

Inspired Stitching

by Harriet Hoover | Mar 7, 2018

Tweet Share Email Print

Museum staff had the great pleasure of working with two designers in residence, Katherine Diuguid and Precious Lovell, during our fall special exhibition *Inspiring Beauty: 50 Years of Ebony Fashion Fair*. Throughout the run of the show, Diuguid and Lovell shared their craft, process, creative inspiration, and personal histories with thousands of exhibition visitors. Both artists created hand-stitched garments using materials and processes that evoke the spirit and legacy of [Eunice Johnson's Ebony Fashion Fair](#).



Designer-in-residence Precious Lovell with her finished garment



Henry Jackson, Ball Gown, special order, 2005, west African woven cotton, synthetic tulle, appeared in *Stylishly Hot*; Photograph by John Alderson, © 2013 Chicago Historical Society



Lovell took inspiration from Jackson and embroidered messages of empowerment on the surface of her garment. They include "Black Lives Matter" and "Black Is Beautiful" stitched on panels of the skirt.

Precious Lovell took inspiration from the kente cloth of Henry Jackson's ensemble in the exhibition. Using a special-order chair webbing material, Lovell whipstitched colorful strips of woven fabric to create a two-piece garment designed to move and flow with the wearer. As an homage to the legacy of Johnson Publishing and its critical role in African American culture, Lovell embroidered messages of empowerment on the surface of the garment. This celebratory ensemble features messages such as "Black Lives Matter" and "Black Is Beautiful" stitched on panels of the skirt.

Lovell's ensemble features messages such as "Black Lives Matter" and "Black Is Beautiful" stitched on panels of the skirt.



Designer-in-residence Katherine Diuguid with a mockup of her garment



Designer Ann Lowe in the December 1966 issue of *Ebony*.

Artist and designer Katherine Diuguid drew inspiration for her garment from an unsung hero in American history. Ann Lowe was an amazing artist and designer, most notably of [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy's wedding dress](#). Lowe learned her craft in her family's custom dress shop in Alabama and then moved to Florida in 1916, where she quickly became a premier custom dressmaker. She practiced in New York until her retirement in 1972. During a 1965 appearance on *The Mike Douglas Show*, Lowe explained that the driving force behind her work was not a quest for fame or fortune but a desire "to prove that a Negro can become a major dress designer."

Using Lowe's design for Jacqueline Bouvier's bridal gown as inspiration, Diuguid used haute couture techniques to craft a bridal gown out of silk faille embellished with suffolk puffs and gold-work embroidery. The entire garment is laboriously hand-stitched and pieced together.

The driving force behind Ann Lowe's work was not a quest for fame or fortune but, she said, a desire "to prove that a Negro can become a major dress designer."



Diuguid's embellishments on her garment include suffolk puffs and gold-work embroidery.



The bodice of Diuguid's dress is laboriously hand-stitched and pieced together.

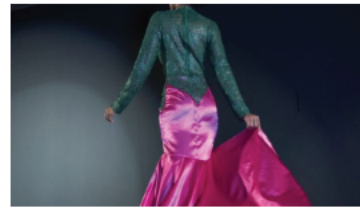
We are grateful to Lovell and Diuguid for bringing the spirit of the Ebony Fashion Fair to the Museum by sharing their craft and passion for hand making, haute couture, and empowerment through self-expression.

Stay Up-to-Date

Don't miss a beat. Sign up to receive updates and special offers.

SIGN UP

YOU MAY ALSO LIKE



The Sound of Ebony Fashion

NOV 22, 2017

DJ Chico Scott: "These songs speak to my American experience, and how fashion, glamour, and elegance translate down ... to everyday people."...

READ MORE



The Vision of Ebony Fashion Fair

DEC 20, 2017

Through the 1960s in many stores, African Americans were not allowed to try on clothes before they bought them and could not return clothes after...

READ MORE



Fashion Fair Delivered Style + Empowerment

OCT 18, 2017

The Ebony Fashion Fair significantly influenced black culture in America, as well as the way in which African American women perceived themselves....

READ MORE



At the Intersection of Darkness and Light

MAY 23, 2018

As a woman, rarely allowed entry to mosques in Pakistan, Anila Agha was inspired to create *Intersections*, a place of meditative wonder open to all....

READ MORE



Five Great Quotes by American Artists

MAY 16, 2018

Ever wonder what drives artists to create as they do? Four painters and one sculptor tell us what they think of artistic expression and, in the...

READ MORE



What Is Art?

MAY 2, 2018

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Soo Sunny Park, and Heather Gordon, three artists featured in the NCMA's *You Are Here* exhibition, answer the question for *Circa*...

READ MORE



Harriet Hoover is coordinator of studio, teen, and college programs at the NCMA.