
The Irene Lewisohn Costume Reference Library Collection Development Policy

The Metropolitan
Museum of Art

1000 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10028
[metmuseum.org/
costumeinstitutelibrary](http://metmuseum.org/costumeinstitutelibrary)

I. MISSION STATEMENT

The Irene Lewisohn Costume Reference Library is primarily intended for the use of the curatorial staff of The Costume Institute to support exhibition research and department related publications. Limited access by appointment to the library, located within The Costume Institute department, can sometimes be arranged for outside researchers such as scholars and professionals working in the fashion, television, and film industries. Library appointments are granted at the discretion and availability of The Costume Institute Librarian. Materials in the Costume Institute Library can be requested through Watsonline for use at the Watson Library, in Museum staff offices, or for use by outside institutions through Interlibrary Loan.

II. BRIEF HISTORY OF THE DEPARTMENT

The Museum of Costume Art was established in 1937 by Irene Lewisohn, founder of the Neighborhood Playhouse, a collection of historic and regional costume which formed the basis of the Museum's holdings. Lewisohn had originally amassed it to provide historical authenticity for the Playhouse's theatrical performances. The Museum's statement of purpose noted that it would include the dress and accessories "of all epochs and all people, which may serve industrialists, artists, art historians, craftsmen, and students of all kind." The Museum provided facilities to enable visitors to study original materials first hand; established of a reference library of images and published materials, and a storeroom/showroom to demonstrate examples; and offered workroom demonstrations for designers and students. As often as three times annually it organized exhibitions of historic garments and accessories drawn from its own collection as well as loaned materials.

In 1959 the Costume Institute became a full curatorial department at The Met, now housed in a context where the art of costume could be studied and exhibited in relation to other arts. In its first decade the Costume Institute served primarily as a study collection to support and authenticate the depiction of historic dress in the fine arts, as well as a resource for the design community. From the original collections of Irene Lewisohn and Lee Simonson, The Costume Institute's garment and object holdings numbered more than eight thousand costumes and accessories from around the world given by more than six hundred donors.

III. DEFINITION OF CI LIBRARY COLLECTION

The Costume Institute's Irene Lewisohn Costume Reference Library collection contains nearly 30,000 books and periodicals as well as over 1,500 designer files all pertaining to the history of fashion, haute couture, regional clothing, and costume from around the world, dating from the fifteenth century to today. Extensive special collections include fashion plates, photographs, illustrations and sketches, textile swatches, lookbooks, archives, and related ephemera.

The Library's holdings largely reflects the scope of The Costume Institute Collection's more than thirty-five thousand costumes and accessories representing five continents and seven centuries of fashionable dress, regional costumes, and accessories for men, women, and children. Current curatorial collecting practices focus on masterworks of those designers widely recognized by fashion historians as the great style-makers of the twentieth century, including but not limited to Dior, Yves Saint Laurent, Chanel, Vionnet, Schiaparelli, and Miyake. (For more references please consult Caroline Milbank's "Couture"



book.) Important late twentieth-century designers include Alexander McQueen, John Galliano and Jean Paul Gaultier. Ultimately, the designation “well-known” or “important” is at the discretion of the curators.

Furthermore, the library collects reference materials about types of clothing, fashion, related topics, and even different formats of materials not currently nor generally acquired for The Costume Institute collection. Among those library topics not covered by the Costume Institute collection are: separates, wearable art objects, boutique objects, study objects, fur, wedding dresses, children’s clothing, and ephemera or works on paper.

IV. SUBJECT SCOPE

While the following guidelines are intended to guide the general practices of The Costume Institute Library acquisitions, its full holdings displays a valued diversity that reflects a history of exhibitions and scholarly projects by curatorial, collection, conservation, installation, exhibition design, and library staff that have generated purchases that, at times, fall outside of the scope of the museum’s collection (and, indeed, outside of fashion-specific research).

Time Frame

1400-present

Geographic focus

Primarily Europe, North America, and Asia, but not limited to these specific areas.

Subjects

There are four levels of collecting comprehensiveness: broadly collected, selectively collected, collected on request by the department, and not collected.

The Library broadly collects:

- Clothing and dress: works on the utilitarian aspects of clothing
- Surveys of fashion history, criticism, & theory: Including economic, environmental, material culture, political, psychological, religious aspects, etc.
- Fashion / Fashion Design / Fashion Designers including:
 - Haute Couture and Prêt-à-Porter or Ready-to-Wear
 - Women’s, men’s and children’s clothing
 - Streetwear, Sportswear, Resort wear, Swimwear, Intimate apparel, and lingerie
 - Military clothing and uniforms (e.g., airlines, sports teams)
 - Vintage clothing
 - Fashion by subculture (e.g., Cosplay, Punk)
- Accessories
- Footwear
- Fashion drawing / Fashion illustration
- Fashion exhibitions, including Curating and Exhibition design
- Fashion photography, including Fashion stylist, Fashion editor, Fashion models, and Fashion icons and muses
- Fashion reference, including Encyclopedias, Glossaries, Collection guides, and Bibliographies

The Library selectively collects materials on related subject matter that discusses or visually illustrates a connection to fashion such as:

- Design techniques, patterns & construction: Sewing, tailoring, patternmaking, draping, embellishments, notions, technological innovations, industrial manufacturing, sustainable design, etc.
- Costume design for theatre, TV, film & motion pictures: Fashion designers who have crossed over into costume design, presentation or representation of fashion in media, the influence on fashion trends, etc.
- Art, artist’s books: Non-wearable fashion, art or artists that explore fashion as a theme or medium.
- Advertising, graphic design: Editorials, ad campaigns, and brand identity
- Architecture: Fashion inspired by architecture or architecture related to boutiques, store design, merchandising, windows display
- Beauty: Changing trends in makeup, hair and wig styling, tattoos, body modification, etc.
- Blogs and blogging: Internet blogs covering style, streetwear, etc. (e.g. Advanced Style)

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- Folk arts and crafts related to the design of clothing and accessories
 - Etiquette books, style guides, image consulting and handbooks: Rules pertaining to social customs related to clothing and dress (e.g. more so rare books on this topic and not books written by reality stars)
 - Dolls and mannequins: Related to high-end fashion or exhibition display (e.g. Bonaveri)
 - Humor and anecdotes: Satire and social commentary on the world of fashion (e.g. “The World According to Karl”)
 - Jewelry, including general reference works closely connected to a fashion designer or house
 - Music: Clothing and style associated with different genres of music and their corresponding subcultures (i.e. punk, psychedelia)
 - Perfume: Works closely connected to a fashion designer or house
 - Photography: Some celebrity, portrait, and street photography related to fashion icons (e.g. Audrey Hepburn), different subcultures (i.e. youth), or photographic works that define an era and/or place (e.g. disco in New York City)
 - Textiles & associated materials (e.g. natural & synthetic), textile design: General reference works, historical overviews, works closely connected to a fashion designer or house.

Additional copies of titles that fall within The Costume Institute Library collection scope may also be acquired for the Watson Library or one of the other libraries in Metropolitan Museum. The presence of a title in another Met library should not necessarily prevent the acquisition of The Costume Institute Library copy where the item has a demonstrable value to the curatorial staff at The Costume Institute.

Purchased only at the request of Costume Institute staff:

- Conservation
- Fabric Science
- Research methods & writing

Subjects and formats to be generally excluded:

- Graphic novels
- Juvenile
- VHS, DVDs
- Textbooks
- Trend reports & forecasting

V. CATEGORIES AND FORMATS

Monographs

The library makes every effort to acquire all current monographic titles that fall within the parameters of its collecting scope. Books are selected for their visual and/or scholarly content. The library comprehensively collects collection catalogs of both public and private collections; and exhibition catalogs from museums, art galleries, foundations and other venues. Collected essays and the proceedings of congresses and symposia are acquired if the general scope of the work falls within the library’s collecting parameters. Copies of unpublished dissertations are acquired when they directly relate to the current research of Museum staff or at the suggestion and initiative of the curatorial staff.

- Monographs that are less frequently consulted are stored offsite.

Periodicals

The Library subscribes to magazines and journals in both print and electronic format, both current subscriptions (50+) and archived content (300+ titles). Electronic serials are reviewed for purchase, monitored and paid for by The Costume Institute department and maintained by Watson Library as a museum-wide resource.

- Recent print copies of current subscriptions are shelved in the Library until they are bound. Periodicals are bound by the season, shelved in alphabetical then chronological order. Some titles may be housed offsite.

Auction and Sales Catalogs

The library acquires through gift or subscription auction catalogs with fashion-related sales from all major market auction houses worldwide, and to selected secondary market arts auction houses. While many of these catalogs are also collected in the Watson Library, The Costume Institute Library should be considered the primary repository for these subject areas. In addition the library acquires through gifts individual sales catalogs from other auction houses. No effort is made to be comprehensive for these houses. Retrospective catalogs are also selectively purchased to support

specific provenance research and new fields of research; to supply missing holdings; or when the individual catalog contents warrant.

– Auction and sales catalogs are stored offsite.

Vertical Files

The Library has over 1,500 designer files (designers, companies, fashion icons, etc.) and subject files filled with tearsheets, press clippings, press kits, and related ephemera. This collection was compiled in the late 1990s and has not been added to since the mid-2000s. Files from this collection are indicated in the library record as “Costume File – People” or “Costume File – Subjects” in the call number field.

Special Collections

The library actively collects rare books and periodicals, and other antiquarian materials and ephemera. The library will collect an antiquarian title that is also freely available on the Web or is already available in the library through subscription digital collections if the original item: differs critically from its Web counterpart, such as manuscript annotations (for example, prices and buyers names in an auction catalog); has a significance apart from its contents, such as an association copy; or is specifically needed in the print version, as for an exhibition.

Other special collection materials include fashion sketches, fashion plates, lookbooks, textile swatches, scrapbooks, photographs, and related ephemera such as fashion invitations, etc.

Special Collection Highlights include:

- Bergdorf Goodman Sketches Collection, 1929-1952
- Charles James Collection (available Fall 2018)
- Costume Institute exhibition binders, 1939- present
- CI Exhibition Records (part of Museum Archives)
- French Fashion Photographs, 1895-1915
- Lookbooks, 1976-2015
- Woodman Thompson Fashion Plates, 1790-1939
- Complete set of Visionaire, 1991- present

VI. COLLECTING GUIDELINES

Gifts

Gifts to the collection are added using the same criteria with regard to their scholarly value as purchased materials. Gifts are accepted with the understanding that the Library has complete discretion over the option to retain. The Library does not rely extensively on exchange programs to acquire materials, but does participate in exhibition catalog exchanges with fashion related institutions abroad in Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Spain.

Exhibition catalogs related to outgoing loans

The Library receives copies of catalogs of exhibitions to which objects from The Costume Institute have been lent. Borrowing institutions are contractually required to supply at least one copy of the exhibition catalog to the curatorial department which is then deposited in the Library.

Languages and translations

The Library acquires resources in all Western European languages for those subjects collected comprehensively. If a publication is available in more than one language, English is preferred. However, acquisition will not be delayed when a foreign language edition is published before an English language edition.

The Library collects exhibition catalogs from multiple venues in various languages. If a foreign language edition has different content from the English edition or if the English translation is poor, an additional copy in the original language may be acquired.

Multiple copies

In most instances, the Library acquires only one copy of any given publication. Added copies of selected titles may be acquired where heavy use is expected (i.e. before and during the run of a Costume Institute exhibition). . At least three copies of Costume Institute exhibition catalogs are collected.

New editions and Reprints

New editions are acquired when they reflect significant changes and additions in comparison to the previous editions.

VII. RELATION TO OTHER LIBRARY COLLECTIONS

The Costume Institute Library serves primarily The Costume Institute staff, Museum staff, and researchers but also, as an integrated member of The Metropolitan Museum of Art libraries, complements the holdings of the Thomas J. Watson Library and departmental libraries. Its books are available through interdepartmental mail to researchers working at the main building of the Met and also eligible for Interlibrary Loan (ILL) for use outside of the Museum.

New York City is also rich in other fashion-related library collections that both complement and supplement the library's resources, including:

- The New York Public Library Art & Architecture Collection
- The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts
- The New York Public Library Picture Collection
- Gladys Marcus Library at the Fashion Institute of Technology
- The New School Libraries and Archives
- The Bard Graduate Center Library of Bard College
- The Adrian G. Marcuse Library at LIM College

VIII. OFFSITE & WITHDRAWAL PROCEDURES

Prior to the renovation of the Costume Institute department in 2012, materials that were infrequently used by curatorial staff were sent to our offsite storage facility to accommodate the new smaller space. All of those materials are still accessible for retrieval for both staff and outside researchers.

Considerations for sending additional materials offsite:

- Excess number or duplicate copies in other MMA libraries
- Unbound copies of periodicals
- Reference or special collection materials that are digitized
- Foreign language books where an English translated copy is also available
- Unprocessed archival materials
- Oversized materials that do not fit in the library space
- Former exhibition/installation materials

Any decision to withdraw multiple titles or a serial holding is at the discretion of The Costume Institute Librarian.

IX. REPLACEMENT

If printed material has been lost or damaged, criteria for replacement should follow the same guidelines as acquisition of new material. Replacement copies may be ordered for badly damaged books when conservation is determined not to be appropriate.

X. PHYSICAL CAPACITY OF THE LIBRARY

The physical capacity of the existing book shelving in The Costume Institute Library is approximately 2,300 linear feet. A little over fifty percent of the library's total collection is stored offsite.