Nike Highlights Innovation in David Hallberg Photo Shoot

The dancer appears in the brand’s summer NikeLab campaign wearing the ACG poncho.

Innovation has been a hallmark of the Nike brand since Phil Knight and Bill Bowerman teamed up to create a superior running shoe in the mid-1960s. Now a $32 billion company, the Oregon-based sporting goods brand prides itself on creating products that provide athletes with the tools they need to perform at their best.

Tonight, Nike will unveil its latest iteration in “Objects of Desire,” an exhibition that highlights its 40 years of innovation in sports apparel. The brand will showcase images from nearly 20 “brand-defining” campaigns from the past two decades, which are intended to illustrate how style and culture have evolved over the years.

The event at Nike’s brand space at 41 Grand Street, which will be open to the public from June 1 to 15, will also serve to introduce the latest series of images featuring ballet dancer David Hallberg in the NikeLab ACG Poncho.

The exhibition was curated by Paris-born and Yale-educated Dorian Griswold, the editor and founder of Out of Order magazine. He worked in partnership with contemporary artists and architects, including NikeLab’s creative director, to create a fully immersive experience.

Hallberg, who made history in 2013 by becoming the first American to be a principal dancer at the Bolshoi Ballet, returned to the American Ballet Theater on Saturday after being sidelined for nearly three years to a serious ankle injury. Before being sidelined by the career-threatening injury, Hallberg had been the first person to be a principal dancer for both ABT and the Bolshoi simultaneously.

Looking back, Hallberg said “burning the candle at both ends” was probably not the best decision, but the Bolshoi is a legendary company and it wasn’t a chance he could pass up. So he found himself flying all over the world, performing in New York, Moscow, Singapore, Japan and more. “As a dancer, when you’re in demand, you don’t want to say no. And I paid the price.”

He weathered two surgeries, the first one a disc failure, he said. After the second, he opted to go to Australia to rehab. “It took a lot to be away from home and to be here four months,” he said, but it wound up taking over a year. “Things had gone very wrong in New York, so I was either out or in, so I decided to go to Australia, where they have the best dance rehab in the world.”

It worked and Hallberg is now back at the top of his game. His emotional and triumphant appearance in “Giselle” last weekend received high marks from the ballet community. But he’s also a changed man. “I feel like I’ve been totally reborn,” he said. “I’m completely different artist now and that’s the silver lining. Things mean so much more now. Everything is...
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With David Hallberg

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more honest and raw."

He has worked as hard honing his
"instrument" as he refers to his body
with a head-to-toe sweep of his hand
as he ever did dancing. And he's also
learned firsthand the "delicate balance
between expressing my art form and
conditioning like any other athlete. There's
got to be as much rest as work. I can't bash
my body anymore."

It was this perseverance and athleticism
that made Hallberg the ideal model for
Nike's latest ACG campaign.

He said he had been talking to the brand
for over five years but any partnership had
to be organic and not forced. "This was a
very natural evolution," he said. "Collabor-
ing with Born and working with the
ACG poncho, which signifies weathering
the outer elements, clicked with me right
away. I've weathered a lot in my career, so
it spoke to me."

It should also help further elevate ballet
as a sport. Hallberg isn't the only ballet
dancer to be signed to an activewear
brand. ARTY's Misty Copeland is an ambas-
sador for Nike's arch-rival Under Armour.

"We train like athletes and we push our-
selves to the limit," he said. "It's great that
we're gaining awareness of how dancers
honor their craft."

So will Hallberg return to the Bolshoi
now that he's healthy? "Not yet," he said.
"I'm just going to take it one show at a
time."

Tonight he'll be center stage again, but
at the Nike space instead of the Metropoli-
tan Opera House.

The images of Halberg will join others
from photographers including Thierry
Le Goues, Craig McDean, Carlos Serrao,
Boogie, Liz Collins, Jacob Sutton,
Nalav Kander, Daniel Jackson, Platen,
Billy Kidd, David Stiss, Tywone Leben
and others. The photos are intended to
illustrate Nike's commitment to showcase
visionary photographers and athletes and
"celebrate modern movement and human
potential," the company said.

The still and video images of Hallberg
highlight what Nike is calling "a pinnacle
garment from the NikeLab summer ACG
Collection - built to move, design to adapt
and constructed to protect."

"The film is inspired by the original
ACG campaign shot by Thierry Le Goues
in 2000 that featured several of
Nike's most accomplished athletes.

The poncho is intended as "a sym-
monic armor of protection and a tool for
achievement," Nike said. It's a three-layer,
water resistant piece made from a rip-stop
fabric with an adjustable hood, reinforced
brim and magnetic closures on the sides.
The poncho also features a dual-zip, inter-
nal kangaroo pocket.

NikeLab's summer collection was
designed in partnership with Acronym
founder Errolson Hugh. Other collabora-
tions under the NikeLab moniker have
included Undercover's Jun Takahashi and
designers Kim Jones, Riccardo Tisci and
Olivier Rousteing.

Giro Fiannoti, vice president of North
America marketing for Nike, said the
summer NikeLab ACG is "an important
new chapter in Nike apparel's design
and innovation journey, a trigger to cele-
bate Nike's history in apparel and to cele-
bate two decades of iconic Nike apparel
campaigns. ACG represents one of our prin-
cipal apparel collections, always focused
on serving today's urban explorer, because
we believe the city has become the ulti-
mate landscape."

He said over the past two decades, Nike
has worked to "transform the way we think
about materials, fit and how athletes
think about a system of dress. It goes with-
out saying that those insights also inspire
and impact innovations in sport style."

Among the most important, he said, are
the Dri-FIT, Tech Pack, the 2004 Olympics
Swift Speed Suit and the Euro-Champs
2012 French jerseys.

When the exhibit closes in New York on
June 10, Nike intends to "share the journey
of design and innovation in the future
and its other stories," said Fiannoti, who
declined to be more specific.