

CULTURE

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IMAGES OF AN ICON

EXHIBITIONS HONOUR MARILYN MONROE 50 YEARS AFTER HER DEATH

BY FIONA BRUTSCHER | JULY 30TH 2012 | 11:37 AM



When you picture Marilyn Monroe, you almost certainly have a specific image in mind. There will surely be blonde, curled hair, red lips (probably pouted), and that unique beauty spot – all sitting atop a perfect hourglass figure wrapped up in one of the actress's most recognisable outfits. Is it Marilyn wearing the billowing white dress in *The Seven Year Itch*? Or are you thinking of the hot pink gown with matching gloves and sparkling diamonds in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*? Or perhaps the beaded LBD she sported in *Some Like It Hot*?

Whatever your mental image of Marilyn Monroe, it's sure to be tied to her inimitable style and flair for glamorous fashion. Hence, it comes as no surprise that exhibitions and tributes to the late actress often focus on those signature looks so indelibly etched in the public imagination. Surrounding the 50th anniversary of her untimely death, which occurs this coming Sunday, major exhibitions and several glamorous brands pay tribute to the late icon and her enduring impact on popular culture, each with a different focus.

'MARILYN' AT MUSEO SALVATORE FERRAGAMO, FLORENCE

Earlier this year, Getty Images Gallery in London showed a collection of imagery and memorabilia, including numerous film costumes worn by Monroe. Since June, the **Museo Salvatore Ferragamo** has been hosting a retrospective showing some of the same costumes. The highlights include all three aforementioned on-screen dresses, as well as the scandalous cascade of glittering nude barely-there fabric Monroe wore to sing her sultry *Happy Birthday* to President Kennedy, just a few months before her death. The pieces on display are put in the context of a Marilyn mythology, which the curators trace to ancient mythology as depicted in classical art, for example by placing nude photographs of Monroe beside a reclining nude marble sculpture, or by comparing Monroe on the beach to Botticelli's *Venus*. The analysis is rounded out by personal memorabilia, pictures, magazine covers, film reels and audio footage.



And then, there's the shoes. This being the Museo Ferragamo, there are 30 pairs of shoes created by 'the shoemaker to the stars' for Marilyn, some of which are instantly recognisable. In fact, Ferragamo allegedly invented the metal-reinforced stiletto heel for the petite performer. Seeing up close the red Swarovski crystal heels custom made for one of the biggest on-screen stars of all time really drives home how tiny she was in real life. This exhibition, which is a must for die-hard fans, runs until January 2013.



'MARILYN MONROE: TRIBUTE TO A FEMALE ICON' AT GALLERIA CA 'D'ORO, MIAMI

Also in Italy, Rome's **Galleria Ca 'd'Oro** opened the exhibition 'Marilyn Monroe: Tribute to a Female Icon' on June 8th, less than a week after what would have been Marilyn Monroe's 86th birthday. The exhibition has since crossed the Atlantic and will re-open in the Miami branch of the gallery on August 5th, the anniversary of Monroe's death. The gallery, which specialises in contemporary art, will be showing how the pop culture icon Marilyn earned her place in 21st century art, as a popular motif, muse or cypher. The biggest tribute to the actress – literally – is Seward Johnson's giant painted bronze sculpture depicting the famous pose from the scene in *The Seven Year Itch* where Monroe's dress is blown up by hot air from a subway grate. Most of the other works on display are by Italian artists, such as Erika Calesini whose photo series *marilyn is fresh air* was inspired by that same scene, which has obviously captured the artistic imagination. However, no exhibition on this topic can be complete without one of Andy Warhol's *Marilyns*, several of which are on display at the gallery.