Iris van Herpen: Transforming Fashion – Descriptive Audio Tour

Stop 1: Introduction

Welcome to *Iris van Herpen: Transforming Fashion* at the Royal Ontario Museum. This exhibition extends through two galleries and features collections by Dutch designer and couturier Iris van Herpen. Her earlier collections, from 2008 to 2011, are located in the Patricia Harris Gallery of Textiles and Costume, and more recent collections are in the Roloff Beny Gallery. Also in the Roloff Beny Gallery is the related immersive installation *Philip Beesley: Transforming Space.* Together, they take you on a captivating exploration into design, fashion, technology and the world around us.

This descriptive audio tour consists of nine stops featuring van Herpen's collections and touchable samples from her designs. All stops are marked by floor labels around the exhibition.

Van Herpen's bold creations have earned international acclaim for being at the forefront of experimentation and collaboration. She creates extraordinary new shapes using technologies like 3D printing and materials such as metal umbrella ribs and magnets. She also collaborates with leading architects, engineers and scientists to create her stunning and mystifying haute couture collections. Canadian architect Philip Beesley is one of her longest-standing collaborators.

Stop 2: Chemical Crows

From January 2008, *Chemical Crows* is Iris Van Herpen's first major collection and crafted entirely by hand. This collection was inspired by van Herpen's fascination with alchemy and a group of crows that lived around her studio. As alchemists tried to turn base metals into gold, so van Herpen has transformed gold-coloured umbrella ribs into whimsical fan-like shapes resembling birds. There are three designs from *Chemical Crows* on this platform.

Design 2a

Chemical Crows, Skirt, Collar
Ribs of children's umbrellas, industrial boat filament yarns, cow leather, and metal eyelets
Groninger Museum, 2012.0191.a–b

One design features a gold top and tasseled bands across its narrow skirt.

A narrow black collar loosely circles the mannequin's neck. From the collar, metal ribs from a children's umbrella jut out to form a gold vest.

Long, thin rods splay up at angles around the head - creating rigid and slightly asymmetric shoulder lines. The rods circle down the vest, shortening to end at the top of the ribcage. From here, a panel of spokes trimmed with leather flares out in a flirty peplum. A peplum is a short, exaggerated flare over the hips.

The top is worn over a narrow black skirt that suggests a modern-day flapper. It is constructed of tassel fringe held tight to the body by leather bands. Each band is edged top and bottom with tiny gold studs and the garment ends in a tight band at a modest mid-thigh.

Touchable
You may touch a sample from this top at Stop 4.

Design 2b

Chemical Crows, Dress, Collar
Ribs of children's umbrellas and cow leather
Groninger Museum, 2012.0193.a–b

Also from *Chemical Crows* is a gold micro-mini.

A leather bra serves as the foundation for the cage-like dress. Below the bra, panels of gold umbrella ribs are fastened together in tiers to look like stitching and create a subtle A-line silhouette.

A panel of ribs trimmed with black leather fans out around the waist in a peplum.

Over the dress is a gleaming gold collar resembling a jacket with an upswept shawl. A panel of ribs attached to a thin leather neckline forms the top of the bodice over the leather bra and angles in at the waist just above the peplum.

At the shoulders, another panel flares up in a dramatic collar to frame the head and face, and circle the shoulders like a shawl.

The overall silhouette emits soft, curvy movement from an unyielding element.

Design 2c

Chemical Crows, Skirt, Collar
Ribs of children's umbrellas, industrial boat filament yarns, cow leather, and metal eyelets
Groninger Museum, 2012.0192.a–b

Finally, from *Chemical Crows* is a garment with a narrow skirt and a gleaming gold ruffled collar.

A narrow, flesh-toned leather band loosely circles the mannequin's neck. Below it, a panel of gold umbrella ribs covers the torso.

A second panel of ribs has been bent and curled to create a ruffle, blowing around the shoulders in an imaginary wind.

Under this is a miniskirt constructed of flesh-tone leather that's been sewn into vertical stripes. It features a panel of black flapper fringe down each thigh.

Stop 3: Crystallization

The *Crystallization* collection, from July 2010, is inspired by Benthem Crouwel's design for the new extension to Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum, which earned the nickname "bathtub." Iris van Herpen sought to design a dress that would cascade around the wearer like a splash of water, and the properties of water in its various states are clearly recognizable in this collection.

There are three deisgns from *Crystallization* on this platform.

Design 3a

Crystallization, Dress
ECCO® Leather and busks
Groninger Museum, 2012.0205.a
Mask in collaboration with Irene Bussemaker

One is a brown, knee-length dress with half sleeves and a zipper down the front. Strips of leather have been sewn together to construct a form-fitting sheath reminiscent of a 1940s silhouette.

Leather strips run horizontally across the chest to form a smooth flat bodice. From the bottom of the bust, the strips run vertically to the hemline, hugging the body closely as if corseted but with no formal waistline.

Across the bodice is a large bow fashioned from the same strips of tanned leather. Here the strips have been left separated so they bubble out to create the giant bow detail.

The same bowing strips detail repeats in the sleeves, which bubble out from the shoulder and end in a cuff at the elbow.

The detail comes back again with a bubble pocket on each hip and a final time at the bottom of the garment. The hemline bucks out in a slight flip.

An intricate mask, created in collaboration with Irene Bussemaker, obscures the face. It is composed of mottled black and white feathers with two antennae that stretch up from the bridge of the nose.

Design 3b

Crystallization, Dress, Collar, July 2010
Transparent polyethylene terepththalate (PET), ECCO leather with oil treatment, goat leather, silver chains and viscose
2012.0206.a-b

Also from the *Crystallization* collection is a shimmering gold mini-dress with what appears to be a splash of water cascading around the bodice. The dress has a bandeau top and gold waistband. Strips of gold leather are folded into frills and drape down the front and sides.

Surrounding the dress is a lifelike imitation of a splash of water, created from polyethylene terephthalate plastic. Waves encircle the head and torso, and extend down the front of the bodice to the hem. The dress appears frozen in time, at the precise moment that a wave crashes over the wearer. Van Herpen used a hot air gun and pair of pliers to create the wave effect.

Touchable

You may touch a sample of this crystallized-in-plastic splash of water at Stop 4.

Design 3c

Crystallization, Skirt, Top
In collaboration with Daniel Widrig and Materialise
3-D-printed polyamide, goat leather, and transparent lasered acrylic sheets
Groninger Museum, 2012.0207.a–b

Finally, from the *Crystallization* collection is an all-white design consisting of a dramatic 3D printed top and a fitted miniskirt. It is the first 3D printed garment ever sent down the runway, and was created in collaboration with Daniel Widrig and Materialise.

The top resembles limestone deposits hardened into a mass of ridged shells forming a dramatic shawl.

Two ovular shells with a hole at the centre form a high, tight, pointed collar. Two more shells spiral out over the shoulders, and large round shells cover the upper arms.

The bodice is constructed of two oval shells that meet in a solid panel down the center of the torso. The bottom rims expose the waist and navel, and a hole at the centre of each shell reveals the lower curves of the breasts.

A white leather mini skirt, sitting low on the hip and ending high on the thigh, completes the ensemble. Transparent lasered acrylic sheets splay out from the hip and away from the body like a spray of water.

Stop 4: Table of Touchable Samples (1 of 2)

There are two tables of touchable samples along the walls of this gallery.

We invite you to touch the samples on these tables. These are from designs in this exhibition, and provide a glimpse into Iris van Herpen's process. Van Herpen is known for her willingness to experiment with new fabrics and unexpected, non-traditional materials. Her work constantly transforms the boundaries of traditional handwork, new technology, and performance. Please handle these touchable samples with care.

On this table are three samples: one from *Chemical Crows* and two from *Magnetic Motion.*

From the January 2008 collection *Chemical Crows*, Stop 2 in this gallery, you will find brass ribs from children's umbrellas fastened together by industrial boat filament yarn. Van Herpen transformed these often-overlooked rods into extravagant sculptures that suggest birds' wings.

From the crystal dress in the September 2014 collection *Magnetic Motion*, Stop 7 in the Roloff Beny Gallery, this 3D printed material was created using stereolithography and a beam of ultraviolet light to harden a clear liquid substance layer by layer. The fine details in the transparent ribbons of resin recall water crystallized into ice.

Also from *Magnetic Motion* is a sample from the transparent halo-like acrylic netting used over the black dress. The material began as flat, laser-cut acrylic that was painstakingly heated and hand-moulded into cones and linked by silicone.

Stop 5: Table of Touchable Samples (2 of 2)

On this table are samples from three collections: *Crystallization, Hacking Infinity* and *Wilderness Embodied*.

From the July 2010 collection *Crystallization*, Stop 3 in this gallery, is a piece of transparent plastic hand-moulded into a splash of water by a hot air gun and pair of pliers.

From the March 2015 collection *Hacking Infinity*, Stop 8 in the Roloff Beny Gallery, is a piece of translucent metal fabric folded over into a pleated fan. Woven together from tiny stainless streel threads, the fabric is hand-burnished to create an iridescent nebula of blue, red, orange, purple and yellow.

From the July 2013 collection *Wilderness Embodied,* Stop 6 in the Roloff Beny Gallery, is the mix of iron filings and resin used in the charcoal grey mini dress, created in collaboration with artist Jólan van der Wiel. Van Herpen and van der Wiel used liquid iron resin to create a rubbery, pearlescent substance that can be manipulated by magnets. This substance was then applied to a circular dress form and shaped into a surface resembling a crater-covered moon.

Stop 6: Wilderness Embodied

The July 2013 collection *Wilderness Embodied* is inspired by the powerful, unbridled forces of nature manifested in, or on, the body. On this platform are two designs from *Wilderness Embodied*.

Design 6a

Wilderness Embodied, Dress
In collaboration with Cedric Laquieze
Silicone laser-cut feathers, gull skulls, pearls, cotton, and flexible metal busk
Groninger Museum, 2016.0214

One dress is champagne-coloured and covered in long, silicone feathers that waft around the body. The form-fitting garment is a sculptural ode to the avian world and was created in collaboration with Cedric Laquieze.

Structured like a housecoat, the garment has no lapels, is wrapped closed and cinched with a belt in champagne patent leather.

The hemline curves around the top of the knees and rises up to a modest mid-thigh. Wide, three-quarter length sleeves end in a crude open cuff just above the wrists.

A gull skull covered in pearls and feathers emerges from each shoulder. Each has an open beak and splayed wings as if about to take flight.

Design 6b

Wilderness Embodied, Dress
In collaboration with Jólan van der Wiel
Iron filings, polyurethane resin, and cotton
Courtesy of the designer

The other *Wilderness Embodied* design is a long-sleeved mini-dress created in collaboration with Jólan van der Wiel**.** It is constructed of a mixture of iron filings, polyurethane resin, and cotton that has been pinched and textured to look like spiky terrain.

The dress has a simple crew collar and skims the body without hugging it, ending at the upper thigh.

From the collar, the sleeves curve out in exaggerated arcs to create a circle when the wearer's arms are at their sides. The manipulation of the material is extra dense and the pinching looks like clustered rock forms that are sharp to the touch.

The entire piece is constructed in shades of murky charcoal gray and mossy sea green, and the crater-like topography of the fabric evokes the surface of the moon.

Touchable

You may touch a sample of this material at Stop 5 in the Patricia Harris Gallery of Textiles and Costume.

Stop 7: Magnetic Motion

From September 2014, *Magnetic Motion* was inspired by the interplay of magnetic forces Iris van Herpen observed in the Large Hadron Collider when she and Philip Beesley visited CERN, the European Organization for Nuclear Research. This collection explores the dynamic forces of attraction and repulsion.

There are three dresses from *Magnetic Motion* on this platform. There are also touchable samples from two of these dresses at Stop 4 in the Patricia Harris Gallery of Textiles and Costume.

Design 7a

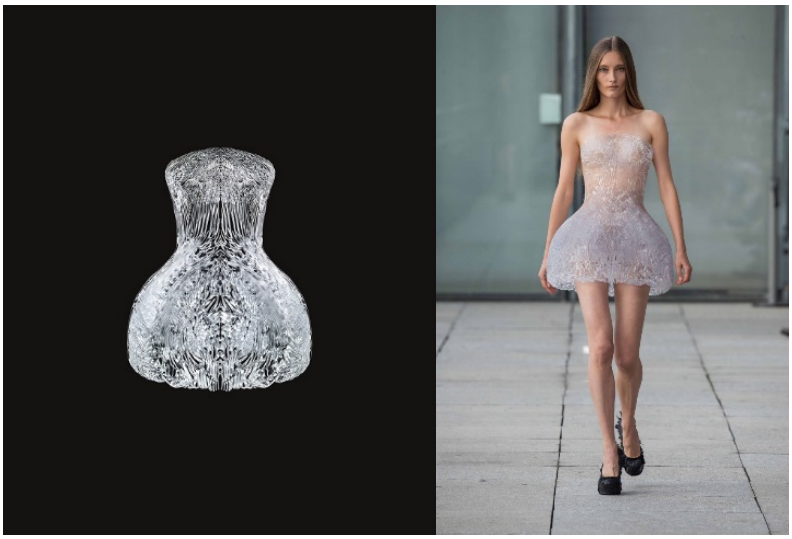
Magnetic Motion, Dress
In collaboration with Philip Beesley
Thermoformed laser-cut acrylic, silicone chevrons, and microfibre
Courtesy of the designer

One of the *Magnetic Motion* designs, created in collaboration with Philip Beesley, features a black dress overlaid with a translucent halo-like three-dimensional sculpture.

An underlying dress in black microfiber has rounded shoulders, puff sleeves to the elbow, and a hemline ending above the knee. The hem scoops higher in front to around the mid-thigh. The dress features a deep v-neckline with no lapels and a thin black zipper down the front.

A sculptural overlay constructed of translucent laser-cut acrylic and silicone resembles super-large spiky bubble wrap. The acrylic was heated and hand-molded into cones, the pointed ends facing inward and the circular bottoms creating a net of hundreds of small, translucent webs linked by silicone. This overlay follows the lines of the black dress and doubles the bulk of the overall garment– but still maintains a light, airy, bubble bath feeling because of the material's translucence.

Dress 7b



Magnetic Motion, Dress
In collaboration with Niccolò Casas and 3D Systems
3-D-printed transparent photopolymer and stereolithography resin
High Museum of Art, Atlanta, purchase with funds from the Decorative Arts Acquisition Trust and through prior acquisitions, 2015.82

Also from *Magnetic Motion* is a transparent crystal micro-mini designed and 3D printed in collaboration with Niccolò Casas and 3D Systems.

Constructed from transparent photopolymer and resin, this dress was printed in two pieces, a front and back that snap together. A strapless bandeau top hugs the bust and torso, then flares out at the hip in a bubbled skirt ending high on the leg.

The top of the garment is etched with a dense swirl of lines across the bust. The detail resembles the shimmering surface of ice, and provides a bit of opaqueness where needed.

The garment becomes more transparent below the bust. Vertical lines follow the curve of the waistline, angling inward at the narrowest point and out over the accentuated arc of the hips.

The dense, crystal-like etching picks up again where the skirt bubbles around the legs, again mimicking the surface of ice and providing an opaque screen.

Design 7c

Magnetic Motion, Dress
Goat leather, Swarovski stones, acrylic chevrons, and viscose
Courtesy of the designer

Finally, *Magnetic Motion* features a beige dress covered with a net of acrylic chevrons topped with Swarovski stones.

The underlying sheath has a mock turtleneck collar and fits the body snuggly. The garment flares out dramatically at the hips and turns inward sharply to create a narrow skirt ending at mid-thigh. The hem scoops slightly higher in the center.

A gold and black chain netting drapes over the entire dress, ending just past the skirt. The chains hang lower on the sides, creating an upside-down V at the bottom.

Stop 8: Hacking Infinity

Hacking Infinity from March 2015 explores the idea of terraforming, or modifying the surface of another planet to resemble that of Earth. The circle is the formal starting point for these designs, representing the shape of planetary bodies as well as a symbol for infinity. In this collection, van Herpen extends the boundaries of the human body with synthetic terrains and new textures. There are three designs from *Hacking Infinity* on this platform.

Design 8a

Hacking Infinity, Dress
In collaboration with Philip Beesley
Thermoformed acrylic, lacquer leather, silicone chevrons, silk, and Swarovski crystals
Courtesy of the designer

One of the dresses features a net of large black acrylic links over white lacquer leather bra cups and miniskirt. It was created in collaboration with Philip Beesley.

Three chain link straps connect a narrow black collar to a bodice constructed entirely of hexagonal black links. The front of the bodice is an oval surface that extends past the body on both sides and consists of hexagonal links and silicone chevrons accented with Swarovski crystals.

Design 8b

Hacking Infinity, Dress
Hand-burnished metal gauze and cotton
Courtesy of the designer

Also from *Hacking Infinity* is an iridescent dress constructed of hand-burnished metal gauze and cotton, with a circle of pleats in front. The fabric is light bronze and translucent, woven together by tiny threads of stainless steel. The dress has a busy abstract pattern with swirls of blue, red, orange, purple and yellow, its nebulous sheen achieved by hand burnishing.

At the base of this garment is a sleeveless dress with a boat neck, baggy at the waist and ending at the knee.

The fabric used in this dress was hand pleated into a fan shape called *plissé* to outline and echo the body. A panel of pleats radiates out from the center of the dress and ripples around in a circle at the front of the dress.

Touchable

A touchable sample of this fabric can be found at Stop 5 in the Patricia Harris Gallery of Textiles and Costume.

Design 8c

Hacking Infinity, Dress
In collaboration with Niccolò Casas and 3D Systems
3-D-printed transparent photopolymer and stereolithography resin
Courtesy of the designer

Hacking Infinity also features a 3D printed translucent strapless mini dress in a soft shade of silvery-lilac. It was created in collaboration with Niccolò Casas and 3D Systems.

The garment is constructed from transparent photopolymer and stereolithography resin that hug the body like rubber. It features a sweetheart neckline, and its waistline nips in at the narrowest area above the hips. The hemline ends mid-thigh and the material lends itself to a featheriness that splays open ever so slightly. The willowy, semi-transparent print gives an ethereal feel to the piece.

Stop 9: Aeriform: Dome Dress

Design 9

"Dome Dress", presented as Look 18
Zinc-coated, laser-cut steel in collaboration with Philip Beesley
2017.63.1. This acquisition was made possible with the generous support of the Louise Hawley Stone Charitable Trust

The *Aeriform* collection from Fall 2017 explores the natural tension, contrast and space between water, air, shadow and light. There is one dress from *Aeriform* in this exhibition: the "Dome Dress." It was created out of zinc-coated laser-cut steel by Iris van Herpen in collaboration with Philip Beesley.

Iris van Herpen says her "Dome Dress" is "made of a delicate metal lace of a geodesic molecular pattern, that echoes around the body like a silver cloud, obscuring the contours of the wearer."

Zinc-coated, laser-cut steel circles were expanded over a mould to form shimmering, feathery-light domes. Linked by tubes and worn over a flesh tone underlay, the domes float around the body, billowing weightlessly through air.

We highly recommend taking time to enjoy the documentary film about the making of this dress. The film is in this gallery, to the left of the entrance, with benches to sit on.

The "Dome Dress" and the documentary were commissioned by the Royal Ontario Museum.

Touchable

Touchable samples from this dress can be found near the film, and provide a glimpse into the process behind its creation.

Conclusion

Thank you for visiting *Iris van Herpen: Transforming Fashion* at the Royal Ontario Museum. We hope you enjoyed your visit.