

The background of the cover is a geometric pattern of squares and diamonds in three colors: red, dark navy blue, and a muted olive green. The pattern is symmetrical, with the olive green forming a central vertical band and the red and navy blue forming the surrounding areas. The text is overlaid on this pattern.

V&A

AFRICA FASHION

V&A Teachers' Resource for KS3 – 5

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The Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in London is the world's leading museum of art, design and performance. Its collection of 2.7 million objects spans over 5,000 years of human creativity. Each object in the museum has a story to tell and can spark different questions about our connection to design.

The V&A Object Discussion Cards in this pack showcase objects from the V&A *Africa Fashion* exhibition. Each Object Discussion Card encourages object – based learning and allows students to develop critical, creative and collaborative – thinking skills with the support of teachers and educators.

Guidance for teachers and educators

These cards can be used while visiting the V&A or to support object – based learning in the classroom. You can use the cards as posters in your classroom after the activity. Before starting, please check the suitability of the content of the cards and questions for your students. Some of the object descriptions may include sensitive language and/or topics and may require a more tailored approach.

Students can use the cards for individual work, but we recommend students refer to them in small groups to encourage peer – to – peer discussion. Or in some cases, you may wish to facilitate the discussion. Each card includes an object image, short object description and discussion questions. Encourage your students to take time looking at or drawing the object before taking it in turn to read the description aloud and questions to their group. Some cards include more than one object to prompt students to make interesting connections between objects. We suggest giving students about 5 – 10 minutes to work through the questions on each card.

Managing student discussion

We recommend voicing the following discussion guidelines before students start:

- Allow everyone in the group to voice their opinion. Be kind, patient and respectful of other people's views and ideas.
- Don't worry if you don't know what your opinion is yet. Ask further questions to your group or do more research to help you decide.
- Remember that everyone's opinion is valid. If someone has a different opinion to you, listen to them and ask them to explain their reasoning – it might change your own viewpoint.

Further questions

As well as the discussion points on the cards, use the questions below to encourage further object – based discussion with your students:

AESTHETIC What does it look like?

TECHNICAL What is it made from? How does it work?

INDUSTRIAL How and in what volume is it manufactured?

CULTURAL What or who is it responding to?

BEHAVIOURAL How do you interact with it?

ECONOMIC How does it financially impact the consumer and/or manufacturer?

ENVIRONMENTAL Is it sustainable? What is its lifespan?

Find out more

Encourage your students to find out more about some of the exhibition objects and others by visiting vam.ac.uk/collections



AFRICA FASHION

About the exhibition

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About the exhibition

Contemporary African creatives are shifting the geography of global fashion. The vitality of the scene is irrepressible, its creativity limitless. Now, *Africa Fashion* shares a glimpse of the glamour and politics of this influential scene that is always changing, always resisting definition.

The 'Africa' the exhibition references has multiple histories, cultures and creative expressions, at times interrelated, at times contradictory. It is shaped by a new pan – Africanism, a unity that embraces difference informed by a continental sensibility and a cosmopolitanism that includes rather than excludes. Within this exhibition, Blackness, in the political sense with all its nuances and complexities, is given priority.

There are many ways to be fashionable and African. The story we tell is one of fashion as a self – defining artform, encompassing attitude, gesture, movement – *style*. The exhibition begins in the African independence era, from the 1950s to the 1990s, when fashion, music and the visual arts looked towards self – rule with an unforgettable independence of spirit. This continues in the work of Africa's contemporary creatives as the story unfolds. Every cut, line, drape and stitch, each fabric and fibre, reveals a tale of agency and abundance from myriad African perspectives.

From V&A Senior Curator of Africa and Diaspora: Textiles and Fashion Christine Checinska:

'Being of African diaspora heritage, having worked as a designer in the British fashion industry for almost 35 years, and having spent 20 of those years researching the relationship between fashion, culture and race, I know the importance of creating space for others to be heard. Our approach has been to focus on abundance rather than lack, as we consciously celebrate an innovative 21st – century scene on the continent. Centring Africa is our guiding principle; African fashion creatives speak for themselves about themselves. Our narrative has been shaped by hundreds of conversations recognising that expertise comes in many forms. But *Africa Fashion* is more than an exhibition. It is a steppingstone towards a more inclusive and equitable V&A that better reflects the people we serve.'

Watch this video for an overview of the *Africa Fashion* exhibition from curators in addition to featured designers:



<https://youtu.be/X7ualClvN4Q>

Meet the curator



Dr Christine Checinska

Before becoming the V&A's inaugural Senior Curator of African and Diaspora Textiles and Fashion, and Lead Curator of *Africa Fashion*, I was a womenswear designer, academic, artist and curator. In industry I designed collections for high street and high fashion brands like Margaret Howell. My wider creative practice explores the relationship between cloth, culture and race. Other exhibitions include *Makers Eye: Stories of Craft*, July – October 2021, Crafts Council Gallery, London, and *Folded Life* February 2021, Johanne Jacobs Museum, Zurich, Switzerland. My recent publications include 'Re – Fashioning African Diasporic Masculinities' in *Fashion and Postcolonial Critique*, Elke Gaugele and Monica Tilton (eds.), 2019.

Watch Dr Chesinska's TedxTalk *Disobedient Dress: Fashion as Everyday Activism* here:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=63-9YIVAhpl>

Explore more about the exhibition

www.vam.ac.uk/exhibitions/africa-fashion

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Cover image: 'North Star' suit, Sindiso Khumalo

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FELA

ANIKULAPO KUTI
& EGYPT 80

BEASTS OF NO NATION



...THIS UPRISING
WILL BRING OUT
THE BEAST IN US!

-PIETTA BOTHA, U.S. TV JUNE '86



Beasts of No Nation, Fela Kuti, album cover artwork by Lemi Ghariokwu, Shanachie Records, 1989

Fela Anikulapo Kuti (1938 – 1997) is an internationally – celebrated musician and was a powerful force in Nigerian and international politics from the 1960s until his death. He came from a family of influential musicians, teachers, writers and political campaigners, and was a pioneer in the Afrobeat music genre. This album cover was designed by Lemi Ghariokwu, a Nigerian artist and illustrator who frequently collaborated with Fela Kuti on his album cover art.

Music was a powerful medium for celebration, commemoration and dissent in the independence era in Africa, mixing homegrown genres like highlife, juju and afrobeat with jazz, pop and reggae. 'Ghana, we now have freedom', E. T. Mensah sang in his joyous highlife track marking Ghana's independence in 1957. Decades later, 'Mannenburg' by Dollar Brand (later known as Abdullah Ibrahim) became the unofficial soundtrack for the struggle against apartheid in South Africa.

Discuss

- Fela Kuti often developed the content of his songs at 'yabi sessions', open discussions at his nightclub in Lagos, Nigeria. Is there an artist or music genre that you think represents your home country, this time period, your generation or issues you feel strongly about?
- Look at the artwork used for this album cover. What messages do you think Fela Kuti was trying to get across?
- Music today is often used and shared in a digital format, instead of an analogue one like this record. How do you think it affects its reach and impact?
- Listen to Fela Kuti's music, as well as learn more about his life and work, here:



<https://felakuti.com/gb/store/digital>

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Khanga celebrating the Arusha Declaration, Urafiki Mill (designed and manufactured), 1969 (printed 2002), Tanzania

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Khanga celebrating the Arusha Declaration, Urafiki Mill (designed and manufactured), 1969 (printed 2002), Tanzania

This type of cloth is known as *khanga* and originally became popular along the Swahili coast at the end of the 19th century. Usually worn in matching pairs, *khanga* was one of the main products of the Urafiki Friendship Textile Mill. This factory was the single largest employer in Tanzania in the early 1970s and a source of national pride. This *khanga* commemorates the 1967 Arusha Declaration – Tanzania's most prominent statement of African socialism. The text translates as: 'This house is indeed the place where the declaration was born'.

Discuss

- What clothing can you think of that makes a statement about people's beliefs or politics? In what similar and what different ways do written messages communicate to the viewer as opposed to styling and design? What are the benefits and limitations of wearing your beliefs or politics 'on your sleeve'?
- If there was a mass – produced item of clothing celebrating a recent national event here and now, what event do you imagine that could be? Who would be most likely to wear the item of clothing, who not and why?





Búbá, iró, ipèlè and gèlè, Shade Thomas – Fahm, 1970s, Lagos, Nigeria

©Victoria & Albert Museum, London

Búbá, ìró, ipèlè and gèlè, Shade Thomas – Fahm, 1970s, Lagos, Nigeria

Shade Thomas – Fahm is known as 'Nigeria's First Fashion Designer'. She studied fashion at St Martin's School of Art (now Central Saint Martins) in London, having originally moved to England in 1953 to train as a nurse. She returned home to Lagos in 1960, the year of Nigeria's independence, and quickly established her own boutique, *Maison Shade*. Championing Nigerian fabrics and silhouettes, Thomas – Fahm designed for the cosmopolitan, working woman. Her boutique swiftly became the go – to place for stylish people in Lagos and she counted diplomats and royalty among her regular customers.

Discuss

- Thomas – Fahm often re – imagined established Nigerian styles for the modern woman, making adjustments like creating a pre – tied *gèlè* (headwrap) and adding a zipper to the traditionally wrapped *ìró* (wrapped skirt). What kind of impact do you think this could have had on Nigerian women in their daily lives?
- Thomas – Fahm said: 'I was always putting one style up against the other style. For instance, I would look at the European skirt and then I would put it up against, in my mind, the Yoruba *ìró*... Both clothe a woman's lower half, and in similar ways, but with distinct differences. Both styles had something to learn from the other.' Where do you see African influences in the fashion and style of the UK today and UK influences on the continent?
- Watch this video to learn more about Shade Thomas – Fahm in her own words:



<http://bitly.ws/tNyP>

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1973

Hamidou Maiga

Studio portrait of man with guitar, Hamidou Maiga, 1973 (printed 2010), Bamako, Mali

©Victoria & Albert Museum, London

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Studio portrait of man with guitar, Hamidou Maiga, 1973 (printed 2010), Bamako, Mali

In the second half of the 20th century, cheaper film and user – friendly cameras helped photography to flourish. New photographic studios were springing up all over the African continent. These were filled with a constant stream of young dapper dressers, all wanting their latest outfits immortalised on film. Photographers like Hamidou Maiga supplied backdrops and props. Each item – whether flight bag, telephone, scooter or ghetto blaster – signalled an individual's aspirations. Sitters were excited by the prospect of what independence would bring. This zest for life played out through the way they styled themselves for the camera and the photographer's composition of the image.

Discuss

- How do you think this young man wants to present himself and his aspirations to others through this portrait? Do you think the desired effect has been achieved?
- In Maiga's earlier work, he had his sitters sit outdoors against a simple cloth backdrop. As his work progressed, he moved to photographing them against elaborate painted backgrounds under artificial light in his studio. What setting would you choose, and what props might define how you present yourself?





Top and trousers, Moshions, *Intzinzi* collection, Spring/Summer 2018, Kigali, Rwanda

©Victoria & Albert Museum, London

Top and trousers, Moshions, *Intzinzi* collection, Spring/Summer 2018, Kigali, Rwanda

This top and trousers ensemble was designed by Moses Turahirwa for fashion brand Moshions. Based in Kigali, Rwanda, Turahirwa often pays tribute to ceremonial attire historically worn by the country's royalty, particularly the *umushanana*. The *umushanana* comprises the *umukenyero* (a wrapper) and the *umwitero* (a sash draped over the shoulder). Turahirwa references the *umwitero* in the 'Intzinzi' ensemble with a pleated detachable sash on the tunic top. His inspirations also include *Imigongo*, a popular artform with geometric designs traditionally used to decorate walls, pottery, and canvas.

Discuss

- Turahirwa's designs can be seen as viewing traditional garments through a more modern lens. What do you think the benefits and the challenges in breaking with expectations can be?
- This ensemble is made of a wool and viscose blend, with glass beading. What kind of person in what kind of environment do you imagine that the designer had in mind when creating this outfit?
- The Moshions brand aims for 100% sustainable production of fully African – made products, and advocates for gender equality in pay and hiring practices, as well as empowering a new generation of young designers and makers. Do you think these aims are worthwhile, and if so, why? Do you have other values you think are important?





'North Star' suit, Sindiso Khumalo, Autumn/Winter 2021, Cape Town, South Africa

©Victoria & Albert Museum, London

'North Star' suit, Sindiso Khumalo, Autumn/Winter 2021, Cape Town, South Africa

Sindiso Khumalo is a sustainable textile designer based in Cape Town, South Africa. This quilted 'North Star' suit was inspired by African – American abolitionist and social activist Harriet Tubman (1822–1913) and her role in the Underground Railroad, helping enslaved people escape to freedom. Patchwork quilts were hung outside safe houses as a signal that they were a place of refuge. Specific messages were hidden within the design motifs of the quilts. Of her influences, the designer says '[I'm] inspired by the lineage of enduring and powerful Black women in history... I hope to amplify their voices through the storytelling in our collections!'

Discuss

- As seen with this suit, designs can take inspiration from elements beyond the realm of fashion. Which activists, historical moments or movements do you find inspiring? How could these translate into design?
- Many of the contemporary *Africa Fashion* designers have sustainability of production as a focus. Why do you think this is important to them, and what impact might it have? In the short term? In the long term?



Addis Foam, styled and photographed by Gouled Ahmed, C – Type print, 2017, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

©Victoria & Albert Museum, London

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Addis Foam, styled and photographed by Gouled Ahmed, C – Type print, 2017, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Gouled Ahmed is a multidisciplinary artist based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Their works are mostly self – portraits in which they design and select clothes and aesthetics that explore self – representation. In Ahmed's words: 'Through my work as a costume designer, stylist and photographer, I attempt to push back against the lack of nuance in the depictions of non – binary Black Muslims. If our starting point is invisibility, if our starting point is erasure, what modes and what modalities can we employ to prove that we exist? In this series, I use self – portrait photography to reclaim agency over how my narrative is told and to revolt against ingrained hegemonic cultural norms. I mix intricately textured garments from the Horn of Africa with everyday materials, playing with the notions of the veil, of being masked and unmasked!'

Discuss

- Gouled Ahmed looks straight into the camera lens in this work. Do you think this was intentional, and what impact does it have on the tone of the portrait? How can fashion and the way you present yourself give you agency and control over others' perception of you?
- How do clothing and accessories influence our ideas of gender – can you think of specific items that are often gendered? What issues do you think there can be in having strict gender definitions in fashion?
- Ahmed works in the disciplines of photography, film, costume design and writing. Which of these disciplines do you feel is most effective in making statements about your identity and why? What are ways you could do this across art forms/modes of expression?





Coat, jacket, shirt, trousers, Tokyo James with Burna Boy, Autumn/Winter 2020 (customised), Lagos, Nigeria

©Victoria & Albert Museum, London

Coat, jacket, shirt, trousers, Tokyo James with Burna Boy, Autumn/Winter 2020 (customised), Lagos, Nigeria

Tokyo James is a menswear design brand founded in 2015 by Iniye Tokyo James. This suit is made from embossed jacquard and designed in collaboration with Burna Boy. Burna Boy is an award – winning Nigerian singer, songwriter and record producer. He regularly works with fashion creative Tokyo James to create pieces that represent their shared goal of 'finding commonalities within different worlds'.

Burna Boy wore this outfit on the red carpet at the Grammy Awards in 2020. Tokyo James said, 'Creating this unique piece for Burna Boy's debut at the Grammy Awards was a natural and instinctive move. We are African giants in both the music and fashion scene in Africa. The piece was created to champion and celebrate African creativity'.

Discuss

- How do popular cultural icons and their personal style influence street fashion? Who has had the biggest impact on you, or who do you see influencing people around you and in what ways?
- Can you think of other examples of collaboration across music and fashion? What kind of questions can people co – designing ask each other, or guidelines could they follow, for the relationship to be equitable and productive?
- In addition to wearing this outfit to the 2020 Grammy Awards, Burna Boy also wore silver teeth grills and a neck chain with a charm depicting Nigerian musician Fela Kuti (see the first exhibition object in this resource for more information about Fela Kuti). What kind of message do you think he was trying to convey through his clothing and personal style?

