

PRESS RELEASE

The Art of High Style: Minnesota Couture 1880-1914



Minneapolis Institute of Art
2400 Third Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55404
artsmia.org

Robert Koehler, American, 1850-1917 Rainy Evening on Hennepin Avenue, c. 1902 Oil on canvas Gift by subscription in honor of the artist

MINNEAPOLIS—May 9, 2019—A new exhibition at the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) explores the rise of Twin Cities couture (high-end, hand-sewn, custom-made clothing) during a pivotal moment for fashion both worldwide and in the developing state of Minnesota. On view May 18 through August 4, 2019 in the museum's Cargill Gallery, “The Art of High Style: Minnesota Couture 1880–1914” features historic dress from the [Minnesota Historical Society](#) collection—most never displayed before—set in context with paintings and works on paper from Mia’s collection.

“We’re delighted to share these extraordinary objects that tell the story of Minnesota’s little-known historic couture fashion industry and the talented female artisans who led it,” said Nicole LaBouff, associate curator of textiles at Mia.

Twin Cities couture emerged during a transitional period in elite cosmopolitan fashion worldwide. The modern luxury brand was born in the late 1860s, when designers like Paris-based Charles Frederick Worth began “signing” dresses with sewn-in labels. But by the 1910s, even very wealthy consumers started turning to department store ready-to-wear apparel.

Local couture ascended during a pivotal time for Minnesota, which became a state in 1858 amid coercive and fiercely contested negotiations with the Dakota and Ojibwe Nations. Abundant natural resources extracted through milling and mining, along with innovations in rail transportation, brought a rapid growth in the state’s population. The economic boom enriched early settlers and attracted industrial tycoons, and this class of wealthy white Minnesotans sought elegant dress to reflect its new status.

Fashionable garments from this era by some of Minnesota’s most prominent couturieres are showcased in “The Art of High Style.” These featured designers had strong ties to Paris and other fashion centers with respect to training, design trends, and fashion fabrics. Their painstakingly and meticulously tailored clothing kept their clientele in step with tastemakers around the globe.

Mia

"The exhibit highlights the interrelationships between the couturieres who created the vision, their clients who dressed for their social occasions, and the workers who constructed the garments. All set within a backdrop of the development of Minnesota's industries," said Linda McShannock, textile curator at Minnesota Historical Society and co-curator of the exhibition.

Object highlights include:

- A formal winter evening dress made from imported luxury fabrics by designer Mary Worley, who was regarded as St. Paul's most expensive and most fashionable dressmaker.
- *The Visitor* by Alexis Jean Fournier. This rare portrait painting depicts an anonymous visitor wearing a dress similar to one designed by Salome Underhill, also in the exhibition. Both feature flared skirts, fitted sleeves, and dark fabrics to mask the dirt from partially paved city streets.
- A pink wool traveling suit (1906) by designer Julia Tomasek created for St. Paul socialite Greta Spinning Evans' honeymoon. The silhouette of the suit follows the natural contours of the body, newly popularized by French couturier Paul Poiret.
- Illustrations by Paul Iribe for Paris couturier Paul Poiret. Poiret is often credited with "liberating" modern elite women from corsets and cumbersome underskirts. His designs feature loosely draped, high-waisted "Empire" gowns.

Related Programming

Third Thursday: Fashion Night celebrates the opening of "The Art of High Style" on Thursday, May 18, 6–9pm with a free evening of fashionable fun. Enjoy a "Then & Now Fashion Show," live DJ set by [DJ AriAtari](#), and cash bar. Take a fashion-themed tour of Mia's collection, Create your own custom art wig with multidisciplinary artist [Kristi Ternes](#), Learn basic mending and hand stitching techniques led by fashion designer, Katherine Sieve of Winsome Goods, and join [Jonathan Herrera Soto](#) (upcoming MAEP fellow) and [Donald Thomas](#) (Million Artists Movement) to learn about their processes, practices, and even try some of their techniques for yourself.

The "Then & Now Fashion Show" is inspired by styles and trends spanning across the century, showcasing how Minnesota fashion designers continue to reinvent and redefine the art of making clothes. This live fashion show with local boutique [thefittingroommpls](#), highlights the looks of creative and inspiring designers who are leading Minnesota's fashion of today. Enjoy spotlights from Alma Mia, Joeleen Torvick, Karen Morris Millinery, Streym Design Handbags, Tessa Louise and Vikse Designs and more.

About the Minnesota Historical Society

The Minnesota Historical Society is a nonprofit educational and cultural institution established in 1849. MNHS collects, preserves and tells the story of Minnesota's past through museum exhibits, libraries and collections, historic sites, educational programs and publishing. Using the power of history to transform lives, MNHS preserves our past, shares our state's stories and connects people with history. Visit us at [mnhs.org](#).

The Minnesota Historical Society is supported in part by its Premier Partner: Explore Minnesota Tourism.

Press Contacts

Michaela Baltasar-Feyen
+ 1 612 870 3280
mbaltasar-feyen@artsmia.org

Tammy Pleshek
+ 1 612 870 3171
tpleshuk@artsmia.org

About The Minneapolis Institute Of Art

Home to more than 90,000 works of art representing 5,000 years of world history, the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) inspires wonder, spurs creativity, and nourishes the imagination. With extraordinary exhibitions and one of the finest wide-ranging art collections in the country—Rembrandt to van Gogh, Monet to Matisse, Asian to African—Mia links the past to the present, enables global conversations, and offers an exceptional setting for inspiration.

General admission to Mia is always free. Some special exhibitions have a nominal admission fee.

Museum Hours

Tuesday, Wednesday, Saturday	10am–5pm
Thursday, Friday	10am–9pm
Sunday	11am–5pm
Monday	Closed
For more information, call + 1 612 870 3000 or visit artsmia.org	

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