

Self-Guide

Art in Vogue

On this voguish voyage through the museum, the galleries are the fashion runway. Strut to the following style-studded stops and decide for yourself whose designs are in and whose are out.



GALLERY 107

“America” (Amerika) (1860) by Utagawa Hiroshige III

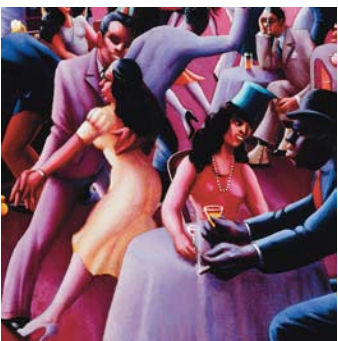
When this vivid print was produced shortly after Japan officially opened its ports to trade, female fashions of the West were practically unknown in Japan. In fact, at the time, less than 20 Western women lived in Yokohama, the town designated for foreigners. However, knowing the power of a few key accessories—a horse and a hat—the Japanese artist Hiroshige III effectively conveys his subject’s non-native identity. In contemporary Japan, only men rode horses, so this image of a modern lady riding sidesaddle through the snow would have been quite a head-turner. Also rather eye-catching is her wildly plumed cap. Though this feathered head attire was not commonly worn in the U.S. or Europe, it was regularly used in Japanese prints to crown the heads of foreign women.



GALLERY 171

“Croquet Scene” (1866) by Winslow Homer

With *Croquet Scene*, American Winslow Homer presented not only the period’s popular pastime but also its ever-expanding skirt silhouette. Complaining of this crinoline-enhanced style, a contemporary French journalist noted, “Every woman today is a tempest. She cannot enter or leave a room without knocking over everything in her path; and whenever she takes a step, it sounds like rain or hail, according to the stuff her dress is made of.” Homer’s croquet players sport the day’s latest variation on the crinoline trend, their colored overskirts lifted at the hem by loops to reveal contrasting underskirts. Cleverly Homer used his subjects’ fashionable attire to create visual rhymes in the painting; the blue-striped skirt bottom along with the players’ banded hats all echo the stripes of a croquet ball.



GALLERY 263

“Nightlife” (1943) by Archibald John Motley, Jr.

For over two decades, Archibald Motley, Jr., captured the infectious vibrations and fabulous fashions of the jazz era. In this painting of a crowded hotspot in Chicago’s Bronzeville neighborhood, the female patrons do not wear the short bobs and flapper dresses of the 1920s jazz scene but rather the more feminine and fitted looks of the 1940s. Long hair, set in loose waves, is topped with small hats dramatically angled towards the face. The decade’s more athletic dancing demanded shorter hemlines and flowing fabrics, but these trends along with the tightly cinched waistlines also revealed more of female form. Shorter skirts also drew attention to knee-high stockings like those worn by the ladies at the bar and high-heeled shoes that grew higher as the decade progressed.



GALLERY 157

“Pendant Shaped as a Dragon” (late 16th/early 17th century) Spain

Just as not all of us are born with model-perfect physiques, not all natural pearls are created with perfectly spherical forms. Yet imperfections can be beautiful. In fact, irregularly shaped pearls, or baroque pearls, became a favorite inspiration for Renaissance craftsmen who transformed the bulbous forms into fantastic jeweled creatures. This tiny dragon is created from three lumpy pearls—two in the body and one for the neck—while gold is skillfully wrought to form the head, wings, and tail. Often quite whimsical, baroque pearl designs brought some levity to Renaissance jewelry, which was worn primarily to signal status, wealth, or religious devotion rather than as mere decoration. This piece ups the playful spirit with a tiny hinge that allows the dragon’s feet to swing from its body.



GALLERY 209

“An Elegant Company” (1632) by Pieter Codde

With a man kneeling and lifting a covered cup to an elegantly attired couple, the scene depicted by Dutch artist Pieter Codde appears to be a betrothal or wedding party. At such celebrations today the woman’s dress often takes fashion’s center stage, but as Codde’s painting indicates, once upon a time, the gent’s dapper duds shared the spotlight. The fashionable fellow wears a coat and breeches of black, a color so difficult and expensive to achieve in the 17th century that it was anything but basic. Completing this formal look are silk stockings, shoes decorated with a rosette of spangled lace, and a stiff ruff around the neck. Style even extends to his hair, worn in love-locks. Cropping the left side shorter than the right, the cut mimics the popular look of wearing an earring affixed with a lock of the beloved’s hair.



GALLERY 216A

“A Young Lady with a Parrot” (c. 1730) by Rosalba Carriera

Through her innovative drawing technique, Venetian artist Rosalba Carriera is credited with winning respect from the art establishment and favor in the courts for pastel portraiture. Her delicate handling of the pastel medium beautifully captured the Rococo rage for pretty powdered faces and flowing fabrics. In *A Young Lady with a Parrot*, Carriera used a “dry-brush” technique, dragging her chalk lightly over a contrasting color, to suggest the gauzy material draped across the young lady and clear, wet-chalk accents to realize the lady’s floral hairpiece and jewelry. Her subject’s daring décolletage becomes playfully provocative with the aid of an avian accessory, a mischievous parrot that perfectly matches the brilliant blue of her gown.

Looking for more fashionable fodder?

Catch the Chicago History Museum’s *Chic Chicago*, an exhibition featuring extraordinary couture gowns from 1861 to 2004. And see the fashion capital of the world through the art of the 1920s and 1930s in *Henri Cartier-Bresson and the Art and Photography of Paris* at the Art Institute.