

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Chanel shines light on link between literature, femininity

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Ms. Sy shines a special light on African-American and women writers, revealing how these reads helped her connect with her own identity. Image credit: Chanel

By EMILY IRIS DEGN

French fashion house Chanel is sitting down with a female leader in the arts for the latest edition of "In the Library."

For the slot, French Senegalese director and screenwriter Ramata-Toulaye Sy discusses her relationship to reading, shining a specific light on African-American literature. Ms. Sy reveals how books and femininity are connected, all while wearing treasured fashion pieces from Chanel, a brand that has dressed women for over a century.

"I love this campaign and its focus on literature because it offers women a beautiful moment to escape into another world and to dream and imagine, reflecting on their own lives in the process," said Sydney Mintle, founder of [Gossip & Glamour](#), Seattle.

"The connection to literature is thought-provoking in a nuanced way because it aligns the brand with women who are reaching for more, evolving, and uncovering new ways of looking at the world and themselves in the process," Ms. Mintle said. "Literature written by women gives readers a chance to discover their own voice, and that is what Chanel offers as a brand in its collections.

"The series explores the complexity of what it means to be a woman today and celebrates the beauty of seeking truth and passing it along to future generations."

Ms. Mintle is not affiliated with Chanel, but agreed to comment as an industry expert.

Reading into it

In new footage, Ms. Sy, donning an outfit comprised of Chanel products, muses with the brand on which books sparked her interest in storytelling, a skill that is among the most essential in her field as a filmmaker.



Ms. Sy and Chanel both uplift female creativity, the director as a woman artist and the house as a continued legacy of Coco Chanel. Image credit: Chanel

With a variety of women-written reads and African-American literature spread out on a table in front of her, the director goes through her favorites. In this exclusive slot, consumers are invited to reflect with the house on an opening question that Ms. Sy poses "What does it mean to be a woman?"

Founded in 1910 in Paris by a female designer, Chanel has specialized in women's ready-to-wear items for 113 years. This history shows a particularly intimate relationship between the brand and femininity, as it is what has not only fueled its revenues for all these decades but is what sparked its genesis in the first place thanks to Coco Chanel's involvement.

Womanhood is arguably as deeply engrained in the company as fashion itself is, representative of its customers, designers and of course, the leading lady who started it all.

Ms. Sy meditates on lessons that literature has taught her about her own place in the female world, bringing up the work of American authors Maya Angelou and Toni Morrison.



Tales told by African-American writers are of special interest to Ms. Sy, who shares with viewers a few of her favorites from her treasured library. Image credit: Chanel

Both of these Black writers delved into subjects like race, gender, oppression and sexuality, drawing lines between masculinity and violence, and femininity and strength. It is this duo that Ms. Sy states brought her a lifelong love of complex characters, and that built her relationship with her identity as a woman.

She reminisces on her childhood, looking at the ways that her heritage came into play as a child of Senegalese parents. Though her mother comes from a background of oral rather than written histories as Ms. Sy says she is largely responsible for the director's love of reading, as she often took her and her siblings to their local library on a weekly basis.

An appreciation for travel and self-discovery was also forged while turning pages, passions that continue to be drivers behind her art today.



Things get personal in this latest Chanel slot, as Ms. Sy shares memories from her childhood, speaks about her parents and discusses her appreciation for her gender. Image credit: Chanel

She shares with viewers that her current bookshelves are stocked with magical realism and tales that capture the Afro-American experience. Through these genres, she believes that books are transformed into transmitters of culture; of history it is this role that Ms. Sy feels is the "fundamental" mission of literature.

In a discussion with a heritage house, the subject is seemingly quite apt.

"As an avid reader myself, I loved this particular interview with Ramata Toulaye," said Ms. Mintle.

"The books she picked were fantastic and her depiction of the stories was spot on," she said. "How brilliant of Chanel to conceptualize and execute this campaign!

"It goes far beyond fashion and is such a thought-provoking way to engage with women of all ages."

Female framing

Women's stories are getting the spotlight in a slew of marketing campaigns and initiatives across the luxury fashion category.

The year began with Italian fashion brand Prada exploring female fluidity in a film project, which looked into contemporary aspects of gender ([see story](#)).

In the Library with Ramata-Toulaye Sy

A month later in February 2023, Roman jeweler Bulgari took to Madrid to celebrate the 75-year anniversary of the brand's Serpenti silhouette. Femininity stood at the heart of the accompanying campaign, leaning into the historic associations between women and snakes ([see story](#)).

French fashion house Chanel centered its fall/winter 2023 presentation on the daily routine of a model while looking into what it means to be a modern woman ([see story](#)). Like this latest slot, it was highly personal and engaged in conversations about what it is like to be diverse, female and creative.

As women continue to be the driving force behind the luxury industry on many fronts ([see story](#)), it is unlikely that this trend will abate any time soon.