Zandra Rhodes x DMU - celebrating iconic fashion designer Dame Zandra Rhodes with major new exhibition

De Montfort University Leicester (DMU) has opened a landmark exhibition celebrating the work of fashion icon Dame Zandra Rhodes, following her decision to donate a significant part of her personal archive to the university.

Zandra Rhodes: Archive Unfolded will showcase highlights from a donation spanning six decades of Rhodes' career, from 1964 to 2025, and containing thousands of objects including licensed work, press cuttings, film, opera material and colour transparencies.

The gift follows Dame Zandra's Honorary Doctorate of the Arts from DMU in 2023, when she announced her intention to place a key part of her archive with the university's Special Collections. Established in 2020, the Zandra Rhodes Foundation exists to preserve her legacy and open up her archive as a learning resource for future generations.

Zandra said she decided to donate her archives to see them put to use.

She said: "I formed the foundation when I realised my extensive archive could do so much more than sit in personal storage, unseen by anyone beyond my studio team.

"After learning about the university's special collections and its impressive facilities and opportunities available to students and staff, I knew I wanted to build a connection with the institution to help inspire the creative minds of today and tomorrow."

The exhibition will run across two sites on DMU's Leicester campus. At Leicester Gallery, Zandra Rhodes: Design Collaborations will explore her licensing partnerships with brands including IKEA, Topshop and Marks & Spencer, alongside an introductory press timeline featuring highlights such as the 1970 US Vogue feature of Natalie Wood wearing pieces from Rhodes' first collection, and her 2021 HUNGER cover story shot by Rankin. The gallery will also house a process table revealing Rhodes' design methods and a display of hanging silk screens, with the adjoining atrium featuring printed silk chiffon banners and show posters.

At DMU Museum, visitors can explore Rhodes' iconic Autumn/Winter 1983 Mediæval Collection in depth, tracing its journey from historical research and sketches to finished garments and runway. The display sits within the museum's distinctive setting, built around the remains of a fourteenth-century church uncovered during construction of the campus in 1935.

Student responses to the archive will also be exhibited across the university, reflecting how the collection is already being used within teaching.

Carolyn Hardarker, Head of the School of Design Innovation, said the archive had already made a significant impact on students.

She said: "It is a great privilege to collaborate with Dame Zandra and her team on the forthcoming exhibition, which will celebrate this remarkable resource."

Katherine Short, Head of De Montfort Special Collections, said the archive was now thoroughly embedded into teaching across art, fashion and design subjects, adding: "There's such a vibrant energy to Zandra's works and it's so inspiring to see and handle original sketches, tracing their development through the collection from drawing to finished garment."

Professor Katie Normington, DMU's Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive, said the university was honoured to display the collection. "They are an inspiration to our students and visitors and her confidence in bestowing these to us demonstrates our world-leading status as a fashion educator."

Entry to Zandra Rhodes: Archive Unfolded is free and open to all members of the public, with a programme of associated events and workshops running alongside the exhibition, including tours for local school children.