

Burgundy velour tunic dress with long sleeves and matching detachable hood. Size 9/10, Label reads Marilyn Brooks Made in Canada, ca. 1970s.
Toronto Metropolitan University
FRC1998.01.002AB. Gift of Anne Sarsfield.



A MARILYN BROOKS EVENING GOWN

By Dr. Ingrid Mida

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This rich toned burgundy velour tunic dress with long sleeves and matching detachable hood was designed by Marilyn Brooks in the early 1970s. Highly fashionable for the period, but also washable, it would have been suitable as an evening gown. Hooded gowns were popular during this time, and Margaret Trudeau wore a [hooded wedding dress](#) that she designed herself for her wedding to then Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau in 1971.

The sheen of the fabric is undiminished and the ensemble is in perfect condition. The shoulder yoke has horizontal tucks that are not readily visible in the photo. The dress closes at the back with a metal zipper. The label reads: "marilyn brooks, size 9/10, Made in/Fabrique au CANADA CA07455". Handwritten in script are the words "Betty Sonsfield 1970".



Marilyn Brooks Gown,
ca. 1970s. Detachable
hood. Toronto
Metropolitan University
FRC1998.01.002AB. Gift
of Anne Sarsfield.

Although Marilyn Brooks does not recall designing this specific dress, she wrote in an email to me on November 1, 2013 that: "The fabric was great and it was washable. Somehow I remember the fabric being made in Canada. It was important to always cut the fabric only one way. The feel of the hand going down....never up." She also recalled that she had designed some medieval inspired gowns for the department store Simpson's in the 1970s, but that this dress was not part of that series.

The Marilyn Brooks label was an important part of Canadian fashion history (note 1), providing fashionable and innovative designs for more than 40 years. The collection page on her website reads "The women who wore Marilyn's designs ran the gamut from twenty onwards, but they were all creative, self-confident women with strong personalities who exude warmth and humour. These intelligent women were looking for ease with innovation and function with whimsy, at a price that immediately said good value! Marilyn's clothes were known for versatility and easily stood up to the rigors of an active and travel oriented lifestyle."



Marilyn Brooks
Gown, ca. 1970s.
Label detail. Toronto
Metropolitan University
FRC1998.01.002AB. Gift
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Marilyn is now retired from fashion and works as an artist. She is also working on her autobiography, and visited the Toronto Metropolitan University campus last fall to speak to students about her experiences as a designer. I recall feeling her warmth and good humour as she told the many anecdotes from her life.

The Toronto Metropolitan University Fashion Research Collection only has only one other garment from the Marilyn Brooks label, a lilac cotton two-piece top and skirt ensemble from the late 1970s and pre-1983 (FRC1983.04.21A+B). The top has a Peter Pan collar with machine embroidery in a floral pattern and a front button closure as well as a shoulder yoke with ruched detail and a drawstring waist. The skirt is gathered at the waist and buttons at the back. We would welcome donations of any other Marilyn Brooks garments in good condition.

Note 1: In the book "In Style: 100 Years of Canadian Fashion", Caroline Routh mentions Marilyn Brooks as well as Claire Haddad, Pat McDonagh, Edith Strauss, and Winston as among the "important fashion designers in Toronto in the seventies" (152).