

Vogue College of Fashion: Fashion Writing and Criticism

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Unveiling Marilyn: A Star's True Story

Beneath the historic arches of London Bridge sits a shimmering tribute to one of Hollywood's most legendary figures: Marilyn Monroe. Marilyn: The Exhibition isn't just a display of fame—it's a distinctive homage to a woman whose magnetism and vulnerability continue to resonate through generations. Walking into the exhibit is like stepping into Monroe's private realm, where every piece—be it handwritten letters or delicate silk garments—offers an intimate peek into her world. Among the most poignant pieces are her intimate effects: kitchen utensils, worn attire, and a diary filled with reflections. The exhibition is thoughtfully arranged, with four sections, each emphasising a different aspect of her journey.

The display does not overlook Monroe's complexities. She embodied a paradox—projecting confidence in the spotlight while privately wrestling with inner struggles. Her preserved makeup kits and wardrobe showcase her carefully crafted public image, while love letters and parts of journal entries reveal her innermost thoughts. This blend of mystique and sincerity makes the experience profoundly personal. One section explores Monroe's time in London, featuring photographs of her meeting Queen Elizabeth II. Seeing her standing beside royalty highlights her unique ability to bridge two worlds—Hollywood stardom and British tradition. For those visiting from Los Angeles or beyond, this moment illustrates Monroe's timeless global influence.

The setting, the Arches London Bridge, enhances the atmosphere. The aged brick walls create an air of unearthing a hidden relic, as if Monroe's possessions have been preserved in a long-lost vault. This sense of discovery adds to the exhibit's

reverent tone, urging visitors to appreciate her legacy beyond mere celebrity. One of the exhibit's greatest strengths is its ability to transcend nostalgia. It doesn't simply invite admiration for Monroe's beauty and career but encourages deeper reflection on her struggles, ambitions, and resilience. By the time visitors encounter her favourite perfume, scripts, and letters, they feel an emotional link to the woman beyond the icon.

However, Marilyn: The Exhibition has not been without controversy. Some critics challenge the portrayal of Monroe as a feminist figure, arguing that actions like wearing trousers or launching a short-lived production company don't fully align with the feminist ideals the exhibit suggests. Additionally, the inclusion of highly personal artifacts—such as medical prescriptions and floor plans of her final residence—raises ethical concerns. Some may find these inclusions an invasion of privacy, blurring the boundary between tribute and exploitation. This aspect forces visitors to consider the ethical implications of displaying such deeply private memorabilia.

Despite these criticisms, the exhibition ultimately succeeds in humanising Marilyn Monroe. It moves beyond the glitz and glamour, offering insight into the complexities of a woman who continues to fascinate decades after her passing. Whether longtime admirers or new observers, visitors gain a rare opportunity to engage with the lasting legacy of a true Hollywood luminary. This is more than a simple showcase—it is a journey into the nature of fame, identity, and the delicate balance between admiration and intrusion. This exhibition does more than commemorate Marilyn Monroe—it allows visitors to truly understand her.

From Birkin's Legacy to Shein's Knockoffs: How We Lost the Art of Bag Styling

Bag personalisation used to be a way to make accessories truly your own. Icons like Jane Birkin set the stage by turning her Hermès bag into something deeply personal, adding little trinkets from her travels, sentimental gifts, and unique charms that all had stories behind them. For years, customising a bag was about picking out meaningful pieces that reflected your personality and experiences. Now, though, things have taken a different turn. What was once a thoughtful process is now a quick, mass-market trend. Today, people buy charms, scarves, and stickers in bulk, often from fast fashion giants like Shein or Temu. These accessories come in sets, all ready to stick on your bag right away, leaving little room for actual self-expression or individuality.

A good example of this shift is the Coach cherry bag charm. It started as a high-quality, fun accessory from a luxury brand, but its rise in popularity led to countless knockoffs flooding the market. Now, those cheap versions are everywhere, dangling from bags in every direction. It's tough to claim that a bag is personalised when the same trinket shows up on so many others. This change is part of a bigger trend in fast fashion. Companies know how to quickly create micro-trends that make people buy more, often without thinking about quality or long-term use. Items that once carried emotional weight or personal significance are now just cheap buys that end up being discarded. Many of these decorations are made from low-grade plastic or other materials that aren't sustainable, only adding to the growing waste created by the fashion industry. This trend also brings up the idea of authenticity. Can you really express

yourself when companies decide how you should do it? Customising your bag today often means simply picking up whatever trendy, mass-produced accessories are available, rather than selecting pieces that reflect your personal story. What was once a way to show off your unique identity has turned into just another product to buy. That said, decorating your bag is still a fun way to express yourself - it just needs to go back to its roots. Instead of buying a bunch of cheap accessories all at once, think about collecting meaningful items over time. Vintage charms, handmade trinkets, or souvenirs from your travels are great ways to add authenticity to your bag. These personal pieces bring back the tradition of telling a story through the things you wear.

While the current trend reflects the disposable nature of today's fashion culture, it's not too late to turn things around. If we focus more on quality and meaning, we can bring back the real creativity behind bag personalisation. This way, it won't just be about filling our bags with more stuff but rather making choices that reflect who we are and what we truly value.

The question remains: can we rewrite the narrative, or will we let it remain another victim of fast fashion's unrelenting cycle?



Dua Lipa with a Birkin. Getty Images. 2024.

The Fashion Anti-Influencer: How @lolfashiondump is Ditching Trends and Dressing for Herself

Scrolling through TikTok, it's easy to get lost in a sea of micro-trends, Shein hauls, and 'quiet luxury' aesthetics. But then, there's @lolfashiondump, the alias of Jaclyn—a New York native creator with over 1.6 million collective followers who stands out not for chasing trends, but for rejecting them. With her signature chunky heels, unexpected layering, and long nails that double as art, Jaclyn has carved out a space in fashion that feels unfiltered.

Despite her growing platform, Jaclyn insists she's just a "regular girl on the internet." However, the work behind her content tells a different story. Creating fashion content requires waking up early, filming before work, and staying up late editing. "People think that I'm loaded from TikTok," she explains. "I still have to go to work; I still have to go to school. I think people get the wrong idea about influencers." The reality is that most creators, even those with large followings, still have traditional jobs to support themselves.

In an era dominated by Pinterest boards and TikTok algorithms, the idea of originality in fashion is often questioned. Jaclyn believes that while complete originality is rare, uniqueness can still exist. "Individuality, to me, is about doing something because I enjoy it, not because someone else is going to enjoy it," she explains. "A lot of art is taking inspiration from different places and doing what you want with that." Fashion, for Jaclyn, is a mix of inspiration and reinvention rather than strict adherence to trends. The trend cycle has drastically accelerated due to TikTok, with trends now dying within weeks instead of months or years. She agrees that micro-trends now vanish quickly, driven by brands like Shein that churn out new styles daily. She bought a dress on Depop once, thinking it was vintage, only to find out it was from Shein. "And they charged me a crazy price, too!" she recalls. This rapid turnover makes it hard for individuals to develop a distinct style. "Honestly, if I could deinfluence people from trend shopping, I would," she admits. But breaking free from fast fashion isn't easy. Brands continuously produce disposable clothing at an unsustainable rate, making resistance to trends challenging.

For Jaclyn, fashion and feeling unique is deeply tied to self-acceptance. Living with psoriasis, a skin condition that can draw attention, she initially felt self-conscious. "I was looked at a little in high school," she shares. "It was all over me—my face, everywhere. It was hard for a few years." Over time, she reframed the way she saw herself. "People are going to look at me anyway, so I might as well wear something cool and funky." That realisation gave her the confidence to embrace a new, personal style. It hasn't come without its problems, though. From high school to Tik Tok, handling scrutiny is now inevitable as a content creator. Negative comments are common, but Jaclyn has learned to brush them off. "I personally just don't care if someone doesn't like the way I look or present myself," she says. "When you're content with yourself, nothing anyone says can really hurt you that bad." Sometimes, she types out responses to negative comments just to delete them afterward, finding the act therapeutic. "It's



@lofashiondump. 2024. Instagram



@lofashiondump. 2025. Instagram

weird, but it helps!” she laughs.

For those hesitant to experiment with personal style out of fear of judgment, her advice is simple: just try it. “You really only live once. This is your only life, and you should try whatever you want at least once.” She encourages individuals to shift their perspective when receiving stares—perhaps it’s admiration rather than disapproval. “People care way less than you think. And even if they’re looking, you don’t know what they’re thinking. They could be thinking, ‘Wow, that person looks so cool!’” Pushing past that fear can open up new avenues of self-expression and confidence.

Now, her personal styling revolves around patterns and textures. “Shopping for pattern and texture is a way to create something out of the ordinary for yourself,” she advises. She believes that sometimes the best outfits come together by accident. “I’ll look into my closet and be like, ‘Oh my God, these two things sitting next to each other... they’re cute!’ and then it just grows into something.” The chunkier the shoes, the more comfortable they are, she insists. “Honestly, the chunkier they are, the more stable they feel!”

Nail art is another aspect of fashion Jaclyn believes is often overlooked. Runways tend to neglect it, yet nails serve as an extension of style and self-expression. “They’re such a fun accessory,” she says. Her nail-focused TikTok’s receive just as much, if not more, engagement than her fashion videos, proving that people are eager to see beauty beyond clothing alone. “I feel like people forget about them!” she adds. For her, nail art is an easy way to make a statement without overhauling an entire wardrobe. “I did a set inspired by a tape measure choker, and I still have them on now!” she shares excitedly. “This, but on nails” or “this, but as an outfit” Jaclyn says in response to being asked what lesson the fashion world could learn from her approach. She describes her creative process as seeing a theme and translating it into fashion, emphasising the importance of using inspiration without fear. To her, originality isn’t about avoiding influence but about reworking it into something fresh and personal. “Use the world and what’s around you as your inspiration and don’t be scared to take inspiration and use it elsewhere,” she explains. “If you’re trying to be original and have that feeling of individuality, fuel it with different inspirations to create something new, and it’s going to grow into something beautiful.”

In a social media landscape filled with sameness, Jaclyn encourages people to dig through their closets, experiment with what they have, and dress for themselves rather than for trends. Fashion should be about self-expression, not impressing others or following arbitrary rules. “My outfits are like the inside of my brain on display,” she says. And in the end, isn’t that what fashion is truly about?



The Curious Case of Le Bal: Why Are Celebrities Still Playing Dress-Up in 2024?

Le Bal des Débutantes is like a museum exhibit that refuses to shut down - a relic from another time, somehow still clinging to relevance. In a world where women are breaking barriers in politics, science, and business, why are we still parading rich kids in couture? It's bizarre. What started as a high-society marriage market has now become a playground for American celebrity offspring seeking an extra dose of prestige. And honestly? It's a little strange. Take Apple Martin, the 20-year-old daughter of Gwyneth Paltrow and Chris Martin, who made her debut at Le Bal in November 2024, floating through the Ritz in a powder blue Valentino gown. Fashion media ate it up, but beyond the breathless coverage, one question loomed: Why are we still doing this? And why, of all people, are nepo babies leading the charge?

Le Bal des Débutantes, in its modern form, was revived in 1992 by Ophélie Renouard, but its origins go back much further. Debutante balls were originally designed for one thing: matchmaking. Aristocratic families would present their daughters to society—that's code for parading them in front of equally well-bred bachelors. It was less about the young women themselves and more about securing the right marriage. These days, Le Bal insists it has 'evolved.' Now, it's framed as a cultural event and a fundraiser for charity, with celebrity participants from around the world. But let's be real - if it were really just about philanthropy, why does it still revolve around presenting young women in designer ballgowns and calling them "debutantes" like it's the 1800s? Enter: the celebrity kids. Apple Martin isn't the first American child to grace Le Bal's dance floor. It's hosted the daughters of Bruce Willis, Sylvester Stallone, Andie MacDowell, and Reese Witherspoon. For Hollywood offspring, it's like a stamp of high-society approval - another way to signal elite status in an industry built on exclusivity. Sociologist Elizabeth Currid-Halkett argues, "The media obsession with 'nepo babies' is an indication of how status, whether earned or inherited, remains an essential currency in the social fabric of our times."

But here's where it gets weird. The whole point of debutante balls was to keep wealth and status within a tight circle, reinforcing class hierarchies. So why are movie stars and rock icons, who are supposed to be symbols of achieving success on talent, so eager to join in? It's a peculiar contrast when the daughters of A-listers voluntarily step into a tradition designed to uphold old-school elitism. And to be honest - do we really think these celebrity kids need Le Bal? They're not debuting into anything. They've been famous since birth. They've had Vogue features before they had driver's licenses. The idea that Apple Martin, or any of the other rich and well-connected daughters who attend, needs a 'coming-out' event is just odd. They were born into the spotlight. The whole thing just feels like a redundant spectacle and a way for already-privileged young women to get an extra dose of validation under the guise of tradition.

Then there's the awkwardness of Le Bal's aesthetic. The grand gowns, the choreographed waltzing, the idea of these young women being 'presented' to society - it's all so out of touch. Women are now leading companies and revolutionising industries. And yet, we still treat their coming-of-age moment like it should involve a tiara and a twirl across the ballroom floor. Le Bal seems like an outdated performance,



Virgile Guinard for British Vogue, 2024. Apple Martin.

echoing a bygone era of gendered rituals.

Let's not forget the exclusivity. At a time when conversations about privilege and accessibility are more relevant than ever, an event that hinges entirely on lineage, wealth, and luxury fashion feels tone-deaf. Shouldn't the next generation of privileged young women be making waves in meaningful spaces rather than posing in Valentino? Beyond the exclusivity, there's also the question of relevance. Debutante balls were once about ensuring young women made the right connections and upheld class values. Now, it feels like another influencer-driven spectacle. The difference between Le Bal and an influencer event at a luxury hotel is essentially just a waltz - and a sprinkling of old-money aristocratic children, forgotten in a sea of Hollywood nepotism.

Of course, no event like this is complete without a little scandal. Apple's debut was overshadowed by a viral video that led to speculation she was acting like a 'mean girl.' The internet went wild with opinions. Was she embodying nepotism, or was it just a misleading clip? One debutante quickly defended her, calling Apple "genuinely the nicest girl ever." But the situation highlights how ridiculous this all is. Why are we analysing a 20-year-old's ballroom demeanour like it's world-shaking news? The fact that people are still invested in debutante culture shows how deeply ingrained outdated ideals are.

Le Bal is a bit of a relic. No amount of haute couture can hide the fact that it represents an outdated, exclusionary vision of society. The charity angle is nice, but philanthropy doesn't require princess cosplay. If it were truly about cultural exchange, why not invite young men or people from diverse socio-economic backgrounds who have worked hard to make a difference? It's time to let this one go. If Apple Martin and her peers really want to make a statement, they should be breaking down barriers, not upholding them. There are countless ways to celebrate young adulthood that don't involve waltzing into an elitist tradition. And before anyone defends Le Bal with the "it's just a bit of fun" excuse - remember, its 'fun' is for an extremely small and wealthy group, designed to uphold an idea of status that feels increasingly ridiculous. If debutante balls had a place in modern society, they would be open to everyone and actually mean something.

Le Bal will probably keep going - at least for a little while longer - giving wealthy families a photogenic excuse to pretend debutante culture still means something. But in a world that has moved on, it's starting to look more and more out of place.

Perhaps it's time to leave it behind.