

Out of the Box

A Barbie Retrospective



March 8 - July 31, 2025

*Ensemble, 1961. Carolyn and Richard F. Barry III
Art Purchase Fund.*

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In 2025, the Barry Art Museum will open a brand-new exhibit of the world's most famous doll: Barbie. Focusing on her history as a design icon, this show will investigate the people and processes behind Barbie and her wardrobe.

Few fashion dolls have had as significant an impact on the world as Barbie. Developed by Ruth Handler for Mattel and debuting in 1959, Barbie represented both a continuation of the fashion doll tradition and the transformation of it. Like the dolls of Adelaide Huret or Madame Alexander, Barbie represented a fashionable teenager, but the massive scope of her production (enabled through new, affordable materials such as plastic) allowed her to reach a significantly larger audience. Through savvy marketing, affordability, diverse wardrobes and accessories that appealed to a variety of interests, Barbie quickly became a cherished part of many childhoods. More than 60 years later, Barbie and her maximalist style continue to influence popular culture, as demonstrated by the *Barbie* movie phenomenon of 2023. Yet how did Barbie's iconic style develop, and who were the people behind the doll?

This exhibition showcases Barbie's design history by focusing on major contributors to her image over the decades. We'll examine the work of Charlotte Johnson, who created Barbie's earliest wardrobes, and Kitty Black Perkins, who designed the first Black Barbie in the 1970s and created hundreds of outfits and accessories. We will also look at how Barbie's various trousseaus were developed and manufactured. To explore this rich design history in-depth, the Barry Art Museum is partnering with Bradley Justice Yarbough, a leading expert on Barbie. Yarbough writes for *Doll News* and *Antique Doll Collector* magazines and has appeared on *The Doll Podcast* with host Louisa Maxwell.

The objects in this exhibition delve into Barbie's design history, while the exhibition layout will further explore Barbie's brand by invoking her modern aesthetic. Working with ODU's theater department and local artists, the museum will bring Barbie's distinctive style of life through an homage to the interiors of her various dreamhouses. This will be an immersive installation that charts Barbie's changing style across the decades.



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- One (1) private Museum tour per year
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- Two (2) copies of Museum catalog or other commemorative exhibition related materials, as available (not published for all exhibitions)



CONTRIBUTOR

Community investment: \$2,500

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- One (1) private Museum tour per year
- Subscription to eMagazine
- Two (2) copies of Museum catalog or other commemorative exhibition related materials, as available (not published for all exhibitions)



Your support of the Barry Art Museum is greatly appreciated!

The Barry Art Museum is a private, not-for-profit foundation. It was created in 2017 through the generosity of Carolyn K. and Richard F. Barry III, who donated the Museum's luminous new building, the Founders' Collection of art, and operating funds. Visitors of all ages can explore art and the world in which it is made in a museum environment that encourages a dynamic relationship between art objects and observers. The permanent collection showcases international glass sculptures, 20th-century American Modernist paintings, and historical dolls and automata.

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