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## 'YVES SAINT LAURENT — SHAPES AND FORMS', AS SEEN BY MADISON COX

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Hundreds of billionaires' wives and Gulf princesses will descend on Paris soon for private haute couture shows. Tens of thousands more can enjoy couture in a new exhibition on the greatest couturier of the past half century entitled 'Yves [Saint Laurent](#) – Shapes and Forms'.

It's a novel, concise and revealing look at Saint Laurent, focusing on his sense of geometry and architectural style, with a series of telling exhibits from his famed archive of fashion, accessories, posters and sketches.

The exhibition, which opened in June, is also in part a collaboration with fine artist Claudia Wieser, where the Berlin-based artist ceramics and designs form an ideal juxtaposition.

Instead of the magnificent kaleidoscopes of color one associates with Saint Laurent, the focus here are expressions of geometry – stemming from a first marvelously understated ecru belted dress from his days at Christian [Dior](#) to a series of poshly futurist jumpsuits. Several displays with sunning metaphysical hats and visors from couture shows running from 1966 to 1991 capture Yves' sense of sculptural chic. The bold graphics of Yves 1966 Pop Art collection is on display, while the show poster is of Iman Abdulmajid Bowie photographed by Guy Marineau in a cubist patchwork tailleur.

Upstairs an entire space is devoted to a series of black and white couture and ready-to-wear looks, backed up by Wieser's ceramic forms. Leading to a small door where one enters the very studio of Saint Laurent, with his desk, papers, crayons and memorabilia still spotlessly displayed. And just one look – a famed Mondrian red, white, blue and yellow jacket from 1980.

Co-curated by the museum's director Elsa Janssen and its head curator [Serena](#) Bucalo-Mussely, it's a must-see show

for true aficionados and fashionistas in Paris over the next week. Doubly so, during couture. And staged inside Saint Laurent's historic maison at 5 avenue Marceau.

So, we caught up with Madison Cox, the president of the Foundation [Pierre Bergé](#) and Yves Saint Laurent – which controls this museum and a second in Marrakech - for a discussion on the exhibition and its plans for the future. A much-acclaimed garden designer and aesthete, Cox took over the foundation after the departure of Pierre Bergé, Saint Laurent's great partner. Originally from San Francisco, Cox married Bergé in March 2017, six months before Pierre's death.

Now, besides a busy career overseeing the restoration of three historic European gardens, Cox oversees with patrician aplomb and manners the preservation of the legacy of Saint Laurent.

**FashionNetwork.com: Why did you create an exhibition about Yves Saint Laurent's forms and shapes?**

Madison Cox: It's part of our approach. [Well](#), it is co-curated by our new director of museum, Elsa Jansen. She also did 'Gold', our previous exhibition and our most successful ever. Over 130,000 people came in a period of five months. That's extremely impressive for a very small museum in a city like Paris, which has an incredible amount to offer in terms of culture.

The previous exhibition we had was for the 60th anniversary of Saint Laurent. It was in part here and also spread over five major Paris museums. That was our second most successful with over 100,000 visitors. But Gold was really a new approach and Elsa's first expression as a new director. It illustrated the new approach of putting together dialogues between Yves Saint Laurent's work and contemporary artists in a contemporary manner.

So, this particular sort of exhibition on Yves Saint Laurent is envisioned from a scenography point of view by the German artist Claudia Wieser. She is a very interesting woman who lives now in Berlin. And very interested in geometric forms, color and volumes. Her works are both pictorial and ceramic. So, working with the curators, Elsa and Serena, who is also the conservator of collections, the three in co-accordance with our archive department – chose clothes, accessories and drawings to underline the concept. It's an interesting dialogue – a new approach we have adopted since two years, and since we began exhibiting YSL's work in the context of a fine art museum as opposed to a fashion museum.

**FN: What do you hope people will think when they see an exhibition like this?**

MC: I hope they will look at this man's vast body of work that crosses over 40 years and see the vibrancy and modernism contained within in it. And also appreciate how contemporary it looks. It shows the integrity of someone whose work has a certain line that goes through everything he did. And one of these is form and volumes and constantly playing with proportions. Like an architect building structures, Yves built clothes with fabric. You will see looks that are almost impossible to date. Even if fashion is constantly moving by, he kept this line of continuity. I'd like for a younger generation to discover and be inspired by Yves Saint Laurent.

**FN: So, your archive is central to this approach?**

MC: Yes, that is what distinguishes us from most other fashion houses. Because Yves and Pierre from day one saved. From the very beginning, to be completely transparent, they saved sketches, drawings and patterns. All the correspondence was kept and the seating shots of who sat where and when, and all the order books. What was less kept at the very beginning was the actual clothes. For the very simple reason they had to sell the samples to make some money. The tradition in all fashion houses back then was never to keep something. Because it was old and already out of fashion. When Yves was working in Dior, back in the 50s, no one saved collections.

**FN: Where is the archive?**

MC: It's right above your head. That was part of the extraordinary transformation that happened here. From maison de couture with two floors of workrooms and studios, the fashion house was transformed into a museum. All those workrooms were transformed into storage, climate controlled, etc. There are over 7,000 garments, almost all catalogued. Over 60,000 works on paper, from sketches to drawings to annotations. 15,000 accessories, and lots of shoes. It went from a commercial enterprise to a museum, archive and exhibition space. And then three years before Pierre Bergé's death into a museum that principally exhibited Saint Laurent work.

**FN: Your show frequency is twice a year – for five or six months, right?**

MC: Yes, what happens with clothes is that they start to deform if you leave them on a mannequin. Clothes are made to be worn. If you wear them a lot, they start to lose shapes. So, the preservation of textiles, fashion or works on paper is in fact much more extreme than it is for oil paintings or stone. By the nature of the materials.

**FN: With some other exhibitions of other artists?**

MC: Yes, initially we did various exhibitions, like David Hockney who showed his first works on iPads, or Jean Michel Frank. But since the reopening five years ago, we have concentrated principally on Yves Saint Laurent and a juncture with contemporary art.

**FN: When Yves and Pierre sold out to François Pinault, how come they didn't sell the archive?**

MC: No, they felt it was their patrimony. And maybe Pinault didn't want it, though you would have to ask [Kering](#) about that. You have to realize that at the time, that was something that wasn't considered important. People didn't see the importance or necessity of keeping it. It sounds strange today in 2023 but in 2002 it wasn't. When [Hubert de Givenchy](#) sold his business to Monsieur Arnault he took his archives with him. No one wanted the archives because the view then was out with the old and in with the new.

**FN: There was a time when the relationship between the brand and the museum was somewhat distant, no?**

MC: I would say it was somewhat conflictual. Listen, I now cannot ask for a better partnership. Francesca Bellettini (Saint Laurent brand CEO) is actually downstairs right now. Having a tour. We have very defined and different roles. And two different entities, but we work together. At the end, Pierre Bergé made no secret, he knew his days were numbered. He had a tumor, and his health was declining very rapidly in the last year of his life. He was a savvy man and knew his days were limited. But he and I discussed a number of issues, and I asked him shouldn't Francesca Bellettini come on the board? Which had never been the case. There was no representative of the fashion house or of Kering involved. But in June 2017 we changed that, the year Pierre passed away.

**MC: How do you see your role?**

MC: I am the president of the foundation, comprising two not-for-profit organizations which controls the archives, the building and the museum here. In Morocco, we control the Jardin Majorelle and an exhibition space in Marrakech. My role is to maintain the two foundations principal activities – to preserve and promote the work of Yves Saint Laurent. To make sure both entities are alive, dynamic and evolve with time.

**FN: When they bought Majorelle, which is a phenomenal garden, what did it look like?**

MC: Well, they first arrived in Marrakech in 1966, their very first trip. Pierre recalled it rained for four days, and they sat in their hotel, and they couldn't wait to get out of there. But on the fifth day, with clear blue sky and mountains covered in snow and they decided to buy a house. In 1966, they bought a small house in the medina. But by 1975, they had enough money, so they wanted a proper house with garden and swimming pool. They first bought a house adjacent to Majorelle, which was owned by the widow of the painter Jacques Majorelle. But in 1980, after visiting the garden, which was opened to the public but very much abandoned, they had learned from a friend that Madame Majorelle had passed away. And the family, all of whom had been born in Morocco, had all relocated back to France after Moroccan independence. So, the family sold to a consortium of local businessmen, who had filed building permits to build a holiday condominium. But through connections to the King Hassan II, he decreed the area a green zone, so it lost its interest to the consortium, and Pierre and Yves bought it.

**FN: There have been five successors to Saint Laurent – Alber Elbaz, Tom Ford, Stefano Pilati, Hedi Slimane and now Anthony Vaccarello. Did you ever go to any of their shows?**

MC: Eh, no. I did go to one or two of Hedi's shows. I am not a man of fashion. I did not come to Paris to see shows. But I did go to Berlin to Vaccarello's show. And I did see his last show in the Trocadero. I think he is brilliant in his adaption and in his vision of the whole world of Saint Laurent. I have great admiration for what he and Francesca are doing. It's alive and contemporary. I used to meet Alber in Tangiers, and I met [Tom Ford](#) but never went to his shows, nor those of Pilati.

**FN: But your principal profession is as a garden designer?**

MC: Yes, didn't you know! I am a garden designer. I am working near Nice on two projects. One is the restoration of the Villa Santo-Suspir which was the house decorated by Jean Cocteau. It's a fun project restoring it to a version of what it once was, after WW2. The other project is Villa Maryland. A house built in early 20th century which has

an extraordinary garden. It was Paul Allen's house, I cannot tell to whom it was sold. And I am working on an extraordinary garden near Dieppe, called [Bois](#) des Moutiers, built by Edward Lutyens. So, I am very active in my profession. I come in here not as the director of the museum, but as president of the foundation. And I live I live between Morocco in a house on the property of Majorelle, and in New York in [West Village](#) on Christopher Street. I am constantly learning. Dealing with people who raise or cultivate plants. Even yesterday being in Villa Maryland. Even if Paul Allen past five years ago, his estate wisely kept the garden and vegetable garden beautifully maintained, on a scale that is almost regal. Gardens reflect their owners and can come and go and evolve and be in a constant state of flux and never the same. So that tree, shrub, plant or vine one day becomes too invasive. And that fascinates me that it is not fixed in time. In the Normandy garden we have spent two years just cleaning out deadwood, shrubs and branches. A massive amount of trees, but views and vistas had to be reopened. What I enjoy about my profession is that nothing is ever the same.