

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

## Rodarte founders bridge the gap between fashion, art

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From left to right, Kate Mulleavy, Maude Apatow and Laura Mulleavy. Image credit: NYFW

By NORA HOWE

From the runway to the silver screen, sisters and Rodarte founders Kate and Laura Mulleavy have distinguished themselves in the fashion industry through storytelling and art.

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Since founding Rodarte in 2005, the Mulleavys have expanded their creativity and skills across a multitude of artistic categories, including fashion and costume design, writing and directing. To celebrate "The Art of Rodarte" immersive exhibition sponsored by Afterpay ([see story](#)) during New York Fashion Week at Spring Studios, which featured an archive of works from the designers, actress and star of HBO's "Euphoria" Maude Apatow spoke with the Mulleavy sisters about their journey through the fashion and film industries and what inspires them.

"I didn't grow up seeing fashion at all it was more in my head, and we just watched a lot of old films and I think costume design shaped how I viewed fashion," Laura said. "Even staring at paintings affected the way I thought about fashion.

"We grew up in a really beautiful natural landscape and I think we are very inspired by nature," she said. "The one thing you have that makes you different and unique as a designer is being you."

### Art of Rodarte

The Mulleavy sisters were born in California to a mycologist and artist. Both sisters attended the University of California Berkeley, with Kate pursuing art history and Laura studying English literature.

Their first experience designing clothes was ballet costumes for a friend while in school, but it was not until they returned to Los Angeles after school that they began to pursue their first 10-piece fashion collection.

"I had a record collection that we took down to Amoeba in L.A., and I sold it and we got enough money to buy some fabric," Kate said. "We knew that we wanted to work with certain textiles and then we built our first collection, which was 10 pieces."

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### *Rodarte spring/summer 2018 collection*

Upon completion, they took their collection to New York, a city they had never visited prior, and secured a meeting with Bridget Foley, Bobbi Queen and Nandini D'Souza of *Women's Wear Daily*.

The collection was then on the cover of the magazine's following issue.

"Lisa Love at *Vogue* in L.A. had seen the cover, and wanted to meet with us when we got back," Kate said. "She said Anna Wintour was coming to Los Angeles and wanted to see what we were doing.

"[Anna] gave us the best advice we could have gotten," Kate said. "She said, what you do is very personal and you need to keep it that way."

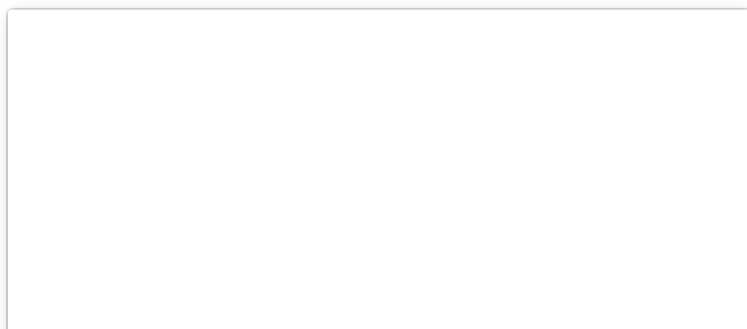
Having grown up surrounded by natural landscapes, the Mulleavy sisters have turned to the redwood trees of Santa Cruz for inspiration in their collections a motif that has remained consistent throughout Rodarte's history.

As part of the "Art of Rodarte" exhibition, 12 Rodarte runway looks spanning from fall/winter 2008 to spring/summer 2022 were on display for public viewing.

### From fashion to entertainment

In addition to their numerous runway collections, the sisters designed pieces for the Los Angeles Philharmonic production of opera *Don Giovanni*, with stage design by Frank Gehry. Four gowns from the opera were featured in the Rodarte exhibit at New York Fashion Week.

They also designed the ballet costumes for Darren Aronofsky's Academy Award-winning film *Black Swan* in 2010, the sketches of which were displayed as part of this week's exhibition.



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A post shared by RODARTE (@rodarte)

"I sat down the other day to watch it, and it felt like an out-of-body experience like we made something that lives beyond what we do," Kate said. "That is what I love about working on a film it becomes something where all the elements become this story that lives on."

Laura pointed out that the greatest difference between fashion and costume design is that, in fashion, it is about bringing one's own vision to life, while in film, it is about enhancing someone's performance or vision.

Inspired by their experience in the film sector, in 2017, the sisters wrote and directed their debut film *Woodshock*, starring Kirsten Dunst and distributed by A24, which premiered at the 74th annual Venice Film Festival.

Four ensembles from the film, including slip dresses worn by Ms. Dunst in the film, were featured in "The Art of Rodarte."

Most recently, Kate and Laura worked on designing the costumes for the final act of the animated film *Sing 2*. This work was also featured in the "Art of Rodarte" exhibition.

"We had to learn their language and they had to learn ours," Laura said. "We are very tactile, you know, we build things out of materials and they are making things out of air, and we didn't have much to reference besides the characters from the previous film.

"But we had a great relationship with the director," she said. "He would tell the story to us in the most brilliant way like he was reading a story, and it was enough."

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