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Dior exhibition brings glamor to museum

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Couture house Christian Dior brings a dash of Parisian glamor and elegance to Shanghai with the “Esprit Dior” exhibition.

Couture house Christian Dior brings a dash of Parisian glamor and elegance to the Museum of Contemporary Art Shanghai (MoCA Shanghai) with the “Esprit Dior” exhibition that opened today and runs until November 10.

“The exhibition intends to immerse the visitor in the world of the House of Dior and the magical spirit developed from 1947 to today by its founder Christian Dior and his successors,” said Florence Muller, curator of the exhibition.

“It shows how Christian Dior was the first couturier to build a global style around the world, but that his couture house was built on more than just a style. It highlights Dior’s expression of a unique art de vivre, synonymous with the joy of living, his love of parties and social moments, his quest for excellence and passion for beauty,” Muller added.

The founder Christian Dior (1905-57) is remembered for his revolutionary “New Look” after World War II, celebrating ultra-femininity and opulence and suffusing women’s wardrobes with a soft, new vitality of color. His sure taste, passion for beauty and excellence, and avant-garde spirit came together in what later was to be called the Esprit Dior (Dior Spirit).

Art, architecture, perfumes, jewelry, accessories and haute couture garments are all fundamental to the Dior spirit. The Esprit Dior constantly was rejuvenated on the foundation of a past strongly defined by the founder and his successors in order to express a very contemporary way of life.

The exhibition explores nine themes and the display includes nearly 100 haute couture dresses from the Christian Dior era to recent ones directed by Raf Simons. It includes 100 iconic photos by Patrick Demarchelier that pay homage to the Dior silhouette, and a selection of works by contemporary Chinese and foreign artists including Yan Pei-Ming, Zeng Fanzhi, and Christian Berard who reinterpret the Dior ethos for themselves.

Christian Dior started his career as a gallerist and represented both Dali and Giacometti early on. The love of art has always been a profound part of the identity of the founder, and therefore of the House of Dior as well.

Haute couture designs are juxtaposed with bespoke works of art and each piece of art is inspired by Dior's most prominent codes and in their own way gives an interpretation of Dior spirit around themes such as Pink and Red, Paris, Dior Garden, and Dior Ateliers. Yan Pei-Ming drew a portrait of Christian Dior in red; an amazing installation by artist Lin Tianmiao and a monumental sewing needle from Liu Jinhua pay tribute to the exceptional expertise of Dior Ateliers; Zheng Guogu's sculpture seems to want to materialize the immaterial and give an everlasting dimension to the garden of Dior perfumes.

Among the nine themes, "Versailles: Le Trianon" shows the founder's true affinity with the 18th-century Louis XVI style, and especially the fashions associated with Queen Marie Antoinette. When he founded the couture house, Dior imagined an atmosphere of refined, elegant splendor in clean lines infused with 18th-century chic.

Curator Muller said Dior chose to be inspired by the marvelous past of France, both by the prestigious spirit of the Galerie des Glaces and by the exquisite charm of Trianon, the estate of Marie Antoinette. "There was also another reason: The 18th-century style made him dream about his childhood, about the family houses where he lived at Granville and in Paris, where the living room was decorated in 18th-century style," she added.
