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VMFA to showcase art, innovation of haute couture design

Yves Saint Laurent: The Perfection of Style to open May 6, 2017

The fast-paced sights and sounds of the fashion runway will come to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts this spring with *Yves Saint Laurent: The Perfection of Style*, a multifaceted exhibition that opens May 6, and continues through August 27, 2017. Drawn from the unparalleled collection of the Paris-based Fondation Pierre Bergé - Yves Saint Laurent and other private collections, this breathtaking exhibition offers an intimate and comprehensive look at the lifetime achievement of Saint Laurent, one of history's most radical and influential fashion designers.

Featuring 100 examples of haute couture and ready-to-wear garments—some never shown publicly before—this exhibition reveals Saint Laurent's artistic genius, as well as his working process, and the sources of his design inspiration. VMFA is the only East Coast venue for the exhibition, which has been organized by the Seattle Art Museum in partnership with the Paris-based Fondation.

In addition to haute couture ensembles and ready-to-wear clothing, *Yves Saint Laurent: The Perfection of Style* includes costume jewelry and other accessories, photographs, drawings, films, and video from the Fondation's vast archive. The exhibition traces the trajectory of Saint Laurent's style as it developed throughout the course of his career, beginning in 1953 with the "Paper Doll Couture House" that he created as a teenager, which is being shown for the first time in the United States. Ensembles early in the exhibition focus on his formative years at the House of Dior, including an example of a short evening dress from his successful "Trapeze" collection, which marked his debut as a fashion designer when it was shown in Paris in 1958. The exhibition continues with his groundbreaking designs of the 1960s, which revolutionized the fashion industry. During this decade, Saint Laurent liberated modern women from the constraints of strict gender codes by creating clothing—such as the safari jacket, the pantsuit, and the tuxedo—which he borrowed from the male wardrobe. Visitors also will see how Saint Laurent was inspired by the work of other artists, including Piet Mondrian and Tom Wesselmann, as well as African art and ancient Greek vase painting.

Another key element of this presentation is the inclusion of production documents that offer a rare behind-the-scenes glimpse into the creative workings of the Yves Saint Laurent fashion house and the private life of the couturier. Collection boards containing sketches and color swatches from 1962 to 2002 document every Saint Laurent haute couture show, while a room of "toiles"—the forms ateliers use to create as first draft of couture garments—offers a unique look into the various stages of production and fitting before the final garment was realized. The exhibition concludes in an explosion of color with a procession of eveningwear, including garments in black silk, blue-green chiffon, and white damask, which date from the early 1970s to 2002, when Saint Laurent officially retired with his final runway collection.

"History has already cemented Yves Saint Laurent's reputation as one of the greatest couturiers of the 20th century," said Alex Nyerges, VMFA Director. "This remarkable exhibition presents Saint Laurent's exquisite designs in an immersive environment that allows visitors to see firsthand the development of



Evening Gown, Yves Saint Laurent (French, 1936-2008). Fall-Winter 1983 *Paris* haute couture collection. © Fondation Pierre Bergé - Yves Saint Laurent, Paris. Photo: Alexandre Guirkingner.

Saint Laurent's style, as well as his impact on fashion, film, and popular culture.”

Yves Saint Laurent: The Perfection of Style is curated by Florence Müller, the Denver Art Museum's Avenir Foundation Curator of Textile Art and Curator of Fashion, in collaboration with Chiyo Ishikawa, Seattle Art Museum's Deputy Director of Art and Curator of European Painting and Sculpture. Barry Shifman, VMFA's Sydney and Frances Lewis Family Curator of Decorative Arts, 1890 to the present, is the organizing curator for VMFA.

“As a fashion designer, Saint Laurent was always pushing boundaries,” said Dr. Michael R. Taylor, VMFA's Chief Curator and Deputy Director for Art and Education. “During his 40 years of designing, Saint Laurent transformed the female wardrobe by borrowing the tuxedo, the safari jacket, and the pantsuit from men's clothing. By turning traditional menswear into haute couture, Saint Laurent empowered women with this new form of clothing and, in doing so, revolutionized the fashion world. This exhibition demonstrates the impact of Saint Laurent's work on the history of fashion and the present-day relevance of his style.”

Timed admission tickets for the exhibition will go on sale Monday, February 6, 2017. Tickets are \$22 for adults, \$18 for seniors, and \$10 for college students and children ages 7-17. Tickets are free for VMFA members and children ages 6 and younger. Visitors can [reserve tickets online](#) or by phone at 804.340.1405.

About Yves Saint Laurent

Yves Saint Laurent was born in 1936 in Oran, Algeria. He later studied at the Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture in Paris but was soon hired by Christian Dior to work in his studio. Upon Dior's death in 1957, the then-21-year-old Saint Laurent was named artistic director of the House of Dior and his first collection, “Trapeze,” was an immense success.

After being dismissed by the House of Dior in 1960, Saint Laurent launched his own couture house a year later with Pierre Bergé, who would become his lifelong business and personal partner. Over the next 40 years, Saint Laurent transformed women's fashion with his innovative designs. He revolutionized fashion by opening SAINT LAURENT *rive gauche* in 1966, the first ready-to-wear boutique to bear a couturier's name, paving the way to what has become today's fashion world.

In 1999, Saint Laurent sold the ready-to-wear activity to the Kering group and dedicated himself to his couture collection. After his retirement on January 7, 2002, the Centre Pompidou in Paris presented more than 40 years of his creations, including his last Spring-Summer collection. Since then, only ready-to-wear collections have been produced by the brand owned by Kering, whose name was changed to SAINT LAURENT PARIS in 2012. He died in his Paris home in 2008.

Sponsorship

Sponsors include Northern Trust Company, the Julia Louise Reynolds Fund, Teri Craig Miles, Eda Hofstead Cabaniss, First Tennessee Bank, Julia and Tunnicliff Fox Charitable Trust, Dr. and Mrs. William Jackson Frable, Floyd and Helga Gottwald, McGue Millhiser Family Trust, Norfolk Southern Corporation, the Virginia Sargeant Reynolds Foundation, Deborah and Thomas Valentine, and The Winebow Group.

About the Fondation Pierre Bergé - Yves Saint Laurent

Yves Saint Laurent and Pierre Bergé opened their haute couture house at 30 *bis* rue Spontini in 1962. During their 12 years there, Saint Laurent invented the wardrobe for the modern woman. They settled at 5 Avenue Marceau in 1974, in a Second Empire-style private mansion, where Saint Laurent asserted his style until his retirement in 2002.

Opened in 2004 in the premises of Yves Saint Laurent's couture house, the Fondation Pierre Bergé - Yves Saint Laurent is founded on 40 years of creativity. Recognized as a public utility organization, it has three missions:

- **The rigorous conservation of a unique heritage** comprising more than 5,000 haute couture garments and 15,000 accessories, as well as thousands of sketches, collection boards, photographs and objects that bear witness of Yves Saint Laurent's creativity.
- **The promotion of Yves Saint Laurent's work**, through the Musée Yves Saint Laurent Paris and the Musée Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech to be opened in Fall 2017 and through exhibitions organized in museums around the world.
- **The support of cultural institutions** encouraging the contemporary arts.

About the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, Virginia, is one of the largest comprehensive art museums in the United States. VMFA, which opened in 1936, is a state agency and privately endowed educational institution. Its purpose is to collect, preserve, exhibit, and interpret art, and to encourage the study of the arts. Through the Office of Statewide Partnerships program, the museum offers curated exhibitions, arts-related audiovisual programs, symposia, lectures, conferences, and workshops by visual and performing artists. In addition to presenting a wide array of special exhibitions, the museum provides visitors with the opportunity to experience a global collection of art that spans more than 5,000 years. VMFA's permanent holdings encompass more than 35,000 artworks, including the largest public collection of Fabergé outside of Russia, the finest collection of Art Nouveau outside of Paris, and one of the nation's finest collections of American art. VMFA is home to important collections of English silver and Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, British sporting, and modern and contemporary art, as well as renowned South Asian, Himalayan, and African art. In May 2010, VMFA opened its doors to the public after a transformative expansion, the largest in its 80-year history. The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts is the only art museum in the United States open 365 days a year with free general admission. For additional information, telephone 804-340-1400 or visit www.vmfa.museum.

Media contact:

Anthony Backherms | anthony.backherms@vmfa.museum | 804.204.2705
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 200 N. Boulevard, Richmond VA 23220-4007