

RETAIL

Selfridges salutes Shakespeare's work with contemporary update

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Selfridges Shakespeare Refashioned window display featuring Dries Van Noten designs

By SARAH JONES

British department store chain Selfridges is embracing literal retail theater with a celebration of the work of renowned playwright William Shakespeare.

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In honor of the 400th anniversary of the Bard's death, the retailer is launching a multichannel campaign, "Shakespeare Refashioned," updating some of his most popular plays through a fashion-forward filter. Through this celebration, beginning July 4, Selfridges is able to showcase its affection for the arts while highlighting its British heritage.

"We always strive to surprise, amaze, and amuse our customers so the opportunity to stage an homage to Shakespeare, arguably the world's most famous theatre author, was too good to miss," said Linda Hewson, creative director at **Selfridges**, London.

"Our brand's DNA is steeped in retail theatre," she said. "We were the first retailer to introduce this concept in Europe when we opened in 1909, so the correlation between this campaign and what we do every day fits perfectly."

Lifting the curtain

For this campaign, Selfridges is opening a 100-seat theater on its lower ground floor, a first for a department store. Being built in partnership with LG, the theater will house theater company The Faction's production of "Much Ado About Nothing."

The Faction is staging a modern interpretation of the play, placing it in today's society, complete with 24-hour tabloid coverage.

Selfridges Presents: Shakespeare Refashioned

While the theater and play will not officially open to the public until previews begin on Aug. 23, Selfridges is giving consumers a backstage pass to the process of staging a production. In the empty space, they can watch rehearsals unfold or get a look at the creation of character through makeup with help from partner MAC cosmetics.

For two weeks, this theatrical blank canvas will also be home to hands-on workshops and masterclasses from the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA), through which consumers can seek their expertise in acting, auditioning,

stage combat and Shakespeare-era dancing.

RADA is also bringing some of Shakespeare's work to life through an audio series. Accessible from Selfridges' Web site, the first recitation is by Sir Kenneth Branagh.

Cult streetwear brands including Caitlin Price, Astrid Andersen and Life's A Beach are co-hosting a series of spoken word, music and art performances running from July to September. Opening up the experience to more than those gathered in the Refashioned Theater, these events will be simulcast on Periscope and Snapchat.



Shakespeare Recited promotional image

For the first performance of Shakespeare Recited, spoken word artist James Massiah will read a trio of poems inspired by Shakespeare, underscored with beats by DJ Maximum and Preditah. Novelist will make a comparison between Shakespeare's exploration of modern life and the topical nature of MCs and rappers' work today.

Also exploring Shakespeare's place in history and today, 5x15 is hosting a series of three talks about the Bard, in which speakers will discuss everything from their personal relationship to his plays to using Shakespearean literature as an advice columnist for modern day problems.

Tying the campaign to modern fashion, Selfridges has asked 20 high fashion labels to create one-of-a-kind designs that reference some of the most iconic Shakespeare plays. The results will be displayed in theatrical window scenes at the retailer's Oxford Street flagship in London.



Window display depicting A Midsummer Night's Dream; photo by Matt Writtle

Act I, which premiered June 27 and will run through Aug. 28, concentrates on light themes. Alexander McQueen's floral designs are fit for fairies in a wooded scene recalling "A Midsummer Night's Dream," while Christopher Kane's Juliet is positioned in a modern metal balcony.

A second act surrounding the dark will debut Sept. 5 and run until mid-October.



Selfridges window display paying homage to Coriolanus; photo by Matt Writtle

Consumers can shop an edit of Shakespeare-ready apparel and accessories from Balmain, Smythson and Edie Parker, including 120 exclusives from 50 different labels.

Further exploring the theme, photographer Mary McCartney will be shooting the latest fashions for a still image and a film. Her video, along with footage of interviews, performances and other special content, will run on Selfridges' content channel Hot Air.

On Selfridges' social media accounts, the store is driving a social conversation and foot traffic with the hashtag #GetTheeToASelfridges, a play on a line Hamlet delivers to Ophelia.

Topical retail

Selfridges frequently brings together experts and creatives for campaigns that inspire consumers to not only shop but contemplate a particular topic.

Last year the retailer investigated the changing face of employment, from shifting work-life balance to innovations in enterprise, with a multichannel campaign.

"Work It!" included in-store workshops, displays and online content which feature forward thinkers on the subject and products to help consumers regain some "me-time" in today's world. This campaign speaks to pandemic issues, allowing Selfridges to connect with its consumers and create a conversation ([see story](#)).

A luxury brand's retail environment should be carefully orchestrated to make consumers want to participate in the store experience, according to panelists speaking at the French American Chamber of Commerce's "The Luxury Retail Store: Real Estate, Design and Customer Experience Trends" event.

During the presentation Nov. 12, one resounding theme was that the increase in luxury's presence online has removed the necessity of interacting with a bricks-and-mortar location, creating a need for a sense of theater and engagement to draw consumers away from other possible activities to shop. By going above the traditional store design, bricks-and-mortar retail can better compete with online channels for revenue ([see story](#)).

"With Shakespeare Refashioned, we have the opportunity, especially by opening a live, fully-functioning theatre within our London store, to magnify and elevate the retail theatre experience we provide our customers like never before," Ms. Hewson said. "We're very excited to see how our customers will respond to this engaging new initiative."