

Hair, Makeup, Legal: The Lawyering Behind The Met Gala

By **Theresa Schliep**

Law360 (May 1, 2025, 4:58 PM EDT) -- While the red carpet arrivals of the biggest names in the entertainment industry are sure to win the most attention at the Met Gala on Monday, attorneys also play a significant role in advising the brands and celebrities at the center of fashion's biggest night.

Lawyers are busy working behind the scenes brokering agreements between fashion houses and the stars wearing their designs, advising on rights of publicity and much more.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute Benefit, colloquially known as the Met Gala, is one of the most high-profile events in fashion, and its theme this year is based on the upcoming Costume Institute exhibit "Superfine: Tailoring Black Style," which the New York museum says "explores the importance of sartorial style to the formation of Black identities."

Celebrities like Kim Kardashian and Rihanna have likely been preparing for the event for months, whether by enduring unpleasant beauty treatments or making the tiniest tweaks to dresses and accessories to get everything just right.

But with an event this high-profile, attorneys also are part of the mix, and some spend months getting clients ready for the big night, including putting together the agreements that allow celebrities to wear the designs of major fashion houses and brands.

"Those agreements going into play with those celebrities have been negotiated way far in advance," Preetha Chakrabarti, a Crowell & Moring LLP partner whose specialties include intellectual property and the fashion industry, told Law360. "Who is the celebrity? What are they going to promise to do? What are they going to promise not to do?"

The agreements between brands and attendees comprise a significant portion of the lawyering for an event like the Met Gala, experts told Law360. They'll outline the loaning of, say, an archival dress from Givenchy or lay out what the celebrity's role will be in the actual creation of a design.

The agreements also can protect from disclosure of the secret creative process behind designing a gown or suit, or contain morals clauses to ensure that celebrities wearing pieces from a high fashion house are on their best behavior. While some houses or designers are more daring than others and are OK with, say, political statements on the red carpet, others aren't, according to Michelle Mancino Marsh, an ArentFox Schiff LLP partner and co-leader of its consumer products group.

"Those [contractual terms] have become de rigueur for brands who are working with celebrities and have an expectation that the behavior matches the brand's goodwill," Marsh told Law360.

However, while it's typical for these agreements to contain such provisions, they're not likely to be invoked or relevant, since invitations are highly sought after and the celebrities in attendance don't want to upset Vogue Editor-in-Chief Anna Wintour, who approves the guest list, according to Anthony Lupo, chairman of ArentFox and a top attorney in the fashion industry.

"This is an event to be seen at — [the celebrities] are on their game," said Lupo, who represents brands and high fashion houses like Valentino, Yves Saint Laurent and Christian Louboutin.

Attorneys also handle the overlapping relationships between celebrities and brands. So while a designer might dress a star in an archival Givenchy dress, they might also want to accessorize with jewelry from Cartier and red-soled Louboutin heels. It's on the attorneys to make sure such combinations don't run afoul of any existing deals.

"That's the No. 1 risk for talent," Lupo said.

And that talent, especially the higher-profile celebrities, typically have lawyers helping them get to events like the Met Gala without compromising any of these agreements or relationships.

"Most celebrities are really not dressing themselves, and they're not negotiating the terms themselves," Marsh said. "They are using highly skilled entertainment and media attorneys to interact with fashion houses to make sure everyone is protected and that expectations are set and met."

Some designers also want attorneys to weigh in on particular looks to suss out any potential problems with clothing or accessories.

"I'm not going to know if a dress is copied," Chakrabarti said. "But I'm going to ask questions to understand if there is a copying concern."

Marsh, an expert in footwear IP law, said this concern is more likely to come up for designers of shoes and bags.

"Where IP attorneys tend to get involved [in the design review process] is accessories, like handbags and footwear, where there's less room for creativity and so there's a smaller playground for designs," she added.

And in situations where designers from one house go to work temporarily for another or under their own name, attorneys for both the fashion entities and the individuals will want to weigh in.

Among other things, agreements between the parties can lay out who owns designs that don't get used but can be revisited for potential future use, according to Erica D. Klein, a Brooks Kushman PC shareholder specializing in trademark and copyright law.

"Someone who is a designer can take weeks or months putting a design together, and if there's a rejection, there's real value in what's rejected," Klein said. "A lawyer is going to be speaking about all of those things and putting it on paper."

Then there are the photos, which implicate a number of rights and protections for brands, celebrities and photographers.

The Met Gala carpet is surrounded by paparazzi whose images are protected by copyright, while the celebrities have rights of publicity for the commercial use of their image. Securing rights to those photos, whether before, during or after the event, is important, especially for the stars on the red carpet, given a spate of copyright infringement lawsuits filed against celebrities who have reposted paparazzi photos of themselves on Instagram.

"They think, 'Oh, I'm in the picture. I can just post this amazing picture of me in this incredible outfit,'" said Laura Ganoza, a Foley & Lardner LLP partner and co-chair of the firm's fashion, apparel and beauty industry group. "But it's the photographer that usually is going to have the copyrights, and the celebrities have to get permission."

A lot of the work that lawyers do for events like the Met Gala is to protect relationships, according to Lupo. While it's always possible that lawsuits can crop up around events like the Met Gala, a big reason to get deals down on paper is to prevent brands or celebrities from feeling burned.

"Ensuring that the talent and the brand have not gone afoul of any agreements — that's the No. 1 thing," Lupo said.

--Editing by Alanna Weissman.