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Flora and Fauna *The Nature of Fashion*

12 September – 1 November 2015

A Blue Mountains Cultural Centre Exhibition curated by Charlotte Smith, Darnell Collection

Nature has long been fashion's muse. Creatives in the industry have celebrated her beauty in diverse and unique ways from full impact embellishment to subtle incorporation in weaves, from organic shapes and silhouettes to fabulous textiles that echo nature's sublime nuances in a myriad of patterns, colours and styles.

Each garment and accessory was selected to reflect the diversity of flora and fauna. The exhibition will include six categories; *Lace, Embroidery, Embellishment, Printed, Textured Textiles* and *Natural Dyeing*.

Rare and priceless pieces, as diverse as an evening dress from 1800 most probably dyed with arsenic; an elaborate Mexican necklace from the 60s studded with opals and an elaborately embroidered gown by Vietnam's only couturier, Mrs Minh Hanh from her 2013 collection, will bring to life flora and fauna's influence on fashion.

An international line-up of fashion's elite, including designers such as Dior, Dolce & Gabbana, Emilio Pucci and Christian Lacroix along with Australia's own Beril Jents, Jenny Kee and Easton Pearson, will flaunt fashion's relationship with nature and celebrate how she is intimately entwined.

Mary Katrantzou, a Greek born designer who graduated from St. Martins College of Art and Design in London in 2008, is a master of digital printing and trompe l'oeil photographic overlaying. She is considered a game changer in the fashion industry of the 21st Century. The quality of and visual uniqueness in her choices of digital prints highlights her mastery of the technology which has been embraced by other designers and fashion brands, from Peter Pilotto in England and Josh Goot in Australia to the high street brands such as Zara and Topshop.

Mary Katrantzou is also known for her fabric manipulation, focusing on the effect of digital printing in its ability to perceive a change in shape of a woman's body. She believes women should make a statement of empowerment, which comes from the confidence of wearing colour and bold patterns.

IMAGE: Evening dress made by Mary Katrantzou, 2011, England, digitally printed on silk satin. Photograph: Brigitte Grant Photography



At the end of the Victorian era and leading into the Belle Epoch, Cincinnati faced the same dilemma as many other cities in the US: a large number of unemployed and impoverished women had followed their husbands, fathers and brothers and were now in search of work.

In Cincinnati, where the majority of these women were Irish, town leaders launched a program to teach them a skill from their own country; Irish crochet lace work. Anna Dunlevy, a highly respected and sought-after dressmaker, who employed 500 women at her peak of popularity, embraced this initiative and engaged many Irish women to create lace for some of her most sumptuous gowns.

By mid-1910, Irish crocheted lace from Cincinnati was considered as fine as the lace coming straight from Ireland. To this day, Cincinnati is renowned for its fashion and lace made during its 'Golden Age' from the 1870s to the early 1920s.

IMAGE: Anna Dunlevy 1905, Cincinnati, Ohio, Irish crocheted lace, cotton lace, silk satin, silk bodice lining, cotton tape. Photograph by Brigitte Grant Photography



A reticule is a small handbag closed by drawstrings. The reticule became popular when women stopped sewing pockets inside their delicate dresses in the late Georgian era and took to carrying small handbags that were made of silk, velvet, lace and knitted fabrics. Often they were beaded or tasseled. Patterns on Victorian beaded handbags varied from floral to figurative and even abstract.

Beaded reticules were imported from France, Italy, and Germany where they were painstakingly made and therefore costly to buy. When laid flat and empty, the shape of the handbag was reminiscent of the shape of the earlier pocket. In 1804, *The Imperial Weekly Gazette* wrote "While men wear their hands in their pockets so grand, the ladies have pockets to wear in their hands."

Reticules remained popular until the 1920s when handbags with more substantial frames came into fashion.

IMAGE: Victorian Bead Reticule - Maker unknown, 1860, France, glass beads, silk cord, silk. Photograph by Ian Hill Photography

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About the Darnell Collection

For over 70 years, Doris Darnell, a Quaker from Pennsylvania, pursued a passion for fashion by collecting vintage clothes and accessories. For Doris, the social history behind the items was as important as the items themselves and preserving them and their stories for future generations became an important part of her passion. *The Darnell Collection* grew out of donations and gifts from her family's wide circle of friends and acquaintances around the world. Importantly, most of the items came with accompanying letters, photographs and stories which linked them to the original owners or donors and often to the occasions to which they were worn.

Charlotte Smith inherited her godmother Doris's collection in 2004. It has continued to grow through further bequests to over 8000 pieces representing 32 different countries and is considered the largest private vintage clothing collection in Australia. Included are many internationally recognised 20th century designers such as Lucile, Vionnet, Dior, Chanel, Balenciaga, Pucci, Jean Muir, Zandra Rhodes, Westwood, Versace, Dolce & Gabana and Jil Sander among many, many other names.

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Hours: 10am – 5pm Monday – Friday, 10am – 4pm Saturday – Sunday
10am – 2pm Public Holidays (closed Good Friday, Christmas Day)
Admission: \$5 adults / \$3 concession. Members & under 16 free