

**Ahead of fashion, ahead of her time:
Elizabeth Hawes helped define American style identity
Cincinnati Art Museum to host first major museum exhibition of visionary
designer April 24–August 2, 2026**

MARCH 5, 2026– If fashion had a crystal ball, Elizabeth Hawes would have owned it.

[Elizabeth Hawes: Radical American Fashion](#) tells the story of one of the women who helped shape a distinctly American identity in fashion design and personal expression. The exhibition, opening April 24, features more than 50 garments made between the 1920s and 1960s, alongside original sketches and illustrations. The exhibition is accompanied by the first publication devoted entirely to Hawes’s career.

Hawes (American, 1903–1971) was a radical designer, author and social commentator whose ideas were consistently far ahead of her time. This exhibition marks the first major museum presentation of Hawes’s long overlooked work, tracing her early design methods, the evolution of her career and her lasting influence on American fashion.

Longtime Cincinnati Art Museum Curator of Fashion Arts and Textiles, Cynthia Amnéus, curated this exhibition and wrote for and edited the accompanying catalogue before her retirement in early 2026. Her many years of original research on Hawes reflect in this first-of-its-kind examination of the American designer’s career.

At a moment when American fashion was overwhelmingly dominated by Parisian influence, Hawes emerged as the first visible American couturier. Though she briefly moonlighted in Paris, Hawes firmly believed that American women deserved clothing designed and produced on American soil, shaped by the realities of their lives rather than European trends. She famously articulated this position in her first book, *Fashion Is Spinach*, a sharp critique of blind devotion to French fashion and the follies of the fashion industry that became a manifesto for independent American design.

Throughout the 1930s her work, writing and public persona drew significant attention. She authored nine books on fashion and its role in society, arguing that clothing was a direct expression of the self.

“Though today not many people know her by name, we’re all familiar with conventions that Hawes introduced to our way of dressing,” said Megan Nauer, Acting Curator of Fashion Arts and Textiles. “When you read her sharp-tongued words, you recognize things we still wrestle with, both in dressing ourselves and in the functioning of the fashion industry.”

For Hawes, style was psychological as much as aesthetic, and she rejected the idea that fashion should be dictated by industry elites. Instead, she championed comfort, practicality and

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democratic access to beautiful well-made clothing, advocating for ready-to-wear garments long before they were widely embraced. As she wrote, “The minute I saw that hundreds of women could have Hawes clothes, I wanted thousands to wear them.”

Hawes forecasted developments such as gender-neutral clothing, paper garments and methods for quality mass manufacturing, ideas that would not enter the mainstream until the 1960s and beyond. Her designs emphasized ease for both women and men, reflecting her belief that fashion should serve the wearer rather than restrict them.

After closing her couture house in 1940 as America turned toward World War II, Hawes pursued a strikingly diverse career. She wrote for the left-leaning *PM* magazine, worked in an airplane engine factory during the war and later became a labor organizer for the United Auto Workers. Her outspoken socio-political views eventually led to her being blacklisted by the FBI.

Elizabeth Hawes: Radical American Fashion will be on view in the museum’s Thomas R. Schiff Galleries (234 and 235) April 24–August 2, 2026. Admission is free. Photography is permitted; no flash. Use hashtag #ElizabethHawes.

Visit cincy.art/Hawes for a full list of related programming.

About the Cincinnati Art Museum

The Cincinnati Art Museum features a diverse, encyclopedic art collection of more than 73,000 works spanning 6,000 years. In addition to displaying its own broad collection, the museum conducts extensive research and creates and organizes several exhibitions each year. It also hosts national and international traveling exhibitions. Through these critical projects and art-related programs, activities and special events, the museum contributes to a more vibrant Cincinnati by inspiring its people and connecting its communities.

Cincinnati Art Museum is supported by the tens of thousands of people who give generously to the annual ArtsWave Campaign, the region's primary source for arts funding. The Ohio Arts Council helps fund the Cincinnati Art Museum with state tax dollars to encourage economic growth, educational excellence, and cultural enrichment for all Ohioans. The Cincinnati Art Museum gratefully acknowledges operating support from the City of Cincinnati, as well as its members. Free general admission to the Cincinnati Art Museum is made possible by a gift from the Rosenthal Family Foundation. Generous support for the museum’s extended Thursday hours is provided by Art Bridges Foundation’s Access for All program. Exhibition pricing may vary. Parking at the Cincinnati Art Museum is free. Accessibility accommodations are available. Visit cincinnatiartmuseum.org.

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