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Judith Leiber – Art of the Handbag

What: *Judith Leiber – Art of the Handbag*
September 10 – October 17, 2010

Judith Leiber is widely recognized as the grand dame of couture handbag design, having created more than three thousand different motifs during a career spanning over thirty years. *Judith Leiber: Art of the Handbag* on view at Moore College of Art & Design from September 10 – October 17, 2010, celebrates Leiber's career with twenty-five examples of her designs from the early 1970s to the late 1990s, when she retired.

Art of the Handbag is organized by The Galleries at Moore and curated by Lorie Mertes, Rochelle F. Levy Director and Chief Curator and presented in conjunction with Moore's annual Visionary Woman Awards. Launched in 2003, the awards recognize women whose lives and careers have made a significant impact on the worlds of art and design. Leiber is one of three awardees this year along with photographer and educator Wendy Ewald and curator Ann Temkin. A public opening reception for the fall exhibition season will be held Thursday, September 9 from 6 to 8pm with The Elizabeth Greenfield Zeidman Lecture, featuring a conversation with all three women on Thursday, September 30 from 2 – 3:30 pm.

Leiber's contributions to the design field are significant. Her designs transcend objects of utility to become objets d'art placing Leiber in an elite group of designers such as Lalique, Tiffany, and Cartier creators of high quality products for public consumption that have come to be regarded as art.

While Judith was at the helm of the company, the Leiber bags were all made by hand in the United States. The hand of the artist is evident at every step of the creative process. Typically, each beaded bag takes two years to design. *Minaudières*, or gilded metal evening bags, for instance, are constructed out of cardboard, stamped in brass, gold plated, painted and beaded. Each crystal is picked up with jeweler's tweezers and individually glued onto a design that has already been outlined on the bag. One beaded bag may be encrusted with as many as thirteen thousand Swarovski crystals and can take up to five days to complete.

In 1967, the first beaded minaudière was created by accident: the gold-plated metal box arrived tarnished in Leiber's factory. Working under a tight deadline, Leiber did not have time to send the frame back to Italy where the molds are made. Her solution was to apply thousands of crystals to the blemished evening bag. The handbag was so popular that even when the plating process was improved, Leiber did not return to unadorned metal bags. Her original design, which she called the Chatelaine, is still in production. The

exhibition at Moore includes a dozen examples of Leiber's minaudière designs including an all gold example of the original 1967 design.

While the bejeweled minaudière may be the style with which Leiber is most often associated, throughout her career she designed handbags using a broad range of unusual materials including antique fabrics, seashells, metalwork, carved wood, and exotic skins as varied as ostrich, lizard, karung (snake), and whipsnake, frog and alligator.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

The exhibition at Moore presents twenty-five bags that highlight the breadth and range of Judith Leiber's more than 3500 designs that are inspired from a variety of sources including the natural world, popular culture, and art history. A collector of Asian art, she also has adapted bags from antique tapestry and Oriental rug designs. Examples in the exhibition include a Buddha-shaped minaudière and fabric bags inspired by Japanese obis, Parsi Ribbons and Fez textile designs. Garden inspired handbags on view include beaded bags with elaborate floral patterns as well bags formed in the shape of an eggplant or bundle of asparagus. In addition to flora, examples of fauna displayed include a snake, a cat and, from the sea, a penguin, a fish and a nautilus shell. Artists such as Henri Matisse, Sonia Delaunay, Faberge and Charles Rennie Mackintosh and periods of art such as Art Deco and Art Nouveau are also represented.

Judith Leiber retired from designing handbags in 1999, but the power of her vision and creativity continues to attract new generations of aficionados. Inspired by Leiber's original designs, Judith Leiber L.L.C.. continues to enchant new customers and established collectors to this day. An enduring example is her Chatelaine minaudière. A gold version of the 1967 design is included in the exhibition representing how evolving reinterpretations of this classic handbag represent a meeting point for a new design generation and a pioneer.

ABOUT JUDITH LEIBER

Born in 1921, Judith Leiber was the first female apprentice journeyman and master in the Hungarian handbag guild. She survived World War II in hiding, and met her husband, an American soldier, in the streets of Budapest when the city was liberated. After moving to the United States as a GI bride, Leiber worked as a pattern maker and then foreman for several handbag companies until she formed her own company in 1963. Initially, she and her husband were the sole employees of the company. Leiber did all the designing and production while he made deliveries to major department stores. Leiber's first factory had four employees whom she worked alongside, teaching them her expertise. Today her handbags are considered unique works of art and are included in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum (London), The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), the Smithsonian Institution (Washington, DC), and many other major museum collections. Leiber has received numerous awards and recognition for her work including being the first and only designer in her field to receive the Coty Award (1973) and receiving a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Council of Fashion Designers (1994).

The exhibition is presented in cooperation with The Leiber Museum in East Hampton, New York.
www.leibermuseum.org

When: September 10 – October 17, 2010

Who: **The Galleries at Moore**

Where: Graham Gallery

Cost: **FREE** and open to the public

Info: **For more information call 215-965-4027 / www.thegalleriesatmoore.org**

20th Street and The Parkway ♦ Philadelphia, PA 19103 ♦ www.moore.edu

The Galleries at Moore are free and open to the public. Located at 20th Street and The Parkway, Philadelphia, regular Gallery hours are Monday through Friday 11 am to 7 pm and Saturday 11 am to 5 pm, closed on Sundays and all academic and legal holidays. For gallery information call 215.965.4027 or visit www.thegalleriesatmoore.org or www.moore.edu.

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Moore College of Art & Design celebrates more than 160 years of educating women for careers in the visual arts as the nation's first and only women's art college. Moore's student-focused environment and professionally active faculty form a dynamic community in the heart of Philadelphia's cultural district. The College continues to offer nine bachelor of fine arts degrees for women. New coeducational graduate programs were launched in summer, 2009. In addition, Moore provides many valuable opportunities in the arts through The Galleries at Moore, continuing education programs for professional adults, the 85 year old acclaimed Young Artists Workshop for girls and boys grades 1-12, The Art Shop and the Sculpture Park. For more information about Moore, visit www.moore.edu.