



Pat McDonagh white satin strapless evening gown with black velvet trim and applique, ca. 2000s.
Toronto Metropolitan University
FRC2013.99.020. Label.

Toronto Metropolitan
University

EVENING GOWNS & CANADIAN DESIGNER PAT MCDONAGH

By **Dr. Ingrid Mida**

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There are many beautiful evening gowns in the Fashion Research Collection at Toronto Metropolitan University, with the oldest gown dating back to c.1860.

Wedding gowns, ball gowns and evening gowns might only be worn once or perhaps only a few times, and then stored for many years before the owner is willing to part with them. Special event clothing often makes up a high proportion of study and museum collections, and that is also true at Toronto Metropolitan University.

For this blog post, I have selected two evening ensembles created by acclaimed Canadian designer Pat McDonagh. Both evening gowns featured in this post are finely finished, a hallmark of the Canadian label *Pat McDonagh*.



Pat McDonagh white
satin strapless evening
gown with black velvet
trim and applique,
ca. 2000s. Toronto
Metropolitan University
FRC2013.99.020.

Pat McDonagh was born in England and studied at Manchester University and the Sorbonne, before coming to Canada in the 1970s. According to her website biography, she was known for her “innovative textile techniques and youthful romanticism” and has designed gowns for celebrities and royalty. She was one of the founding members of the Fashion Design Council of Canada and had a remarkable career as a Canadian fashion designer with 2010 marking her 40th year in fashion. She was the recipient of a number of awards including:

American Legend Fur Award
Five World Bureau Awards, 1975
New York Times award for Design Excellence, 1982
Judy Award for Contribution to the Canadian Fashion Industry, 1992
The Majestic Mink Award, 1994
Bata Shoe Museum Best Shoe Award, 2000
Matinee International Award, 2002
NAFA Fur Award, 2002
FDCC Lifetime Achievement Award, 2003



Pat McDonagh gold
lame two-piece
evening ensemble,
ca. 1980s. Toronto
Metropolitan University
FRC2000.04.002AB.
Donated by Alice Chu.

Two evening gowns in the FRC collection can be linked to awards, since the shiny gold of one evening ensemble suggests a gold medal performance and the other was actually worn by the first Canadian winner of an international Irish dance competition.

This shiny metallic gold lame Edwardian style top with puffed sleeves and ruffles with a matching skirt captures the essence of the 1980s evening look, which was a blend of decadence and Hollywood glitz. The metallic finish would sparkle in the dimmest light.



Pat McDonagh white satin strapless evening gown with black velvet trim and applique, ca. 2000s. Toronto Metropolitan University FRC2013.99.020. Applique detail.

A snow-white satin evening gown with black velvet trim at the bust-line and black velvet applique on the skirt is another statement piece by Pat McDonagh, but in a quieter and more refined way. The dress is in perfect condition, and likely worn only once. According to the McDonagh studio, this dress was designed for “Canada’s first winner of the Rose of Tralee Festival in Tralee Ireland. Contestants of Irish descent come from all over the world to compete for the title of Irish Rose, the dress was prepared with traditional Irish symbols, it is the biggest pageant festival in the world.” This festival takes its inspiration from a 19th century ballad about a woman called “The Rose of Tralee” because of her beauty. The 1996 winner was Colleen Mooney of Toronto.

The black velvet applique is reminiscent of the soutache embroidery on white cotton gowns that was so popular in the 1860s. (See for example the White cotton pique day dress embroidered with black soutache from the Costume Institute at the Met. [C.I.60.6.11 A+B](#) recently on display alongside a painting by [Claude Monet](#) called “Women in the Garden” from 1866 in the exhibition [Fashion, Impressionism and Modernity](#) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art seen in this [installation shot](#)).

Wearing McDonagh would make for a winning statement!

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

“About Pat McDonagh”. *Pat McDonagh*, n.d. Web, Jan. 2013.

Routh, Caroline. *In Style: 100 Years of Canadian Women’s Fashions*. Toronto: Stoddart Publishing Co. Ltd., 1993. Print.