

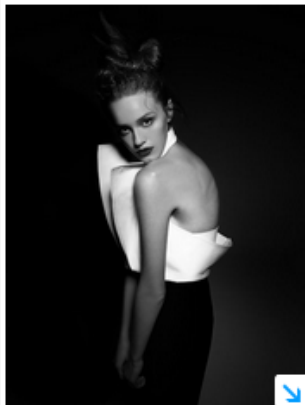


Gianfranco Ferré fashion exhibit opens at Phoenix Art Museum



GIANFRANCO FERRÉ

The exhibit of Italian fashion designer Gianfranco Ferré, "The White Shirt According To Me," in the Steele Gallery at the Phoenix Art Museum, 1625 N. Central Ave., Phoenix.
Mark Henle/The Republic



(Photo: Luca Stoppini)

It's unlike any other exhibition the Phoenix Art Museum has hosted.

"The White Shirt According to Me. Gianfranco Ferré," in the main first-floor gallery, is a statement about fashion, of course, but also one about the influence and sophistication of the museum's fashion department.

Phoenix is the only North American stop for this finely edited and dramatic 27-shirt show, on loan from Gianfranco Ferré Foundation in Milan.

Yes, it's a show about white shirts. And because of that simple premise, the exhibit feels wholly accessible, even as the execution is avant garde.

The cavernous Steele Gallery has been completely transformed.

Clear plastic rings are anchored to a metal ceiling grid and to black platforms on the floor. Fine metal cables are strung between them, suspending black dressforms. The shirts, fitted to the busts, appear to be floating in the giant, dimly lit black box, each dramatically spotlighted to show fabric and construction details. Mirrors on the gallery's back wall give the room an infinity effect.

The exhibit is composed of 27 noteworthy shirts Ferré crafted from 1982 to 2006 and runs through March 6. Upstairs in the Ellman Fashion Gallery is "Gianfranco Ferré Designs," featuring more than 80 of the designers sketches specifically curated for this show by the museum's fashion curator, Dennita Sewell.

Ferré, who passed away in 2007, was obsessed with the white shirt. He graduated from the Polytechnic University of Milan with a degree in architecture, and took the idea of the wardrobe staple and elevated it.

He created complex forms, blurring the lines between men's and women's clothing. He sought inspiration everywhere, from the Indian sari to Elizabethan England to a dragonfly's fluttering wings

Alessandra Arezzi Boza curated the exhibition.

"It aims not only to introduce the designer's work to a wide audience," she said, "but also to provide an initial key for understanding both his work per se and his unique vision of the process behind the art of fashion design.

"(I like) the idea of tackling the same object over and over with the intent of making it new and different every time through creative experimentation."

Ferré began his career in 1970, designing accessories and then raincoats. He launched his signature collection for women in 1978, and later men's and couture collections, before joining Christian Dior as artistic director from 1989-1997.

He came from an important generation of Italian designers that included Giorgio Armani and Gianni Versace, and was known as the "Architect of Fashion." His designs were forward-thinking with immaculate construction, and he shunned gimmicks. He was a master of "power dressing," in the 1980s, offering women especially clothing with strong silhouettes that was also feminine.

"He was always himself, as to manner and behavior," said Rita Airaghi, director and general manager of the Gianfranco Ferré Foundation and Ferré's cousin. "He didn't frequent the fashion crowd. For the most part he only socialized with people who were true friends of his, whether they worked in fashion or not. He didn't care about visibility, maintaining a high profile. He'd say time and again: 'When I come home, success stays outside my front door.' "

The exhibit pays homage to his fashion and architectural backgrounds.

"It's a sensory experience from the start," Sewell said. "When you walk in the first room, there are sheets of tulle fabric hanging from the ceiling with projections of some of Ferré's sketches of the shirts. You feel the tulle brush against as you walk through."

'The White Shirt According to Me. Gianfranco Ferré'

When: Opens Wednesday, Nov. 4. 10 a.m.-9 p.m. Wednesdays. 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays. Noon-5 p.m. Sundays. Both exhibits run through Sunday, March 6.

Where: Phoenix Art Museum, 1625 N. Central Ave.

Admission: Included with museum admission of \$12-\$15; \$10 for students; \$6 for ages 6 to 17; free for age 5 and younger and museum members. During free nights (3-9 p.m. Wednesdays and 6-10 p.m. on First Fridays), admission for this special exhibition is \$5, \$3 for ages 6-17. Photography is allowed; visitors are encouraged to tag their photos #FerreinPhoenix and #mywhiteshirt.

Details: 602-257-1222, phxart.org.

Here are five shirts to look for:

- **"Calice," 1982:** The silk gazar and taffeta bustier-style shirt was inspired by the spirals traced in the air by sword duels.
- **"Cravat," 1991:** It's influenced by the men's neckwear of the same name and the fichu triangular scarf, both from the 18th century.
- **"Nastro," 1995:** "Nastro" means "ribbon" and this bustier is so named because it's made from one long piece of silk taffeta, wrapped multiple times.
- **"Plastron," 2000:** Ferré took the basic men's dress shirt with a stiffened bib and made it feminine with a bare midriff and silver lace trim on the cuffs.
- **"Origami," 2004:** This shirt features nylon tulle and silk chiffon, laser cut to create its intricate design.

"You can see from his designs that he took them apart, deconstructed and reconstructed them," Sewell said. "He would take one idea and retool and retool it ... which pushed his creativity further."

Glass cases on either side of the numbered shirts show patterns, ephemera, sketches and ad campaigns for the shirts. The soundtrack is a 1975 concert recording by Keith Jarrett in Köln, Germany. Sewell said it is the perfect mix of classical and contemporary, like Ferré's designs.

As visitors exit, they encounter a series of large X-ray photographs that go even deeper into the construction of some of Ferré's shirts, and again see the influence of architecture and innovation.

"The white shirts had no influence to speak of on his other designs," Araghi said. "We can, however, say that the white shirt represents such a strong thread of continuity in Ferré's collections, appearing in each one, that it became a hallmark of his style. Likewise, we can say that every white shirt fit in perfectly with the collection it belonged to, reflecting that collection's inspirations and mood."

The accompanying exhibition upstairs showcases Ferré's thought process. It's especially interesting in a time when many designers use computer programs instead of hand sketching.

"This is a snapshot of how he created, with idea after idea after idea," Sewell said. "He laid down his ideas so quickly, and some of the sketches have less than 10 lines."

The more than 80 sketches, created in mostly pencil and felt-tip marker, come from his foundation, which has boxes of drawings. It's clear in his earlier sketches that Ferré stayed true to his architectural training, using large sheets of graph paper and creating structured designs that focused on the construction of the clothing, Sewell noted.

Ten garments will be on pedestals in the middle of the room, surrounded by the sketches and large photo collages featuring runway models wearing Ferré's designs and Ferré at work. A table set up on one end invites designers and artists to sit and

A memorable spread in the March 1996 issue of *Vogue* magazine featured the major players in the couture world: Oscar de la Renta, Christian Lacroix, Valentino, John Galliano, Karl Lagerfeld and Gianni Versace. Italian designer Gianfranco Ferré of Christian Dior stood among the heavy hitters of fashion.

Although not as big a name as the others of his generation, Ferré was a major influence on style, known as the "Architect of Fashion." His designs were forward-thinking with immaculate construction, and he shunned gimmicks. He was a master of "power dressing," in the 1980s, offering women especially clothing with strong silhouettes that was also feminine.

Described at one time in *Women's Wear Daily* as "very pleasantly plump," Ferré was unassuming and sported a full beard. But his work spoke for itself.

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Boza says visitors don't have to be fashion or design enthusiasts to enjoy the beauty and attention to detail in Ferré's work.

"I hope visitors will come away with a renewed awareness of the fact that fashion is an important part of contemporary culture, that it's not all about catwalk shows, glam events, superficiality and razzmatazz," Boza said.

"True fashion, with a capital 'F,' is an art form requiring rigorous methodology, hard work and discipline, study and research, a constant quest for balance, quality and beauty. In my opinion, that's the greatest lesson and legacy bequeathed to us by Gianfranco Ferré."

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Gianfranco Ferré Programs

Gallery Talks

Free admission.

Nov. 11: "Architecture and Fashion. A Behind the Scenes Discussion." Featuring Richard Jensen, principal at Worksureau Architecture and curator Dennita Sewell. 7 p.m. in Steele Gallery.

Jan. 27: "The Evolution of Fashion Illustration." Featuring Loretta Tedeschi Cuoco, former illustration professor at the Fashion Institute of Technology, and Lindsey Enyart, creative director at Lelli Kolibri. 7 p.m. in Ellman Gallery.

First Friday

Nov. 6: "La Dolce Vita." 7 p.m. in Dorrance Sculpture Garden. Free.

Salon Series: The Best of Italy

Wednesdays at 7 p.m., Singer Hall. Free for museum members and students with ID, \$5 for non-members. Seating is limited, purchase tickets in advance.

Dec. 2: "History of the Classic White Shirt." Featuring Dennita Sewell.

Dec. 16: "From the Back Bone of Italy to an Icon on Modern Design." Featuring Celia Bertoia, director of the Harry Bertoia Foundation.

Jan. 13: "'Made in Italy' - An Ocean of Difference in Pasta Manufacturing." Featuring Jeffrey Root, regional food service sales manager for De Cecco.

Feb. 3: "Romance of Italian Leather, Beyond the Runway." Featuring Mary Wolfe of Spinneybeck.

Feb. 17: "Vespa Cool." Featuring Bob Golfen, author of "How to Restore and Maintain Your Vespa Motorscooter."

Film Series

All films are \$5 for members, \$10 for non-members, unless noted.

Dec. 13: "The Great Beauty." Introduction by Dennita Sewell. 2 p.m. in Whiteman Hall.

Jan. 10: "Men of Cloth." Featuring filmmaker Vicki Vasilopoulos. 2 p.m. in Whiteman Hall.

Jan. 17: "Men of Cloth," Featuring filmmaker Alina Marazzi in conversation with Enrico Minardi, honors faculty at ASU. 2 p.m. in Whiteman Hall.

Feb. 10: "Suspiria." Presented by Midnite Movie Mamacita. 7 p.m. in Whiteman Hall. Free for members, \$5 for non-members.

Feb. 21: "Red Desert." Introduction by Enrico Minardi, honors faculty at ASU. 2 p.m. in Whiteman Hall.

