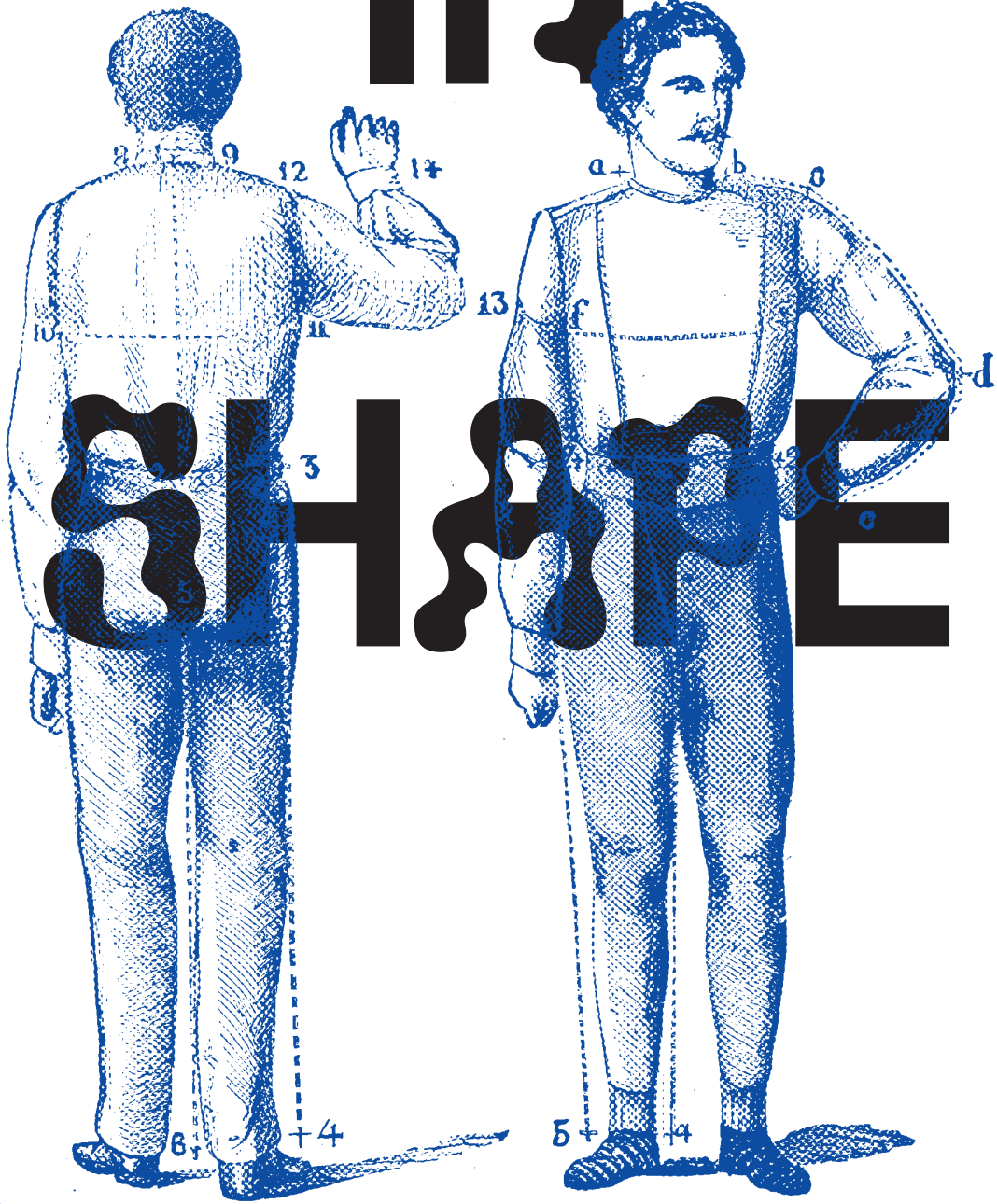
Hand-out
EN

IN SHAPE



IN SHAPE

DESIGN
MUSEUM
DEN
BOSCH

In a time when fitness routines, beauty filters and cosmetic procedures are omnipresent, the body increasingly appears as something that can be improved. It is no longer simply a given, but a project: something worked on and adjusted in order to meet an ideal that is constantly shifting and often unattainable.

This pursuit of the ideal body is not new, but has existed for centuries. In the nineteenth century, clothing production changed radically with the rise of ready-to-wear fashion and standardised sizing. At the same time, the fashionable body became extraordinarily diverse in form. Silhouettes were constructed using padding, boning and structural elements. These invisible layers determined what was revealed or concealed, enlarged or reduced. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, attention increasingly shifted towards physical training and cosmetic intervention. The ideal was not only worn, but also practiced and sometimes made permanent.

In Shape **traces this history not chronologically, but through themes. Each section focuses on a different part of the body, such as legs, waist, hips or bust, and the ways in which it has been shaped, read and judged over time. Fashion reveals how social norms are made visible through etiquette and propriety, but also through seduction, status and distinction. What is concealed or emphasised, flattened or exaggerated, speaks to gender, morality and power, as well as to the space people are able to claim, or are denied, in shaping their bodies.**

ABOUT THE COLLECTION OF DIRK-JAN LIST

A large portion of the objects in this exhibition originate from the collection of Dirk-Jan List. His collection focuses on undergarments, aids, prints, and everyday objects that are rarely visible, yet were essential to the fashionable silhouette. These utilitarian items reveal how ideals functioned in practice: worn on the body, hidden beneath clothing, yet decisive for posture, movement, and appearance. The collection makes clear how fashion, industry, and social norms shaped the body and how familiar many of these mechanisms still are today.

LOOKING AND COMPARING

The mannequin emerged in the eighteenth century as a tool in the tailor's workshop. Using a dummy allowed tailors to fit garments without the customer being present. In this process, the body was reduced to measurements, proportions, and volume. This development was closely connected to the rise of ready-to-wear clothing and the idea of an average body, often referred to as l'homme moyen.

In the nineteenth century, the mannequin moved from the workshop to the shop window, a space of viewing and comparing. The figure acquired a new function: it no longer displayed clothing alone, but also the body meant to wear it. That body changed along with fashion silhouettes, evolving full breasts and narrow waists to muscular torsos and solid thighs. In all these forms, the mannequin does not represent an average body, but an ideal. From the 1980s onwards, mannequins appeared in a wider range of sizes, skin tones, and body types. These changes increase the visibility of different bodies, while also raising new questions about how diversity is shaped and presented.

1 **Various dress forms and mannequins 1890–2025**

Dirk-Jan List, The Hague
Design Museum Den Bosch, 's-Hertogenbosch
Gruppo Corso, Breukelen

THE CHANGING SILHOUETTE

Fashion prints have circulated since the sixteenth century, but from the eighteenth, and especially the nineteenth century, they played a key role in disseminating ideals of the fashionable silhouette. They functioned as both example and instruction, making visible how form and volume related to one another. Over the course of the twentieth century, fashion photography gradually took over this role.

What stands out in these prints is the extent to which the silhouette shifts over time. That form is determined primarily beneath the clothing, by corsets, crinolines, bustles, and other shaping undergarments. What appears in the image is always the result of a hidden construction.

The emphasis continually shifts: from bust to waist, from hips to backside, from volume to uprightness. These shifts are not isolated fashion whims, but responses to earlier silhouettes and progress logically and gradually. Each new ideal corrects, exaggerates, or rejects the previous one.

THE CHANGING SILHOUETTE

2.1 Abraham de Bruyn
Two women and two men, dressed according to fashion in Flanders
ca. 1580

2.2 Galerie des Modes et Costumes Français
1782

2.3 Costume Parisien
1801

2.4 Costume Parisien
1813

2.5 Incroyable
ca. 1815

2.6 Wiener Mode
1828

2.7 Costumes Parisiens
1833

2.8 Le Journal des Dames et des Demoiselles
1853

2.9 Le Journal des Dames et des Demoiselles
1865

2.10 La Mode Illustrée
1876

2.11 Allgemeine Moden-Zeitung, Leipzig
ca. 1875

2.12 Journal Illustré des Dames
1883

2.13 La Mode Française
1895

2.14 15 June
1905

Dirk-Jan List, The Hague

OUT OF SIGHT

Historical fashion prints and later fashion magazines reveal how representation in fashion has always been selective. Nineteenth-century prints disseminated ideals of form and elegance that implicitly assumed a white, affluent body. Difference remained out of frame, not through explicit exclusion, but through absence. From the 1960s onwards, this image begins to shift under the influence of broader social change. Black models become more visible, for example on the 1969 cover of *Life* magazine featuring Naomi Sims (1948–2009). For the first time, a body long excluded from the fashionable domain appears at the centre of a mass medium.

Yet the ideal only changes marginally. The body considered desirable remains slim, youthful, and controlled. The same preference is visible in the mannequins in this exhibition, whose forms and skin tones are predominantly white. Together, prints, magazines, and objects show how representation can shift, while the frameworks defining the ideal body remain strikingly persistent.

3.1 **LIFE Magazine**
17 October 1969

Design Museum Den Bosch, 's-Hertogenbosch

3.2 **Avenue**
November 1971

3.3 **Vogue UK**
December 1987

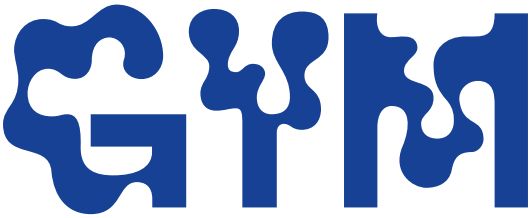
3.4 **Vogue France**
August 1988

3.5 **Vogue Netherlands**
September 2019

3.6 **Harper's Bazaar Netherlands**
September 2020

Centraal Museum, Utrecht

Jane Fonda, 1993



GYM

More and more people regularly go to the gym. Everything there revolves around visible results and self-improvement. The body is not shaped by how you dress, but by what you do with it. Muscles, fat, and weight are actively trained, directed, and measured.

In the nineteenth century, physical exercise shifted from education and collective discipline towards individual routines and exercises. Mechanical training devices and workout schedules approached the body as a system of muscles and joints that could be purposefully improved. At the same time, a commercial fitness culture emerged in which improvement is actively promised and sold. Muscle mass became associated with masculinity and strength, whilst slenderness was linked to feminine discipline and control. Advertisements, magazines, workout videos, and social media present the ideal body as attainable, provided you invest in the right equipment, exercises, nutrition, or supplements.

THE FIRST FITNESS MACHINES

In the nineteenth century, physical exercise increasingly aimed to shape the body. At first, this took place mainly in collective settings such as gymnastics clubs and gymnasiums, where movement was linked to education, discipline, and citizenship. Towards the end of the century, a shift becomes visible. Training becomes more individual and technical, partly through the mechanical exercise machines developed by the Swedish physician Gustav Zander (1835–1920). He approached the body as a system of muscles and joints that could be precisely controlled and corrected. His machines, powered by weights, springs, or motors, were used worldwide in hospitals, sanatoria, spas, and gymnasiums. Zander machines mark the transition from a shared body culture to a designed and controlled fitness practice, and were early predecessors of modern gym equipment.

4.1 **Fa. Keunen, Amsterdam**
Exercise device for strengthening the arm muscles
1875–1900

4.2 + 4.3 **Gustav Zander**
Zander machines, including devices for mobilising the ankle joint and strengthening the lower-leg muscles
1875–1900

Museum de Dorpsdokter, Hilvarenbeek

ROUTINES AND ROLE MODELS

An important part was played by moving images in presenting and disseminating ideas about training and the ideal body. As early as 1894, Eugen Sandow (1867–1925), the world-famous bodybuilder, had his body filmed. These short recordings presented muscle movement as a spectacle. There was no instruction, but there was a visual ideal. Thanks to video and television, fitness became accessible to anyone with a screen. Workout videos in the 80s, such as those by Jane Fonda (1937), brought fitness into the living room.

Today, fitness imagery circulates continuously via social media. Fitness influencers such as Kayla Itsines (1991) and Mo Bicep (1990) combine example, motivation, and marketing. Others, like Jeff Nippard (1990), approach training as a measurable system. Figures such as Andrew Tate (1986) use physical strength to convey ideas about success and masculinity, often in terms of dominance and hierarchy. Together, these images shape how people think about training, appearance, and the so-called good body.

5.1 *Sandow: The Strong Man*
1894

5.2 **Workout videos**
1980–1990

5.3 **Compilation of excerpts from social media, including: Harley Spann, Guusje van Geel, Michelle Lewin and Michael Ulloa**
2026

5.4 **Compilation of excerpts from social media, including: Jeff Nippard and Jesse James West**
2026

THE PROMISE

Long before social media, the ideal body was already actively promised and sold through mass media. Around 1900, Susanna Cocroft (1862–1940) did so in the United States through lessons, lectures, and books such as *What to Eat and When* (ca. 1904) and *Beauty a Duty: The Art of Keeping Young* (ca. 1907). In the rapidly expanding American landscape of magazines and advertising, she presented exercise and nutrition as rational and respectable. Her own body functioned as visible proof and standard: those who followed her method could approach this ideal.

From the 1920s onwards, Charles Atlas (1892–1972) translated physical training into a commercial mass market. His advertisements linked bodily transformation to self-confidence, success, and social recognition. Through mail-order courses, in which instructions were sent by post, training became an individual home project. Together, Cocroft and Atlas show how the ideal body is commercialised as a promise that demands individual investment and continuous self-improvement.

5.1 **Susanna Cocroft**
Advertisements
ca. 1900

5.2 **Charles Atlas**
Advertisements
ca. 1920–1925

Design Museum Den Bosch, 's-Hertogenbosch

A SLIM BODY

Around the beginning of the twentieth century, the female body increasingly came to be seen as something that could be shaped through fixed routines and diets. Publications such as *Streamline Your Figure* and *Physical Culture* presented slimness as the result of repetition, discipline, and precise self-management. Exercises and meal plans were explained step by step and linked to measurable goals such as weight and waist circumference.

Sylvia Ulback (1881–1975), better known as Sylvia of Hollywood, was one of the first modern fitness gurus within the American film industry. Through strict regimes of exercise, massage, and diet, she kept film stars slim for the camera and translated this approach for a wider audience in *Streamline Your Figure*. In *Physical Culture*, published by Bernarr Macfadden (1868–1955), the female body is approached even more explicitly. Through photographs, measurement charts, and direct advice, the body is analysed, evaluated, and adjusted. Thus, these publications turn slimness into a visible and measurable ideal.

6.1 **Sylvia Ulback**
Streamline Your Figure
1939

6.2 + 6.3 *Physical Culture* **magazines**
1929

Design Museum Den Bosch, 's-Hertogenbosch

POWDERS, PILLS, AND INJECTIONS

At the end of the nineteenth century, countless health products circulated that promised a strong and vital body, often without medical evidence. Products such as Mandrake Pills suggested that strength, energy, and masculinity could be achieved through internal regulation. Advertisements frequently used the fame of Eugen Sandow (1867–1925), then the world's most famous bodybuilder. His muscular body functioned as visual proof of success and control.

Due to the increase in misleading claims the Pure Food and Drug act of 1906 was inacted to regulate the sale of food and health products. The promise of the ideal body remained, but became increasingly subject to regulation worldwide. The idea that the body can be shaped from within is recognisable today in protein shakes, slimming pills, and the use of medication such as Ozempic, all promising rapid, measurable results and continuing a long tradition of body improvement.

7.1 **Dr. Schenck's Mandrake Pills Advertisement**
ca. 1880–1900

7.2 **Collection of supplements and medicin**
1950–2026

Museum de Dorpsdokter, Hilvarenbeek
Design Museum Den Bosch, 's-Hertogenbosch

Portret van Madame de Pompadour, François Boucher, 1759.


LESS

LEGS

What was visible of the legs changed over time, and with it how the body was seen. Women's legs remained largely covered until well into the twentieth century. From the 1830s onwards, skirts grew steadily wider, reaching an unprecedented scale by the mid-nineteenth century. That volume was actively constructed with petticoats, crinolines, and other supporting systems.

Layers of fabric and internal structures made the legs subordinate to form and volume. Precisely because the female leg was scarcely visible; its concealment gave it significance and meaning. By contrast, the male leg remained visible and recognisable, and in art and dress it was connected to classical ideals of proportion and self-control.

The objects here show how the leg in the nineteenth century was concealed or revealed in different ways, and together fashion and industry determined what could be seen, and what had to remain hidden.

CRINOLINES FOR EVERYONE

This newspaper article offers a behind-the-scenes view of crinoline production. It focuses on Douglas & Sherwood, one of the largest skirt manufacturers of the nineteenth century. In their factory, hundreds of women assembled large numbers of hoop skirts every day. The illustrations show how crinolines were produced at an industrial scale.

Around 1859, the fashionable silhouette was shaped not only by taste or elite fashion, but also by what was technically and industrially possible. A rapidly growing industry made it possible to produce crinolines separately from the dress, to standardise them, and to distribute them in large quantities. This made them affordable for a broad public, not only for the upper classes. The wide silhouette that is often seen as exceptional was, in reality, widespread and everyday. The crinoline was not an exclusive design, but a form shaped by manufacture and scale, one that fundamentally changed the street scene of the nineteenth century.

8.1 *Harper's Weekly* **(New York) (publisher)**
Douglas & Sherwood Skirt Manufacturers
1859

Dirk-Jan List, The Hague

INCONVENIENCES

Crinolines often conjure up a familiar image. They are seen as awkward, exaggerated, and restrictive. In the nineteenth century, countless satirical prints appeared in which women in crinolines get stuck in doorways, knock over furniture, or collide with one another's skirts. These prints exaggerate reality and often depict non-existent situations. At the same time, these prints show to what extent the silhouette shaped movement, posture, and everyday social interaction.

That satirical gaze obscures the fact that the crinoline was not a single, fixed garment. Many models and constructions existed, and they were continually adjusted to make wearing them safer and more practical. Manufacturers actively sought ways to preserve the silhouette while improving ease and safety. A well-known example is the Zepherina, a safety crinoline developed by W. S. Thomson, in which the lowest hoops are interrupted at the front to make walking easier.

10.1 **Gangel Lithographes, Metz (publisher)**
Encore une Crinoline
ca. 1860

10.2 **W. S. & E. H. Thomson**
Thomson Zepherina, safety crinoline
1868

Dirk-Jan List, The Hague

HORSES AND BIRDS

To create a fashionable skirt silhouette, various solutions coexisted in the nineteenth century. Horsehair was used in petticoats because it was stiff and springy. It kept the skirt away from the legs and added volume without metal structures. This material was heavy and warm, but effective in visibly enlarging the silhouette.

At the same time, other materials were used to achieve a similar effect. A white cotton crinoline petticoat from around 1865 shows how layers of fabric and stitching broadened the lower body. Quilted petticoats, such as the red down skirt by Booth & Fox from around 1873, used padding of cotton, wool, or sometimes poultry down to add volume.

These variants existed alongside the steel crinoline. Demonstrating that the same silhouette could be achieved through different constructions. In every case, the legs remained subordinate: they disappeared beneath layers, stuffing, or structure.

11.1 Crinoline petticoat, or petticoat made of horsehair fabric
ca. 1855

11.2 White cotton crinoline, French
ca. 1865

11.3 Booth & Fox's
Down Skirt
ca. 1870

Dirk-Jan List, The Hague

PRIZE WINNERS AND FAVOURITES

Countless models and variants of the crinoline existed, adapted to fashion, use, and occasion. Within that wide range, the Thomson firm played a major role. The company was run by the brothers W. S. Thomson (1826–1887) and C. H. Thomson (ca. 1828–1883), who produced crinolines on a large scale from factories in the United States, England, France, and Germany.

Thomson's reputation was based on technical innovation. At international exhibitions, they presented lighter and more flexible constructions than many existing models. These innovations won prizes, reflected in names such as Thomson's Paris Prize. Thomson's Favourite of the Empress likewise referred to status. Empress Eugénie was considered an influential style icon, and the association with her court underscored that these crinolines were seen as both technologically advanced and fashionable.

Where French manufacturers tended to respond primarily to Parisian fashion ideals, Thomson and other American producers made technology and scale decisive in the spread of the silhouette.

12.1 **W. S. & E. H. Thomson**
White cage crinoline, ***Thomson's Favorite of the Empress*****, with shoulder straps**
ca. 1860

12.2 **W. S. & E. H. Thomson**
Thomson's Paris Prize**, no. 75**
ca. 1872–1875

12.3 **Red cage crinoline,** ***Imperial Parisian Jupon***
ca. 1863

Dirk-Jan List, The Hague

NEW INNOVATIONS

In the 1950s, the voluminous skirt silhouette returns in a new, modern form. Petticoats such as the Bell-o-the-Ball and the Hoop-La deliberately reference the nineteenth-century crinoline. As then, the aim is to create a wide, rounded silhouette in which shape matters more than the visible body.

Innovation now lies again in materials and use. Where nineteenth-century designs used steel to create volume, these petticoats used plastic and lightweight, flexible, foldable hoops. They could be compactly collapsed and were literally sold in a paper envelope, emphasising their status as a modern, practical, standardised fashion product.

Bell-o-the-Ball and Hoop-La show how historical forms are reinterpreted within a different technological and social context. The silhouette remains recognisable, but the means change. What was once heavy becomes light, temporary, and portable, without the ideal of the shaped body disappearing.

13.1 **Clayton MFG Co.**
***Belle o' the Ball* hoop**
ca. 1948

13.2 + 13.3 **Hoop skirt for woman and child**
ca. 1955

Dirk-Jan List, The Hague

WHO WEARS THE TROUSERS

In the nineteenth century, women were expected to wear skirts. Skirts covered the body and kept the female leg out of view. Thus, clothing became a means of marking and maintaining differences between men and women. The leg was barely visible, and precisely for that reason it acquired a particular, charged meaning.

This satirical print from *Le Charivari* plays with that norm. It responds to women's clubs in Paris around 1848 and mocks the demand to replace the petticoat with the *culotte*, trousers considered masculine. That proposal touched on more than fashion: since 1800, women in France were legally prohibited from wearing trousers without police permission.

The photo series relates to this. As a woman gradually undresses, her underpants remain visible. The leg is only partially revealed. This controlled visibility shows how the female leg was viewed within a patriarchal culture in which covering, curiosity, and desire were tightly intertwined.

14.1 **Club Féminin**
Le Charivari
ca. 1848–1852

14.2 **Four postcards depicting striptease**
ca. 1905

Dirk-Jan List, The Hague

LIKE MOTHER, LIKE DAUGHTER

The availability of crinolines and corsets for girls shows how undergarments were used to align the body early on with adult ideals. In the nineteenth century, children's crinolines and corsets were not playful or optional versions, but direct derivatives of the fashions worn by adult women. By applying the same silhouette on a smaller scale, girls learned how a body was expected to present itself. Posture, range of movement, and visibility were shaped from a young age.

This practice makes clear that fashion affects not only appearance, but also teaches behaviour and bodily self-awareness. The body gains meaning through a predetermined model, long before it is fully grown.

That logic is not limited to the nineteenth century. Today, adults still project their ideas about identity, success, and appearance onto children. Fashion plays an important role in this: it makes visible which body is considered desirable, and what behaviour is expected to match it. Preparing young bodies often begins long before they themselves have any influence over how they wish to appear.

15.1 Novelty Skirt Works, Cage crinoline
ca. 1865

15.2 J. C. Kelley Steel & Skirt Co.
Children's crinoline, *Gotham Skirt*
ca. 1865

15.3 Children's crinoline, *Gotham Skirt*
ca. 1865

15.4 Stereographs of children wearing crinolines and bustles
ca. 1865–1885

15.5 English children's corset
ca. 1885

15.6 Fabricage Le Furet, French children's corset with posture brace
ca. 1900

Dirk-Jan List, The Hague

CLASSICAL HEROES

In the nineteenth century, the classical body functioned as a widely shared reference framework for what the male body could, or should, look like. Sculpture and painting disseminated images of athletic, perfectly proportioned bodies rooted in classical antiquity. Since the Renaissance, these were read as timeless and universal, which gave them great cultural authority. But this ideal was not neutral: it almost always concerned white, male bodies, selected within a European perspective and aligned with ideas about civilisation, rationality, and hierarchy.

Working from the classics formed the core of art education in Europe for centuries. The Belvedere Torso, probably a mythological hero, served as a benchmark for anatomy and proportion. This nineteenth-century plaster cast was used at the Rijksakademie of Fine Arts. Through painting, prints, and education, art functioned as an early medium of dissemination, repeatedly reaffirming the classical male body as the norm for masculinity and health.

16.1 **Copy after Apollonios**
Belvedere Torso
1800–1900

National Collection, on loan from the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands / Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten

16.2 **Anonymous**
Abel
1800–1900

City Hall Collection, Municipality of 's-Hertogenbosch, 's-Hertogenbosch

THE HEALTHY BODY

The physician and reformer Gustav Jäger (1832–1917) opposed clothing that literally deformed the body, such as corsets or rigid constructions. His reform dress, made of wool, was meant to follow the body rather than mould it: natural, healthy, and in harmony with the body itself.

Jäger's ideas emerged at a time when industrialisation, urban life, and ready-to-wear clothing raised concerns about physical weakening. Health was seen as something that could be actively maintained and directed, even through clothing. In his catalogues, Jäger presents his underwear on classical sculptures with muscular, perfectly proportioned bodies. In this way he links his garments to an existing ideal without physically modeling the body. The classical image serves as a reference point for what a healthy and properly formed body was supposed to look like.

17.1 **Gustav Jäger**
Illustrated Catalogue and Price List
Dr. Jaeger's Sanitary Woollen System Co.
1895–1896

17.2 **K.T.W., Syst. Prof. Dr. G. Jaeger**
Woollen undershirt and underpants for men
ca. 1900

Dirk-Jan List, The Hague

WELL-SHAPED LEGS

With the rise of ready-to-wear clothing in the nineteenth century, a need emerged for fixed proportions, and legs played a key role. They determined height, posture, and silhouette, and thus how masculinity was read: upright, stable, and controlled.

Designers and scientists turned to what they considered reliable references. Classical sculptures provided such models, with tightly proportioned, muscular legs that had long stood for strength and self-control. At the same time, Adolphe Quetelet (1796–1874) developed the idea of *l'homme moyen*, the average man, based on measurements of white, European male bodies. This way of measuring and averaging bodies led to the Quetelet Index, later known as the Body Mass Index (BMI), and at the same time laid the groundwork for later eugenic thinking. This average became normative: what deviated was seen as incorrect or incomplete.

Within this framework, the standardised male body appears strikingly homogeneous. Legs considered too thin or too crooked did not fit dominant ideals of masculinity and were seen as correctable. Artificial leg forms offered solutions to bring the body into line with the norm.

18.1 **Paul Gavarni**
Bonneterie
ca. 1829

18.2 **Anonymous**
Pendant
ca. 1840

18.3 **The Alison Company**
Leg Forms for Men
1904

Dirk-Jan List, The Hague

WAIST AND BELLY

WAIST AND BELLY

The waist and the belly play a key role in the history of shaping the body. Here, ideas about beauty, health, morality, and self-control converge. Across the centuries, these areas have been shaped, supported, flattened, or emphasised, by women and by men. What counted as a good or attractive body was never fixed, but changed with fashion, medical thinking, and cultural norms.

Undergarments, medical aids, fashion imagery, and art played an active role in this. They determined not only how bodies looked, but also how they were seen and judged.

In this part of the exhibition, you can see how the waist and belly were literally brought into shape: laced in, supported, flattened, or concealed. Corsets, bellybands, prints, and sculptures make visible what was allowed to stand out, and what had to remain obscured.

TIGHT, TIGHTER, TIGHTEST?

In popular films, the corset invariably appears as an instrument of torture: laced as tightly as possible, with fainting women as the dramatic climax. These images, often based on tight-lacing, have profoundly shaped how we view the corset. They suggest that extreme lacing was the norm and that women's bodies were structurally damaged by fashion.

This historical portrayal is one-sided. Tight-lacing was practised by only a small group of women. The corset itself was worn by almost everyone, in many different forms and with functions such as support and posture. Nineteenth century medical school charts mainly warned against excessive lacing, not against the corset as such. Film, popular culture, and medical imagery reinforced one another in the twentieth century and reduced the corset to a symbol of oppression. Thus, the corset shows that dominant body images arise not only from historical practice, but also from how that history is repeatedly retold.

19.1 **Film clips from, among others,** *Bridgerton* **(2020),** *Fanny by Gaslight* **(1944),** *Cinderella* **(2015),** *Tap Roots* **(1948),** *Picnic at Hanging Rock* **(2018),** *Gone with the Wind* **(1939),** *The Tall Men* **(1955),** *In the Time It Takes to Get There* **(2019),** *North and South* **(1985),** *Mr. Malcolm's List* **(2019),** *Sisi* **(2009),** *Meet Me in St. Louis* **(1944),** *Sisi* **(2021),** *Titanic* **(1997),** *The Corset* **(2022),** *Pirates of the Caribbean* **(2003),** *Lady Macbeth* **(2016),** *Stiff Upper Lips* **(1997),** *House of Wax* **(1953),** *The Empress* **(2022),** *Queen Charlotte* **(2023), and** *French Cancan* **(1954)**

Design Museum Den Bosch, 's-Hertogenbosch

19.2 **J. F. Schreiber Verlag**
School chart illustrating the effects of tight-lacing
ca. 1900

19.3 **Stereographs of the lacing of a corset**
1860–1900

19.4 **Spot print depicting the tightening of a corset**
ca. 1810

Dirk-Jan List, The Hague

HEALTH IN SHAPE

In the nineteenth century, the waist became a place where medical knowledge and ideals of beauty intersected. Doctors and orthopaedists presented corsets and bellybands not only as corrective aids, but also as means of shaping the body into a desired silhouette. Medical corsets ensured an upright posture, support for the abdomen, and a controlled bodily form. In orthopaedic print series they are even depicted as fashionable objects, in which health and aesthetics converge. Modern versions of the corset give the wearer more freedom in how a corset looks, but they remain decisive in the shape the body is brought into.

Morality, too, was medically underpinned and shaped to fit an ideal. In *Traité des bandages et appareils*, J. B. J. Thillaye (1752–1822) describes a men's corset intended to prevent undesirable sexual behaviour. Bellybands for men linked a flat stomach to vitality, self-control, and health. The medical gaze did not merely correct the body, it actively helped shape the ideal body.

20.1 **J. B. J. Thillaye**
Traité des bandages et appareils
1815

Design Museum Den Bosch, 's-Hertogenbosch

20.2 **Léon & Jules Rainal Frères**
Orthopédie, **prints of medical corsets**
1901

20.3 **Medical corset**
ca. 1900

20.4 **Postcard depicting a man wearing a medical corset**
ca. 1900

20.5 **Men's corset,** *De Luxe Health Belt*
ca. 1910

20.6 *NuLife Health Belt*
1941

Dirk-Jan List, The Hague

THE BELLY OUT OF VIEW

The belly, too, has been debated across the centuries. When may it be visible, and when must it be hidden? At the end of the eighteenth century, the pad, a loose, stuffed belly, offered women a way to manipulate their silhouette. The abdomen could be enlarged or concealed, blurring what was fashion and what was reality.

In the nineteenth century, attention to the belly takes a very different form. Pregnant women wore looser corsets or lace-up bodices that allowed for adjustment. Only from the middle of the century did specialised maternity corsets appear. They offered support and space, but above all they were meant to conceal pregnancy for as long as possible.

Later, the typical *droit-devant* corset created a long, straight silhouette in which curves were smoothed away. The silhouette gained popularity through famous actresses such as Lily Elsie (1886–1962), then the most photographed woman of her time, whose upright posture and flattened abdomen were widely circulated via theatre, postcards, and photography. In *Les Modes* (1911), the belly of a model can be seen to have been retouched, fully in line with the fashion ideal of the moment. It is an early example of image manipulation, a practice that today can even take place in real time through filters. Together, these objects show how the belly is repeatedly adjusted, concealed, or erased to meet social and aesthetic norms.

21.1 **Maternity corset**
1890–1900
Amsterdam Museum, Amsterdam

21.2 ***Les Modes***
1911

21.3 **Isaac Cruikshank**
Cestina Warehouse or Belly Piece Shop
1793

Dirk-Jan List, The Hague

THE WAIST IN SHAPE

This sequence shows how the female body is repeatedly rearranged. The corset is not only about the waist: it directs the entire silhouette. By narrowing the waist, hips appear wider, breasts fuller or flatter, and the belly can be emphasised or pushed back. The focus shifts again and again.

From the eighteenth-century stays to richly decorated nineteenth-century corsets, not only the shape changes, but also the emphasis. What remains is a newly streamlined body each time. Cut, boning, and fastenings determine posture and presence. At the same time, corsets become more beautifully finished. They do not only correct the body, they also make the ideal visible and seductive.

That logic does not disappear. The SKIMS waist trainer, developed by Kim Kardashian (1980), works according to the same principle. With modern materials, the body is brought back into shape. The technology changes, the ideal shifts, but directing the silhouette remains.

THE WAIST IN SHAPE

22.1 Koch & Co.
Catalogue with two pages of corsets
1890–1891

22.2 Stays, linen and whalebone, American
ca. 1775

22.3 Cotton corset, American
ca. 1810

22.4 Cotton corset, English, with wide busk
ca. 1840

22.5 Brown corset, woven in one piece
ca. 1865

22.6 Cooley's Cork Corset
Brown checked corset with purple embroidery
ca. 1885

22.7 Black corset with spoon busk and blue flossing
ca. 1890

22.8 Maison M. Delhez
Floral corset
ca. 1898

22.9 Light blue and pink corset
ca. 1900

22.10 Baleine Polaire
Straight-front corset (droit-devant)
ca. 1905

22.11 W.C.C.
Royal Worcester Adjusto
ca. 1910

22.12 Marie-Rose Lebigot
Pink guipure
ca. 1948

Dirk-Jan List, The Hague

22.13 SKIMS
Waist trainer
2019

Design Museum Den Bosch, 's-Hertogenbosch

VENUS AS AN EXAMPLE

The Venus de Milo, discovered in 1820, quickly acquired the status of a universal ideal of beauty. Her body was presented as timeless, natural, and perfectly balanced. This image was highly influential. Venus became a yardstick for female beauty, not as one possibility, but as a norm.

Venus also appears in paintings as the embodiment of love and beauty. In *Venus and Vulcan* after Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo, her body is rendered as sensual and harmonious, again as an ideal. In both cases, it is a white female body presented as self-evident.

At the same time, this display shows what is missing. Bodies that did not conform to the ideal of Venus in shape, colour or origin were viewed very differently during the same period. The ideal torso thus proves not to be a neutral measure, but a culturally constructed and norm-setting image.

23.1 **After Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo**
Venus and Vulcan
1700–1800

City Hall Collection, Municipality of 's-Hertogenbosch, 's-Hertogenbosch

23.2 **Copy after Alexandros of Antioch**
Fragment: *Venus de Milo*
1800–1900

National Collection, on loan from the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands / Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten

THE MAN UNDER THE SUIT

Satirical prints from the early nineteenth century show that men, too, actively shaped their bodies. The mockery lies in exaggeration: cinched waists and bodies built up with fabric, padding, and stiffening. In a bourgeois culture in which the male body stood for self-control and rationality, such visible body correction quickly became suspect. Where lacing-in was considered normal for women, the same practice in men was ridiculed. The dandy made visible that masculinity was not a fixed given, but something made and maintained.

At the same time, body correction for men persisted—though less visibly. Bellybands and body belts promised at the end of the nineteenth century a tighter waist and better posture. Hidden under the suit, they were presented as practical and healthy: not fashion, but sensible care for the body.

24.1 **Isaac Robert Cruikshank**
Dandies Dressing
1818

24.2 **Unknown**
Lacing a Dandy
1819

24.3 **George Cruikshank**
The Dandies' Coat of Arms
1819

24.4 **Harness**
Electropathic Belt
1892

Dirk-Jan List, The Hague

Lillie Langtry (1853–1929)

HIPS AND BUT-TOCKS

HIPS AND BUTTOCKS

With hips, buttocks, and the crotch, differences are made visible: between male and female, between status and subordination, between what is considered desirable or deviant. Paniers, bustles, hoops, pads, and later shapewear give the body width and volume, or pull it tightly into shape.

In the eighteenth century, the panier widens the body sideways and signals social rank. In the nineteenth century, volume shifts to the back: the bustle shapes the buttocks and demonstrates how technology and industry increasingly influence the silhouette. In the twentieth century, the male crotch is also explicitly shaped, while other forms of undergarments create space to escape fixed gender assumptions.

The objects shown here reveal how these zones are repeatedly used to make power, gender, and identity visible, and how their meanings continually change.

PADDED SEDUCTION

In the 1950s and 1960s, hips take centre stage in the ideal of feminine sensuality. Rounded forms suggest softness, movement, and sexual appeal. Hollywood plays a key role. Film stars such as Marilyn Monroe (1926–1962) and Jane Russell (1921–2011) embody a pronounced silhouette presented as natural, yet carefully constructed with shapewear and padding. A 1966 Frederick's of Hollywood catalogue states this explicitly: *"Where nature leaves off, add with pads!"*

In the 1980s, Frederick's sells essentially the same aids, but the tone changes. In an era of fitness culture, self-discipline, and performance, the body is expected to appear firm and trained. Where the emphasis once lay on adding and accentuating, it now shifts to smoothing and controlling, emphasising control rather than augmentation. What changes is not so much the product, but the language used to sell it.

25.1 **Frederick's of Hollywood**
No. 93
1966

25.2 **Frederick's of Hollywood**
Curve Control
ca. 1980

Dirk-Jan List, The Hague

THE COURT AS MEASURE

In the second half of the eighteenth century, fashion was dictated by the court. The French court at the Palace of Versailles in particular functioned as a centre of taste and power. Clothing signalled social hierarchy. The panier was a key object: a knee-length underskirt with reinforcements at the sides that widens the skirt and allows the body to occupy space literally. The wider the silhouette, the higher the rank. The panier became popular through influential women at court, such as Madame de Pompadour (1721–1764), official mistress of King Louis XV, whose appearance set the tone for court fashion.

Paniers were also worn outside the court, by urban elites and affluent citizens. There they were narrower and more simply executed, like the example shown here. Even so, they gave the wearer a recognisable, stately width that directly indicated her social status.

26 **Panier hoop**
1750–1790

Amsterdam Museum, Amsterdam

THE APPROPRIATED REAR

Even before 1800, enlarged buttocks for women were a fashion phenomenon. In the print *The Bum Shop*, women purchase bustles and padding to enlarge their bum. The tone is playful and satirical, but the message is clear: femininity can be made and improved through such enhancements.

When Saartjie Baartman (ca. 1789–1815) appears in Europe from 1810 onwards, this fascination takes on a different charge. European entrepreneurs and showmen exhibit Baartman, a Khoikhoi woman from southern Africa, against her will in London and Paris. They turn her body into a spectacle for a paying public. Cartoonists, too, measure, mock and present her body as aberrant.

Against this background, the fashion silhouette shifts. In the decades that follow, the bustle appears, deliberately relocating volume to the back and constructing it technically. Contemporary sources make this connection explicit. In the Northern Whig of Thursday, 8 December 1859, it is written:

> *"The modern bustle dates from the time of the Hottentot Venus, who was exhibited at the Egyptian Hall. She possessed perhaps the most remarkable natural development of this kind ever seen; and English ladies, who had long groaned under the tyranny of flat, pancake-like skirts, envied the breadth and fullness of her figure, from the sultry coast of Kafferland*."*
>
> *** 'Kafferland' is a colonial term that is now recognised as racist and offensive.**

Thus, the bustle translates a form that was first ridiculed into a stylized, detachable, and socially accepted silhouette. What provoked dehumanization in Baartman's case is transformed into elegance in fashion, a sharp and harrowing example of how admiration and appropriation go hand in hand.

THE APPROPRIATED REAR

27.1 **R. Rushworth**
The Bum Shop
1785

Dirk-Jan List, The Hague

27.2 **Louis François Charon**
Les Curieux en extase, ou les cordons de souliers
Reproduction © The Trustees of the British Museum
1815

27.3 **William Heath**
Love at First Sight, or a Pair of Hottentots, with an Addition to the Broad Bottom Family!!
Reproduction © The Trustees of the British Museum
1810

Design Museum Den Bosch, 's-Hertogenbosch

VARIATION AND INNOVATION

From the 1870s onwards, the bustle appears on the market in many variations. Manufacturers develop a wide range of solutions to create volume at the back of the body: from soft pads filled with down to technical constructions of horsehair, steel, and spirals. With ties, the silhouette could be adjusted to fashion, body, and occasion. This diversity points to a growing industry responding to different desires, budgets, and ideas about comfort. When the bustle itself falls out of fashion around 1890, its shaping function is taken over by various cushion forms.

Popular figures and broader social developments play an important role in the success of these models. The foldable Langtry bustle, named after actress Lillie Langtry (1853–1929), promised elegance without discomfort: the frame folded inward when sitting and sprang back into shape when standing. Around 1900, *The Scott* is promoted for its ventilation and hygiene, with perforated padding intended to keep the body cool and clean.

VARIATION AND INNOVATION

28.1 **Bustle made of metal wire, in three spirals**
ca. 1887

28.2 **Bustle made of horsehair**
ca. 1873

28.3 **Bustle with five spiral springs**
ca. 1888

28.4 **Langtry bustle**
ca. 1887

28.5 **Bustle made of Featherbone band**
ca. 1902

28.6 *The Scott Hip Form and Bustle*
ca. 1905

28.7 **Alaska Hip bustle, No. 3**
ca. 1898

28.8 **Small cotton bustle pad**
ca. 1840

28.9 **Red cotton bustle, filled with down**
ca. 1873

28.10 *Taylor's Full Dress* **bustle**
ca. 1888

28.11 *Fancy Goods Graphic*
Catalogue with bustles and corsets
1888

Dirk-Jan List, The Hague

HIPS, POWER, AND ACCESSIBILITY

Body ideals become desirable when they are made visible by people with status. In 1947 Christian Dior (1905–1957) introduces the New Look silhouette, supported by under-structures that once again present wide hips as ideal. Today, that role is fulfilled by celebrity culture.

Kim Kardashian (b. 1980) has had a major influence on how wide hips and full buttocks are perceived and pursued. Through media, her body functions as a reference point. The silhouette she popularises is not new. Comparable forms were historically often racialized and viewed as undesirable or excessive, especially when associated with black women as well as other women of colour.

Kardashian's popularity coincides with the rise of the Brazilian Butt Lift (BBL), a cosmetic procedure in which the buttocks and hips are enlarged using the body's own fat. At the same time, Kardashian markets her silhouette through SKIMS, shapewear that promises a similar effect. A clear divide emerges: those with money can permanently alter their bodies; those without emulate it through textiles and padding.

29.1 **SKIMS**
Butt- and hip-enhancing mid-thigh bodysuit
2025

Design Museum Den Bosch, 's-Hertogenbosch

29.2 **Featherbone**
Hip Flare
ca. 1925

29.3 ***Hoops! My dear***
ca. 1950

Dirk-Jan List, The Hague

READING AND RE-READING

With the introduction of the Jockey Y-front in the 1930s, the men's underpants with the characteristic Y-shaped seams across the crotch, the male crotch takes on a central role in how masculinity is shaped and read. The Y-shaped lines draw the gaze forward and make the crotch a recognisable focal point. This model becomes widespread in the 1950s and 1960s and forms the basis for much modern men's underwear, in which the crotch is outlined, supported, or emphasised.

Within gay male cultures, this focus is further intensified. Masculinity is consciously staged through clothing and underwear. Garments such as those by Jockmail emphasise volume and visibility and play explicitly with sexual attraction. The crotch is not only supported but accentuated and desired.

In contrast stands the tucking slip by Untag. A tucking slip is a garment designed to reduce the visibility of the contours of the penis and to create a flatter appearance at the crotch. This object demonstrates how strongly bodies are culturally read and categorised. By reshaping the body, tucking offers a way to escape fixed interpretations of gender and claim the right to self-definition.

30.1 **Jockey**
Y-Fronts
ca. 1960

Design Museum Den Bosch, 's-Hertogenbosch

30.2 **Jockmail**
Men's briefs with padding
2025

Dirk-Jan List, The Hague

30.3 **Untag**
Tucking brief
2026

Design Museum Den Bosch, 's-Hertogenbosch

READY-TO-WEAR AND CRAFT

By the end of the nineteenth century, the bustle becomes a product of both fashion and industry, depending on where it is made. In the United States, the ready-to-wear industry grows rapidly. With industrial production and a rising middle class, the emphasis lies on technology, efficiency, and comfort. The American bustles shown here are lightweight, adjustable, and functionally designed, suitable for mass production and everyday wear.

In France, fashion remains more closely tied to luxury and craftsmanship. There, bustles are more often produced in ateliers, in smaller numbers, with emphasis on materials, finish, and decoration. Even invisible undergarments contribute to status and elegance. At a company like Thomson, with factories on both sides of the Channel, this combination is clearly evident.

This contrast marks an important shift. The American approach to fashion, focused on mass production and consumption, lays the foundation for a system that is globally dominant today, while the French tradition continues to associate fashion with refinement and exclusivity, something we now see primarily in haute couture.

31.1 **W. S. & E. H. Thomson**
Thomson Crinolette, Pagoda model, incl. cover
ca. 1872

31.2 **Diamand, WS & D Co.**
Crinoline with integrated bustle
ca. 1885

31.3 **Bustle skirt, American**
ca. 1885

31.4 **J. Schoenhof**
Bustle skirt
ca. 1884

31.5 **Bustle skirt, French**
ca. 1885

Dirk-Jan List, The Hague

Radclyffe Hall, ca. 1930

CHEST AND SHOULDERS

CHEST AND SHOULDERS

Chest and shoulders are sites where power is expressed and read. They determine how bodies appear in public space and who is taken seriously. By broadening the upper body, clothing and underwear shape how presence, attractiveness, and authority are represented. These interventions align with dominant ideas about gender, sexuality, strength, and power.

The objects in this section show how women use shoulders to claim social position and professionalism, how breasts are shaped into objects of desire, and how masculinity is linked to a powerful chest and muscularity. At the same time, the objects reveal that these ideals do not work for everyone. Design can affirm, but also correct, conceal, or protect. Thus, chest and shoulders demonstrate how bodies are deployed within social power relations, and who is given space within them, or not.

TAKING UP SPACE

In the nineteenth century, sleeves constantly changed in shape and volume, supported by a wide range of devices. Sometimes subtle, sometimes extreme, they always determined how much space a female body occupied. Towards the end of the century, shoulders became distinctly broader, precisely at the moment when the first women's movements and early feminism emerged. Women became more visible in education, labour, and public life. Their clothing increasingly adopted elements from menswear, such as shirts, jackets, and sometimes even ties. This was not a rejection of femininity, but a way of expressing their new social position.

In the 1980s, this dynamic returned under the label of power dressing. Women enter the workforce in large numbers and operate within existing power structures, and once again a pronounced shoulder line emerges. Figures such as Margaret Thatcher (1925–2013) made the silhouette iconic, but its impact lay precisely in its widespread adoption. The shoulder functioned as a means of taking up space. First in fashion, and ultimately in social terms as well.

32.1 Warren's Featherbone
Catalogue
ca. 1902

32.2 Warren's Featherbone
Sleevette, folder with samples for sleeve supports
ca. 1902

32.3 Bra with shoulder pads
ca. 1980–1990

32.4 T. P. Taylor
Patented foldable sleeve supports
ca. 1896

32.5 Women's blouse with puffed sleeves, linen and cotton
ca. 1925

Dirk-Jan List, The Hague

SEXY LADY

The idea that breasts are inherently erotic is not self-evident, but culturally determined. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, breasts were often visible in low necklines and sheer fabrics. They were not primarily read as sexual, but as aesthetic and functional. At this time, the expectation was that fertile women were often pregnant, and the breast was therefore regarded simply as a source of nourishment.

Around 1900, reform bras with open cups aligned with this view: visibility stood for health and naturalness. The meaning shifted fundamentally in the 1950s. With the rise of pin-up imagery, film, and advertising, the breast became part of a new visual culture of desire. Women such as Bettie Page (1923–2008), an American pin-up model and icon of the 1950s, made this imagery iconic. Lingerie played a key role: open-cup bras and models using transparent materials like Warner's Merry Widow isolate and emphasise the nipple. The breast was no longer simply shown, but deliberately shaped within an erotic visual language.

33.1 Warner's
Cinch-Bra Merry Widow
ca. 1955

33.2 Reform bra with tabs for fastening to underwear, open cups
ca. 1900

33.3 *Histoire naturelle de la femme*, II, Jacq. L. Moreau (de la Sarthe), Paris
Plate IV, elastic corset by Lacroix
1803

33.4 Escora
Blue bra with open cups
ca. 1955

33.5 Svelta
Pink bra with open cups
ca. 1950

Dirk-Jan List, The Hague

SIZE DOES MATTER

Around 1900, breast size emerged explicitly as a fashionable ideal. A full bust became part of the overall silhouette, visible in the so-called mono-bosom. Through padding, corsets, and false bosoms, the breast became a matter of proportion and form. In the twentieth century, it was primarily the technology that changed. Lingerie continued to increase breast volume through reinforced cups and even inflatable bras. Since the introduction of silicone breast implants in 1962, permanent enlargement has also been an option. A growing emphasis on the malleable body turned size into an adjustable choice.

At the same time, there are practices aimed at reducing or neutralising breast size. For trans and gender-diverse people, binding, in which the chest is flattened using specialised bindings or garments to bring the body more in line with the person's experienced gender identity, is often not an aesthetic preference but a physical and social necessity. Reducing breast volume can be essential for feeling safe or to suggest masculinity in everyday life. As early as the early twentieth century, Radclyffe Hall (1880–1943) bound her chest to achieve a flatter silhouette. For many people today, binding forms part of a broader struggle for bodily autonomy and the right to exist.

SIZE DOES MATTER

34.1 **Sahlin**
Perfect Form and Corset Combined
ca. 1905

34.2 **Frederick's of Hollywood**
1961

34.3 **False bosom**
1900–1910

34.4 **False bosom**
ca. 1887

34.5 **Yellow bra with reinforced cups**
ca. 1950–1960

34.6 **Spruyt van Rietschoten**
Fit-Form **bra in envelope**
ca. 1940

34.7 **D.W.**
Bra with ruffles on the exterior for added volume
ca. 1930–1940

34.8 **Bra with a set of padding inserts**
ca. 1950–1960

34.9 **J. Moyaux Suc.r.**
Silk corset with internal padding
ca. 1905

Dirk-Jan List, The Hague

34.10 **Mentor**
Gel breast implant, 440 cc
2023

34.11 **Untag**
Short binder
2026

Design Museum Den Bosch, 's-Hertogenbosch

BROAD AND POWERFUL

The chest has been a core zone in the construction of masculinity for centuries. The breast- and backplate of a suit of armour from 1578 was meant to provide protection. But it did more than that. Its shape enlarges and emphasises the chest, broadens and strengthens the upper body, and gives the wearer an imposing presence. Protection and representation converge here. The armour does not merely show strength; it symbolises it.

The modern muscle shirt continues this principle in everyday life. This type of garment is worn beneath regular clothing or for occasions where physical presence matters. Padding at the chest, shoulders, and upper arms creates a muscular silhouette aligned with contemporary ideas of masculinity. Muscle here serves as a symbol of confidence and control, even if it is fake. Where armour links strength to combat and status, the muscle shirt connects that same chest to attractiveness and the public impression someone makes.

35.1 **Breastplate and backplate of a suit of armour**
1578–1580

Amsterdam Museum, Amsterdam

35.2 **Men's fake muscle shirt with padded chest and shoulder pads**
2025

Design Museum Den Bosch, 's-Hertogenbosch

MUSCLE POWER AND DESIRE

From the late nineteenth century onwards, bodybuilding photography developed a recognisable visual language. Photographs of Eugen Sandow, a pioneer of modern bodybuilding around 1900, show tensed muscles, controlled poses, and a strong emphasis on the chest and upper body. The body is presented frontally, carefully lit, and largely stripped of context. Clothing is minimal and primarily serves to make muscle mass visible. Photography functions here as a means of idealising and standardising strength.

That same visual language took on a different meaning in magazines such as *Your Physique*, *The Male Figure*, and *Manual*. Although these magazines present themselves as sports or health magazines, they have a homoerotic undertone and circulate within gay networks. The images are constructed so that the body stands at the centre and can be endlessly viewed and compared. Within this context, the muscular male body becomes both a benchmark of masculinity and an explicit object of desire.

36.1 **Geo Steckel**
Eugen Sandow (1867–1925) (reproductions)
1894

36.2 **BJ Falk**
Eugen Sandow (reproductions)
1894

36.3 *Physical Culture Magazine*
1904

36.4 *Your Physique* **magazine**
1944

36.5 *The Male Figure*
1957

36.6 **Manual**
1966

Private collection, Oosterhout

Premier Margaret Thatcher spreekt het partijcongres van de Conservative Party toe in Brighton, 1980

Jane Russell, 1947


THE PLAY
PICTORIAL
No. 99
"THE DOLLAR PRINCESS"
Vol. XV.
Miss LILY ELSIE as the Dollar Princess

Lily Elsie

COLOPHON

In Shape
Design Museum Den Bosch

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