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QUINCEANERA: DRESS AND MEMORY IN LATINE CULTURE

A Godwin-Ternbach Museum Exhibition, *Quinceañera: Dress and Memory in Latine Culture*, Explores the Extravagantly Symbolic Dress and Culture at the Heart of the Quinceañera Coming of Age Ceremony, **September 25 – December 18, 2025, Queens College Campus.**



Installation in progress of Quinceañera gowns

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The Godwin-Ternbach Museum at Queens College (CUNY), is pleased to present *Quinceañera: Dress and Memory in Latine Culture*, which will open with a reception on Thursday, September 25, from 6 to 8pm. This exhibition is a full-throated celebration of Latin American culture as visualized through the Quinceañera coming of age ceremony and the extravagantly symbolic dress that sits at the heart of the ritual. When wearing the opulent dress, the Quinceañera embodies the psychic, physical, and spiritual space of an adult woman. This transitional moment is further marked by an exchange of dress accessories—flat shoes for high heels, headbands for tiaras. As an intrinsic part of humanity, dress manifests gender, race, religion, sexuality, modesty, the

body, age and identity. We are marking the persistence and cultural authentication of this dress practice and honor the tradition's continuing importance to the Latine communities in the US.



Photo by Cinthya Santos Briones



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This exhibition is formed and narrated by the personal material culture objects, documentary items, and first-person oral and written accounts from the pan-Latine communities of New York City. Auditory soundscapes of firsthand Quinceañera memories, visual, and material objects, allow the visitor to absorb the temporal-spatial elements of dress as embodied practice, along with the rites and customs of the Quinceañera observance. We present the material and transformative spirit of the Quinceañera, to reveal dress as a powerful expression of identity and cultural continuity.



Steven Blum "El Sueño Americano" (The American Dream)

This exhibition is a community-minded event, formed and narrated by first-person oral and written accounts from the pan-Latine communities of New York City, along with personal objects and documentary items. This material manifestation of spirit echoes the creative act of becoming that defines the Quinceañera itself. Through auditory, visual and tactile components, the exhibition offers a multi-sensory experience that immerses visitors in the temporal-spacial elements of dress, along with the rites and customs of the Quinceañera observance. Works of art include Steven Blum's "El Sueño Americano," and a series of striking images by noted documentary photographer Cinthya Santos Briones, which examine traditional Quinceañera celebrations among the Mexican migrant community in New York City. Students of the Queens College Fashion and Design Program have created a multitude of fabric flowers as an offering and creative act.

The exhibition's soundscape, *Hilos y Echos*, was created by theater company *What Will the Neighbors Say?* in conjunction with Queens College Professor Emily Ripley, and is designed to highlight the real stories of folks from various backgrounds who interacted with the Quinceañera tradition in their lives. In collaboration with Creative Director Melannie Vásquez Lara, The Neighbors conducted six interviews, which were then compiled into the sound world on display on the museum's mezzanine. Using motion

activation as visitors move through the gallery, the soundscapes created for this project explore themes of private life, family and community, fiesta and tradition, and the dress itself.

Far from being a static relic of the past, the Quinceañera has evolved from its original forms established in the 1930s and 1940s. Although a strong tradition exists for the celebration, contemporary participants are exuberantly redefining it for the future. A recent development has been the growth of Quinceañeros, that writer Rachel Valentina Gonzalez-Martin describes as "for the range of queer and questioning Latino who find themselves outside a tradition they cannot yet choose to call their own." Other alternative variations include Quinceañera performances by trans artist Lía García, and Emerge NYC's Queerceañera celebration.

Quinceañera: Dress and Memory in Latine Culture has been organized by Professor Emily Ripley, the director of the Fashion and Textiles Program and curator/collections manager for the Queens College Fashion and Textiles Collection, in collaboration with Louise Weinberg and Maria Pio, co-directors of Godwin-Ternbach Museum.

The organizers are partnering with the Consulate General of Mexico in New York, the investigative theatre company *What Will the Neighbors Say?*, Ballet Folklorico Quetzalcoatl/ Benito Bravo, CUNY LGBTQIA+ Consortium, CUNY Mexican Studies Institute, Queens Memory Project, LaGuardia & Wagner Archives, LGBTQIAA+ Programs at Queens College, and Mano a Mano, along with multiple entities from Queens College.

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About the Godwin-Ternbach Museum

The Godwin-Ternbach Museum, a part of Queens College's Kupferberg Center for the Visual and Performing Arts, presents contemporary and historical exhibitions and programs that provide exciting educational opportunities and aesthetic experiences to the college community and residents of Queens, Manhattan, and Long Island. As the only museum in the CUNY system, and the only encyclopedic collection of art and artifacts in the borough housing over 7,000 global objects that date from ancient to modern times, the museum introduces visitors to works they might not otherwise encounter. Virtual and in-person programs complement

and interpret the art on view to serve the needs and interests of local and international communities. All exhibitions and programs are free.

About Queens College

Queens College enjoys a national reputation for its liberal arts and sciences and pre-professional programs. With its graduate and undergraduate degrees, honors programs, and research and internship opportunities, the college helps its students realize their potential in countless ways, assisted by an accessible, award-winning faculty. Located on a beautiful, 80-acre campus in Flushing, the college has been cited by Princeton Review as one of America's Best Value Colleges for five consecutive years, as well as being ranked a U.S. News and World Report Best College and Forbes Magazine Best Value College thanks to its outstanding academics, generous financial aid packages, and relatively low costs. Visit our homepage (www.qc.cuny.edu) to learn more.

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CUNY Fashion & Design Program: **@queenscollegefashionprogram**

Queens College School of Arts: **@queenscollegesoa**

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