

**The Weight of Costumes:
Sartorial Power in the Glenn Close Costume Collection**

A Review for Art Journal

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The Art of the Character: Highlights from the Glenn Close Costume Collection
Curated by Kelley Gallett Richardson
Jepson Center, Savannah, GA
Organized by the Eskenazi Museum of Art
October 10, 2025 – February 15, 2026

At the grand intersection of cinema and fashion, lies the work of dressing an actor. While the costume designer is often relegated to a supporting role, *The Art of the Character: Highlights from the Glenn Close Costume Collection*, recently on view at the Jepson Center, vehemently refuses this notion. Glenn Close is known for her repertoire as one of the most versatile actors in this lifetime. She maintains a close relationship with her costumes, utilizing them as foundational elements of her performative identity, which prompted her to serve as the exhibition's primary creator and donor.

Close generously gifting her iconic pieces worn throughout her storied career with the intent to ensure these works of art would not be "pulled apart, reconstructed or redesigned" ¹. While she is the protective force behind the collection, the true visual artists on display are the master costume designers she collaborated with. Rather than placing the garments as cinematic byproducts, the exhibition frames them as sculptures born from the brilliant minds of the designers such as Anthony Powell (*101 & 102 Dalmatians*) and James Acheson (*Dangerous Liaisons*). The exhibition proves how these great artists began to weaponize garment construction to project social and institutional themes from these movies.

¹ John Wogan, "Glenn Close's Theatrical Costume of a Kind," *New York Times*, February 18, 2018, LexisNexis.

The pieces are isolated from their cinematic environment and placed in a dark, dimly lit room. This may have been done intentionally to push focus onto the garments, and compel the viewer to confront them as isolated art objects. The layout of the exhibition has been laid out intuitively in thematic clusters rather than chronological timelines, ensuring full attention of the viewer for each movie. Mannequins have been left barefaced and deliberately underdeveloped to ensure the garments remain at the center of attention.

A striking masterpiece within the exhibition is the iconic wardrobe of the formidable Cruella de Vil (*101 & 102 Dalmatians*), designed by the late Anthony Powell. Powell was well known in the design world for his attention to detail and his deep research abilities which were honed during his apprenticeship under Cecil Beaton. His work for the *Dalmatians* movie is the strongest work in place at the Jepson Centre. These pieces have been removed from the sets of the film, a calculated move to command the physical space of the gallery. The floodlights shine directly onto these pieces, creating overhead spotlights, that exaggerate the intricacy of each garment. The chaos of the fur is subdued by loud prints that accurately capture scenes from the movie. Powell's use of exaggerated proportions, and severely structured shoulders are tastefully combined with cinched waists, that inherently proves Powell's ability to birth concepts of "wild, villainy-enhancing ensembles"². The garment execution is flawless and the dialogue between the varied textures of leather and knits is captivating enough to keep the viewer hooked on a single piece.

Collection curator Kelly Gallett Richardson highlights the hidden labour behind these garments, in particular, the long hours taken to create a single piece³. Close had also famously given Powell creative freedom to finalise her wardrobe so she could take a look in

² Richard Sandomir, "Anthony Powell, 85, A Costume Designer With 3 Oscars, Dies," *New York Times*, May 1, 2021, LexisNexis.

³ Kelly Gallet Richardson, "Art of the Character: Curator Talk," posted June 11, 2021, by Eskenazi Museum of Art at Indiana University, YouTube, 1:17:56, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AwOlm3gdBwk>.

the mirror and discover how she would play de Vil ⁴. The colours of the costume in this movie are notoriously black and white, which have been complemented by the pedestals that the mannequins stand on. This colour palette is not a visual gag, but a calculated move to portray de Vil's own eccentricities and villainy with her wardrobe immortalising her.

Equally compelling, though functioning on another contextual register, are the costumes from *Dangerous Liaisons* (1988), which earned James Acheson his second Academy Award. Acheson's background in art and theatre, allowed him to view and develop costumes in a structural and artistic format than tradition ⁵. Acheson's lack in technical knowledge allowed him to play around with the medium rather than constrict himself from the historical perspective ⁶. The gown worn by Close as the Marquise de Merteuil has been highlighted in particular, allowing the viewers to scrutinise the layers of heavy, luminous brocade that is only further accentuated by the application of delicate lace. The use of classic, yellowing, dress forms further highlights the physical presentations of the costumes of this period piece, that mimic gilded cages. Acheson has skilfully utilised the extreme restriction of the eighteenth century French silhouette to underscore the Marquise's internal reality.

The physical weight of the textiles mirrors the social expectations placed on the character, and through this lens, Acheson has transcended historical pastiche. His designs have now become a poignant commentary on the performative nature of gender and power within the French royal court.

The exhibition's greatest strength lies in elevating the garments beyond utility, as Close had willed to happen. The absence of process sketches, poses a minor weakness. The

⁴ Richard Sandomir, "Anthony Powell, 85, A Costume Designer With 3 Oscars, Dies," *New York Times*, May 1, 2021, LexisNexis.

⁵ Jan Lindstrom, "Ain't it grand," *Variety*, February 12, 2004, A1.

⁶ Jan Lindstrom, "Ain't it grand," *Variety*, February 12, 2004, A2.

dynamic illustrations of designers like Powel or Acheson would have undoubtedly illuminated the collaborative ideation process. A tactile board currently occupies the hallway of the gallery, but having these textured swatches beside their corresponding garments would facilitate simultaneous tactile and visual analysis. Furthermore, spatial constraints, for the MET ensemble, in particular, has restricted viewer mobility, preventing a thorough examination of the intricate architecture of the garment.

Ultimately, *The Art of the Character* is an enriching and compelling exhibition that shifts the concentration of the cinematic experience on the costume designer, demanding they receive the recognition they deserve. It commands the viewer's attention at all turns and stands as a powerful expression of sartorial articulation. Visitors will be left to admire the aesthetic value while questioning the art the character embodies.

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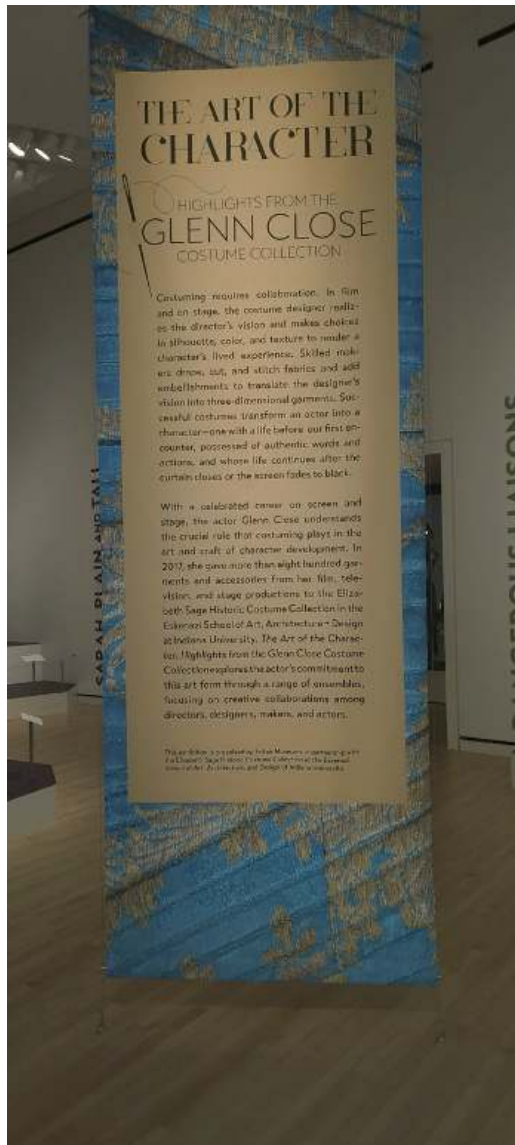


Installation view of exhibition *The Art of the Character: Highlights from the Glenn Close Costume Collection*, Jepson Center at Telfair Museums
Savannah, GA, October 10, 2025 – February 15, 2026.
Photo Credit: Tara Murali



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