

ALEXANDER McQUEEN: MIND, MYTHOS, MUSE

ARTWORK LABELS

© COPYRIGHT

This document remains the property of the National Gallery of Victoria and must be returned upon request.
Reproduction in part or in whole is prohibited without written authorisation.

Table of Contents

<u>4</u>	<u>Exhibition Sensory Map</u>
<u>6</u>	<u><i>Alexander McQueen: Mind, Mythos, Muse</i></u>
<u>10</u>	<u>Alexander McQueen</u>
<u>14</u>	<u>Mythos</u>
<u>16</u>	<u><i>Untitled (Angels and Demons)</i></u>
<u>35</u>	<u><i>Eye</i></u>
<u>51</u>	<u><i>Neptune</i></u>
<u>74</u>	<u>Runway and backstage</u>
<u>91</u>	<u>Technique and innovation</u>
<u>122</u>	<u>Dangerous Bodies</u>
<u>146</u>	<u>Costume History</u>
<u>180</u>	<u>Surface Decoration</u>
<u>206</u>	<u>Fashioned narratives</u>
<u>209</u>	<u><i>The Girl Who Lived in the Tree</i></u>
<u>231</u>	<u>In Memory of Elizabeth How</u>
<u>244</u>	<u><i>The Widows of Culloden</i></u>
<u>270</u>	<u>Evolution and existence</u>
<u>273</u>	<u><i>Scanners</i></u>

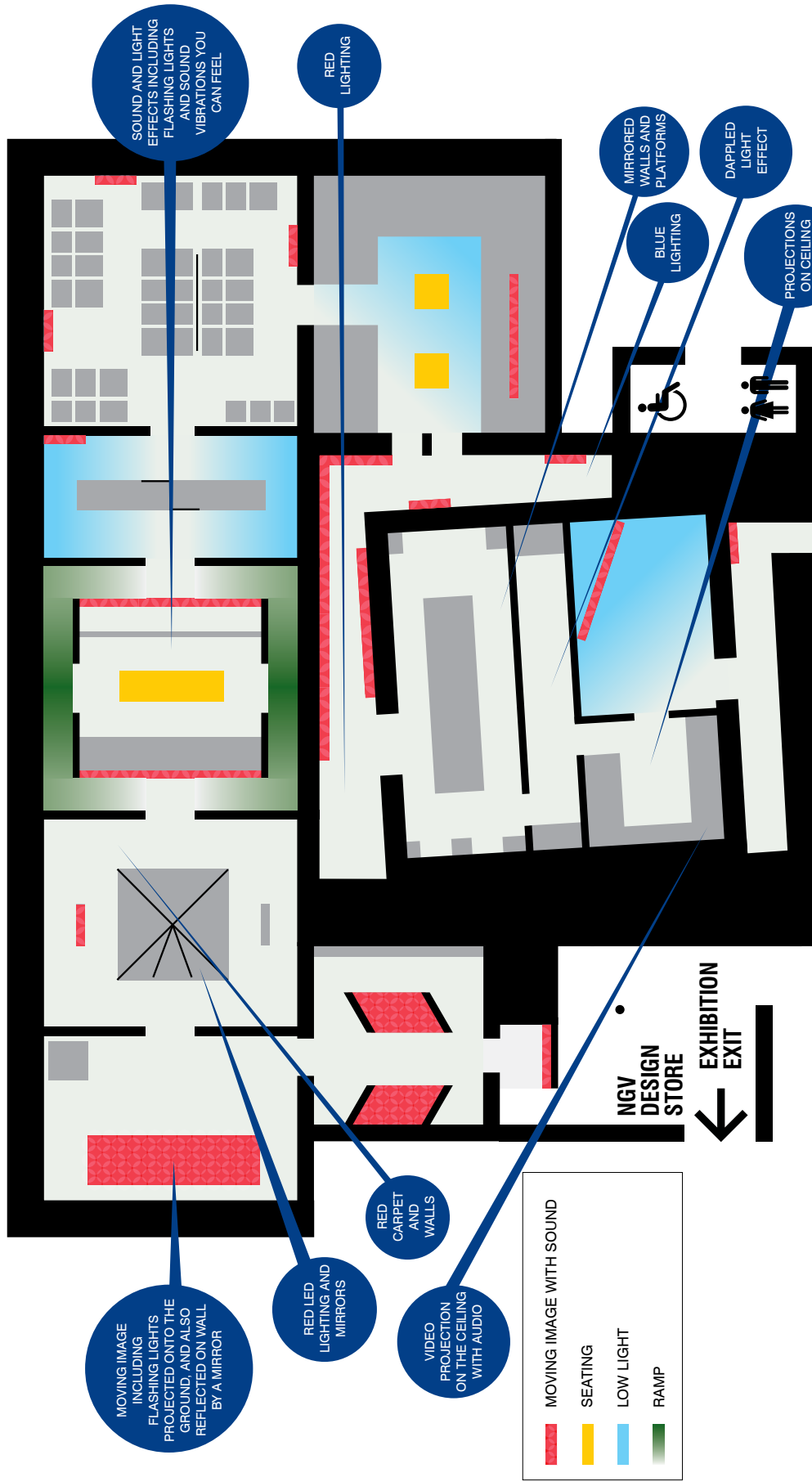
<u>288</u>	<u><i>Sarabande</i></u>
<u>301</u>	<u><i>The Horn of Plenty</i></u>
<u>313</u>	<u><i>The Dance of the Twisted Bull</i></u>
<u>326</u>	<u><i>Deliverance</i></u>
<u>347</u>	<u><i>Plato's Atlantis</i></u>

Exhibition Sensory Map

This map on the following page shows the locations of audio-visual content, sensory elements and seating and can help people with autism or disability prepare for their visit.

Visit [ngv.melbourne/access](https://www.ngv.melbourne/access) for more resources and information about accessible facilities, events and services at NGV.

SENSORY MAP ALEXANDER MCQUEEN: MIND MYTHOS MUSE GROUND LEVEL, NGV INTERNATIONAL



Loud music and sound effects are used throughout. The exhibition follows a set path. If you need assistance exiting quickly, please see security team members. Please note video clips used throughout this exhibition include flashes of photography. Gallery spaces are air conditioned and are between 20 and 24 degrees Celsius. Visit ngv.melbourne/access for more resources and information about accessible facilities and services for your visit to NGV.

Room:

***Alexander McQueen:
Mind, Mythos, Muse***

Room description: Entrance hallway with a screen upon entrance, windows into the Gallery Kitchen cafe on left and deep maroon walls on right.

Wall text:

***Alexander McQueen:
Mind, Mythos, Muse***

Alexander McQueen (1969–2010) is one of the most original fashion designers in recent history. Celebrated for his conceptual and technical virtuosity, McQueen's critically acclaimed collections synthesised his proficiency in tailoring and dressmaking with visual references that spanned time, geography and media.

Showcasing more than 120 garments and accessories, *Alexander McQueen: Mind, Mythos, Muse* offers insight into McQueen's far-reaching sources of inspiration, his creative processes and capacity for storytelling. Displayed alongside McQueen's innovative designs are more than eighty artworks – spanning

painting, sculpture, textiles, prints, photography and decorative arts – that help to illuminate the interdisciplinary impulse that defined his career. Drawn from the collections of the National Gallery of Victoria and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art – the exhibition reveals common themes and visual reference points that connect his practice with that of artists and designers throughout history.

McQueen's designs were always personal and complex responses to the world around him: he once stated, 'Fashion is just the medium'. McQueen's interests were broad and his inspirations both encyclopaedic and autobiographical: he was an avid reader of books on subjects that included, art, design, literature and history; a regular fixture in London's queer

club scene; a voracious consumer of cinema; and deeply passionate about the natural world. His love of fashion was evident from a young age, and was equally influenced by popular culture as by visits to museums. Throughout his career, McQueen distilled a multitude of ideas and experiences, bringing together seemingly disparate references to create collections that pushed far beyond the bounds of conventional fashion design.

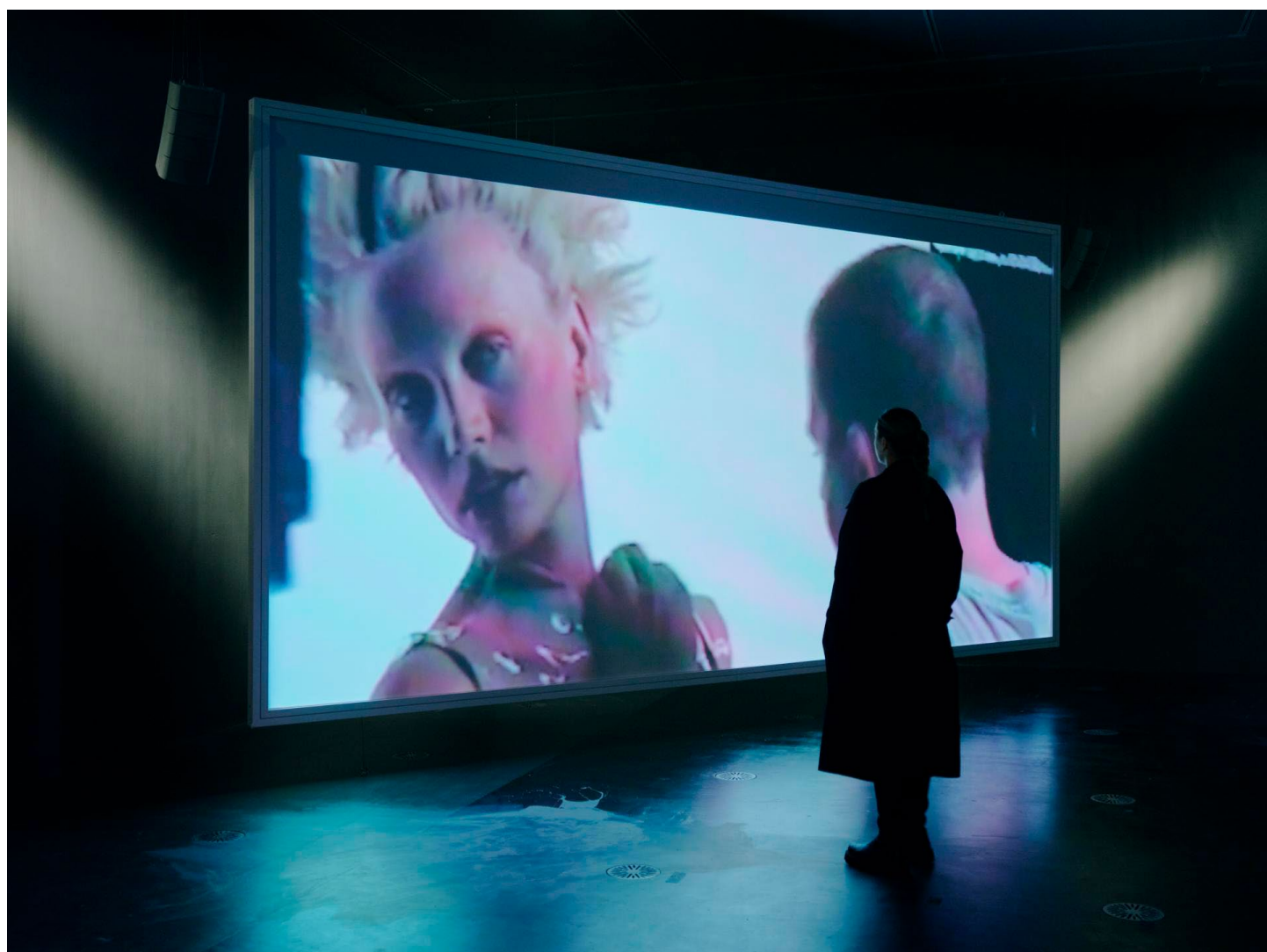
This exhibition would not be possible without the visionary philanthropy of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family in Melbourne and Regina J. Drucker in Los Angeles, whose individual support has brought such depth and richness to each institution's holdings of McQueen.

Organised by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), in partnership with the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

Unless otherwise noted, all exhibition works are by Alexander McQueen (1969–2010) for Alexander McQueen, London (fashion house, est. 1992).

Room:
Alexander McQueen

Room description: A darkened space with grey walls and large projected screen in right-hand corner.



Wall text:

Alexander McQueen

Born in London's East End in 1969, Lee Alexander McQueen was passionate about fashion and art from a young age. At just sixteen years old, he served an apprenticeship on Savile Row learning to cut and construct in the bespoke tailoring tradition. McQueen used these skills throughout his career in revolutionary ways. In 1989, McQueen enrolled in fashion design at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design in London; in 1992, his entire graduate collection was purchased by the stylist Isabella Blow. A year later, he established his own label: Alexander McQueen.

From the beginning, McQueen's collections combined autobiographical

references with challenging silhouettes and ideas. His work tackled history, politics, religion, philosophy, violence and environmental destruction. These themes fuelled narratives amplified in highly sensational runway shows.

Openly gay and inspired by queer fashion history, McQueen frequently challenged traditional ideals of beauty through disruptive designs that transformed fashion industry standards. In 1993, he debuted his extremely low-waisted 'bumsters', which were cut inches below the hipline; in 1998, Paralympian Aimee Mullins walked McQueen's runway in a pair of prosthetic legs elaborately carved from elm wood.

In the decade before his premature death in 2010, McQueen's aesthetic

was defined by its visceral qualities and technical proficiency; his distinctive shapes and complex cutting laid a foundation for clothing that delineated the body while simultaneously conferring agency to the wearer.

Wall text:

Mythos

Mythological and religious belief systems, along with wideranging cultural and historical references, inspired many of Alexander McQueen's collections and highlight the impressive breadth of artistic source material that he drew upon.

The *Untitled* collection, autumn–winter 2010–11, posthumously called *Angels and Demons*, references Christian iconography from the Byzantine Empire as well as the northern and Italian Renaissance. Through the collection, the existential dualities of heaven and hell, sin and redemption, and damnation and salvation are explored. *Neptune*, McQueen's spring–summer 2006 collection, looks to ancient Greece and

Rome to recast contemporary women as powerful and empowered warriors or goddesses, while *Eye*, spring–summer 2000, combines Western fashion with interpretations of dress and textiles traditionally associated with the Ottoman Empire (late thirteenth century to 1923).

By fusing religious symbols and silhouettes, historical secular dress and contemporary fashion, and costume and artistic traditions drawn from various cultures, McQueen developed a multifaceted vision.

Room:

***Untitled* (Angels and Demons)**
autumn–winter 2010–11

Room description: A darkened room with coloured projections on the ceiling, red fire imagery on left and blue sky imagery on right.



Wall text:

Untitled (Angels and Demons)

autumn–winter 2010–11

The collection's posthumously attributed title derives from tweets McQueen posted just before his death ('Hells Angels + Prolific Demons') less than one month before the premiere of the collection in Paris on 10 March 2010. The exploration of heavenly and fallen angels has been interpreted as a reflection of McQueen's mental health struggles. However, conflict, religion and finding meaning in ambiguity were themes that characterised his practice throughout his career.

With *Angels and Demons*, McQueen looked to medieval art 'to find light and beauty'. Three-dimensional gilt embroideries and inventive Jacquard

textiles borrow from Italian and northern Renaissance art, as well as Classical sculpture.

A celebration of craftsmanship, concept and beauty, the small collection was completed by McQueen's womenswear studio – led by Sarah Burton, now the label's creative director – and masterfully blends high-tech elements with ancient history.

***Untitled* (Angels and Demons)**

autumn–winter 2010–11

Labels (clockwise from the entrance):

Alexander McQueen designer

English 1969–2010

Sarah Burton designer

English born 1974

Dress

2010

Untitled (*Angels and Demons*) collection,
autumn–winter 2010–11

silk (satin, jacquard), metal (fastenings)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2018

M.2018.278.9

Pieter van der Heyden engraver

Dutch c. 1530–after 1572

Hieronimus Cock publisher

Belgium c. 1510–70

Pieter Bruegel the Elder (after)

Christ's descent into Limbo

c. 1561

engraving

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Mary Stansbury Ruiz Bequest, 1988

M.88.91.440

This dramatic scene shows Christ descending into Limbo, a place at the gates of Hell. According to the Old Testament, all people, wicked or not, were sent here after death to await God's redemption. Fantastical and grotesque hybrid creatures dominate the composition, threatening to overwhelm the beseeching figures. Tales and images

of the afterlife informed the narratives of several McQueen collections, including *Dante* (based on Dante's *Divine Comedy*) and *Angels and Demons*. In this image, the message is one of promise, rather than damnation.

Alexander McQueen designer

English 1969–2010

Sarah Burton designer

English born 1974

Look 3, dress and boots

2010

Untitled (*Angels and Demons*) collection,
autumn–winter 2010–11

silk (satin), metallic thread, leather,
plastic

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty and Family through the Australian Government's
Cultural Gifts Program, 2017

2017.595.a-c

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

Byzantine Imperial dress was another reference for this collection, seen in the rich colour and ornate embellishment that decorate this dress. Medieval in origin but modern in form, the hourglass silhouette is delineated by scarlet satin drapery

Untitled (*Angels and Demons*)

[HOME](#)

23

cut to highlight a front panel of raised gilt-thread embroidery. The composition of conjoined birds, skulls and foliate strapwork, purl wires, rhinestones and metal sequins pays poetic homage to the work of artisans of earlier centuries.

Jacques Callot

French 1592–1635, worked in Italy c.
1611–21

The Temptation of Saint Anthony (second version)

1635

etching, 4th of 5 states

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1958

3805-4

The iconography and religious themes of McQueen's final collection also find expression in the work of French printmaker Jacques Callot. Like Hieronymus Bosch, Callot found inspiration in the tale of Saint Anthony: this nightmarish scene depicts the supernatural torments faced by the hermit while secluded in the desert. An avowed atheist, McQueen was critical of

religious doctrine but remained fascinated by the philosophical questions central to these stories of good and evil, faith and doubt, sin and salvation.

Alexander McQueen designer

English 1969–2010

Sarah Burton designer

English born 1974

Look 2, dress and boots

2010

Untitled (*Angels and Demons*) collection,
autumn–winter 2010–11

silk (satin, jacquard), metallic thread,
sequins, leather, plastic

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through
the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2022

2022.129, 2022.549.a-b

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

In 1997, for the *It's a Jungle Out There*
collection, McQueen translated Dutch
and Flemish Old Master paintings

into printed textiles. Photographs of
paintings by sixteenth-century Dutch
artist Hieronymus Bosch (*The Temptation*

Untitled (*Angels and Demons*)

HOME 27

of Saint Anthony, c. 1501, and *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, 1515) have been digitally composited and woven in a luxurious silk jacquard framed by fish-scale embroideries. The art of the Northern Renaissance, with its tradition of fantastical, allegorical and demonic subject matter, and themes of human vice and suffering, represented here by Jan Mandijn's painting, was a touchstone for McQueen throughout his career.

Jan Mandijn

Dutch 1500–60

Saint Christopher and the Christ child

c. 1550

oil on wood panel

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift of Mr and Mrs Ben Maddow, 1959

59.48

Alexander McQueen designer

English 1969–2010

Sarah Burton designer

English born 1974

Look 4, dress

2010

Untitled (*Angels and Demons*) collection,
autumn–winter 2010–11

silk (brocade, lining), metal (fastening)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty and Family through the
Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2018

2018.1600

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

Alexander McQueen designer
English 1969–2010

Shoes

2007

In Memory of Elizabeth How, Salem, 1692
collection,
autumn–winter 2007–08
leather, plastic

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2019

M.2019.399.4a-b

Alexander McQueen designer

English 1969–2010

Sarah Burton designer

English born 1974

Jacket

2010

Untitled (*Angels and Demons*) collection,
autumn–winter 2010–11

silk, polyester and metallic thread
(jacquard)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2018

M.2018.278.8

Marking a shift from the digitally engineered designs presented in *Plato's Atlantis*, spring–summer 2010, McQueen's *Angels and Demons* collection drew on tailoring and dressmaking traditions. Hand-cartridge-pleated satins, gilded feather work

and three-dimensional embroidery exemplified McQueen's mastery of haute couture techniques. This jacket, woven with images of angelic figures, is skilfully draped to create the impression of golden wings extending outwards from the body. A foil to Hieronymus Bosch's demons, the angels here emulate the seraphim of Italian Renaissance marble sculpture.

***Desiderio da Settignano* (circle of)**

Italian 1428–64

Fragment with two seraphim

c. 1460

marble

Fragment with two seraphim

c. 1460

marble

Fragment with seraph enframed by his wings

c. 1460

marble

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
William Randolph Hearst Collection, 1951

51.18.3, 51.13.7 & 51.13.8

Room:

Eye

spring–summer 2000

Room description: Long room with light green walls and speckled light effects.



Wall text:

Eye

spring–summer 2000

McQueen's *Eye* collection was inspired by Turkish music he first heard in a taxi, and by the greater Islamic community in London. The collection clashes body-conscious Western fashion with McQueen's interpretations of Middle Eastern clothing, citing cultural and religious dress practices, as well as belly dancing costumes and contemporary soccer uniforms.

These references can all be traced to lands once encompassed by the Ottoman Empire, as well as modern-day Turkey and the Persian Gulf.

Eye conflates a vast region of diverse peoples and histories into a single,

sensational vision. In the collection are echoes of the legacy of *Turquerie*, an eighteenth century Western European fashion for imitating the beauty of Turkish culture in an idealised and reductive manner. Although the collection could be also interpreted as querying the value ascribed to clothing as a means of concealing or revealing women's bodies, *Eye* offers no clear commentary on women's agency.

Eye spring–summer 2000

Labels (clockwise from the entrance):

Dress

1999

Eye collection, spring–summer 2000

polyester (jacquard), rayon

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2019

M.2019.399.7

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

Top and skirt

1999

Eye collection, spring–summer 2000
wool (twill), silk and rayon (twill)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2019

M.2019.399.6a-b

Shoes

1999

Eye collection, spring–summer 2000
synthetic figured satin and leather

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Purchased with funds provided by Regina J. Drucker, 2022

M.2022.182a-b

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

Though McQueen lacked personal connection to *Eye*'s diverse cultural references, certain design details demonstrate his appreciation for their aesthetics: a red, white and black striped

Jožef Tominc

Slovenian and Italian 1790–1866

Man in Ottoman dress

1830–40

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased with funds donated by Luisa, Simona and Luca Valmorbida in memory of Carlo Valmorbida, 2010

2010.363

This portrait of an unknown sitter in Ottoman attire was painted in Trieste, the cosmopolitan seaport of the Habsburg monarchy. At first thought to be a wealthy citizen dressed *à la mode Turque*, more recent research suggests the man to be an Arabic-speaking, expatriate Ottoman. The painting is believed to document a stage in a marriage negotiation, based on the Arabic inscription in the letter, which reads, 'For your dowry: To the honoured Nicola al-Habib the jewel(s), for

my respected uncle in Trieste'. Here, the turban implies resistance to the erosion of Ottoman identity and status, despite the wearer's participation in a European portraiture convention.

Top and pants

1999

Eye collection, spring–summer 2000
silk and rayon (twill), metal (coins)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2018

M.2018.278.23a-b

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

The coin embellishments on this outfit bear a faux-Arabic inscription of McQueen's name that reference the calligraphic traditions of Ottoman-era Turkey. A more contemporary reference is also found in the arched opening exposing the midriff, which evokes the costumes worn by belly-dancers in modern cabarets.

miniskirt is reminiscent of French-influenced silks fashionable in eighteenth-century Turkey, while its top with partially detached sleeves emulates Turkish garment construction. In a similar manner, a white soccer-inspired top and skirt adorned with confronting red crescent moons – reminiscent of Turkey’s national flag and the men’s soccer team uniform – reinforces the idea that *Eye* depicts a competition between East and West.

Jean-Baptiste Greuze

French 1725–1805

Portrait of a lady in Turkish fancy dress

c. 1790

oil on canvas

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift of Hearst Magazines

47.29.6

This portrait exemplifies the vogue for *turquerie* in the eighteenth century that saw Europeans adopt fashions inspired by Turkish and Middle Eastern costume traditions. The sitter poses in an opulent ensemble that contemporaneous audiences would recognise as *à la sultane* (in the sultana's style), referring to imperial consorts in the harem of an Ottoman sultan. The artist's interpretation of Ottoman dress, including a fur-trimmed, half-sleeved robe resembling

the *kurdee* and feather-adorned turban, has been filtered through French fashion tastes and beauty ideals. In *Eye*, McQueen's fusion of Turkish and Middle Eastern dress with contemporary Western fashion harks back to this historical trend.

Palestine, Hebron

Wedding headdress (*Wuqayat al-darahim*) or 'Money hat'

20th century

silver (coins), brass (coins), metal (chain, ornaments), cotton (thread), silk (thread), amber (beads), stone (beads), coral (beads), glass (beads), cowrie shells

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift of B. Rich, 2012

M.2012.188.36

Western ideology, rooted in colonialism and art historical movements, has privileged outsider interpretations of the Eastern world. Several artworks displayed here counter these views with evidence of more complex cultural exchange. This Palestinian money hat, worn to signal a bride's marital status and economic position, is adorned with Ottoman coins

and silver *thalers* (coins) depicting Habsburg ruler Maria Theresa, while the adjacent liturgical veil, embroidered with a Greek Orthodox cross and inscription, has been refashioned from a precious Turkish textile.

Turkey

Liturgical veil

(cover for chalice and paten set)

second half of the 16th century

silk (satin, thread), silk and metallic
thread (lampas)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift of Miss Bella Mabury, 1939

M.39.2.478

Turkey, probably Istanbul

Banner (*Sanjak*)

early 19th century

silk, metallic thread

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
The Edwin Binney, 3rd, Collection of Turkish Art, 1985

M.85.237.6

Room:
Neptune
spring–summer 2006

Room description: Surrounding walls are mirrored. Central display on plinths.



Wall Text:

Neptune

spring–summer 2006

Named after the Roman god of water, *Neptune* draws upon imagery from the Classical period. Borrowing from representations of soldiers, gladiators and wrestlers, marble sculpture and architecture, as well as the deity of the sea himself, the collection underscored McQueen's desire to impart strength to the women wearing his creations.

Neptune (and his Greek counterpart, Poseidon) was both turbulent and seductive, like the sea. In the collection's runway presentation, McQueen married these concepts with a soundtrack featuring self-assured musicians, including Missy Elliott, Aretha Franklin

and Suzi Quatro. Neoclassical motifs such as columns, hippocamps (Hellenistic seahorses) and phoenixes connect McQueen to a long history of artists similarly inspired by the iconography and aesthetics of ancient Greek and Roman mythology.

Neptune spring–summer 2006

Labels (clockwise from the entrance):

Aimé-Jules Dalou

French 1838–1902

Caryatids of the four continents

c. 1867

patinated plaster

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift of Leona Cantor Palmer, 1982

M.82.197.1-.4

These graceful caryatid columns sculpted in female form personify four continents: the Americas, Africa, Europe and Asia. A classical architectural form, the caryatid evokes the concept of a woman as a pillar of strength. The best-known caryatids support the porch of the Erechtheion, on the north side of the Acropolis in Athens. This nineteenth-century homage by Aimé-Jules Dalou, made for the facade of a Parisian hotel, reinforces cultural stereotypes of the

exotic, natural woman constructed for the European gaze.

Italy

Archaistic *kore*

Roman period, 1st century BCE – 1st century CE
marble

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Gift of Mr Tomas Harris, 1951

1045A-D4

Ancient Greek statues have been a source of inspiration for fashion designers since the early twentieth century when an uncorseted form became socially acceptable. *Kore*, an ancient Greek word for 'girl', denotes a full-length, draped statue common in the Archaic period (sixth century BCE). In this later example, soft vertical drapery clings to the moulded torso and falls languorously to the floor in an exposition of the close relationship between body and cloth.

Dress

2006

Neptune collection, spring–summer 2006

silk (crepe), crystals

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2016

M.2016.260.11

Shoes

2008

The Girl Who Lived in the Tree collection,
autumn–winter

2008–09

leather, metal

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2020

M.2020.123.2a-b

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

The immortal goddesses of ancient Greece and Rome serve as the inspiration for these columnar white

gowns. Rather than the delicately carved,

sensuous drapery of marble sculpture, McQueen has employed purity of colour and simplicity of cut to construct an image of statuesque beauty. In many ways, *Neptune's* storyline highlights the persistence of classical ideals in dress, and their reconfiguration for contemporary contexts.

Dress

2005

Neptune collection, spring–summer 2006
acetate and rayon (crepe), silk (net), glass
(beads), metal (chain)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2016

M.2016.260.9

Shoes

2006

Neptune collection, spring–summer 2006
leather, metal, plastic

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2019

M.2019.399.5.a-b

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

France

Neptune on a Seahorse

c. 1600–50

earthenware

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Purchased with funds provided by Alan Ross Smith,
Mr and Mrs Edward Sowter, John Spring, Mrs A. Stiasni,
Walter Stein, Mr B. L. Stilphen, Grenville W. Stratton and
Anna A. Streckewald, 1982

82.9.15

Italy, Sicily

Hippocamp

Classical period, 3rd century BCE

earthenware

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift of Varya and Hans Cohn, 1992

AC1992.152.13

Italy, Apulia

The Painter of the Berlin Dancing Girl (attributed to)

***Pelike* (Apulian red-figure ware)**

Classical period, 420 BCE
earthenware

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1966

1391-D5

McQueen's narrative for the *Neptune* collection celebrates ideas of confident, feminine strength, recalling the Amazonian warriors seen on this *pelike* jar (a two-handled ceramic vessel). The scene depicts a battle between the bearded Greek, Telamon, and the Amazon queen, Andromache, depicted astride her horse, to win her girdle. Andromache is dressed according to classical imagination: in intricately patterned trousers and a soft Phrygian

cap, just as the statuesque women warriors of McQueen's runway appear in body-conscious looks inspired by ancient Greco-Roman men's and women's garments.

Jacques-Antoine Beaufort

French 1721–84

The Oath of Brutus

c. 1771

oil on canvas

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
The Ciechanowiecki Collection, Gift of The Ahmanson
Foundation, 2000

M.2000.179.18

Dress

2005

Neptune collection, spring–summer 2006
silk, nylon (net), glass (beads), metal
(beads)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2019

M.2019.394.4

Shoes

2005

Neptune collection, spring–summer 2006
leather, metal, stone

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2020

M.2020.122.20a-b

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

This diaphanous dress recalls the sleeves and torso of a belted Ionian *chiton* or tunic, shortened to reveal the legs. An inset band of sheer net at the waist, encrusted with beads and crystals, also

resembles the lower portion of a moulded cuirass (*lorica*) worn by the Roman military to protect their torsos.

A similar bodice can be seen in Jacques-Antoine Beaufort's *The Oath of Brutus*, c. 1771, hanging nearby, where it is worn under a red cloak or *chlamys*.

Derby Porcelain, Derby manufacturer

England c. 1748–1848

Neptune

c. 1800–10

porcelain

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
The Colin Templeton Collection. Gift of
Mrs Colin Templeton, 1942

459.a-b-D4

Worcester Royal Porcelain Co., Worcester manufacturer

England, est. 1862

Vase

1876–91

porcelain

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria by
Sir Thomas and Lady Travers, Governors, 1982

D52-1982

Look 36, dress

2004

Pantheon ad Lucem collection, autumn–
winter 2004–05

silk (organza, chiffon), acetate (lining),
glass (beads),
metal (fastenings)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through
the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2022

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

Blouse, skirt and belt

2005

Neptune collection, spring–summer 2006
cotton/lurex, mother-of-pearl (buttons),
cashmere/silk (crepe), polyester, lurex,
leather, metal (buckle)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2016

M.2016.260.27a-c

Shoes

2005

Neptune collection, spring–summer 2006
leather, metal

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2020

M.2020.123.1a-b

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt
Gladiators who fought in arenas as
entertainment inspired this silver outfit
featuring a short pleated skirt and
belt, quilted with rearing hippocamps

– the Hellenistic seahorses that draw Neptune’s chariot. Artists revived the mythological creature – a symbol of both the sea and netherworld – during the Renaissance, but examples in this room date from classical antiquity through to the early nineteenth century. McQueen’s specific references, drawn from ancient Roman culture, contribute to a collection centered around feminine strength, body-conscious dressing and power.

France

Textile length

1820–40

silk

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift of Mr and Mrs John Jewett Garland, 1961

M.61.15

The phoenix – a mythical bird that cyclically regenerates, symbolising everlasting life, renewal and the sun – was often used in revival styles in combination with other neo-classical motifs. This narrow textile length, most likely woven for a paravent, or screen, features a pair of phoenixes alongside other mythological creatures in a stylised design fashionable from the late eighteenth century. Confronting phoenixes beaded in crystal on a sheer back panel also appear on McQueen's

long white dress in keeping with the allegorical tenor of the collection.

Fontana Workshop,
Urbino manufacturer
Italy, active 1520s–80

Wine cistern

c. 1565–71

earthenware (*maiolica*)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift of Stanley Mortimer, 1950

50.42.1

Room:

Runway and backstage

Room description: A hallway that curves around to the right. Large video screens display runway and backstage footage.



Wall text:

Runway and backstage

Alexander McQueen presented thirty-six collections between March 1992 and October 2009. These runways were important opportunities for McQueen to express his vision, which stretched far beyond the clothing he created.

Imagining the story he wanted to tell with the runway was often McQueen's starting point for designing his collections. He closely collaborated with everyone involved in the creative choices regarding runway presentations, including settings, music, models, lighting, styling, hair and make-up.

This series of highlights from McQueen's always unexpected and now iconic runway presentations includes formative

collections – such as his graduate collection *Jack the Ripper Stalks His Victims*, 1992, which drew the attention and advocacy of Isabella Blow, and the Gothic power of the acclaimed *Dante* collection, autumn–winter 1996–97, shown in a candlelit Spitalfields church – alongside the confrontational *Voss*, spring–summer 2001, and *Plato's Atlantis*, spring–summer 2010.

Among those documenting the frenzy of activity behind-the-scenes was British photographer Robert Fairer, who specialises in the art of backstage photography and has captured the zeitgeist of the fashion industry since the early 1990s. These photographs reveal the otherwise-hidden world behind the catwalk with all its candid detail and frenetic energy.

Runway and backstage

Labels (large label with corresponding numbers below works)

Robert Fairer

English born 1966

All photographs © Robert Fairer

- 1 *Look 38*, from the *Deliverance* collection,
spring–summer 2004
La Salle Wagram, Paris,
10 October 2003
Model: Karen Elson

- 2 *Look 31*, from the *Deliverance* collection,
spring–summer 2004
La Salle Wagram, Paris,
10 October 2003
Model: Isabeli Fontana

- 3 *Look 17*, from *The Widows of Culloden* collection,
autumn–winter 2006–07

Palais Omnisports de Paris-Bercy,
Paris, 3 March 2006
Model: Julia Dunstall

4 *Look 38, Look 40, Look 41*, from *The Widows of Culloden* collection,
autumn–winter 2006–07

Palais Omnisports de Paris-Bercy,
Paris, 3 March 2006
Models: Natasha Poly, Querelle
Jansen, Tanya Dziahileva

5 *Look 7*, from *The Widows of Culloden* collection,
autumn–winter 2006–07

Palais Omnisports de Paris-Bercy,
Paris, 3 March 2006
Model: Natasha Poly

6 *Look 50*, from *The Widows of Culloden* collection, autumn–winter

2006–07

Palais Omnisports de Paris-Bercy,
Paris, 3 March 2006

Model: Hana Soukupova

7 *Look 50, Look 51, Look 47, Look 48,*
from *The Widows of Culloden*
collection, autumn–winter 2006–07

Palais Omnisports de Paris-Bercy,
Paris, 3 March 2006

Models: Hana Soukupova, Daria
Werbowy, Gemma Ward, Raquel
Zimmermann

8 *Look 15,* from *The Widows of*
Culloden collection, autumn–winter
2006–07

Palais Omnisports de Paris-Bercy,
Paris, 3 March 2006

Model: Ana Mihajlovic

- 9 *Gemma Ward and Katy England, backstage, The Widows of Culloden* collection, autumn–winter 2006–07
Palais Omnisports de Paris-Bercy, Paris, 3 March 2006
- 10 *Look 26, from The Widows of Culloden* collection, autumn–winter 2006–07
Palais Omnisports de Paris-Bercy, Paris, 3 March 2006
Model: Bette Franke
- 11 *Look 33, from The Widows of Culloden* collection, autumn–winter 2006–07
Palais Omnisports de Paris-Bercy, Paris, 3 March 2006
Model: Fabiana Semprebom

- 12 *Backstage, In Memory of Elizabeth How, Salem,*
1692 collection, autumn–winter
2007–08
Le Zénith Arena, Paris, 2 March 2007
- 13 *Backstage, In Memory of Elizabeth How, Salem,*
1692 collection, autumn–winter
2007–08
Le Zénith Arena, Paris, 2 March 2007
- 14 *Look 18, from the In Memory of Elizabeth How, Salem, 1692*
collection, autumn–winter 2007–08
Le Zénith Arena, Paris, 2 March 2007
Model: Snejana Onopka
- 15 *Look 23, Look 22, from the Sarabande* collection,
spring–summer 2007

Cirque d'Hiver, Paris, 6 October
2006

Models: Bette Franke, Marina Perez

16 *Look 18*, from the *Sarabande*
collection,
spring–summer 2007
Cirque d'Hiver, Paris, 6 October
2006
Models: Jessica Stam

17 *Lee Alexander McQueen, backstage*,
from the
Natural Dis-tinction, Un-Natural
Selection collection,
spring–summer 2009
Le 104, 5 Rue Curial, Paris, 3
October 2008
Model: Karlie Kloss, Irena Kulikova

18 *Lee Alexander McQueen*, from the

Dante collection,
autumn–winter 1996
Christ Church, London, Paris, 1
March 1996

- 19 *Alexander McQueen and Sarah
Harmarnee, backstage*, from the
Joan collection, autumn–winter
1998–99
Gatliff Road Warehouse, London, 25
February 1998
Model: Svetlana
- 20 *Look 39, Look 40*, from *The Girl Who
Lived in the Tree* collection, autumn–
winter 2008–09
Palais Omnisports de Paris-Bercy,
Paris,
29 February, 2008
Model: Abbey Lee Kershaw

- 21 *Backstage, The Horn of Plenty*
collection,
autumn–winter 2009–10
Palais Omnisports de Paris-Bercy,
Paris, 10 March 2009
- 22 *Look 9, Look 29, Look 1, Look 31,*
from *The Horn of Plenty* collection,
autumn–winter 2009–10
Palais Omnisports de Paris-Bercy,
Paris, 10 March 2009
Models: Sara Blomqvist, Aida
Aniulyte, Alla Kostromichova,
Anastasija Kondratjeva
- 23 *Backstage, The Horn of Plenty*
collection,
autumn–winter 2009–10
Palais Omnisports de Paris-Bercy,
Paris, 10 March 2009
Model: Amanda Laine

24 *Look 15*, from *The Horn of Plenty*
collection,
autumn–winter 2009–10
Palais Omnisports de Paris-Bercy,
Paris, 10 March 2009
Model: Kamila Filipcikova

25 *Look 9*, from *The Horn of Plenty*
collection,
autumn–winter 2009–10
Palais Omnisports de Paris-Bercy,
Paris, 10 March 2009
Model: Sara Blomqvist

26 *Backstage*, *The Horn of Plenty*
collection,
autumn–winter 2009–10
Palais Omnisports de Paris-Bercy,
Paris, 10 March 2009

27 *Look 29*, from *The Horn of Plenty*

collection,
autumn–winter 2009–10
Palais Omnisports de Paris-Bercy,
Paris, 10 March 2009
Model: Aida Aniulyte

28 *Backstage, The Horn of Plenty*
collection,
autumn–winter 2009–10
Palais Omnisports de Paris-Bercy,
Paris, 10 March 2009

29 *Look 14, from The Horn of Plenty*
collection,
autumn–winter 2009–10
Palais Omnisports de Paris-Bercy,
Paris, 10 March 2009
Model: Irinia Kulikova

30 *Look 39, from The Horn of Plenty*
collection,

autumn–winter 2009–10

Palais Omnisports de Paris-Bercy,
Paris, 10 March 2009

Model: Karlie Kloss

31 *Look 15*, from the *Natural Dis-
tinction*, *Un-Natural Selection*
collection, spring–summer 2009
Le 104, 5 Rue Curial, Paris, 3
October 2008
Model: Alyona Osmanova

32 *Look 22*, *Look 23*, from the *Natural
Dis-tinction*,
Un-Natural Selection collection,
spring–summer 2009
Le 104, 5 Rue Curial, Paris, 3
October 2008
Model: Kate Somers

33 *Look 11*, *Look 12*, from the *Natural*

Dis-tinction,
Un-Natural Selection collection,
spring–summer 2009
Le 104, 5 Rue Curial, Paris, 3
October 2008
Models: Diana Farkhullina, Anabela
Belikava

34 *Lee Alexander McQueen, backstage*,
from the
*Natural Dis-tinction, Un-Natural
Selection* collection, spring–summer
2009
Le 104, 5 Rue Curial, Paris, 3
October 2008
Model: Kate Somers

35 *Backstage*, from *Plato's Atlantis*
collection,
spring–summer 2010
Palais Omnisports de Paris-Bercy,

Paris, 6 October 2009
Model: Drielly Oliveira

36 *Backstage*, from *Plato's Atlantis*
collection,
spring–summer 2010
Palais Omnisports de Paris-Bercy,
Paris, 6 October 2009

37 *Look 36*, from *Plato's Atlantis*
collection,
spring–summer 2010
Palais Omnisports de Paris-Bercy,
Paris, 6 October 2009

Room:

Technique and innovation

Room description: A darkened room with seating in the centre. Mannequins are displayed around the perimeter.



Wall text:

Technique and innovation

Essential to every McQueen work is the designer's foundation in garment construction. Demonstrating McQueen's mastery of tailoring and dressmaking, the works in this gallery and the following illustrate the ongoing influence of his formative years spent cutting men's suits as an apprentice tailor on Savile Row. McQueen's dressmaking also features complex garment patterns, informed by skilful cutting and tactile sensitivity in draping.

McQueen's deep knowledge of technique also enabled him to deconstruct clothing, resulting in designs that combine, in the words of Isabella Blow, 'sabotage and tradition'. He learnt

methods of deconstruction while working for experimental designers Koji Tatsuno and Romeo Gigli, while as head designer at Givenchy, he further refined his couture skills. These experiences culminated in designs strongly informed by McQueen's hands-on approach to garment creation.

McQueen's attention to detail was not limited to construction; it is also apparent in his inventive use of fabrics, surface treatments and embrace of emerging technologies, such as laser-cutting and digital printing, which have had a lasting impact on the fashion industry.

Technique and innovation

Labels (clockwise from the entrance):

Look 44, dress

2002

Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious
collection, autumn–winter 2002–03
polyester, cotton, silk, nylon, acetate,
metal (fastenings)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased with funds donated by Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM
and Family, 2022

The dark gothic fantasy and horror films of artist and filmmaker Tim Burton served as inspiration for the dramatic presentation of the *Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious* collection. Burton designed the lighting and invitations for the show, which conveyed references to the classroom and unruly children. In this dress, McQueen combines the implied innocence of a milkmaid neckline with complex panelling and corsetry detail,

Jacket and jeans

2002

Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious

collection,

autumn–winter 2002–03

wool, cotton (cord), leather, cotton/
elastane (denim)

Boots (attributed to)

2006

The Widows of Culloden collection,

autumn–winter 2006–07

leather

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gifts from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2020

M.2020.122.25, M.2020.122.24 &
M.2020.122.33a-b

McQueen's tailoring and patternmaking skills enabled him to masterfully assemble and disassemble clothing. In this tweed and leather outfit, McQueen subverts outerwear, underwear and

accessories, transforming a conventional jacket through the addition of a belted bra and harness, with corsetry lacing highlighting the back of the jacket (like a spine) and the sides of a pair of jeans.

McQueen's remixing of conventional garments, particularly his addition of fastenings and elements that bind parts of the body, is reminiscent of the subversive forms of expression that characterise gay leather and queer club-wear aesthetics.

and delicate lace and satin elements that carry a more subversive reference to lingerie as outerwear.

Dress

2002

lrere collection, spring–summer 2003

(attributed to)

silk (chiffon), cotton (lace), vinyl,
metal (fastening)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through
the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2022

Look 41, dress

2002

Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious

collection, autumn–winter 2002–03

silk, cotton, elastane, nylon, leather

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through
the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2019

2019.960

Boots

c. 2002

leather

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles

Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2020

M.2020.123.23.a-b

To create this dress, and the similar example on display nearby from the *Scanners* collection, McQueen bound and enveloped the body with gauzy lengths of cloth that reimagine the body-conscious bandage and zipper dresses of the 1980s made famous by the

Tunisian designer Azzedine Alaïa, who
McQueen greatly admired.

Dress

2003

Scanners collection, autumn–winter

2003–04

silk/spandex (crepe), leather and metal
(fastenings)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2020

M.2020.122.40

Alexander McQueen designer

English 1969–2010

Sarah Burton designer

English born 1974

Shoes

2010

Untitled (Angels and Demons) collection,
autumn–winter

2010–11

leather, lurex (thread), metal

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2020

M.2020.123.17a-b

Toile for dress

2006

The Widows of Culloden collection,
autumn–winter 2006–07

wool, silk (tulle)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through
the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2019

2019.460

McQueen's design process left little room for error. Surrounded by large, three-metre-high boards filled with reference imagery, studio staff would develop a collection under his direction, cutting toiles from the actual fabrics intended for the runway, rather than the calico typically used by fashion houses.

Two rare toiles for *The Widows of Culloden* collection – prototypes for looks 33 and 40 – attest to McQueen's unique working methods, with swathes of silk

taffeta and lace held in place by tacking stitches and pins, and expertly placed panels of bias-cut tartan alluding to the final runway looks.

Toile for dress

2006

The Widows of Culloden collection,
autumn–winter 2006–07

silk (taffeta), cotton (lace), metal (boning,
fastenings)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through
the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2019

2019.459

Look 30, coat

1996

Dante collection, autumn–winter 1996–97
wool, metallic thread (braid)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through
the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2021

2021.90

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

McQueen worked as an assistant pattern-cutter at theatrical costumiers Bermans & Nathans from 1988 to 1989, where he had access to an extensive archive of military and historic clothing. Throughout his career, he drew on this experience to create technically brilliant designs, such as this asymmetrical naval-style tailcoat with golden braid work, which is masterfully cut from a single panel of cloth. McQueen created only three of these jackets. One was sold at Liberty department store in London, and another

was owned by McQueen's friend, patron and muse Isabella Blow. This jacket belonged to Ruti Danan, McQueen's studio manager at the time.

Look 4, dress

1997

Untitled (Golden Shower) collection,
spring–summer 1998

wool, synthetic fabric (lining), cotton
(tulle), metal (fastenings), plastic
(buttons)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through
the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2019

2019.477

Dress

1996

Dante collection, autumn–winter 1996–97
acetate/nylon/elastane (twill), nylon/
elastane (net)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2019

M.2019.394.3

McQueen – who once stated that ‘the basis for anything I do is craftsmanship’ – consistently looked to his formative apprentice years working on Savile Row when developing each of his collections. These examples from the *Untitled (Golden Shower)* and *Dante* collections use fabrics traditionally associated with menswear, such as wool, pinstripes and plaid, but are cleverly transformed by net inserts and piecing to reveal, conceal and highlight parts of the body. Two dresses are constructed with

plunging lapel necklines, pocket flaps and a front vent in direct reference to a conventional suit jacket.

Dress

1997

Untitled (Golden Shower) collection,

spring–summer 1998

wool

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2019

M.2019.399.8

Dress

1997

Untitled (Golden Shower) collection,

spring–summer 1998

wool, nylon/elastane (net)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2016

M.2016.260.26

Look 11, dress

1998

Joan collection, autumn–winter 1998–99
wool, plastic

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased with funds donated by Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM
and Family, 2022

2022.776

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

McQueen became renowned for the severe silhouette evident in these two outfits in grey wool and black beaded cashmere from the *Joan* collection.

Referencing ecclesiastical dress and Victorian-era womenswear, each garment integrates excess buttons to exaggerate and reinforce the impact of the silhouette and convey heightened drama.

Look 18, jacket and skirt

1996

Bellmer La Poupée collection, spring–
summer 1997

cotton, acetate, polyester, elastane,
metal and plastic (fastenings)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through
the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2021

2021.754.a-b

‘What attracted me to Alexander was the way he takes ideas from the past and sabotages them with his cut to make them thoroughly new and in the context of today. It is the complexity and severity of his approach to cut that makes him so modern. He is like a Peeping Tom in the way he slots and stabs the fabric to explore all the erogenous zones of the body.’

– Isabella Blow, 1996

Look 42, jacket and skirt

1998

Joan collection, autumn–winter 1998–99
cashmere, acetate, glass (beads), plastic
(buttons), metal (zip)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased with funds donated by Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM
and Family, 2022

2022.773 & 2022.780

‘Tailoring is just a form of construction, it’s the rigour behind the design but at the end of the day you’re still dealing with a single or double-breasted jacket. The narrative is what makes it interesting, plus the romance behind it and the detail ...’

– Alexander McQueen, 2006

Dress

2002

Irere collection, spring–summer 2003

silk/cotton (crepe chiffon)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2020

M.2020.122.41

Complex garment patterns emerge in McQueen's dress designs, informed both by his training and his tactile sensitivity to cloth. This grouping of dresses made after McQueen's 1996 appointment as head designer at Givenchy attest to the skills in lightness he gained while at the couture house. The draping of delicate fabric and use of complex insets and godets demonstrate his ability to create sinuous movement around the body.

Runway presentation of *No. 13* collection, spring–summer 1999

Courtesy of YOOX Net-a-Porter Group, Runway Collection, Fashion Footage Archive

Alexander McQueen brought unprecedented creativity, excitement and innovation to his runway presentations. Arguably the most memorable runway moment, and the only one that made the designer cry, was the finale of his thirteenth show.

Presented in a disused London bus depot, *No. 13* culminated with model Shalom Harlow, wearing a white trapeze dress, being sprayed with black and yellow paint by two robots in a performance conveying both balletic grace and implied violence. McQueen utilised the robots, hired from a car manufacturing workshop, to convey his

growing fear of automation, replacing the handmade in fashion. Their inclusion in the show has also been linked to the gestural performativity of Abstract Expressionism and Rebecca Horn's 1991 mechanical sculpture *High Moon*.

Dress

2007

pre-collection, autumn–winter 2007–08
rayon/polyamide (lace), metallic thread,
silk (crepe)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2019

M.2019.399.11

Shoes

2005

The Man Who Knew Too Much collection,
autumn–winter

2005–06

cotton (sateen), silk (ribbon, velvet),
leather

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2020

M.2020.123.18a-b

Dress

2004

Pantheon ad Lucem collection, autumn–
winter 2004–05

silk/elastane (crepe chiffon)

Shoes

2006

The Widows of Culloden collection,
autumn–winter 2006–07

embossed leather

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gifts from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2020

M.2020.122.6 & M.2020.122.36

Room section:

Technique and innovation: Dangerous Bodies

Room description: Black and white printed floor and walls. Mannequins are displayed on a riser as you enter, there are glass cases on your left.



Wall text:

Dangerous bodies

McQueen's lexicon of design codes, techniques, materials and references was grounded in a desire to transcend fashion norms. McQueen wanted to imbue his garments with a distinct power, claiming: 'I want people to be afraid of the women I dress'.

The distinctive silhouettes and anatomical cutting of McQueen's designs delineated the female form while conferring a ferocious agency on the wearer.

This notion of fearlessness influenced McQueen's work technically and conceptually. On the runway, his models were defiant, and the clothes confronting. Audiences were unsettled by his transgressive vision of beauty,

dominance and desire.

Key collaborators Sarah Harmarnee and Dai Rees also contributed to the realisation of McQueen's vision during the late 1990s. Headpieces were sharp, hard, decorative and protective, and face veils were analogous with the themes of vulnerability, survival and empowerment through transformation. These themes were at the heart of his collections during this period, and indeed throughout much of McQueen's career.

Technique and innovation: Dangerous Bodies

Labels (clockwise from the entrance):

Sarah Harmarnee designer

Australian, born 1970, worked in London and Paris 1996–2011, Italy 2012–

Face veil

1997

silver plate, leather

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1988

1998.11

For the *It's a Jungle Out There* collection, McQueen invited artist Sarah Harmarnee to create horn and metal accessories, including *Face veil* and *Blade headpiece*. Sharp, decorative, menacing and protective, these pieces were analogous with the themes of vulnerability, survival and empowerment through transformation that were at the heart of the collection and, indeed, much of McQueen's work.

‘What materialised went far beyond simple catwalk looks ... the girls manifested a warrior-like prowess and defiance that juxtaposed (with) the underlying gentle beauty, poetry and vulnerability of the primary inspiration – the gazelle.’

– Sarah Harmarnee, 2022

Dai Rees designer

Welsh, born 1967

Headpiece

1996

Bellmer La Poupée collection,
spring–summer 1997

quills (turkey), synthetic polymer paint,
glitter, leather, metal (buckle)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through
the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2022

For the *Bellmer La Poupée* collection, artist Dai Rees – who met McQueen while studying at Central St Martins – was commissioned to create turkey-quill head cages. McQueen's directive to Rees was to create something that 'gives the impression of a half-animal, half-human'. When worn, the spiky quills were designed to encircle and shield the face

of, and thereby empower, the wearer.
'Without Lee's [McQueen's] trust in me, I can honestly say my career would never have taken its then route. What a journey it's been and is. A collaboration in the 1990s that was built on both trust and bravado. We felt fearless and provocative.'

– Dai Rees, 2022

Sarah Harmarnee designer

Australian, born 1970, worked in London and Paris 1996–2011, Italy 2012–

Blade headpiece

1997

silver plate

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1988

1998.10

‘Significantly, and contrary to popular belief at the time, my pieces were not about attack, aggression, violence or sadomasochism but [were] conceived for protection. With the *Jungle* show, I wanted to evoke a sense of fragility through the metal, to juxtapose against its strength ...’

– Sarah Harmarnee, 2022

Alexander McQueen designer

English 1969–2010

Ian Reid shoemaker

English, active 1990s

Bodice and shoe-boot leggings

1995

Highland Rape collection, autumn–winter

1995–96

leather, metal, silk, polyvinyl chloride,
wool, mohair, rubber

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1996

1996.207a&c

When describing his design practice, McQueen stated: 'I think there has to be an underlying sexuality. There has to be a perverseness to the clothes'. On the body, McQueen's clothes breached the conventions of acceptability. Armoured, naked or exposed torsos and elongated

proportions foregrounded a defiant sexuality. In this design, the rigid form of a leather breastplate combines delicate embossed foliage details with fiercely protective metallic studs. This and other powerful creations by McQueen on display nearby align with the tradition of transgression in queer fashion history.

Look 50, top with integrated mask, bumsters and shoe-boots

1995

The Hunger collection, spring–summer

1996

stainless steel, polyester, aluminium,
plastic, leather

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1996

1996.208.a-d

Throughout McQueen's career, he fashioned hard carapace-like bodices out of moulded leather, wood, plastic glass, metal and mussel shells that armoured the body. A similar sentiment is expressed in this outfit from *The Hunger*, modelled by Katy England on the runway. Inspired by an erotic 1983 vampire horror film of the same name, the collection's severe silhouettes, savage cutting and sheer fabrics gave primacy to the wearer's

body. In this instance, the silver metal-mesh 'bumsters', and bodice with a fully enclosed head covering, also infer fetishistic associations characteristic of queer club aesthetics.

Dress

1995

Highland Rape collection, autumn–winter

1995–96

cotton (lace)

Collection of Katy England

McQueen's *Highland Rape* collection was the second time he collaborated with his close friend, stylist Katy England. With England's input, the runway was strewn with heather: models staggered out, their gossamer lace dresses appearing as if torn and ripped amid an assault.

'Lee's mother Joyce was a keen genealogist who had tracked the family's ancestry back to its origin on the Isle of Skye. Lee romanticised the Jacobite rebellion ... believing his own ancestors played a role in this period of history ...

this collection was based on the battle between the Scottish and the English in the Highlands.'

– Katy England, 2022

Dress

1995

Highland Rape collection, autumn–winter

1995–96

polyester, plastic (fastenings)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through
the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2021

2021.760

Initially misunderstood by the press, the title of the controversial *Highland Rape* collection was intended by McQueen to be a reference to Scotland's turbulent history: the Jacobite risings of the eighteenth century, the forced Highland Clearances of the nineteenth century, and what journalist Marion Hume described as 'a desire to strip romance to the truth'. In an interview, McQueen said about the show, 'Eighteenth-century Scotland was not about beautiful women drifting across the moors in swathes of unmanageable

chiffon. My show was anti that sort of Romanticism'.

Dress

1994

Banshee collection, autumn–winter

1994–95

wool blend, plastic (thread)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through
the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2022

2022.128

The concept of fear influenced McQueen's work technically and conceptually. On the runway, his models were defiant, and the clothes confronting. Audiences were unsettled by his transgressive vision of beauty, dominance and desire. The *Banshee* collection was titled after a female spirit in Gaelic mythology whose wailing presaged a death. This dress was knitted by Julien MacDonald (the Welsh-born designer who later succeeded McQueen at Givenchy) and incorporates a sheer panel that

reveals the wearer's lower breasts.
This subversive design eschews the
convention of acceptability and is an early
example of provocation at play in
McQueen's work.

Top

1995

Highland Rape collection, autumn–winter

1995–96

synthetic fibre, cotton, metal (fastenings)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through
the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2021

2021.95

Look 13, dress

1997

It's a Jungle Out There collection,
autumn–winter 1997–98
leather, nylon (net)

Collection of Katy England

Presented in London's Borough Market against a backdrop of wrecked cars and bullet-ridden corrugated iron, McQueen's *It's a Jungle Out There* collection was the designer's tribute to the animal kingdom. The Thomson's gazelle was his primary inspiration for the collection. The animal's struggle to survive attacks from big cat predators, as is depicted in this dress, served as a metaphor for survival of the fittest in the urban context and pointedly within the cut-and-thrust of the fashion industry.

Jacket

1995

Highland Rape collection, autumn–winter

1995–96

wool, acetate, metal

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through
the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2022

2022.125

Skirt

1995

Highland Rape collection, autumn–winter

1995–96

polyvinyl chloride

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1996

1996.207.b

This sharply tailored tartan jacket, with a curved and open centre front and rear peplum, was shown on the runway with a pair of the designer's infamous 'bumster' trousers. These were cut so low they

grazed the model's pubic bone at the front and highlighted the lower spine at the rear.

'I wanted to elongate the body, not just show the bum. To me, that part of the body – not so much the buttocks, but the bottom of the spine – that's the most erotic part of anyone's body, man or woman.'

– Alexander McQueen, 1996

Ian Reid shoemaker
English, active 1990s

Shoes

1995

Highland Rape collection, autumn–winter
1995–96

leather (faux lizard matte, snakeskin
patent), cotton (lace), plastic (aglet)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through
the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2021

2021.761.a-b

Room section:
Technique and innovation
Costume History

Room description: Dark pink and white printed floor and walls. Silver risers display mannequins.



Wall text:

Costume history

McQueen regularly turned to Western costume history for inspiration, refashioning men's and women's dress, textiles and embellishments from past eras ranging from the Renaissance and the Enlightenment to the Belle Époque and the Jazz Age.

His interest in, and adaptation of, historical silhouettes, textiles and trims greatly influenced the storylines of McQueen's collections, which were often inspired by historical prints, fashion plates and paintings, as well as the contemporary film genres of sci-fi and horror through to fantasy and period drama.

Technique and innovation: Costume History

Labels (clockwise from wall text):

Jack Cato

Australian 1889–1971

**No title (Woman wearing pearls
and an arm band)**

1920s

gelatin silver photograph

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Presented through the NGV Foundation by John Cato, Fellow, 2005

2005.211

Dress

2001

What a Merry Go Round collection,
autumn–winter 2001–02
polyamide (net), plastic (sequins), silk
and metallic thread (lace)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2018

M.2018.278.18

This dress from McQueen's *What a Merry Go Round* collection highlights the designer's engagement with and reinterpretation of the 1920s *robe de style* silhouette, with its straight cut and volume at the hips. McQueen has also reinterpreted the applied decorations associated with the era in the sequined surface and rows of tulle and lace. Its green colour palette recalls the nightlife of Germany's Weimar Republic, which is the setting of the 1972 film by Bob Fosse,

Cabaret, an important inspiration for the collection.

Coat

1998

No. 13 collection, spring–summer 1999
cotton/rayon/silk (twill), mother-of-pearl
(buttons)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2020

M.2020.122.2

The two women's coats on display here from McQueen's *No. 13* collection were modelled after early-nineteenth-century men's tailcoats. This coat features deconstructed lapels that button to the front collar and has a skirt that may be buttoned at back into a tail or buttoned in front to create the skirt of a frock coat – two styles that prevailed throughout the 1800s.

Jacket and skirt

2004

It's Only a Game collection, spring–
summer 2005

cotton (twill), silk (net, lace, faille
organza),

mother-of-pearl (buttons), leather

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2020

M.2020.122.11 & M.2020.122.12

Boots

2004

Pantheon ad Lucem collection, autumn–
winter 2004–05

leather, suede

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2021

M.2020.122.14a-b

McQueen was inspired by the costumes
from the 1975 film *Picnic at Hanging Rock*
by Peter Weir for his *It's Only a Game*

collection. This ensemble references the high collars, vertical pintucks, silk net and lace of the Edwardian period as characterised by this afternoon dress by French couture house Callot Soeurs on display nearby. The influence of these stylistic elements of the earlier garment are evidenced by McQueen's distinctive design for the jacket, with its pastel colour palette and use of grosgrain ribbon, typically found inside historic boned bodices, acting here as an exposed waist closure.

Callot Soeurs, Paris couture house

Paris 1895–1937

Marie Callot Gerber designer

French c. 1870–1927

Afternoon dress

1905

wool, silk (satin), lace, metallic thread

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased with funds donated by Mrs Krystyna Campbell-Pretty
in memory of Mr Harold Campbell-Pretty, 2015

2015.585.a-b

England

Evening or Full Dress

1810

fashion plate for *Ackermann's Repository of Arts*,

published by Rudolph Ackermann,
London

hand-coloured engraving on paper

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift of Charles LeMaire, 1983

M.83.161.148

Dress

2002

Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious
collection,
autumn–winter 2002–03
silk (satin), cotton (thread)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2016

M.2016.260.21

Early-nineteenth-century fashions, as illustrated in the nearby English fashion plate from 1810, inspired this form-fitting dress from McQueen's *Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious* collection, with its empire-line silhouette. The empire line was named after the First French Empire (1804–14), during which this cut of dress was made popular by Napoleon's wife, Empress Josephine. The empire-line style silhouette can be traced as far back as the Greco-Roman

era, where woman wore flowing tunics that were often belted directly under the bust.

Coat

1998

No. 13 collection, spring–summer 1999
polyester/acetate (twill)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2020

M.2020.122.30

Morris & Co., London retailer

England 1861–1940

Henry Holiday designer

English 1839–1927

Catherine Holiday embroiderer

English 1839–1924

Hanging

1887

linen, silk (thread)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1976

D150-1976

Bodice

1995

Highland Rape collection, autumn–winter

1995–96

silk (damask, satin), acetate (lining),
plastic (buttons)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through
the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2021

2021.759

McQueen's knowledge of costume history came from his early professional experiences as well as his study of the textiles and fashion holdings of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Beyond being fascinated by period garments, McQueen admired the work of British textile designer and polymath William Morris. For his *Highland Rape* collection, McQueen used Morris-inspired prints and woven upholstery fabrics, as featured in this fitted bodice, to craft

designs paired with his signature
'bumster' trousers.

Frans Pourbus II

Dutch 1569–1622

**Portrait of Louis XIII, King of France,
as a boy**

c. 1616

oil on canvas

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift of Mr and Mrs William May Garland, 1948

M.48.1

Hendrick Goltzius

Dutch 1558–1616

Lady Françoise van Egmond

1580

engraving, 4th of 5 states

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Everard Studley Miller Bequest, 1959

445-5

The standard bearer, turned to left

1587

engraving

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1923

1278.236-3

Dress

2006

The Widows of Culloden collection,
autumn–winter 2006–07

silk (chiffon, net), feathers, glass (beads),
crystals, metallic thread (braid)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2017

M.2017.280.2

Shoes

2006

Sarabande collection, spring–summer
2007

leather, silk (net)

Collection of Regina J. Drucker

Flemish court painter Frans Pourbus II's portrait of a young King Louis XIII of France renders the monarch with exquisite attention to detail, especially in his starched lace collar, slashed satin

doublet and sleeves, and gold scrolling-vine embroidery. A comparable level of precision is reflected in this dress from McQueen's *The Widows of Culloden* collection, which includes a small ruff at the neck and elaborate gold beading across the chest and around the central, mirrored gold 'McQ' (referencing the McQueen logo).

Jacket

2002

Irere collection, spring–summer 2003

leather

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2019

M.2019.399.17

This close-fitting, perforated and embossed leather jacket from McQueen's *Irere* collection recalls the historical fashion for slashing in menswear. This decorative technique involves making small cuts and perforations in the outer fabric of a garment to reveal the inner lining. This is beautifully illustrated in Dutch artist Hendrick Goltzius's 1587 engraving of a Polish standard bearer, on display nearby.

Jacket and jeans

2002

Irere collection, spring–summer 2003
cotton (denim), leather

Shoes

2005

The Man Who Knew Too Much collection,
autumn–winter 2005–06
cotton (sateen), silk (ribbon, velvet),
leather

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gifts from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2020

M.2020.122.26a-b & M.2020.123.22a-b

McQueen's deep knowledge of fashion history, trends and related construction details across the centuries is evident in this denim ensemble. The silhouette of the jacket references the doublets worn by men in the sixteenth century, with its short length, nipped-in waist, sleeve

caps and exaggerated cross lacing
throughout.

Vest, skirt, purse and shoes

2002

Irere collection, spring–summer 2003

leather, suede, glass (beads), metal
(chains, fastenings),

silk (crepe chiffon, twill), feathers, plastic

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2016

M.2016.260.14

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2020

M.2020.122.5, M.2020.122.32.a-c &
M.2020.122.31.a-b

McQueen often reimagined the silhouettes and details of Western costume history to tell a story. At times, he married his knowledge of historical dress styles and construction with his love of period films, such as Roland Joffé's *The Mission* (1986), which informed the sweeping storyline in the *Irere* collection, of European colonialism and Christian missionaries in South America in the late sixteenth century.

Shoes

2008

Natural Dis-tinction, Un-Natural Selection
collection,
spring–summer 2009
printed leather, wood

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2020

M.2020.123.3.a-b

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

McQueen's appreciation for eighteenth-century menswear is visible in this ensemble, which replicates the vocabulary of a *habit à la française* or formal court dress. Mirroring Rococo sensibilities, the work layers a striking digital woodgrain print, floriate embroidery, and curved cutaway panels at the front of the jacket.

Italy

Dress (*Robe à la française*)

textile 1700–20; dress constructed 1760s
silk (damask)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Costume Council Fund, 1964

M.64.83.1a

England

Stomacher

mid-18th century

linen, silk and metallic thread
(embroidery, passementerie)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift of Dr Alessandro Morandotti, 1959

M.59.21.2

England

Petticoat

c. 1760

silk (satin)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift of Mrs Henry Salvatori, 1979

M.79.19.2

France

Coat and waistcoat

c. 1775

silk, linen, wool, metal

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1958

1792.a-b-D4

Dress

2007

pre-collection, autumn–winter 2007–08

silk (taffeta)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2019

M.2019.394.7

This dress was directly inspired by fashionable garments of the eighteenth century. Its long, draped box pleats at the front of the body reference the back of a traditional *robe à la française*, a distinctive design depicted in Swedish painter Alexander Roslin's 1757 portrait of a Russian Imperial noblewoman and courtier, on display nearby. A reference to the stomacher – a V-shaped piece of decorative cloth typically worn at the open centre front of period gowns – appears at the back of McQueen's dress, completing the designer's vision for a

kind of deconstructed and backwards
construction.

Alexander Roslin

Swedish 1718–93, worked throughout
Europe 1745–93

Anastasia Ivanova, Countess of Hesse-Homburg, Princess Trubestkaya 1757 oil on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Everard Studley Miller Bequest, 1971

E-1971

John Hose & Son manufacturer
England, active 18th century

Shoes

1756

silk, leather

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift of Mrs Carl W. Barrow, 1989

M.89.144a-b

Look 12, jacket

2008

Natural Dis-tinction, Un-Natural Selection
collection,

spring–summer 2009

digitally printed silk (satin, thread), metal
(fastenings)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through
the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2021

2021.762

Look 12, skirt

2008

Natural Dis-tinction, Un-Natural Selection
collection,

spring–summer 2009

digitally printed silk, metal (fastenings)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased, NGV Supporters of Fashion and Textiles, 2021

2021.660

Room section:

Technique and Innovation: Surface Decoration

Room description: Black and white printed floor and walls. Mannequins are displayed on silver risers.



Wall text:

Surface decoration

Alexander McQueen's use of inventive fabrics, surface treatments and photorealistic imagery expresses his appreciation for both historical and emerging technology. The *Natural Distinction, Un-Natural Selection* collection, spring–summer 2009, was pioneering in its use of digitally engineered and printed textile designs to reinforce McQueen's artistic concepts. Other surface treatments, such as quilting, beading and fringing, were inspired by McQueen's fashion predecessors, including Charles James, or muses, like his friend and patron Isabella Blow.

Technique and Innovation: Surface Decoration

Labels (clockwise from the wall text):

Gilbert Adrian

American 1903–59

Suit (jacket and skirt)

1943–45

wool

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift of Mrs Houston Rehrig, 1969

CR.69.55.3a-b

Look 24, suit

2003

Scanners collection, autumn–winter

2003–04

wool, metal (fastenings)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through
the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2022

Boots

2002

Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious

collection, autumn–winter 2002–03

leather, metal (buckles), cotton (braid)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles

Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2022

M.2022.173.3a-b

This checkerboard suit highlights
McQueen's advanced cutting abilities:
curved or squared, on the grain or bias,
the pattern pieces are meticulously
arranged to create a vibrant optical
illusion, visually sculpting the body. His

technique – first honed during his Savile Row apprenticeships – can be compared to that of the American designer Gilbert Adrian, who similarly excelled in the graphic pattern placement of tailored suits, an example of which is on display nearby. Both designers are noteworthy for their innovative and gender-bending translation of traditional men’s tailoring approaches for womenswear.

Jacket

1999

The Overlook collection, autumn–winter

1999–2000

wool (twill)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2017

M.2017.280.12

Referencing the work of queer fashion design icon Charles James, who was also a leader in pattern-cutting, here McQueen expertly uses curved seams and quilting to create a down-filled coat. James's 1937 eiderdown and satin jacket, photographed for *Harper's Bazaar* in October 1938, is a notable precursor to other high-end 'puffer' styles that have been fashionable ever since. McQueen showed this insulating silhouette in the snow-globe-inspired runway collection *The Overlook*, whose chilling namesake

was the Colorado hotel setting of director Stanley Kubrick's 1980 film, *The Shining*.

Look 9, coat

2007

In Memory of Elizabeth How, Salem, 1692

collection,

autumn–winter 2007–08

silk (satin), polyester (coat), acetate,

rayon (lining)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through
the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2021

2021.756.a-b

To create this lustrous golden coat, McQueen employed a dense geometry of quilting with curved seams; this was a departure from his typically corseted Victorian silhouette.

McQueen said the most perfect shape in nature is the egg, echoed in the ovoid shape seen here. The silhouette is also a nod to the work of Cristobal Balenciaga, whose experimental cocoon-

shaped jackets and coats created a new relationship between body and cloth.

Coat

2004

pre-collection, autumn–winter 2004–05

cotton, nylon, silk, metallic thread

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased with funds donated by Olga Kononchuk, 2017

2016.405

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

Look 55, dress

1998

Joan collection, autumn–winter 1998–99
nylon mesh/lycra, glass (beads)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased with funds donated by Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM
and Family, 2022

The entire surface of this key work from *Joan*, a collection inspired by French martyred saint Joan of Arc, is fully embellished with glistening, blood-red bugle beads. The bead work is interrupted by diagonal slices of mesh panelling, visceral and suggestive of the physical toll of battle. The tension between transparency and profusion, and restraint and movement, highlights McQueen's capacity for conveying spectacle through intricate technical detailing. The dramatic finale of the catwalk presentation of *Joan* featured a

model in a hooded version of this gown
encircled by a ring of flames.

Look 15, dress

2008

Natural Dis-tinction, Un-Natural Selection

collection,

spring–summer 2009

polyamide, elastodine, silk

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through
the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2020

2020.103

Dress (variation of Look 37)

2000

Eshu collection, autumn–winter 2000–01
synthetic hair, glass (beads), polyester
(lining), metal (fastenings)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through
the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2021

2021.101

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

This fitted dress made for Isabella Blow – McQueen's close friend and patron – features a bodice encrusted with tiny chartreuse beads that spill down over a skirt of synthetic horsehair. Surfaces consisting of fur, feathers, hair and animal skins appear across many of McQueen's collections. Expressive of his longstanding interest in nature, and ideas of transformation, employing highly sophisticated couture techniques, works

integrating natural materials were often as breathtaking as they were unsettling. For the *Eshu* collection, McQueen drew inspiration from the story of a Victorian lady who settled in Africa and referenced an earth deity worshipped by the Yoruba people of Nigeria in its name.

Dress

2007

La Dame Bleue collection, spring–summer 2008

silk (crepe), plastic (sequins), glass (beads)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2019
M.2019.394.9

Shoes

2003

pre-collection, autumn–winter 2003–04
leather, crystals

Collection of Regina J. Drucker

La Dame Bleue memorialised Isabella Blow, one of McQueen's closest confidantes, champions and muses, who passed away in 2007. The sequin dress is paired with a hat, previously owned by Blow, that was crafted by

their mutual friend, milliner Philip Treacy. Deceptively simple, McQueen's dress design highlights his gift for imbuing the technical with the personal: on the wearer's left side, gold-coloured beads are precisely embedded between vertical rows of black sequins to produce a faithful portrait of Blow. Mimicking a lenticular print, this representation of her face is visible only at certain angles, an effect not unlike the experience of memory.

Philip Treacy, London millinery house
England est. 1994

Philip Treacy designer

Irish born 1967, worked in England
1988–

Hat

2005

twine, metal, horsehair, crystals

Collection of Regina J. Drucker

Jacket

1998

Joan collection, autumn–winter 1998–99
polyester/acetate (crepe), plastic
(sequins)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2018

M.2018.278.11

This jacket from McQueen's *Joan* collection reproduces an 1845 daguerreotype by Carl Gustav Oehme, an early adopter of the medium who trained with its inventor, Louis Daguerre. Superimposing Oehme's image atop a sequined ground textile disrupts the print registration, producing a shadowy effect that further emphasises the spectral quality of McQueen's collection, named for martyred saint Joan of Arc.

Look 11, dress

2000

Eshu collection, autumn–winter 2000–01
screenprinted leather, mother-of-pearl
(buttons)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased with funds donated by Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM
and Family, 2022

An experimental image, composed from two layered negatives, is screenprinted on the back of this white leather dress and given further dimension and kinetic qualities through laser-cut vertical slashes. McQueen may have encountered Italian photographer Wanda Wulz's iconic 1932 photograph *Io + gatto* ('I + cat') through art historian Michel Frizot's *New History of Photography* (1998), which the fashion designer held in his personal library.

Look 22, jacket and leggings

2008

Natural Dis-tinction, Un-Natural Selection
collection,

spring–summer 2009

wool, silk, nylon, acetate, polyamide,
crystal (button)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased with funds donated by Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family, 2022 2022.777.a-b

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

Natural Dis-tinction, Un-Natural Selection was inspired by Charles Darwin and the Industrial Revolution and served as a commentary on humanity's impact on the environment. Provocatively contrasting the natural and technological in the creation of this collection, McQueen and his team achieved idealised silhouettes by engineering print placements on fabric in accordance with the shape of garment

patterns rather than relying on tailoring or undergarments. The resulting compositions produced artful, multidimensional effects in a graduated, jewel-like colour palette.

Dress

2008

Natural Dis-tinction, Un-Natural Selection

collection,

spring–summer 2009

digitally printed wool/silk/nylon (twill)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2020

M.2020.123.15

Dress

2008

Natural Dis-tinction, Un-Natural Selection
collection,
spring–summer 2009
digitally printed rayon

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2018

M.2018.278.1

Shoes

2008

Natural Dis-tinction, Un-Natural Selection
collection,
spring–summer 2009
silk (satin), leather, acrylic

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2019

M.2019.394.11a-b

McQueen's *Natural Dis-tinction, Un-Natural Selection* collection pioneered the use of digital print design that significantly

contributed to the widespread, and ongoing, adoption of this technique in the fashion industry. The digitally manipulated images of crystals that pattern this pair of dresses exemplify the collection's theme of – and McQueen's fascination with – the interplay between the natural and the artificial.

Room:

Fashioned narratives

Room description: Dark space with large perspex case as you enter. There is a projection of a white tree on the wall on your right.



Wall text:

Fashioned narratives

Rooted in McQueen's personal history and romanticised historical references, his narrative-driven collections explore themes of tradition, discovery, exchange, power, persecution, violence and metamorphosis.

The Widows of Culloden, autumn–winter 2006–07, mines McQueen's Scottish ancestry, condemning British colonialism and violence in eighteenth-century Scotland. *In Memory of Elizabeth How, Salem, 1692*, autumn–winter 2007–08, traces the designer's familial background to colonial Massachusetts to pay tribute to distant ancestors executed in the Salem witch trials.

The Girl Who Lived in the Tree, autumn–winter 2008–09, envisions a fairytale that ultimately traces the rhythms of power in the rise and fall of the British Raj in India, while *Scanners*, autumn–winter 2003–04, portrays a journey across Siberia, through Tibet, to Japan, via designs that borrow from textile and dress traditions of these regions.

Wall text:

The Girl Who Lived in the Tree
autumn–winter 2008–09

Inspired by an ancient elm on McQueen's East Sussex property and his travels to India, *The Girl Who Lived in the Tree* envisions a fairytale about a princess who descends from the tree's branches to the ground. The story of the girl's explorations spans the lives of Queen Victoria and Queen Elizabeth II, and the British Raj, with silhouettes and ornamentation drawn from both nineteenth-century and mid-twentieth-century English fashion. Further details are inspired by the opulent textiles, jewellery and motifs of Indian court dress. These references to a queen whose colonial reach no longer included the Indian subcontinent were purposely

optimistic, resulting in a collection that symbolises hope for a girl emerging from darkness into the light.

The Girl Who Lived in the Tree **autumn–winter 2008–09**

Labels (anti-clockwise from the entrance):

Ernst Barlach

German 1870–1938

Lilith, Adam's first Wife

plate 15 from the *Goethe: Walpurgisnacht*
portfolio 1922

published 1923, edition 18/120

woodcut on Japan paper

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
The Robert Gore Rifkind Center for German Expressionist
Studies, purchased with funds provided by Anna Bing
Arnold, Museum Associates Acquisition Fund and
deaccession funds, 1983

83.1.34.20

Albrecht Dürer

German 1471–1528

Witch riding backwards on a goat

1497

engraving

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1956

3479-4

In the fifteenth century, witchcraft was a popular subject in art and was associated with fears about the deviance and apostasy of women, as seen in these two engravings by Albrecht Dürer. Powerful, diabolical and naked, the witches here are shown surrounded by instruments of alchemy, devilry, skulls and bones. Unsurprisingly, this kind of imagery had a profound influence on how witches were portrayed and reimagined

Albrecht Dürer

German 1471–1528

The Four Witches

c. 1500

engraving

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1956

3488-4

Dress

2008

The Girl Who Lived in the Tree collection,
autumn–winter 2008–09
silk/cotton (jacquard), silk (organza)

Boots

2008

The Girl Who Lived in the Tree collection,
autumn–winter 2008–09
leather, plastic, metal

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2020

M.2020.123.14 &
M.2020.123.4a-b

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

A fantastical white line drawing of a twisting tree and woodland creatures decorates this black strapless dress. The digitally woven scene derives from a series of illustrations by Arthur Rackham

for a 1908 edition of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. An expansive 600-year-old elm tree on the property of McQueen's seventeenth-century East Sussex home also served as a source of inspiration for this collection. For the runway presentation, inspired by the artist Christo, McQueen recreated the tree, wrapping it in swathes of white tulle.

Look 20, dress

2008

The Girl Who Lived in the Tree collection,
autumn–winter 2008–09
silk (faille, satin), leather, tulle

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through the
Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2021

2021.764

Shoes

2008

The Girl Who Lived in the Tree collection,
autumn–winter 2008–09

leather, silk, silk (net), crystals, glass
(beads)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2019

M.2019.399.19.a-b

Jewellery by Sguscio Studio

Dress

2008

The Girl Who Lived in the Tree collection,
autumn–winter 2008–09
silk (crepe chiffon), silk (net, thread),
glass (beads)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2016

M.2016.260.20

Boots

2008

The Girl Who Lived in the Tree collection,
autumn–winter 2008–09
leather

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2020

M.2020.123.10a-b

Jewellery by Sguscio Studio

This dress, with its high empire waist,
alludes to the prevailing silhouette of the
Regency period (1811–20), when Queen

Victoria was a child. It is also the period during which the collection's fairytale narrative begins. A goth-punk tone is introduced by the collection's initially dark palette, which lightened over the course of the runway show. Appliquéd acorns and oak leaves decorate the bodice, embellished with tiny glass beads. During Queen Victoria's reign, acorns were a symbol of stability and a common motif in decorative arts.

Look 40, dress

2008

The Girl Who Lived in the Tree collection,
autumn–winter 2008–09

silk (chiffon, thread), plastic (boning),
metal (boning)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased with funds donated by Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family, 2022

2022.775

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

Dress

c. 1820

cotton, silk (gauze), metallic thread
(passementerie, tassels, embroidery),
metal (sequins)

Shoes

1825–50

silk, leather

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
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, 2007

M.2007.211.734
M.2007.211.312a-b

During the period of British rule in India, the export of commodities and styles associated with the subcontinent had a profound impact on Western tastes. Luxury dress in Europe and North America adopted Indian fine muslins and imitated the delicate metal-thread embroideries. This 1820s dress features

a scrolling vine-and-leaf motif that recalls the floriate forms and motifs prevalent in Mughal Indian architecture, decorative arts and block-printed fabrics.

Man's waist sash (*Patka*)

early 19th century

cotton, metallic thread (embroidery, fringe), beetle-wing (elytra) (sequins), silk (braid)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
From the Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck Collection,
Museum Associates Purchase, 1971

M.71.1.38

Through sea trade, fine cottons were exported from India to European markets in the nineteenth century. These luxury fabrics were equally prized domestically. This cotton waist sash known as a *patka* is decorated with fine gold thread embroidery and iridescent beetle-wing (*elytra*) sequins. The tradition of metallic embroidery is echoed in the nearby dress by McQueen. Feminine and romantic, the mid-twentieth-century hourglass silhouette – a nod to Queen Elizabeth II's reign – features appliqués of gold-

embroidered birds and branches,
symbolising the girl emerging from the
tree in McQueen's fantastical tale.

Dress

2008

The Girl Who Lived in the Tree collection,
autumn–winter 2008–09 (attributed to)
silk/polyamide (satin), silk (tulle), metallic
thread (embroidery), metal (sequins)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2018

M.2018.278.13

Shoes

2008

The Girl Who Lived in the Tree collection,
autumn–winter 2008–09
leather, silk, silk (net), crystals, glass
(beads)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2019

M.2019.399.13a-b

Jewellery by Sguscio Studio

England

A Lady of Hindoostan

early 19th century

fashion plate for unknown publication

hand-coloured engraving on paper

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift of Dr and Mrs Gerald Labiner, 1986

M.86.266.18

England

Evening dress

February 1819

fashion plate for *La Belle Assemblée*,
published by John Bell, London
hand-coloured engraving on paper

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift of Dr and Mrs Gerald Labiner, 1986

M.86.266.272

Linnaeus Tripe

English 1822–1902, worked in India
1839–75

Madura, arcade in the quadrangle of Trimul Naik's Palace

1858

from the *Photographs of Madura, Part III*
series, 1858

albumen silver photograph

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased through The Art Foundation of Victoria
with the assistance of David Syme & Co. Limited,
Fellow, 1982

PH124-1982

The invention of photography coincided with the beginning of Queen Victoria's reign in 1837 and was increasingly allied to Britain's colonial endeavours. Images like this helped to visually convey India to audiences at home. Captain Linnaeus Tripe was a leading photographer of

British India. Commissioned to document local architecture and landscapes while stationed there, Tripe produced thousands of images, published books and mounted exhibitions in line with creating an imagined narrative about Britain's Imperial project.

Wall text:

***In Memory of Elizabeth How,
Salem, 1692***

autumn–winter 2007–08

One of McQueen's distant relatives was executed in Salem in the deadliest witch hunt in colonial New England. Embracing witchcraft rather than shying away from it, the runway show for this collection also acknowledged the long history of paganism that the Salem Puritans decried. During the presentation, models walked along a black sandy stage, following the lines of a large red pentagram, a common symbol of Wiccan identity.

Two dresses encrusted with beads celebrate the wavy strands of hair typically shorn from women accused of

practising witchcraft, to reveal any marks of Satan hidden underneath. Long symbolising women's strength, unconfined hair connotes virility and freedom, as well as temptation and sin. The beading may also be interpreted as fire, referencing the European practice of burning witches at the stake. Associations of witchcraft, hair and fire are also reflected in Ernst Barlach's woodblock print of Lilith, a figure recently recast as a symbol of feminine strength, a reconsideration that McQueen similarly posed with this collection.

**In Memory of Elizabeth How,
Salem, 1692
autumn–winter 2007–08**

Labels (anti-clockwise from exit):

Dress

2007

In Memory of Elizabeth How, Salem, 1692
collection,
autumn–winter 2007–08
silk (velvet), glass (beads)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2016

M.2016.260.10

In Memory of Elizabeth How, Salem, 1692, referenced religious themes as well as McQueen's own family history. The beaded waves of hair that fall from the shoulder line of these dresses reference the locks shorn from women's heads during the Salem Witchcraft Trials of 1692. The symbolic association of hair with feminine strength, but also temptation and sin, is echoed in German artist Ernst Barlach's print *Lilith, Adam's first wife*, hanging nearby. Although Lilith

has been interpreted as a demonic figure, in recent decades she has been reclaimed as a symbol of autonomy on the basis of sexuality and gender.

Dress

2007

In Memory of Elizabeth How, Salem, 1692

collection,

autumn–winter 2007–08

silk (satin), glass (beads)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2019

M.2019.394.10

Boots

2007

In Memory of Elizabeth How, Salem, 1692

collection,

autumn–winter 2007–08

leather, cotton (thread), elastic, plastic

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2020

M.2020.123.25a-b

Look 45, evening gown

2007

In Memory of Elizabeth How, Salem, 1692
collection, autumn–winter 2007–08
silk (velvet), glass (beads)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2021

2021.763

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

McQueen's collections sought to convey the universality and ongoing relevance of the themes he tackled, such as colonial violence and the persecution of often marginalised communities. Speaking about his *Elizabeth How* collection to *Big* magazine in 2007, he stated,

'There's a witch hunt for every Muslim [person] living in England, purely because of their religion. There's a witch

hunt for every gay [person] living with HIV. Everyone wants to point the finger at someone. Witch hunts have been around forever, really. It's always everyone else's fault and never our own'.

Look 18, dress

2007

In Memory of Elizabeth How, Salem,

1692 collection,

autumn–winter 2007–08

silk (satin), sequins, glass (beads)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2022

2022.130

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

across subsequent centuries.

Head covering of Padihorpasheraset, Egypt

Roman period, 1st century CE – 2nd
century CE

cartonnage, gilt, glass paste, pigment

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1939

D144-1994

As a nod to the pagan origins of witchcraft, McQueen presented a golden dress with references drawn from Egyptian culture to develop *Look 18* for *In Memory of Elizabeth How, Salem, 1692*. In its styling, McQueen borrowed from the iconic Hollywood film by Joseph L. Mankiewicz, *Cleopatra* (1963), starring Elizabeth Taylor. McQueen also referenced ancient historical source materials, items similar to this golden funerary object. The head covering has been painted and gilded with coloured

glass eyes and brows. In ancient Egypt, funerary coverings were placed over the head and upper part of the mummified body and secured with bandages as a part of the burial process.

Room:

The Widows of Culloden

Room description: A large square design feature that is accessible via ramps. Seating in the centre. Textured walls and light box design elements that are coloured grey, blue or red with lighting effects.



Wall text:

The Widows of Culloden
autumn–winter 2006–07

This collection acknowledges McQueen's Scottish ancestry and condemns Britain's violent colonial history, particularly the brutal 1746 Battle of Culloden, where British troops defeated the Jacobite army, later storming villages and burning buildings housing the wounded.

Reprising themes at the heart of his controversial *Highland Rape* collection from eleven years prior, autumn–winter 1995–96, McQueen's *The Widows of Culloden* collection memorialises Highlander widows left behind.

The historical and romantic silhouettes and refined construction that characterise the collection draws upon traditional

MacQueen tartan and Scotland's natural landscape. An expertly draped green jersey dress recalls the colour of the moors; heavy wool tweed evokes gamekeeping traditions. McQueen's use of plaid references its application in support of the Jacobite cause prior to the Battle of Culloden, reclaiming tartan not as a trophy of British conquest but as a symbol of Scottish identity. Through an intimate examination of melancholy, *The Widows of Culloden* also finds the beauty therein.

Curious about the mannequins' headpieces? These were made for this exhibition by the Los-Angeles based designer and costumier Michael Schmidt. Learn more here:



The Widows of Culloden **autumn–winter 2006–07**

Labels (clockwise from the entrance):

John Singleton Copley

American 1738–1815

Portrait of Hugh Montgomerie, later Twelfth Earl of Eglinton

1780

oil on canvas

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift of the Andrew Norman Foundation and the Museum
Acquisition Fund, 1968

M.68.74

At the time this portrait was painted, it was forbidden to wear Scottish tartan unless serving in the British military. Scotsman Hugh Montgomerie is shown wearing clan tartan in a fictional retelling of an American battle between the colonial government forces and the *Tsalagi* (Cherokee). Although the image appears to be one of conquest, in truth, the Cherokee prevailed and the invading battalion retreated from the area.

Ultimately, the British lost the American Revolutionary War, and the Cherokee Nation became the largest tribe in the territory known as the United States of America.

Look 15, suit and shirt

2006

The Widows of Culloden collection,
autumn–winter 2006–07

wool (lining), metal (fastenings), silk,
polyamide

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through
the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2022

2022.127

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased with funds donated by Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family, 2022

2022.772

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

The Widows of Culloden collection evoked a place that McQueen felt was 'harsh and cold and bitter'. Set to Michael Nyman's haunting score for director Jane Campion's film, *The Piano*, the runway show moved through a palette of earthy hues to pale neutral tones, emblematic of subjects connected to the collection's

title: the moors, gamekeeping traditions and Celtic mythology. McQueen said, 'The reason I'm patriotic about Scotland is because I think it's been dealt a really hard hand. It's marketed the world over as fucking haggis, fucking tartan, fucking bagpipes. But no-one ever puts anything back into it'.

Coat and belt

2006

The Widows of Culloden collection,
autumn–winter 2006–07

fur (rabbit), crocodile skin, metal

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2020

M.2020.122.27a-b

Blouse and skirt

2006

The Widows of Culloden collection,
autumn–winter 2006–07

silk (chiffon)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2020

M.2020.122.28a-b

Shoes

2006

The Widows of Culloden collection,
autumn–winter 2006–07

leather, rubber

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

Look 30, dress

2006

The Widows of Culloden collection,
autumn–winter 2006–07

wool, cotton, silk, metal (fastenings)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through
the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2018

2018.1599

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

Tartans have been part of fashionable dress since the Highland romantic revival of the nineteenth century. In the early 1840s, the publication of two illustrated books documenting Scotland's clan tartans for a wider public helped to cement a poetic image of Highland dress. For *The Widows of Culloden* collection, McQueen acknowledged this commodification with garments that drew on traditional Scottish costumes

in dialogue with exaggerated historical silhouettes. This Victorian-era bustle and a jabot of black lace are offset by the broad shoulders and tailored austerity of the dress.

Look 50, ballgown

2006

The Widows of Culloden collection,
autumn–winter 2006–07

silk, crinoline, metal (fastenings)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through
the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2021

2021.91

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

This grand ballgown of ivory silk jacquard, featuring a pattern of flowering blossom branches and birds, uses metres of finely hand-pleated and draped fabric to create structure, alongside volume and lightness. It was the second-last look that appeared on the runway. The sweeping train of the skirt is internally supported by hoop inserts, a contemporary interpretation of historical technique.

Look 26, dress and belt

2006

The Widows of Culloden collection,
autumn–winter 2006–07

wool jersey, leather, brass

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased with funds donated by Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family, 2022 2022.779.a-b

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

Purse

2006

The Widows of Culloden collection,
autumn–winter 2006–07

leather, metal, fur (raccoon)

Collection of Regina J. Drucker

Ensemble (jacket, blouse, jabot, skirt, boots and belt)

2006

The Widows of Culloden collection,
autumn–winter 2006–07

leather, cotton/elastane, silk (taffeta,
grosgrain, ribbon), wool (twill), metal,
crystals

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2019

M.2019.399.12a-g

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

Peter Graham

Scottish 1836–1921

After the massacre of Glencoe

1889

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Gift of James Graham Esq., 1889

p.315.1-1

At 5 am on 13 February 1692, over fifty years before the Battle of Culloden, the forces of King William III – all of whom, under the false pretence of collecting taxes, had been billeted with residents of Glencoe Valley in Scotland – rose against their MacDonald hosts and massacred the majority of Glencoe's citizens. Troops were instructed to 'put all to the sword under seventy' and, after doing so, they burned Glencoe's villages to the ground. This 1889 painting by Scottish artist

Peter Graham depicts a few straggling survivors of the conflict's carnage climbing to safety into the hills above their torched homes.

Look 35, coat

2006

The Widows of Culloden collection,
autumn–winter 2006–07

cashmere, cupro, synthetic fabric (lining),
plastic (buttons)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through
the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2019

2019.478

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

Shirt and trousers

2006

The Widows of Culloden collection,
autumn–winter 2006–07

wool, silk (crepe), cupro lycra (lining),
synthetic fibre (laces), plastic (buttons),
metal (fastenings)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through
the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2021

2021.97.a-b

Look 38, dress

2006

The Widows of Culloden collection,
autumn–winter 2006–07

wool, cotton (velvet), silk, tulle, lace,
metal (fastening)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased with funds donated by Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family, 2022

2022.778

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

Look 7, dress

2006

The Widows of Culloden collection,
autumn–winter 2006–07

silk (chiffon), feathers (ostrich),
metallic thread

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through
the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2022

2022.126

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

Look 17, dress

2006

The Widows of Culloden collection,
autumn–winter 2006–07

silk, nylon, metallic thread, plastic, metal
(fastenings)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased with funds donated by Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family, 2022

2022.774

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

‘There’s nothing romantic about
Scotland’s history. What the British did
there was nothing short of genocide.’

– Alexander McQueen

Revisiting themes he addressed in 1995’s
Highland Rape, McQueen considered
the nature of rebellion, devastation and
loss. This dress is a military-style braid
in reference to the soldiers who fought.

However, the pale pleated chiffon, plaited at one shoulder and drawn across the body, also has allusions to the dress of the Amazons – the legendary tribe of warrior women who led a separatist existence on the physical fringes of the ancient Greek world.

Look 33, dress

2006

The Widows of Culloden collection,
autumn–winter 2006–07

wool, cotton, silk, metal (zip, buckle),
leather

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through
the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2019

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

'I needed to do something that was close
to my heart ... I wanted to start from the
crux, and the crux is my heritage.'

– Alexander McQueen

The tartan fabrics used for this
collection were specially woven by
the Lochcarron Mill in the Scottish
Highlands, established in 1892.

To create this dress, the long edges of a roll of wool tartan were hand-frayed before the material was painstakingly manipulated over an inner corset to resemble the belted plaids of early Highlander dress. A version of this dress was worn by Sarah Jessica Parker when she accompanied McQueen to the Met Gala in 2006.

Look 44, coat

2006

The Widows of Culloden collection,
autumn–winter 2006–07

silk (velvet), rayon

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through
the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2021

2021.757

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

Room:

Evolution and existence

Room description: Red carpet and walls. A central square structure has displays in quarters.



Wall text:

Evolution and existence

McQueen's fascination with life cycles and the human condition – nature, evolution and death – resulted in collections that explore life's inherent fragility and find hope in its regeneration.

The Dance of the Twisted Bull, spring–summer 2002, presents bullfighting as a metaphor for life and death. *Sarabande*, spring–summer 2007, which references Stanley Kubrick's film *Barry Lyndon* (1975), traditions of mourning dress and Dutch floral still life painting, finds beauty in the inevitability of decay. *The Horn of Plenty*, autumn–winter 2009–10, critiques mass consumerism – and its role in the global financial crisis – which McQueen countered by recycling famous

silhouettes from his own work and designers before him. *Deliverance*, spring–summer 2004, presents an allegorical ‘dance to the death’ inspired by Sydney Pollack’s film *They Shoot Horses, Don’t They?* (1969). The designer’s final completed collection, *Plato’s Atlantis*, spring–summer 2010, imagines a world consumed by the ocean, where life originated and, McQueen suggested, where life might continue.

Wall text:

Scanners

autumn–winter 2003–04

Scanners conveys a journey across the Siberian tundra, south through Tibet, and finally eastward to Japan. Punctuating McQueen's narrative are designs that borrow from the textile traditions of these locations and mirror the vast region's rich history of cultural exchange that occurred along Eurasian trade routes such as the Silk Road. Also influencing these designs was McQueen's affinity for Japanese dress and his personal adoption of Buddhism.

McQueen's appropriation of global dress styles can be understood as a commentary on politics or identity against a backdrop of rapid globalisation.

A sumptuous fur coat evokes Siberian 'soft gold', with metallic trims reminiscent of gold-embellished Russian textiles. A brocade pattern of interlocking octagons and floral medallions (called *kati rimo* in Tibetan) illustrates movement into Tibet. And in Japan, where *Scanners* concludes, McQueen's red, kimono-inspired jacket with trompe l'oeil piecing recalls the patchworked mantles or *kesa* worn by Japanese Buddhist priests.

Scanners

autumn–winter 2003–04

Labels (clockwise from the wall text):

Tibet

Pair of brocade design (*Kati Rimo*)

temple hangings

17th century

silk

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift of Ruth Sutherlin Hayward and Robert W. Hayward
in honour of the 18th Birthday (April 25, 2007) of the
11th Panchen Lama, Gendun Choekyi Nyima, 2006

M.2006.156.3a-b

Japan

Buddhist Priest's mantle (*Kesa*)

late Edo to early Meiji period, 19th
century

silk (twill, thread), gilt-paper thread

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift of Miss Bella Mabury, 1939

M.39.2.32

Buddhism originated in India around the fifth century BCE, before arriving in Japan by way of Korea and China in the sixth century CE. This *kesa* emulates the ascetic mantle made from discarded cloth that Buddha is said to have worn on his journey towards Enlightenment. Its patchwork construction and devotional stitchwork follows a traditional columnar configuration, while the fine silk is woven with a pattern known in Japan as *shokkō*, a variation on the Chinese brocade

design *kati rimo* brocade design in Tibet.
This work prefigures McQueen's fictional
narrative of cultural appropriation and
exchange by more than 100 years.

Jacket

2003

Scanners collection, autumn–winter

2003–04

silk/rayon/polyester (jacquard)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2019
M.2019.394.5

Skirt

2003

Scanners collection, autumn–winter

2003–04

cotton, leather

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2019

M.2019.394.6

Boots

2006

pre-collection, autumn–winter 2006–07

leather, silk (velvet), cotton (thread), fur

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

McQueen held a life-long affinity for Japanese dress and drew on the kimono as a source of inspiration throughout his career. The sleeves and neckline of this red jacket mirror the kimono's construction, as does the fabric – a clever *trompe l'oeil* design of the kind of piecework associated with Japanese priest's mantles.

Dress

2003

Scanners collection, autumn–winter

2003–04

silk/rayon/polyester (jacquard), acetate
(satin, twill, ribbon)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2018

M.2018.278.15

Boots

2002

Supercalifragilisticexpialidocius

collection,

autumn–winter 2002–03

leather, metal (buckles), cotton (braid)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2020

M.2020.123.9.a-b

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

This dress shows an interlocking

octagon and floral medallion pattern with international resonance. Known in Tibetan as *kati rimo* ('brocade design'), it was introduced from China through imported silks and adapted widely across Tibet for goods such as Buddhist temple hangings and painted wooden trunks, like the one seen nearby. By reimagining a historical textile for contemporary fashion, McQueen's collection continues the legacy of cross-cultural pollination evident throughout textile history across the globe.

Top

2003

Scanners collection, autumn–winter

2003–04

wool/cashmere

Top

2003

Scanners collection, autumn–winter

2003–04

polyester/nylon (net), metal (sequins)

Skirt

2003

Scanners collection, autumn–winter

2003–04

cotton (twill), acetate (satin, ribbon),
leather

Boots

2007

In Memory of Elizabeth How, Salem, 1692
collection,
autumn–winter 2007–08
leather, metal

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gifts from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2020

M.2020.122.3, M.2020.122.9,
M.2020.122.1 & M.2020.122.22a–b

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

Tibet

Trunk with brocade design (*Kati Rimo*)

17th–18th centuries

wood with mineral pigments, metal
(fittings)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles

Gift of Dr Robert Hayward in memory of Ruth Sutherlin Hayward, 2013

M.2013.183.1

Coat and skirt

2003

Scanners collection, autumn–winter

2003–04

fur (rabbit, fox), silk (organza), metal (sequins, buckles), metallic thread, wool (damask, pompoms), leather

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2017

M.2017.280.6a-b

Boots

2003

Scanners collection, autumn–winter

2003–04

leather

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2020

M.2020.123.7a-b

Russia

Textile cover

early 18th century

silk (satin, chenille), silk and metallic
thread (lampas, brocade), metallic
thread (passementerie, fringe)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift of Anton Lourie, 1975

M.75.68

Wall text:

Sarabande

spring–summer 2007

Sarabande derived its name from Baroque composer George Frideric Handel's harpsichord suite in D minor (fourth movement), which was the title sequence of Stanley Kubrick's 1975 film *Barry Lyndon*. An ode to the fragility of beauty, the film inspired McQueen's collection – as did European mourning practices, seventeenth-century Dutch floral still life paintings, and the work of Spanish artist Francisco de Goya. These varied sources of inspiration informed McQueen's examination of the inevitability of death. In the final walk of the runway presentation, the colour palette transitioned from black to grey to mauve – the traditional order of mourning

colours – circling the runway like a cycle of life.

Sarabande

spring–summer 2007

Labels (clockwise from the wall text):

The Netherlands

Flowerpiece

late 17th century
oil on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Mr Norton E. Grimwade in memory of his wife Mrs Norton E. Grimwade, 1945

1417-4

McQueen cited British artist Sam Taylor-Johnson's film capturing decaying fruit, *Still Life* (2001), as another source of inspiration for his *Sarabande* collection, 'Things rot. It was all about decay. I used flowers because they die'. Taylor-Johnson, in turn, cited the work of seventeenth-century Dutch still-life paintings as her inspiration. With its masterful use of light and shadow, *Flowerpiece* records exotic tulips, irises and peonies picked at the height of their beauty, with some beginning to wilt.

Flowers, their blooms inevitably giving way to eventual decay, serve to remind viewers of the passage of time.

Dress

2006

Sarabande collection, spring–summer

2007

rayon/cotton (faille), polyamide (lace)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2016

M.2016.260.29

Shoes

2006

Sarabande collection, spring–summer

2007

silk (net), silk, leather

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2021

M.2021.18.1a-b

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

Suit (jacket and skirt)

2006

Sarabande collection, spring–summer

2007

polyamide/rayon (faille), polyamide (net),
acetate/rayon (crepe)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2016

M.2016.260.28a-b

Shoes

2006

Sarabande collection, spring–summer

2007

leather, plastic

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2022

M.2022.173.4a-b

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

In the finale of McQueen's runway show
for the *Sarabande* collection, the colour

palette transitioned from black, to grey, to mauve – the traditional order of mourning colours – circling the runway like a cycle of life. In this look from the collection, delicately ruched black silk net over a white ground cloth accentuates the curves of the body while mimicking the look and feel of crape – the crimped, textured silk worn in the early stages of grieving in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Look 12, blouse and skirt

2006

Sarabande collection, spring–summer

2007

silk (satin), viscose, cotton (lace)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through
the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2022

2022.131.a-b

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

Look 20, evening dress

2006

Sarabande collection, spring–summer

2007

polyester (lace, lining), lycra, synthetic fibre (padding),

silk (satin), diamantés, metal (fastenings)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through
the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2021

2021.98.a-b

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

An ode to the fragility of beauty, the *Sarabande* collection derived its title from a sixteenth-century dance originating in the colonial era in Latin America.

The musical style was considered provocative in Europe until its adaptation by Baroque composers such as George Frideric Handel, whose 'Keyboard suite in D minor' (for harpsichord), the fourth

movement, would later be reorchestrated and used for the title sequence of Stanley Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon* (1975). On the runway, this composition was played by a small chamber orchestra in the round while models walked beneath an illuminated chandelier, echoing a scene from Kubrick's film.

Dress and blouse

2006

Sarabande collection, spring–summer

2007

cotton (net, lace), glass (beads), plastic (sequins), silk (satin), mother-of-pearl (buttons)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2016

M.2016.260.8a-b

Shoes

2006

Sarabande collection, spring–summer

2007

leather, silk (net)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2021

M.2021.18.2a-b

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

This black lace dress patterned with vases of flowers features a wide-

hipped silhouette referencing women's voluminous and sweeping eighteenth-century dress styles, which appear throughout Stanley Kubrick's 1975 film, *Barry Lyndon*. Following the exploits of Redmond Barry, who ascends to become Lord Barry Lyndon before fate ultimately unravels his self-styled transformation, the film served as a source of inspiration for McQueen's *Sarabande* collection. The fatalistic romanticism in *Barry Lyndon*, evoked in the *Sarabande* collection, underscores the shared artistic proficiencies of Kubrick and McQueen, including exceptional craftsmanship and capacity for world-making.

Wall text:

The Horn of Plenty

autumn–winter 2009–10

Conceived during the Great Recession, which began in 2007, *The Horn of Plenty* critiqued financial and social structures – including the fashion industry and its reliance on overconsumption – that had imperilled the world's economies. The collection's title connotes bounty, and is also the name of the hotel where the final victim of Jack the Ripper (the inspiration behind McQueen's first collection) was last seen. The runway presentation for the collection was subversive, whimsical and performative, elevating trash and repurposing jewellery, headpieces, stage props and songs from McQueen's previous shows.

The Horn of Plenty
autumn–winter 2009–10

Labels (clockwise from the wall text):

Richard Barnes

American born 1953

Murmur 23 (December 6, 2005)

2005

inkjet print

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles

Purchased with funds provided by the Ralph M. Parsons Fund, 2012

M.2012.16

McQueen had a longstanding fascination with and reverence for birds. Bird motifs were used in his designs numerous times and executed in print, weave and even lace. For *The Horn of Plenty* collection, the idea of a massive flock of birds swirling in and out of formation worked as a powerful symbol for the complex, relentless and pervasive issues that he saw playing out in a turbulent consumer age. These amorphous patterns of human behaviour are echoed by a

massive flock of starlings recorded in this photograph by Richard Barnes.

Blouse and dress

2009

The Horn of Plenty collection, autumn–winter 2009–10

polyamide, polyamide/polyurethane
(crepe)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker in loving honour
of her husband, Bruce Drucker, 2020

M.2020.123.13a-b

Shoes

2009

The Horn of Plenty collection, autumn–winter 2009–10

leather

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2020

M.2020.123.20.a-b

Between 2007 and 2009, an economic crisis stretched across the globe.

McQueen's *The Horn of Plenty* collection critiqued the financial and social

structures – including the fashion industry and its reliance on over-consumption – that had imperilled the world's economies. Parodying famed haute couturiers (including Dior, Chanel, Yves Saint Laurent and Givenchy), as well as himself, McQueen revised and exaggerated well-known silhouettes of fashion history, which he mixed with references to trash and recycling. One such design is this black blouse and dress that resembles a garbage bag; though made of a woven textile and expertly shaped, its 'bin liner' reference is overt.

Alexander McQueen for McQ

est. 2006

Belt

2006

spring–summer 2007

cotton (braid), metal

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker in loving
honour of her husband, Bruce Drucker, 2020

M.2020.122.13c

Look 29, dress and boots

2009

The Horn of Plenty collection, autumn–winter 2009–10

silk, acetate, leather, polyester, vinyl, metal (zip, studs)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased with funds donated by Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family, 2022 2022.771.a-c

A version of this textile design was first imagined by McQueen's friend and colleague Simon Ungless for *The Birds* collection, spring–summer 1995. Marrying his love of cinema and ornithology, the original print referenced Alfred Hitchcock's 1963 thriller of the same name. This dress is woven with a radiating houndstooth design (a nod to Christian Dior) that transforms into a flock of magpies, not unlike M. C. Escher's *Day and night*. The design also recalls the

natural phenomenon of murmuration, whereby large numbers of starlings fly in formation, morphing between chaos and order.

Look 7, coat

2009

The Horn of Plenty collection, autumn–winter 2009–10

wool, leather (buttons, trim), rayon and silk (lining)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Yvonne Pettengell Bequest, 2014

2014.4

Shoes

2009

The Horn of Plenty collection, autumn–winter 2009–10

leather, rubber

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2022

M.2022.173.2a-b

McQueen approached his politically charged collection *The Horn of Plenty* as a fifteen-year retrospective. Its title implies bounty, but it is also the name of the hotel

where the final victim of Jack the Ripper was last seen. The runway presentation of the collection recycled jewellery, headpieces and even songs from past shows. The centre of the stage was also heaped with former stage props along with additional objects found in landfill. McQueen transgressively reimagined couture classics, dressing them on models sporting clown-like make-up, a nod to queer subcultural icon, Leigh Bowery.

M. C. Escher

Dutch 1898–1972, worked in Italy 1923–35

Day and night

February 1938

woodcut printed in grey and black ink on Japanese paper

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased with funds donated by Carol Sisson, Carolyn Stubbs, NGV Foundation and the Escher Appeal Donors, 2019

2019.314

Wall text:

The Dance of the Twisted Bull **spring–summer 2002**

The bullfight – synonymous with Spanish culture, where it is called *corrida* – inspired McQueen’s 2002 spring–summer collection. Interpreted by the designer as both masculine and feminine, the costume of the male matador (*traje de luces* or the ‘suit of lights’) informed the silhouettes, with accents drawn from the traditional dress of women flamenco dancers. Tailored angles and draped ruffles blend in a collection that explores the undercurrent of eroticism and death in bullfighting. Two ensembles from *Sarabande*, spring–summer 2007, also inspired by similar motifs and art, reimagine the matador’s high-waisted, close-fitting breeches

(taleguilla) with blouses inspired by Spanish blackwork embroidery and lace.

The Dance of the Twisted Bull **spring–summer 2002**

Labels (clockwise from the wall text):

Pablo Picasso

Spanish 1881–1973, worked in France
1904–73

Six prints from the *Tauromachy, or the Art of the Bullfight (La Tauromaquia, o arte de torear)* portfolio

1959

aquatint

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gifts of Mr and Mrs David Gensburg, 1968

M.68.13.2, M.68.13.5,
M.68.13.8, M.68.13.11,
M.68.13.14, M.68.13.17,
M.68.13.20, M.68.13.23
& M.68.13.26

Pablo Picasso's 1957 portfolio

La Tauromaquia, o arte de torear

(Tauromachy, or the Art of the Bullfight)

was a meditation on themes such as sexual domination and death. Though both Goya and Picasso were devoted to the pastime, in rendering the different moments of combat and ceremony in the

erotic atmosphere of the arena, they also reflected on its intimacy with mortality. These themes similarly find expression in McQueen's *The Dance of the Twisted Bull* collection.

Francisco de Goya y Lucientes

Spanish 1746–1828, worked in France
1824–28

Six prints from the *La Tauromaquia* (The Art of Bullfighting) series

c. 1815–16, published 1876, 3rd edition
etching, aquatint, lavis, burnisher,
drypoint and burin; reworking mainly in
roulette

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1949

2086-4

The Spanish bullfight has long symbolised dichotomies of brutality and beauty, hard horns or spears and soft flesh. McQueen interpreted the *corrida* (bullfight) from an outsider's perspective but followed in the footsteps of Spanish artists Francisco de Goya and Pablo Picasso, who both drew upon the

bullfight in their own practices. Goya published thirty-three etchings on the subject of bullfighting in 1816, at the age of seventy. Goya had been an aficionado of the bullfight in his youth, but scholars have increasingly identified an ambivalence in his later attitude, especially in *La Tauromaquia*, which emphasises scenes of violent encounter and death.

Blouse and skirt

2006

Sarabande collection, spring–summer

2007

cotton, silk (crepe, net), glass (beads),
crystals, metal (sequins)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2018

M.2018.278.22a-b

Shoes

2006

Sarabande collection, spring–summer

2007

silk (faille), crystals, plastic, leather

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2020

M.2020.123.8a-b

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

An interpretation of the matador's close-fitting breeches (*taleguilla*), worn high on

The Dance of the Twisted Bull

HOME 320

the waist and held in place with braces or suspenders (*tirantes*), is found in two ensembles from McQueen's *Sarabande* collection, which was similarly inspired by Spanish art and culture. Each look features a ruffled shirt, one in white with open-work embroidery referencing a form of embroidery using black thread known as Spanish blackwork, and one of black embroidered lace recalling a woman's mantilla head cover. Both blouses bear a similarity in construction to eighteenth-century men's shirts, perhaps due to the influence of the eighteenth-century period film by Stanley Kubrick, *Barry Lyndon* (1975) on McQueen.

Blouse

2006

Sarabande collection, spring–summer

2007

silk (net, thread)

Trousers

2006

Sarabande collection, spring–summer

2007

acetate/rayon (satin), leather, metal
(buckles)

Shoes

2010

pre-collection, autumn–winter 2010–11

silk and cotton (lace), nylon, leather

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gifts from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2020

M.2020.122.7, M.2020.122.8 &
M.2020.123.6a-b

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

The Dance of the Twisted Bull

HOME 322

Jacket

2001

The Dance of the Twisted Bull collection,
spring–summer 2002

wool, silk (crepe)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2018

M.2018.278.16

This tailored jacket with sharp, broad shoulders is cropped at the waist, referencing the shortened matador's jacket known as a *chaquetilla*. The jacket's tail is lined in silk, printed with deep red roses referencing the flowers closely associated with flamenco, but also the colour of bloodshed. One side of the tail can be unhooked to resemble the cape used in the matador's dance to entice the bull.

Bustier and skirt

2001

The Dance of the Twisted Bull collection,
spring–summer 2002

wool/rayon/silk (twill), cotton, cotton
(braid), mother-of-pearl (buttons)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2018

M.2018.278.20a-b

Shoes

2001

The Dance of the Twisted Bull collection,
spring–summer 2002

leather, plastic, metal (buckles)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2020

M.2020.122.15a-b

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

Beyond the bullring, McQueen's *The
Dance of the Twisted Bull* collection

was inspired by the power, beauty and

grace of flamenco dancing. This black ensemble reimagines the dancer's dress, paired with a rigid corset with lacing detail. An asymmetrical ruffled skirt insinuates the dynamic movement of a traditional tiered flamenco costume.

Room:
Deliverance

Room description: A darkened space. Moving image is projected onto the floor and then reflected onto a mirror above.



Wall text:

Deliverance

spring–summer 2004

The Great Depression dance marathon portrayed in the 1969 film *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* inspired McQueen's *Deliverance*, which poses the *danse macabre* as a metaphor for working in fashion. A 'raven cape' embodies the film's sense of foreboding: ravens, like other birds of prey, traditionally represent death. In *Deliverance*, even wristwatch-strap sandals, marking McQueen's 1969 birth year, are a form of memento mori.

The 1930s-style silhouettes of *Deliverance* and dancehall staging closely approximated that of the film. Athletic knitwear enabled models to recreate the film's stampede across a

racetrack finish line. The runway performance, choreographed by Michael Clark, closed with a dancer collapsed onstage.

Deliverance spring–summer 2004

Labels (clockwise from the entrance):

Dorothea Lange

American 1895–1965

Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California

1936, printed c. 1975

gelatin silver photograph

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1975

PH90-1975

Analogous with American documentary photographer Dorothea Lange's iconic images of migrant farm workers, taken amid the Great Depression, McQueen's *Deliverance* runway show closed on a dancer collapsed lifelessly on centre stage, animating danse macabre imagery in a provocative critique of the fashion industry. The bleak reality of the Depression referenced in the 1969 film, *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* – and some of the Americana-inspired looks in

McQueen's runway show – are captured by these period photographs.

Arthur Rothstein

American 1915–85

**Wife and child of a sharecropper,
Washington county, Arkansas**

1936, printed 1975

gelatin silver photograph

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1975

PH178-1975

Arthur Rothstein

American 1915–85

**Farmer and sons walking in the face of
a dust storm, Cimarron County,
Oklahoma**

1936, printed 1975

gelatin silver photograph

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1975

PH179-1975

Left to right

Dress

2003

Deliverance collection, spring–summer

2004

silk (chiffon), synthetic fabric (padding),
plastic (fastenings)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through
the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2021

2021.755

The *Deliverance* runway presentation was enacted as a theatrical performance, choreographed by Michael Clark, in the manner of the Great Depression-era dance marathon in Sydney Pollack's 1969 film *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* In McQueen's version, the film's 'dance to the death' becomes a poignant metaphor for the experience of working in fashion. Despair

and exhaustion – of the Depression, of dance marathons, of designers – palpably accelerate until the performance culminates in a dancer collapsed lifelessly on centre stage.

Dress and capelet

2003

Deliverance collection, spring–summer

2004

silk, nylon, plastic (boning), metal (zip)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased with funds donated by

Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family, 2022

2022.781.a-b

The silhouettes and runway staging of McQueen's *Deliverance* collection, along with Michael Clark's energetic choreography, conveyed the initial anticipation of dance marathon contestants. Crystal-embellished and bias-cut silk gowns embody the

escapism of 1930s Hollywood. The accessories in *Deliverance* even featured this leitmotif: wristwatch-style sandal straps, all set to six and nine o'clock, a reference to McQueen's birth year of 1969, and an acknowledgement of the passage of time.

Dress

2003

Deliverance collection, spring–summer

2004

cotton (jersey), rayon/elastane (jersey), nylon/elastane (net), rubber, silk (satin), nylon (lace), polyurethane

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2018

M.2018.278.28

Shoes

2003

Deliverance collection, spring–summer

Deliverance

HOME 336

2004

leather, metal, glass, plastic

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2020

M.2020.122.16a-b

Dress and bodysuit

2003

Deliverance collection, spring–summer

2004

silk (crepe), nylon/elastane (net)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2018

M.2018.278.17a-b

Boots

2003

Deliverance collection, spring–summer

2004

cotton (canvas, cord), polyester (ribbon),
plastic, metal

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2019

M.2019.399.20a-b

Both McQueen's *Deliverance* collection and the film that inspired it turned their respective settings – dancehalls and runways – into racetracks. McQueen reflected this setting in his designs, including 1930s-style bias-cut dresses that include competitor numbers and sporting jersey dresses worn as models raced to the finish line. A notable departure from his signature tailoring, these knit elastic ensembles provide the wearer an athlete's freedom of movement. *Deliverance's* racetrack was also suggestive of the seasonal pressure on designers to deliver new ideas, and the burnout experienced by many in the fashion industry.

Dress

2003

***Deliverance* collection,**

spring–summer 2004

**cotton (jersey), cotton/silk/elastane
(jersey), polyamide/elastane (net),
nylon/elastane (trim)**

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2019

M.2019.399.2

Shoes

2003

Deliverance collection, spring–summer

2004

leather, metal, glass, plastic

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2020

M.2020.122.17a-b

Dress

2003

Deliverance collection, spring–summer

2004

silk/nylon (crepe)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2016

M.2016.260.17

Shoes

2004

It's Only a Game collection, spring–
summer 2005

leather

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2020

M.2020.122.14a-b

Jacket and skirt

2003

Deliverance collection, spring–summer
2004

cotton, acetate, plastic (fastenings)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased NGV Foundation, 2021

2021.286.a-b

All headpieces by Michael Schmidt

Albrecht Dürer

German 1471–1528

The coat of arms with the skull

1503

engraving

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1949

2130-4

Capelet

2003

Deliverance collection, spring–summer

2004

feathers, silk (satin)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2018

M.2018.278.24

Blouse

2008

The Girl Who Lived in the Tree collection,
autumn–winter 2008–09

cotton/elastane, mother-of-pearl
(buttons)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2020

M.2020.123.12

Pants

2003

Deliverance collection, spring–summer

2004

Deliverance

HOME 342

polyester (twill), silk, metal (studs)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2018

M.2018.278.25

Shoes

2003

Deliverance collection, spring–summer

2004

leather, metal, crystals, faux pearls

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2018

M.2018.278.10a-b

Headpiece by Michael Schmidt

This black-feathered ‘raven cape’ foreshadows the deadly finale of McQueen’s dance-hall performance for his *Deliverance* collection. Ravens, like other birds of prey, are traditionally associated with death. McQueen’s use of such *memento mori* devices connects his

work with other art historical representations of life's transience and preciousness. For example, in French artist Jean-Baptiste Auguste Clésinger's *vanitas*, an owl peering at a crowned human skull symbolises the futility of material wealth in the face of fate.

German artist Albrecht Dürer's depiction of a bride illustrates the constant spectre of mortality, present even during life's celebratory moments.

Jean-Baptiste Auguste Clésinger

French 1814–83

Owl and Skull

c. 1871

earthenware

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles

Purchased with funds provided by J. B. Koepfli by exchange, 1973

M.73.61

Dorothea Lange

American 1895–1965

**Texas Panhandle; Power farming
displaces tenants
in cotton areas**

1938, printed 1975

gelatin silver photograph

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1975

PH97-1975

Room:

Plato's Atlantis

Room description: Screens and mannequin displays on two sides of the room.



Wall text:

Plato's Atlantis

spring–summer 2010

McQueen's interest in evolutionary theories inspired career-spanning explorations of humanity's place in the natural world, or Darwinism as a metaphor for the fashion industry. The designer's final completed collection, *Plato's Atlantis* proposes a science-fiction scenario: global warming has reversed evolution, driving humanity to adapt for survival underwater.

The stages of this evolution are traced in silhouettes that radically alter the form of the body, and evoked by innovative, digitally manipulated and printed textiles that reproduce patterns and textures drawn from animals from the land, sky

and sea.

Despite portraying humanity's Atlantean return to the sea, the overall tone of the collection is not pessimistic. Rather, *Plato's Atlantis* emphasises the interconnectedness of all existence. This notion of circularity, whether in nature or theology, features in much of McQueen's work. For the designer, who saw water as a refuge, and Atlantis as 'a metaphor for Neverland', *Plato's Atlantis* affirmed that from destruction, regrowth inevitably follows.

Today, Alexander McQueen is regarded as a visionary, as his designs continue to inform contemporary approaches to fashion, whether in construction, new technologies or runway shows.

Interviewed in 2004, the designer said:

‘When I’m dead and gone, people will know that the twenty-first century was started by Alexander McQueen’.

Plato's Atlantis **spring–summer 2010**

Labels (clockwise from the entrance):

Left to right

Manuel Cipriano Gomes Mafra

Portuguese 1830–1905

Urn

c. 1865–87

earthenware

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift of Barbara and Marty Frenkel, 2013

M.2013.193.5

Bernard Palissy (school of)

Dish

1580–1620

earthenware

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1939

4561-D3

The ceramics created by the French polymath

and potter Bernard Palissy are evidence of his sustained scholarly interest in the natural world. Palissy cast the reptiles and aquatic figures on his ceramics from life, and created watery garden grottos in Paris for Catherine de Medici, Queen of France. Here, using watery glazes, a serving platter has been transformed into a freshwater pond, and a visual joke. Many aquatic creatures, such as toads and snakes, were believed to have health-giving properties. Like McQueen, Palissy's work presents an ecological fantasy that is overwhelmingly visual.

Janet Beckhouse

Australian 1955–2020

Crustacean ginger pot

1999

stoneware

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Kenneth Hood Bequest Fund, 2005

2005.3.a-b

The protector

2011

stoneware

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Kenneth Hood Bequest Fund, 2011

2011.431

Yama's cenote

2003

stoneware

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Kenneth Hood Bequest Fund, 2005

2005.2.a-b

Microcosm

2006

stoneware

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Gift of Dr Michael Elliott through the Australian
Government's Gifts Programs, 2013

2013.255

The forms of these vessels crafted by Australian artist Janet Beckhouse are barely discernible beneath encrusted surfaces of barnacles, shells

and coral. The relationship between human-made objects and the restless force of nature is a recurring theme in Beckhouse's work, and aligns with McQueen's interest in both evolutionary theory and the futility of the notion that humanity could overpower nature.

Alexander McQueen

English 1969–2010

***Titanic* ballet pumps**

2009

Plato's Atlantis collection,
spring–summer 2010

metal, leather

Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through
the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2022

McQueen's presentation of *Plato's Atlantis* immediately garnered attention for many reasons,

including its distinctive conceptual footwear designs, especially the now-iconic 'Armadillo' boot and skeletal 'Monster' stilettos. The former design, also shown in a rusty green leather and verdigris, with its riveted Meccano heels and a black ballerina-style toe, references the ill-fated 1912 voyage of the *RMS Titanic*, a reminder of nature's might as the threat of rising sea levels increases.

Dress

2009

Plato's Atlantis collection,
spring–summer 2010
digitally printed silk (satin, chiffon),
enamelled metal (beads)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2020

M.2020.122.10

Headpiece and shoes by
Michael Schmidt

Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle

Spanish born 1961, worked in United States 1985–

Iceberg B15

(02/15/2005 21:55 GMT)

2010

from the *Iceberg* series
archival giclee print

Iceberg B15

(12/30/2003 21:00 GMT)

2010

from the *Iceberg* series
archival giclee print

Iceberg B15

(12/30/2003 20:20 GMT)

2010

from the *Iceberg* series
archival giclee print

Iceberg B15

(11/01/2001 20:30 GMT)

2010

from the *Iceberg* series

archival giclee print

Iceberg B15

(12/08/2003 21:25 GMT)

2010

from the *Iceberg* series

archival giclee print

Iceberg B15 (12/18/2003 05:20 GMT)

2010

from the *Iceberg* series

archival giclee print

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased NGV Foundation, 2015

2015.574, 2015.573,
2015.572, 2015.569,
2015.570 & 2015.571

Spanish-American artist Iñigo Manglano-

Ovalle uses the constructed frameworks of science to represent nature in the technological age. Like the cautionary tale of *Plato's Atlantis*, these photographs examine the physical manifestations of climate change. The images show the changing perimeter of an Antarctic iceberg, B15, at a specific date and time, between November 2001 and February 2005. Capturing the diminishing sea ice with high-level aerial photographs, Manglano-Ovalle inverts and repeats the original picture, resulting in a fractured image that resembles the complex, beautiful patterns created in a kaleidoscope, a motif echoed in McQueen's digital prints for *Plato's Atlantis*.

Robert Mapplethorpe

American 1946–89

Snakeman

1981

gelatin silver print

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles
Gift of The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation to
the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and to
The J. Paul Getty Trust, 2016

M.2016.152.579

Queer photographer Robert Mapplethorpe is best known for his arresting black and white portraits and self-portraits. Like McQueen, he found inspiration in the world around him, claiming to always be ‘looking for the unexpected ... for things I’ve never seen before’. Mapplethorpe and McQueen also shared an interest in classical mythology. This powerful image of a masked man holding a snake evokes

mythical figures, such as the satyr (the half-man, half-goat associated with debauchery), and religious imagery associating serpents with evil and sin. Beyond its mythological underpinnings, the image is a highly sensual one. The inclusion of such queerly inflected motifs as the leather mask and the snake entwined around the subject's bare torso connect to the gay BDSM subculture of New York City in the 1970s and 1980s.

Ensemble (dress and leggings)

2009

Plato's Atlantis collection, spring–summer

2010

digitally printed rayon/elastane (jersey),

digitally printed

nylon/elastane (jersey)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2016

M.2016.260.19a-b

Headpiece and shoes by
Michael Schmidt

Plato's Atlantis is one of McQueen's greatest collections due to its extraordinary vision, execution and presentation. Live-streamed, the show opened with a short film featuring model Raquel Zimmerman writhing naked among snakes – possibly a reference to the biblical story of Eve's awakening

– while motion-controlled cameras recorded the audience.

The first garments to emerge featured this yellow-hued ‘Reptilia’ print. Across culture and art history, snakes have represented duality: good and evil, mortality and rebirth; this ensemble recalls the serpent’s regenerative possibilities.

Dress

2009

Plato's Atlantis collection, spring–summer

2010

digitally printed silk (crepe chiffon), lamé,
leather

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2019

M.2019.394.1a-b

Headpiece and shoes by
Michael Schmidt

The designs comprising McQueen's final collection, *Plato's Atlantis*, feature innovative and complex digital imagery, evocative of the natural world. As explained by then design assistant (now creative director), Sarah Burton, each of the collection's thirty-six prints was circle-engineered to the body. The design was placed in the centre of the bolt of fabric

and manipulated so that when the pattern pieces were cut, the prints perfectly aligned at the seams. This dress features a camouflaging moth-print, mirrored at centre front, and is overlaid with metallic suede.

Dress and harness

2009

Plato's Atlantis collection, spring–summer

2010

digitally printed silk/rayon/elastane,
digitally printed silk (chiffon), nylon
(braid), leather

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles

Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker in memory of Juliana Cairone, 2017 M.2017.276.1
& M.2017.276.2

Shoes

2009

Plato's Atlantis collection, spring–summer

2010

leather, metal, silk (ribbon)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles

Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker, 2020

M.2020.123.5a-b

Headpiece and shoes by
Michael Schmidt

This dress and the dress nearby feature geometric, mandala-like print designs evocative of the cosmic nature of the ocean and water's life-giving power. As the runway show for *Plato's Atlantis* progressed, the garments charted an evolution from life on the land to life under the sea evidenced by watery blue hues. Equipped with prosthetic face enhancements and towering plaited hair, the models transformed as they responded to drastic ecological change. As McQueen wrote in his show notes, 'Humanity would go back to whence it came or perish'.

Ensemble (bodice and leggings)

2009

Plato's Atlantis collection, spring–summer

2010

faux stingray leather, metal, digitally
printed nylon/polyamide and elastane

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker in memory of
Vincent 'Stingray' Venegas, 2019

M.2019.394.8a-b

Headpiece and shoes by
Michael Schmidt

The themes of adaptation and survival that informed the *Plato's Atlantis* collection were captured in designs inspired by the natural defence mechanisms of various forms of sea life. Jellyfish bioluminescence and hardened shells were reimagined as floating swathes of fabric or a carapace of colourful enamelled sequins. Similarly,

this 'stingray' leather jacket recalls scuba diving gear, offering another means of underwater existence.

End

Thank you for visiting!