

# Phoenix Art Museum

News Release

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Phoenix Art Museum presents *A Tribute to James Galanos*, legendary American couturier  
*Comprehensive museum retrospective chronicles more than forty years of Galanos' impeccable designs*

**PHOENIX (July 12, 2017)** – Phoenix Art Museum will present *A Tribute to James Galanos*, a retrospective dedicated to the iconic American fashion designer known for the elegant craftsmanship and luxurious materials that characterized his work. Featuring more than 40 couture-quality, ready-to-wear ensembles and accessories, the exhibition will illuminate the designer's influence and legacy with objects from the 1950s through the 1990s. *A Tribute to James Galanos* will open August 19 in the Ellman Fashion Gallery, and remain on view through January 7, 2018.

"Phoenix Art Museum is pleased to present the iconic work of one of the most significant American designers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century," said Amada Cruz, the Sybil Harrington Director and CEO of Phoenix Art Museum. "Along with works drawn from private collections, many of the objects are drawn from the Museum's extensive fashion design archive, which now numbers more than 7,000 objects of remarkable quality and diversity. The collection benefited from Mr. Galanos' generosity, with his personal gift of a group of his designs in 1990."

During a career spanning nearly half a century, James Galanos designed clothes with the skill of a Paris couturier. From his selection of the finest fabrics to his impeccable construction and finishing, the designer's exacting standards resulted in an elegant simplicity that became a hallmark of his work. "A black dress," Galanos once said, "reveals everything: line, cut, drape, seaming. It must be perfection."

Born in Philadelphia in 1924 to parents who had emigrated from Greece, Galanos and his three sisters worked in their parents' South New Jersey restaurant. "As a young boy, I had no fashion influence around me," Galanos recalled in a 1980 interview, "But all the while I was dreaming of Paris and New York." He began his career in 1944 as an assistant to Hattie Carnegie in New York, and spent the next several years in a series of jobs, including as an assistant to couturier Robert Piguet in Paris and as a part-time sketch artist in the costume department of Columbia Pictures, where he worked for the legendary Jean Louis. It was Louis who urged Galanos to establish his own label, and in 1951, he opened Galanos Originals in Los Angeles, where his first ready-to-wear collection was immediately ordered by Saks Fifth Avenue.

This early success led Galanos to begin dressing some of the most famous women in the world. His clients included the Duchess of Windsor, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, Marilyn Monroe, Marlene Dietrich, Grace Kelly, Rosalind Russell and Diana Ross. He is perhaps best known as the favorite designer of the late Nancy Reagan, who wore the first of four Inaugural Ball gowns in 1967 when her husband was first elected as Governor of California. Galanos and Mrs. Reagan would continue a deep friendship until her death in 2016, just a few months before Galanos would pass away.

"Phoenix Art Museum's fashion collection includes works by James Galanos that were once worn by Nancy Reagan, Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt Whitney, and many Museum benefactors who enjoyed close friendships with great American designer," says Dennita Sewell, the Jacquie Dorrance Curator of Fashion Designer, who curated this exhibition. "Over the years, I have incorporated many of his iconic designs into the Museum's exhibitions as an example of unparalleled American craftsmanship."

Until his retirement in 1998, Galanos continued to design for his discerning clientele, who appreciated the timeless quality of his work, which could be worn throughout the decades, always retaining his trademark elegant simplicity. As the designer's longtime friend, fashion collector Tatiana Sorokko observed, "When you look at his overall career, nobody else

in American fashion has been able to achieve the same level of quality. And he produced everything in his factory on Sepulveda Boulevard in Los Angeles.”

*A Tribute to James Galanos* is organized by Phoenix Art Museum and curated by Dennita Sewell, the Dorrance Curator of Fashion Design. It is made possible through the generosity of donors to the Museum’s annual fund. For more information, visit [phxart.org/exhibition/jamesgalanos](http://phxart.org/exhibition/jamesgalanos). For press inquiries, including requests for press images, contact the Museum’s Press Office at 602.257.2105 or [margaree.bigler@phxart.org](mailto:margaree.bigler@phxart.org).

#### **About the Exhibition**

*A Tribute to James Galanos* will be on view from August 19, 2017 through January 7, 2018 in the Ellman Gallery. Admission is free for Museum Members; past and present members of the military; Maricopa Community College students, staff, and faculty (with ID); and youth aged 5 and under. Entrance to the exhibition is included in general admission for the general public. During voluntary-donation, free-access times, the exhibition is offered free to the general public. Free-access times include Wednesdays from 3 – 9 pm, the first Fridays of every month from 6 – 10 pm, and the second weekend of each month (Saturday from 10am – 5pm and Sunday from Noon – 5pm). For a full breakdown of general admission prices and hours, visit [bit.ly/VisitPhxArt](http://bit.ly/VisitPhxArt).

#### **About the Fashion Design Collection**

Founded in 1966, the fashion design collection of Phoenix Art Museum is recognized for its quality and comprehensiveness. It is composed of more than 7,000 objects of American and European men’s, women’s, and children’s dress and accessories, dating from the 18th century to the present day.

#### **About Phoenix Art Museum**

Phoenix Art Museum has provided access to visual arts and educational programs in Arizona for more than 50 years and is the largest art museum in the Southwestern United States. Critically acclaimed national and international exhibitions are shown alongside the Museum’s permanent collection of more than 18,000 works of American, Asian, European, Latin American, modern and contemporary art, and fashion design. The Museum also presents festivals, a comprehensive film program, live performances and educational programs designed to enlighten, entertain and stimulate visitors of all ages. Visitors also enjoy vibrant photography exhibitions through the Museum’s landmark partnership with the Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona. To learn more about Phoenix Art Museum, visit [PhxArt.org](http://PhxArt.org), or call the 24-hour recorded information line at (602) 257-1222.

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