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The Museum at FIT Presents: *Untying the Bow* March 1-31, 2024



Victor Edelstein, long evening dress with black velvet bodice and pink silk satin skirt with bustle bow, 1987, USA, gift of Anna Wintour.

The School of Graduate Studies at the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT), in collaboration with The Museum at FIT (MFIT), presents [Untying the Bow](#), a new exhibition conceived of and organized by graduate students in the college's [Fashion and Textiles Studies: History, Theory, Museum Practice program](#). The exhibition invites viewers to delve into the captivating world of bows and explores the impact of bows as they transcended their humble utilitarian origins to become a sophisticated and influential component of personal style.

Untying the Bow is presented in three thematic sections: Form and Functions begins by tracing the bow's utilitarian origins. The next section, Status and Gender, explores the "bow's" symbolism as a marker and subverter of status and gender. Finally, in Abstraction, the exhibition examines how the symbolism of bows has evolved into abstract forms and patterns. Experiments with scale and technique have allowed bows to transcend their original form to become captivating motifs.

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Untying the Bow is a transformative journey, unraveling the hidden narratives and cultural expressions that have elevated the bow from a mere structural element to a timeless icon in fashion.

Form and Function offers insights into how the simple yet versatile bow knot influenced the structure and use of the bow, highlighting its role in the stays and corsets that shaped women's torsos throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. A circa 1937 hat by Lilly Daché borrows the silhouette of the turban, which provided a practical method of keeping hair back and was often worn by factory workers. Despite this practical purpose, the hat's fashionable appearance was also a concern; the tensions between bows as a feminine fashion element and their omnipresence in menswear on neckties and hats are also explored.



Carel, ankle boots with a tuxedo illusion in red leather with pointed inset of white leather styled as a man's wing tip collar with black patent leather bowtie, spring 1984, France, gift of Tony Carel.

Status and Gender moves beyond the bow's utilitarian purpose to explore symbolism, focusing on how the bow can reinforce and subvert traditional expectations through shifting material costs, placements on the body, and abundance. The bow has evolved into a potent symbol with a number of styles and iterations. This section of the exhibition challenges pre-existing beliefs about the bow's importance in the world of fashion. For example, pair of whimsical Carel women's ankle boots humorously reinterpret the formality of a tuxedo and bow-tie ensemble by bringing these design elements to the feet.

Bows can also be used with sophistication. This is exemplified by a 1987 Victor Edelstein gown gifted to the museum by Anna Wintour, editor-in-chief at *Vogue* since 1988, which features a large satin bow at the center back. Contrasted with matte black velvet, the shining, structural pink bow stands out as the focal point of the gown. Prominent bows on cocktail dresses and

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evening gowns are a hallmark of 1980s fashion excess and, like the bow, the color pink has a long and varied history with similar shifting cultural perceptions. By the time this gown was made, pink was relegated primarily to women's wear. The combination of these two overtly feminine elements creates a striking and powerful image, fittingly worn by one of the most influential women in fashion today.

The third section, Abstraction, further explores the bow's symbolism. As the bow transcended its original functional form, its physical presentations became more abstract. Manipulation of scale, dimensionality, and repetition breathed new life into this age-old fashion icon, especially during the 20th and 21st centuries. In different scales and iconography, bows emphasize dressing as an act of decorating and presenting oneself. A playful polka-dotted evening dress by designer Ágatha Ruiz de la Prada from 2014 features a huge, maximalist bow at the center of the strapless bust. Enlarging its dimensions transforms the bow into the garment's focal point. A different form of abstraction is the bow as a motif. A 1934 evening dress exemplifies the physical reduction of bows into a flat design, by playing with both dimensionality and the printed motif: The applique bows decorating the neckline are cut from the red bows printed onto the dress's ivory linen fabric.

Accompanying the clothing and accessories in the exhibition are historical and contemporary images of the myriad unique and artistic ways that the bow—born from function—has morphed into stylistic inspiration. In addition, a video documents how the bow has dominated contemporary fashion.

In conjunction with the exhibition, a panel discussion titled *Parts of Fashion*, will be held on March 14 as part of MFIT's Spring 2024 Fashion Culture programs. It will examine the unique challenges of curating an exhibition that focuses on a specific part of a garment. Colleen Hill, curator of costume and accessories at MFIT, will be in conversation with Sarah Byrd, adjunct professor of Fashion and Textiles Studies, and a graduate student involved with the exhibition. The conversation will be moderated by Hilary Davidson, chair of Fashion and Textile Studies. [To register, please click here.](#)

Also this spring, the museum will feature an online event with Michael Weisman of Hyman Hendler & Sons, importers of fine European ribbons, in conversation with Davidson.

The museum will be open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays from noon to 8 pm, and Saturdays and Sundays from 10 am to 5 pm. Admission is free.

For the latest MFIT updates, click [here](#); register for the newsletter [here](#); and follow [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), and [Facebook](#).

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About the Fashion and Textile Studies: History, Theory, Museum Practice MA

Part of FIT's School of Graduate Studies, the Fashion and Textile Studies: History, Theory, Museum Practice MA program builds knowledge in fashion and textile history, textile conservation, costume mounting, and museum theory over the course of two years. During their second year, students utilize the interdisciplinary skills they have acquired through the program to collaborate with The Museum at FIT, developing and installing an exhibition of fashion objects from MFIT's collection. For more information on the program, visit fitnyc.edu/fashion-design-mfa.

About the School of Graduate Studies

The School of Graduate Studies at FIT provides advanced professional education in seven distinctive areas, promoting excellence in the post-baccalaureate study of fashion, business, art, and design. The school offers programs leading to the MA, MFA, and MPS degrees and is dedicated to advancing research in the creative industries and fostering innovative collaborations that link students and faculty with industry and professional partners worldwide.

About The Museum at FIT (MFIT)

The Museum at FIT, which is accredited by the American Alliance of Museums, is the only museum in New York City dedicated solely to the art of fashion. Best known for its innovative and award-winning exhibitions, the museum has a collection of more than 50,000 garments and accessories dating from the 18th century to the present. Like other fashion museums, such as the Musée de la Mode, the Mode Museum, and the Museo de la Moda, The Museum at FIT collects, conserves, documents, exhibits, and interprets fashion. The museum's mission is to advance knowledge of fashion through exhibitions, publications, and public programs. Visit fitnyc.edu/museum.

About the Fashion Institute of Technology

A part of the State University of New York, FIT has been a leader in career education in art, design, business, and technology throughout its history. Providing its more than 8,000 students with an uncommon blend of hands-on, practical experience, theory, and a firm grounding in the liberal arts, the college offers a wide range of affordable programs that foster innovation and collaboration. Its distinctive curriculum is geared to today's rapidly growing economy, including fields such as computer animation, toy design, production management, film and media, and cosmetics and fragrance marketing. Internationally renowned, FIT draws on its New York City location to provide a vibrant community in which to learn. The college offers nearly 50 majors and grants AAS, BFA, BS, MA, MFA, and MPS degrees, preparing students for professional success and leadership in the new creative economy. Among notable alumni in fashion are Calvin Klein, Michael Kors, Reem Acra, Brian Atwood, Dennis Basso, Francisco Costa, Norma Kamali, Nanette



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Lepore, Bibhu Mohapatra, Ralph Rucci, John Bartlett, Peter Do, Daniel Roseberry and Michelle Smith. Other prominent graduates include Leslie Blodgett, creator of bareMinerals; international restaurant designer Tony Chi; and Nina Garcia, editor-in-chief, *Elle*. Visit fitnyc.edu.

