

News Release
Public Information
Department

First Retrospective of the Work of African American Fashion Designer Patrick Kelly on View at the Brooklyn Museum of Art April 17 through September 5, 2004

November 2003

The first retrospective exhibition of the works of the African American fashion designer Patrick Kelly will include more than fifty complete ensembles and more than a dozen partial ensembles drawn from the Patrick Kelly Estate and from the collections of the actress Cicely Tyson, the singer Grace Jones, and others. Archival material from the Kelly estate and numerous objects from Kelly's personal collection of Black memorabilia will also be featured. The exhibition is presented in celebration of the opening of the Brooklyn Museum of Art's new front entrance pavilion and public plaza. It will be on view from April 17 through September 5, 2004, in the Robert E. Blum Gallery, adjacent to the new entrance.

This exhibition is being organized for the BMA by guest curator Thelma Golden, Deputy Director for Exhibitions and Programs at The Studio Museum in Harlem.

A native of Vicksburg, Mississippi, Patrick Kelly was influenced during his early years by the creativity and fashion sense of his female relatives, who often added their own embellishments to simple store-bought garments, as well as by the fashion magazines that his grandmother brought home from the stylish white household where she worked as a domestic. As a young adult, Kelly moved to Atlanta, where he sold recycled clothes and worked without pay as a window dresser at the Yves Saint Laurent Rive Gauche Boutique. He later lived in New York, where he attended Parsons School of Design.

It was in Paris, during the mid- to late 1980s, that Kelly found his greatest success, eventually becoming the first American member of the *Chambre Syndicale du Prêt-à-Porter* (the governing body of the prestigious French ready-to-wear industry). He began in Paris by selling dresses on the street and working as a costumer for the nightclub *Le Palais*. His flamboyant garments became popular, and he soon gained the backing of the clothing conglomerate *Warnaco*. Such well-known stores as *Henri Bendel*, *Bloomingdale's*, and *Bergdorf Goodman* carried his Paris designs, and the celebrities *Isabella Rossellini* and *Bette Davis* were among his clients.

Some of Kelly's most memorable garments incorporated such humble materials as masses of multicolored buttons or grosgrain ribbons clustered together. Other motifs, like the use of flamboyant hats and splashy accessories, celebrated his rural southern roots. Kelly also created works using controversial Black images drawn from popular culture, bringing issues of racial stereotyping to the forefront.

Although he produced collections only from 1985 until his death from AIDS in 1990 at the age of forty, his exuberant, witty garments proved to be potent and original contributions to the field of fashion.

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GENERAL INFORMATION

Admission:

Contribution \$6; students with valid I.D. and older adults \$3. Free to Members and children under 12 accompanied by an adult. Group tours or visits must be arranged in advance by calling extension 234.

Directions:

Subway: Seventh Avenue express (2 or 3) to Eastern Parkway/Brooklyn Museum stop; Lexington Avenue express (4 or 5) to Nevins Street, cross platform and transfer to the 2 or 3. **Bus:** B71, B41, B69, B48. On-site parking available.

Museum Hours:

Wednesday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; First Saturday of each month, 11 a.m. to 11 p.m.; all other Saturdays, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day.