



It is difficult to imagine a circus without the glamorous costumes worn by circus performers: the vibrant colors, feathers, and luscious fabrics all help to tell a story. This story is created by the costume designer, whose job is to create outfits for each performer in the circus.

Many circus costumes require specialized adaptations for each performer; for example, tight wire walkers need shoes with soft soles so that they can feel the wire under their feet. In 1859, a man named Jules Leotard invented the flying trapeze. To perform safely he needed a costume that would not catch on the equipment and so he developed a one-piece suit now known as the leotard.

Search **Miles White** on [e-museum](#) for inspiration, then create your own costume designs in the activity on the next page.

Miles White (American, 1914-2000), *Woman in Yellow and White* (Detail), 1955. Paint and Ink on Paper, 15 1/4 x 11 in. Tibbals Circus Collection. ht3000704

WHEN LOOKING AT A CIRCUS COSTUME, ASK YOURSELF:

- What type of performer wore this costume?
- What is the costume made from?
- Describe the colors used in the costume
- Describe the textures you see in the costume
- What features of the costume would add visual interest to the act?
- What features of this costume would make it easy to move in during a performance?
- What is your favorite part of the costume? What would you change?

STANDARDS:

VA.K.H.1.1
VA.68.S.1.3

ACTIVITY

COSTUME DESIGNER

MATERIALS:
COLORED PENCILS, CRAYONS, OR MARKERS

DIFFICULTY LEVEL:
SIMPLE

Try it Out! Do you have what it takes to be a costume designer?

Design costumes onto both the male and female mannequins below. Before you start designing, decide what type of act you are creating costumes for: do your performers train lions? Act as clowns? Walk on a tightrope? Try to incorporate functional elements for the act into each costume.

