

New museum exhibit tells of waist control

NEW YORK (AP) — Ow! The torture that people have endured through the ages to make their waists look small.

Girdles and corsets. Whalebone and wood. Bustles and hoop skirts.

Jane Fonda videos.

It's all on display in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's "Waist Not" costume exhibit, which opens Tuesday and shows how the waistline has been treated through the ages.

"Fashion is always contrived to show off the waist," said Richard Martin, curator of the museum's Costume Institute, who supervised the exhibit.

Rather than forgoing an extra helping, 19th century women stuffed themselves into corsets to give themselves the proper silhouette.

Posture was enhanced by busks, or vertical stays of wood, metal, whalebone and ivory, often elaborately chiseled with fleurs-de-lis, cupids, scrolls and such slogans as "Faithfulness above all."

The waist also could be made to look smaller by bustles, large sleeves and hoop skirts. That created the heavy look of the Victorian era.

The outfits were rarely comfortable, and the demands of fashion sometimes led to miscarriages and anemia, said Harold Koda, assistant curator of the Costume Institute.

But economic liberation for women eventually led to at least some fashion liberation, Martin said. Girdles, for example, are not as ubiquitous as they once were.

The exhibit includes a few examples of men's clothing — an outfit from late 18th century France and a high-waisted American suit from the early 19th century — mostly on display as a comparison to the women's attire.

The idea that little is beautiful is still with us. Playing in the background throughout the exhibit, which runs through Aug. 21, is a Jane Fonda exercise tape, exhorting people to bend, breathe and move — and trim that tummy.

Rodney King recounts emotions felt during 1991 roadside beating

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A soft-spoken Rodney King got down on a courtroom floor Monday, re-enacted portions of his 1991 beating by police and told jurors: "I felt like I had been raped."

As batons smashed into his head, "I felt like I had lost half of my face. ... I could hear my bones crunching every time the baton hit me," he testified. "It sounded like throwing an egg and hearing the shell crack."

When officers hog-tied and dragged him to the side of the road, "I felt like a cow that was waiting to be slaughtered, like a piece of meat," he said.

"I was just so scared. I felt like I was going to die."

King was testifying in his \$9.5 million lawsuit against the city of Los Angeles for damages stemming from his March 3, 1991, beating by four Los Angeles police officers.

King, who is black, was beaten by the white officers after a traffic stop. The beating was videotaped by a bystander and broadcast widely, prompting an investigation of police brutality around the nation.

The officers were acquitted of nearly all assault charges in a 1992 state trial, whose verdicts sparked three days of rioting. Two of the officers were convicted last year in federal court of violating King's civil rights and were sentenced to 30 months in prison.

The city has admitted liability, but jurors are being asked to set a damage figure. In a second phase, they will try to allocate blame to individual defendants, including former Police Chief Daryl Gates and the four officers, for punitive damages.

King, who rejected the city's \$1.25 million settlement offer, was asked whether he felt the beating was unusual.

"I had a feeling that this happens all the time," he said. "I just happened to run into the wrong pack of dogs: police officers."

Asked to recount what happened, King, 28, recalled an evening that began in celebration of his

winning back his job with a construction company.

"I was very proud of myself for having got back with my company," said King, who had served time in prison for robbery. He admitted drinking too much beer and champagne that night and said he tried to elude a police traffic stop because he feared going back to prison.

When police caught up with him, he said, he tried to comply with orders to get down on the ground.

Under questioning by his lawyer, Milton Grimes, King left the witness stand twice and got down on the floor to show jurors the position he was in when struck by police batons and boots.

As his mouth filled with blood, he said, he heard police yell, "We're gonna kill you, nigger. Run!" He said he ran to get away.

"I felt like I had been raped (of) my decency and manhood," he said quietly. "I heard them say 'nigger' and 'killer.'"

"How did you feel?" Grimes asked.

"Very scared for my life," King said. "I knew they were going to try to kill me when they started saying 'nigger' and 'killer.'"

At last year's federal trial, King made the same claims but later said he wasn't sure about the racial remarks.

Doctors in the current trial have testified that King suffered injuries that could have killed him; one neurologist said he was surprised King survived.

King said his wounds were psychological as well as physical.

"I felt that I had been stripped of my decency and my will as a human being," he said. "I felt helpless. I felt scared, confused and very weak."

In his only allusion to the political impact of the case, he said: "I felt I had landed somewhere in the world not in the United States. The officers, the words, the racial slurs they were using that night — I thought I was somewhere else, not here."

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