



Guo Pei
ART OF COUTURE

GALLERY GUIDE

BOWERS MUSEUM

THE COUTURIER'S JOURNEY

“EVERY ONE OF MY COLLECTIONS IS A PERSONAL JOURNEY OF IDEAS AND MATERIALS THAT ARE CONSTANTLY ADJUSTED AND REFINED.”

Guo Pei: Art of Couture presents the story of one of the world's most acclaimed couturiers through a selection of garments that have been handpicked for the Bowers Museum by the designer; many of the ensembles in this exhibition have never before been seen off the runway.

Born in 1967 in Beijing, Guo Pei's childhood aspiration to make beautiful clothes has guided her rise into the exclusive echelon of designers who create to standards of haute couture. Her luxurious garments interweave Chinese aesthetics with contemporary design, and she has dressed the most fashionable and famous women of our time—most notably Rihanna when she selected a majestic yellow cape for her red-carpet entrance to the Met Gala in 2015.

Guo Pei credits her professional and personal success to **“dreams, devotion, love, and faith.”** *Art of Couture* uses these four principles to retrace Guo Pei's personal journey and explore the sources of inspiration for her collections.



夢想

DREAMS

**“EVERY NIGHT WHEN I WAS FOUR OR FIVE,
MY GRANDMOTHER DESCRIBED THE DRESSES
THAT WOMEN WORE IN THE OLD DAYS,
AND I PICTURED THEM BEFORE I FELL ASLEEP...
I ALWAYS WANTED TO USE MY CREATIONS TO
CONVEY THAT BEAUTY CONJURED UP BY THE
TALES FROM MY GRANDMOTHER. THIS IS
MY EARLIEST MEMORY OF FASHION.”**

Childhood experiences are the foundation of Guo Pei's creativity. Although she was born during the Cultural Revolution—an era of uniform clothing and muted palettes—her grandmother's bedtime stories about the embroidered fabrics of the Qing dynasty provided an important link for Guo Pei to China's imperial past. These memories left a lasting impression on the designer and speak to the emotional power of her choices of color, material, and embellishment. Most garments in this section are from her 2007 collection titled *An Amazing Journey in a Childhood Dream*, presented during China International Fashion Week and created while Guo Pei was pregnant with her second child. This collection is the realization of a fairytale with baby doll silhouettes, laces, and cascading ribbons in candy pastel colors.

IN THE WORDS OF GUO PEI

“MY CHILDHOOD DREAM WAS
ALL ABOUT MAKING BEAUTIFUL CLOTHES.”

“LEARNING TO MAKE BEAUTIFUL CLOTHES
WAS A STRONG DESIRE OF MINE EVEN AS
A CHILD, AND IT HASN'T CHANGED SINCE.
I THINK IT'S THE HAPPIEST THING FOR ME,
MY LIFE PURPOSE, YOU MIGHT SAY.”

“OUR HUMAN LIFE IS A
COLLECTION OF VARIOUS STORIES.”

1

COLLECTION:
**AN AMAZING JOURNEY IN A
CHILDHOOD DREAM, 2007**
Look 15

Silk satin fabric embroidered with silver and Indian silk thread using standard and padded satin stitch; embellished with cat's eye opal, Swarovski crystals, rhinestones, and wooden beads hand-wound in silver-silk thread.

2

COLLECTION:
**AN AMAZING JOURNEY IN A
CHILDHOOD DREAM, 2007**
Look 7

Silk organza and silk fabric embroidered with silver and Indian silk thread using standard and padded satin stitch; embellished with cat's eye opal, Swarovski crystals, rhinestones, and wooden beads hand-wound in silver-silk thread.

3

COLLECTION:
**AN AMAZING JOURNEY IN A
CHILDHOOD DREAM, 2007**
Look 17

Silk fabric embroidered with silver and Indian silk thread using standard and padded satin stitch; embellished with cat's eye opal, Swarovski crystals, and rhinestones.

4

COLLECTION:
**AN AMAZING JOURNEY IN A
CHILDHOOD DREAM, 2007**
Look 12

Silk fabric embroidered with silver and Indian silk thread using standard and padded satin stitch; embellished with cat's eye opal, Swarovski crystals, rhinestones, and wooden beads hand-wound in silver-silk thread.

5

COLLECTION:
AN AMAZING JOURNEY IN A
CHILDHOOD DREAM, 2007
LOOK 13

Silk fabric embroidered with silver and Indian silk thread using standard and padded satin stitch; embellished with cat's eye opal, Swarovski crystals, rhinestones, and wooden beads hand-wound in silver-silk thread.

6

COLLECTION:
ENCOUNTER,
FALL 2016/WINTER 2017
LOOK 4

Fringed fabric and silk neckline embroidered with silver thread using standard and padded satin stitch; embellished with Swarovski crystals, rhinestones, and zircon beads.

7

COLLECTION:
**AN AMAZING JOURNEY IN A
CHILDHOOD DREAM, 2007**
Look 30

Silk satin fabric embroidered with silver and Indian silk thread using standard and padded satin stitch; embellished with cat's eye opal, Swarovski crystals, rhinestones, and ostrich feathers.

Guo Pei's grandmother once reprimanded her for wanting a yellow dress, a color forbidden to commoners and reserved exclusively for the emperor. However, the color has become inextricable from the legacy of the designer due to her yellow cape being worn by Rihanna at the 2015 Met Gala and an acclaimed documentary film on her life titled, *Yellow is Forbidden*.



DEVOTION

**"WHEN CREATING ART, IN ORDER TO PUT
YOUR LOVE AND EMOTION INTO YOUR WORK
YOU REALLY NEED TO BE DEVOTED TO IT."**

After graduating in 1986 from Beijing Second Light Industry School with a degree in fashion, Guo Pei dedicated herself to perfecting her craft. She joined the women's fashion company Tianma, one of the first generation of privately-owned companies in a China that had newly rediscovered its interest in fashion. The success of her garments afforded the designer enough money to establish her own atelier, Rose Studio, in 1997.

In the 2000s, Guo Pei's reputation grew both in and out of China. She became an international name in 2015 when two of her ensembles were included in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's exhibition *China: Through the Looking Glass*. By the following year, she had expanded to France, setting up a second studio Paris and becoming a guest member of *Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture*, the governing body of fashion designers working at the pinnacle of the industry. Guo Pei's first and second haute couture collections, *Courtyard* and *Encounter*, were presented just five months apart. Both drew from and combined elements of Chinese and Western fashion history.

IN THE WORDS OF GUO PEI

“AS A CHINESE DESIGNER, TRADITIONAL CHINESE CRAFTS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN THE MOST VALUABLE ASSET FOR MY WORK.”

“SOMEHOW, WE WILL ALWAYS END UP CARVING OUR OWN PATHS—AND ON THE WAY HAVE TRIUMPHS AND DISASTERS.”

“I BELIEVE AS LONG AS YOU PERSEVERE AND KEEP MOVING FORWARD TO ACHIEVE ONE’S GOALS OR DREAMS, REGARDLESS OF ANY SHORT-TERM DIFFICULTIES OR PAINFUL EXPERIENCES, IT IS ALWAYS WORTH IT.”

“ALL OF THIS IS TRYING TO CONVEY A SENSE OF DEVOTION.”

8

**COLLECTION:
COURTYARD,
SPRING/SUMMER 2016
LOOK 35**

Silk fabric embroidered with gold thread using satin stitch; embellished with Swarovski crystals, rhinestones, zircon beads, and ostrich feathers.

9

**COLLECTION:
COURTYARD,
SPRING/SUMMER 2016
LOOK 17**

Silk taffeta embroidered with gold and silver thread using standard, padded, and shaded satin stitch; embellished with Swarovski crystals, rhinestones, zircon beads, and ostrich feathers.

10

**COLLECTION:
COURTYARD,
SPRING/SUMMER 2016
Look 38**

Reflective fabric embroidered with silver and colored thread using standard, padded, and shaded satin stitch; embellished with Swarovski crystals, rhinestones, and zircon beads.

11

**COLLECTION:
COURTYARD,
SPRING/SUMMER 2016
Look 36**

Acetate fabric embroidered with silver and colored thread using standard, padded, and shaded satin stitch; embellished with Swarovski crystals, rhinestones, and zircon beads.

12

**COLLECTION:
ENCOUNTER,
FALL 2016/WINTER 2017
Look 27**

Draped and textured fabric gown with silk fabric straps embroidered with silver thread using standard and padded satin stitch.

13

**COLLECTION:
ENCOUNTER,
FALL 2016/WINTER 2017
Look 21**

Sequined fabric embroidered with gold thread using appliqué, high relief, and superimposed techniques; embellished with golden lace, Swarovski crystals, rhinestones, and zircon beads.

14

**COLLECTION:
ENCOUNTER,
FALL 2016/WINTER 2017
LOOK 12**

Taffeta and silk fabric embroidered with gold thread using high relief and satin stitch techniques; embellished with Swarovski crystals, rhinestones, zircon beads, and ostrich feathers.

15

**COLLECTION:
COURTYARD,
SPRING/SUMMER 2016
LOOK 34**

Acetate fabric embroidered with gold and colored thread using appliqué, and standard and shaded satin stitch techniques; embellished with Swarovski crystals, rhinestones, and zircon beads.

Guo Pei is devoted to the revitalization of traditional sewing techniques that were practically lost during the Cultural Revolution. In addition to being her atelier, Rose Studio is also a school of embroidery. Today, Rose Studio employs and trains nearly 500 designers, embroiderers, pattern cutters, and sewing technicians.

16

**COLLECTION:
ENCOUNTER,
FALL 2016/WINTER 2017
Look 27**

Draped and textured fabric gown with silk fabric straps embroidered with silver thread using standard and padded satin stitch.

17

**COLLECTION:
COURTYARD,
SPRING/SUMMER 2016
Look 1**

Leatherette and golden wire guipure embellished with Swarovski crystals, rhinestones, and brass florets.

**“FOR THIS COLLECTION, I USED MY ACCUMULATED
THIRTY-YEAR DESIGN CAREER. EACH DETAIL,
EACH CRAFT REQUIRED EVERY EFFORT FOR PERFECTION.
I USED MY MOST DEVOTED PASSION TO EXPRESS MY
UNDERSTANDING OF THE SPIRIT OF HAUTE COUTURE.”**

18

**COLLECTION:
COURTYARD,
SPRING/SUMMER 2016
LOOK 33**

Silk organza embroidered with gold thread using standard, padded, and shaded satin stitch; embellished with Swarovski crystals, rhinestones, and zircon beads.

19

**COLLECTION:
ENCOUNTER,
FALL 2016/WINTER 2017
LOOK 9**

Taffeta and silk fabric embroidered with black and gold thread using standard and padded satin stitch; embellished with Swarovski crystals, rhinestones, and fox fur.

20

**COLLECTION:
COURTYARD,
SPRING/SUMMER 2016
Look 37**

Acetate fabric embroidered with gold and silver thread using standard, padded, and shaded satin stitch; embellished with Swarovski crystals, rhinestones, and zircon beads.

21

**COLLECTION:
ENCOUNTER,
FALL 2016/WINTER 2017
Look 20**

Japanese velvet and silk fabric embroidered with gold thread using high relief and satin stitch techniques; embellished with Swarovski crystals, rhinestones, zircon beads, and ostrich feathers.

Encounter is characterized by richly embroidered garments in gold and silver thread, luxurious textiles, and accents of feathers and fur. Designed in just 40 days, the ensembles ranged from high Edwardian looks with lavish collars to the slender, fringed, or sequined evening gowns of the Jazz Age.

22

COLLECTION:
**AN AMAZING JOURNEY IN A
CHILDHOOD DREAM, 2007**
Look 19

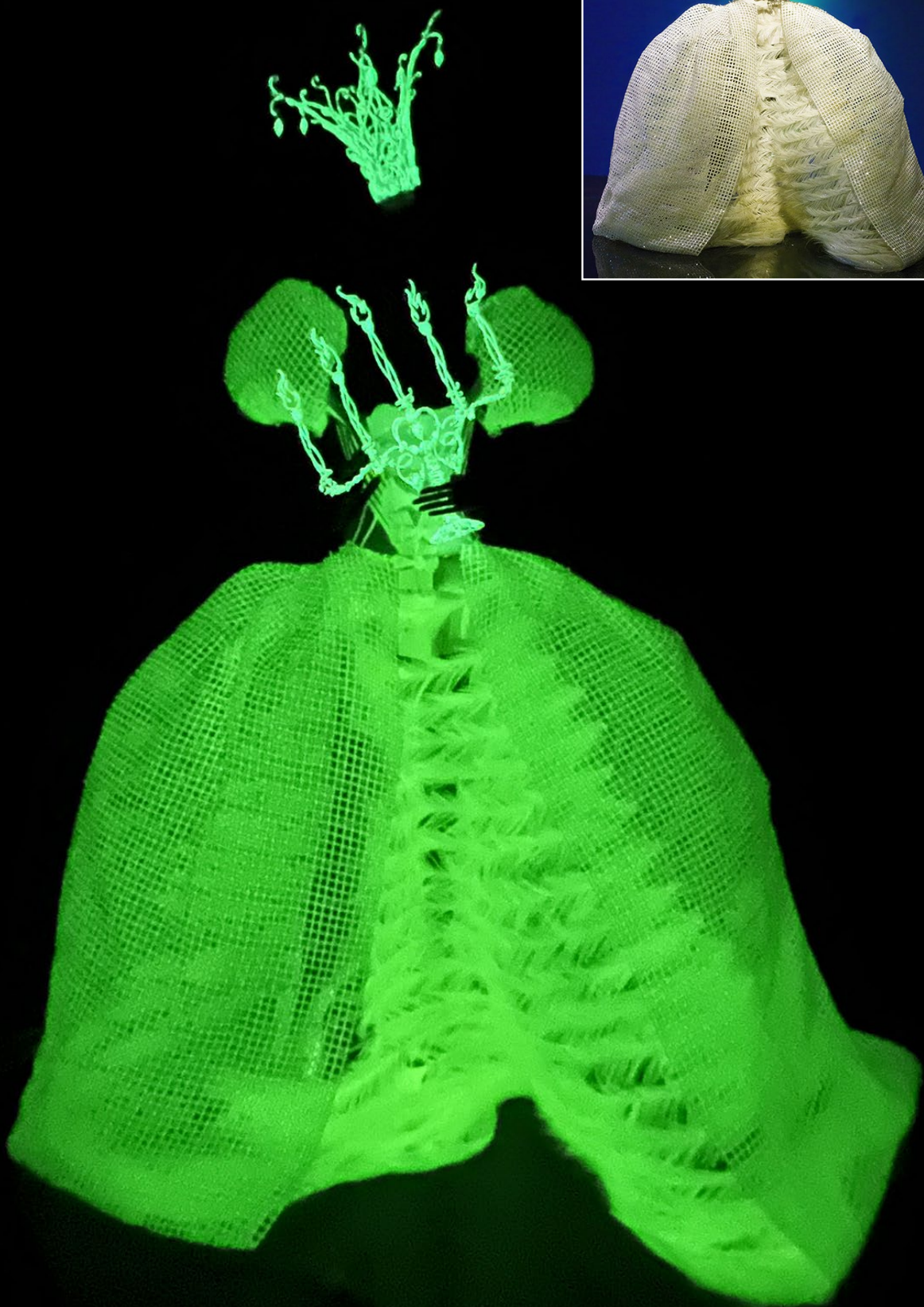
Silk fabric embroidered with silver and Indian silk thread
using standard, padded, and shaded satin stitch;
embellished with cat's eye opal,
Swarovski crystals, and rhinestones.

23

COLLECTION:
**LEGENDS,
SPRING/SUMMER 2017**
Look 1

Woven luminescent fabric and silk bodice.
(pictured on following page)

The Parisian setting for the Legends *haute couture* show was La Conciergerie, the medieval fortress where Marie Antoinette was detained before her beheading. Guo Pei opened the show with this gown, The Revenant. Fabricated using a luminescent fabric, it floated down the runway like an apparition.



24

**COLLECTION:
ELYSIUM,
SPRING/SUMMER 2018
LOOK 9**

Silk fabric embroidered with silver thread using appliqué and satin stitch techniques; embellished with Swarovski crystals, rhinestones, and fox fur.



LOVE

**“THE CEREMONY, THE WEDDING,
THE COMING TOGETHER OF TWO PEOPLE
IS THE MOST POWERFUL HUMAN EXPERIENCE
I CAN THINK OF.”**

Though creating couture garments energizes Guo Pei, she finds greater strength in the support of her loved ones. She credits her husband, Jack Tsao, with instilling in her the confidence to grow as a designer and artist. Tsao, who comes from generations of textile merchants, became her main investor early after the establishment of Rose Studio in 1997 and to this day is her trusted advisor and business partner.

In return for the love Guo Pei has received, she has given much back to those in love: she is often lauded for her role in redefining Chinese bridal wear. After the Cultural Revolution, many Chinese women chose to be married in Western wedding gowns—some ensembles from Guo Pei’s Parisian collections pay homage to these dresses in both palette and profile. Beginning in the early 2010s, Guo Pei began offering an alternative in the form of a bridal collection inspired by imperial court robes. Of the thousand or more bespoke dresses designed by Guo Pei’s atelier every year, approximately a fifth of them are made for brides to be.

IN THE WORDS OF GUO PEI

“SIMPLY PUT, YOU NEED TO LOVE WHAT YOU DO.
THE LOVE SHOULD BE REAL AND SINCERE.”

“IF WE CAN TURN DESIGNING CLOTHES
INTO A REPRESENTATION OF OUR TIMES,
OF ABUNDANT EMOTIONS AND OF LOVE,
SO THAT THEY BECOME A SPIRITUAL SUSTENANCE,
I THINK THAT IS REALLY THE ULTIMATE PURSUIT.”

25

**COLLECTION:
ENCOUNTER,
FALL 2016/WINTER 2017
LOOK 1**

Silk mesh fabric embroidered with silver thread using standard and padded satin stitch; embellished with Swarovski crystals, rhinestones, custom-made paillettes, and metal accents.

26

**COLLECTION:
CHINESE BRIDE, 2012
LOOK 7**

Silk fabric embroidered with gold and colored threads using couched golden thread, and standard and shaded satin stitch techniques; embellished with golden beads.

27

COLLECTION:
CHINESE BRIDE, 2012

Silk fabric embroidered with gold and colored threads using couched golden thread, and standard and shaded satin stitch techniques; embellished with cloud collar (*yunjian*) decoration at the collar.

28

COLLECTION:
CHINESE BRIDE, 2012

Silk fabric embroidered with silver, gold, and colored threads using couched golden thread and Chaozhou pad techniques; embellished with Chinese frog closures (*pankou*).

29

**COLLECTION:
COURTYARD,
SPRING/SUMMER 2016
Look 40**

Silk and silk mesh fabric embellished with Swarovski crystals, rhinestones, zircon beads, sequins, and other assorted beads.

30

**COLLECTION:
ENCOUNTER,
FALL 2016/WINTER 2017
Look 29**

Silk fabric embroidered with gold thread using high relief and satin stitch techniques; embellished with Swarovski crystals, rhinestones, sequins, and metal accents.

信念

FAITH

“HAUTE COUTURE CAN REPRESENT YOUR SPIRITUAL WORLD, CAN ACCOMPANY YOU IN YOUR LIFE, AND BRING YOU BEAUTY BEYOND REALITY.”

Guo Pei's Legends and Elysium collections mark a time of self-reflection by the designer. They comprise her musings on life and immortality, as well as the power of myths and legends to inspire long after death. A visit to the 18th-century cathedral in the Swiss town of Saint Gallen sparked the “cathedral collection” that became Legends. In just twenty ensembles, Guo Pei shows a fluency in the admittedly unfamiliar iconography of Christianity. Less than a year later, her father terminally ill, the designer again turned to Western tradition for her Elysium collection, named for the final resting place of virtuous souls in Greek mythology. The collection brims with floral motifs in its silhouettes, accessories, and intricate embroidery. Just as her first runway collection, Samsara (2006), used the gold of daylight and deep blue hues of twilight as a symbol for the Buddhist cycle of death and rebirth, this collection marries the two and introduces white, a color representing purity and mourning in Chinese culture.

IN THE WORDS OF GUO PEI

“I USE THE WEIGHT OF THE CLOTHES, THE HEIGHT OF THE SHOES, AND THE UNWIELDINESS OF THE DRESS TO REPRESENT THE INNER STRENGTH AND CONFIDENCE OF A WOMAN.”

“I THINK THAT IS ALL ANYONE WANTS—
TO BE REMEMBERED.”

“A PART OF MY SOUL WILL ALWAYS HOLD ONTO
THE MOST BEAUTIFUL FANTASIES
INSPIRED BY LEGENDS.”

“WHEN PEOPLE TALK ABOUT *HAUTE COUTURE*,
IT’S NOT ABOUT THE FORM
BUT A KIND OF INNER SPIRIT.”

31

**COLLECTION:
LEGENDS,
SPRING/SUMMER 2017
LOOK 9**

Printed silk embroidered with gold thread using standard and padded satin stitch; embellished with Swarovski crystals, rhinestones, and zircon beads.

Guo Pei spent a year working with renowned textile manufacturer Jakob Schlaepfer to create custom printed fabrics inspired by the ornate Baroque murals in the cathedral of Saint Gallen. At Paris' Saint-Ouen market she discovered a cache of rare, vintage gold embroidery floss which she used in the multi-layer embroidery and beadwork of her Legends collection.

32

**COLLECTION:
LEGENDS,
SPRING/SUMMER 2017
LOOK 17**

Metallic fabric embroidered with silver thread using standard and padded satin stitch; embellished with Swarovski crystals, rhinestones, and zircon beads.

33

**COLLECTION:
LEGENDS,
SPRING/SUMMER 2017
LOOK 14**

Metal collar, silk organza, and metallic fabric embellished with Swarovski crystals, rhinestones, and other assorted beads.

34

**COLLECTION:
LEGENDS,
SPRING/SUMMER 2017
LOOK 13**

Custom-made fabric embroidered with metallic thread using standard and padded satin stitch; embellished with Swarovski crystals and rhinestones.

35

**COLLECTION:
LEGENDS,
SPRING/SUMMER 2017
Look 10**

Printed silk embroidered with silver thread using standard and padded satin stitch; embellished with Swarovski crystals, rhinestones, zircon beads, and ostrich feathers.

36

**COLLECTION:
ELYSIUM,
SPRING/SUMMER 2018
Look 4**

Layered lace on silk mesh fabric embellished with metallic leatherette straps, Swarovski crystals, rhinestones, and assorted beads.

37

**COLLECTION:
ELYSIUM,
SPRING/SUMMER 2018
Look 12**

Silk organza structured with golden wire and silk fabric embroidered with silver and colored thread using appliqué, and standard, padded, and shaded satin stitch techniques; embellished with Swarovski crystals, rhinestones, zircon beads, and brass florets.

38

**COLLECTION:
ELYSIUM,
SPRING/SUMMER 2018
Look 10**

Silk fabric embroidered with silver and colored thread using appliqué, and standard, padded, and shaded satin stitch techniques; embellished with Swarovski crystals, rhinestones, and zircon beads.

39

**COLLECTION:
LEGENDS,
SPRING/SUMMER 2017
LOOK 16**

Metallic fabric embroidered with gold thread using standard and padded satin stitch; embellished with Swarovski crystals, rhinestones, zircon beads, and metal accents.

40

**COLLECTION:
ELYSIUM,
SPRING/SUMMER 2018
LOOK 5**

Textured silk fabric embroidered with silver thread using standard and shaded satin stitch; embellished with Swarovski crystals, rhinestones, and silk rosettes.

41

**COLLECTION:
ELYSIUM,
SPRING/SUMMER 2018
LOOK 18**

Silk fabric embroidered with colored thread using standard, padded, and shaded satin stitch; embellished with Swarovski crystals, rhinestones, and raffia.

42

**COLLECTION:
ELYSIUM,
SPRING/SUMMER 2018
LOOK 13**

Textured silk fabric embroidered with colored thread using standard, padded, and shaded satin stitch techniques; embellished with Swarovski crystals and rhinestones.

IN THE WORDS OF GUO PEI

“SINCE DEATH IS INEVITABLE,
I PREFER TO IMAGINE IT AS A DREAM,
AN ALTERNATE UNIVERSE PARALLEL TO THIS WORLD,
WHERE EVERYTHING RETURNS TO ITS
ORIGINAL STATE OF TRUE PURENESS AND BEAUTY.
IT IS THE START OF A MYSTERIOUS JOURNEY.”

43

**COLLECTION:
LEGENDS,
SPRING/SUMMER 2017
Look 20**

Silk fabric embellished with Swarovski crystals, rhinestones, and zircon beads.

Guo Pei defied expectations by dressing her muse, Carmen Dell'Orefice, who was 85 years old at the time, in a resplendent gown and cape in scarlet red silk. The designer has often spoken about her admiration for the model. The gown's regal presence speaks to the timeless quality of beauty in Guo Pei's work, the elegance that Guo Pei finds in age, and the very meaning of "legend" to Guo Pei.

EMBROIDERY TECHNIQUES

In many cases Guo Pei's complex embroidery work is created by combining two or more techniques.

Here is a selection of the different types of embroidery that can be seen in the exhibition:



Appliqué:

A design is embroidered on fabric, then cut out and affixed where the garment needs to be decorated.



Beadwork:

Bead tubes, sequins, crystals, and other beads are affixed to fabric using needle and thread to create decorative motifs.



Couched golden thread:

A traditional Chinese embroidery technique called *panjin* in which golden threads are coiled on the surface of fabric to form a pattern and then fixed in place with fastening stitches of corresponding colors.



High relief:

Leather or a similar firm material is used to pad out the high and low relief layers of a pattern before it is embroidered, resulting in very sculptural embroidery.

EMBROIDERY TECHNIQUES



Satin stitch:

A traditional Chinese embroidery stitch in which embroidery threads are arranged tightly and neatly within a section to create a uniform block of color that does not show the ground fabric beneath.



Padded satin stitch:

Thread, batting, or a similar padding material is used to create a raised area on a piece of fabric that is then embroidered with satin stitch.



Shaded satin stitch:

A type of satin stitch derived from the Shu embroidery of Sichuan Province in which long and short stitches are used together to transition between at least two colors of embroidery thread; this can be used to create a smooth color gradient or to depict the uneven coloring of organic elements like animal fur.



Superimposed:

Embroidery is superimposed on top of existing embroidery for added dimensionality.