

# PARACHUTE

SUBVERSIVE FASHION OF THE '80s



MCCORD  
MUSEUM

100 Years Young

## Press Release

### ***Parachute: Subversive Fashion of the '80s*** **An invitation to experience the avant-garde design and culture of the 1980s**

**November 16, 2021.** – The McCord Museum's new exhibition—*Parachute: Subversive Fashion of the '80s*—opens on November 19. From its beginnings inspired by New Wave subculture to its position as a veritable international fashion sensation, the Parachute brand from Montreal was recognized from New York to Tokyo for its visionary, bold apparel and innovative concept stores. The exhibition explores the history of the brand, a go-to label for stars like Madonna, Peter Gabriel and David Bowie, while immersing visitors in the exuberance of the 1980s.

Founded in Montreal in 1977 by British clothing designer Nicola Pelly and American architect and urban planner Harry Parnass, Parachute was active in the world of fashion until 1993. Several factors contributed to the brand's rise to global phenomenon.

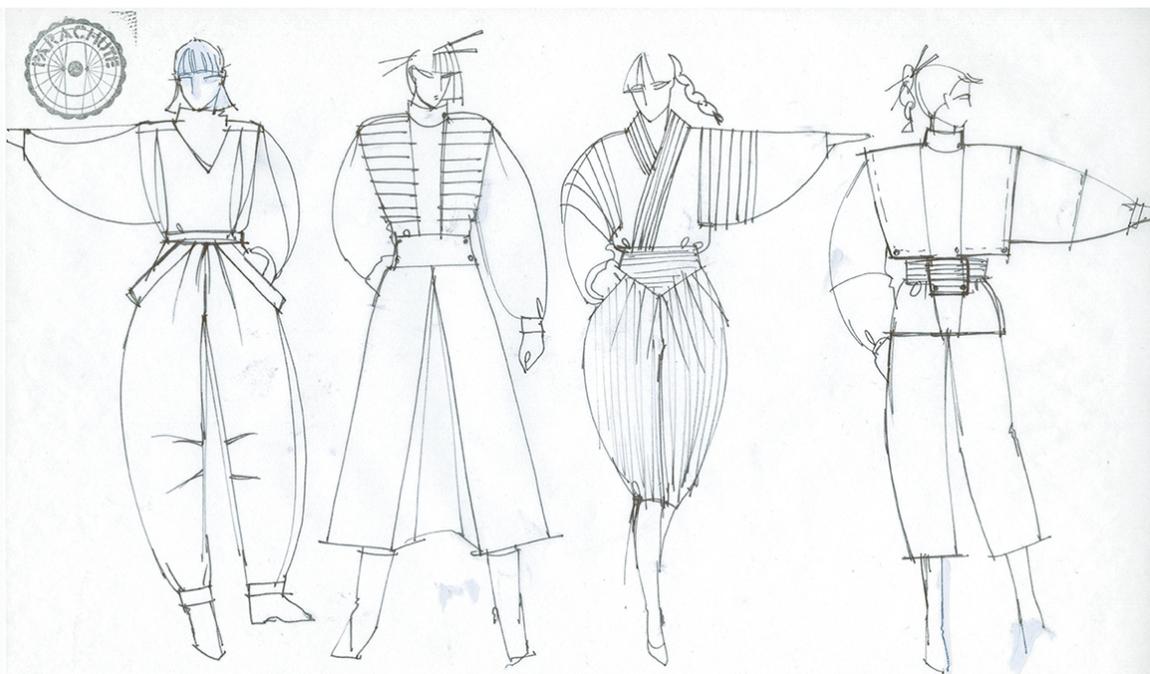
“Through a combination of youth-driven countercultural inspiration, a bold and graphic fashion product, and theatrical, experiential retail environments, Parnass and Pelly lucratively commodified cool urban life at the dawn of the digital age. Parachute, with its authentic, subversive hipness and street credibility, should be considered amongst the vanguard fashion brands that paved the way for the mainstream explosion of streetwear at the start of the 1990s,” says Alexis Walker, Associate Curator, Dress, Fashion and Textiles at the McCord Museum and curator of the exhibition.

As Parachute co-founder Nicola Pelly notes, “We saw our clientele as modern-day heroes and heroines, independent beings in control of their destinies, fighting against conformism and homogeneity. For us, fashion was a radical form of expression and a way to build a strong personal identity.” “The exhibition aims to illustrate the concepts behind the design of Parachute, and its ties with the urban environment and underground artistic communities in an atmosphere evocative of the '80s,” adds Alexis Walker.

Visitors to *Parachute: Subversive Fashion of the '80s* can admire the androgynous, avant-garde creations of Parachute through some sixty outfits, including two stage costumes from the personal collection of Peter Gabriel. They can also examine over 140 archival documents such as sketches and advertisements, as well as promotional photographs and images taken in Montreal's night clubs. Finally, they can view exclusive interviews along with video excerpts of fashion shows and concerts, all against a soundtrack of music from Men Without Hats, Peter Gabriel and Montreal group FHANG.

The exhibition is organized into five areas. The first—***New Wave Beginnings***—recounts the early years of the brand, which was inspired by the emerging Montreal New Wave scene, when the co-founders met in the design studios of Montreal-based fashion retailer Le Château. The second—***Collage & Hybrid***—presents Parnass and Pelly's design techniques, a postmodern approach that synthesized sartorial references from various sources to produce challenging and contemporary silhouettes. The third area—***Underground Images***—illustrates Parachute's striking, elegant promotional images, which solidified the brand's subversive, avant-garde reputation while driving consumer desire. The fourth—***Music Videos, Rock Stars and Miami Vice***—explores the advent of MTV, MuchMusic and Musique plus, networks which broadcast music videos 24 hours a day and had a tremendous impact on the pop culture of the 1980s. This section also references the stars who wore Parachute, including Don Johnson in *Miami Vice*, Michael Jackson, Madonna and the band Duran Duran. The fifth area—***The Store Experience***—looks at the cutting-edge Parachute concept stores, notably those in Montreal, New York City and Los Angeles, whose high-tech, industrial aesthetic, at once minimalist and grand, created unique public spaces where people could meet and be seen.

"We are absolutely thrilled to present this social and historical exhibition devoted to a relatively recent period of effervescent creativity and transformation. Our goal is to celebrate the incredible global success of this Montreal brand and recreate the era for those who were part of it while introducing it to younger generations who are fans of pop culture, fashion or the '80s. Finally, the exhibition is incredibly relevant for the Museum given that we are home to the largest collection of Parachute clothing, photographs and archives," explains Suzanne Sauvage, President and Chief Executive Officer of the McCord Museum.



Nicola Pelly, *Sketch, Autumn-Winter 1981-1982* (detail). Gift of Nicola Pelly, M2019.121.1.79, McCord Museum

## ***Parachute: Subversive Design & Street Fashion***

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue entitled *Parachute: Subversive Design and Street Fashion*, designed and published by Perron—Roettinger, a celebrated Los Angeles-based design studio, in collaboration with the McCord Museum. Organized in three chapters, it delves deeper into the themes presented in the exhibition and features photographs, archival documents, and interviews with key players in the brand's history, like Nicola Pelly, Harry Parnass and Peter Gabriel. It is being sold in limited quantities at the Museum Boutique and on the [Perron—Roettinger website](#).

In addition, sweatshirts and T-shirts for adults and children will be sold at the Museum Boutique, along with various branded items such as bags, stationery products, glasses and button pins.

## **Credits and curatorship**

The exhibition is organized by the McCord Museum.

Curator: [Alexis Walker](#), Associate Curator, Dress, Fashion and Textiles, McCord Museum

Project Manager: [Caroline Truchon](#), McCord Museum

Associate Curators: [Nicola Pelly](#), co-founder of the Parachute brand, and [Stéphane Le Duc](#), journalist at Dress to KILL magazine and professor at the ESG-UQAM École supérieure de mode

Exhibition design: [Atelier Zébulon Perron](#)

Audio-visual : [BLVD](#)

Graphics: [Principal](#)



Albert Sanchez, *Models wearing the Spring-Summer 1985 collection at the 456 North Camden Drive store, Beverly Hills, Los Angeles, 1985.*  
Lent by Nicola Pelly. © Albert Sanchez

## EXHIBITION-RELATED ACTIVITIES

Visitors and fashion lovers can enjoy numerous cultural activities, free of charge, both in person and online.

### Let's talk!

Two citizen discussion workshops presented in collaboration with Les têtes bien faites. The first will look at cultural appropriation in fashion, Sunday, November 28, 2021, 1 pm, in the exhibition, while the second will look at clothing as a means of empowerment, on Sunday, February 27, 2022, 1 pm, in the Museum theatre.

### Fashion at the Museum Series - The success of a Montreal brand: Parachute in New

A conversation with Morgan Allard, co-owner of Parachute's New York stores in the 1980s, about the New York concept stores and their role in the international success of the Montreal brand. Hosted by Stéphane Le Duc, Wednesday, December 1, at noon, on Zoom and live streamed on Facebook.

### Fashion at the Museum Series – Parachute: A brand, an exhibition

A conversation with Nicola Pelly and Alexis Walker about the close collaboration that enabled them to tell the story of the Parachute brand and its socio-cultural context in the form of an exhibition. Hosted by Stéphane Le Duc, Wednesday, February 23, 2022, at 6 pm, in the Museum theatre.

### Fashion from all Perspectives Series – Who owns streetwear?

A discussion with the collective Never Was Average about the social and artistic impact of streetwear, on Wednesday, March 16, 6 pm, in the Museum theatre.

### FIFA at the McCord – *Montréal New Wave*

Screening of the documentary *Montréal New Wave*, directed by Érik Cimon, Wednesday, February 2, 6 pm, at the Museum theatre.



Andrée Gagné, *Models in early designs, photographed for Forces magazine, about 1980. Lent by Nicola Pelly. © Mlle Andrée Gagné*



Roger Aziz © McCord Museum



Roger Aziz © McCord Museum



Marilyn Aitken © McCord Museum



Roger Aziz © McCord Museum

## OPENING HOURS AND ADMISSION FEES

Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, 10 am to 6 pm | Wednesdays, 10 am to 9 pm  
Saturdays and Sundays, 10 am to 5 pm

In celebration of the McCord Museum's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, visitors can enjoy free admission to the Museum for 100 days, from October 13, 2021, to January 19, 2022, thanks to the support of BMO Financial Group. The 100th anniversary celebrations are presented in co-operation with the SAQ.

## COVID-19: NEW MEASURES FOR A SAFE VISIT

The Museum follows strict hygiene measures to ensure a safe and pleasant visitor experience. To visit the Museum, people must first reserve a ticket online, even when these tickets are free of charge for 100 days as of October 13. While Quebec's vaccination passport is not currently required to visit the Museum's exhibitions, it must be presented, along with photo ID, by those ages 13 and up who wish to take part in the cultural activities held in the Theatre. For more information about the measures in effect, see the [Museum's Website](#).

## McCord Museum, A Museum of Fashion

The McCord Museum has the largest museum collection of Canadian garments and accessories. Its Dress, Fashion and Textiles collection consists of over 20,000 items made or worn in Canada over the past three centuries. The custodian of many examples of mid-20th century high fashion created by Montreal, Canadian and international designers and couturiers, the McCord preserves the history of Montreal's apparel industry and retail clothing sector. In the fall of 2019, the McCord Museum launched [EncycloFashionQC](#), a unique online reference tool with over 500 entries documenting who's who in the Quebec fashion industry, from the 19th century to the present day.

## ABOUT THE McCord Museum

The McCord Museum celebrates life in Montreal, its people and its communities, past and present. Reaching beyond the city to the wider world, the Museum creates and presents engaging exhibitions, educational programming and cultural activities with a critical and inclusive take on social history. It is renowned for its collections of Archives, Documentary Art, Dress, Fashion and Textiles, Indigenous Cultures, Material Culture and Photography, which comprise 200,000 objects and works of art, 2.15 million photographs, 3,500 rare books and 340 linear metres of textual archives. Founded on October 13, 1921, the Museum is celebrating its 100th anniversary with special programming until fall 2022. McCord Museum: Our People, Our Stories.

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[Download high-resolution images](#)

[Consult the press kit](#)

Source:

McCord Museum

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