

Featured Artifact: Cuban Rumba Dress

Era 10: Contemporary United States (1968 to the Present)

<http://historyexplorer.americanhistory.si.edu/resource/?key=1370>



Look at the artifact presented to you. In a few sentences, respond to the following questions:

Describe: Objectively describe the artifact. What do you think it is made of? What does it look like? Does it look old or new? Is it intact, or is it damaged in some way?

Analyze: When, where or how do you think this item was used? What kind of person may have created or used this item? What significance do you think the object held, either for the creator or the user? Do you see words or images on the artifact that connect it to others (besides the creator and user)?

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Share your conclusions with a partner, then discuss the following:

Evaluate : Justify why you came to those conclusions about the artifact. What further questions do you have about the object? Of those questions, which could you solve by observing the object in person and which would you need to solve with research?

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Background Information

This is a Bata Cubana, or Cuban Rumba dress, donated to the Smithsonian by Celia Cruz, the great Cuban salsa singer in 1997. An adaptation of the traditional Cuban rumba dress, it was made in the United States by Cuban-born designer José Arteaga. The Bata Cubana has its roots in the 19th century, with origins as diverse as the multicultural makeup of the people of Cuba. It brings together influences from Spanish, French, and African culture and dress, combining theater, fiesta, and the spectacle of carnival with slave and gypsy dress. The Bata Cubana is a garment worn for performance on stage or cabaret. Celia Cruz's Bata Cubana is made of orange polyester satin, trimmed with white nylon eyelet along ruffle-edges and eyelet beading along seams with inserted orange ribbon. The Bata Cubana was Celia's preferred performance costume.

After reading and considering the background information, compose a response to the following:

Analyze: Address the following object-specific questions:

- Based on her costume, what do you think Celia Cruz's music might have sounded like? Why?
- How does this costume combine influences from a multitude of cultures?

Synthesize: What does this object tell us about the era in which it was created, or the American experience as a whole? How would you describe the social, economic, or political climate of America during this time? What connections can you make between this object and other things that you have seen, read, or experienced?

Analyze: Address the following era-specific questions:

- How have economic, social and cultural developments in contemporary America shaped who we are as a country today?