

WORLD OF MUSEUMS – L'UNIVERS DES MUSÉES

Canadian Clock Museum, Deep River, Ontario:

Features a research library and collection, consisting of items from three manufacturers: The Arthur Pequegnat Clock Company, Westclox Canada, Snider Clock.

url: www.canclockmuseum.ca

Musée canadien des civilisations, Gatineau, Québec :

Prezenza – Un nouveau Regard sur l'héritage italo-canadien
13 juin 2003 au 6 septembre 2004

« Unitevi a noi nell'ascoltare, garde e fare tesoro di questi beni che gli immigrati italiani hanno donato al Canada. »

Musée des beaux arts de Montréal, Montréal, Québec :

Édouard Vuillard, Maître du postimpressionisme

15 mai au 24 août, 2003

Saskatchewan Western Development Museum, Moose Jaw, Saskatoon etc.

Offers training courses in traditional crafts and skills: Steam Traction Engine Operation, Introduction to wheelwrighting, Blacksmithing.

Exhibit Review

Clothes Make the MAN / Lui: la mode au masculin

McCord Museum, Montréal, Québec

By Eileen O'Connor

Itinerary:

Canadian Museum of Civilization, Gatineau, Québec

24 April – 1 September, 2003

Musée de la civilisation, Québec, Québec

24 March – 26 September, 2004

Curators

Guest Curator: Gail Cariou (Parks Canada) Cynthia Cooper (Curator of Costumes and Textiles, McCord Museum)

Eileen Stack (Curatorial Assistant, McCord Museum)

CMC Exhibit Addition: Christina Bates (Ontario Historian, CMC)

Clothes Make the MAN is an exhibit from the McCord Museum in Montréal that highlights more than three hundred years of men's fashions, from the eighteenth century to the present. It is a fascinating exhibit that draws from the extensive clothing collection at the McCord, displaying many items that have not been exhibited before. Currently on display at the Canadian Museum of Civilization (CMC) in Gatineau, with plans to travel to the Musée de la civilisation in Québec City in 2004, I visited *Clothes Make the MAN* on its opening night at the CMC. It was a night where fashion was clearly at the forefront among dignitaries and fashionistas from the National Capital Region.

I returned twice thereafter and each time was struck by the level of sophistication and nuance in the selection of artifacts, exhibit text and design.

Clothes Make the MAN begins with the statement, " 'Men' and 'fashion' are usually considered mutually exclusive terms in Western society. Social taboos against men's interest in clothing that first appeared in the 19th century have blinded us to the enduring male enthusiasm for fashionable apparel". To lend credence to their claims that men enjoy fashion, visitors are welcomed to the exhibit by a display of clothing from the wardrobe of former Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau, generously loaned by the Trudeau family for this exhibit. Deemed 'Canada's Man of Fashion', the selected articles that capture his sense of style include his mohair cape, hat, gloves, buckskin jacket and northern parka. His clothes are an effective reminder of the power of self-expression through fashion, and the chosen artifacts accurately display his stylish confidence.

Throughout the exhibit, the creators set out to convey the message that there are multiple reasons men dress as they do. The exhibit thoughtfully explores how middle-class men's clothing decisions have been shaped by function, vanity, formality, fraternity, propriety, changing perceptions of the masculine ideal and its relationship to the body. *Clothes Make the MAN* successfully situates fashion changes in the context of economic systems of production and consumption; athleticism and the pursuit of a healthy body; and notions of what constitutes public and private. As costume scholar Joanne Entwistle notes, 'it is the body that fashion speaks to', and understanding the meaning acquired by the body in culture is imperative to understanding fashion. Changes to what body parts were considered appropriate to reveal or accentuate reflects cultural shifts, and the creators of *Clothes Make the MAN* ably explore the links between the body and fashion in their treatment of The Country Gentleman (late 1700s-early 1800s), The 'Coming Man' (late 1800s early 1900s), manufacturing 'ideal' looks through the work of tailors, and in changing notions of modesty and sexuality in the chronological display of men's trouser fastenings and swimwear. The issue of gender and dress is brought into focus in a section that surveys how young boys were dressed over time, highlighting evolving perceptions of masculinity and femininity. Constructing masculinity is relational to constructing femininity, and this exhibit addresses the social power related to menswear and ensuing tension when women appropriated men's clothing styles and fabrics.

Featured garments in the exhibit include a lavishly embroidered 18th century silk waistcoat, a model of the 19th century Papal army uniform worn by approximately 400 Catholic men from Quebec (les zouaves), an Eastern-influenced *banyan and*

buta, precursors to the dressing gown, a tuxedo and top hat from the 19th century, an academic gown, an evening dress suit from the 1930s, a Savile Row tailored suit from the 1950s, sportswear, jeans, among many other articles of clothing. There is also a rich display of accessories such as shoes, hats, gloves, handkerchiefs and walking sticks. The impressive selection of clothing artifacts are complemented by a wide range of period photographs, catalogues and newspapers, as well as audio effects such as the sound of water at the chronological display of swimwear. Several men who attended the exhibit opening at the CMC were asked to strike a pose, and their clothing styles were captured on camera and are prominently displayed in a photograph gallery. The exhibit includes several interactive zones that expand on the exhibit themes. For example, visitors can learn how to knot a nineteenth-century tie or try on a replica of a padded vest or various hairpieces. There is also a small table with several classic titles on men's fashion, and visitors are encouraged to sit and peruse the lavishly-illustrated books while pondering the questions written on the wall: How do your clothes "make" you? What is today's masculine "ideal" and what clothes does this "ideal" man wear? Do you prefer the shelter of a power suit or the ease of casual Fridays? Indeed, these questions encourage the visitor to reflect on whether a power suit or casual khakis 'makes' the man or whether it is secondary to a man's power, wealth and knowledge.

In no means to detract from the overall excellence of this exhibit, there are a few comments to make. In parts, the lighting is dark and in a few places, the printing on text boards beyond the railings is quite small. While cognizant of the necessary limitations that such a large exhibit imposes, I think it could have been interesting to include more of the clothing worn by men who were not white, heterosexual and from middle-upper class families in Montreal. What were some of the regional similarities and differences in the ways Canadian men dressed? How were gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality and fraternity constructed through the clothing worn by Natives, Italian Canadians, African-Canadians, Asian-

Canadians, and traditionally marginalized groups like gay men? While there are some references and artifacts that depict clothing worn by some of these men, the possibilities and excitement this type of exhibit generates lends itself well to an inclusive approach. The CMC has added an important dimension to this exhibit, emphasizing the importance of utility in the clothing created and worn by men from different rural regions in Canada. This section highlights the clothing men wore on the farm, in fishing boats, lumber and railway camps. Included are items such as early twentieth-century hand-woven wool garments from an Ontario farmstead and a nineteenth-century homespun suit from rural Quebec. The inclusion of clothing worn by some working class men in non-urban settings is welcomed.

While on display at the McCord Museum, *Clothes Make the MAN* was a popular and critical success. It was recently awarded the Costume Society of America's Richard Martin Award for Excellence in the Exhibition of Costume, the first time a Canadian institution has received this prestigious award since its inception in 2002. Named for Richard Martin (1947-1999), an outstanding scholar and former curator of costume at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City, two institutions are recognized each year for their excellence in costume exhibition. Indeed, *Clothes Make the MAN* constitutes an important contribution to the field of men's fashion, a much-neglected subject in the world of museum exhibition and academic scholarship. This is a fine example of museum work at its best and challenges visitors to think about why men clothe their bodies the way they do, and how identities are constructed and communicated through dress.

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