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Wearing Art History: Fashion as an Art

By

Sofia Killion

A culminating thesis submitted to the faculty of Dominican University of California
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Humanities and
Cultural Studies

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Abstract

Fashion is often seen as a frivolous craft which many believe to lack substance. Fashion however has for generations drawn inspiration from one of the very things that defines culture and that is art. Some of the most successful fashion designers of our time have drawn inspiration directly from masterpieces of art. The Spanish fashion designer Cristóbal Balenciaga (1895-1972) was heavily inspired by his countrymen including Diego Velázquez (1599-1660), Francisco de Zurbarán (1598-1664), and Francisco Goya (1746-1828). The Italian fashion designers Domenico Dolce (1958-present) and Stefano Gabbana (1962-present) created a Fall 2013 collection that was significantly inspired by the Byzantine mosaics from the Sicilian Cathedral of Monreale. The American fashion designer L'Wren Scott (1964-2014) created a Fall 2013 collection entitled *Allegory of Love*, her inspiration for this collection was the Austrian painter Gustav Klimt's (1862-1918) "Golden Phase", as well as his muse at the time, Adele Bloch-Bauer. The Belgian artist Isabelle de Borchgrave (1946-present) has created paper costumes inspired by well known paintings from art history. Through the analysis of exhibition catalogues, secondhand interviews, fashion collection reviews, and art history textbooks, this paper shows why these contemporary fashion designers were inspired by these iconic artists and their artwork. This thesis analyzes these artists and their artwork, as well as the subsequent fashion that arose through inspiration from their art. This paper demonstrates fashion is not simply a craft, nor a frivolity.

Wearing Art History: Fashion as an Art

Fashion is often seen as a frivolous craft which many believe to be lacking in substance. Fashion however has for generations drawn inspiration from one of the very things that defines culture and that is art. Some of the most successful fashion designers of our time have drawn their inspiration directly from masterpieces of art. The Spanish fashion designer Cristóbal Balenciaga (1895-1972) was heavily inspired by his fellow countrymen including Diego Velázquez (1599-1660), Francisco de Zurbarán (1598-1664), and Francisco Goya (1746-1828). The Italian fashion designers Domenico Dolce (1958-present) and Stefano Gabbana (1962-present) created a Fall 2013 collection that was significantly inspired by the Byzantine mosaics from the Cathedral of Monreale on the island of Sicily. The American fashion designer L'Wren Scott (1964-2014) created a Fall 2013 collection entitled *Allegory of Love*, her inspiration for this collection was the Austrian painter Gustav Klimt's (1862-1918) "Golden Phase", as well as his muse at the time, Adele Bloch-Bauer. The Belgian artist Isabelle de Borchgrave (1946-present) has created paper costumes inspired by well known paintings from art history. Through the analysis of exhibition catalogues, secondhand interviews, fashion collection reviews, and art history textbooks, this paper shows in what ways these contemporary fashion designers were inspired by these iconic artists and their artwork. This paper analyzes these artists and their artwork, as well as the subsequent fashion that arose through inspiration from their art. Fashion as an art has the powerful ability to evoke emotions and meaning within humans. Fashion is not simply a craft, it is a cultural phenomenon that has existed for hundreds of years, and continues to thrive to this day. Art and fashion are a reflection of our humanity, and one cannot exist without the other.

Balenciaga

From the very start of his career as a fashion designer, Cristobal Balenciaga's designs were heavily influenced by Spanish culture and by many iconic Spanish artists. These artists notably include the Romantic painter Francisco de Goya (1746-1828), the Mannerist, El Greco (1541-1614), the Baroque painters: Diego Velázquez (1599-1660) and Francisco de Zurbarán (1598-1664), the Cubist painter Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), and the Surrealist painter Joan Miró (1893-1983). Although Balenciaga's designs were very much imprinted by Spanish art history, according to his close friend Bettina Ballard, a fashion editor at Vogue, he knew "little about his country or its art. I could never drag Cristóbal into the Prado with me" (Bowles 35). Although Balenciaga may have disavowed his knowledge of Spanish art, his designs exhibited the obvious influence of Spanish culture especially the art, the royal court and religious life. The culture that he grew up in was infused into his designs by osmosis.

The abundant draperies and severe vestments which clothed the saints and clerics of the seventeenth-century painter Francisco de Zurbarán were constantly referenced by him, alongside debts to the portraits of Velázquez and Goya and clear homages to folk dress. The reluctant designs carried a dramatic impact magnified by Balenciaga's ability to develop a historical quotation into something uncompromisingly contemporary.

(Breward 82-83)

Balenciaga effortlessly transferred the essence of Spain and its art into his contemporary designs.

Francisco de Goya's portrait paintings of aristocratic women provided Balenciaga inspiration for his designs throughout much of his career. Some of Balenciaga's designs were directly or indirectly inspired by Goya's portraits. One portrait that surely inspired one of

Balenciaga's designs was *The Duchess of Alba*, 1797 (see figure 1). In the portrait the Duchess is wearing a maja inspired dress. The maja were the lower classes of Spanish society who wanted to differentiate themselves from the middle class Francophiles. The maja style of dress was infused with Spanish regional style of dress which helped the maja's display their Spanish pride. The Duchess of Alba, by wearing this dress, also wanted to emphasize her national pride and identity (Bowles 36). The black lace and overlay of the dress that the Duchess is



Figure 1 *The Duchess of Alba*, 1797, Francisco Goya (Courtesy of WikiCommons)

wearing in the portrait (see figure 1) can also be seen as the inspiration for several of the Balenciaga's designs, one being a studio drawing of a ball gown from Balenciaga's 1957 winter collection. The gown's silk-satin ribbons and silk fringe tassels has a similar look to the silk-gauze flowers that can be seen on the skirt of the Duchess's dress. A cocktail dress from Balenciaga's winter 1948 collection echoes inspiration from the 1797 portrait (see figure 2).



Figure 2 cocktail dress of rose peau de soie and black lace, winter 1948, Balenciaga, photo by Joe McDonald/FAMSF (Courtesy of ARThound) dress of black silk crepe and "chou" wrap of black silk gazar, winter 1967, photo from Balenciaga Archives, Paris (Courtesy of huffingtonpost.com)

The fichu, which is the small shawl that is draped over the Duchess's shoulders, is mimicked on the cocktail dress through the attached collar on the cocktail dress. Balenciaga reinterpreted the mantilla that the Duchess wears in the portrait. The mantilla is the lace scarf that is worn over the

duchess's head in the 1797 portrait. In a dress Balenciaga designed for the winter of 1967 he created a voluminous cape (see figure 2) that covers the head of the model in the same manner that a mantilla does (Bowles 36). This cape demonstrates that Balenciaga had the vision and ability to reinvent shapes into wearable and contemporary fashion. Details and silhouettes from religious art by the



Figure 3 Saint Francis in Prayer, 1580-85, El Greco (Courtesy of WikiCommons) Balenciaga coat and dress, 1955 (Courtesy of harpersbazaar.com)

Mannerist El Greco can be seen in Balenciaga's designs. The morose mood and colors of El Greco's paintings are echoed through the drama of the silhouettes that Balenciaga created. The silhouette of the robes Saint Francis of Assisi (see figure 3) can be seen in a brown gabardine raincoat that was designed for the 1965 summer collection. The hood and drapery of the gabardine is strikingly similar to the Franciscan robes (Bowles 112).



Figure 4 Christ Carrying the Cross, ca. 1577-87, El Greco (Courtesy of WikiCommons) evening dress, embroidered gazar, August 1959 (Courtesy of The Met)

Another coat that Balenciaga created that is similar in silhouette to the Franciscan robe, was a black coat and dress he designed circa 1955 (see figure 3). The exaggerated collar of the coat replicates the bagginess of the Franciscan hood. The coat's

wide sleeves are comparable to the billowing sleeves of the Franciscan robes. Balenciaga further demonstrated that he had the ability to extract an essence from a dreary painting such as El

Greco's *Christ Carrying the Cross* (see figure 4) and then use it to create a delicately embellished white evening gown (see figure 4). At first glance the painting and the dress appear to have no relation to one another, however, upon closer examination, one can see the striking correlation between the two. The silver embroidery on the gown resembles in appearance the crown of thorns that wrapped around Christ's head in El Greco's painting (Bowles 134, 135). Balenciaga brought beauty to a gruesome act.

The paintings of the Spanish Baroque painter, Diego Velázquez provided Balenciaga with a staple source of inspiration for his designs. Velázquez's well-known portraits from the 1650s of the Infanta Margarita and her ladies-in-waiting, inspired

Balenciaga's winter 1939 collection (Bowles 35). The *Infanta Margarita* (see figure 5) portrait of 1654 inspired Balenciaga's "Infanta" evening dress, which was made of ivory silk satin and black silk velvet (see figure 5). The black scallop-edged lace trim of the



Figure 5 *Infanta Margarita*, 1654-55, Diego Velázquez (Courtesy of WikiCommons) "Infanta" dress, 1939, silk, Balenciaga (Courtesy of The Met)

infanta's dress is mimicked in Balenciaga's design with the black trim on his gown (Bowles 35).

The drapery and volume seen in the attire of the saints and angels of Zurbarán paintings also provided inspiration for Balenciaga's designs. The yellow drapery in Zurbarán's *Annunciation* can be seen in the straw-yellow satin stole that is styled with a severe black evening column gown from Balenciaga's winter 1951 collection (Bowles 35). The "volumes of looped fabric falling into trains depicted by Zurbarán in his portraits of [...] Saint Casilda of

Toledo” are exhibited in the pink taffeta that wraps the upper bodice of a summer 1951 embroidered ivory evening sheath that is finished with a giant bow” (Bowles 35). Surrealist painters, specifically Joan Miró also had their impact on Balenciaga’s silhouettes. These new silhouettes were formed from Balenciaga’s ability to sculpturally manipulate fabric.

... Joan Miró —who used biomorphic abstract shapes to create ‘otherness’ not seen before in the fine arts. The silhouettes of these organic shapes lent themselves to sculpture as well as painting. Miró and Ernst painted personal themes by using amoebic signs and symbols seemingly painted in a spontaneous way, while Arp sculpted curvilinear shapes that related to the organic forms of nature and suggested growing body parts. (English 58)

Balenciaga’s most prominent evening gowns were created from stiff fabrics that were molded into sculptural statement dresses. One of these creations was his “envelope dress” from 1967 (see figure 6) in the austere black that Balenciaga was known for. The black alluded to the orthodoxy of Spain, as well as Balenciaga’s devoutness.

Balenciaga was hailed as being fashion’s Picasso. “For like that painter, underneath all of his experiments with the modern, Balenciaga has a deep respect for tradition and a pure classic line” (Bowles 16). Balenciaga, also like Picasso, started his career in Spain and honed his talent in France (Bowles 16). Their creative style was seen as being parallel, “like the artist Picasso ... Balenciaga



Figure 6 “envelope dress”, June 1967, Balenciaga (Courtesy of harpersbazaar.com)

played with the abstraction of form and the revelation of the body as if these were two themes in a piece of music ... The result, too, was like Picasso's fascinating oscillation between abstraction and realistic representation, for Balenciaga offered a new form of fashion, not only an option for fashion to represent the figure faithfully but also to flatter the figure in a splendid semi-fitted succession of curves, construction, fabric and cut" (Bowles 36). Picasso and Balenciaga both drew from *Las Meninas*, 1656 and created works in their own mediums. Picasso and Balenciaga both experimented in form.

The exuberance at a Balenciaga show was testament to his art. As Audrey Hepburn was quoted as saying to Vogue's editor-in-chief Diana Vreeland at a Balenciaga show in the early 1960s, "why I wasn't frothing at the mouth at what I was seeing" (The Fashion Law). Balenciaga manifested himself an artist in that much like Picasso he used the techniques of an artist in the creation of his designs. Like Picasso who offered the art world a new form of art, Balenciaga offered the world of fashion the excitement of a new perspective of the human form as art.

Dolce and Gabbana: Sicilian Baroque and Byzantine

For the Italian fashion designers, Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana, Sicily has and continues to be an inspiration for their designs. Stefano Gabbana was quoted saying: “There is so much in Sicily, we could be doing this forever” (Blanks). The diverse Sicilian history, culture and architecture has helped to influence many of their collections. Some of these inspirations include: the Chinese Palace in Palermo (Spring 2016 men’s collection), the Spanish rule of Sicily from 1516 to 1713 (Spring 2015 men’s collection), the Normans rule of Sicily 1030 to 1198 (Fall 2014 women’s collection), Greece’s colonization of Sicily that began in the 8th century B.C.E. (Spring 2014 women’s collection), the Cathedral of Monreale, a great example of Norman Architecture (Fall 2014 women’s collection), Sicily’s Baroque religious heritage (Fall 2012 women’s collection), “imagined evenings spent at Palermo’s Teatro Massimo opera house circa 1910” (Fall 2012 men’s collection), and they even used Palermo’s thriving vegetable market as inspiration for the foodie prints they designed (Spring 2012 women’s collection) (Yotka). The two collections that will be focused on in this chapter are their Fall 2014 women’s collection which drew inspiration from the Cathedral of Monreale and their Fall 2012 women’s collection which drew inspiration from Sicily’s Baroque architecture.

Dolce and Gabbana’s Fall 2012 women’s collection displays the many characteristics of Italian Baroque architecture. This collection echoes the magnificence, grandeur, richness and the highly ornate characteristics of the Late Baroque churches that are found on Sicily. After a catastrophic earthquake in 1693 hit Sicily, entire cities had to be rebuilt, and from this palaces and magnificent churches were built in the Sicilian Baroque style (Norberg-Schulz 305). The Baroque style is known to have different definitions but a common link and that link is the Roman Catholic Church.

Baroque was seen as having knowingly distorted the sacred norms of classical design based on the rules of the ancient Greeks and Romans that had been carefully systematized in the Renaissance. The word is of course still used in much the same sense today to describe anything elaborately or grotesquely ornate, whimsical or bizarre. ... the Baroque are [*sic*] closely linked to the seventeenth-century rise of political absolutism and the simultaneous revival of the Roman Catholic Church. (Snodin et al. 74)

This collection perfectly coincides with the intent of the Baroque style, “It was made to persuade as well as impress, to be both rich and meaningful” (Snodin et al. 75). Dolce and Gabbana’s Fall 2012 collection focused on the Baroque architecture as seen in the Catholic Churches on Sicily.

One of the most well known Late Baroque churches on Sicily is the Catania Cathedral which was rebuilt in the Baroque style after the 1693 earthquake hit. A dress (see figure 7) in the collection shows a similarity in its structure and form to that of the facade of the Catania Cathedral (see figure 7). The facade of the cathedral is grand and monumental in its stature and appearance. Movement can be seen in the facade of the church, “which is articulated by the superimposed freestanding columns indicating an undulating horizontal movement” (Norberg-Schulz 308). In the Fall of 2012 collection there is a dress with gold embroidery which appears to be vines, these also mimic movement and growth, two of the things the Catholic Church wanted during the Counter Reformation. The silhouette of the dress echoes the silhouette of the church, both being wide on the bottom and then sweeping upwards toward the top. The boning in the corset of the dress is revealed through the sheer fabric and resembles the columns of the

facade; they both support their given structures. Both the dress and the facade generate an impression that induce a sense of awe.

The interiors of the Sicilian Baroque churches were even more extravagant than their facades; no expense was spared. When one enters a Baroque church, one is completely enveloped by the many qualities that make a Baroque church, Baroque.

The Baroque style ... was paradoxically both sensuous and spiritual; while a naturalistic treatment rendered the religious image more accessible to the average churchgoer, dramatic and illusory effects were used to stimulate piety and devotion and convey an impression of the splendour of the divine. (“Baroque Art and Architecture”)

The collection manifests these qualities in the 74 designs in the collection. Gold embroidery and gold accouterments (see

figure 8) are showered across the collection much like the gold painted religious figures and the gold trim that can be seen throughout the Baroque churches (see figure 8). The drama of chiaroscuro, the

“Italian term ... that refers to

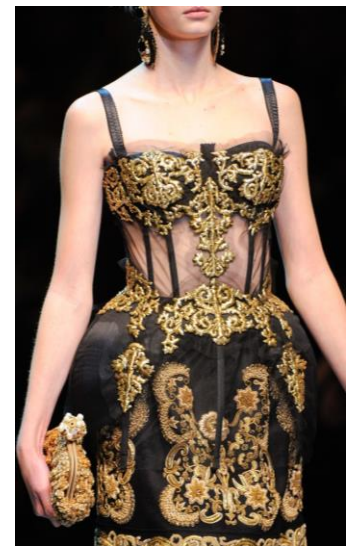


Figure 7 Catania Cathedral, Sicily, Italy, 1078-1093 (Courtesy of WikiCommons)
Dolce & Gabbana Fall 2012 Ready-to-Wear Collection (Courtesy of Vogue.com)

the balance and pattern of light and shade in a painting or drawing” (Tate), can be seen in the cathedral and is also replicated in the stark contrast of the black fabrics and pure white lace. The evening handbags in the collection have intricate designs that feature sequins, jewels, pearls, and

beads which resemble the exquisite reliquaries that can be found in Baroque cathedrals. The putti, which is Italian for a male toddler, were featured in many Italian Baroque paintings as well as cathedrals. Dolce and Gabbana featured the putti along with Baroque bouquets on purses and on several of the articles of clothing. The Baroque cathedrals during the Counter Reformation inspired an aspiration for sanctity in their parishioners and this Dolce and Gabbana collection echoes the sentiment of the Baroque cathedrals. “Baroque church ceilings thus dissolved in painted scenes that presented vivid views of the infinite to the observer and directed the senses toward heavenly concerns”

(“Baroque Art and Architecture”).

This collection thus takes the viewer on a tour through an Italian Baroque Church through the splendor of the clothes. “The Sicilian Baroque is in general colorful and picturesque, although it never approaches the formal dissolution of Spanish



Figure 8 The choir of the nuns in the Church of San Benedetto, Catania, Sicily, Italy, 1708-1763 (Courtesy of WikiCommons) Dolce & Gabbana Fall 2012 Ready-to-Wear Collection (Courtesy of Vogue.com)

architecture” (Norberg-Schulz 308).

Sicily is an island that has seen many rulers come and go, which explains why the art is so wonderfully diverse. David Talbot Rice in *Art of the Byzantine Era*, offers a short summary of Sicily’s relationship with the Byzantine Empire and its art:

In the early centuries Sicily was a part of the Byzantine Empire, but with the advance of Islam much of the island fell under Muslim domination as early as 662, and its control remained

disputed until the arrival of the Normans in 1072, when a new and stable kingdom was founded and the Muslims were finally expelled. Little, if anything, survives from the years of Byzantine overlordship; it is to that of Norman domination that the most important Byzantine monuments in Sicily are to be assigned, for nearly all the Norman rulers were active patrons of art, and nearly all sought for craftsmen in the Byzantine world and sponsored works which were more Byzantine than they were Western. The churches they built, though they usually adopted longitudinal three-aisled plans of the West and were without the traditional Byzantine domes, were mostly very Byzantine in detail. They constitute a group which may best be described by the term “orientalizing”. (159)The Monreale Cathedral is an exceptional example of a Norman Church. It was commissioned in 1174 by William II who was the King of Sicily from 1166 to 1189. William II wanted Monreale Cathedral to show “the magnitude of wealth, piety, and artistic talent of the Norman kingdom” ... “the new cathedral became the excuse to realign control of the lands and resources, balance the majority of political power, and create an alliance with the newly established pope” (5 Henry). Dolce and Gabbana’s Fall 2013 collection titled “Marvelous Mosaics”, exemplified the wealth, piety, and artistic talent exhibited in the mosaics of Monreale cathedral. One aspect of the cathedral that shows this is the main apse, which

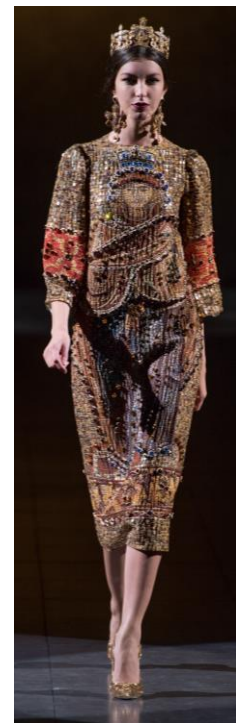


Figure 9 View of the main apse, featuring Christ Pantocrator, Monreale Cathedral, 1198, Sicily, Italy (Courtesy of WikiCommons) Dolce & Gabbana Fall 2013 Ready-to-Wear Collection (Courtesy of Vogue.com)

features Christ Pantocrator (see figure 9). In Orthodox iconography, this icon of Jesus Christ was seen as an equal to God as well as eternal like God (Beck). Like William II, Dolce and Gabbana hired artisans to create mosaics on the collection's dresses, bags, and shoes. In a promotional video for the collection Dolce and Gabbana make a connection between mosaic-making and tailoring, "As the art of mosaic-making is a slow and precise one, achieved by placing single piece next to the other, at the same time tailoring is made by single stitch after single stitch" (Dolce and Gabbana). The same artistry that existed with the Byzantine mosaic-making is present in the Dolce and Gabbana tailoring. The collection was beaded, bejeweled and sequined, and it also featured royalty worthy crowns, earrings and necklaces. The first look in the collection exemplifies many of these characteristics (see figure 9). Light brought the glittering ornamentation on the garments to life. As the models came down the runway the mosaics on the garments brought life to the images on the garments of "the prophets, saints, and angels" (Guida 49) that are featured in the Monreale cathedral. Life and light are significant elements of Byzantine art. Gervase Mathew, an Oxford University Lecturer of Byzantine studies, states in his book, *Byzantine Aesthetics*:

there is a recurring Byzantine association between Life and Light and between light and the immaterial element in material things. Colour is conceived as light materialized. ... In Byzantine painting and mosaic there is often no relation between the colour combination chosen and the natural tint. Changing colour schemes are conceived in terms of rhythm. Perhaps both painting and mosaic were in some fashion apprehended as music and the colour combinations seen as harmony." (5)

Monreale Cathedral as a whole is unique cathedral due to its history. It is a Sicilian piece of architecture but it was commissioned by a Norman ruler. The Norman architecture was a mix of

the Islamic with its arabesque forms, Byzantine with its mosaics and European with its blueprint of a Western cathedral (Guida 5). Monreale exhibits the cultural diversity that was present in Sicily at the time of the Norman rulership, “the mosaics have little that is purely Sicilian in them, which suggests that several teams of workmen must have been brought from the Byzantine world to do the work at Monreale, men who were familiar with the most up-to-date developments of the penultimate decade of the twelfth century” (Rice 166, 167). The attributes featured in the work of these artisans are seen echoed in the Dolce and Gabbana’s mosaic collection. One look from the collection that demonstrates this artisanal work is a corset that appears to be made of gold filigree that is embellished with gems (see figure 10). “Wind blown draperies” (Rice 166) are seen in the long gowns of the collection. The intensity of the colors red, blue, orange, and gold in the mosaics of Monreale are also seen in the many looks of the collection. Like the Monreale Cathedral itself, this collection is mesmerizing.

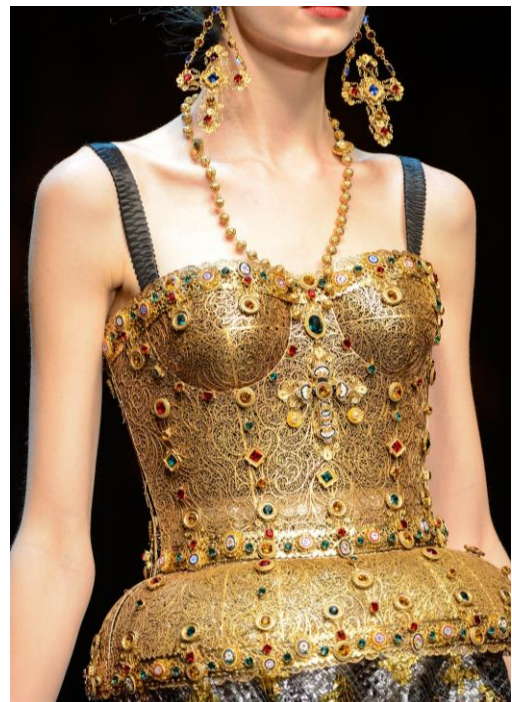


Figure 10 Dolce and Gabbana Fall 2013 Ready-to-Wear Collection (Courtesy of Vogue.com)

In these collections alone Dolce and Gabbana have exemplified fashion as art. Their translation of the beauty that abounds in Sicily into garments that grace the human body are no less exquisite than the inspirations they were drawn from. Their ability to envision the color, the form and the light of a place into new forms that inspire and bring joy to the eye and spirit in the form of dress is art in the ephemeral.

L'Wren Scott: Gustav Klimt's Muses

L'Wren Scott (1964-2014) an American Women's Wear designer drew inspiration for her fashion designs from various time periods in history, from art and from cultures that she had observed and experienced in her fervent life. She implemented colors from the French post-Impressionist artist Paul Gauguin's paintings (Fall 2011 collection), from the English painter David Hockney's East Yorkshire landscapes with its radiant colors and from the German Actress Marlene Dietrich's graphic tailoring (Spring 2013 collection) (Horyn); these were some of the luminaries who inspired her work. She conjointly incorporated into her creations propaganda materials she had that dated back to the two World Wars (Resort 2013 collection), from England during the 1900's to World War I (Fall 2013 collection), and also included her visions of beauty from the Japanese culture (Spring 2014 collection). The one collection that was most heavily influenced by art was her Fall 2013 Ready-to-Wear collection. "Her inspiration was the artist Gustav Klimt's gilded depictions of his obsessive love for the Viennese socialite and *saloniste* Adele Bloch-Bauer. Scott identified, 'I'm as in love with what I do as Klimt was in love with Adele'" (Blanks). The Fall 2013 Ready-to-Wear collection showed influence from Klimt's paintings of Adele Bloch-Bauer, as well as of the other women he painted in his career. Like Gustav Klimt, L'Wren Scott had a great appreciation for the shape and grace of the female form. Klimt's muses in his masterpieces are beautifully manifested in L'Wren Scott's Fall 2013 Ready-to-Wear collection.

One of Klimt's most large-scale and controversial commissions that he is known for are "the series of monumental murals for the Great Hall of the University of Vienna" (Natter 46). He was hired to paint allegories of the faculties of Medicine, Philosophy, and Jurisprudence, which were meant to encircle the central picture of *The Victory of Light over Darkness* (Natter 49). The

murals caused major controversy due to the nude women that he featured throughout them as well as for a failing to properly represent the themes of medicine, philosophy and jurisprudence. The art critic, Angelica Bäumer offered another plausible reason for this controversy surrounding the murals,

Surely the three sciences had always been practiced by men? It was men who pursued philosophy, practiced medicine, made laws and administered justice. But is it an accident that these sciences in German are feminine gender: *'die' Philosophie, 'die' Medizin, 'die' Jurisprudenz?* It is possible that Klimt intended his treatment to be understood in this way, but it is also possible that to Klimt woman is the focus of all things, that, through her

earthy, elemental essence, she is life itself, the all-determining and all-embracing being.

(10)

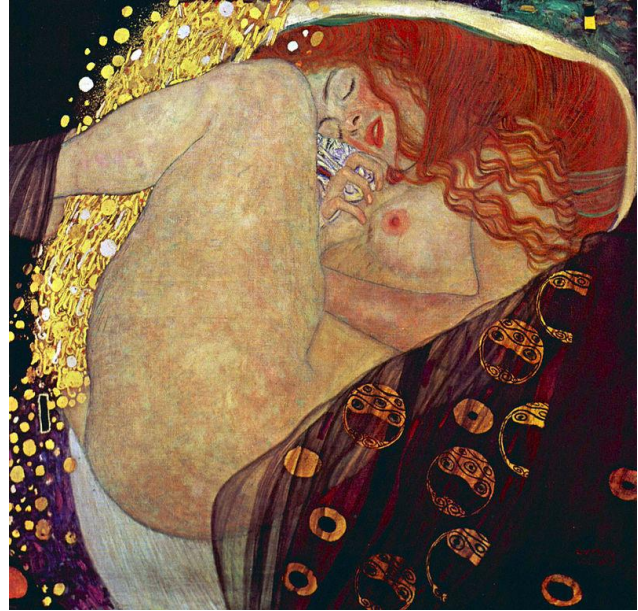


Figure 11 Danaë, Gustav Klimt, 1907 (Courtesy of WikiCommons)



Figure 12 Hygieia (detail of Medicine), Gustav Klimt, 1900 (Courtesy of WikiCommons) L'Wren Scott Fall 2013 Ready-to-Wear Collection (Courtesy of Vogue.com)

Given the time and place in history, it is probably correctly conjectured that the men felt possibly threatened by the presence and power of women in their university. The mural L'Wren Scott drew inspiration from was the *Medicine* mural, specifically the section of the mural that featured Hygieia (see figure 12). In Greek mythology Hygieia is the goddess of health. In this painting there is a gold serpent wrapped around her left arm as she holds a bowl with water from the Lethe in her right. Lethe was a mythological river in the underworld of Hades whose waters were professed to cause drinkers to forget their past. From her inspiration of Klimt's painting of Hygieia, Scott designed a gown (see figure 12). This gown exudes the same quality of femininity and of the power and strength of Klimt's Hygieia in its use of its embellishment with the large gold serpents slithering through the pattern and the vibrant blood red used in the textile and also by the manner in which the gown hugs the feminine body. The effect of the gown on the runway is that of the serpents in motion snaking along the fabric with the movement of the gown.

Another gown in this collection shows that it was inspired by two of Klimt's paintings, containing elements from both of the paintings. The first painting being *Danaë* (see figure 11), painted in 1907/08. The painting depicts Danaë, a figure from classical mythology who became an allegory of



Figure 13 *Judith I (and the head of Holofernes)*, Gustav Klimt, 1901 (Courtesy of WikiCommons) L'Wren Scott Fall 2013 Collection (Courtesy of Vogue.com)

chastity due to her father, King Acrisius of Argos imprisoning her in a windowless chamber within the court of the palace. Zeus, however, was able to reach her by turning himself into a gold rain shower that came in through the skylight (Natter 550). Klimt and Scott, both took a feminist point of view in their manifestations of this Greek mythological story. Klimt interpreted the story of Danaë as a story of “desire and sexual fulfillment” (Natter 550). The feminist art history point of view has two interpretations of Klimt’s *Danaë*. The first one being, Danaë is seen as a woman simply pleasuring herself in solitude. In the second interpretation she is viewed as sleeping, a prisoner dreaming of a golden rain that erotically possesses her (Natter 550). In her design, Scott integrated the gold rain shower into her gown (see figure 13) as well as the gold circular graphic print seen on Danaë’s sheer blanket. Scott’s design brought the sensuality of Danaë to life through her gown. “Both in a veiled and in an open manner Klimt in countless drawings and paintings professed his belief in sensuality, in sexuality as the mainspring of human existence and the pursuit of happiness (Bäumer 12). Both Klimt’s paintings and Scott’s designs through their exuberant use of color and form contain an essence of the celebration of life.

The other painting of Klimt’s that was also an influential inspiration to one of Scott’s gowns (see figure 13) and indeed her entire Fall 2013 collection was, *Judith I* (see figure 13). Scott’s collection celebrates the gold regality and femininity that is present in *Judith I*. Klimt’s painting of Judith introduced a new perspective of how one should view her. “While Judith in the Old Testament stands allegorically for the weak woman who only conquers the enemies of the people of Israel with God’s help, in Klimt’s work, she has become the man-eating woman, the *femme fatale*” (Natter 520). The gold in this painting illuminates the strength of women.

This whole, pulsating body, no point of which is still, in which everything lives and breathes, seems electrified by the jewelry sparkling around it. Red, green and blue stars glitter from Judith's neck, shine from her belt and scatter their lavishly colorful reflections. This pomp is so intimately wedded to this body that one might think it was born of its flesh, and it is impossible to conceive of any other raiment for these luminous limbs than luminous gems. (Natter 520)

The gold in the gown Scott designed inspired by this painting, as well as the 23-karat gold featured throughout the collection, which can be seen in the use of gold tattoos worn by the models, in the gold embellished shoes and in the accessories, can be perceived as a statement of decorative armor for women.

The last look (see figure 13) in Scott's Klimt inspired collection was directly inspired by

Klimt's painting, *Portrait of Johanna Staude* (see figure 14). This painting is vibrant due to the contrasting colors of purple and turquoise in Johanna's fur-trimmed blouse and the rusty orange backdrop (Natter 583). The style of Fauvism is present in this painting. "In artistic terms, meanwhile, the portrait makes unusually pointed reference to



Figure 14 *Portrait of Johanna Staude*, Gustav Klimt, 1917 (Courtesy of WikiCommons) L'Wren Scott Fall 2013 L'Wren Scott Fall 2013 Ready-to-Wear Collection (Courtesy of Vogue.com)

the vitality of form and colour in French Fauvism and its European successors in its freshness, painterly openness and generously conceived forms” (Natter 583). Like Klimt, Scott liked an element of sensuality in her designs, “I like a very sexy silhouette, and I like to feel like when you put something on, you zip yourself into it and you’re secure in there” (Larocca). This gown has hundreds of beads sewn on to it, these also help to create the same abstract pattern seen in, *Portrait of Johanna Staude*. This is an excellent example of Scott’s design process, “When I start to explore something, I kind of don’t stop until I can push it as far as it can go” (L’Wren Scott).

Like Gustav Klimt, L’Wren Scott loved the female form and celebrated that by creating designs that would honor the feminine body, just as Klimt’s paintings have. Klimt saw fashion as a vital part of his art.

he derived pleasure even from superficial adornment. But to this outward beauty he has added an inner one, through his genius he has revealed the essential. Thus decoration became art, superficiality became depth, fashion became beauty. He never denied decoration, nor his liking for fashion. Gustav Klimt, as did so many of his best contemporaries and especially his Succession friends, realized the importance of the total work of art. It was art that would bring everything together in an ecstasy of *joie de vivre* and in the service of beauty. (Bäumer 16)

Scott’s design’s served beauty, and served the female form, “she believed in everything that had anything to do with ultimate femininity and sensuality” (Talley). Klimt and Scott both saw past any superficiality of fashion straight to the essential importance of fashion in human culture.

L’Wren Scott found the way to project her artistic ideas through fashion and to thus create a

visually magnificent manifestation for the nourishment of the human spirit born from the love of feminine beauty.

Isabelle de Borchgrave: Portraits

Inspired by the fashion in fine art paintings, and seeing the fashion in the paintings itself as an art Isabelle de Borchgrave has brought this vision full circle. In her interpretation of the fashion she sees in paintings, she has brought to life works of art in the form of garments created from paper. Some of her collections include: “‘Papiers à la Mode’ (Paper in Fashion), this takes a fresh look at 300 years of fashion history from Elizabeth I to Coco Chanel. ‘Mariano Fortuny’ immerses us into the world of 19th century Venice. Plissés, veils and elegance are the watchwords of that history. ‘I Medici’ leads us through the streets of Florence, were we come across famous figures in their ceremonial dress” (Isabelle de Borchgrave.com). Essentially De Borchgrave creates paper costumes that become extraordinary works of art. In order to make paper look like a textile, she, with the help of her team and through a variety of techniques, manipulates the paper by: “crumpling, pleating, braiding, feathering, and painting the surface” (D’Alessandro 17). Her paper costumes are not replicas of the fashion seen in the paintings, but rather her impression of the fashion (D’Alessandro 21). The pieces I focus on are three different paper costumes from three different series of costumes De Borchgrave has created. The first exhibition being *Papiers à la Mode*, the second series being focused on the Medici portraits, and the last costume being the Neapolitan woman which De Borchgrave was inspired to create after viewing the painting *Woman in Neapolitan Costume* painted by Massimo Stanzione, in the collection at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor museum in San Francisco, California.

In 1998, De Borchgrave put together her first paper costume exhibition titled *Papiers à la Mode* at the Musée de l’Impression sur Étoffes in Mulhouse, France. The paper costumes in this exhibit focused on “iconic looks from key periods in fashion history” (D’Alessandro 29). One of the paper costumes that is an impressive recreation is that of *Elizabeth I Court Dress, 2001*, (see

figure 15) which was inspired by a portrait painting of Elizabeth I, painted in 1599 by the painter Nicholas Hilliard (see figure 15). Queen Elizabeth I was a perfect fit in *Papiers à la Mode*, due to the nature of the exhibition.

“De Borchgrave astutely selected costumes worn by legendary historical figures whose very names conjure visions of ideal beauty, opulent dress, and extravagant court life” (D’Alessandro 29).

De Borchgrave’s paper costume of Elizabeth I is a



Figure 15 The "Hardwick Hall" portrait of Elizabeth I of England, Nicholas Hilliard, 1599 (Courtesy of WikiCommons) Elizabeth I Court Dress, Isabelle De Borchgrave, 2001 (Courtesy of obviousmag.org)

toned-down version of the opulent court dress. The sheen seen on the skirt of the court dress in the painting was recreated in the paper costume by using what appears to be silver paint. De Borchgrave has managed to transform paper to make it appear as if it is a luxurious fabric. Although De Borchgrave chose not to decorate the exaggerated lace collar on the dress, such as it is in the painting, it still gives the same effect of nobility. The skirt and part of the bodice of the court dress exhibit the imagery of nature that was popular at the time of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,

Oversized fruits, lush flowers, and small frolicking animals are found among the protagonists in even the most harrowing biblical tales, and these motifs themselves often form the main subject of embroidery of the period. The seventeenth century saw a huge

increase in the availability of printed material, as well as in a general interest in gardening.

(Watt)

During this time period the wealthy citizens of England would import exotic flora for their gardens. Written works on the subjects of botany and the hybridization of plants became a popular choice for

leisure reading

during the

seventeenth century.

The garden had

become at this point

a multi-purpose

environment used for

entertainment

purposes and also as

a place for private

moments of tranquility. Nature was seen as a gift from God that should therefore be honored.

The celebration of nature and all its bounties consequently inspired English embroiderers to incorporate these themes of natural world into the composition of their craft (Watt). The skirt on

De Borchgrave's dress has less imagery thus simplifying her design, and making the dress

appear more modest than the original design. Although this court dress is made entirely of paper,

De Borchgrave's skill and talent could lead one to believe that this dress could very well be an

authentic court dress from the Elizabethan era and not a paper recreation.



Figure 16 Portrait of Eleanora of Toledo and her son Giovanni de' Medici, Agnolo Bronzino, ca. 1545 (Courtesy of WikiCommons) Eleanora of Toledo, Isabelle De Borchgrave, 2006 (Courtesy of isabelledeborchgrave.com)

In the Uffizi Gallery, a prominent art gallery in Florence, Italy, there is a painting that inspired De Borchgrave. It is a portrait from 1545 of Eleonora of Toledo and her son Giovanni de' Medici painted by Agnolo Bronzino (see figure 16). "Uncompromising detail and linear clarity characterized Bronzino's work" (Thomas 262). It is these very characteristics that make the textile of Eleonora's gown striking, thus leading De Borchgrave in her inspiration to create a paper costume from this painting. The textile in the painting was not the only thing that De Borchgrave admired about the painting. "It is telling that De Borchgrave's favorite Medici piece is the dress of Eleonora of Toledo as painted by Bronzino. She was attracted to Eleonora's rich adornment of pearls and gold chains, pointing out that sixteenth-century Italian goldsmiths were unrivaled at their craft" (D'Alessandro 63). Textiles played a significant role in Eleonora's life. When Eleonora moved from Spain to Italy she brought chests filled with Spanish fabric that she used to decorate her walls (Stoeltie) "Eleonora's dowry was comprised largely of Spanish textiles. Therefore, the iconic dress that she wears is a symbol of this fortune and the riches she brought from Spain. Richly brocaded, Bronzino is able to use the dress to show his mastery of creating illusionistic textures" (Zappella). This portrait shows off Bronzino's mastery of painting textiles and showing their textures. This painting gave the message to others that the Medici dynasty was strong, wealthy and that it would continue on through its heirs (Zucker and Harris). "The costume and fabric are given such importance that the painting has almost become a still life" (Thomas 262). This portrait exemplifies the pronouncement that fashion is power. De Borchgrave's paper costume of Eleonora's gown shows an impeccable impression with a lighter feel due to the material and the stark whiteness of the paper.

Although most of De Borchgrave's costumes are inspired by historical figures painted by well-known artists, there is one portrait that captivated De Borchgrave in which the subject is

nameless, and which inspired her to create a costume from it (see figure 17). The painting is from 1635 and it is titled *Woman in Neapolitan Costume*, (see figure 17), it was painted by the Baroque Italian painter Massimo Stanzione (1585-1658?).

“Stanzione’s personal style is an amalgam of artistic traits observed in the work of seventeenth-century masters, in both Naples and Rome; his early dramatic Caravaggesque extremes of light and dark are moderated by his subsequent exposure to Bolognese classicism” (Nash et al. 62). This painting is an excellent example of Stanzione’s ability to work in extremes,

and not just in light and dark but also in his subject matter. The way in which De Borchgrave copies Stanzione’s work is by being meticulous, not only when it comes to the details in the dress, but also in the details seen in the chicken



Figure 17 Woman in Neapolitan Costume, Massimo Stanzione, ca. 1635 (Courtesy of WikiCommons) "Neapolitan Woman," Isabelle De Borchgrave, 2010, inspired by a portrait by Massimo Stanzione (Courtesy of nytimes.com)

that the woman is holding in her arms.

It is little wonder that De Borchgrave was fascinated by the young woman's ornate costume. She wears not one but two stiff, tightly fit bodices, elaborately decorated with rows of blue ribbon, embellished with silver threads and buttons, against a crimson ground. Resting upon her shoulders is a scalloped lace collar; more lace trims her inner bodice and linen bonnet. Such an extensive use of lace on a peasant costume is surprising, as seventeenth-century sumptuary laws restricted the wearing of lace to the higher classes. (D’Alessandro 83) The juxtaposition of

rich and poor brings a great deal of visual interest, which is probably what drew De Borchgrave to this painting. The mystery of the subject is what draws the viewer in.

De Borchgrave's practice resuscitates the role of the painter tailor, extending the art of drapery into the realms of fashion, sculpture, and installation (D'Alessandro 22). She elevates the fashion of the paintings into works of art in themselves. By developing her vision one step further into a tangible embodiment, she created a new form of art.

Fashion, as an art can draw inspiration from a myriad of sources. In the same manner in which iconic artists of the fine art world have extensively exerted their energy and years of time to hone their talent and create their masterpieces, so also have the fashion designers who have drawn inspiration from them. Each of the fashion designers that I have discussed here, Balenciaga, Dolce & Gabbana, L'Wren Scott, as well as the paper costume designer Isabelle De Borchgrave understood the significance of fashion as an art, and the power and influence that it has on humanity.

Fashion is, in a manner, a type of performance art. It comes to life with movement. When it is exhibited, when it is shared, it can inspire and thus it has the capacity to transform. Fashion has an immense power in our society. The iconic fashion designer Miuccia Prada stated, "Fashion is the first step out of poverty. You have nothing and then you put something on. It is one of the first things you do to elevate yourself" (LeGrave). It has a purpose and value and its purpose is similar to that of the fine arts.

In the same way that most people who admire a Picasso will never be able to buy one, the majority of people who pine for an iconic Chanel suit will never feel that wool against their skin. Nevertheless, much as one can still appreciate Picasso's pieces and his invaluable contributions to the art world as co-founder of the Cubist movement, one can still look at early Chanel designs and see how themes of women's empowerment and activity were manifested in the designs. You don't have to love Cubism and you don't have to love Chanel, but perhaps there should be some semblance of equal understanding and respect. (LeGrave).

Fashion much like a fine art enriches our world with its aesthetic. When attended to, it is an essential part of culture in that it nourishes an aspect of the spirit, it is a joy on the beauty of the human form. Fashion is not a frivolity.

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