

Out of the Vaults: Marie-Antoinette's Dress
Royal Ontario Museum

[Classical music: Mozart's No. 17 playing throughout the video; Animated Out of the Vaults title followed by animated ROM logo]

[Animated rendering of a white gown within a square case turning 360 degrees; title reads: Marie-Antoinette; as the case continues to rotate, the camera zooms out to show 4 tiled photographs of Versailles and the dress rendering in the lower left corner. Clockwise from the lower right corner images are: Interior view of the Queen's bedchamber, exterior view of Versailles across reflecting pond, interior view of the Hall of Mirrors, exterior view of Versailles]

[One by one, the images of Versailles change to details of Marie-Antoinette's silk gown: upper left image changes an embroidered flower detail; lower right image changes to an embroidered peacock feather detail; centre top image changes to a zooming high angle detail of the bustle; upper left image changes into a detail of a painting: Marie-Antoinette in her Apartments in Versailles (1770), Anonymous artist showing Marie-Antoinette at her toilet with various servants.]

[Cut to front detail of the dress where the bodice meets the skirt, the gown is mounted on a mannequin against a grey background]

[Cut to detail of painting: Marie-Antoinette in her Apartments in Versailles (1770) by an anonymous artist; camera zooms in to frame Marie-Antoinette seated with a harp; title reads: Marie-Antoinette Queen of France 1774-1789]

[Music fades; cut to close-up of mounted placard on a shelf in the Textiles storage unit at the ROM]

Voice of ROM Curator, Alexandra Palmer: If it was Marie-Antoinette's dress, we're assuming that it was *[cut to close-up of technician's hands in white cotton gloves opening a drawer]* it was probably handed to a courtier when she was finished with it, *[sequence of shots: two technicians stand in the collections storage area; they remove the lid of a large box; cut to technicians carefully lifting the dress from the storage unit into the box]* and certainly at the Revolution in France is probably when it made its way to England *[cut to the technicians slowly wheeling the box on a steel cart]*

[View of Alexandra standing in the mounting area; white mannequins in various states of preparation are distributed around her. Text reads: Alexandra Palmer, Curator, Textiles and Costume] Currelly, our founding director, was a big shopper, and if you read his book, *I Brought the Ages Home*, he has wonderful stories of where he got things, how he got things.

[Animated rendering of a letter turns against a black background as the camera zooms in] In 1925, it was purchased in London from a private antique's dealer.

[Cut to close-up of letterhead, black type reads: Christie Antiques and Decorations 345 Fulham Road, S.W (New Park Walk) Early Closing Thursday. Handwritten text reads: To Professor Currelly The Royal Ontario Museum Toronto, Canada] She had these three 18th Century dresses...

[Fade to close up of the bottom of the letter, handwritten in black ink; some text is illegible. Superimposed upon one red and one green stamp, cursive handwriting reads: Mary Christine 23/3/25, Received with thanks by cheque – £75.00; an animated blue oval encircles the date] and this one comes with this provenance of Rose Bertin, *[camera pans up the letter to show a rubber-stamped mark and a handwritten receipt which reads: 1 French silk dress, embroidered late 18th Century – £45.00 1 ditto English silk dress embroidered, early 18th Century – £30.00. An animated blue oval encircles the words 1 French silk dress]*

She talks about the embroidery. Rose Bertin was a dressmaker to Marie-Antoinette. She was sure he would like it when he sees it, and if he doesn't, there's someone hot on the trail to have it.

[Classical Music gets louder; sequence showing two technicians moving the dress down a corridor of the Curatorial Centre at the ROM; the dress is laid out flat on a cart under a layer of white tissue; the technicians enter the conservation lab and move the dress from the cart to a table]

Shirley Ellis, Textile Conservator: The curator, she would choose objects *[view of Shirley wearing white gloves, standing in the conservation lab. Text reads: Shirley Ellis, Textile Conservator]* and then when I come in to the picture and I look at them and determine how stable they are.

[Cut to close-up of a photograph of the skirt of the dress; Shirley holds the photo and points to indicate what she is describing]

Shirley: I've made a photographic image and [Cut to view of Shirley seated at a desk, pointing at the photograph] just block off every area that I work on. [Cut to view of Shirley stitching the skirt, which is arranged on a table] Once I've done that, [close-up of Shirley's hands as she stitches the skirt] I will do a final examination and then I can start the treatment [cut to close-up of Shirley speaking]

[Classical music: Mozart's *Noir*; detail of painting: The Palais Royal Gallery's Walk (1787) by Debucourt; camera pans across the image, coming to rest with Marie-Antoinette at the centre of the frame]

[Cut to animated rendering of a small portrait: Portrait en Médaille de Madame R. by Jean-François Jaignet]

Alexandra: Rose Bertin is this icon of fashion history and is often said in the same *breath* as the first named dressmaker [cut to extreme close-up of Rose Bertin's face] and the founder of *haute couture*. [Cut to view of Alexandra in the textiles collection area] Marie-Antoinette had lots of dressmakers; they were in fact, called *marchands des modes*.

[Cut to panning detail of illustration: Haute Couture, Plate 429 from A Diderot Pictorial Encyclopedia of Trades and Industry, plates selected from *L'Encyclopedie*, Nk30.D555 v.2] They were women who did not make dresses.

[Cut to illustration detail: Feathers I, Plate 430 from A Diderot Pictorial Encyclopedia of Trades and Industry, plates selected from *L'Encyclopedie*, Nk30.D555 v.2] They were merchants who dealt in all the trims you'd want to make this dress look amazing.

[Cut to view of Alexandra in the Textiles collection area] Rose Bertin was apparently very good at this—she had good or appropriate taste and could somehow make everyone look good. [Cut to panning detail of painting: Louis XVI and members of the French royal family gathered around the Dauphin born in 1781 (Oil on canvas), c. 1782-1783, French School] And around the court, she was so well known that she became dubbed the Minister of Fashion.

[Classical music: Mozart's *Noir*; sequence of shots showing Karla Livingston preparing the dress; she forms rolls of white tissue; Karla and another technician cover the dress completely in a sheet of tissue]

Karla Livingston, Textile Technician: I get the call and I pull it up on the database [cut to show Karla and another technician as they wheel the dress on a

cart through a doorway; the cart is wheeled into the conservation lab] and then I will pull it out for the curators to ponder and they decide whether or not it's going to be used.

[Cut to split screen: on the left Karla stands in the Textiles collection area; on the right there is a close-up of the bodice of the dress on a white dressform. Text reads: Karla Livingston, Textile Technician] I am creating a form *[in the frame on the left, cut to close-up of Karla stitching a dressform]* without interfering with the dress at all, or as little as possible.

[Cut to view of Karla and another technician as they carefully fold the dress around layers of white tissue; camera zooms out] It's complicated because it's been worn by at least two different people.

[Detail of painting: Marie Antoinette in 1775 wearing court dress and with her hand on a globe by Jean-Baptiste Gautier-d'Agnoty]

[Cut to split screen: on the right, a detail of a coloured engraving: Young Lady wearing a bonnet of "Victory"; on the left a painting: Marie Antoinette in 1775 wearing court dress and with her hand on a globe by Jean-Baptiste Gautier-d'Agnoty]

[Cut to close-up of the skirt; Shirley points out soil and missing beads with her finger]

Shirley: This skirt is fairly soiled; it has a lot of loss.

[Cut to view of Shirley in the conservation lab] I am just going to confirm that the fiber is silk.

[Close-up of Shirley looking into a microscope] I am just going to look at it under the microscope *[cut to close-up of a slide on the bed of a microscope; Shirley rotates the lens with her hand]* and what I am seeing is silk.

[Cut to view of Shirley seated at a table] Every time you do any treatment on an object, it's invasive *[cut to extreme close-up of Shirley's hands]* and you're causing some damage.

[Cut to view of Shirley seated at a table] So you want to make sure that what you do is minimal but also that it lasts.

[Classical Music: Mozart's Noir; cut to skirt arranged on a table; camera zooms in to show detail; cut to detail of beadwork and embroidery; cut to detail of embroidered flowers and leaves on the skirt]

Alexandra: In terms of conservation, the best thing to do *[cut to detail of centre of pale blue embroidered flower]* is just let everything stay in the dark, *[cut to side of a table; camera pans up to show the dress arranged flat and stuffed with tissue]* in terms of curation, the best thing to do is to fluff everything up and bring it out. What it represents for this installation *[cut to view of Alexandra and Karla standing in the Textiles collections area]* is a piece worn by Marie-Antoinette, which is 18th Century, but in fact, the dress has been altered in the 19th Century.

[Cut to side view of the bodice mounted on a dressform; camera rotates to show the front] We're not going to try and undo that. That's part of the history of the object.

[Classical music: Mozart's Noir; sequence of still photographs showing exterior views of the gardens and architecture of Versailles]

[Cut to detail of floral embroidery on the skirt of the dress; camera zooms in]

Alexandra: This dress had already been requested for loan by the Palace of Versailles in France. *[Cut to high angle shot of the train; camera zooms out to show the entire bodice and train arranged flat on a table]* There's so few of her dresses remaining, *[cut to close-up showing the mounted bodice stuffed with tissue]* and this is one that is more complete. *[Cut to view of Karla working on a dressform; Marie-Antoinette's dress is visible in the foreground]* These things survive because they are a commodity *[cut to view of Alexandra in the Textiles collection area]* and it's like a piece of jewelry or something in times of difficulty, it's a salable item.

[Sequence of panning shots of the dress mounted on a mannequin against a grey studio background; back detail zooms out to show back of dress; cut to side overview of dress; cut to view of skirt and train; This is a cornerstone of our 18th Century collection in that you [still detail of front of skirt and bodice] see resonances of and the traditions [cut to back detail where bustle meets the bodice] of haute couture that are still continued today [classical music: Mozart's Noir, grows louder as the camera pans out]

[Screen fades to black; music stops]

[Credits roll: Still images courtesy Art Resources, My; Bibliothèque nationale de France; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Music courtesy of CBC Records/Tafelmusik Orchestra & Choir; © Copyright ROM, 2008]