

THE **DRESS UP** VISIT

Whether it's donning a full-blown disguise, getting decked out for a special event, or suiting up for a ceremony, we humans just can't seem to resist adorning our bodies with transformative garb. Enjoy some vicarious vesturing with this month's guide to the collection. (No special attire required.)



GALLERY 137

Headdress (Nimba, D'mba, or Yamban) (mid-19th/early 20th century), Baga, Guinea

Some masquerades are just for fun; others are more serious affairs. Across west and central Africa, masquerade is often used to connect with supernatural forces and has deep spiritual significance. Among the Baga people of the Republic of Guinea, large headdresses like this invoke an ideal of motherhood and carry associations with continuity, fertility, and sustenance. Today, this type of mask is worn for performances at events such as marriages and funerals, which mark transitions in social status, as well as secular events such as soccer tournaments, where it celebrates cultural pride and identity. While the mask represents an idealized woman, it is worn by a male dancer whose body is obscured by a large raffia costume, like the facsimile here. Peering through eyeholes in the chest, the dancer displays great strength and skill maneuvering the nearly 130-pound piece.



GALLERY 236

Half Armor and Targe (c. 1600), Milan, Italy

During the Middle Ages and Renaissance, armor was, of course, the official (and highly functional) costume of battle, but it was also worn for more style-conscious occasions—sporting events, parades, and ceremonies—when men wanted to flaunt their status and power as both officers and fashionistos. Indeed, male fashion in the 16th century, when this ceremonial suit was made, was often as, if not more, ostentatious than that of the fairer sex. This stylish suit's cinched waist follows the cut of the period's fashionable garments, while the entire get-up gains flamboyant flair from the gilded and etched banding, which is decorated with interlace, trophies, mythological beasts, classical figures, and heroes on horseback. Decked out in this elaborate outfit, there would be no doubt—it would be the suit that makes the man.



GALLERY 218

Lady Sarah Bunbury Sacrificing to the Graces (1763–65) by Sir Joshua Reynolds

It's no wonder that English portraitist Sir Joshua Reynolds was so successful in his day—he was a staunch proponent and practitioner of what became known as the Grand Style, painting idealized forms taken from classical art rather than observed directly from nature. His sitters, who numbered into the thousands, couldn't help but be flattered by the nobility and grace that Reynolds conferred on them through the use of classical costumes and poses. Here, Lady Sarah Bunbury, who once charmed the young King George III, gets the Reynolds treatment. Wearing a vaguely Grecian-style robe and looked upon fondly by the Three Graces, Lady Sarah becomes more than just another pretty face; she's a practically a goddess.



GALLERY 152-153

Ragini Setmalar, Page from a Jaipur Ragamala Set (1750/70), Rajasthan, Jaipur, India

Anyone who's read a bit of Shakespeare knows that lovers and disguises go hand in hand. So it's not totally surprising that the woman in this miniature painting (sitting in a yellow dhoti under a tree) opts for the guise of a male ascetic after being forsaken by her lover. Her longing is conveyed not only through her austere garb but in the sentiment: "The black clouds have cast their shadow on all quarters; my beloved, who is a generous lover, has forgotten me." In stark contrast to this lamenting lady's emaciation and minimal costume, the fat pilgrim in the foreground comes to pay his respects wearing a lively patchwork ensemble. The work is part of a set of 36 paintings known as a ragamala or garland of ragas, which illustrate the melodic modes in Indian classical music; fittingly, this page depicts the raga of the rainy season.



GALLERY 57

Furisode (c. 1920), Japan

The woman lucky enough to wear this striking kimono, enhanced with glittering gold and silver leaf and embroidery, was surely getting gussied up for a special occasion. This kind of formal kimono, called a *furisode*, which literally means "swinging sleeves," was worn by unmarried women and would have been belted with an obi, or sash, wrapped tightly around the waist. The garment's eye-catching design is made up of enlarged pine needles, considered an auspicious symbol of long life, and while such a dramatic, almost abstract patterning may seem very modern and 20th century, this type of exaggerated motif was actually a revival of a style popular during the late 17th century or Genroku period.



GALLERY 105

Chinese Men in Foreign Dress (8th century), China

We can all get a little bored with our wardrobes after a while, even those formal duds we rarely wear, so it's refreshing when something new comes along. This was certainly the case for the Chinese of the 8th century when the country's borders expanded in all directions and Silk Road traffic brought exotic people and goods to its cosmopolitan cities. Suddenly foreign dress was all the rage among both men and women alike. Here two dapper gents, whose facial features are distinctly Chinese, wear clothing of a Persian and Central Asian style—long, wide-lapeled coats, tall boots over trousers, and soft, peaked caps with upturned brims. The era's fervor for foreign fashion can also be seen in other figures in this case—the young girl with braided pigtails as well as the *Six Female Musicians* wear decidedly non-Chinese dresses with tight sleeves and fitted, low-cut bodices.