



## Marilyn Forever: New Exhibit Opens in Philadelphia

A new mixed-media exhibit at Moore College of Art & Design examines Joe DiMaggio and Marilyn Monroe's romance.

By **Venessa Lau** on February 3, 2009  
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The rhinestone-studded gown she wore to sing “Happy Birthday” to President Kennedy, her pleated white halter dress from “The Seven Year Itch” and the jeans-and-shirt combo from “The Misfits” — these are Marilyn Monroe’s most iconic outfits, but there’s another that is getting play: the dress she was buried in.

“Marilyn Monroe Wanted to Be Buried in Pucci,” which opened on Friday at the Moore College of Art & Design in Philadelphia, is a mixed-media showcase by artist Devon Dikeou partly inspired by the actress’ fondness for Emilio Pucci’s dresses — Monroe’s wardrobe was filled with the designer’s punchy kaleidoscopic frocks. “Marilyn is so overwhelming and flamboyant, kind of like a Pucci,” Dikeou, 46, says. “What lots of artists and **people** find compelling about her is the way she captivated the American consciousness and still remains of interest.” Dikeou’s fascination with Monroe is rooted as well in the actress’ relationship with Joe DiMaggio, to whom she was married for nine months in 1954. The resulting work is a rather poetic take on the two icons and the way their worlds overlapped.

The most poignant example is the rose-filled urn on display. DiMaggio, who planned Monroe’s funeral, had flowers delivered to her grave for 20 years after she died. Dikeou located the florist, Parisian in Hollywood — still in business today — and ordered bouquets to be sent to the Moore College gallery until the show ends March 14: a half-dozen red roses, three times a week (Monday, Wednesday and Friday), as per DiMaggio’s original request. “I really don’t know why it was 20 years. He gave me no reason,” says Parisian’s Louis Alhanati, 81, noting he never once raised the price for DiMaggio during that period. Alhanati, who doesn’t remember the exact figure he initially charged, is donating the arrangements to Dikeou.



Joe DiMaggio escorting Marilyn Monroe to the New York premiere of “The Seven Year Itch” in June 1955.  
*Bettmann/Corbis*

At the opening reception on Thursday, Tiffany & Co. lent the artist a diamond ring, a look-alike of the eternity band DiMaggio gave Monroe. Dikeou displayed it on a pedestal for guests to try on themselves. “It’s like stepping into somebody else’s footsteps at Grauman’s Chinese Theatre,” says Dikeou, who is the founder and publisher of the art journal *Zingmagazine* and owns a gallery in her hometown of Denver. Also featured are five (because DiMaggio wore number 5 for the New York Yankees) photographs of the half-mast flag at New York’s Union Square, taken by Dikeou on March 8, 1999 — the day DiMaggio died.

Core to the exhibit, though, are those Pucci prints. Dikeou painted 36 watercolors based on the swirling patterns; the gallery walls are covered in them as well. The number signifies Monroe’s age when she died. Dikeou, however, uses a design from her own Pucci tunic, purchased in the Eighties, rather than Monroe’s actual burial attire. “I didn’t want it to be a complete narrative of Marilyn,” she explains. “I thought, ‘What do I have to do with this? There had to be an element of me in there as well.’ [It still alludes] to the Pucci design, the mythic Monroe persona and the nostalgia around her idea of being buried in a particular design.”



Devon Dikeou's "Marilyn Monroe Wanted to Be Buried in Pucci."

*Dave Holt*

“Marilyn Monroe Wanted to Be Buried in Pucci” is an endeavor almost a decade in the making. In 2000, the artist did a similarly themed piece for the literary magazine *Open City*; one spread was a close-up photograph of Dikeou’s Pucci dress. The Union Square shots were there as well. The timing, the artist notes, was just never right to turn the motif into a full-blown exhibit until now.

Curiously enough, the project had its starting point with DiMaggio, not Monroe. Dikeou is a baseball buff (her father, John Dikeou, once owned the minor league Denver Zephyrs, now the New Orleans Zephyrs) and she often integrates the sport into her artwork. In 1995, for instance, she created a ready-made installation using her own DiMaggio-signed baseball. For the piece, called “Touch of Greatness,” she invited visitors to put their fingerprints on the ball. “You make it an artwork, but it devalues as a collectible,” says Dikeou.

Of course, here the Monroe angle makes all the difference, both visually and conceptually. “I’m interested in the folklore of stuff,” says Dikeou. “What I like about this piece is that it’s so loaded. Both Joe and Marilyn are so loaded. But there’s something just so crazy and great about it, too. I mean, who wants to be buried in Pucci?”



**Jan. 27, 2009**

**DIMAGGIO-MONROE AT MOORE COLLEGE**

New York installation artist **Devon Dikeou** is bringing a conceptual-art perspective to the storied romance between **Joe DiMaggio** and **Marilyn Monroe** in her exhibition at the **Galleries at Moore** at the **Moore College of Art and Design** in Philadelphia. "Marilyn Monroe Wanted to Be Buried in Pucci," Jan. 30-Mar. 14, 2009, features 36 watercolors based on the Pucci design, five photographs of a flag at half mast, shot in 1999 when DiMaggio died, and an urn containing six red roses. Dikeou is having fresh roses sent to the galleries three times a week during the run of the exhibition, just as DiMaggio had roses delivered to Monroe's grave long after the couple parted. What's more, the show features a replica of the platinum ring that DiMaggio gave to Monroe (courtesy of **Tiffany & Co.**, the maker of the original), which visitors can try on.

*-Walter Robinson*



## TIP OF THE MONTH

**Moore College of Art & Design**, the first and only women's fine art college in the nation, regularly features cutting-edge exhibits in its galleries. ***Marilyn Monroe Wanted to be Buried in Pucci***, an eclectic mixed-media installation by New York-based artist Devon Dikeou, was inspired by the actress' living request to be buried in a dress by renowned Italian designer Emilio Pucci. Expect an eclectic array of art, artifacts and design relating to society and pop culture since the 1960s. The exhibit is open free to the public through March 14, 20th St. and Ben Franklin Parkway; call 215-965-4027 for info.

