

History, Art, Beauty and Fashion Come Alive in NYC Museums

By Renee Phillips





Three compelling New York museum exhibitions reflect the course of history and share a common thread of beauty, fashion and glamour in different ways. The “Gilded Age” at the Museum of the City of New York provides a view of the 19th century lifestyle of the elite in New York, while the “Killer Heels” exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum encompasses decades of styles of high heel shoes. An exhibition of Cubist Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art would not have come to fruition without the 40 year collection of cosmetics mogul Leonard A. Lauder. We know that Cubism has had an influence on fashion throughout the decades.

“Gilded New York” at the Museum of the City of New York

The Museum of the City of New York was founded in 1923 and has been responsible for celebrating New York City and educating the public about its distinctive history, heritage, and transformation.

Last year, the museum inaugurated its Tiffany & Co. Foundation Gallery with “Gilded New York”, an exhibition that explores the city’s visual culture at the end of the 19th century. This was an era of glamor in New York, when the city’s cultural institutions helped launch its global prominence and New York became the nation’s corporate headquarters. The elite class displayed a massive amount of extravagance when it came to its fashions, architecture, and interior design.

“Gilded New York” presents some 100 works, including costumes, jewelry,

portraits, and decorative objects, all created between the mid-1870s and the early 20th century. The Tiffany & Co. Foundation Gallery consists of elegant state-of-the-art display cases, herringbone wood flooring, decorative wallpaper, mirrored window shutters, draperies, as well as a historic chandelier and fireplace mantel from the Museum’s collections.

“Gilded New York” is organized by Donald Albrecht, the City Museum’s Curator of Architecture and Design; Jeannine Falino, an independent curator; and Phyllis Magidson, the City Museum’s Curator of Costumes and Textiles. The exhibition runs through November 30, 2014.

Visit the Museum of the City of New York’s website www.mcny.org

“Killer Heels” at The Brooklyn Museum

Founded in 1895, the Brooklyn Museum is a massive, 560,000 square foot art institution. Its permanent collections include a wide range of objects -- from ancient Egyptian masterpieces to contemporary art -- representing almost every culture in the world.

“Killer Heels: The Art of the High Heeled Shoe” is a current exhibition through February 15, 2015. It explores the most provocative and coveted fashion accessory and its rich and varied history. Comprised of 160 elevated shoes in a wide range of styles, origins and eras, this exhibition is a feast for the eyes.

Included in this exhibition are the high platform chopines (a style of women’s platform shoe that was

popular in the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries), Salvador Dalí’s fanciful, inverted Shoe Hat of the late 1930s, many of the glamorous stilettos seen on today’s red carpets, and the memorable eight-inch-heel platform booties created by United Nude for Lady Gaga.

Both contemporary and historic footwear in “Killer Heels” have been borrowed from designers or culled from the renowned Brooklyn Museum costume collection housed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Bata Shoe Museum in Toronto and Museo Ferragamo in Florence, Italy. Throughout the ages, the high-heeled shoe has gone through many transformations and interpretations of artistic expression for both designer and wearer. According to Lisa Small, the Brooklyn Museum’s curator of exhibitions and this exhibition “Killer Heels” strives to present shoes “from an aesthetic, design and material culture standpoint.”

Visit The Brooklyn Museum’s website www.brooklynmuseum.org

“Cubism: The Leonard A. Lauder Collection” at The Metropolitan Museum

The Metropolitan Museum of Art is an art mecca that attracts more than six million visitors each year. Its history begins in 1866 in Paris, France, when a group of Americans agreed to create a “national institution and gallery of art” to bring art and art education to the American people. It is one of the world’s largest and finest art museums that hosts a collection comprised of more than two million works of art.

Over the past 40 years, Leonard A. Lauder, the cosmetics mogul and philanthropist, has selectively acquired masterpieces and seminal works to create the most important collection of Cubist Art that has existed in private hands. This unsurpassed collection is now a promised gift to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and will be shown in “Cubism: The Leonard A. Lauder Collection”, from October 20, 2014 – February 16, 2015.

Included in this unprecedented exhibition are 79 paintings, collages, drawings, and sculpture by the four preeminent Cubist artists: Georges Braque (French, 1882–1963), Juan Gris (Spanish, 1887–1927), Fernand Léger (French, 1881–1955), and Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973). Cubism is recognized as the most influential art movement of the early twentieth century and remains a major source of inspiration for many artists today. Fundamental traits of Cubist art -- with its distortions, dimensions, angles and geometric shapes -- were also translated into fashion from 1908 into the early 1920s. We can still see its influence on designers today. Simply consider Prada’s angular shoes and Lagerfeld’s cubist shapes.

In his book, “Cubism and Fashion,” Richard Martin states, “In the search for a description of or analysis for fashion’s radical transformation, it becomes clear that Cubism possesses both the aesthetic proximity and the worldly diffusion to be not only metaphor but also cause.”

Visit The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s website www.metmuseum.org