

Luis Estévez: Fashion, Elegance, and Exoticization

Joshua D. Simon and Kelly L. Reddy-Best, Iowa State University, USA

Associated with contemporaries like Oscar de la Renta, Bill Blass, and Rudi Gernreich, a founding member of the Council of Fashion Designers of America, and a designer for former first lady of the United States Betty Ford, Luis Estévez (circa 1929—2014), was a prolific fashion designer from the 1950s to the 1990s.¹ He created simple, sensual, dramatic designs that were widely disseminated, from clothing patterns that were free with the purchase of cereal to dress patterns where home sewers could make their own Estévez looks to custom designs for the previous first lady of the United States. He was unique from his peers in that in 1970s he was open about his sexuality of having interest in both women and men during interviews with the industry press. Much activism, particularly in the late 1960s and early 70s, contributed to fighting stigma and discrimination faced by queer people. However, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, and other systems of marginalization were still faced by LGBTQ+ communities, leading some to actively hide or not speak openly about their sexuality or gender identity. For example, Rudi Gernreich, a contemporary of Estévez, “believed it would be bad for his fashion business if it was known that he was gay” (Woo, 1999, para. 15). Despite these fears by others, Estévez talked openly about his bisexuality. Additionally, Estévez occupied multiple marginalized identities in that he also identified as Cuban American. Unlike other white designers at the height of his success, the press often centered Estévez’s Cuban heritage when describing his design work. Centering a person of color’s ethnic or racial background could certainly be a sign of highlighting and celebrating their success, but drawing upon Kaiser and Green’s (2021) critical concepts of marking/unmarking, race and ethnicity is assumed to be white when left unmarked, hence othering people of color in these processes. His career spanned five decades from the 1950s to the 1990s and he was particularly known for his eveningwear designs (Warren, 1965). In *Luis Estévez: Fashion, Elegance, and Exoticization*, a physically-mounted (opened April 8, 2022) exhibition at a university (Figures 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7), we explore Estévez’s career, a Cuban American, openly bi-sexual designer who had a prolific fashion career, yet has received minimal scholarly attention. Centering Estévez disrupts the dominant, white, heterosexual narrative in fashion history.

Luis Estévez: Background, Education, and Career

Luis Estévez de Gálvez was born circa 1929 in Havana, Cuba (Jacobs, 2015; Koski, 2014). Born into an economically well-off family in the Cuban sugar industry, he went to an elementary school in England (Berges, 1979) and then “attended Sanford Prep in Wilmington, Del.” (Koski, 2014, para. 3). Estévez continued his education by attending architectural school in Havana for a period, but later dropped out (Kern, 1976; Koski, 2014). It was then when Estévez shifted his focus to education and work in the fashion industry. He married Betty Dew Menzies (whom he met during childhood in the Bahamas) in the late 1950s (Crawford, 1959; Kern, 1976; Koski, 2014). Estévez had a “mad secret affair,” which resulted in his son, Edward, being born circa 1962 (McCarthy, 1985, p. 5). Estévez and Betty lived together in Paris in the early years of their marriage, but when Estévez returned to the United States, Betty decided to stay, with the two living apart but remaining married for many years, meeting up a few times a year (Kern, 1976). Estévez passed away in late 2014, at the age of 85 (Koski, 2014).

Estévez’s initial interest in fashion began when he was young, sketching clothing he saw people wearing during parties thrown at his home (Berges, 1979). This was dismissed by his father, who pressured him to attend school studying architecture (Berges, 1979). During summer break from school, Estévez took a job as a window merchandiser at Lord and Taylor (Kern, 1976). His supervisors took interest in him and noted his talent for fashion, leading him to drop out of architectural school and enroll at the Traphagen School of Fashion in New York (Berges, 1979). After this, he continued his studies by learning about couture in Paris, working at Jean Patou without pay for over a year (Berges, 1979; Kern, 1976).

¹ Throughout this paper, there will be inconsistent use of the acute accent over the second e in Estévez. This is intentional, as it reflects the source material; many sources documenting Estévez’s early career drop the accent. However, sources documenting his later career started to include the accent more frequently. Additionally, Estévez included the acute accent when starting his own firm, Estévez, after leaving Grenelle-Estevez.

In consideration of Estévez’s cross-national ties to both Cuba and the United States, it is important to contextualize the two nations’ relationship during his career. Due to the fear of communism present in the United States during the Cold War, the 1959 Cuban Revolution and its communist ties, as well as the subsequent Cuban Missile Crisis lead to a strained relationship between the countries (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021). This led to imports of Cuban sugar into the United States being diminished, as well as President John F. Kennedy imposing “a full economic embargo that included stringent travel restrictions” (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021, para. 3). Estévez’s position as a Cuban American and part of a prominent family in the Cuban sugar industry meant that he and his family were likely directly impacted by such events, both economically and relating to their ability to travel between the two nations.

Additionally, Estévez was open about his bi-sexuality/queerness, first found to be publicly documented within the context of research for this exhibition in a 1976 interview. The timing of this may have significance, as in spite of Estévez’s work in the fashion industry and associated celebrity status/being in the public eye as early as the 1950s, sources that discussed his queerness prior to the 1970s were not found. Breward (2013) outlined that there was a lesser degree of openness surrounding queer identities in the 1950s (in comparison to the present and more recent periods, such as the 1970s) and how this manifested in the fashion industry “through elaborately veiled allusions” (p. 132) in the autobiographies of prominent couturiers, such as Christian Dior and Pierre Balmain. Further contextualizing queerness during the mid and latter part of Estévez’s career (1960s—1980s) is the work of Gloria Anzaldúa. Anzaldúa’s work helps contextualize Estévez’s career (1960s—1980s) and bi-sexuality through the notion of borders. Her conception of borders encompassed both physical land borders, as well as borders related to traditional binary social systems, like gender and sexuality. Within her writing, “Anzaldúa took the Spanish word *mestizaje*, originally meaning a mixture of races, and applied it in a broader way. In her writing, *mestizaje* means to live without binaries, to stop thinking of the world as being neatly divided into two halves” (Bronski, 2019, p. 187). Such work provides context regarding developments related to queer and other identities and their intermixing in relation to part of period in which Estévez was working (Bronski, 2019).

Institutional Budget, Resources, and Target Audience

The museum in which we mounted *Luis Estévez: Fashion, Elegance, and Exoticization* is part of a university fashion department. The museum’s budget supports personnel including part of one full-time faculty salary, three endowed graduate student assistantships, and undergraduate student assistant salaries. The faculty salary draws from the department’s overall operational budget, which has about 40 total faculty. The graduate assistantship salaries draw from the earnings of an endowment restricted specifically for these positions. The undergraduate student assistant salary is from a one-time donor donation to the museum to support undergraduate student excellence in the museum. See Table 1 for the personnel budget and Table 2 for the exhibition materials budget. The museum has neither a recurring revenue stream nor funds allocated from the department’s general fund nor tuition revenue budget for museum operations or exhibitions.

Table 1

Personnel Budget

Budget item	Amount
Endowed graduate assistantship annual salary (portion dedicated to museum time)	\$25,701 (\$17,134 annual salary x 50% of their time x three students)
Undergraduate student assistant total allotted salary	\$5,000
Associate professor salary (portion dedicated to museum time)	\$19,800 (\$99,000 annual salary x 20% of their time)
Total	= \$50,501

Table 2

Exhibition Budget

Item	Cost
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Printing didactics	\$150
Accessions	\$1,500
Total	\$1,650

The museum has various facilities, including a 375-square-foot conservation laboratory complete with modular worktables, a washer and dryer, a sink, and a fume hood. There is also an environmentally-controlled 700-square-foot storage space with rolling compact storage units and another 600-square-foot storage space with mostly flat storage drawers. The museum has three galleries including the Mary Alice Gallery, the Donna Gallery, and the LeBaron Gallery. The Mary Alice Gallery is a 500-square-foot space centrally located on campus. In the gallery, track lights on the ceiling provide all necessary lighting for the space. The Donna Gallery is located inside the Conservation Laboratory in 0017 Morrill Hall. Visitors can visit the Donna Gallery from the lower-level Morrill Hall 003 hallway. The gallery objects are mounted inside the conservation laboratory and are visible through four large windows. The gallery features a modular text railing in the hallway consisting of weighted bases and posts and easily changeable graphics panels. The LeBaron Gallery is located in the hallway outside the 1009 LeBaron Hall Conference Room. It includes two moveable cases made of plexi-glass with wood bases. It also features a modular text railing consisting of weighted bases and posts and easily changeable graphics panels.

Curatorial Selection, Research Methods, and Theoretical Considerations

The historic method was the primary research methodology employed in curating the exhibition. Within this, archival research and material culture analysis were used (Prown, 1982). Archival research drew information from a variety of industry and popular press sources, including *Women's Wear Daily*, *Vogue*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *New York Times*, and several small upstate New York popular press publications. We followed a modified version of Prown (1982). Material culture analysis was employed via a critical examination of the objects selected for inclusion in the exhibition (Figures 2 and 3). For example, the blue and white sundress (Figures 2b and 2c) included in the exhibition was examined and found to have buttons and thread loops included in the interior of the skirt, allowing a wearer to convert the skirt to two different hemlines and styles (Figures 9a and 9b). Material culture analysis contributed to exhibition object grouping and theming, with the sundress example being used to illustrate Estévez's "American" or democratic approach to creating unique styles, such as a dress' skirt being convertible.

The objects utilized within this exhibition were acquired from private sellers via Etsy and eBay, utilizing acquisition funding. There were multiple purposes to acquiring and accessioning these objects into the permanent collection: first, to use in the exhibition, as well as potential future exhibition purposes. Next, some objects filled gaps within the collection. For example, an accessioned sundress is convertible to two different hem lengths and styles, a standard hemline, and a bubble hemline (Figures 8a and 8b). The collection has minimal examples of bubble hemlines and none that are convertible, leading the sundress to strengthen the collection in relation to style variety and construction techniques. Further, the objects were accessioned to increase the diversity of individuals represented in the collection, in consideration of the Textile and Clothing Museum's (TCM) mission, which has a social justice focus. This also allowed us to deaccession similar objects in the collection pertaining to dominant groups. Additionally, objects were accessioned with student engagement in mind. Specific courses were suggested that could possibly use the objects to accomplish their purposes, providing students with better understandings of construction techniques, the social science aspect of the dressed body, and examples of design from Estévez.

For the exhibition, we drew upon intersectionality, drawn from Black feminist thought. Intersectionality aims to challenge how "dominant conceptions of discrimination condition us to think about subordination as disadvantage occurring along a single categorical axis" (Crenshaw, 1989, p.140). We supplemented this approach through incorporating tenets of critical race theory. That is, critical race theory suggests that racism is ordinary and manifests in both overt ways and small, covert instances in everyday life (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Evaluating these covert occurrences, particularly as seen in industry and popular press, were central to this exhibition. For our work, we considered Estévez's multiple and intersecting marginalized identities that he occupies and critically centered his position as a person of color.

This exhibition focuses on several themes (Figure 7); pertaining to Estévez's design work, *simple*, *uncluttered design* focused on his use of clean lines and a minimalist aesthetic. *Sensual, dramatic design*

emphasized his employment of body-revealing design features, like plunging necklines and open backs, as well as over-the-top, eye-catching visual elements that created theatrical ensembles. *Expansion of “American” fashion* investigated how Estévez was involved at various levels and price points of the fashion industry to create unique or democratic looks, similarly to other designers who took an “American” approach to fashion, with Estévez extending this idea to include bi-sexual Cuban Americans. Finally, *exoticization of Estévez* put forth that the fashion and popular presses employed his race at particular times in exoticizing ways.

Simple, Uncluttered Design

Simplicity, clean lines, and uncluttered design were hallmarks of Luis Estévez’s work. A 1956 *New York Times* article stated he “keeps his lines clear and uncluttered” and that his “clothes are simple yet sophisticated.” Estévez stated in a 1962 article that wedding dresses: “should be as simple, uncomplicated and as unmarred by the torturing of fabric as a girl should be when she is getting married...nothing to break it up—not a belt, or bow, or buttons, or embroidery.” His wife Betty most likely influenced this aesthetic; Estévez stated “she likes her dresses to be of simple, sharp lines, uncluttered with details and in good taste for every possible occasion.” These design principles are seen in the black dress on display, which features no decoration on the front and simple pieces of fabric that drape off of the back (Figure 2a). The red evening ensemble featured in the magazine advertisement on display also features minimal adornment and sharp lines (Figure 2m).

Sensual, Dramatic Design

Estévez was “known for his sexy but ladylike afternoon and evening clothes.” Numerous popular press articles from the 1950s to 1970s highlighted this throughout his career. He was honored “for his svelte, femme-fatale creations” and described as “known for siren dressing.” A 1970 *Women’s Wear Daily* article proclaimed, “Luis Estevez is still a master at the theatrical, dramatic presentations.” The white evening dress on display (Figure 2d), evening dress pattern (Figure 2k), and press photographs (Figures 2e, 2i, and 2j), which feature low, plunging necklines to create a sensual, over-the-top aesthetic, as well as the black and white coatdress (Figure 2f), featuring an eye-catching and daring polka dot pattern highlight this dramatic design aesthetics. As journalists emphasized his focus on dressing women’s bodies with elegant, over-the-top styles, they also discussed Estévez’s bi-sexual identity. He was first open about his bi-sexuality in a 1976 interview, which was quite controversial at the time. He described that while women have always been more important in his life than men as he both designed for them and was attracted to them, he was interested in both women and men equally.

Expansion of “American” Fashion

Price point was also central to Estévez’s work and he felt high prices did not equate to style. For example, the displayed “party apron” pattern was originally included in cereal boxes, allowing consumers to create stylish accessories for minimal amounts of money (Figure 2l). Further, in a 1976 interview, he stated, “I don’t believe in expensive clothes, and I don’t think that good taste has to be expensive.” He went on to condemn clothing priced over \$400, and said his apparel sold “from \$100 to \$400.” This point was reiterated several years later, in which the retail prices of his clothing went “up to \$400 but he prefers to aim at a market between \$150 and \$250.” Estévez explained, “I dine with the classes but I also dress the masses.” This was especially true of his work with former First Lady Betty Ford, who purchased items from his collections rather than buying high end garments from French couturiers. Betty purchased this same ready-to-wear beige and white dress that is on display (Figure 2g). Several of his contemporaries also appealed to multiple price points in what was considered by some as an “American” or democratic approach to fashion design. Of note though, is that Estévez expanded the idea of who could be an “American” fashion designer, including bi-sexual Cuban Americans, contrary to the mostly white-and heterosexual-appearing designers. This idea of a democratic approach to create unique styles is evident in two looks on display: the yellow bifurcated evening ensemble (Figure 2h) and the blue and white dress, which is convertible to two different hem lengths and styles (Figures 2b and 2c).

Exoticization of Estévez

For Estévez’s summer 1956 collection “the Latin motif” was popular. Journalists described Estévez as coming “by the Latin theme naturally” because he was “born in Cuba of Spanish parents.” This summer collection had “Spanish influence,” with some designs referred to as “the Flamenco look.” In November 1957, he showed “spring and resort wear,” with “the dresses and costumes [being] named for popular Latin American songs such as

Siboney, Amapola and Begin the Beguine.” While it is unclear if the displayed press photograph was one of these designs specifically, it was created around the same time, providing a visualization of Estévez’s aesthetic during this period (Figure 2j). In 1976, *Women’s Wear Daily* published an interview with Estévez regarding his design and business philosophies, he was quoted saying: ““What I am talking about here is my fashion, and my theory. I know that it’s not ‘in’ with the very hip crowd of people...but I don’t really give a damn.”” The journalist wrote Estévez said this with “Latin fire.” Critical race theory helps explain a critical reading of the phrase “Latin fire” so often used by journalists to describe Estévez. One argument is that racism manifests within U.S. society in both overt and covert ways. Through the addition of the phrase, Estévez’s pattern of speech was racialized; the “fire” language suggests that Latina/o/x individuals are inclined to speak in passionate or direct ways. Therefore, the “Latin fire” wording othered Estévez in that his Cuban heritage influenced his speech pattern in ways journalists did not describe of those from dominant backgrounds such as with “French passion” or “white flair.”

Conservation

When preparing the objects for exhibition, we referenced Reddy-Best and Ordoñez’s (2022) recent work on conserving 20th century fashions. We first analyzed each object for condition prior to mounting. The objects were all stable and did not require any conservation cleaning. Each object was steamed, and we first tested the steam in an inconspicuous area to ensure that the steam did not damage the object such as on the plastic closures, dyes, or other trim. All objects and associated parts were stable during steaming. We mounted each object on a mannequin and provided padded support for any areas that may be experiencing stress while on display (Figure 9).

Our gallery is at a controlled temperature between 70°F and 75°F and between 45% and 55% RH. Our museum uses LED lighting, and direct sunlight does not enter the gallery space. The lights are on between 7am and 5pm Monday through Friday. Therefore, we minimized object light exposure for the duration of exhibition. Additionally, the objects are only on display for about 6 months. Because the gallery is located inside the conservation lab, we have three window shades that are dropped down behind the garments to protect them from individuals bumping into the objects. We also place tape on the floor to indicate the individuals should not go beyond that area due to the exhibition.

Reach, Accessibility, and Retrievability

To increase the reach of the exhibition, we held both an in-person and digital curator talk (Figure 10). For the in-person curator talk, we invited individuals across the university and also those in the community. We gave a 15-minute lecture and then had an informal gathering with refreshments for the guests. Because some folks are not in Ames, IA, we also held a Zoom curator talk. In this one-hour session, we gave a 15-minute lecture about the exhibition and provided a virtual tour of the gallery space so visitors could “see” the exhibition. In case individuals could not make it to either event, we also recorded the curator talk and put it on our museum’s YouTube channel. Each exhibition in our different galleries has their own YouTube playlist. We also created numerous social media posts about the exhibition including information about the events, the objects, and the exhibition content. Due to resource restrictions, we were unable to document the number of visitors, their demographics, and their response to the exhibition.

Conclusion

Luis Estévez was a prominent individual in the fashion industry for five decades (from the 1950s to the 1990s) and was a founding member of the Council of Fashion Designers of America. His simple, sensual, dramatic aesthetic was widely disseminated, from clothing patterns that were free with the purchase of cereal to dressing the First Lady of the United States. Estévez was a contemporary of and closely associated with Oscar de la Renta, Bill Blass, and Rudi Gernreich, names commonly discussed in fashion history contexts. Estévez, however, is virtually always absent from such discussion, in spite of significant contributions to the industry. It could be suggested that the candidness about his sexuality partially influenced museums’ collecting practices. Museums incorporating social justice into their praxis is a fairly recent trend, which still faces extreme opposition (Orloff, 2017). Historically, key stakeholders from privileged groups have held power within museums and have, thus, reproduced systems of domination, such as homophobia and white supremacy. When a majority of the collecting of objects by Estévez’s heterosexual/heterosexual-presenting contemporaries was occurring, the same did not transpire for pieces by Estévez. Therefore, it could be argued that Estévez’s openness surrounding his sexuality vilified him. Museums’

vested interest in upholding queer marginalization positioned Estévez (and, therefore, objects created by him) as the “other,” in comparison to heterosexual/heterosexual-presenting contemporaries. Pieces by Estévez may have been seen as “not worthy” of collection and preservation due to othering stemming from Estévez’s queerness.

The analysis of museum collecting practices can be enhanced via Crenshaw’s intersectionality framework (1989). While it can be argued that Estévez’s openness about non-normative sexuality partially contributed to a lack of collecting, this did not occur in a vacuum. Estévez’s sexuality and status as a person of color act as a case study for larger, intersecting systems of marginalization. The fashion industry and museums reflect larger, societal forms of systemic oppression that manifest in unique ways for individuals facing multiple marginalizations. The centering of white bodies within the fashion industry is reflected through focus on the same bodies in museum collections. An intersectional critique provides insight into how racism and homophobia work in tandem to control whose histories and material culture is considered “worthy” of preservation.

Through white domination, geographic areas outside of Western contexts are not seen as desirable for fashion work. Thus, white supremacy creates difficulty for those outside of the West who seek to work in fashion: either giving up home, family, and friends to move to a fashion capital or choose to pursue an alternative career field. Moving can prove particularly difficult for people of color and immigrants, due to the importance of community within marginalized groups (Doetsch-Kidder & Bracamonte, 2011). Therefore, it could be argued that the fashion industry’s systemic white supremacy impacted Estévez’s work and his success.

Last, representation in museum collections and fashion history conversations that accurately reflect what occurred in the industry are imperative and it is vital for people of color, queer individuals, and others from marginalized backgrounds to be centered so that the field can move toward being more socially just. Narciso Rodriguez, a contemporary Cuban American designer, was interviewed by Araujo, who discussed, “why does representation like this matter? Because there are children like me who, when visiting museums, see work from creators who do not look like them. Rodriguez’s work –which has been shown in museums –inspires people like me to feel confident in their dreams” (2018, para. 18). This dialogue regarding representation can also be applied to other underrepresented individuals, such as Estévez.

Iterative Revision Process

The exhibition went through much iterative revision from both internal and external reviewers (Figure 10). The museum team engaged in weekly meetings with the purpose of reviewing and critiquing the various stages. The first step was pitching the proposal to the internal team. After this process, two outside reviewers with curatorial and fashion history expertise were invited to a proposal review meeting. We presented the exhibition proposal including the big idea, potential objects, potential exhibition space, and some of the relevant background literature.

We made much revision during the iterative revisions. We reconsidered themes, object labels, and the overall designed aesthetic. In the future, we would utilize large-scale backdrops behind the display that correspond with the exhibition. This would bring a more cohesiveness to the look.

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Figure 1a. One version of the exhibit's posters.



Figure 1b. One version of the exhibit's posters.



Figure 1. The exhibit's posters.

Figure 1c. The exhibit's poster on the door entering the Museum.



Figure 2a. Cocktail dress.



Figure 2b. Sundress with bubble hem.



Figure 2c. Sundress with standard hem.



Figure 2d. Evening gown.



Figure 2e. Press Photo.



Figure 2f. Coatdress.



Figure 2g. Day dress.



Figure 2h. Evening jumpsuit.



Figure 2i. Press Photo.



Figure 2j. Press Photo.



Figure 2k. Evening gown pattern.



Figure 2l. "Party" apron pattern.

Figure 2. All objects included in the exhibit.



Figure 2m. Advertisement.



Figure 3a. Detail photo of evening gown.



Figure 3b. Detail photo of coatdress.



Figure 3c (above). Detail photo of evening jumpsuit.
Figure 3d (right). Detail photo of day dress.



Figure 3. Detail photos of some objects featured in the exhibit.



Figure 4a. View of the exhibit.



Figure 4b. View of the exhibit.

Figure 4. Views of the exhibit.



Figure 5a. View of the exhibit.



Figure 5b. Closeup view of the exhibit.

Figure 5. Views of the exhibit.



Figure 6a. Closeup view of the exhibit.



Figure 6b. Closeup view of the exhibit.



Figure 6c. Closeup view of the exhibit.



Figure 6d. Closeup view of the exhibit.



Figure 6e. Closeup view of the exhibit.

Figure 6. Views of the exhibit.

Luis Estévez: Fashion, Elegance, and Exoticization

Simple, Uncluttered Design

Simplicity, clean lines, and uncluttered design were hallmarks of Luis Estévez's work. A 1956 *New York Times* article stated he "keeps his lines clear and uncluttered" and that his "clothes are simple yet sophisticated." Estévez stated in a 1962 article that wedding dresses "should be as simple, uncomplicated and as unreserved by the logarithm of fabric as a girl should be when she is getting married...nothing to bewick it up—not a belt, or bow, or buttons, or embroidery." His wife Betty most likely influenced this aesthetic; Estévez stated "she likes her dresses to be of simple, sharp lines, uncluttered with details and in good taste for every possible occasion." These design principles are seen in the black dress on display, which features no decoration on the front and simple piece of fabric that drapes off the back. The red evening ensemble featured in the magazine advertisement on display also features minimal adornment and sharp lines.



Sensual, Dramatic Design

Estévez was "known for his sexy but ladylike afternoon and evening clothes." Numerous popular press articles from the 1950s to 1970s highlighted this throughout his career. He was honored "for his subtle, female-tailor creations" and described as "known for slim dressing." A 1970 *Women's Wear Daily* article proclaimed, "Luis Estévez is still a master at the theatrical, dramatic presentation." The white evening dress on display, evening dress pattern, and press photographs, which feature low plunging necklines to create a sensual, over-the-top aesthetic, as well as the black and white contrast, featuring an eye-catching and daring pose (see pattern highlight in dramatic design aesthetic). As journalists emphasized his focus on dressing women's bodies with elegant, over-the-top styles, they also discussed Estévez's bi-sexual identity. He was first open about his bi-sexuality in a 1976 interview, which was quite controversial at the time. He described that while women have always been more important in his life than men as he both designed for them and was attracted to them, he was interested in both women and men equally.

Figure 7a. Exhibit rail text (left).

Expansion of "American" Fashion

Price point was also central to Estévez's work and he felt high prices did not equate to style. For example, the displayed "party apron" pattern was originally included in cereal boxes, allowing consumers to create stylish accessories for minimal amounts of money. Further, in a 1970 interview, he stated, "I don't believe in expensive clothes, and I don't think that good taste has to be expensive." His went on to condemn clothing priced over \$400, and said his apparel sold "from \$100 to \$400." This point was reiterated several years later, in which the retail prices of his clothing went "up to \$400 but he prefers to aim at a market between \$100 and \$250." Estévez explained, "I dine with the masses but I also dress the masses." This was especially true of his work with former First Lady Betty Ford, who purchased items from his collections rather than buying high end couture garments. Betty purchased this same ready-to-wear beige and white dress that is on display. Several of his contemporaries also appointed to multiple price points in what was considered by some as an "American" or democratic approach to fashion design. Of note though, is that Estévez expanded the idea of who could be an "American" fashion designer, including bisexual Cuban Americans, contrary to the mostly white and heterosexual-appearing designers at that time. This idea of a democratic approach to create unique styles is evident in two looks on display: the yellow textured evening ensemble and the blue and white dress, which is convertible to two different hem lengths and styles.



Exoticization of Estévez

For Estévez's summer 1956 collection "the Latin motif" was popular. Journalists described Estévez as coming "by the Latin, those naturally" because he was "born in Cuba of Spanish parents." This summer collection had "Spanish influence" with some designs referred to as "the Flamenco look." In November 1957, he showed "spring and resort wear," with "the dresses and costumes being named for popular Latin American songs such as Siboney, Amapola and Beguine the Beguine." While it is unclear if the displayed press photographs was one of these designs specifically, it was created around the same time, providing a visualization of Estévez's aesthetic during this period. In 1976, *Women's Wear Daily* published an interview with Estévez regarding his design and business philosophies, and he was quoted saying, "What I am talking about here is my fashion, and my theory I know that it's not 'in' with the very hip crowd of people, but I don't really give a damn." The journalist wrote Estévez said this with "Latin fire." Critical race theory helps explain a critical reading of the phrase "Latin fire" so often used by journalists to describe Estévez. One argument is that racism manifests within U.S. society to both overt and covert ways. Through the addition of the phrase, Estévez's pattern of speech was reinforced; the "fire" language suggests that Latino/a individuals are inclined to speak in passionate or direct ways. Therefore, the "Latin fire" wording inferred Estévez in that his Cuban heritage influenced his speech patterns in ways journalists did not describe of those from dominant backgrounds such as with "French passion" or "white fire."

Figure 7b. Exhibit rail text (right).

Figure 7. Exhibit rail text and figures.



Figure 8a & b. Displaying the sundress with the standard hem instead of the convertible bubble hem, due to the weight of the skirt pulling on interior threads that hold up the skirt. Full skirt supported with a prop petticoat.



Figure 8c. Cocktail dress with supported sleeves via hosiery filled with fiberfill.



Figure 8c. Coatlress with supported sleeves via hosiery filled with fiberfill.

Figure 8. Conservation considerations.



Figure 9a. Facebook event for in-person curator talk.



Figure 9b. Photo from in-person curator talk.

Figure 9. In-person curator talk.

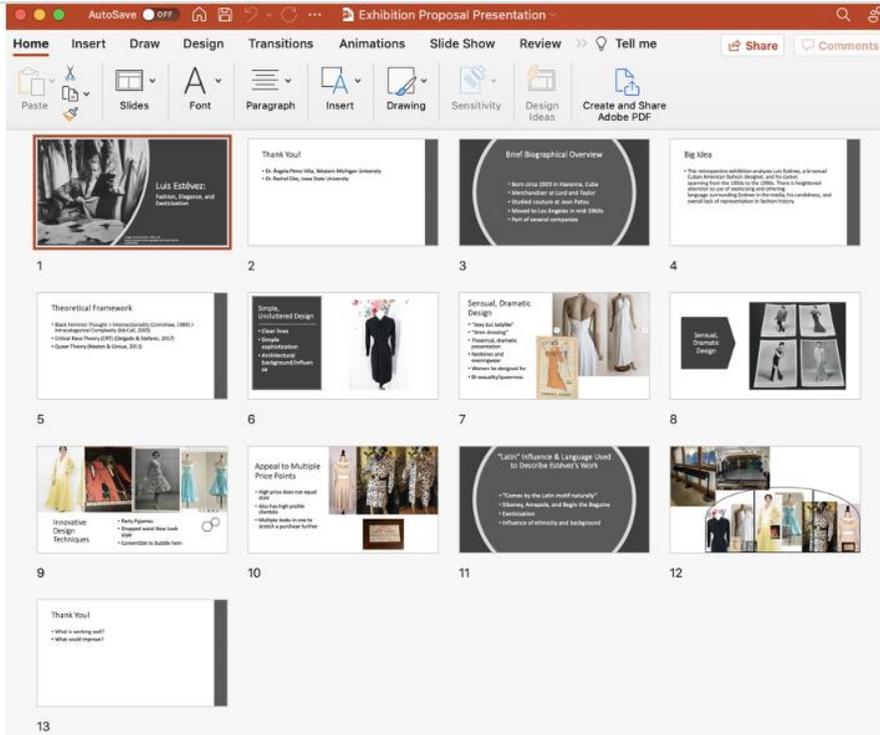


Figure 10a. Exhibit proposal presentation.

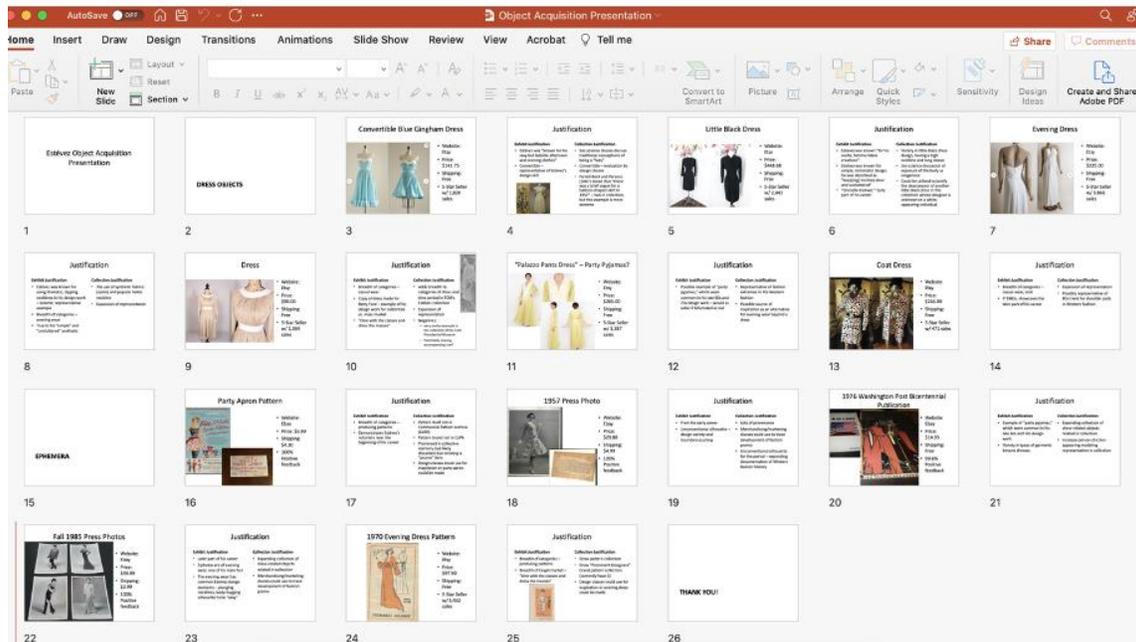


Figure 10b. Object acquisition presentation.

Figure 10. Exhibit planning presentations.