

## *Kleibacker: New York Designer to Ohio Curator*

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In any discussion with Charles Kleibacker, his strongly held beliefs about clothing design quickly become evident. He dislikes the term “fashion,” with its connotations of swift and superficial change, and cherishes designs that stand the test of time. He values the engineering of garments, the way they are designed to complement the human form and utilize the potential of their fabrics. These qualities are as evident in Kleibacker’s own designs as in the vast majority of the pieces he has chosen to feature in his exhibitions, and certainly in the selections seen in this exhibition.

Several of Kleibacker’s exhibitions have introduced viewers to often-unrecognized aspects of fashion whose importance he learned from his own experiences as a designer. He saw the ways that photography and illustration were essential in conveying a garment’s spirit, along with its appearance, to potential customers as well as other audiences. Exploring those relationships became the theme of such exhibitions as the Riffe Gallery’s *Reality and Interpretation* exhibition in 2000 and *DRESSed-up Photography* (1997) and *Uncommon Clothes: Photographic Inspiration* (2006), both at the Columbus Museum of Art.

Kleibacker’s earliest self-education in the ways of clothing design taught him to respect the skill and dedication of the workers at the *atelier* (the studio/workshop of a leading design house) and to value the special creativity of an *atelier’s premier* (or head) and staff. He learned about draping, about the significance of examining fabrics and about fitting and refitting. In the exhibition *In Black and White: Dress from the 1920s to Today*, he gave viewers a peek into an *atelier*. In other exhibitions, he has made a point of displaying muslin patterns along with the garments made from them and so offered viewers a look “behind the scenes” at the work of the designer. *Couture / Ready-to-Wear* educated viewers about the differences between these two practices in clothing design. Finally, as a curator, Kleibacker is always attuned to the details of exquisite craft, whether in elaborate laces, beading or embroidery or in the construction of a simple seam or buttonhole. This attention to careful workmanship also can be related to Kleibacker’s familiarity with all phases of clothing design and construction.

Both Kleibacker the designer and Kleibacker the curator have shown notable ingenuity in drawing on multiple approaches to reach and interact with varied audiences. While a designer he also became a consultant on synthetic and natural fibers and an advisor to home sewers on achieving professional results; as a curator he has linked clothing design to historical figures, fine art and the movies. That creativity is yet another thread that runs throughout this exhibition.

The majority of the clothing and accessories in this exhibition comes from the Historic Costume and Textiles Collection at The Ohio State University, a collection Kleibacker helped found and develop. Other garments and illustrations are on loan from Mount Mary College in Milwaukee and Kent State University (the Kent State University Museum and the university’s School of Fashion Design and Merchandising) and from illustrators Steven Stipelman, Ruben Toledo and designer Isabel Toledo, all of New York.