

Among all objects of design, the ones we wear are the most universal and the most intimate. Every day, everywhere, everyone wears something, whether a full outfit or nothing more than a tattoo. Like other kinds of design, fashion thrives on productive tensions between form and function, automation and craftsmanship, standardization and customization, universality and self-expression, and pragmatism and utopian vision. Fashion ranges from mass production to precious, hand-crafted uniqueness. Like all design, it exists in the service of others (sometimes many, many others) and it can have profound consequences—social, political, cultural, economic, and environmental. Of the various design fields, none has, or has had, greater impact.

Items is—surprisingly then—the first exhibition on fashion at The Museum of Modern Art since 1944, when curator Bernard Rudofsky organized *Are Clothes Modern?*, a provocation that was intended to prod museumgoers to reconsider their relationship with the clothes they wore. With today’s question—*Is Fashion Modern?*—we shift the focus from the individual to the collective sphere and highlight not only the ways in which clothing is made but also the ways in which it *might* be made. Every item in the exhibition can be used as a lens through which to gain a deeper understanding of fashion in all its systemic complexity.

Today, like yesterday, “modern” in architecture and design indicates a constructive attitude based on the unity of the arts, working together on society’s needs, aspirations, and priorities. In this exhibition, garments created for the benefit of many coexist with those made for the delight of a few. What they have in common is their influence on the world over the past one hundred years. We examine these items in three tiers: archetype, stereotype, and prototype. Presented first in the incarnation that made a particular garment or accessory significant—its stereotype—each item is accompanied by contextual material that traces it back to historical archetypes. Our method for defining a design’s stereotype was subjective but drew on collective consciousness: when you close your eyes and think of a sari or a pair of chinos, what do you see? *That* is the item’s stereotype. For about a third of these pieces, we are presenting new prototypes (whose labels have a red corner) that use pioneering materials, more sustainable approaches, and novel design techniques. Most of them were commissioned especially for this exhibition.

The 111 items featured here are hardly exhaustive, in terms of either cultural or geographic reach. We have chosen to celebrate our center of gravity, New York, using the city as an observatory and its inhabitants and copious visitors as discussion starters. Go ahead, make your own list, notice the overlaps, and let us know what we forgot by using the hashtag **#itemsMoMA**. We hope the exhibition will prompt you to look at fashion with more curiosity, awareness, agency, and respect.

Organized by Paola Antonelli, Senior Curator, and Michelle Millar Fisher, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Architecture and Design.

The *Items* curatorial team also includes: Stephanie Kramer, Research Assistant; Anna Burckhardt, Twelve-Month Intern; Kristina Parsons, Project Curatorial Assistant

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Hyundai Card

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WGSN

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