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MAKING MAINBOCHER: THE FIRST AMERICAN COUTURIER

Opens at the Chicago History Museum October 22

CHICAGO (September 9, 2016) – The Chicago History Museum explores the life and legacy of an enterprising Chicagoan who rose to the heights of the fashion world in its newest costume exhibition, “Making Mainbocher: The First American Couturier,” opening Saturday, October 22.

The exhibition features nearly 30 garments from the Museum’s permanent collection. Enhanced by fashion illustrations, photography, oral histories and video, the ensembles reveal the story of a remarkable man and his journey to become the first American working as a couturier in Paris.

“By examining the steps taken by Main Bocher to achieve great success as a couturier, this exhibition introduces visitors to the extraordinary career of Main Bocher and invites them to get know him as an arbiter of early- to mid-twentieth-century style,” said Petra Slinkard, curator of costume, “This exhibition is the first of its kind, dedicated to the study and presentation of the work of Mainbocher.”

Main Rousseau Bocher (1890–1976) grew up in a modest home on Chicago’s West Side. Educated at John Marshall High School and the Lewis Institute (a precursor to the Illinois Institute of Technology), Bocher transformed his interest in the arts into a fashion empire serving royalty, Hollywood icons and the social elite. As stated on his plaque on New York’s Fashion Walk of Fame, “Mainbocher was known for the understated elegance of his couture clothing. Among his innovations were short evening dresses, jeweled sweaters, and a revival of the corset that anticipated Dior’s New Look.”

Most famous for designing the wedding dress of the Duchess of Windsor in 1937, Mainbocher balanced his elite brand by creating uniforms for the Navy W.A.V.E.S. during World War II, the Girl Scouts of America and nursing students at Chicago’s Passavant Memorial Hospital.

Follow the trajectory of Main Bocher’s life throughout the exhibition, discovering his bold career choices and unrelenting ambition which guided him through work in Chicago, Paris and New York. Exhibition highlights include a 1937 suit identical to one selected by the duchess for her trousseau, a stunning strapless ball gown worn by Mrs. Watson Armour III, two items donated by the couturier and samples of his uniforms.

The gallery’s interactive experiences invite visitors to step into a designer role: create a Mainbocher-inspired moniker, flip through sketchbooks featuring fashion illustrations of garments on view, and use Mainbocher’s preferred colors, fabrics, and motifs to design a garment that is projected on a 3-D dress form in the gallery.

The Costume Council of the Chicago History Museum presents a first look at the exhibition at Making Mainbocher: An Opening Night Gala,” on Friday, October 21. The fashionable evening gala promises cocktails, dinner and dancing. The event is sponsored by The Costume Council of the Chicago History Museum alongside: Liz Stiffel as Presenting Sponsor, Luvanis as Lead Corporate Sponsor, Laurent Perrier, Jewell Catering, and BBJ Linen as Event Sponsors, and Chicago Magazine as Media Sponsor. Co-chairs for the event are Nancy Connelly, Marci Holzer, and Mary Shearson.

The exhibition is sponsored by the Costume Council of the Chicago History Museum with lead corporate sponsor Luvanis. For more on “Making Mainbocher” and the Chicago History Museum’s programs and exhibitions, visit makingmainbocher.com or call 312-642-4600.

ABOUT THE CHICAGO HISTORY MUSEUM

The Chicago History Museum, a major museum and research center for Chicago and American history, has dedicated more than a century to celebrating and sharing Chicago’s stories through dynamic exhibitions, tours, publications, special events and programming. The Museum is located at 1601 N. Clark Street in Chicago’s beautiful Lincoln Park neighborhood. Admission includes our audio tours: \$16 adults, \$14 seniors/students, free for children 12 years and younger. The Museum is a 2016 recipient of the National Medal for Museum and Library Service, the highest award given to these institutions for significant achievements in community engagement. The Chicago History Museum gratefully acknowledges the support of the Chicago Park District on behalf of the people of Chicago. To learn more visit www.chicagohistory.org and follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).