

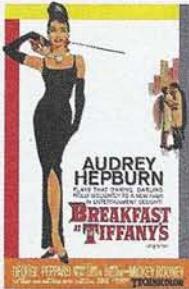


COMING COUTURE AUCTION

Doyle New York's next couture and accessories auction is **Wednesday, April 9**, at 10 a.m. Offered: hundreds of dresses, suits, and ensembles by the world's most famed designers, including Chanel, Gucci, Worth, John Galliano, Yves St. Laurent, Christian Dior, Valentino, Emilio Pucci, Pierre Balmain, Pauline Trigere, Fortuny, Norman Norell, Courreges, Geoffrey Beene, and Galanos. Highlights include an exquisite 1930s sequined gown with train by Worth, a late 1950s embroidered ballgown by Balmain, and two stunning black and white evening gowns by Galliano. The public can view the items—which have pre-auction estimates ranging from hundreds of dollars to tens of thousands—from April 5–7 at Doyle in New York (see "Sources & Resources").

THE LITTLE BLACK DRESS

What woman doesn't have in her closet a little black dress reminiscent of the one Audrey Hepburn wore as "Holly Golightly" in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*? Actually, womankind owes the whole "little black dress" phenomenon to Coco Chanel, who, back in the 1920s, designed a fashion icon destined to impact the way women would dress for decades to follow. The little black dress, together with gobs of pearls and long black gloves, even found its way into the 1990s in Givenchy's advertising campaigns—another example of the enduring appeal of vintage couture.



Waifish Audrey Hepburn made the "little black dress" vogue in 1961's *Breakfast at Tiffany's*.



AN UNRAVELING TALE...

Because of its rarity, fragility, or association with a noted celebrity, rare haute couture is usually bought for display only. Often, it's the very costliness of such pieces that makes them unwearable. Let's face it: No one wants to be responsible for dribbling champagne and caviar down the front of a rare Charles James black satin evening dress, or on the gown Princess Diana wore when she danced with John Travolta at the White House. —C.A.

HAUTE HOLLYWOOD!

In recent years, collectors of pop culture memorabilia have begun to raise the ante for the clothes off their Hollywood idols' backs.

By Caroline Ashleigh

"What we remember most about Hollywood is the glamour and the romance.... Those beautiful women, those handsome men. For Hollywood, everything was larger than life, bigger than anything before or since. The diamonds were bigger, the furs were thicker; the silks, velvets. Satins, chiffons were richer and silkier. There were miles of ostrich feathers, marabou, white fox, and sable; miles of bugle beads, diamante, and sequins. Hollywood was paved with glitter, shine, and glory."

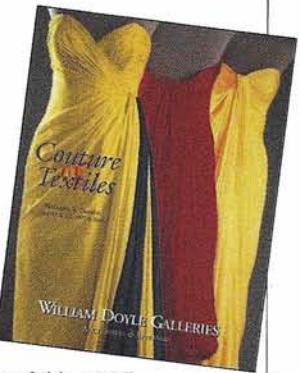
—Diana Vreeland, longtime fashion expert, editor, and writer

Whoever and wherever you were—whether a shoe shine boy from the Bronx or a waitress in a donut shop in Duluth—you went to the movies. You saved your money to sit in a darkened theatre to become, if only for a little while, Marie Antoinette, the Count of Monte Cristo, or Cleopatra, Queen of the Nile. That was the magic of the movies. And still is.

Costumes help translate those classic Hollywood stories to which we've become so attached. And they often start fashion trends that spread across international boundaries, as life attempts to imitate art. As Mae West mused, "Them's that has 'em, wears 'em."

Today, to paraphrase West, "Them's that has 'em, pays for 'em." A growing base of collectors hunts for vintage costumes worn by the stars, and they pay top dollar for the best pieces. A denim jacket worn on stage by Madonna, for example, recently sold for \$26,000, and a costume Julia Roberts wore in the movie *Erin Brockovich* sold for \$18,500.

The venue for those sales was Entertainment Rarities.com, a Los Angeles

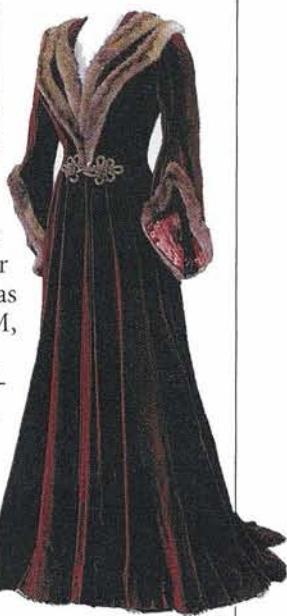


Rene Zellweger wore the yellow gown on the far right of this 1997 William Doyle catalog cover at the 2001 Academy Awards. Designed by Jean Dessès, the gown dates to 1960. Zellweger's stylist bought it for the actress for \$9,200.

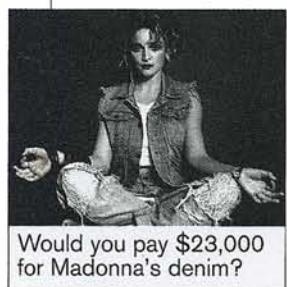


geles-based firm specializing in high-profile auctions for such clients as Cher and such companies as Dreamworks, MGM, and Paramount.

Meanwhile, collectors, celebrities, museum curators, producers, fashion designers and students, and prominent social figures eagerly anticipate Doyle New York's semi-annual couture sales. The widespread publicity attracted by Doyle's events has a lot to do with Hollywood celebrity interest. Among the many items that have sold at Doyle's couture auctions is the dark blue sequined gown pictured on p. 10. Norman Norell designed it for



Lauren Bacall (above in press photo) wore this fur-trimmed robe in *Bright Leaf* (1950).



Would you pay \$23,000 for Madonna's denim?

The author owns Birmingham, Mich.-based Caroline Ashleigh Associates Inc. (www.appraiseyourart.com). An Antiques Roadshow appraiser since Season 1, she's a certified senior member and regional representative for the Appraisers Association of America.



an opera performer some three decades ago. Recently, actress Demi Moore wore the gown at an Emmy Award presentation.

Unfortunately, Hollywood didn't have the foresight to preserve much of its costume history, so a large chapter of film memorabilia has been lost forever. The rare examples of individual pieces that remain are displayed and revered all over the world. "We owe private collectors a huge debt of gratitude for rescuing an important part of our history," says Clara Varnell, a conservator at the Metropolitan Museum of Arts' Costume Institute.

Two of the "survivors" pictured here come from the collector profiled below in "A Passion for Fashion": the claret-colored, fur-trimmed robe (p. 9) that Lauren Bacall wore in the 1950 film *Bright Leaf* and the gown that Mary Pickford wore in 1924's *Dorothy Vernon of Hadden Hall*. Also in his collection: a magnificent gown designed by Travis Banton for Claudette



Actress Mary Pickford (inset), who appeared in 52 feature films from 1913-33, wore this elaborate costume in *Dorothy Vernon of Hadden Hall* (1924). Designer: Mitchell Leisen.

authentic bits of gold lace, antique embroidery, yards of velvet, antique gilt braids and buttons, festoons of chiffons and tulle, and bolts of glittering lame—all strewn on the studio's cement floor, underneath leaking water pipes. "All its beautiful European beads and jewels fell off the soaked and stained fabric. It broke your heart..."

Varnell agrees that the treatment accorded much of Hollywood's fashion treasures has been careless, at best. In the past half-century, however, professional costume conservation has come a long

way. In museums, garments are kept under strict environmental conditions.

"Fabric is an organic material," she notes. "It has a life span. We never touch [vintage costumes] unless we have washed our hands. These things invite touch, and a lot of our appreciation for them comes through the fingertips."

But too much loving handling is among the potential threats—along with dampness, pollutants, insect infestation, and sunlight—that compromise these dazzling mementos. "We only know what we know today," Varnell points out. "In 50 years, we might have the ability to do something better, to fix it better."

Hollywood costumes are a part of our collective cultural heritage, and, as such, "We are the keepers of the dreams," as Susan Sarandon recently remarked. ■



Actress Demi Moore wore the vintage Norell gown in the center of this photo at an Emmy Awards event. This photograph was taken at a Doyle New York auction exhibit.

A CLOSER LOOK

A PASSION FOR FASHION

In my years as an appraiser, I've met countless collectors of vintage Hollywood memorabilia. One in particular comes to mind first because of his passion for his hobby. John L. (who asked that we not use his full name) became addicted to films as a child, when rheumatic fever kept him off the playgrounds of New York City and inside its movie theaters.

On his way into the city one day in 1953, the then-13-year-old wandered into a second-hand store to buy his mother a birthday present with \$30 in his pocket. To his delight, he discovered from the label in a dress that

Marlene Dietrich had worn it in the film *Pittsburgh*, from 1942. (To put this in some perspective, in the recent "Planet Hollywood/Selections from the Vault" sale at Sotheby's, an outfit Marlene Dietrich wore in 1939's *Destry Rides Again* fetched a whopping \$19,120!)

The next day, with \$15 in his pocket, John L. decided to return to the store and found a three-piece suit—from the same movie—worn by John Wayne. "From that moment," he admits, "I was hooked. Through costumes, I could get close to those who to me were almost mystical. I still feel something magical happens when I touch costumes worn by the great Hollywood stars."

That childhood passion turned into a lifelong pursuit when John L.—whose private archive now includes more than 1,500 Hollywood costumes—moved to California and worked as a "dresser" in the wardrobe division of many film studios. It was there that he met and developed close friendships with a number of Hollywood legends, including Bette Davis, Jeanette MacDonald, and Rita Hayworth. One of his favorite memories is of Mary Pickford: "She would allow me to 'play' in her attic, which was filled with memorabilia. I would find two identical costumes and bring them down to Mary and ask if I might have one of them. She would always say yes...." —Caroline Ashleigh

Photo courtesy of Sotheby's



Marlene Dietrich's *Destry Rides Again* threads drew \$19,120.



SOURCES & RESOURCES

AUCTIONS

- **Doyle New York:** 175 East 87th St., New York, NY 10128. Phone: 212-427-2730 (www.doylenewyork.com)
- **Entertainment Rarities** (an online associate of Sotheby's): www.entertainmentrarities.com
- **Guernsey's:** 108 East 73rd St., New York, NY 10021. Phone: 212-794-2280 (www.guernseys.com)
- **Sotheby's:** 1334 York Ave., New York, NY 10021. Phone: 212-606-7000 (www.sothebys.com)

MUSEUMS & ORGANIZATIONS

- **Chicago Historical Society:** 1601 Clark St. at North Ave., Chicago, IL 60614. Phone: 312-642-4600 (www.chicagohs.org)
- **Kent State University Museum:** Rockwell Hall, PO Box 5190, Kent, OH 44242. Phone: 330-672-3450 (<http://dept.kent.edu/museum/>)
- **Los Angeles County Museum of Art:** 5905 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, CA. 90036. Phone: 323-857-6000 (www.lacma.org)
- **The Costume Institute, Metropolitan Museum of Art:** 1000 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10028. (www.metmuseum.org/collections/department.asp?dep=8)
- **The Fashion Institute of Technology:** West 27th St. at 7th Ave., New York, NY 10028. (www.fitnyc.sunys.edu)