

# TRANSPARENCY MADINA VADAGHE

THE VILCEK FOUNDATION  
EXHIBITIONS

COVER & OPPOSITE PAGE  
**SILK ORGANZA**  
INDIA



**TRANSPARENCY**  
**MADINA**  
**VADACHE**

**A WORLD-PREMIERE COLLECTION OF  
FASHIONS FOR SPRING 2011**

# FOREWORD

TRANSPARENCY  
MADINA VADACHE

As one of the fashion capitals of the world, New York is celebrated for all it has to offer fashionistas, students of design, and fans of couture. The public interested in the art and history of fashion design has only to head uptown to one of the most important collections of costumes and accessories in the world, the Metropolitan Museum's Costume Institute. For the design student, the city is home to many outstanding educational and career opportunities in the arts and fashion design. But it is during the annual Fashion Week that New York really flaunts its fashion know-how, when the city teems with talented designers and fashion-related events – when the Big Apple seems to turn into one long runway. How could we, at the Vilcek Foundation, draw some of that crowd to an exhibition featuring the work of just one gifted clothing designer – Madina Vadache? That was our challenge. There was only one answer: Let the artist's designs speak for themselves. And we are confident that they are capable of doing just that. They are indeed a worthy contribution to New York City's rich fashion design scene – even during frenzied Fashion Week.

As it is our central mission at the Vilcek Foundation to publicize, honor, and reward the contributions of immigrants to the arts and sciences, we pay very close attention to the aspirations and achievements of immigrants from all over, of all ages, and in all fields of endeavor. So it is not surprising that we became aware of a growing group of young immigrant fashion designers who are today fusing the esthetics and memories of the faraway places where they were born with inspirations from their new surroundings, to shift the center of the couture universe. They have, in short, created an entirely new American look, one that is favored by – among many other notables – First Lady Michelle Obama.

Madina Vadache is one of this generation. Born in Russia, in the mountainous southern region of Dagestan, she grew up without luxuries and with no access to western television or international fashion magazines. She was fired by her own imagination to create her designs, then relied upon her homegrown skills to produce them. It was her hard work, talent, and determination – all fed by a strong will – that led to her admission to the prestigious Academy of Fine Arts in the Republic of Georgia, where she studied fashion design and art. Once trained, and now more knowledgeable about



**SILK ORGANZA**  
INDIA

the industry, she came, in the late 1990s, to these shores. Here, free to apply the power of her creative energy and drive, Madina was soon pursuing her dream to build a fashion house in the United States. It wasn't long before she had presented her first couture collection, in 2000.

Madina Vadache's background in art, coupled with her keen interest in the world of art, comes through dramatically in her designs. She has a vision, and takes joy in the act of bringing it to life. She approaches dress design as a sculptor approaches a block of marble: She gets to know the fabric, really know it, before she begins to manipulate it into the desired shapes and effects. Madina's innovative use of unusual materials and striking contours is tempered by her emphasis on line continuity, giving her clothes a strong contemporary presence. Add to that an exuberant mix of colors, embellished with tiers of ruffles and lace flowers, one cannot help but recognize that Madina is gifted at producing ethereal effects. She incorporates light, transparent fabrics – the luminosity of silk crepe, the muted reflectivity of tulle – with her keen sense of proportion and color. All this artistic bravado is informed by Madina's Russian sensibility, which further defines the dramatic effect of her creations. The result? Madina Vadache's designs are evocative and magnetic; they have the power to inspire not only those lucky enough wear them, but those who admire them from afar as works of art.

The process of designing for the couture industry requires entrepreneurial skill, and relies on teamwork. Madina is a master at directing the highly skilled people with whom she works to realize her vision. We are grateful to Madina and her colleagues for creating 19 exquisite costumes expressly for this exhibition. Fashion is a visual art form; words cannot adequately describe a finely designed article of clothing. It must be seen – and, of course, worn.

Special thanks to the Vilcek Foundation staff, who did a stellar job of exploring the wild world of fashion, and were indefatigable in bringing this exhibition to light.

**Marica Vilcek**

Vice President



**POLKA DOT NYLON-MIX NETTING**  
ITALY



# TRANSPARENCY

MADINA  
VADACHE

## EXQUISITE COUTURE MARKS A RUSSIAN DESIGNER'S ENTRÉE INTO NEW YORK

BY ATIM ANNETTE OTON

Fashion design exhibitions embody still-life performance pieces that are staged with shrouded and clothed mannequins, each carefully selected and assembled to showcase the dramatic moments of a designer's vision and its creative realization. These exhibitions epitomize a stationary setting for displaying a designer's inventions; as such, they differ in nature from the highly mobile, fast-paced flow of the runway fashion shows. The traditional fashion exhibition usually celebrates a singular designer by means of a retrospective of his or her work, featuring original design pieces and assemblages over a certain period of time. Or they may display a collection of designers, styles, or design history as seen through the eyes of a curator, or as conceived by a museum or an academic institution. This tradition remains strong today, though it has evolved to include the direct commissioning of fashion designers for the express purpose of mounting exhibitions based on their ideas, works, and collections.

**Madina Vadache: Transparency** exemplifies the latter; it was commissioned by the Vilcek Foundation then envisioned and carried out by the Seattle-based Russian immigrant and fashion designer. **Transparency** presents Madina's Spring 2011 collection and is specifically timed to open during Fashion Week in New York City. The collection comprises a fascinating and flawless intersection of modern art, architecture, and fashion. It exudes mystery and drama, manifested in Madina's abundant use of structured proportions and complex draping, folding, and gathering of her signature material – silk organza. The results are provocative, sophisticated couture garments that define the designer's notions of what the modern woman wants and needs.



**EMBROIDERED NYLON-MIX NETTING**  
FRANCE



Since the Russian Revolution of 1917 and, subsequently, the emergence of Perestroika, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the end of the Cold War, the borders of the former Soviet Union opened wide to bring westward not just the secrets of old-world Russia but its exuberant assets – the ideas, styles, and talents of fashion designers – who are now showcasing in Paris, London, Milan, and New York, the fashion capitals of the world. Historically, as a fashion source, Russia has given to the world its traditional costumes, its Cossack outfits, folklore prints, fur hats, the epaulette and military-style frog, intricate detailing, and complex draping and intricate embroidery, all in the form of fashion couture styling.

According to Dorothy Behling, author of *The Russian Influence on Fashion 1909-1925*, famed fashion designer Coco Chanel's collections borrowed ideas from Russian traditional wear. One can see the source of influences, "in some of her loose shift dresses, tunics, crepe de chine blouses, waistcoats, and evening clothes."<sup>1</sup> Her clothing was typically decorated with beautiful colored embroidery and stitching using traditional Russian peasant designs.<sup>2</sup> Another highlight for Chanel's couture clientele was her version of the Russian *roubachka*, the long-belted blouse worn by Russian peasant women.<sup>3</sup>

According to Russian writer, Viktor Pelevin, "Russian history is in a sense a history of fashion. Scenery and costumes of main characters may change, but the essence of deep-laid processes remains the same. One may not agree with it, but as for Russian fashion, it's undoubtedly true."<sup>4</sup> Ksenia Galouchko, in a recent article for the British newspaper the *Telegraph*, noted that, in Russia, fashion revolutions overlapped political changes. This can be seen "from Peter the Great to the Revolution of 1917 to Gorbachev's Perestroika."<sup>5</sup> And this overlap is where new ideas and influences come into existence.

1

Behling, Dorothy [1979]. "The Russian Influence on Fashion 1909-1925," *Dress*, 5, 1–13; first published in *Costume Society of America*, Volume 5.

2

Ibid.

3

Ibid.

4

Galouchko, Ksenia. "Russian Fashion: Every Revolution Has Had Its Effect on the National Wardrobe" [2010, January 4], the *Telegraph*. Retrieved from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sponsored/russianow/culture/6931839/Russian-fashion-every-revolution-has-had-its-effect-on-the-national-wardrobe.html>

5

Ibid.

**NYLON - MIX NETTING**  
ITALY





Behling, again in *The Russian Influence on Fashion*, outlined the three important contributors to Russian haute couture, which shaped its growth and development. First, the art world was a key source of inspiration – in particular, the cubism and fauvism movements – which gave clothing its distinctive shapes and patterns. Fashion also brought greater awareness and attention to Slavic/traditional Russian folk art, around the early 1920s.<sup>6</sup> Second, and closely connected to the art world, was the theater, with artists such as Picasso and Matisse designing costumes for Diaghilev’s Ballet Russes. Third, in the early 1900s, came the appearance in the publishing industry of fashion periodicals, such as *Gazette du Bon Ton* and the *Journal des Dames et Des Modes*. These publications were key influencers on Russian haute couture. Prior to 1912, the Russian publishing trade produced few publications with a focus on fashion.<sup>7</sup>

In the last fifty years, a number of designers have used the Russian ballet as their muse. Consider the tribal designs of Yves Saint Laurent in the 1970s. He based his “a la Russes” collections on the Russian ballet.<sup>8</sup> More recently, Karl Lagerfeld was also inspired by the Ballets Russes to design a costume for the English National Ballet’s production of *The Dying Swan*, as part of its Ballets Russes season. The late Alexander McQueen likewise was inspired by the Ballets Russes to create the crimson silk kimono. It was worn by ballerina Sylvie Guillem in Russell Maliphant’s production of *Eonnagata* at Sadler’s Wells in June 2010.<sup>9</sup>

Russian immigrants began arriving to the United States during the eighteenth century. Since then, there have been waves of Russian immigrants to this country, but none to match the surge put into motion by the introduction of the Soviet policies glasnost and Perestroika, in the mid-1980s. Paul Magocsi’s essay “Russian Americans” details where Russian immigrants – men, women, and children – settled across the United States: in the Northeast, they came to New York City, Philadelphia, Boston, and other large cities; in the Midwest, they took up residence in Chicago, Cleveland, and Pittsburgh; and on the West Coast, they made homes in California and cities like Seattle.<sup>10</sup> Among them were members of the country’s artistic and professional classes, who brought with them the wealth of Russian culture – their expertise, skills, and crafts. Fashion designer Madina Vadache is one of those.

6

Orzada, Belinda T. Twentieth Century Design: Ethnic Influences. Russian Influences [1998, University of Delaware] referenced Behling, D. [1979], 1-13., Retrieved from <http://udel.edu/~orzada/Russia.htm>

7

Ibid.

8

Behling, D. [1979], 1-13.

9

Robinson, Victoria, *Fashion History: The Influence of the Ballets Russes on Fashion*. [2010, June 30], retrieved from <http://womensfashion.suite101.com/article.cfm/fashion-history---the-influence-of-the-ballets-russes-on-fashion#ixzz0wGuqd4Rn>

10

Magocsi, Paul Robert, “Russian Americans.” From *Countries and Their Cultures*, retrieved from <http://www.everyculture.com/multi/Pa-Sp/Russian-Americans.html>.

**SILK FAILLE**  
ITALY



Very few fashion designers evoke the fascinating and flawless intersection of art and fashion as dramatically as Russian-born designer Madina Vadache. Based in Seattle, Madina has a unique aesthetic, and the couture quality of her work clearly separates her forte from that of other designers. This distinction is most recognizable in her fabric choices, such as silk organza; in her dramatic proportioning and undulating lines; and in the flawless detailing of her materials and textures. Her one-of-a-kind styling is enabled by the methodologies of her close-knit group of couturiers, who are instrumental in helping her mold and shape her work.

In my opinion, Madina Vadache is a quiet talent. Her work speaks volumes about her, her upbringing, education, work experiences in Russian fashion houses, as well as her discriminating choices of traditional old-world couturier detailing and finishes. In this realm, she has become an important influence on European formal wear. Madina was born in the Dagestan region of Russia. Here, in the late 1970s, she recalls, she grew up with very little awareness or knowledge of fashion. As noted in her biography, “there were no outside fashion influences,” and so “she learned to rely on her own imagination and determination to develop a fine eye for beauty and art.”<sup>11</sup> She and her sister, Raya, began to handcraft their own clothing, which drew the attention of the locals and led to her work at several fashion houses, where she gained valuable experience.<sup>12</sup>

Madina’s early work at some of the Russian fashion houses made it clear that she was destined for a career in the fashion industry, and helped her to win a place at the Academy of Fine Arts in the Republic of Georgia, where she earned her bachelor’s degree in fashion design.<sup>13</sup> According to Madina, the experience prepared her well and allowed her to imagine creating her own fashion house. And in some sense, it provided the impetus for her to come to America.

**11**  
Basye, Ali, “The Madina Vadache Story: The Art of Fashion.” Retrieved from [http://www.madinavadache.com/mv/about\\_madina](http://www.madinavadache.com/mv/about_madina)

**12**  
Ibid.

**13**  
Ibid.



**SNAKE SKIN**  
USA



In the late 1990s, Madina and her former husband came on a short visit to the United States. That trip was enough to convince her that she wanted to live in this country and work here as a fashion designer. But there were some obstacles. Primary among them was that Madina spoke very little English at the time. But her fantasy – her American dream – needed no words.<sup>14</sup> She wanted to build her own fashion house in the States, specifically in Seattle; and like every other fashion designer, she also had one eye trained on New York. This long-term goal was the key to her work ethic and her ambition; it was also a reflection of her upbringing and a statement to the tenacity of her immigrant spirit. In short, Madina became driven to fulfill her goals.

After settling in Seattle, Madina immediately began working on her first U.S. couture bridal collection, unveiled in 2000. Bridal design is now a hallmark of her fashion house and a primary showcase for her talents. She received rave reviews for her now-signature use of silk organza, exquisite beading, sumptuous fabrics, and intricate and complex drapes, folds, and pleats. In Seattle, her new home, she found the opportunity to create something from nothing, and to build a following, along with a solid fashion business.

As her career began to take off, she worked even harder and dreamed even bigger to expand her business. Sadly, her marriage did not keep pace with her career; Madina and her husband began to grow apart, eventually separating after 10 years of marriage, and divorcing in 2007. Madina explained: “We lost common ground in our marriage, and the emotional stress of the divorce took the focus [away from] my business.” This major crisis in her life forced her to dig deep inside herself, and she took some time off to resolve her personal feelings. This period also gave her a chance to pay closer attention to herself, to her personal well-being. And it came at a time when the economy was shifting downward, so she also began a full reassessment of her professional dreams, her fashion career, and business.



**OSTRICH FEATHERS**  
AUSTRALIA



In 2009, Madina came to New York to explore the possibility of living and working there. That brought her to the attention of the Vilcek Foundation, and ultimately resulted in her commission to design the works featured in this exhibition. While she was in the City, she took the time to explore it – the design industry, in particular. She came to realize that Seattle was, after all, the place she wanted to be; but it took coming to New York to make her realize that Seattle is the city she loves, the place that nurtures her soul – it is, to her, home.

**Madina Vadache: Transparency** highlights the designer’s Spring 2011 collection, which revolves around the theme of transparency, with a concentration on fluidity and sculpture in clothing, and reveals her fascination with architecture, which is interwoven with the concepts of modernity and femininity. There is a veil of mystery about her work, which converges with the provocative idea of woman as modern-day goddess. Madina thinks of herself as a “soul designer,” one who creates to the rhythm of a modern woman’s soul and spirit.

Madina’s talent is at once definitive and classically European; it is about details and finish. In producing her clothing, she incorporates delicate ruching, fine stitching, intricate pleats, and a variety of folds and gathers, all carefully finished by hand. This detailing gives her work its exclusivity, its custom-fit and made-to-order feel; most importantly, it points to the distinct branding of an old-school couturier.

There are three types of fashion designers: those who can draw beautiful pieces, those who can draw and fabricate sensational fashions, and those who can truly relate to their materials and work with them to create spectacular pieces. Madina’s process – from first sketch to drawing board to finished product – takes the form of latter. She feels the fabric, allows it to take its own form and then shapes her vision around it. She is of those designers whose focus is on the finished item – the dress, and its three-dimensional character – not on the drawings on paper, where the work, to her, remains flat.

**BLACK LAMINATED COTTON LACE**  
ITALY



If modern art is one of Madina's sources of inspiration, so is architecture. Her friendship with Seattle gallery owner Patricia Cameron has given her greater exposure to modern art; and the influence of Seattle architect Milan Heger has enabled her to combine the influence of contemporary architecture with her experiments in futurism. She is intrigued by the transformation of flat surfaces – two-dimensional drawings into three-dimensional objects – and of odd shapes that can be converted into imaginative dress forms. These myriad influences are in keeping with her design sense and process.

Madina's Spring 2011 collection focuses on her ready-to-wear fashions and makes use of her signature fabric, silk organza. The exhibition draws attention to her love of this fabric, whose properties make it easy to manipulate. Silk organza is unique in its capability to be light, fluid, and transparent, even as it can keep the structure of its form. The collection includes form-fitting fashions that are punctuated by rich colors, volume, and shimmer, and stamped with Madina's unmistakable design touches: chic sophistication and daring feminine independence. Her creations are nurtured by her profound design sensibility and intuitive understanding of fabrics; the couturier herself is nurtured by her team of five local Seattle seamstresses, fabric specialists, and stylists.

**Transparency** opens at an opportune moment for Madina, and provides an ideal stage on which to present her talents to New York's fashion world – not at the Mercedes Benz Fashion Week venue, but in an intimate gallery setting easily accessible from the main show. The concept for the show came about at a time when Madina saw the need to rebuild her practice and fashion house. At the same time, she saw the economic changes in the industry and the country as an opportunity to explore showing in the competitive atmosphere of New York, by unveiling her ready-to-wear collection.



CHANTILLY LACE WITH GOLD METALLIC THREAD  
FRANCE



Her Spring 2011 collection features some 19 designs, at the center of which is the signature piece of her bridal wear collection – a wedding gown. The collection also showcases dresses and two-pieces, skirts and pants that can be worn as separates or mixed and matched according to the whims and needs of today’s practical, modern, stylish woman. Madina is confident the exhibition will meet with a positive response, yet she is not expecting miracles. Rather, she sees the event as the great opportunity it is to show her work in New York for the first time. As a fashion designer, she understands the significance of being in the right place and time, and the prospect of gaining the attention of New York’s fashion world is irresistible. She has come a long way from her small-town Russian origins. As for New York, it now can add another inspiring immigrant success story to its already long list, that of Madina Vadache.

#### **ADDITIONAL SOURCES**

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#### **COLLECTION DESIGN**

MADINA VADACHE

#### **GRAPHIC DESIGN**

AHOY STUDIOS

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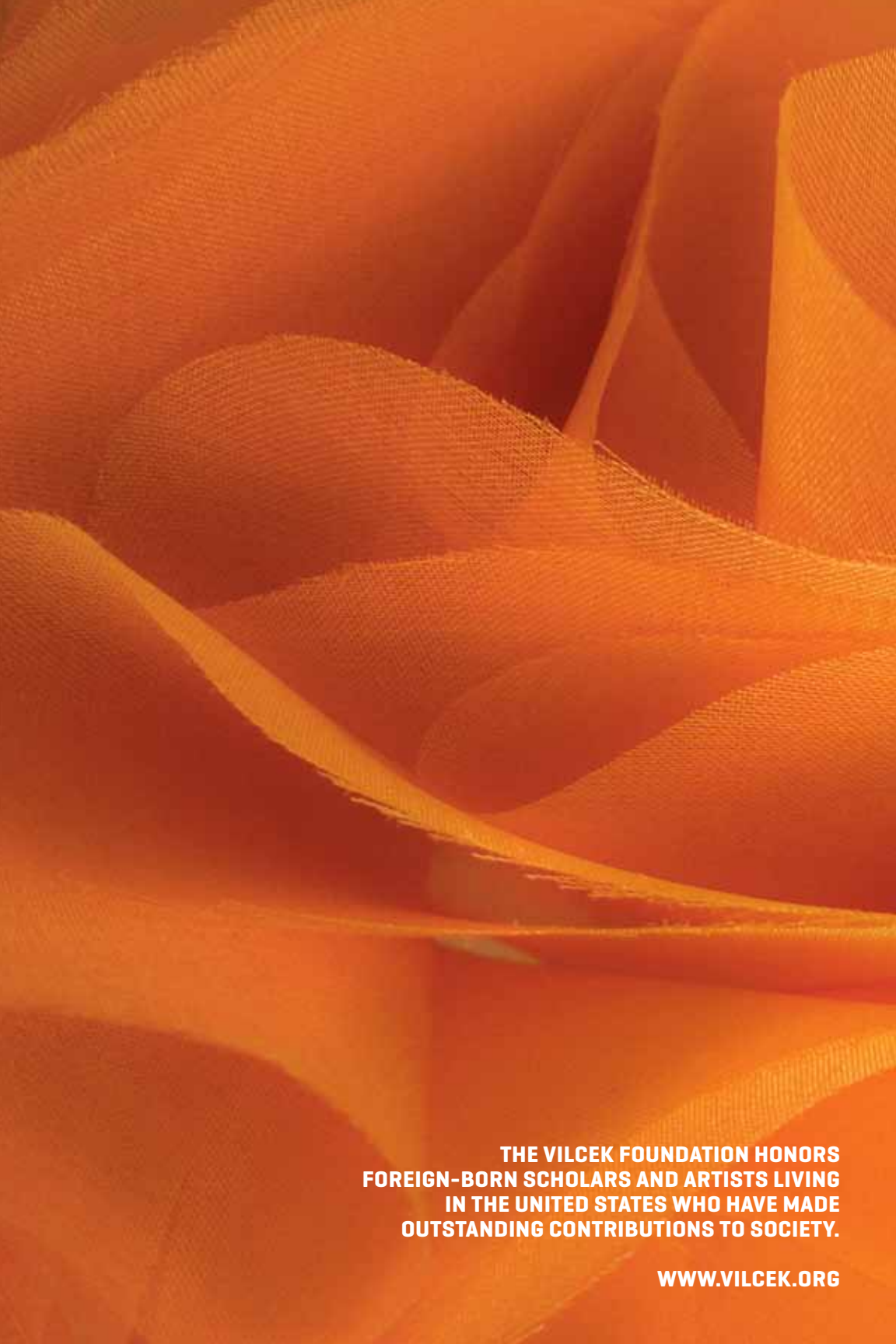
#### **EXHIBITION DESIGN**

TOW STUDIOS ARCHITECTURE PLLC



**CHANTILLY POLY-COTTON LACE**  
FRANCE





**THE VILCEK FOUNDATION HONORS  
FOREIGN-BORN SCHOLARS AND ARTISTS LIVING  
IN THE UNITED STATES WHO HAVE MADE  
OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTIONS TO SOCIETY.**

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