



WOLFSONIAN

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'BEAUTY ON THE BEACH: A CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION OF SWIMWEAR' AND 'SUN STROKE STIMULUS' EXPLORE SWIMWEAR DESIGN AND CONTEMPORARY BATHING CULTURE EXHIBITION AND INSTALLATION TO OPEN AT THE WOLFSONIAN–FIU ON JULY 10, 2009



MIAMI BEACH, FL (June 8, 2009)—From July 10 through October 11, 2009 The Wolfsonian–Florida International University presents *Beauty on the Beach: A Centennial Celebration of Swimwear*, a retrospective look at swimwear design, and *Sun Stroke Stimulus*, a photographic installation that focuses on contemporary bathing culture. The exhibition and accompanying installation, curated by Marianne Lamnaca, The Wolfsonian's associate director for curatorial affairs and education, are part of The Wolfsonian's "Celebrating America" series of exhibitions that explore various aspects of the American experience—social, political, and cultural—from the early 1900s to the present, through a range of viewpoints.

Beauty on the Beach, which presents swimsuits from the early twentieth century to today, examines how swimwear design and marketing shape and reflect popular ideas about fitness, beauty, and glamour. The exhibition also features original illustration art, advertising, postcards, and promotional materials from The Wolfsonian collection and other private collections, including rare items from the Jantzen archives in Portland, Oregon.

Among the themes addressed in the exhibition are the swimwear industry's use of new materials, such as the U.S. Rubber Company's Lastex yarns and the changing strategies employed by advertisers to sell swimwear. Approaches included clever advertising slogans, celebrity endorsements, and the promotion of beach resorts such as Miami Beach and Atlantic City using images of glamorous, swimsuit-clad women. Swimsuits worn by celebrities like Marilyn Monroe, Janet Leigh, and Princess Diana are also on display.

“During the early years of the twentieth century the number of people living in cities increased, personal wealth rose, the marketplace expanded and travel and tourism flourished,” notes Marianne Lamonaca. “In response to these changes in culture and society, swimwear designers created new styles and advertisers developed new marketing strategies that reflected attitudes about the health benefits of bathing (for both hygiene and fitness) and the exposure of the body, especially the female body. Those conditions also led to advances in manufacturing techniques and materials by the swimwear companies.”

The show explores the beneficial effects of water, known since ancient times, for both health and hygiene. In America in the 1880s and 1890s, visits to spas and beaches increased, but the “water experience” was primarily limited to soaking or bathing, rather than swimming. Photographs of bathing beauties from the 1890s depict women in dresses cut below the hip and worn with matching bloomers, stockings, shoes, and caps, their bodies hidden beneath layers of fabric. Swimming as a popular sport began to take hold just before the First World War. But it was the “new woman” of the 1920s, liberated from nineteenth-century Victorian dress and armed with her newly won right to vote, who flexed her muscles and exposed her body in new ways. The flat, ribbed knit bathing suits developed by Jantzen Knitting Mills in the early 1920s exploited new machine knitting techniques that provided both flexibility and durability, and revealed the arms and contours of the body. Beach towns like Atlantic City capitalized on the newly exposed female figure by using images of bathing beauties to promote visitation. Atlantic City famously hosted the Miss America pageant, beginning in 1921, in which contestants in swimwear posed for judges and onlookers.

The exhibition also traces the history of swimwear design from the early twentieth century to the present with an emphasis on the interrelationship between changing cultural and social mores about the body, health, and beauty and changing strategies for advertising. One stellar example is Jantzen’s elegant International Set, a 1956-59 fashion line inspired by vernacular designs from across the globe. The development of the International Set corresponded to the new-found accessibility to exotic places made possible through commercial jet travel. A number of these elegant swimsuits are on view along with their supporting marketing materials. The Colombia-inspired “Cartagena” suit is embellished with fine Spanish lace. The “Vedado” sheath, named for one of Cuba’s famed beaches, is made from Helanca, a highly elastic yarn that clings tightly to the body, displaying the model’s voluptuous contours. The powerful black and white images for the International Set illustrate how fashion photographs were carefully crafted to promote commercial sales.

The Wolfsonian commissioned New York-based photographer Miles Ladin to create a contemporary portrait of Miami Beach bathing culture to complement the historical images on view in *Beauty on the Beach*. In his installation, wryly titled *Sun Stroke Stimulus*, Ladin’s photographs reveal, in his words, “both the raw beauty found in bathing culture as well as the aspirational desires presented in the display of flesh. Sun, surf, fabric stretched against buttocks, cleavage, and biceps are all tactile elements that give our eyes pleasure. The acquisition of the tan, the physique, the lifestyle, is all meant to entice the viewer to desire what they see.”

Ladin’s provocative installation is on view in the museum’s entrance lobby, and is free to the public. His photography has been featured in *The New York Times Style* section, *W* magazine, and *Harper’s Bazaar*. Ladin views his work as being about human consciousness. “My images are also a subjective document of the human condition as it is reflected through contemporary times. I’m interested in man’s foibles

and vulnerabilities,” explains Ladin. “I also think that our existence is fraught with humor as well as challenges. Making pictures with intelligence and formal complexity, my desire is to open the viewer’s eyes to society’s excesses as well as the possibility for redemption in unvarnished beauty.”

Ladin has created two limited-edition artist’s books—*Lunch Poems* and *That Various Field: A Salute to James Schulyer*. Noted for his critical view of everyday life, Ladin’s work is included in the collections of The Victoria & Albert Museum, London; the Artist Book Collection, The Museum of Modern Art Library, New York; and the Special Collection Library at The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Beauty on the Beach: A Centennial Celebration of Swimwear and *Sun Stroke Stimulus* are made possible thanks to support from André Balazs. The Wolfsonian–FIU also gratefully acknowledges the generosity of Jantzen Apparel, LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Perry Ellis International, Inc., for providing access to and loans from the Jantzen archives.

About The Wolfsonian–Florida International University

The Wolfsonian is a museum, library, and research center that uses objects to illustrate the persuasive power of art and design, to explore what it means to be modern, and to tell the story of social, historical, and technological changes that have transformed our world. The collections comprise approximately 120,000 objects from the period of 1885 to 1945—the height of the Industrial Revolution to the end of the Second World War—in a variety of media including furniture; industrial-design objects; works in glass, ceramics, and metal; rare books; periodicals; ephemera; works on paper; paintings; textiles; and medals.

The Wolfsonian is located at 1001 Washington Avenue, Miami Beach, FL. Admission is \$7 for adults; \$5 for seniors, students, and children age 6 -12; and free for Wolfsonian members, State University System of Florida staff and students with ID, and children under six. The Wolfsonian, presently on a Summer Schedule through October 14, 2009, is open Thursday and Friday from noon-9pm (galleries close at 7pm on Thursday); Saturday and Sunday from noon-6pm; and is closed Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. Contact us at 305.531.1001 or visit us online at www.wolfsonian.org for further information.

The Wolfsonian–FIU receives ongoing support from the State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs, the Florida Arts Council; the Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs and the Cultural Affairs Council, the Miami-Dade County Mayor and Board of County Commissioners; the City of Miami Beach, Cultural Affairs Program, Cultural Arts Council; the Arthur F. and Alice E. Adams Foundation; William J. and Tina Rosenberg Foundation; Continental Airlines, the Official Airline of The Wolfsonian–FIU; The Miami Herald; Miami.com; Bacardi U.S.A., Inc.; and Pistils & Petals.

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