

# RISD MUSEUM

## *Swagged and Poufed: The Upholstered Body in the Late 19th-Century and Today,* January 22, 2016-July 3, 2016

In 1890, English designer and activist William Morris quipped that most women dressed as though they were “upholstered like arm-chairs.” Under layers of folds, ruching, tassels, and fringe, fashionable women found themselves nearly buried amid cascades of rich and weighty fabric, on the verge of becoming fixtures in their own drawing rooms. Likewise, a popular French publication had announced in 1868 that “the upholsterer is at the same time the tailor and the milliner of the room.” The distinction between dressing one’s home and dressing the female body threatened to become almost nonexistent.

The elaborate late-19th-century fashions on view in this gallery, accompanied by contemporaneous illustrations of modish interiors, exemplify the luxury of material, eccentricities of form, and layering of historical and cross-cultural references typical of the period. They also provide a new framework for interpreting more recent garments that similarly blur the boundary between upholstery and fashion. In this context, opulent late-Victorian garments and avant-garde contemporary ensembles share an artifice that does not often come to light, allowing us to note innovation in historic pieces and tradition in the new.

### CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Turkish

*Rug*, Mid 1800s-Late 1800s

Wool pile on wool plain weave

Bequest of Mr. Charles L. Pendleton 04.2016

Rugs were commonly part of late-19th-century interior decoration. This Turkish example was made in the vicinity of the town of Kula for a foreign market. Featuring Ottoman-style carnation and tulip motifs mixed with Persian-style vases and a central medallion arrangement, it is already a composite of cultural traditions. In the European or American home, it would have contributed a visual complexity and worldliness to the overall decorative scheme.



Caucasian

*Rug*, 1800s

Wool soumak embroidery on wool plain weave foundation

Anonymous gift 1995.085.1



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House of Worth, design house

French, 1858-1952

Charles Frederick Worth, designer

British, 1825-1895

*Reception Dress*, ca. 1874

Silk plain weave with cotton net inserts and silk embroidery, applique, and fringe

Gift of the Goddard family 2005.89.12A

In this dress, made for a member of Providence's Goddard family, the renowned couturier Charles Frederick Worth masterfully manipulated ribbons, draperies, pleated bands, and fringes into an elaborately layered autumnal ensemble. The bodice's doublet silhouette and the false slashing on the sleeves allude to Renaissance styles. These historical references fluidly mix with contemporary trends, such as the yellow ochre and olive green color scheme (strongly associated with the Aesthetic movement; see the ca. 1880 curtain design at right) and the voluminous folds of the bustle drape and double swags defining the skirt at back. The ruched yellow panel at front closely resembles the festoon-blind window treatment in the illustration at far right.



Maison Martin Margiela

Belgian

*Evening Dress*, Spring/Summer 2012

Plastic sequins on silk plain weave and silk fringe

Georgianna Sayles Aldrich Fund 2015.103

In their Spring/Summer 2012 presentation, Maison Martin Margiela presented this columnar evening dress on a runway strewn with Turkish, Central Asian, and Persian carpets. Entirely encrusted in sequins arranged in a Persian carpet pattern, the dress gives the appearance of a rug coming off the floor to swathe the figure.

In the 1870s and 1880s, carpets such as the soumak embroidered rug displayed here not only graced parlor, library, and smoking-room floors, but were used as table covers and—as the illustration at right suggests—portieres hanging in interior doorways. Carpet patterns were also translated into apparel fabrics for outerwear that recall Margiela's proposal here.



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Gianfranco Ferré, designer

Italian, 1944-2007

Christian Dior, design label

French, 1905-1957

*Dress ensemble (dress and vest)*, Fall/Winter 1994/95

Silk jacquard weave, velvet, and fringe

Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2015.29.3ab

Trained as an architect and known for his structured fashion designs, Gianfranco Ferré produced this lavish dress toward the end of his tenure as creative director at Dior. Viewed alongside late-19th-century garments and compared to drapery illustrations, the dress quickly reveals its sources of inspiration. The ornate ogival (or pointed-oval) pattern recalls sumptuous fabrics like those in the mantle and mantelet seen here, the exaggerated pouf skirt points to bustle silhouettes, and the line of silk fringe at the hem—punctuated by a large decorative tassel hanging from an upholstery ball—is remarkably akin to the 1876 illustration at right.



Kenzo, design label

Japanese, b. 1939

Kenzo Takada, designer

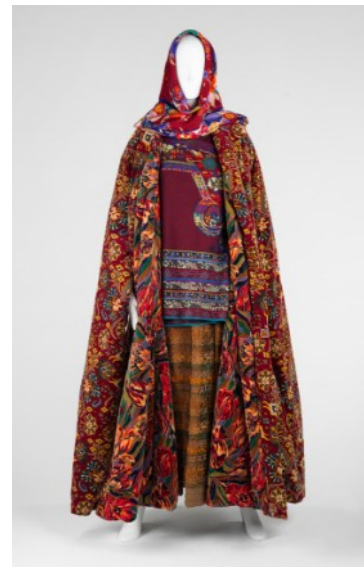
Japanese, b. 1939

*Woman's ensemble (sweater, skirt, overskirt, coat, scarf)*,

Autumn/Winter 1994

Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2015.6.1ae

The individual elements in this heavily layered ensemble by Japanese designer Kenzo Takada include references spanning the Silk Road from Mongolia through Central Asia to Eastern Europe. In particular, the voluminous and opulent printed velvet coat gives the appearance of a Central Asian carpet thrown over its wearer's shoulders. The coat's interior—a pattern of hazy tulips—bears a striking resemblance to this mid-19th-century carpetbag.



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American

*Carpetbag*, mid 1800s

Wool pile weave, brass closure, cotton plain-weave lining

Gift of Madeleine U. Wilcox and Mrs. Zenas R. Bliss in memory of Mrs. Anna Utley Wilcox 56.137.41



Probably; French

*Mantelet*, ca. 1890

Silk voided velvet with ostrich feather trim

Gift of Lea S. Luquer 57.080.1

The sumptuous voided velvet of this fitted evening mantelet was inspired by Persian textile designs, a reference that would have summoned for the wearer and her audience associations with exotic splendor, technical skill, and personal refinement. Garments like this one were worn outside and therefore seen by many, and as the *Godey's* February 1880 issue makes clear, they were often weighed down with opulent cross-cultural references:

The Mante, or mantelet, . . . is made only of rich materials, such as brocaded or damassee silk, stamped or embossed velvet, or Indian cashmere covered with rich silk embroidery. It is beautifully trimmed with thick lace ruches beaded with jet, elaborate passementeries with tiny plush tassels, full copeaux fringes of waved silk braid, or of chenille with tiny satin balls and elegant network headings; silk embroidery and passementerie ornaments complete the trimmings.



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American; European

*Dolman*, ca. 1880

Wool jacquard weave with silk chenille fringe

Gift of Mrs. E. R. Behrend 59.124.7

With the advent of the increasingly exaggerated bustle silhouette in the mid-1870s and mid-1880s, mantles like this one were designed to accommodate the added volume at the back of the skirt. The relatively unstructured nature of this dolman mantle makes reference to Turkish robes called *doloman*, and hints at the riches of such Near Eastern origins. While paying tribute to North African caftan trim, the caterpillar or snake chenille-yarn fringe around the neck, cuffs, hem, and front opening also relates to the trim on the lambrequin, or valance, in the illustration at right. (Note also the paisley pattern of the inner curtains.)



American

*Reception Dress*, 1884

Silk brocade and satin weave, trimmed with chenille fringe

Gift of Miss Beatrice McCloy 60.068.2

In addition to the enveloping application of pleats, gathers, and caterpillar fringe, this 1884 dress is defined by its "centaur" silhouette, created by the juxtaposition of tightly fitted bodice and shelf-like bustle. As Marcel Proust wrote in *In Search of Lost Time*, women were "either straightlaced to suffocation or else completely buried" in "the architecture of these fripperies."



An 1882 article in *The Decorator and Furnisher* describes similar styles in home decor: "The Parisian *tapissier* [upholsterer] gathers up, crumples, and rumples plush, broche (brocaded) silks, lampas, satins, and scores of rich tissues that Lyon is continually turning out, with an art, a grace, an indescribable chic of the Parisian modistes and dressmakers."

American

*Fashion plate from Godey's Lady's Book*, December 1878

Walter H. Kimball Fund 81.095.10

Fashion plates in popular publications of the 1870s and 1880s attest to the predilection for the swags and poufs, rich fabrics, and elaborate trim that defined both the well-outfitted woman and her domestic interior. In the "Chitchat on Fashions" section of the December 1878 issue of *Godey's*, the editors wrote: "No piece is left for sweet simplicity. There are lappets of every shape and length, waistcoats of one color and tabliers of another, flutings of cashmere,





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and draperies of brocade, ruches of silk, and bias bands of striped satin." The accompanying illustration, from *How to Furnish a Home* (1882), shows a similar approach to a lady's boudoir.

American

*Fashion plate from Peterson's Magazine*, February 1881  
Walter H. Kimball Fund 81.095.36

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American

*Fashion plate from Peterson's Magazine*, January 1882  
Walter H. Kimball Fund 81.095.38

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American

*Fashion plate from Peterson's Magazine*, September 1885  
Walter H. Kimball Fund 81.095.44

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