

"Fashioned in America" at Phoenix Art Museum

Written by Stacia Affelt and Tamara Kraus



Wes Gordon

In the 1920's, 78 percent of clothing was made in the New York Garment District. Today, that number has dropped to just three percent. To showcase a revival in United States manufacturing, the Phoenix Art Museum is featuring about 30 ensembles from established and up-and-coming designers in its newest exhibit.

During World War II, the Nazis closed off Paris manufacturing districts to the rest of the world. New York took the initiative to become a hub for American-made garments with the formation of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. International garment workers flocked to this new location, and thus, the New York Garment District was born.

The exhibit opens with three looks from the 1940's that include a vintage wedding dress, an emerald green peplum top and a black and gold dress. Other pieces dated from 2008 to pieces straight from the 2014 runway. These contemporary looks included a red-carpet-ready gown by Rosie Assoulin, an off-white J. Mendel floor length gown, and one menswear look from The Elder Statesman.



The Elder Statesman

Starting with simple items like undergarments and socks, manufacturing slowly moved overseas for cheaper production costs. Dennita Sewell, the fashion curator at the museum, says that if we are going to salvage American made fashion, it's going to be in the luxury industry.

More and more high-end designers in America want to have a personalized thumbprint on their designs and have control over the final production of the look. Even though these designers are considered American, they are not necessarily American-born. The exhibit features the viewpoints from Wes Gordon, Kaufman Franco and a classic like Oscar de la Renta on the importance of local manufacturing. Some of the benefits of local manufacturing include more control over design, better fit and more profitability.

While local manufacturing is considered a benefit to designers, our society has become global. This means that one collection can be made up of garments made in multiple countries. And that is the beauty of fashion inspiration. "We're not saying it's bad to manufacture overseas," Sewell says. "We're just saying here are all the considerations."

The exhibit is open until March 15, 2015 in the Ellman Fashion Design Gallery. Visit <http://www.phxart.org/exhibition/fashionedinamerica> for more information.