

DONALD AND MARY OENSLAGER GALLERY October 18, 2012 - January 12, 2013

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Katharine Hepburn

KATHARINE HEPBURN

Dressed for Stage and Screen

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ORGANIZED BY THE KENT STATE UNIVERSITY MUSEUM,
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IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS, BARBARA COHEN STRATYNER,
JUDY R. AND ALFRED A. ROSENBERG, CURATOR OF EXHIBITIONS

Katharine Hepburn (1907–2003) is the most honored actress in the history of American film, with twelve Academy Award nominations and four Academy Awards for Best Actress, as well as many other honors both national and international. In a 1967 interview, George Stevens, who directed *Alice Adams*, *Quality Street*, and *Woman of the Year*, called Katharine Hepburn “the most inspiring person I ever met in my life . . . I never knew anyone in any way related to Kate in intelligence, dignity, beauty of spirit, generosity and lack of criticism . . . she was always for accomplishment of some kind.” During her sixty-six year career Hepburn consistently performed on both stage and screen. She took her career in hand early in her professional life, learned from each failure, and continually sought meaningful and challenging projects. Katharine Hepburn knew the importance of costume in defining character and drawing the audience into the story, and how her personal style could be best interpreted in a role. Hepburn was very conscious of the tools of the costumer’s craft and had a sure sense of what would work for her. Edith Head, quoted in the Spring 1976 issue of *Liberty*, said, “One does not design *for* Miss Hepburn, one designs with her . . . She’s a real professional, and she has very definite feeling about what things are right for her, whether it has to do with costumes, scripts, or her entire lifestyle.”

Fortunately both Broadway producers and Hollywood studios assigned the finest costume designers to her productions. Woodman Thompson, Howard Greer, Valentina, Cecil Beaton, and Jane Greenwood, among others, costumed Hepburn for the stage, while Walter Plunkett, Adrian, Irene, Muriel King, Margaret Furse, Edith Head, Pat Zipprodt and Noel Taylor were among those who worked with her in film and television. For her private wardrobe Hepburn patronized cutting edge fashion designers such as Elizabeth Hawes, Claire McCardell, and Valentina in New York. If she were particularly fond of a costume, she might have had it replicated for her personal wardrobe and, perhaps, change the color, fabric or detailing. It was no accident that many of the costume designers also worked in

high fashion since many of the productions starring Katharine Hepburn were set in contemporary times, and many in the audience expected to see the very latest fashions on stage and in the movies. That she chose to wear slacks instead of dresses and skirts in many of her publicity images, established her first as a fashion rebel, and then as an icon. “I realized long ago that skirts are hopeless,” she said in the Turner Pictures 1993 documentary *All About Me*, “anytime I hear a man say he prefers a woman in a skirt, I say, “Try one. Try a skirt.” It was this personal sense of style that transcended the decades of her career to influence the fashion choices available to women today. In presenting Hepburn with the 1985 Council of Fashion Designers of America’s Lifetime Achievement Award, Calvin Klein said, “she has truly epitomized the ultimate American woman. She’s vibrant, she’s outspoken, she’s hardworking and she’s independent and, fortunately for all of us, she’s never been afraid to be comfortable.”

Katharine Hepburn did not set out to collect her costumes. She told Louis Botto in a mid-1970s recorded interview that she didn’t know why she had not kept more, that “It would have been interesting,” but she immediately followed that comment by noting that costumes took special care. Upstairs in her New York City home was a closet reserved for costumes she had worn on stage and screen. The contents of this closet were separated from her other wardrobe, and when the townhouse was closed, these special garments were inventoried, carefully packed and placed in a Connecticut warehouse. In accordance with her wishes, the collection was to be given at the discretion of her estate executors to an educational institution, and is now housed at the Kent State University Museum in Ohio. *Katharine Hepburn: Dressed for Stage and Screen* includes costumes for the stage, for film and television, and for publicity or private life selected from the actress’s personal collection. The costumes are augmented by film stills, posters, playbills and related objects also from the Kent State University Museum Collection with important additions for this venue from the Billy Rose Theatre Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

COVER

Contact sheet of Katharine Hepburn portraits by Vandamm Studio, used by the Theatre Guild for their production of Philip Barry’s *The Philadelphia Story* (1939), The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Billy Rose Division, Vandamm Collection

INSIDE COVER

Make up case used by Katharine Hepburn for stage and screen work. Katharine Hepburn Collection, Kent State University Fashion Museum



LEFT
The Lake, Howard Greer (1896-1974), Costume for Katharine Hepburn as "Stella Surrege" in *The Lake*, (1934). White satin and duchess lace, Kent State University Museum, Gift of the Estate of Katharine Hepburn, 2010.12.53



TOP CENTER
Publicity photo of Katharine Hepburn as "Stella Surrege" in *The Lake*, Martin Beck Theatre (12/26/1933 o 2/1934). Produced and directed by Jed Harris, Written by Dorothy Massingham and Murray MacDonald, Scenic design by Joe Mielziner, Miss Hepburn's costumes designed by Howard Greer

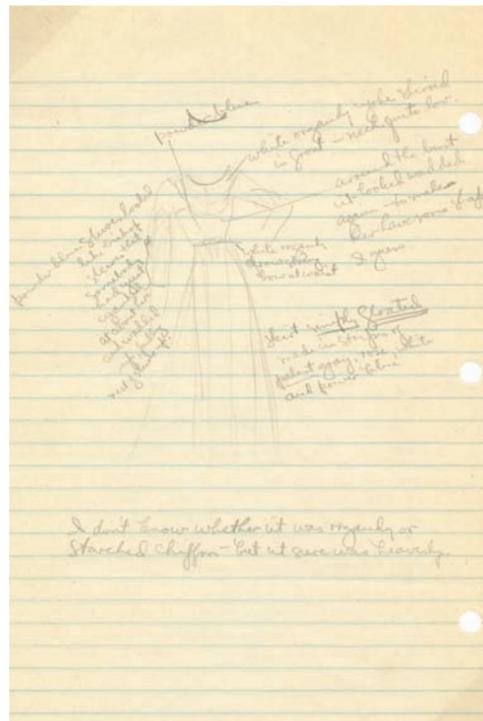
The earliest example in the Hepburn Collection from the theater is the wedding gown from *The Lake*. Howard Greer designed this costume, of duchess lace and satin, that Katharine Hepburn wore as "Stella Surrege" for the ill-fated 1933 production at the Martin Beck Theatre. It was after seeing Hepburn's performance in the Broadway opening that Dorothy Parker was quoted saying, "she ran the gamut of emotion from A to B." Tormented by the producer/director, Jed Harris, Hepburn had lost her confidence during rehearsals and regained it only slowly during the run of the play. She later said that *The Lake* was the most important lesson of her life, and that it had taught her "what it takes to be an actor, what it takes to be a star. You are the person responsible for what happens to you and to the play."

Having made a series of box office flops, and with her career at its nadir, Katharine Hepburn was delighted when Philip Barry presented her with the outline of a play that suited her perfectly, *The Philadelphia Story*. During the summer of 1938 they worked together on the script and asked the Theatre Guild to produce the play. Both Hepburn and her beau Howard Hughes invested in the production. *The Philadelphia Story* was a great theatrical success. Knowing that any number of actresses would want to play "Tracy Lord" in a film version, and suspecting that no one would want to cast Hepburn, since she had been labeled "box office poison," Howard Hughes purchased the movie rights and gave them to her. This gift enabled Hepburn to negotiate the terms for the MGM film with Louis B. Mayer. Valentina designed the costumes for the 1939 stage production of *The Philadelphia Story* including the wedding dress for "Tracy Lord" of pink silk organza, chiffon and crepe de chine. Hepburn saved the dress in her personal collection, and thirty-four years later she ask Patricia Zipprodt to use the dress in the 1973 film of *The Glass Menagerie* for the scene where "Amanda" entertains the "Gentleman Caller." Although Hepburn remarked that the dress had to be "considerably let out," in fact the alteration added only about 2 1/2" to the bodice of the underdress.

BOTTOM CENTER
Publicity photo of Katharine Hepburn as "Tracy Lord" in *The Philadelphia Story* (stage production), Shubert Theatre (3/28/1939 – 3/30/1940), Produced by the Theatre Guild, Directed by Robert B. Sinclair, Written by Phillip Barry, Scenic design by Robert Edmond Jones, Miss Hepburn's costumes by Valentina



RIGHT
The Philadelphia Story, Valentina Schlee (1899? – 1989), Costume for Katharine Hepburn as "Tracy Lord" in , *The Philadelphia Story* (stage production), Pink silk organza, chiffon and crepe de chine (reproduction belt), Kent State University Museum, Gift of the Estate of Katharine Hepburn, 2010.12.16ab

**FAR LEFT**

Valentina Schlee (1899? – 1989), Costume for Katharine Hepburn as “Jamie Coe Rowan” in *Without Love* (1942) (stage production), Multicolored silk organza, Kent State University Museum, Gift of the Estate of Katharine Hepburn, 2010.12.62

LEFT

Publicity photo of Katharine Hepburn as “Jamie Coe Rowan” in *Without Love*, St. James Theatre (11/10/1942 – 2/13/1943), Produced by the Theatre Guild, Directed by Robert B. Sinclair, Re-staged by Arthur Hopkins, Written by Phillip Barry, Scenic design by Robert Edmond Jones, Miss Hepburn’s costumes by Valentina

BOTTOM LEFT

Katharine Hepburn (1907 – 2003), Sketch of a costume by Valentina to be worn in *Without Love*, (1942), Pencil on lined yellow paper, Katharine Hepburn Papers, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

Valentina did only one other Broadway play for Katharine Hepburn, *Without Love*, which opened at the St. James Theatre on November 10, 1942. Inside her copy of the souvenir program, Hepburn placed a sketch of one of the Valentina gowns in the Hepburn Collection. The bodice and sleeves are draped to enhance Hepburn’s slender figure, and the skirt is made of multicolored panels of silk organza. The gown has an ingenious tie belt that begins at an angle at the side fronts, wraps around and ties in front. The sketch is in the Hepburn papers in the Billy Rose Theatre Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. There is a photographer’s proof from the Vandamm Studio of Hepburn in the costume in the Theresa Helburn Theatre Guild Photography Collection, Bryn Mawr College Library Special Collections.



Katharine Hepburn did a number of watercolor sketches of herself in various roles. This sketch of herself as “Coco Chanel” captures the essence of her approach to the role in the 1969 production of *Coco*. The late Ray Diffin said that she was “quite willful” and initially uncomfortable because she had never done a musical. To make her more at ease with the part, the producers took her to Paris to meet Chanel. She wasn’t getting along with Cecil Beaton, who she felt would never achieve Chanel’s simple elegance, so she bought two complete couture ensembles,

one white and one black. She wore the black wool ensemble, a sleeveless dress and coat, in performance. It must have been challenging to wear, because Chanel made no allowance for the needs of a performer singing and dancing under stage lights. There were, however, multiple sets of detachable white collars and cuffs to keep the look fresh through eight performances a week. Ray Diffin made many of Hepburn’s costumes for *Coco* in his New York costume studio, while Beaton supervised the tailored suits being made in London.

LEFT

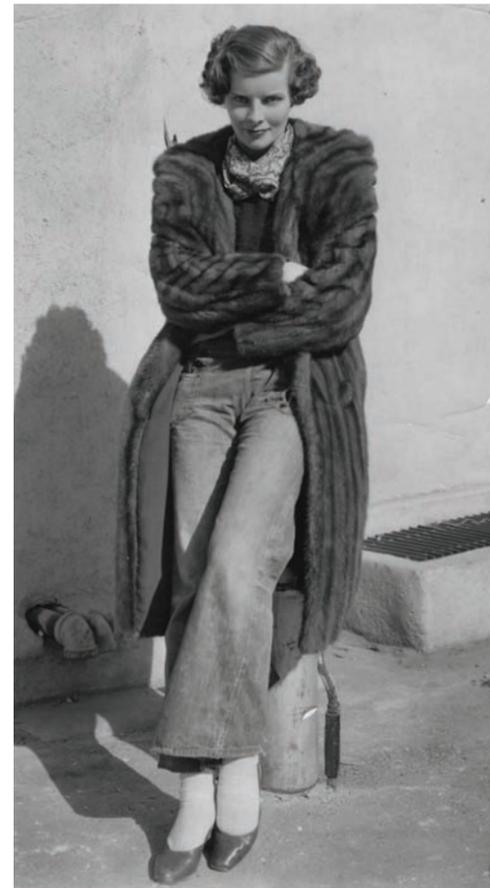
Katharine Hepburn (1907 – 2003), Self-portrait as “Coco Chanel,” (1970), Watercolor on paper, H: 16.5” x W: 14.75”, Kent State University Museum, Gift of the Estate of Katharine Hepburn, 2010.12.58

RIGHT

Publicity photo of Katharine Hepburn as “Coco Chanel” in *Coco*, Mark Hellinger Theatre (12/18/1969 – 10/3/1970), Produced by Frederick Brisson and Monfort Productions, Inc., Music by André Previn, Lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner, Directed by Michael Benthall, Choreographed by Michael Bennett, Scenic and costume design by Cecil Beaton, Kent State University Museum, Gift of Christopher P. Sullivan, M.D., 2010.3.53

9 CLOTHES FOR PUBLICITY AND PRIVATE LIFE

More than thirty pair of slacks from Hepburn's wardrobe, most in shades of beige and brown, are now in the Kent State University Museum Collection. In addition, there is enough yardage of beige wool cavalry twill for another pair. Those in the exhibition were custom made either in theatre shops such as Brooks Van Horne or Ray Diffin's, or in department stores such as Saks Fifth Avenue. Although the look is casual, Katharine Hepburn knew precisely what would work for her public image and her private life. There is no doubt that she used these garments, for many are patched and worn. A publicity still of Hepburn wearing blue jeans with a mink coat, taken on the RKO lot in 1932, captures the look that so irritated the studio magnates trying to mold their new and expensive star into the studio ideal. When they took her dungarees away during filming, she simply walked around the lot in her underpants until they gave her back her denim jeans. As George Stevens remembered, "She was never personally much on ornamentation, off the camera. She Jimmy Deaned before Jimmy Dean ever thought of it, with slacks. Kate was the first blue jeans woman. How she anticipated this era today (1967) I don't know, but she wore blue jeans and it was unheard of, and a sweater, and she's a grand dame of a studio." Hepburn's taste for the unornamented but elegant is evident in the costumes she kept in her personal collection. There is an emphasis on fluid line, on exquisite fabrics and quality workmanship. There is the sure knowledge of what a costume should do for a dramatic character, for a professional image and for Katharine Hepburn's personal use.



RIGHT
Publicity photo of Katharine Hepburn wearing dungarees and a mink coat on the lot at RKO, (ca. 1932), Judy Samelson Collection

BELOW
Slacks in the wardrobe of Katharine Hepburn, Kent State University Museum, Gift of the Estate of Katharine Hepburn
Left to right: 2010.12.110 (seated), .105 (Upside down), .104 (white), .101 lying down, .95 (red), .103 (seated) .109 (jodhpurs)



Credits & Acknowledgements

Katharine Hepburn: Dressed for Stage and Screen is organized by The Kent State University Museum, Jean L. Druesedow, Director and exhibition curator, in association with the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Jacqueline Z. Davis, Barbara G. and Lawrence A. Fleischman Executive Director; Barbara Cohen-Stratynner, Judy R. and Alfred A. Rosenberg Curator of Exhibitions. The Kent State University Museum staff: Sara Hume, Curator; Joanne Fenn, Collections Manager/Museum Registrar; James Williams, Exhibition Designer/Preparator; interns Gretchen Greenwood, Jaclyn Lerner and Allison Wickham. Shelby Cullom Davis Museum, the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts staff: Caitlin Whittington, Designer; René Ronda and Herbert Ruiz, Installers. We thank the staff of both institutions for their support of the project.

We would like to thank the Estate of Katharine Hepburn for providing access to Miss Hepburn's personal collection of her performance clothes by entrusting it to the Kent State University Museum, and for providing access to her extensive papers by placing them at the Billy Rose Theatre Division of The New York Public

Library for the Performing Arts and the Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles. We are grateful to Christopher P. Sullivan, M.D. who provided a gift of posters, film stills and materials related to Miss Hepburn's career to the Museum for this exhibition and Mary Strauss, St. Louis, Missouri, for the loan of Miss Hepburn's CFDA Lifetime Achievement Award.

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Public Program

THURSDAY

October 18 at 6:00 p.m.

**LIFE UPON THE WICKED
STAGE: NEW BOOKS IN
THE PERFORMING ARTS**

***KATHARINE HEPBURN:
REBEL CHIC***

A panel discussion on Katharine Hepburn and her dual roles as hard-working actress and fashion icon with the book's contributors: Barbara Cohen-Stratynner, Nancy McDonell, Judy Samelson, and Kohle Yohannan. Moderated by: Jean Druesedow.

Presented in conjunction with the exhibition *Katharine Hepburn: Dressed for Stage and Screen* and the publication of *Katharine Hepburn: Rebel Chic* by Skira/Rizzoli.

Programs take place in the Bruno Walter Auditorium. Admission is free and on a first come, first served basis.

For further information about the programs at the Performing Arts Library, call 212.870.1630.

All programs are subject to last minute change or cancellation.

