly detailed objects.

X-ray: A framed X-ray photograph of a late 19th-century corset (positioned over a mannequin wearing a chemise and petticoats from the same era) is used in a vignette inspired by a 1950s window display. This will allow visitors a playful look at the complex construction of a corset.

Visual references

Above: A 1950s department store window display by James Buckley, showing a mannequin's 'X-rayed' torso.

Below: A 2016 X-ray image by Nick Veasey of late 19th-century stays from the V&A.

Sample objects

A miniature black and white leather Delvaux handbag, 2019, MFIT (to be featured alongside a full-size version of the bag)

An adjustable brass sleeve shaper from a garment drafting set, circa 1886, MFIT

The main gallery: 'Behind-the-scenes' cabinet

The final cabinet combines two previously mentioned ideas: the 'viewer's choice' crowdsourced initiative described earlier in this chapter, and the 'behind-the-scenes' exhibitions analysed in Chapter 5. Here, I propose creating a cabinet that mimics the appearance of collections storage at The Museum at FIT at a much-reduced scale. The cabinet would take the shape of a three-sided box with one side open (and covered in acrylic) to allow visitors to peer inside. The interior will include white metal shelving housing hats, shoe boxes, and handbags flanking bays of hanging garments.

The five 'winners' of the viewer's choice contest (from the initial choice of twenty, see Praxis G, Checklist, object numbers 7.1–7.20) will be displayed on mannequins beside a metal table that contains tools and materials used by conservators (such as scissors, a pincushion, tulle, and a roll of archival tissue), giving the impression that the mannequins have just been dressed for exhibition. A lab coat will hang on a coat rack nearby (an idea inspired by Mark Dion, whose installations regularly include utilitarian garments such as lab coats hanging from coat racks or pegs). This detail will help to remind viewers of the conservation work that goes into creating an exhibition (a subject about which visitors are often curious). It will also provide a space to underscore the connections between storage, study, and display inherent to the historic cabinets of curiosities. The tableau will further complement the aforementioned, adjacent exhibition on the history of collecting at MFIT.

Praxis E8

Design brief: Behind-the-scenes cabinet

DESIGN BRIEF #8
Behind-the- scenes cabinet

Concept description

A cabinet designed in the 'behind the scenes' exhibition design format, which mimics the look of collections storage. (To be included in the main gallery).

Objective

The experience of viewing a facsimile of the collections storage spaces at MFIT will prompt visitors to consider the conservation and curatorial processes that go into creating an exhibition. This will also be a space to spotlight 'viewer's choice' objects, the result of a crowdsourced initiative that allowed MFIT followers to vote on which five objects (from a selection of twenty) they would most like to see on view.

Content format

The cabinet will be presented as a three-sided box, with one side open (and covered in acrylic) to allow visitors to peer inside. The interior will be fitted to resemble MFIT collections storage. White metal shelving housing hats, shoe boxes, and handbags will flank bays of hanging garments. The five 'winners' of the viewer's choice contest will be displayed on mannequins beside a metal lab table that displays some of the tools and materials used by conservators, giving the impression that the mannequins have just been dressed for exhibition.

Visual references

MFIT collections storage

A detail of the installation *Mark Dion: The Octagon Room* at Mass MoCA, 2015. Dion's use of workwear to complete his 'vignettes' has inspired the inclusion of a conservator's lab coat on a coat rack.

The main gallery: conclusion

It could be argued that the varying means of interacting with an exhibition—especially in a modestly-sized space like MFIT's Special Exhibitions Gallery—could cause confusion, defined by the American Psychological Association as 'a mental disturbance characterized by bewilderment, inability to think clearly or act decisively, and disorientation for time, place and person' (American Psychological Association, 2022, 'Confusion': n.p.). Yet Rugoff writes about the potential benefits of bewilderment while experiencing an exhibition:

> Part of my definition of a memorable exhibition is that it leaves me slightly confused, yet not in such a way that I simply feel excluded or left out of the picture … it is precisely when we are unsure of something that our curiosity is aroused, and that we then tend to regard it more closely, consider it more carefully, and in the end, experience it more intensely (Rugoff, 2006: 48).

A scholarly study substantiates Rugoff's observation, indicating that confusion can enhance learning (D'Mello *et al*, 2014). Confusion is an epistemic emotion, meaning it is linked to advancements in knowledge and understanding. Other epistemic emotions include surprise and curiosity, fostering a clear link to this research (Vogl *et al*, 2019). As neuroscientist Delphine Genin writes, 'Emotions such as confusion can open up mental space for responding to new situations' (Genin, 2021: n.p.).

Based upon these theories, I hope that my overall strategy—the creation of a space that generally looks cohesive but is in fact quite variable—will create a sense of enjoyable confusion for viewers.

Praxis F

Compendium of curatorial strategies

My practice-led research into the intersections between museology and psychology—and how those ideas may be used to invoke curiosity within a museum setting—have resulted in the themes and corresponding design concepts and objects described above. Yet these intersections need not be considered exclusive to the creation of a fashion exhibition (theoretical or otherwise)—they could also be explored by other museum practitioners and applied to a variety of settings and objects. For this reason—in addition to ease of reference to readers of this thesis—I have crafted a compendium of curatorial strategies that can be applied to stimulate visitors' curiosity within a museum setting. Please note that the page numbers listed here reference exhibitions and publications as they are included in this thesis.

Strategy	**Corresponding museological/exhibition reference(s)**	**Corresponding psychological/sociological reference(s)**
Use of large-scale objects and/or replicas	*Promiscuous Assemblage, Friendship, and the Order of Things* (book and exhibition, Yale Center for British Art, 2009–2010, p. 139) *Orla Kiely: A Life in Pattern* (exhibition, Fashion and Textile Museum, 2018, p. 287) *Il Tempo e la moda* (exhibition, Florence Biennale, 1996, p. 289) Kenseth, *The Age of the Marvelous* (book and exhibition, Hood Museum of Art, 1992, p. 341) Falk and Dierking, *The Museum Experience Revisited* (book, 2013, p. 342)	Mack, *The Art of Small Things* (book, 2007, p. 279) Bitgood, Serrell, and Thompson, 'The Impact of Informal Education on Visitors to Museums' (book chapter, 1994, p. 342) Bitgood, *Attention and Value: Keys to Understanding Museum Visitors* (book, 2013, p. 342) Proulx, 'Size Matters: Large Objects Capture Attention in Visual Search' (article, 2010, p. 342)

Use of small-scale objects and/or replicas	Athanasius Kircher's 17th-century collection of curiosities (p. 139) *The House of Viktor and Rolf* (exhibition, Barbican Art Gallery, 2008, p. 280) *Orla Kiely: A Life in Pattern* (exhibition, Fashion and Textile Museum, 2018, p. 288) *Christian Dior: Designer of Dreams* (travelling exhibition, first on view Musée des Arts Décoratifs, 2018, p. 290) Kenseth, *The Age of the Marvelous* (book and exhibition, Hood Museum of Art, 1992, p. 341) Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (book, 2000, p. 344) Ramljak, 'Intimate Matters: Objects and Subjectivity' (book chapter, 2004, p. 345)	Mack, *The Art of Small Things* (book, 2007, p. 279) Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (book, 1966 [1962], p. 344) Manly in Yuko, 'This is Why Tiny Things Make Us So Happy' (article, 2022, p. 417)
Display of personal possessions from a notable figure	*Flair: Fashion Collected by Tina Chow* (exhibition, The Museum at FIT, 1992, p. 158) Quiccheberg, *Inscriptiones* (book, 2014 [1565], p. 162) *Lauren Bacall: The Look* (exhibition, The Museum at FIT, 2015, p. 170) *Appearances Can Be Deceiving: The Dresses of Frida Kahlo* (exhibition, Museo Frida Kahlo, 2012-2016, p. 254)	Newman, Bartels, and Smith, 'Are Artworks More Like People Than Artifacts?' (article, 2014, p. 258)
Inclusion of 'mystery', novel, or unfamiliar objects	*Fashion Detective* (exhibition, National Gallery of Victoria, 2014, p. 240) Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750* (book, 1998, p. 340) Spalding, *The Poetic Museum: Reviving Historic Collections* (book, 2002, p. 385) 'What is it?' (permanent exhibition, Victoria & Albert Museum, p. 386)	Berlyne, 'Determinants of Human Perceptual Curiosity' (article, 1957, p. 311) Forsythe et al, 'Predicting Beauty: Fractal Dimension and Visual Complexity in Art' (article, 2011, p. 345) Kidd and Hayden, 'The Psychology and Neuroscience of Curiosity' (article, 2008, p. 345) Vitz, 'Preference for different amounts of

		complexity' (article, 1966, p. 345) Armstrong and Detweiler-Bedell, 'Beauty as an Emotion: The Exhilarating Prospect of Mastering a Challenging World' (article, 2008, p. 345) Bruner, *Toward a Theory of Instruction* (book, 1966, p. 386) Berlyne, *Conflict, Arousal, and Curiosity* (book, 1960, p. 411)
Inclusion of familiar objects	Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (book, 2000, p. 345) Falk and Dierking, *The Museum Experience Revisited* (book, 2013, p. 346) Hein, *Learning in the Museum* (book, 1998, p. 346) Bedford, *The Art of Museum Exhibitions* (book, 2014, p. 346)	Berlyne, 'The Influence of Complexity and Novelty in Visual Figures on Orienting Responses' (article, 1958, p. 346)
Creation of an immersive environment	*Orla Kiely: A Life in Pattern* (exhibition, Fashion and Textile Museum, 2018, p. 287) McKenna-Kress and Kamien, *Creating Exhibitions: Collaboration in the Planning, Development, and Design of Innovative Experience* (book, 2013, p. 378) de Jong and Kossman, *Engaging Spaces: Exhibition Design Explored* (book, 2010, p. 379)	Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson, *The Art of Seeing: An Interpretation of the Aesthetic Encounter* (book, 1990, p. 317) Harvey *et al*, 'The Influence of Museum Exhibit Design on Immersion and Psychological Flow' (article, 1998, p. 378)
Use of cabinetry or vitrines to distinguish 'curiosities' within	Putnam, *Art and Artifact: The Museum as Medium* (book, 2009, p. 295) Laurencich-Minelli, 'Museography and Ethnographical Collections in Bologna During the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries' (book chapter, 2017 [1983], p. 360)	Rice *et al,* 'Appearance Wood Products and Psychological Well-Being' (article, 2006, p. 361)

	Moser, *Wondrous Curiosities: Ancient Egypt at the British Museum* (book, 2010, p. 361) Lasser, 'The Return of the *Wunderkammer*: Material Culture in the Museum' (book chapter, 2014, p. 361)	
Application of atmospherics/the emotional impact of environments to increase visitor attention	Forrest, 'Museum Atmospherics: The Role of the Exhibition Environment in the Visitor Experience' (article, 2013, p. 321)	Mehrabian and Russell, 'The Basic Emotional Impact of Environments' (article, 1974, p. 322) Kaltcheva and Weitz, 'When Should a Retailer Create an Exciting Store Environment?' (article, 2006, p. 322)
Asking questions of visitors via interpretive labels	Simon, *The Participatory Museum* (book, 2010, p. 336) Rugoff, 'You Talking to Me?' (article, 2006, p. 336) Serrell, *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach* (book, 2015, p. 336)	Berlyne, 'A Theory of Human Curiosity' (article, 1954, p. 336)
Juxtaposition and diversity of displayed objects	Bowry, *Re-thinking the Curiosity Cabinet* (PhD thesis, 2015, p. 359) Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750* (book, 1998, p. 359)	Berlyne, 'The Influence of Complexity and Novelty in Visual Figures on Orienting Responses' (article, 1958, p. 359) Bitgood, *Attention and Value: Keys to Understanding Museum Visitors* (book, 2013, p. 359)
Sensory engagement with objects	Levent and Pascual-Leone, 'Touch and Narrative in Art and History Museums' (article, 2014, p. 389) Howes, 'Introduction to Sensory Museology' (article, 2015, p. 389) Classen, *Touch in the Museum* (book, 2005, p. 390) Meadow, 'Prudence, *Techne*, and the Practice of Good Governance in the Early Modern *Kunstkammer*' (symposium presentation, 2019, p. 390) Tactile Gallery (permanent display, Louvre Museum, p. 392)	Koran et al, 'Attention and Curiosity in Museums' (article, 1984, p. 389)

Sensory deprivation	*Gothic: Dark Glamour* (exhibition, The Museum at FIT, 2008, p. 406) *Spectres: When Fashion Turns Back* (exhibition, Victoria & Albert Museum, 2005, p. 407)	Litman, 'Curiosity and the Pleasures of Learning: Wanting and Liking New Information' (article, 2005, p. 406)
Sensory overload (through the use of mirrors and optical effects)	*Malign Muses: When Fashion Turns Back* (exhibition, ModeMuseum [MoMu], 2005, p. 411) Loscialpo, 'From the Physical to the Digital and Back: Fashion Exhibitions in the Digital Age' (article, 2016, p. 411)	Gibson, *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems* (book, 1966, p. 412)
Incitement of numinous or awe-inspiring experiences	Latham, 'Numinous Experiences with Museum Objects' (article, 2013, p. 319) *America's Smithsonian* (travelling exhibition, first on view at the Los Angeles Convention Center, 1997, p. 319)	Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (book, 2008 [1990], p. 317) Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson, *The Art of Seeing: An Interpretation of the Aesthetic Encounter* (book, 1990, p. 317) Maslow, *Motivation and Personality* (book, 1970 [1954], pp. 317) Keltner and Haidt, 'Approaching Awe, a Moral, Spiritual and Aesthetic Emotion' (article, 2003, p. 320)
Free-choice learning	Falk and Dierking, *The Museum Experience Revisited* (book, 2013, p. 318)	Bitgood, *Attention and Value: Keys to Understanding Museum Visitors* (book, 2013, p. 310) Ryan and Deci, 'Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations: Classic Definitions and New Directions' (article, 2000, pp. 310, 318) Mehrabian and Russell, 'The Basic Emotional Impact of Environments' (article, 1974, p. 383)

Praxis G: Checklist

The selections for this checklist were informed by my practice-led research and the subsequent themes it suggested for the theoretical exhibition. Each object is pictured and given a basic description, rendering the document too large to be included in the body of this text. I have therefore included the Checklist at the very end of this document, following the Appendices.

Conclusion

Curatorial strategies will always rely on subjectivity, but my research into psychological studies, in addition to information gathered from my front-end evaluation research, have established a framework for the evocation of curiosity within a museum setting. The strategies for museum interpretation, exhibition design, object selection, and placement that these studies helped to shape are designed for a specific, theoretical exhibition. Yet I contend that many of my ideas could be applied more generally by museum practitioners who aspire to spark curiosity among their visitors. In summary, the application of psychology and the adoption of front-end evaluation—neither of which was previously incorporated into my practice—have allowed me to envision curatorial strategies that exceed the theoretical to become both tangible and adaptable to later exhibitions. Although the presence of this chapter relies on a culmination of the ideas presented elsewhere in this thesis, the broader outcomes are outlined in my final section, the Conclusion.

Conclusion

Reflections on the evolution of research

In conclusion, I will briefly summarise the research processes that led to new ways of thinking, allowed for the substantial expansion of my topic, and helped to develop my curatorial practice. Finally, I will suggest further avenues for research.

At the onset of this thesis, my director of studies posed an important question: what would make this research worthy of a PhD, rather than 'just' an exhibition? In the earliest phase of my work, that question proved challenging to answer. I began by conducting research that was largely historical in nature, and then put together a checklist that corresponded to my findings. Many of these selections were 'one-to-one' translations: the cabinet of curiosities collectors' interest in Egyptian antiquities, for example, could be represented by a handbag printed with Egyptian motifs. Although this approach could have resulted in an entertaining and educational exhibition, it would not have engaged with strategies for object selection, interpretation, and exhibition design far beyond what I have previously employed within my work.

Fortunately, the potential for an original contribution to knowledge presented itself within the first few months of my research. This centred on the need to define curiosity—a single word that has, in various forms, come to characterise this thesis. The search for a definition led to the discovery of psychological literature on the subject, and ultimately resulted in the interweaving of psychological theories of curiosity, museological findings on visitor engagement and interpretation, and fashion curation that I have described

throughout this thesis. These fundamental elements of my research were mirrored by the expertise of my advisors—psychologist Dr Soljana Çili, exhibition maker Dr Jeffrey Horsley, and curator Amy de la Haye.

Some of my earliest conclusions about curiosity—that it does not have a set definition, and that it is a relatively new focus of study among psychologists—could have acted as a deterrent. Instead, I viewed these resolutions as a positive quality within my research, as they allowed me to explore my own connections between curiosity and its potential applications to curatorial practice. This realisation also led to a small but significant change to the title of this thesis. I had initially endeavoured to *articulate* the quality of curiosity, but my research led me to the conclusion that such a task is too exacting, even for psychologists. I shifted instead to an *examination* of the quality of curiosity, which, as this text has evidenced, can take form physically, psychologically, and philosophically.

Although I maintain that there is no single way to define curiosity, its explanation by the American Psychological Association— 'the impulse or desire to investigate, observe, or gather information, particularly when the material is novel or interesting' (American Psychological Association, 2022, 'Curiosity': n.p.)—was of immediate interest for its potential relationship to exploratory behaviour in museums, as well as its emphasis on unusual objects. Through a mapping of related terms, I was able to articulate the goals for my theoretical exhibition: the promotion of exploration, observation, investigation, and learning. Although all of these have been integrated into my curatorial practice in the past,

my research for this thesis allowed me to consider them differently, with the consistent intention of evoking curiosity. Likewise, the intertwining of empirical research, theory, and exhibition analyses provided an informed framework for the construction of my own ideas.

Ultimately, my research for this thesis deterred me from approaching my subject in a way that was more surface than substance. My earliest ideas for conceiving of the theoretical exhibition largely corresponded to the physical characteristics of cabinets of curiosities. Although this path mirrored numerous, relatively recent publications on the subject (Demeulemeester, 2007; Davenne, 2011; Mauriès, 2011; Carciotto, Paolucci and Listri 2020), it did not address the more theoretical aspects of the cabinets. Engaging with the latter, I came to realise, would push my work in a more original and thought-provoking direction.

In a manner dissimilar from my typical curatorial practice, I shifted away from thinking closely about my object checklist at the beginning of the research process. Instead, I focussed on my original research questions, reiterated here:

1) What constitutes curiosity among museum visitors, and how can that quality manifest in fashion curatorial practice?

2) How can cabinets of curiosities be used to develop ideas for critical engagement within a fashion exhibition?

This change in thinking allowed me the space to examine psychological and museological texts through the lens of curiosity, and also to explore the topic of the cabinets themselves in greater depth. I am certain I will return to these ideas in future work.

Original contributions to knowledge

The foremost method of understanding historic cabinets of curiosities and their collections was to conduct research in extant catalogues and inventories dating from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries. Although I expected a few references to shoes, jewellery, and other objects of fashion or dressed appearance, it soon became evident that there were more examples than I had realised. My fascination with these catalogues and inventories—which could be accessed through online databases, even during global lockdown—led to my own inventory of fashion objects within prominent collections. This empirical investigation provides insights into some of the earliest documented examples of fashion collecting. The scope of this research comprises one element of my original contribution to knowledge.

The creation of the fashion inventories led to questions regarding the means by which objects were acquired, and also fuelled considerations regarding how (and how much) to acknowledge the cabinets' links to colonialism within my theoretical exhibition. Although theories on decolonising the field of fashion studies have accelerated during the twenty-first century, their potential application to curatorial practice is significantly less developed. Throughout the course of my writing on the subject of decolonising fashion studies

(Chapter 4), I present ideas as to how theory can be used to inform exhibition object selection, text, and interpretation. These concepts were enhanced by constructive conversations with front-end evaluation participants, the study of publications that address colonialism, and the analysis of previous strategies applied to MFIT exhibitions. Cumulatively, this research results in the creation of a framework that suggests ways for fashion curators of all backgrounds to be more inclusive and equitable in their practice, and I contend that this provides another original contribution to knowledge.

The third contribution to knowledge centres on the compendium of curatorial strategies presented in Chapter 6, Praxis F. As I began to research tangible ways to evoke curiosity within a museum setting, I discovered that although psychologists and museologists regularly present parallel ideas, these overlaps were not previously specified. Charting these correlative, interdisciplinary concepts strengthened my confidence in their effectiveness, and also highlighted myriad potential approaches to inspiring curiosity. Although this compendium is designed to enhance my theoretical exhibition—and I indicate numerous ways in which fashion objects and their display can be paired with the strategies presented—this compendium is not relegated to the display of fashion, nor to curators. It can be referenced by museum practitioners in numerous disciplines and positions who wish to inspire curiosity in the way they select, display, and interpret objects of many kinds, such as those in the natural sciences, archaeology, and anthropology. Therefore, it is hoped that this particular contribution to knowledge will be beneficial to the museum studies community more widely,

and I further hope that it can be expanded upon by myself and others in the future.

Developments in my curatorial practice

Although the contributions to knowledge outlined above summarise the core elements of my research, I encountered numerous shifts in thinking that are important, ancillary outcomes of this theoretical exhibition. Foremost among them was the richness of the information I received from front-end evaluation participants. In preparing my questions and the information for the object interviews, my initial sense was that I might gain insight into what potential museum visitors know about cabinets of curiosities, and what types of objects they were interested in seeing. In practice, their responses were much more rewarding and detailed than expected.

These evaluations resulted not only in the addition of the 'Craftsmanship' cabinet detailed in Chapter 6 (a theme I had not previously considered, despite its relationship to objects housed within cabinets of curiosities), but they also underscored the significance of addressing colonialism within this writing, where it was expanded to constitute an entire chapter. My participants' responses regarding colonialism further inspired an upcoming paper for a professional conference centred on decolonising and museums, where I will discuss how their responses, as well as existing theoretical writing on decolonising fashion studies, can be used to shape curatorial strategies.

Although the seven accessories discussed in the object interviews were selected early in my research process (by necessity of preparing my ethics forms for approval), the majority of the objects on the proposed checklist in Praxis G were added towards the end of my research process. The full selections bear a connection to the types of objects collected within historic cabinets of curiosities; they were also informed by my psychological research on curiosity, which suggested ideas for designing cabinets with a specific theme and/or function.

Although I have evidenced that I am always somewhat involved in the design of my exhibitions, research developed for this theoretical exhibition has allowed me to expand my processes (especially through creating design briefs that my colleagues can reference) as well as think more expansively about how visitors may interact with the design and the objects within the cabinets. Pairing a cabinet's concept with the types of objects on view (for example, including trompe l'oeil garments in a cabinet with lights on timers) provides a multi-layered—and hopefully curiosity-evoking—strategy of curation that I had no conception of at the beginning of this research.

Over the fifteen years I have worked as a curator, I have developed certain conventions (my own 'professional formulas', Staniszewski, 1998: xxiii) from which I rarely stray. For example, I have always ardently supported exhibitions with high volume of label copy, with the mindset that disinterested visitors can simply ignore what they do not wish to read. After conducting research for this thesis, however, I became concerned that visitors' perception of the 'workload'

necessary for such text may ultimately impede their curiosity (Rounds, 2004), which prompted me to rethink this practice. This change may seem marginally significant on paper, but it will in fact result in a substantial shift in how I interpret information for museum visitors.

Peer-to-peer evaluation

My work with front-end evaluation participants was extremely valuable, but their knowledge of the scope of my theoretical exhibition was limited. As themes for the exhibition developed and the checklist took shape, my director of studies suggested that I share my ideas with several trusted colleagues for their informal yet critical feedback. It is worth reiterating that although the ideas I present in this thesis form a theoretical exhibition, they will be applied to a physical exhibition at The Museum at FIT in spring 2025. At that time, an in-gallery survey, in addition to my direct interactions with attendees of in-gallery tours, will provide more formal evaluative measures. At present, however, the ideas outlined throughout this thesis remain theoretical.

I invited three colleagues of diverse personal and professional backgrounds: Darnell-Jamal Lisby, a curator; Julian Clark, a (retired) museum publications manager; and Loren Olson, an editor at a major publishing house. I have close professional and personal relationships with all three participants, which I felt would allow them to express their opinions more freely. They have varying expertise in fashion—Lisby works with a fashion collection at another museum; Clark was formerly employed at The Museum at FIT and maintains an understanding of the museum's collections and operations;

and Olson specialises in the publication of art and fashion books.

I made individual appointments with each colleague to visit my office, where we referenced the cork board with a working pin-up of exhibition themes and objects. I initially planned to explain only three of the cabinets—'What is it?', 'Specimens', and 'Hide-and-seek', each of which was strongly but distinctly representative of the exhibition's overarching theme. Yet each colleague asked questions about other parts of the theoretical exhibition, and I ended up describing the entire project and individual objects more thoroughly than anticipated. Their curiosity about the research as a whole was heartening, and showing them the full scope of my ideas for the theoretical exhibition, as it stood at the time of our discussion, led to more robust feedback. I have outlined a selection of that feedback below.

I first met with Lisby (Lisby, 2023: n.p.), who was particularly intrigued by the trompe l'oeil portion of the 'Hide-and-seek' cabinet. After careful consideration of the objects I had identified for potential inclusion, he suggested that I refine the selections. The resulting group, as it is represented in the checklist in the previous chapter, reflects our discussion about what might be most entertaining for visitors: a combination of objects deemed highly convincing (those we felt would be most perplexing to visitors) and designs that are much less convincing (which may provide visitors with a feeling of competency for being able to 'figure them out' so quickly). Lisby felt that the whimsy intrinsic to some of the less convincing objects was also evident in ideas such as the

earrings suspended in jars like specimens. Such playfulness, he felt, would allow visitors to feel at ease in the space.

Lisby observed that the cabinets and their contents felt interactive and would offer something with which any visitor could identify. He could imagine visitors asking, 'What is that?', 'How does that work?' or commenting 'That reminds me of…' He astutely commented that visitors' reactions to garments on display are often based on their personal taste and understanding, and that cabinets of curiosities collections were similarly based on individual preferences.

Intriguingly, one of Lisby's suggestions mirrored a comment I received from front-end evaluation participants. When considering the 'What is it?' section, he suggested that some object descriptions (intended to be located under a flip label) be accompanied by an illustration that would provide more context. Several front-end evaluation participants made similar observations; for example, one stated that his curiosity about an obsolete object such as the patch box would be further satiated by an illustration demonstrating how the patches were worn. I agree that this additional information would be useful and intend to implement this strategy when planning the physical exhibition.

Although Clark worked with MFIT curators for many years, he has less knowledge about individual fashion objects than Lisby, and I considered that a benefit to this research. He confessed that he was not familiar with most of the objects in the 'What is it'? cabinet, stating that he would 'be lingering there for a while' (Clark, J.H., 2023: n.p.). Since Clark had previously edited and formatted my MFIT exhibition text for

more than a decade, I was especially mindful of his warning against including too much text in this show—a statement that cemented my decision to avoid substantial object label copy.

Furthermore, Clark had worked as an installation specialist at MFIT for two decades prior to his role as publications manager and was thus familiar with a long history of its exhibitions. He remembered the timed lighting used in Valerie Steele's exhibition *Gothic: Dark Glamour*, which he felt was an intriguing technique to reintroduce (as I have proposed in Chapter 6). He also recalled an exhibition in Amsterdam that included the work of Issey Miyake (possibly the 1990 exhibition *Energieën* at the Stedelijk Museum) in which visitors could try on clothing. Recalling visitors' enjoyment of that option, he suggested I consider something similar for 'The Senses' cabinet. Overall, he felt that my proposed ideas were 'exciting, intriguing, and fascinating', and underscored that each object selection seemed interesting in its own right.

Olson, who is a regular visitor to MFIT exhibitions, felt that my proposed ideas reflected the research and time I had put into them, describing the exhibition as 'highly considered'. She, too, questioned the need for traditional labels for each object, as she thought a high volume of labels would impede a visitor's sense of exploration. Olson was especially drawn to the 'Specimens' cabinet, as she felt the connection to cabinets of curiosities was clear both visually and conceptually. She questioned the link between the historic cabinets and my work on the 'Senses' and the 'Craftsmanship' cabinets. After a brief discussion, she felt that link could be made evident through carefully crafted wall text.

Olson made a particularly valuable comment regarding what I now call the 'Hide-and-seek' cabinet, which was then labelled the 'Deprivation' cabinet. Although she understood the concept of the cabinet and the strategies it would employ to evoke curiosity, she was confounded by its name. Deprivation was, to her, an inherently negative appellation for what she understood as an enjoyable and intriguing part of the exhibition. I agreed with her assertion, and I decided to change the title within the theoretical exhibition to Olson's suggestion of 'Hide-and-seek' (though this title may change again in the physical exhibition).

Overall, my colleagues were highly enthusiastic about the theoretical exhibition. There was a consensus that while my ideas are appropriate and feasible for The Museum at FIT's audience and resources, they are also markedly different from previous exhibitions. This was not simply an exercise in receiving my colleagues' approval, however, but one that tested how easily I could describe my ideas, justify my choices, and respond to questions. Although my ideas for the exhibition are undoubtedly complex, I felt capable of explaining their relationship to both historical cabinets of curiosities and the psychology of curiosity. Questions and comments from Lisby, Clark, and Olson ultimately helped to corroborate my proposed contributions to knowledge.

Topics for further research

The scope of this research was ambitious. For the sake of conciseness and clarity, I did not include several avenues of research that piqued my interest but ultimately proved

secondary to my main arguments. These remain potential subjects for future research, and I have chosen to briefly summarise them here.

There is an overlap between collections of fashion in cabinets of curiosities and early costume books. In *Establishing Dress History*, Lou Taylor notes that early dress publications from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (the printing of which roughly overlaps with the dates of cabinets of curiosities) 'were to become a major source for the visual imagery upon which European notions of the barbarous and the exotic other were constructed' (Taylor, 2004: 5).

Several of these books included information on natural history, paralleling what was collected in the cabinets and rendering them 'visual travellers' tales' (Ibid.: 6). Furthermore, as professors Margaret Rosenthal and Ann Rosalind Jones remark in the reproduction and translation of artist Cesare Vecellio's *Habiti Antiche et Moderni*—a compendium of historical and global fashions from the late sixteenth century—European clothing at the time 'marked the gender, age, marital status, and rank of its wearers, and reflected their city or regional identity … To dress was to be *invested* with a public identity according to a system of fixed codes' (Rosenthal and Jones, 2008: 16). I want to study these texts using my expanded knowledge of the types of fashion collected within cabinets of curiosities—cross-referencing the types of objects shown, their geographical locations, and contemporaneous commentary about them. Despite my strong interest in this topic, a focus on curatorial strategies precluded the pursuit of this ancillary topic (which could likely form an entire thesis on its own) within this writing.

Similarly, I had considered applying semiotics to the analysis of various artworks related to the cabinets. These depictions would have included historical paintings of cabinets and anthropomorphised representations of cabinets. As my research evolved, I discovered that most of the paintings of cabinets were, like catalogue engravings, either partially or completely fictionalised. Although that is another compelling avenue of research, the paintings did not lend themselves to the more precise empirical research I aimed to collect on the cabinets—and I therefore reference them sparingly in this text.

I maintain a strong interest in artworks that represent the cabinet in human form, such as the 1936 Salvador Dalí painting *The Anthropomorphic Cabinet*. There are numerous iterations of this idea, some of which take a more literal shape. An example in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg from 1780 was created in the form of a fashionable woman, whose full skirt hides a series of drawers that house treasures (fig. Conclusion 1). When I mentioned my desire to examine these artworks more fully during my confirmation exam, my examiner, Claire Wilcox, suggested that this path did not bear an appropriately strong connection to my largely exhibition-centred research. I agree with her assessment, though I remain intrigued by these representations for future study.

Fig. Conclusion 1

A life-size figure of a fashionably dressed woman with pull-out drawers in her bodice, skirt, and the back of her head. As pictured, one drawer contains a clavichord—a type of instrument collected in cabinets of curiosities. Little is known about this intriguing, German-made woman-as-cabinet, which dates to circa 1780. Collection of Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg.

Finally, I would like to research the potential overlaps between the psychology of curiosity, museology, and well-being in future projects. Psychological studies have shown that many museum goers demonstrate intellectual curiosity, and that, in turn, visits to museums can contribute to an individual's well-being (Meyer *et al*, 2023: 2). The potential, positive effects of museums on personal, intellectual, social, and physical well-being is increasingly important within museological research. John Falk, whose work on museum learning provided a springboard for numerous ideas in this thesis, writes that 'I have come to believe that there is an even more basic value that sits at the heart of the museum experience—enhanced well-being' (Falk, 2022: n.p.).

Research further suggests a relationship between haptic engagement with museum objects and well-being (Willcocks, 2021: 13). This avenue of research and its specific relationship to fashion is yet to be examined, though my idea for public programming using the museum's study collection—mentioned in Chapter 3, 'Collections-related public programming'—provides a means to explore these connections in the future.

Final thoughts

Much as cabinets of curiosities are considered the foundation of modern museums, they also laid the groundwork for the formation of this thesis, and they allowed me to construct each of my chapters to build upon one another. An examination of the history of cabinets of curiosities in Chapter 2 lent itself to two specific outgrowths: the collection of fashion in museums (Chapter 3, 'Collection Studies') and the long-term implications (and potential mediations) of the colonialist legacy on collecting, studying, and exhibiting fashion (Chapter 4, 'Decolonising: Perspectives on Collecting and Curating Fashion'). The progressive enthusiasm for fashion display, when combined with recent, renewed interest in cabinets of curiosities, resulted in the analysis of related exhibition and retail display themes in Chapter 5, 'Fashion Display'. All of these ideas—from the collecting categories of historic cabinets to the late twentieth-century development of 'behind-the-scenes' exhibition designs—amalgamate into the exhibition strategies described in Chapter 6, 'Exhibition Interpretation and Design'. In this way, Chapters 2 and 6 act as bookends to this research.

The multifaceted topic of cabinets of curiosities could have taken many directions. Throughout my writing, therefore, I continuously questioned how the research I present here relates back to fashion, the psychology of curiosity, and tangible exhibition strategies. Although I recognise that the result is not exhaustive, the creation of this thesis was nonetheless highly rewarding, allowing me to explore the possibilities of curation and giving me the opportunity to foreground curiosity within my practice in novel, experimental ways.

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EXHIBITIONS

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A Tribute to the Black Fashion Museum. The Museum at FIT, New York, 7 April—2 May 1992.

About Time: Fashion and Duration. The Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 29 October 2020—7 February 2021.

Addressing the Century: 100 Years of Art and Fashion. Hayward Gallery, London, 8 October 1998—11 January 1999.

Adele Simpson: 1,001 Treasures of Design. The Museum at FIT, New York, 1 November 1978—6 January 1979.

Ain't Misbehavin': 1920s Richmond. The Valentine, Richmond, Virginia, 21 July 2020—28 March 2021.

Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty. The Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 4 May—7 August 2011; Victoria & Albert Museum, London, 14 March—2 August 2015.

America's Smithsonian, travelling exhibition to six locations in the United States, 1996–1998.

Appearances Can Be Deceiving: The Dresses of Frida Kahlo. Museo Frida Kahlo, Mexico City, 24 November 2012—2016.

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Fashion Detective. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia, 9 May—31 August 2014.

Fashioning Fashion: European Dress in Detail, 1700–1915. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, 2 October 2010—27 March 2011.

Flair: Fashion Collected by Tina Chow. The Museum at FIT, New York, 17 March—9 May 1992.

Folk Couture: Fashion and Folk Art. American Folk Art Museum, New York, 21 January—23 April 2014.

Fresh, Fly, and Fabulous: Fifty Years of Hip Hop Style. The Museum at FIT, New York, 8 February—23 April 2023.

Global Fashion Capitals. The Museum at FIT, New York, New York, 2 June—14 November 2014.

Gothic: Dark Glamour. The Museum at FIT, New York, New York, 5 September 2008—21 February 2009.

Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination. The Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 10 May—8 October 2018.

High Style: Betsy Bloomingdale and the Haute Couture. FIDM Museum, Los Angeles, 21 October—13 December 2009.

Hussein Chalayan: Récits de Mode. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 5 July—11 December 2011.

Il tempo e la moda, Florence Biennale, Florence, 20 September 1996—25 January 1997.

In America: A Lexicon of Fashion. The Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 18 September 2021—5 September 2022.

In Pursuit of Fashion: The Sandy Schreier Collection. The Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 27 November 2019—27 September 2020.

Iris van Herpen: Transforming Fashion. Grand Rapids Art Museum, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 23 October 2016—15 January 2017.

Jacqueline Kennedy: The White House Years. The Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1 May—29 July 2001.

La Licorne et le Bézoard. Musée Sainte-Croix and Espace Mendès France, Poitiers, France, 8 October 2013—16 March 2014.

La Mode Retrouvée: Les Robes Trésors de la Comtesse Greffulhe. Palais Galliera, Paris, 7 November 2015—20 March 2016.

Lauren Bacall: The Look. The Museum at FIT, New York, 3 March—4 April 2015.

Latin American Fashion. The Museum at FIT, New York, 5 March—13 April 2002.

Loca Miraculi: Rooms of Wonder. Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, August 2011—February 2014.

Malign Muses: When Fashion Turns Back. ModeMuseum (MoMu), Antwerp, 18 September 2004—30 January 2005.

Manus x Machina: Fashion in an Age of Technology. The Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 5 May—5 September 2016.

Marché et demarché, une histoire de la chaussure. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 7 November 2019—22 March 2020.

Masterworks: Unpacking Fashion. The Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 18 November 2016—5 February 2017.

Moda Hoy: Latin American and Latinx Fashion. The Museum at FIT, New York, 31 May 2023—30 August 2023.

Mrs Tinne's Wardrobe: A Liverpool Lady's Clothes, 1910–1940, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, UK, 17 November 2012—30 March 2014.

Native Fashion Now. National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian, New York, 17 February 2017—4 September 2017.

One Woman's Wardrobe: The Jill Ritblat Collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Victoria & Albert Museum, London, 20 March—25 October 1998.

Orla Kiely: A Life in Pattern. Fashion and Textile Museum, London, 25 May 2018—23 September 2018.

Ouverture pour Inventaire. Palais Galliera, Paris, 3 April—8 August 2004.

Promiscuous Assemblage, Friendship and the Order of Things. Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut, 24 September 2009—18 July 2010.

Proust's Muse: The Countess Greffulhe. The Museum at FIT, New York, 23 September 2016—7 January 2017.

Raid the Icebox 1 with Andy Warhol. Museum of Art at Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island, 23 April—30 June 1970.

Rara Avis: Selections from the Iris Barrel Apfel Collection. The Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 13 September 2005–22 January 2006.

Reinvention and Restlessness: Fashion in the Nineties. The Museum at FIT, New York, 19 January—17 April 2022.

Rock Style. The Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 6 December 1999—19 March 2000.

Rooms of Wonder: From Wunderkammer *to Museum, 1599–1899.* The Grolier Club, New York, 5 December 2012—2 February 2013.

Rosamond Purcell: All Things Strange and Beautiful. Geological Museum at the Natural History Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen. 2017—present.

Rosamond Purcell: Two Rooms. Santa Monica Museum of Art, Santa Monica, California, 17 May—9 August 2003.

Selection I: Backstage. ModeMuseum (MoMu), Antwerp, 21 September 2002—16 February 2003.

Shoes: Anatomy, Identity, Magic. The Museum at FIT, New York, 1 September—30 December 2022.

Spectres: When Fashion Turns Back. Victoria & Albert Museum, London, 24 February—8 May 2005.

Style and Splendour: The Wardrobe of Queen Maud of Norway. Victoria & Albert Museum, London, 2 February 2005—8 January 2006.

The Age of the Marvelous. Hood Museum, Hanover, New Hampshire, 21 September—24 November 1991.

The Art of Scent, 1889–2012, The Museum of Arts and Design, New York, 20 November 2012—3 March 2013.

The Ashmolean Story. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, UK, 3 October 2017—present.

The Concise Dictionary of Dress. Blythe House, Victoria & Albert Museum, London, 28 April—27 June 2010.

The House of Viktor and Rolf. Barbican Art Gallery, London, 18 June—21 September 2008.

The Library for the Birds and Other Marvels. Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York, 25 February—16 April 2016.

The Melancholy Museum. Cantor Arts Center, Stanford, California, 18 September 2019—present.

The Vulgar: Fashion Redefined. The Barbican Centre, London, 13 October 2016—5 February 2017.

Wunderkammer. Venice Biennale, Venice, 1 June—24 November 2013.

Wunderkammer: A Century of Curiosities. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 30 July—10 November 2008.

Yves Saint Laurent: 25 Years of Design. The Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 14 December 1983—2 September 1984.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Psychological definitions of curiosity and related terms

Exploratory drive: the motivation that compels an organism to examine its environment. The exploratory drive may be secondary to other drives, such as fear or hunger leading to exploration.

Observation: the careful, close examination of an object, process, or other phenomenon for the purpose of collecting data about it or drawing conclusions.

Investigatory behaviour: exploration of a new object or other aspect of the environment.

Learning: the acquisition of novel information, behaviors, or abilities after practice, observation, or other experiences, as evidenced by change in behavior, knowledge, or brain function.

Motivation: a person's willingness to exert physical or mental effort in pursuit of a goal or outcome.

Object: an entity in the environment (i.e., a thing, person, or condition) that acts as a stimulus and elicits a response from an organism; that is, a stimulus object; the focal target of attention, perception, or some other [psychological] process.

Knowledge: the state of being familiar with something or aware of its existence, usually resulting from experience or study; the range of one's understanding or information. In some contexts the words *knowledge* and *memory* are used synonymously.

Novelty: the quality of being new and unusual. It is one of the major determining factors directing attention.

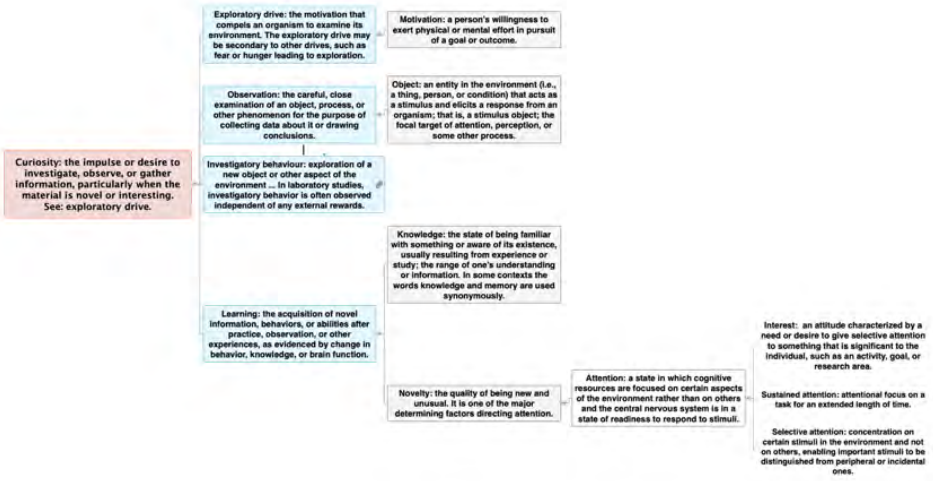
Attention: a state in which cognitive resources are focused on certain aspects of the environment rather than on others and the central nervous system is in a state of readiness to respond to stimuli. See: sustained attention, selective attention.

Sustained attention: attentional focus on a task for an extended length of time.

Selective attention: concentration on certain stimuli in the environment and not on others, enabling important stimuli to be distinguished from peripheral or incidental ones.

Interest: an attitude characterised by a need or desire to give selective attention to something that is significant to the individual, such as an activity, goal, or research area.

[all texts: American Psychological Association, 2022]


Curiosity: the impulse or desire to investigate, observe, or gather information, particularly when the material is novel or interesting. See: exploratory drive.
Exploratory drive: the motivation that compels an organism to examine its environment. The exploratory drive may be secondary to other drives, such as fear or hunger leading to exploration.
Motivation: a person's willingness to exert physical or mental effort in pursuit of a goal or outcome.
Observation: the careful, close examination of an object, process, or other phenomenon for the purpose of collecting data about it or drawing conclusions.
Object: an entity in the environment (i.e., a thing, person, or condition) that acts as a stimulus and elicits a response from an organism; that is, a stimulus object; the focal target of attention, perception, or some other process.
Investigatory behaviour: exploration of a new object or other aspect of the environment ... In laboratory studies, investigatory behavior is often observed independent of any external rewards.
Knowledge: the state of being familiar with something or aware of its existence, usually resulting from experience or study; the range of one's understanding or information. In some contexts the words knowledge and memory are used synonymously.
Learning: the acquisition of novel information, behaviors, or abilities after practice, observation, or other experiences, as evidenced by change in behavior, knowledge, or brain function.
Novelty: the quality of being new and unusual. It is one of the major determining factors directing attention.
Attention: a state in which cognitive resources are focused on certain aspects of the environment rather than on others and the central nervous system is in a state of readiness to respond to stimuli.
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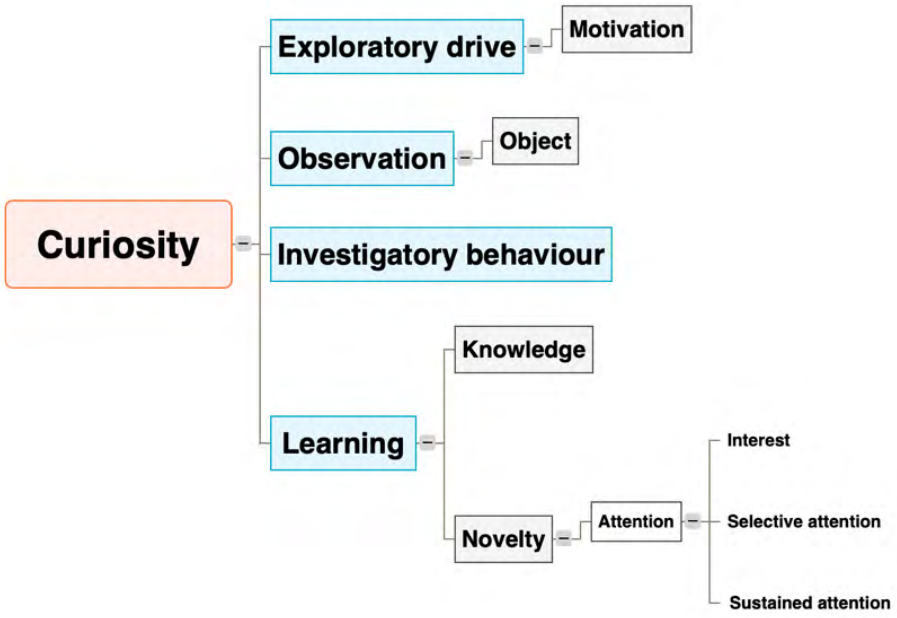
Sustained attention: attentional focus on a task for an extended length of time.
Selective attention: concentration on certain stimuli in the environment and not on others, enabling important stimuli to be distinguished from peripheral or incidental ones.


Curiosity
Exploratory drive
Motivation
Observation
Object
Investigatory behaviour
Learning
Knowledge
Novelty
Attention
Interest
Selective attention
Sustained attention

APPENDIX B: Statistics and further analysis from front-end evaluation interviews

Keywords (by number of mentions among twenty-nine participants)

Keyword	**Frequency**
Craftsmanship	15 (52%)
Materials/materiality	15 (52%)
Utility/functionality (questions about)	14 (48%)
Small objects	13 (45%)
Aesthetic detail	12 (41%)
Personal histories	10 (34%)
Construction/fabrication	9 (31%)
Unusual objects	8 (28%)
Never seen before	7 (24%)
Bright color	6 (21%)
Repurposed	3 (10%)
Handmade	3 (10%)
Designer/artist inspiration	3 (10%)
Sculptural	3 (10%)
Immersion	3 (10%)
Flow	3 (10%)

Demographics

Location:
The Americas: 94%
Europe: 6%

Age:
Average age: 55
Youngest participant: 22
Oldest participant: 74

Race/Ethnicity:
White: 94%
Asian/Asian British/Asian American: 3%
Hispanic or Latino/a: 3%

Gender Identity:
Female: 87.5%
Male: 9%
Gender-queer/Gender-fluid: 3.5%

Native language:

Native English speaker: 94%
Non-native English speaker: 6%

Highest degree attained:
2-year degree: 6.5%
4-year degree: 34%
Advanced degree (MS, MSc, MA, JD, MD, PhD, etc): 56.5%
High school degree or equivalent: 3%

Do you work in the arts?
Yes: 56%
No: 44%

Object interviews: final scores and observations

Masaya Kushino shoes (score 2.85)
Key points: strong interest in the use of human hair; numerous questions about functionality; intrigue about the juxtaposition of materials; conceptual and sculptural; 'creepy'; could also be read as misogynistic ('dangerous', reminiscent of foot-binding or fetish shoes)

Miser's purse (score 3.73)
Key points: numerous questions about functionality; unfamiliarity with this type of object; interest regarding its obsolescence; was frequently mistaken for a bow tie based on its shape; not strongly visually arresting

J. Smith Esquire top hat (score 3.77)
Key points: pronounced interest in the material and high quality of craftsmanship; bat artwork (positive response); bat artwork (negative response); graphic quality; sometimes read as a theatrical costume rather than fashion

Patch box (score 4.3)
Key points: questions about use; interest in small objects; could be easily overlooked within the context of display; less interesting for its appearance than its utility; beautiful hand painting/craftsmanship; would need some context to be understood; questions about the meaning of the phrase 'the reward of virtue'; interesting social history

Shaun Leane for McQueen earrings (score 4.35)
Key points: oversaturation on things related to McQueen; interesting mix of materials; 'too contemporary'; potentially controversial materials (taxidermic claws); 'grotesque and peculiar' (but not necessarily in a negative way)

Bustle (score 4.46)
Key points: interest in seeing something that was largely meant to be unseen; multiple references to its resemblance to a fishing basket and/or a handbag; interest in the materials and how the bustle was shaped; might require more context (e.g. a corresponding fashion plate) to be understood; too industrial; 'torture device'; not a beautiful object

B. Altman gloves (score 4.54)
Key points: less interesting because of their mass-manufactured quality; embroidered details of flies were intriguing but could be hard to discern; object was too 'face value' compared to the others; bright colour was appealing; some nostalgia from New Yorkers who remembered B. Altman

APPENDIX C: Examples of private collections of fashion that were incorporated into museum collections

Collector(s) or wearer	Current location	Related exhibition (if applicable)	Key source(s)
Irene Lewisohn (collector)	The Costume Institute (founding collection, 1946)	*Dress Rehearsal: Origins of the Costume Institute* (The Costume Institute, 2001)	Scaturro and Fung, 2016; Regan and Huber, 2019
Cecil Willet Cunningham (collector)	Fashion Gallery, Manchester Art Gallery (founding collection, 1947)	n/a	Cunnington, 1961
Doris Langley Moore (collector)	The Fashion Museum, Bath (founding collection, 1963)	n/a	Langley Moore, 1955; Langley Moore, 1969; Cumming, 2004; Majer, 2010
Shannon Rodgers and Jerry Silverman (collectors)	The Kent State University Museum (established 1982)	n/a	Kent State University Museum, n.d.
Tina Chow (collector and wearer)	The Museum at FIT (acquired 1992)	*Flair: Fashion Collected by Tina Chow* (The Museum at FIT, 1992)	Martin and Koda, 1992
Lady Jill Ritblat (wearer)	The Victoria and Albert Museum (acquired 1998)	*One Woman's Wardrobe: The Jill Ritblat Collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum* (V&A, 1998)	Victoria and Albert Museum, 1998; Reynolds, 1998
The Messel family (wearers)	Brighton Museum and Pavilion (acquired 1981 through 2005)	*Fashion and Fancy Dress: The Messel Family Dress Collection 1865–2005* (Brighton Museum and Pavilion, 2005–2006)	de la Haye, Taylor, and Thompson, 2005
Queen Maud of Norway (wearer)	Museum of Decorative Arts and Design, Oslo (acquired 1961 and 1991)	*Style and Splendour: The Wardrobe of Queen Maud of Norway* (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2005–2006)	Kjellberg and North, 2005
Iris Barrel Apfel (wearer)	Peabody Essex Museum (acquired beginning 2009; ongoing)	*Rara Avis: Selections from the Iris Barrel Apfel Collection* (The Costume Institute, 2005–2006); rotating selection in the Fashion and Design Gallery at the Peabody Essex Museum (2010–)	Boman, 2007; Peabody Essex Museum, n.d.

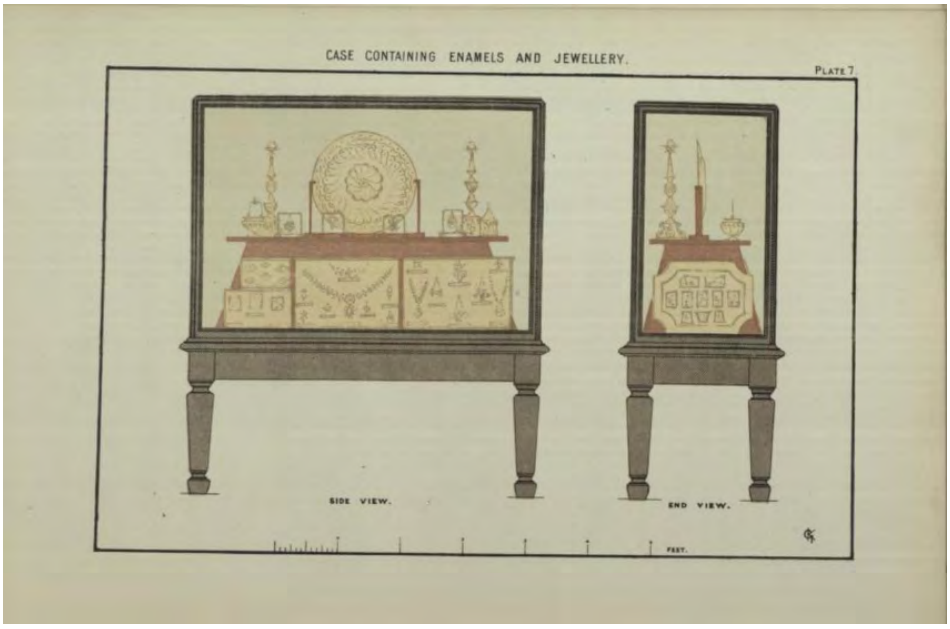
Betsy Bloomingdale (wearer)	Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising (acquired in multiple donations 1977–2009)	*High Style: Betsy Bloomingdale and the Haute Couture* (Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising, 2009)	Seward, 2009
Martin Kamer and Wolfgang Ruf (collectors)	Los Angeles County Museum of Art (acquired 2007)	*Fashioning Fashion: European Dress and Detail, 1700–1915* (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2010–2011)	Takeda *et al*, 2010
Emily Tinne (wearer)	National Museums Liverpool (acquired 1966, 2001, and 2003)	*Mrs Tinne's Wardrobe: A Liverpool Lady's Clothes, 1910–1940* (Walker Art Gallery, National Museums Liverpool, 2012–2014)	Rushton, 2006
Élisabeth de Caraman-Chimey, the Countess Greffulhe (wearer)	Palais Galliera (acquired 1964)	*La Mode Retrouvée: Les Robes Trésors de la Comtesse Greffulhe* (Palais Galliera, 2015–2016); *Proust's Muse* (The Museum at FIT, 2016–2017)	Palais Galliera, 'La mode retrouvée', n.d.
Sandy Schreier (collector)	The Costume Institute (promised gift 2019)	*In Pursuit of Fashion: The Sandy Schreier Collection* (The Costume Institute, 2019–2020)	Regan and Huber, 2019

APPENDIX D: References to 'South Kensington' museum cases

1.

A book from 1876 containing drawings of specialised cases used at the South Kensington Museum (later the Victoria and Albert Museum) to display varying types of artwork. The example in the image below, specified for displaying Limoges enamels, enamels and jewellery, and English porcelain, is the style used at Comme des Garçons's Trading Museum in Tokyo today. It was described in the book as a 'dwarf oblong case on a stand, with turned legs' (p. n. 26)

[Source: South Kensington Museum (1876) *Drawings of glass cases in the South Kensington Museum, with suggestions for the arrangement of species*. London: Vincent Brooks, Day and Son.]



2.

A late nineteenth-century treatise on cookery (this passage focusses on the International Health Exhibition, held in South Kensington in 1884):

'I was glad to see at the Health Exhibition a fine series of the South Kensington cases displaying in the simplest and most demonstrative manner the proximate analyses of the chief materials of animal and vegetable food …These cases show one pound of wheat, oats, potatoes, peas, etc., etc.'

[Source: Williams, W.M. (1884) 'The chemistry of cookery', *Popular Science Monthly*, 25 [Online]. Available at: https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Popular_Science_Monthly/Volume_25/September_1884/The_Chemistry_of_Cookery_XV]

3.

A compilation of Rudyard Kipling's essays and notes on his global travels during the late nineteenth century, demonstrating the early use of the South Kensington case style internationally:

'There is, in all honesty, no limit to the luxury of the Jeypore Museum. It revels in 'South Kensington' cases—of the approved pattern—that turn the beholder homesick, and South Kensington labels, whereon the description, measurements, and price of each object are fairly printed' (p.35).

[Source: Kipling, R. (2020) [1887] *From sea to sea: letters of travel*. Warsaw: Ktoczyta.]

4.
A late twentieth-century reference to a series of five related public exhibitions centred on participants' personal collections, staged at the Bargehouse in London's South Bank:

'This event, the "Museum of collectors", aimed to investigate collecting as a personal enthusiasm and indeed obsession. Forty-two collections were put on display, mostly belonging to local people, including such enthusiasms as plastic monsters, Dolly Parton, and buttons. Clare Patey worked with a team which included Cathy Wren, a designer with a theatre background. Each collection was given a discrete area, wittily installed, so that, for example, the plastic monsters were shown in traditional South Kensington cases'.

[Source: Waterfield, G. (1999) 'A whole new neighbourhood of art: Tate Modern invigorates the South Bank', *The Art Newspaper*, 31 May.]

APPENDIX E: Examples of MFIT label copy from the 2021 exhibition *Reinvention and Restlessness: Fashion in the Nineties*, as they were formatted for the exhibition.

Helmut Lang frequently utilized high-tech fabrics. For his spring 1991 collection, however, the designer selected an unconventional material from the past. "Paper" dresses, which were usually made from bonded synthetic fibers, were a short-lived but influential trend during the 1960s. Lang donated this dress to The Museum at FIT after reading about its collection of paper garments.

Helmut Lang
"Paper" dress
Black and white printed nonwoven material
Spring/summer 1991, USA
The Museum at FIT, 91.24.1, gift of Helmut Lang

In 1997, Maison Martin Margiela presented two collections inspired by the Stockman dressmaker's dummy. Introduced in 1867 by the French sculptor Frédéric Stockman, the now-familiar form was intended to standardize sizing among dressmakers. Margiela's interpretation drew attention to fashion's idealization of the female body, and also to the processes involved in constructing clothing.

Maison Martin Margiela
Tunic
Beige linen
1997, France
The Museum at FIT, 2008.91.1, museum purchase

Skirt
Black wool
Fall/winter 1997, France
The Museum at FIT, 2020.20.3, gift of David Moses

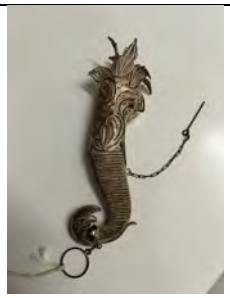
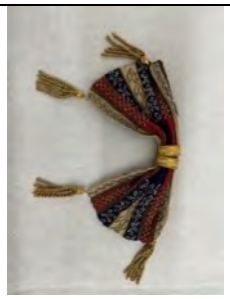
Praxis G
Checklist

INTRODUCTORY GALLERY

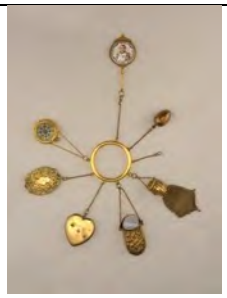
I.1		**Potential loan** **(from designer or V&A)** Valentino, autumn 2013 Dress: silk printed with 'curiosities' visible through a gold lace overlay
I.2 (Picturing the Cabinets)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2016.15.1 Alexander McQueen, spring 2003 Dress: blue, red, yellow and orange feather print chiffon; flyaway scarf panels at back shoulder; boned bodice, handkerchief hem
I.3 (Picturing the Cabinets)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2021.33.5 Comme des Garçons, spring 2018 Dress: multicolor brushed polyester printed with anthropomorphic vegetable and collage floral print of Emperor Rudolf II by Giuseppe Arcimboldo

I.4 (Picturing the Cabinets)		**Potential loan** **(from designer)** Giles, spring 2015 Dress: silk printed with oversize, swirling serpent motif
I.5 (A Problematic History)		**The Museum at FIT,** 77.146.2 Mme. Pauline, ca. 1955 Hat: black felt hat with rolled brim, trimmed across center front with bird of paradise that dips to either side

CABINET 1: WHAT IS IT?

1.1		**The Museum at FIT,** 82.127.1 Unlabelled, 19th century Posy holder: silver tone metal in cornucopia shape; body of looped metal; top and bottom in filigree stylized leaves
1.2		**The Museum at FIT,** 85.80.15 Unlabelled, ca. 1780 Busk: wood with lace-like linear carving and four pinholes
1.3		**The Museum at FIT,** P91.43.3 Unlabelled, 1888 Bustle: wire woven to form crescent tube; natural cotton tape forming a buckled waistband, attached with loop at top centre and stitched to attached side bands
1.4		**The Museum at FIT,** 2008.18.3 Unlabelled, 1820-1830 Bag: miser's purse in red, blue, cream stripe silk knit with metallic gold detailing; embroidered with gold and silver cut steel beads; gold/brass bead tassels
1.5		**The Museum at FIT,** P85.35.9 Unlabelled, 1855-1862 Calash: green silk taffeta; sides and top shirred on and between five wire hoops held together at center back; long self-fabric ties

1.6		**The Museum at FIT,** 2012.9.5 Unlabelled, 1837–1901 Lorgnette: gold metal, collapsible hinged eyeglasses inside a decorative case; attached to necklace of scrolling relief design
1.7		**The Museum at FIT,** 2019.85.2 Unlabelled, late 18th to early 19th century Muff: bright pink chenille edged in grosgrain ribbon and two bows; lined in ivory silk
1.8		**The Museum at FIT,** 77.225.46 Unlabelled, mid-19th c. Bracelet: braided human hair with gold fittings; large central knot with sprig of berries; pair of quadruple puffs at each side with gold barrel fittings between
1.9		**The Museum at FIT,** 2004.1.1 Unlabelled, ca. 1900 Bust bodice: unbleached cotton muslin over metal boning
1.10		**The Museum at FIT,** 80.131.7 Patch box: green and white enamel; painted with the phrase 'The Reward of Virtue' [Miniature: length: 2.5 cm width: 2.5 cm height: 1.5 cm]

1.11		**Potential loan** (from Cooper-Hewitt) Unlabelled, mid-19th c. Chatelaine: silver, gold wash, ivory, enamel, and glass
1.12		**Potential loan** (from New-York Historical Society) Unlabelled, 1500-1650 Knitting sheath: carved boxwood
1.13		**Potential loan** (from New-York Historical Society) Unlabelled, 1820-1870 Milliner's head: carved red pine
1.14		**Potential loan** (from New-York Historical Society) Unlabelled, ca. 1880 Glove fastener: gold, multicolour enamel

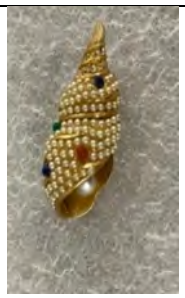
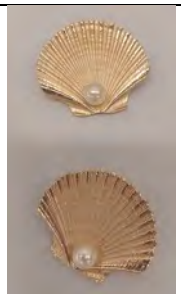
CABINET 2: THE SENSES

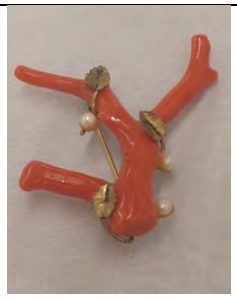
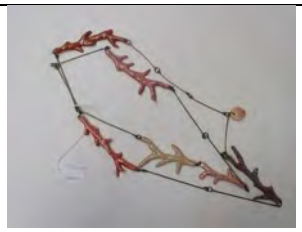
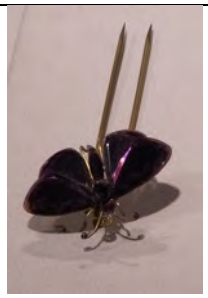
2.1 (Touch)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2013.83.1 Hadid/United Nude, 2013 Shoes: rose gold chromed vinyl and rubber blend with hidden fiberglass structural support [To be replicated using 3D printing; original object to be shown behind acrylic]
2.2 (Touch)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2019.20.1 Alexander McQueen, 2017 Bag: knuckle duster; hard shell covered in ivory silk satin with red lace overlay; lacquered red metal knuckle ring handle in the shape of roses and a skull [To be replicated using 3D printing; original object to be shown behind acrylic]
2.3 (Touch)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2017.6.2 Iris van Herpen in collaboration with Jolan van der Wiel, 2014 Shoes: 'Magnetic Motion' wedge platforms made in metal powder, polyurethane, metal and leather [To be featured alongside a touchable swatch of the material; original object to be shown behind acrylic]
2.4 (Touch)		**Potential loan** (from designer) Comme des Garçons Homme, autumn 2022 Suit: jacket and knee-length shorts made from grey synthetic fabric; densely padded and engineered to create a raised circular pattern [To be featured alongside a touchable swatch of the material]

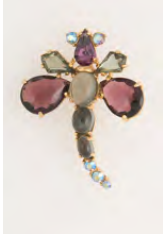
2.5 (Touch)		**The Museum at FIT,** 91.253.1 Madame Gres, 1948–1949 Dress: deep red velvet and knife pleated silk jersey, curved lapels and cap sleeves; calf length skirt with full jersey front overskirt, self-covered contour buckle belt [To be replicated as a touchable object via Tactile Images; original object to be shown behind acrylic]
2.6 (Sound)		**The Museum at FIT,** 83.164.2 Courrèges, spring 1969 Shoes: orange leather slip on flats with flat heel and square toe with brass plaque at tabbed throat; large brass ball with bell [Audio clip of bells to be featured on an iPad]
2.7 (Sound)		**The Museum at FIT,** 87.96.3 Saks Fifth Avenue, ca. 1958 Umbrella: red taffeta; wood handle in shape of violin with functioning music box [Audio clip of music box to be featured on an iPad]
2.8 (Sound)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2006.33.4 Alyce Santoro, 2004 Textile: woven flag with wefts made from recycled cassette tapes that had music previously recorded; hand screened circles [Audio clip of the object as it sounds when 'played' to be featured on an iPad]

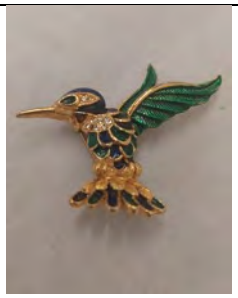
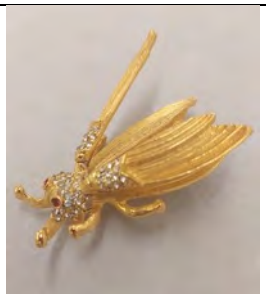
2.9 (Sound)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2020.23.1 Loewe, spring 2021 'Show-in-a-Box': collection issued during the Covid-19 pandemic; white cardboard box containing a miniature, pop-up runway set and collection looks; inspiration booklet; fabric swatches; a pattern for a top; a cardboard record platter features the show's soundtrack [Clips from the show's soundtrack to be featured on an iPad]
2.10 (Sensory memory)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2013.72.2 Calvin Klein, autumn 2012 Suit: polyester in shades of grey and white; printed to look like television static [Visitors will be prompted to recall the sound of television static]
2.11 (Sensory memory)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2004.2.1 *Visionaire*, December 2003 Magazine: 'Scent' issue; white vinyl case containing white felt book of 21 photographs on various themes; and corresponding set of 21 perfumes in glass atomizers. Themes include cold, noise, heat, hunger, gigabyte, 2am, sadness, success, broken glass, and others [Visitors will be prompted to imagine what the themed scents might smell like]

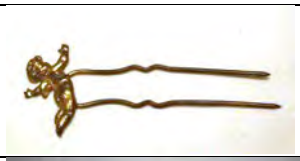
2.12 (Sound)		**Potential loan** (from designer) Lulu Guinness, 2023 (reissue) Birdcage bag: embroidered satin box bag; plays a bird song when a button at the bottom of the bag is pushed [Audio clip of bird song to be featured on an iPad]
2.13 (Smell)		**Prop leather gloves** to be scented with Acqua della Regina perfume from Santa Maria della Novella, Florence
2.14 (Sea life drawer)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2018.12.25 Versace, ca. 1980 Bag: gold tone hard metal clam shell minaudière with orange rhinestones
2.15 (Sea life drawer)		**The Museum at FIT,** 86.91.9 Yves Saint Laurent, 1985 Necklace: gold metal chain choker with light orange/peach faceted plastic gems, red and pink painted ceramic shells

2.16 (Sea life drawer)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2020.10.30 Christian Lacroix, spring 1988 Earrings: gilt metal shells with dangling clusters of porcelain branch coral and rhinestones
2.17 (Sea life drawer)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2020.10.31 Christian Lacroix, spring 1988 Earrings: dangling clusters of faux branch coral, poured glass coral beads and faux pearls and shells of varying shapes
2.18 (Sea life drawer)		**The Museum at FIT,** 89.143.3 Unlabelled, 1950s Necklace: beaded brown cotton net with shells, cork, purple, orange and bronze-tone metallic fish-shaped charms
2.19 (Sea life drawer)		**The Museum at FIT,** U.2464 Unlabelled, ca. 1980s Brooch: gold tone metal tulip shell with seed pearls and rhinestones; scattered blue, green, orange faux stones; single larger pearl inside the shell
2.20 (Sea life drawer)		**The Museum at FIT,** U.2470 Unlabelled, ca. 1980s Earrings: gold tone metal in the shape of oyster shells, each with a single pearl at center bottom
2.21 (Sea life drawer)		**The Museum at FIT,** U.2465 Unlabelled, ca. 1980s Brooch: gold tone metal clam shell with rhinestones and single turquoise stone at top of shell

2.22 (Sea life drawer)		**The Museum at FIT,** 77.216.19 Unlabelled, ca. 1968 Earrings: gold metal; three jointed fish hanging from clip back
2.23 (Sea life drawer)		**The Museum at FIT,** 81.60.66 Unlabelled, 1960s Brooch: red coral with three pearls and gold leaves
2.24 (Sea life drawer)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2020.10.34 Chloé, autumn 1994 Necklace: porcelain coral branches or twigs in shades of pink and coral connected with silver-tone metal wire links
2.25 (Animals and insects drawer)		**The Museum at FIT,** 75.87.14 Unlabelled, ca. 1920 Pendant: celluloid scarab with green and black body and tan wings
2.26 (Animals and insects drawer)		**The Museum at FIT,** 77.225.32 Unlabelled, ca. 1890 Hat pin: brass wire with purple glass butterfly held to pin with springs

2.27 (Animals and insects drawer)		**The Museum at FIT,** 88.95.2 Judith Leiber, 1983 Bag: gold metal minaudière shaped as a rabbit; embellished with rhinestones
2.28 (Animals and insects drawer)		**The Museum at FIT,** 93.60.19 Unlabelled, ca. 1979 Necklace: diamante 'snake'; lariat-style with pointed gold metal snake head and tail at ends, linked with large concealed hook
2.29 (Animals and insects drawer)		**The Museum at FIT,** 93.79.26B Napier, ca. 1979 Brooch: turtle in gold-tone metal filigree with green stone eyes
2.30 (Animals and insects drawer)		**The Museum at FIT,** U.2469 Unlabelled, ca. 1950s Dress clips: gold tone metal in the shape of beetles; blue and clear rhinestones set all over the back
2.31 (Animals and insects drawer)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2018.12.3 Versace, ca. 1992 Necklace: gold-tone metal and metallic leather choker necklace; jeweled panther head and tear drop fringe in red and clear rhinestone crystals
2.32 (Animals and insects drawer)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2019.31.60 Fabrice, 1980s Brooch: wood lady bug, gold stud eyes and gold and blue rhinestone bezel dots at body
2.33 (Animals and insects drawer)		**The Museum at FIT,** P83.30.1 Schiaparelli, 1945-1949 Brooch: gold-tone dragonfly with purple, grey and blue glass stones

2.34 (Animals and insects drawer)		**The Museum at FIT,** U.2467 Unlabelled, ca. 1980s Brooch: gold tone metal hummingbird; green and blue enamel feathers; rhinestones on head and neck
2.35 (Animals and insects drawer)		**The Museum at FIT,** U.2466 Unlabelled, ca. 1950s Brooch: gold-tone metal winged cicada; clear rhinestones on head and wings; red rhinestone eyes
2.36 (Gold drawer)		**The Museum at FIT,** 91.186.114A Carolyn Roehm, ca. 1988 Necklace: collier-style of 'molten' gold metal discs encrusted with rhinestones; iridescent stones and gray pearls; graduated and linked
2.37 (Gold drawer)		**The Museum at FIT,** 93.60.38 Unlabelled, ca. 1985 Bracelet: curved cuff of honeycombed gilt metal encrusted with large rhinestones
2.38 (Gold drawer)		**The Museum at FIT,** 95.37.20 Hattie Carnegie, ca. 1943 Perfume bottle: metallic gold glass in the shape of a female bust; Art Deco styling

2.39 (Gold drawer)		**The Museum at FIT,** 95.90.3 Hattie Carnegie, 1960s Ornament: gold metal in the shape of a safety pin; rhinestone encrusted head [Oversize (15.25 cm)]
2.40 (Gold drawer)		**The Museum at FIT,** 95.90.16 Hattie Carnegie, ca. 1950s Hair pin: gold metal decorated with a flying cherub
2.41 (Gold drawer)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2011.22.1 Duvelleroy, early 20th c. Fan: gold metallic silk net, embroidered and beaded in a floral design; intricately carved amber colored celluloid frame; cream silk cut-out work; tiny sequins and star shaped sequins overall
2.42 (Gold drawer)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2020.10.4 Unlabelled, 1980s Brooch: gold-tone metal mesh bow pin with solid center knot, trim and hardware
2.43 (Gold drawer)		**The Museum at FIT,** P85.61.5 Paul Monroe, 1985 Earring: gilt plastic cup and saucer, spoon, and star with rhinestones
2.44 (Pearls and mother-of-pearl drawer)		**The Museum at FIT,** P91.94.1 Unlabelled, ca. 1950 Bracelet: white and gold-tone baroque pearls on gold metal chain

2.45 (Pearls and mother-of-pearl drawer)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2019.31.10 Ted Muehling, ca. 1979 Earrings: gold with white Biwa pearl drops, gold wire
2.46 (Pearls and mother-of-pearl drawer)		**The Museum at FIT,** 93.60.41 Unlabelled, ca. 1960 Brooch: large baroque teardrop-shaped faux pearl with pearl and rhinestone trimmed "flames" at top
2.47 (Pearls and mother-of-pearl drawer)		**The Museum at FIT,** 98.77.4 Manolo Blahnik, 1998 Shoes: gold metallic lizard skin mules with paisley shaped vamp; ornament of faux pearl and crystal teardrops and gold beads
2.48 (Pearls and mother-of-pearl drawer)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2002.28.1A Opera glasses: mother of pearl set in brass metal frame and hinged handle
2.49 (Pearls and mother-of-pearl drawer)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2019.31.54 Fabrice, 1980s Brooch: brass and silver metal with cherry shapes in mother of pearl, brown wood and grey agate or abalone stones
2.50 (Pearls and mother-of-pearl drawer)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2007.63.5A & B Lawrence Vrba for Miriam Haskell, 1970s Necklace and bracelet: two strand faux pearl choker necklace with gold filigree and six teardrop-shaped pearl medallions flanking one larger medallion at centre front; three strand gold tone chain link bracelet embellished with faux pearls and rhinestones

2.51 (Pearls and mother-of-pearl drawer)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2019.31.49 Ted Muehling, ca. 1979 Brooch: pearl branch with dangling baroque pearl, gold bar pin closure
2.52 (Pearls and mother-of-pearl drawer)		**The Museum at FIT**, 85.56.426 Unlabelled, late 19th/early 20th c. Buttonhook: silver with mother-of-pearl handle

CABINET 3: SPECIMENS

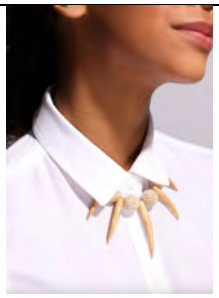
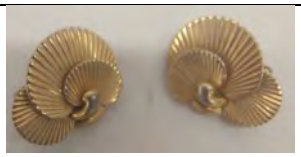
3.1		**The Museum at FIT,** 2017.46.1 Unlabelled, 1750s Robe à la française: lace-patterned Spitalfields silk with dense stylised flowers and foliage in ivory; details in green on rose pink satin ground trimmed with serpentine ruching [To be hung with light padding and shown from the bac]
3.2		**The Museum at FIT,** 95.77.3 Versace, spring 1995 Dress: butterfly printed white rayon/spandex blend [To be flat mounted]
3.3		**The Museum at FIT,** 98.50.1 Vivienne Tam, spring 1998 Dress: strapless, column style with large-scale, printed design of a Tibetan tiger in shades of orange, gray and black on nylon net [To be flat mounted]

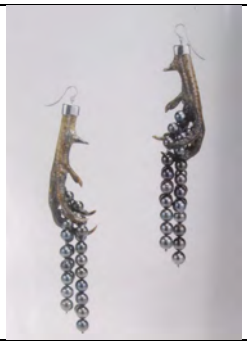
3.4		**The Museum at FIT,** 80.262.1 Fortuny, ca. 1930 Dress: pale green silk pleated 'Delphos' gown with coordinating sash [Displayed similar to photo: twisted and coiled]
3.5		**The Museum at FIT,** 2002.29.1 Unlabelled, 1870–1875 Bustle: tan polished cotton, back hoops inserted into tape runners [Invisible mount (no mannequin)]
3.6		**The Museum at FIT,** 91.241.131 Charles James, 1956–1957 Dress: 'La Sirène' in taupe silk crepe; sleeveless floor length tapered sheath with shoulder straps, multiple horizontal released pleats at centre front; gathered centre back seam releasing to fishtail hem [Invisible mount (as pictured)]
3.7		**The Museum at FIT,** 82.224.1 Unlabelled, late 1860s Hoop: cage crinoline constructed from a series of wire hoops suspended on five cotton tapes from buckled waist band [Suspended using invisible mount]

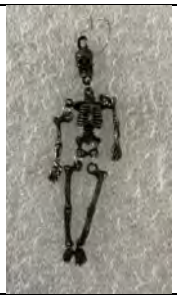
3.8		**The Museum at FIT,** P89.40.60 Unlabelled, ca. 1850 Bonnet: brown straw, tan cord, beige threads [Displayed without head form to emphasise shell-like shape]
3.9		**The Museum at FIT,** 2016.46.25 Ohne Titel, spring 2012 Choker: taupe alligator skin with taupe feather plume fringe [Displayed as in photo (upside down)]
3.10		**The Museum at FIT,** 2018.3.3 Shaun Leane, 2014 Anklet: 'Silver Tusk' oval ankle band applied with graduated silver tusks with single long spike; safety chain closure [Displayed as in photo (as a sculptural form)]
3.11		**The Museum at FIT,** 81.61.24 Schiaparelli, 1930s Compact: brown enameled brass; chestnut shape and color with chain and belt clip; down puff and mirror inside [Miniature: 13 cm tall x 6 cm wide]
3.12		**The Museum at FIT,** 2008.58.46 Otto Lucas, ca. 1958 Hat: taupe fur felt in the shape of a beehive, embellished with three gold metal bee pins with pearl heads. [Displayed without head form]

3.13		**The Museum at FIT,** 71.254.136 Unlabelled, late 1960s Bags: double pouches; ivory satin with multicolor beaded starburst motif; gold metal fine chain handles linked to heavy chain wrist loop
3.14		**The Museum at FIT,** 2007.46.86 Emme, 1962 Hair comb: flower ornament of brown lacquered horsehair
3.15		**The Museum at FIT,** 82.237.13 Elsa Peretti, ca. 1971 Bag: large abalone shell with brown leather trim, tab and strap, silver metal hardware
3.16		**The Museum at FIT,** P91.102.1 Mary Wright, ca. 1940 Bag: strawberry-shaped basket bag in red looped wood splints; hinged top and braided natural straw loop handle

3.17		**The Museum at FIT,** 2019.4.1 Masaya Kushino, 2010 Shoes: 'Ceryneian Hind' platform lace-up ankle boots in black leather, lamb fur, and stingray, three point resin antler at heel's outer side, metal ornament at centre back lower heel
3.18		**The Museum at FIT,** 2008.5.1 J Smith Esquire, 2007 Hat: pigskin top hat tattooed with the image of a bat; sterling silver frame; black leather whip-stitch trim
3.19	 Beetle Juice Brooch Beetle, silver, resin, cubic zirconias, lacquer, steel	**Potential loan** (from designer) Marta Mattsson, date unknown Brooch: 'Beetle juice' design; Beetle, silver, resin, cubic zirconia, lacquer, steel
3.20		**Potential loan** Susanna Bauer Framed artwork: 'Everything That Surrounds Us'; dried leaves with crocheted borders
3.21		**Potential loan** (from New-York Historical Society) Unlabelled, 1860-1880 Brooch: rock crystal quartz, amethyst, and gold with amethyst 'fly'

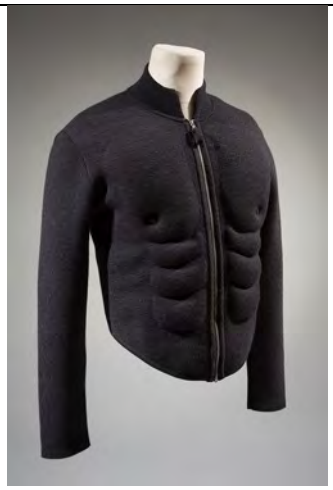
3.22		**Potential loan** Rahul Mishra, 'Weigala' dress, 2023 Dress: densely embroidered 'leaves' made from shades of green, pink, and gold
3.23		**Potential loan** (from designer) Niio Perkins, 2023 Necklace: 'Claw' design; bear claws and white glass beads
3.24 (Jar)		**The Museum at FIT,** U.2472 Origin unknown Earrings: gold-tone metal; three petal stylized floral or fan shape
3.25 (Jar)		**The Museum at FIT,** 75.161.19 Unlabelled, ca. 1950 Earrings: gold metal in half circle shape edged with metal ropes and rhinestones; mesh chain tassel [Display single earring]
3.26 (Jar)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2005.93.1 Napier, ca. 1965 Earrings: gold metal geometric pendants of graduated half-domes on a chain of gold balls; clip back [Display single earring]

3.27 (Jar)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2019.31.8 Ted Muehling, ca. 1979 Earrings: 'Turret' style in sterling silver spirals with gold wire
3.28 (Jar)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2019.31.7 Ted Muehling, ca. 1979 Earrings: 'Moth Wing' style in gold with a cluster of quartz and amethyst stones at center, gold backings
3.29 (Jar)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2019.31.11 Kai-yin Lo, 1990s Earrings: gold dangling wire cage encasing a pearl bead, milky quartz stone, and rock crystal bead [Display single earring]
3.30 (Jar)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2019.31.14 Tiffany, 1980s Earrings: 14 karat gold; swirling, fluted ribbon fan design
3.31 (Jar)		**The Museum at FIT,** P85.13.24 Unlabelled, ca. 1865 Earrings: braided human hair with gold fittings, with three acorn shaped drops
3.32 (Jar)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2018.3.2 Shaun Leane, autumn 2001/2002 Earrings: pheasant claws grasping four strands of 32 Tahihtian pearls (each earring) set in silver mounts [Display single earring]

3.33 (Jar)		**The Museum at FIT,** U.2473 Origin unknown Earring: single, silver tone metal; shaped like an articulated skeleton; wire loop

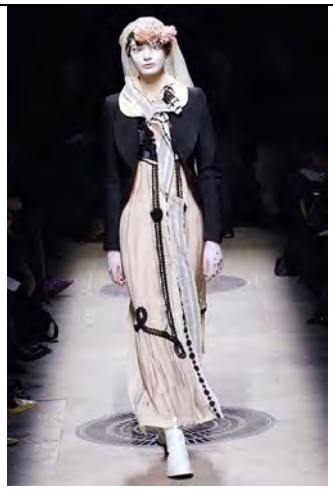
CABINET 4: SENSORY DEPRIVATION

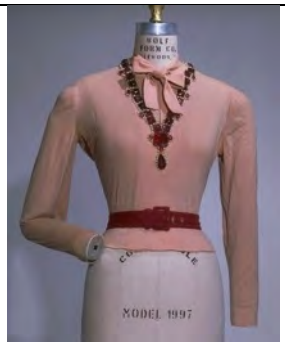
4.1 (Behind the curtain)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2011.30.1 Rodarte for Target, 2009 Dress: mini-length, sleeveless sheath dress in black polyester crepe chiffon, covered with black sequins over front dress panel; white sequins form a trompe l'oeil 'X-ray' image of a ribcage
4.2 (Behind the curtain)	 	**The Museum at FIT,** 2012.4.2 (top) and 2012.12.4 (trousers) Jean Paul Gaultier, spring 2010/spring 2009 Top: blue and white synthetic knit printed with muscles and veins; top is slashed and draped Trousers: navy blue wool and nylon blend with attached cage-like, boned waistband

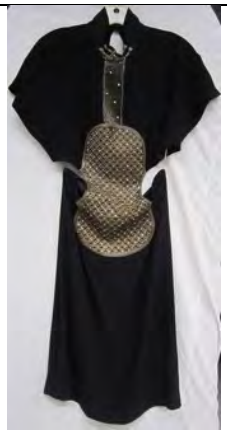
4.3 (Behind the curtain)		**The Museum at FIT,** 91.256.1 Jean Paul Gaultier, 1991 Man's sweater: dark grey wool with trapunto method creating the effect of a man's muscular torso
4.4 (Behind the curtain)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2007.2.1 Yohji Yamamoto, autumn 2006 Three-piece suit: black silk crepe oversized jacket; sleeveless collared shirt with attached 'cage' corset on exterior; long asymmetrical skirt with self-covered whalebone band at left hip
4.5 (Behind the curtain)		**The Museum at FIT,** 89.98.2 Moschino, 1989 Man's swim trunks: black Lycra with silver metallic fig leaf appliqué at center front

4.6 (Behind the curtain)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2015.31.1 Arzu Kaprol, spring 2013 Dress: metallic rose gold leather with skeletal cut out design; full-length; form-fitting
4.7 (Behind the curtain)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2012.4.4 Jean Paul Gaultier, spring 2004 (re-edition of 1990 design) Pantsuit: black linen, double breasted jacket with open ribbed cage-like back, matching wide, straight-legged trousers
4.8 (Behind the curtain)		**Potential loan** (from designer) Dilara Findikoglu, autumn 2023 Dress: black satin with silver 'skeleton' and other embellishments crafted from cutlery

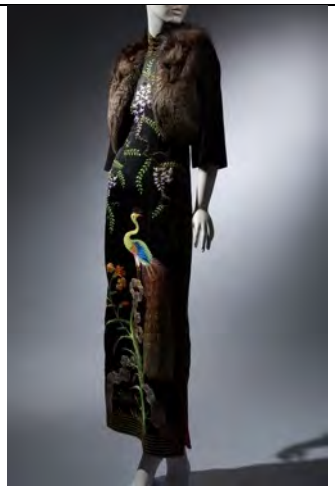
4.9 (Behind the curtain)		**Potential loan** (from designer) Off-White (Ibrahim Kamara), spring 2023 Suit: black wool embroidered with an abstracted design of the female body in white thread
4.10 (Lights on timer)		**The Museum at FIT, 2002.67.1** Roberta di Camerino, 1973-74 Shirtdress: gray, black, pink and red printed polyester jersey with trompe l'oeil design; printed to look like a three-piece skirt suit with a cummerbund
4.11 (Lights on timer)		**The Museum at FIT, 2002.67.12** Roberta di Camerino, ca. 1972 Tote bag: black canvas printed with tan trompe-l'oeil drawing of flapped satchel with buckled straps, luggage tag and logo
4.12 (Lights on timer)		**The Museum at FIT, 98.25.1** Hermès, 1970-71 Scarf: silk velours au sabre printed with trompe l'oeil design of tassels and other passementerie

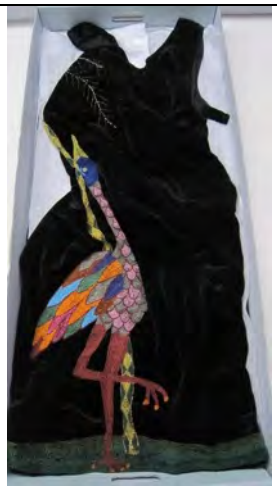
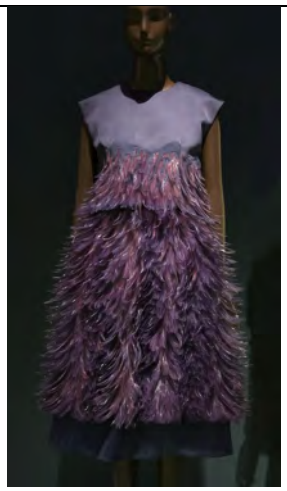
4.13 (Lights on timer)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2012.57.3 Maison Martin Margiela, 1990s T-shirt: white cotton knit with trompe l'oeil image of buttoned shirt, vest with pocket chain, and fringed scarf in shades of grey
4.14 (Lights on timer)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2015.89.4 Jean Paul Gaultier, ca. 1994 Man's jeans: ivory cotton jeans with trompe l'oeil blue jeans print
4.15 (Lights on timer)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2005.80.1 Comme des Garçons, autumn 2005 Ensemble: ivory silk dress stitched to black wool/rayon twill jacket; dress with printed trompe l'oeil pattern of ruffles at hem
4.16 (Lights on timer)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2009.16.26 Jean Paul Gaultier, autumn 2002 Ensemble: multiple trompe l'oeil designs: pearl necklace and black lace on sleeveless bodysuit; teal blue silk floor length skirt printed to look like an open skirt with legs beneath; separate sleeves with precious stone bracelet print in black, grey, white, emerald and topaz

4.17 (Lights on timer)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2018.71.2 Ralph Rucci, autumn 2016 Dress: columnar evening gown with chiffon overlay featuring an oversize, abstracted image of a woman's face [Best observed at a distance; to be positioned at a high point in the cabinet]
4.18 (Lights on timer)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2014.63.6 Louis Féraud, ca. 1989 Dress: black and tarnished gold synthetic brocade; appliqued overall in a beaded and sequined pocket watch and chain link design
4.19 (Lights on timer)		**The Museum at FIT,** 84.228.1 Norell, ca. 1943 Blouse: pink wool jersey with faux pearls, pink and dark red plastic faceted 'stones', tie front; long sleeves; red wool jersey belt with self-covered buckle

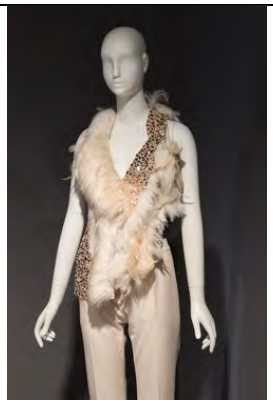
4.20 (Lights on timer)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2016.91.1 Chloé, 2012 (re-edition of 1983 design) Dress: 'Angkor' design in black crepe with gold beaded violin in bugle beads, rhinestones and metallic thread, cut-out side midriff and back
4.21 (Lights on timer)		**Potential loan** (from designer) Thom Browne, spring 2022 Man's dress: screen printed to resemble a toga
4.22 (Lights on timer)		**Potential loan** (from designer) Mary Kantrantzou, autumn 2012 Dress: one-piece garment made with an engineered pattern to give the impression of a multi-piece ensemble

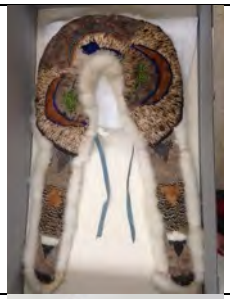
4.23 (Peep holes)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2007.46.69 Adolfo, 1962–64 Headdress: stuffed bird head, pheasant feathers and cascading white coq feathers
4.24 (Peep holes)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2013.79.2 Bill Cunningham, 1970s Capelet: guinea feathers with rust feather accents; brown velvet ground fabric
4.25 (Peep holes)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2014.6.1 Bill Cunningham, date unknown Table: wood covered with feathers; three corners have pheasant heads
4.26 (Peep holes)		**The Museum at FIT,** P90.11.1 Unlabelled, ca. 1889 Dolman: warp printed ivory silk satin with weft pile of colourful humming birds and butterflies; olive velveteen appliqué along centre front, collar, back, and cuffs, with embroidery, and seed beads; silk plush and beaded ball trim

4.27 (Peep holes)		**The Museum at FIT,** 88.91.1 Rudi Gernreich, ca. 1965 Ensemble: brown jersey floor-length gown and brown marabou feather jacket
4.28 (Peep holes)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2018.52.3 Chado Ralph Rucci, autumn 2006 Dress: mini-length, strapless with ostrich feathers on silk ground fabric
4.29 (Peep holes)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2017.57.1 Unlabelled, ca. 1937 Qipao: black crepe back satin with multi-colored, hand-embroidered design of wisteria flowers, peacocks and garden motifs

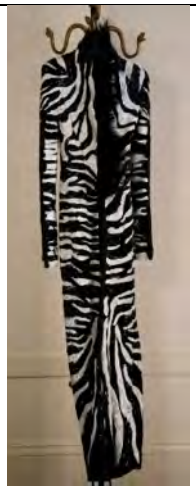
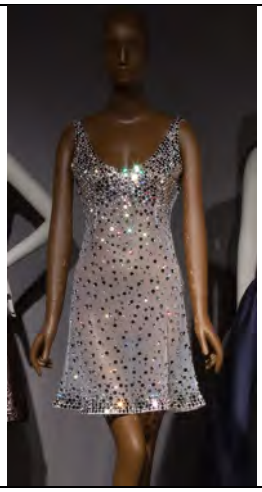
4.30 (Peep holes)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2022.65.12 Christian Dior, 1960s Jacket: bolero made from clipped, dyed green cock feathers, short sleeves, green silk lining
4.31 (Peep holes)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2018.56.1 Unlabelled, 1927 Dress: black velvet with hand beaded bird in multicolour seed beads
4.32 (Peep holes)		**The Museum at FIT,** 70.37.17 Givenchy, ca. 1968 Dress: navy blue heavy silk twill, matching feather trim from under bust to hem

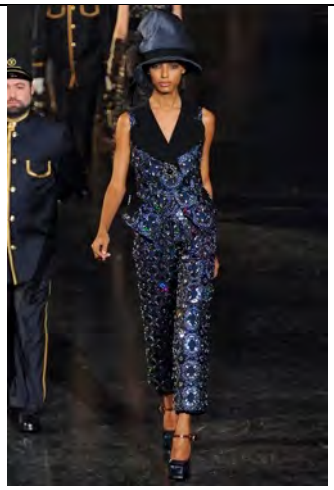
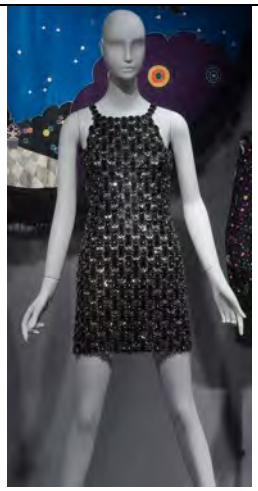
4.33 (Peep holes)		**The Museum at FIT,** 89.159.14 Stavropoulos, ca. 1978 Gown: white silk chiffon with seed beads and heavy, white feather trim at neckline
4.34 (Peep holes)		**The Museum at FIT,** 91.183.15 Jean Patou, ca. 1967 Ensemble: pink silk dress, matching belt, coordinating cape embellished with ostrich feathers
4.35 (Peep holes)		**The Museum at FIT, 2005.48.23** Carolina Herrera, ca. 1986 Coat: guinea hen feathers, black and crystal beads in alternating horizontal stripes, on black silk satin

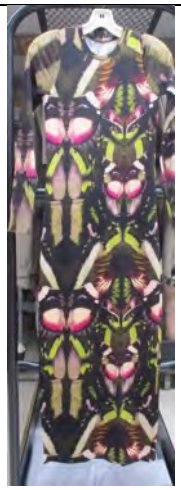
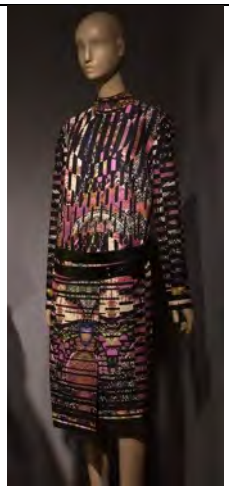
4.36 (Peep holes)		**The Museum at FIT, 2015.20.1** Bouchra Jarra, autumn 2013 (couture) Ensemble: off-white sleeveless harness top in rooster feathers, encrusted gold and diamond crystals; narrow tailored wool trousers
4.37 (Peep holes)		**The Museum at FIT,** 88.105.15 Carolina Herrera, autumn 1981 Cape: pale pink taffeta with grey feathers
4.38 (Peep holes)		**The Museum at FIT,** 92.227.1 Bob Mackie, ca. 1991 Fan: long white marabou feathers; beaded frame with attached beaded tassel [Oversize: 91 cm (36 in.)]
4.39 (Peep holes)		**The Museum at FIT,** 81.195.9 Unlabelled, ca. 1920 Fan: orange ombré ostrich plumes, amber-coloured celluloid sticks [Oversize: 73 cm tall (29 in.)]
4.40 (Peep holes)		**The Museum at FIT,** 81.131.24 Unlabelled, early 20th c. Fan: black, white and red-orange ostrich feathers; amber celluloid sticks [Oversize: 79 cm (31 in.)]

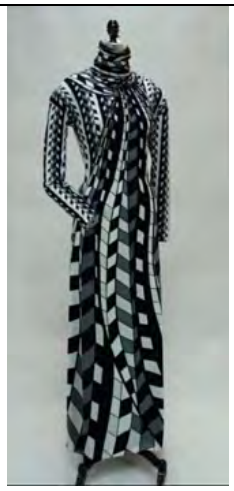
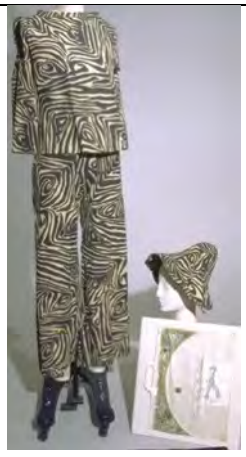
4.41			**The Museum at FIT,** 71.227.2 Unlabelled, ca. 1845 Capelet: with long front tails; in pheasant, duck, peacock, and kingfisher feathers arranged to form geometric pattern; trimmed around the edges in swansdown
4.42-.5			**The Museum at FIT,** 79.226.2-.5 Unlabelled, 1960s Masks: 4 eye masks, densely embellished with feathers in shades of white, grey, and brown

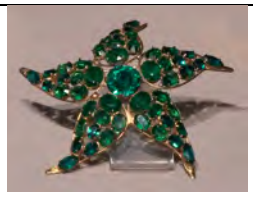
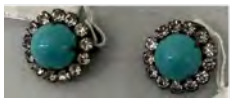
CABINET 5: SENSORY OVERLOAD

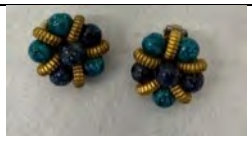
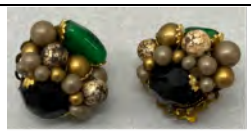
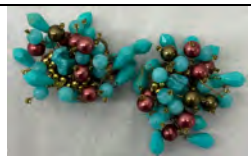
5.1		**The Museum at FIT,** 2022.65.35 Tom Ford, autumn 2013 Dress: black and white allover sequin and seed bead zebra print gown; black horsehair mane detail around neck and down centre back
5.2		**The Museum at FIT,** 2022.65.46 Tom Ford, ca. 2013 Dress: allover mirrored glass embellishments; mini-length; long black sheer sleeves
5.3		**The Museum at FIT,** 2016.50.1 CD Greene, 1996 Dress: mini length in silver nylon net embellished with Swarovski crystals

5.4		**The Museum at FIT,** 2014.64.5 Unlabelled, 1960s Qi pao: black and white Op-Art printed silk; knee length
5.5		**The Museum at FIT,** 2022.21.25 Louis Vuitton, autumn 2012 Ensemble: blue jacquard wool sleeveless vest with black wool notched collar, allover metallic thread medallions, glass beads, oval and iridescent trimmings; matching blue and brown wool jacquard embroidered side zip trousers
5.6		**The Museum at FIT,** 2008.62.1 Paco Rabanne, ca. 1971 Dress: circular black plastic discs, attached by silver metal links and embellished with small sections of black wool yarns, grey metal chain, and grey tear shaped pearl beads

5.7		**The Museum at FIT,** 2021.30.11 Jean Paul Gaultier, 1990s Dress: nylon stretch fabric printed with mirror image motif of green and pink moths
5.8		**The Museum at FIT,** 2010.77.1 Alexander McQueen, spring 2010 Dress: silk satin and chiffon short in a multicolor reptile/snake patterned, mirror image photo digital print, double layered seamed sections
5.9		**The Museum at FIT,** 2019.16.1 Etro, autumn 2013 Dress: multicolor abstract 'blackout' print in wool blend with band collar, attached asymmetrical wrap skirt and black double wrap belt in leather with silver stud closures

5.10		**The Museum at FIT,** 2019.15.1 Anrealage, autumn 2018 Dress: hologram multicolor silver metallic long sleeve dress in an intricate triangular patchwork; surface responds to light
5.11		**The Museum at FIT,** 2002.67.2 Roberta di Camerino, 1976-1977 Dress: 'Scarpone Spinato' (herringbone scarf), long turtleneck shift in gray, black and white polyester jersey printed with signature engineered graphic design of chevron patterned stripes and flowing scarf in trompe-l'oeil
5.12		**The Museum at FIT,** P90.78.4 James Sterling Paper Fashions Ensemble: blouse, trousers, matching hat in black and beige swirl-printed 'paper'

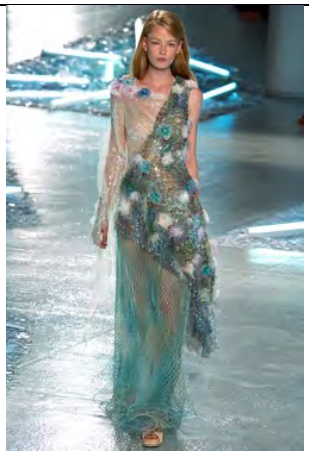
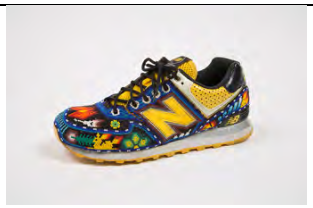
5.13		**The Museum at FIT,** 2015.65.1 Halston, 1979 Dress: magenta and white long silk crepe with tie-dye, Op Art-inspired print; shift silhouette, floor length
5.14		**The Museum at FIT,** P92.55.2 Barbara Brown for Heal Fabrics, 1969 Textile: screen printed cotton; large scale column composed of alternating black and off-white spiralling bands creating a positive/negative pattern
5.15 (Symmetrical display)		**The Museum at FIT,** 96.56.2 Hattie Carnegie, ca. 1945 Brooch: starfish shaped; medium and large green paste stones on gold plated sterling silver setting
5.16 (Symmetrical display)		**The Museum at FIT,** 88.29.216 Kenneth Jay Lane, 1968-1971 Earrings: goldtone metal with transparent pink center stone surrounded by smaller green outer stones
5.17 (Symmetrical display)		**The Museum at FIT,** 86.78.11 Kenneth Jay Lane, Ca. 1960 Earrings: clear plastic faceted stone with rhinestones, green pointed oval beads
5.18 (Symmetrical display)		**The Museum at FIT,** 86.78.21 Kenneth Jay Lane, late 1950s Earrings: turquoise plastic stone encircled by rhinestones

5.19 (Symmetrical display)		**The Museum at FIT** Earrings, origins unknown
5.20 (Symmetrical display)		**The Museum at FIT** Earrings, origins unknown
5.21 (Symmetrical display)		**The Museum at FIT** Earrings, origins unknown
5.22 (Symmetrical display)		**The Museum at FIT** Earrings, origins unknown
5.23 (Symmetrical display)		**The Museum at FIT** Earrings, origins unknown
5.24 (Symmetrical display)		**The Museum at FIT** Earrings, origins unknown
5.25 (Symmetrical display)		**The Museum at FIT** Brooches, origins unknown
5.26 (Symmetrical display)		**The Museum at FIT** Brooches, origins unknown

5.27 (Symmetrical display)		**The Museum at FIT** Brooches, origins unknown

CABINET 6: CRAFTSMANSHIP

6.1 (Visible construction)		**The Museum at FIT,** U.508 Unlabelled, ca. 1895 Corset: taupe cotton with black sateen tape over multiple rows of boning, ochre embroidered neckline trim
6.2 (Visible construction)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2010.1.13 Yamamoto, spring 2000 Dress: tan linen with muslin toile styling; black top stitching at all seams and darts; tailor's red and black thread tracing or running stitch at front and back; unfinished round neckline
6.3 (Artificial flowers)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2022.21.21 Louis Vuitton, spring 2012 Dress: off white floral broderie anglaise with horsehair stiffened hips; attached pink slip; attached pale blue sheer silk organza overdress; front embellished with multi-layer plastic flowers with studs and rhinestones

6.4 (Featherwork)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2015.35.1 Rodarte, spring 2015 Dress: mermaid-inspired design made from iridescent white and turquoise netting with hand beaded Swarovski crystals, sequins, pearls and feathers overall; hand painted net skirt
6.5 (Appliqué)		**The Museum at FIT,** 70.57.51 Christian Dior, ca. 1955 Dress: strapless sheath with trumpet shaped train, in white organdy heavily embroidered with symmetrical pattern of dimensional floral appliqué
6.6 (Beadwork)		**The Museum at FIT,** P88.1.1 Yves Saint Laurent, 1967 Dress: from the 'Africa' collection; brown organza, plastic plaques, bronze tone beads, black seed beads, and gold metallic beads
6.7 (Beadwork)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2015.5.1CD Ricardo Seco/New Balance, spring 2015 Shoes: embellished overall with multicolor glass beads in a floral and animal pattern

6.8 (Beading and sequins)		**The Museum at FIT,** 92.154.10 B. Altman, 1941 Gloves: fuchsia jersey embellished with black flies or bees made from jet seed beads and sequins
6.9 (Sequins)		**The Museum at FIT,** 82.32.1 Norman Norell, 1971 Dress: cream jersey with wide jewelled collier of blue and crystal faceted stones in alternating rings; slightly blouson bodice with long tapered sleeve; long skirt with inset waistband; hand-applied gold sequins
6.10 (Sequins)		**The Museum at FIT,** 91.255.7 Chanel, spring 1970 Ensemble: suit and long jacket in beige silk, densely embroidered with white sequins [Designed and worn by Gabrielle Chanel]

6.11 (Embroidery)		**The Museum at FIT,** 69.192.3 Kate Reily, ca. 1880 Dolman: polychrome silk embroidered Indian fabric
6.12 (Needlepoint)		**The Museum at FIT,** 75.109.48 Cartier, ca. 1930 Bag: needlepoint envelope clutch patterned with diagonal floral stripes; brown suede band holding clear glass ring and jade bar for closure
6.13 (Lace)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2013.16.1 Masaya Kushino, 2008 Shoes: heel-less platforms in gold metallic Leavers lace over beige leather; high platform in lacquered Japanese cypress wood; blond human hair ponytail at center back
6.14 (Lace)		**The Museum at FIT,** 69.160.9 House of Worth, ca. 1890 Cape: cream lace (likely repurposed from an ecclesiastical vestment); wide neckline border of black silk velvet; trimmed with black silk chenille bobble tassels
6.15 (Crochet)		**The Museum at FIT,** 99.30.4 Christian Louboutin, 1996-1998 Shoes: high heeled mules with gilt crochet vamp, lined with ivory satin

6.16 (Knotting)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2010.72.3 Ohne Titel, spring 2009 Ensemble: patterned macramé suit in white, pink, green, grey and black silk crepe chiffon and white cotton yarn; fabric made of bias bands of silk crepe with raw edges and cotton yarn; short sleeve cut away jacket
6.17 (Pleating)		**The Museum at FIT,** 68.143.20 Christian Dior, spring 1951 Dress and matching shawl: gold tone silk gauze with magenta red, purple and orange printed butterfly print; finely pleated skirt
6.18 (Trapunto)		**The Museum at FIT,** 85.144.1 Giorgio Armani, 1981 Ensemble: peplum jacket in taupe silk satin with horizontal trapunto; black silk satin culottes with black sequins; made to resemble samurai armour

6.19 (Painting)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2007.22.1 Mariano Fortuny, ca. 1918 Robe: copper silk velvet stencilled in gold with symmetrical pattern; reinterpreting Coptic and Cretan designs
6.20 (Painting)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2003.59.5 Giorgio di Sant'Angelo, autumn/winter 1988 Dress: single length of silk chiffon hand painted in shades of garnet, crimson, persimmon, amber and ivory; designed to be worn like an Indian sari
6.21 (Leatherwork)		**The Museum at FIT,** 92.86.17 Dino Busso, ca. 1940 Shoes: dark red leather high platform sandals with 13-layer sole in wrapped leather; red, yellow and pink suede thong strips with buckled ankle straps
6.22 (Leatherwork)		**The Museum at FIT,** P94.12.9 Galeries Lafayette, 1930s Gloves: gauntlet style; brown kid leather with perforated paisley and spiral designs; scalloped edges

6.23 (Miniatures)		**The Museum at FIT,** 78.184.6 Hattie Carnegie, ca. 1938 Hat: 'Hat buds' asymmetrical hat in black felt; 'bouquet' of multicolor miniature hats on extended, wired front brim [Miniature hats are approx. 2 cm wide]
6.24 (Miniatures)		**The Museum at FIT,** 91.7.7 Candee, 1910–1915 Boots: miniature black rubber boots used as a manufacturer's sample; with curved top and pull loop at either side [13 cm tall; sole is 7.5 cm long]
6.25 (Miniatures)		**The Museum at FIT** Promised gift Delvaux, 2022 Bag: miniature black leather handbag adorned with the phrase 'ceci n'est pas un Delvaux' in cursive font [7.5 cm wide x 8.5 cm tall]
6.26 (Miniatures)		**The Museum at FIT,** 2019.67.1 Delvaux, spring 2019 Bag: black leather satchel with cutout phrase 'Ceci n'est pas un Delvaux' in white leather; logo D buckle strap at front flap, D handle tag, silver tone hardware, interior key clasp and mirror [Full size bag; to be shown alongside miniature replica above]
6.27 (Miniatures)		**Potential loan** (from New-York Historical Society) Maker unknown, 1830s Pedlar doll: composition, textile, wood, ceramic, glass, metal, paper, paint [40 cm tall]

6.28 (Miniatures)		**Potential loan (New-York Historical Society)** Maker unknown, 1820-1840 Sewing case: leather, metal, paper, ivory, glass [7 x 5.7 x 3.2 cm (case)]
6.29 (Miniatures)		**Potential loan** (from designer) Louis Vuitton, spring 2023 Bag: doll's house shape with handle at top [Dimensions unknown]
6.30 (Miniatures)		**Potential loan** (from designer) Dior, autumn 2020-21 Miniature samples of collection designs [Dimensions unknown]
6.31 (Tools)		**The Museum at FIT,** P85.19.3 The Diamond Garment Cutter, 1886 Drafting tool: adjustable brass sleeve sloper

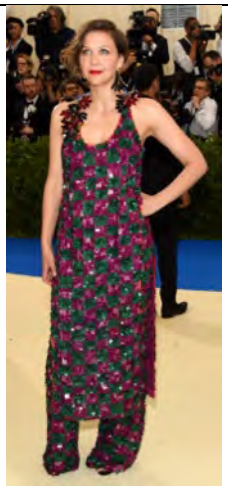
6.32 (Tools)		**The Museum at FIT,** P79.1.1 Hall-Borchert, 1881 Dress form: metal wire; adjustable
6.33 (Tools)		**Potential loan** (from New-York Historical Society) Willcox and Gibbs, 1893 Portable chain stitch sewing machine: iron, sheet metal, paint

CABINET 7: VIEWER'S CHOICE

7.1		**The Museum at FIT,** 2016.20.6 Unlabelled, ca. 1971 Jeans: denim, embellished with multi-colored embroidered design of suns, butterfly, clouds, rain, rainbow, house and garden; flared legs
7.2		**The Museum at FIT,** 2016.82.5 Patrick Kelly, 1985 Dress: black sleeveless column in wool ribbed knit with white nylon net bows and rhinestone button at centre front
7.3		**The Museum at FIT,** 2016.108.2 Betsey Johnson for Paraphernalia, ca. 1965 Dress: printed pink cotton; long, puffed sleeves; mini-length; white plastic buttons down centre front

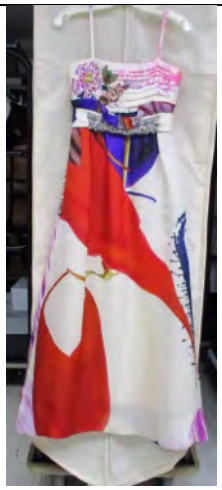
7.4		**The Museum at FIT,** 2017.45.23 Halston, 1980 Ensemble: navy blue silk chiffon jacket, halter top and trousers; beaded overall with purple iridescent bugle beads in a swirling wave pattern
7.5		**The Museum at FIT,** 2018.11.1 Guo Pei, ca. 2015 Dress: black cashmere; long sleeves; wide ruffle collar lined in leather cascading down centre front, ending in a double flower at waist
7.6		**The Museum at FIT,** 2018.12.38 Versace, autumn 1990 Suit: red silk double breasted bodice/jacket and skirt; embellished with bullion and silk thread embroidery, crystals, and beads

7.7		**The Museum at FIT,** 2018.36.9 Chado Ralph Rucci, autumn 2011 Ensemble: pink silk satin coat and skirt; barrel shaped coat with quilted yoke; knee-length skirt
7.8		**The Museum at FIT,** 2019.39.1 Henri Bendel, ca. 1910 Dress: yellow silk chiffon with hand beaded silver bugle beads in a window pane pattern on layered tiered panels; wide neckline with low back; bodice and short sleeves cut in one piece
7.9		**The Museum at FIT,** 2019.49.1 Viktor & Rolf, spring 2010 Dress: shirred tulle fitted sleeveless mini dress in coral, black, ivory and lavender; white sequins at front V-shaped bib insert; black moiré lapels, shoulder pads

7.10		**The Museum at FIT,** 2020.1.1 Marni, 2017 Ensemble: purple and green beaded long tunic and matching trousers
7.11		**The Museum at FIT,** 2020.19.4 Comme des Garçons (Junya Watanabe), autumn 2001 Dress: red, black, and white thick tweed and alternating clear vinyl strips wrap dress; one left side short sleeve and right side opening for arm; bodice wraps around body; buttons at waist and drapes over right side of attached short skirt
7.12		**The Museum at FIT,** 2020.35.1 Madame Grès, 1970s Dress: red silk; one shoulder; floor length; pin-tuck gathered detail seams at shoulder and hip; side slit to thigh

7.13		**The Museum at FIT,** 2020.54.1 Brioni, 1952 Man's suit: red and blue silk paisley tuxedo jacket with black braid trim and black wool trousers; matching silk waistband
7.14		**The Museum at FIT,** 2021.26.3 Unlabelled, 1930s Dress: black silk and velvet bias cut gown
7.15		**The Museum at FIT,** 2021.36.2 Ungaro, 1988 Dress: black and white silk with allover white wavy lines on black ground; square neck with two red roses; short puffy sleeves with self-fabric rose and bow at cuffs; ruched bodice with draped and ruffled overskirt over straight to the knee skirt

7.16		**The Museum at FIT,** 2021.52.1 Gareth Pugh, autumn 2006 Ensemble: black leather and wool dress with two large silk organza arm ruffs
7.17		**The Museum at FIT,** 2021.66.1 Lanvin-Castillo, 1950s Dress: silk taffeta strapless evening dress with blue roses on green stems; warp print on off-white ground; interior boned corset and petticoat; purple silk front bow with ribbons to hem
7.18		**The Museum at FIT,** 2022.21.2 Louis Vuitton, spring 2002 Coat: off-white leather with multicolor embroidered flowers and butterflies

7.19		**The Museum at FIT,** 2022.32.2 Christian Lacroix, 2005–2006 Ensemble: off-white silk with thin shoulder straps; pleated bodice; bead and sequin floral appliques; large scale allover abstract print in orange, purple, pink and blue
7.20		**The Museum at FIT,** 2022.65.32 Tom Ford, autumn 2013 Dress: black silk with two large metallic gold, pink, green, and white glass bead fireworks-inspired appliqués; attached back train panel