

Press Release
12 May 2016

LEADING FASHION DESIGNERS REVEAL EXCLUSIVE WW1-INSPIRED WORKS IN *FASHION & FREEDOM* EXHIBITION

Fashion & Freedom at Manchester Art Gallery opens tomorrow, 13 May 2016. The exhibition sees leading female fashion designers explore the profound effect the First World War had on women. It features contemporary pieces by Vivienne Westwood, Roksanda, Holly Fulton, Emilia Wickstead, J JS Lee and Sadie Williams, and the premiere of specially commissioned films by SHOWStudio and an original short by Luke Snellin. *Fashion & Freedom* is co-commissioned by 14-18 NOW, the UK's arts programme for the First World War centenary, and Manchester Art Gallery, with support from the British Fashion Council, and runs until 27 November 2016.

The onset of war in 1914 brought many significant changes across British society. As men left home to fight on the frontline, over a million women joined the industrial workforce, taking on jobs as bus conductors, ambulance drivers and window cleaners, as well as in offices and factories. New responsibility gave women new freedom and led to new ways of dressing, as silhouettes and social codes changed.

The designers reveal new pieces inspired by the huge impact the First World War had on women: Holly Fulton and Roksanda take inspiration from the women who worked in the munitions factories and often suffered TNT poisoning resulting in yellow skin; J JS Lee has chosen work-wear as her focus, looking to men's tailoring and the trouser; Emilia Wickstead is inspired by the experimental graphic camouflage patterns of dazzle ships; Sadie Williams celebrates women who worked as Voluntary Aid Detachments on the frontline; Vivienne Westwood presents an iridescent Laundry jumpsuit, inspired by those worn by women working in factories during WWI, a Propaganda uniform coat, and a 17th century inspired camouflage dress and boots. These exclusive designs will be presented alongside historical wartime selections drawn from Manchester Art Gallery's renowned costume collection.

The exhibition features original films that are contemporary reflections on the experience of women before, during and after the First World War. These include shorts by emerging directors commissioned by Nick Knight's award-winning fashion film platform SHOWstudio, and *first* by Luke Snellin, with a cast wearing specially designed uniforms by Manchester fashion label Private White.

Fashion & Freedom includes work by students from five fashion colleges, working on the theme of *Restriction / Release*. This next generation of fashion designers have examined the two physical extremes women faced within fashion, from the pre-war tight fitted corsets (Restriction) to the soft free-flowing silhouette post war (Release).

Restriction / Release also explores the social and political barriers women endured at this time, including fighting for the right to vote. *Restriction / Release* was included within each college's curriculum, and participating institutions include Manchester School of Art, University of Salford, Leeds College of Art, University of Westminster and London College of Fashion.

Darrell Vydelingum, Creative Director of *Fashion & Freedom*, said:

“When I was invited to create a project which looked at the impact of the First World War on women and fashion I wanted to achieve a mix of new commissions by leading designers alongside emerging talent from fashion colleges, animated by fashion films. The exhibition shows how the silhouettes that emerged a hundred years ago are still the bedrock of our catwalks and high streets today. *Fashion & Freedom* is first and foremost a celebration of women – their strength, creativity and resilience.”

Jenny Waldman, Director of 14-18 NOW, said:

“We wanted to look at the often-neglected impact that the First World War had on the lives of British women – the roles they took on, the freedom they gained, and the resulting shift in fashion. Our partners Manchester Art Gallery and British Fashion Council have made this an exciting and rewarding journey.”

Maria Balshaw, Director of Manchester City Galleries, said:

“We are thrilled to co-commission this ambitious exhibition, which showcases outfits from our rich costume collection in dialogue with new pieces by contemporary designers. It is particularly appropriate for a project about the changing role of women to launch in Manchester, the birthplace of the Suffragette movement. This project exemplifies our wish to create connections between the past and present using our collections and reflects our championing of female artists and designers.”

Caroline Rush CBE, CEO British Fashion Council, said:

“The role fashion has played in our social and political history is often forgotten. And the First World War is no exception - women went to work in factories and drove buses for the first time and as ever fashion was at the heart of this story. Which is why it is so exciting to see today's leading female designers revisit this significant moment through their own contemporary lens.”

Fashion & Freedom

Manchester Art Gallery

13 May – 27 November 2016

Admission Free

www.fashionandfreedom.org

www.manchesterartgallery.org / www.14-18now.org.uk

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Notes to Editors

14-18 NOW

14-18 NOW is a programme of extraordinary arts experiences connecting people with the First World War, as part of the UK's official centenary commemorations. It aims to engage as many people as possible with the First World War, exploring how the war has impacted on

the society we live in now. 14-18 NOW commissions new work by leading contemporary artists from all art forms, inspired by the period 1914-1918. The commemorative period is marked by three key seasons - the first season centred around 4 August 2014 (Anniversary of the Declaration of War), the second is March to November 2016 (anniversary of the Battle of Somme) and the last in 2018 (centenary of Armistice Day). 14-18 NOW is responsible for the UK tour of the iconic poppy sculptures by artist Paul Cummins and designer Tom Piper. 14-18 NOW is supported by the National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund and Arts Council England and by additional fundraising. 14-18 NOW has commissioned over 80 artworks to date that have been seen by over 20 million people.

Manchester Art Gallery

Manchester Art Gallery is one of the country's finest art museums. It welcomes over half a million visitors each year with a blend of historic and contemporary architecture that echoes its innovative artistic programme. It mixes works from the wonderful historic collections with the best international contemporary art to bring fresh perspectives to familiar images, create visual dialogues and encourage conversation and debate.

Darrell Vydelingum

Darrell Vydelingum has been working in the fashion industry for over twelve years. Through his public relations company, Blow and Blow Presents, Darrell has helped nurture and support emerging and international designers. Darrell has worked closely with international organisations, including fashion councils along with the British Council, Southbank Centre and British Fashion Council. Darrell has a great understanding of the fashion industry from commercial, ready to wear and sales to the conceptual, editorial designers.

DCMS

4 August 2014 marked 100 years since the start of the First World War. In recognition of this significant milestone the Government is leading a four-year commemorative programme of national ceremonial events, cultural and educational activity and community engagement. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport, DCMS, manages this cross government programme working with key delivery partners including Imperial War Museums, 14-18 NOW, Arts Council, Heritage Lottery Fund and Historic England.

Heritage Lottery Fund

Thanks to National Lottery players, we invest money to help people across the UK explore, enjoy and protect the heritage they care about - from the archaeology under our feet to the historic parks and buildings we love, from precious memories and collections to rare wildlife. [@heritagelottery](http://www.hlf.org.uk) #UnderstandingWW1

Other HLF-funded First World War projects include:

- First World War Galleries, Imperial War Museum London - £6.5m
- The Yorkshire Film Archive – £52,400
- HMS Caroline, the last surviving First World War battleship - £12m
- Herts at War - £98,400
- 1914 London B-type 'Battle' Bus, which drove out to the Western Front - £750,000

Arts Council England

Arts Council England champions, develops and invests in artistic and cultural experiences that enrich people's lives. We support a range of activities across the arts, museums and libraries – from theatre to digital art, reading to dance, music to literature, and crafts to collections. Great art and culture inspires us, brings us together and teaches us about ourselves and the world around us. In short, it makes life better. Between 2015 and 2018, we plan to invest £1.1 billion of public money from government and an estimated £700 million

from the National Lottery to help create these experiences for as many people as possible across the country. www.artscouncil.org.uk

First World War Centenary Partnership

2014 - 2018 marks the centenary of the First World War, a landmark anniversary for Britain and the world. IWM is marking the centenary by leading a vibrant, five year programme of cultural activities across the world. This year is the centenary of the Battle of the Somme. IWM will be announcing its programme to mark the anniversary later this year. For more information visit www.1914.org.