



Heidi Klum arrives for the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Gala on Monday in New York. PHOTO: REUTERS

A visitor views an installation for the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Models as Muse exhibit. PHOTO: REUTERS

# Strike a pose

They have style, they have grace, Christy Turlington gave good face. Naomi, Linda and Twiggy, too. 'The Model as Muse' aims to give credit to the women who helped set the standard of Western feminine beauty

BY GUY TREBAY  
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“What would *Dovima With Elephants* have been without *Dovima*?” the curator Kohle Yohannan said last week, referring to a celebrated Richard Avedon photograph of 1955 that depicted the attenuated mannequin *Dovima* (nee Dorothy Virginia Margaret Juba) wearing a Christian Dior sheath and sandwiched between monumental pachyderms. One could just as easily ask what *Dovima With Elephants* would have been without the elephants, of course, but then 3-tonne pachyderms don't rate the cultural attention devoted to beautiful clothes-hangers who weigh 50kg.

Elephants don't have fanzines, magazines, Web sites and blogs devoted to their images and antics. They don't attract the thumb-tapping haiku artists of the Twitter-sphere. They do not rate museum shows consecrated to their essentially unsung contributions to fashion, art, feminism, commerce, body imagery and art. In truth, models have never garnered the full-scale museum treatment, either. Or they didn't until now.

Opening at the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art today, *The Model as Muse* aims to give credit to the assorted women who, at least since the invention of photography, have helped set the standard of Western feminine beauty. The sophisticates (*Dovima*, Lisa Fonssagrives, Sunny Harnett) of the 1950s, with their distant gazes and angular figures, became the hippie goddesses (Veruschka, Penelope Tree, Twiggy) of the 1960s. And they in turn were transformed into the ruddy athletic types of the following decade (Lisa

what gave way to the glamourpuss supermodels (Christy Turlington, Naomi Campbell, Linda Evangelista) of the 1980s. And, with the notable exceptions of Kate Moss and Gisele Bündchen, that is pretty much where the occupational and cultural needle got stuck.

*The Model as Muse* seeks to examine the relationship, as Yohannan writes in the big glossy book that accompanies the exhibition, “between high fashion and the evolving ideals of beauty through the careers and personifications of iconic models who posed in the salons, walked the runways and exploded onto the pages of *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar* and even *Life* and *Time*.”

Action verbs are one of the enduring tropisms of fashion-speak and so naturally models never “land” in either *Vogue* or our lives with a passive thump. Models are locomotives, to use an archaic Vreeland-era formulation. Models rocket. Models explode. Whether or not models are icons, they incontestably excite our attention and draw us in.

“I was a little Southern, ignorant white female and would have been one forever,” Lauren Hutton once told me, had modeling not propelled the Carolina tomboy from her simple beginnings and onto a string of *Vogue* covers and lucrative advertising campaigns.

Now in her 60s and still working, Hutton is among the few models to have improvised a durable career in a business where the talent is often considered a necessary nuisance and in which it is commonplace for people to talk about a model's “use by” date.

“Modeling is a heinous job,” said Yohannan last week and, having been a model himself, the curator should know. Yet an awful lot of people seem to want to be a model

or else look at or look like or learn about one (check the Google hits for Gisele Bündchen). And it almost goes without saying that a reason for all this interest is that these gorgeous and petted and idealized creatures are passive — their beauty that of a butterfly pinned to a collector's tray.

Still, models' images “tell the story of entire generations of women,” or one aspect of it, anyway, claimed Yohannan, who shared curatorial duties with Harold Koda, the curator in charge of the Costume Institute. He cited the example of the 1920s model Marian Morehouse, whose lean physique and sleek modernist beauty marked a dramatic shift away from the simpering and corseted beauties of the Belle Epoque to a newly liberated and unfettered type.

“In a nutshell, the show is about expanding the way we see a fashion photograph to include the model,” Yohannan said.

Whether or not *The Model as Muse* sustains this notion, it does provide a guilt-free opportunity to revisit fashion's back pages (literally; many of the images in the show exist only as tear sheets from magazines). The crowds likely to throng this show may include some of the kooks who carve out spooky cultist Web-caves devoted to favorites (one such site features 15,000 images), but also anyone looking to become reacquainted with a face from the past.

And what faces they had, and what surprising kinds of beauty. True, there are the symmetrically formed goddesses like Suzy Parker or Jean Shrimpton or Rene Russo. But there are also plenty of oddballs like Twiggy, whose gangly limbs and freckled androgyny seem as startling now as when *Life* magazine gushingly

nominated her the “Face of 1967.” There is Vera von Lehndorff, or Veruschka, the double-jointed German aristocrat with slightly rubbery features, an Amazonian physique and a quirky intelligence that made her an ideal photographer's foil.

There is Penelope Tree, the society girl with the high forehead of a Memling Madonna and eyes so wide-set she looks like a Martian bug. There is Peggy Moffitt, the model whose impassive face and stylized posture added a compelling Kabuki element to her collaborations with provocative designers like Rudi Gernreich (she modeled his famous Topless bathing suit in 1964). There is the haughtily aristocratic Donyale Luna — born Peggy Anne Freeman in Detroit — an early African-American model whose phenomenally long limbs and ethereal aura made her an ideal vehicle for the futuristic creations of design innovators like Paco Rabanne.

Are models perhaps the last silent film stars? A preview of *The Model as Muse* suggests they are. A model's face on a magazine cover may sell fewer issues than that of the latest hot actress, but they are ultimately a lot more compelling to look at and this is because we hardly ever have to hear about their private lives or be burdened with their thoughts.

It cannot be accidental that Kate Moss, the most persuasive contemporary example of a model as an artistic catalyst, has assiduously guarded what she says throughout her career. Moss is no dummy. She knows that the basic requirement of her particular job is silence. A model is a muse to the precise extent that a model is mute.

Established & Sons Buggs lamp by Sebastian Wrong.



BY ALICE RAWSTHORN  
NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, MILAN

## New directions in home furnishings

Utilitarianism, innovation and a retreat from opulence were major themes at this year's Milan furniture fair

Despite the economic gloom, Milan seemed as frenzied as ever during the furniture fair here late last month. Hotels were full, even at vertiginous rates, cabs scarce (empty ones, at least) and roads choked with traffic. There were hundreds of parties, including one every night at the flagship store of Skitsch, a new Italian furniture company.

Behind the bravado, some manufacturers cut costs by introducing fewer products than usual, and designers swapped sob stories of canceled projects and dwindling royalties. The number of people visiting the Salone del Mobile, which ran from April 22 to April 27 in the labyrinthine Rho-Pero complex, fell from last year's record of 348,452 to 304,702, according to the organizer, Cosmit.

There was also an uncomfortable awareness that the investment decisions to green-light this season's new products and ventures, like Skitsch, had been made over a year ago, when the industry's prospects looked very different.

“The market is obviously much tougher now,” said Alasdair Willis, chief executive of the British furniture company Established & Sons. “But we won't see the full effect of the recession on the fair until next year.”

Young companies, like the five-year-old Established & Sons, can still grow, albeit more slowly, by expanding into new countries. The chief casualties of the economic crisis are the larger, longer-established European manufacturers, whose sales have fallen. These companies have, at least,

weathered recessions before. Some also have the advantage of being privately owned, and therefore free from the scrutiny of external investors.

“Family ownership is a great strength, especially at a difficult time like this,” observed Rolf Fehlbaum, chairman of Vitra, the Swiss furniture group founded by his father in 1950. “You need that passion, commitment and craziness.”

Yet the economic storm has also aggravated the European manufacturers' longer-term problems of fierce competition from China, and their own failure to meet consumers' demands for sustainable products. The most depressing sights in Milan last week were the seemingly endless “eco-installations,” typically featuring twee New Age music and digitally animated trees, and apparently bent on guzzling as much energy as pointlessly as possible.

That said, there were some gems to be found in the fair's flotsam. Among the technical coups were Vegetal, an intricately molded plastic chair by the brothers Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec for Vitra, and Konstantin Grcic's 360° collection of office furniture for Magis, another innovation in advanced plastics. Equally ingenious were Paul Cockesedge's lights for Flos, one of which is switched on by placing a flower into a vase and switched off when the flower is removed, and the eco-savvy 10-Unit series of furniture designed by Shigeru Ban for Artek, made from identical L-

shaped pieces of a recycled composite material.

Several manufacturers responded to the crisis with things that they hope people will care about and use for longer, because they were so thoughtfully designed and made.

This was the theme of a quietly elegant exhibition by the Dutch school Design Academy Eindhoven, which showed products intended to encourage the enjoyment of the rituals of daily life, like a series of liquid and solid soaps meant to make washing more engaging. (The exhibition was the debut of Alexander van Slobbe, the Dutch fashion designer, as Eindhoven's artistic director; he has the unenviable task of succeeding the formidable Li Edelkoort, who established it as the world's most dynamic and influential design school.)

Some companies put the theory of “thoughtfulness” into practice. The 400-year-old Dutch ceramic manufacturer Royal Tichelaar Makkum showed off its workers' skills in Dick van Hoff's tiled stoves, as did the Venetian glassmaker Venini, in BarberOsgerby's gorgeous Lanterne Marine vases.

Other examples were Amsterdam Armoire, Scholten & Baijings' digital take on an antique Dutch cabinet with screen-printed decoration, and the beautifully restrained, improbably slender Iri chair by the young Italian designer Paolo Cappello.

Another theme was functionalism, a rugged variation on the dystopian survivalist style that

surfaced in Milan last year. This took the form of sparse compositions of angular shapes made from rough materials in boldly contrasting colors and reflected the influence of Grcic and the Dutch conceptualist Jurgen Bey.

Those qualities were visible in the work of Nacho Carbonell, Peter Marigold and Raw Edges in Design Miami's “Craft Punk” installation, as well as in Maarten Baas' roughly hewn wooden Standard Unique chairs for Established & Sons and the circular tables that Martino Gamper made from salvaged chunks of laminated hotel cabinets, originally designed by Gio Ponti in 1960, for the gallery Nilufar.

Whatever happens to the economy, the future of design arguably lies not in reinventing old styles or dreaming up new ones, but in harnessing technology to develop solutions to the world's problems. A group of Japanese manufacturers rose to the challenge by inviting designers to invent practical applications for their newly developed nanofibers — some of which are 1/7500 the width of human hair — and displaying the results at an exhibition at La Triennale di Milano, a design museum.

From “wiping robots” that sweep across the floor like tiny clouds and clean it after detecting dirt with their sensors to a sofa that changes shape at the touch of a remote control pad, the results were pragmatic and optimistic, offering an enticing glimpse of a future in which design will help to improve our lives — hopefully without a note of twee New Age music.



360° chair, desk and storage unit designed by Konstantin Grcic for Magis. PHOTO: NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE



Lanterne Marine, hand-blown glass vases designed by BarberOsgerby for Venini. PHOTO: NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE