WHERE ART & FASHION INTERSECT

In November 2025, student fashion designers and makeup artists had the unique opportunity to bring art to life on the runway at the Museum of Art's fashion show.

by Emma Lindorf (Editing and Publishing '27). Photo illustration by Jaren Wilkey / BYU Photo

BYU's well-beloved Museum of Art (MOA) was transformed into a venue more likely to be found at Paris Fashion Week than on a college campus. Under the soft glow of string lights against the November sky, patrons enjoyed refreshments and the quiet strumming of Spanish guitar while waiting for the start of an exclusive event: the MOA's first-ever fashion show.

To a casual observer, the main lobby of the museum was unrecognizable, the space filled with rows of chairs, all positioned to face a catwalk illuminated by spotlights. Guests milled about *The Sense of Beauty* exhibition, on loan from the Museo de Arte de Ponce in Puerto Rico, taking in the art that inspired the fashion show's student-created designs.

The lights dimmed and attendees found their seats, the chatter dying down as Professor Heather Belnap (19th-Century French Art and Culture) took to the podium near the runway. Her remarks set the stage for the show: a living demonstration of the intersection between art and fashion.

Fashion Found in Art

Paintings such as those found in *The Sense of Beauty* collection provide glimpses into a different era, their colors and composition standing the test of time. But just as relevant, if less noticeable, is the clothing that the subjects wear. Belnap emphasized the importance of clothing as an artistic choice, explaining how the fashion displayed in artwork can demonstrate elements of humanity.

"Costume and accessories," Belnap said, "perform symbolic functions, conveying a sense of individual identities as well as collective cultural developments." She cited several examples from *The Sense of Beauty* that demonstrate this intersection: A *fichu*, the dainty neck scarf found in Thomas Gainsborough's *Portrait of a Young Lady*, demonstrates the lady's wealth and her modest disposition; a colorful dress, seen in Raimundo de Madrazo y Garreta's *Woman in a Garden*, shows the woman's patriotism. Belnap continued, "The styles, cuts, and fabrics of costumes and accompanying accessories included in a painting can be a means of expressing national pride and suggest the commingling of cultures during a particular age."

These paintings, along with the rest of *The Sense of Beauty* collection, were brought to life on the catwalk. BYU students designed and created the looks, effectively translating the works of art into a new medium.

Bringing Art to Life

The practice of taking a historical art piece and creating a contemporary interpretation in a new medium has been happening for years. For example, Baz Luhrmann's 1996 film reimagined *Romeo and Juliet* by Shakespeare. Andy Warhol's 1962 *Marilyn Diptych* reworked an old publicity photo of Marilyn Monroe into a format typical of historical Christian art. For the December 2013 issue of *Vogue*, Annie Leibovitz photographed Jessica Chastain, imitating the clothing and the composition of well-known historical paintings. The spread was, according to Belnap, "a stunning intersection between art and fashion"—an intersection also demonstrated by the MOA's event.

The fashion show featured the collection and the original designs of intermediate sewing students taught by Amber Williams, a faculty in the School of Family Life. Williams wanted her students to "see beauty in different lenses," so she challenged each one to come up with a fashion look inspired by one of the works in the MOA's visiting collection.

Students worked on their pieces for a full semester. They began by sketching designs based on three different paintings and pitching their ideas to the fashion show organizers, who selected the final designs. The students then gathered materials and started sewing, altering, and adjusting their original ideas as they went. Williams paired each designer with a model, who would wear the design on the runway, and a theatre and media arts student, who created a makeup look to complete the piece.

The MOA fashion show marked the culmination of their work. As each model paraded down the catwalk, the painting that inspired the design was projected on the wall. The emcee animatedly described the materials in each look and how the design related to the piece of art. Senior Emmie Hall (Cybersecurity '26) modeled her own work, drawing inspiration from Miguel Trelles's *The Philanthropist*. The painting depicts a suit-clad man sitting on his couch, cast in cool tones. Above him hangs a warm-hued portrait of an unknown man wearing loose-fitting, colorful clothes. Hall interprets the warm-hued portrait as "a picture of the cool-toned, harsh man's beautiful, vivid imagination." She wanted her piece to create "the harmony of those two, where you get the true representation of who the philanthropist really is."

Hall's design had three pieces, including a pleated pencil skirt made with shiny red satin and embellished with four gold buttons on the front. The garment's crisp lines and defined shape imitate the philanthropist's suit. She also created a white short-sleeved button-down shirt, which she trimmed with orange and blue, pulled from the philanthropist's tie. "In a suit, the only place where you can really express individuality is in your tie," Hall says, so she believes the colorful tie provides a "glimpse of who the philanthropist is inside." Hall finished the look with a long red scarf hung over her shoulders. It functioned as a kind of cape to capture the colorful spirit of the brightly colored portrait, which Hall describes as the cool-toned man's "adventurer."

Emmie Hall (MIDDLE) drew inspiration from The Philanthropist *by Miguel Trelles, 2000, oil on canvas.*

Amber Williams (BOTTOM) guided students through the construction process.

Creating Perspective

One of the main reasons Hall enjoyed participating in this unique experience was because it allowed her to not only develop her creativity but also learn from her peers to see art and the world in a different way. Hall says that learning about different perspectives is important because "if you want to make the world a better place . . . you need to know about the world you're trying to change." For Hall, that aspect of seeing things from multiple perspectives is "how fashion is connected to the humanities."

Hall feels grateful for the platform the show provided, allowing students to create their own contemporary interpretations of art from *The Sense of Beauty* collection. The event, as described by Belnap, put "art into conversation with fashion," engaging people across campus and the community in a new, innovative way. Hall believes that expressing creativity in contexts such as the fashion show is important because creativity provides "a unique way to express your own personal opinions," she says. "Everyone has the ability to be creative. People resonate with others' creativity because it's part of everyone's divine nature to try to be creative."

Photos by Jaren Wilkey / BYU Photo

Frederic Edwin Church (TOP RIGHT) Morning in the Tropics, *1872, oil on canvas.*

Raimundo de Madrazo y Garreta (BELOW) Woman in a Garden, *ca. 1880, oil on panel.*

Artworks courtesy of the Museo de Arte de Ponce. The Luis A. Ferré Foundation, Inc.