

EVENTS/CAUSES

First Karl Lagerfeld retrospective traces designer's hands-on approach

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Karl Lagerfeld at the opening of The Little Black Jacket exhibit in São Paulo, Brazil.

By SARAH JONES

For the first time, fashion designer Karl Lagerfeld's entire storied 60-year career at houses including Chanel, Chloé and Fendi is being explored via a retrospective held at the Art and Exhibition Hall of the Federal Republic of Germany in Bonn.

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"Modemethode" displays 126 looks and accessories, from his 1954 International Woolmark Prize-winning coat, which was instrumental in his hiring at Balmain, to a neoprene wedding dress created for Chanel autumn/winter 2014-15. While the focus is on the designer's creative process and methods, this exhibit will simultaneously shine a light on the kind of design talent and craftsmanship hired by the houses he has worked for.

"Karl Lagerfeld is the world's most well known German fashion designer and it is time to appreciate his oeuvre in a comprehensive gesture," said Rein Wolfs, curator of Modemethode and director of the Art and Exhibition Hall of the Federal Republic of Germany, also known as the [Bundeskunsthalle](#), Bonn, Germany. "So, it is more than self-evident that the Art and Exhibition Hall of the Federal Republic of Germany as the national flagship for exhibitions in art and culture shows his 60 years lasting creative process.

"For the first time the archives of Fendi, Chloé, Karl Lagerfeld and Chanel opened their treasure boxes and loaned a significant amount of dresses and accessories, complemented by dresses from the Metropolitan Museum in New York," he said.

"Highlighting a fashion designer's oeuvre in a museum's exhibition is still rather unusual in Germany compared to other Western European and overseas countries. To put it like that: The Bundeskunsthalle enjoys entering uncharted waters contrasting a fashion exhibition with fine art exhibitions like we do in Bonn."

Looking back

Modemethode was curated by the Bundeskunsthalle's Mr. Wolfs and Mr. Lagerfeld's creative consultant Lady Amanda Harlech, an expert on the designer's work. Other frequent collaborator hairstylist Sam McKnight created the wigs for the mannequins, and Mr. Lagerfeld himself collaborated on a sound installation.



Sketches from Karl Lagerfeld

Pieces on display come from the archives of the Chanel, Fendi, Chloé and Karl Lagerfeld brands, as well as from the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Mr. Lagerfeld spent about 30 years on and off with Chloé, and 20 dresses from 1966 through 1996 are on display in the exhibit, showcasing his interpretation of the brand's airy, romantic aesthetic.



Chloé dresses from 1994 and 1983

In 1965, the designer took the helm at Fendi, and has been in charge of its ready-to-wear collections since, putting his own spin on the Roman label.

Throughout the seventies, Mr. Lagerfeld accrued more notoriety, and leveraged his own name into an eponymous brand of clothing. Within Modemethode are 14 suits and dresses from the ready-to-wear Karl Lagerfeld line, dating back to the 1980s, illustrating

the street-style appeal of this aspect of his business.

Chanel currently represents the bulk of Mr. Lagerfeld's work, so fittingly, 63 looks are devoted to his contributions to the brand since 1983. A portion of the display is dedicated to his manipulation of the house's iconic tweed, which he has imprinted, embroidered and interwoven with other fabrics to lighten it.



Look from Chanel haute couture spring/summer 2009

Through apparel and accessories displayed, visitors can get a sense of the care and craftsmanship Mr. Lagerfeld devotes to his fashions, from selecting materials to production sites. Many of the skilled artisans used in the production process, including hatters, shoemakers and goldsmiths, work only for Mr. Lagerfeld, making their contributions to his various labels unique.

Mr. Lagerfeld's hand in the process go from sketching runway looks to planning fashion show sets to creating the marketing for a collection, including press materials, graphic design, advertising and store window displays.

"The exhibit starts with the coat Karl Lagerfeld tailored for the International Wool Secretariat's competition in 1954, which he – of course – won," Mr. Wolfs said. "This was his access to the fashion world.

"Four pret-a-porter areas of Fendi, Chloé, Karl Lagerfeld and Chanel follow and it ends

with a Chanel haute couture area, all accompanied by displays with accessories of Fendi and Chanel, campaign posters, lookbooks, models and specially for the exhibit composed music by Michel Gaubert."



Modemethode exhibit

Chanel's show sets are often dramatic and thematic.

French fashion house Chanel designed an unusual set for its fall/winter 2014-15 runway show, making the venue look like a supermarket.

Models walked down the aisles or in between the checkout lanes, pushing shopping carts or toting wire baskets. By using such a plebeian setting for a fashion show, the brand took away some of the fantasy, while adding a layer of fun to its presentation ([see story](#)).

Modemethode opened March 28 and will run through Sept. 13.

First time for everything

The designer's contributions to his houses have previously been explored in brand exhibits, such as Chanel's touring Little Black Jacket ([see story](#)) and Fendi's Un Art Autre

([see story](#)).

Mr. Lagerfeld is a large personality in the fashion world, spawning products that share his personal style.

With the help of online retailer Net-A-Porter's Instagram account, a Karl Lagerfeld-inspired Barbie doll popped up at runway shows during Paris Fashion Week.

On Sept. 29 the limited-edition Barbie went on sale at exclusive retailers. Limited to only 999 pieces, the doll became a coveted novelty purchase for enthusiasts of Karl Lagerfeld's work and Barbie doll collectors ([see story](#)).

Due to the level of enthusiasm surrounding the designer, this exhibit may spur trips to Germany from avid fans.

"If you look at every detail of the garments precisely you will find the answer immediately," Mr. Wolfs said. "From the beginning of Karl Lagerfeld cooperation until today every fashion house has still its unique appearance, his tradition, his modernity and freshness.

"Every garment could be from the latest collection made for the runway," he said. "It is Karl Lagerfeld's talent to combine tradition with innovation, texture with line, color with materiality."

Final Take

Sarah Jones, staff reporter on Luxury Daily, New York

Embedded Video: <https://www.youtube.com/embed/xu-KowTutSs>

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