



FASHION IS

Art Is

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**CAN FASHION BE CONSIDERED ART? HEIDI HOFSTAD
EXPLORES THE CREATIVE DEBATE.**

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hen iconic designer Elsa Schiaparelli and surrealist painter Salvador Dali collaborated to produce a silk organza dress printed with a giant image of a lobster, they touched on an idea that goes well beyond the seams. The notion that “fashion is art is fashion” places clothing design as part of the greater creative canvas, where designers are labelled as artisans. That was 1937, but today, this comparison continues to captivate the creative community, with some of the biggest names in fashion on either side of the debate.

Some argue fashion is wearable art—that a designer utilizes a similar level of creative skill and imagination, and stirs up emotions through their garments, similar to a painter creating their next masterpiece. Haute couture certainly has all the musings of works of art. And then there are those design houses that collaborate with artists—spot the Louis Vuitton monogram Speedy bag covered in dots by artist Yayoi Kusama.

The hallways of acclaimed art museums from the Museum of Fine Arts in Montreal to the Petit Palais in Paris, continue to resemble runways with hugely attended fashion exhibitions added to their programming. The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s curatorial department, known as the Costume Institute, has amassed over 35,000 costumes and accessories, from around the world, representing seven centuries of dressing. Patrons may also recall the Met’s Yves Saint Laurent retrospective; a special exhibition curated by former Vogue Editor-in-Chief Diana Vreeland. Or 2011’s Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty, which celebrated the late and truly revolutionary designer’s work, and attracted more than 660,000 visitors—securing a spot as one of the Museum’s top ten most visited exhibitions and proving an injection of style never hurt anybody. And yet, Karl Lagerfeld reportedly dismissed the presence of fashion exhibitions in museums labelling a designer who likens himself/herself an artist as second-rate.

Entering the tug of war debate between designer and artist is Arline Malakian, a renowned Toronto-based fashion photographer. “Fashion as art surpasses its craft, evoking ideas, aesthetics and ideologies. It has integrity; it sculpts and takes form with ingenuity,” says Malakian. “When created intuitively through an artistic vision, executed in perfection; when envisioned from a concept, an ideal and emotion; when colour, cut, layers, tactile sensation, form and shape inspire, chisel and mold the body, fashion is seen as art,” she adds.

Malakian made her debut in fashion photography in 1987. Spending her university years between Beirut and Paris, she studied Interior Design and Arts and Literature, before acquiring her major in Communications and Design. During her career, she has collaborated with advertising agencies, fashion publications, designers and brands—such as Alfred Sung bridal, Natori, and Make Up For Ever—as both a photographer and an artistic director. Not stopping there, one of her recent projects is becoming the talk du jour.

Photographing the pre-Fall 2015 clothing collection of British-Canadian designer and artist Angela Huntington, Malakian blended fashion, art and photography, for a truly visual experience. Huntington’s artistic aspirations saw her drawing and painting from a young age, attending both Chelsea College of Arts and Central St. Martins in London. One could conclude she is an artist, who chooses the medium of fashion. “[My paintings] serve as the foundation for me to draw the clothes. The shapes that I have invented or used in my artwork are put into the clothes,” Huntington continues. “I am currently working on a new fashion collection using one of my paintings to create the fabric.”

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Learning that Huntington is a painter-designer (and vice versa), Malakian aimed to explore this relationship by combining both genres in her photography of the collection—an attention to detail and a personalized touch that didn’t go unnoticed by the designer. “It was a privilege to work with Arline. She studied my work closely and took the concept and created a mood and environment to combine the fashion and art together,” recognizes Huntington appreciatively. “She completely understood me and the concept for the collection.”

The resulting images resemble futuristic fine art, depicting models wearing garments with geometric-inspired patterns and cuts, standing in front of shape-filled, aesthetically pleasing paintings—both created by Huntington—that served as backdrops. The colour palette of the clothing line is confined to black, white, red and grey, and ultimately adds to the dramatic nature of the photographs.

The unique collaboration is also steeped in cubism. “I love monochrome, architecture, sculpture, geometric shapes and anything three-dimensional. I became fascinated with arranging the blocks in the large abstract paintings in numerous patterns with varying light and shadows,” describes Huntington of the artwork that would become the background for her designs.

For her part Malakian sums up the fashion versus art relationship by furthering their connection. “Fashion as art is the expression of time and fluidity or rigidity, integral to the vision of the artist and the magic of manipulating the textile to the figure in space. Fashion is art as an expression of beauty crafted and conceived for the figure.”

...tell that to Karl. And the debate between fashion and art is to be continued.

To see Huntington’s full designer collection, visit huntingtonldn.com. You can view Malakian’s work at arlinemalakian.com.



Fashion: Angela Huntington
Pre-Fall 2015

Artistic Director and
Photography: Arline Malakian
Model: Jo from Plutino
Make-up / Hair: Sophie from Plutino

