

Press Release
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Mary McFadden: Goddesses
August 28 – December 6, 2008

Inspired by the art and culture of ancient Egyptian, Greek, Celtic, Byzantine, Pre-Columbian, Indian and African civilizations, internationally-renowned fashion designer Mary McFadden has developed a pantheon of artistic creations for the adornment of the feminine form.

In recognition of McFadden's original contributions to the design field and distinguished career, Moore College of Art & Design has organized a special exhibition that juxtaposes gowns and clothing ensembles with a selection of historic textiles and jewelry drawn from McFadden's own collection assembled during her extensive world travels.

The exhibition is presented in celebration of the College's 160th Anniversary year and in honor of McFadden, recipient of the College's 2008 Visionary Woman Award. The exhibition is curated by Lorie Mertes, Rochelle F. Levy Director and Chief Curator, The Galleries at Moore and is on view from August 28 through December 6, 2008 in Moore's Goldie Paley Gallery.

Frequently referred to as a "design archeologist," McFadden's distinctive garments reflect an avid study of ancient and ethnic cultures weaving the art of ancient Near Eastern, African, Classical Greek, Javanese, Pre-Columbian, Dynastic Chinese, Japanese and Korean cultures into her fabrics.

"My inspiration comes from ancient civilizations of the world," says McFadden. "I have adapted symbols and religious signs from many civilizations for my decorative fabric designs. Bits of heraldry, calligraphic ornamentation, stylized leaves and clouds, mythical animals, mosaics are ever present in my textiles and embroideries."

With an artist's sensitivity to color, harmony, and proportion, McFadden builds from a foundation of pure, timeless silhouettes and luxurious fabrics to which she adds exotic details and decorations. Many of her designs feature her own signature fabric, "Marii," a pleated polyester fabric, which she created in 1975. Designed to "fall like liquid gold," the fabrics cling to the body in animated folds while revealing the contours of the form beneath. McFadden is also known for her exquisite hand-painted quilted jackets and use of the traditional Indian Zardozi embroidery technique that was once used to embellish the attire of the Kings and the royals in India.

About the Exhibition:

On view in the exhibition are more than thirty major works from signature collections: works from the “Medici” collection, inspired by the Medici dynasty of fifteenth-century Florence incorporate velvet and opulent use of embroidery and hand-beading; gowns and jackets from the “Tales of Genji” collection (1988) inspired by the eleventh-century book of the same title by Lady Shikibu Murasaki (980-1016) is one of the numerous collections McFadden created based on Asian themes. Other Asian-inspired collections on view include the “Archaic Chinese Bronze” collection, and the “Emerald Buddha” collection inspired by the soft pastel hues, especially the celadon green, characteristic of Ming Dynasty China. Also on view are: gowns from the “Cult of Osiris” (1995) combining gold-hued macramé bodices with “Marii” pleated skirts; “Collection Mongolia” (Fall 1999) is represented with a stunning hand-painted floor-length quilted wedding dress; and gowns from the Jean-Auguste-Dominique-Ingres collection incorporate elaborate designs in Zardozi gold thread embroidery on velvet accented with pearls and jewels.

Textile Collection

Inspired by the simplicity of the design patterns from ancient cultures and civilizations, McFadden has an extensive collection of traditional ethnographic clothing and textiles—African robes, Japanese kimonos and Romanian folk costumes—many of which she was fond of wearing before she herself became a designer.

In her travels to research new themes for future haute couture collections, McFadden has amassed a personal textile collection ranging from Italian ecclesiastical garments to a 16th century Korean marriage robe. Each of these items is distinguished by the simple elegance of its construction or the magnificence of its surface detail. The exhibition presents a number of works from her collection alongside her fashions to reveal McFadden’s imaginative interpretations that draw from the past to create the present.

Jewelry

For McFadden, jewelry is an integral part of the entire design of a dress, “jewelry is to beautify a woman. But it should also be an *objet d’art*.” She created cuffs, necklaces and earrings that were independently conceived but coordinated with the themes of her couture collections. In addition to McFadden’s original designs, a selection of more than thirty stunning examples from McFadden’s personal jewelry collection are also on view and include ancient Pre-Columbian gold and Byzantine jewelry to sixteenth-century ceremonial pieces from India.

About Mary McFadden

An internationally-renowned textile, clothing and jewelry designer, Mary McFadden is also a designer of dramatic interior décor, a world traveler, an avid art collector, curator, textile collector, journalist, champion tennis player, successful entrepreneur and ever-curious scholar.

Born in New York in 1938, Mary McFadden spent her early formative years on her father's cotton plantation near Memphis before she moved to Long Island, New York. She attended school in New York and Paris, and studied sociology and anthropology at Columbia University.

After working as a publicist for Christian Dior - New York, an editor for *Vogue South Africa* and as a columnist for the *Rand Daily Mail*, in Johannesburg, South Africa, she launched her first collection in New York in 1973. In 1974 she created her own signature fabric, "Marii," pleated polyester. She won her first Coty Award in 1976 and entered the Coty Hall of Fame in 1979. In the span of her thirty-five-year career, McFadden has designed more than 100 collections, each based on an ancient civilization.

She is the recipient of numerous awards and honors including: a Lifetime Achievement Award during Fashion Week of the Americas, the Neiman Marcus Award of Excellence and the President's Fellow Award from Rhode Island School of Design. She was also inducted into the Best-Dressed Hall of Fame and served as President of the Council of Fashion Designers of America from 1982-83. McFadden was also awarded the first Living Landmark Award by the New York Landmarks Conservancy.

McFadden's collections have been shown on runways in Caracas, El Salvador, Ecuador; Guatamala; La Paz, Bolivia; London; Mexico City; Mumbai, India; New York; St. Petersburg, Russia; and Tokyo. Past special projects include: designing costumes for Henry Purcell's opera *Dido and Aeneas* in 1989, stage sets and costumes for *Degas Impressions* performed by the Oregon Ballet Theater in 1992; stage furniture and costumes for *The World of Mysteries: The Mysteries of Eleusis* directed by Vasilios Calitsis and performed at the Brooklyn Academy of Music; and designing gowns for the 2000 World's Fair in Hanover, Germany. From 1994 to 2002 she designed a line of accessories for the QVC shopping channel.

In 2004, The Allentown Art Museum organized the first career retrospective of McFadden's designs, *Mary McFadden: High Priestess of High Fashion – A Life in Haute Couture, Décor and Design*. The exhibition was accompanied by an illustrated, ninety-page book co-published by the museum and Bunker Hill Publishing. In 2005, the exhibition opened in McFadden's hometown at The Dixon Gallery and Gardens in Memphis, Tennessee.

Miss McFadden has created a line of furs for Serbos Furs Inc. in New York and Collection Mary McFadden for Ben Elias, New York. She continues her work designing costumes for the film, *Zooni, the last Chak Empress of Kashmir*, directed by Indian filmmaker Muzaffar Ali and filmed in Shrinagar, Kashmir. The film, originally begun in 1992, was postponed due to political unrest in Kashmir. In December, Miss McFadden will travel to Delhi, India to design costumes for the feature film, *Shah Jahan*. In February, she returns again to India, which she does every year, to direct an annual musical festival at Aliyaha Fort in Maheswar. The festival preserves the ancient musical traditions of India.

ORGANIZATIONAL CREDIT:

Mary McFadden: Goddesses is organized by The Galleries at Moore and curated by Lorie Mertes, Rochelle F. Levy Director and Chief Curator. The exhibition is presented with assistance from the Allentown Art Museum.

Moore's 2008-09 exhibition season is presented with support from The Philadelphia Inquirer, Gallery Sponsor's of Moore's 160th Anniversary Year.

- **Photos available upon request**

RELATED PROGRAMS:

Visionary Voices: Conversations on Art & Culture Conversation with Mary McFadden on Art and Ancient Civilizations in Contemporary Design

Wednesday, September 24, 2 - 3:30 pm

Stewart Auditorium

Talk features Moore's 2008 Visionary Woman Award Recipient in dialogue with Jill Furst, professor of art history and Michael Olszewski, professor of textile design. Moderated by Lorie Mertes, Rochelle F. Levy Director and Chief Curator, Galleries at Moore.

This talk is presented as The Elizabeth Greenfield Zeidman Lecture and is endowed by The Albert M. Greenfield Foundation.

Visionary Voices: Conversations on Art & Culture Mary McFadden – Goddesses, Symbols and Ancient Textiles

Tuesday, November 18, 6 – 8:30 pm

Renowned fashion designer returns to Moore for an illustrated lecture and book signing followed by a reception.

The Visionary Voices: Conversations on Art & Culture series is made possible through the generous support of Wilmington Trust.

About the Curator

Lorie Mertes has more than fifteen years of curatorial experience with a focus on international art of the 20th and 21st centuries. Prior to joining Moore as the Rochelle F. Levy Director and Chief Curator of The Galleries at Moore, Mertes served as Director of The Fabric Workshop and Museum from June to December 2006 where she oversaw the installation of exhibitions by Paul Chan and Jean Shin, as well as curating "Process and Collaboration: Celebrating Twelve Years at 1315 Cherry Street." Before coming to Philadelphia, Mertes was Assistant Director for Special Projects/Curator at The Miami Art Museum (MAM) where she was a member of MAM's curatorial and senior staff from 1994 to 2006. At MAM, Mertes curated numerous exhibitions featuring such artists as: Janine Antoni, Russell Crotty, Dara Friedman, Jim Hodges, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Ann Hamilton, Alfredo Jaar, Vik Muniz, Oscar Munoz, Paul Pfeiffer, Miguel Angel Rios, James Rosenquist, George Segal, Shahzia Sikander, Lorna Simpson, and Bill Viola.

Moore's 160th Anniversary Sponsors:

Moore is grateful to the following sponsors of its 160th anniversary: Marguerite and Gerry Lenfest (160th Anniversary Presenting Sponsor); *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (160th Anniversary Galleries' Presenting Sponsor); Fran Graham '66 and Bill Graham (*Moore Footsteps* Alumnae Exhibition Sponsor); Charming Shoppes (160th Anniversary Fashion Show Patron); Wilmington Trust Company (160th Anniversary Lecture Series Sponsor); Comcast (160th Anniversary Senior Show Sponsor); Blank Rome LLP (WHYY 160th Anniversary Video Sponsor); Phoebe W. Haas Charitable Trust B as recommended by David Haas; Michael Fell and M&M Displays; Phoebe W. Haas Charitable Trust A as

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About The Galleries at Moore College of Art & Design

For the past twenty years, The Galleries at Moore have provided a forum for exploring contemporary issues and ideas through the presentation of a diverse range of exhibitions and programs that offer insights into the work of established and emerging artists. Past exhibitions include the first U.S. presentations of internationally-renowned artists: Artur Barrio, VALIE EXPORT, Terry Fox, Raymond Hains, Jean-Frédéric Schnyder, and Roman Singer. Serving the only art and design college for women in the US, the Galleries have featured solo exhibitions of significant women artists and designers including: Jo Baer, Janet Biggs, Dara Birnbaum, Hanne Darboven, Jay DeFeo, Marlene Dumas, Barbara Ess, Viola Frey, Marisol, Jacqueline Matisse, Alice Neel, Adrian Piper, and Faith Ringgold. Major group exhibitions featuring women artists include: *Guerrilla Girls Talk Back: A Retrospective: 1985-1991*; *The Philadelphia Ten: A Women's Artist Group 1917-1945*; *Painted Faces: Mary Cassatt, Karen Kilimnick, Alice Neel*; *Gloria: Another Look at Feminist Art of the 1970s*; *Women to Watch: Photography in Philadelphia*; and *IN REPOSE: Images of Women by Women*.

The Galleries at Moore receives generous support from Moore College of Art & Design and the Friends of The Galleries at Moore. The Galleries also receive state arts funding support through a grant from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, a state agency funded by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency as well as program support from the Philadelphia Cultural Fund and the Barra Foundation. In addition, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, an independent federal grant-making agency dedicated to creating and sustaining a nation of learners by helping libraries and museums serve their communities, supports The Galleries at Moore. Any views, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this program do not necessarily represent those of the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

The Galleries at Moore

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All exhibitions are open to the public, free of charge.

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Moore College of Art & Design sets the standard of excellence in educating women for careers in art and design. The nation's first and only art college for women, Moore offers a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree with ten majors. The award-winning faculty, 8:1 student-to-faculty ratio and central location in Philadelphia, place Moore BFA students at the center of a vibrant, supportive community of artists, designers and scholars. In addition, Moore provides many unique opportunities in the arts through The Galleries at Moore, continuing education programs for professional adult men and women, the acclaimed Young Artists Workshop for girls and boys grades 1-12, The Art Shop and Sculpture Park. For more about Moore, visit www.moore.edu.

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