

TRAVEL PORTLAND

Culture

Wild Woman Collection Celebrates Diversity and Identity A collection that's equally fashion and art, Wild Woman aims to travel the word, spreading a message of solidarity.

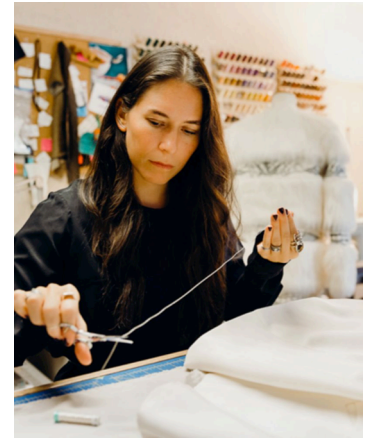
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Eden Dawn

"It started with the Women's March," says fashion designer Marcela Dyer on the inspiration for her new Wild Woman collection, a selection of modern white womenswear with complex, artful embroidery of women's faces. "It was so powerful and such a great experience to see so many women coming together around the world to support each other. In that moment, I thought, 'I want to celebrate womanhood.'"

The Mexican-American designer from Guadalajara is a successful part of the Portland fashion community, designing under the name Myriam Marcela. Dyer won the Best Emerging Designer title at FashionNXT in 2015, and now showcases her designs at stellar runway shows. Her pieces are known for their intricate details, like sculptural pleated sleeves, hand beading and woven leather embellishments.

"Out of all the things that involve my work — whether it's emails, or patternmaking or fabric shopping — when I am sitting down by myself, hand-sewing, I feel like I am in my zone," says Dyer. She talks about how those details, which are tedious for most, delight her. "I cannot let go of ... creating a piece slowly. That is my passion: to create something with my hands."



Portland designer Marcela Dyer uses fashion to celebrate female empowerment
Credit: Ashley Anderson



Embroidery artist Laura Reneé Maier stitches a portrait onto each Wild Woman garment.
Credit: Ashley Anderson

The Wild Woman Collection

Dyer decided to combine her love of detailed clothing with the powerful solidarity of the Women's March, creating a meaningful collection that would tell a story. She teamed up with East Coast embroidery artist Laura Reneé Maier, who is known for her meticulous hand work. Together, they've made an ambitious line of coats embellished with hand-stitched portraits, each inspired by women from around the world.

As Dyer designed a new shaggy faux fur coat or wool cocoon coat, she would ship pattern pieces to Maier in New York City, leaving blank spaces intended for Maier to embellish. "I would write on pieces, 'This is your canvas,'" says Dyer. Maier's delicate thread-drawn portraits were created using a single continuous thread and a vintage 1920 Singer sewing machine operated by just a hand crank. "It was like Christmas for me every time I got the package back from her," Dyer recalls.

Wild Woman on Tour

Many labor-intensive hours were spent crafting the collection. Dyer devoted hours to elaborately hand-pleating jacket backs to emulate spines (“The first one looked like a cockroach, and the second one looked like a dinosaur. But I wanted a vertebra,” she laughs.) Meanwhile, Maier was adding museum-worthy portraits to the garments. When the collection was finished, the pair realized each piece would have to be sold at an exorbitant price to cover their costs. They decided to forgo that model altogether, choosing to take the pieces on the road instead.



Dyer devoted hours to elaborately hand-pleating jacket backs to emulate spines.

Credit: Ashley Anderson

The pair showed a runway preview of Wild Women at FashionNXT in 2017 to thunderous applause. They’re now moving full-throttle toward a plan to debut the full collection at New York Fashion Week in fall 2020. This extended timeline allows them to get in sync with the booking cycle of museums, so they can achieve their goal of Wild Woman exhibits in cities like San Francisco, Seattle, Monterrey and Mexico City. After the stunning pieces have circled the globe, the designers plan to auction them off and donate 100% of profits to a still-to-be-determined nonprofit that celebrates diversity and focuses on female empowerment in Latin America.

Every element of the collection — from the years-long timeline to working with a cross-country partner to a zero-profit model — goes against fashion industry norm. But Dyer says that for her, the message is the most important part. It all goes back to her thoughts during that protest march in January 2017: “We want to say that there are no walls, that diversity is powerful. That we all have this power to be strong and creative — the things women are.”