

Press Release

Brooklyn Museum



Alan Strutt (British, born 1967). *Yasmin Le Bon, Palladium, London, 1997. Evening Standard, October 1997. Haute couture Fall/Winter 1997-98 collection ("La Chimère")*. © Alan Strutt

The Brooklyn Museum Presents *Thierry Mugler: Couturissime*, Marking the Global Exhibition's Debut in the United States

On view from November 18, 2022, to May 7, 2023

From haute couture designs to stage costumes, photographs, films, and unpublished archives, *Thierry Mugler: Couturissime* is the first retrospective to explore the fascinating, edgy universe of French designer and creator of iconic perfumes Thierry Mugler. Organized by the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, *Thierry Mugler: Couturissime* has been adapted for the Brooklyn Museum by Thierry-Maxime Lorient, curator of the exhibition, and Matthew Yokobosky, Senior Curator of Fashion and Material Culture, Brooklyn Museum. Showcasing over 100 outfits, most on view for the first time, the exhibition will also include accessories, videos, photographs, sketches, and a special gallery dedicated to fragrances. Already seen by more than one million visitors in Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, and France since its launch in 2019, the exhibition concludes its tour in Brooklyn.

A fashion visionary, Mugler established himself as one of the most daring and innovative designers of the late twentieth century. In the 1970s, Mugler defined trends by creating his acclaimed "glamazon" (a conflation of "glamour" and "Amazon"), a chic, modern

woman whose style evolved from the flower power, hippie fashions of the 1960s. Throughout Mugler's career, his bold silhouettes and use of avant-garde fabrication techniques and materials—including glass, Plexiglas, PVC, faux fur, vinyl, latex, and chrome—made their mark on fashion history. In the 1980s and '90s, he galvanized the renaissance of haute couture through his provocative collections and theatrical fashion shows, which involved grandiose locations and the era's most acclaimed models. To this day, his work continues to influence new generations of couturiers.

Mugler's sensational presentations and sleek aesthetic have been immortalized through his direction and designs for George Michael's music video "Too Funky" (released in 1992) and his costume designs for Cirque du Soleil (*Zumanity*, 2003) and Beyoncé's acclaimed world tour *I Am . . .* (2009). Celebrities continue to be drawn to Mugler's designs: his classic gowns have recently been worn by Beyoncé, Cardi B, and Kim Kardashian. *Thierry Mugler: Couturissime* is an opportunity to discover and rediscover the fantastical work of an artist, couturier, director, photographer, and perfumer who revolutionized the world of fashion.

The exhibition is organized thematically, highlighting Mugler's interests in fantasy, glamour, science fiction, eroticism, and the natural world. Displayed in the Brooklyn Museum's Morris A. and Meyer Schapiro Wing and Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Gallery, the exhibition opens with a life-size 3-D hologram, made by Quebec artist Michel Lemieux (Lemieux Pilon 4D Art). The projection brings to life Mugler's designs for a theatrical production of *La Tragédie de Macbeth*, presented by the Comédie-Française at the 1985 Festival d'Avignon. The Brooklyn Museum presentation also includes a gallery dedicated to fragrance, with a new section celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of Mugler's trailblazing scent Angel. Mugler distinguished himself in the world of modern perfumes with this 1992 release. The fragrance's inclusion of ethyl maltol, a compound used in the food industry to lend a sugary taste to sweets, started an olfactory revolution that launched a new perfume category: gourmand. Angel is displayed alongside Mugler's later fragrance creations Alien, A*men, Aura, and Womanity.

Couturissime also explores the significance of fashion photography, with works by numerous artists and Mugler collaborators including Lillian Bassman, Guy Bourdin, David LaChapelle, Karl Lagerfeld, Sarah Moon, Pierre et Gilles, Herb Ritts, and Ellen von Unwerth. Mugler himself became a prominent fashion photographer in the 1970s, shooting his own advertising campaigns. He played on the glamour and beauty of his muses, from Jerry Hall to Iman, in extreme locations such as Greenland, the Sahara, the roof of the Paris Opéra, and atop the famed eagles on the sixty-first floor of New York City's Chrysler Building. The exhibition also highlights the lifelong collaboration between Thierry Mugler and photographer Helmut Newton. Twenty-three of Newton's photographs are on view, including images that feature Mugler's important collection "Lingerie Revisited," Fall/Winter 1998–99, and the models Carla Bruni and Kristen McMenamy.

Mugler's interest in futurism and his distinctive "fembot couture" are showcased in galleries designed by Berlin artist and set designer Philipp Fürhofer. Mugler took inspiration from a variety of sources, such as science fiction and comic-book

superheroines, medieval armor and uniforms, and industrial design and futuristic vehicles. He playfully devised detachable or “convertible” sheath gowns, “fender” bustiers, “radiator” belts, and a “tail fin” bag. He collaborated with Jean-Pierre Delcros, an aircraft bodywork specialist, and Jean-Jacques Urcun, an artist, to create robotic humans seemingly poured into chrome bustiers and Plexiglas catsuits. Mugler’s all-time masterpiece, *Maschinenmensch*, presented in 1995 at his twentieth-anniversary show, is a fully articulated robotic armor suit that required six months of intensive work to fabricate. The suit pays tribute to the character of Futura from the dystopian novel *Metropolis* (1925), famously visualized in the eponymous 1927 film by Fritz Lang.

In 1991, Mugler’s talents extended into music and film when he directed the music video for George Michael’s song “Too Funky,” which has gone on to become an MTV and YouTube classic. As explored in a dedicated gallery, the video’s costumes were worn by top models of the day, including Tyra Banks, Linda Evangelista, Connie Girl, Eva Herzigová, Estelle Lefébure, and Emma Sjöberg, as well as performer Joey Arias and actor Julie Newmar, the original Catwoman.

In the “Metamorphosis” section of the exhibition, an immersive installation by Montreal studio Rodeo FX (which has developed special effects for such productions as *Dune*, *Game of Thrones*, and *Stranger Things*) highlights flamboyant silhouettes from Mugler’s “Les Insectes” and “La Chimère” collections of 1997–98, featuring steep shoulders, plunging décolletés, and hourglass waistlines. The centerpiece design is a black velvet sheath and train, adorned with butterfly wings made of feathers created by plumassier Maison Lemarié. Another dress features iridescent scales and is embroidered with crystals, costume diamonds, feathers, and horsehair, a culmination of the extravagance of Mugler’s couture imagination. “Metamorphosis” also includes nymphs donning scalloped glass-and-shell bustiers, posed alongside organza jellyfish that evoke the imagery of Jules Verne’s nineteenth-century science-fiction novel *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Seas*—but with a modern twist.

“The constant innovations, inventions, and avant-garde architectural silhouettes in the work of Mugler have marked an era,” says **Thierry-Maxime Loriot, curator of the exhibition**. “His singular style found a place in the history of fashion that still has a powerful influence on today’s generation of couturiers, not only because of its designs, but also because of the strong message of inclusivity, diversity, and empowerment in his body of work. To present the exhibition I created with him, in the city he lived in and loved so much, is the most beautiful tribute to celebrate the man and the artist’s legacy.”

“Building on the Brooklyn Museum’s history of celebrating the trailblazing French couturiers Jean Paul Gaultier in 2013, Pierre Cardin in 2019, and Christian Dior in 2021, we’re thrilled for our audiences to experience *Thierry Mugler: Couturissime*,” says **Matthew Yokobosky, Senior Curator of Fashion and Material Culture, Brooklyn Museum**. “Originally a ballet dancer, Thierry Mugler was a designer who intimately understood the mechanics of the body and had extensive knowledge of materials and production. He used this expertise to create empowering visions for all people, especially women, including his archetypal superheroine silhouettes.”

Danièle Lahana-Aidenbaum, Mugler Fashion and Fragrance Global President, says, “Always ahead of his time, Manfred Thierry Mugler built a world blending fantasy, extravagance, and experimentation. I also see Mugler as a troublemaker and a sculptor of fantasies, who never had enough extravagances. Mugler used to say, ‘My limit is NO limit.’ Presenting *Couturissime* in New York City is the culmination of the dream we had seven years ago, when we began to imagine the biggest exhibition ever dedicated to the artist and the brand.”

“I’m so excited to bring *Couturissime* to Brooklyn,” says **Casey Cadwallader, Creative Director of Mugler**. “The exhibition is a vibrant journey through Manfred Thierry Mugler’s vision and legacy. A true creative running in his own lane, everything he touched, from silhouettes and craft to casting and fragrance, was different. He was always true to himself, because it was the only way he knew how to be.”

Ticket Information

Reserve timed tickets for *Thierry Mugler: Couturissime* by visiting my.brooklynmuseum.org. Members will have access to untimed tickets and special Member hours, including a preview on November 17 and early access on Saturdays at 10am. To become a Member, visit www.brooklynmuseum.org/support/join or email membership@brooklynmuseum.org.

Exhibition Credit

Thierry Mugler: Couturissime was initiated, produced and circulated by the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, in collaboration with the Maison Mugler.

The exhibition is curated by Thierry-Maxime Loriot, guest curator for the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

The Brooklyn presentation is coordinated by Matthew Yokobosky, Senior Curator of Fashion and Material Culture, Brooklyn Museum.

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