**The Future on Display: Fashion as Storytelling**

**By Sarah Bradley**

When Rafael Gomes, Director of  Exhibitions at the SCAD FASH Museum of Fashion + Film, is asked where he began when designing the “Pierre Cardin: Pursuit of the Future,” exhibition he says, “Well you need to tell a story, you need really to tell a story, this is very important… the process is how to tell a story.”

When asked how much of fashion is storytelling, Gomes says, “Well it's a lot. Like, for example, we have Pierre Cardin. We start telling the story from the very beginning, from the end of the 50s. Then we explain about the space age to our visitors, what was the space age period, what was in the air, why fashion started assimilating these aspects.  Then we tell a story.”

Telling a story, is something this exhibit does well. You see the and sharp change from the Dior inspired pieces that mark the beginning of Cardin’s career. The story changes when Cardin hit the sixties: color floods in. You see Cardin’s clothing take on the futuristic tilt that marks Cardin’s work to this day. The Space Age clothing is open, clean,  jaunty, and fun. They make you happy to know that Cardin was the only civilian ever to wear an astronauts space suit. It was Neil Armstrong's.

Pierre Cardin’s clothing looks like what people will be wearing in posh neighborhoods in 100 years. I read in his clothing why he bought the famous bubble house in the South of  [Théoule-sur-Mer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Th%C3%A9oule-sur-Mer).  Pierre Cardin future is one where there is room for every color in the rainbow. There is a fascination and possibility written everywhere.

If you go back stage, you will see a realer world. While entering, I walk past a storage closet. I see the tall, thin mannequins that were displayed during the “Guo Pei: Couture Beyond” exhibit that closed March 4th. They are gathered in the back of a small room, leaning against the wall.

The statuesque mannequins look  informal without their grand clothes, like they’ve given them the slip for a coffee break, and a smoke. I leave the closet behind and enter a work room, where a new exhibit is being prepared to accompany Pierre Cardin’s.

This workroom gives you the impression that everything is where it is for a reason, and that you better not fiddle around. The room is lousy with dress forms in various stages of preparation. Some are children, and one or two have prestigious looking high collars. One wears a gas mask. One is having a pillow stuffed under her red dress, telling the story of life. She wearing a soft white hood.

Next to the shiny chrome, and austere white walls of the Pierre Cardin exhibit, the ‘Handmaid’s Tale: Dressing for Dystopia,’ exhibit opens like the mouth of a monster. “I think we wanted to create a dialogue between both exhibits.” Says Executed Director of SCAD FASH and Atlanta Exhibitions, Alexandra Sachs who designed the exhibit.

On April 30th, SCAD FASH opened “The Handmaid's Tale: Dressing for Dystopia,” to accompany the Pierre Cardin exhibition. Seeing both pieces together allows viewers to consider the duality of the future in uncertain times. How we might look into the future with both gaiety, and with growing disquiet.

Sachs designed  “Handmaid’s Tale: Dressing for Dystopia”, and says about the duality of the two exhibits, “The goal was to create two very distinct exhibits. Pierre Cardin is very bright very futuristic, very optimistic, and then you have ‘The Handmaid's Tale’ where you’re transported into Gilead.”

Transported is the perfect verb to use. The story of “The Handmaid's Tale: Dressing for Dystopia”, is one of a future on the dark side of the force.  There are no clean shapes or vivid colors, no showy poses here. The stories *these* mannequins tell, is one of humanities more philistine nature.

When you enter the exhibit, you are surrounded by burned black wood and the light is low**.** You hear distant groaning music, the blowing of horns, almost like a call to prayer. You hear a fingernail digging into wood.

There is genuine anxiety in the shadows of the exhibit. One can’t help but imagine how many poor people have been lead down somber halls like this one, never to return. The dress forms are gently turned toward one another, like they are trying to make themselves small.

The dress forms have blank faces, so it’s easy to imprint ourselves onto them. Because of who I am, because of my story, I see my sister, my mother, my enemies. You will see something different. On some level, we see ourselves in the people who wear these clothes, that’s why we’re anxious.

When asked where she started to create the exhibit, Sachs says she started with acclaimed costume designer Ane Crabtree. “The place that we started with Crabtree, is that costume designers are storytellers,” says Sachs.

“I wanted the exhibit to tell a story, and to integrate film and sound, to combine it with the music playing, and the scratching on the walls. We wanted it to be a cinematic experience, we wanted it to be the story of ‘The Handmaid's Tale’.”