NEW ART INSTITUTE EXHIBITION EXPLORES BOUNDARIES BETWEEN ART AND FASHION
WITH WORKS OF THREE VISIONARY FASHION STUDIOS

*Fashioning the Object* Brings 30 Runway and Conceptual Pieces by

**Bless, Boudicca, and Sandra Backlund to Chicago**

Exhibition on View April 14 through September 13, 2012

Contemporary fashion over the last 50 years has become increasingly tied to issues surrounding everyday life, fuelled by agendas as diverse as politics, the environment, pop culture, and social reform. Fashion designers, moving beyond traditional presentation methods such as the catwalk show or window displays, have embraced a diversity of methods to push their practice into new arenas. The Art Institute of Chicago’s newest exhibition from the Department of Architecture and Design, *Fashioning the Object*—on view April 14 through September 13, 2012, in the Modern Wing’s Abbott Galleries (182–184)—presents three of the most visionary design studios at work today: Bless, Boudicca, and Sandra Backlund. Fiercely independent and far-reaching in their influences, these young designers from Berlin, London, Paris, and Stockholm are producing fashion objects that straddle the line between traditional craft and cutting-edge technique, both in their use of materials and in the promotion of their brands.

*Fashioning the Object* includes 30 signature works by each of the designers as well as the films, objects, printed materials, and photography that are integral to each new collection. This multimedia,
multi-layered approach speaks to the inventiveness of the designers and offers a unique look into the working processes of each of the talented designers.

Bless, a collaboration between Austrian designer Desiree Heiss and German designer Ines Kaag, blurs the boundary between fashion and designed objects. Founded in 1997, Heiss and Kaag’s practice is informed by a fascination with found objects, recycled materials, and traditional craft techniques. Mentored by Belgian designer Martin Margiela, Bless’s deeply creative designs include a unisex multifunctional clothing line, edible knitwear, and furniture-shaped vacuum cleaners. Bless’s presentation is equally original: lookbooks are distributed inside existing magazines to reach a broader audience, and fashion shows are interactive endeavors—the fall/winter 2011 Paris show was staged in an artist’s studio with models arranged as if they were posing for a drawing class, the output of which was sent to the press in lieu of press photography.

Boudicca, established in 1997 by British designers Zowie Broach and Brian Kirkby, is grounded in a deeply intellectual approach. Acute attention is paid to the construction of garments, reinterpreting tradition with work infused with contemporary ideas and approaches. In 2008, Boudicca launched a perfume called Wode, which is sprayed out of a graffiti can and resembles Yves Klein Blue paint before it evaporates, leaving only a lingering scent behind. The house is well known for utilizing film to illustrate their ideas and process behind each collection. Only seen by fashion insiders, these works, on display in Fashioning the Object, stand alone as unique creations that portray the inherent complexity of Boudicca’s designs.

Swedish designer Sandra Backlund established her own label in 2004 and has since created knitwear that expands expectations of this area of fashion design. Backlund’s designs use sophisticated construction to sculpt three-dimensional geometric forms that simultaneously reference art history and street culture while celebrating the movement of the human
body. Her spring 2011 collection incorporated works spun entirely from metal yarn. Like Bless and Boudicca, Backlund presents her works in groundbreaking ways, including dramatic images captured by photographer Ola Bergengren.

The exhibition charts the exciting departures these young design houses have undertaken and how they have drawn inspiration from architecture, performance, film, and fine art. From Bless’s numbered editions to Boudicca’s graffiti-can perfume to Backlund’s ready-to-wear pieces of knitted copper, these designers defy convention and adapt objects to new uses, promulgating their ideas in playful, thought-provoking ways.

Accompanying Fashioning the Object is the first fully illustrated publication to explore the work of Bless, Boudicca, and Sandra Backlund. Part of the A+D Series published by the Art Institute and Yale University Press, the 96-page catalogue will be available in the Museum Shop beginning April 16, 2012, for $16.95.

Fashioning the Object: Bless, Boudicca, Sandra Backlund is organized by the Art Institute of Chicago. Major funding for this exhibition and catalogue is provided by the Auxiliary Board of the Art Institute of Chicago. Additional exhibition support is provided by Piper Jaffray Companies. Generous support is provided by the Exhibitions Trust: Goldman Sachs, Kenneth and Anne Griffin, Thomas and Margot Pritzker, the Earl and Brenda Shapiro Foundation, Melinda and Paul Sullivan, the Trott Family Foundation, and the Woman's Board of the Art Institute of Chicago. Additional support is provided by the Architecture & Design Society. The exhibition is curated by Zoë Ryan, John H. Bryan Chair and Curator, Department of Architecture and Design at the Art Institute.

Images:
Bless, BLESS, N°42, Servering, Fall/Winter, 2010-11.
Boudicca, still from promotional film for Wode by Boudicca, 2011.

# # #
Closed Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year’s Day.

**ADMISSION**

Adults $18.00 Includes all special exhibitions
Children 14 and over, students, and seniors $12.00 Includes all special exhibitions
Chicago residents receive a $2.00 discount with proof of residency
Children under 14 always free
Members always free

City of Chicago residents with Chicago Public Library cards can borrow a "Museum Passport" card from any library branch for free general admission to the nine members of Museums in the Park, including the Art Institute of Chicago.