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HD FASHION SCOOPS

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STAR TURN: Cate Blanchett certainly keeps busy. The recent Oscar winner appeared at a press preview in New York Friday as an ambassador of Giorgio Armani's new women's fragrance, Si. Asked about new projects, Blanchett said she had just finished a film, "Carol," with Todd Haynes, based on "The Price of Salt," a book by Patricia Highsmith. In the movie, Blanchett plays opposite Rooney Mara.

That is in addition to her stage work. In August, she will return to New York with her Sydney Theatre Company in a production of Jean Genet's "The Maids" as part of the Lincoln Center Festival. Also in the cast will be Isabelle Huppert.

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But the role that the crowd focused on Friday at Milk Studios was Blanchett's appearance in the TV commercial for Si, which was produced by director Anne Fontaine. It has been shown in much of the world, since the fragrance was launched in Europe last September and in China in February. The U.S. rollout is set for September following an initial introduction in Armani's American boutiques in July.

Veronique Gaultier, worldwide president of Giorgio Armani Parfums, said sales increased significantly in the January through March period, meaning that the brand has generated repeat purchase. For instance, the fragrance had advanced in ranking from number five to number three in both the U.K. and Australia, she noted during an interview, adding that the hottest markets are the U.K. and Germany followed by Italy and duty free. Gaultier said her goal is for the fragrance to rank in the top 10 worldwide.

Blanchett proved that she has an intimate grasp of fragrance when she pointed out that certain smells are associated with different emotional experiences. "I do like the smell of excitement," she revealed.

— PETE BORN AND JULIE NAUGHTON

EARTHLY DELIGHTS: Gucci is embracing Mother Nature with plans to take part in the annual Chelsea Flower Show for the first time with a garden inspired by its traditional Flora motif. The brand will take part in the Fresh Garden area of the vast and colorful fair that takes place each year on the Royal Hospital grounds, not far from Sloane Square in London.

Landscape and garden designer Sarah Eberle will create a "horticultural realization" of the brand's classic pattern for the Gucci Flora Garden. The brand's creative director Frida Giannini called the Chelsea project "truly magical," and said she is looking forward to seeing Flora transformed into a real garden.

"Flora was the very first iconic design motif from Gucci's storied past that I decided to revive and reinterpret, and since then I have used it on bags, dresses, scarves and as the inspiration for a series of fragrances," she said.

Gucci will introduce two exclusive Lady Lock handbags to tie in with the Chelsea Flower Show project. The bags will be available in two sizes in the Flora canvas, and will be sold exclusively at Gucci's Sloane Street store from May. Gucci will also invite its customers to experience firsthand the work of the brand's silk artisans in the Sloane Street store from May 20 to 24 — coinciding with the dates of the flower show.

— SAMANTHA CONTI

DIOR BY THE BAY: Christian Dior is set to take over three floors of retail space on the prestigious corner of Post Street and Grant Avenue in the heart of downtown San Francisco. No one is commenting about the move, with ink barely dry on the lease.

De Beers, the previous tenant of the glass-surfaced Grosvenor Properties building, quietly closed last month after five years. One of the other floors of the building was previously home to Priscilla of Boston, the bridal **company** that recently closed.

Dior previously had a jewel-box showcase for its women's collections on Stockton Street, overlooking Union Square. After extensive renovation, that space now houses a Dior Homme store.

The opening of the new Christian Dior women's wear store is significant because it highlights the extensive LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton retail presence in a two-block area of San Francisco's retail heart. Within the block bordered by Stockton, Post and Geary Streets and Grant Avenue, LVMH's **stake** includes multistory flagships for Bulgari and Louis Vuitton, the yet-to-be-announced opening of Tag Heuer, the pair of adjacent Loro Piana and Dior Homme boutiques, and a large Marc Jacobs store on Maiden Lane. Steps away on Post Street, there's Thomas Pink, and a nearby Fresh beauty outpost, and the Benefit and Sephora cosmetics and skin-care companies. Not to mention Hermès on Grant Avenue, in which LVMH has a large **stake**.

— DIANE DORREN SAEKS

AROUND THE WORLD: Kris Van Assche has been racking up a lot of frequent flyer miles lately. Two weeks ago, the Dior Homme creative director was in Shanghai to present the label's "autumn" collection, and on Friday he was in New York for the same purpose. But for this occasion, the label transformed its SoHo store into an art installation designed by the Paris-based design duo Mathias Augustyniak and Michael Amzalag. Van Assche was only in New York for a brief period.

"I got here yesterday, and I'm going back tomorrow. Because, I mean, it's a lot of fun going to Shanghai and having shows and doing installations here in New York, but I still need to do the collection," he said. "That's the problem. I mean, it's always about presenting and explaining collections that are done, but it doesn't mean that the next ones shouldn't get finished. I'm always late anyway."

The store event drew a number of New York personalities — former hockey player Sean Avery, Peter Brant Jr. and Stephanie LaCava. Van Assche himself invited French musician Yoann Lemoine, who also operates under the name Woodkid. The two collaborated on the fall 2011 collection, which Van Assche called "A Solider of My Own" and which was inspired by the musician's work.

"We met a few times in Paris and he just was in New York, so it's fun to have him arrive," he said. Lemoine was at a dinner that followed at Acme that also drew Shala Monroe and artist Collier Schorr.

"I found out somehow my work as a musician and a director made sense with his work as a designer," Lemoine said. "Because we have the same love for formalism and craft, and a sense of sobriety, too. We both, I think, are very rigorous in our work, and we do things seriously. We don't joke about what we do." Now Van Assche dresses him for some of his stage performances. The musician had just returned from the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Annual Festival, where he appeared in his own set and also played the role of creative director for Pharrell Williams' performance. "It was a very busy festival for me," he said.

— ERIK MAZA

ART EFFORT: Gap is getting in on the mutual fascination between the fashion and art worlds, partnering with the Frieze Art Fair in New York and London. New York comes first, from May 9 to 12 on Randall's **Island**, and will feature Gap White Space.

Billed as "a unique outdoor experience," according to a statement, the White Space sounds like a pop-up shop. It's a collaborative effort between Gap, Visionaire and the New York-based architects Leong Leong that will feature a lounge, café and arty merchandise, including 11 limited-edition T-shirts by artists including Alex Katz, Yoko Ono, Richard Phillips, Ugo Rondinone, Peter Lindbergh, Francois Berthoud and Roe Ethridge. The shirts are made with UV-sensitive inks that change colors when exposed to sunlight.

The Gap White Space will be reprised for Frieze London in October in Regent's **Park**, this time with a focus on themes and art featured in Visionaire. "With this being the first time Frieze has partnered with a fashion **brand** to create an experience, Gap is moving collaborations forward and allowing people to

access contemporary art in a different way,” said Rebekka Bay, creative director and executive vice president of Gap Global Design.

— JESSICA IREDALE

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