Elizabeth Hawes

RADICAL AMERICAN FASHION

Large Print Labels

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RADICAL AMERICAN FASHION

Elizabeth Hawes was an outspoken critic of fashion: how we create it, how we wear it, and the industry we build around it. Although she made couture gowns for wealthy clients, she also wanted the whole nation to have access to well-made garments, dabbling in ready-to-wear dresses and accessories. She was one of the first designers championed in Lord & Taylor's 1930s "American Fashion for American Women"—now called the "American Look" campaign—which advocated for home-grown design talent. Hawes believed couture could be made in the United States, and that women had their own unique concerns and style, for which she sought to create a language. In her first book, *Fashion is Spinach* (1938), she outlined her design philosophy, advocating comfort and utility in clothing for all.

Hawes foretold trends and approaches to dress that would not become a reality until the 1960s and beyond, including advocating for a style more free of gendered confines than the designs of her day allowed. Hawes was a prolific writer and social commentator, publishing nine books in her lifetime, with another unfinished at the time of her death. She also wrote for numerous publications, including *The New Yorker,* over the course of her career, developing an acerbic tone well beyond her years.

Early Influences

The 1920s saw a distinct move away from the structure and formality of past silhouettes, and the first inklings of American couturiers striking out on their own. Among all early twentieth-century designers, Madeleine Vionnet (French, 1876–1975) was the most influential for Elizabeth Hawes. She wanted her clothing to mirror and flow with the body, and used the bias cut to achieve long, lean silhouettes that moved with the wearer rather than constricting the body—an idea often received as scandalous . Hawes adopted aspects of the French designer's approach to cutting and draping and dedicated her first book, *Fashion is Spinach*, to Vionnet.

The elegant designs of Jessie Franklin Turner (American, 1881–1956) also influenced Hawes, but the two were philosophically vastly different in their approaches to creating fashion. Turner was the only couturier working in New York City when Hawes set up her first salon in 1928. In 1933, Hawes moved right next door to Turner on Manhattan's East 67th Street. Turner had a classist objection to the wholesale trade Hawes was involved in at this time

and looked down on what she viewed as the lower social status of her workers. At the same time, Hawes only grudgingly acknowledged Turner's influence in the city.

Madeleine Vionnet
(French, 1876-1975)

Dress
1948

silk
Gift of Dorette Kruse Fleischmann in memory of Julius Fleischmann
1991.214

Madeleine Vionnet created soft, sleek clothing, and rejected the structure of corsets, girdles, petticoats—anything that hid the natural curves of the body—a transgressive philosophy at the time. Influenced by Ancient Greek art and the modern dancer Isadora Duncan (1877-1927), Vionnet created garments cut on the bias. With this technique, a cut goes 45° across a woven fabric rather than with the grain, which follows the warp or weft threads (yarns that are perpendicular to one another). Cutting in this way created dresses that clung to the body, stretching and moving with the wearer. While Vionnet did not invent the bias cut, she was an innovator—the first to use it for the cut of the entire garment.

Hawes admired Vionnet's ideas about construction so much that she adopted some of her hallmark methods early on, cutting most of her dresses on the bias and borrowing the French designer's technique of draping on a 15-inch scale model dress form.

Jessie Franklin Turner
(American, 1881-1956)

Tea Gown and Belt
1925-35

silk
Gift in memory of Helen Rentschler Waldon
1991.231 a-b

When Hawes returned from Paris in 1928 to start her own salon in New York City, Jessie Franklin Turner had been operating on Park Avenue since 1922. Hawes grudgingly admitted that Turner was the only American couturier making high-end clothing not imitating the French. Turner worked expertly with the body, draping directly on a model, and was known for languid dresses and flowing tea gowns, which, up to this point, had been garments reserved for private wear.

Turner often designed and created her own fabrics. She acknowledged the Brooklyn Museum's collection of global textiles as her inspiration for her most successful garments. She was an expert colorist, creating combinations that met with

enthusiasm: bright blues with deep rusts and geranium pinks, and jolts of bold color that offset her pastel gowns and adorned the interiors of her salons. Hawes may have found inspiration for her own color palettes in Turner's work.

Elizabeth Hawes – Early Life

Born in 1903 in Ridgewood, New Jersey, Elizabeth Hawes learned self-confidence and critical thinking from her mother, who was an an advocate of Montessori education involved in local and regional politics. Hawes started sewing at an early age, and by the time she was 12, was selling clothing at The Greenaway Shop in Haverford, Pennsylvania. The young creative wanted to go to art school but was persuaded to attend Vassar College, as her mother had done. Since Vassar had no fashion design courses, she fed her desire by taking a course in fashion design at the New York School of Fine and Applied Art (now known as Parsons School of Design) and obtaining an internship at the Bergdorf Goodman department store.

Hawes went to Paris after graduating from Vassar but felt she could better design for American women on American soil. In her first book, *Fashion is Spinach*, she railed against American women lusting after French labels. She laid out her philosophies on style versus fashion, as well as her complaints about the fashion industry. Hawes opened her first atelier in New York City in 1928

with business partner Rosemary Harden. Two years later, in 1930, she went out on her own and created one-of-a-kind couture gowns until closing her house in 1940. During World War II, Hawes went on to design Red Cross and other uniforms and to work for Wright Aeronautical and the United Auto Workers.

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

“Styx” Evening Dress
circa 1935

silk
Gift of Mrs. Dudley Schoales
Fashion Institute of Technology
69.156.1

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

Dress and Slip
1935

silk
Gift of Dorette Kruse Fleischmann in memory of Julius Fleischmann
1991.209a-b

This dress is a tour de force for Hawes. Cut in a princess line, she crafted it for Fleischmann out of a delicate, blue silk chiffon. Hawes cleverly centered separate straps at the low neckline at the center front to create a unique design element—they hold up the center of the bodice and the skirt. She thought about every detail, including the effect the dress has in motion when worn. Hawes inserted triangular pieces, called godets, starting at the waistline of the skirt—some of the godets are curved over the hips. This allowed the dress to lie straight when still, but to billow and flow as the wearer moved.

Hawes showed a high level of care for all her clients, but achieved some of her greatest triumphs for Fleischmann, who was an early supporter of Hawes and became a stockholder in her company.

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

Dress
1935

cotton, silk
Gift of Dorette Kruse Fleischmann in memory of Julius Fleischmann
1991.202

Constructed with a fine cotton mesh net over silk, this dress also has a large-scale net-like effect on the ropes that form the fine shoulder straps. They are most prominent on the front upper chest and the back, creating diamond shapes as they cross over the corresponding ropes. They are tied in a knot where they meet their counterparts and are securely stitched to the inside of the bodice. The silk layer is sewn, turned the “wrong” way, with the dull side facing out, undoubtedly to keep the silk lining from outshining the cotton net and strap details.

This dress also has a zipper, which is unusual for Hawes. She disliked them and usually closed her dresses with snaps, hooks and eyes, or buttons, often searching for antique ones, unique to the piece. Judging by this and the thread color, the zipper was likely installed as a repair, indicating that Fleischmann sought to extend the life of this special garment.

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

Lounging Pajamas
1939

silk
Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection
at The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009;
Gift of the estate of Elinor S. Gimbel, 1984
2009.300.1008

Though lounging pajamas had been around for some time, trousers were generally not socially acceptable for women to wear except at home. Hawes made wearing slacks more agreeable and encouraged women to wear them because they were comfortable and utilitarian. Many designers of the time made lounging pajamas that created the illusion of a skirt, whereas Hawes had no compunction about issue with showing the bottoms of her loungewear as a bifurcated garment. Her commitment to stylish, easy-to-move-in, easy-to-wear clothes is exemplified in these lounging pajamas.

The designer's use of bows on this piece is unusual and likely the result of a specific client request. Hawes disliked embellishments, saying, "I don't like trimming. Clothes should be good fabric, good lines, good color. The most common error women make is in wearing too many gadgets."

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

"Alimony" Dress and "Misadventure" Capelet

1937

silk, wool
Gift of Mrs. George B. Wells Wadsworth Atheneum
1965.241

This dress was part of a men's fashion show which Hawes staged with her friend Tony Williams in March 1937. Hawes designed all the menswear looks, but her associate MacDonald Heath constructed them, as she did not have the tailoring expertise to sew the outfits herself. All the ensemble's titles were names of crimes or related to court and legal affairs. Pieces of womenswear, with corresponding thematic names, were interspersed with the menswear. According to the donor, this dress was shortened by 12 inches from its original full-length to make it suitable to wear as a dinner dress.

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

Dress
1948

silk
Gift of Dorette Kruse Fleischmann in memory of Julius Fleischmann
1991.201

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

Dress
1939

silk
Gift of Dorette Kruse Fleischmann in memory of Julius Fleischmann
1991.218b

Hawes urged men to wear "silks, satins and bright colors" and suggested they "set fire" to the "ugly and uncomfortable garments that irk and annoy them." She wanted men to wear soft, light textures and flexible garments that did not constrain them. The menswear show she staged in 1937 received widespread national press coverage and was attended by the editor-in-chief of Harper's Bazaar, Carmel Snow—the Anna Wintour of her time. Hawes interspersed womenswear, but her unconventional menswear stole the show. She said about the collection, "It made me quite certain, …. [that] the skirt is the thing, and there is no difference between the sexes."

The suggestion of suspenders on this dress is a recurring theme in Hawes's designs, showing her willingness to mix socially gendered elements of dress. The designer borrowed generously from menswear for her womenswear, and vice versa, advocating for trousers for women and skirts or kilts for men.

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

Dress
1935-39

silk
Gift of Dorette Kruse Fleischmann in memory of Julius Fleischmann
1991.215

The cuts of Hawes's garments are unusual and forward-thinking even among the long flowing shapes of the 1930s. She showed even more of the natural form than was commonplace, as she did not believe that women should have to wear constricting brassieres or other undergarments. Hawes created signature cuts that cupped the bust on their own, often exposing the bare skin of the back, and made her skirts fuller so women did not have to wear girdles.

Hawes designed Lin Gees—a silk jersey undergarment cut on the bias—in 1933. They served as underwear for women who did not want

to go entirely without undergarments but still wanted the smooth look of nothing beneath their clothes. This practical solution bordered on scandal at the time. Lin Gees were sheer but held up to laundering and day-to-day wear and even worked with Hawes's deep décolleté backs, as in the case of this dress.

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

"Look Homeward, Angel" Dress
1937

Gift of Dorette Kruse Fleischmann in memory of Julius Fleischmann
1991.208

In many of Hawes's programs for her fashion shows, she named her dresses thematically rather than simply giving them a number. Hawes blamed this on her inability to remember generic model numbers, despite her love of math. All the names of her dresses, in this collection, are titles of books. *Look Homeward, Angel* is Thomas Wolfe's 1929 semi-autobiographical novel.

Hawes did not like prints as she felt they tended to overwhelm the wearer, but sometimes her clients could convince her to use one. Perhaps this dress was a Valentine between Dorette and Julius. The shaped panel at the front of the dress cups and shapes the bust without constricting. Note the heart-shaped panels at the sides, which continue the print.

This object incorporates sensitive content. Please see below for information.

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

“Geographic” Dress
1940

linen, silk
Museum Purchase: Fashion Arts Purchase Fund
2011.31

Hawes closed her fashion house in 1940 because she could see war on the horizon. She felt both that a custom dress-making business could not survive, and that it would be inappropriate to design for the highly privileged in the face of global struggle. She turned the business over to Narcissa Vanderlip, a college friend, and renamed it Hawes Customers Inc. It became a cooperative run by the atelier's staff in consultation with clients.

At the final runway show before the transition, she designed a dress that spoke to the politics of the day: a full-skirted, linen dress called "Geographic," which incorporated the flags of many allied European countries on the skirt—and on the derriere, she placed the flags of Nazi Germany, Italy, and Japan, so that each time the wearer sat she would sit upon the Axis flags. This dress was an anti-Fascist statement by Hawes.

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

Dress
1948

silk
Gift of Dorette Kruse Fleischmann in memory of Julius Fleischmann
1991.214

This dress, or a version of it, was originally made for film star Lauren Bacall. Fleischmann had her own version made and clearly wanted to prolong its wearable life; at some point, she had a panel of the velvet skirt, perhaps damaged during party wear, replaced. The replacement panel, being of a different velvet, eventually stretched longer than the other sections.

Hawes's and her clients did not want fad-driven styles to wear for only one season; they wanted to wear their garments out before buying another. Hawes's customers often returned to have their dresses reworked when the garments were wearing out, but they still wanted to find a way to wear

them. Hawes believed a good style was ageless. She said, “If a frock is smart today and dowdy tomorrow, it was not good at the onset.”

Writing on Fashion

Elizabeth Hawes was known for her writing as well as her fashion design and left us with a cache of material about fashion and her other ventures, including articles for *The New Yorker*, and her 1938 best-selling book *Fashion is Spinach*.

When she closed her house in 1940, she began to write for *PM* magazine as the "News for Living" editor. She continued to write about fashion but also addressed many other social issues, including rent control, early childcare, vaccination programs, food and drug violations, and the education system. In 1943, Hawes went to work for Wright Aeronautical in Paterson, New Jersey, to see the clothing needs of working women in American industrial towns. Her 1943 book, *Why Women Cry, or Wenches with Wrenches*, outlined the difficulties she witnessed women faced when holding a full-time job without childcare or hired help. Hawes next got a job with the United Auto Workers in the Education Department, working to unionize women employees.

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

“Liebestraüm” Dress and Slip
1933–34

silk
Gift of Dorette Kruse Fleischmann in memory of Julius Fleischmann
1991.209a-b

Hawes loved working with stripes because they posed a mathematical challenge She loved math, and Hawes shows her prowess here, working with sheer and opaque stripes with the fabric pieced in different directions. Many of her pieces use stripes in “all kinds of giddy diagonals.” The slip of this two-piece set is colored to make it seem as though the wearer was nude underneath: an early “naked dress.”

Liebestraüm (Dreams of Love) is a set of three solo piano nocturnes published in 1850 by Franz Liszt. All the dresses from this season’s collection are named after songs, inspired by Hawes’ listening.

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

Dress and Bolero
1931–39

cotton, silk
Gift of Dorette Kruse Fleischmann in memory of Julius Fleischmann
1992.125a-b

Dorette Kruse Fleischmann undoubtedly bought or bartered for the printed fabric for this dress while on one of her trips with her husband. Hawes took the fabric Fleischmann brought her and cut the ensemble pieces on the straight grain because there was not enough to cut them on the bias. The back of the dress has a simple crisscross of bands, and the hem is finished and weighted with a stuffed roll of the bodice fabric.

Fleischmann was one of Hawes' wealthiest and most dedicated clients. Julius, Dorette's husband, inherited the Fleischmann Yeast Company when he was just 22. In 1931, the Fleischmanns set out on a round-the-world cruise aboard the Camargo,

then the largest private yacht in the country, documenting their travels and bringing back some 900 artifacts to Cincinnati.

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

Set
circa 1930

wool
Gift of Mrs. Dudley Schoales
Fashion Institute of Technology
69.156.8

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

"Dry Goods Economist" Dress
1935

silk
Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection
at The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009;
Gift of Mrs. George B. Wells, 1957
2009.300.817

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

Hat
1930s

straw, silk
Gift of Michael Begley
07/08.84

In 1933, Hawes began her ready-to-wear venture. She appointed a smartly dressed customer, James Mabon, to design couture hats specifically for Filene's department store. Original couture designs sold in Hawes's salon for $20 to $35, while department store copies sold for $12.50 and $15. She made suits and dresses for Lord & Taylor, which sold for $19.75, featuring "Hawsers"—special Hawes-only accessories such as belts, saucer-size buttons, or enlarged "paperclips" to hold cuffs closed.

Hawes was intrigued by department store clothing. "The minute I saw that hundreds of women could have Hawes clothes, I wanted thousands to wear them." She felt that in a democratic country like

America, clothing should be defined by the needs of the middle class. She continued working with mass-manufacturing firms for the next few years to get Hawes clothing out to the public and also to weather the Great Depression.

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

Day Dress
1937

wool, leather
From the collection of Dorette Krue Fleischmann, Gift of her daughter, Joan F. Tobin, and her granddaughter Alexis Dorette Tobin
19/20.22:22a-b

Many of Hawes's dresses were long, but she did create some shorter day garments. While this one has a separate belt with suede-pieced embellishments at the tips, many of her designs had the "belt" built into the dress giving the appearance of a high-waisted or Empire-style gown—a silhouette and line that she particularly favored. The dress also shows Hawes's unexpected color combinations, using a desaturated rose red with bold accents of blue and black.

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

Dress and Jacket
1948

silk
Gift of Dorette Kruse Fleischmann in memory of Julius Fleischmann
1991.207a-b

This dress and its neighbor are made of wholly or partially of upholstery fabric. There is a photo in Hawes's scrapbooks of this dress with the madras plaid as a chair cover, and the other printed dress is obviously an upholstery fabric. Hawes used whatever fabric felt right to her for a dress and was known for making unusual textile choices. She used upholstery fabrics, lace together with fur, wool with satin inserts, and even incorporated seashells on a headdress in a 1937 collection. In 1933, Hawes promoted the idea of disposable paper dresses, although she said she had yet to find paper strong enough for their construction. Paper dresses became a popular trend decades later in the 1960s.

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

Dress
1948

silk
Gift of Dorette Kruse Fleischmann in memory of Julius Fleischmann
1991.212a–c

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

Coat
1948

wool, silk
Gift of Dorette Kruse Fleischmann in memory of Julius Fleischmann
1991.206

This coat is a lesson in the piecing for which Hawes was famous. The back of the collar is surprisingly split, allowing the neck more flexibility, and some unusual piecing over the collarbone gives the chest and arms a bit more room and mobility. Hawes liked coats that showed off the body's shape rather than being boxy. Here she has cinched in the waist and completed the look with a back waistline seam.

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

Evening Dress
1949

silk
Gift of Dorette Kruse Fleischmann in memory of Julius Fleischmann
1991.205

Hawes used this dress to show all the things she liked best. She favored the princess line—untrimmed, relying on shape and fabric. Here she has cupped the bust with the fabric, using the piecing to bisect the bust line, emphasizing the waist. Hawes did not like waistlines that went straight around the waist and so brought them upwards to just below the bosom. She has used upholstery fabric at the neckline and for the diamond at the stomach. The inset diamond shape was a Hawes trademark. It made the dress sit at the abdomen, giving it a quite flat appearance, and added greater fluidity to the front line of the dress. Hawes often brought fullness to the front of her skirts rather than featuring trains in the back, despite Paris's decree that all evening dresses be trained.

Enduring Influence

Through her designs, writing and advocacy, Elizabeth Hawes strived to make the world a better place, creating objects and systems that worked harder for the people they were designed to serve. Hawes influenced many who followed her, cracking open the door for more women designers to push through with new ideas about how to make clothing that supported modern ways of moving through the world—each adding to the societal conversation in their own voice.

The designers in this section embraced Hawes's philosophy of design and personal style, often commenting directly on her work. Claire McCardell (American, 1905–1958), for instance, designed and popularized a flat-soled, comfortable, ballet-style shoe in 1941 after Hawes had done so in 1937. Bonnie Cashin (American, 1907–2000) made luxurious garments using beautiful textiles, unique hardware, and other new concepts to create functional, freeing fashion pieces. These designers navigated the world of wholesale manufacturing to make their garments more accessible to many. Although Hawes never quite found a way to do the same by her exacting standards, she is still credited

with the beginnings of ready-to-wear clothing designed in a uniquely American style.

Claire McCardell
(American, 1905–1958)

“Gay Weekend” Ensemble
1947

cotton
Museum of the City of New York
2013.5.20

Claire McCardell first became interested in style at an early age, cutting out images from her mother’s fashion magazines as paper dolls. At 16, she entered Hood College, later transferring to the New York School of Fine and Applied Art (now Parsons School of Design), from which she graduated in 1928. McCardell went to Paris, but in 1940, she broke away from Parisian style standards and refused to visit French fashion collections, stating, “I don’t want French influences confusing me.”

McCardell often created clothes for herself and once remarked that, “It just turns out that other people needed them, too.” She often described

her approach to clothing as functional and fuss-free. McCardell became the first designer to use zippers, popularize leotards, wear tweed evening coats, and put spaghetti straps on evening gowns. This ensemble recognizes her love of sporty beachwear—a hallmark of her collections.

Muriel King
(American, 1900–1977)

Ensemble
circa 1935

silk
Gift of The Museum at F.I.T.Courtesy of the Kent State University Museum
1998.002.0013a.b

Muriel King opened her New York City salon in 1932. She specialized in separates and day-to-evening looks, exemplified here. King liked simplicity, believing that dresses should have one special detail. She was not a formally trained fashion designer and did not cut, drape, or sew. In September 1933, King entered a partnership with the department store B. Altman, who sold her clothing through their Shop for American Design. King also signed a licensing partnership with the department store Lord & Taylor. In 1936, she was featured alongside Alice Smith, Ruth Payne, and Clare Potter in the second iteration of Lord & Taylor's "American Fashion for American Women" promotion (now called the "American

Look" campaign), which championed home-grown American design talent. During the 1940s, King mostly produced ready-to-wear designs for department stores.

Anne Fogarty
(American, 1919–1980)

Dress
1950s

wool
Gift of Mrs. Harry McDonald
Courtesy of the Kent State University Museum
1987.017.0285

Anne Fogarty was an American fashion designer, active from 1940 to 1980. She became known for her understated yet stately designs, accessible to American women on limited incomes. Fogarty's clothes were easy to wear, practical, and made from casual, durable fabrics, following the American sportswear tradition.

Fogarty also favored full-skirted designs with fitted bodices, inspired by Christian Dior's New Look. In 1959, she published a style manual, *Wife Dressing: The Fine Art of Being a Well-Dressed Wife*, which emphasized neatness, elegance, and always being suitably dressed for an occasion as desirable qualities. While her ideas regarding gender roles

may have differed from Hawes's, they fundamentally overlapped in meeting women's needs and wants: well-made, flattering, functional clothing.

Clare Potter
(American, 1903–1999)

Suit
circa 1950

silk
Gift of Mrs. Jane Seastrom
Indianapolis Museum of Art
S6127.86.1A-B

In the 1930s Clare Potter was one of the first American fashion designers to be publicized as an individual design talent. While working in Manhattan under her own name, the American Look campaign promoted Potter as a named, credited designer—one of the first American designers to achieve such name recognition. In 1938, she received the first Lord & Taylor Design Award for distinguished design in the field of women's sportswear.

Potter created clothes for women like herself, saying in 1948, "Large numbers of American women want clothes that are refined. I aim to give them in a medium-priced, ready-to-wear costume

as good as what they would find in custom-made styles." She continued designing through the 1940s and 1950s. Her clothes were beloved for being elegant but easy to wear, much as Hawes intended. In 1946, Potter was awarded a Coty American Fashions Critics' Award for her casual clothes and her distinctive use of color.

Bonnie Cashin
(American, 1907–2000)

Cape, Skirt, and Belt
1954

wool, Lurex
Museum Purchase
1999.221

Bonnie Cashin
(American, 1907–2000)

Skirt
1950s

wool
Private Collection
L3.2026:7

Bonnie Cashin's designs were always aimed at keeping women's hands free when traveling and in motion. An avid traveler herself, she was inspired by clothing from around the globe. She incorporated handbags into her garments, featuring long-handled bags that converted to pockets and kiss-lock purses integrated into the fronts of dresses, tunics, and outerwear. Cashin's timeless, functional and artistic garments emphasized utility and versatility.

This skirt shows two of Cashin's design signatures: her choice of luxurious textiles like mohair wool and her use of decorative, functional hardware. She was famous for her witty and ingenious approaches to

designing for increased mobility, including a “dog leash” skirt: a long wool skirt that could be instantly shortened to allow for faster walking or climbing, using rings and latch hooks sewn into the waistline, inspired by dog leash clips.

Later Life

In the early 1950s, Elizabeth Hawes moved west and settled in Hollywood. She looked for work and resumed handknitting, which she had experimented with in the 1930s. She began making unisex clothing for special clients, friends, and family, drawing on the construction of tunics and kimono and furthering her early ideas about dressing people without regard for their sex or gendered approaches to apparel design.

While in California, Hawes met designer Rudi Gernreich (Austrian-American, 1922–1985), who shared many of her ideas about fashion. He was a maverick and often showed androgynous, unisex garments. Gernreich said of Hawes, "I knew her attitude and admired it, through her books, even before I met her." In 1967, they showed their work in a joint exhibition at the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT). Although there is little documentation of what they showed in the exhibition, it was a success with visitors and the press.

Hawes returned to New York City later in 1967. She lived there until her death in 1971. She and Gernreich corresponded through the rest of her life. Hawes left one book, her tenth, unfinished at the time of her death. The Brooklyn Museum now holds her archives.

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

Sweater
1968

wool
Gift of J.Q. & Dr. B. Riznik, 1980
Metropolitan Museum of Art
1980.490.2

Over the course of her career, Hawes came to believe there was little inherent difference between the sexes except for the clothes they wore. To her, their needs, wants, and preferences for garments emerged as largely the same. Much of Hawes's later work, particularly her experiments in knitwear, took on an androgynous tone, furthering her previous interests in designing garments that mixed or otherwise ignored gender markers and conventions.

Rudi Gernreich
(Austrian-American, 1922–1985)

Dress
1960s

cotton
Nancy Foxwell Neuberger
Acquisition Endowment Fund
Indianapolis Museum of Art
2012.139

Rudi Gernreich
(Austrian-American, 1922–1985)

Dress with Cut-Outs
1961

wool
Museum Purchase with funds
provided by Friends of Fashion
2009.188

Rudi Gernreich
(Austrian-American, 1922–1985)

Monokini
1964

wool
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. William L. Taylor
1989.5

The Monokini, or topless bathing suit for women, was the first of its kind. Rudi Gernreich's revolutionary and controversial design was a brief that extended from the midriff to the upper thigh and was held up by shoestring laces that made a halter around the neck.

Gernreich designed the monokini as a protest against a society he saw as repressive in its attitudes toward the body. He did not initially intend to produce the monokini commercially. At the end of 1963, editor Susanne Kirtland of *Look* magazine called Gernreich and asked him to send a design for the suit to go with a trend story looking at conceptually futuristic designs. Although he found the garment more difficult to produce than he had

thought, he was persuaded by Kirtland to make it available to the public. It generated significant controversy in the United States and other countries. Gernreich sold about 3,000 suits, but only two were documented as ever worn in public.

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

Man's Swimsuit
1964

wool
Gift of Barnes Riznik
Fashion Institute of Technology
88.65.3

When Hawes returned to designing in the 1960s, she concentrated on handknitting, which she had done before in a limited capacity in the 1930s. This swimsuit is a colorful example of Hawes's handwork.

Sketches and Photographs

These sketches are from the Brooklyn Museum Libraries and Archives and are the original sketches made by Elizabeth Hawes or her assistants. Some of them feature a sample swatch of the material from which the dress was meant to be crafted, the name of the client, and the date or collection for which it was made. Some even feature the price and the garment's name. Hawes signed off on each one, and the notes are in her own hand. She always did a sketch of the back of the garment, which was one of her rules of designing. The photographs are original Hawes designs.

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

Sketch
1933

artist's sketch
Brooklyn Museum Libraries and Archives

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

Sketch
Look Homeward, Angel
1949

artist's sketch with fabric swatch
Brooklyn Museum Libraries and Archives

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

Sketch
Diego Rivera
1933

artist's sketch with fabric swatch
Brooklyn Museum Libraries and Archives

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

Sketch
Compatibility
1937

artist's sketch with fabric swatch
Brooklyn Museum Libraries and Archives

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

Sketch
Uphill Ingrid Bergman
1939

artist's sketch with fabric swatch
Brooklyn Museum Libraries and Archives

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

Fashion is Spinach
1938

Mary R. Schiff Library & Archives

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

Gloves
1934

suede, plastic
Anonymous Loan
L3.2026:1

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

Men Can Take It
1939

Mary R. Schiff Library & Archives

Lucky Strike advertisement
1935

printed advertisement
Anonymous Loan
L3.2026:7

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

Photograph of a Dress
1938

photograph
Anonymous Loan
L3.2026:3

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

Photograph of
“Basic Beauty” Dress
1949

photograph
Anonymous Loan
L3.2026:5

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

Sketch
Rousseau
1948

artist's sketch with fabric swatch
Brooklyn Museum Libraries and Archives

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

Sketch
Special 71
Undated

artist's sketch
Brooklyn Museum Libraries and Archives

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

Sketch
1939

artist's sketch with fabric swatch
Brooklyn Museum Libraries and Archives

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

Sketch
1939

artist's sketch with fabric swatch
Brooklyn Museum Libraries and Archives

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

Sketch
Harrisburg Patriot News
1939

artist's sketch with fabric swatch
Brooklyn Museum Libraries and Archives

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

Photograph of
“Belittled Middle” Coat
1949

photograph
Anonymous Loan
L3.2026:4

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

Photograph of "Falernum"
1948

photograph
Anonymous Loan
L3.2026:2

Elizabeth Hawes
(American, 1903–1971)

Photograph of a Red Cross Uniform
1941

photograph
Anonymous Loan
L3.2026:6

Life Magazine
"Speaking of Fashion…"
Elizabeth Hawes
1939

Woman's Home Companion
"Along Your Own Lines"
Alice Stetson Fletcher
1930