

First Look at the Hollywood Costume Exhibit

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"Maybe the best costumes are the ones you never notice. When what we do requires our work to completely disappear, we are creating a story—one that our audience is going to love," says Deborah Nadoolman Landis, costume designer, historian, and curator of the Hollywood Costume exhibit at the Phoenix Art Museum. Landis shared her passion for the exhibit at an intimate media breakfast on Friday, March 21. She described how much work, thought, and effort goes behind each costume and why the costume designer's role is so crucial to film. AFM became one of the first onlookers to experience the exhibit, and it did not disappoint. The ambiance feels as though you have stepped onto the set of more than 80 iconic movies at once. "This is not about the clothes," says Landis. By walking a few feet into the exhibit, you can tell right away that clothes are a miniscule part of the big picture.

The exhibit is split up into three scenes. First, the production begins with the writer. How does the script describe the character, what the character does in the film, and what the end result is. The second act is the creative context meshing with the visual context. What will the costume look like, how will the scene and costume define the character and how does that correlate with the screenwriter's vision? The third act is the ultimate finale, where actor, director, and costume designer all join forces and create the movies we have learned to treasure.

We asked Landis how she went about choosing the costumes for the exhibit and she said, "The costume closet is small. Some actors keep their costumes, like Glenn Close, and others leave them behind after film production ends. There's not much to choose from and most of them are sold on Ebay or Amazon. Jennifer Lawrence's sports bra she wore in the 'Hunger Games' was sold on Amazon for thousands of dollars for goodness sake. I was, however, able to acquire Jennifer's white gown and Christian Bale's velour suit from 'American Hustle' which was a great way to update the exhibit."

The acquisitions that Landis was able to obtain are remarkable. Movies like "Cleopatra," "Dangerous Liaisons," "Indiana Jones," "Spiderman," and "Vertigo" all have a special place in the exhibit. The famed Darth Vader costume stood astute in fluorescent lighting and heavily guarded by museum staff. As the rest of the Valley's media perused the gallery, there was a respective silence that filled the room. This exhibit is nothing short of extraordinary. Projections of the faces of actors above the costumes, or behind the scenes chats with directors releases the exhibit from being static and creates a three dimensional feel.

Alongside Hollywood Costume is the Hollywood Red Carpet exhibit. Beautiful gowns worn by Academy nominees and winners such as Amy Adams, Glenn Close, Cate Blanchett, and Marilyn Monroe are delicately showcased with descriptions about the actress wearing them. Both galleries are absolutely exquisite. Each leaving you with a new found respect for the designer behind the movie. The exhibits open on March 26, 2014 and close July 6, 2014. Get your tickets at www.phxart.org/hollywoodcostume.

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