

**The *Théâtre de la Mode* at Maryhill Museum of Art**  
Steven L. Grafe, Curator of Art

**Important Dates**

**14 June 1940–25 August 1944:** German occupation of Paris.

**November 1940:** Lucien Lelong's first visit to Berlin to lobby against the relocation of the Parisian fashion industry to Berlin and Vienna.

**October 1944:** A project benefiting war relief efforts and showing the continuing vitality of the couture industry is approved by the *Chambre Syndicale*.

**28 March 1945:** The *Théâtre de la Mode* exhibition opens in the Grand Gallery of the *Pavillon de Marsan* of the Louvre Museum. It remains on view for about five weeks and is visited by more than 100,000 people.

**8 May 1945:** Germany surrenders (VE Day).

**12 September 1945:** The *Théâtre de la Mode* opens in The Prince's Gallery, Piccadilly, London. Other 1945–46 venues with partial arrays of décors include Barcelona, Stockholm, Leeds, Copenhagen, and Vienna.

**1 May 1946:** The *Théâtre de la Mode* opens in New York with new décors and spring/summer 1946 fashions. It then travels to San Francisco, opening on 12 September 1946. It appears in both locations for less than two months.

**March 1952:** After several years in storage in the City of Paris department store in San Francisco, the *Théâtre de la Mode* mannequins arrive at Maryhill Museum of Art. By this time, the original stage sets have been lost.

**1988–1990:** The mannequins return to Paris and are conserved there. Nine replica stage sets (eight from the 1945 Paris exhibition) are created by Anne Surgers.

**Noteworthy Personalities**

**Christian Bérard** (French, 1902–1949) served as the overall artistic director for *Théâtre de la Mode* and was the designer of its *Le Théâtre* décor.

**Béla Bernard** (French [b. Hungary], 1911–1967); press photographer who took numerous photos of the staging of the 1945 Paris *Théâtre de la Mode* exhibition.

**Éliane Bonabel** (French, 1920–2000) conceived the design of the *Théâtre de la Mode* mannequins.

**Louis Chéronnet** (French, 1899–1950); Paris-based art critic and writer who provided the descriptive text for the 1945 and 1946 *Théâtre de la Mode* catalogues.

**Lucien Lelong** (French, 1889–1958); couturier who served as president of the *Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture Parisienne* from 1937–1945.

**Joan Rebull** (Spanish [Catalan], 1899–1981) created the plaster heads for the *Théâtre de la Mode* mannequins.

**Robert Ricci** (French, 1905–1988); business manager of the Nina Ricci fashion house and PR/Marketing director for the *Chambre Syndicale*. With Paul Caldaguès and Lucien Lelong, Ricci was responsible for the creation and administration of the *Théâtre de la Mode*.

**Jean Saint-Martin** (French, 1899–1988) built the many *Théâtre de la Mode* mannequins and designed the *Croquis de Paris* (Paris Sketch) décor.

**Anne Surgers** (French); theater historian who created nine replica stage sets in 1988–1990.

**Paul Verdier** (French, 1882–1966) was president of the City of Paris department store in San Francisco from 1904–1966. With Alma de Bretteville Spreckels (1881–1968), he brokered the transfer of the 1946 *Théâtre de la Mode* to Maryhill Museum of Art.

**References and Links**

The main reference text for the *Théâtre de la Mode* is Edmonde Charles-Roux, Herbert R. Lottman, Stanley Garfinkel, et al, *Théâtre de la Mode: Fashion Dolls: The Survival of Haute Couture* (2002).

The two links below take one to different online exhibitions about the *Théâtre de la Mode*. Both are provided as PDF files and can be downloaded. The first is a general history and the second discusses the décors:

<https://www.maryhillmuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Theatre-de-la-Mode-ONLINE-Dec-8-2020.pdf>

[https://www.maryhillmuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/TDLM-The-Decors-ONLINE.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1fA27IECI7k7k1PiPx3N7noyylhV6XVJq2P9-IV88K\\_8V1pi7qJMaBQyY](https://www.maryhillmuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/TDLM-The-Decors-ONLINE.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1fA27IECI7k7k1PiPx3N7noyylhV6XVJq2P9-IV88K_8V1pi7qJMaBQyY)

The *Théâtre de la Mode* inspired the use of miniature mannequins during the COVID-19 pandemic. The first (of three) is Dior's 2020 video response. It is essentially a 15-minute movie:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yxBFwgRbl8c>

Moschino (Jeremy Scott) put together a COVID-era runway show with marionettes (7:01-long). It too references the *Théâtre de la Mode* mannequins:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7dpNzuRda0Y>

And then there's this from Walter Van Beirendonck (an 11:50-long video): "I was inspired by what the couturiers did after the war, the *Théâtre de la Mode* ... So, we made the collection in miniature and dressed them on gold dolls, with makeup and everything ... The collection is entitled 'Mirror,' references shamanistic practice, and [some] contain panels of mirrored fabric: "I created 22 looks and they're all very wearable. I didn't want to do something difficult to put on.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uUO9b\\_-x0gY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uUO9b_-x0gY)

These links lead to images of the 1949 "Merci Train" (Gratitude Train) mannequins showcasing a 1706–1906 history of French fashion. The project utilized the design of the *Théâtre de la Mode* mannequins. The first link details the 1949 Brooklyn Museum "Two Centuries of French Fashion Elegance" exhibition. The second and third provide historical overviews, and the last link takes one to a Pinterest page with images of the fronts and backs of many of the dolls:

<https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/exhibitions/729>

<https://costume.mini.icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2020/02/Annelena-de-Groot-The-creative-craft-of-thankfulness.pdf>

[https://prezi.com/co11psciw\\_h9/dolls-of-the-gratitude-train/](https://prezi.com/co11psciw_h9/dolls-of-the-gratitude-train/)

<https://www.pinterest.com/althornhill/1949-merci-train-dolls/>

Here is the Maryhill Museum of Art page on the Google Arts & Culture website. It shows 80 prime items from the museum collection:

<https://artsandculture.google.com/partner/maryhill-museum-of-art>

Finally, drone footage on the museum's Facebook page showing Maryhill Museum of Art and its Stonehenge War Memorial in their landscapes. There is no accompanying soundtrack.

<https://www.facebook.com/maryhillmuseum/videos/688482918530378>