

Bal Harbour Shops caters to growing interest in art through cultural space

By [Joe McCarthy](#)

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Fashion Project Morphing Exhibition

South Florida shopping center Bal Harbour Shops is bringing consumers a range of art experiences this summer through its Fashion Project.

Fashion Project events trace the evolution of fashion over time and explore the many minds that contribute to lasting trends, showing how sartorial choices influence the broader culture. Driven partly by Art Basel Miami, affluent coastal areas of Florida are attracting consumers with an appetite for art who will appreciate the chance to broaden their awareness of fashion.

"Fashion is culture and Bal Harbour Shops' heritage is to provide its customers with unique experiences," said Cathy Leff, the former director of The Wolfsonian-FIU Museum, Miami.

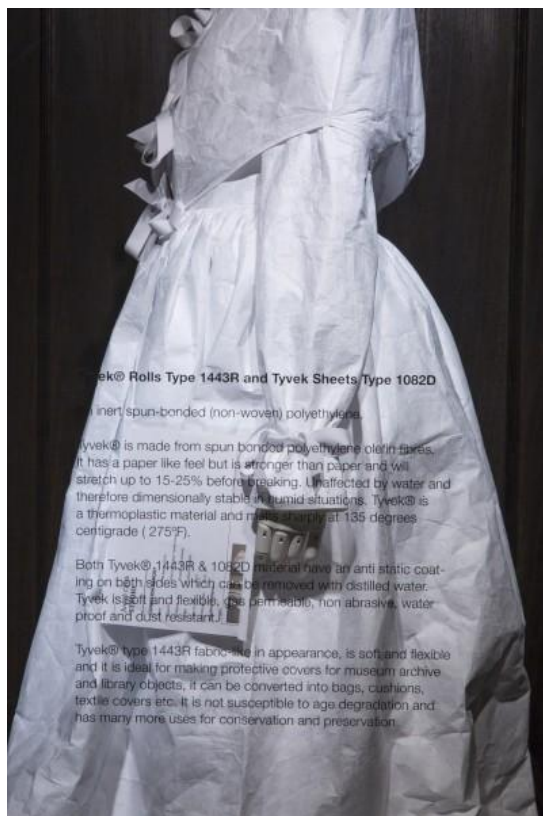
"Fashion Project's high-level exhibits and cultural programs, especially ones related to fashion and the culture of what we wear, provide our clientele with the opportunity to enjoy and gain a deeper appreciation and understanding of the designers, movers, makers and writers who have or are shaping fashion, and the art, design, production and broader culture surrounding fashion, in a setting that sells the best in fashion," she said.

“Our events and programs include cultural chats, author talks/book signings, films, exhibitions and demonstrations that attract the on-site shopper, as well as visitors who come especially for the cultural experience.”

Morphing ideas

Bal Harbour Shops strives to differentiate itself from other shopping centers through engaging events and the Fashion Project is the latest extension of this.

The Fashion Project will include several multidisciplinary events with varying levels of interactivity. Tying all the events together is an abiding sense that fashion is much larger than what we wear.



Fashion Project at Bal Harbour Shops

Cathy Leff, the former director of The Wolfsonian–FIU, and London-based curator Judith Clark collaborated on the conceptualization of the Fashion Project.

Through Aug. 28 the exhibition “FP02: Morphing” aims to challenge how people view art, disrupting previously solidified opinions by presenting objects from a former version of the exhibit in new ways.



Fashion Project Morphing Exhibition

Ms. Clark said of the exhibit, "Everyone can have different stories about the same objects. In museums you never get to see the objects presented differently. With Fashion Project, we are exploring ideas around display by experimenting with various ways of presenting the same objects."

On June 3 at 7 p.m. guests can listen to esteemed designers and architects discuss the overlapping influences of architecture and fashion.

The future of wearable objects and their role in the fashion world will be explored on June 5 at 7 p.m.

High heels will be parsed on June 11 at 7 p.m., as panelists chart the iconic footwear from its root as menswear item to its now ironclad status as a symbol of femininity.

Ms. Leff notes that the high heel discussion is particularly relevant now considering that the Cannes Film Festival banned women with flat shoes from walking on the runway not too long ago.

Guests will have the opportunity to join a sketching session in the afternoon of June 20. Participants will draw inspiration from the Morphing exhibition.

Other events include a discussion of the shoulder pads of the 1980s and Haute Couture Ateliers. All events are free and open to the public.

The Fashion Project operates on the third floor of Bal Harbour Shops from noon to 8 p.m. Monday through Saturday and from noon to 6 p.m. on Sundays.

Some of the partners involved include the American Institute of Architects, Bass Museum of Art, Miami Rail, Miami Center for Architecture and Design, FIU's Miami Beach Urban Studio and Museum of Art and Design in New York.

Out in front

Digital may have plateaued in its cannibalization of in-store sales, setting forward-looking shopping centers up to capture a large portion of the retail market.

Consumers mainly use digital to facilitate in-store purchases through interactive touchpoints and research. Combined with the desire among brands for greater autonomy, shopping centers find themselves in fertile territory and places such as Bal Harbour Shops in Florida are capitalizing on the changing climate with immersive, rejuvenating environments ([see story](#)).

Other luxury retailers are dedicated to providing immersive experiences to their customers as well.

The intersection of contemporary art and luxury has always been hectic with shout-outs and an atmosphere of grandeur, but when the two fields merge through collaborations, can tangible value be gleaned?

Brands are able to highlight their devotion to craft and innovation by borrowing an artist's aesthetic, but such maneuvers can have the unintentional consequence of downplaying the quality of that brand's own hard-earned aesthetic. Also, commercialization of venerated artists may jeopardize the aura of ultra-exclusivity that has driven art sales at both auctions and fairs to all-time highs ([see story](#)).

For Bal Harbour Shops, the primary exhibit acts as the sun around which all the other events revolve.

"It's an exquisite, museum-quality site-specific exhibit," Ms. Leff said. "Currently on view are iconic pieces by Leon Bakst for the Ballets Russes, Hussein Chalaya (remote control dress), Felicity Brown, Alexander McQueen, Elsa Schiaparelli, among others.

"It can be viewed and appreciated by a shopper in as few as 10 minutes, or provide a more in-depth experience for those with more time on the history of fashion, on fashion collecting, museum practice, end exhibition design," she said.

Final Take

Joe McCarthy, staff reporter on Luxury Daily, New York