



PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID LASSMAN



Cocktail couture

OHA'S 'FASHION AFTER FIVE'
HIGHLIGHTS COCKTAIL DRESSES
FROM THE 1920S TO PRESENT

| BY LINDA BIEN

The Onondaga Historical Association toasts cocktail couture from the 1920s to the present day with its exhibit "Fashion After Five."

The exhibit was curated by Jeffrey Mayer, an associate professor of fashion design and history and the curator of the Sue Ann Genet Costume Collection at Syracuse University. It and the adjacent exhibit, "Culture of the Cocktail Hour," continues through June 15 at the OHA's museum.

"Fashion After Five" breaks down cocktail wear decade by decade, from the sleek and beaded flapper dresses of the 1920s to the glamorous gowns of the 1990s, which were influenced by the HBO ▶



TOP, "Fashion After Five" at the Onondaga Historical Association. ABOVE, a display of rhinestone jewelry sparkles amid martini glasses and barware.



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The exhibit features a display of accessories, including cocktail hats and handbags.

television series "Sex and the City." Also featured in the exhibit is the work of students from SU's department of fashion design, who took inspiration from vintage styles to create their own little black dresses.

For each decade, Mayer pays meticulous attention to detail, adding the décor of the era, including mirrors and tables, to complement the fashions. Mayer also finds connections to what was happening in Syracuse in each decade. For the 1920s, for example, he highlights Syracuse China, which was manufacturing tea cups that were likely used in speakeasys. Such establishments, which were fronts for bars, were popular when Prohibition was in effect. The OHA has re-created its own speakeasy, the Coffee, Tea and China Shop,

in the OHA's basement.

Other Central New York companies that are highlighted include Heuber-Breuer (1930s), Smith Corona and General Electric (1940s), Syroco (1950s), Syracuse department stores (1960s), the John H. Mulroy Civic Center (1970s), Heaphy's Tin Man (1980s) and Lisa Boutique (1990s).

"I was hoping to give viewers to this show ... a local context to the fashion," says Mayer. "Most of the garments were worn in Syracuse, so it is interesting to know what was happening at the time. I tried to highlight companies that were very important during different eras so that you would get a flavor of Syracuse as well as fashion while attending the show."

This exhibit was more than two years in the making and marks the first time that Mayer has worked with the OHA. He has been involved with previous exhibits at the Everson Museum of Art, including the recent "An American Look: Fashion, Decorative Arts & Gustav Stickley," which he co-curated with Everson Museum



Mannequins are handpainted to evoke the look of each era.



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The 1960s, left to right, a Jonny Herbert Original black taffeta "bubble dress," a pink and gold brocade sheath dress and matching coat, and a Larry Aldrich pink sequin mini dress. The mannequin wearing the mini dress is made in the image of iconic model Twiggy.



The 1940s started the era of little black dress due to wartime frugality. Left to right, black rayon crepe satin evening dress with muskrat chubbie coat and hat trimmed with fox tails, black rayon crepe evening dress and black rayon crepe day dress. All are circa 1942.

Senior Curator Debora Ryan, and "Marie Antoinette: Styling the 18th-Century Superstar," which he curated in 2008.

The fashions and accessories (hats, jewelry and purses) on display are from the Genet collection, which focuses on women's wear from the 1820s to the present and includes about 3,500 items, and the OHA's fashion collection, which numbers more than 15,000 items. The OHA collection includes everything from women's wear to children's wear to military uniforms. Mayer says the collection's 19th-century pieces are "beyond compare" and include one of the most extensive and beautiful collection of gowns from the pre and early Victorian eras, the 1810s to the 1920s, that he has ever seen.

What the pieces have in common is that they ►



The 1920s, left to right, a green and silver lame Charles Worth dress with gold and silver leather hip decoration, and an oyster silk georgette dress trimmed with white seed beads in an art deco pattern. Both dresses are circa 1925 and are from the OHA Clothing Collection.



PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID LASSMAN

Looks from the 1990s were influenced by the HBO series "Sex in the City," which premiered in 1998. The leather bustier in front from Neiman Marcus is paired with a taffeta ball skirt.

have been manufactured locally or worn by someone of local historic significance, says Gregg Tripoli, executive director of the OHA.

Despite the popularity of fashion exhibits, the OHA doesn't do them frequently, mostly out of practical considerations. Tripoli says the garments are often quite fragile and have to be handled with extreme care. Plus, the older pieces are quite small compared to today's sizes and that makes it a challenge to find the right size mannequins. In fact, the OHA doesn't have any of its own mannequins, Tripoli says.

Fortunately, that was one area that Mayer was able to address because the Genet collection includes a variety of mannequins. For "Fashion After Five," Mayer used several from London's Rootstein Display Mannequins, which were customized by mannequin painter David Costa of Dash-N-Dazzle in Paramus, N.J.

Among the mannequins at the OHA is an original Twiggy mannequin from the late 1960s, which Rootstein created in the image of iconic model. You'll find it in the 1960s area, wearing a pink sequined sleeveless mini sheath dress by designer Larry Aldrich. ♦



PHOTOGRAPH BY STEPHEN SARTORI

Syracuse University students model little black dresses that were inspired by vintage fashion at the opening of the exhibit in November. Some of the students' dresses are included in the exhibit.

THE DETAILS

"Fashion After Five" and "Culture of the Cocktail Hour" will be on display through June 15 at the Onondaga Historical Association, 321 Montgomery St., Syracuse. Museum hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesday through Friday and 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. The exhibit is free but donations are accepted.