

NONPROFITS

The Yves Saint Laurent Museums: A portrait of the couturier as an artist

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Musée Yves Saint Laurent Paris Open House Day, Oct. 1, 2017. Image credit: Musée Yves Saint Laurent Paris

By STAFF REPORTS

*On the occasion of the recent grand opening of the Yves Saint Laurent museums in Paris and Marrakech, Morocco, Aurlie Tennerel, head of media relations at the **ESSEC Business School**, spoke with the institution's marketing professor, Delphine Dion, about what this move means for the Saint Laurent Paris brand. This was part of an ESSEC Knowledge Live initiative.*

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On Avenue Marceau in Paris, and in Marrakech on the aptly named Rue Yves Saint Laurent, the Saint Laurent Paris brand has opened two of the former residences of designer Yves Saint Laurent to the public.

These two museums are dedicated to the life's work of Yves Saint Laurent, and will offer visitors an intimate look at his workspaces, sketches and inspirations on hallowed fashion ground.

Saint Laurent Paris is not the first to dedicate a museum to a founder, and it will certainly not be the last. Delphine Dion, marketing professor at ESSEC Business School and luxury industry expert, argues that this new trend gaining traction for two key reasons.

Fashion as an art form

"First, fashion is in the process of legitimizing itself as a true art form," Ms. Dion said. "To put an article of clothing in the same category as a painting or a sculpture, fashion houses must to be the subject of museum exhibits. If we look at semantics, the word 'couturier' or 'dressmaker' has disappeared. The new terminology is 'artistic director,' and this is really emblematic of a larger strategy.

"In other words, the director of a fashion house has reached the status of artist.' He or she has become a creator, an inventor, someone who breaks the rules. This is central to the fashion world and draws attention to its ability to start trends and impose new style codes on the market."



De la maison de couture au musée. Rencontre avec Aurlie Samuel, Aug. 11, 2017. Image credit: Musée Yves Saint Laurent Paris

The man, the myth

Ms. Dion also explains that this trend seems to stem from a larger myth-building strategy employed by luxury brands.

"If we look at the most important fashion brands today Dior, Chanel, Saint Laurent they are all human brands, they are intrinsically linked to a personality.

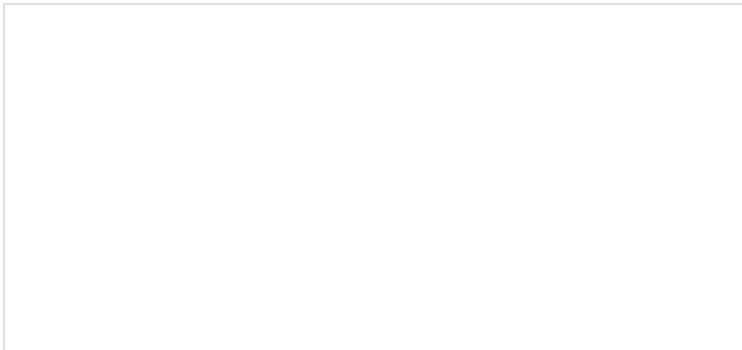
"With Saint Laurent Paris, the brand is built around Yves Saint Laurent. Current artistic director, Anthony Vaccarello, he is only the messenger, the spokesperson for Yves Saint Laurent. His job is to reinterpret the style and spirit embodied in the personality of Yves Saint Laurent."

In this sense, the YSL museums are particularly important because they are the homes of the creator and were therefore central to his life and work. These residences in Paris and Marrakech are two locations that played an important role in Yves Saint Laurent's life, both creatively and personally.

If the personality of the founder is so important, why change the brand name from Yves Saint Laurent to Saint Laurent Paris?

Although this question has preoccupied many, Ms. Dion argues that not much has changed.

"Dior is called Dior and not Christian Dior, Chanel is called Chanel and not Gabrielle or Coco Chanel," Ms. Dion said. "It is a way of distinguishing the founder and the brand. The Saint Laurent brand is a symbolic envelope created around the personality of Yves Saint Laurent. This symbolic envelope is then embodied by a succession of designers and artistic directors.



Musee Yves Saint Laurent Paris Web site homepage. Image credit: Musee Yves Saint Laurent Paris

Making museums more fashionable

Signs point to a growing trend.

Chanel, for example, just purchased the vacation home of Coco Chanel on the French Riviera and will likely open this site as a new museum.

Furthermore, Ms. Dion said, brands have more reason than ever to help develop the myth around their founder as this is a primary source of strength for true luxury brands.

But in other museums around the world, fashion as an art form will help bring new visitors to museums.

"Exposition and exhibits focused on fashion houses or artistic directors have seen a great deal of success in recent years," Ms. Dion said. "For museums, this is important because it helps draw crowds including new publics.

"People who visit this kind of exhibit aren't necessarily those people who would regularly visit a museum," she said. "By developing new revenue streams in such a way, museums will be able to expand their collections and organize more specialized exhibitions."

A conversation with ESSEC Business School marketing professor Delphine Dion on the newly open Yves Saint Laurent museums in Paris and Marrakech, Morocco

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