YVES SAINT LAURENT
THE PERFECTION OF STYLE

EDUCATOR RESOURCE GUIDE
ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Organized by the Seattle Art Museum in partnership with the Fondation Pierre Bergé – Yves Saint Laurent, *Yves Saint Laurent: The Perfection of Style* highlights the legendary fashion designer’s 44-year career. Known for his haute couture designs, *Yves Saint Laurent*’s creative process included directing a team of designers working to create his vision of each garment. He would often begin by sketching the clothing he imagined, then a team would work to sew and create his designs. After the first version of the garment was created with simple fabric called muslin, Saint Laurent would select the final fabric for the garment. Under Saint Laurent’s direction, his team would piece the garment together—first on a mannequin, next on a model. Working collaboratively, the team made changes according to Saint Laurent’s decisions, sewing new parts before the final garment was finished.

Taking inspiration from changes in society around him, Saint Laurent adapted his designs over the years. Starting his career designing custom-made clothing worn by upper-class women, he shifted his focus to create clothing that more people would want to wear and could afford. He responded to contemporary changes of the time and pushed gender, class, and expressive boundaries of fashion. He created innovative, glamorous pantsuits for women, ready-to-wear clothing for the wider population, and high fashion inspired by what he saw young people wearing on the street. In 1971 Yves Saint Laurent summed this up with one sentence, “What I want to do is shock people, force them to think.”

The exhibition features over 100 haute couture and ready-to-wear garments. Viewers will also see a rich selection of photos, videos, and articles, fabric samples, and accessories. Beginning with a set of paper dolls Saint Laurent created in 1953 (when he was just 17 years old), the exhibition follows his journey working in the fashion industry before opening his own fashion house, his groundbreaking designs in the 1960s and ’70s, to the elegant splendor of his later collections in the 1980s and ’90s. Films and other multimedia elements are shown to help viewers understand Saint Laurent’s style and recurring themes throughout his career.

*Cover:* “First” pantsuit (detail), Spring-Summer 1967 haute couture collection, © Patrick Bertrand/Les Editions Jalou.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

YVES SAINT LAURENT (1936–2008)

“I am no longer concerned with sensation and innovation, but with the perfection of my style.”
—Yves Saint Laurent, 1982

Born in Oran, Algeria, which was a French colony at the time, French Saint Laurent enjoyed a creative childhood cultivating his natural instinct for fashion at a young age. Entering his mid-teens, Saint Laurent was a nervous and sickly youth and endured bullying at school. Looking inward and cultivating his imagination in his late teens, Saint Laurent crafted paper dolls of famous models cut from fashion magazines and used them to put on fashion shows for his sisters. He made more than 500 miniature outfits and accessories for the paper dolls in two years. Shortly after, he was recognized in the fashion world in Paris after his designs won an international competition. This led to an assistant position working for world-renowned fashion designer Christian Dior, who hired Saint Laurent immediately upon viewing his portfolio. Following Dior’s sudden death in late 1957, Saint Laurent took over at the age of 21, and the success of his first line was said to have saved the fashion house.

Proving his talent and instincts in fashion, Yves Saint Laurent had his first show under his own name in 1962. He opened with a woman wearing a navy-blue wool pea coat—a coat traditionally worn by male sailors—paired with white pants made of shantung, a type of silk traditionally used for bridal gowns. While this outfit is typical for a woman today, pants and coats like this were not made for women during this time, and it was uncommon to bring working-class clothing into high fashion. Borrowing ideas from men’s and women’s traditional fashion and blending them together became a focus for Saint Laurent over the rest of his career. Beyond garments borrowed from menswear such as the trench coat, safari jacket, pantsuit, and the tuxedo, Yves Saint Laurent helped redefine the world of women’s fashion with ready-to-wear styles. This meant that for the first time, the wider population could walk into a store and buy clothes instead of having everything made especially for you—something previously only wealthy people could afford.

Beyond new fashion lines, Saint Laurent was also one of the first haute couture designers to work with a diverse range of models. In 1962 he featured the first black model, Fidelia, on a high-fashion runway and continued to feature women of color in his fashion shows for the rest of his career. Saint Laurent left a groundbreaking legacy, influencing the world of fashion and beyond, working until his retirement in 2002.
ABOUT THE WORK

“I tried to show that fashion is an art . . .
I created for my era and I tried to foresee what tomorrow would be.”
—Yves Saint Laurent, 1983

In this section, consider the piece by Yves Saint Laurent and compare it to other artworks in SAM’s collection by artists Louis André Gabriel Bouchet and Nick Cave, discussed later in this guide. Each piece came from a different society and time in history, and was created by artists responding to the social events of their time. Reflect on the issues of expression, gender, and class with the following pieces.

YVES SAINT LAURENT: TUXEDO

In the 1960s Saint Laurent began to take inspiration from street fashion and the creative excitement of pop culture. The traditional world of haute couture was changing, and Saint Laurent began designing for the modern independent woman with his ready-to-wear SAINT LAURENT rive gauche line. The tailored pantsuit for women, which he first introduced in the late 1960s, proved that menswear could effortlessly be adapted to the lifestyle of modern women. Saint Laurent’s blurring of gender norms made him the designer of the moment as traditional roles were being challenged throughout Western society. Speaking about the pantsuits he designed for women, he explained:

When I introduced the pantsuit for the working woman, it caused quite a stir in America. In New York’s famous 21 Club, a woman wearing pants and a tunic was turned away. To be admitted to the dining room, she had to check her pants in the coatroom and wear just the tunic—leaving her, in essence, in a mini dress.
—Yves Saint Laurent, 1991

Saint Laurent was inspired by the world that surrounded him. With the creation of the ready-made “Le Smoking” Tuxedo, Autumn–Winter in 1966, Saint Laurent offered an alternative to the evening gown with mixed responses from his elite clients. The jacket and pants had a subtle black weave with a black silk satin braided trim; the white cotton shirt had a flat collar and ruffled cuffs. Open to endless variations, the Tuxedo for women became a timeless icon and representative of a new masculine glamour. The play between masculine and feminine continued as other garments typically associated with masculine virility and mainstream society made their way into Saint Laurent’s designs. Gender and style distinctions were blurred in a mix of tradition and modernity, elegance and fantasy.
LOOKING QUESTIONS

Younger Students

• What is going on in this image?
• What do you see that makes you say that?
• What do you wonder about this outfit?
• Who do you think could wear this? Why?
• What does this outfit express? Why?
• Where does that idea come from?
• Have you ever worn something like this?
• Where and when?
• Imagine that you are wearing this. How would it make you feel? What place or event would you wear it to?

Additional Questions for Older Students

• Who do you think this outfit was made for? Have you seen someone wear something similar? Where and when? Does gender matter to wear this? Why or why not?
• Imagine this outfit belonged to you. How would you change or customize it? What accessories would you add? What might you remove?
• What do you think is being expressed with this outfit? How would you feel if you were wearing it?
• How is this outfit different from what you see in your neighborhood?
• What does this outfit reveal about the wearer? What does it conceal?

LOUIS ANDRÉ GABRIEL BOUCHET: MME. H AND HER CHILDREN

Louis André Gabriel Bouchet’s portrait Mme. H and Her Children, part of SAM’s permanent collection, captures what appears to be a relaxing afternoon of an upper-class family. Created in France at the beginning of the **romantic era**, a time when clothes strongly indicated social status, fashion of this time had elements of **medieval** and **Renaissance** influences.

This painting uniquely places the woman outdoors with her children, rather than in a house, the traditional expectation of this time. The one-piece dress was created for a formal occasion, indicated by the design: flared neatly with a low neckline and short sleeves. Women’s dresses were often made of heavy, richly textured fabrics in rich jewel tones—resembling those depicted in medieval artworks—with puffed sleeves and decorative edging on dresses. The use of such materials and the level of detailing on their outfits symbolize their wealth and status. Geography began to influence fashion, as soldiers in Napoléon’s army, returning to France from Egypt, imported Indian cashmere shawls for women to wear. These became popular, providing both color and warmth to an outfit, as seen here.

Her children are wearing more typical clothing for an afternoon outside. In the 1800s, children dressed in free-flowing, loose clothing, often called frocks. Both girls and boys would wear this style of clothing, complete with lace edging, signifying the family’s financial status. The loose-fitting outfit allowed growing children to get more use out of it, and made it easy for the children to play, move, and experiment with nature.

*Mme. H and Her Children*, 1815. Louis André Gabriel Bouchet, French, 1759–1842. Oil on canvas, 65 1/8 x 48 1/4 in. (165.4 x 122.6 cm). Eugene Fuller Memorial Collection, 62.75. Photo: Paul Macapia.
LOOKING QUESTIONS

Younger Students

• What is going on in this image? What do you see that makes you say that?
• What do you wonder about the outfits in this image?
• What do the outfits tell us about the person wearing them?
• Are the outfits expressing anything? What? Would that change if we saw each person separately instead of all together?
• Imagine that you are wearing one of these outfits. How would it make you feel? What place or event would you wear it to? Think about these questions for each outfit in this painting.

Additional Questions for Older Students

• Who do you think these outfits were made for? Have you seen someone wear something similar? Does it matter the gender, age, or class of the person wearing each of these? Why or why not?
• What are some occasions for which a person would wear this? Does it need to be worn as is or can it be altered, accessorized, or mixed and matched? Explain.
• Are these outfits still worn today? Are parts of them worn today? Why or why not? Which parts, and where do you see them?
• How would this painting change if gender roles were different?
• What fabrics or materials might have been used to make these outfits? How do you think those materials might feel?
• What do the outfits reveal about the wearers? What do they conceal?
• How do travel and geography continue to influence fashion today?
Chicago-based contemporary artist Nick Cave (seen here wearing part of one of his Soundsuits) is a sculptor, dancer, visual artist, innovator, and entrepreneur. Cave uses recycled materials and everyday objects to create wearable art that explores movement, personal identity, and adornment. With his Soundsuits, identity is communicated to the outside world in unique ways. When speaking about his work, Cave stated:

**You can’t just put a Soundsuit on right away. You need to look at it and imagine the potential. You have to imagine what it will be like wearing it. You have to have a conversation with the suit first. That is because when you do put it on, your identity is completely erased.**

—Nick Cave, 2008

Cave reclaims fabrics and objects, offering a new way to value secondhand materials. Combining high fashion, surface design, and recycling, he creates Soundsuits that are somewhere between ordinary and imaginary. Buttons, plastic tabs, hot pads, metal flowers, sandwich bags, spinning tops, and crocheted doilies are used to make visually fierce and impeccably detailed suits. Cave’s Soundsuits bridge cultures, fusing influences from haute couture, African ceremony, popular culture, and contemporary artists.

LOOKING QUESTIONS

Younger Students

- What is going on in this image?
- What do you see that makes you say that?
- What do you wonder about the outfit in this image?
- What does the outfit express? Why?
- Where does that idea come from?
- Imagine that you are wearing this outfit. How would it make you feel? What place or event would you wear it to? Why or why not?
- What does this outfit reveal about the wearer? What does it conceal?
- How would you move in this outfit? Fast, slow, dancing, walking?

Additional Questions for Older Students

- Who do you think this outfit was made for? Have you seen someone wear something similar? Where and when?
- Does it matter the gender of the person wearing this? Why or why not?
- What are some occasions a person would wear this? Does it need to be worn as is or can it be altered, accessorized, or mixed and matched? Explain.
- Does this outfit tell us anything about the personality of the wearer? Explain.
- How would this outfit change according to the person wearing it?
ABOUT THE WORK

“I know that inspiration will come, it always does. The work I do unconsciously is still churning. The fabrics are churning, as well as the colors, and everything is moving along unconsciously in my mind.”
—Yves Saint Laurent, 1991

QUESTIONS FOR COMPARISON

Compare the three works in this guide, thinking about expression, gender, and class.

• What might we learn about each artist’s life by observing their artwork?
• Ask students to compare Saint Laurent’s Tuxedo to the red gown in Bouchet’s painting. How would the story change if the woman in the painting were wearing Saint Laurent’s Tuxedo?
• Compare Saint Laurent’s Tuxedo to Cave’s Soundsuit. Who were they designed for? Where would they be worn and why?
• How do you think each artist was reflecting and responding to the society and culture in which they live(d) with these artworks? How might their gender or class influence their artwork?
• How does what we wear influence who we are? How does it influence how we act?
• Imagine Saint Laurent’s Tuxedo and the red gown in Bouchet’s painting were made using recycled materials. What might that look like? How would that change our view of the outfit or the wearer?
• What do the materials of an outfit reflect about the person wearing it? Consider self-expression, gender, class, etc.
“I have always believed that art is not only a part of culture but of life itself . . .”
—Yves Saint Laurent, 1998

DESCRIPTION

These works by Yves Saint Laurent, Louis André Gabriel Bouchet, and Nick Cave reflect the events of each artist’s community, place, and time. Consider major events occurring in our communities today. What is happening locally, nationally, or globally? The art activity below asks students to respond to events by creating a mood board—a type of collage or arrangement of images, materials, pieces, text, or other objects that are intended to communicate a particular style or concept.

MATERIALS

- Pencils
- Scissors
- Glue
- Stapler (optional)
- Pushpins (optional)
- Sketch paper
- Cardboard or foam core, suggested size: 11 x 17 in.
- Water-soluble oil pastels, markers, or colored pencils
- Collage materials from newspapers, magazines, printed from online, etc.
- Recycled materials and found objects
- Fabric samples or patterned paper

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 STEPS

One: Social Issues

Begin with a discussion about mood boards. Each mood board should include three areas: influences/inspiration, material samples or objects, and examples of the outfit(s). The largest area is often the influences, with 3–10 items depending on the size of the mood board, followed by 3–6 material samples, and 1–5 outfit(s), often drawn.

Next, ask the students to think about social issues that affect their lives (e.g. school policies, climate change, globalization, etc.). As a class, create a list of topics. These topics will be used to inspire the mood boards.

Two: Collaborative Mood Boards

Working in groups of 3–4 or individually, the students will collaborate to create a mood board about a social issue, which students will use later to individually create an outfit. Ask the students to brainstorm what images, feelings, colors, objects, environments, fabrics, and so on come to mind when thinking of their social issue. Come up with a list of 10 words or less, depending on their topic, to inspire their mood board. Encourage the students to note what is important to them about the social issue and why. These feelings, ideas, and passions will help them clarify what types of images and objects they would like to add to their mood board.
Three: Object Selection
Have the students divide up their list of words and search for images and objects that represent their word(s). Ask them to think about which area on the mood board their items will go into: influences or materials. Suggested materials include old magazines, newspapers, online images and articles, fabric scraps, found objects, or original designs and sculptures. They may represent a single word or multiple words with one object. Remind students to think about the overall composition of their mood board. Encourage them to select a balance of images versus objects.

Four: Creating the Layout
Ask the students to share why they chose their image or object and which area the item would be in: influences or materials. Encourage them to sort through, discuss, and choose the items that best represent the social issue, keeping it to 5–7 items per area. Have them work together to arrange the items on the board and leave space for their outfits (option to have the outfit sketches separate), then attach their items.

Five: Designing an Outfit
Using the inspirational images, objects, and materials on the mood board, the students will work individually to create an outfit that connects to their social issue. Younger students have the option to use images from magazines, newspapers, etc. What types of shirts, shorts, skirts, coats, hats, belts, and so on represent the style of the mood board? Encourage them to think about the reason for choosing each piece of the outfit. Students may use water-soluble oil pastels, markers, or colored pencils to sketch their outfit. When the outfits are finished, add them to the mood board.

Six: Presenting the Artwork
Ask students to think about their mood board and outfits, and share their work with the class.

As a group, present the mood board and explain how it represents the social event. Then have each student share the outfit they created.

How did the group’s artistic choices influence their outfit? Name one choice the artist might have made differently—how does this change the outfit?

How do the outfits represent the social event? How might it feel to wear that outfit?

Who were the outfits designed for? Where would they be worn and why?

How is each group reflecting and responding to society and culture with these outfits? How might their gender or class affect the outfit?

ACTIVITY EXTENSIONS

- Create a setting or environment for the outfit to be worn. Ask the students to identify what type of event or location would work best for this outfit, and why.
- Have groups swap mood boards and create new outfits based on their peers’ mood boards, then explain their designs.
- Ask the students to imagine, write about, or design an outfit considering what Yves Saint Laurent, Louis André Gabriel Bouchet, or Nick Cave might create based on their mood board.
- Write a short story featuring a character wearing the outfit on their mood board.
**Christian Dior**: French haute couture fashion designer (1905–1957), best known as the founder of one of the world’s top fashion houses, also called Christian Dior. He compared his designs to flowers, was known to use a lot of fabric, and created captivating shapes and silhouettes.

**Class**: A group of people who share basic economic, political, or cultural characteristics; having the same social position or level.

**Collage**: A piece of art made by arranging and sticking different materials such as pieces of paper, photographs, or fabric onto a backing.

**Composition**: Arrangement of different parts or visual elements (colors, subject matter, etc.) in a work of art.

**Entrepreneur**: A person who starts a new business.

**Fashion house**: An establishment where clothes are designed, made, and sold.

**Gender**: Either the female or male division of a species, especially as differentiated by social and cultural roles and behavior.

**Haute couture**: High fashion, the most fashionable and influential designing.

**Louis André Gabriel Bouchet**: French historical painter (1759–1842), known for painting portraits and subjects from poetry and history.

**Mannequin**: A figure shaped like a human body that is used for making or displaying clothes.

**Medieval**: 5th–15th century in European history; began with the fall of the Western Roman Empire and merged into the Renaissance.

**Mood board**: A type of collage or arrangement of images, materials, pieces, text, or other objects that are intended to communicate a particular style or concept.

**Muslin**: A lightweight fabric made of cotton with a plain weave.

**Napoléon**: Napoléon Bonaparte was a French military and political leader (1769–1821) who rose to prominence during the French Revolution and led several successful campaigns during the Revolutionary Wars from 1792 to 1802.

**Nick Cave**: American fabric sculptor, dancer, and performance artist (born in 1959); trained dancer, he is best known for his Soundsuits: wearable fabric sculptures that are bright, whimsical, and otherworldly.

**Ready-to-wear**: Clothes made for the general market and sold through stores rather than made to order for an individual customer; off the rack.

**Renaissance**: 14th–17th century in European history; started as a cultural movement in Italy and is regarded as the cultural bridge between the Middle Ages and modern history.

**Rive Gauche**: French term for the Left Bank, generally refers to the Paris of an earlier era.

**Romantic Era**: An artistic, literary, musical, and intellectual movement that originated in Europe toward the end of the 18th century.

**SAINT LAURENT rive gauche**: A clothing line created by Yves Saint Laurent in Paris, 1966, identified as ready-to-wear clothes.

**Shantung**: A type of silk fabric that has a sheen and ribbed effect that gives dimension and interest; often used for bridal gowns.

**Yves Saint Laurent**: A French fashion designer (1936–2008), regarded as one of the greatest names in fashion history. He is credited with introducing the tuxedo suit for women, and was known for his non-European cultural references and non-white models.
WASHINGTON STATE EDUCATION STANDARDS

ARTS

Arts 1.
The student understands and applies arts knowledge and skills.

Arts 2.
The student demonstrates thinking skills using artistic processes.

Arts 3.
The student communicates through the arts.

Arts 4.
The student makes connections within and across the arts to other disciplines, life, cultures, and work.

COMMUNICATION

Communication 3.
The student uses communication skills and strategies to present ideas and one’s self in a variety of situations.

WRITING

Writing 2.
The student writes in a variety of forms for different audiences and purposes.

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS

Anchor Standards for Reading Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

Production and Distribution of Writing

4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening Comprehension and Collaboration

1. Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

2. Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
NATIONAL CORE ARTS STANDARDS

CREATING
Anchor Standard 1:
Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard 2:
Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard 3:
Refine and complete artistic work.

CONNECTING
Anchor Standard 10:
Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

Anchor Standard 11:
Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

PRESENTING
Anchor Standard 6:
Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

RESPONDING
Anchor Standard 7:
Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Anchor Standard 8:
Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.
Mme. H and Her Children, 1815. Louis André Gabriel Bouchet, French, 1759–1842. Oil on canvas, 65 1/8 x 48 1/4 in. (165.4 x 122.6 cm). Eugene Fuller Memorial Collection, 62.75. Photo: Paul Macapia.