

Dressed to Kill

Edward Gorey and the Social Fabric

April 6 – December 31

**“Part of me is genuinely eccentric, part of me is a bit of a put on.
But I know what I am doing.”**

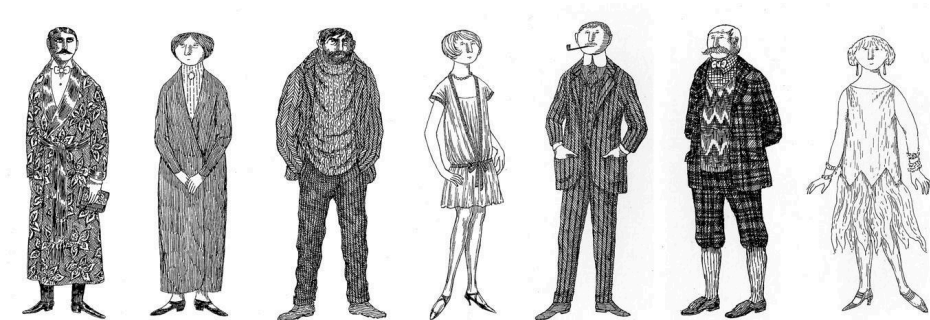
—Edward Gorey to Lisa Solod, *Boston Magazine*, 1980

Costuming is an integral component of Edward Gorey’s universe—both for his fictional characters as well as his own persona. In addition to creating over 116 self-authored books, Gorey’s half century of commercial illustration includes cover designs, periodicals, and award-winning costume and set designs—notably the Broadway production of *Dracula*, as well as the animated intros to *PBS Mystery!* Throughout all these works Gorey displays a sweeping eye for blending textures, cultures, and eras into a style that is both worldly and other-worldly, timeless, intentionally nostalgic—and distinctly, unmistakably Gorey.

The wardrobe that Gorey swathes his characters in straddles Victorian, Edwardian, and early Modern—with recurring Japanese motifs as well. Carefully researched and rendered, Gorey’s costuming is meticulously specific, in stark contrast to the weightless text it accompanies—a scrupulous attention to detail that supports narratives virtually devoid of detail. Gorey’s own wardrobe evolved, like his works, into a sweeping statement of eras as well—a highbrow-lowbrow, formal-casual attention-grabbing façade of furs, jeans, sneakers and clanging jewelry—all used both to draw attention to his entrance and to keep people at a distance. *Beatnik Dandy* is a term used more than once. While Gorey’s unique attire might have been largely a put-on—it was a put-on which he was deadly serious about.

From Victorian morning coats, empire waisted evening gowns, and 1920s motoring attire to filmy ballerinas, ostentatiously tuxedoed suspects, kimonoed femme fatales and sweated beaked creatures, Edward’s closet is both distinctive and deeply imaginative. This curious combination of then-and-now attire, of real-and-facade reflects Edward’s lifelong artistic (and personal) obsession

with obscured meaning and layered messaging. *Dressed to Kill* explores the sartorial world in which Gorey's illustrations and books live, and the rapidly changing world in which *he* lived in—and how he dressed for it.



“...[it] take guts in a world that continually asks us, ‘What are you dressed up for?’ to respond, ‘Myself,’ and to mean it.”

—Alok Vaid-Menon (Writer/Performer)

Using original artwork and costume design studies as well as his own wardrobe, **Dressed to Kill** shows how Gorey was canny in establishing identity and mood in his illustrations, to his stage work, and in his own appearance as well—in each case, a brilliant eloquence of personal statement. Fashion is indeed a language, becoming for Edward not so much a sign of social status as a means of self-creation. Or, put simply, Edward dressed the part of Edward Gorey until he no longer felt he needed to. In his illustrations he very effectively appropriates the costuming of not-so-distant eras to define our own. Gorey's work remains a catwalk of fashion tropes and archetypes showing us who we are, where we just were—and where we stand right now; his legacy a not-so-gentle reminder that, as far as we know, we just may already be The Past.



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