



ABOVE
Installation images from *Tutu reimagined*
4 July to 6 September 2015
Photo: Carl Warner



References

- ¹Thomas Hecht, "Ballet Costume," in *The Berg companion to fashion*, ed. Valerie Steele (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 47.
- ²Ibid.
- ³Ibid.
- ⁴Maureen Needham, ed., "Louis XIV and the Académie Royale de Danse, 1661: A commentary and translation," *Dance Chronicle* 20, no. 2 (1997): 173..
- ⁵Hecht, "Ballet costume," 47.
- ⁶Jennifer Homans, ed. "Kings of dance," in *Apollo's angels: A history of ballet* (London: Granta Books, 2013), n.p.
- ⁷*En pointe* is a ballet technique in which a dancer supports all of their body weight on the tips of fully extended feet; *entrechats* is a vertical jump during which the dancer repeatedly crosses their feet and beats them together; and *cabrioles* is a jump in which one leg is extended into the air, either forwards or backwards, the other is brought up to meet it, and the dancer lands on the second foot.

- ⁸Judith Chazin-Bennahum, *The lure of perfection: Fashion and ballet, 1780–1830* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 43.
- ⁹Ibid. (*Batterie* is the action of beating the feet or calves together during a leap.)
- ¹⁰Ibid., 181.
- ¹¹Ibid., 214.
- ¹²Ibid.
- ¹³Hecht, "Ballet costume," 48.
- ¹⁴Marion Kant, *The Cambridge companion to ballet* (New York: Cambridge, 2007), 184.
- ¹⁵Chazin-Bennahum, *The lure of perfection*, 224.
- ¹⁶Oi'Ga Vainshtein, "Female fashion, Soviet style: Bodies of ideology," in *Russia—Women—Culture*, ed. Helena Gosilo and Beth Holmgren (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 69.
- ¹⁷Robert Bell, ed., *Ballet Russes: The art of costume* (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2010).
- ¹⁸Victoria and Albert Museum, "Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes," 2015, <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/d/diaghilev-and-the-ballets-russes/>.

- ¹⁹Ibid.
- ²⁰Tina Sutton, "Coco Chanel and the Ballets Russes," *Laura Gross Literary Agency*, n.d., <http://lg-la.com/of-interest/coco-chanel-ballets-russes/>.
- ²¹Valerie Steele, ed., "Dance and fashion: History of a pas de deux," in *Dance and fashion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 7.
- ²²Akira Isogawa quoted in Tony Magnussen, "Akira Isogawa's designs on The Australian Ballet," *Qantas Travel Insider*, 2011, <http://travelinsider.qantas.com.au/australia/other/things-to-do/akira-isogawas-designs-on-the-australian-ballet>.
- ²³Steele, "Dance and fashion," 58.
- ²⁴Anna Sutton, "NGV en pointe with ballet & fashion exhibition," *Broadsheet*, 8 November 2012, <http://www.broadsheet.com.au/melbourne/art-and-design/article/ngv-en-pointe-ballet-fashion-exhibition>.

QUT Art Museum

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The Australian Ballet

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FRONT
EASTON PEARSON
Tutu 2003
cotton, lycra, nylon tulle, metal paillettes and sequins, glass beads, plastic beads, cotton and synthetic braid, found objects
The Australian Ballet collection
Photo: Narelle Wilson, NGV Photo Services

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Installation image from *Tutu reimagined*
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Tutu reimagined





Detail of Akira Isogawa tutu from *Tutu reimagined*
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Photo: Carl Warner

Tutu reimagined

Developing from its regal beginnings, and evolving throughout the Romantic era and into Modernism, the tutu has emerged as an icon of the ballet world. *Tutu reimagined* at QUT Art Museum brings together a collection of garments by Australia's top designers that were commissioned by The Australian Ballet for their 2003 project TUTU. The exhibition highlights the relationships between ballet and costume, fashion and dance, and art and design that have been intertwined for hundreds of years.

Ballet originated in the Italian and French royal courts during the Renaissance, when noble men and women of the court would dance for the sake of public spectacle.¹ According to Thomas Hecht, “evidence of costumes specifically for ballet can be dated to the early fifteenth century”, although it was from the 17th to 19th centuries, as ballet developed into a specialised art form and many public dance theatres were built, that the costumes underwent the greatest changes.² Initially, during the 17th century, “court dress remained the standard costume for female performers”.³

In 1661, Louis XIV, a passionate and accomplished dancer himself, founded the Académie Royale de Danse in order to “raise the level of both social dancing in Paris and theatrical dancing in the *ballets de cour*”.⁴ He saw ballet as one of the principal exercises of the nobility, and played a significant part in elevating the role of dance from a Court pastime into an art form. By the 18th century, the Paris Opéra was the centre of European ballet. At the time, as Hecht explains, “stage costumes were still very similar in outline to the ones in ordinary use at Court, but more elaborate”.⁵ Jennifer Homans describes the typical dance costumes worn by women then, and how they influenced movement and form:

...heavy skirts that fell to the floor, worn over petticoats and topped with mantuas, aprons, and stiff bodices and corsets, conspired to constrain movements in the interests of upright posture and dignified carriage. These gowns, however, were not necessarily seen as impediments: a woman carried her dress as if it were part of her body, and its architectural structure contributed to her poise and stature. The art lay in concealing rather than revealing, in artifice rather than self-expression, and the layers of fabric, wigs, masks, jewels, makeup were designed to build up from nature and make the body, in itself, a work of art.⁶

Over the next hundred years, however, specially designed garments were slowly introduced to allow the dancer maximum movement and to expose the complicated footwork seen *en pointe*, Ballerina Marie Camargo (1710–70), noted for her speed and agility, was the first woman to perform the difficult *entrechats* and *cabrioles*, previously performed exclusively by men.⁷ She famously shortened her skirt to allow herself more freedom to execute the complicated legwork, and to allow the audience to better see the steps.⁸ Camargo also selected more flexible shoes with no heels, “in order to facilitate her *batterie*”.⁹ When considering the example of Camargo, one can imagine how ballet not only shaped costume, but also how costume shaped ballet. As Judith Chazin-Bennahum, author of *The lure of perfection: Fashion and ballet, 1780–1830*, explains:

Changes in costume during the 1790s rendered the body more free moving and gave the legs a chance to lift higher, turn more quickly, and jump higher...heels were taken off shoes and sandals; ballet slippers were used to create a new technique for the foot, the heel, the instep, and the metatarsal, as well.¹⁰

The costumes and the dance itself continued to evolve, and the tutu as we know it, with its fitted bodice and large round skirt, debuted in Paris in 1832. It was worn by Marie Taglioni (1804–84), perhaps the most influential and famous Romantic-era ballerina. She danced as the prima ballerina in *La Sylphide*, wearing a gauze-layered white tutu and wings. According to Chazin-Bennahum, Taglioni's tutu became the “symbol and the uniform of the dancer”.¹¹ She writes:

No single theatrical costume in the history of ballet is more important than that worn by Taglioni in *La Sylphide*, for of it was born the tutu, which is to ballet as the ermine to royalty. That costume is the prototype and elder sister of all tutus.¹²

Hecht echoes these sentiments, confirming that the tutu in *La Sylphide* “set a new trend in ballet costumes, in which silhouettes became tighter, revealing the legs and the permanently toe-shoed feet”.¹³

With the freedom of less restrictive hemlines and its more svelte contours, the tutu liberated the female dancer in a sense. This idea of liberation may seem contradictory to how ballet is commonly perceived: a highly technical form of dance, with strict rules and rigid traditions. However, the stories of Camargo and Taglioni reveal how costume evolved over the centuries to allow women more freedom to execute the same technical proficiency as their male counterparts. As Marion Kant suggests:

The skirt and the point shoe represented a complete change in the nature of the ballet as an art form. They have not always been there. When they were introduced in the 1830s...they initiated a revolution in artistic values and a fundamental shift in the attitude towards women in public life.¹⁴

Indeed, Chazin-Bennahum suggests that the very reason the tutu and the point shoe have maintained such great significance is that “they provided agency for the woman dancer; they signaled her abilities, talents, beauty, dedication, and fame”.¹⁵ The evolution of ballet costume was central to the evolution of ballet itself, and was a reflection of changing attitudes towards women, which would continue to develop over the next two centuries.

In 2003, The Australian Ballet asked several Australian designers to create their own interpretation of a tutu, with the project culminating in a one-off performance at the Sydney Opera House. This collaboration between art and design is not unprecedented; in fact, this cross-disciplinary approach was common in many modern art movements throughout Europe, including the Bauhaus in Germany, Constructivism in Russia, and De Stijl in the Netherlands. For example, in the 1920s, Russian Constructivists Lyubov Popova and Varvara Stepanova designed theatre sets and costumes. Creating textiles and clothing designs was central to their ideology that art must work directly for the revolutionary development of society.¹⁶ This modernist spirit of collaboration between art, theatre and fashion design was also felt in the ballet world.

Coco Chanel, Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso were among the influential artists and designers who created sets and costumes for Ballets Russes, an itinerant ballet company based in Paris that operated from 1909 to 1929.¹⁷ The company, conceived by Russian art patron and impresario, Sergei Diaghilev, is considered ground-breaking for its collaborations between innovative choreographers, composers, designers, artists and dancers.¹⁸ For Ballets Russes, Chanel designed simple knitted bathing suits and

rubber slippers,¹⁹ a far cry from the highly structured tutus of previous centuries. Tina Sutton explains the designer's approach:

After decades of women being painfully cinched into tight, wasp-waisted corsets and covered neck-to-toe in elaborately draped fabric, Chanel chose to reveal the body's natural contours in comfortable, softened silhouettes.²⁰

Chanel is commonly credited with liberating women from the constraints of the corseted silhouette, and popularising casual chic with her practical jersey knit sportswear, so it is unsurprising that her ballet costumes would reflect this more natural, relaxed aesthetic.

Since then, many international fashion luminaries have designed for dance: Valentino for the New York City Ballet; Christian Lacroix for the American Ballet Theatre; Viktor&Rolf for the Nederlands Dans Theater. Valerie Steele suggests that dance and fashion share a close relationship because they are the “two great embodied art forms”.²¹ For The Australian Ballet's 2003 project, 17 designers were asked to bring their own creative vision to the tutu, and the results were as diverse and spectacular as one could imagine. Easton Pearson created a graphic black-white-and-red bell tutu, complete with red, beaded headpiece; Alex Perry presented a black, feathered, pancake tutu with a beaded bodice; Akira a white leotard and belted powder puff tutu; and Scanlan Theodore a classical shaped tutu, with a skirt made entirely of ballet slippers. The selection of designers was not limited to those from the fashion industry: architect Harry Seidler contributed a colourful pancake tutu; the Indigenous art and design studio Balarinji created a black-and-gold bell tutu complete with emu feathers; and jewellery and homeware specialist Dinosaur Designs produced a tutu featuring their signature material, resin, in turquoise.

Some of the participating designers went on to design for other dance projects. Michelle Jank has designed costumes for The Netherlands Dance Company, The Lobero Theatre in Santa Barbara, The Baryshnikov Center for the Arts in New York and the Sydney Dance Company. Akira Isogawa did the designs for four Sydney Dance Company productions, before designing costumes for 70 dancers in The Australian Ballet's 2011 production of *Romeo and Juliet*. Isogawa acknowledges how his costume design projects influence his own runway collections, explaining “I find it difficult to separate projects... The way I work is so organic, they kind of echo each other.”²² It is hardly surprising that ballet influences fashion and vice versa. Steele explains that the influences “have long flown back and forth. Dancers have moonlighted as mannequins and fashion professionals have drawn inspiration from dance.”²³ Further, Anna Sutton acknowledges costume's “ability to expand the parameters of design and fashion.”²⁴ In fact, in many ways, ballet costumes are much like haute couture in that they are one-of-a-kind masterpieces that are meticulously hand-crafted and designed especially for the wearer.

As indicated here, ballet and costume, fashion and dance, and art and design have a long history of overlapping and intertwining. The evolution of the tutu shows us that costume has the ability to push creative boundaries of fashion and dance and, subsequently, to push social boundaries that drive our culture forward.

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Installation image and detail of Collette Dinnigan tutu
from *Tutu reimagined*
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