



“Spectrum of Fashion” Exhibition Opens

BALTMORE, MD (October 7, 2019) – The Maryland Historical Society* opened its newest exhibition Saturday night. The *Spectrum of Fashion* opening featured a fashion show hosted by Maryland-native Christian Siriano.

The exhibition showcases nearly 100 of the museum’s more than 12,000 garments and accessories, each telling a spectacular story ripe with American – and Maryland – history. The collection is open to the public through October 2020.

“This exhibition has been 10 years in the making,” said Mark Letzer, president and CEO, Maryland Historical Society. “Uncovering these amazing pieces has been a labor of love for our curators. And the history and story each piece has to share is unparalleled.”

At 12,000 pieces, the Historical Society’s Fashion Archives is on par with that of the Met. The collection spans the period from 1724 to 2019, with the earliest piece on display in *Spectrum of Fashion* being a wedding apron. This exhibition tells a fashion story that has roots in Maryland but reaches beyond the state, demonstrating our country’s history and telling the story of both every day and well-known Americans. The collection ranges from pieces connected to U.S. presidents, the formerly enslaved and internationally famous icons, as well as pieces from average citizens.

“As we were putting together this exhibition, we really chose pieces that had an impact both from an historical perspective, but also a fashion and color perspective,” said Alexandra Deutsch, lead curator, and former Maryland Historical Society vice president of collections. “So many of our garments have kept their brilliant colors – from bright chartreuse to deep red. The exhibition is a sampling of garments that allow us to study fashion through the centuries, but even more importantly, it serves as a social history of the women and men who wore them: telling the story of the United States through the lens of Maryland. How we dress tells the story of how we live.”

The Maryland Historical Society began accepting gifts of clothing and accessories at the end of the 19th century. The museum credits Enolliah Williams, a gallery assistant from 1959 to 1985, with the meticulous storage and record-keeping of the Fashion Archives which, until now, had been in storage since the late 1970s.

Spectrum of Fashion showcases garments that were worn by a duke and duchess, a first lady, an opera singer turned suffragist, a World War II supply driver, a nurse, an editor, a smuggler, formerly enslaved individuals, politicians, socialites, artists, scholars, designers, philanthropists and many others.

“Ms. Williams is why we are able to have this exhibition today,” said Allison Tolman, curator and vice president of collections, Maryland Historical Society. “It’s rare to be able to display garments that are made of delicate silk and are hundreds of years old, let alone know to whom they belonged and be able to piece together a story – a life. The conservation process for each dress is unique – some needed more work than others – and we are so proud of how they have come to life through the process, and in this exhibition.”

The exhibition will also feature current designers, including a gown from opening host Christian Siriano, a gown from recent Project Runway alum Bishme Cromartie, a piece from Joy Davis, and more.

The Maryland Historical Society is located at 201 West Monument Street in Baltimore, Maryland. The museum's operating hours are 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday, and 12 – 5 p.m. Sunday.

* Now the Maryland Center for History and Culture.

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The Maryland Center for History and Culture (MCHC) collects, preserves, and interprets the history, art, and culture of Maryland. Originally founded as the Maryland Historical Society in 1844, MCHC offers a museum, library, and education programs to inspire critical thinking, creativity, and community. Learn more at mdhistory.org.

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