

QUEST



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ANDY WARHOL,
PHOTOGRAPHED BY
HARRY BENSON IN 1983



David Patrick Columbia
NEW YORK SOCIAL DIARY

LEGENDS and Legendary. On the fifth day of last month, right smack after Labor Day, came Fashion Week. Fashion Week has been around for years now. A woman named **Fern Mallis** turned a business, a whole industry, into a performance—into New York theater, by which I mean the

feeling that you're at the center of the world.

Two or so years ago, Fashion Week was moved from the tents in Bryant Park behind the New York Public Library to Lincoln Center. People wondered why. I don't know the story but someone came up with the idea. Maybe it

was Fern Mallis.

Upon first hearing, it sounded inconvenient for all those who come to New York specifically to see the collections. However, it turned out to be visionary. Lincoln Center gave the whole schmatta business a sense of stature and grandeur in all the different social pock-

ets in New York. It's called class. New York style.

It used to be, for the rich, chic, and shameless, that summer ended sometime in September. Now, it's whenever the Fashion Week calendar is calling. For those attending the scores of collections, after-parties, and marketing

THE SEASON OPENING FOR THE METROPOLITAN OPERA AT LINCOLN CENTER



Martha Stewart



Jessica Hart



Marjorie and Michael Stern



Crystal Renn and Erin O'Connor



Julie Macklowe and Zang Toi



Beatrice and Christopher Daggett



Katie Lee and Beth Ostrosky Stern



Renée Fleming

THE PREMIERE OF *SCATTER MY ASHES* AT BERGDORF'S



Pat Cleveland



Alvin Valley and Michelle Harper



Jamie Johnson and Lily Kwong



Jeisa Chiminazzo and Nadejda Savcova



Robert Verdi, Linda Fargo and Sami Gayle



Minnie Mortimer and Peter Davis



Valerie and Graziano de Boni

receptions, not to mention the dinners and luncheons, it is hyper-social New York.

For the younger crowd, the hip and the hipless, it kicks off the season of Going Out. Parties, clubs, parties, openings (store, bar, bicycle shop, etc.), screenings, and whatever is on the scene. This is vintage New York, and always new. This is why people come to here to make their way in life. If you're 20-something, 30-something, or even something-something, Fashion Week is like the circus comes to town.

Now that it is established at Lincoln Center, Fashion Week is launched by a lunch. The Couture Council of the

Museum at FIT, hosts an event where they honor a famous designer. Last year, it was **Valentino**; the year before, **Lagerfeld**. It is held the day or so before the first collection hits the runway. This year, they honored **Oscar de la Renta**.

A lunch like this brings out the money, so it is good for the fashion retail business. It's a time to get out the Best Dressed stuff. There must have been scores of well-dressed women in their Oscars. This is the smart crowd, the SUV-with-a-driver crowd; the fashion mavens, the culture crowd; and the philanthropic crowd. This year, **Henry Kissinger** was a guest at Mrs. de la Renta's ta-

ble, along with **Mayor Bloomberg** and **Barbara Walters**.

Oscar drew the largest attendance that this lunch had ever had—more than 600 people. Some were comparing it to the spring "hat luncheon," hosted by the Women's Committee of the Central Park Conservancy (by far the most financially successful luncheon in the city).

The Couture Council raised almost a million dollars, which goes to the Museum at FIT to fund their exhibitions, lectures, and student programs. FIT is a highly successful college in New York. It is a part of SUNY, but they can claim that a very high percentage of

their graduates go directly into employment in some aspect of the fashion industry.

This event put the organization on the New York social map. This luncheon, which now opens the Fall Gala Season in New York, is *important*—a must-attend. It is where you can get a look at *Who's Who* and *Who's Here...* in New York, right now. It is theater but, remember one thing, it is *working* theater. And work they do.

Oscar de la Renta possesses the ultimate stature in American fashion today, or ever. He has European fashion stature. He is also an example of *How To Become a Man of Stature*.

The last trained by the Old School of the Couturier, he's had a long career and come a long long way from Santo Domingo, via Spain and Paris, to New York.

In his 50-year career, he has established himself not only as an important American designer (a multimillion-dollar-a-year business), but a distinguished member of the community. All of the major philanthropies in New York have been either touched by his professional and social largesse, or by his active work. He is well-known among his close associates for his quiet philanthropies in the interest of his native Dominicans. He wears his success in a patri-

cian manner, a reflection of his Latin roots, and he keeps an intense, daily involvement in his business in his 80th year.

Oscar de la Renta's life is ultimate New York. Despite his European and Latin backgrounds, his achievements could only have been accomplished here. Although it is rarely mentioned, his great success has always been a team effort, a situation of profound support, from his wives—the late **Francoise** and his current wife of several decades, **Annette**. These women have been there with their support in myriad ways, both of them excellent partners to an industriously creative, ambitious man.

The luncheon: It was a very hot day, overcast and late summer muggy. Traffic was normal: a logjam. The 2012 Couture Council Award for Artistry of Fashion luncheon was held on the Promenade of the David H. Koch Theater.

The program opened with the luncheon's co-chairs, **Elleanora Kennedy** and **Alexandra Lebenthal**, welcoming the guests. **Liz Peek**, chairman of the Couture Council, told us more about the Museum at FIT and the school itself.

Liz then introduced **Dr. Joyce Brown**, president of FIT, who announced a new Couture Council scholarship for all four years of the program. This year, it was funded

by one of the luncheon guests who wished to remain anonymous (I later learned she was seated at my table). Then Liz introduced **Mayor Bloomberg** to present the award to Oscar.

In accepting his award, Oscar told the guests that he believed that he worked in "the greatest country in the world," a country that had been generous to him with a long list of friends and supporters, greater than he had time to recount, but he said, "they know who they are."

In reflecting on his career of a half-century, he explained that he loves his work and, to this day, nothing gives him more pleasure than working every day in his studio on his

1STDIBS PRESENTED "THE WORLD OF GLORIA VANDERBILT" AT THEIR GALLERY IN THE NEW YORK DESIGN CENTER



Liz Smith with Sam and Elizabeth Peabody



Marcia Sherrill, Michael Bruno and Eve Krzyzanowski



Tom Brandenburger and Annie Curtin



Ben Brantley and Frederick Everstadt



Gloria Vanderbilt and Anderson Cooper



Serena Tufo, Peter Tufo and Francesca Nye