



PRESS RELEASE

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EXHIBITION *VOICES OF FASHION: BLACK COUTURE, BEAUTY & STYLES* IN CENTRAAL MUSEUM UTRECHT FROM MARCH 2021

From 13 February to 24 May 2021, Centraal Museum Utrecht presents the major fashion exhibition *Voices of Fashion: Black Couture, Beauty & Styles*, in which iconic designs, models and sources of inspiration promote a more inclusive fashion legacy. In this multi-disciplinary exhibition, fashion curator Ninke Bloemberg teams up with fashion activist, co-curator and founder of Diversity Rules, Janice Deul, to examine how Black designers have influenced the world of fashion, what stereotypes continue to exist, and how beauty is perceived. *Voices of Fashion* was created in close collaboration with designers, photographers and models from the Netherlands and abroad. The

visually striking exhibition design is by AFARAI's Afaina de Jong, and the exhibition is structured according to several themes.

COUTURE

The exhibition opens with a dazzling display of couture by domestic and international Black designers. To name just a few highlights: first is a highly personal installation by South African designer Thebe Magugu, who also presented this collection during the Paris Fashion Week. Magugu won the prestigious LVHM prize for young designers in 2019. Also, from South Africa, filmmaker and photographer Kristin-Lee Moolman worked with the stylist Ib Kamar to produce photographs and a film featuring Magugu's work.

Of course the exhibition also features work by Virgil Abloh, creative director of men's fashion at Louis Vuitton and founder of the label Off-White. Several of his ensembles are on display, including the black-and-white men's suit consisting of woollen pants and a coat decorated with what seems to be a classic pied-de-poule pattern. On closer inspection, however, the motif turns out to be based on the shape of the African continent.

Rushemy Botter and Lisi Herrebrugh are represented in the exhibition with two ensembles: one which they created for Nina Ricci, consisting of silk pants and blouse and their signature 'bucket hat', and a second iconic design by their own Botter label. Maria Grazia Chiuri, the first-ever female creative director at fashion house Dior, worked with the African designer Pathé Ouédraogo – better known as Pathé'O – to pay tribute to the African continent, as part of Dior's Resort 2020 collection. On display is an indigo-coloured skirt and jacket. This collaboration embodied the identity of the entire collection.

We are also proud to show an iconic evening gown made of down, from Moncler. It is the result of a collaboration between Valentino's creative director Pierpaolo Piccioli with the Ethiopian label Lemlem, founded by model and designer Liya Kebede.

The Surinamese-Dutch designer Marga Weimans launched her own label in 2006 and has presented several successful collections, investigating themes such as identity, technology and beauty. The exhibition shows an outfit from the *Power of my Dreams* collection, in which she infused traditional African wax prints with new meaning. We furthermore show an impressive black evening gown from her Debut collection, about which Weimans says: "It is my first collection, in which I tell a story about the sublime and seductive beauty of the Parisian couture landscape, using the archetypical ballgown as basis. I combine this with the horrors of slavery, from which the fashion industry arose. The blood, sweat and tears of ambition are mixed with the blood, sweat and tears of my enslaved ancestors."

Stereotypes still abound: consider the Surinamese-Dutch designer Giorgio Toppin of the Xhosa label, who is regularly asked whether he makes streetwear while in fact, he specialises in men's couture.

THE INFLUENCE OF STREETWEAR AND MUSIC

Hip-hop music has had a strong impact on everyday fashion and even couture. Cross Colours, famous for dressing 'the Fresh Prince of Bel Air', among others, was founded in 1989 by TJ Walker and Carl Jones. Their goal was to design clothing that is blind to prejudice. With their creations, full of symbolism and statements, the designers aim to give Black youths a voice. This goal is echoed by Dutch Black-owned brands like Patta, Daily Paper, Filling Pieces, The New Originals and HOSSELAER. These brands staked out their spot in the fashion industry by selling sneakers or T-shirts, soon followed by complete collections and sales points across the world. Such labels have become a permanent fixture of the fashion landscape. They owe their success in part to their collaborations with domestic and international labels like Nike and Adidas, but the real strength of these entrepreneurs is their sense of shared responsibility towards young people who feel unheard or misunderstood.

Political and social messages are also found in the colourful streetwear collections by Priya Ahluwalia. Her designs are always geared to sustainability, for instance by creating a series of new designs using Adidas deadstock. The creations by Farida Sedoc, artist, entrepreneur and founder of HOSSELAER are likewise suffused by statements. Especially for *Voices of Fashion* she made an installation using a selection of T-shirts from her private archive.

BEAUTY

Black women often were and continue to be marginalised. Their skills, beauties and body shapes are rarely celebrated and their natural Black hair is viewed as 'unprofessional'. The cosmetics industry, with its limited colour palette, has likewise seemed to ignore them. Black women have been fighting to change this for decades. A selection of Dutch and international fashion magazine covers from the 1960s until today celebrates the diversity of Black models. This part of the exhibition includes photographs made by Kwame Brathwaite in the 1960s of the people and street images that inspired the Black is Beautiful movement in New York. The Black Panthers and icons such as Angela Davis, instantly recognisable for her large afro, contributed to the international reputation of this movement. More than 50 years on, the goal of highlighting the beauty of Black women remains relevant, although change does seem to be underway.

A BOOK, A MULTI-MEDIA TOUR, AND FRINGE PROGRAMME

The exhibition is accompanied by a lavishly illustrated book containing unique interviews and several long-reads, designed by Serana Angelista and Glamcult.Studio. The book will be published in mid-February and can be purchased in (among other outlets) the Museum Shop and from Waanders publishers.

Discover much more through the *Voices of Fashion* multi-media tour featuring the voices of Guillaume Schmidt (Patta), Giovanca Ostiana (singer, model, presenter) and Denise Jannah (singer).

There is also an extensive fringe programme, with the collaboration of The Black Archives, the African Fashion Research Institute, The New Originals, and others. More details of this programme will be announced online. The exhibition is sponsored by the City of Utrecht, BankGiro Loterij, Fonds 21, the Creative Industries Fund NL, VSBfonds, Prins Bernhard Culture Fund, Mondriaan Fund and Prins Claus Fund.

Musea Bekennen Kleur (Museums Face Up to the Matter of Race)Voices of fashion is part of Musea Bekennen Kleur (Museums Face Up to the Matter of Race), a partnership between twelve museums in the Netherlands that are all working to embed the practices underpinning true inclusion and diversity in the DNA of the museum industry. The Centraal Museum's partners in this venture are the Amsterdam Museum, the Bonnefanten, the Dordrechts Museum, the Frans Hals Museum, Museum Arnhem, the Rembrandt House Museum, the Rijksmuseum, the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, the Van Abbemuseum, the Van Gogh Museum and the Zeeuws Museum. We hope to welcome other museums aboard in the future. The museums in this partnership will this year hold exhibitions and stage events highlighting themes of cultural diversity and slavery/the legacy of colonialism.