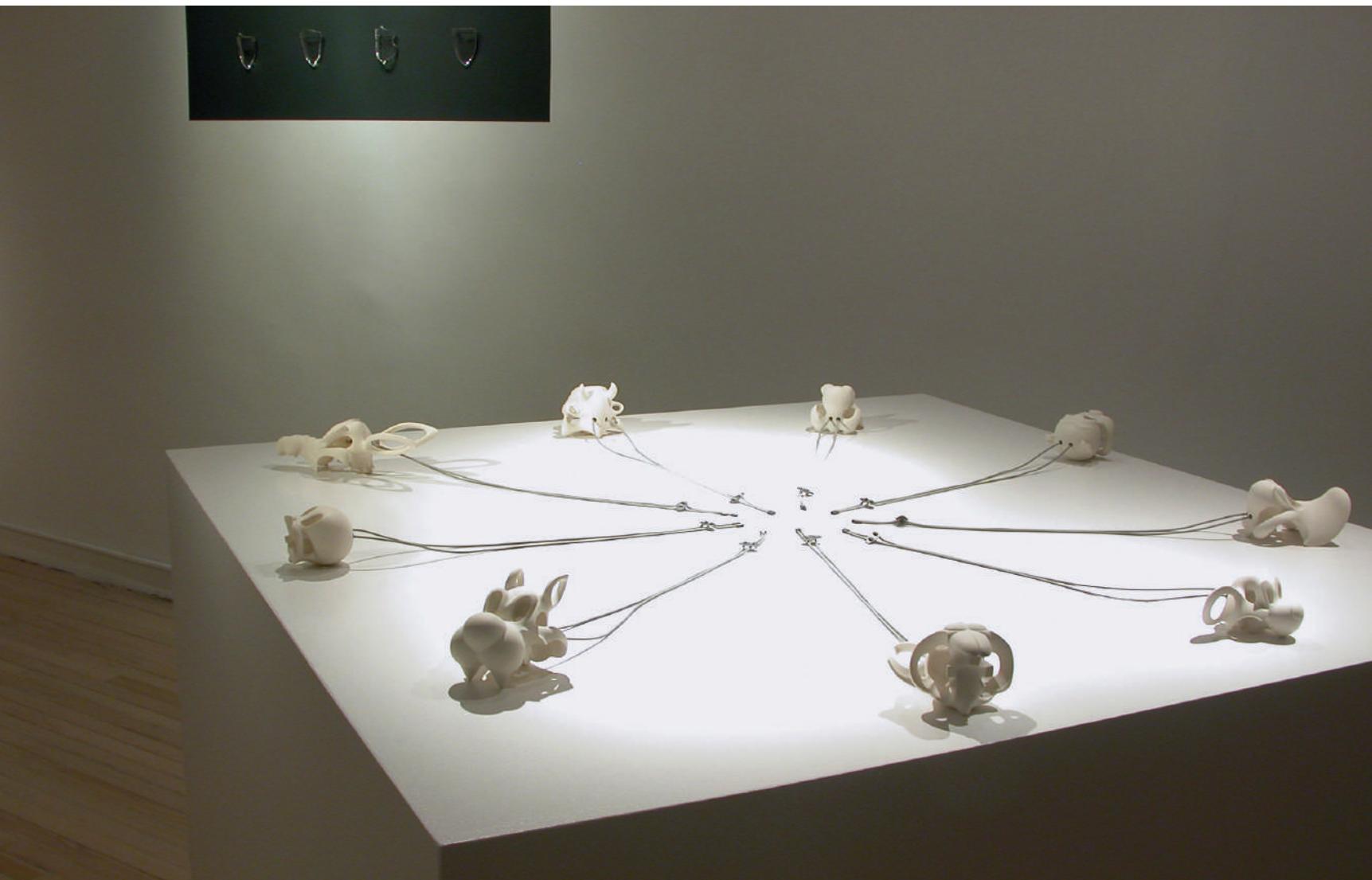


The ornament is the  
body and what follows.

# DRESSING AND ITS 'ARTISTIC JOY'



TEXT BY MICHELE VENTURINI

**T**he human body is both nature and an ornament of nature, of the places that man himself has built: a paradigm of the shapes he elaborates. The atmosphere is essential in order for man to express himself in the decorativism that defines him. By examining the act of dressing as anthropomorphic scenography, we recognise its role-playing and its dramaturgy. The curtains of this scene are members in synchronous movement with the concept of choreography and the telling of

signs that are sketched and fade in the act. This is the world of clothes and the act of dressing and describing oneself. The description is a drawing, a material and structural mediation between the skin, the 'fleece' (or what remains of it) and how incisive it appears between gaze and limbs.

The chemistry of these factors leads to qualitative acquisitions that concede little to the sentimentality of their discovery and more than science, reveal rhythmic cognitive glimpses between physical and physicality, form and per-

**ABOVE** *Memento Juniori*, Blank Planet, Alexander Blank, courtesy Ornamentum Gallery, New York  
**RIGHT FROM THE TOP** *Ted Noten, Drawer Delight* 2016, courtesy Ornamentum Gallery, New York.  
*Ted Noten, Super Bitch Bag Lady K* edition 2018, courtesy Ornamentum Gallery, New York.  
*Eisa 1955 Cristóbal Balenciaga cocktail coat cape in gros de tour*, courtesy Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa, ph. Jon Cazenave



sonality, pressing on the meninges as much as *Penone's hand on the bark of a tree*. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, clothing design merged with that of art to promote the formal accents of social dialogue and artistic expression. This path was taken by Sonia Delaunay who, through the simultaneous chromatic contingencies traced on the human body by the clothes she painted, expressed the applications of Orphic Cubism, exalting the personality of the rainbow's components.

Shortly after, it was Elsa Schiaparelli with her dreamlike sartorial version of the unconscious linked to Surrealism (Dalí - Man Ray), who designed with the art and avant-garde of the period, creating a Haute Couture with a revolutionary and at the same time investigative aspect. Nowadays, collaborations between ancient leatherworkers, already active at the court of Napoleon III (Louis Vuitton) and the artistic avant-garde of the Rising Sun (Murakami - Kusama), are the result of these processes and testimonies of an uninterrupted flow of emotions connected to the practical functionality of dressing to appear and communicate. The work of art has become a vector of new consumerist obsessions and a regenerator of the copulative impulses between the public and the market.

Yet it cannot be said that clothing needs art to be a work of art. In the 20th century, Cristobal Balenciaga placed Haute Couture as a masterful execution of an emotion beyond the accessory that accompanies it, a potential quote or inspiration from the artistic universe. For the tailor originally from Getaria, his experience in the territory contributed to the creative act and its results, linked to the cultural processes of his origins, to be trained between cutting and sewing, design and colour. Velasquez, Goya, Zurbarán represented the inspirational universe of a certain production of his. At the same time, contemporary pictorial reflections on spatial depth emerged from fellow countryman Pablo Picasso to influence Cristobal's sartorial architecture. Balenciaga's accent on the back seems to convey a Cubist memory.

The perspective pose of his creations represents a synchronous presence, to the eye, from front to back. This vision has nourished the feminine ideal through lines such as: the 1947 *Tonneau*, the 1950 *Balloon*, the 1951 *Semi Adjustée*, the 1955 *Tunique*, the 1957 *Robe-sac*... Slits on canvas that appear giant in the silk gazar and in the wool diagonals: stories of the dorsal vision

and its expressive force, which have become cornerstones of the clothing of the modern era. In this proportion, the tonal scale echoes from the nape of the neck, followed, as in a feature film, up to the 'end credits'. The eye catches the woman's beauty with essential wonder, as she appears until her memorable departure from the scene.

In Balenciaga's design, fabric is the starting point in the construction of the line: without excessive accessories. His fashion does not contemplate jewellery: its scant trace is only an impression. The clothes, in themselves, are the precious subject of his narrative. Among the few bijoux allowed at number 10 Avenue George V, there was that of Roger Jean-Pierre: vanishing points from the absolute, sacral black, preferred by the creator who illuminated the Envelope Dress with them in 1967.

The history of Couture is dotted with tailors who 'chiselled shapes,' who became famous for their craftsmanship: from a young Cardin who thinned the waist with silk shantung and rounded the hips with wadding, in the *Bar* of Dior, to the skilful moulage of the Ionian-inspired peplums by Madeleine Vionnet, up to the straight as well as sinuous corners artfully cut by the Tunisian Alaïa, contributing to the creation of Saint Laurent's Mondrian in 1965. The latter example represents the highest dialectical sum ever reached in the dialogue between art and fashion. Neoplastic edges in the lunar jersey proposed by Courrèges, interpreted chromatically by Yves, inspired by Piet and sculpted with scissors by Azzedine, at that time loaned to the Maison de Rue Spontini. Clear lines that frame the multi-faceted surface of something that is not fixed to a wall, nor painted, nor even carbon cut to splendour, but shines with the colours and admiration that the eye reserves for the ingenious execution of its essential as well as composite figure: a Mondrian on an anatomical trace. Yellow, red, blue, and achromatic white supported by a black lattice: the colour is spread as if it were pictorial matter, paint, because it is the fabric, and not the print, that give it its shape. Every square, every line is tailoring. Mondrian spreads colour, Yves frames fabric, and the clothes are, in fact, works of art.

The graphics of the Autumn/Winter of 1965 expanded the perception of the true anthropomorphic retinal and open up to the plasticity of deconstructed, re-signified and pop representations of the contemporary frontier. The school of form was given a new out-of-the-box

vision that began with Orphic Cubism and was then completed with Saint Laurent. The artist's jewel prevails in this current, whose landscape is entirely linked to the imagination that subverts matter, structure and colour, in the effect linked to emotion and a new formative consciousness. While in bijoux the precious jewel is evoked and rarity is falsified, in designer jewellery value is imposed on the set of forms rather than on the substance, in the name of the project/object that is affirmed in the message and denied in the appearance of the material. From the 1900s onwards, haute jewellery has experienced continuous escapes from the concept of desirability. The contemporary perception of the precious does not start from the latter but is linked to the subject bearer of ideas, to the forms that are told for man, beyond appearance, for the intertwining between the uniqueness of intuition and its execution and relationship with states of consciousness.

This is how designer jewellery is articulated. If the work of Balenciaga, Saint Laurent, Chanel... is to be evaluated as a sophisticated elaboration of the anatomical sign of man, in the totality of the proportions dictated by Vitruvius, the decoration and specifically jewellery are accessory and have evolved exactly in the direction of indicating a prospective and emotional vanishing point, in the general layout of the body. Metals, resins, the most disparate materials, from organic to petroleum derivatives, the prints themselves, have intervened in a lexicon that has agreed with the cultural needs of non-canonical thought in subtracting matter from the concept of value to give it the emblematic nature of representative subjectivity.

Contemporary personalities of the calibre of Alexander Blank and David Bielander have inspired designer jewellery towards the vision of nature a la Henri Rousseau and Bosch that corrects itself before the eye of man in the perverse personifications of his soul, between naïf and heraldry, to seize an adult with the contradictions of the infant who, in terms of cruelty, has no limits and works between the constant extremes of the 'memento mori' and the saving power of the hero, a sort of King Arthur of a fairy-tale modernity. The Swiss Bielander creates jewellery from plant forms extracted from the fruit and vegetable universe, such as still lifes to wear, anatomical prosthetic parts added to existing ones, crustaceans, curls, cartoned aureous to package nails, wrists, and

timepieces, crowned heads for a papier-mâché kingdom and a popular sovereignty to be delivered to an imaginary personality courier, like the one who made them.

Through resins, the German Blank imposes himself on the world with the death of the characters of Warner Bros (*Memento Juniori*): those Looney Tunes that have fascinated us since we were still riding on three wheels and today, thanks to the memory and sympathy for the lost time of a rediscovered childhood, have become symbolic of a feeling. Operations such as Blank's become an amulet and a trophy, an apparent ornament that dresses the faces of daily life in the narrative mask of a life at play, but a game it is not. This bestiary is linked to a plasterboard that announces itself for the body, in small proportions, in a ring or on a steel cable, by landing rather than by acting: a manifesto of a future already here for the osseous cavities of the imagination. No gender connotations constrain these renowned authors of designer jewellery, but the purity of the ornament as an emblem of a state of mind beyond any role, if not the free imagination. This universal, raw, unpasteurised heraldry is for 'anyone': he or she who has access to the Pantheon of the image, for what inspires and represents them her. To this extent, when jewellery draws on the tradition of the emblem of power, it melts, it deforms: the precious mineral crystals, historically schooled by the Belgians for the 'brilliant' cut, are surreally transformed, created by the Estonian Julia Maria Künnap who gives precious stones the dreamlike deformation of an aberrant mirror.

For the Belgian Ted Noten, the accessory becomes a sculpture and ornament to be added, transportable, between the fashion universe and the raw crystallisation of human action, in a sort of graspable display case of emotions. Weapons in action, from the bullet in trajectory, exploded in the fixedness of an apparent glass, as well as animals and objects of various kinds that become visible crystallisations in the plexiglass that contains them, representing how information is transformed into the subjectivity of everyday life in accessory, and aesthetic images to feelings, labelled by the most sophisticated names in fashion and decorative of the anatomy of places and people, in the distance between the truth of the experience and its narrative. The human body has become the bedrock of the most extreme formal executions and a global lexicon of feelings. Jewellery and clothing exemplify the totalising value

of anthropomorphic anatomical semantics linked to art. The diffraction of light is no longer about iridescence, but about intuition.

Its resulting aesthetic is internalised by the cognitive experiences of psychoanalysis and the processing of materials; their forms, as a whole as well as in detail, respond to this feeling expressed on the surface. Fashion reflects the architecture of the formal needs of its time: in the dialogue with art, the constant of a marriage that has become indissoluble. The plastic construction of proportions, the semantic and defining homogeneity of the habitable bodies of modern costume, generates the unitary perception of a new consciousness of dressing that today can be glimpsed on the shores of the futuristic. This process is well paired with designer jewellery, its human current personified by historical and new figures who become tangents to those of fashion (always sensitive to this sector), from Rey Kawakubo to Martin Margiela, from Walter van Beirendonck to JW Anderson, to name just a few. An interesting example of this interdisciplinary glimpse between art history, jewellery and tailoring skills is the work of the winner of the last edition of the LVMH award, Satoshi Kuwata. Through the brand he founded, Setchu, he impressed his Japan on the artisan wisdom of the great London tailoring tradition, dividing it into angular ridges in the shaping heat of the folds of origami. These reliefs create a sort of baguette cut (diamond effect) of the trouser suit and a luminous preciousness with a textile interface, which in turn becomes as modular as the tatami in the architectural experimentation behind the design of the imperial villa of Katura in Kyoto. Mondrian's black stripes from 1965 are today the folds that welcome the atmospheric play of light and divide anatomy into a new third spatial dimension of a neoplastic nature. Combining the 'three-dimensional-stylistic' experience of Balenciaga with the 'chromatic-stylistic' experience of Saint Laurent, clothing has gone from being 'the art of the way' to 'the way of art.'

In this panorama, the artistic accessory is the 'emotional prosthesis' whose function is pure emotion: 'artist's joy,' a feeling beyond everyday logic in favour of an abrasion of the obvious. Tailoring is the supporting tool in which to integrate or interact the emotional force of a story in perfect grammar, syntax and not secondarily phonetics, of body art for the body. Designer jewellery is 'in-vested' in this.

1. David Bielander, *Big Apple necklace 2015 silver white gold*, courtesy Ornamantum Gallery, New York, ph. Dirk Eisel

2. *Cocktail dress worn by Diana Gaertner. Yves Saint Laurent, Fall-winter 1965, haute couture collection. Last fashion show. Centre Pompidou, Paris, January 22, 2002*, courtesy Musée Yves Saint Laurent Paris

3. *SETCHU SS 24*, courtesy Next Agency

4. *Cristóbal Balenciaga 1964 silk gazar evening dress*, courtesy Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa, ph. Jon Cazenave

5. *SETCHU FW 23-24*, courtesy Next Agency

6. *JW Anderson MFW 2023*, courtesy JW ANDERSON LIMITED

8. David Bielander, *Pinocchio 2019 confessional wood pear carved and varnished elastic unique stamped and numbered*, courtesy Ornamantum Gallery, New York, ph. Dirk Eisel



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