

# The Elegant Man

FROM VAN DYCK TO BOLDINI



ROBILANT+VOENA





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COVER AND BACK COVER James Tissot, Nantes 1836-1902 Chenecey-  
Buillon, *The Circle of the Rue Royale* 1868, Oil on canvas, H. 174.5;  
W. 280 cm, © Musée d'Orsay, dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Patrice Schmidt.







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LEFT Detail of James Tissot, Nantes 1836-1902 Chenecey-Buillon,  
*The Circle of the Rue Royale* 1868, Oil on canvas, H. 174.5; W. 280  
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## INTRODUCTION



In the second half of the twentieth century, the word “fashion” became primarily associated with the dress of women but as the old master paintings in this catalogue and exhibition demonstrate, long before that time, men too took great care of what they wore and how they wore it. Certainly in the twenty-first century, men’s fashion is again competing with women’s fashion in its style, care, and craftsmanship. Kiton, a brand entrenched in history, is at the forefront of this renewal of interest in

**THE INFLUENCE OF HISTORICAL MEN’S FASHION IS MANIFEST TODAY  
ON CITY STREETS, RUNWAYS AND STYLISH MEN THE WORLD OVER.**

the aesthetics of menswear. So as the fashion-conscious male is making a comeback, we demonstrate that this exhibition and catalogue demonstrates that from the time of the artist Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641) through to that of Giovanni Boldini (1841-1941), European menswear was, in fact, an inexhaustible source of style and innovation and often menswear, not womenswear led these trends.

The paintings chosen by Marco Voena for this exhibition, by many of the greatest artists of their time, captures the expensive elegance of great men of the past. The essay by the noted fashion historian, Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell, further illuminates the riveting history of menswear from the seventeenth through the early twentieth century. Indeed, this joint venture between Kiton and Robilant + Voena not only elucidates the history of men’s dress but it demonstrates that the influence of historical men’s fashion is manifest today on city streets, runways and stylish men the world over.

This is the first joint venture between Kiton and Robilant + Voena and it is abundantly clear it is a natural one that will enrich those who view the results.

LEFT Detail of James Tissot, Nantes 1836-1902 Chenecey-Buillon,  
*The Circle of the Rue Royale* 1868, Oil on canvas, H. 174.5; W. 280  
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# The Elegant Man

## FROM VAN DYCK TO BOLDINI

KIMBERLY CHRISMAN-CAMPBELL

*For most of human history, men have vied with women for sartorial splendour. It is only relatively recently—in the two hundred years since the french revolution—that flamboyant colour, texture, and embellishment have gradually disappeared from the everyday male wardrobe.*

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, men and women alike wore vivid silks and velvets, lace, embroidery, fur, ribbons, cosmetics, and accessories like muffs, earrings, perfumed gloves, face patches, and high-heeled shoes—all unisex ornaments at the time. These were not considered signs of masculinity or femininity, but expressions of wealth and taste. Artists meticulously depicted clothing, armour, accessories, and jewellery chosen to emphasize their male subjects' physical, political, or intellectual power.

"Dress is a very foolish thing, and yet it is a very foolish thing for a man not to be well dressed," Lord Chesterfield famously advised his son in 1745. In the eighteenth century, an era characterized by rapid social

and sartorial change, the subject of appropriate dress for modern men was much discussed and debated. But the struggle to balance modesty and luxury, dignity and display can be traced back to 1528, when diplomat Baldassare Castiglione wrote in *The Book of the Courtier*: "Practise in everything a certain nonchalance that shall conceal design and show that what is done and said is done without effort and almost without thought."

In *Hamlet* (c. 1602), Polonius advises his son: "Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy, / But not expressed in fancy—rich, not gaudy, / For the apparel oft proclaims the man." Similarly, in *The Compleat Gentleman* (1622), Henry Peacham recommended "moderate and middle garbe" rather than vulgar display. Take the pursuit of elegance too far, and a man risked becoming ridiculous, mocked as a coxcomb, fop, macaroni, dandy, or peacock, depending on his era. But to neglect one's dress was equally dangerous.

Artists, too, argued over what their sitters should wear for posterity. Was it preferable to immortalize in fashionable, contemporary dress or a supposedly timeless pastiche of armour, fancy dress, fashion, and pseudo-classical drapery, such as that worn by Carlo Edoardo di Scozia in Francesco de Mura's portrait? [FIG. 01] Historical dress was a popular choice for

Dress is a very foolish thing, and yet it is a very foolish thing for a man not to be well dressed.

- LORD CHESTERFIELD, 1745



RIGHT FIG. 01 Francesco de Mura, Naples 1696 – 1782  
*Portrait of Carlo Edoardo di Scozia* (1720-1788),  
Oil on Canvas, 107 x 76cm. Collection of Marco Voena.





several reasons: it was considered more picturesque than modern dress, it did not go out of style as quickly as newer fashions, and it looked at home among portraits of one's ancestors. Ceremonial garments—like peer's robes—and uniforms were other anti-fashion options. In his seventh *Discourse* (1776), Sir Joshua Reynolds, the first president of England's Royal Academy, devoted several pages to the subject of timelessness in dress. Reynolds thought fashion was frivolous and recommended "something with the general air of the antique for the sake of dignity." His chief rival, Thomas Gainsborough disagreed,

master, Francis Nivelon, published *The Rudiments of Genteel Behaviour*, an illustrated guide for men and women alike. It included twelve plates illustrating skills such as "Walking," "Standing," and "To Offer or Receive"—images that were often quoted by contemporary portraitists. [FIG. 02] The text warned that "the Exteriour Part of the human Figure gives the first Impression. . . . It will be absolutely necessary to assist the Body and Limbs with Attitudes and Motions easy, free and graceful, and thereby distinguish the polite Gentleman from the rude Rustick." Fine dress was an essential complement to graceful movement; a

## ELEGANCE WAS A QUESTION OF DEPORTMENT AS WELL AS DRESS.

preferring to paint his sitters wearing contemporary, fashionable dress. This, Gainsborough felt, was the surest way to capture a good likeness, which he called "the principal beauty and intention of a Portrait." As he told one of his clients: "Nothing can be more absurd than the foolish custom of painters dressing people like scaramouches, and expecting the likeness to appear." Dress in the male portrait was a compromise between the ideal and the real, as artists struggled to capture both the inner and the outer man.

Elegance was a question of deportment as well as dress. Dancing masters and fencing instructors taught posture and graceful movement; etiquette manuals and fashion magazines reinforced these lessons explicitly or implicitly, drawing upon a recognized vocabulary of deportment. In 1737, a French dancing

good tailor could not hide bad posture, and vice versa.

Once again, men were confronted with a vanishingly fine line between just masculine enough and overly "Rustick." Nivelon advised his readers to make their movements "firm, yet easy and without Affectation" and "manly, yet easy and genteel." A hat should be "plac'd firm, yet easy on the Head"; a sword must be worn "exactly plac'd as shewn in this Figure. . . the only proper and genteel Situation for it." For Nivelon and his disciples, "genteel behaviour" encompassed one's physical appearance—which included dress, grooming, posture, and movement—as well as correct manners and speech.

The portraits in this exhibition trace the evolution of menswear from the early seventeenth century to World War I. The visual record is particularly important,

LEFT FIG. 02 F. Nivelon, "Standing" from *The Rudiments of Genteel Behaviour* (1737), British Museum, acc. no. 1882, 1209.753-765. Bridgeman Images.



because menswear is dramatically underrepresented in museum costume collections. Men's clothing has, historically, been more utilitarian and less subject to the whims of fashion than women's, and thus more likely to be worn out and discarded. Even elite menswear does not survive in appreciable quantities; images remain our primary source of information about how men dressed in the past.

The common thread running through the period covered here is the three-piece suit, a rare survivor in the volatile history of fashion; rare, too, is the fact that historians can pinpoint its adoption to a specific time, place, and person. In October of 1666, Charles II adopted a new fashion, "a comely vest, after the Persian mode . . . resolving never to alter it, & to leave the French mode," as John Evelyn recorded. The knee-length vest was worn under a coat of the same length, nearly covering the knee-length breeches.

Previously, men had worn short jackets called doublets, paired with short capes and hose: leg coverings traditionally made in two separate pieces

that were, by the seventeenth century, replaced by breeches, joined in the middle. The tight-fitting Spanish style in monastic, monochrome black gave way to the looser, more ornamental French style in brightly coloured silk satin as the balance of European power shifted. Doublets were slashed, beribboned, unbuttoned, and unstructured, as in Anthony Van Dyck's portrait of John Belasyse [FIG. 03]; breeches were so wide that they resembled skirts. In 1661, the English diarist Samuel Pepys recorded that a friend mistakenly "put both his legs through one of the knees of his breeches, and went so all day."

Belasyse pairs his red doublet with pinked edges and shirt with needle lace cuffs and lace-trimmed cravat with a silver breastplate, leather gauntlets, and an ornamental sword suspended from a striped silk baldric, combining elements of contemporary fashion with the swashbuckling accoutrements of a military hero and adventurer, a common archetype in Stuart England. His long, artfully tousled hair emulates the fashionably coiffed Charles I; by the mid-1600s, men would turn to periwigs to achieve the desired



ABOVE FIG. 03 Anthony Van Dyck, Antwerp, 1599 – London 1641  
*John Belasye, First Baron Belasye of Worlaby* (1614–1689), Oil on canvas  
99.1 x 78.7cm. Koelliker Collection, courtesy of Robilant + Voena.





Fashion plates depicting royalty, celebrities, or anonymous “*hommes de qualité*” helped men keep track of fashion’s rapid permutations.

mane of lush curls. In England, such sartorial finery was associated with the royalist cause. The Puritans, who opposed and eventually vanquished them in the English Civil War, were derided as “Roundheads” for their close-cropped hair; they were also distinguished by their sober dress, much of it black, with plain linen instead of lace. The Puritans equated the loose clothing of the court—worn by men and women alike—with its loose morals.

A full-length portrait of Belasyse by Gilbert Jackson of the same period completes the picture, showing long, loose-fitting breeches trimmed with bunches of ribbon at the knees and turned-down leather boots with silver spurs. [FIG. 04] One hand holds a sword, its baldric hanging loose, and the other a wide-brimmed hat. His doublet is unbuttoned from mid-chest down, and its sleeves are slashed, revealing the white linen shirt. The bright red ensemble is trimmed with silver lace. A matching coat rests on the bed behind him, prefiguring the three-piece-suit, which would not become standard for another thirty years. Instead of a cravat at his neck, he wears a wide needle lace collar, spilling over his shoulders. But while the provincial artist has captured the details of Belasyse’s dress, the stiff, ungainly figure has none of the relaxed, effortless elegance of the Van Dyck.

The casual ease of the cavaliers gave way to the dense ornamentation and artifice of the baroque period, dominated by the three-piece suit. Because the fundamental outer garments—coat, waistcoat, and breeches—remained the same from the early to late eighteenth century, with only minor and gradual



changes in cut and construction, the most conspicuous developments in fashion during that period were superficial. Getting dressed required many separate accessories and detachable ornaments—wigs, buttons, cuffs, cravats, buckles, and decorative waistcoats—that could be taken apart and rearranged, mixed and matched according to the wearer’s taste. Lavish trimmings covered the surface of men’s garments, which were made of high-quality fabric but did not necessarily require complex cutting or sewing techniques.

It was these trimmings and accessories that determined whether or not a person was in style; they were often even more costly than the textiles they adorned, and were designed to be recycled for maximum value and visual impact. Lace was handmade and could cost as much as jewels; metallic trimmings such as gold braid

LEFT FIG. 04 Gilbert Jackson, *John Belasyse (Bellasis)*, 1st Baron Belasyse of Worlaby, Oil on canvas, 1636, 189.2 x 129.5 cm. © National Portrait Gallery, London.

ABOVE FIG. 05 Henry Bonnart, *Monsieur l'électeur de Bavière (Maximilien Emmanuel)*, estampe, 1694, Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Estampes et photographie, RESERVE QB-201 (91)-FOL.



“The men at that time wore lace-cravats, which took up some time and pains to adjust. The princes having dressed themselves in a hurry, threw these cravats negligently about their necks.”

- VOLTAIRE, LOUIS XIV, 1751

contained real gold, and they were sold by weight rather than length. Suits were heavily embroidered with real gold and silver thread, which was also woven into textiles. Fashion plates depicting royalty, celebrities, or anonymous “hommes de qualité” helped men keep track of fashion’s rapid permutations. [FIG. 05]

The three-piece suit continued to evolve in subtle iterations. In his portrait of Pierre-Joseph Titon de Cogny, Nicolas de Largillière ensures that we can see the sleeves of the sitter’s waistcoat peeking out at the cuffs of his coat. The waistcoat is made of so-called “bizarre” silk, a fashionable Asian-inspired textile style characterized by bold, stylized, asymmetrical patterns. [FIGS. 06, 07] At this period, men were beginning to economize by wearing waistcoats without sleeves, sometimes disguising the fact by attaching false cuffs to their coats, or wearing waistcoats with plain linen sleeves and cuffs matching the body fabric. Here, the waistcoat is clearly sleeved; by the 1740s, however, sleeveless waistcoats would be standard.

De Cogny’s cravat is not tied; instead, the one of the tasseled ends is pushed through a buttonhole. This style—also seen in the



RIGHT FIG. 06 Nicolas de Largillière, Paris 1656 – 1746 *Portrait of Pierre-Joseph Titon de Cogny* (1686 – 1758), Collection of Gian Enzo Sperone, courtesy of Robilant + Voena.

ABOVE FIG. 07 Sleeved waistcoat of bizarre silk, English, 1705-1715, Manchester City Galleries, acc. no. 1961.275.







LEFT FIG. 08 Francesco Solimena, Canale di Serino 1657 - 1747 Barra , *Portrait of Gentleman*, Oil on canvas, 134 x 114 cm, Robilant + Voena.



ABOVE FIG. 09 Court Suit, France, 1720-30, blue silk velvet, silver and gold embroidery, Stibbert Museum, Florence.

fashion plate of the Elector of Bavaria—was known as a Steinkirk after the battle of Steenkerque of 1692, when the French army was surprised by the Dutch as they dressed. As Voltaire explained in his *Age of Louis XIV* (1751), “the men at that time wore lace-cravats, which took up some time and pains to adjust. The princes having dressed themselves in a hurry, threw these cravats negligently about their necks.” Thanks to their quick action, the French won the battle, and a fashion was born—one of many trends in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century menswear that can be traced back to the military campaigns that so frequently punctuated the era.

The hilt of de Cogny’s sword is just visible at his hip. The right to wear a sword was an aristocratic privilege; men wore them proudly and prominently, as functional fashion accessories. Although de Cogny wears fashionable dress, swathes of rich green and red drapery lend him an heroic air, and elevate the portrait from everyday life to allegory. His wig sports the twin peaks at the crown fashionable around 1710-15, but another version of this portrait depict him with a lower, flat-topped wig, similar to the one in Francesco Solimena’s *Portrait of a Gentleman*, indicating a slightly later date. [FIG. 08] Fashions in hair changed faster than fashions in clothes, and artists were sometimes called upon to update the outmoded hairstyles in their portraits.

Solimena captures the dense surface decoration of formal men’s dress in the baroque period. His sitter wears a velvet court suit encrusted with gold embroidery and lined in white silk; the deep, golden cuffs of his coat reach almost to the elbow. The polychrome brocade waistcoat is trimmed with gold fringe, a decoration reserved for the most formal court costume; a slightly different gold brocade faces the turned-back cuffs of the coat. The lustrous silk velvet





and precious metallic thread, buttons, brocade, and fringe were intended to gleam in candlelight; the heavy ornamentation contrasts with the delicate lace of his cravat and cuffs. A similar suit survives in the Museo Stibbert, undoubtedly preserved for its fine embroidery and because the extremely formal style would not have been worn on many occasions. [FIG. 09]

Solimena worked in Naples, where Charles III took up his royal residence in 1734, transforming it into a sovereign kingdom and overseeing the excavations of the ancient cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum. Along with Venice and Rome, Naples quickly became one of the must-see highlights of the Grand Tour of Europe most aristocratic Englishmen took to complete their education, which could last several months or even years. The Grand Tour was an opportunity for these young men to soak up classical art, history, and culture while indulging in flashy Continental fashions—many of which were immortalized in portraits commissioned from Italian artists like Pompeo Batoni, who catered to the tourist market.

George Craster, the son of a London lawyer, visited Batoni's studio in Rome in 1762. [FIG. 10] However, instead of the fur-lined coat or a garish frogged waistcoat so often seen in portraits of Grand Tourists, he wears his regimental uniform—arguably an equally splendid choice. Craster was an officer in the Horse Grenadier Guards, and he may have had the foresight to pack his uniform for the express purpose of having his portrait painted in it.

The influx of English tourists to the Continent would have lasting effects on menswear. The taste for practical, comfortable clothing distinguished by expert tailoring and plain, high-quality fabrics rather than lavish surface decoration was only one of many

principles and pastimes exported from England in the eighteenth century, along with gambling, afternoon tea, English gardens, English novels, horse-racing, and democracy. The restrained, sober elegance of English tailoring—so different from the brightly colored, heavily embellished suits worn on the Continent—made a powerful impression long before it began to appear in French fashion magazines in the 1770s.

Previously, fashions had crossed from Europe—and, specifically, Paris—to England but rarely the other way around. By 1786, *London's Fashionable Magazine* could boast “that London now, generally speaking, gives Fashions to Paris and, of course, to all Europe, not Paris to London.” While the French set the standard of elegance, the English perfected what is now called sportswear. The typically English taste for the outdoors and physical activity produced a distinctive wardrobe of functional, comfortable, body-conscious garments. Many of these garments had rural origins, including gaiters, riding boots, leather breeches, and frock coats, called fracs in France. Identifiable by its economical cut and small, rounded collar, the frock coat was often worn with a contrasting waistcoat and breeches. The sleeves and skirts of coats became narrower, the waistcoats shorter, and breeches tighter, creating a slim, elegant, and aerodynamic line. Soon, English dress was synonymous with informal dress.

The taste for English dress, pastimes, and politics intensified in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, as cultural and political trends converged to produce a climate of rampant Anglomania (Anglomanie) across Europe. The comte de Ségur observed: “Mature men studied and envied the laws of England. Young men only liked English horses, jockeys, boots and frock coats.” In November 1786, the French fashion magazine *Cabinet des modes* even changed its name to

LEFT FIG. 10 Pompeo Batoni, Lucca 1708 - 1787 Rome, *Portrait of George Craster* (1734-1772), Oil on canvas, 76.4 x 63.5 cm, Robilant + Voena.





OPPOSITE FIG. 11 Robert Jacques Francois Lefèvre, Bayeux, 1755–1830 Paris, *Portrait of Michael Elias Meyer*, 1804, Signed and dated lower left: Rob. Lefèvre 1804, Oil on canvas, 116 x 89 cm. Collection of Marco Voena.

RIGHT FIG. 12 Robert Dighton, Beau Brummel, watercolour, 1805, Bridgeman Art Library.

ABOVE FIG. 13 The Acme of Fashion, or the secrets of the toilet discover'd, intended as a lesson for the Stiff Necked Generation in the Art and Mystery of Starch'd Collars by a Nobleman, early 19th century, hand-coloured etching, Victoria & Albert Museum, acc. no. E.467-1955.





Magasin des modes nouvelles, françaises et angloises to acknowledge the growing importance of English fashions. On the eve of the French Revolution, Gouverneur Morris—the American ambassador to Versailles and no stranger to violent political upheaval—noted: “Everything is à l’anglaise, and the desire to imitate the English prevails alike in the cut of a coat, and the form of a constitution.”

Balzac would call the French Revolution a “debate between silk and broadcloth”; in truth, however, that debate had been raging for several years before the fall of the Bastille on July 14, 1789. The language of fashion was inextricable from the language of politics. The term “sans-culottes,” meaning “without breeches,” described the working-class men who led the charge on the Bastille, clad in utilitarian trousers (*pantalons*) rather than the knee-length breeches (*culottes*) favoured by aristocrats and the bourgeoisie.

of Pompeii and Herculaneum in the second half of the eighteenth century generated interest in the art, interiors, fashions, and politics of the ancient Greeks and Romans, not just among Grand Tourists. Illustrated books on the cities published throughout Europe helped to spread the vogue for art in the classical style—known as neoclassicism—and provided artists and architects with information and inspiration. In November 1790, the fashion magazine *Le Journal de la Mode et du Goût* reported that young men dressed with “the greatest simplicity,” and wore their hair “cut and curled like that of an antique bust.” When, in 1803, the painter Elisabeth Vigée Le Burn remarked that she had not painted any lace in 15 years, she was thinking of her male sitters as well as her female ones.

Robert Lefèvre—a committed neoclassicist, who had made his debut at the Salon in 1791 with a painting of

### BALZAC WOULD CALL THE FRENCH REVOLUTION A “DEBATE BETWEEN SILK AND BROADCLOTH.”

Along with breeches, the sans-culottes rejected lace, embroidery, diamonds, rouge, silk, swords, shoe buckles, hair powder, and non-patriotic jewellery, and all those who wished to appear politically correct followed suit. Shoelaces replaced ornamental buckles. Cropped hair replaced powdered wigs. Plain, dark wool suits replaced colourful silks and embroideries; several commentators noted that everyone seemed to be in mourning.

In addition to Anglomania, many of the new fashions also expressed the general fascination with the austere aesthetics and democratic governments of classical antiquity. The widely publicized excavations

of a bacchante—captured the new masculine austerity in his portrait of Michael Elias Meyer. [FIG. 11] Meyer’s unpowdered hair is cropped and curled, much like that like of an antique bust. But the precise tailoring of his slim, unembellished coat and breeches owes as much to England as it does to the ancient world. He wears a tail coat—a cutaway style based on traditional English riding coats—in dark wool, which forms a stark contrast with his pristine, starched snow-white shirt with intricately pleated jabot, cravat, and waistcoat. Though breeches had been joined by long trousers and pantaloons in the fashionable wardrobe, they were still worn on horseback, for comfort; they grew longer along with the tails and sleeves of the coat,

## Tailors applied scientific principles and mathematical methods to fit, measurement, and proportion.

exaggerating the slim line. Indeed, breeches had become so close-fitting that they were equipped with ties at the knees to make them easier to button. Because they left the calves unprotected, high boots were a must. These black boots—called top boots—are folded down to reveal their tan linings, a style first seen on English horsemen in the 1760s. Although Meyer is ostensibly dressed for riding, his elegant attire would have been acceptable in all but the most formal settings.

Wool was not only a more democratic textile than silk, but a more versatile one; it could be steamed, stretched, lined, and moulded to fit the body in a way that silk could not. London’s Savile Row perfected the art of manipulating wool, and became the centre of the bespoke tailoring industry. Tailors applied scientific principles and mathematical methods to fit, measurement, and proportion. George “Beau” Brummell popularized the new, somewhat austere male uniform of trousers, cutaway coat, and starched linen cravat twisted into elaborate knots, making it look luxurious and elegant. Brummell became famous for his restrained good taste, which was exquisite without ever being conspicuous. [FIG. 12] As Max Beerbohm later wrote of him: “In certain congruities of dark cloth, in the rigid perfection of his linen ... lay the secret of Mr. Brummell’s miracles.” Brummell went to extraordinary lengths to achieve a perfect fit and exacting cleanliness; it was even rumoured that he cleaned his boots with champagne. Numerous caricatures mocked Brummell and his disciples, depicting them as incurable dandies suffering sartorial torture to gratify their vanity. [FIG. 13] Brummell pursued this fastidiousness with a zeal that would today be called obsessive-compulsive; he spent the last years of his life in a French asylum, where he died in 1840.

In the same year Lefèvre painted Meyer, Napoleon Bonaparte crowned himself Emperor of France. His revival of the French court was partially calculated to rescue the ailing French clothing and textile industries, which had languished since the Revolution. The new, politically motivated preference for informal, inexpensive fashion—made of imported English wool or Indian muslin rather than native silks and velvets—had catastrophic consequences for the French fashion industry, which indirectly employed an estimated 25,000 people in Paris alone. Napoleon realized that formality and luxury were not incompatible with neoclassical minimalism; he encouraged the return of balls, fashion magazines, and court ceremony.





LEFT FIG. 14 François-Pascal-Simon Gérard, *Camillo Borghese*, ca. 1810, Oil on canvas, The Frick Collection, formerly Robilant + Voena.

ABOVE FIG. 15 Nicholas-Henry Jacob, 1782 Paris 1871, *Portrait of Prince Camillo Borghese*, 1817, charcoal on paper, 88 x 65 cm. Collection of Marco Voena.

In François-Pascal-Simon Gérard's formal, life-sized oil portrait of 1810 —recently acquired from Robilant and Voena—Napoleon's brother-in-law Prince Camillo Borghese wears formal, ceremonial dress inspired by the Renaissance, including a cape, ruff, breeches, feathered hat, and pumps with low, red heels. [FIG. 14] A similar blend of neoclassicism and historicism had characterized Napoleon's coronation costume, as well as alluding to the fashion for nostalgic art and entertainment in le style troubadour, evoking the glorious reign of King Henri IV. But an intimate drawing—dated after the fall of Napoleon—presents Borghese in contemporary, fashionable dress. [FIG. 15] In 1808, J. P. Malcolm observed in his *Anecdotes of the Manners and Customs of London* that men were stretching “their Pantaloon to almost bursting.” Not only were pantaloons and breeches worn tight, but they were made of flesh-coloured nankeen (cotton), leather, or cashmere, emulating the nude statues of classical antiquity. Thanks to the persistent fashion for cutaway coats, “nothing disguised their shapes any longer,” the baron de Frénilly lamented. (Trousers were an acceptable, looser option.) These breeches are made of leather, which was recommended for riding, as it was more durable than cloth.

The lean line of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century menswear began to develop into an hourglass figure, with a broad chest and shoulders created by padding and puffed sleeves, a narrow waist (sometimes achieved through corseting), and wide hips emphasized by the tails or skirt of the coat. [FIG. 16] Through steaming, padding, quilting, and notching, clothing was engineered to fit and flatter the contours of the male physique.

In Giuseppe Molteni's *Portrait of a Collector*, the sitter wears a frock coat instead of a cutaway, with a fitted torso and a long, full skirt attached by a waist seam.



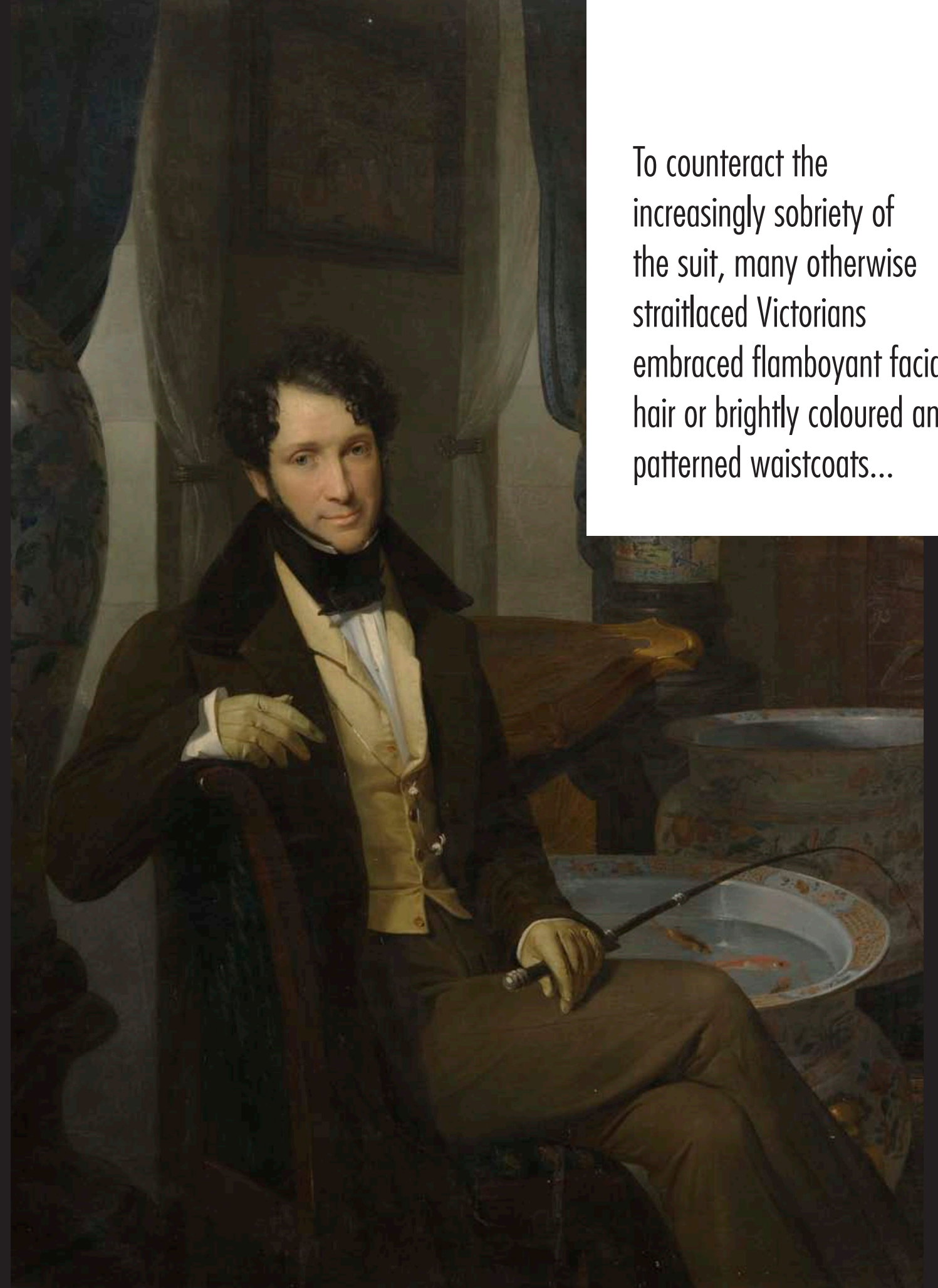


[FIG. 17] His brown coat has a black velvet collar and a slight puff to the sleeves; a black cravat prefigures the bow tie. His trousers may be outfitted with stirrups, to maintain a long, lean line; by now, long trousers were worn for all but the most formal occasions, when old-fashioned breeches and low-heeled pumps made an archaic appearance. Though the sitter is indoors, he carries a riding crop and wears kid gloves, a fashionable accessory. His hair is curled, with long sideburns; after more than a century of clean-shaven faces, young men of the Romantic Era discovered a new form of self-expression. To counteract the increasingly sobriety of the suit, many otherwise straitlaced Victorians embraced flamboyant facial hair or brightly coloured and patterned waistcoats, cut straight across the waist, following the waist seam of the frock coat.

Late nineteenth-century sporting culture transformed menswear, both democratizing it and fetishizing it, as distinct fashions were introduced for distinct leisure activities, from smoking to sailing. During the summer of 1889, Jacques-Emile Blanche painted a portrait his friend, the writer George Porto-Riche, who was visiting him in the Normandy seaside resort of Dieppe. [FIG. 18] Porto-Riche is appropriately cool and casual in a lightweight striped lounge suit. The lounge suit—also called the sack suit—could be worn with or without a vest. It was an informal alternative to the three-piece frock suit, cut without a waist seam, skirt, or tails. Loose-fitting and comfortable, it has remained a menswear staple to this day. The textile makes it even more casual. Striped jackets were originally worn for sports like cricket, tennis, and rowing; they became fashionable for seaside wear during the 1880s, often accessorized with a straw boater and a necktie instead of a cravat. [FIG. 19] The bristling moustache, too, was associated with the

ABOVE FIG. 16 "Longchamp," *Costumes Parisiens*, 1828, no. 2591, Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

RIGHT FIG. 17 Giuseppe Molteni, Affori 1800 - 1867 Milan, *Portrait of Collector*, oil on canvas, 134 x 114 cm, Robilant + Voena.



To counteract the increasingly sobriety of the suit, many otherwise straitlaced Victorians embraced flamboyant facial hair or brightly coloured and patterned waistcoats...





sporting heroes who were beginning to make names for themselves on the cricket pitch and the rugby field. Blanche recorded that other houseguests in Dieppe included “Alexandre Dumas in his reefer jacket”—another informal style of nautical inspiration.

Another artist, James McNeill Whistler, appears in a portrait by his friend and fellow painter Giovanni Boldini. [FIG. 20] At a time when formal attire consisted of white tie and tailcoat, Whistler is the picture of fin-de-siècle nonchalance, wearing a black three-piece suit discreetly but unmistakably adorned with the red rosette of the Légion d’honneur, established by Napoleon to recognize achievement in various fields. His crisply starched wing collar is anchored by a black bow tie. He holds a gleaming top hat in his left hand, his cloak over his arm, and lifts a monocle to his right eye. Whistler’s friend Henry Labouchère described his appearance at an evening lecture he delivered in London in 1885: “With his light, graceful black figure, in an American dress suit, he appeared a remote silhouette, making graceful motions.” This portrait dates to 1897, but the description fits; indeed, the nearly timeless simplicity of Whistler’s ensemble ensures that it could still be worn as eveningwear today. Labouchère’s reference to an “American dress suit” may well indicate the tuxedo, a tailless evening jacket first worn in the elite New York enclave of Tuxedo Park in around 1888.



LEFT FIG. 18 Jacques-Emile Blanche, Paris, 1861- 1942, Offranville, *Portrait of George Porto-Riche*, 1889, Oil on canvas, 100 x 65 cm, Robilant + Voena.

ABOVE FIG. 19 Boating suit (jacket, waistcoat, trousers), 1890s, Great Britain, Cream wool with blue pinstripe, hand-and machine-sewn, Victoria & Albert Museum, acc.no. T.113 to B-1934.





Whistler is  
the picture  
of fin-de-siècle  
nonchalance.

Whistler was fascinated by exotic costume and cultivated a reputation as an elegant if eccentric dresser, appearing in public in chrysanthemum-coloured gloves, fur-lined coats, black and pink polka-dotted shirts, and white suits. He was immensely proud of the single streak of white that snaked through his dark hair. His exuberant moustache and neat goatee were personal trademarks he'd cultivated since he was a much younger man. Yet he had harsh words for the aesthete Oscar Wilde, who was known for embracing nostalgic, theatrical styles inspired by fashion history, like velvet breeches, floppy bow ties, fur-trimmed coats, capes, and sunflower boutonnieres. Wilde wore his hair long and his face clean-shaven, in the style of a Romantic poet rather than a modern, bewhiskered Victorian gentleman. "Costume is not dress!" an outraged Whistler proclaimed. Though Wilde and Whistler had been friends, united by their sharp wit and their interest in aestheticism, their relationship was always tinged by rivalry. To one of Whistler's quips, Wilde allegedly responded: "I wish I

"CLOTHES MAKE THE MAN. NAKED PEOPLE HAVE  
LITTLE OR NO INFLUENCE IN SOCIETY" -MARK TWAIN

had said that." Whistler shot back: "You will, Oscar, you will." Conversely, Whistler's relaxed pose in Boldini's portrait echoes the famous 1882 Napoleon Sarony photo of Wilde, lounging on a bearskin in his studio. By the time the portrait was painted, they'd had an irreparable falling out. By contrast, Boldini's depicts Marchese Ignazio Boncompagni, Prince of Venosa, in casual daywear befitting a man of leisure. [FIG. 21] The portrait, begun in Rome in 1913, was likely completed after the sitter's death in October of that year, but before Boldini fled the city at the outbreak of World War I in 1914. It captures an ensemble that, in many ways, appears strikingly modern; the three-piece lounge suit with contrasting waistcoat, necktie, turned-down collar, and pocket square (an informal alternative to a boutonnière) are recognizable elements of contemporary menswear more than a hundred years later. Yet, at the same time, this style of dressing was teetering on the brink of extinction. The casual fashions of

ABOVE FIG. 20 Giovanni Boldini, Ferrara 1842 – 1931, *Portrait of James McNeill Whistler*, 1897, Oil on canvas, 170.8 x 94.6 cm. Brooklyn Museum, Gift of A. Augustus Healy, 09.849.





one generation have always become the formalwear of the next; the war accelerated that process. Stiff, detachable collars were replaced by softer, integral shirt collars; one can imagine that Boncompagni is wearing spats on his feet, an accessory that would become another casualty of the conflict. Edward VII had popularized full beards before his death in 1910, but beards and sideburns would vanish during the war, and for many years afterwards; gas masks did not sit well on whiskers. While the principal components of menswear have stood the test of time, myriad details belie its sensitivity to changing manners and morals.

Paraphrasing Shakespeare, the American humorist Mark Twain declared: “Clothes make the man. Naked people have little or no influence in society.” All joking aside, however, Twain was extremely particular about his own clothing, favoring light-colored suits. Chatting with reporters before addressing the United States Congress in 1906, he asked: “What can be more depressing than the somber black which custom requires men to wear upon state occasions? A group of men in evening clothes looks like a flock of crows, and is just about as inspiring. After all, what is the purpose of clothing? Are not clothes intended primarily to preserve dignity and also to afford comfort to their wearer?” The question of how to achieve both aims at the same time was one that every man had to answer for himself.

LEFT FIG. 21 Giovanni Boldini, Ferrara 1842–1931, *Portrait of the Marchese Boncompagni*, Oil on canvas, 129 x 95 cm, courtesy of the Museo archives Giovanni Boldini Macchiaioli, Pistoia.



CATALOGUE

AUTHOR

Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell





Anthony Van Dyck

Antwerp 1599 — 1641 London

*John Belasyse, First Baron Belasyse of Worlaby* (1614 — 1689)

Oil on canvas

99.1 x 78.7cm

Koelliker Collection, courtesy of Robilant + Voena

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Baron Belasyse is the picture of masculine power and grace in this portrait by the consummate courtly artist, Anthony Van Dyck. His costume combines fashionable elements—a mane of tousled curls, a lace-trimmed shirt and cravat, a vivid silk doublet ornamented with slashing and pinking, leather gauntlets, and a black silk bracelet ornament with a diamond—with martial touches including a breastplate, sword, and ornamental striped silk baldric, evoking the common contemporary visual vernacular of the aristocratic warrior. Though the portrait was painted before the English Civil War, these fashions became associated with the royalist cause; indeed, they were largely inspired by the impeccable dress of King Charles I. By the mid-1600s, the three-piece suit—with its fitted coat, waistcoat and breeches—began to replace the loose-fitting doublet and breeches, and the periwig mimicked natural curls. In the baroque period, dense ornamentation and obvious artifice would supplant the effortless elegance of the cavaliers.





Francesco de Mura

Naples 1696 – 1782

*Portrait of Carlo Edoardo* (1720 – 1788)

Oil on canvas

107 x 76 cm

Collection of Marco Voena

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This magnificent if wholly fictional mélange of armour, fashion (evident in the hairstyle and lace-trimmed cravat and cuffs), and classical allusions (in the toga-like cloak, skirt-like pteruges, and plinth) solved two of the problems plaguing early modern portraitists and their male sitters: how to appear suitably masculine—with all the power, dignity, and splendour that implied—while avoiding dress that tried too hard, or dated too quickly. The sitter’s precarious social and legal status as the “Young Pretender” to the throne of Great Britain made his self-imaging all the more important, and more difficult. Without a legitimate crown, the young man popularly known as Bonnie Prince Charlie could not rely on the traditional trappings of royalty. Instead, he presents himself as an urbane warrior, holding a military baton rather than a sceptre. Raised to reclaim his grandfather’s throne, he is clearly prepared to do so by force if necessary. Significantly, his father James, the “Old Pretender,” had worn a similar costume as a child, in a portrait painted by Pierre Mignard in 1694, now in the Royal Collection.





Francesco Solimena  
Canale di Serino 1657 - 1747 Barra

*Portrait of Gentleman*

Oil on canvas, 134 x 114 cm  
Robilant + Voena

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During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, vivid silks and velvets, lace, embroidery, and jewels were not considered signs of masculinity or femininity, but expressions of wealth and taste. Solimena's sitter is posed in three-quarters profile to show off the maximum amount of luxurious textiles and trimmings. This conspicuous consumption extended to men's wigs. When they were first introduced in the mid seventeenth century, wigs may have looked natural, but they were obviously, unapologetically artificial by the eighteenth century. Wigs were no longer considered purely cosmetic devices, designed to disguise baldness or thinning hair; instead, they functioned as important status symbols and fashion statements, changing frequently. Like wigs, hair powder had both practical and symbolic functions. It served as a perfume while giving heads a fresh, uniform appearance. Ironically, by imitating gray hair, it masked one's true age—one reason why it remained in vogue for so long, prized by young men and old alike.





Nicolas de Largillière

Paris 1656 — 1746 London

*Portrait of Pierre-Joseph Titon de Cogny (1686 — 1758)*

Oil on canvas, 138.4 x 105.7 cm

Collection of Gian Enzo Sperone, courtesy of Robilant + Voena

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By this time, the three-piece suit has assumed the form it would retain for the rest of the eighteenth century. A white cravat encircles the neck, and the waistcoat is visible under the close-fitting coat, showing off even more textiles and embroidery—in this case, an Asian-inspired “bizarre” silk, shot with metallic threads. The sitter’s rich, mushroom-hued velvet coat sprinkled with silver recalls the marquis de Saint-Simon’s description of the trendsetting King Louis XIV in the later years of his life: “He was always dressed in brownish colours with a light embroidery.” Swaths of green and crimson silk velvet add an element of fantasy to the fashionable attire and damask-covered fauteuil. Yet layers upon layers of sumptuous textiles, a gravity-defying powdered wig, and a twinkling assortment of buttons, metallic threads, tassels, glove, and sword hilt do not distract from the confidence and vitality of the sitter’s face.





Pompeo Batoni

Lucca 1708 — 1787 Rome

*Portrait of George Craster* (1734 — 1772)

Oil on canvas, 76.4 x 63.5 cm

Robilant + Voena

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An Englishman in Rome, George Craster resisted the urge to adopt colourful, flashy Continental finery that seized so many of his countrymen who visited Italy as part of the Grand Tour. In his portrait by Pompeo Batoni—an artist known for his dignified and erudite depictions of young male (and, occasionally, female) tourists—Craster wears his uniform as an officer of the Horse Grenadier Guards. With its bold regimental colours, gold braid, brass buttons, epaulets, sashes, frogging, and facings, military uniform was as splendid and showy as any artist (or sitter) could desire, while having the advantage of being largely immune to the whims of fashion. Suggesting patriotism and heroism rather than wealth or taste, uniform was, nonetheless, infused with luxury and explicitly indicative of rank. Indeed, Craster likely brought his uniform to Rome for the express purpose of having his portrait painted in it.





Robert Jacques Francois Lefèvre

Bayeux 1755 – 1830 Paris

*Portrait of Michael Elias Meyer*

Signed and dated lower left: *Rob. Lefvre 1804*

Oil on canvas, 116 x 89 cm

Collection of Marco Voena

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The French Revolution sparked a corresponding revolution in fashion, which had particularly lasting effects on menswear—a phenomenon psychologist J. C. Flugel would later dub “the Great Masculine Renunciation,” when men “abandoned their claim to be considered beautiful” and “aimed at being only useful.” Michael Elias Meyer exemplifies the new simplicity and practicality of post-Revolutionary menswear, characterized by precise tailoring, sober colouring, and sporting influences (such as Meyer’s boots and tailcoat, originally designed for riding). All of these elements testify to the widespread popularity of English culture and politics in France in the turbulent years before and after the Revolution, when it was observed that “the desire to imitate the English prevails alike in the cut of a coat, and the form of a constitution.” Meyer’s cropped, natural hair is a bold departure from the wigs and powder worn for most of the eighteenth century, testifying to the popular backlash against aristocratic modes as well as the vogue for art and dress in the style of the ancient Greeks and Romans, known as neoclassicism.





Nicholas-Henry Jacob

Paris 1782 — 1871

*Portrait of Prince Camillo Borghese (1775-1832)*

Inscribed and dated: *Dessine par N.H. Jacob. Des ur de S.A.R. le P.Eugene de Baviere Fait en 1817*

Charcoal on paper, 88 x 65 cm

Collection of Marco Voena

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Freed from the manufactured magnificence of court ceremony after the downfall of his brother-in-law, Emperor Napoleon I, Prince Camillo Borghese wears contemporary, fashionable riding dress in this intimate drawing. While collared cutaway coats, durable leather breeches, and tall black boots folded down to reveal their tan linings had been part of English riding dress since the mid-eighteenth century, they had only entered the fashionable male wardrobe in the 1780s. By 1817, long trousers and pantaloons were more fashionable, but breeches were more comfortable on horseback, paired with boots to protect the calves. Whether a man wore breeches or pantaloons, a close fit was key; Borghese's breeches are equipped with ties to make them easier to button over the knee, and the top hat under his arm elongated the fashionably slim line. His coat is cut straight across the waist to facilitate riding, but its high, broad collar and puffed sleeves anticipate the hourglass silhouette of menswear during the Romantic era.





Giuseppe Molteni  
Affori 1800 — 1867 Milan

### Portrait of a Collector

Oil on canvas  
134 x 114 cm  
Robilant + Voena

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The slim line of the severely tailored cutaway coat of the Regency dandy broadened into an hourglass during the Romantic Era, a development mirrored in women's fashions. The frock coat sprouted a wide collar (here accentuated by black velvet facings), padded shoulders, and sometimes even puffed sleeves, balanced on the bottom by a full, knee-length skirt and loose-fitting trousers instead of tight pantaloons. The narrow waist might be cinched with a masculine corset to achieve the desired silhouette. Though the sitter in this portrait wears the dark, subdued colours that characterized menswear for most of the nineteenth century, he is far from being inattentive to fashion. Clearly, he has devoted careful attention to his facial hair, pristine white shirt, and accessories, including his meticulously tied cravat, eye-catching waistcoat, watch fob, gloves, and riding crop. These subtle details distinguished the man of taste and fashion from the rapidly expanding middle class.





Jacques-Emile Blanche  
Paris 1861 — 1942 Offranville

*Portrait of George Porto-Riche*

Signed, dated and dedicated on the lower-right: *à mon ami Rodin / J. E. Blanche / Dieppe 1889*

Oil on canvas  
100 x 65 cm

Robilant + Voena

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A writer and a friend of the artist, George Porto-Riche is casually dressed in a two-piece lounge suit, also called a sack suit; it was named for its comfortable, unstructured cut, without a waist seam or tails. His yellow necktie is knotted in a large four-in-hand anchored by a stickpin which, along with his ring and cufflinks, humorously echo the silver bells on the cat's collar. The casual, lightweight suit with a sporty pattern of nautical stripes was perfectly appropriate for summertime in Dieppe, a fashionable resort town on the Normandy coast. By the 1920s, however, lounge suits with long ties would be acceptable everywhere on all but the most formal occasions, one of many examples of fashion etiquette relaxing after World War I.





Giovanni Boldini

Ferrara 1842 — 1931

*Portrait of the Marchese Boncompagni*

Oil on canvas, 129 x 95 cm

Courtesy of the Museo archives Giovanni Boldini Macchiaioli, Pistoia

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On the eve of the First World War, Boldini depicted Marchese Ignazio Boncompagni in a three-piece lounge suit with contrasting waistcoat, four-in-hand tie, and pocket square—an ensemble that is recognizably modern even as it teetered on the verge of extinction. The portrait, begun in Rome in 1913, was likely completed after the sitter's death in October of that year, at the behest of his widow. But it predates the outbreak of the war, which had profound and lasting effects on menswear and the popular perception of masculinity. Boncompagni's shirt with its stiff, detachable collar would be replaced by shirts with softer, integral collars after the war. Full beards—popularized by the bearded King Edward VII—were another casualty of the conflict; gas masks did not sit well on whiskers. Often, however, what goes out of fashion comes back into fashion. While the detachable collar may be consigned to the dust bin of history, beards and waistcoats have enjoyed periods of renewed popularity, and ties and pocket squares remain mainstays of formal day dress.











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With gratitude to our lenders Luigi Koelliker, Gian Enzo Sperone,



and Polimnia Attolico Trivulzo and Kristy Soo for their contributions to the exhibition and catalogue.

Edited by Carolyn H. Miner

Curated by Marco Voena

Texts by Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell and Carlo Mazzoni

Design by LR-LA, Los Angeles [www.lr-la.com](http://www.lr-la.com)

Printed by Pure Print

Published by Robilant and Voena, 2018