

Alexander McQueen, dress, Spring/Summer 2001. The Voss collection was acclaimed for evoking beauty, horror, and madness. Photograph courtesy Alexander McQueen.

A FASHION MUSEUM

The Museum at FIT is the only museum in New York City dedicated solely to the art of fashion. Best known for its innovative and award-winning exhibitions, which have been described by Roberta Smith in *The New York Times* as "ravishing," the museum has a collection of more than 50,000 garments and accessories dating from the eighteenth century to the present. Like other fashion museums, such as the Musée de la Mode, the Mode Museum, and the Museo de la Moda, The Museum at FIT collects, conserves, documents, exhibits, and interprets fashion. Its mission is to advance knowledge of fashion through exhibitions, publications, and public programs. For more information, visit www.fitnyc.edu/museum.

SUPPORT THE MUSEUM

COUTURE COUNCIL

An elite membership group, the Couture Council helps to support the exhibitions and programs of The Museum at FIT. Members receive invitations to exclusive events and private viewings. Annual membership is \$1,000 for an individual or couple and \$350 for a young associate (under the age of 35). For more information, write to couturecouncil@fitnyc.edu, or call 212 217.4532.

TOURS AND DONATIONS

The museum has a permanent collection of over 50,000 garments and accessories from the eighteenth century to the present. A changing selection is put on display every six months in the Fashion and Textile History Gallery. Tours of the Fashion and Textile History Gallery and of the Special Exhibitions Gallery may be arranged for a sliding fee of approximately \$350, depending on the number of people in the group. For more information about tours or donations, call 212 217.4551.

The Museum at FIT

Fashion Institute of Technology
Seventh Avenue at 27 Street
New York City 10001-5992
www.fitnyc.edu/museum
Museum information line:
212 217.4558

Hours

Tuesday-Friday, noon-8 pm
Saturday, 10 am-5 pm
Closed Sunday, Monday,
and legal holidays
Admission is free

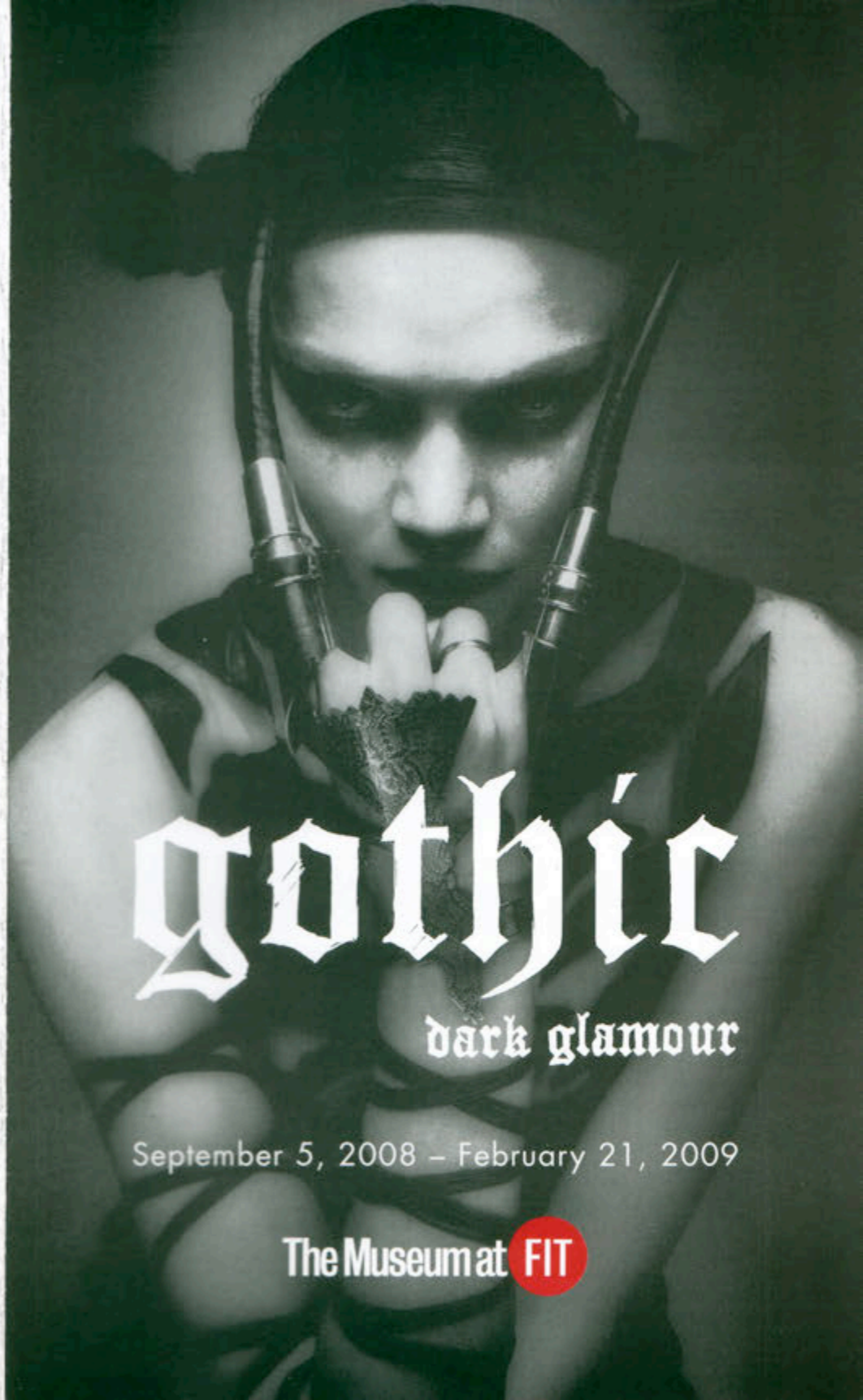
Curator	Valerie Steele
Art Director	Simon Costin
Editor	Julian Clark
Exhibition Manager	Fred Dennis
Exhibition Designer	Charles B. Froom
Graphic Designer	Angela Middleton
Scenic Stylist	Ken Nintzel
Scenic Painter	Anastasios "Taso" Megaris
Wigs and Hair	Isaac Davidson for Wigbar

Support for this exhibition was provided by

 THE COBY FOUNDATION, LTD.,
New York, , and the Couture Council
of the Museum at FIT.

Cover:

Finger horns by Sarah Harmanee for Alexander McQueen. Styling by Isabella Blow. Photograph courtesy Sean Ellis/www.theofficelondon.com.



gothic

dark glamour

September 5, 2008 – February 21, 2009

The Museum at FIT

gothic

is an epithet with a strange history, evoking images of death, destruction, and decay. It is not just a word that describes something (such as a Gothic cathedral); it is almost inevitably a term of abuse, implying that something is gloomy, barbarous, and macabre. From its origins in the gothic novel of terror to its contemporary manifestations in art and cinema, "the Gothic" is a style that embraces the dark side. Several recent exhibitions have explored gothic themes in art, and many books have addressed gothic literature, music, film, and architecture, as well as the goth subculture. But this is the first exhibition devoted to the gothic style in fashion.

Although—popularly associated with black-clad teenagers and rock musicians, the gothic has also been an important, recurring theme in contemporary high fashion. The imagery of death and decay, the power of horror, and the erotic macabre are perversely attractive to many designers. John Galliano, for example, has described the "Gothic girl" as "edgy and cool, vampy and mysterious." Alexander McQueen, Rick Owens, Yohji Yamamoto, and Ricardo Tisci of Givenchy have also created what could be described as gothic fashion. Ann Demeulemeester may reject the gothic label, associating it with the ubiquitous skull accessory, but Owens proudly recalls that he once was a goth, just as Vivienne Westwood was a punk.

The appeal of gothic fashion draws on deep cultural roots. As the scholar Catherine Spooner puts it: "Within gothic discourse, the clothes are the life... Surely, therefore, within the world of fashion, it is this enduring potency of gothic images for imaginative self-identification that leads to their perennial revival."



Contemporary goths appreciate the morbid allure and claustrophobic corsetry of the Victorian mourning dress. Circa 1880, from the collection of Evan Michelson. Photograph MFTT.

Just as the "barbarian" Goths were perceived by the Romans as the antithesis of classical civilization, so the medieval Gothic came to be seen as modernity's Other, its "dark side." With the rise of the Enlightenment, the entire medieval period was retrospectively envisioned as the Dark Ages, characterized by superstition and sorcery, and ever since the appearance of the gothic novel in the eighteenth century, gothic style has been associated with sublime themes of terror and the supernatural.

The Gothic has long attracted cultural outsiders, from the homosexual aesthete Horace Walpole, author of the first gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto*, to the habitués of today's Vampire Balls. The perversely seductive image of the vampire evolved alongside the Satanic



Contemporary goth styles run the gamut from Victorian/romantic, such as this dress by Kambriel, to futuristic cyber-goth. Photograph Nadya Lev, courtesy Kambriel.

figure of the dandy. In fact, if the devil is the Prince of Darkness, then the Black Prince of Elegance is the dandy vampire aristocrat.

Black has long been suggestive of death and evil, as well as mystery, elegance, and eroticism. The seductive danger of black made it the gothic color *par excellence*. Thus, the Victorian cult of mourning mandated head-to-toe black, inspiring members of the goth subculture—and contributing to the image of the *femme fatale* and the vamp.

According to the scholar Chris Baldick, a gothic work "should combine a fearful sense of inheritance in time with a claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space...to produce an impression of sickening descent into disintegration."



Rick Owens, jacket, pants, hat, and boots, Fall 2008. Photograph Dan Lecca, courtesy Rick Owens.

Some of the fashions on display in *Gothic: Dark Glamour* allude to decay and destruction, while others suggest mental states, such as fear or passion. Veiling, masking, and corsetry, displayed on a platform surrounded by a graveyard fence, evoke a sense of claustrophobia.

The *mise-en-scène* for *Gothic: Dark Glamour* was inspired by the iconography of the gothic. For example, a Ruined Castle, which is often symbolic of the human mind ("psychology in stone," as it were), is the paradigmatic gothic setting. Likewise, a Haunted Palace recalls Edgar Allan Poe's architectural metaphor for a disturbed mind.

Rubber curtains mark the boundaries of a laboratory, where fashion "monsters" are created, and in a section on Strange



Ricardo Tisci for Givenchy, evening dress, Haute Couture Fall/Winter 2006. Tisci is known for his gothic glamour. Photograph courtesy Givenchy.

Beauty, fashions are characterized by unconventional shapes and strange sources of imagery, such as the image of blood in water from Japanese horror movies that inspired Rodarte's gothic evening dress.

The association of fashion and death is central to gothic style, but death is also allied to fashion in general. "Fashion must die and die quickly, in order that it can begin to live," declared Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel. "One must forgive fashion everything, because it dies so young," joked her friend, the poet Jean Cocteau.

"Fashion mocks death," countered the philosopher Walter Benjamin. By celebrating novelty and artificiality, fashion promises seasonal renewal and



Rodarte. The Fall/Winter 2008/09 was inspired by Japanese horror films. Photograph Dan Lecca, courtesy Rodarte.

eternal youth. Yet although fashion is the modern measure of time, it exists outside the organic cycle of birth, death, and decay. According to Benjamin, the essence of fashion is fetishism, because it is based on the sex appeal of the inorganic. As a result, he argues, the living person becomes a kind of mannequin, "a gaily decked-out corpse."

Unlike the living and dying body, fashion is neither dead nor alive. Like the vampire, fashion is undead.

Valerie Steele