Front Row traces and celebrates the rise of Chinese American designers who decided to make their mark in New York. In the 1980s, designers such as Anna Sui, Yeohlee Teng, Vera Wang and Vivienne Tam emerged onto the New York fashion scene just as the city was transforming its identity from a garment center into one of the fashion capitals of the world. Curiously, the growth of New York’s Chinatown, the preponderance of Chinese manufacturers (tailors and seamstresses) in the city’s garment district, and the increased outsourcing of garment manufacturing to China, occurred alongside the rapid growth of fashion’s creative industries and a broader shift towards creative-driven production in New York.

Since then, a new generation of young designers, from Derek Lam to Phillip Lim, have gone on to build global enterprises alongside established figures in an international fashion world. The diversity of their aesthetics, their individualized approaches to branding, and their varying personal relationship to cultural identity has shaped what we now understand as not only New York fashion, but an American sense of style.

This exhibition, guest-curated by designer Mary Ping, features the unique visions of seventeen designers amidst a larger narrative of social and cultural forces that accentuated and cultivated this group’s rise. Front Row will feature designer assemblages of signature looks while drawing on personal reflections that speak to unique artistic visions and entrepreneurial paths. From the origins of their careers and development of signature styles, to understanding their own complex relationship to the concepts of New York and Asia, the exhibition will explore the rise of these Chinese American designers and their connection to New York City.
Shanghai Glamour: New Women 1910s-40s
April 26, 2013 – September 29, 2013

Shanghai Glamour explores how Shanghai women and their fashionable dress epitomized the seduction and mystery of this legendary city as it was modernizing in the early 20th century. Shanghai was established as a treaty port in the nineteenth century and became a major modern metropolis by the 1920s, internationally known as “the Paris of the East.”

The city’s identity was deeply associated with its women and their fashion. Their dresses and manners textured the city’s modern life and became the emblems of Shanghai modernity. Beyond the glamour, the changing styles of female clothing and the controversial images of modern women also manifested the social and political anxieties in the transitional period that ushered in new gender roles.

The exhibition, guest-curated by scholar Mei Mei Rado features fifteen exquisite outfits from the 1910s to 1940s on loan from the China National Silk Museum in Hangzhou and prominent New York collections. The dresses will be complemented by period accessories, photographs, lifestyle magazines and films. Focusing on the unique Shanghai allure represented by women of different roles and their dresses, the exhibition examines how Shanghai women initiated styles that expressed their identities in relation to the city and how each archetype of femininity came to be associated with a certain characteristic Shanghai look. The show will describe styles from various corners of Shanghai society — the student, socialite, courtesan, movie star, artist, dancing girl, and housewife — to reconstruct the social and cultural pulses behind the many facets of Shanghai glamour.