



In this file photo performers and models on the runway at the 2018 Victoria's Secret Fashion Show at Pier 94 in New York City. — AFP

END OF AN ERA AS VICTORIA'S SECRET SCRAPS ANNUAL FASHION SHOW

It was one of the most popular fashion shows for 20 years, but US lingerie brand Victoria's Secret is canceling its annual extravaganza amid controversy and weak financial results in the #MeToo era. The decision, in the offing since the summer, reflects a shift towards brands seen as more empowering of women, such as singer Rihanna's, and comes after several years of declining TV viewership. The brand is often accused of objectifying women and has been struggling to appeal to a younger generation of lingerie shoppers who increasingly prefer simpler, less sexualized designs.

Victoria's Secret has also received negative publicity surrounding its owner's links to Jeffrey Epstein, who killed himself in prison this year while awaiting trial on charges he trafficked underage girls for sex. The fashion show, in which models parade around with

angels' wings on their backs, first aired in 1995. It was broadcast around the world, with the venue changing from year to year. American viewers have declined by almost a third since 2014, from nine million then to 3.3 million in December last year.

The decision to scrap it was confirmed by Stuart Burgdoerfer, finance director of parent company L Brands, during a conference call with analysts about the brand's latest quarterly results. Victoria's Secret once defined glamour, attracting the most sought-after supermodels like Gisele Bündchen and Naomi Campbell. But Burgdoerfer added that the brand, which was the jewel in L Brands' crown for many years, had not been able to achieve a new lease on life despite recent leadership changes.

Its sales have been slipping in the past two years, weighing on the bottom line of L

Brands which reported a net loss of \$252 million in the third quarter, against a \$43 million loss a year earlier. Victoria's Secret sales were just over \$1 billion in the third quarter of 2019, down seven percent from the same period in 2018. More than 30 of its stores have closed since February. The brand seems to be paying the price, in part, for some marketing blunders.

The cast in the show's 2018 edition was more cosmopolitan than usual, following criticism that the brand had little regard for diversity in its choice of models. But days after last year's event, marketing director Ed Razek ruled out using transgender or plus-size models in future shows. His ill-judged comments came as demands for greater diversity on catwalks increases. They sparked an outcry on social media and he later apologized.

Rihanna

More serious perhaps is that the brand has regularly been mentioned in articles about disgraced hedge fund manager Epstein, who was accused of multiple sexual assaults on young women, many of them teenagers. Epstein, who was arrested in July, had been close to L Brands founder Leslie Wexner. Wexner was thought to be Epstein's biggest financial backer for a while after hiring him as a financial advisor in the 1980s.

Wexner said he severed ties with Epstein after the latter's conviction for sex crimes with underage girls in 2008. Moreover, countless women who accused Epstein of sexual assault said they were recruited to work for him on the false promise that he would get them jobs as Victoria's Secret models. Models' rights group the Model Alliance hailed the show's cancellation, noting that 100 models had

signed a letter calling on Victoria's Secret to join its "Respect" program aimed at preventing sexual assault and fostering fair working conditions.

With Victoria's Secret on the slide, Rihanna is the new star of the lingerie market with her "Savage X Fenty". The brand is big on diversity and seeks to project an image of women as the masters of their own bodies and desires. Supermodels Gigi and Bella Hadid and Cara Delevingne paraded its lingerie at New York Fashion Week in September, signaling how popular the brand has become. "It was the first time on the runway that I felt really sexy," supermodel Bella Hadid told Elle magazine. — AFP

First Marvel comic sets auction record

The first comic book produced by Marvel, the famed US publisher behind Spider-Man, X-Men and The Avengers, went under the hammer Thursday, fetching a record \$1.26 million, Heritage Auctions said. "This is a historic copy of a historic comic book," Ed Jaster, auction house senior vice president, said of the book, which was published in 1939 by Timely Comics, which later became Marvel.

"Without question, this is the granddaddy of all Marvel Comics, without which we would not have the characters and stories we enjoy in today's comics and feature films," Jaster added.

Under the direction of screenwriter Stan Lee, Marvel in the 1960s created superheroes which have become iconic today and whose cinema adaptations have conquered box offices worldwide.

The first copy of "Marvel Comics" was sold in very good condition and well above the price of 10 cents it fetched back in 1939. "Amazing Fantasy #15," in which Spider-Man first appears, slipped to second-highest Marvel comic ever auctioned, having sold for \$1.1 million in 2011. The most expensive comic book in history remains the first issue of "Action Comics" published in 1938 in which Superman makes his debut. It sold for \$3.2 million in 2014. — AFP

This image courtesy of Heritage Auctions shows a copy of Marvel Comics No. 1, the 1939 comic book considered the 'Big Bang' of the Marvel Comics Superhero Universe. — AFP



Posthumous Leonard Cohen album offers apt final waltz

Though his storied career needed no epilogue, Leonard Cohen's graceful new posthumous album "Thanks for the Dance" offers a satisfying postscript, giving fans one last chance to savor his inimitable poetry. Mere weeks before his death at age 82, Cohen released his 2016 album "You Want It Darker," a stirring work whose lyrics continue his metaphysical exploration of death, spirituality, and his place in the universe.

Though many saw it as the final chapter from a singular talent, Cohen had more reckoning to do—and the unfinished pieces he left behind are now integrated into his vast body of work. In mourning his father's death, Cohen's son Adam, also a musician, grew determined to do justice to the raw vocal recordings left behind. He assembled a number of star musicians including Spanish guitarist Javier Mas, Daniel Lanois and Jennifer Warnes—one of Cohen's collaborators and many flames—to compose sparse but warm instrumentals to accompany Cohen's rich baritone timbre.



Canadian singer and poet Leonard Cohen takes off his hat to salute in Paris. — AFP

The likes of artists Beck, Feist and Damien Rice also lent their talents to the new album. The nine tracks on "Thanks for the Dance" blend coherently into his oeuvre with forward-looking contemplations, examining the past not with nostalgia but with an inner drive to explore his own psyche. "It was nothing, it was business / But it left an ugly mark / So I've come here to revisit / What happens to the heart." Cohen intones on the opening track "Happens to the Heart."

Devotional investigation

In "Moving On"—an elegy to his one-time love and muse Marianne Ihlen, the inspiration behind the 1967 classic "So Long, Marianne" who died just months before Cohen—the artist considers his own restlessness in romance, a theme that has long pervaded his work. "And now you're gone, now you're gone / As if there ever was a you / Who broke the heart and made it new? / Who's moving on, who's kiddin' who?" he says. Adam Cohen has said his father recorded those vocals just after he heard of Ihlen's death.

"He was not trying to be a nostalgia act, like so many of his contemporaries," he recently told The New York Times. "He wasn't going backwards. He would say to me, 'I am taking the inner life very seriously.'" "And I think that's why it resonates so deeply to us. It wasn't an act. This was a devotional investigation into wherever he found himself." The haunting "Puppets" considers the world he would leave: "German puppets burned the Jews," he says, later delivering the line, "Puppet presidents command / Puppet troops to burn the land."

Cohen draws in listeners with his signature deadpan humor—but leaves them with poignant introspection. In the sensual "The Night of Santiago" he follows up amusing lines like "her nipples rose like bread" with a moving recollection of distant lust: "Though I've forgotten half my life / I still remember this." In his final public appearance promoting "You Want It Darker," the then ailing Cohen granted journalists in Los Angeles a glimpse into a work in progress.

He said, "God willing," the poetry would appear on his next album—it's now his final track, a last dance. His son retrieved audio of his father's recitation from the conference to include on the album. "Listen to the hummingbird / Whose wings you cannot see / Listen to the hummingbird / Don't listen to me," Cohen says, before the song drifts into silence. — AFP

Monty Python's Terry Gilliam outraged by climate change

Fresh from winning an award from the Cairo International Film Festival, outspoken British-American director Terry Gilliam on Friday lambasted Donald Trump, urged more action on climate change and denounced political correctness in Hollywood. Speaking in the Egyptian capital on his 79th birth-

day, the prolific filmmaker, known for cult classics including "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas", took a shot at the US president. Gilliam praised former top White House Russia expert Fiona Hill's testimony in Thursday's impeachment hearings against Trump. "If anyone

takes down Trump, it will be Fiona Hill," he said in a briefing with reporters overlooking the Nile on the sidelines of the festival. The director who was part of the culture-shaping comedy troupe Monty Python received a lifetime achievement award from the festival this week. Addressing the dire impact of climate change, Gilliam insisted that the 2016 Paris climate accord had not gone far enough to combat environmental degradation. "You got this planet and there's no question that it is in big trouble. We already have passed the danger mark," he said. "We keep on spending billions to try to get to Mars and by that time this planet will look like Mars," he added.

No stranger to controversy, Gilliam derided attempts to make films more socially inclusive, particularly with regards to gender and race. "In Hollywood, there's a lot of pressure if you're going to have a transgender character, then you have to have a transgender actor—it's ridiculous," he told AFP. "If you're going to have a serial killer then you've got to have a serial killer actor who has killed many people? It's illogical," Gilliam added.

He referred to actress Zoe Saldana who was criticized for portraying legendary soul singer Nina Simone, saying she was "pilloried" for darkening her skin for the role. "If

I'm going to play an Italian on film I'll darken my skin, I'll try to look Mediterranean," Gilliam said. "This is such superficial nonsense". He went to say the #MeToo movement had not made him rethink his casting decisions.

Last year, Gilliam sparked a firestorm by saying ambitious actresses willingly "paid the price" of having sex with disgraced film executive Harvey Weinstein. He has since walked back from those comments, describing Weinstein on Friday as a "complete monster", but said similar behavior in the film industry was likely inevitable. "Hollywood has always been and will probably continue to be about power, and power is always abused," he told AFP.

The Cairo festival, which runs until November 29, was the first Arab film festival to sign the "5050x2020" Gender Parity Pledge launched last year at the Cannes Film Festival. The pledge aims to promote gender equality in filmmaking after the Weinstein scandal. Gilliam's latest film, "The Man who killed Don Quixote", stars heart-throb Adam Driver and took 17 years to complete. — AFP



British film director Terry Gilliam speaks with reporters during an interview on the sidelines of the 41st edition of the Cairo International Film Festival (CIFF) at a hotel in the centre of the Egyptian capital Cairo. — AFP

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