

“Hats Off to Women!” by Dana E. Watson

If you have walked through the atrium in Wallace Hall, you may have noticed the ever-changing exhibitions in its windows. The latest one is “Hat’s Off to Women!” an exhibit that celebrates Women’s Month. It includes an array of women’s headwear, ensembles, and accessories from the 1950s through the 1970s, a period when women typically wore hats.

Dina Smith-Glaviana, director of the Oris Glisson Historic Costume and Textiles Collection (OGHCTC), earnestly tried to convey this year’s National Women’s Month theme, “Women Who Advocate for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion.” The exhibition was a collaborative effort with her students. Together they selected all the items included in the exhibition.

“This year, it was a challenge because the theme is so broad,” said Smith-Glaviana. “It does capture the tone of Women’s Month. We have included fashion with subtle symbols supporting women’s rights,” such as the red and white “IKE” dress. The “IKE” dress was worn by women who supported Dwight D. Eisenhower’s 1956 presidential campaign, which advocated for equal rights for women. According to Salomé Levy, a researcher at the Cornell Fashion and Textile Collection, the dress was not only worn by white women but many Latinas as well. The exhibit also includes black mannequins to represent women of color. Smith-Glaviana admits their mannequin stock is limited but wigs were carefully selected to further suggest diversity.

The title, “Hats off to Women!” was proposed by Jessica Pattison, who assists Smith-Glaviana in the collection. The title was inspired by Smith-Glaviana’s desire to showcase more of the OGHCTC’s large hat collection.

“I always envisioned doing a large hat exhibit with nothing but hats with many suspended from the ceiling,” said Smith-Glaviana, “But my students wanted to fill in all the space in the

windows by incorporating mannequins. As a compromise, I suggested that the students choose day dresses or daytime ensembles from the '50s or '60s that would likely have been worn with hats. The students were right to include more than just hats. I think the exhibition turned out great!”

Smith-Glaviana has curated Women’s Month exhibitions for the past three years and plans to continue doing so every year. She said, “Participating in Women’s Month is personally important to me, and it is a great way to engage with the Virginia Tech community.”



The “IKE” dress and matching accessories introduce the “Hats Off to Women!” exhibition.

Photos by Dana E. Watson.