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PREVIEW

When Fashion Meets Art and Art Meets Fashion

Transcending the invisible line dividing fashion and art, the exhibition 'GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) Contemporary-Aware: Art Fashion Identity' centres on clothing as an essential element in the artistic expression of one's identity.

Echoing trends in both fashion and Contemporary Art, the works featured in *GSK Contemporary-Aware: Art Fashion Identity* combine the best of both worlds by examining fashion's function as more than just a field of frivolity, attempting to shed light on its role as a legitimate art form and mechanism of creative communication. "Fashion is an expression of our times. Like art, it shares the need to reveal and reinvent in continuum," explains the show's curator, Lucy Orta. "If a tangent traverses this perfect and infinite geometry, it provokes an obstruction to artistic self-expression."

With a carefully chosen selection of over 30 international artists, the show, which runs from 2 December-30 January at London's Royal Academy of Arts, features the creations of artists and designers from the Middle East, including Handan Börüteçene, Sharif Waked and Hussein Chalayan (*Canvas 6.6*) alongside works by the likes of Cindy Sherman, Alexander McQueen and Yoko Ono in the unifying theme of 'Art, Fashion and Identity.'

Despite its standing as a cultural force to be reckoned with, the fashion industry is still sometimes treated with a sense of flippancy, despite being seen by many as a valid form of artistic expression. It is this idea of creative fusion that initially sparked the concept for the show. Bridging the gap between design and art, fashion serves more than just an aesthetic purpose; like Contemporary visual arts, it conveys deeper notions and ideas, revealing snippets of the creator's personal identity. "I am particularly interested in exploring how and why Contemporary artists employ clothing in their practices, to challenge our opinions on fashion and to create a wider public debate on the subject," explains Orta. "Fashion carries multiple functions. It provides us with means to express ourselves, to attract or reject others," adds participating Austrian artist Azra Akšamija. "The reactions we get from others, in turn, inform our behaviour and shape our identities." Adds Orta, "Clothes reveal our way of life and our unconscious. They can communicate social positions, aspirations and desires, emerging aspects and visions of the world."

With artists such as Chalayan successfully blurring the lines between various fields, *GSK Contemporary-Aware: Art Fashion Identity* provides a platform where art, design and fashion are fundamentally analogous. For example, Akšamija's work on show, entitled *Nomadic Mosque*, is an

Other pieces on show include a new work by Chalayan inspired by the Japanese tradition of Bunraku puppet theatre and Turkish artist Börüteçene's 2007 work, *Waters that Tie/Waters that Untie* (*Canvas 3.6*) - which examines the historical ties between the cities of Istanbul and Venice. These are joined by Palestinian Sharif Waked's 2003 video *Chic Point: Fashion for Israeli Checkpoints* and Italian Marcello Maloberti's *Marcello Che Arriva in Treno* (*Marcello Who Arrives by Train*), a series of photographs portraying individuals in an Algerian barber's shop in the city of Milan.

In spite of their intertwining roles, the obvious dividing factor between art and fashion is the notion of functionality, which applies - albeit not always - to the latter. *GSK Contemporary-Aware: Art Fashion Identity* purposely features pieces that are far removed from their intended use and are solely decorative alongside others that can be utilised as clothing attire. "The exhibition includes a series of actual garments that can be worn," explains Orta. "This functionality aids in bridging metaphor and reality, and assists in creating communication with the diverse audiences beyond the sphere of the imaginative, so that they can touch and interact with real life situations." Works on show range from film projections, drawings, renderings, photography and sculpture to knitting, embroidery, patchwork, and braiding, to name a few.



Handan Börüteçene. 'Waters That Tie / Waters That Untie'. 2007. Silk dress covered with ancient ceramic pieces, 12 prints mounted on aluminium. 40 x 60 cm each. UniCredit Art Collection, © the artist.



Sharif Waked. 'Chic Point: Fashion for Israeli Checkpoints'. 2003. Video. 5:27 minutes 3:4. Image courtesy of the artist. Photography by the artist.



Azra Akšamija. 'Nomadic Mosque'. 2005. Textile and photographs. 160 x 50 x 30 cm. ©

With fashion playing an increasingly important role in artistic practises, the works in *GSK Contemporary-Aware: Art Fashion Identity* show that the industry's appeal lies in its ability to fuse with other Contemporary art forms, all the while exploring deeper existential questions. "Fashion is at the core of research carried out by many artists as an expression of identity. It speaks of our experience of the present day, its pleasures and rapid transformations," concludes Orta. "It is a universal subject of interest."

GSK Contemporary-Aware: Art Fashion Identity runs from 2 December-30 January. For more information visit www.royalacademy.org.uk

By Tala Chukri

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