

The Million Dollar Dress



A Givenchy-clad Audrey Hepburn at the window of Tiffany & Co. in the opening scene of *Breakfast at Tiffany's*

Fashion is enjoying another Audrey moment. Next month's auction at Christie's of her iconic Hubert de Givenchy *Breakfast at Tiffany's* dress—worn here by Natalie Portman—to benefit the poor in India could not be more timely

Text by Sarah Bailey

Photographs by Peter Lindbergh

Oh, I was so nervous that I wasn't going to fit into it," says Natalie Portman of Audrey Hepburn's *Breakfast at Tiffany's* dress. "Everyone kept telling me how small it was, and I'm not the type who can starve myself. I'm small," she continues, laughing, "but it's not like I'm see-through."

Fit, however, the famous Givenchy column dress did. "I did feel very elegant suddenly. I mean, you can't possibly measure up to Audrey Hepburn; there's no comparison. But the elegance that she exuded was transmitted to the dress, you know, the feeling, the emotion of it..."

The image of Hepburn as Holly

Golightly—pearls roped around her neck, a beehive, the perfect long black dress—drinking from a paper cup of coffee on Fifth Avenue in the early hours is one of the most potent fashion moments in movie history. "That dress was the first guide to my career at Givenchy," says Riccardo Tisci, current creative director of the house, "because it's very sensual but at the same time very severe. It was 1961, and this dress is in a way very '60s. The front is severe, elegant, very clean, but at the back there is this very interesting neckline, somewhere between ethnic and Parisian: a softness that other designers in that time didn't have."

As Hubert de Givenchy tells it today, Audrey Hepburn walked into his life in 1953, less than two years after he opened ▶

EVERETT COLLECTION



Today's gamine, Natalie Portman, wears a timeless classic for charity. Audrey Hepburn's 1961 Hubert de Givenchy *Breakfast at Tiffany's* dress, estimated at £50,000 to £70,000, to be auctioned at Christie's South Kensington, London, on December 5. 44-207-930-6074. Diamond-and-pearl earrings, \$2300, **Tiffany & Co.** 800-526-0649. Necklace, \$400, **Kenneth Jay Lane**. See page 20 to order. Headband, stylist's own. See Where to Buy for details. Fashion editor: **Jenny Capitain**

his first *maison de couture* in Paris at age 24. A friend of Givenchy's from the house of Schiaparelli, Gladys de Segonzac, who'd gone to work for Paramount, announced she wanted to bring a certain Miss Hepburn to his salon. "*Roman Holiday* had not yet shown in Paris, and I was thinking it was *Katharine* Hepburn. And certainly, I was very happy because I had a great admiration for Katharine Hepburn," chuckles the 79-year-old designer, speaking from Paris. "And it was a great surprise to see this very beautiful, very thin young girl who asked me if I was ready to help design the dresses for *Sabrina*."

And the rest, as they say, is one of the greatest love stories in the history of fashion. At Audrey's request, Givenchy went on to design looks for contemporary movies like *Funny Face* and *Charade* as well as for her personal wardrobe. "And the more we worked together, the more and more we loved each other. A little bit like a big brother, I understood Audrey and I loved her and I was completely dedicated to her," says Givenchy warmly. "And this happens, I tell you, rarely in the life of anybody."

Even for the great couturier himself, the Holly Golightly black dress somehow crystallizes the ultimate Audrey moment: "It was a perfect dress for her." In fact, three versions were made for the film's production. Today one resides in Madrid's Museum of Costume, another in the Givenchy archive in Paris. Since Audrey's death in 1993, Givenchy has donated key pieces from his collection to raise money for disadvantaged children around the world in an attempt to continue the spirit of his late friend's work for UNICEF. When he recently dined with French writer Dominique Lapierre, whose City of Joy Aid charity has been providing aid to the poorest of the poor in India for 25 years, Givenchy decided it was time to release the last Holly Golightly dress for auction—his own.

It was this compassionate gesture that lured Natalie, not known for her love of a gratuitous photo opportunity, away from rehearsals for her upcoming film *The Other Boleyn Girl* in London to model Audrey's gown for the pages of *Bazaar*.

The Israeli-born, Long Island-raised actress has oft been tagged the modern-day Audrey Hepburn, not only for her gamine beauty but also for her commitment to charitable work. "Oh, no, no, no, no," she protests, horrified. "Comparing people is only insulting to her unique quality. She's the original one to put her empathy before everything. She was a very, very special person."

Still, at only 25 years old, Natalie shares Ms. Hepburn's appetite for activism. A meeting with Queen Rania of Jordan during her final year of college was the catalyst that sparked her involvement with the Foundation for International Community Assistance (FINCA), a nonprofit agency that provides "village banking"—including small loans to low-income families—throughout the world, placing particular emphasis on the empowerment of women. How she came to meet Queen Rania betrays the Harvard psychology graduate's quiet courage, not to mention considerable boldness. "Because I'm Israeli and Queen Rania is probably the most high-profile Palestinian woman in the world, I had this dream of meeting with her and doing something that would promote peace and working together between Israeli and Palestinian women," Natalie explains. "She talked to me a lot about what she calls the 'hope gap' that exists between the one third of the world that has and the two thirds that do not. I wasn't even aware that two thirds of the world population are extremely poor, living on less than three dollars a day, and that 70 percent of those people are women and children. It's not something they teach you in school in the States."

Since then, Natalie has traveled to three FINCA field projects, in Guatemala, Uganda, and Ecuador, and met with several members of Congress to argue for more government funding for such microfinance initiatives. From the animated turn our conversation has taken, I can only imagine how effective she is. "I'm at my happiest when I'm working on stuff like this," she grins, "so it's a lucky opportunity."

And if, in years to come, a sale is held at Christie's to auction the quintessential Natalie Portman dress to raise money for FINCA, what would it be? "Oh, I've no idea," she eye rolls, looking down apologetically at the nondescript sweater, pants, and canvas sneakers she's worn for our interview. "But I feel that it would be *Star Wars* related," she laughs.

For an actress who has been working since she was 11 years old, Natalie is astonishingly grounded. "Anytime I start enjoying a Hollywood party, I start getting nervous. It's fun to observe," she says with a shrug. Though she's unlikely to delight the tabloids by modeling a new It handbag for every day of the week (a careful eco-consumer, she frankly abhors such profligacy), Natalie does understand the power of beauty. "I'm very aesthetically inclined," she smiles when I commend her on her recent impeccable red-carpet choices, be they a vintage lace Chanel strapless sheath or a Grecian Lanvin gown. "You have to enjoy the things that are lucky about your life. Enjoy it, but also try to continue to experience things and be curious, and also try to spread the luck."

On Givenchy's long collaboration with Audrey, Natalie observes, "Their work together was so well matched, because she had that inimitable grace and elegance. All women desire to carry themselves with that balletic grace. Givenchy's dresses complemented that in their simplicity. It shows confidence to wear such a simple, graceful dress that is not calling attention to itself. Not showy, not flashy, just confidence that the woman herself will attract the gaze."

Audrey once said of Givenchy, "His are the only clothes in which I feel myself." And so for the last word, we must turn to the maestro: "You know, this is a marvelous story," says Givenchy, his voice crackling just a little over the telephone, "because one piece of fabric worn by a beautiful person like Audrey gives joy and possibility—the possibility to give water or food or a roof. So we continue with Audrey's spirit, because for me she is always still there, and this is a way to communicate, to continue this love affair." ■

“All women desire to carry themselves with Audrey’s balletic grace. Givenchy’s dresses complemented that,” says Natalie

A new silhouette for the legendary fashion house, courtesy of creative director Riccardo Tisci. Dress, \$2470, Givenchy. Barneys New York, NYC; 212-826-8900. See Where to Buy for details. Hair: Eugene Souleiman for TIGI S-factor; makeup: Val Garland; manicure: Marian Newman; production: Mega Film Factory