

**Exhibition:** *Reigning Men: Fashion in Menswear, 1715–2015*

**On View:** April 10–August 21, 2016

**Location:** BCAM, Level 2



(Image captions on page 5)

(Los Angeles — January 12, 2016) The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) presents *Reigning Men: Fashion in Menswear, 1715–2015*, a major survey exploring the history of men's fashionable dress from the 18th to the early 21st century. Re-examining the frequent association of "fashion" with "femininity," the five thematic sections of the exhibition's 300-year survey—Revolution/Evolution, East/West, Uniformity, Body Consciousness, and The Splendid Man—reveal that early fashion trends were informed by what men were wearing, as much as they were by women's dress. In the 18th century, the male aristocrat wore a three-piece suit conspicuous in make and style and equally as lavish as the opulent dress of his female counterpart; the 19th-century dandy made famous a more refined brand of expensive elegance; the 20th-century mod relished in colorful and modern styles; and the 21st century man—in an ultra-chic suit by day and a flowered tuxedo by night—redefines today's concept of masculinity.

*Reigning Men* makes illuminating connections between history and high fashion, tracing cultural influences over the centuries, examining how elements of the uniform have profoundly shaped fashionable dress, and revealing how cinching and padding the body was, and is, not exclusive to women. The exhibition, featuring 200 looks drawn mostly from LACMA's renowned permanent collection of costume and textiles, celebrates a rich

history of restraint and resplendence in menswear. *Reigning Men: Fashion in Menswear, 1715–2015* is curated by Sharon S. Takeda, Kaye D. Spilker, and Clarissa M. Esguerra from LACMA's Costume and Textiles department.

“Through major acquisitions and generous gifts over the past 10 years, LACMA now has the strongest European and American menswear collections in the western United States,” says Michael Govan, LACMA CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director. “*Reigning Men* is an exciting and rare opportunity to examine the comprehensive history of men's fashion, and we are thrilled to share the collection and scholarship with Los Angeles and beyond.”

Sharon Takeda, senior curator and head of LACMA's Costume and Textiles department, notes, “*Reigning Men* takes us on an intriguing 300-year journey of sartorial splendor of aristocrats, dandies, mods, punks, and so many others. Through examples of historical and contemporary ensembles, viewers can encounter the evolving nature of menswear and contemplate the future of men's fashion.”

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue co-published by LACMA and Prestel/DelMonico and features essays by Tim Blanks, editor-at-large of *The Business of Fashion* (businessoffashion.com), and Peter McNeil, professor of design history at University of Technology Sydney, Australia, and distinguished professor at Aalto University, Finland. The exhibition installation is designed by Commune, an award winning Los Angeles-based design group.

### **Exhibition Highlights**

*Reigning Men* debuts several rare surviving ensembles from the collection, including fashions worn by men from different levels of society during the French Revolutionary period, such as an aristocrat's at-home robe (*banyan*) and a revolutionary's *sans-culottes* pants and *carmagnole* jacket. Additionally, LACMA curators have secured important ensembles representing other key moments in the history of menswear, such as an authentic 1940s zoot suit that took more than a decade to locate. *Reigning Men* also includes a selection of shoes, accessories, and textiles that complement the featured ensembles. Over 50 contemporary designers and fashion houses are represented in the exhibition.

### **Exhibition Organization**

Men's fashion has undergone revolution in dress and evolution in style throughout the last 300 years of Western history. *Reigning Men* begins with an examination of this continuous reinvention in the first theme, **Revolution/Evolution**. The fashionable male



expresses individuality and ideals through clothing and these ensembles often serve as inspiration for future generations. For example, the English Macaroni male of the 1770s and the French *Incroyable* of the 1790s wore suits in exaggerated shapes and were adorned with dramatic accessories. Contemporary avant-garde designers, like Vivienne Westwood and Walter Van Beirendonck, reimagined these icons, using outrageous palettes and creating different shapes for their modern take on a

phenomenon of the past. The history of menswear has also drawn inspiration from strong anti-authoritarian currents, such as the French Revolution in the 1780s and 90s and the punk movement in the 1970s (and into the 1980s). Radical revolutionaries of France utilized new styles, textiles, and colors to express political sentiments, and, 200 years later, punks embraced bricolage and do-it-yourself personalization to create anti-authoritarian fashion statements. Additionally, the elegant clothing of men—more understated and refined—defines the quintessential dandy. This style has gone through various iterations, including the Romantic Dandies of the early 1800s, to the bespoke ensembles of the 1900s, to the power suits of the 1980s, and the form-fitting suits of the early 2000s. Such dress still expresses the individual's careful attention to details, his appearance, and what a man's clothing may proclaim to the world.

Interactions between East and West have greatly influenced textiles and fashion for centuries. The second theme of the exhibition—**East/West**—examines the impact of cultural exchange in men's dress. During the 17th and 18th centuries, upper-class Western men wore loose-fitting informal robes in their homes that were informed by Eastern styles such as the T-shaped kimono from Japan or the Middle Eastern caftan. One T-shaped banyan was made of luxurious print-and-



painted cottons (chintz) imported from India for the Western market. In the 18th and 19th centuries traders returned from their travels to India, China, and Japan with clothing designs and materials that were reinterpreted for Western fashions. During the mid-20th

century, immigrants transferred their indigenous styles to the dress of their adopted countries, such as Japanese settlers in Hawaii who repurposed traditional kimonos and imported printed silks to create shirts now called Aloha or Hawaiian shirts.



**Uniformity** acknowledges that while military and working uniforms might appear to limit the possibilities for individual expression, a close examination of tailoring techniques, stylish details, and embellishments reveal high sartorial standards. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, British army and naval officers had their fine wool uniforms made on London's Savile Row. Wool could be molded, stitched, and steamed into silhouettes that idealized the male body.

Other characteristics of military uniforms conceived for use in battle on sea and land—such as maritime motifs, protective outerwear, and camouflage—can commonly be seen in fashion today. Military and work uniforms made for function have often been brought into the realm of fashion such as a 1930s French workman's coverall informing a Fall/Winter 2010–11 silk flight suit by 3.1 Phillip Lim.

**Body Consciousness** features garments used to conceal, manipulate, or reveal the male figure. Historically men have turned to clothing devices such as stockings with padded calves, waist-cinching underpants, and body-shaping tailored jackets or corsets to achieve an ideal male silhouette. Molding the garment with tailoring or padding has been used for nearly two centuries. In the early 19th century, a jacket's broad shoulders, expansive chest, and wide skirts created an illusion of a narrow "wasp waist." Padding has traditionally been used to enhance aspects of the masculine body; however, contemporary designers have used this in satire as seen in Naoki Takizawa's Inflatable Pants for Issey Miyake. The growing acceptance of exposed skin can be traced through swimwear: a circa 1900 bathing suit that nearly covered the entire body evolved into a 1935 Jantzen swimsuit with a detachable top, then dissolved into Rudi Gernreich's 1974 thong



swimsuit, only to revert back to a 2008 full-body competition swimsuit made by Speedo in collaboration with designer Rei Kawakubo.



In menswear, “splendid” is synonymous with excess, whether in materials or construction. In the 18th century, court dress for noble men mandated an abundance of precious metals to signify opulence and power—garments heavy with gold and silver embroidery, shining sequins, gemstones, and metallic lace. **The Splendid Man** considers how superfluities that were once commonplace in men’s dress—such as sparkling paste (glass) stones and sequined embellishments, animal furs, floral patterns, and vividly colored textiles—are resurrected

and reinterpreted in clothes by contemporary fashion houses, such as the mid-1990s wool pinstripe business suit covered in plastic sequins by Franco Moschino, a 2013–14 fur-print ensemble by Kean Etro for Etro, and a 2009 acid-green ensemble by Italo Zuchelli for Calvin Klein Collection. From the 16th to the 18th centuries, Europeans were fascinated by horticulture, and the flower became an enduring decorative motif of beauty and craftsmanship. Flowers were generally relegated as appropriate decoration for feminine fashion by mid-19th century but the motif has returned as a symbol of the elegant male as seen in contemporary design like Frida Giannini’s Gucci ensemble or Helmut Lang’s floral trousers. A culmination of the themes explored in *Reigning Men* is summarized by three looks that acknowledge the past while considering the future of menswear: a ruffled suit by Rei Kawakubo for Comme des Garçons blurs the line between masculine and feminine; a dress with a blazer by Rick Owens redefines the formal and casual; and a deconstructed *kandora* by Ahmed Abdelrahman for Thamanyah reinterprets dress traditions of the Middle East with Western aesthetics.

#### Credit

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#### About LACMA

Since its inception in 1965, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) has been devoted to collecting works of art that span both history and geography, in addition to representing Los Angeles's uniquely diverse population. Today LACMA is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection that includes nearly 130,000 objects dating from antiquity to the present, encompassing the geographic world and nearly the entire history of art. Among the museum's strengths are its holdings of Asian art; Latin American art, ranging from masterpieces from the Ancient Americas to works by leading modern and contemporary artists; and Islamic art, of which LACMA hosts one of the most significant collections in the world. A museum of international stature as well as a vital part of Southern California, LACMA shares its vast collections through exhibitions, public programs, and research facilities that attract over one million visitors annually, in addition to serving millions through digital initiatives such as online collections, scholarly catalogues, and interactive engagement. LACMA is located in Hancock Park, 30 acres situated at the center of Los Angeles, which also contains the Page Museum and La Brea Tar Pits and the forthcoming Academy Museum of Motion Pictures. Situated halfway between the ocean and downtown, LACMA is at the heart of Los Angeles.

Location: 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA, 90036 | 323 857-6000 | lacma.org

**Image captions:**

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Left: Macaroni Ensemble: *Suit*, Italy, c. 1770, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Costume Council Fund  
*Waistcoat*, France, c. 1770, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, purchased with funds provided by Suzanne Saperstein and Michael and Ellen Michelson, with additional funding from the Costume Council, the Edgerton Foundation, Gail and Gerald Oppenheimer, Maureen H. Shapiro, Grace Tsao, and Lenore and Richard Wayne  
*Sword with Sheath*, France, late 18th century, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of Mary H. and Martin Retting, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA

Center: *Zoot Suit*, United States, 1940–42, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, purchased with funds provided by Ellen A. Michelson; De Luxe Hollyvogue for Lundahl Clothing Co., *Necktie*, c. 1945, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of Stephen J. and Sandra Sotnick; The Guarantee (United States, active 20<sup>th</sup> century), *Shoes (Spectators)*, 1935–42, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of Mrs. Carl W. Barrow, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA

Right: Kean Etro for Etro, *Ensemble*, Fall/Winter 2014–15, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of Etro, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA

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Left: Incroyable *Ensemble: Coat, Breeches, Lorgnette, and Walking Stick (Hercules Club)*, France, 1790s, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, purchased with funds provided by Suzanne A. Saperstein and Michael and Ellen Michelson, with additional funding from the Costume Council, the Edgerton Foundation, Gail and Gerald Oppenheimer, Maureen H. Shapiro, Grace Tsao, and Lenore and Richard Wayne; *Vests*, France, 1790s, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Costume Council Fund, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA

Right: Walter Van Beirendonck, *Ensemble*, Fall/Winter 2000–1, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of Walter Van Beirendonck, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA

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Left: *At-home Robe (Banyan)*, India, probably Coromandel Coast for the Western market, c. 1750, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Costume Council Fund, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA

Right: *Lounge Suit*, India for the European market, 1860s, purchased with funds provided by Suzanne A. Saperstein and Michael and Ellen Michelson, with additional funding from the Costume Council, the Edgerton

Foundation, Gail and Gerald Oppenheimer, Maureen H. Shapiro, Grace Tsao, and Lenore and Richard Wayne, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA

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Left: *Naval Uniform Ensemble*, England, c. 1820, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, purchased with funds provided by Michael and Ellen Michelson, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA

Right: Jeremy Scott with Adidas, *Ensemble*, Fall/Winter 2013–14, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of Jeremy Scott, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA

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Left: Jean Paul Gaultier, *Corset from the "Photography Maniacs" collection*, Fall/Winter 1992–93; *Leggings and Boots from the "Jean Paul Gaultier Monsieur, Boxers" collection*  
Fall/Winter 2010–11, lent by Jean Paul Gaultier, photo © Museum Associates

Right: Naoki Takizawa for Issey Miyake, *Inflatable Breeches*, Spring/Summer 2001, gift of Robert Looker, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA

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Left: *Coat*, France, c. 1800, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of B. Rich; *Vest*, France, c. 1800, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, purchased with funds provided by Suzanne A. Saperstein and Michael and Ellen Michelson, with additional funding from the Costume Council, the Edgerton Foundation, Gail and Gerald Oppenheimer, Maureen H. Shapiro, Grace Tsao, and Lenore and Richard Wayne, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA

Right: Frida Giannini for Gucci, *Ensemble*, Spring/Summer 2014, gift of Gucci America, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA

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