

# Brooklyn Museum

## Teacher Resource Packet

*American High Style: Fashioning a National Collection*

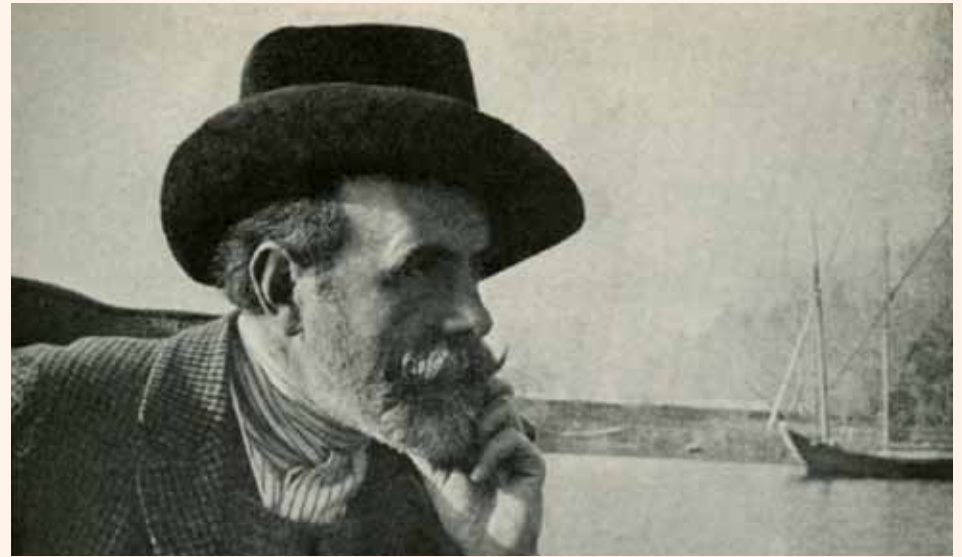
May 7–August 1, 2010



# American High Style: Fashioning a National Collection

## About the Exhibition

*American High Style* offers a comprehensive overview of the Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection, one of America's earliest and greatest collections of fashion design. It also celebrates a landmark partnership that has transferred ownership and care of the collection to The Metropolitan Museum of Art while at the same time preserving the collection's identification with, and availability to, the Brooklyn Museum. The exhibition consists of approximately eighty-five fashion masterpieces from the mid-nineteenth century to the late twentieth century, augmented by a selection of hats, shoes, sketches, and other fashion-related items. The material is organized in groups representing the collection's most important strengths. Works by the first generation of American women designers such as Bonnie Cashin, Elizabeth Hawes, and Claire McCardell are featured, as well as fashions created by Charles James, Norman Norell, Gilbert Adrian, and other important American men designers. Also included are pieces by French designers who had an important influence on American fashion, such as Charles Frederick Worth, Elsa Schiaparelli, Jeanne Lanvin, Jeanne Paquin, Madeleine Vionnet, and Christian Dior. Some of the designs have never been on public view; others have not been displayed in more than twenty years. The Metropolitan Museum of Art is celebrating the arrival of the Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at the Met with a related exhibition.



## About the House of Worth

Charles Frederick Worth (1825–1895) is considered the father of haute couture—luxurious, high-quality made-to-order day, evening, and special-event attire. Born in England, Worth moved in 1846 to Paris, where he took advantage of new technological innovations such as the sewing machine to build his fashion business, the House of Worth. Known for elevating dressmaking from craft to art and for creating the concept of seasonal collections, Worth served a clientele that included royals, aristocrats, the wealthy, and the famous.



The gown discussed here was designed by Worth's son, Jean-Philippe Worth (1856–1926). Jean-Philippe studied art under the French painter and family friend Camille Corot and sketched designs for garment ideas in the margins of his notebooks. At the age of nineteen, he went to work for his father as a full-time design assistant. His design style incorporated elaborate trim and references to the work of French portrait painters of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, such as Jean-Marc Nattier and Nicolas de Largillière.



### About the Gown

This gown was worn by Emily Warren Roebling (1843–1903), wife of Washington Augustus Roebling, architect and chief engineer of the Brooklyn Bridge, during her formal presentation to the British monarch Queen Victoria in 1896. Later that same year she also wore it to the coronation of Czar Nicholas II and Czarina Alexandra Fyodorovna of Russia. Protocol for such events, which were attended by the elite of European and American society, set special requirements related to dressing. One of the most significant was a long, elaborate train that required the assistance of attendants to maneuver. The train could be removed, however, once the official presentation was over.

In 1896, the French artist Carolus-Duran, known for his portraits of fashionably dressed women, painted a portrait of Roebling (seen above) in her court presentation ensemble.

### Emily Warren Roebling and the Brooklyn Bridge

The original designer and chief engineer of the Brooklyn Bridge was John Augustus Roebling. His son, Washington Augustus Roebling, took over as chief engineer after his father's unexpected death in 1869. In 1872, two years after construction began, Washington fell ill and was unable to continue supervising the work on-site. His wife, Emily, carried out this supervision under his direction until the bridge was completed in 1883. While working in this capacity, she pursued studies in advanced mathematics, design, and engineering. A plaque inscribed with the names of John, Washington, and Emily is mounted on the bridge in their memory.

### Description of the Gown

The **bodice** portion of a gown is the section above the waistline. In this gown, the bodice is fitted, which means it follows the figure rather than hanging loose. The design element forming a V-shape by the waist is made to look like a stomacher, a separate decorative triangular piece attached to the front of eighteenth-century dresses. The bodice is made of yellow and white satin and includes ruffled short sleeves with rose and orchid flowers.



The **skirt** is the portion of the garment that hangs below the waist. The skirt of this gown is floor-length and made of yellow and white satin. The opening in the front is referred to as open-robe style.



A **train** is the back section of an evening gown extending to the floor. Trains are removable and can be attached at the waist or the shoulders. The train of this gown is made of violet velvet and includes fabric orchids and roses intertwined on tulle, or fine netting.



Decorative patterns, lines, and shapes sewn into fabric are called **embroidery**. Floral patterns have been embroidered on the bodice and skirt of this gown with gold and silver thread.

## Questions for Viewing the Gown and Portrait of Emily Warren Roebling

What do you notice about this garment?

How many different textures can you find? Describe how each of them might feel.

What adjectives would you use to describe this gown? For example, is it elegant? Does it look expensive? Explain your answer.

To what type of event might this dress have been worn? In what time period? What do you see to support your idea?

Review the information included in this packet. Can you speculate as to why this particular gown, out of the many that Emily Roebling owned, was preserved and donated to a museum? Consider the purpose of a museum and the decisions that the curators of a museum make when they collect and exhibit objects.

Look closely at the portrait of Emily Warren Roebling. What details from the gown appear in the portrait? What differences do you notice?

Describe Emily Roebling's pose and facial expression.

If you were going to attend a formal event such as a school prom or awards ceremony, what would you wear? How might you design your ensemble? Would it be similar to or different from this nineteenth-century European-style gown? Why?

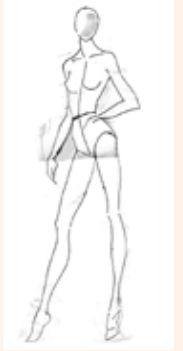
Prior to the 1860s technicians working in French fashion houses known as *couture facon* created fashions based on the client's choice of preselected designs and fabrics. Haute couture was special because the fashion house supplied both design ideas and fabrics. **Ready-to-wear** or premade garments became popular for their convenience and price. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of purchasing haute couture, *couture a facon*, or ready-to-wear ensembles for an important event. How might your response differ based on the event, for example, for a wedding versus an awards ceremony?

Designer Charles Worth once said, "My business is not only to execute but especially to invent. My invention is the secret of my success. I don't want people to invent for themselves; if they did I should lose half my trade." What are your thoughts about this statement? Do you think everyone should learn how to design and sew clothing, or should fashion designers be responsible for fashion innovations and trends? Explain your point of view.

## Classroom Activities

### Art Activity

Today, television shows such as "Project Runway" and "The Fashion Show" feature up-and-coming designers who showcase their most creative styles in a design competition. Fashion designers on these shows are given inspirational ideas on which to base their designs. Use the Brooklyn Bridge or another famous landmark as your inspiration to design an evening costume or ensemble. Use colored pencil on paper. Make a *croquis* (a quick drawing) like the example here to start your sketch.



### Art and Writing Activity

The clothes we choose to wear signal to others something we want to say about ourselves. Different clothes worn on different occasions help to express how we feel about ourselves and the types of activities or interests we enjoy. Consider three aspects of your personality. Look through magazines to select fashions that best describe who you are in these moments. Cut out, arrange, and collage these fashions onto three separate pieces of paper. On the back of each design, write a paragraph describing why you chose these fashions and what they say about you.

### Journalism and Media

The Brooklyn Museum (then known as the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences) acquired its first costume in 1903. As the collection grew throughout the twentieth century, the Museum became a destination for designers and design students to study fashion as an art form. Why do you think people choose to collect and preserve clothing?

Using a video camera or a camera phone, film and interview family members about a piece of clothing special to them. During the interview be sure to ask: Why was this garment purchased? What does it feel like to wear it? Where was it worn? How has it been preserved? Now search through your wardrobe. Pick an article of clothing special to you. It could be something you used to wear or something current. Record yourself sharing your thoughts about the garment. Present your video collage in your classroom or online. Discuss the similarities between everyone's stories. What differences do you notice?

## Resources

[www.metmuseum.org/Works\\_of\\_Art/department.asp?dep=8](http://www.metmuseum.org/Works_of_Art/department.asp?dep=8)

In January 2009 the Brooklyn Museum transferred ownership and care of its costume collection to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, where it is now known as the Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. This link introduces the collection.

Reeder, Jan. *High Style: Masterworks from the Brooklyn Museum Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art in association with Yale University Press, 2010.

This book gives an overview of the history of the costume collection.

Coleman, Elizabeth A. *The Opulent Era: Fashions of Worth, Doucet, and Pingat*. Brooklyn: The Brooklyn Museum in association with Thames and Hudson, 1989.

This exhibition catalogue gives an historic overview of the fashion industry in the Victorian period.

[www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/exhibitions/737/](http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/exhibitions/737/)

This Web site features photographs from the exhibition *The Opulent Era: Fashions of Worth, Doucet, and Pingat*, originally on view at the Brooklyn Museum from December 1, 1989, to February 25, 1990.

<http://fitnyc.edu/museum>

The Museum at FIT is located on the campus of the Fashion Institute of Technology and features fashion exhibitions and programs throughout the year.

[www.fitnyc.edu/precollege](http://www.fitnyc.edu/precollege) (Click on "Summer Live.")

High school students interested in taking fashion courses can register for weekend and summer classes at the Fashion Institute of Technology.

<http://forums.threadsmagazine.com/>

This online forum for *Threads* magazine offers tips on sewing techniques, fabrics, and design ideas.

*American High Style: Fashioning a National Collection* is organized by Jan Glier Reeder, Consulting Curator for the Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The exhibition is supported by Lisa and Dick Cashin, Barbara and Richard Debs, Cheryl and Blair Effron, Arline and Norman Feinberg, Stephanie and Tim Ingrassia, Barbara and Richard Moore, Martha A. and Robert S. Rubin, and Barbara M. and John L. Vogelstein.

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**Pages 1, 3, and 7: Carolus-Duran [Charles Auguste Émile Durand] (French, 1838–1917). *Portrait of Emily Warren Roebling*, 1896. Oil on canvas. Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Paul Roebling, 1994.69.1**

**Page 2: Jean-Philippe Worth, circa 1908**

**Pages 2, 3, and 6: Emily Roebling, circa 1890. Brooklyn Museum Archives, Records of the Department of Costume and Textiles**

**Page 8: Attributed to Jean-Philippe Worth (French, 1856–1926). *Court Presentation Ensemble*, 1896. Yellow silk satin; white silk satin with gold and silver metal thread embroidery; ecru embroidered net lace; yellow silk chiffon; violet velvet; silk crepe and velvet orchids; lavender silk tulle. Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Anonymous gift in memory of Mrs. John Roebling, 1970 (2009.300.941a–e)**

## Brooklyn Museum

200 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn, NY 11238-6052  
[www.brooklynmuseum.org](http://www.brooklynmuseum.org)





