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The Art of Selling:

A History of Visual Merchandising

Presented by the Historic Costume & Textiles Collection
Geraldine Schottenstein Wing
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Cover: Fully rounded papier-mâché mannequins with molded hair, circa 1950. Photo by Bernard Faucon.

Above: Dressmaker's form with metal cage skirt, 1908-1912.

Right: Female plaster bust form, c. 1943.

Every shopkeeper and merchant's primary objective is to sell merchandise.

When the giant 19th century dry goods establishments like Marshall Field & Co. shifted their business from wholesale to retail, the visual display of goods became necessary to attract the retail customer. The store windows no longer simply allowed natural light to shine in the building or act as storage space for stock, they became important venues to attractively display the store's merchandise. Gradually, the design aesthetic used in window displays moved indoors, becoming part of the overall interior store design and eventually displacing the importance of windows altogether in suburban malls.

Museums and department stores in America have a shared history of displaying their products, both having come of age in the last quarter of the 19th century. Like world's fairs, department stores and museums crowded everything together on shelves or in display cases. Today, displays in museums are referred to as exhibitions, while displays in stores are referred to as "visual merchandising." Essentially, visual merchandising is the selling of a store's goods through visual means, incorporating advertising, window displays, and interior sales floor design and display. Throughout the 20th century, well-known artists such as Salvador Dali and Andy Warhol created window displays, while other artists who are lesser known were commissioned to design unique objects specifically for visual merchandising purposes. The "Art of Selling" is a historical exploration of these display practices, including a look at several window display artists, interior display methods, and some of the unique art created for visual displays, especially the mannequin.



Nineteenth century display and merchandising

The artistic display of merchandise in mid-19th century American dry goods stores was not a high priority of the store's proprietors. Most of the business in the large dry goods establishments in the major cities was wholesale, and catered mainly to a clientele of businessmen. A small amount of trade was done in

retail, and the necessary staples that customers requested were folded and stacked on tables, or on simple wooden shelves behind counters above unadorned wooden plank floors. The assistance of a salesperson was required to access the merchandise, and little thought was given to displaying merchandise for impulse buying.

By the mid- to late-19th century, when most of America's department stores were established, windows and glass-fronted display cases started appearing for the display of merchandise. In 1852, when Potter Palmer started the dry goods store in Chicago that would eventually become Marshall Field's, he created a small window display of his goods. Most merchants of the day, however, ignored their

windows as potential advertising space, either leaving them empty or displaying their merchandise in a crowded and inartistic clutter. Many were perfectly content to have a window's sole purpose simply be to illuminate the interior of the store.



Scruggs, Vandervoort, and Barney Dry Goods Store interior showing use of counters and shelves. Woodcut from Veiled Prophet Magazine, 2 October 1883, St. Louis.

Eventually, the retail side of the department stores began to rival the dominant wholesale business. This change drew attention to the store windows and the people who tended them. In 1883, Harry Gordon Selfridge started a retail revolution at Marshall Field's. In addition to installing the newfangled revolving doors, he ripped out the counters and high shelving that traditionally housed piece goods in the store interiors and instead piled merchandise on tables in the center of the main floor to make it more accessible to the customers. Selfridge also espoused visual merchandising practices by using print advertising and window displays to bring in customers. The 1883 remodeling of the store included the installation of two windows on either side of the main entrance. These served as the store's only show windows until others were added in the 1890s.

Around the turn of the century, window trimming was a fledgling art. The job was often given to artistically inclined salesclerks or porters. When Mandel Brothers, a competitor of Marshall Field's, started to receive notoriety through their brilliant window displays created by a Mr. Ambrose, Field's started looking for greater talent for its own displays. In 1895, Field's hired 26-year-old Arthur Fraser to trim their windows. He worked for the store for 49 years, and came to be known as "the greatest displayman of them all."

Windows

Arthur Fraser

"Artistry was keynote to all efforts."—Arthur Fraser

According to *The Show Window* in 1922, "America's foremost artist in window display" was Arthur Fraser, whose window designs were featured in almost every issue between 1910 and 1930. Fraser changed the look of traditional window display by reducing the clutter of the "stocky" windows of



the turn of the century. Instead of building bridges from spools of thread, creating mountains out of hats, and cluttering everything into a window with a cheesecloth backdrop, Fraser limited the quantity of goods in a "less is more" style. Arthur Fraser brought a true sense of artistry to the field of visual merchandising in its infancy. In fact, he dominated the field.

Arthur Fraser's first windows to receive significant press were his "red epidemic" windows of 1897. Red was the favored fashion color in Paris that year, and Fraser used it in all six Field's windows to display red silks, red gowns and wraps, red ribbons, red millinery, and red petticoats. His most well-known windows, however, are those of the 1910s and 1920s. It was during these years that he introduced the use of mannequins and elaborate backgrounds, imitating museum-like displays by offering selective concentrations of merchandise, in settings that appealed to women's fantasies of luxury.

Field's first "human" figures were headless dummies, and they graced Field's windows exclusively until 1912. Wax mannequins, which looked extremely lifelike, even to the point of using human hair,



Bridge constructed of spool cotton by Edward S. Smith, 1898. Courtesy of Visual Merchandising and Store Design Magazine.

Arthur Fraser window showing classical inspiration and headless dress forms, c. 1912. Courtesy of Marshall Field's Archives.

were available around the turn of the century. However, Field would not allow their use in his store windows because of their inherent problems. When exposed to the sun's warmth, the mannequins' arms would get soft, and their faces would run. He was not going to expose Marshall Field & Co. to an embarrassing spectacle like he had witnessed on a trip to New York. While passing a store window using wax mannequins, Field noticed that one of the mannequin's heads had fallen onto its bosom because the sun had melted its neck.



Right: Spring Exposition windows, April 1926, featuring composition mannequins and modern art style influences. Courtesy of Marshall Field's Archives.

Below: Fraser window, c. 1926, using art deco inspired mannequin and theatrical staging. Courtesy of Marshall Field's Archives.

In addition to no heads, the dressmaker dummies had neither arms nor feet, and this made it difficult to accessorize the fashions with hats and shoes. In 1912, Fraser became interested in creating as lifelike a picture as possible in his window displays, so he purchased some wax figures from Paris six years after Marshall Field's death. However, Fraser soon discovered for himself the problems with wax mannequins. He developed papier-mâché mannequins to replace the wax figures, and deemed the solution a success.

Fraser started designing his elaborate backgrounds in 1913, just when the world was beginning to follow the "modern school of art." In an interview with Lloyd Lewis in 1947, Fraser stated, "I derived more from theater than anything else," and its influence is obvious as his windows are blatantly reminiscent of stage sets. The windows incorporated obvious elements of the modern movements in art, including art nouveau and art deco, as well as influences from Egyptian and classical art. The style of the window displays always reflected the style influences in the clothes. If Empire dresses were featured, classical backgrounds were in order.

Fraser was responsible for all the designs in the 67 windows surrounding the first floor of

Marshall Field's. The windows changed once per week, except for the Christmas windows and the Spring and Fall Exposition windows, which remained up for two to three weeks. Although Fraser worked closely with Harry Selfridge around the turn of the century, he had carte blanche to do what he wanted for the last 25 years of his career. Beginning in 1916, he controlled a staff of 50 carpenters, artisans, and craftspersons, and had budgets ranging from \$150,000 to \$175,000. James Simpson, president of Field's from 1923-32, told Fraser, it "was money well spent."

For Arthur Fraser, the purpose of window displays was to make people think. He "always aimed to be realistic" in his work, and "tried to get the mannequins so real the woman would feel it was she wearing it." He didn't appreciate the fantasy-laden windows which were to become popular following the surrealist style in the late 1930s and 1940s. Arthur Fraser retired from Marshall Field's in 1944, and died three years later.



Art Windows: Dali, Warhol, and Moore

Windows continued to play a dominant role in visual merchandising throughout the 1930s, '40s and '50s, and reflected the changing art movements experienced during those decades. In the January 1925 issue of *Display World*, Edward J. Owen, display manager for Aetna Life Insurance Co., called for the use of more modernism in displays. He told readers that “suggestive settings or merchandise,” and not just “eye-stopping displays,” would bring in more sales. He encouraged other display men to use more originality through “less conservatism and pastel shades—more impressionism, bold outlines, and big blobs of color; less realism in detail—more broad, suggestive treatment.”

Both modernism and art deco influences are evident in Arthur Fraser's windows of the late 1920s. Within the next 10 years, however, the effect of surrealism on window display was quite strong. There was also a reciprocal influence on the artists themselves. In



1936, surrealist artist Salvador Dali designed windows for Bonwit Teller in New York. Two years later, several artists, including Dali, Man Ray, and Marcel Duchamp, used mannequins and the store window context in the International Exhibition of Surrealism at the Galerie des Beaux Arts in Paris.

The surrealists were drawn to the lifelike mannequins, using them as creatures in dreamscapes, in which nightmares were revealed and dreams realized. Throughout the following decade, Dali designed windows for several New York stores, and window displays in general took on a sophisticated and whimsical feel, incorporating humor, parody, and theatrics in everyday situations. In 1949, surreal-

ism departed from store windows following the Museum of Modern Art's exhibition, “Modern Art in Your Life.” Simple geometric abstractions bearing the influence of modernism and Bauhaus design became the new preference.

Andy Warhol

“Looking at the store windows is great entertainment because you can see all of these things and be really glad it's not in your home filling up your closets and drawers.”—Andy Warhol

Throughout his career, Andy Warhol was intrigued with store windows as a commercial art form. In the late forties, while Warhol was still an art student at the Carnegie Institute of Technology, he had a part-time job in Hornes Department store as a member of the display department. After graduating in 1949, he moved to New York to work in commercial illustration. By the mid-fifties Warhol was a successful commercial artist. However, he still found himself drawn back to the allure of window display as a way to feature his style of illustration on a broader scale.

Gene Moore, display director for Bonwit Teller department store in New York, commissioned Warhol to design some windows. Moore believed that Warhol knew how to get the job done to trans-



Above: Salvador Dali surrealist window for Bonwit Teller, New York, 1936.

Left: Whimsical window display featured in James David Buckley's Drama of Display, 1953.



A young Andy Warhol in visual shop at Hornes Department store, Pittsburgh, 1947. Courtesy of the Archives of the Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh; gift of Larry Vollmer.



Andy Warhol window for Bonwit Teller integrating his artwork with store merchandise, 1955. Courtesy of the Archives of the Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh; Founding Collection, contribution of the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc.

Gene Moore

Gene Moore entertained thousands as they walked past the five small Tiffany's windows along Fifth Avenue from 1956 to 1994. Along with Arthur Fraser, Moore is credited with elevating window display to a high art. His humor, creativity, and whimsy became legendary as he juxtaposed simple everyday items such as egg shells or empty spools of thread alongside diamonds and precious gems.

Following his studies in painting at the Institute of Art in Chicago, Moore moved to New York in 1935. He eventually was hired as an assistant to a store display director at I. Miller, and worked at Delman's and Bergdorf Goodman before moving to Bonwit Teller in 1945. In his windows at Bonwit's, Moore posed mannequins in realistic and interactive situations, such as on the telephone, at a hot dog roast, or stealing the clothes off another mannequin's back. During the early 1950s, Moore hired Andy Warhol, already a successful commercial artist, to

design windows for Bonwit's. He also featured the work of then-unknown artists Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, and James Rosenquist.

Some of Gene Moore's better known windows for Tiffany's include those featured in the movie, "Breakfast at Tiffany's," with their miniature chandeliers; the "early bird" that pulled a diamond bracelet from the earth; and his "New York construction" window, in which FAO Schwarz bulldozers excavated diamond necklaces from real dirt. He has been a mentor to several contemporary window artists, including Tom Beebe for Paul Stuart, and has written two books about his tenure at Tiffany's, "Windows at Tiffany's," and "My Time at Tiffany's." Gene Moore passed away in November 1998.



Below: Gene Moore Tiffany's window, May 15, 1957: FAO Schwarz steam shovel with diamonds in the dirt. Photo: Virginia Roehl Studio.

Right: Miniature chandeliers window featured in "Breakfast at Tiffany's," October 2, 1960. Photo: Virginia Roehl Studio.



Contemporary windows

The field of visual merchandising experienced several significant changes in the last half of the 20th century. The importance of store windows gradually decreased and they ceased to have a significant impact except in the most urban of cities. In 1956, the first enclosed shopping mall, Southdale Shopping Center, in Edina, Minn., was constructed. The building of malls, the result of the general population's move to the suburbs and away from the pedestrian-oriented downtown stores, and the rise in popularity of television contributed to the general demise of store window design in almost every downtown.

Prior to the widespread use of television, store windows were utilized as a visual advertising medium outside of newspapers and magazines. They promoted current events, movies, operas, and art gallery openings. They were used to educate consumers about new products such as the many new electric appliances available after the war, including irons, washers and dryers, and ... televisions. With the popularity of television, however, advertisers could reach far greater numbers of potential customers than they could with a store window. Television took the window right into the consumer's home, rather than waiting for the consumer to come to the window.

Today, the only stores that have windows in which to create elaborate or artistic displays are those located in urban areas where there is pedestrian traffic. These consist of the major department stores located in the downtown areas of most cities, and the majority of stores in a city such as New York. Suburban shopping malls don't have exterior windows. Some of the most controversial and provocative displays of the last 14 years appeared in the windows of Barney's 17th Street store in New York. The mastermind behind those apparitions is Simon Doonan.

Simon Doonan

"Window display is basically a costly form of free entertainment."—Simon Doonan

Born in Reading, England, a town Oscar Wilde described as "a cemetery with lights," Simon Doonan first discovered the allure of window dressing while he was a sales associate for John Lewis department store. He recalls working in the clocks and watches department when he overheard two men arguing and laughing. These two people were window dressers for the store. He thought at the time that the life of the window dresser seemed "infinitely more desirable than any other occupation in the entire world."

Doonan soon left Reading and moved to London where he trimmed windows on Regent Street and Savile Row for a few years. During that time he met a man named Tommy Perse, a designer/clothing retailer from Southern California. Perse saw Doonan's work and liked it, convincing Doonan to move to Los Angeles in 1978 and work for Maxfield's, an avant-garde clothing store.

The controversial topics of some of Doonan's windows during his residence in Los Angeles were based on current affairs of the city. For example, he recreated an incident in which a baby was abducted by a coyote. Doonan borrowed two stuffed coyotes; one he rigged to the ceiling to give the impression that it was about to jump on the back of a male mannequin while he mowed the lawn. He dressed a female mannequin in a jumpsuit from the store and positioned her watering the lawn, and wired a baby mannequin to the other coyote's teeth, making it look as if the coyote had snatched the baby. The baby mannequin was wearing a tiny T-shirt with the logo of the store on it, of course. There were complaints, naturally, but with complaints came notoriety.



An example of Barney's as the "home of the messy window." Simon Doonan commissioned James Vance to create this "yuletide hellhole" in 1991.

In 1985, Doonan's notoriety led him to an opportunity to work on a project at the Metropolitan Museum of Art with Diana Vreeland, former editor of *Vogue* and *Harpers Bazaar*. The exhibit was the Costumes of Royal India. It was on the night of the exhibit opening that he was introduced



Doonan window for Barney's, 1989, featuring the "patron saint of window dressing," Andy Warhol.

to Gene and Bonnie Pressman, part owners of Barney's department store in New York City. Two weeks later he had an interview at Barney's, where he remains today as the creative director.

The intelligently hip window displays Simon Doonan created for Barney's jolted even apathetic New Yorkers out of their complacency. Taboo topics such as death, religion, and politics were incorporated with the store's merchandise and often accompanied by irreverent humor. Some of his most famous windows were those created with celebrity caricature mannequins featuring the likes of Martha Stewart, Joan Rivers, and Madonna. Like Gene Moore, Doonan com-

missioned other artists to create several of the memorable window displays at Barney's.

Doonan still believes that being a window dresser is the most desirable occupation in the world, especially since he gets to do it at a great place and with great people. He fears, however, that the new generation of retail is leading the occupation of window dressing down the trail of extinction. He hopes that there will come a time when this great field will return to its heyday.

Christmas windows

The elaborate window displays produced during the Christmas selling season are the only window displays across most of the nation that still evoke the grand old days of window dressing of the early 20th century. Many suburbanites will make a special trip just to see the elaborate Christmas windows of their downtown store. During the 1995 Christmas season, Macy's Herald Square store displayed an entire forest of carved foam animals in their store windows. The animals were dressed in human clothing and were based on a theme of animals shopping at a turn of the century Macy's building. There was even an elephant Santa Claus.

Carved foam animals created by Macy's creative team and manufactured by Creative Arts Unlimited for Macy's NYC Christmas windows, 1995.



The Christmas selling season has become the major profit-making

time of year for merchants, and therefore a major project for many visual display departments. Around the turn of the century, Christmas windows did not hold as much significance as they do today, remaining up for only a couple of weeks. By mid-century, however, Christmas had taken on a larger commercial significance, and stores like Marshall Field's began planning their Christmas windows in February, with construction on the figures and props beginning in July. Today, the installation of a store's interior Christmas displays begins as early as mid to late October and remains up until the end of December.



Interiors

Visual merchandising and display practices continually evolved throughout the 20th century. Architects were hired to update store interiors—improving the lighting, replacing outdated fixtures, adding modern technologies in heating and cooling for customer comfort, and installing streamlined new escalators to facilitate movement between floors. Gaining respect, “visual merchandising” replaced “display” as the name of the profession. New books were published on the methods of visual display in the late 1940s and early 1950s helping to legitimize the field.

During the 1920s and 30s, there was a shift of interest from window display to interior display.



During his tenure at Marshall Field's, Arthur Fraser had very little time for the store's interior displays. Mrs. Clara Wilson, who was also the editor of Field's in-house magazine, *Fashions of the Hour*, and her two assistants managed interior displays. Mrs. Wilson brought the first mannequin into the women's apparel department in the 1920s, replacing the dressmaker's forms that were traditionally used. Previous to this, mannequins were used exclusively in the store's windows. Mrs. Wilson placed the mannequin at the end of an aisle and put a spotlight on it. She also experimented with displays of merchandise to encourage impulse buying and association buying.

By the 1930s, mannequins were in general use in store interior displays, usually placed on a pedestal or small platform. In his 1952 “how to” book, *Window and Interior Display*, Robert Kretschmer explains that mannequins can be dis-

played throughout the store on “oval or square platforms of various sizes, raised approximately six inches above the floor level.” However, he warned against having too many platforms because “they would make for a crowded space and prevent the free movement of customers.”

Glass-fronted display counters replaced solid counters on the sales floors, and updated lighting illuminated display cases and wall showcases in addition to the store interior. A majority of the merchandise was still kept behind counters or in display cases, especially the quality merchandise, but a tendency for open displays began, allowing a customer to make his or her own merchandise decisions. These open displays were on countertops or tables, in bins, or on racks. This overall trend toward customers self-selecting their merchandise instead of being assisted by clerks had a major effect on the manner in which merchandise was displayed, leading to an increase of wall displays, bins, tables, round racks and t-stands.

Throughout the 1950s, '60s and '70s, millions of dollars were spent on new store construction and modernization as department stores began a march out to the suburbs. New ideas and innovations associated with self selecting purchasing such as slatwall and grid systems were implemented for the display of merchandise in the new branch stores and the malls. The windowless exteriors of most sub-

Left: Newly renovated interior of F&R Lazarus' second floor. Photo courtesy the Lazarus Enthusiast, October 8, 1949, Columbus, Ohio.



Architect's rendering for the men's shoe store, Lazarus Richland Mall, Columbus, Ohio, 1975.

urban malls forced retailers to visually merchandise their stores' products through the "window" display cases at the mall entrance to the store, and throughout the store's interior sales floors. Placing merchandise similar to what other stores were selling in the close proximity of the mall created fierce competition in retail. This competition created a need to distinguish the goods, services, and image of one store from the next, leading to a boutique style of merchandising, incorporating a vast quantity of visual props.

Props are all the objects within the display area that are not considered salable merchandise; namely, floor coverings, wall treatments, backgrounds, mannequins, shelves, steps, and other objects involved in creating settings for the merchandise. Designer "boutiques" within large department stores used props to enhance the merchandise and its image. Ralph Lauren's country American look included duck decoys, fishing creels, and riding boots, recalling leisure time in the countryside. Smaller specialty stores also needed to distinguish themselves, marketing their product to a specific age group, gender, or culture. Niketown stores built their various sporting good product departments around various sports heroes and enhanced their merchandise with interactive displays, basketball hoops, and uniform jerseys of professional athletes.

Much of the design of the stores, including cabinetry, furniture, fixtures, mannequins, and special props are manufactured specifically for those stores to fit the desired image of the store. The store designers create the image and then work with cabinetmakers, mannequin manufacturers, sculptors, etc. to construct whatever is needed.

Many of today's props echo the postmodern era in which they were created, either imitating a past historical period or taking an item out of its originally intended context. Mannequins are a particularly good example of postmodern art in visual merchandising. The naturally rendered human "bodies" have been "deconstructed" into abstract metal fixtures, or have become sculptures themselves. The shapes are so unnatural or distinctive that clothing could never be displayed on them to good effect, or they are so interesting in and of themselves that it would be a shame to cover them.

Visual merchandising became part of overall corporate store planning, instituting a strong link between the merchandise and its method of display, in keeping with the store image and the targeted market audience. Creative control is maintained at corporate headquarters, where a merchandise and display plan is designed. These plan-o-grams insure uniformity in merchandise presentation and visual display, providing store front, window display, or department setup; amounts of merchandise to be



Cubist mannequins created by Goldsmiths of Long Island City, N.Y., for Macy's Brooklyn in 1983. Designed by Shane DeRols and sculpted by Alexander Danel.



Right: Gold goddess, copy of a 1920s sculpture found by James Mansour for The Limited Corp. in a London antique shop. The statue was cast and reproduced by Greneker of Los Angeles and used in Cacique stores across the nation.

Below: Singing mannequins created by Fabricon of Ridgewood, N.Y., for Gimbel's Milwaukee. Signed, "Lindsey B. 1984."





used and how it should be presented on the shelf or fixture (color, vendor, size, etc.); the type of fixture and its placement; the price and description of the merchandise; and signs and sign holders to be used. With this type of organization, in addition to specialty visuals props being sent out for manufacture, it was no longer necessary to keep large staffs in individual store display departments. Employee numbers went from 60 in 1960, with separate divisions for interiors and windows, to four

Original art deco wood spiral vase and copies inspired by the original for Macy's.

employees in 1990 for an entire downtown department store with several floors.

Many of today's visual display personnel hope for a less corporate approach to visual merchandising; however, the field is faced with new competition as we face the millennium. Today's retailers are competing with direct mail catalogs, TV shopping networks, and Internet shopping.

Mannequins

French fashion dolls of the mid-18th century are the ancestors of today's mannequins. As a matter of fact, the earliest mannequins were constructed exactly like life-sized dolls, with realistic looking heads and arms and fabric-covered bodies filled with sawdust. Mannequin faces and bodies have evolved over the subsequent years, reflecting societal changes in fashionable styles of dress, ideals of feminine beauty, retail and display practices, and advances in technology.



Abstract mannequin with hole in center created by Silvestri for Macy's Brooklyn, c. 1990.

Mannequins from various periods, arranged by James David Buckley for The Drama of Display, 1953.



Flexible form mannequins with jointed fingers and wax heads manufactured by Hugh Lyons & Co., Chicago, 1897-8. Courtesy of Visual Merchandising and Store Design Magazine.

Right and below: Pierre Imans' incredibly lifelike wax mannequins from the early 20th century. Courtesy of the Bibliothèque des Arts décoratifs, Paris, Maciet Collection.

arms, and legs to give the mannequin more flexibility. A metal screen designed so that a skirt could be easily draped over the form was attached to the bottom of the torso. This entire structure was supported by a wooden tripod that was fixed under the skirt screen and hidden from the public. Female mannequins appeared this way until the beginning of the 20th century.

By the turn of the century, mannequin workshops existed in Brussels, Rome, Berlin, London, and Paris, employing wood carvers, cabinet makers, varnishes, painters, and dressmakers. Pierre Imans also established his mannequin studio at this time. He is considered to be the most famous of his profession due to his systematic use of wax and his skills in mesmerizing the public with his

lifelike creatures. Some of his mannequins had mechanisms that allowed them to wink, smile, and even powder their nose.

The body parts of the mannequin that were not shown to the public were made of papier-mâché and covered with canvas. The face, hands, and neck, however, were produced out of wax. The head was the most important part of the mannequin, having its features copied from live models. The wax was first poured into clay molds; while the wax was still warm, the eyes were added, followed by the teeth, which were imported from dentists in the United States. When ordering a mannequin during this time, customers had a choice of eye color and real or fake teeth.



The most painstaking process was the addition of the hair, which was often real and purchased from hair shops around town. Each strand was individually implanted to the head with a needle. This process was done with the eyebrows and eyelashes, as well, and with mustaches if the mannequin was a male. Each head took one working day to make.

During the 1920s, fashionable styles of dress changed to reveal more of the human body. This forced manufacturers to produce a mannequin body that looked as good as its face. They answered this challenge with several materials, including plaster, composition materials, and lacquered papier-mâché, which produced a mannequin that weighed over 200 pounds. Fashionable styles of the art world also had their influence on mannequin design. Futurist abstract features such as long pointed faces with small eyes and hair which was no longer natural but sculpted from the same material as the head began appearing on mannequins.

In the 1930s, mannequin artists reverted to a more lifelike look for their creations, and more importantly, gave them *personality*. In the shop windows of Europe, one could see not only the thin, model type female figure, but also different body types of male and female figures, including a size 46 woman's frame and a round-bellied man's frame. An African-American female mannequin was introduced in 1931, but did not appear in shop windows until 1940. By the mid-'30s, the production of mannequins resembling film stars and members of American high society were seen frequently in store windows. These were considered the ideal figures of the time.



Dior's revolutionary new styles. The measurements of these mannequins were 35-24-36½.

In the 1950s, the trend for mannequins was ultra-feminine—curvy but thin long legs, a generous mouth, and bright makeup. Natural-looking hair also made a comeback, this time in the form of a synthetic wig. Male mannequins were also given a fifties update with a classic V-shape torso and combed back hair. Of significance is the fact that these mannequins were depicted as the same age as their female counterparts. In previous decades, male mannequins were shown as older men.

Technological innovations in the 1960s had a major effect on the evolution of mannequins. Manufacturers switched from papier-mâché to a blend of fiberglass and polyester, creating mannequins that were lightweight but strong, could be taken apart and stored



Stylized composition mannequin, Display World, 1932. Courtesy of Visual Merchandising and Store Design Magazine.

Left: World War II vintage mannequin head with molded blond hair and no smile. Photo: Christian Bouvier.

Below: One of the "New Look" mannequins, Display World, 1947. Courtesy of Visual Merchandising and Store Design Magazine.





Twiggy and her look-alike mannequins, courtesy of Adel Rootstein Archives, London.

Right: A postmodern "deconstructed" mannequin, courtesy of Simon Doonan.

Back cover: World War II vintage mannequin head with molded blond hair and no smile. Photo: Christian Bouvier.

easily, and were easily repaired. Wigs and makeup were paramount for mannequins in the sixties because hair and makeup fashions changed frequently, and it was important to have the right style. The wigs that were used could be brushed, rolled, and set as easily as real hair. During the 1960s, the body type of the mannequin changed from a curvaceous to a smaller body shape. The supermodel Twiggy was reproduced in mannequin form to highlight the fashions that were popular.

During the 1970s, mannequins assumed a more natural body shape with the breasts taking on an unsupported "bra-less" look. Mannequins of different races were also produced, reflecting changing attitudes in society in this decade. For the first time, African-American and Asian mannequins were produced for the American market. The male shape changed as well in the seventies, from a muscular to a more natural form. Futuristic and androgynous trends of the seventies can also be seen in the production of mannequins. Thin, ill-defined creatures with long necks and small heads were being produced and shown painted uniformly in metallic colors such as gold and silver.

The natural form of 1970s mannequins carried over to the 1980s. Makeup was changed to keep current with fashionable styles, and poses were more severe; however, the most notable change in mannequins during this decade was their veritable disappearance. Natural human forms were replaced either by futuristic sculptures that were never intended to wear or display

garments or by severely abstracted minimalist forms constructed of metal poles. These "costumers" took the place of mannequins in many stores and were used to display apparel merchandise. The human body

had become a deconstructed postmodern abstraction.

Mannequins of the 1990s continue to be postmodern stylized versions of the human form, but in different manners than in the previous decade. They are not severely abstract like metal display fixtures, but rather they have reverted to the futuristic looking mannequins of the late 1920s with molded and shaped hair, or taken on a cartoon context such as the Pucci mannequins, with drawn on hair and features.

It is not certain what the future of the mannequin will be in the coming millennium. Whichever fixtures are used to display apparel, however, will reflect the ideals and styles popular in their time. Perhaps in the future world of virtual shopping we will no longer visit malls or stores and view merchandise on display, but will see ourselves as display forms projected on the video screen wearing the latest fashions.





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The latest principles in store design for 1936 in the men's wear department of Silverwood's Seventh Street, Los Angeles. Display World, March 1937. Courtesy of Visual Merchandising and Store Design Magazine.

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