

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

Met's Costume Institute investigates intersection of religion, fashion

May 4, 2018



Saks Fifth Avenue has set up window displays inspired by The Met's exhibit. Image courtesy of Saks Fifth Avenue

By SARAH JONES

The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute is putting its lens on religious influences in fashion, tracing the ways in which devotional practices have found their way into design.

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"Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination" will showcase religious art from the museum's collection alongside liturgical garments and fashion designs that take reference from Catholicism. As the show opens in New York, local luxury players Saks Fifth Avenue and The Surrey are aligning themselves with the theme through displays and art projects of their own.

"The hotel's private rooftop garden reopens each year around the time of the Met Gala, so we decided to partner with Jimmie Martin to help us relaunch the space in a fresh and engaging way with an incredible collection of custom 'Naughty Angels' inspired by the theme of this year's big event," said Pedro Dias, general manager at [The Surrey](#), New York. "Pieces from the collection will also be displayed throughout the hotel including in the lobby as well as the Penthouse and Presidential Suites.

"We also see several returning guests that choose to stay at The Surrey every year for the Met Gala, so we wanted to offer something new and exciting tied to the annual event."

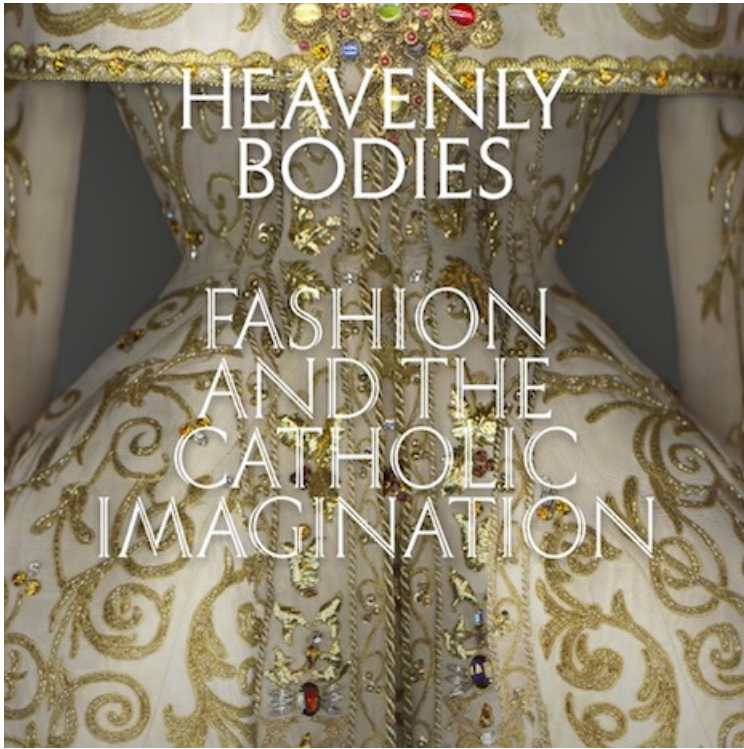
Devotional dressing

Heavenly Bodies showcases the ways in which the fashion industry borrows from religious imagery.

Among the pieces on display will be a Valentino dress designed by Maria Grazia Chiuri and Pierpaolo Piccioli that depicts biblical characters Adam and Eve on the skirt. Other exhibit items include a Jean Paul Gaultier dress resembling stained glass and an Azzedine Alaïa dress featuring crosses.

"Fashion and religion have long been intertwined, mutually inspiring and informing one another," said Andrew Bolton, curator in charge of The Costume Institute, in a statement. "Although this relationship has been complex and sometimes contested, it has produced some of the most inventive and innovative creations in the history of fashion."

Designers have also taken inspiration from the ornate aesthetic of the church, particularly its pope.



Promotional Image for "Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination." Image credit: The Metropolitan Museum of Art

For Heavenly Bodies, the Vatican is lending the museum 50 masterworks from the Sistine Chapel, many of which will be on view outside the chapel for the first time during the exhibit.

The Vatican also shipped pieces including papal garments and accessories such as rings and tiaras overseas. Dating from the 18th to the 21st century, these fashions cover more than 15 papacies.

This is not the first time that the Catholic church's headquarters has collaborated with The Met, but it has been decades since it has sent this considerable a collection to the museum. In 1983, the Vatican sent a similarly sized loan to The Met for "The Vatican Collections," which was the third most-visited show for the museum.

Lately, the Costume Institute exhibits have been breaking attendance records ([see story](#)), and this show will likely not be an exception.

Along with displays in The Met's Anna Wintour Costume Center, the exhibit will span the museum's medieval galleries and cloisters.



The Met's exhibit is being staged across two sites. Image credit: The Met Cloisters

Italian fashion label Versace and media group Condé Nast are among the sponsors of Heavenly Bodies. Designs from the house of Versace during both Gianni Versace and Donatella Versace's times as creative directors are featured within the exhibit, including a golden dress embellished with a shoulder-to-toe cross.

On May 7, the museum will put on its annual Costume Institute Benefit, more commonly known as the Met Gala, with co-chairs Amal Clooney, Rihanna, Donatella Versace and Anna Wintour.

In recent years, the gala has become more accessible, allowing consumers to follow along via social media. Making the invite-only affair more democratic, entertainment television network E! will be broadcasting live as stars and designers walk the red carpet ([see story](#)).

Following the gala, the exhibit will open to the public on May 10 and will run until Oct. 8.

External exhibits

In honor of Heavenly Bodies, a number of New York luxury institutions have created their own installations that revolve around religion.

Department store chain Saks Fifth Avenue teamed up with Condé Nast-owned *Vogue* magazine for a window display in its flagship store. Acting as a form of preview for the exhibit, the displays feature archival garments from houses including Versace, Chanel, Valentino, Dior and Dolce & Gabbana.

These fashions are displayed against backdrops inspired by The Met's art collections.

Saks' windows debuted on April 30 and will run until May 14, giving consumers an opportunity to delve into the theme before the exhibit opens.



Saks' windows feature archival fashion from houses including Dior. Image courtesy of Saks Fifth Avenue

"It is an honor for Saks to collaborate and to partner with the editorial team at *Vogue* to create a preview destination for this historic moment and exhibition in advance of the Met Gala on May 7," said Roopal Patel, fashion director at [Saks Fifth Avenue](#), New York.

"Creating experiences is part of Saks' DNA," she said. "The new luxury is no longer merely about shopping—Saks is a destination, and our window installation, created in partnership with the editorial team at *Vogue*, is one of the many experiential offerings that enhance our in-store experience."

Similarly to Saks, The Surrey took The Met's exhibit as a jumping off point. The hotel commissioned artist Jimmie Martin to create original works.

Mr. Martin's "Naughty Angels" present a cheeky take on the heavenly creatures. One is covered in graffiti with a skateboard and cigarette, while another is a tattooed jewel thief.

The artist also created angels that represent figures such as Anna Wintour and Karl Lagerfeld.



Jimmie Martin's Naughty Angels rethink the cherubic figures. Image courtesy of The Surrey

Naughty Angels will be on display throughout the hotel throughout the summer. Consumers can also coordinate with the artist to purchase their own Naughty Angel.

The Surrey's collection reflects the potentially controversial tones of The Met's exhibit.

"Art has always been a medium to explore controversial ideas and everyone has differing tastes and views, but that is the beauty of it – art it encourages healthy discussion of other views and opinions that might differ from your own," The Surrey's Mr. Dias said. "The Met is an iconic cultural institution in New York, and we are happy to be a part of the cultural dialogue in the city.

"The 'Naughty Angels' are also one of Jimmie Martin's most popular collections and we have received great feedback from our guests," he said. "I think that in today's world, the collection is a breath of fresh air as they are meant to be light-hearted and cheeky, and guests can have fun with it."

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