

# “His & Hers” at the Museum at FIT

**OPENS TUESDAY**

Own This City

A new exhibit looks at how fashionable folks challenged gender tropes long before Janelle Monáe wore tuxedos and *guyliner* became a word. By **Sarah Bruning**

At one point in history, it was easy to divide clothing into two categories: men's and women's. But over time, visionary designers (from Coco Chanel to Commes des Garçons' Rei Kawakubo) and their followers defied conventional thinking, creating unisex looks that blurred or even erased gender lines. This evolution is examined in “His & Hers,” which opens Tuesday 30 at the Museum at FIT, which reveals how men's and women's clothing has changed—and even overlapped—throughout the ages. We asked curators Colleen Hill and Jennifer Farley, along with androgynous style icon Jenny Shimizu, to comment on what three notable pieces say about the role of gender in fashion.

## Men's dressing gown (circa 1845)

A stark contrast from the somber daytime looks of the period, this vibrant cotton robe typifies the more decorative items that gents sported in private. “We're coming from the 18th century and court dress, when menswear pieces were extremely ornate,” notes Hill. “There was still that desire to show their personalities, and home was somewhere they could express that.” The piece's fitted waist initially led Shimizu to think the garment was intended for a woman. On second glance, she found it apt for the likes of “Ebenezer Scrooge or Elton John.”

## Men's skirt by Jean Paul Gaultier (circa 1987)

“In Western culture, the skirt is almost exclusively a feminine garment,” explains Farley. “For Gaultier to introduce a skirt as a masculine garment in the '80s was really challenging these gender boundaries.” Echoing the curator's observation, Shimizu also references the forward-thinking designer's propensity to draw on other cultures and time periods for inspiration, likening this particular navy-wool-and-black-leather version to a Spanish cowboy's garb. “It's very caballero to me, kind of the way open chaps were worn,” she notes.

## Women's evening dress by Alexander McQueen (2008)

The late designer's pioneering clothes were as impeccably tailored as they were edgy. “This particular dress has that striking aspect with the black-and-white, very graphic cut leather [on the bodice], but it has a traditional hourglass silhouette that sort of recalls the 1950s or even the 19th century,” Hill observes. “I hate generalizing what's masculine and what's feminine,” says Shimizu. “You can have someone like Alexander who creates these ornate pieces, and it's coming from a man.”

**DRESS UP!**

See two more pieces from “His & Hers” at [newyork.timeout.com/ownthiscity](http://newyork.timeout.com/ownthiscity).