

***RODARTE* exhibition at
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF WOMEN IN THE ARTS
NOVEMBER 10, 2018–FEBRUARY 10, 2019**



WASHINGTON—The celebrated American luxury fashion house Rodarte, founded by sisters Kate and Laura Mulleavy, will be featured this fall in the first fashion exhibition organized by the National Museum of Women in the Arts ([NMWA](http://nmwa.org)). On view November 10, 2018–February 10, 2019, *Rodarte* will showcase the designers' visionary concepts, impeccable craftsmanship and profound impact on the fashion industry.

The exhibition will explore the distinctive design principles, material concerns and reoccurring themes that position the Mulleavys' work within the landscape of contemporary art and fashion. Spanning the first 13 years of Rodarte, nearly 100 complete looks, presented as they were shown on the runway, will be on view, highlighting selections from their most pivotal collections. Through a conceptual blend of high fashion and modern femininity that employs a multiplicity of textiles and meticulous couture techniques, Rodarte has drawn critical acclaim from both the art and fashion worlds since its inception in 2005.

“Rodarte continually prompts a dialogue between the worlds of contemporary art and fashion,” said NMWA Director Susan Fisher Sterling. “This exhibition will continue that discussion with new insights, illustrating the Mulleavy sisters’ highly creative practice and sources of inspiration.”

Early Rodarte collections drew critical acclaim for their use of unconventional methods and materials that fused dressmaking and art-making processes. Together, these collections reveal a rapid command of their *métier* as the Mulleavys mastered one technique after another, skillfully combining them in subsequent collections.

“We are honored to be the first designers to have a fashion exhibition organized by the National Museum of Women in the Arts,” said Kate and Laura Mulleavy.

At NMWA, the collections will be displayed on accessorized mannequins as well as on invisible mounts, which will present the designs as floating sculptural forms.



“Rodarte burst onto the scene in 2005, taking the fashion and art worlds by surprise with their deeply personal and conceptual approach to fashion design,” said Jill D’Alessandro, guest curator of *Rodarte* and curator in charge of costume and textile arts, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. “The exhibition celebrates the Mulleavys’ pioneering approach and explores their use of narrative to convey complex thoughts on a wide range of subjects, including film, literature, art history, nature and the California landscape.”

With each collection, the Mulleavys draw inspiration from a wide range of artistic sources, layering these elements into abstract narratives. This use of narrative allows them to address larger questions about the human condition and the greater world.

For example, in their Spring 2012 Collection, the Mulleavys were influenced by Vincent van Gogh. The collection references the painterly details of *The Starry Night* (1889) and Van Gogh’s iconic sunflowers, however, their initial ideas grew out of a visit to the Mount Wilson Observatory in Los Angeles. It was there, not far from the Mulleavys’ Pasadena home, that Edwin Hubble discovered that the universe was expanding. Throughout the collection, digitally printed planetary images of space and sunspots are intermixed with details from Van Gogh’s paintings—which share surprising

aesthetic similarities. The Mulleavys' seamless blending of scientific imagery and Van Gogh's art demonstrates that the painter's abstracted interpretation of celestial bodies is, in fact, much closer to scientific reality than the 19th-century artist could have known.

Nature is also a primary source of inspiration for the Mulleavys, and can be found in most Rodarte collections, frequently in the form of floral and garden motifs. Drawing upon their childhood spent outdoors, the sisters often define their process through their relationship to the natural world. A garden is not just a garden, but a specific memory, touch or scent; a subject matter as serene as a flower garden has deeper implications. For the Spring 2017 Collection, inspired by the poetic Spanish film *El espíritu de la colmena* (*The Spirit of the Beehive*) (1973), models were sent down the runway in yellow, white and black-hued layers of ruffled lace and dotted tulle reminiscent of a honeycomb. That same spring, the North American rusty patched bumblebee was added to the endangered species list for the first time.

The *Rodarte* exhibition is curated by Jill D'Alessandro, curator in charge of costume and textile arts, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, with support from Virginia Treanor, associate curator, NMWA. NMWA partnered with New York-based design firm Rafael de Cárdenas / Architecture at Large (RDC/AAL) to create an immersive environment within the exhibition.

In conjunction with the exhibition, NMWA's Museum Shop is creating a number of limited-edition products in collaboration with Kate and Laura Mulleavy of Rodarte, artist Jess Rotter and design firm [Third Drawer Down](#). Rotter's whimsical drawings will be featured on a variety of everyday objects alongside a special series of paper dolls. The Rodarte collection for NMWA will be available exclusively at the NMWA shop and online at [shop.nmwa.org](#).

Rodarte is organized by the National Museum of Women in the Arts. The exhibition is made possible by Christine Suppes, with additional funding provided by Denise Littlefield Sobel and Northern Trust. Further support is provided by the Sue J. Henry and Carter G. Phillips Exhibition Fund, Tresemmé, Swarovski, and NMWA's Couture Circle. In-kind support is provided by KnollTextiles and Levy NYC Design & Production.

BACKGROUND

Kate and Laura Mulleavy received their liberal arts degrees from the University of California at Berkeley in 2001. Kate (b. 1979) studied art history with an emphasis on the 19th and 20th centuries. Laura (b. 1980) focused her studies on literature and the Modern novel. They were raised in Northern California. Following their graduation from Berkeley, both Kate and Laura returned to their home in Los Angeles, where they launched their brand Rodarte. The name



“Rodarte” is taken from Kate and Laura's mother's maiden name. The first Rodarte collection, comprised of 10 hand-finished pieces, appeared on the February 3, 2005, cover of *Women's Wear Daily* within days of Kate and Laura's first trip to New York. Shortly thereafter, in September 2005, Rodarte presented its first complete runway collection to accolades during New York Fashion Week.

More acclaim soon followed. Rodarte was nominated for the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA) Swarovski Emerging Womenswear Designer Award in both 2006 and 2007 and received the award in 2008. The following year, 2009, the brand was awarded the CFDA Womenswear Designer of the Year Award; in 2010, they



received the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Award in Fashion and were the first fashion designers to receive the National Arts Award from Americans for the Arts. That same year, they designed and created the ballet costumes for the Academy Award-winning film *Black Swan*, directed by Darren Aronofsky, receiving a Critics' Choice nomination for their work. In 2013, Rodarte received the Legend of Fashion Award from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

The Mulleavys' design and costume work has been featured in exhibitions at the Cooper-Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum (2010), the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2011), the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2011) and the Metropolitan Museum of Art (2018). Their work is included in the permanent collections of the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Museum at FIT in New York.

The Los Angeles Philharmonic's 2012 production of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, led by Gustavo Dudamel, in collaboration with Frank Gehry, Rodarte and Christopher Alden, featured costume designs by Kate and Laura Mulleavy. *Woodshock*, the feature film written and directed by Kate and Laura Mulleavy, starring Kirsten Dunst and distributed by A24, premiered at the 74th Venice Film Festival and was released in theaters in September 2017.

A number of international icons have worn Rodarte, including Beyoncé, Cate Blanchett, Maggie Cheung, Kirsten Dunst, Dakota and Elle Fanning, Lady Gaga, Selena Gomez, Jay-Z, Nicole Kidman, Keira Knightley, Brie Larson, Michelle Obama, Sienna Miller, Julianne Moore, Ruth Negga, Natalie Portman, Rihanna, Saoirse Ronan, Chloë Sevigny, Tilda Swinton and Kerry Washington.

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF WOMEN IN THE ARTS

The National Museum of Women in the Arts ([NMWA](https://www.nmwa.org/)) is the only major museum in the world solely dedicated to championing women through the arts. With its collections, exhibitions, programs and

online content, the museum seeks to inspire dynamic exchanges about art and ideas. NMWA advocates for better representation of women artists and serves as a vital center for thought leadership, community engagement and social change. NMWA addresses the gender imbalance in the presentation of art by bringing to light important women artists of the past while promoting great women artists working today. The collections highlight painting, sculpture, photography and video by artists including Louise Bourgeois, Mary Cassatt, Judy Chicago, Frida Kahlo, Shirin Neshat, Faith Ringgold, Pipilotti Rist, Amy Sberald and Élisabeth Louise Vigée-LeBrun.

NMWA is located at 1250 New York Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. It is open Mon.–Sat., 10 a.m.–5 p.m. and Sun., noon–5 p.m. Admission is \$10 for adults, \$8 for visitors 65 and over and students, and free for NMWA members and youths 18 and under. Admission is free the first Sunday of each month. For information, call 202-783-5000, visit nmwa.org, [Broad Strokes Blog](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) or [Instagram](#).

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IMAGES

Rodarte, Spring/Summer 2018 runway; Courtesy of Rodarte; Photo © Greg Kessler/Kessler Studio

Rodarte, Spring/Summer 2009 runway; Courtesy of Rodarte; Photo © Dan & Corina Lecca

Rodarte, Black Swan costume, 2010; Photo © Autumn de Wilde

Kate Mulleavy (left) and Laura Mulleavy of Rodarte; Photo © Clara Balzary