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Extreme Beauty: The Body Transformed (Metropolitan Museum Of Art Series)



Synopsis

Over time and across cultures, extraordinary manipulations of the body have occurred in a continuing evolution of the concept of beauty. Fashion can be seen as the practice of some of the most extreme strategies to conform to shifting concepts of the physical ideal. Various zones of the body—the neck, the shoulders, the bust, the waist, the hips, and the feet—have been constricted, padded, truncated, or extended through subtle visual adjustments of proportion, less subtle prosthesis, and, often, deliberate physical deformation. This stunning book shows that an undeniable if uncanny beauty abides in the bundled cylindricality of a geisha tottering on raised geta or clogs; the tea-tray supporting bustle of an 1880s French visiting dress; the double-door expanse of eighteenth-century panniered court gowns; the bound feet and caged nails of aristocratic Manchu women; the neck-extending chokers of the Masai, of Edwardian beauties, and of John Galliano's designs for Dior; or the waist suppression of the sixteenth-century iron corsets and the cinches of early-nineteenth-century dandies. The photographs of fashion are augmented by paintings, prints, and drawings, including caricatures by Gilray, Cruikshank, Daumier, and Vernet.

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Customer Reviews

Throughout history, humans have used clothing and accessories to lift, squeeze, frame and pad the body. In *Extreme Beauty: The Body Transformed*, Harold Koda deftly weaves anthropology, sociology, art history, and haute couture into a lively survey of shifting notions of the body beautiful.

Divided into five sections--Neck and Shoulders, Chest, Waist, Hips, and Feet--the book surveys fashion's literal imprint on the body while tracing the history of clothing styles. The long neck may be the only bodily ideal equally prized by all cultures. Young Padaung women of Burma traditionally wore weighted brass coils that pushed down their collarbones and shoulders, creating the illusion of a remarkably long neck. The wide van Dyke lace collar achieved a similar "triangulated" shoulder-line in 17th-century Europe. Fashionable women in the 1830s relied on hugely inflated sleeves--held up with down-filled or wire-ribbed supports--to create the rounded dropped shoulder then in vogue. In the "Feet" section, Koda, who remains scrupulously nonjudgmental throughout, juxtaposes the miniaturized "Golden Lotus" bound foot of pre-Revolutionary China with the reshaping effect of today's stiletto heels. The platform shoe was another way of encumbering a woman's gait, whether as a way of keeping her at home (away from sexual temptation) or as a means of showing her off (the courtesans of Japan and Renaissance Venice perched on elevated soles). Men's body-altering fashions also get their due, from sculpted codpieces and male waist-binding to a front-padded shirt by Issey Miyake that resembles a baseball catcher's uniform. Koda's discussions of the historical allusions of avant-garde designers like Viktor and Rolf, Olivier Theyskens, and Hussein Chalayan vividly illuminate an often murky aspect of contemporary couture. Copiously illustrated with works of art and photographs of clothing and undergarments from many eras, *Extreme Beauty* packs a wealth of information into a slender volume. --Cathy Curtis

High-heeled shoes, push-up bras, Elizabethan ruffs and Japanese platform clogs are just a few examples of clothing that has pushed and pulled the human form into new shapes in the last few centuries. With color photos and illustrations, *Extreme Beauty: The Body Transformed*, which accompanies a Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibit of the same name, traces the role of fashion in manipulating the body to fit physical ideals. Harold Koda, curator of the Met's Costume Institute, focuses on extreme exaggerations of human form like the European 19th-century bustle, tiny corseted waists or the enormous-hipped dresses of the 18th-century French court, but also shows how today's designers quote and send up these iconic shapes. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Fabulous photographs and a perceptive historical overview of European/American high fashion. There are occasional references to other cultures and charming contemporaneous cartoons as well as examples of the male and female ideal shown in sculptures and paintings. The focus of the book

is both how our perception of beauty drives the fashion industry and how fashion influences our perception. I wish that the commoners' attempts to imitate the fashion ideal were represented more often but that's actually a whole different subject.

The book itself in content is beautiful! However, I ordered a hard cover, it's not hard it is a semi-hard surface, but still completely bendable. Also it showed up in horrible condition, the edges were bent, and the "hard" cover is in really rough shape and the binding is starting to come off. I ordered this as a last minute christmas present and I don't even feel comfortable giving this to them as it is in such rough condition.

This book taught me some things about the body and clothing that I did not previously see... in site of having been through a 4-year degree program in clothing design, and decades of interest in historic and ethnic clothing. Sure, we know about corsets and feet, but the neck and shoulders just don't get that much attention... very well done.

The book does contain some wonderful fashion statements, but over all content is a bit weak & superficial.

love it

This is a beautiful book illustrating the different ways cultures reform the body and for what reasons. It is just like actually visiting an exhibit at a major museum. But this you get to take home and enjoy over and over. The photos are plentiful, full color, large and professional. The text is not overly scholarly, but informative and intelligent. It does leave me wanting to delve deeper into the subject intellectually.

The photography is beautiful. The book makes you think about how distinctive people can be, depending on how and where they are raised.

Sentient humans with brains as well as bodies have always been fascinated by the way we adorn ourselves and why. Once we can get past the cultural anthropology of fashion, and the fads that make it a billion-dollar world industry, we can dig down to discover the roots of historical and current adorned beauty, and EXTREME BEAUTY does this . . . beautifully. It is pleasing--in an era in which

physical beauty and adornment typified by fashion have been roundly rejected by most of the jeans-wearing public--to find a book that lets beauty out and helps us exercise our sense of mystery and wonder, based in no small part on human sexuality and attraction. Harold Koda (curator of the Costume Institute at New York's Met) has mounted a show and created a book with marvelous insights and passion, and the illustrations are wondrous--consider, as a case in point, Thierry Mugler's 'Chimere,' with its savage eroticism. One could quibble with Koda's arbitrary division of the body into 'neck and shoulders,' 'chest,' 'waist,' 'hips' and 'feet,' and his exclusion of the fascinating face/head/hair perplex, and the hands, with their magical touch and allure. But this book and its illustrations will become a benchmark by which human adornment is judged, and is a keeper of power and importance.

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