

# Review & Sports



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## Magazines need new trends every month

**VIFF** Vancouver International Film Festival opener part of a host of movies exploring parenthood Page

GOTHIC » DARK GLAMOUR

## Mourning glory

A grandly theatrical exhibition in New York turns eyes once again to Goth culture



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Attention newspaper and fashion magazines worldwide: The point is not, as you continue to report, that Gothic fashion is back, or that it "just won't die"; the point is that media stories announcing that Goth "won't die" won't die. The "Goth is back" story – or the feigned amazement that such an aesthetic cliché continues to live with very little variation among teenage subcultures and continues to influence major fashion designers (every fall, as it turns out, as the weather gets colder) – this story has become a media staple, and even though it recurs almost yearly, it always contains the same astonishment. Hell, I've written about it myself a couple of times.

The Goth story is back this fall because of a delightful but flimsy excuse, a lovely museum show that has been on in New York since Sept. 5. The museum of the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT), which is curated by fashion historian Valerie Steele (founder of the journal *Fashion Theory*, author of *Fetish: Fashion, Sex and Power* and other beautiful books), is right now home to a grandly theatrical exhibition called *Gothic: Dark Glamour*. It's a collection of high-fashion and artistic images through the ages, and argues that the current image of Goth derives primarily from the Victorian "cult of mourning" that put widows into black sequined gowns. There is also a luscious coffee-table book of the exhibition that Steele is currently touring with.

Why this exhibition now? No reason, really. You could have put it on at any time in the past 20 years. Now, you could point out – as fashion writers have, and will – that several big-league designers showed fall collections last spring that were heavy on black and buckles. You could mention Alexander McQueen and Galliano and Rodarte and show some new over-the-top Romantic stuff they are doing and pick all the black stuff for your photo spread. You could easily pick out a dozen strappy patent-leather stiletto-heeled shoes from recent collections. Then you could mention the FIT museum show – or perhaps, if you prefer, the success of Stephenie Meyer's vampire teen novels – and book and have what journalists call a peg, something current to hang your story on.

This is fair enough: When you need a new trend every week, you become adept at creating trends out of three or even two current examples. And then, if you are, say, Cintra Wilson, writing in *The New York Times* ("You just can't kill it," Sept. 17) you may use this "trend" as a trigger for reminiscences about your own past as a Goth, and musings on both the durability and the silliness of Goth and their punk-listening cousins, the emos. You end with the pain of adolescence.

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A dress by designer Kambriel, on display at New York's Fashion Institute of Technology. NADYA LEV

» Don't get me wrong: I love this story. I have done almost exactly this in this space twice in the past four years. (The last time, I used a travelling museum show about Catherine the Great as my peg.) It is telling that the *Times* used an illustration for this piece that was used in a *Vice* magazine photo spread in 2002 – a spread that also had a quasi-ironic "Goth is back" theme. However, you would be conveniently avoiding the fact that every fall there are always quite a few new fashions that are black (leading to the standard quip about black being the new black) and quite a few that are shiny and vaguely aggressive or sexual, and that high heels have always been around.

You must avoid mentioning that every season the trend-spotting firms that make up names for fashions that they then sell to advertising firms and department stores always create four or five concurrent trends that are quite opposite to each other. For example, the trendspotters will sell you, every year, on a back-to-nature theme with lots of beige and hemp ("Simple Sensual"), which is apparently happening alongside the back-to-preppy trend ("New Nostalgics" or "Restrained Classics" – this year pegged to *Mad Men*), along with a spare, geometric look ("Back to Moderne", "Urban Sport"), etc., and every single year one of these trends has to be dark and punky ("Future Goth", "New Brutalists", "Dandy Tech", etc.). Fashion magazines must publish monthly, and so alternate among these themes to suggest dramatic changes in public taste.

Goth doesn't die because it isn't really a separate or underground aesthetic: There is always and has always been, since around 1800 anyway, a thread of fashion that is proudly ornate, unapologetically lush and/or suggestive of an aggressive sexuality.

Goths are the object of the ambivalent curiosity of the media – it's a sort of eye-rolling fascination – because they never even nod to the rival trends. They are unwavering in their commitment to these powerful images of sexuality – images that conflate sex and death; images that tend to suggest restraint, confinement or discomfort; archetypal images that will always, always titillate. Another thing that will probably never change is that we have to make fun of their appearance while we describe it yearningly.