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Sites That Are Small, But, Oh, So Fashionable

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By LYNNE ARANY (NYT); Museums

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DISPLAYING ABSTRACT - Survey of some of New York's smaller museums devoted to apparel and fashion

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MUSEUMS

Sites That Are Small, But, Oh, So Fashionable

By LYNNE ARANY (NYT)

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WE know. The first word you think of after "fashion" is likely to be "frivolous." But fashion, besides being fun, is big business. No one knows this better than New Yorkers.



Museums here have collected apparel since the late 19th century, when the grandest of the grande dames began to donate their Parisian-made confections to the usual suspects: the New-York Historical Society, the Museum of the City of New York, the Brooklyn Museum of Art and certainly the Metropolitan Museum of Art. But scattered around the city are smaller, lesser-known museums that take you from the days of peddlers and pushcarts to the latest edge.

The Museum at F.I.T.

Going to a show at the Fashion Institute of Technology is -- almost -- as good as an invitation to prowl around the institute's back rooms. No glassed-in mannequins for this museum -- the displays are close-up. The museum grew out of the Edward C. Blum Design Laboratory, a study archive from the Brooklyn Museum of Art. The Institute may collect a garment solely for a button or pocket treatment, for its overall aesthetic or its historical importance. Exhibitions range from simple 1920's housedresses from Kresge's to the wildest 60's jumpsuit by the designer Rudi Gernreich. The museum's approach is evident in past shows like "Driving Fashion: Automotive Fabrics of the 1950's" and in future exhibitions like "Femme Fatale: Fashion and Visual Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris," which will open Oct. 22.

The Museum at F.I.T., Seventh Ave. at 27th St. (212) 217-5800; www.fitnyc.suny.edu. Open Tuesdays through Fridays, noon to 8 p.m.; Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission, free.

The Glove Museum at LaCrasia Gloves

LaCrasia Gloves, a retail shop and glove manufacturer, is owned by Jay Ruckel and Lacrasia Lorné Duchein. Mr. Ruckel -- a master glove cutter and stalwart of the garment district (known for his slide lectures like "Our Glove Affair With Hollywood"), is the founder and curator of this small museum, tucked into a back room of the shop. His informal collection includes a diverse assortment of mittens and gloves as well as the tools that helped make them. Among the many highlights are the rubber molds (donated by the Smithsonian Institution) used to make the mitts that were worn by the Apollo astronauts on their moon mission; delicate gold-embroidered Shakespeare-era gauntlets; white suede elbow-length button-ups (a copy of a pair commissioned at LaCrasia by Jacqueline Onassis); and runway accessories from Geoffrey Beene and Betsey Johnson.

The Glove Museum at LaCrasia, 304 Fifth Ave. at W. 31st St. (212) 695-0347. By appointment only.

Lower East Side Tenement Museum

A tour of sites connected to the fashion industry would not be complete without a look at the role that immigrants played in the business. By the late 1800's and early 1900's the garment industry work force was predominantly Jewish Eastern Europeans, who settled mostly in crowded tenements. A tiny apartment might serve as a dressmaker shop, garment factory, boardinghouse and home to a family, often a large one. The museum recreates that past in its newest guided tour, "Piecing It Together: Immigrants in the Garment Industry," at the museum's 97 Orchard Street location. Picture dimly lighted rooms: in one, a tailor and several workers toiling at their stitchery; in another, a presser with an 18-pound iron sharing a stove top with the soup pot.

Lower East Side Tenement Museum, 90 Orchard St. (212) 431-0233; www.tenement.org. Tuesdays through Fridays, 1:20 p.m. to 4 p.m.; Saturdays and Sundays, 11:15 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. Admission, \$9.

The Bronx Museum of the Arts

To celebrate its 30th anniversary, this contemporary art museum is featuring "One Planet Under a Groove: Hip-Hop and Contemporary Art," an exhibition that takes a fearless, sharp and, at times, ironic look at the ways hip-hop music and its culture have influenced visual artists. The show, which has more than 60 works and runs through May 26, traces its subject's evolution from street culture to a billion-dollar industry. Max King Cap's 1998 piece, "Counted, Tracked, Observed," is a commentary on racial profiling. It shows the Carhartt jacket and its fashion evolution -- originally drab prison issue, it was reborn in colors as street wear, then went out to the suburbs, losing meaning along the way. Kori Newkirk's 2001 spin on ghetto fabulous goldware, "Hip-Hop from Home (Fake that Floss)," offers foil-wrapped oversize dollar signs, tooth caps and the like. The sound of Spanish-language soaps might lure you into Judi Wertheim's installation, "Manicured," a hot-pink nail salon where (by appointment) a manicurist will decorate your nails with one of 10 images from the museum's permanent collection.

The Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1040 Grand Concourse at 165th St. (718) 681-6000; www.bxma.org. Open Wednesdays, noon to 9 p.m.; Thursdays to Sundays, noon to 6 p.m. Admission, \$5. Free on Wednesdays.

Gallery of Time at the Tourneau Time Machine

No one will look askance if you walk past the main-floor retail displays and head down the escalator to the Gallery of Time. There are two very small rooms to look at here. The first is a time tunnel filled with historic Tourneau watches like a 1960's 18-karat television-shaped watch, a 40's fountain pen watch (the watch face is in the cap) and 1980's "rock" clocks (the face is embedded in the rock). This room also has a detailed timeline on the ceiling. Question: when was the first watch invented? Answer: in 1477.

An adjoining room displays watches by manufacturers other than Tourneau. And there are smaller showcases highlighting their permanent collection: an Art Deco lipstick with a watch in the cap and a jeweled ring watch from the 1920's; unusual leather watch bands with novelty buckles from the 1930's; a gold bowtie brooch and a chunky acrylic crystal and gold chain bracelet from the 1940's.

Gallery of Time at the Tourneau Time Machine, 12 E. 57th St. (212) 758-7300. Open daily, hours vary. Admission, free.

Annette Green Museum at the Fragrance Foundation

While you may already know that Marilyn Monroe's favorite bedtime attire was Chanel No. 5 and not much more, the connection between celebrity, film and fragrance may be traced back to the earliest days of cinema. Take Cecil B. DeMille's 1920 comedy "Why Change Your Wife?," in which a plain-Jane Gloria Swanson nearly loses her husband to a sexily scented lingerie model. The museum's fourth exhibition, "Sex, Scents and Cinema," which runs through April 30, shows this connection through film clips, vintage photos, advertisements and period perfume bottles with celebrity ties.

Annette Green Museum at the Fragrance Foundation, 145 E. 32nd St. (212) 725-2755; www.fragrance.org. By appointment only.

The Bard Graduate Center Gallery

This gallery, part of the Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, Design and Culture, often interprets fashion within a cultural context. The current show, "Utopia and Reality: Modernity in Sweden, 1900-1960," which runs through June 16, offers more than 200 works: Swedish-designed textiles, graphics, furniture, glasswork and paintings. Its emphasis on smartly designed consumer goods illustrates -- in Sweden, anyway -- that "everyone was entitled to beauty in daily life."

The Bard Graduate Center Gallery, 18 W. 86th St. (212) 501-3023; www.bgc.bard.edu. Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Thursdays, 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Admission, \$3.

Photos: A GOOD VIEW -- At the Museum at F.I.T., visitors can get close to the sights, like these mannequins in an exhibition titled "Red." (Philip Greenberg for The New York Times); SURE 'CURE -- In an installation by Judi Wertheim, far right, Teresa Salazar decorates the nails of a visitor to the Bronx Museum of Arts. The curator, Marysol Nieves, watches. (George M. Gutierrez for The New York Times); MANY TASKS -- In dimly lighted settings like this at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, workers stitched and pressed clothes, often while tending to children. (Philip Greenberg for The New York Times)