

PRÊT-À-PAPIER

THE EXQUISITE ART OF



ISABELLE DE BORCHGRAVE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Images available on request

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Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens announces the special exhibition
Prêt-à-Papier: The Exquisite Art of Isabelle de Borchgrave
On view June 16-December 30, 2012

**Crumpled, pleated, painted, and sculpted—ordinary paper becomes haute couture
in the hands of the Belgian artist**

Washington – A selection of iconic dresses, reinterpreted in *trompe l'oeil* paper masterpieces by Belgian artist Isabelle de Borchgrave, is presented in the exhibition *Prêt-à-Papier: The Exquisite Art of Isabelle de Borchgrave*, on view at Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens from June 16 to December 30, 2012. The first exhibition of the artist's work to be presented in Washington, DC, *Prêt-à-Papier* will bring together more than 25 of de Borchgrave's quintessential interpretations of historical costumes and haute couture dresses, with six new works made for this exhibition, including one commissioned solely for Hillwood.



For over 15 years, inspired by the rich history of fashion represented in European paintings, famous costumes in museum collections, and designs of the grand couturiers, de Borchgrave has turned her passion for painting toward the recreation of elaborate costumes—crumpling, pleating, braiding, and painting the surface of simple rag paper to achieve the effect of textiles and create the illusion of haute couture.

Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens

4155 Linnean Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20008 (202) 686-5807 www.HillwoodMuseum.org

“Hillwood founder [Marjorie Merriweather Post](#) absolutely loved the lavish apparel of the [Russian imperial family](#) and 18th-century French aristocracy, and was equally passionate about modern couture,” explained Hillwood executive director Kate Markert. “This is all seen in the objects and personal items she collected and left for the public to enjoy at Hillwood, making it a perfect venue to showcase Isabelle de Borchgrave’s exquisite works of art,” she continued. “We’re thrilled that this exhibition launches a new program at Hillwood that adds contemporary and outdoor initiatives to the current presentation of exhibitions to offer added perspectives on the collections, gardens, and the Marjorie Merriweather Post life story.”

Highlights

By reconstructing dresses from key periods in fashion history, including gowns worn by famous figures and those created by prominent fashion designers, *Prêt-à-Papier* will present a range of styles from the late 17th to the early 20th century. The exhibition will be presented in Hillwood’s [Adirondack Building](#) and will also animate spaces in the Mansion, reinterpreting both the art objects and Post’s extraordinary collection of [20th-century apparel](#).

The sumptuous apparel of the royalty of the 18th and 19th centuries revered by Post, and depicted in the paintings and decorative arts she collected, will take on an added dimension in the work of de



Borchgrave. The costumes of Tsar Peter the Great and Empress Josephine, for example, come to life, with de Borchgrave’s own intricate painting and manipulation of the paper convincingly mimicking the finest brocades, damasks, and silks. For the work commissioned by Hillwood, de Borchgrave draws inspiration from the life-like details, textures, and opulent colors of the main figure’s dress in Karl Briullov’s *The Countess Samoilova*. This dress will be displayed in the Pavilion at Hillwood with the grand-scale painting that inspired it, along with a *Boyar Wedding Dress* that de Borchgrave interpreted from the sister painting to Hillwood’s *A Boyar Wedding Feast*—Konstantin Makovsky’s *The Russian Bride’s Attire*, at the San Francisco Legion of Honor.

The period styles will be joined by works inspired by turn-of-the-century fashion designers Mariano Fortuny and Charles Frederick Worth. Classic, crisp Fortuny pleats—the construction of which still remain a mystery to most—are recreated expertly in a series of dresses based on the famous

designs, while the glamorous construction and intricate details of a Worth gown stand out in a pure white couture creation. Post herself favored the evening looks of Callot Soeurs. And in Post's dressing room, visitors will barely discern that the detailed lace, ribbons, and lamé of a 1920s style dress from the prominent Parisian fashion house are crafted completely from paper.

The Artist

A painter by training and by passion, Isabelle de Borchgrave turned her talent for trompe l'oeil to the paper sculptures that reinterpret and recreate almost 300 years of fashion after a 1994 trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. With the Canadian theatrical costumier Rita Brown, she set out to create *Papiers à la Mode*, a collection of costumes, all in paper and paint, which offered a fresh look at fashion history, from Elizabeth I to Coco Chanel. Her collections that followed included an immersive dive into the 19th-century Venice-inspired line from *Fortuny*, a look at the famous figures of *I Medici*, and *Ballet Russes*, whose playful figures and saturated colors nod to her love of the Nabis movement. Over the 15-year period since, de Borchgrave has also created commissions for museum collections in America and Europe. de Borchgrave's name is also readily associated with the world of design. For Caspari she has created popular paper dinnerware and other products for entertaining. With Gien, Target, and Villeroy and Boch, she has brought her bright colors and exciting patterns to a world of entertaining that is accessible for all.

The Twentieth-Century Costume Collection at Hillwood

Throughout her life, Marjorie Merriweather Post acquired and preserved many dresses, ensembles, gowns, and accessories. Today, the collection at Hillwood houses over 175 dresses and over 300 accessories, including shoes, hats, jewelry, gloves, and purses, comprising one of the most significant collections of 20th-century apparel in Washington, D.C. *Prêt-à-Papier* is the third exhibition at Hillwood to focus on this aspect of the collection.

Hillwood Background

When Post cereal heiress, art collector, social figure, and philanthropist Marjorie Merriweather Post left to the public her northwest Washington, D.C. estate, she endowed the country with the most comprehensive collection of Russian imperial art outside of Russia, a notable 18th-century French decorative art collection, and 25 acres of serene landscaped gardens and natural woodlands. Opened as a public institution in 1977, today Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens offers a gracious and immersive experience unlike any other. Highlights of the collection include Fabergé eggs, Russian porcelain, Russian orthodox icons, Beauvais tapestries, and Sèvres porcelain, and Post's personal collection of apparel, accessories, and exquisite jewelry. Thirteen acres of

enchanting formal gardens include the Japanese-style Garden, Rose Garden, French Parterre, and working greenhouses full of exotic orchids.

Prêt-à-Papier: The Exquisite Art of Isabelle de Borchgrave has been generously supported by the Marjorie Merriweather Post Foundation, Dina Merrill Hartley, Mrs. Ellen M. Charles, Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Linke, Janice and Ralph Shrader, Ms. Cheryl Owens, Kate and Bunky Markert, and an anonymous donor.

GENERAL INFORMATION

- What:** *Prêt-à-Papier: The Exquisite Art of Isabelle de Borchgrave*
- When:** June 16 – December 30, 2012
- Where:** 4155 Linnean Avenue, NW, Washington, DC
Metro: VanNess/UDC, Red Line (20 minute walk)
- Information:** 202.686.5807 or www.HillwoodMuseum.org
Follow us on Facebook and Twitter
- Hours:** Tuesday through Saturday, 10 am to 5 pm. Closed Mondays and most national holidays. Open on Select Sundays throughout the year.
- Café:** The Café serves lunch Tuesday through Saturday from 11:00 am to 3:30 pm.
Afternoon Tea is served on Sundays only from 1 to 3:30 pm.
Express Dining, featuring a quick selection of sandwiches, salads, snacks, and beverages (cash only) is available Tuesday through Saturday from 10 am to 4 pm and Sunday from 1 to 4 pm.
Call (202) 686-5807 for café reservations
- Suggested Donation:** \$15; \$12 for seniors (65 and older); \$10 for college students; \$5 for visitors age 6 to 18. Donation waived for visitors under age 6.

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