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From the SelectedWorks of Jan Comfort

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Fashion Photography Archive

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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/jan_comfort/40/
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The Bloomsbury Fashion Photography Archive is one part of the suite of fashion information resources available through Bloomsbury Fashion Central. It launched in 2016 with 150,000 images dating from 1980 – 2000. There are currently 400,000 images available, and images will be added in groups of 100,000 until the collection reaches 750,000. The photographs were taken by Niall McInerney at runway shows – both on the catwalk and backstage, and even on the streets of New York. Be sure to check out the videos featuring Valerie Steele (the curator of the collection) interviewing the photographer.

Beginning a search is quite intuitive, with the typical search box and link to Advanced search highlighted on the opening screen. I chose to search Michael Kors, which yielded 7 text hits (a Biography and 6 Articles) and 639 images. The default display shows a row of thumbnail images, with the text entries listed beneath them. The results are sorted by relevance, but users can change the default to sort by title (ascending or descending), date (ascending or descending) or author (ascending A-Z or descending Z-A). There is a handy link to View the image results, at the top to get right to it instead of slowing down to read text. From the Results: Images screen, searchers can choose to view small, medium, or large images and also 25, 50, or 100 results per page.

Clicking on an image opens it to screen size, and you can mouse over to zoom in slightly more. A thumbnail view of the same image displays to the right, as do additional images of the same look, if available. Related images display at the bottom of the screen, and in some cases, links to related content also display. This can include biographies, book chapters, or articles. However, there is no way to get to the next image without returning to the results screen. This is very disappointing, as I would really love the ability to scroll through the larger images without having to continually click Back to search results. Perhaps this could be a future enhancement. In the meantime, viewing the largest images with 100 per screen made it somewhat easier to navigate.

When confronted with a large results set, it is easy to filter by Dress; Organizations, including Design Houses; People; Period; Place; Textiles and Materials; Themes; or aspects of The Fashion Industry. For example, when viewing the 639 Michael Kors images, I clicked on “Related Images” and now had a set of 35,116 images. These appear to be images that share metadata, but it was not always clear why they were related. Luckily, it was a simple matter to drill down by date until I had limited my results to one particular show. I am not sure if this search is typical of what other users might do, but it worked well for me. The advanced search screen allows searchers to limit their keyword searches to Anywhere; Author/Editor; Image Title; Image Designer; or DOI.

The Browse feature allows you to drill down by all of the keyword filters mentioned above. It is a great way to focus on specific areas of interest. I did find it somewhat surprising that the People index is arranged by first name. This works fine most of the time, but when looking for Halston, I had to learn that the designer’s full name is Roy Halston Frowick. Several designers I had hoped to find were missing; perhaps they will be included in future updates. The biographies of those who ARE included are excellent. There is just enough information to get started, with hot links to other named individuals and a nice set of References and Further Reading. As with other results, users can view a citation (in MLA, Chicago, or APA style), or print an image. You can even share via email, Pinterest, Facebook, Twitter, or any of 194 other social media sites. If you create an account, you can also sign in to create a folder to facilitate working with results, and add notes to articles.

Another useful feature is the timeline, which organizes the images by designer/collection in 5-year ranges from 1980-2000. Clicking on a thumbnail image provides access to a particular designer’s collection for that year, or all collections by that designer, or all collections from that year. It was fun to choose a year when I visited New York and document the fashion trends that were happening when I was actually in the city. Related articles are also shown, creating context for the beautiful images. In addition, mousing over a pushpin displays brief
descriptions of relevant information relating to the designers and models, art and music, film and television, or historical events.

I love, love, love this database! The photographs are exceptional – from both a resolution and a design/layout point of view. Every single photograph is high quality. There are many links provided in appropriate places to facilitate exploration. My favorite way to search is simply to browse. I love starting with a large results set and then filtering by type of garment, or designer, or a particular accessory. I can see where this would be very valuable for aspiring designers as well as students and fashionistas.

The Fashion Photography Archive is a wonderful database, and it is reasonably priced considering the depth and breadth of its resources. It would be appropriate for many types of libraries – those who support art and design collections; journalism programs; retail management; or even popular culture. That said, I do think it is out of scope for my collection, which is a shame. If you support fashion in any way shape or form, I highly recommend this database.