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My PURSEonal Favorites: 300 Bags from the World’s Largest Handbag Collection

***Selections from the World’s Largest Independent Handbag Collection
to be Exhibited at Fort Wayne Museum of Art***

April 3, 2025 (Fort Wayne, IN) – The Fort Wayne Museum of Art is pleased to announce *My PURSEonal Favorites: 300 Bags from the World’s Largest Handbag Collection*, an exhibition of selections from the personal collection of Ilene Hochberg Wood. The exhibition will be on view April 19-July 20, 2025.

* Note, FWMoA will be closed on April 20 in observance of the Easter holiday.

The collection ranges in style from folk art to contemporary designer to embroidered and is the third exhibition of a curated selection of Wood’s collection, which numbers into the thousands, making it the largest in the U.S., if not the world. Visitors will have the opportunity to explore a timeline of the handbag, representing the trends of each decade, and to experience a selection of handbags that represents Wood’s personal favorites acquired in her decades of collecting.

“Art museums are known for showing fine art like paintings and sculptures, but it’s important to remember the art in our everyday lives, such as fashion. We are honored to be sharing this important collection from Ilene Hochberg Wood who has so graciously shared her passion with the communities of Northeast Indiana and beyond,” says VP & COO Amanda Shepard and curator of the exhibition.

Designer highlights include Betsey Johnson, Karl Lagerfeld, Balenciaga, Christian Dior, and Nicoletta Carlone, plus several historical Vera Bradley bags. The artist bag section will spotlight bags that are hand decorated or inspired by famous artworks, and other handbag themes will include animals, unusual materials, food, and custom designs made just for Wood.

“I view my collection from both aesthetic and academic perspectives and always seek specific handbags to fill a gap in the collection. I read extensively on fashion history and the art of adornment to learn as much as I can about my growing collection,” says Wood. She continues, “Women love handbags. They are totems and objects of desire that convey who we are and what we hold dear, both literally and figuratively. Look at any woman and the bag she carries, and you will learn a lot about her and the image she wants to convey to the world. Empty the bag and examine its contents to learn who she really is and what she finds essential to her everyday life.”

The collection, which now numbers over 3,000 handbags and counting, is under review for a Guinness Book World Record. This collection is sure to create excitement among viewers of all ages and spark an appreciation of fashion history and the arts.

To celebrate the exhibition of this acclaimed collection, FWMoA will host a **Collector’s Tour with Ilene Hochberg Wood on April 19 at 11am**, included with museum admission. The collection will also be featured at the **Art of Fashion show featuring all local designers on Monday May 5 at 7pm**. Attendees will feast their

eyes on the creations of 15 local designers who will send models wearing their looks through the galleries at FWMoA surrounded by the beautiful collection of purses. Designers include Dupe Adebayo, Dorothy Adjei, Anton Alexander, Isabelle Alonzo, Mark Braster, Sharon Bryan, Lauren Finley, Sam Glassley, Angie Hayden, Jordan Latham, Jae McGee, Vienne Rey, Stella Scruggs, Clairity Walton, and Kalia Yager. Support for the Art of Fashion is from Jae and Justin McGee and Vera Bradley. Check our events calendar for upcoming programs.

This exhibition was curated by Ilene Hochberg Wood and Amanda Shepard, vice president and chief operating officer at the Fort Wayne Museum of Art and was developed in partnership with Historic Bethlehem Museums & Sites in Bethlehem, PA. Support for this exhibition comes from Vera Bradley, Jae and Justin McGee, and the Edward D. and Ione Auer Foundation.

General admission to see this exhibition at the museum is free for FWMoA members, \$10 adults, \$8 students and seniors 65+, and \$25 for families. General admission is free for everyone on Thursdays from 5-8pm. Veterans, active military personnel, and their families receive free general admission. FWMoA gallery hours are Tuesday-Saturday 10-6pm, Thursdays 10-8pm, and Sundays 12-5pm.

About Ilene Hochberg Wood, Collector: A lifetime collector of art, Ilene Hochberg Wood holds a B.S. in Design and Environmental Analysis from Cornell University and is an avid community activist involved in a number of non-profit organizations. After spending eight years in retail management as a Director of Fashion Coordination and Visual Merchandising for several department and specialty stores, she then founded the pet apparel company Dogwear. She is also the author of several pet parody books, including DOGUE, a canine version of VOGUE, which became an international bestseller. Wood is most passionate when sharing personal anecdotes about each piece of her handbag collection and takes pride in knowing every detail - the designer, where they were purchased, events she has carried them to and each one's special feature. When not on exhibition, many are kept in her home and an army bunker on her property in Pennsylvania.

About the Fort Wayne Museum of Art: Beginning with art classes in 1888 given by J. Ottis Adams and later William Forsyth, the Fort Wayne Museum of Art has evolved into the primary resource for the visual arts in Northeast Indiana. Regularly exhibiting regional and nationally acclaimed artists, the FWMoA also boasts an extensive permanent collection of American Art, including the Steven Sorman Archives and more than 350 pieces of glass sculpture. The Museum is committed to the collection, preservation, presentation and interpretation of American and related art to engage broad and diverse audiences throughout the community and region and add value to their lives. The Fort Wayne Museum of Art is accredited by the American Alliance of Museums. This activity is made possible, in part, with support from the Indiana Arts Commission and the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency.

For more information, visit www.fwmoa.org.

Image Credit:

1. Peter Gourniak, "Delill"
2. Peter Gourniak, "Purse collection"
3. Peter Gourniak, "Ilene Hochberg Wood"

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