



museum of arts and design

MAD SPOTLIGHTS THE CONVERGENCE OF FASHION AND CRAFT IN THE COUNTERCULTURE MOVEMENT OF THE 1960s AND '70s

Counter-Couture: Handmade Fashion in an American Counterculture
March 2–August 20, 2017



NEW YORK, NY (February 28, 2017) – The Museum of Arts and Design (MAD) is pleased to present *Counter-Couture: Handmade Fashion in an American Counterculture*, opening March 2 and running through August 20. The exhibition brings together over two dozen seminal artists working in the 1960s and '70s who fought for change by sewing, embroidering, quilting, patch-working, and tie-dyeing their identity.

Counter-Couture takes place as part of MAD's spring series of exhibitions, all of which focus on fashion. "This is our first season to be wholly dedicated to one of New York's most beloved and celebrated creative fields," said William and Mildred Lasdon Chief Curator Shannon R. Stratton. "We've selected a group of shows that embrace craftsmanship, cultural commentary, and critical thinking in fashion practices. In keeping with MAD's dedication to investigating studio 'process' in modern and contemporary art and craft, these exhibitions highlight how fashion, as an expanded field of craft, serves as a platform for artists and designers to explore ways of making that champion artistry, expressiveness, and social responsibility—from concept to product."

Counter-Couture: Handmade Fashion in an American Counterculture displays garments, jewelry, and accessories by American makers who crafted the very reality they craved, on the margins of society and yet at the center of an epochal shift. The works on display reflect the ethos of a generation of Counterculturists who—against the backdrop of the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement—rejected ideals of the American Dream that were rooted in

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consumerism and conformity, and interrogated a political establishment invested in maintaining the status quo. They embraced the vision of a new, homegrown civilization rooted in self-expression, self-reliance, an affirmative connection to nature, and ideas of love and community that deviated from the values of the traditional nuclear family.

“When I was fifteen years old, I found a copy of Alexandra Jacopetti Hart’s book *Native Funk & Flash*,” said Guest Curator Michael Cepress, “which led me to devote more than half of my life so far to researching a period in history that I find deeply inspiring.” *Counter-Couture: Handmade Fashion in an American Counterculture* represents the culmination of that research. The exhibition “shares the vital stream of passion, ideas, and artist activists who chose fashion to help create a better world for us all,” said Cepress. “As the show now begins to travel, it is an honor to showcase it at MAD and bring the magic of it all to a New York audience.”

“Artists such as Kaisik Wong and The Cockettes put craft and the handmade at the center of their daily revolution,” said Assistant Curator Barbara Paris Gifford, “wearing garments, jewelry, and personal accessories not only as forms of wearable art, but also as inextricable symbols of their personal and political allegiances. Each artist acted as celebrant and author of America’s Counterculture movement.” Artists represented in the exhibition alongside Wong include 100% Birgitta (Birgitta Bjerke), Alexandra Jacopetti Hart, Alex & Lee, Apple Cobbler (Mickey McGowan), and Dina Knapp.

San Francisco designer **Kaisik Wong** evoked disparate cultures, time periods, and aesthetics in his sculptural silhouettes, transforming the body into an otherworldly, iridescent carapace. Art Nouveau, Eastern religions, and ancient mysticism all echo throughout his remarkable creations. His client list included performers and socialites such as Tina Turner, Elton John, Dodie Rosekrans, and Ann Getty. Salvador Dalí celebrated the complexities and surrealism of Wong’s style by commissioning the “Ray” series (1974), which can be viewed in the exhibition.

A hippie globetrotter from Sweden by way of England, France, and Ibiza, **100% Birgitta (Birgitta Bjerke)** arrived in the United States in the early 1970s. Her colorful crocheted pieces, which combine a kaleidoscopic sense of color with humor, ostentatiousness, and wearability, allowed for an easy transition into the Counterculture of the San Francisco Bay Area. Her fashions could be seen on the Paris runways as well as on the backs of The Who and the Grateful Dead.

Alexandra Jacopetti Hart joined a thriving culture of Beat-era poets, musicians, and artists in the 1960s. Psychedelic drugs, experiments in communal living, and spiritual exploration fueled her creative voice. In 1974, she wrote the book *Native Funk & Flash*, from which this exhibition was developed. After its release, she co-founded Folkwear Patterns, a global and vintage clothing pattern company. Her *Afghan Nomad Dress* (1975), made of faded velvet theater curtain, antique silk thread embroidery, and metallic thread, is exemplary of her work.

Partners **Alex & Lee** used found objects in their elaborate jewelry pieces to reflect the anti-materialistic hippie creed of recycling and repurposing. Regularly incorporating stones, minerals, shells, lobster claws, feathers, and even monkey fur, they upheld jewelry as an art form, and echoed the revolution experienced by the discipline in the 1960s.

Apple Cobbler (Mickey McGowan) saw footwear as unexplored creative territory and approached his medium as a craftsman, purposely using non-animal materials and working on one pair of shoes at a time. The layered, multicolored foam soles and pliable fabric structures of

his designs were especially popular with California rock-and-roll drummers who embraced their comfort, flexibility, and style.

Dina Knapp was one of a group of students at New York's Pratt Institute in the late 1960s who turned their attention to wearable art, using crochet as a vehicle for artistic expression. *Multicolor Beret* and *Rasta Tam*, examples of her early work, reference the Jamaican flag and were popularized by the musician Bob Marley, who could be seen wearing one of her creations throughout his life.

EXHIBITION CREDITS

Counter-Couture: Handmade Fashion in an American Counterculture is part of *The Art and Craft of Getting Dressed*, a series of three exhibitions at the Museum of Arts and Design this spring that embrace craftsmanship, cultural commentary, and critical thinking in fashion practices—from the couture to the conceptual—across multiple generations.

Counter-Couture: Handmade Fashion in an American Counterculture was organized by the Bellevue Arts Museum and curated by Guest Curator Michael Cepress. It was secured for the Museum of Arts and Design by William and Mildred Lasdon Chief Curator Shannon R. Stratton with the support of Assistant Curator Barbara Paris Gifford.

RELATED PROGRAMMING: MADactivates

Exhibition Tour with Guest Curator Michael Cepress and Artist Fayette Hauser

Thursday, March 2, 2017 – 6:00 pm

Free with Pay-What-You-Wish Admission

4th and 5th floor galleries

Discover the new exhibition *Counter-Couture: Handmade Fashion in an American Counterculture* with a tour led by Guest Curator Michael Cepress and featured artist Fayette Hauser, a founder of the famed San Francisco-based theater troupe The Cockettes. Celebrating the handmade fashion and style of the 1960s and '70s, Cepress and Hauser will offer personal and historical interpretations of garments, jewelry, and accessories by American makers who crafted the very reality they craved, on the margins of society and yet at the center of an epochal shift.

Following the tour, visitors are invited to attend a panel discussion in The Theater at MAD, featuring textile and fashion expert Andrea Aranow in conversation with Cepress, Hauser, and Alexandra Jacopetti Hart, author of the influential 1974 style guide *Native Funk & Flash: An Emerging Folk Art*.

Counter-Couture Panel Discussion

Thursday, March 2, 2017 – 7:00 pm

\$10 general / \$5 members and students

The Theater at MAD

[Click here](#) to purchase tickets

Often referred to as the hippie movement, the Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s swept away the conformism of the previous decades and professed an alternative lifestyle whose effects still

resonate today. This cultural moment was epitomized by unique manifestations of handmade fashion and personal style.

For this panel discussion, fashion and textile expert Andrea Aranow will lead a conversation with Michael Cepress, fashion designer and curator of *Counter-Couture: Handmade Fashion in an American Counterculture*, and exhibiting artists Alexandra Jacopetti Hart and Fayette Hauser. They will discuss the broader context of this milestone moment in American cultural and fashion history, including the influence of the American civil rights and social justice movements and non-Western textile traditions on the style of the Counterculture.

Andrea Aranow, moderator, is a fashion and textile expert, and founder of Andrea Aranow Textile Documents.

Michael Cepress, fashion and costume designer, is an instructor at the University of Washington School of Art, and curator of *Counter-Couture: Handmade Fashion in an American Counterculture*.

Alexandra Jacopetti Hart, textile and fashion artist, is the author of the influential 1974 style guide *Native Funk & Flash: An Emerging Folk Art*.

Fayette Hauser is an artist, photographer, costume designer, performer, and co-founder of the San Francisco-based avant-garde experimental theater troupe The Cockettes (1969–1972).

Studio Sunday

Sunday, March 5, 2017 – 10:00 am to 1:00 pm
Free with Museum Admission
6th floor classroom

Join us for “Denim Demolition” Studio Sunday! The program will begin in the galleries with a lively reading of *Levi Strauss Gets a Bright Idea* by Tony Johnston to get the scoop on the history of jeans. Following the reading, get inspired by the fashions of the 1960s and '70s while exploring the [exhibition](#). Draw on this inspiration to distress, paint, bead, rip, or embroider denim. MAD will have a limited supply of denim on hand, and recommends that participants bring their own denim to work with.

Encounter

Figure and Fashion Drawing with Drawing New York

Thursday, March 30, 2017 – 6:00 pm
4th floor galleries

Teen Night

Thursday, April 27, 2017 – 7:00 pm
Various locations

Teachers' Open House

Friday, May 5, 2017 – 4:30 pm
Various locations

Talk

Lauren Whitley

Thursday, June 29, 2017 – 7:00 pm

The Theater at MAD

Docent Tours

Featuring highlights of the exhibition

Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays – 11:30 am and 3:00 pm

Thursdays – 11:30 am, 3:00 pm, and 6:30 pm

Lobby

ABOUT THE MUSEUM OF ARTS AND DESIGN

The Museum of Arts and Design (MAD) champions contemporary makers across creative fields and presents the work of artists, designers, and artisans who apply the highest level of ingenuity and skill. Since the Museum's founding in 1956 by philanthropist and visionary Aileen Osborn Webb, MAD has celebrated all facets of making and the creative processes by which materials are transformed, from traditional techniques to cutting-edge technologies. Today, the Museum's curatorial program builds upon a rich history of exhibitions that emphasize a cross-disciplinary approach to art and design, and reveals the workmanship behind the objects and environments that shape our everyday lives. MAD provides an international platform for practitioners who are influencing the direction of cultural production and driving twenty-first-century innovation, and fosters a participatory setting for visitors to have direct encounters with skilled making and compelling works of art and design. The Museum will be celebrating its Diamond Jubilee 60th Anniversary this year.

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PRESS CONTACTS

Museum of Arts and Design

Claire Laporte / Hally Wolhandler

212.299.7737

press@madmuseum.org

Third Eye

Katie Wisniewski / Will Hoffman

Katie@hellothirdeye.com / Will@hellothirdeye.com

Image captions: Left: Kaisik Wong, 1974. Photo by Jerry Wainwright. Middle: *Hippie Royalty on the Rocks*. Ibiza, 1969. Photo by Karl Ferris, featuring crocheted designs by 100% Birgitta. Right: Cockette Pristine Condition (left) and Cockette Scrumby Koldewyn (right). Opening act for New York Dolls, Matrix, New York, August 1973. Image taken from a gelatin silver print, 10 inches by 8 inches. Courtesy of Kourosh Larizadeh and Luis Pardo.