

Short Subjects

Ellen Terry “Beetle Wings” Dress Restored

Dress of famed Victorian actress was embellished with natural jewel beetle wings.

A Victorian dress decorated with 1,000 real beetle wings was recently restored by a conservation team lead by Zenzie Tinker at Smallhythe Place in Kent, now a National Trust property.

This stage costume is over 120 years old and required over 1,300 hours of detailed conservation work

This emerald and sea green gown was worn by Terry when she portrayed

Lady Macbeth at London's Lyceum Theater in 1888. It is covered with the naturally shed iridescent wings of the jewel beetle.



Painting by John Singer Sargent. (left) dress being restored. (right)



Conservation was complicated by the unusual construction: hand crocheted and knitted from Bohemian yarn, described by the designer Alice Comyns-Carr as, “a twist of soft green silk and blue tinsel”.

Conservators supported the weakened and stretched dress on a custom dyed nylon net after repairing all the holes in the crochet using a re-crochet technique. They also restored the original length and fullness to the elaborate sleeves.

According to Paul Meredith, House Manager, at Smallhythe Place, ‘We had collected the beetle wings that had fallen off over the years so that the conservator was able to re-attach many of the originals, plus others that had been donated to us – 1,000 in total. The one hundred or so wings that were broken were each carefully repaired by supporting them on small pieces of Japanese tissue adhered with a mixture of wheat starch paste.

The dress is now in a new display space which also features items from Ellen’s dressing room that have never been shown in public before. For information, visit the Smallhythe Place [website](#).

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts: Hollywood Costumes

Exhibit explores the central role costume design plays in cinematic storytelling.

Organized by the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, Hollywood Costume explores the central role costume design plays in cinematic storytelling. Bringing together the most iconic costumes from a century of cinema, it is a once in a-lifetime opportunity to see the clothes worn by unforgettable and beloved characters in films such as *The Wizard of Oz*, *The Birds*, *My Fair Lady*, *Superman*, *Titanic*, *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince* and *The Dark Knight Rises*.

The exhibition includes cinema costumes from private and archival collections in California. Most have



Dark Knight Rises, 2012, ©Warner Bros/The Kobal Collection

never been publicly displayed or seen beyond the secure walls of the studio archives.

The exhibition explores in detail how the design and use of costume has been central to the creation of some of the most iconic characters in popular culture and is a key component in what is arguably the greatest art form of the 20th century: cinema.

In addition to premiering Hollywood Costume in the United States, VMFA is the only East Coast venue for the exhibition.

The exhibit runs from Nov. 9, 2013 through Feb. 17, 2014 at the NewMarket and Altria Group Galleries. Tickets run \$10 for youth, \$15 for seniors, and \$20 for adults. Visit the exhibit [website](#) for details.

Fortuny Costumes in Paper

Famous fashion artist mounts exhibit of historical costumes made of paper.

For more than fifteen years, Belgian artist Isabelle de Borchgrave has been producing a completely original body of work that is easy to explain but difficult to categorize. Her central project revolves around recreating exquisite, life-size historical costumes and fabrics entirely out of paper.

Isabelle de Borchgrave, Delphos Dress and Coat, 2008. Courtesy of Isabelle de Borchgrave Studio.

Taking inspiration from depictions in early European paintings, iconic costumes, period photographs, sketches, and descriptions, de Borchgrave skillfully works paper to achieve her aims: crumpling, pleating, braiding, feathering, and painting the surface to mimic textile effects and fool the eye of the viewer.



The artist has creations spanning more than 500 years of fashion history. This exhibition presents one of her six collections, that inspired by Mariano Fortuny, a Spanish-born eccentric whose designs were the height of fashion in the early 20th century.

In the exhibition's North American debut, The Bellevue Arts Museum in Bellevue, Washington is presenting Isabelle de Borchgrave's Fortuny collection in its entirety, offering a rare glimpse into the minds of not one, but two influential artistic figures.

The exhibit runs from November 21, 2013 through February 16, 2014.

Learn more and see examples of the costumes at the exhibit [website](#).

[See Isabelle de Borchgrave's article about her studio in the [February 2013 \(Vol. 11 issue 1\)](#) issue of VC – Ed]

Hats and Other Fashion Accessories on Exhibit

Exhibit covers accessories from the mid-18th century to the present.

The Charleston Museum in South Carolina continues its five-part accessories exhibition with Fashion Accessories: Hats, on exhibit June 19, 2013 - January 19, 2014. Installed in the study drawer section of the Museum's historic textiles gallery, headwear included ranges from the accordion-folded calash of the 18th century and the stiff little pillbox of the 1960s to men's ever-popular top hat and Derby.



Charleston was a prominent commercial and cultural center in the early 19th century. It had its share of hat-related businesses, including 26 milliners and millinery stores and 13 hatters and hat stores listed in the 1822 City Directory. By the mid-19th century, more hats were being imported and retailed at Charleston establishments, but local hatters and milliners were still abundant.

The exhibit continues in 2014 with exhibits on Bags, Fans, and “Completing the Look. Visit the museum [website](#) for additional information about the exhibit.