

Bedouin fashion romp

Couturier Christian Lacroix's "orientalist" vision

PARIS: In the 19th century, Europe's romantic artists and imperial adventurers escaped from the utilitarianism of the industrial revolution into a wild, opulent and mysterious Orient shaped and coloured largely by their own imagination. Now, at a time when the popular western images of the Middle East are often negative, the Musée de Quai Branly, Paris, is trying to re-echo that forgotten world. Best known for its collection of primitive tribal artefacts from Africa and Oceania, the museum also houses a collection of middle-eastern costumes amassed in the 1920s and 30s at the peak of France's colonial era. Some of these will be on display, with others loaned by the Jordanian collector, Widad Kamel Kawar, in the museum's exhibition "L'Orient des Femmes".

The show brings together 150 marriage and other festive costumes and accessories: in cottons and silks, robes, head-dresses and veils stitched, dyed, embroidered and worn by peasant and Bedouin nomad women in an area extending from northern Syria to the Sinai peninsula. Almost all the pieces date from the late 19th and 20th centuries, although the show will include a late-13th century infant's swaddling robe, discovered in a Lebanese cave in the 1990s.

The curator, Hana Chidiac, responsible for the north African and near eastern collections of the museum, entrusted the artistic direction of the show to the Paris haute-couture designer Christian Lacroix. The colourful and poetic trajectory conceived by Lacroix traces in filigree the history of the art of clothing in the near east," Chidiac said.

The original idea, she said, was to draw on the museum's relatively unknown, but rich, collection of Bedouin and peasant costumes, dolls in traditional dress, and Persian-style gouache miniatures to illustrate the rich-



A design for the show by Christian Lacroix and (below) a Syrian coat

ness, variety and vivacity of oriental women's dress.

But over time the concept evolved from a fundamentally ethnological show towards something more artistic.

"Beyond its historical and ethnological reach, 'L'Orient des Femmes' is intended to be an invitation to an aesthetic discovery," Chidiac said. Lacroix is a creator, she said, "sensitive to the memory of the past, to vibrant colours, to the cross-fertilisation of cultures, to Mediterranean arts."

Theatricality is the keynote of Lacroix's *mis-en-scène*,

described by the museum as "a poetic stroll: the pieces form a procession, stationary and hovering. They inhabit a coloured space where, in a warm and dusky light, the couturier's imaginary world projects itself towards a dream of Orient."

As a romp in the tradition of Lacroix's catwalk shows, and an antidote to the grimmer stereotypes of the Middle East, this should be a fun show. Whether it comes any closer to the realities of women's lives in the region than the 19th-century romantics did is a question for ethnologists, historians and social anthropologists, not couturiers. ■

L'Orient des Femmes
Musée du Quai Branly
8 February-15 May

The many faces of medieval women

Elegant, humorous, erotic—and liberated

BILBAO. Virgins, schemers, mothers, seductresses and saints: depictions of medieval women were as varied as the objects that bore their image. Over 50 works dating from the 13th to the 15th centuries including paintings, textiles, toiletry items, sculptures, furniture, gold and silver jewellery, and chastity belts have been assembled by the Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao to illustrate the ways women were portrayed. "Today, the female image is used to sell anything and everything," said the medievalist and curator, Corinne Charles. "I wanted to explore why women were so widely represented in medieval art and investigate the objectives of the artists and the men who commissioned these extraordinary pieces."

The show seeks to dispel common misconceptions about

women in the Middle Ages. "Medieval women shared many of the same dreams and fantasies as women do today," said Charles. "They enjoyed political and economic power and had more freedom than women in Renaissance times when it came to issues such as choosing a husband," she said. Charles argues that the chastity belt, believed to restrict a woman's freedom during her husband's absence, was actually a sexual enhancement device. "For health reasons, it's simply impossible to wear a chastity girdle for more

than a few hours," said Charles. "In my opinion they were used as pleasure enhancers in the sexual game." Highlights include a

14th-century ivory mirror depicting scenes of a courting couple (left). Two manuscripts are on loan from Swiss collections: the *Roman de la Rose*, an illustrated poem of chivalric love begun by Guillaume de

Lorris in the 1230s and completed by Jean de Meun in the mid 1270s, and the *Cité des Dames* by Christine de Pizan. Labelled an early feminist by some scholars, in it, Pizan imagines a city built and run entirely by women.

"The Middle Ages is not the Dark Ages. I'd like visitors to come away knowing how beautiful, elegant, humorous and erotic medieval works of art can be," said Charles. ■ **Emily Sharpe**

There Is More in You: Women in the Middle Ages
Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao
7 February-15 May



Soviet avant-garde seeks UK capitalists

BARCELONA. "Lost Vanguard: Russian Avant-garde Art and Architecture (1915-30)" at the CaixaForum Barcelona (4 February-17 April) explores the cross-current of themes and techniques exchanged by Soviet architects and artists. More than 100 works are drawn from the Costakis Collection, which is housed at the State Museum of Contemporary Art in Thessaloniki. The show will travel to London's Royal Academy (29 October-22 January 2012). The Academicians are seeking a sponsor to help fund the construction of Vladimir Tatlin's 400-metre high tower to be sited in its courtyard. ■ **G.H.**

Grasmere
Wordsworth Trust
Savage Grandeur and Noblest Thoughts: Discovering the Lake District 1750-1820
until 12 June
www.wordsworth.org.uk

Leeds
Henry Moore Institute
Henry Moore Deluxe: Books, Prints and Portfolios
3 February-3 April
www.henrymoore-fdn.co.uk

Liverpool
Lady Lever Art Gallery
Old Master Drawings: Guercino, Rubens, Tintoretto
until 2 May
www.nmfm.org.uk/ladylever

Tate Liverpool
*Nam June Paik
until 13 March
www.tate.org.uk/liverpool

Walker Art Gallery
*A Collector's Eye: Cranach to Pissarro
18 February-15 May
Dare to Wear: Glass Dresses by Diana Dias-Leão
20 September
www.walkerartgallery.org.uk

London
176
Future Map 10
until 6 February
www.projectsplace176.com

Barbican Art Gallery
Thirty Years of Japanese Fashion
until 6 February
www.barbican.org.uk/artgallery

Ben Uri Gallery—The London Jewish Museum of Art
The Land of Light and Promise: Ludwig Blum (1891-1974)
until 24 April
www.benuri.org.uk

British Library
The Time of the Ancient Mariner
until 27 February
Evolving English: One Language, Many Voices
until 3 April
www.bl.uk

British Museum
Impressions of Africa: Money, Medals, Stamps and Seals
until 6 February
*Journey through the Afterlife: The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead
until 6 March

Eric Gill: Wilful Child
10 February-7 August
www.britishmuseum.org

Camden Arts Centre
Simon Starling: Never the Same River
until 20 February
www.camdenartscentre.org

Courtauld Gallery
Life, Legend, Landscape: Victorian Drawings and Watercolours
17 February-15 May
www.courtauld.ac.uk

Design Museum
*Drawing Fashion
until 6 March
Brit Insurance Designs of the Year
16 February-7 August
www.designmuseum.org

Dulwich Picture Gallery
*Norman Rockwell's America
until 27 March
Masterpiece a Month: Diego Velázquez, *El bufón don Sebastián de Morra*
until 28 February
www.dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk

Hayward Gallery
British Art Show 7: in the Days of the Comet
16 February-17 April
www.hayward.org.uk

Imperial War Museum
Outbreak 1939
until 6 September
Once Upon a Wartime: Classic War Stories for Children
14 February-30 October
www.iwm.org.uk

Museum of Everything
Exhibition #3
until 13 February
www.museumofeverything.com

National Gallery
*Jan Gossaert's Renaissance
23 February-30 May
www.nationalgallery.org.uk

National Portrait Gallery
Portraits of Artists: Artist Films by Gerald Fox
until 17 February
*Taylor Wessing Photographic

Portrait Prize 2010
until 20 February
Hoppé Portraits: Society, Studio and Street
until 30 May
www.npg.org.uk

Parasol Unit
Nathan Cash Davidson
until 13 February
www.parasol-unit.org

Raven Row
Hilary Lloyd
until 6 February
Morgan Fisher: Films and Paintings and In Between and Nearby
24 February-24 April
www.ravenrow.org

Royal Academy of Arts
Masterworks: Architecture at the Royal Academy
until 13 March
Will Alsop RA: En Route
until 13 March

***Modern British Sculpture**
until 7 April
www.royalacademy.org.uk

Saatchi Gallery
The Power of Paper
20 February-17 April
www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk

Anish Kapoor, Sky Mirror, 2006, at the Serpentine Gallery, Kensington Gardens

Serpentine Gallery
Anish Kapoor: Turning the World Upside Down
until 13 March
www.serpentinegallery.org

Sir John Soane's Museum
Michael Petry: Bad Seed
4 February-12 March
www.soane.org

Tate Britain
*Susan Hiller
1 February-15 May
Watercolour
16 February-21 August
www.tate.org.uk/britain

Tate Modern
Gabriel Orozco
until 25 April
*The Unilever Series: Ai Weiwei
until 2 May
www.tate.org.uk/modern

Victoria and Albert Museum
Shadow Catchers: Camera-less Photography
until 20 February
*Imperial Chinese Robes from the Forbidden City
until 27 February
Jain Manuscripts
until 31 December 2012
www.vam.ac.uk

Wallace Collection
The Conservation of the Comte d'Artois' Chair
until 27 March
www.wallacecollection.org

Whitechapel Art Gallery
This Is Tomorrow
until 6 March
Keeping It Real: Current Disturbance: Mona Hatoum
until 6 March
John Stezaker
until 18 March
Bethan Huws: Capelgwyn
until 18 March

The Bloomberg Commission:
Claire Barclay
until 2 May
*The D. Kaskalopoulos Collection
until 5 June
www.whitechapel.org

***Alan Cristea Gallery, 34 Cork Street**
Christiane Baumgartner
17 February-19 March
www.alancristea.com

***Frith Street Gallery**
Amelies Strba: My Life's Dreams
until 11 March
www.frithstreetgallery.com

***Hamiltons**
Anderson and Low: Manga Dreams
until 5 March
www.hamiltonsgallery.com

***Hauser & Wirth, Old Bond Street**
*Louise Bourgeois and Tracey Emin: Do Not Abandon Me
18 February-12 March
*Hauser & Wirth, Piccadilly
Diana Thater: Chernobyl
until 5 March
www.hauserwirth.com

***Lisson Gallery**
Haroon Mirza
16 February-19 March
www.lissongallery.com

***Max Wigram Gallery**
Christian Hidak: Waterfall at the Top of the River
until 19 February
www.maxwigram.com

***Poussin**
High-abstract
11 February-12 March
www.poussin-gallery.com

***Riflemaker**
Zigzagbaum & Coelho
until 26 February
Analog
until 3 March
www.riflemaker.com

***Sprith Magers London**
Cindy Sherman
until 19 February
www.sprithmagers.com

***Timothy Taylor Gallery**
Susan Hiller
3 February-5 March
www.timothytaylorgallery.com

Manchester
Manchester Art Gallery
Exporting Beauty: Pilkington's Pottery and Tiles
until 9 October
Grayson Perry: Visual Dialogues
1 February-1 January 2012
www.manchestergalleries.org

Middlesbrough
Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art
Questions of Belonging
until 13 March
Lawrence Weiner: a Line is a Line For All That
until 13 March
www.visitmima.com

Milton Keynes
Milton Keynes Gallery
Gerard Byrne: Loch Ness, 2001-11
until 3 April
www.mkg-g.org

Norwich
Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts
*Basketry: Making Human Nature
8 February-22 May
www.scva.org.uk

Oxford
Ashmolean Museum
Thomas Houseago: Contemporary Sculpture
until 20 February
*British Drawings in the Age of the Engraving Press
until 20 February
Japanese Ghosts and Demons
until 27 February
*Lucien Pissarro in England
until 13 March
www.ashmolean.org

Modern Art Oxford
*Thomas Houseago
David Austen: End of Love
until 20 February
www.modernartoxford.org.uk

Salisbury
*New Art Centre
Peter Frie: Last Summer
5 February-27 March
www.sculpture.uk.com

St Ives
Tate St Ives
Simon Starling
5 February-2 May
Design Research Unit
5 February-2 May
www.tate.org.uk/stives

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