

CONSERVATION

■ art conservation

IT'S NOT EASY BEING GREEN

MUSEUM CONSERVATORS WEIGH THE BALANCE OF HOW TO PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT—AND THE ART

by Rachel Wolff

Come summertime, there are at least two venues you can rely on for a constant stream of unnaturally cool air: movie theaters and museums. But that might not always be the case. Under pressure to reduce expenses as well as carbon footprints, many institutions, including New York's Museum of Modern Art and Boston's Museum of Fine Arts, are going the now familiar "green."

But what does a museum's quest for reduced energy consumption mean for the precious objects within its walls? Hot lights and changes in air-conditioning can cause irreversible damage to art and artifacts. Take a painting on a wooden panel, for instance. Severe fluctuations in heat and humidity cause tension between the paint and the wood underneath, which can cause the paint to crack and flake. It's a serious threat: So much that precious works, such as Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, are even furnished with little sensors in the back that monitor every movement, every "breath" in the wood.

As a result, it's becoming the job of conservators—mostly known for their ability to safely touch up old paintings and mend fractured urns—to find ways to save energy, and cash, without

putting cultural patrimony at risk. "The role of conservators is going to increase in the future," says Hannelore Roemich, acting chairman of the Conservation Center at NYU's Institute of Fine Arts. The center, which celebrated its 50th anniversary last fall, recently received a \$190,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to study sustainability in cultural heritage. "And when it comes to these issues," Roemich adds, "it will be up to them to give the final okay."

In terms of air quality and environment, museums have long heeded the guidelines established in 1978 by the International Group of Organizers of Large-scale Exhibitions (of which many major museums are members).

rocketing energy costs, the organization presented new, more eco-friendly guidelines—raising the temperature range from 67–73 degrees Fahrenheit to 59–77 degrees. The range of relative humidity also rose to between 40–60 percent, up from 45–55 percent. The wider ranges were based, in part, on the argument that the original standards were overly cautious and, in this day and age, unrealistic.

Although conservation is a science, Roemich says, it's not always an exact one, and these new guidelines still need to be thoroughly tested. "About 90 percent of the items in a collection should be safe," she adds, but it's the other 10 percent (objects made of especially sensitive materials such as

"We don't have the full picture yet about what more relaxed standards [for temperature and humidity] will do to the art," conservator Sarah Nunberg says.

They were costly but effective measures that allowed for little fluctuation in temperature and percent of relative humidity. But last April, under pressure from museum directors facing new budgetary restrictions and sky-

wood, ivory, and ceramics) that conservators must monitor more carefully than ever. Some professionals are worried. "We determined that that wider range is okay now, but what if it's not okay down the road? There's no going



back,” says Steven Weintraub (GSAS ’75), an IFA grad and conservation consultant who worked at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Getty Conservation Institute before establishing his own New York advisory group, Art Preservation Services.

Without the guidance of a trained conservator, he says, museums might rely too heavily on the new guidelines and opt for cheap climate-control systems incapable of refinements. “To me, intelligent decision-making is spending the money upfront to have a flexible system so you can

work to find that sweet spot that gives you the best energy benefit without compromising your collection,” Weintraub says. He also worries that as more museums seek LEED certification—the environment design standards that are a major marketing boon these days—the sacrifices could be even more extreme.

Reduced lighting is another energy-saver, but one where museums and conservators tend to see things a bit more eye-to-eye. While it’s yet to be determined whether or not eco-friendly LED bulbs are the safest and most effi-

cient way to go, occupancy-controlled lighting—those little sensors that turn the lights on and off as you enter and leave the room—has proven to be a win-win, a way to both save energy and reduce artworks’ exposure to light. Natural lighting, however, is a different story. It might be good for a museum’s LEED campaign (and a star architect’s airy, statement-making design), but sunlight has ultimately proved more hazardous to artworks than any known artificial source.

The American Institute for Conservation is considering many

of these issues. Its recently formed Committee on Sustainable Conservation Practice seeks to raise awareness of how eco-friendly concessions will affect the field. “Our big push right now is to get the information out there,” says Sarah Nunberg (GSAS ’96), an IFA graduate and Brooklyn-based independent objects conservator, who co-chairs the AIC Committee. “We don’t have the full picture yet about what more relaxed standards will do to the art, but we have to realize that the original standards are very expensive and very difficult to maintain.” ■



DESIGNER JASON WU WITH FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA, WHO WORE WU'S GOWN TO THE INAUGURATION BALLS.

fashion

ASIAN RUNWAY

HOW IMMIGRATION TRENDS HAVE BROUGHT A NEW GROUP OF DESIGNERS TO THE TOP OF THE FASHION WORLD

by Sally Lauckner / GSAS '10

For Taiwanese-born, New York-based fashion designer Jason Wu, Barack Obama's inauguration was a career-changing day. When the new First Lady appeared at the inaugural balls wearing—to his surprise—Wu's white, one-shouldered, chiffon creation, it catapulted the then-26-year-old from little-known designer to

household name overnight.

The growing success of Wu, whose perfectly tailored, ladylike dresses are now favored in Hollywood by stars such as Natalie Portman and Diane Kruger, marks a larger cultural trend: Asian-American designers are having their moment. And their rise, according to Thuy Linh Nguyen Tu (GSAS '03), NYU assistant professor of social and cultural analysis and the

author of *The Beautiful Generation: Asian Americans and the Cultural Economy of Fashion* (Duke Univ. Press), is part of the story of immigration in New York City.

Perhaps the best evidence that these designers have reached the top of the field was made clear last summer at Lincoln Center, when the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA) presented its annual awards. For the first time,

Asian-Americans took the top three prizes for best new designers: Wu won for womenswear; Korean-American Richard Chai won for menswear with his grunge-meets-military style; and Chinese-American Alexander Wang—who has redefined downtown cool with slouchy knits and studded handbags—won for accessories. Tracey Lomrantz (GSAS '05), contributing style editor at *Glamour* magazine and a graduate of the journalism master's program at NYU, says the importance of that night cannot be overstated. “People call the CFDA awards the Oscars of fashion,” she says. “They have the ability to make or break a designer's career, and for Asian-

Americans to sweep the awards was huge.”

Their growing prominence is not limited to high-end fashion. In the past few years, a number of Asian-American designers have created lower-priced, limited-edition collections for mass-market retailers. Thakoon Panichgul, a Thai-American designer known for distinctive, colorful prints, and Chai both released widely popular, diffusion clothing lines for Target, while Wang, Panichgul, designer Phillip Lim (a Cambodian-American of Chinese ancestry), and Doo-Ri Chung (a Korean-American designer) created limited-edition clothes for the Gap.

This success, according to Tu, follows an historic pattern. “Fashion grows out of processes of immigration and labor,” she

Kors, and Marc Jacobs in the 1980s. Tu attributes this current rise in Asian designers to the Immigration Act of 1965. At that time, laborer positions in the garment district were filled by a wave of new immigrants from Asia, she says. And now, a generation or two later, the figurative heirs of those workers are behind the designs that others will stitch.

A significant influence on this cohort, Tu notes, were Japanese designers Hanae Mori, Issey Miyake, Rei Kawakubo, and Yohji Yamamoto, who took Paris runways and the fashion world by storm in the 1980s with avant-garde, deconstructed clothing that some journalists called “anti-fashion.” In addition to their aesthetic importance, the assistant professor

“Just as Ralph Lauren, Donna Karan, and Calvin Klein have all evolved into real powerhouses, this group has the same potential,” editor Tracey Lomrantz says.

says. “The first set of people who worked in the garment district were Jewish immigrants, and then we had a generation of Jewish designers,” she adds, noting the prominence of Donna Karan, Calvin Klein, Michael

adds, they “introduced the idea that there could be such a thing as an Asian designer. It wasn’t even a concept that we had floating around until then.”

This Asian-American moment is no passing trend. *Glamour’s* Lomrantz notes that several of the young designers, particularly Wu and Wang, have already shown signs of longevity. “Of course it’s fashion, so there are always going to be casualties, and not every one of these designers is going to be a long-term success story,” she says. “But just as Ralph Lauren, Donna Karan, and Calvin Klein have all evolved into real powerhouses, I think this group of young Asian-Americans has the same potential. It’s the classic American success story.” ■



ISSEY MIYAKE WAS ONE OF SEVERAL JAPANESE DESIGNERS WHO TOOK PARIS RUNWAYS BY STORM IN THE 1980S.

CREDITS

ALUMNI AWARDS FROM SUNDANCE TO HOLLYWOOD

At this year’s Academy Awards, four of the 10 films up for Best Picture had NYU roots, including the acclaimed *Western True Grit*, which racked up 10 nominations and earned **JOEL COEN** (TSOA ’78) and brother Ethan a nod for Best Director... *The Social Network*, produced by **MICHAEL DE LUCA** (TSOA ’95), scored Oscars for Best Adapted Screenplay, Best Film Editing, and Best Original Score... **MICHAEL ARNDT** (TSOA ’87) penned the screenplay for *Toy Story 3*, named Best Animated Feature at both the Golden Globes and the Oscars... Writer-director **DEBRA GRANIK** (TSOA ’01) was nominated for Best Adapted Screenplay for *Winter’s Bone*, which led nominees at the Film Independent’s Spirit Awards, where fellow alumna **NICOLE HOLOFCENER** (TSOA ’84) received the Robert Altman Award for writing and directing the quirky drama *Please Give*... **LUKE MATHENY** (TSOA ’10) won Best Live Action Short Film for the comedy *God of Love*, which he wrote, directed, and starred in as his senior thesis at NYU... **LORA HIRSCHBERG** (TSOA ’85) nabbed Best Sound Mixing for the mind-bending thriller *Inception*... HBO’s *Boardwalk Empire*, created by **TERENCE WINTER** (WSC ’84) and executive-produced by **MARTIN SCORSESE** (WSC ’64, STEINHARDT ’68, HON ’92), picked up statues at both the Golden Globe and Screen Actors Guild



THE SOCIAL NETWORK

awards... Meanwhile at the Sundance Film Festival, more than 200 NYU grads worked on almost a third of the films screened there—including eight features directed by alumni. **SEAN DURKIN** (TSOA ’06) received the dramatic Directing Award for his thriller *Martha Marcy May Marlene*, starring **ELIZABETH OLSEN** (TSOA ’11)... The dramatic Grand Jury Prize went to *Like Crazy*, which stars **CHARLIE BEWLEY** (TSOA ’92)... Writer-director **MARYAM KESHAVARZ’s** (TSOA ’10) *Circumstance* scored an audience



TRUE GRIT

award, while in the World Cinema Competition, audience awards went to the documentary *Senna*, executive-produced by **LIZA CHASIN** (TSOA ’87), and to the drama *Kinyarwanda*, written and directed by **ALRICK BROWN** (TSOA ’08) and starring **CASSANDRA FREEMAN** (TSOA ’05)... Special Jury Prizes were given to *Another Earth*, executive-produced by **TYLER BRODIE** (TSOA ’98) and **PAUL S. MEZEY** (TSOA ’96), and to the documentary *Being Elmo: A Puppeteer’s Journey*, edited and co-directed by **PHILIP SHANE** (TSOA ’93)... *Gun Hill Road*, written and directed by **RASHAAD ERNESTO GREEN** (TSOA ’03, ’11) and scored by **STEFAN SWANSON** (STEINHARDT ’08), was also nominated in the U.S. Dramatic Competition.

—Renée Alfuso

PHOTOS COURTESY ACADEMY OF MOTION PICTURE ARTS AND SCIENCES