

NEWS RELEASE

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New Exhibition Reveals 2,500 Years of Style Connecting Humanity Through the Ages



Image: Rendering of *The Stories We Wear*, highlighting the meaning behind clothing and accessories. Opens September 2021.

The Stories We Wear
 September 25, 2021–June 12, 2022

Press Preview: September 23, 2021

PHILADELPHIA — The Penn Museum unveils fashion and apparel across time with *The Stories We Wear*, a nearly 3,700-square-foot exhibition opening to the public on **Saturday, September 25, 2021.**

Showcasing **2,500 years of style and adornment** through approximately 250 remarkable objects, *The Stories We Wear* reveals how clothing and accessories offer powerful expressions of identity—examining the purpose and meaning behind “what we wear.”

Curated by Dr. Lauren Ristvet, Robert H. Dyson Curator in the Penn Museum’s Near East Section, Dr. Sarah Linn, Research Liaison in the Academic Engagement Department, and Dr. Jane Hickman, Consulting Scholar to the Mediterranean Section, the exhibition features a spectacular array of **attire, jewelry, uniforms, regalia, and tattoos.**

The objects and outfits invite guests to identify common threads woven into stories that transcend language, culture, and time in an effort to connect people through shared experiences.

"Today, we often dismiss fashion as frivolous," said Lead Curator Dr. Lauren Ristvet. "But our appearances are important. The way we dress communicates who we are and what we do. Clothing doesn't just express someone's sense of style; it gives us a peek into the society they live in."

Organized into five themes, *The Stories We Wear* explores how people around the world have dressed for:

- **Ceremony**, featuring a traditional wedding outfit of a Hopi bride (circa 1900) and the headdress of a Buddhist priest from 16th-century Nepal, alongside ritual objects and statues from Tibet ranging from the 14th to the early 20th century
- **Performance**, illustrated by a stunning satin opera robe from China during the Qing Dynasty (19th century), and a theatrical ensemble from *Thweeney Todd: The Flaming Barber of Fleek Street*, worn by LGBTQ+ icon and 2018 **Drag Queen of the Year Eric Jaffe**
- **Battle**, including the armor of Samurai warriors from Japan, with a sword dating to 1603, along with Kiribati weapons from the 1800s
- **Work and Play**, highlighting attire worn by *chaski* runners as they delivered important messages in the mountains of Peru during the Inka empire, as well as the traveling ensemble of a 19th-century Mongolian woman, and
- **Rule**, with a Coclé (modern-day Panama) chief's burial regalia (circa 750-1000 CE).

Some of the oldest artifacts on display in *The Stories We Wear* are a collection of arrowheads and gold ornaments that may have belonged to a female Scythian warrior (650-330 BCE) and the brilliant jewelry that adorned the glamorous women of the Mediterranean during the Roman Empire. In addition, **contemporary pieces** will be on display, such as a:

- Full [Philadelphia Eagles](#) uniform loaned by sports legend **Connor Barwin**,
- Dress worn (ca. 1938) by groundbreaking contralto **Marian Anderson** (the first African-American to perform with the New York Metropolitan Opera in 1955)—on loan from the [National Marian Anderson Museum & Historical Society](#), and
- Haute couture created by designer **James Galanos**, including a gown similar to one worn by Hollywood superstar **Marilyn Monroe** and a **Givenchy** dress worn by **Grace Kelly**, Serene High Princess Grace of Monaco, both on loan from the [Robert and Penny Fox Historic Costume Collection](#) at [Drexel University's Westphal College of Media Arts & Design](#).

"Museum work is about telling stories, and the timeless stories behind what we wear are fascinating," said Dr. Christopher Woods, who joined the Penn Museum as Williams Director in the spring. "*The Stories We Wear* opens up another way to make anthropology and archaeology accessible to all: through style and fashion. We will also be inviting the public to share their own meaningful stories to add their voices to the exhibition—another thread connecting our cultural memories through the ages."

The Stories We Wear is included with Museum admission and will run through June 12, 2022. Tickets are now available online.

A Press Preview will take place on Thursday, September 23, 2021. Invitation to follow.

Downloadable high-resolution images are available [here](#).

About the Curators

Lauren Ristvet, Ph.D., Lead Exhibition Curator

Dr. Lauren Ristvet, the Robert H. Dyson, Jr. Assistant Curator in the Museum's Near East Section, specializes in Ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern history and archaeology, with an emphasis on the formation and collapse of archaic states, landscape archaeology, human response to environmental disaster, and ancient imperialism. She is the associate director of excavations at Tell Leilan, Syria (ancient Shehna/Shubat-Enlil), where she has excavated since 1999, and serves as the co-director of the Naxcivan Archaeological Project in Naxcivan, Azerbaijan, a combined survey-excavation project. Dr. Ristvet earned her Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge.

Sarah Linn, Ph.D., Curator

Dr. Sarah Linn is a Mediterranean archaeologist who specializes in Greek prehistory, particularly Minoan Crete. As the Research Liaison at the Penn Museum, her passion is sharing the Museum's collections and research with the public in an accessible way. Dr. Linn earned her Ph.D. in Mediterranean Archaeology from the University of Pennsylvania.

Jane Hickman, Ph.D., Curator

An expert in gold and silver jewelry from the ancient Aegean, the Near East, and Central Asia, Dr. Jane Hickman has studied and published articles about jewelry from Minoan Crete, the eastern Mediterranean, and Afghanistan. A Consulting Scholar in the Mediterranean Section, she earned her Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of Pennsylvania and is the former editor of *Expedition* magazine.

Acknowledging Our Underwriters

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About the Penn Museum

Since 1887, the Museum has been transforming our understanding of the human experience. Dedicated to building connections between cultures, the Museum welcomes everyone to uncover the past, gain an understanding of our shared humanity, and find one's own place in the arc of human history.

The Penn Museum is open Tuesday–Sunday, 10:00 AM–5:00 PM with safety guidelines. For more information, visit www.penn.museum, call 215.898.4000 or follow @PennMuseum on social media.