

Fashion and the Metropolitan Museum of Art  
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Summary by Clare Sandford

The Metropolitan Museum of Art is located in the center of America's fashion industry in New York City. It wasn't until 1946 that the Met had a Costume Institute. The "Museum of Costume Art" was opened by sisters Irene and Alice Lewisohn in 1937; it moved to the Met as its own distinct department in 1946. The first director of the Costume Institute was Polaire Weissman. All of the curators since, from Diana Vreeland to Andrew Bolton, have impacted the Costume Institute in their own unique and significant ways. The Met Gala that the museum puts on to fundraise for the Costume Institute highlights a particular costume exhibition every year. Throughout the years, the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art has facilitated meaningful conversations around historic and contemporary fashion in the world of art.

Diana Vreeland was the one who really brought attention to the Costume Institute. Growing up with a socialite mother, Diana was exposed to the world of high fashion at a young age. As a "special consultant" to the Costume Institute starting in 1971, she was able to successfully blend her privileged background with her experience as a fashion journalist at *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue* to incorporate history, culture and high fashion into the exhibitions. At first it was a controversial decision, but she successfully curated the first show devoted to a living designer in 1983, highlighting Yves Saint Laurent. Museums all over the country took notice of costume exhibitions because of the way Diana Vreeland made her exhibits at the Met fashionable and relatable.

Jean Druesedow followed Diana Vreeland as the associate curator in charge. The next trailblazing curator at the Met was Richard Martin. He successfully blended his contemporary innovative ideas with his knowledge of art history in order to bring more interest and attention to the Met. His exhibits facilitated intellectual conversations around fashion exhibitions and created more prestige around them in the art world. His work was so impactful that the Costume Society of America created the "Richard Martin Exhibition Award" to recognize outstanding costume exhibitions from both large and small institutions around the nation.

Succeeding Richard Martin was Harold Koda who, over 16 years, oversaw several memorable exhibitions that highlighted famous designers in relation to contemporary culture. In particular, the Alexander McQueen exhibition, held shortly after the designer committed suicide, was one of the top 10 best attended exhibitions in Met history. Under Harold Koda, the exhibitions at the Met reached peak numbers in attendance. The next, and current, curator in chief at the Costume Institute is Andrew Bolton. Although he has only been in charge for 4 years, his impact has already been tremendous. He put on the most visited exhibition ever in 2018, *Heavenly Bodies*, with about 1.6 million visitors.

The Met started throwing parties as fundraisers in 1948. The starting price for tickets used to be as low as \$50 and now they are around \$30,000. The Met Gala has turned into a major red carpet event and garnered the attention of designers, actors, models and consumers alike. The editor-in-chief of *Vogue* Magazine, Anna Wintour, decides who gets invited to the "most important night in fashion." The hard work and creative genius over the years from each of the Costume Institute's curators has resulted in memorable exhibitions that have sparked conversations about the intersection of fashion and art.