

MACARONI ENSEMBLE

c. 1770

In 1763, with the end of the Seven Years' War, which had split Europe into two coalitions led by Great Britain and France, a period of peace came over Europe, making travel on the Continent possible and prompting many young English gentlemen to embark on the "Grand Tour" of continental Europe in hopes of broadening their education and achieving greater cultural refinement. In the course of such travel, many well-to-do Englishmen acquired a taste for exotic foreign fashions and, when they returned home, their clothing reflected this influence. These young men became known as "macaroni," after the similarly exotic food they had enjoyed in Italy. Today, people may be familiar with this usage of "macaroni" from the song, "Yankee Doodle Dandy," which was originally sung by British military officers to mock the poorly dressed American colonial troops (derisively called "yankee doodles"): "Yankee Doodle came to town, riding on a pony; stuck a feather in his cap and called it macaroni."

Macaronis were known to be excessively concerned with their appearance in a decidedly un-English way. Not content to blend in, they wore outrageous wigs and apparel in an effort to demonstrate their worldliness. While most Englishmen of the time wore staid clothing made of sensible, long-lasting English wool, macaronis delighted in expensive, impractical silks and satins imported from abroad and adorned with decorative buttons, brocade, and embroidery. These suits were made in striking pastels, particularly pea green, orange, and pink, which were often worn together for high contrast (see LACMA's green suit with an orange waistcoat, or vest). Green was a particularly prized color at the time, as green garments had to be dyed twice, once blue and once yellow (the colors had to mix on the garment to make green; a permanent green dye wasn't discovered until 1808). This time-intensive process made green clothing rare and costly. While most English suits were loose-fitting and comfortable, the macaronis' suits were tailored to fit as tightly as possible, and

with sleeves cut so closely that strenuous movement was rendered impossible. (In fact, the LACMA suit shows evidence of being altered to make it narrower.)

The contrast in the fashion choices of macaronis and their countrymen is also apparent in their accessories. At a time when Englishmen wore large hats, macaronis wore tiny hats. While Englishmen were phasing out wigs, macaronis fully embraced artificial hairpieces in all their pomaded, powdered glory, wearing towering toupees with long curls and a ponytail held within a large satin bag trimmed with bows at the back of the neck. To complete the look, macaronis wore hanging swords; traditionally these had been carried by noblemen but at the time they were fading from general use and were purely decorative. Other accessories included slippers adorned with diamond or gilded buckles, large floral corsages, and watches hanging on chains, all of which can be viewed in the LACMA ensemble.

In its excess and international roots, the macaroni style declared one's wealth and worldliness, and from the 1760s until about 1780, macaronis were the most fashionable men in England. However, even as the style was celebrated, it was simultaneously ridiculed. The English thought of themselves as rational and measured, and macaronis did not fit their idea of proper English masculinity. Glittery styles that may have been at home at the French court appeared out of place on the busy commercial streets of London, and, even at the height of the look's popularity, exaggerated versions of the macaroni were mocked in plays and in the papers. Such displays of extravagant consumption made showy fashion for men appear ridiculous, and, following the macaroni's demise, English male fashion became increasingly uniform and subdued, focused on minute subtleties of tailoring rather than grand, splashy gestures.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- Today people return home from their travels with T-shirts and other souvenirs. In eighteenth-century England, many young men came back from their trips abroad with a whole new, outrageous style. Can you think of an item in your wardrobe that you purchased on a trip or that someone got for you while traveling? What is it? Do you wear it? Do people engage you in conversation about it? What do you feel it says about you when you wear it?
- What is your most outrageous item of clothing?
- We think of our clothing as much more comfortable and freeing in terms of movement than it was in the past, but trends like skinny or extra-baggy jeans are not necessarily conducive to playing sports or doing manual labor. Do your clothes inhibit or allow you to do the things you want and need to do? Do you suffer for fashion?
- The macaroni suit dates to 1770, nearly 250 years ago. If items of clothing from today were displayed in a museum exhibition 250 years in the future, what styles do you think would be represented? What do you think people would say about our time and society based on our clothing?



Macaroni Ensemble: Suit
Italy, c. 1770,
Los Angeles County Museum of Art
Costume Council Fund

Waistcoat
France, c. 1770
Los Angeles County Museum of Art
Purchased with funds provided by Suzanne A. Saperstein and Michael and Ellen Michelson, with additional funding from the Costume Council, the Edgerton Foundation, Gail and Gerald Oppenheimer, Maureen H. Shapiro, Grace Tsao, and Lenore and Richard Wayne; Sword with Sheath, France, late 18th century, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of Mary H. and Martin B. Retting.



THE MACARONI BRICKLAYER,
PRIOR to any other Macaroni.
Pub^d accord^g to Act of Parli^t, Sep^r 17 1772, by M^r Darby (B^o) Strand.

The Macaroni Bricklayer
Sept. 17, 1772
Published by Matthew Darly, London
Black and white line engraving with period hand color
The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. Museum Purchase (#1954-481)
Photo © 2013 The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

VEST

1789–94

WALKING STICK (HERCULES CLUB)

1790s

CARMAGNOLE JACKET AND SANS-CULOTTE TROUSERS

c. 1790

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, forty percent of Paris's urban economy was dedicated to clothing and grooming for wealthy men. Well-to-do gentlemen wore full-skirted knee-length coats, knee breeches (short trousers fastened just above the knee and worn with stockings), silk stockings, vests, leather shoes with stacked heels, shoulder-length wigs, and hats—much of which was adorned with lace, sequins, embroidery, and gems. Considering the vast resources committed to fashion at that time, it is understandable that clothing quickly became a political battleground during the French Revolution (1789–1799). Due to the tempestuous conditions of the time period, few examples of clothing from this era in French history have survived. LACMA is extremely fortunate to have several exceptional examples in its collection.

In May 1789, rank-based dress codes were dictated by King Louis XVI's ministers; by October 1789, all distinctions of dress indicating rank were outlawed. Following the fall of the Bastille on July 14, 1789, both royalists and revolutionaries carried Hercules clubs (twisted walking sticks) with which to defend themselves against attacks from one another while out on the street. Supporters of the French monarchy wore vests adorned with fleurs-de-lis, which were associated with the monarchy; and revolutionaries like Maximilien Robespierre (1758–1794), a leader of the Revolution's Reign of Terror (the period from September 1793 to July 1794 marked by mass executions of "enemies of the Revolution"), wore vests decorated with revolutionary symbols and text in red, white, and blue, the colors of the

Revolution. LACMA's vest is an example of the latter. The vest was most likely worn by an aristocratic convert to the revolutionary cause who repurposed an old vest of luxurious green silk as lining for a new revolutionary vest. At first glance, the vest appears to be knitted, but in fact canvas has been stitched with needlepoint to create the appearance of a knitted vest. This would have been a deliberate choice, given that female knitters were among the early, vocal supporters of the Revolution, and knitted apparel invoked their revolutionary ardor.

A butterfly embroidered on the vest's left lapel references 1780s slang, referring to a casually dressed man as a caterpillar who would change into a colorfully flamboyant butterfly when dressed more formally. The Revolution made the showy butterfly politically incorrect; as such, this butterfly's wings are clipped by a giant pair of scissors. On the right lapel, the newly grounded caterpillar sits by its shorn wings and the discarded scissors on the green grass. A pattern of red, white, and blue adorns the body of the vest, and its pockets are embellished with the following French sayings (translated): "The habit does not make the monk" (Don't judge a book by its cover) on the right pocket, and "Shame upon him who thinks evil of it" (the motto of one of England's oldest orders of chivalry, associated with England's constitutional monarchy) on the left. Ironically, considering its decoration advocated for the renunciation of fashion and embellishments, a surprising amount of thought and painstaking labor went into the creation of this vest.

In 1794 revolutionary leaders declared that anyone not wearing a cockade (a circular-shaped knot of ribbons) with the colors of the Revolution on one's hat or lapel was a counter-revolutionary. After the Revolution, menswear became much more subdued. Leaders of the new regime took pride in wearing informal, slovenly clothing; even cleanliness was considered counter-revolutionary. A good cut, a shiny fabric, or anything showing hints of stylishness could catch the eye of a citizen revolutionary and get you arrested or, worse yet, executed. The more militant of these citizen revolutionaries were known as *sans-culottes*, literally "without knee breeches," because

they wore the loose-fitting, coarse cotton trousers of the working class rather than the breeches of the aristocracy. Before the Revolution, trousers were worn only by those who couldn't afford stockings; afterward, trousers were embraced as a political statement. (LACMA's trousers also have red, white, and blue stripes.)

Above their trousers, the *sans-culottes* adopted the hip-length woolen jacket known as a carmagnole, traditionally worn by peasants.

The finishing piece of the *sans-culottes'* look was the red cap called the bonnet rouge, or Liberty cap, a brimless, felt, cone-shaped hat with its tip slumped forward. The bonnet rouge was a reference to the ancient Roman ritual in which a freed slave received a red cap as a symbol of his newfound liberty. For its French wearers, the cap symbolized republican liberty and freedom from the tyranny of the monarchy; its red color represented the flag, as well as the blood that was shed for the cause.

Once a sign of poverty, the humble trouser and jacket of the *sans-culotte* eventually became everyday wear for men of all classes. After the Reign of Terror ended in the summer of 1794 and expatriates who had fled the Revolution returned to France, bright colors remained in hiding. Tucked away in the linings of jacket flaps and on waistcoats seen only partially from behind in subdued jackets, they appeared as small accents on neckties and cuffs and were only fully embraced out of the critical public eye, in the privacy of one's home, where one could wear a colorful dressing gown or bathrobe.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- Long before sports fans declared their allegiance to teams with jerseys and colored insignia, men in Revolutionary War–era France declared their allegiance to either the king or the Revolution and, in some cases, avoided death with their choice of clothing. Do you own any sports-team-affiliated clothing? Do fans of other teams ever challenge you over your “fashion” affiliation?
- Can you think of any other clothing that you own that identifies you as part of, or loyal to, a certain group, culture, or religion? A fan of a certain cause, band, or type of music? How do people react to you when you wear that clothing?
- Do you wear any items of clothing or accessories that have symbolic value for you?
- How does the clothing you wear differ from that worn by your parents when they were your age? Looking at these differences, how has time changed fashions for people your age? Are there any elements of clothing from your parents' youth that resonate with you now? What do you think motivated them to wear what they wore; and how are their motivations similar or different from yours?
- Does what you wear at home differ from what you wear at school? If so, how does it differ and why? For example, do school rules prevent you from wearing a beloved shirt with holes in it or your favorite flip-flops?



Vest
France, 1789–94
Los Angeles County Museum of Art
Purchased with funds provided by Suzanne A. Saperstein and Michael and Ellen Michelson, with additional funding from the Costume Council, the Edgerton Foundation, Gail and Gerald Oppenheimer, Maureen H. Shapiro, Grace Tsao, and Lenore and Richard Wayne.
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Vest (detail)

France, 1789-94

Los Angeles County Museum of Art

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Walking Stick (Hercules Club)

France, 1790

Los Angeles County Museum of Art

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Carmagnole Jacket

France, c. 1790

Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Purchased with funds provided by Suzanne A. Saperstein and Michael and Ellen Michelson, with additional funding from the Costume Council, the Edgerton Foundation, Gail and Gerald Oppenheimer, Maureen H. Shapiro, Grace Tsao, and Lenore and Richard Wayne

Sans-culotte Trousers

France, c. 1790

Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Purchased with funds provided by Phillip Lim.

Photo © Museum Associates/LACMA

ZOOT SUIT 1935–1945

The zoot suit was originally an African American style strongly associated with jazz in the 1930s. Legendary jazz singer and bandleader Cab Calloway described the suit as “the ultimate in clothes.” Certainly no suit was quite as distinctive or splashy as the zoot suit. Comprising an extra-long, double-breasted jacket with padded shoulders and voluminous peg-top trousers worn high on the torso with legs that ballooned out at the knees before tightly tapering in at the ankle, the zoot suit was usually worn with either very wide or very narrow ties (LACMA’s tie, known as a “belly-warmer,” is shorter to avoid overlap with the high-waisted zoot suit pants), exceedingly thick-soled shoes, and extra-long, dangling watch chains. The zoot suit made its wearer wider, longer, and generally more imposing. Its excesses of fabric and tailoring made it expensive and thus, a coveted luxury item. Young men saved up for months to buy a zoot suit or bought them on credit. LACMA’s striped zoot suit has additional fabric inserted into the pleats of the sleeves for even greater fullness, and the billowing pant legs inflate out into a forty-seven-inch circumference at the knee before narrowing into a seventeen-and-a-half-inch cuff at the ankle.

Promoted by music, movies, the press, and especially swing dance, whose steps required the greater range of movement provided by a roomy suit, the zoot suit soon became popular among immigrant groups, including Filipino Americans and Japanese Americans, as well as men of Jewish and Italian descent. In the Southwest, the suits were particularly associated with young Mexican American men who rebelled against their parents’ culture despite the fact that they were still largely viewed as foreigners by many white Americans. A young Malcolm X wore a zoot suit in the 1940s, as did a young Cesar Chavez and black musicians Dizzy Gillespie and Cab Calloway. The marginalized groups who wore zoot suits refused to blend in, like the “invisible man” described in Ralph Ellison’s famous 1952 novel

of the same name (in which the zoot suit makes an appearance). These men used their style to stand out, declare their presence, and express their point of view. Internationally, the zoot suit was adopted by young French rebels called *zazous*, who wore the suit in defiance of Nazi regulations during World War II. Those who wore the striking suit refused to defer to majority pressure and traditional roles. Zoot-suiters were not “respectable”; they were cool and sophisticated.

In addition to racial and ethnic minorities, the zoot suit was also identified with working-class youth, and, as a result, the suits were associated with stereotypes of petty crooks and juvenile delinquents. In the early 1940s, some theaters, ballrooms, and other entertainment venues banned men wearing zoot suits because of their association with disorderly conduct. Some police officers attached razor blades to their nightsticks to rip zoot suits, and judges ordered young men arrested for loitering to cut their hair and surrender their zoot suits to the court.

Parents and middle-class-minorities pleaded with their zoot-suit wearing youths to stop calling attention to themselves in fear that this would encourage discrimination and exacerbate cultural tensions, but the zoot-suiters refused to give up their signature style. Even after the War Production Board created regulations rationing the use of wool and effectively prohibiting the manufacture of zoot suits in 1942, young men continued to wear them. The press labeled zoot-suiters unpatriotic slackers (in contrast to the young men who enlisted to fight in World War II), and unrest over adequate housing, lack of jobs, and segregation worsened the situation. Tensions finally erupted in the Zoot Suit Riots of 1943. Ignited by a reputed conflict between a group of sailors on leave in Los Angeles and a group of young Mexican Americans, gangs of off-duty marines set upon Mexican American zoot-suiters with “zoot-beaters” (two-by-fours with protruding nails on each end for slashing the zoot suit’s inflated pant legs).

The worst of the rioting took place on June 11, 1943, four days after the riots began. Thousands of servicemen and citizens prowled the streets of downtown L.A. attacking zoot-suiters and even some young minority men who were not wearing zoot suits. Soldiers, sailors, and marines from as far away as San Diego traveled to L.A., and taxi drivers offered free rides to the riot areas for those wanting to join the fight. Approximately five thousand civilians and military men gathered downtown that night, and the riots spread into the predominantly African American section of Watts. A mob entered a movie theater and made the manager stop the film and turn on the lights so they could force the men in the audience to stand up and show their pants to prove they weren't zoot-suiters. Those wearing zoot suits were beaten and humiliated, publicly stripped of their zoot suits, which in some instances were urinated on or set on fire. During the riots, many zoot-suiters were jailed "for their own protection." Not a single sailor or soldier was ever arrested. Though there were no fatalities in L.A., more than one hundred people were hospitalized with serious injuries.

After nearly a week of riots, senior military officials finally brought the violence to an end by declaring L.A. off-limits to military personnel. However, in the following weeks, similar disturbances occurred across the country in cities like Philadelphia, New York, and, tragically, in Detroit, where thirty-four mostly African American people died and 1,800 people were arrested in mid-June. In the aftermath of the riots, L.A. commentators insisted that the events of that June did not constitute a race riot but rather "style warfare."

As a result of the riots, very few zoot suits survived intact. LACMA's zoot suit is thus an exceptional artifact and a particularly valuable document of U.S. history.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- Can you think of clothing worn today that arouses suspicion in others? I.e., trench coats, hoodies, extra baggy pants, religious clothing?
- Does it surprise you that someone could be attacked or arrested based on what they're wearing? Why or why not?
- Can you think of any of today's fashion trends that are associated with certain kinds of music? How do older generations generally view young people wearing these trendy styles?



Zoot Suit

United States, 1940–42

Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Purchased with funds provided by Ellen A. Michelson; De Luxe Hollyvogue (Lundahl Clothing Co.), *Necktie (Belly-warmer)*, United States, c. 1945, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of Stephen J. and Sandra Sotnick; The Guarantee, *Shoes (Spectators)*, United States, 1935–42, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of Mrs. Carl W. Barrow.

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Cornell Capa
USA, New York City, Harlem, 1939, Savoy Ballroom
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Man in Torn Clothing with Two Zoot Suiters
Los Angeles, California, June 8, 1943
Photo © Bettmann/CORBIS