

art

The ROM revisits Dior's New Look

By MICHELLE DA SILVA

A display of 38 haute couture dresses at Canada's largest research museum might seem like an odd choice for the Royal Ontario Museum, especially considering current threats to science, geography and art. Fashion, lately, has become more associated with hyper-consumerism and frivolity than culture, and nothing seems more inconsequential in the face of contemporary issues than expensive gowns once worn by Canada's elite.

But the Christian Dior exhibition at the ROM, which coincides with the House of Dior's 70th anniversary, focuses on the French couturier's foundational years from 1947 to 1957, when women's fashion reflected a post-war modernity. In a museum setting, these dresses provide a springboard for discussion on gender performance, the fast-fashion industry and our current political climate.

The ROM's emphasis on Dior's early years is significant. It was during this time when the designer presented his collection known as the "New Look," which focused on an overtly feminine silhouette — soft shoulders, cinched waist, accentuated hips and full skirts. The "New Look" stood in contrast to wartime attire, when clothing was seen as functional, masculine and uniform.

"Christian Dior's revolutionary fashions captured the excitement of post-war modernity," says Alexandra Palmer, the exhibition curator. "This was made possible with the work of numerous industries and artisans who produced extraordinary ribbons, beads, sequins and embroideries that Dior incorporated into his dresses."

Palmer, who is the author of *Christian Dior: History & Modernity, 1947-1957*, a companion book to be published by ROM Press early next year,



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says that Dior had a great influence in shaping the modern aesthetic and his vision continues to guide the House of Dior and resonate with designers the world over.

What's unique about this exhibition is that it's entirely original to the ROM. All of the garments were donated by Toronto socialites, and it's presented by Holt Renfrew, the first store in Canada to carry the brand. Dresses span daytime, evening wear and gowns, and the pieces are contextualized with more than 100 objects, including accessories, perfumes, short films, sketches, photographs, magazines and advertisements.

Visitors can see a ruby-red version of Dior's Delphine dress, a classic cocktail dress that Audrey Hepburn might have worn. There's the show-stopping Vénus gown, a frothy pink strapless number with a tiered sequin and rhinestone tail. Plus, Avril, a two-piece garden-party organza dress with silk embroidered flowers. Perhaps the most jaw-dropping piece is a satin jacket with concentric lace embroidery so intricate that the jacket lining appears three-dimensional.

Fashion is a reflection of the times, an idea that underlines the exhibit. With peace and prosperity came sequins, ruffles and full skirts, and during

political unrest and global turmoil, we got more practical, genderless clothes. Utility jackets, jeans and flat shoes were the uniform for men and women of the 1930s, 70s, 90s and today. Contrast that with the fashion of the 1950s, 80s and early aughts.

The 38 couture dresses can tell us a lot about the craftspeople who made them, the women who wore them and the world they lived in. The same can be said of the jeans and T-shirts most of us throw on today.

Christian Dior runs to March 18 at the ROM (100 Queen's Park). rom.on.ca/dior. michelled@nowtoronto.com | @michdas

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READINGS THIS WEEK

Thursday, November 30

INCARNATIONS BY JANIETA EYRE Launch for a book featuring works by the photographer. 7-9 pm. Free. Creeds Coffee Bar, 390 Dupont. facebook.com/events/146551145954551.

PAPERBACKS FROM HELL LIVE Author Grady Hendrix delivers a multimedia presentation about the history of lurid 1970s paperbacks. 8 pm. \$14, adv \$12. Royal Cinema, 608 College. universe.com/paperbacks.

THE PETTICOAT AND THE NOOSE: HANGING WOMEN IN CANADA Talk by Lorna Poplak, author of *Drop Dead: A Horrible History of Hanging in Canada*. 7 pm. Free. Toronto Reference Library, 789 Yonge. tpl.ca.

THE RECONCILIATION MANIFESTO: THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF ARTHUR MANUEL

Book launch and discussion by Audra Simpson, Ska7cis Manuel, Naomi Klein, Russ Diabo and Hayden King, on the work and profound impact of the late activist. 6:30 pm. Free. Ryerson Oakham House, 63 Gould. hayden.king@ryerson.ca.

Saturday, December 2

BOUND BOOK ARTS FAIR Limited edition handmade books, artist's books, original prints, broadsides, cards, ephemera, door prizes and more. 10 am-5 pm. Free admission. Arts & Letters Club, 14 Elm. gracenotespress.com.

QUEER PLAY Hardworkin' Homosexuals & Playwrights Canada present performances by Carolyn Taylor, Keith Cole, Tabia Lau, Dawn Whitwell, host Elvira Kurt & others at a launch for the book edited by Moynan King. 6:30 pm. Free. Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, 12 Alexander. buddiesinbadtimes.com.

ZONGI UN/MASKED Collective durational reading of M. NourbeSe Philip's poem about Africans thrown to their deaths off a slave ship in 1781. Suggested dress code is white. 7 pm-1 am. Free. Dance Annex, 527 Bloor W. facebook.com/events/133801920719917.

Sunday, December 3

THE DRAFT READINGS: A CELEBRATION OF THE WRITING PROCESS New & unpublished works by Vince Colistro, Christine Higdon, Jess Taylor and part 1 of a collaboration between Jade Wallace and Joshua P'ng. 3 pm. Free. The Dock on Queen, 932 Queen E. draftreadings.com.

GUERNICA'S WINTER LAUNCH Celebration of new titles with the authors. 3:30 pm. Free. Supermarket, 268 Augusta. facebook.com/events/124449284913525.

POEMS FOR YOUR SOUL Reading by poet Nova, showcasing her book *Love & Behold; A Self-Story Written in Verse*, accompanied by ukulele. 2 pm. Free. Black Rock Coffee, 677 Bloor W. nova.softlyhere@gmail.com.

Monday, December 4

ADAM KAHANE The author talks about Collaborating With The Enemy: How To Work With People You Don't Agree With Or Like Or Trust. 5 pm. \$22.21 (includes book). U of T Rotman School of Management, 105 St George. 416-978-6119, uoft.me/Kahane.

BRICK 100 LAUNCH Celebrating 40 years & 100 issues w/ Karen Solie, Aisha Sasha John, Melanie Mah, Michael Redhill and Linda Spalding. 7:30 pm. Free. Super Wonder Gallery, 584 College. 416-593-9684, brickmag.com.

JACLYN FRIEDMAN Ryerson Feminist Hour presents a launch for *Unscrewed*. 6:30 pm. Free. Ryerson University Student Learning Centre, 341 Yonge. 416-462-1104, anotherstory.ca.

Tuesday, December 5

ART BAR POETRY SERIES Readings by Carolyne Van Der Meer, Cornelia Hoogland and Dayle Furlong. 8 pm. \$5. Free Times Cafe, 320 College. artbar.org.

ROWERS READING SERIES Michael Fraser, Anne McDonald, Ursula Pflug and Chris Gilmore. 6:30 pm. Free. Supermarket, 268 Augusta. rowerspubreadingseries.com.

THIS WEEK IN THE MUSEUMS

GARDINER MUSEUM 12 Trees: Let There Be Light group show (light-inspired installations), to Jan 7 (\$9-\$15, under 18 free). The Canadian Odyssey Of Lord Milton (bone china) to Jan 7. Lobby. Steven Heinemann to Jan 21. GA: \$15, srs \$11, stu \$9, under 18 free; Fri 4-9 pm half-price. 111 Queen's Park. 416-586-8080.

ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM Christian Dior (fashion), to Mar 18 (\$21.50-\$28). The Evidence Room to Jan 28. Vikings: The Exhibition to Apr 2. \$21-\$32. GA: \$20, srs \$17, stu \$15.50. 100 Queen's Park. 416-586-8000.

TEXTILE MUSEUM OF CANADA Diligence And Elegance: The Nature Of Japanese Textiles to Jan 21. Tied, Dyed And Woven: Ikat Textiles From Latin America to Feb 25. GA: \$15, srs \$10, stu \$6; pwyc Wed 5-8 pm. 55 Centre. 416-599-5321.

MUST-SEE SHOWS

DANIELS SPECTRUM iAM: An Exhibition On Reconciliation group show by Indigenous youth (photos), to Jan 7. 585 Dundas E. 416-238-2453.

EJ PRATT LIBRARY Dominion Of The North: Literary & Print Culture In Canada (monographs of rare books/pamphlets/periodicals), to Dec 12. 71 Queen's Park Cres E. 416-585-4470.

ONSITE GALLERY Raise A Flag: Works From The Indigenous Art Collection; Jackson 2bears and Janet Rogers to Dec 10. 199 Richmond W. 416-977-6000 ext 265.

STOCKYARDS GALLERY Al Runt and Jean Paul Langlois (painting), Dec 2 to Jan 2. 1611 Dupont. 416-903-0117.

TORONTO REFERENCE LIBRARY Charles Dickens: The Man Who Invented Christmas (artifacts/first-edition novels/personal letters/paintings), to Dec 3. 789 Yonge. 416-395-5577.

Everyone's invited to our Holiday Party! Saturday, December 2nd

All day long we'll have:
• a store-wide discount
• snacks and tasty treats
• free gift-wrapping



At 2pm we'll launch
WEAVE A CIRCLE ROUND,
by Kari Maaren.

Kari and friends will
also provide music.

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