

Exhibition: *Lee Alexander McQueen: Mind, Mythos, Muse*

Dates: April 24–October 9, 2022

Location: Resnick Pavilion



(Image captions on page 5)

(Los Angeles, CA—February 23, 2022) The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) presents *Lee Alexander McQueen: Mind, Mythos, Muse*, an exhibition that contextualizes the work of Lee Alexander McQueen (England, 1969–2010) within art history and examines the interdisciplinary impulse that defined the designer’s career. The first McQueen exhibition on the West Coast of the United States, *Mind, Mythos, Muse* interprets the designer’s work through the lens of inspiration, juxtaposing his designs with non-fashion artworks by makers who drew upon analogous themes and visual references. Exploring imagination, artistic process, and innovation in fashion and art, the exhibition presents a case study of McQueen’s methods and influences, providing the opportunity to better understand artistic legacy and the cyclical nature of inspiration.

Comprising nearly 200 objects, *Lee Alexander McQueen: Mind, Mythos, Muse* places over 70 designs by McQueen in conversation with examples of costume and textiles, decorative arts, paintings, sculptures, prints, and photographs by 35 other artists—primarily drawn from LACMA’s permanent collection. The exhibition also highlights a substantial gift from Los Angeles–based collector Regina J. Drucker that has greatly enhanced LACMA’s collection of works by McQueen, which is the largest held by a public institution in North America.

Lee Alexander McQueen: Mind, Mythos, Muse is organized by Clarissa M. Esguerra, associate curator of Costume and Textiles, and Michaela Hansen, curatorial assistant, Costume and Textiles.

“This is not only the first McQueen show on the West Coast, but also the first to display objects that link his work to specific moments in art history from which he drew inspiration,” Esguerra and Hansen said. “Our access to LACMA’s encyclopedic collection and the collaboration of many of our curatorial colleagues within the museum made these juxtapositions possible.”

"This exhibition brings the work of Alexander McQueen in conversation with artworks in LACMA's collection, highlighting the power of inspiration and influence in art," said Michael Govan, LACMA CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director. "We're so fortunate that LACMA's collection allows us to illustrate these connections across time, geography, and media. *Mind, Mythos, Muse* is a beautiful example of how LACMA curators are sharing new perspectives on art history with the public, and we also owe thanks to Regina Drucker for her passion and generosity."

One of the most significant contributors to fashion between 1990 and 2010, McQueen was both a conceptual and technical virtuoso. His critically acclaimed collections synthesized the designer’s proficiency in tailoring and dressmaking with both encyclopedic and autobiographical references that spanned time, geography, media, and technology. The delicate ruff and gold beading around the neck and front of a dress from McQueen’s “Widows of Culloden” collection (Fall/Winter 2006–07), for example, echos the lace collar and scrolling metallic-thread embroidery in Frans Pourbus II’s *Portrait of Louis XIII, King of France as a Boy* (c. 1616). Similarly, McQueen drew upon the Spanish bullfight, flamenco, and the work of Francisco de Goya in “The Dance of the Twisted Bull” (Spring/Summer 2002), which portrayed bullfighting as a metaphor for life and death. McQueen’s interpretation of the distinctive *kati rimo* (brocade pattern) design, seen painted on a 17th-century Tibetan trunk, is incorporated into pieces from his collection “Scanners” (Fall/Winter 2003–04), which illustrated an eastward migration across Siberia through Tibet and to Japan. Contemporary works include a 2010 monumental photograph of the ocean by Andreas Gursky paired with looks from McQueen’s collection “Plato’s Atlantis” (Spring/Summer 2010), which explored rising sea levels.

Revealing art historical connections that demonstrate the strength and diversity of LACMA’s collection, the selection of works represents a wide range of curatorial departments including American Art; Contemporary Art; Costume and Textiles; Decorative Arts and Design; European Painting and Sculpture; Art of the Middle East; Prints and Drawings; the Wallis Annenberg Photography Department; the Rifkind Center for German Expressionist Studies; and South and Southeast Asian Art.

Continuing LACMA’s long tradition of collaborating with local artists and creators, the exhibition also features head and mannequin treatments created by Los Angeles–

based artist Michael Schmidt and an exhibition design by L.A. firm Michael Maltzan Architecture.

Exhibition Organization

Lee Alexander McQueen: Mind, Mythos, Muse is organized into four thematic sections: **Mythos, Fashioned Narratives, Technique and Innovation, and Evolution and Existence.**

Mythos explores select McQueen collections inspired by mythological and religious belief systems, incorporating visual references to diverse cultures as well as art historical movements. While these collections put McQueen's impressive breadth of artistic source material on display, they also highlight a practice of external inspiration-seeking that characterized fashion design during his career. *Untitled (Angels and Demons)* (Fall/Winter 2010) references Christian iconography from art of the Northern and Italian Renaissance. *Neptune* (Spring/Summer 2006) looked to ancient Greece and Rome, while *Eye* (Spring/Summer 2000) combines Western fashion with interpretations of dress traditionally associated with the former Ottoman Empire. McQueen's fusion of religious symbols and silhouettes, historical secular dress, and contemporary fashion conflates costume traditions found across disparate cultures into his singular vision.

The second section, **Fashioned Narratives**, considers McQueen's penchant for worldbuilding, highlighting collections that tell original stories or reimagine past events. *Scanners* (Fall/Winter 2003–04) portrays a journey across Siberia, through Tibet, to Japan, with designs that borrow from the regions' textile and dress traditions. *The Girl Who Lived in the Tree* (Fall/Winter 2008–09) envisions a fairytale that draws on 19th- and mid-20th- century English fashion and India's rich textile traditions. In *Memory of Elizabeth How, Salem, 1692* (Fall/Winter 2007–08) traced McQueen's familial background to colonial Massachusetts to pay tribute to distant ancestors executed in the Salem witch trials. *The Widows of Culloden* (Fall/Winter 2006–07) mines McQueen's Scottish ancestry, condemning British colonialism and violence in Scotland, especially during the 1746 Battle of Culloden. Rooted in McQueen's personal history and romanticized historical references, these narrative collections explore themes of tradition, discovery, exchange, power, persecution, violence, and metamorphosis.

Evolution and Existence examines McQueen's fascination with life cycles and the human condition. The designer's considerations of nature, evolution, and death resulted in collections that explored life's inherent fragility—and found hope in its regeneration. *The Horn of Plenty* (Fall/Winter 2009–10) critiqued mass consumerism, which McQueen countered by recycling famous silhouettes from himself and haute couturiers before him. *The Dance of the Twisted Bull* (Spring/Summer

2002) portrayed bullfighting as a metaphor for life and death, while *Deliverance* (Spring/Summer 2004) presented an allegorical “dance to the death” inspired by the film *They Shoot Horses, Don’t They?* Citing Stanley Kubrick’s *Barry Lyndon*, mourning, and Dutch floral still lifes, *Sarabande* (Spring/Summer 2007) finds beauty in the inevitability of decay. The designer’s final completed collection, *Plato’s Atlantis* (Spring/Summer 2010), imagines a world consumed by the ocean, the place where life originated—and, McQueen suggested, would continue.

Technique and Innovation demonstrates McQueen’s masterful abilities in garment construction. His collections consistently drew upon formative years spent apprenticing as a tailor on Savile Row. In his dressmaking, complex garment patterns emerge, informed by skillful cutting abilities and a tactile sensitivity in draping. Mixing form with function and history with innovation, McQueen regularly drew upon Western costume history, refashioning men’s and women’s dress, textiles, and embellishments from eras ranging from the Renaissance and the Enlightenment to the Belle Époque and the Jazz Age. This thoughtful attention to detail was also applied to the designer’s inventive fabrics and surface treatments. McQueen incorporated emerging technologies such as laser-cutting and digital printing that have had a lasting impact on the fashion industry.

Publication

The exhibition will be accompanied by an illustrated catalogue published by DelMonico/D.A.P. and edited by Sara Cody, with essays contributed by Meghan Doherty, Linda Komaroff, Leah Lehmbeck, Erin Sullivan Maynes, Rosie Chambers Mills, Mei Mei Rado, and Britt Salvesen.

Credit

This exhibition was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

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About LACMA

Located on the Pacific Rim, LACMA is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection of more than 147,000 objects that illuminate 6,000 years of artistic expression across the globe. Committed to showcasing a multitude of art histories, LACMA exhibits and interprets works of art from new and unexpected points of view that are informed by the region’s rich cultural heritage and diverse population. LACMA’s spirit of experimentation is reflected in its work with artists, technologists, and thought leaders as well as in its regional,

national, and global partnerships to share collections and programs, create pioneering initiatives, and engage new audiences.

Image caption: (L-R) Alexander McQueen, *Woman's Dress from The Widows of Culloden collection* (detail), Fall/Winter 2006-7, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker in honor of her parents Joseph and Genevieve Venegas, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA; Frans Pourbus II, *Portrait of Louis XIII, King of France as a Boy*, c. 1616, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of Mr. and Mrs. William May Garland, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA; Alexander McQueen, *Woman's Dress and Harness from the Plato's Atlantis collection* (detail), Spring/Summer 2010, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift from the Collection of Regina J. Drucker in memory of Juliana Cairone, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA; Andreas Gursky, *Ocean IV*, 2010, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, anonymous gift, © 2022 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

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