

The "Geoffrey Beene: Trapeze" exhibit at the Phoenix Art Museum.

Beene Streak

When Geoffrey Beene died in 2004, longtime client Patsy Tarr honored him by publishing a book. Done in collaboration with Abbott Miller, art director of Tarr's dance magazine 2wice, "Geoffrey Beene: A Design Tribute" featured more than 40 of her own Beene garments. "In our grief, we made the book and wrote lengthy, schmaltzy essays," says Tarr. Now, four years after the book's release, Tarr has opened her closets again, this time for an exhibition at the <u>Phoenix Art Museum</u>.

What makes "Geoffrey Beene: Trapeze," which opened this weekend and runs through March 7, different from his other shows is Tarr herself. "We're not just looking at Beene and his work," says Dennita Sewell, the museum's curator of fashion design, "but looking at it through the eyes of a dedicated wearer." So while the exhibit doesn't catalogue every Beene career hit — no football jersey-inspired gowns here — it does offer a nice array of, for example, his breakthrough boleros and jumpsuits, both Tarr favorites. "I didn't buy the clothes to have a collection," says Tarr. "I bought clothes to wear."

Tarr and Sewell narrowed the exhibition pieces down to 37, most of which are from the late Eighties and Nineties. "You'll see a number of his signature themes," says Sewell. "Geometry, mix of fabrics, black and white." The two brought in Miller to help with the backdrop, which proved a poignant move; not only is Miller a close friend of Tarr, but he was also once Beene's graphic designer.

In keeping with the exhibit's "trapeze" theme — Beene was a lover of the circus, as seen in the polkadot and cartoon motifs — Miller created a playful feel, with circular platforms and mannequins hanging from the ceiling. "The fact that Abbott, Beene and Patsy all knew each other gives this a sophistication and insight beyond a normal retrospective," says Sewell, adding other Beene acquaintances will also be making appearances. On Jan. 20, Russell Nardozza, senior vice president and chief operating officer of Geoffrey Beene LLC, will give a talk with Doo-Ri Chung, who worked closely with the designer, and on Feb. 2 and 3, Grace Mirabella and former Vogue creative director Jade Hobson Charnin will give their own lectures.

The highlights for Beene aficionados, however, will be the custom designs he did for Tarr — the quilted silk gown she wore to the 2003 Costume Institute gala at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, for instance. "I needed a dress to wear to the 'Goddess' exhibit opening," she recalls. "I told him I would leave [the design] up to him, but that my understanding was that everyone was wearing Madame Grès." Beene, in a move reflecting his famous wit, re-created an old gown of his for Tarr — in gray.