



whitewall

CONTEMPORARY ART AND LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE

WINTER 2024

THE EXPERIENCE ISSUE

LUDOVIC NKOTH - KELLY WEARSTLER - DEREK FORDJOUR -
EWA JUSZKIEWICZ - FRANCIS KURKDJIAN - BRUNO MOINARD AND CLAIRE BÉTAILLE

Astonishing orange



TWEED DE CHANEL COLLECTION

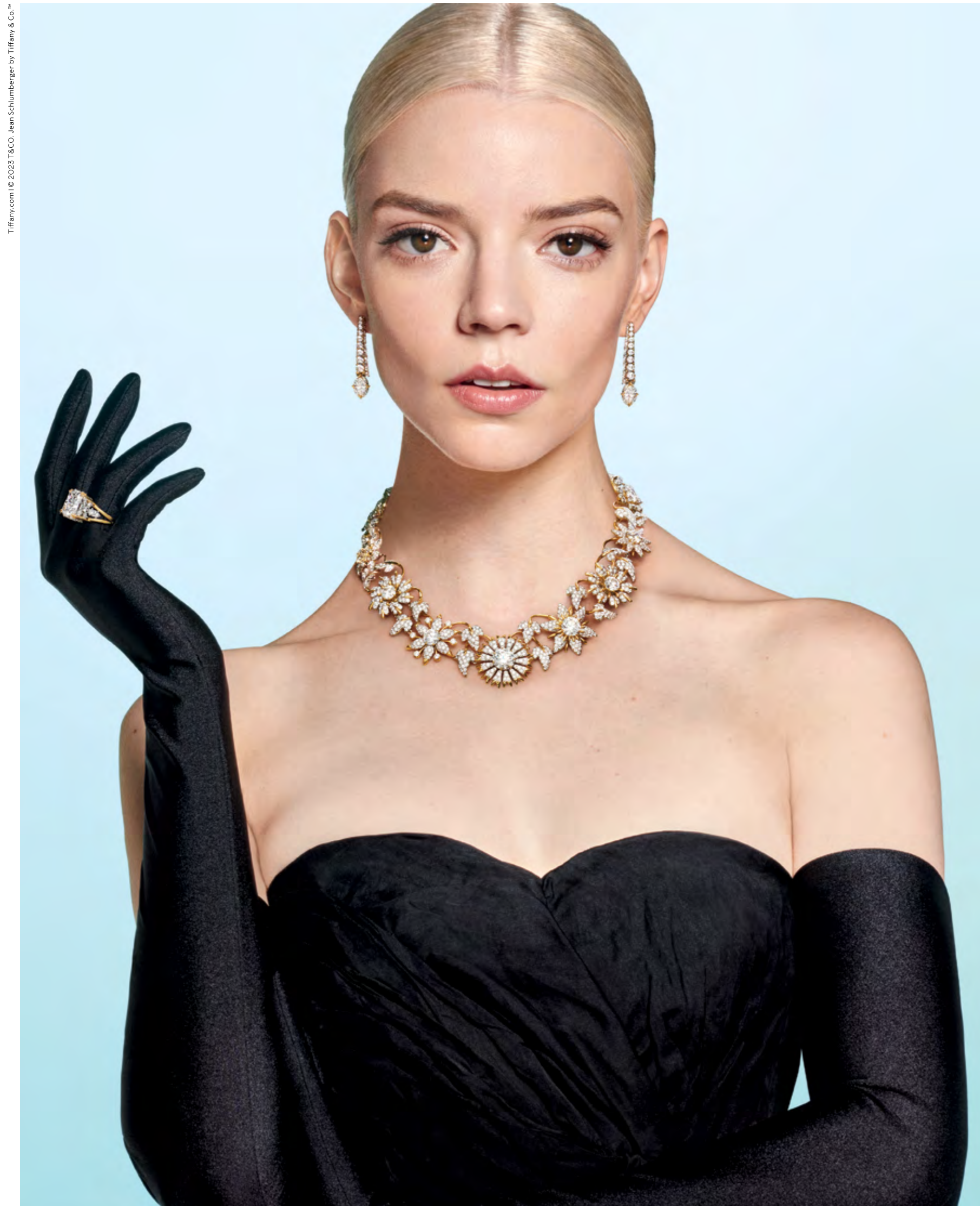
TRANSFORMABLE TWEED ROYAL NECKLACE IN 18K YELLOW GOLD, 18K WHITE GOLD*, DIAMONDS AND RUBIES.
10.17-CARAT PEAR-CUT DFL TYPE IIA DIAMOND AND 37 OVAL-CUT RUBIES.



CHANEL
HIGH JEWELRY



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FROM THE EDITOR

We always find such joy in starting out the year with our annual Experience Issue. This edition offers a greater chance to dream, imagine, travel, and grow. And as we put it to print at the close of 2023, the light that shines from artists and creatives continues to outweigh the darkness that has crept into the reality of our everyday this winter.

We ask that you take heart and find sustenance in the positive changes we're seeing in the art world and beyond. In our profiles section, you'll see new appointments, like Courtney Willis Blair at White Cube in New York and Aaron Levi Garvey at the Andy Warhol Museum, as markers of exciting shifts in artistic and institutional leadership. Dan Ghenacia blends neuroscience and art to create an instantaneous meditative journey, while Daniel Humm champions a vegan menu—both boasting benefits to health that abound.

Fernando Laposse tells the fascinating stories behind his utterly delightful designs, drawing us in with fanciful tactility. A furry mirror or table with maze-like marquetry are the result of an ongoing, long-term project to combat the problem of dwindling biodiversity in a small mountain village in Mexico. But, as we find out, the fruits of that labor and research are starting to blossom.

Travel with us to the shores of Lake Maggiore in Italy for two total immersions. One, with Louis Vuitton, on an idyllic island for its fantastical Cruise 2024 collection, shown within the perfectly landscaped gardens of the storied Isola Bella. The other to the heritage-enriched manufacture of the luxury outerwear company Herno, where the lush landscape inspires both innovation and a deep-rooted commitment to sustainability.

Kayak beside us in Iceland, where we explore with Vacheron Constantin glaciers and more to discover the watchmaker's latest partnership with the artist Zaria Forman. And wander the gardens of Grasse, where Louis Vuitton's resident nose Jacques Cavallier Belletrud takes us on a trip of the senses, igniting our memory and obsessions.

Go behind our three covers, featuring Kelly Wearstler, Ludovic Nkoth, and Derek Fordjour. Join Wearstler in Paris as she shares her favorite spots in the city to find inspiration for her more is more design ethos. In Paris we also connect with painter Nkoth at the end of his year-long residency that has resulted in multiple solo exhibitions and a self-described new understanding of painting, color, mark-making, and overall harmony. Go inside the studio of Fordjour, whose multi-installation, multidisciplinary major exhibition at Petzel Gallery in New York showcases a more personal and explorative side to the New York-based artist.

As we set our sights on 2024, we hope these pages offer transportive experiences that inspire, spark new ideas, and foster even just a tiny bit of comfort and hope.

Katy Donoghue
EDITOR IN CHIEF

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DIOR

FROM THE PUBLISHERS

How to start this letter in such a divided world . . .

As we enter the end of this year, with the continuous wars in the Middle East and in Ukraine, the suffering of so many individuals, and the prevalence of chaos and violence, how can one focus on the positive?

Yet this is our mission, transcending divisions to shine a light on the beauty of creativity and the fullness of hope in projects and initiatives in the realm of art and culture.

We are full of joy when we discuss with Ludovic Nkoth his passion and vision for his future as a figurative painter, where talent becomes again the center of attention of collectors and institutions alike.

We marvel when speaking with Kelly Wearstler about her journey and her mission to make interior design more accessible and inclusive.

And we are full of hope when hearing from emerging talents, as well as learning more from activations and initiatives by various brands around sustainability and conservation.

We are indeed living in interesting times, yet we feel the need to remain certain of better tomorrows. Know that we will always cherish life and creativity and fight with our means any and every hateful comment and action, wherever they come from.

Let's finish on a bright note with a quote from Henri Matisse, "Creativity takes courage." So let's all be courageous and create.

Happy holidays,

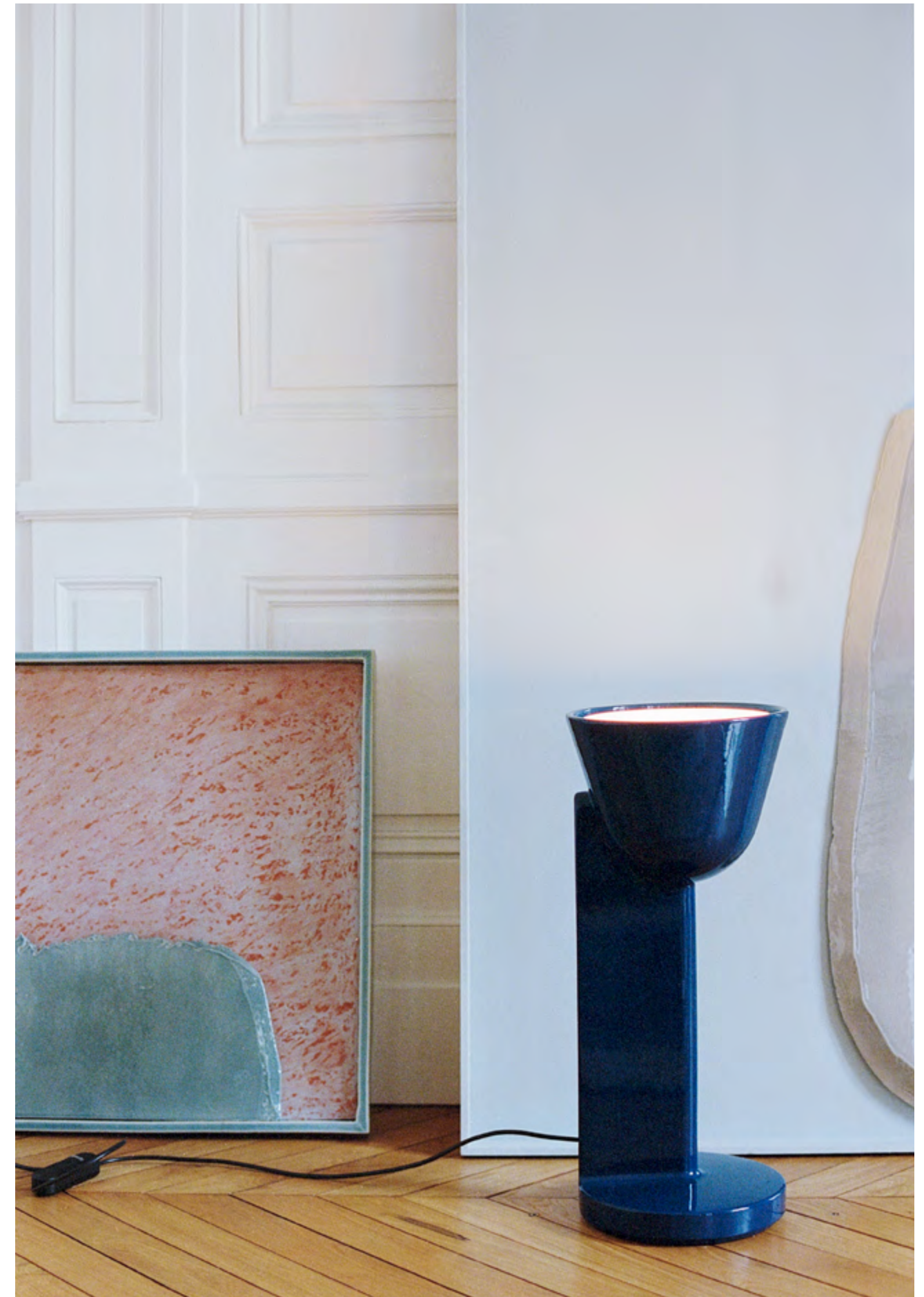
Michael Klug & Laurent Moïsi
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RIMOWA



NO ONE BUILDS A LEGACY BY STANDING STILL





Céramique
by Ronan Bouroullec
2023

FLOS



24

NEWS

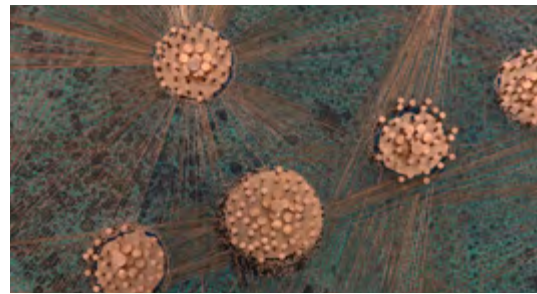
WHAT TO SEE, DO, BUY, AND WEAR THIS SEASON.



30

REVIEWS

"GABRIELLE CHANEL. FASHION MANIFESTO," WEDGE HOUSE, DIRIYAH BIENNIAL.



36

PROFILES

DAN GHENACIA, DANIEL HUMM, NADTO FUKASAWA, COURTNEY WILLIS BLAIR, ON THE WINGS OF HERMÈS, BURAK CAKMAK, DELPHINE JELK.



48

TO WATCH

NATHANIEL MARY QUINN, FERNANDO LAPOSSE.



54

SITE VISIT

A MYTHICAL ESCAPE, VACHERON CONSTANTIN IN ICELAND.



62

ATELIER VISIT

LOUIS VUITTON IN GRASSE, "GUCCI COSMOS," ON THE SHORES OF LAKE MAGGIORE.



80

FOCUS

CHARAF TAJER.

COVERS

KELLY WEARSTLER
PORTRAIT BY JACQUES BURGA.

LUDDVIC NKOTH
LUDDVIC NKOTH, SYSTEM (YELLOW) II (DETAIL), 2023, PHOTO BY PAUL SALVESON, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND FRANÇOIS GHEBALY.

DEREK FORDJOUR
DEREK FORDJOUR, SWIMMING LESSONS (DETAIL), 2023, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND PETZEL GALLERY.

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PARIS LONDON NEW YORK MIAMI TOKYO DUBAI MONACO

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82

KELLY WEARSTLER

BRINGING BEAUTIFUL TENSION TO THE WORLD OF DESIGN.



88

BRUNO MOINARD AND CLAIRE BÉTAILLE

IMAGINING IDEAL SPACES, AS CREATORS OF IMPRESSIONS, FOR LIFE'S EVOLUTIONS.



94

EWA JUSZKIEWICZ

FUSING ART AND FASHION TO EXPLORE FEMALE IDENTITY WITH LOUIS VUITTON'S ARTYCAPUCINES COLLECTION.



100

LUDOVIC NKOTH

SEARCHING FOR HOME AND HARMONY AFTER A YEAR-LONG RESIDENCY IN PARIS.



108

FRANCIS KURKDJIAN

THE DIOR PERFUME CREATION DIRECTOR REIMAGINES AN ICON WITH L'OR DE J'ADORE.



114

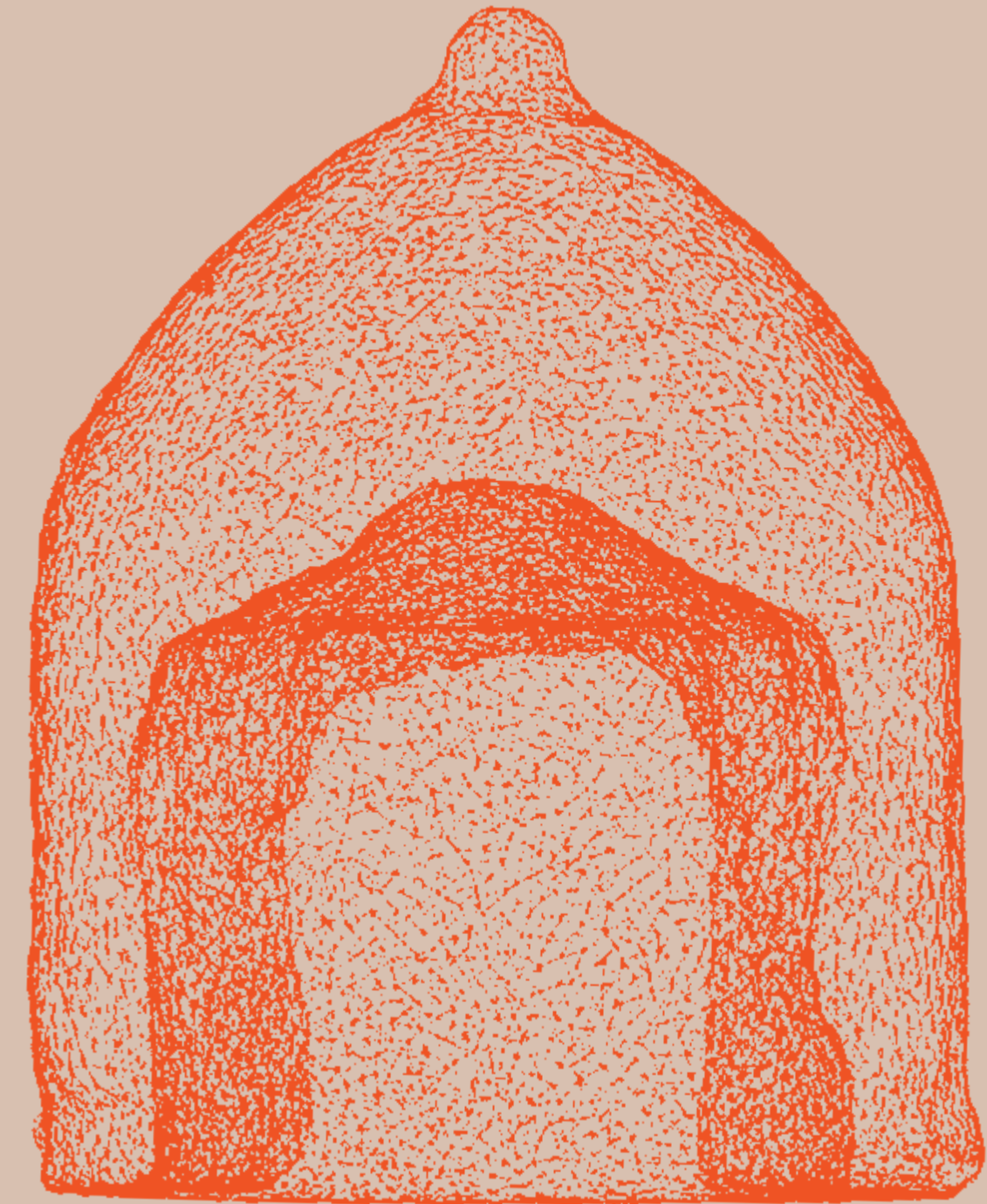
DEREK FORDJOUR

EMBRACING A CERTAIN CREATIVE MATURITY AND VULNERABILITY IN HIS LATEST SOLO SHOW, "SCORE."

Bijoy Jain

with the artists
Alev Ebüzziya Siesbye and Hu Liu

**Studio
Mumbai**



Visual: Studio Mumbai. Graphic Design: Neo Neo.

Exhibition

**Breath of
an Architect**

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pour l'art contemporain

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1895

BERLUTI

PARIS

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ALBERTO ZANETTI

Alberto was born in 1977 in Cernusco Sul Naviglio in conjunction with a Juventus UEFA cup match, even though he is a die-hard AC Milan fan, and on the same day as Chris Martin, so to speak because it's cool. During his university studies in economics, he is kidnapped by the world of photography due to a fortuitous New York meeting with Pierpaolo Ferrari, who invites to follow him as an assistant, despite not knowing anything about photography. The *Sliding Doors* effect makes you unexpectedly and without a reason abandon your studies to get closer to this unknown but fascinating world. After a long apprenticeship as an assistant alongside Pierpaolo, he begins to photograph. Passionate about film, he prefers fashion but also winks at the world of art and portraits. He has been part of the *ToiletPaper Magazine* team since its foundation, and has collaborated with various magazines such as *L'Uomo Vogue*, *Wallpaper*, *Vogue Italia*, *Vanity Fair*, *Vogue Mexico*, and with various fashion brands.

STEVE BENISTY

Steve Benisty was born and raised in Antwerp, Belgium. After moving to Paris and London to study theater, Benisty ultimately settled in New York's Lower East Side to pursue a career in film and photography. Along the way he traveled extensively to Asia, South America, and the Middle East, capturing landscapes and portraits unique to each region. Benisty is a regular contributor to *Whitewall*. His images of artists, collectors, and architects have been featured in publications including *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Departures*, and *Marie Claire*. He has also directed video commercials for Zegna, David Webb, Elie Tahari, St. John, and Cirque du Soleil. When not traveling on assignment, he can usually be found at a dog run with Beau, Skye, and his daughters, Leila and Eden.



CHANDLER KENNEDY

Chandler Kennedy is a photographer and casting director living and working in Los Angeles and New York. She grew up in Santa Monica and later moved to New York City, where she started her career as a photographer. She has since returned to the West Coast (10 years later) to further focus on both her casting work in film and her ongoing body of work documenting Southern California. Both fields of her work pioneer the exhibition of real people in a commercial space.

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BARBORA ŽILINSKAITĖ

CHAIRS DON'T CRY

JAN 11 – MAR 30, 2024





1.

ART OF THE MOMENT

1. On view at the Ferragamo museum in Florence, Italy, is "Salvatore Ferragamo 1898-1960" (October 27, 2023-November 2, 2024), celebrating the vision of the brand's founder through documents, objects, artworks, photographs, and more.

2. "Ruth Asawa Through Line" at the Whitney Museum of American Art highlights the artist's drawing practice with over 100 works from public and private collections—many of which have never been seen before. (Ruth Asawa, Untitled (AN.077, Pigeons on Brick), 1963, ink on coated paper, 24 1/2 x 37 1/4 inches, © 2023 Ruth Asawa Lanier, Inc. / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, courtesy of David Zwirner.)

3. Friedman Benda has announced the opening of a new gallery in Paris at 38 rue du Temple in early 2024, with Astrid Malingreau acting as director. (Photo by Matthew Avignone, courtesy of Friedman Benda.)

4. "Mood of the moment: Gaby Aghion and the house of Chloé" (October 13, 2023-February 18, 2024) at the Jewish Museum in New York spotlights the label's founder and its 70-year history with nearly 150 archival garments and documents. (Gaby Aghion, photographed by Raymond Aghion, undated. Courtesy of Philippe Aghion and Chloé Archive, Paris.)

5. "Akris: St.Gallen, selbstverständlich" (October 6, 2023-March 10, 2024) at the Textilmuseum St.Gallen exhibits the prominent relationship between fashion and textile in the house's founding city.

6. Almine Rech opened its latest gallery in New York's TriBeCa neighborhood on October 5, 2023, with an exhibition by Vaughn Spann named "Trilogy." (Vaughn Spann, Floodgates, 2023, oil on primed wood panel, 241.3 x 182.9 x 3.8 cm 95 x 72 x 1 1/2 in.)

7. Under the care of creative director Sabato De Sarno, Gucci Prospettive launches as a publication to accompany each collection that underscores the dialogue between art and fashion, first with an edition named "Milano Ancora."

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2024

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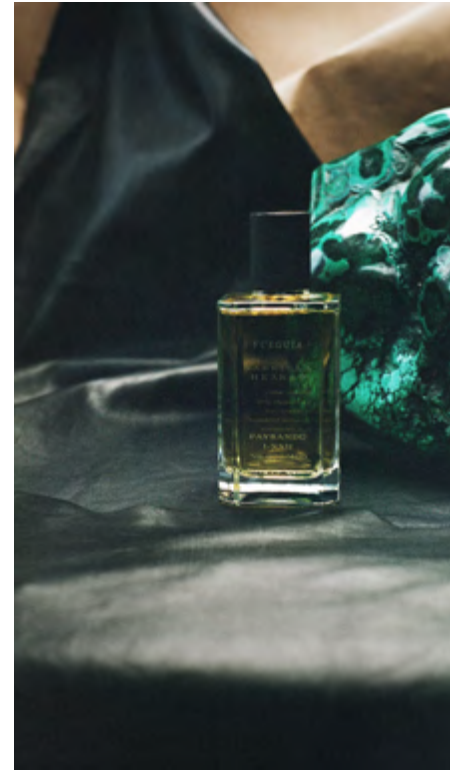
A CHIC BALANCING ACT

1. Introduced in LOEWE's Fall/Winter 2023 collection is the new Squeeze bag available in two sizes, featuring an adjustable strap to be worn over the shoulder or cross-body.
2. Fueguia 1833 and Gabriela Hearst launched a collaborative eau de parfum with two scents—Paysandú and New York—marking the designer's foray into fragrance.
3. At.Kollektive reveals its third collection filled with ECCO leather pieces designed by Nina Christen, Peter Do, Anne Holtrop, and Kiko Kostadinov.
4. Fendi's latest title, Peekaboo-k, details the story of the iconic bag's concept, creation, and evolution through four chapters, text from famous contributors, and countless stunning images.
5. Imagined by Maria Grazia Chiuri, the "DiorAlps" capsule collection unveils technical looks for the slopes, including pieces like puffer jackets, boots, and the beloved Dior Book Tote adorned in the Plan de Paris print. (Dior Magazine © Fanny Latour-Lambert.)
6. Balenciaga's iconic "Le Cagole" line has expanded to include a new style, Le Cagole Sling Bag, featuring a pared-down symmetrical silhouette adorned in flat studs, small buckles, and a braided and grouted shoulder strap.
7. From Versace's Fall/Winter 2023 collection is the new Greca Goddess top handle bag, an architectural symbol of infinity and unity with a shoulder strap, internal pockets, and a magnetic closure.
8. Mulberry welcomes two new ranges—"Lana" and "Pimlico"—with bold accentuations, Postman's and Rider's Locks, that take cues from jewelry.



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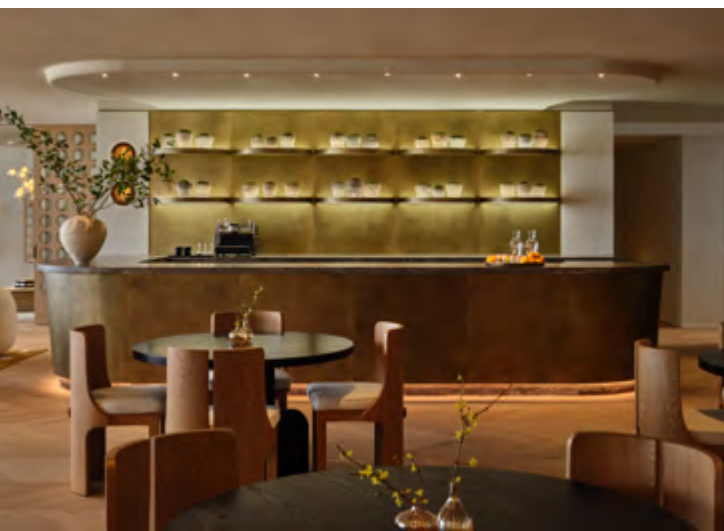
SÃO PAULO . RIO DE JANEIRO . PUNTA DEL ESTE . FAZENDA BOA VISTA
 ANGRA DOS REIS . BELO HORIZONTE . SALVADOR . NEW YORK . TRANCOSO



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3.

DESIGNED TO ADORE

4.



1. Inspired by nature and united by curiosity, The Macallan unveils its third edition of "The Harmony" collection, created in collaboration by Stella and Mary McCartney to honor their memories of Scotland.

2. Part of Heller's "Next Generation of Modern" series, the Hlynur Atlason-designed Limbo lounge chair is available for order.

3. Audemars Piguet celebrates the opening of its first AP House on the West Coast in Los Angeles, situated at the center of West Hollywood on Sunset Boulevard.

4. Marking Thom Browne's 20th anniversary is a monograph on the American designer, published by Phaidon. (Courtesy of Phaidon.)

5. Recounted and imagined by photographer Andrea Fazzari, Tokyo Chic published by Assouline illustrates the beauty of the Japanese capital, filled with never-before-seen images of architecture, fashion, food, and more.

6. Dior Maison launches the "Perles" collection, dreamed up by Jean-Michel Othoniel, echoing The Gold Rose artwork he created for Francis Kurkdjian's new perfume L'Or de J'adore.

7. KATKIM takes its core collection to new heights with its latest pieces—like the Trace Cloud ring, made of 18-karat solid gold—that blend design, quality, and sustainability.

8. Part of its Fall/Winter 2023 collection, Zegna's latest Triple Stitch Vetta sneakers in suede are an outdoor-inspired evolution of the house's iconic luxury leisure shoe.



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8.

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Installation view of "Gabrielle Chanel. Fashion Manifesto," courtesy of Chanel.



Installation view of "Gabrielle Chanel. Fashion Manifesto," courtesy of Chanel.



Installation view of "Gabrielle Chanel. Fashion Manifesto," courtesy of Chanel.

"GABRIELLE CHANEL. FASHION MANIFESTO"

Exhibiting a lifetime of fashion at the Victoria & Albert Museum.

By Eliza Jordan

For the very first time in the United Kingdom, an exhibition dedicated to Gabrielle Chanel is open at the Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A) in London. Set within The Sainsbury Gallery, "Gabrielle Chanel. Fashion Manifesto" (September 16, 2023–February 25, 2024) is organized into 10 sections, guiding visitors through the many categories Chanel has gained acclaim for since its founding in 1910. In addition to nearly 200 looks, a selection of accessories, perfumes, and jewelry are also on view, illustrating the designer's dedication to fashion and modern-day elegance.

Presented in partnership with Palais Galliera, Fashion Museum of the City of Paris, where a previous iteration was seen in 2021, the show is reimagined with more than 100 new objects. To complement rarely seen collection pieces from the V&A, Palais Galliera, and the Patrimoine de Chanel—the heritage collections of the *maison* in Paris—are also exhibited. Highlights include one of the first garments produced in 1916, costumes for the Ballets Russes production of *Le Train Bleu* in 1924, ensembles from Chanel's final collection in 1971, and Chanel's British inspirations—from her adoption of tweed to partnerships with British textile companies.

The presentation's curator, Oriole Cullen, curator of modern textiles

and fashion at the V&A, shared with *Whitewall* the splendor in organizing a show of this scale.

WHITEWALL: *How did presenting these in 10 themed vignettes highlight who Gabrielle Chanel was and is to the brand today?*

ORIOLE CULLEN: We spend time seeking out objects in collections worldwide, examining and researching, and submersing ourselves into the research and material. From this, narratives appear, and we work on weaving them together and enabling the objects to tell a story.

The ten sections follow a chronology of Chanel's 60-plus-year career, taking the visitor through the defining elements of Gabrielle Chanel's "fashion manifesto"—her template for the modern woman's wardrobe. Within these overarching themes, the objects represent crucial aspects of that distinctive Chanel style—some well-known, such as the little black dress and the Chanel suit, and some less widely recognized, such as her radical approach to textiles and her innovative construction techniques. At certain moments, we break out of the chronology to focus on a particular

aspect of her work, showcasing the importance of accessories to the Chanel look; the iconic 2.55 handbag and two-tone shoes; the invisible accessory of Chanel No. 5, and the fragrance, beauty, and skincare collections; and her abundant and imaginative costume jewelry.

WW: *The exhibition builds from a previous iteration. What is particularly unique?*

OC: Over 170 new objects, a new exhibition design, AV and soundtrack, as well as added elements to the narrative, such as her connections to Britain. We have also added elements of biography to give a glimpse of the woman behind the fashion design. We have examples by Gabrielle Chanel in the V&A's collection, and the exhibition offers the chance to showcase these alongside pieces borrowed from over 25 collections worldwide, covering the full span of her career, examining how Chanel shaped the modern woman's wardrobe from her entry into fashion in 1910 to her final collection in 1971. It's an opportunity to display several rare objects from early in her career, as well as many garments that have never been displayed in the U.K. before and which shed light on the elements of her fashion output that continue to influence the way we dress today.

WW: *What is one key piece included from the V&A's collection?*

OC: An all-over sequined trouser suit from 1937. Intended to wear when entertaining at home, the suit consists of a blouse of silk chiffon with a ruffled lace collar that sits on a simple cropped jacket embroidered with shiny black sequins, paired with wide-leg trousers of the same all-over shimmering sequins. This particular suit was owned by fashion editor Diana Vreeland, a regular Chanel client in this period. The outfit is strikingly modern—a radical proposal at the time, managing to be both opulent and pared-back in that distinctive Chanel way. Another example from the V&A's collection is an evening dress from Spring/Summer 1923 of black georgette decorated with an all-over embroidery design of gilt frisé thread and clear glass bugle beads, probably embroidered by the House of Kitmir—a Parisian embroidery house established by the Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna Romanova of Russia.

WW: *How does the show further highlight the brand's relationship with the U.K., and London in particular?*

OC: At certain periods of her life, Gabrielle Chanel spent significant time in Britain—particularly in the 1920s and early 1930s. Her interest in Britain was first piqued through her relationship with British shipping merchant Arthur "Boy" Capel. Later, through her well-connected friend Vera Bate Lombardi, Chanel was introduced to British high society, including the Duke of Westminster, Winston Churchill, and the Duke of Windsor. In the exhibition, we touch on how her time in Britain and her connections to British society influenced her fashion designs.

For instance, her adoption of tweed wool textiles during the 1920s. At this time, she was spending much of her time with members of the British aristocracy, participating in country sports such as fishing.

took the practical protective fabrics she wore for these activities—such as tweeds and wool jerseys—and reinterpreted them into her elegant, couture daywear. We include objects from the archive of Linton Tweed, based in Carlisle in Northern England, who supplied Chanel from the 1920s onwards. For a limited period, Chanel opened a couture salon in London in 1927. We also discuss her partnerships with British textile manufacturers. In 1932, Chanel established British Chanel Ltd to work directly with U.K. textile manufacturers. To mark this partnership, she organized a fashion show of 130 designs made of British textiles, which took place at 39 Grosvenor Square in London. A film of this show is included in the exhibition, as well as a swatch book from the British textile manufacturers Ferguson Bros Ltd, one of the companies that Chanel partnered with, which features a design by Chanel. As well as Gabrielle Chanel's personal and professional links to Britain, we also have some garments worn by British personalities, such as Anne Gunning, the top British model of the 1950s.

WW: *Chanel designed clothing first and foremost for herself, actualizing garments for an independent and active lifestyle. How do you see these styles speaking to the women visiting the exhibition today?*

OC: As you say, Gabrielle Chanel designed first and foremost for herself. She was not designing a fantasy or an ideal; she was designing for her active life, for the life of a modern woman. Her designs are founded in a desire for comfort, ease, and wearability, and her success lay in her ability to create effortlessly elegant clothes that did not compromise on the wearer's movement or comfort. Right up to the end of her career, she said she didn't design clothes that she didn't want to wear herself. Whilst the garments themselves might look strikingly simple and understated on the figure, the magic is in the detail: Every element was carefully thought out, every pattern piece perfected, in order to deliver on both style and wearability, and cultivate that sense of relaxed elegance that is so characteristic to Chanel. Importantly, she wasn't only concerned with how the garments looked; she prioritized how they felt to wear. As we all know, if you feel good in your clothes, it gives you a certain attitude, confidence, and a natural elegance.



Photo by Draper White.

WEDGE HOUSE

CCY Architects designs a dreamlike residence in Aspen, Colorado, for jewelry designer Jane Berg.

By Andrew Huff

Building a home from scratch can be a relentless, stressful undertaking. But does it have to be? With the right team of designers and clients, creating site-specific architecture can be an incredibly rewarding and energizing experience.

When jewelry designer Jane Berg wanted to find a place to live in Aspen, Colorado, after many years in Chicago, she turned to the Colorado-based design firm CCY Architects to realize her unique vision. With more than 50 years of experience working throughout the Rocky Mountain region and beyond, CCY was well positioned to create a space that carefully reflected Berg's dream home for entertaining and relaxing, that respected the site upon which the house sits. Wedge House, named for the geometric form of the home, is a ski-in ski-out residence that was carefully crafted to speak to the clients' edgy design preferences and reflect their personality in this jewel-like structure.

We spoke with Jane and architects John Cottle and Simon Elliot of CCY Architects, who worked closely on realizing this project, about the process of designing this home, some of the key influences, how art plays a role in the design, and more.

WHITEWALL: Can you tell us about the process of building this home and how you found the property?

JANE BERG: Before moving to Aspen, my husband and I were living in Chicago. We both fell in love with this part of the country, and specifically the Highlands, which is where we were lucky enough to build this house. It was a very long process looking for this particular site, almost seven years of searching until we found this lot to build on. When we first moved to Aspen, we purchased a townhouse located very close to our current home, and we can actually see it from our living room, which we love.

WW: Art seems to be an important component of the project, both through the work you collect but also the way art manifests itself through various zones throughout the home. Can you discuss your influences and passions as they relate to art and design?

JB: I am very influenced by my brother, who is an abstract sculptor and artist with a remarkable sense of perspective and ability to create three-dimensional forms. There are artworks and design elements that he made, such as the scrim wall at the entrance and other sculptural pieces throughout the home. He has also had a major influence on the way I have collected art over the years. I've always been drawn to photography, both black-and-white and color. I've always been drawn to clean, geometric lines. Even if you look at some of my jewelry designs, there is a parallel in



Photo by Draper White.



Photo by Draper White.



Photo by Draper White.

architectural forms. Some of my earliest collections were inspired by a trip I took to New Orleans, and the wrought-iron fencing throughout the city.

WW: The shape of the house is so compelling. Was this your idea from the start?

JB: I can't take much credit for the shape of the house, as it was really CCY who came up with that decision. The form was realized after many conversations and a really in-depth charrette process led by the design team to figure out what we were looking for, and how this could be materialized. But here, too, I see a connection between the exterior of the house and some of the interior design considerations and influences from my brother's art practice.

JOHN COTTLE: Jumping off from that, the house is situated on a surprising site, and really a memorable place. You don't really expect it upon approach. When you are standing on the site of the house, it's magnificent. The idea for the shape of the house was also inspired by Jane, who mentioned an interest in clean lines, so we looked at a lot of different forms of the house and got really intrigued by the idea of a simple, opening up, wedge-shaped form that respected the scale of the neighborhood and was one strong movement opening up to the mountains. The design was all about studying the site, the neighbors, and the views, and how we could emphasize the place as much as we could.

SIMON ELLIOT: We also did some early work with VR and Lumion, which allowed us to position ourselves in the design and see how the angle of the roofline, and window placement, could open up views to the ridge and make the wedge shape that much more dynamic. The shape also informs the experience of being inside the home. The way the roofline angles, how the ceiling extends to outdoor overhangs at the entrance and deck, and the carefully crafted views out to the mountains all enhance this gemlike structure.

WW: How does the home function in different seasons?

JB: People are attracted to Colorado and living here full time because it provides an opportunity to be outdoors for all four seasons; a lot of people don't just come here to ski. We are always thinking about our homes, not as ski or summer houses, but places that can be fully functional

year-round. The deck is a perfect example of this because it can be used twelve months of the year. It gets tremendous sunlight in the winter, when the sun is at a low angle, and in the summer it is also a gathering space, protected from the direct sun by the projected roof above. We're always thinking about how the spaces will be living throughout the year, not just at one time. It utilizes every aspect that the site has to offer, and all the different environments that surround it.

JC: Jane and her husband are big skiers, and during the design process, we talked a lot about how the home would function during ski season. Now, they're essentially living there year-round. How wonderful a result is that? I love that.

WW: What were some of the defining characteristics of this collaboration between architect and client?

JC: One of the things that I found so productive and enjoyable about this design process was the healthy friction we were able to create. I would say that during many creative processes, you need healthy friction, because you can challenge convention and the solution, which might come easily, but there's enough back and forth to make it better. We had a great time working with Jane to capture her interests and making sure they all tie together in the end. The result is that the house has more unique qualities and spaces than most in Aspen.



Photo by Draper White.



The repurposed district of JAX in Diriyah is a new hub for Saudi Arabia's creative industry, courtesy of JAX.

THE 2024 DIRIYAH CONTEMPORARY ART BIENNALE

Examining the feelings of renewal and revitalization that come “After Rain.”

By Pearl Fontaine

The Diriyah Biennale Foundation presents the second edition of Saudi Arabia's Diriyah Contemporary Art Biennale from February 20 to May 24, 2024, returning to its home near the UNESCO World Heritage site of At-Turaif just outside of the capital Riyadh. Under the care of a new artistic director, Ute Meta Bauer, the curatorial title “After Rain” has informed a program around ideas of renewal and revitalization. The 2024 biennial encompasses works and presentations by over 90 artists from more than 40 countries, selected by Bauer with the help of an international curatorial team comprised of Anca Rujoiu, Rose Lejeune, Rahul Gudipudi, and Wejdan Reda.

“It is our deeply held belief and ambition as a Foundation to deliver world-class international platforms that highlight the transformative power of the arts in Saudi Arabian society. ‘After Rain’ opens a new chapter for the Diriyah Biennale Foundation, where a diverse and multi-generational group of artists come together,” said Aya Al Bakree, CEO of the Diriyah Biennale Foundation. “Following the great success of the inaugural Diriyah Contemporary Art Biennale in 2022, this edition's team will make a significant contribution to the vitality of contemporary

art in Saudi Arabia and to the presence of Saudi culture on the world stage.”

Making up the biennial's presentation space is a series of seven halls and a compilation of courtyards and terraces in Diriyah's JAX District, where attendees will find exhibitions, installations, events, and other programming. Throughout the show's three-month run, visitors can engage with multisensory art experiences across mediums and through an array of happenings, including special concepts put in place for the month of Ramadan (March 10–April 9). Joining more art-centric programming, the holy month has inspired a handful of communal experiences, with gatherings centered around food sharing—like a bamboo structure for cooking and eating by Britto Arts Trust or a public meal headed by Lucy + Jorge Orta.

“The holy month of Ramadan is an important time for Muslims from around the world, this edition of the biennale takes into consideration the time, place and culture in conversation with our participating artists,” said co-curator Wejdan Reda. “During Lucy + Jorge Orta's visit to Saudi Arabia earlier this year we met with local chefs and various experts and



The 2024 Diriyah Contemporary Art Biennale curatorial team; top (L-R): Ana Salazar, Dian Arumingtyas, Ute Meta Bauer, Wejdan Reda, Anca Rujoiu; bottom (L-R): Alanood A Alsudairi, Rose Lejeune, Rahul Gudipudi; courtesy of the Diriyah Biennale Foundation.

spoke extensively about the rituals around communal meals. Considering the nature of their project *70x7 The Meal Act XLVI*, we chose to situate this in Ramadan as it is an important opportunity for art, culture, and the community to be brought together. The wider programming during Ramadan reflects these ideals.”

Of particular note during the biennial is the region's rapidly changing social scene, which is represented in the programming by multiple generations of artists. “The Saudi I visit today is different from the one two years ago,” said Bauer. “For me it is very important to speak about this in the Biennale. What role can art play in a society with a very young generation, in a country that is being restructured in a very fast process? What does this mean for everyday life? Hence, we have a substantial number of new commissions, from performative works to communal eating, to architectural installations and sound research, that reflect local culture in a moment of rapid change.”

The featured artists can be seen engaging in discourse around topics like the region's history, the human-nature continuum, examinations of the built environment, and art that encourages its viewers to better observe and listen to their surrounding landscapes. Treating the program as a living entity built around exchanges and processes, as opposed to a static presentation, this year's show is focused on the importance of encouraging creative dialogue between Saudi Arabia and the rest of the world. Bauer told *Whitewall*, “The Biennale was developed after conducting several research trips across Saudi Arabia, aiming to gain a deeper understanding of the region and the artists active there. These trips involved meeting with artists, but also consultations with experts in various fields, such as medicine and botany, and played a pivotal role in shaping the curatorial framework for the Biennale.”

Supporting the biennial's mission of cultural exchange, the work commissioned especially for “After Rain” includes artworks and architectural activations—some of which create spaces for performances, readings, and other interactions. Nearly 20 artists and collectives are debuting commissioned works, including a collaboration

between the Saudi Arabian artist Ahmed Mater and the Berlin-based photographer and filmmaker Armin Linke, Sara Abdu's look at cleansing rituals featuring towers made of soap, and a reflection on Mohammad AlFaraj's home of Al Ahsa, which encompasses live palm trees and a sound element. Other commissions include those by Anne Holtrop, Mariah Lookman, Azra Akšamija, Rasha Al-Duwaisan, Tarek Atoui, Hasan Hujairi, Camille Zakharia, and NJOKOBOK (Youssou Diop and Apolonija Šušteršič).

“The nature of this Biennale edition is to engage with artists on multiple levels in a way that is aligned with the specificities and the needs of their artistic work. Several artists commissioned for this Biennale are committed to social practice: Njokobok (Apolonija Sustersic and Youssou Diop), Britto Arts Trust (with Tayeba Begum Lipi and Mahbubur Rahman), Mariah Lookman, to name a few,” said co-curator Anca Rujoiu. “Their new work is embedded in interactions and exchanges with different communities, from merchants in the souqs to workers and farmers in Diriyah within the vicinity of the Biennale area.”

Alongside these commissions is an arresting lineup of creators both established and emerging, with more than a third of participating presenters representing the greater Gulf region. These include names like Ursula Biemann, Tomás Saraceno, Nabila Al Bassam, Kee Ya Ting, Regina Maria Möller, Nazgol Ansarinia, Angela Ferreira, Dhali Al Nasser, Irene Agrivina, Taus Makhacheva, Elia Nurvista, Hussein Nassereddine, Liam Young, Nguyễn Trinh Thi, Samia Zaru, and Anne Holtrop, just to name a few. Those in attendance can also expect to be engaged by the work of poets, performers, musicians, and more, across various happenings through the biennial's run.

“The role of a biennial goes beyond the presentation of contemporary art, as it feeds off and nurtures the cultural ecosystem in which it is embedded. This multifaceted and multi-format Biennale can be seen as a journey, becoming a place for both interaction and contemplation, as each work becomes a storyteller, a protagonist, or an actor in a play,” Bauer said.



Dan Ghenacia, portrait by Flavien Prioreau.

DAN GHENACIA

Taking us on a meditative journey with the Alpha Wave Experience.

By Katy Donoghue

This winter Dan Ghenacia's solo show "Have a Good Trip" is on view at Sobering Galerie in Paris, November 16, 2023–January 13, 2024. The exhibition offers an immersive experience for visitors, one that exists between meditation and contemplation, daydreaming and deep reflection.

Ghenacia is known around the world as a DJ and producer who has performed internationally, including with groups like Apollonia. His interest in dynamic visuals and pulsating lights for the music stage led him nearly ten years ago to search out beatnik Brion Gysin's work *Dreamachine*, made in the 1950s, which created stroboscopic flickering light using simple materials like a turntable, lightbulb, and cardboard. Ghenacia's fascination with *Dreamachine* and his own prototype lay dormant until the pandemic, when his travel and DJ schedule suddenly came to a halt.

Ghenacia funneled his focus into what would become the Alphawave Experience, which reimagines Gysin's *Dreamachine* as a multisensory artwork—incorporating light, sound, and environment. The artwork experience puts participants in a near immediate meditative space, whether solo, as with the piece *The Clock*, or in community, as with the piece *The Oracle* (recently on view at Silencio in Ibiza this past summer and fall).

In Paris this winter, Ghenacia will show new works like *The Clouds*, which re-creates flights of fancy when gazing out the window of a plane. *Whitewall* spoke with Ghenacia about his journey into experiential art, aiding our own journey within.

WHITEWALL: *What about Brion Gysin's Dreamachine called out to you back in 2014?*

DAN GHENACIA: I'm a producer and a DJ. I was absolutely fascinated by the idea because it's probably the first stroboscope, which is an element extremely important in clubbing. I was very attracted by the machine and the message. The *Dreamachine* arrived at the same time as the TV, when some were thinking that TV would be dangerous in terms of manipulation, mass marketing, et cetera. They thought people would buy a dream machine to meditate instead of watching TV. This didn't happen, but still I was very attracted by the idea behind it.

WW: *An idea that has parallels today, where rather than TV, it's social media.*

DG: Exactly. And the beauty of the project for me is that this is something that you cannot show on social media. And it's one of the rare things you cannot show today. We are in a moment where we can show everything, everybody is with their phone trying to film and look, but this experience is an internal journey.

WW: *So even though we have to experience Alpha Wave in person, how would you describe it for those who haven't yet had the pleasure?*

DG: The original machine has no music. So I've been working with Tolga Fidan, another producer working with me at Boa Lab Gallery in Lisbon. We started to study meditative music and how we could translate the brain frequency in music, working on ambient and meditative music. And Anine Kirsten helped me to design the piece itself.

We did an exhibition to have viewers and test our machine, and the first time we invited 20 people—some party animals from the club scene, and they all said it was like hallucinating, it was very strong. Most of people see colors, geometrical patterns, and some—maybe 10 percent—have daydreams. They see people, faces, and landscapes.

WW: *What's the length of time that's effective?*

DG: What I do in general for an exhibit is around 10 minutes.

WW: *Getting people to a meditative state so quickly has obvious health benefits. When did that connect for you?*

DG: I'm not a scientist, of course, so I knew I needed the support of neuroscience. We met Francisco Teixeira, who is a neuroscientist in Lisbon who specializes in frequencies and light therapy.

We started to collaborate. He was working on a project collecting data from this neurofeedback headset, a brain trainer for meditation. And for that research, he needed to have people meditate. That can take long and doesn't work all the time. I said, "Let's try with the machine." And what we figured out was that it works instantly. Basically, your brain frequency is activated in a second. It's a shortcut to meditation. If you don't know how to meditate, you have no option, you will meditate. Because the light is so powerful that you don't have time to think. You fight a little bit with the light and there is a moment you let it go.

WW: *Can you tell us about the Mind Art project that's generated from the Alpha Wave Experience?*

DG: The idea came from Francisco Teixeira. The idea of *Mind Art* is that every frequency is an emotion. We collect the data of the experience, and we translate it into emotions that we feed into an AI and you create a piece of digital art with your brain. And, of course, we use a blockchain to make this piece unique and to have the certificate of authenticity of that piece so it becomes a piece of art. If you go on Open Sea you can see where people were concerned, stressed, moved—you have the detail of your experience visualized with this art piece.

WW: *So what's next for the Alpha Wave Experience?*

DG: I hope that *The Oracle* will travel the world. I will try to make it travel, as I have traveled as a DJ. I want the experience for a large audience, and with Francisco Teixeira, we are developing some therapeutic programs.

I'm starting to work on other projects, other pieces of art, as well. Because everything came from the internal journey that I was on because I couldn't travel. When I started to travel again, I figured out that what I was missing most was the clouds. That moment of meditation when you don't have Internet, you can just look at the clouds and stop to think. So I'm working around that at the moment.



Dan Ghenacia's *The Oracle*, 2022, courtesy of the artist.



Daniel Humm, portrait by Craig McDean.

DANIEL HUMM

Moving from "Make it nice" to "Make it matter" at Eleven Madison Park.

By Eliza Jordan

Eleven Madison Park recently celebrated 25 years in business with a limited-edition 10-course anniversary menu available throughout October. The catch for those who have dined at the restaurant prior to 2021, of course, is that it now only features an all-vegan menu. Neither the price nor the three-Michelin-star distinction, which has remained since 2011, has changed. With a heightened sensitivity to our evolving world, and the unsustainable food systems we rely on and perpetuate, the restaurant's owner and chef, Daniel Humm, directed a change.

For the anniversary lineup, that evolution was reflected in dishes that highlighted the wonder of vegetables sourced from the restaurant's upstate farm—including carrot tartare, bread with sunflower butter, white truffle tortellini, and tonburi with avocado and cucumber. The creations were also captured in print, released in Humm's latest Steidl-published book, *Eat More Plants: A Chef's Journal*, featuring drawings and handwritten thoughts on these meatless recipes and others.

Humm shared with *Whitewall* how he ended up in a kitchen rid of meat, and how art, change, and the future of gastronomy continue to inspire him.

WHITEWALL: *Since the last time we spoke in 2018, you've had to navigate the personal change of becoming a celebrity chef, with brands and partnerships constantly approaching you. How do you stay grounded?*

DANIEL HUMM: There are a few people who ground me—friends that I've had for a long time, mostly artist friends. You know, artists go through that, too. They have to be grounded because their practice is often in solitude. And sport. I run and practice yoga regularly. I also get a lot of inspiration from seeing art, too. I visit a lot of galleries and museums around the world—and locally to places like the Met, the Guggenheim, and Dia Beacon. I draw a lot. I write in journals. I paint.

WW: *We see your love of art in the restaurant, with works by artists like Rita Ackermann and Rashid Johnson, among others, on the walls. Where did your interest in art start?*

DH: When I was 12, my parents took me to see Monet's *Water Lilies* at the Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris. I started crying, and I didn't know if I was happy or sad. That was my first exposure to the influence of art. It continues to this day.

WW: *What artists fill your home?*

DH: Lucio Fontana, Rita Ackermann, Daniel Turner, Rashid Johnson, Franz West, and more.

WW: *Who are you interested in right now?*

DH: Francesco Clemente.



Eleven Madison Park, courtesy of Make It Nice.

WW: *During the pandemic, you turned the restaurants into a community kitchen and prepared meals for people in need. How did that impact your thoughts about food?*

DH: I connected with food in a whole new way. Food is such a powerful, magical language that can do a lot more than win awards. It changes people's lives daily. Suddenly, I felt a real responsibility. I had created this platform that Eleven Madison Park is. I have a voice in this industry. So I felt a responsibility to use it to make a change. When we set out to do this, I was aware that no awards may ever follow, but it's not about that anymore. This was about something bigger, and probably less about my ego as it was before. This is about making a difference in the world, having a purpose.

WW: *At that time, you also kept a journal full of sketches, which you recently turned into your latest book. Why was it important for you to draw out recipes?*

DH: I've sketched all my life, throughout my career, but during the pandemic I sketched and wrote a lot of notes about what I was really thinking about—where to go next. This is my journal, so it's a very personal thing to share, but there's this amazing publisher in Germany, Gerhard Steidl. He had dinner at the restaurant and was moved by the experience. We sat down afterward, and he asked, "What's your process like?" I told him it started with my drawings, sitting for weeks, adding colors, writing down thoughts, eventually forming an idea. Sure enough, the next morning, he came to my office and wanted to see all of them. He looked at me and he said, "I would love to publish these."

WW: *The book also dives into your vision of being plant-based. How would you describe that vision, and how it fits into the future of gastronomy?*

DH: The world is changing. The products that arrive in our kitchens are changing. There are mountains of plastic in the ocean. The fish are sick. It is scary. From a creative place, I wanted to speak how I could. Every great musician, every great artist, they're very much tapped into the zeitgeist. With cooking, it came from a creative place.

I'm no expert. I just think vegetables are magical, and I felt with our creativity, we could bring them to life in a way that people would feel it's a luxury. I want the vegetables and the cooking to be very pure. I want the vegetables to taste like what they are. With every season and every year that I get to meet them again, like the tomatoes in the summer and the mushrooms in the fall, I feel I get better at that. We want to get out of the way of the vegetables as much as we possible.

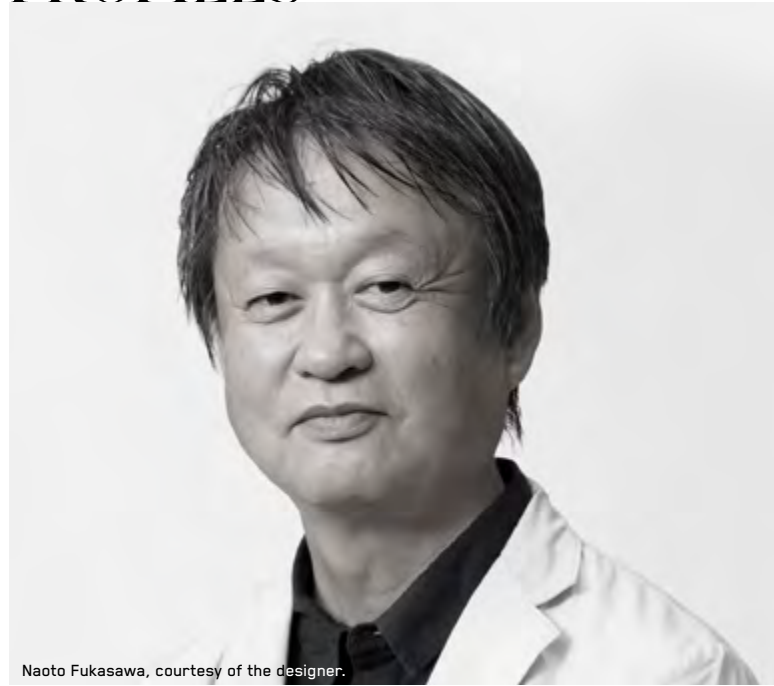
WW: *Eleven Madison Park is 25 years old, and you've been at the helm for 20. What does it stand for today?*

DH: Our transformation to plant-based is our commitment to the future, which comprises forward-looking and forward-thinking approaches, and how to take stock in what we are creating today in better preparedness for tomorrow. We now endeavor to not only make it nice, but to make it matter. We're just getting started.



Carrot tartare, photo by Fecks Wagtuicz.

PROFILES



Naoto Fukasawa, courtesy of the designer.

NAOTO FUKASAWA

Designing with an intuitive approach to inform a collaboration with Molteni&C.

By Pearl Fontaine

The acclaimed Japanese designer Naoto Fukasawa has been working in his field since the 1980s, with a robust résumé that includes the founding of his own eponymous design studio in 2003, a role as the curator of The Japan Folk Crafts Museum, director of 21_21 Design Sight, and recipient of the 2018 Isamu Noguchi Award, among many honors and achievements. The ethos behind Fukasawa's practice, "design without thought," has allowed him to work seamlessly across all areas of the field, including interiors, architecture, electronics, and furniture. His intuition-led approach has aided him in projects for the likes of Issey Miyake, Samsung, Panasonic, the Xue Xue Foundation, B&B Italia, and, most recently, Molteni&C.

It was last year during Salone del Mobile in Milan that the designer made his collaborative debut with Molteni&C, introducing two pieces in the design house's latest collection headed by creative director Vincent Van Duysen. Harnessing the label's sleek, modern minimalism with ease, Fukasawa conceived two sophisticated furniture pieces: the rounded, encompassing Cinnamon armchair and a take on the classic chaise lounge, the reclining Tuscany lounge. To learn more about the collaboration and Fukasawa's intuitive approach, *Whitewall* had the pleasure of speaking to the designer.

WHITEWALL: *What was your starting point for your collaboration with Molteni&C, the Cinnamon chair, in particular?*

NAOTO FUKASAWA: After the first meeting [with Molteni&C], I proposed to them an iconic sofa and chair that I had in my mind. They immediately like it and start making a prototype of it. The next meeting was in front of the prototype, and we were all happy. Molteni&C is one of the few family businesses that are left in the market. They have a long history, confidence, their own technology, and a strong brand. I was very happy they contacted me to work with them.

The main feature of the Cinnamon is that it holds and hugs your body. The shape of the Cinnamon is wrapping your body, in very soft comfort, like a mother hugging her kids.

WW: *The Cinnamon chair was introduced to the world during Milan Design Week at Salone del Mobile, along with your Tuscany lounge and designs by others. How do you see your work interacting with the rest of the Molteni&C collection?*

NF: Since I started working with Molteni&C, I learned more about their typology, color, finish, and atmosphere. My creation is naturally meant to follow their exciting brand atmosphere. I did not try to be outstanding compared to Molteni&C style and collection. I always try to fit in my products in harmony with the brand I design for. I am confident that my product designs fit well in the Molteni&C collection and its environment.

WW: *What was the process of collaborating with Molteni&C? Are the two designs—the Tuscany lounge and the Cinnamon chair—connected in any way?*

NF: Cinnamon and Tuscany have no strong typology relation, but of course, if you see both, they are under Molteni&C brand typology. Molteni&C itself used to make their surroundings for a comfortable life, a relaxing life. In that term, even though the items are different from each other, they both focus on comfort and relaxing moments. Form and shape are different, but the essence of design is related.

WW: *Your philosophy of "design without thought" is based on following one's natural instincts. What does this look like in the context of a studio setting?*

NF: My design is always following people's intuition. In our studio, all the studio members shared this philosophy and thought of this, too. Therefore, our communication is very simple between us even though it is not easy to reach it.

Not everyone can easily follow this approach to design. That is our strongest feature in the studio. We share the philosophy of the design, and then we can share it with all the people.

WW: *Your design practice is pretty widespread and has included a range of things like watches, accessories, electronics, and furniture. How does the concept of designing without thought aid you in these different avenues?*

NF: We all have the same unconscious; we share the same status of human behavior. But when we design, we do it with deep thinking. The designer has to think carefully about the right way to make, but the user should not think about this at all. When making the right tool or object for people, it is harmonized with life, in any type of product. And this is the main idea without thought. People use our design intuitively.

WW: *Do you ever find instances where instinct alone is not enough?*

NF: Sometimes the problem or issue itself is one of the factors in making things. Those issues or troubles help us to develop the idea, to solve it. Problems are the hints of the design or ideas element.

WW: *Are there any areas of design or projects you haven't yet explored but would like to?*

NF: There is not one design category that I can name. My goal now is to make all the things integrated in life. I want to focus on human behavior and human attitude, to know what is comfort, what is happy, and what feels nice.

Normally, people are not aware of those kinds of things—comfort and a happy life. I want to make the world harmonious and integrated.



The Cinnamon armchair by Naoto Fukasawa for Molteni&C.



The Cinnamon armchair by Naoto Fukasawa for Molteni&C.

PROFILES



Courtney Willis Blair, portrait by Mysha Evon Gardner.

COURTNEY WILLIS BLAIR

Letting the artists lead as senior director of White Cube's first New York space.

By Katy Donoghue

Last year, Courtney Willis Blair was named senior director of White Cube in New York. The powerhouse gallery was founded in London 30 years ago, and expanded to include locations in Hong Kong, Paris, Seoul, West Palm Beach, and now New York City. For its first-ever space in New York City, it opened with the inaugural exhibition “Chopped & Screwed” on October 3, 2023. The group show at the gallery's Upper East Side location was curated by Willis Blair and highlights White Cube's unparalleled community of artists and robust programming, featuring work by names like Michael Armitage, Mark Bradford, Julie Mehretu, Adrian Piper, and more.

Whitewall spoke with Willis Blair about following an artist-led approach to her new role at White Cube, which opens a solo exhibition by Theaster Gates in early 2024.

WHITEWALL: How would you describe your role as senior director, overseeing strategy and programming?

COURTNEY WILLIS BLAIR: My role as senior director is to shape White Cube's presence and strategy in New York and the U.S. at large, working to develop the U.S. program, engage in partnership with artists, and deepen our relationships with museums and collectors. My leadership is defined by an intention for White Cube New York to remain distinct and influential in such a robust ecosystem.

WW: As someone who has worked in galleries for years, how would you describe your overall approach as a gallerist?

CWB: My overall approach as a gallerist is pretty simple. White Cube is artist-led, and like the gallery, my focus is the artists. I believe what we do

begins and ends with them, and as a gallerist I have a responsibility to help realize their ambitions and ideas while lending my expertise and insight.

WW: What does the gallery's expansion to New York mean for programming? For representing your artists in New York?

CWB: White Cube's expansion to New York means that we can better serve our artists and clients in a city that is crucial to the cultural landscape, and we can bring the kind of fresh, unexpected, sought-after programming for which White Cube is known.

WW: How does a footprint in New York—which also marks White Cube's 30th year—allow for an expansion of the gallery's foundation?

CWB: There is the physical aspect of our expansion—our sovereign building boasts almost 8,000 square feet, and we have added several exciting artists to our program in the last year.

Our presence in New York will also allow us to expand several areas of the business, from artist engagement and programming to the further development of our secondary market activities. White Cube New York will be a launchpad for exciting initiatives that build on what the gallery has achieved in Europe, Asia, and online in recent years.

We're also thinking about the needs of artists, museums, and collectors in all regions of the country. As for how this dovetails with our global personality, for 30 years White Cube has been known for being artist-led, pioneering, and ambitious, and our New York space will maintain that core ethos.

WW: What was the starting point for the inaugural show, “Chopped & Screwed”? What kind of tone did you want to set with this debut group show?

CWB: Jay Jopling (White Cube's founder), Susan May (White Cube's global artistic director), and I were having dinner when they presented me with the very exciting opportunity to curate the inaugural show. The impetus was to show off, in a way, the incredible program but to also think through the ways in which this show could signal that White Cube New York is, out of the gate, coming strong.

White Cube is known for programming rigorous, thought-provoking group exhibitions—like “Dreamers Awake” (2017), “Memory Palace” (2018), “About Time” (2020), “Tomorrow” (2021), and “Sweet Lust” (2022)—and it is an elegant, searing addition to that tradition.

WW: Can you tell us about how the artists and their work were selected for the show—some represented by the gallery, some not?

CWB: The selection of artists and their work was quite organic. I wanted to engage with our program, while also including key artists who I felt maintained the spirit of the exhibition premise in their work. It takes a lot of reading and conversation and consideration to find the right rhythm between so many differing practices, and in the end, I'm thrilled with the tenor of the show and the artists who trusted my vision.

WW: Could you tell us about the space on the Upper East Side—how you imagine artists responding to the architecture as well as the neighborhood?

CWB: The reaction of the artists who visited the gallery and celebrated this momentous occasion with us is the ultimate indication that we made the right choice, that the wait was worth it.

Some are responding to the space itself, the feeling of the building and its aesthetics. Others are looking at its history. And still others are interested in the pulse well-felt when you step outside. We're a stone's throw from museum row, surrounded by colleagues, clients, and friends. It's nice to continue the tradition of art-dealing in the neighborhood where it began.

WW: In November, the gallery will host a solo show of new paintings by Tracey Emin, her first in New York in seven years. Are you able to share any details on what we can expect from the exhibition?

CWB: Tracey brought some heat to the Upper East Side! It's raw, emotional, breathtaking, passionate, damn good painting. She is undoubtedly one of the most important artists of our time, and her significance within the canon of art history remains undeniable with this show.



Michael Armitage, *Mimi Ni Mwizi Ya Soko*, 2023, oil on Lubugo bark cloth, 59 1/16 x 39 3/8 inches, photo © White Cube, © Michael Armitage.

PROFILES



Photo Benjamin Schmuck, courtesy of Hermès.

ON THE WINGS OF HERMÈS

Transforming our dreams into art in Santa Monica.

By Erica Silverman

Last July in Los Angeles, Hermès unveiled an immersive environment within Santa Monica's Barker Hangar named "On the Wings of Hermès." First, a spellbinding performance weaving the enchantment of Greek mythology with the spirited French *maison* took place, followed by an opulent lunch. Created by the divine minds of the Belgian director Jaco Van Dormael and the choreographer Michèle Anne De Mey, in collaboration with the Astragales Dance Company, "On the Wings of Hermès" whisked viewers away to a visual and lyrical symphony—fusing theater, music, and film for a romantic journey into the heart of the nimble and celebrated brand.

Attendees gathered within the innovative space, which evoked details of a dramatic film set. "Pegasus and the Quest for the Seven Sources of Lightness" was a contemporary adaptation of the famous fable in which the ethereal winged horse guides their young foals on the mysteries of taking flight. In an artistic echoing, seven imaginative vignettes illustrated the search for grace, balance, and freedom—all so that deft flight of the mind, body, and soul might one day take place.

In each scene, the imaginative movement of hands, bodies, and objects transpired across vibrant sets, while the live performances were majestically projected onto sweeping screens. Visitors were led in collective harmony around the intimate space while, one by one, Reverse Gravity, The Flight of the Migratory Gloves, The Circus, Anamorphosis, The Opera of Four Bags, No Gravity, and Rewind whisked visitors away to a magical utopia unfolding the poetics of humanity through art.

"This work metaphorically illustrates the lightness that is omnipresent at Hermès: in the delicate hands of our draftsmen sewing with two needles at once; in the elegance of materials, and in the subtle notes of a perfume," said Hermès artistic director Pierre-Alexis Dumas. "It is an experience which sparks the imagination, designed by artisans of dreams."

Lush set design, skilled puppetry, and ethereal storytelling flowed freely in a timeless masterpiece of creative collaboration. Miniature animals took flight over green pastures, a hypnotic ballet of interlacing gloves pranced across seasonal landscapes, and a tale of two

lovers ebbed and flowed through swirling blue skies. A picturesque circus showcased indigenous choreography and the plight of a young horse, while the jubilant opera of the iconic Kelly handbags invited guests to go forth in lightness.

Ahead of "On the Wings of Hermès" touring worldwide, Van Dormael and De Mey answered a few of our questions.

WHITEWALL: *Your works historically bring together all types of artists for boundary-breaking performances, creating deeply emotional moments for audiences. What are some of the major themes and sentiments woven into this specific presentation spotlighting "Pegasus and the Quest for the Seven Sources of Lightness"?*

JACO VAN DORMAEL & MICHÈLE ANNE DE MEY: Each year, Pierre-Alexis Dumas gives a theme, and this year (2022), it was lightheartedness. Once the theme is given, we have total freedom, so we searched for various evocations of lightheartedness that can be physical, a thought, a feeling, a sensation, a memory. We offered a variety of these sensations. Stories are there to support a sensation. It is important to remember that it is a collective performance made of voices, sounds, and music that all lead to a dream.

WW: *How have audiences reacted to the joyful and tender show in relation to your expectations, and have you noticed diverse reactions in adults as well as in young people as the performance travels the world?*

JVD & MADM: We use our own techniques reimagined and redesigned for this show, often simple tricks with cameras, magic but no digital special effects. The audience is aware of the illusions, they see them, but it doesn't stop them from getting swept away by the magic of the moment.

WW: *Can you explain the significance of the show's title—its allusion to Hermes as the god of trade and the messenger of the gods in Greek mythology—and its powerful bond with the heritage of the enduring fashion house?*

JVD & MADM: There were a lot of things that resonated right away. It was when we were working with Thomas Gunzig, the author of the show's script, on how we could organize this project. The idea of the seven foals who had to grow their wings to become Pegasus came to us and we found this lightness. And then, with Hermès, we were given a theme, the year of lightness: Lightness evokes handcrafted tricks, which fit in well with the artisanal side that is our signature and is important for Hermès.

WW: *Do you have any favorite moments or scenes within the performance?*

JVD & MADM: Lightheartedness is a topic that evokes so many sensations—from the gravitation to the wind to dreams and imagination. Through the exhibition we offered a variety of these sensations. We don't have a particular favorite moment, but, rather, appreciate the ensemble of the different stories weaved together.



Photo Benjamin Schmuck, courtesy of Hermès.



Photo Benjamin Schmuck, courtesy of Hermès.

PROFILES



Delphine Jelk and Violette Serrat in their respective



creative spaces in Paris, courtesy of Guerlain.

GUERLAIN

Delphine Jelk and Violette Serrat strive to bring a historic house into the future.

By Eliza Jordan

Pierre-François-Pascal Guerlain founded Guerlain in Paris, a perfume store at 42 rue de Rivoli 195 years ago. For nearly two centuries, the maison has focused on preservation and innovation to move into the contemporary landscape, offering the world a slice of beauty beyond scent. Lines of skincare, makeup, and more have followed, all still bearing a fragrance of their own.

Today, one woman is at the helm of continuing, protecting, and expanding Guerlain's many fragrances: Delphine Jelk. Her work recalls the brand's storied ethos and concoctions yet brings attention to the evolving dynamic of our lives. Building from the house's go-to collections, including Les Extraits Signature and L'Art & La Matière, her latest scents—including Tobacco Honey and Neroli Plein Sud—blend emotion, nature, and nuance for new expressions of familiar scents like neroli and honey.

The house's Creative Director of Makeup, Violette Serrat, strives to modernize Guerlain's iconic product line. As a young girl, she was inspired by the pastel-colored pearls in the brand's *Météorites* product, which led to a future in the industry. Today, she's revisiting that exact product, alongside Jelk's fragrance infused in its spheres, to offer something chic and contemporary for the woman of today.

Whitewall sat down with Jelk and Serrat to hear how their perfume and makeup take us to back to the past and into the future.

WHITEWALL: *You both have different roles, yet at times, get to work together. What do you consider when approaching items together*

VIOLETTE SERRAT: I think what we do is so complementary. We think of the allure overall—what the emotion we create is going to mean to that person. Lipstick, eyeshadow, hair, clothes, I feel like everything is connected. To be able to work with Delphine, and be at the same maison at the same time is amazing. We have the same vision to bring it to life.

Delphine is kind of a muse herself, so I'm always glad to have her feedback. It's a sounding board. Then we had a baby together—*Météorites*, launching in March 2024.

WW: *This was the first product you created together. Delphine, what was Violette's initial feedback?*

DELPHINE JELK: She told me she didn't want it to smell like her grandmother. [Laughs] She also told me about the aura she wanted to show through *Météorites*. At the same time, the scent is so Guerlain. It's been here for many years. It was a challenge to keep this iconic scent, but have this new aura that Violette brings to Guerlain.

WW: *How would you describe the new aura?*

VS: *Météorites* was in existence a million years ago. It's generations of women, from mother to daughter. When I was a kid, I saw it on my mother's table, my grandmother's table. I said, "I think this is an iconic product. We have so much more innovation now that we could use in service of that product." I would love to know what the creator of this product wanted to achieve. Then I realized he wanted to have this glow, almost like an aura, a visible charisma. I thought this would be an interesting innovation for powder because we could achieve this matte effect, but more importantly, this vibration from your complexion.

I started to work with the chemists, but the challenge was the fragrance because it was strong and it's a big part of the product. I wanted to change it. It smelled like an dried violet flower. They said everyone loves it, did feedback tests to see if that was true, and it was true. They love it.

DJ: Of course people love it! It's something that you have in your memory. When you kiss your grandmother, or your mother, that's what they smell. It's very emotional. But you were right to want to go further and give it something new. So, we did.

WW: *Delphine how did you make a fragrance out of this aura?*

DJ: I was inspired by what Violette had in mind, talking about the aura. Aura for me was adding some sandalwood. It's mystical and almost meditative. There is something about the aura. I think it fits very well with the violet scents. But that is Guerlain—keeping with what is really emotional and patrimonial. Violette and I love all the vintage Guerlain, we don't want to change it, but we want to be in our time. It's a mix of being inspired by all the treasures of this wonderful house and, at the same time, being what we are today.

WW: *Women have been wearing Guerlain perfume since the 19th century. How would you describe those who wear it today?*

DJ: My work with Guerlain perfume began with *La Petite Robe Noire*—an idea I brought to them—but I wasn't working for Guerlain at the time. I thought it was such a wonderful house, an amazing brand, but I couldn't find something for myself. I thought *Mademoiselle Guerlain* was missing.

I was inspired by *Marie Antoinette* with Sofia Coppola, where she's eating macarons from *Ladurée*, has pink hair, and is wearing *Converses*. That for me was exactly *Mademoiselle Guerlain*—this historical part, and at the same time, so today. The story started like that, but I am still in the same mood.

WW: *Delphine, your latest creation, Neroli Plein Sud, launches in January 2024. What's special about this scent to you?*

DJ: I started working on *Neroli Plein Sud* a long time ago. I love it because I think there is a "feel good" element to it. When you have the orange flower in your tea, in your juice, you feel it's good for you. It's the same with the scent. I love this idea, so I wanted to express it as a trip to the south of Morocco. I've smelled an amazing quality of organic neroli there. There are fields for kilometers and kilometers. It's kind of crazy. Imagine flying above the fields of orange flowers, going to the desert. *L'Art & La Matière* is a lot about tension. It's not taking the raw materials and going where you would expect. The idea was to have a fresh, pure neroli, with cold spices—like ginger and turmeric. The bottom of the fragrance is a warm smell with suede and cinnamon—leathery notes that gives this contrast between the top note and enveloping parts.

I love the idea that even if we don't want to be masculine or feminine, I wanted this one to seduce men. I think we need to have in the collection perfumes for men. I love when a woman wears it, but especially a man.

WW: *Violette, you joined Guerlain two years ago, and next year the brand is releasing many new products you designed—including the "Bee Beauty Secrets" collection, featuring a lip oil, a mascara primer serum, an eyeliner, an eyebrow pencil; the Terracotta concealer line and blush compact; and Météorites, which you co-created with Delphine. How does that feel?*

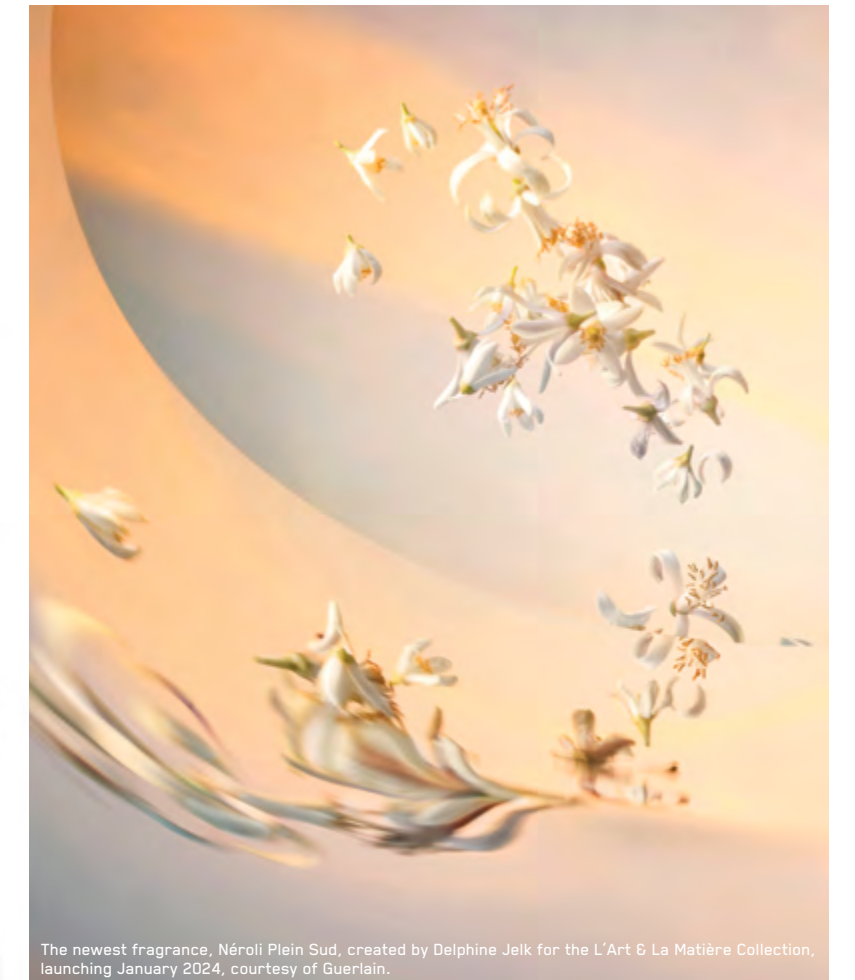
VS: It's exciting! Lip oil is for the contemporary woman. The new eyebrow pencil is important, too. It's mistake proof—you can draw hair by hair. And the concealer, as well as the blush? I'm obsessed. There are a lot of products, but we want a new Guerlain. It's *Sleeping Beauty*—and we're waking her up.



The newest fragrance, Neroli Plein Sud, created by Delphine Jelk for the L'Art & La Matière Collection, launching January 2024, courtesy of Guerlain.

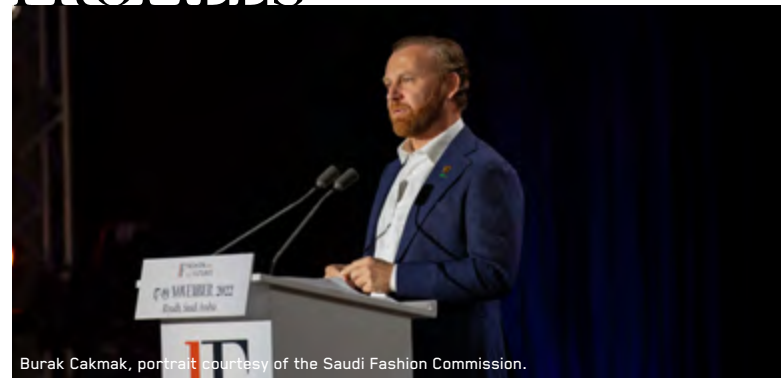


First created in 1987, the iconic pearls of powder, *Meteorites*, will relaunch in March 2024, courtesy of Guerlain.



The newest fragrance, Neroli Plein Sud, created by Delphine Jelk for the L'Art & La Matière Collection, launching January 2024, courtesy of Guerlain.

PROFILES



BURAK CAKMAK

Guiding an emerging fashion ecosystem from Saudi Arabia to the global stage.

By Eliza Jordan

In 2021, Burak Cakmak became the CEO of the Fashion Commission of Saudi Arabia. Upheld by the Ministry of Culture, the institution aims to develop the fashion industry and support designers in the field, as well as focus on inclusive, sustainable, and forward-thinking curriculum. The Commission acts as a vehicle to showcase changemakers putting Saudi Arabian fashion on the world map.

Notably, the Commission hosts an array of initiatives and opportunities to foster growth and expertise, including courses at Institut Français de la Mode and its Saudi 100 Brands program, which offers aspiring designers a one-year mentorship from fashion experts. Recently, the organization presented its first iteration of Riyadh Fashion Week, filled with presentations from 29 local designers.

Whitewall spoke with Cakmak—who previously oversaw social and corporate responsibility, as well as sustainable practices, at Gap Inc., Kering, and Swarovski Group; and supervised fashion degrees at Parsons School of Design—about the Commission.

WHITEWALL: *Saudi Arabia has expanded in recent years to expand upon tourism, including five-star hospitality destinations and art and music festivals. Where does fashion fit into this picture?*

BURAK CAKMAK: Sixty-three percent of Saudi's population is under thirty years old. Objectives under Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 involve providing jobs for over 10 million people in the kingdom. This is where fashion, and expansion in other sectors, can make a difference.

Saudi's youth is ambitious, and is embracing opportunities offered under Vision 2030, which reflects a drop in unemployment (previously at a high of 11.6 percent, the aim is to lower it to 7 percent). There is also the focus on increasing the participation of women in the workforce. As we work to substantially grow local production, further opportunities are emerging for the participation of Saudi women in the increasingly dynamic domestic labor market.

WW: *You're approaching environmental and social responsibility in Saudi Arabia to consider political and social issues, including feminism and inclusivity. How so?*

BC: With a young and engaged population interested in contributing to the creative economy, Saudi offers many opportunities in the fashion sector for the local population. It is one of the first sectors in the country to attract female talent and give them a chance to grow quickly into leadership roles. Through our programs, we are supporting majority "female-owned and -led businesses, as well as providing leadership mentorship initiatives in collaboration with international fashion executives.

Through our ongoing professional development programs, we're seeing businesses focused on supporting local artisans, ethical business practices, and sustainable design solutions. In addition, we are engaging consumers with public programming on reducing textile landfill through ongoing swap shops that are hosted across several cities. In partnership with nonprofits focused on garment collection and recycling solutions, we are working towards building a more sustainable fashion sector in the country.

WW: *Fashion reflects society and culture in real-time. How are Saudi Arabian designers reflecting that now? What do you think their designs currently say about the country?*

BC: Environmental and societal factors influence how people dress—from the designs created to the materials used. Starting 40 to 50 years ago, Saudi Arabia's citizens witnessed a greater exposure to international fashion. And this allowed for an evolution in domestic fashion. That evolution is now peaking, thanks to Vision 2030, and also thanks to growing young population.

As Saudi has opened up to visitors, in turn, many of the Saudi youth have studied abroad, and are returning to the kingdom to be part of the ambitious transformation under Vision 2030. With the opportunity to witness international culture and fashions, they are bringing it back, and mixing it with influences from their own upbringings in Saudi. This is one of many aspects that is shaping what fashion—and broader society—looks like in Saudi Arabia today.

WW: *How would you describe the fashion landscape in the country right now?*

BC: The fashion community in Saudi Arabia is hugely talented. Fashion is a burgeoning sector in the kingdom, and the transformation we are experiencing is quite spectacular. Saudi's fashion talent is diverse, innovative, and inspirational, and the fashion industry has been built completely from scratch, with hardly an ecosystem in Saudi Arabia before 2020. Rooted in unique storytelling and Saudi culture, Saudi designers have strong support from local craftsmanship and artisans. This translates into designs and a brand experience that is not comparable outside of the kingdom.

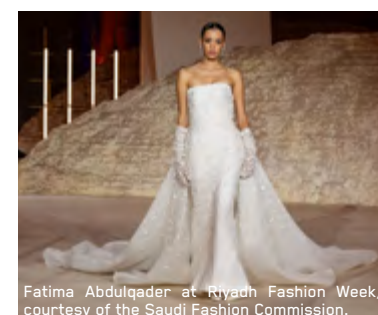
WW: *The Fashion Commission created the Saudi 100 Brands program, offering aspiring designers one year of mentoring from experts at leading fashion houses. Can you tell us more about this?*

BC: Saudi 100 Brands is a mentorship program aimed at Saudi fashion designers and brands looking to take their businesses to the next level. It offers a one-year course, with masterclasses, one-on-one mentorship and workshops on design and innovation, sales strategies, and exhibitions to build competitive advantage.

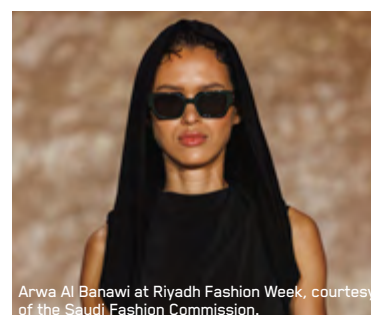
While current applications are in progress, past mentees include the likes of Atelier Hekayat, who designed the physical manifestation of the State of Fashion in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (2023) report, which was unveiled in the form of a book woven into a dress. Then, there's Not Boring, Yousef Akbar, Dar Al Hanouf and many more. Applicants that join for the next round of the program will be guided to exponential growth and development. Mentorship will include support with brand position, all the way to strategic marketing.

WW: *The Commission recently held its first Riyadh Fashion Week presentation. What was that like?*

BC: It showcased designs from 29 designers, including the likes of Honayda Serafi, who last year became the first female-led Saudi brand to be displayed at Harrods. Abadia, an ethical luxury label that recently received foreign direct investment at our roadshow in New York, was also in attendance. Plus, we had a guest appearance from Ashi, following his appointment as the first Saudi designer to present this year on the haute couture calendar at Paris Fashion Week.



Fatima Abdulqader at Riyadh Fashion Week, courtesy of the Saudi Fashion Commission.



Arwa Al Banawi at Riyadh Fashion Week, courtesy of the Saudi Fashion Commission.

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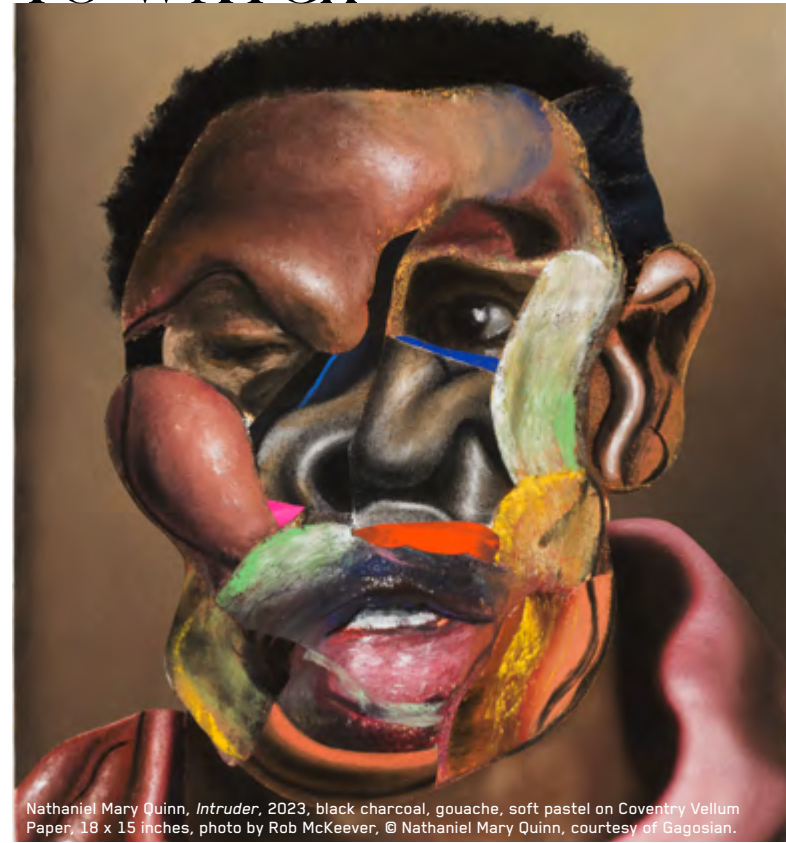


TO WATCH



Nathaniel Mary Quinn

TO WATCH



Nathaniel Mary Quinn, *Intruder*, 2023, black charcoal, gouache, soft pastel on Coventry Vellum Paper, 18 x 15 inches, photo by Rob McKeever, © Nathaniel Mary Quinn, courtesy of Gagolian.

Untangling truth, memory, and perception in a recent show of new paintings.

By Laurent Moïsi
Photos by Steve Benisty

Last summer in Paris, Gagolian presented Nathaniel Mary Quinn's first solo exhibition in the city at its rue de Ponthieu gallery. Entitled "The Forging Years," Quinn's new works explore the subjectivity of the truth and how it hinges on our memory and perception, sparked by his own familial stories and memories.

The artist's recognizable distorted faces—painted as though they were made from collages and warping tools in digital creation platforms—exist in intimate scale and slightly larger ones, their poignant features captured in a carefully selected mixture of mediums like gouache, oil paint, charcoal, paint stick, oil pastel, and soft pastel. Quinn dives into his own memory to consider how the stories he holds near to his heart might actually be just that—stories. He draws on concepts of philosophy, psychology (including Suzanne Imes's thoughts on Gestalt theory), artists from the past like Rembrandt and Francis Bacon, and the basic concepts of Cubism.

To learn more about his captivating figures and the stories behind them, *Whitewall* caught up with the New York-based artist just ahead of the show's opening.

WHITEWALL: *This marks your first show in Paris. Did that inspire you in any way?*

NATHANIEL MARY QUINN: I wouldn't say Paris influenced this series, but what helped to initiate a particular fire and reconsideration of my artistic practice was doing a deep dive into Cubism—Picasso and Braque, in particular.

What influenced me at the time was how the figures seemed to emerge from a collection of cubes [laughs]. That was so mind-blowing to me. It's weird, I just never fully understood that. It's instant genius—the man was way ahead of his time. Cubism to me is like the dawn of cinematic technology and CGI. That is what Cubism was. It was way ahead of its time. It's groundbreaking shit.

WW: *To be able to represent with minimal shapes something that everyone will see as something they are describing is a revolution.*

NMQ: It's so powerful. So I made a Cubist work. I studied how to do it. I gave intense visual attention to those works—I mean, really looking at them very

closely. And it was a simple shape that stood out to me, this shape [gestures] boom, boom, boom. That's the size of a cube, see, like a square. And the works had special depth. So it looks like the cubes, which eventually will form this figure, receded into the background of this two-dimensional plane. That's awesome. You want to connect everything, and you have to remain committed to the process and make very sound choices and make sure everything falls together.

WW: *How do you see this new work as a reflection of your artistic journey so far?*

NMQ: As an artist, I spend an incredible amount of time to myself. I spend most of my life in the studio making work. When I work, I listen to music or podcasts. I listen to both sides of everybody's story—Republican, Democrat, liberal, conservative, I listen to every argument, and all kinds of other stories as well.

Then something began to be highlighted for me, which was, you have these people who may be talking about things or a topic, but they don't really know the truth. There's just a great deal of contributions being made to a story, but nobody really knows what happened. They're just making contributions based on what they saw somewhere—and I found that to be intriguing.

WW: *How so?*

NMQ: Gaining an understanding of that forced me to rethink my experience when my mom died. For years I lived with this particular story about my mother's death, and I just took it as truth. But it dawned on me for the first time that I don't actually know what happened, really. All I know is what people told me.

What I do know is this: My mom did die, and it has something to do with my oldest brother's drug addiction and it has something to do with them buying drugs on credit from local drug dealers. I know that to be true. But I don't know when it happened. I don't know if he knew these guys or not. I don't know if he'd gotten drugs from these guys before. I don't know exactly what the drug dealer said to my mom . . . if they banged, if they kicked the door in. I don't know how it transpired. I don't know what my mother was feeling after being confronted by these guys.

Some people say she died while she was on the sofa. Others think she died while she was in the tub—which is why I have the painting of the woman hanging out of the tub. I don't know the details because I never saw a police report, and I never saw another report, and I never spoke to an eyewitness. The only eyewitness who could tell me and the other eyewitness who could tell me is gone, because they're on drugs . . .

So that's what gave me the idea to do a show, to revisit this narrative of challenging my own myth about the circumstances surrounding my mother's death. And that's it. That's really at the crux of the inspiration behind this body of work. We're all caught up in a whirlwind of narratives and stories, none of them exactly being based on any real truth.



Nathaniel Mary Quinn, portrait by Steve Benisty.



Nathaniel Mary Quinn, *The Getaway*, 2023, oil paint, oil pastel, black charcoal, gouache on Coventry Vellum Paper, 37 x 30 inches, photo by Rob McKeever, © Nathaniel Mary Quinn, courtesy of Gagolian.

TO WATCH

Installation view of Fernando Laposse's "Ghosts of Our Town" at Friedman Benda in New York (September 7–October 14, 2023), photo by Timothy Doyon, courtesy of Friedman Benda and Fernando Laposse.



Fernando Laposse

Designing delightfully tactile furniture rooted in Mexican agriculture and landscape.

By Katy Donoghue

Last fall, Fernando Laposse's "Ghosts of Our Towns" was on view at Friedman Benda in New York. Included in the show were credenzas and tables made of heirloom corn husk marquetry. There were "Furry" mirrors, chairs, and cabinets crafted from agave fibers. And a chaise upholstered in avocado dyed cotton was complemented by a series of tapestries featuring figures like Don Emiliano, Doña Lucy, and Saul rendered in avocado and marigold flower dyes.

Laposse's designs are incredibly inviting in their tactility. They draw us in with the question, what could this material be? When we learn of its origins in corn, agave, and avocado, a deeper story unfolds. Their use is a result of years of research and hands-on agricultural restoration in the small town of Tonahuixtla in the Mixtec region of Puebla, Mexico. There, since 2015, Laposse has worked with the local community to plant heirloom corn, agave to fight erosion, and find long-term solutions for the small farmers of Mexico that have been long exploited by international trade and consumption.

The artist and designer works with a long-term vision, from seed to harvest, developing techniques to create collectible design that funnels funds back into the project. This winter, he'll present a monumental, wrap-around tapestry and documentary related to the devastating effects of avocado production in Mexico, at the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) Triennial, on view through April 7, 2024.

Whitewall spoke with Laposse about how he found himself back in Tonahuixtla after pursuing design outside Mexico for over a decade.

WHITEWALL: *How did you come to start your collaborative workshop in 2015 in Tonahuixtla?*

FERNANDO LAPOSSE: I studied design in London and I graduated from Central Saint Martins in 2010/2011. I then started working in studios there, with Bethan Wood and Faye Toogood, and I slowly started to set up my practice. It was quite hard to stay in the U.K. without a European passport, so I signed up for a residency in Mexico that was all about food and art at an art foundation started by the artist and activist Francisco Toledo in Oaxaca. One of the many things that he was rallying against was the loss of our native corn.

It was a very interesting time to be there. I had spent more than 15 years outside of Mexico, and so it was a little bit of a reeducation in what was going on. What I noticed was that there was a lot of political work being done regarding GMOs being banned, but that's just part of the problem. The bigger problem that I saw was the economics behind why these native corns were growing out of use. That's the business model that big seed

Fernando Laposse, portrait by Pepe Molina.



companies of the world have put into place. So the work started to be more about what can we do with the native corns to make more money for the farmers.

WW: *And from there, how did you arrive at working with the corn husks?*

FL: The leaves are colorful like the corn, and I focused my three-month residency on creating with this new material. At the end of that residency, I had a piece that looked very close to what I do now. I tried to start working with farmers there in Oaxaca, and it was quite complicated; people are quite distrustful of people coming from outside their communities, with good reason.

So I decided to go to Tonahuixtla, this village where my family visited every summer growing up. This place doesn't have Wi-Fi, phones—it was a bit of an adventure, driving through the mountains of Oaxaca to Puebla to this village in the mountains. When I arrived it was super-shocking because the town was completely empty. It was a ghost town. That's the allusion to the title of the show, "Ghosts of Our Towns." Our family friend, Delfino Martínez, was there with ten 70-year-olds digging holes and planting agaves in a completely eroded mountain where there was nothing but sand and rocks.

They were essentially trying to create a situation where they could start to revert that erosion—for me that was super-inspiring. Especially because they are in their seventies, so their actions and what they are doing they will likely not see the results. That really put a different dimension to the project. I was like, "Okay, if I'm going to do this it has to go beyond presenting unique material in a design fair. It really has to become something that gives back to this land and this people. And I have to be very careful about how I do that. And if I start promising things, I have to make sure these promises are kept."

WW: *How did the project evolve from there? And how did that influence your designs?*

FL: It was a very slow process of beginning that collaboration first, with Delfino and his family. At the beginning, it was really hard to get too much material because our harvest was really small. So that's why I started to go toward the collectible design world. We could make one or two tables, and that generated enough money to sustain the whole harvest of the next year.

More families started to join, and further down the line we started to continue that reforestation system that Delfino was doing with the agaves, and that started to create the other body of work which is the "Furry" pieces.

It's all about looking at these projects that are interconnected and circular, and all generate revenue and an interest in the community to care for those mountains and to repair that damage that was done to them as a society, but also their environment around the town.

WW: *You mentioned your "Furry" pieces, which are almost fantastical, and draw us in with the desire to touch. They sort of lure the viewer in, in order to tell the story behind them.*

FL: The inspiration for those pieces and why they look the way they look is based on the material. It really looks like hair. It feels like horsehair and it wants to behave like the hair of an animal. So you can't make sharp corners, you can't make square things, you have to go for these volumes. Some are heavily inspired as well by a lot of traditional dance, especially from this village and this region where they use hair for their ceremonies—without trying to replicate their aesthetic, without trying to take it directly, it is a little bit of a fantastical thing.

The back story is a big thing for me. I think there are serious stories, and they are hard stories sometimes. And they are very complicated stories. It's not for everyone, and this is a little bit of a challenge that we have in design where people see design as a purely functional thing. There has to be levels of engagement, and by making them furry and colorful and approachable, you invite people to be curious about the material and to start asking questions. And then you start to gauge who is ready to really understand the full back story.

What I like about design is that, in a way, there is a simplicity that perhaps sometimes art doesn't have. Art can be intimidating for people who didn't go to art school or don't have an education and understanding of art. I see design as a lot more democratic in that sense. And the messages behind my pieces are not terribly conceptual. They are very straightforward. It's a problem-solving thing. For me, a lot of my work is about diversifying this kind of human-centered design to include humans from another part of the world, outside of the urban focus, that are living traditionally.

WW: *Given that you are seeing things from seed to harvest, what is it like to be thinking on a much different scale of time?*

FL: It's incredible. This year was a really important year to see that as well. Last year we had unprecedented drought. Our corn was okay. Some didn't grow, but because we planted eight varieties, we did have a harvest. That really showed the resilience of these indigenous strains. And we're reaching this point where a lot of the agaves are flowering. By now we're getting close to the 200,000 mark of agaves planted. You have thousands of flowers that get pollinated at night by bats. The bats are going at night to the corn fields and they are completely devouring all of the pests. We're seeing the beginning of that rebalancing, which is incredible.

I can close my eyes and imagine I'm standing in this field, and I'm also envisioning this fancy show at Friedman Benda with the table next to the couch. I think that's what's so lovely about it.



Installation view of Fernando Laposse's "Ghosts of Our Town" at Friedman Benda in New York (September 7–October 14, 2023), photo by Timothy Doyon, courtesy of Friedman Benda and Fernando Laposse.

SITE VISIT

A MYTHICAL ESCAPE

Louis Vuitton presents its Cruise 2024 collection on Isola Bella in Italy.

SITE VISIT

By Pearl Fontaine

For the debut of its 2024 Cruise collection, Louis Vuitton escaped to the idyllic Isola Bella on Italy's Lake Maggiore. The show was staged at the Palazzo Borromeo, with its stunning terrace gardens created in the 17th century by Carlo IV, a scholar and lover of art. Surrounded by sculpted topiaries, stone figures, and the mountains rising in the distance, guests like Oprah Winfrey, Emma Stone, Pharrell Williams, Jennifer Connelly, Phoebe Dynevor, Thuso Mbedu, and Cate Blanchett gathered at the palace gardens for the mystical runway show.

Aided by the storybook destination, a fantastical feeling permeated the air as models began parading through the manicured gardens. The looks that unfolded teetered between ultra-contemporary style concepts and entities that might not be of this time or place. Through sumptuous juxtapositions, the *maison* infused in its latest designs notes of sportswear, sartorial expertise, and the most tasteful hint of costume, which suggested tales of lagoons filled with finned creatures and royalty attending grandiose celebrations.

The collection by Nicolas Ghesquière posed a progression of looks including both daily and formal wear, with both form and detail offering ideas that felt fresh and elevated, from reconceptualized suiting and pairings of blouses and trousers to casual dresses and evening gowns.

Silhouettes included sculptural ruffles and structural, curving shapes mimicking underwater fauna, tailoring in unique fabrications,

and supplely draped pieces so carefully constructed that they could have been carved from stone (such as a suite of knee-length dresses in blocked colors, styled with masks). The collection's surprising and sumptuous tactile choices included a material reminiscent of scuba wear, scaly layers of shimmering oversized sequins, quilted prints, and an airy silk chiffon that was artfully crafted into sculpted shapes.

Looks still lingering in our minds included a neoprene ensemble featuring a graphic jacket with a fish gill collar and a flounced miniskirt with sneakers and a face mask and a bodysuit reminiscent of a rash guard, styled with an overcoat in a gauzy material, a regal headpiece, and high-top athletic shoes. There was a simple button-up shirt and pants made extravagant through metallic beading and tendrils of fabric floating down the sides and a look featuring a draped leather top with anchor buttons, a sheer pearl-crusted skirt worn over bike shorts, and a miniature trunk handbag in quilted leather. Also not to be missed was the series of ethereal pastel dresses that closed out the show and utilized texture in a manner that reminded us of jellyfish and coral formations.

Just as the legend of the Borromeo family has survived for centuries, so too will this dreamlike collection from Louis Vuitton, filled with botanical whimsy, creatures from the deep, and wonders of the imagination that remain in bloom.



Louis Vuitton Cruise 2024, courtesy of Louis Vuitton.



Louis Vuitton Cruise 2024, courtesy of Louis Vuitton.

SITE VISIT

VACHERON CONSTANTIN IN ICELAND

The watchmaker travels with artist Zaria Forman
to celebrate its "Overseas" collection.



By Michael Klug

Last fall, surrounded by snow-capped mountains, glistening glaciers, and roaring waterfalls of stunning Iceland, *Whitewall* embarked on a three-day journey from Reykjavik to Diamond Beach with watchmaker Vacheron Constantin. The trip coincided with the launch of the brand's newest self-winding model joining the "Overseas" collection—an ongoing suite of elegant luxury watches outfitted with technical features for the adventurous wearer. The off-road experience took us to sights like Kvernufoss Waterfall, Fjadrargljúfur Canyon, and up close and personal with glaciers, their brilliant blue hues reflecting in the sea around us as we kayaked amid ice-filled waters. There we had the chance to test out the newest Overseas timepiece in action.

With us on the adventure was the artist and explorer Zaria Forman, who recently joined the *maison* as "One of Not Many," Vacheron Constantin's exclusive ambassador program. Forman's practice is centered on observing the changing landscapes in remote destinations across the world, in an effort to inspire viewers with imagery of remote locations they might not have the chance to experience in person. Having traveled to locations like Greenland and Antarctica, Forman first captures the scenery by photograph before she reimagines it with her own hand in magnificent, photorealistic pastel compositions.

Commissioned by Vacheron Constantin, Forman, who is now the face of the latest "Overseas" collection campaign, traveled to the coastal destination of Fellsfjara, Iceland, before we met on our own Icelandic adventure. Equipped with a 35-millimeter Overseas model in white gold/platinum, the artist surveyed the terrain before capturing mesmerizing snapshots of the blue-tinged waters and glossy glacial surfaces—images that were the starting point for the artwork *Fellsfjara, Iceland no.3*, made exclusively for the house to capture the essence of the "Overseas" collection.

Curious about Forman's collaboration with the watchmaker and her practice as a whole, *Whitewall* caught up with the artist while we were in Iceland to learn more.

WHITEWALL: *Let's start with your partnership with Vacheron Constantin. Can you tell us how it started, how it developed, and why you accepted?*

ZARIA FORMAN: Cory Richards is a good friend of mine, and he is on the "One of Not Many" campaign. I've never done a partnership like this before with a major brand, but he had such a good experience. That was a really good way to enter a partnership, having a good friend that could recommend, and knowing that the people were kind, honest, real, and cared about his work. It was a good introduction.

It didn't feel rushed. We got to know each other. We also have a lot of crossover in terms of our interests. How we work is very aligned in this constant search for excellence and perfection, detail and precision, as well as in our love of travel and exploration, which is such a big part of my work and has been a part of their DNA forever.

Then there's this element of time, too, that has been a part of my work in so many ways since the beginning, since I've been capturing ice in my work: the time it takes a glacier to build, which can be two million years, or the time it takes for a glacier to collapse, which we don't really know the answer to yet; the moment the sun is shining perfectly on an iceberg and I snap a picture; the moment it looks perfect that I make a drawing of, and then stretch that time out metaphorically and physically into the weeks and months that it takes me to make a drawing.

WW: *Can you tell us how you became interested in documenting ice in your work as an artist and why you decided to focus on it?*

ZF: In 2007 was the first time I ever visited glaciers and icebergs. I went to Greenland with my family. From that experience, I was already planning on making work about Greenland, and it just became very clear that it was specifically what I needed to focus on. I've continued to do it since then because ice is a subject matter that continues to inspire me visually for so many reasons.

WW: *Right now, we're in Iceland. What about the scenery here is most inspiring?*

ZF: When I first came here in 2021, I drove around the whole Ring Road with

my family, my husband, and my baby at the time. I wasn't sure exactly what I wanted to do, but I'm always interested in ice, of course, and I really became especially captivated with Fellsfjara, the location that we got to see today. It really mesmerized me in a way that all the other views didn't in terms of something that I wanted to create in my artwork.

There's this phenomenon on the beach—it's hard to describe in words unless you're actually there. There are these beautiful chunks of glacier ice that are so compressed from all the years that they've been pressured down beneath the glacier. They're super clear and there are these little air bubbles inside. They break off the glacier and they move through the canal out into the ocean, and then the ocean washes them up onto the black sand beach.

You have this stark contrast between the bright white, like diamonds of ice, especially when the light is hitting them just right, and then the black background underneath. It was just magical. If you look through the ice, you can see the waves of the ocean behind, and they create this mesmerizing light dance that doesn't really register as waves when you're looking through the ice. It just looks like this beautiful light dance in the ice. That was mesmerizing to me, and whatever I feel most drawn to is what I think other people will as well. That's what I try to portray in my work, whether it's drawings, or video, or sculpture.

WW: *How do you work between your studio and your trips to places like Iceland's Diamond Beach?*

ZF: My process always begins by traveling, taking thousands of photographs, and I'll take video footage as well. Then I also have to remind myself to put my camera down and just be in the landscape, to soak it up with my being, my soul, my heart, and my own eyes.

Then I use both my memory of the experience as well as the photographs when I get back to my studio to create large-scale drawings, which is the main part of my work. I'll begin with a simple pencil sketch, just to make a few lines to follow the outline of the iceberg, or the horizon line, and then I jump in pretty quickly with pigment pastel on paper, just smudging it with my fingers and palms. I don't really use tools very often. Then I build up the color and do the finer details on top of that.

WW: *What do you want to show the audience about ice? Its history, the future? What's the message you want to communicate?*

ZF: The main purpose of my work is to try and transport viewers to these places that are so remote from most of our everyday lives, they're difficult to get to, and somewhat inhospitable to human life. I have these incredible opportunities to visit them, and I want to move people. That's why I draw. I work on such a large scale, and I draw it in as much detail as possible, because I want to re-create the exact image that I saw to try and transport the viewer to these places because I've fallen in love with them. They're so beautiful, it's hard not to when you see them.

When you love something, you want to protect it. My hope is that if people can experience these landscapes in the way that I have, they will be motivated to want to protect and preserve them. I think art has a special ability to tap into people's emotions. I don't just think, it's scientifically proven that it does. Art is the sharpest tool in my toolbox that I use to move people emotionally, and people take action and make decisions based on their emotions more than anything else.

WW: *You've mentioned using other materials to represent ice—like glass, for example. Is that something that we can expect from you in the future?*

ZF: Hopefully, yes. It's definitely still in the works. I was so captivated by the ice at Fellsfjara that it made me want to re-create that phenomena I was describing earlier in drawings, sculpture, and video.

Sculpture is a whole new way of working for me. It's actually been really fun so far, because normally I'm alone in my studio all day long and I'm an extrovert. It's fun to be able to work with other people, fabricators, to try and re-create what I saw on the beach. But I keep hitting walls and having to push through them, so we'll see how it goes. I'm not quite there yet, but it's been a fun process so far, and I hope I'll get there.



ATELIER VISIT

LOUIS VUITTON IN GRASSE

JACQUES CAVALLIER BELLETRUD INFUSES PERFUMES
WITH EMOTION IN GRASSE.

BY PEARL FONTAINE



Since Louis Vuitton relaunched its perfume collection in 2016 for the first time in 70 years, its fragrances have represented the pinnacle of olfactory excellence, continuing to inspire awe with scents that create an encompassing experience unique for each wearer. Crafted under the care of Master Perfumer Jacques Cavallier Belletrud, every scent is made with the finest ingredients and extracts in the world's perfume capital of Grasse, France, where the house has situated its whimsical fragrance atelier. Located in the perfect climate just miles from the Mediterranean, the atelier's most noteworthy feature is a vast garden filled with hundreds of herbs, fruit trees, flowers, and other plant varieties—some of which are exclusively cultured for Louis Vuitton perfumes.

Introduced in 2021, the house's "Les Extraits Collection" saw the fourth-generation perfumer Cavallier Belletrud working in collaboration with the architect Frank Gehry, who conceived a stunning sculptural bottle for the suite of vibrant, concentrated perfumes. Joining scents like Stellar Times, Cosmic Cloud, and Symphony, the sixth and newest extrait, Myriad, is perhaps the most special to date. Enclosed in Gehry's glass container, which is capped with a silvery top invoking the movement of air, the perfume's identity centers something so rare, it's known as black gold: oud wood.

Inspired by nature and made with the intent of invoking pure emotion, Myriad's rich berry hue is the first thing that its wearer will notice. The scent that follows is divinely complex, with the strength of the woody oud—sourced from an exclusive supplier in Bangladesh—complemented by a certain airiness, achieved through the inclusion of floral notes like jasmine and rose, as well as hints of saffron, cocoa, ambrette, and white musk. Curious about a fragrance that is described as both light and dark, *Whitewall* spoke to Cavallier Belletrud, who was at the atelier in Grasse, where he shared more about Myriad and the creative process behind it.

WHITEWALL: *What was the starting point for the latest in "Les Extraits Collection," Myriad? Is there a way you begin each new fragrance?*

JACQUES CAVALLIER BELLETRUD: It's different every time; each time it's a new story. This collection is very particular because I wanted to address a new style for perfumes. We launched "Les Extraits Collection" in 2021, and the purpose is to deliver a different mood, different than the previous collection at Louis Vuitton.

Each family has a different starting point. For Myriad, the starting point is of course Middle Eastern; it's an oud. This oud is full of secrets and olfactory surprises. I've used it for five years now. It's just because it is a fantastic raw material, which is woody, deep, spicy, ambery. I wanted to create a Les Extraits because the price of the oud is the same price as gold. It's something really exceptional, and I wanted to build and to work on the ultimate oud perfume.

WW: *So, you built the perfume around oud.*

JCB: Absolutely, that was the idea. How could I magnify the oud raw materials in a perfume, an extrait, with all the sophistication, all the allure, and the signature?

WW: *What about oud makes it so unique in the art of perfumery?*

JCB: What creates the originality of this essence is that you don't have any equivalent in the woody notes family. It's just because it's different from sandalwood, it's different from cinder wood. It's even more unique than patchouli because it develops ambery tones. And in the fragrance, it brings a very strong signature.

This is a legendary material. The reason why we did not use it too much during the last century is just that the availability of the essence is very poor. And it took me three years to find the right essence in terms of scent. I was looking for the right balance between the woodiness and the enigmatic notes.

WW: *What did you want to unlock in oud? How did you want to "pierce it with light" as you described?*

JCB: Louis Vuitton perfume is built on contrast. I love to work the black notes and the white notes at the same time. The black notes make the white notes very deep and the white notes make the black notes very ivory and full of light.

The idea was to associate oud with rose. There are some other flowers around it, but the major theme is rose. I love to play with spices, with fresh notes, with musk, of course, but the idea was to express the oud in the right way. It has the sophistication that I love for Louis Vuitton, which is creating something unique.

WW: *The rose brings out the oud. What else is included?*

JCB: After we have saffron, cocoa. I wanted to use cocoa because it fits so well with the oud. Cocoa smells like chocolate, of course, but at the same time there is something very sensual, like velvety skin. And it's producing something fantastic and the link between the rose and the oud, it's making the rose darker and it's making the oud more tactile. When someone is wearing this perfume, it has to be his or her own signature making the accents of the scent of this perfume something strong.

So saffron, cocoa; ambrette is a class at Louis Vuitton. It's a clear top note, and very musky soft.

WW: *Scent has such an emotional connection to memory. Were there specific emotions you were trying to bring up with Myriad?*

JCB: Well, for me I'm always seeking for addiction [in] what I'm creating. Perfume has to be something different, creating a lot of emotions for the person who is wearing it, because smelling the perfume and wearing the perfume is a direct connection with yourself, with the deepest part of your personality, emotions.

WW: *Is it more of a personal experience?*

JCB: It should be. I have built all the Louis Vuitton perfumes since the beginning in this spirit.

I want to reunite the love affair between the person and their perfume. I think that if you want to last in success, you have to produce strong emotions for people. Good emotions or bad emotions, that I cannot predict, but definitely, I create my perfumes in this spirit.

WW: *This new fragrance stems from a collaboration with architect Frank Gehry, that began in a meeting in 2021. What was it like working together?*

JCB: Well, Frank for me is an inspiration. It's always easy to work with geniuses. You know? They make your life easier. Because of the pleasure we have together, it's not really working.

I asked him what he thinks. Of course, he is not an expert in perfumes, and I am not an expert in architecture, but we are practicing the same art—producing things that develop emotions, we hope. We share the pleasure of breaking the rules together—and having a look at things in a different way to show our clients at Louis Vuitton that perfume can be different from what they know already.

It was a lot of talk, a lot of admiration from me for him. What I love is that he is 95 years old, but in his mind he is 15 years old. It's fantastic. It's dynamic, it's optimism. Wow, it's really a privilege to share this kind of experience with a guy like him.

WW: *You've discussed movement being at the heart of this connection, the wind, specifically. What led you to try to capture something as ephemeral as the wind?*

JCB: The inspiration for me as a perfumer is, of course, all of the atmosphere created by the wind that carries the many, many different tones of May roses, with the leaves, the freshly cut grass notes . . . I tried to capture those moments, because it makes me very emotional when I smell it—even if I'm used to this kind of scent. I consider that if I have emotions still, my clients who love the bottle will also find these emotions.

WW: *You often collaborate with different creatives, including Frank, Marc Newson, and Alex Israel. What's the best part about these collaborations for you?*

JCB: What I think is fantastic, even if we are not speaking the same language, is that we are speaking the language of creation. This language is international. It's not feminine or masculine, it's universal. There is always respect between us, and I'm always amazed. What is fantastic is that when I see those people,





Courtesy of Louis Vuitton.

I see the children they were and the children they are. They consider things without any thinking before. They discover things for the first time as we did when we were children.

WW: *What's the most special part about the atelier in Grasse?*

JCB: For almost five centuries, people in Grasse have been focusing on how to transfer the scent of a flower, a seed, or a wood, as a liquid, in a perfume. That's the main reason Louis Vuitton is here. We are the only luxury brand creating our perfumes in Grasse.

We have a garden with 400 different plants. It is always green, even in winter. You have flowers in winter, you have fruits in winter, you also have flowers in spring and summer. In fall you still have flowers and fruits. It's, of course, for me an inspiration garden.

WW: *What is a typical day in the studio like?*

JCB: The first thing is to cross the garden. I will view all the flowers, fruits, and these kinds of things. All morning is dedicated to olfaction. We smell every morning with my daughter. She's beginning her seventh year at Louis Vuitton, and she's working as a perfumer.

Then, after, we meet about the productions of Louis Vuitton perfumes, we smell raw materials in the blind. Each morning, five different raw materials in the blind that we have to recognize, as a game. The afternoon is more dedicated to the creation itself.

We have lots of discussions on how it feels. What is important is the balance between the emotional side, which is the creation, and becoming rational again, in terms of the way you can evaluate what you have done.

WW: *You mentioned your daughter is now working with you and you also come from a line of perfumers. How did this become your family's profession?*

JCB: It's a tradition in my family. My father was a perfumer, my grandfather was a perfumer, the father of my grandfather was a perfumer. My daughter has been passionate since she was very young; ten or eleven years old. Step by step, I was bringing her some knowledge through a game.

Transmitting what I know, it's all the techniques and all that you can learn. Everybody can learn it if you are passionate. The most difficult part of the job is to reveal your own creative personality. I didn't want her to be a clone of me. A point of view in creation is what's unique, and she's daring in her creativity. That's the most important thing for me. All of the other things you can learn. But creativity is a mindset.



Courtesy of Louis Vuitton.

ATELIER VISIT

“GUCCI COSMOS”

In London, the story of Gucci brings to life its past, present, and future.



By Eliza Jordan

In 1897, a young Italian man named Guccio Gucci worked as a luggage porter at The Savoy hotel in London. His tasks of carrying luggage and operating the elevator began to nurture his aspirations, as he absorbed the culture and perspectives of his international customers. Along with what they carried, these travelers brought with them ideas, concerns, and passions from other places, giving Guccio a broader understanding of the world beyond the hotel's doors.

After returning home to Florence, Guccio was inspired to establish his own luggage and leather goods company. In 1921, he realized his dream by opening his eponymous *maison* and its first store on Via della Vigna Nuova. What unfolded over the next century is fashion history in its purest form, with Guccio going from a small Italian shop to one of the largest brands in the world.

On October 11, just 500 meters away from The Savoy in London, an exhibition dedicated to the creative vision and unforgettable evolution of Guccio opened at 180 Studios in 180 The Strand. Previously presented in Shanghai, "Gucci Cosmos," on view through December 31, brings together 102 years of the house's fashion history, visually detailing the styles, materials, muses, and more that have garnered the brand global acclaim since its founding. While remaining anchored in Italian craftsmanship and tradition, Guccio has shown through its garments and accessories how ideas can take shape at an atelier and succeed on a global stage.

At "Gucci Cosmos," boundless creativity is presented in an immersive environment conceived by the British artist Es Devlin and curated by the Italian fashion theorist and critic Maria Luisa Frisa. Inside the experiential presentation, viewers move from the past to present and future through an array of color-coded rooms. Beginning with Guccio's founding, each portal reveals the brand's Italian heritage in craftsmanship through vignettes of garments, accessories, footwear, collaboration, and even specially designed clothing for local London legends like Sir Elton John and Harry Styles.

Many unseen archival works and images from the brand's early days are borrowed from the Palazzo Strozzi in Florence, illustrating Guccio's vision and that of his sons, Aldo and Rodolfo. Moving through time and space, guests then venture into the creative process of Guccio's various creative directors—from Tom Ford and Alessandro Michele to Sabato De Sarno, who currently holds the position—and the styles, shapes, and silhouettes that made Guccio a household name. As the brand's history begins to encompass contemporary energy, the exhibition introduces new items, categories, and concepts that grew into iconic and timeless brand staples, including expertly tailored garments, the GG Monogram, Horsebit hardware, bamboo handles, and more.

Throughout the show are chances to explore the lineage of Guccio through artistic, monochromatic spaces in various materials. In the archive-centric space "Archivio," for example, a buzzing blue palette invites the mind to wonder, and leads to a sleek hall of lit-up armoirs of luggage curiosities. The glowing red "Cabinet of Wonders" presentation showcases wardrobes of garments and accessories special to the house, including ostrich feather fans, crystal-adorned handbags, and even Elton John's shoes, sunglasses, and specially monogrammed jacket. Awash in white hues, "Eden" welcomes style patrons to an oasis of flora, fauna, and wildlife sculptures decorating the ceiling, fostering an inspirational space for pastel and floral-patterned garments on mannequins to shine. And in rooms like "Ancora," "Zoetrope," and "Carousel," dark, mysterious spaces await, filled with sequin-adorned clothing, Horsebit halter vests, and sweeping gowns galore.

Curious about what it was like to dive into the history and influence of a century-old fashion house, *Whitewall* spoke with Frisa about curating "Gucci Cosmos."

WHITEWALL: *This exhibition showcases over 100 years of Guccio's creations. How did you approach curating such a significant show without it feeling like a historical retrospective?*

MARIA LUISA FRISA: I wouldn't refer to "Gucci Cosmos" as an archival exhibition, nor strictly as an historical one. "Gucci Cosmos" is an exhibition that tells the story, spanning over 100 years, of one of the most charismatic fashion brands. However, it does so with a contemporary perspective, highlighting the ever-present aspect of fashion. The archive reveals itself as a territory to be traversed, offering new inspirations each time.

WW: *This is a touring exhibition, and you've curated it in the past—at the West Bund Art Center in Shanghai. How does this one differ from its previous iteration in China?*

MLF: The space is a fundamental element in constructing an exhibition. The space in London is very different from that in Shanghai, both in size and spatial layout. Reconsidering the objects to reduce their number has led to some changes that make the exhibition quite different from the one in China.

WW: *The works are presented within an immersive installation by Es Devlin. How did that impact, guide, or alter what you wanted to show?*

MLF: Es Devlin's immersive installation defined the environments. It shaped them in a spectacular manner, but within these environments, I had the freedom to move and navigate. Confronting another vision is always an interesting challenge, as it compels us to explore new paths.

WW: *Included in the show are era-defining designs—from garments and accessories to art, sketches, and more. What's a not-miss piece, storyline, or vignette?*



Maria Luisa Frisa and Es Devlin, portrait courtesy of Guccio.



Installation view of "Archivio" in "Gucci Cosmos," courtesy of Guccio.



MLF: Every exhibition is a complex narrative where each piece lives in relation to others and has a specific reason within the sequence. While they reflect an era, they also illustrate how Gucci items are expressions of an always contemporary lifestyle.

WW: *By seeing fashion in an art-forward gallery setting, how does this shape how you hope the viewer receives its message?*

MLF: Fashion and art are autonomous systems but in constant dialogue, because they are part of—indeed, I would say they shape—the contemporary visual culture. The viewer traversing this exhibition will not lose sight of the power of the forms that fashion assumes over time, especially because they are contextualized in a space that regularly hosts artistic expressions that address and challenge the present.

WW: *Gucci is continuing its evolution, entering a new era with a new creative director this year—Sabato De Sarno. How did this news, or his recent first collection, shape the show?*

MLF: I believe Gucci's story—and I say this not just because I'm working on this exhibition—is unique in how it has always been known to reinvent itself and be a part of the lives of entire generations. Also, very different people, from international socialites to the tribes of hip-hop. I can say that in the exhibition, there are some pieces by Sabato De Sarno that demonstrate how Gucci has always been in tune with its times.

WW: *Objects presented in the exhibition have shaped the history of fashion. Which has shaped your idea of fashion the most?*

MLF: The objects on display are fundamental to fashion and the lives of generations. Personally, I am interested in fashion in all its forms. I

could say that in every decade of Gucci's history, there is a piece that has shaped not only my idea of fashion but also that of many people.

WW: *You and Gucci both have Italian roots. What aspects of Italian fashion, and its evolution in the global landscape of fashion, did you want to highlight?*

MLF: I have worked extensively on Italian fashion, which I believe hasn't been emphasized enough in terms of its strengths and qualities. Gucci's story beautifully narrates that extraordinary, uniquely Italian mix of craftsmanship, industrial innovation, and authorial creativity.

WW: *You're a professor at IUAV University of Venice, where you founded the bachelor's program in fashion design and multimedia arts. Is there something you're teaching your students today that this exhibition illustrates?*

MLF: I teach an introduction to fashion curation, so with my students, we reflect not only on what it means to curate a fashion exhibition but also on choosing objects based not on aesthetics but on their value in relation to time and people. It will be very interesting to show this exhibition to my students and discuss each room and each object with them.

WW: *If there is one narrative that this exhibition can paint, what is it?*

MLF: It is the story of Gucci—how Gucci has shaped our taste, interpreted it, and anticipated it. It tells how Gucci has reflected and continues to reflect the times we live in. I don't see a single narrative; I see multiple paths that the viewer can choose based on how Gucci relates to their sensibility. Designing and curating an exhibition means creating a map containing endless paths and narratives.



Courtesy of Archivio Foto Locchi.



Installation view of "Cabinet of Wonders" in "Gucci Cosmos," courtesy of Gucci.

ATELIER VISIT

ON THE SHORES OF LAKE MAGGIORE

A visit to Herno's manufacture with its president, Claudio Marenzi.

Paper patterns in the Herno manufacture.



Herno President Claudio Marenzi in the sewing room of Herno's manufacture.

By Michael Klug
Photos by Ablerto Zanetti

Just minutes from the famed shores of Lake Maggiore, on the Piedmont side in Northern Italy, stands the headquarters of Herno. The luxury outerwear company was named for the river it resides beside, the Erno, which flows into the lake just in the distance. *Whitewall* visited the manufacture, a short drive from Milan, last fall just before the leaves started to change, ushering in autumn. There, a modern facility built in natural stone and wood is filled with windows overlooking a region rich with green plants and wildlife—forest, water, mountains, and weather. A living wall, seasonally blooming in grasses or wildflowers complemented Herno’s signature “H” logo, welcoming teams of artisans and visitors like us.

On the overcast, slightly foggy day we visited, it was clear to see how this area of Northern Italy originally inspired the founding of Herno. The Italian company began with a spark of innovation in 1948 when Giuseppe Marenzi and his wife, Alessandra Diana, created a raincoat from cotton treated with castor oil. This bit of postwar Italy experimentation led to a line of functional jackets and high-performance raincoats. By the mid-1950s, Herno’s production grew to include women’s garments, with the following decades seeing expansion into Japan (in 1968) and the United States (in the 1980s).

Herno became synonymous with high-performance outerwear complemented by Italian craftsmanship, garnering the attention and business of high-fashion labels, producing coats and jackets for houses like Armani, Prada, Louis Vuitton, Hermès, Gucci, and more. In the 1990s and early 2000s, as brands started taking production in-house, Herno, under the leadership of second-generation family member Claudio Marenzi, decided to focus inward and make Herno a household name known for its superior quality and material know-how.

Committed to the region that inspired its founding, Marenzi chose to keep Herno on the shores of Lake Maggiore, expanding not only production and brand recognition globally, but focusing on a future that was inherently sustainable. Long before “going green” was a staple conversation in the worlds of luxury and fashion, Marenzi implemented self-sufficient energy goals, production chain studies, carbon footprint assessments, plastic-free initiatives, and various certifications. It was a challenge for both the manufacture and its partners, but one that was met with enthusiasm, even spilling over into material innovation, integrating fabrics like Fast5Degradable, regenerated Econyl nylon, recycled wool, and more into its latest collections.

Visiting Herno’s headquarters, it was clear how the site’s surrounding natural landscape has provided endless inspiration. Within the manufacture, displays of contemporary art in its hallways, rooms, and near Marenzi’s office offered another spark of creativity. Indeed, Marenzi shared with us that he began collecting art as soon as he could afford it in high school, hanging a first picture on the back of his door. It’s clear that he shares an understanding of artists, of their vision, their passion, their desire to make. Organizing exhibitions, show locations, and even assisting in helping artists find financing for different projects at a younger age, he has grown his collection to include work where it’s clear the artist has a singular perception.

Within Herno’s manufacture, works by women artists like Susan Jackson and Latifa Echakhch are on view, energizing Herno’s team of mostly female employees. Marenzi’s interest in art extends beyond his own collection, to commissions from artists like Asako Narahashi, Pae White, and Massimo Kaufmann, as well as partnerships with art fairs like miart for the Herno Prize.

After a tour of Herno’s stunning campus, *Whitewall* sat down with Marenzi to learn more about the family company’s heritage and clear vision for what’s next.

WHITEWALL: *What was it like growing up with the family business of Herno?*

CLAUDIO MARENZI: During my summer vacations in high school, I always worked in the company. I liked going to the cutting room, in the style department, and the logistics. So, after high school and university, I started to work in the company, and I fell in love with this job. I became an operations guy. I started with the pattern maker, the procedure, the operations, and it was this great chance at the end of the eighties to work directly with the designers. I learned so many things working with these great designers, about their organization, to build up my idea of the business.

WW: *What made you ultimately decide to carry on the family company?*

CM: What I realized before 2005 was the things that we could make very well—the raincoats, the double face—we could not sell with our own brands. In that period, we were making for other brands. But we had the know-how to do something special. So this really pushed me to go in this direction. Because, for me, the family is the company, the company is the family.

I wanted to protect a vision my father had in 1948 when he was 20 years old. It’s always been about what relates us to the region, to the past, to our roots.

WW: *How have Herno’s roots in innovation remained a driving force for you?*

CM: In 2005, I said, if we are making raincoats, we are making something that has a function, to keep people dry from rain and water. We are making something functional. Functionality is related to performance. So our mission should be to improve functionality, and therefore performance. Performance is about innovation so the innovation at the end should be our mission.

Beginning in 2007 and 2008, we made the down jacket with the injection down, coats that were both light and warm. We started to work with materials from different fields in fashion and active wear. In 2016 we launched, after one year of research, a complete collection in GORE-TEX, Herno Laminar.

When you produce something new, you don’t think only about the aesthetic. You should ask, “Why am I doing it? What’s the reason?” And related to all this is sustainability. Because you have to do something that is better than before, but why?

Because the function is better, it’s easier to recycle, meaning it’s very important, in my opinion, to know what we want to do.

WW: *Walking around the manufacture we could see contemporary art from your collection on its walls in different locations. How did your interest in art begin?*

CM: My interest began in secondary school. I’ve always had an admiration for the people who are able to draw or create with their hands. The first picture that I bought was when I was 15, 16, with the small money my father gave from working. It was on the door of my room. The artist was local here, and it started like that.

Then I met the artists of my generation in Italy, like Stefano Arienti, Alessandro Pessoli, Massimo Kaufmann, and Maurizio Cattelan. I even organized, for some of them, some exhibitions. In my twenties and thirties, I would help artists find financiers. And still today, I always invest in art.

WW: *How has your collection continued to grow?*

CM: At the beginning, for me, it was about passion. Everything is about passion. And then at a certain point, when the collection began to grow, it was clear it needed a direction. I wanted to build a sense of aesthetics and harmony at a certain point.

I have one point—whether it’s pictures, video, installation, or any piece of art, it must be something extraordinary and new. You should understand that the artist is somebody who is able to do something that others cannot. I need to feel the Holy Spirit over the artist. The artist is someone who is doing something we cannot do.

WW: *Why did you want to bring that collection inside the manufacture?*

CM: At the beginning, it was by chance. I spent so much time in the company, I thought, “Why not treat it like a home?” And then the reaction of the people here was nice. More or less 80 percent of the total employees here are women, so there is now a through-line of most art from women artists like Andrea Bowers, Latifa Echakhch, and Susan Jackson.

WW: *You’ve collaborated with artists like Asako Narahashi to capture Lake Maggiore for the brand. What do you enjoy about connecting artists with Herno, that collaboration?*



Herno President Claudio Marenzi’s desk in the open space near the designer’s office at Herno’s manufacture.

CM: I was impressed by her pictures of Mount Fuji, so I wondered what she could capture of our lake, her perspective of Lake Maggiore. Japan was our first international market, so in our 70th anniversary book, we dedicated a section to Japan, and I took the occasion to invite a Japanese artist to interpret our lake and company. She took these pictures of the lake, the landscape, the Erno River as a kind of tribute to Japan.

WW: *Are you interested in collaborating with artists in the future?*

CM: We’ve collaborated with Stefano Arienti in our showroom. For another presentation we collaborated with Pae White. And then we have another great collaboration with Massimo Kaufmann with an intention to do more in the future.

WW: *What’s a piece you’ve recently acquired that you’re excited about?*

CM: Six months ago, I met Susan Jackson. She is an incredible artist, full of life and spirit, and we talked for many hours at her exhibition. In the end, I bought one of her pieces. Hearing her thoughts, about her life, she impressed me quite a lot.

WW: *Is there an exhibition you’ve seen recently you’re still thinking about?*

CM: In Italy, there was a very nice exhibition of Nicolas Party. I have one of his wonderful wall paintings in the company. He did it more or less 15 years ago. It was one of the first works realized directly in the company. It was at the beginning of his career. Now, it would be impossible. I saw his exhibition in Milan a couple of months ago and was very happy to meet him again.

WW: *Sustainability has been at the core of the brand, long before other brands adopted a sustainable approach. Why has that been key for you?*

CM: We are based on Lake Maggiore, for me one of the best places in the world. So I want to keep it! Everything starts with our territory. In some way, I think the sustainability is something like a healthy selfishness. Meaning, if you try to keep your garden perfect, and in this case sustainable, then your neighborhood will do the same. Eventually, the whole street will be clean and sustainable. So, in 2010 we turned our factories to renewable energy where the energy that we produced is the energy that we consume.

Then inside the company, like with the art, we began a virtual path around sustainability. We started to draw attention to sustainability. This is something that drove us to three years later, in 2013, start thinking of our production environmental footprint. Then we made a dedicated capsule collection called “Globe.” That’s how it began.

WW: *You’ve said, “Sustainability is not just a certification or about communication. We have to change chemical materials and industrial procedures.” Can you tell us more about why that is key and how we see that in the latest Herno innovations?*

CM: Innovation means even making innovative fabrics. We push our suppliers to create new fabrics. For example, we use a nylon that biodegrades in the absence of oxygen in just five years instead of fifty for some of our down jackets. This kind of innovation is something that is in our DNA.

WW: *We read that often, instead of taking lunch, you go on a bike ride around the region. How does the territory of Herno’s home continue to inspire you?*

CM: Yes, during lunch or in the summer evenings before dinner I bicycle to the lake or the mountains. For me, it’s easy to concentrate, I can relax, and many ideas come from this kind of short bike ride. It’s something that really inspires me.



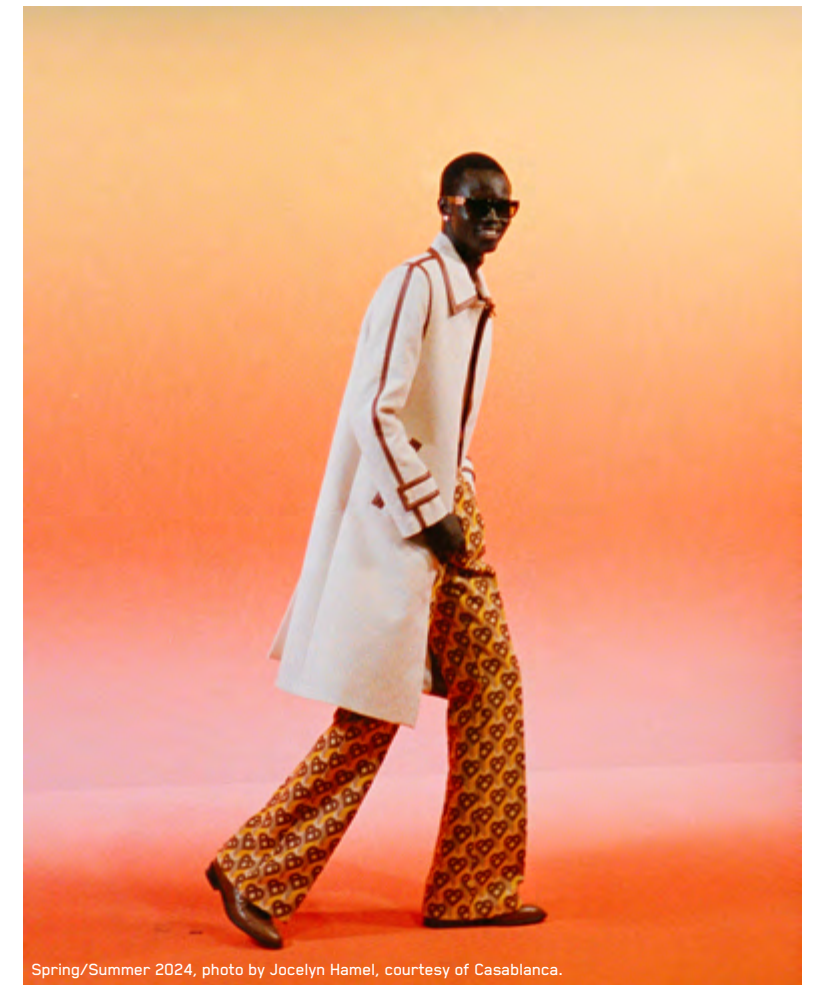
Fall/Winter 2023, photo by Ryan Pellegrini, courtesy of Casablanca.



Fall/Winter 2023, photo by Ryan Pellegrini, courtesy of Casablanca.



Charaf Tajer, portrait by Jake Curtis.



Spring/Summer 2024, photo by Jocelyn Hamel, courtesy of Casablanca.

CHARAF TAJER

Layering luxury, leisure, history, and change with Casablanca.

By Eliza Jordan

In 2018, Charaf Tajer launched a fashion brand in Paris named Casablanca. At first, the collection of men's garments and accessories reflected many of the designer's influences, including his heritage as a Moroccan-born, Paris-based designer, as well as the layered identity of Casablanca, where his parents met and he spent each summer. Partly aspirational, the label blended leisure and luxury with a distinct tennis-inspired aesthetic full of pieces Tajer could not find elsewhere, including specific track suits and silk shirts reminiscent of Hermès scarves. Two years later, Casablanca launched womenswear, offering ladies a look within the same DNA.

For Casablanca's Fall/Winter 2023 collection, Tajer was inspired by the people of Syria celebrating as an act of finding joy, regardless of their fear and limitation to do so amid struggle and warfare. After a trip to Damascus, he embodied the courage, kindness, and resistance he witnessed and displayed it in the new collection. Structured pastel suits with military branch insignia were seen mixed between joyful looks of checker-blocking patterns, heart-shaped prints, and accessories—like roses and newspapers—carried by hand.

Dialing in from Dubai, Tajer shared with *Whitewall* how his layered life and the city of Casablanca inspired his collection.

WHITEWALL: *Why did you initially want to start your own label?*

CHARAF TAJER: I've always traveled a lot, and I find a lot of inspiration in my travels. I couldn't find the clothes that I was looking for. I was always looking for certain things—track suits, silk shirts, glasses, shoes—and I couldn't find them in the market. That's why I decided to build the brand. It took me a few years to find the confidence to do it.

WW: *How did your parents meeting in Casablanca lead to you naming your brand after the city?*

CT: This really is the beginning of my story. My parents met in Casablanca, in a couture atelier, working next to each other. My dad was

a tailor, and my mom was a [sewing] machinist at the time. But to be exact, that day, my dad was selling makeup to girls at the atelier, and he was trying to sell some makeup to my mom. But they liked each other, fell in love, and they decided to go to France together to start a new life.

Parallel to that, the word "Casablanca" sounds to me like travel, exoticism, escapism. This is also the city where I spent a lot of my time being young, every summer since I was a kid. It's a very important place for me. The name has many sides, but, first of all, it's the place where my parents met, and this is where I spent a lot of time in my childhood. A lot of my first souvenirs are in Casablanca and in Paris.

WW: *Would you credit your parents working in fashion as one of your influences?*

CT: Subconsciously, yes. At home, we always had a sewing machine. My dad made me clothes. We'd go window shopping, looking at styles for adults, and then he'd re-make for me as a kid. I still have some of the leather jackets he made me. Making clothes was something very natural at home; it wasn't abstract. It was something I knew was doable because my parents made clothes in front of me every day.

WW: *What inspirational touchpoints are found within the city of Casablanca that you weave into the label to evoke escapism and exoticism?*

CT: My story is very parallel to the city of Casablanca, in the sense that I feel the city is a good representation of who I am. It's an Arab city with a Spanish name in an old French colony. It's a very dynamic city with many different inspirations. I feel I'm a bit the same. I'm French, Moroccan. I travel a lot, speak a few languages. It's very layered. It's not one identity; it's a mix of many. I feel the city is like this.

In Casablanca, there are many different types of architecture—colonial houses, 1950s buildings, Art Deco, Arabic. It's a mix of so many influences, and it was also a very important place during World War II, where many people came as refugees. It was a safe zone for Jewish people. It's a melting pot, and I love this idea. I grew up with so many different people from so many different religions—Paris but also in Morocco. I traveled a lot in Spain and then all around the world, adding layers to my knowledge. The city of Casablanca is a real parallel to me, my personality, and the way I built my adult life.

WW: *In a previous interview, you said you hoped that Casablanca would "join the legacy of French luxury brands, and to signal a new wave of classic brands." What is that new wave?*

CT: That's definitely my goal. Most brands by default today are anarchist. Disruptive. I feel like it's become the norm to become disruptive. People describe Casablanca as disruptive because we bring certain differences to the conversation, meaning we have a different color palette, a message. The brand is very optimistic. We love to share cultures, colors, and ideas. I prefer to say we're not disruptive, but we're rebalancing something. We are only disruptive because we want to rebalance certain codes.

WW: *You introduced womenswear in 2020. What was venturing into this category like?*

CT: Very natural, honestly, because we had so many women wearing the menswear already that we felt it was something that we could very naturally shift to. It was a challenging time in the world, but it's true that Casablanca grew up so much during that time. But indeed it was very natural because a lot of women were wearing it already and we had the support of women and women customers already. It was very natural, and now we want to have a bigger focus on womenswear because we think it's important. I feel like the Casablanca woman is more and more defined by the years and especially the last show. I feel like we're growing into the idea of having a bigger womenswear category, and it feels very good.

WW: *We recently saw your Spring/Summer 2024 collection, inspired by Nigeria. What about this country did you want to spotlight?*

CT: It's about the day of independence of Nigeria, and a forward-moving movement that Nigeria had during those years. It's also the idea of how Africa is the future, in my opinion, and how those people really embodied those movements, even in the sixties and seventies. They were very forward with the idea of Africa as the future. We wanted to dedicate this collection to both the African Futurism movement and the independence of Africa in general.

WW: *What do you hope Casablanca will be known for?*

CT: For the message. We want to be leading, and part of, change. Fifteen years ago, when I grew up in Paris, having a job at any luxury place was absolutely impossible for someone who looks like me. I hope Casablanca will give hope to many people who did not necessarily have the social background, or the right color, to work in fashion. I hope we will inspire the youth to go to architecture and fashion schools, to be independent, to have their own movements, to create, and to stand for the right causes.

Kelly KWearstler

Bringing beautiful
tension to the world
of design.

BY ELIZA JORDAN
Portraits by Jacques Burga

Kelly Wearstler's world of design is an intuitive fusion of contrasts. Since launching her eponymous interiors and architecture firm in 1998, she has revealed the power of layering color, texture, and pattern by combining the bold and the refined, the historic and the contemporary. After taking the pulse of a site's cultural and architectural history, she works with opposites to make it shine. The result has been a collection of award-winning spaces—from homes and hotels to restaurants and retail spaces. In addition, Kelly has launched collections of home product across categories, while also maintaining partnerships and collaborations with Dior, Maison Margiela, Matchesfashion, Net-a-porter and Louis Vuitton—as seen on her Instagram, @kellywearstler.

Over the years, homeowners in New York and California, as well as hospitality clients in the Caribbean and Texas, have gone to the interior designer and her multidisciplinary studio for the same thing: her signature touch. Adventurous and refreshing, these atmospheres feel distinct and familiar, invigorating and functional. Visually, you know a Wearstler-designed space when you see it. Better yet, you recognize it when you feel it. That's because it's Wearstler's intention to design a space that evokes emotion, hinging on both form and function, to nurture meaningful experiences. She also ensures that the local community is reflected in each project by enlisting local designers, engineers, artisans, and artists to create thoughtful site-specific work.

Most recently, we saw Wearstler's magic unfold in her sixth book, *Synchronicity*. The Rizzoli-published title looks at three of Wearstler's Proper Hotels interiors, as well as four residential spaces, to illustrate her collaborative and imaginative work in the field. One notable project highlighted in its pages is the Downtown L.A. Proper—a refined luxury hotel created within a former YWCA building, which Wearstler worked to both preserve and reimagine. Instead of filling a 35-by-12-foot indoor pool on the fourth floor, she designed a private suite around it, centered by an artwork. She commissioned the local artist, Ben Medansky, to create a specific tile piece above the pool, and decorated the rest of the space with a mix of vintage and bespoke furnishings.

Another one of Wearstler's latest projects was creating a tabletop collection with the Belgian homeware company Serax. Divided into two lines, "Zuma" and "Dune," it includes glassware and flatware in various colors and materials, including wood, ceramic, marble, and metal. Playful and surprising, "Zuma" focuses on the pattern, while "Dune," a bit more architectural, zeroes in on the color, glaze, and shape.

Wearstler shared with *Whitewall* how beautiful tension, collaboration, and evolution are key to her practice.

WHITEWALL: *You design an array of spaces and objects—from hotels and homes to furniture and accessories. Where do you typically start with a project, regardless of scope?*

KELLY WEARSTLER: We look at what the story is. For example, if it's an architectural and interiors project, the story can begin with the building that has legacy, digging in deep there. If it's new construction, it's about listening to our collaborator, partner, or client about what they want to accomplish. We want to evolve and take everything to the next level. So we start with concept and the story. Then we continue into the schematic design phase, which is a lot of storyboards and work with 3D modeling and prototyping. I'm really involved in every aspect of the process.

WW: *What is your studio like? Does the physicality of this space facilitate collaboration between teams?*

KW: My studio is open-air, so there's a lot of cross-pollination. For example, if we're working on a hotel interior, we include the textile, furniture, and lighting designers, and create a lot of proprietary products for the project. We're including all different departments, and the team is really learning from one another. It makes it special and unique.

WW: *Collaboration is a very contemporary aspect of design today. How do you revert to a more traditional form of approaching design, like considering the site's history or its architecture?*

KW: We look at the heritage. Sometimes there are some great architectural details that we want to be inspired by, but also give a new spirit. Some of the projects that are new construction are some of the most difficult projects because we want them to feel soulful and evoke emotion. When everything's new, it's challenging. Some of those are more difficult than projects that already have a story and some sort of historic fabric that we can start from.

We always want to give it a new spirit and celebrate the past, but not re-create the past.

WW: *How have you done that with your own space—your home in Los Angeles?*

KW: I live in a 1926 Georgian-style home that has a lot of history. When we bought the house, we looked at a lot of historic millwork. And it was painted this sort of faux bois finish to make it look like wood. The colors were heavy. We sanded it down and studied what the inherent wood was in the millwork, and painted it a vibrant studio white and gave it a high-gloss finish. Now the finish on the millwork is reflective and it feels alive. We redid the kitchens and the bathrooms, so everything is new and modern, but we really want to look at the architecture and celebrate its heritage. I'm always looking to not erase what was there, but give it a new spirit.

WW: *Using high gloss on old millwork is an example of your keen understanding of material. How do you know what a good pairing is? When do you know?*

KW: It's emotional. It's intuitive. Some projects come along and feel so natural and evolve so beautifully. Others take time. For all our projects, we're trying to find a solution. How do we make this look better? How can people function in the space better? Some projects, when finding the solution, are fluid and great. Others, you're banging your head on the wall. But you know when it happens—it's an emotional feeling. It's like meeting your partner for the first time, saying, "Oh yeah, this is right." It's the same thing with design.

WW: *In your MasterClass video, you spoke about the importance of three design facets—color, texture, and pattern. What do you want to convey with the combination of all three?*

KW: We're always looking to create something fresh. Something that sparks emotion. It's like creating a beautiful tension. If everything feels the same and has the same fine material, you don't have any tension. It's like having a dinner party and inviting all the same personalities. It's fine, but it's not as exciting as having a lot of interesting characters. It's about finding that beautiful tension with all of those elements. That's what we look at when we design a space—things that are vintage and contemporary, things that are experimental and interesting. It's how I live, how I dress, and how I design.

WW: *We see that beautiful tension in the projects featured in your latest book, Synchronicity, which celebrates numerous collaborators you worked with on each project. How does it feel to see these spaces completed, and in print all together?*

KW: When I think about working on a hotel project—you can have three to five hundred people, including tile installers, engineers, and operations teams—I



Palma at Santa Monica Proper, photo by Matthieu Salvaing.



think about coming together as one unit in one moment in time to create one beautiful work. You have to be in synchronicity. That's where the title came from. Everyone has to work together. You've got to be highly communicative and learn from one another. That's the beauty of every project. Whether from a client or an artist we've brought in for commission or the landscaper, it's about learning. You get more seasoned, and the work evolves. And I'm all about evolving. It keeps it exciting.

WW: Synchronicity looks at three Proper Hotels and four residential interiors through this lens. Why these spaces?

KW: These are some of our latest projects, and we wanted to showcase a few that felt very different from one another. If you look at the one in downtown Los Angeles, it's Spanish and Mexican—a historic building that was a former YWCA. There are all sorts of interesting things there. There's a pool suite because there's a pool on the fourth floor on the inside. To capture the historic tax credits, we had to keep everything as is. They also wanted to protect the legacy of the architectural design. So we designed a pool suite with a living room surrounding the pool, including a kitchen and a three-bedroom, which is really fun. There's a lot of diversity in all of these projects, so it was about showcasing each one for the book in a special way.

WW: You recently debuted a tabletop collection with Serax, divided into two collections: "Zuma" and "Dune." What was designing tableware like?

KW: It was a dream! I've always wanted to do this. With all of the hotels, we think about the food and beverage experience and what the presentation of the table is like. What the glasses feel like, what the tablecloth looks like; the candles, the lighting. Serax has great craftsmanship of product and has been specified for some of our projects, so they really were the perfect partner. We wanted the collection to feel like the California brand that we are. We wanted to have things that were also distinctive in the marketplace. We covered different materials, so there's timber, ceramic, marble, and metal. There's glassware and flatware. There are so many different combinations. You can continue to surprise your dinner guests over and over.

It was also about the artisanal hand. There's texture and pattern, and architectural elements. The "Dune" pattern is all about architecture—very clean. It's about the color and the glaze, and the refinement of the edges. "Zuma" is more playful, and it comes in three colors. It's about the artistic hand of the pattern. They're very different. The whole process was about two years. It was a fun collaboration and partnership, and we're going to be doing more together.

WW: Were there any references that particularly inspired large design facets, like material or shape? Or a fine detail, like the curve of an edge?

KW: Our glassware is ombre, and really takes cues from sea glass. The timber pieces are based off shapes of rocks you'd find in Malibu. They're all a little different, and subtle with soft edges. They feel friendly. The stone pieces are obviously made from stone, showing the different texture and patterning in the pieces that are unique. All that comes together to create that beautiful tension I was mentioning in our interiors. It's interesting to look at.

Serax is already a big provider to hotels globally, and we're also in the hotel business. A lot of hotel chefs want to have clean dinnerware to serve their creations on—they prefer something a little quieter and understated—so we have something for them as well.

WW: Tableware is an intimate home object. We use it every day, but also when we gather together to enjoy food, celebrate, connect. How were you thinking about the consumer when designing the feel of these pieces?

KW: We wanted "Zuma" to be a little more casual. It's the type of tableware you can have breakfast and lunch and a casual dinner on. There are three colorways, so it's nice to mix them. All the colors work beautifully together. "Dune" feels more elevated and clean—even a bit more serious. It's great for entertaining and for the hospitality experience.

WW: Another intimate design feature in a home is art, from paintings and sculptures to furniture and fine objects. Of what significance is its presence in a space?

KW: Many clients already have or are working with an art advisor. They have them on as a team player. Art is one of my favorite parts of my practice, whether it's inspiration or commissioning an artist to do something specific for

a project. It's something that the project would call out for, whether we need a functional work of art like a cabinet or something within their existing collection. Clients love commissions because it's something made specifically for them. It's much more meaningful and thoughtful.

We also might need something for a focal point. We'll work closely with the art advisor and say, "We have this really special moment. Who were you thinking about?" It's a collaborative effort across all parties, even with the landscape architect. If we want to create a vista outside of a window that speaks to the interior and work as one experience, that's also something we consider.

WW: What has been a recent commission that's been particularly exciting for you?

KW: One that was really unique and interesting was the pool suite we did at the Downtown L.A. Proper. We worked with this ceramic artist, Ben Medansky, and he created an 80-foot wall of tile for the hotel suite and the backdrop of the pool. It was amazing, and quite expansive. And he's a local artist! With our hotel projects especially, we embrace and celebrate the local craft and talent in each city by bringing it to the hotel. When someone visits a hotel, they obviously want to feel like they're in that city, and we want to inspire and support local artists, whether they're emerging or established.

The whole hotel project took about three and a half years, and Ben worked on that for a solid 18 months. There was a lot of prototyping and creative process that went in on the front end of it.

WW: You've worked with artists on other projects, including another local one—the Proper in Santa Monica. How did you arrive at working with Kelly Lam?

KW: She did a few projects in Los Angeles, where she used these big monumental links made of bronze. And when I saw them, I was like, "We should do a light sculpture in the lobby!" So I reached out to her, and she was amazing to work with. And it looks like a chain link from a boat, so it has this maritime feel.

WW: What work are you typically drawn to?

KW: I'm drawn to anything that speaks to me. It could be an emerging artist, or someone more established. I'm super open—I really like it all. It's an emotional feeling, so it could be something I've never seen before, which also gets me really excited. Seeing something new gets your heart racing. It gets you all fired up and inspired. I'd say I'm a free spirit. I'm so open.

WW: Do you feel the same openness in fashion?

KW: I'm so open! That's why I love emerging designers. They're more experimental, and I'm kind of playing. I might put on a crazy outfit that looks bad, but I'm having fun and taking risks. Sometimes, there's a hiccup. [Laughs] But that's what's fun! You have to experiment. I love trying new things. I also love vintage. I usually always have something emerging, a classic brand, and something vintage on—whether it's denim or a vintage T-shirt or a bag that I got from a cool resale shop. I'm always open to exploring.

WW: How did working with artists and craftspeople on projects lead you to creating a gallery platform of your own?

KW: When we're working with artists for some of the residential projects, people would come into the hotel saying, "I love this work of art. This pot. That table." It occurred to me that people wanted to get in touch and get that piece, or find something similar. These were works that we partnered closely with an artist on, looking at their materiality and their voice, and the functionally that we may need for the space. But I saw there was a need. It was an authentic, evolved element to my business.

WW: You're continuing to work with different artists. What's a recent example?

KW: I was just in Rotterdam. We're doing a few collaborations with some emerging artists there that will be on the Gallery platform next year. We're celebrating them and supporting them, but only having a few unique, specific pieces that I offer at the Gallery—and that's the only place you can get them. A lot of galleries carry a lot of the same artists' pieces. Here it will just be unique works that we came together to create. It's great because they're also really thoughtful about sustainability and recycled materials, and looking at technology and sustainability coming together.



“ “ We're always looking to create something fresh , ,

WW: How are you thinking about sustainability in your practice right now?

KW: Because we're in California and already have strict guidelines for our projects and construction, we're ahead of the game. We're thoughtful about that, and we really follow the rules. I'm also involved with the University of Texas, where I speak. After one of my lectures, a girl came up to me and asked, "What are you doing in sustainability? You should have someone on your team that focuses on that." I thought it was a great idea. So at the beginning of 2024, we're bringing in somebody. There will be one person, just her, but it's a good start. We're going to look at all of our departments and see how we can be forward-thinking on how to protect what we have, and apply that to the different departments.

That's what is great about going to these colleges. When she asked that, I thought, "That should have been something we've done!" But it's about being open and receptive. Like the interns we have at our studio for the summer, we learn from them.

WW: What else are you learning from the next generation?

KW: The way they think. They're wide-eyed—and this is how I am! I always want to do something new and explore, and have an open mind. That's how you evolve. And they're all about exploring. That's why we have great internships and apprenticeships at the studio, because they want to be in a forward-thinking studio and have their voice heard, which I think is really important.





BRUNO MOINARD AND CLAIRE BÉTAILLE

Imagining ideal spaces, as creators of
impressions, for life's evolutions.

BY LAURENT MOÏSI

The French interior design firm Moinard Bétaille is comprised of a duo trained in interior architecture and design: Bruno Moinard and Claire Bétaille. After 10 years of collaboration under the title of Moinard's 4BI Studio—first founded in 1995—the pair rebranded the firm in 2021, to reflect a successful decade of collaborative projects and the intent to continue their approach.

Over the last several years, Moinard and Bétaille have realized iconic interiors across the world, from private residences to restaurants, luxury retail environments, and—their specialty—hotels. Traveling to countries like Qatar, Thailand, Spain, Switzerland, Belgium, and Russia, to name a few, the firm has reimagined flagships, apartments, and office spaces for notable maisons including an ongoing partnership with Cartier, and spaces for the likes of Balenciaga and Moët Hennessy. Working side by side, they've also taken on the stunning Château Troplong Mondot estate in Saint-Emilion, France, and the awe-inspiring renovation of Jacques Couëlle's Hotel Cala di Volpe in Sardinia, Italy—a four-year undertaking that maintained the poetry of the 1960s hotspot while offering an encompassing, beautifully customized refreshment of the space.

Intrigued by Moinard Bétaille's seamless collaborations and seemingly perfect interiors, *Whitewall* spoke with the duo to learn more about their approach.

WHITEWALL: *Can you give us an insight into your collaboration process? How do you work together to achieve a harmonious and perfect result?*

BRUNO MOINARD: Our collaboration process is both harmonious and dual. We always do the first meeting with the venue and the client together. Each of us, under the same conditions and with the same constraints, immerses ourselves in the environment, the existing situation, and the challenges of creation or renovation. Each of us reacts in our own way, with our own sensitivity, and translates either into sketches and drawings, or into photos, collages, and notes.

I tend to be spontaneous and instinctive, while Claire analyzes the context, connects the project with its surroundings, and draws upon cultural references. Then, things settle and mature on both sides. When we come together again, a few days later, we merge our visions, and creative options naturally arise. As time goes on, we quickly reach a harmonious solution.

WW: *What prompted you to work together and create Moinard Bétaille? What does this partnership bring to each other's practice and, ultimately, to the clients?*

CLAIRE BÉTAILLE: Bruno had established his agency long before I met him, and he had already gained significant recognition and achieved a number of successes when we started working together. He welcomed me into his firm and quickly involved me in strategic projects, such as the development of Cartier boutiques. Our partnership, now Moinard Bétaille, involves a man and a woman who have proved incredibly complementary in their approach. For our clients, it's a guarantee of balance and maximum relevance in our recommendations.

WW: *Could you tell us about a specific project where you felt you achieved a remarkable level of perfection? What were the key elements that contributed to its success?*

BM: If there is one project that truly embodies our work, a project that we consider successful in every aspect and best exemplifies our passion and happiness in this profession, it is undoubtedly the Hotel Cala di Volpe on the Costa Smeralda in Sardinia. Beyond the technical and qualitative challenges, it is the most artistic, almost painterly project. Taking on the masterpiece of Jacques Couëlle, the great architect and inventor of sculptural houses, was an artistic challenge.

We are not engineers or technicians. We are creators of impressions, decors, and living spaces. We bring light and colors. Cala di Volpe, built in the early 1960s for the jet set close to the Aga Khan, is an architectural legend and an original living space that had retained its aficionados. There were high expectations for us! We completely redesigned the living experience in the property to align it with today's expectations without betraying its essence, playing with the materials that Couëlle had used—plaster, juniper wood, thick colored glass, rattan, and reeds—and involving the best local artisans. We take great pride in the outcome.

WW: *Collaboration often requires compromises. How do you manage creative differences while staying true to your initial vision?*

CB: We don't compromise with each other. If there are compromises, they are made with the client, which is normal. The working process Bruno mentioned earlier, based on the fusion of our visions and the trust we have in each other's strengths, allows us to build step by step, finding a path that we both adhere to. We don't have to "give in" on certain points. This enables us to maintain a positive tension in the project management—the inevitable differences in appreciation are minor and never jeopardize the smooth progress of the operations.

WW: *How do you reconcile innovation with maintaining your unique design language in your collaborative projects?*

BM: Integrating innovation involves bringing comfort and essential amenities to a space, meeting the expectations of modern living and experiences, but we always strive to make it invisible. For instance, at Cala di Volpe, as we mentioned earlier, we allowed this hotel, conceived 60 years ago, to compete with the most beautiful addresses in the Mediterranean without altering its soul. As we like to say, "Everything had to change for nothing to change."

If innovation means introducing bold shapes into an existing space, grafting elements that may appear completely different from the existing ones, and adorning walls and floors with the latest research-derived materials, that is the essence of creation. I use the term "grafting" intentionally, as when this addition is harmoniously integrated, it breathes new life, a new appearance, and a new ambience into a space, allowing it to last for decades, or even centuries. Giving a future to the memory is one of our obsessions!

WW: *Your work spans a wide range of spaces, from residential to hospitality. How do you adapt your approach to achieve harmony in different contexts?*

CB: By diversifying our fields of action and collaborations, we firmly believe that each domain enriches the other, and the specific expectations of our clients do not limit us to a specific style. Lessons learned in one field are likely to be applied elsewhere. If you look at sales outlets, for example, which require very specific customer paths to be designed with maximum efficiency in mind, we're sure that the scenography we use in the hotel industry or when visiting the cellars of great estates has a lot to borrow from them. There's an ongoing dialogue between our different specialties.



Hotel Cala di Volpe, photo ©Jacques Pépion.





Cartier on 13 rue de la Paix in Paris, photo ©Jacques Pépion.

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WE ARE FIRMLY ROOTED IN AN ARTISTIC APPROACH

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WW: *What role does research play in your design process? How do you ensure that your projects are based on a deep understanding of the space and its purpose?*

CB: In our design process, we rely more on intuition than on formal research. Naturally, our intuition is nourished, often unconsciously, by what we have experienced, sought, and learned. It guides us.

When we're in a given environment, with its architectural, urbanistic, and cultural specificities, when we have to redevelop a space, bring it back to life, our intuition combines with the spirit of the place to spark our creative process and put us on the right track. We immerse ourselves in the territory, tune in our antennas, sharpen our curiosity, listen, and exchange ideas. We are firmly rooted in an artistic approach. We start with sketches, gestures, and feelings. We quickly associate forms, colors, materials, and patterns. There is always research involved, but it is there to verify things, to complement and support our thinking.

WW: *What are the main qualities or characteristics that, in your opinion, contribute to achieving a perfect interior design? How do you incorporate these elements into your work?*

BM: Perfection does not exist in this world, nor in the world of interior design, or any other domain, and thankfully so. It always pushes us to do better, to never repeat what we have already done for others. People

come to us because the singularity of our approach lies in respecting the uniqueness of each space and each project. Creation is a dialogue between perfection and imperfection. When the evening light grazes a wall, we are delighted of its imperfections, to create relief, invent a changing landscape, and evoke an impression.

On the other hand, we can strive for an ideal result. Ideal because it is what we deeply desire to do, what we dream of, and what we want to share with our clients, users, and visitors. If there should be perfection, it lies in the execution, in the quality of materials and their implementation, in the choice and supervision of suppliers and partners.

WW: *In your view, how has the notion of perfection evolved in the field of interior architecture over the years? And how do you see this evolution unfolding in the future?*

CB: Perfection is no more attainable today than it was in the past. However, other demands, constraints, movements, trends, and ways of living have emerged. We're quite comfortable with this idea—we play the long game. On an ongoing basis, we need to be able to imagine and design ideal interior spaces for life as it evolves, while taking sustainability into account. I mentioned earlier our reliance on intuition and how it underpins our creative process. Our intuitions today are different from those of the past because the world is changing, and our analytical grid changes with it. But we never lose the principles that shape us. There lies the beauty of our profession.

Château Troplong-Mondot, photo ©Jacques Pépion.



Ewa JUSZKIEWICZ

Fusing art and fashion to explore female identity
with Louis Vuitton's Artycapucines Collection.

BY ELIZA JORDAN



The Polish artist Ewa Juszkiewicz deconstructs female conventions and reconstructs ideals through her paintings filled with unexpected contrasts and contradictions. Often, lush florals or flowing hair replace supple lips and wide eyes, ridding the subject of presumed storylines and returning the tale to the woman in frame. Her painting *Ginger Locks* (2021) is a perfect example. Brushstrokes depict the profile of a woman dressed in blue, her hair swirling in collected tufts that take the place of her face. The piece continues Juszkiewicz's concentration on exploring the juxtaposition of historical and contemporary portraiture, as well as the suppression of female identities in the Western world.

Born from an interest in the past and a promise for the future, Juszkiewicz's work challenges the perceptions, constraints, stereotypes, and limitations of women around the world and over centuries by presenting reimagined narratives. Here, previously oppressed storylines are erased, and women get a second shot without gender and assumptions at the forefront.

Earlier this year, it was announced that the painter would collaborate with Louis Vuitton on its latest Artycapucines collection, in addition to Billie Zangewa, Liza Lou, Tursic & Mille, and Ziping Wang. The imaginative initiative illuminates the work of artists with unique visions on the *maison's* classic Capucines bag. In this recent iteration, Zangewa reaches for her silk patchworks, building from her work *The Swimming Lesson*, featuring her son Mika between sea and sand. Lou returned to her work with beads, embossing the textural materials onto soft leather in soft washes of colorful hues. The artistic duo Tursic & Mille reinvented the bag in a floral shape to host their painting *Tenderness*, accompanied by a charred cedar wood handle. And Wang's piece—the smallest Artycapucines bag so far—features a gorgeous confection of leather patchwork in clouds, checkered patterns, and sweet treat motifs with a candy-striped handle.

For Juszkiewicz, *Ginger Locks* was the perfect surrealistic starting point. It reflected the overall mood of her work and allowed her to keep the details of the colors and composition. First, the painting's background is re-created on the handbag, hand-sprayed directly on the calfskin leather to move from light to dark green. Then a 3D digital printing technique is used to reproduce the portrait, which also covers the LV logo, capturing each detail in high-definition. Finally, the handmade piece is complemented by a handmade string of gold-colored pearls, affixed under the metal LV logo. And inside the green-gray satin interior, a detachable leather envelope inspired by the aesthetics of 18th-century love letter awaits, printed with a detail of the hair from *Ginger Locks*.

Ahead of her exhibition "In a Shady Valley, Near a Running Water," on view at Gagosian Beverly Hills now through December 22, Juszkiewicz spoke with *Whitewall* about her collaboration with Louis Vuitton.

WHITEWALL: *Why was Ginger Locks the painting your collaboration with Louis Vuitton started from?*

EWA JUSZKIEWICZ: When I started working on the design of my bag, I wanted it to reflect the character and mood of my paintings as much as possible. Keeping in mind the size of the bag, it was very important for me to keep the aura of my paintings, and to not lose the details. The colors and composition of my *Ginger Locks* painting turned out to be the perfect choice. I'm glad it worked out so well. The final result that we achieved together with the Louis Vuitton team is stunning.

WW: *What might the woman in Ginger Locks be saying to the viewer that resonates with the spirit of a Louis Vuitton woman?*

EJ: I think that the woman in *Ginger Locks* is strong, independent, and dynamic. She does not succumb to stereotypes and does not allow herself to be pigeonholed. She does not impose established beauty standards on herself or others.

WW: *The painting's background hue is re-created by hand spray-painting the colors onto a calfskin canvas. How does this technique, one you don't typically use, honor the look you can achieve in the studio? What does it give the work that's different?*

EJ: Indeed, although I don't use spray-painting in my practice on a daily basis, the effect we managed to achieve is almost identical to what the backgrounds in my paintings look like. While working in the studio, I use many different tools and methods of applying paint to create various

structures and effects. This is the essence of painting; I love this process. The bag I designed contains elements that are handmade by Louis Vuitton expert artisans. Thanks to their elaborate work, each bag is unique.

WW: *What is it like to see your artwork on a bag, which will be carried and not just admired in an art-centric setting?*

EJ: It's thrilling! I am very happy that the bag I designed will be worn in public spaces—in everyday life, on the move in constantly changing environments. I can't wait to see it worn for various occasions and diversely styled by different people in their own individual ways.

WW: *The bag itself features a calfskin exterior adorned with a handmade string of gold-colored pearls and an interior of gray satin that hides a detachable leather envelope. What was it like working with these materials?*

EJ: Working with these materials was a great adventure! The process of creating the bag was complex and had many different stages. We exchanged samples with the Louis Vuitton team many times and I considered the use of various materials and techniques. I must admit that it was my first time working with leather and pearls and it was a very valuable experience. But the biggest challenge was that all the materials we used had to meet not only aesthetic requirements, but also practical ones. All materials and technical solutions that we used had to meet specific requirements. I'm happy that every aspect of the bag is perfect, and we didn't have to compromise in any respect. This bag looks exactly as I dreamed.

WW: *The leather envelope inside was inspired by the aesthetic of 18th-century love letters and features a printed detail of hair from the woman in Ginger Locks. How does this creative choice focus storytelling around femininity and its associations—like romance, glamour, and mystery?*

EJ: When designing the envelope, I was referring to both 18th-century traditions as well as Surrealism. I intentionally reached for the world of romanticism and non-obvious solutions. By referencing the aesthetics of 18th-century love letters, I wanted to evoke a mood of mystery and romance. I was similarly inspired by 18th-century jewelry while designing the pearl necklace. Pearls, which were often depicted in paintings from that period, have had many meanings in the history of art—they were a symbol of love and passion, but also infidelity. Through these creative choices, I aimed to liberate feelings and sensuality, and to stir emotions.

WW: *How does your personal view of femininity—filled with beauty, constraints, and potential—play into this collaboration?*

EJ: I think my bag fully reflects my view of femininity. All elements of the bag manifest feminine power and sensuality. While working on the project, I reached for intuition and emotions. I wanted the character of my bag to be dreamy, ambiguous, and disturbing—a reference to the Surrealist tradition. I wished it to be in opposition to idealized female images and stereotypical canons of feminine beauty.

WW: *Since 2011, your oil paintings have featured portraits drawing on classical European painting, with a twist, obscuring the subjects' faces to comment on the suppression of the female identity. How does your Artycapucines collaboration explore contrasts, contradictions, and juxtapositions, too?*

EJ: It explores these issues on many levels, not only in terms of content, but also in form. In this bag design, just like in my painting, I mix elements connected to traditional female identity with those that are both surreal and related to nature. In this way, I want to disturb conventions and clichés of female representation that are ubiquitous in the history of art.

WW: *What was it like working with a luxury fashion brand like Louis Vuitton and its artisans to create this collaboration?*

EJ: Our collaboration was perfect in every aspect. The Louis Vuitton team was very supportive throughout the entire process. They were so generous in sharing their experience with me. The Louis Vuitton expert artisans were able to find technical solutions to my ideas, which was sometimes a



Courtesy of Louis Vuitton.

challenge, because each solution had to meet the highest standards. I wish every collaboration was this successful!

WW: *Is there an aspect of this project you've brought back to the studio?*

EJ: Transferring my painting onto a three-dimensional object and taking it out of the frame of the canvas into the public space was an exceptional experience. I find this kind of fusion of art and fashion fascinating and full of possibilities. I hope to continue my adventure with the world of fashion

in the future.

WW: *What will your solo exhibition, opening in spring 2024, entail?*

EJ: It will open at the Palazzo Cavanis in Venice, in connection with the 60th International Art Exhibition—La Biennale di Venezia. Guillermo Solana, the artistic director of the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, will curate this show, and it will be presented in collaboration with Almine Rech.



“ I aimed to liberate feelings and sensuality ,”



LUDOVIC NKOTH

SEARCHING FOR HOME AND HARMONY AFTER A YEAR-LONG RESIDENCY IN PARIS.

BY KATY DONOGHUE
PHOTOS BY CHANDLER KENNEDY

Ludovic Nkoth has always made work in search of the idea of home. As he has moved from place to place from adolescence to adulthood, the one constant for him has been art, and his practice and desire to be present within a place reflects that. The artist grew up in Cameroon before moving to South Carolina at the age of 13. After attending undergrad at the University of South Carolina, he moved to New York to pursue his MFA. And after living and working in New York, he has spent the past year or so in Paris in a residency with L'Académie des Beaux-Arts. His experience of living within the African, then African American, and later European African context has been profound, relating back to the theme of what it means to be call a place home.

In Paris, he was drawn to the Château Rouge neighborhood, with its large concentration of people from the African diaspora in Paris. He spent time at cafés, restaurants, barbershops, and markets—listening to people, stories, and music. Many of his resulting paintings from the yearlong stint in Paris reference the feeling and memory of what he absorbed there. Those works were on view at François Ghebaly in the solo show “The Is of It,” on view recently from October 7 to November 11, 2023. As Nkoth described it, his work in Paris was not only informed by the people he was present with, but by the intense focus he put on developing his relationship to harmony in color and express mark-making. These new figurative paintings no longer ask permission of the viewer to exist. They hold their own it.

Whitewall spoke with Nkoth just as his time in Paris was wrapping up. He described the past year as an exercise in how creative one can be in a year, with an excitement to see how it all translates to his studio back in New York.

WHITEWALL: *You're in Paris right now as part of an artist residency with L'Académie des Beaux-Arts. What has that been like?*

LUDOVIC NKOTH: I've been here since September of last year. I'm based in New York and had just moved into a new studio. What really got me sold to the idea was the culture here is a bit slower than New York. I knew that even if I was in Paris working, I was still going to be able to have a slower pace of life compared to New York.

It's been unlike every other residency that I've heard of or done. It doesn't require much from the artist. You don't have a show at the end, you don't give the venue works, they just want to be able to fund a space for you to create, a space for you to research, or even just a space for you to contemplate as an artist. They understand that as an artist, the making process is not the only time that you're working.

So going into this space, I knew what I was going to do, but I didn't understand how that energy was going to travel through me. It was fascinating to walk around a place Le Moulin Rouge, seeing these buildings that were painted by these artists that growing up I've seen in museums, and now I'm walking on the same soil.

WW: *So how has this residency compared to the way in which you work in New York?*

LN: In New York, I usually try to have a separation of my work space and my living space. But here, it was living and work space joined, so it was a first for me. I embraced it, and it was hard a bit to find a balance. Because you wake up having your tea, the first thing you think about is mixing colors. You go to sleep and the last thing you think about is what you did or what you can fix in the painting you worked on for the last eight hours. I think that allowed me to grow at such a rapid pace, which I don't think I would have grown at if I stayed in New York.

It's almost felt like I've been in this time capsule for a year, where I am reading, painting, going to see museums, inviting people to have conversations around the works, doing that every day and discovering so many things I didn't know about my practice, my process, but also myself. I think my work now is a direct byproduct of my way of living and my life and my journey across this world.

WW: *So how did that all result in the two shows you have this fall at François Ghebaly in Los Angeles and Maison La Roche in Paris?*

LN: I wanted to be able to show what I was up to here. I thought it could be a beautiful way of closing such a beautiful chapter in such a new place. It felt like a yearlong meditation upon the self, in a way. It's been very fruitful, I would say. I think I grew so much as a person and also as an artist. I've been loving living in Paris.

WW: *What is Paris like for you? Did you have any expectations going in?*

LN: I didn't have any big expectations. Sometimes when you go into things with raised expectations, you are a bit disappointed, or you want things to go the way you planned them to go. You're not fully accepting life and things to happen and the place to inform your everyday life and movement.

Growing up, I moved around a lot. I grew up in Cameroon, left Cameroon at the age of 13 to move to South Carolina, where I knew only a few people, barely knew the language. I had to figure out the space for myself, and after my undergrad, I got up again and left for New York where, again, I barely knew anyone. I did my master's there and then created a sense of a home and a family there for myself.

Then again, I got the call from Paris for this residency and decided, “What could possibly go wrong?” For me, that excites me. The idea of diving into the unknown and trusting your instincts, trusting the fact that you've done this before, and your gut will never fail you.

Paris has been so giving. A lot of times, it's hard to be present in the moment because I'm always thinking of the past or future. The present is something that happens, and I realize it after it happens. So Paris has been a good way to go to a café with a friend and sit over a cup of coffee for two hours. Things are happening because they need to happen, not because I wanted them to happen. I was trusting.

My practice shifted a lot here, and I'm in a space where I'm trying to go where the work wants me to go and just listen to that. Here I was not only productive, but I was very open to growth, to new experiences. I love the way I feel mentally and physically here.

WW: *Is there something in your practice that you can pinpoint that has shifted?*

LN: So much. When I got here, the residency invited us for a private walk-through of the “Monet – Mitchell” [October 5, 2022–February 27, 2023] show at Fondation Louis Vuitton. It was mesmerizing to see two amazing artists of their time looking at the same things but at different times of their lives, having a crazy output, and seeing what they saw through different lenses. You have Monet, who was a bit more suave with his approach and created such harmony and such a jazzy flow with his color combination and his mark-making. And then you have Mitchell, who was a bit more gestural, had a bit more power with her brushstrokes. I paid attention to the way both were using color. I thought, “Wow, okay, I've been doing this whole thing wrong.”

Luckily, this was at the beginning of the residency! So it was a bit easy to pivot from the way I thought of color and the way I was using color throughout my works. I went to the exhibition maybe three times and just sat in front of these works for hours looking and filling up my cup. I went back to the studio and started breaking down everything. I wanted to have this harmony that existed in Monet's work, but then I wanted to have this force that Mitchell had whenever she was making her marks as well. I think my work somewhat exists within these two, but then a bit figurative.

There's a bit more confidence in the new works. There's a greater understanding of color theory or color relationship. There is a willingness to explore things that I hadn't yet fully explored within my practice. Being here, I've understood that it's not about what you paint but how you paint it. I see that in the work so vividly now. Within my practice mobility is such an important aspect and every time I move to a new space it has a way of informing me. Something always shifts and grows whenever I move myself.

WW: *It's interesting that you are open to letting that experience come into the work. There has to be intention there in letting yourself open up, no?*

LN: I'm trying to tell the story of the human condition, but also the story of the world. So it's important that I process the world, that I allow myself to be a sponge wherever I go and regurgitate whatever I see or feel in these new spaces. Within the works, too, whenever I don't know what I'm doing is when I discover the most. If I always approach the works with a full understanding of what needs to happen, it closes me off from a discovery.

WW: *There is so much movement in your mark-making, it reminds me of rhythm and music. Does music play a role in your painting?*





Ludovic Nkoth, A meditation upon the nothing, 2023, photo by Paul Salvesson, courtesy of the artist and François Ghebaly.



Ludovic Nkoth, portrait by Chandler Kennedy.



Ludovic Nkoth, portrait by Chandler Kennedy.

LN: Yes, definitely. I love to dance, so movement is such a big idea for whenever I'm trying to make these marks. I paint sometimes with such huge brushes you can't fully control. You have to fully submit to the movement and let the music be a vehicle to follow. Whenever I'm listening to Miles Davis's *Kind of Blue*, a favorite album of all time, I just follow the saxophone. He'll have these long notes, and I'll try to follow as far as the notes go. As soon as he lets go, I let go of the brush.

I think if there is color harmony plus harmony of movement, it makes for something greater. This is where music comes.

WW: *What kind of paintings will be at François Ghebaly in Los Angeles?*

LN: For the show at François Ghebaly, I wanted to investigate the relationship that exists between Cameroon, my home country, and France, because we were a French colony. We gained our independence in 1961, but we were still influenced greatly by the space. I wanted to see how these immigrants are coming from Cameroon to find an idea of home or an idea of place of solitude in this new world that colonized them. Within my practice, home has always also been a huge idea because I've always searched for home. What does home mean for different people around the world?

At the residency in Montmartre, I was close to this little square called Château Rouge which is one of the biggest concentrations of African immigrants in Paris. You have your African markets, your barbershops, your African restaurants, and everyone there is part of the African diaspora. I spent a lot of time there seeing how people were living, speaking with them trying to understand their stories, how they got here, how their families got here, or how their families live back home.

I wanted to be present with these people. They helped me understand where I was because I come from a space where, living in the U.S., I was existing within the context of the African American history. Before arriving to the U.S., I was an African. And now I arrive in Paris as an African European. So there is a dynamic that exists and a bit of nuance where I've been living in both worlds and am able to codeswitch. I was very interested to also see how that would affect me as a person.

With these paintings there are moments of intimacy, movements of discovery, and movements of me going through things I didn't fully understand in that moment. With the paintings I was able to crystallize a lot of those moments and investigate them deeper. It also takes some forms of storytelling and tries to give ideas of narrative, almost like mystery solving. My past paintings were somewhat asking for permission to exist from the viewer. They required the gaze of the viewer to be activated. With these paintings, they exist within their own world and they hold their own space. They don't require us or the gaze of the viewer to exist.

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I'M TRYING
TO TELL THE
STORY OF
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BUT ALSO
THE STORY
OF THE
WORLD



WW: *That kind of desire to live in the present in a space makes me think of a past interview where you talked about how when you first came to the U.S. there was a language gap, so you found yourself at this young age forced into a quietness. You spent a lot of time with yourself before you were able to really engage others after moving to South Carolina. I wonder if there is a parallel there, going from New York to Paris, finding again a quietness to be with yourself and the work.*

LN: I hadn't even fully noticed that, but I think, yes, quietness has been a big part of my life. Being in touch with the self, I would say. And having to fully understand the landscape that I existed within and the context of things. I think this is where art has been such a big part of my life because within these times of quietness and solitude and not fully understanding where I was, art was the one thing that made sense to me and the one thing I kept using as a moral compass and a social compass to navigate within the spaces and to understand where exactly I'm meant to be.

When I look back, those were very challenging times, but without those times I also wouldn't be the person that I am right now. We have to be shaped some way or another, and for me, this is how I know that I was put in this place to create. I was put in this place to feel and create things that ask people, "Hey this is what I see, this is how I feel. Do you feel the same? Do you see the same?" My story and my trajectory in life, it's been so that I don't think I could have a different output in life, other than just creating. Nothing else would make sense. Nothing else has ever made sense. I fully think I was put here to create.



Ludovic Nkoth, *Bearing the impossible*, 2023, photo by Paul Salvesson, courtesy of the artist and François Ghebaly.



Ludovic Nkoth, *A Day's Weight*, 2023, photo by Thomas Lannes, courtesy of the artist and Massimo De Carlo Gallery.

A photograph of Francis Kurkdjian, the Dior perfume creation director, in his office. He is wearing a black shirt and is holding a white strip of paper to his lips, appearing to be in the process of creating or refining a perfume. The background is a bright, out-of-focus window. In the foreground, there are several small glass bottles of perfume on a table, some of which are blurred.

FRANCIS KURKDJIAN

The Dior perfume creation director
reimagines an icon with L'Or de J'adore.

By Katy Donoghue

Scent has been a passion of Francis Kurkdjian since the age of 14. The perfume creation director for Dior, and the visionary behind his own eponymous fragrance house, can still recall the first time he caught a dizzying whiff of Poison on the Champs-Élysées in 1985. Buoyed by the romance and fantasy of Yves Montand playing a perfumer in the seventies flick *Le Sauvage*, his future vocation became crystal clear.

Clarity is certainly a way to describe the characteristics of a Kurkdjian scent. Using cinematic descriptors to tell the story of his vision, he creates streamlined fragrances that we, too, may feel compelled to follow in the street. A reason, no doubt, he was recently named the perfumer for the House of Dior, where he was first asked to reimagine their signature scent, *J'adore*.

In dialogue with both the 25-year-old fragrance and Mr. Dior himself, Kurkdjian created *L'Or de J'adore*. It is a concentrated, super-expressive perfume that expands on the olfactory nuances of the original powerhouse floral bouquet. Discussing its origins and essence with *Whitewall*, Kurkdjian compared his reimagining of the icon of *J'adore* as similar to the way in which the fashion house's creative directors have reimagined the icon of the Bar Suit. Kurkdjian and Dior collaborated with artist Jean-Michel Othoniel to create a gold beaded sculpture around the new *J'adore L'Or* fragrance, available in limited edition. The perfumer shared with us what it was like to dive headfirst into the heady notes of *La Colle Noire* and to reemerge with a new standard for the future of fragrance.

WHITEWALL: *L'Or de J'adore* is a fresh reinterpretation of Dior's iconic *J'adore*. How did you want to update it for the present moment?

FRANCIS KURKDJIAN: *L'Or de J'adore* is a deeper and more concentrated version of *J'adore*, Eau de Parfum from 1999. My signature resides in the dialogue between flowers and the fact that they are treated differently, as I envisaged them streamlined and concentrated, in an ultra-expressive style. There are 25 years between the two compositions. The ingredients have since evolved, and the palette of possibilities has grown considerably wider with olfactory nuances that didn't exist at the time. That is the magic of my profession! But the principle of the dialogue between the flowers is maintained, and it provides the very beauty of *J'adore*.

WW: Was that any different from where you started with *L'Or de J'adore*?

FK: *J'adore* itself was the basis for my inspiration. My entire reflection process came from the genesis of the Eau de Parfum version. *J'adore* is an abstract floral bouquet. You smell flowers but can't tell which they are. Its composition requires an enormous number of raw materials. If flowers are the gold of *J'adore*, to get the purest quality of gold you have to heat it up to so the impurities evaporate. So I mentally envision doing the same for the scent and the formula.

I dived into the extensive list—immersing myself in its richness. Then I trimmed down the profusion. I wanted to define the *J'adore* flowers and maximize them. I simplified the formula to express its quintessence in an unprecedented concentration. This radically streamlined form corresponds to my identity and my style.

WW: How did you turn your focus to gold? What does it symbolize for you? How does it relate to scent? And specifically in this fragrance?

FK: The metaphor for gold appeared immediately and suited my approach perfectly. It was like looking for gold, and I “mined” until I found the quintessence of this iconic house composition. Then, in the same way that metal is heated to retain only its purest parts, I imagined “warming” the Eau de Parfum formula to retain only its most noble aspects and obtain a perfume that was like pure, fluid gold. Flowers are the true gold in *J'adore*!

WW: *L'Or de J'adore* also accentuates the color, the hue of flowers. What made you want to engage with color as well?

FK: My understanding of *J'adore* (the original bouquet) is that it possesses a composition that can easily be compared to pictorial art: In some ways it is like an Impressionist masterpiece, composed of a myriad of floral touches layered upon each other. Rather like a kaleidoscope, or a Pointillist painting.

In my interpretation for *L'Or de J'adore*, I gave it new, rounder, and smoother colors, and I emphasized the pinks and whites, adding a new, more solar light. The miniscule dots have been transformed into pixels and into flowers that are present in overdosed proportions.

WW: When *J'adore* was first created, floral scents were not in fashion. *J'adore* brought something more luminous and cleaner. How does *L'Or de J'adore* push that even further?

FK: The floral bouquet of *J'adore* is profuse and rich. Its unique signature comes from the dialogue within the complexity of the floral bouquet in a clean yet voluptuous way. That's to me the magic of *J'adore*. The dialogue it opens between the flowers is what gives it its unique signature. It is as though *J'adore* had invented an imaginary flower, or rather the very idea of a floral scent.

WW: *L'Or de J'adore* strikes that balance between the contemporary and timeless. Would you say that that is key for any new fragrance? How do you arrive there?

FK: I wanted to capture the “aura of *J'adore*” and turned it into the “gold of *J'adore*.” I dived into the dizzying and heady stylistic exercise of appropriating a flamboyant and contemporary legacy that was nevertheless already timeless. I added my own signature by exploring its quintessence, like a seeker of gold on a quest for the purest, shiniest, and most beautiful form. Here, too, I saw the legacy of the legendary floral bouquet as a field of ultimate expression, a precious bequest that I made mine, with equal parts audacity and humility.

WW: Where do you typically begin when working on a new fragrance?

FK: I always need a name for the perfume (or a code name that is close) to start working, as without that I can't begin to imagine and envisage the olfactory shape that I have to compose. The name encapsulates the entire story. I've worked like that since I started out, 25 years ago! However, sources of inspiration will be completely different as I am the perfumer for the House of Dior, where I engage a dialogue with Christian Dior, his values, and the values of the House of Dior. Whereas at Maison Francis Kurkdjian, it is more of a monologue. I am me, at my own company!

WW: In visiting Grasse and going into Mr. Dior's archives, what were you looking for? What did you find?

FK: Those moments at *La Colle Noire*, in M. Dior's archives, allowed me to understand more about the man, to feel his presence and unprecedented talent. I wanted to catch the soul of the maison, its core values.

WW: We read that you found a seed catalogue of Mr. Dior's mother's that was of particular interest. How so?

FK: This gardening catalogue offers seeds for sale. It is in the archives of the House of Dior. Kim Jones was inspired by it for one of his shows. I demonstrated the love for plants and flowers from Christian Dior, how knowledgeable he was about nature and gardening, and how his love for flowers was sincere and real.

WW: How did Mr. Dior's love and deep knowledge of flowers inspire you to create a rounder expression of the floral notes in *J'adore*?

FK: I am deeply touched by his genuine and sincere love for flowers and nature, which resonates with me. I would like to explain the floral notes of *J'adore* by using the language of film: I tracked forward, then zoomed in. I zoomed in on the flowers, in the sense that I amplified them, maximizing and celebrating them. In my vision, they became hyperbolic, played in a major key. Exaggerating the flowers and making their contours prominent infuses the fragrance with unprecedented opulence and concentration. I wanted a radical approach and an immediate floral sensation. The *J'adore* flowers grab you straight away, without waiting.





The making of J'adore L'Or x Jean Michel-Othoniel, courtesy of Valentin Hennequin for Christian Dior Parfums

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I wanted a radical
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WW: You also spent time listening to archival recordings of Mr. Dior. What did you find there?

FK: We have lots of pictures of M. Dior and some recordings. Adding his voice gives a more intimate touch and brings his soul in a different way, in a more tangible way, maybe.

WW: Do sound and scent ever create a connection for you?

FK: Of course! We can say an odor is high-pitched, or strident, or dull. There are lots of connections between perfume and music.

WW: You've described fragrances as the opposite of fashion—instead of a new silhouette every season, fragrances are meant to be loved and worn for years, decades, even. There's a real loyalty to fragrance. How does that impact your creative process, knowing something will be worn for years, becoming a part of the way a person moves through their everyday?

FK: Perfume can give you strength and confidence because it interacts with your emotions. This is the magic of the scents, and it takes about 18 months to compose, create, and prepare a perfume launch. For L'Or de J'adore, it took about a year, and leaving my signature on it seemed to me to be an introduction that was characteristic of the House of Dior. Indeed, you can see that every artistic director delivers their own, revisited version of the Bar Suit, and I did the same by taking up the great classic of J'adore to make my mark on it—with respect, but also with a lot of audacity, as recommended by Christian Dior!

WW: You knew since you were 14 that you wanted to create perfumes. What made you so sure then? And what keeps you so sure of that now?

FK: I still remember the launch of Poison in 1985: the scent trail in the streets of Paris. My adolescence seems to be bottled inside that perfume. I remember it particularly on the Champs-Élysées. At that very moment, I decided to become a perfumer. It was a true revelation I had at the age of 14, by reading an article about perfumery and perfumers in a magazine. I also watched the movie *Le Sauvage* (1975) with French actors Yves Montand and Catherine Deneuve, where Montand plays the role of a perfumer in a remote Venezuelan island. After that, I fell in love with it and told my parents I wanted to become a perfumer. I knew deep inside that it was my vocation!

WW: You've spoken at length about the future of fragrance. What excites you about the possibilities we'll engage with fragrance in the next 10 to 20 years?

FK: Dior has already embraced the future of fragrance with J'adore Parfum d'eau, the very first highly concentrate Eau de Parfum in a water-based solution. It's a technological breakthrough that has great perspectives.

As we live in a digital world, I believe we will have some innovations that will allow us to finally build a bridge between perfume and IT.

Last, the future is also about sustainability and how we are transforming, reshaping, the olfactive world based on the new challenges we all are facing.



The making of J'adore L'Or x Jean Michel-Othoniel, courtesy of Valentin Hennequin for Christian Dior Parfums



DEREK FORDJOUR

EMBRACING A CERTAIN CREATIVE MATURITY AND
VULNERABILITY IN HIS LATEST SOLO SHOW, "SCORE."

By Katy Donoghue
Portrait by Steve Benisty

Derek Fordjour's multidimensional solo exhibition "SCORE" was on view at Petzel Gallery in New York from November 10 through December 22, 2023. The exhibition brought together new paintings, sculptural installations, kinetic vignettes, an indoor performance space in the round, and a two-floor gallery immersive architectural experience.

The New York-based artist is known for his paintings that are full of color, pattern, texture, and repetition of rhythm. They allude to and feature elements of performance, from musicians to swimmers, gymnasts to jockeys. This latest body of work, as Fordjour shared with *Whitewall* in a recent conversation, is his most vulnerable yet, referencing personal stories and his own journey as an artist.

It may also be the most involved in terms of production, engaging collaboration with actors, builders, dancers, the musician Hannah Mayree of the Black Banjo Reclamation Project, and the choreographer Sidra Bell. Fordjour finds himself in a place where he, always described as a painter, can fully embrace and express the multidisciplinary character of his practice—sculpture, installation, performance, and more.

Fordjour shared with us about what it's like to find himself celebrating a new level of maturity in his creativity, why he always likes to be in the position of learning, and contemplating the act of teaching as a form of love.

WHITEWALL: *What was the starting point for your exhibition of new work at Petzel Gallery, "SCORE"?*

DEREK FORDJOUR: I always respond to space. When I visited the new gallery at Petzel on 25th Street, it just registered in my body. A couple of months later, my brain starts to populate with ideas for the space, and it wasn't much long after that I had a fully baked idea of what I wanted to go where. I had a general framework pretty early.

I'm always turning over content in relation to my works, and I have tons of ideas for shows and paintings that are laying around in my mind. The content that made sense was about where I am right now and the conversation I want to have right now. I try to make shows that are up to the minute on where I am in my life.

WW: *So where was your thinking at?*

DF: I've always wanted to delineate an upper and lower plane inside of a compressed space. So as an architectural challenge, I wanted to create a gallery experience that would take you upstairs and downstairs. I enjoy the idea of moving the body through space. That was one piece, and the other was about creating a kind of arena indoors. We think about arenas and performance spaces as large and outdoors, so to miniaturize that was a formal challenge that was very attractive. And then I knew that I wanted to do more ambitious sculpture as well, and this would be the perfect occasion to do that. So that was the form.

The content that came over a period of months of deliberation is related to what I'm thinking most about on the precipice of turning 50, which I do next year. It is this reflection on life, knowing that you have a little less in the front window than you do the rear window. My son is 25, my dad is almost 80. I've watched family and friends deal with very real illnesses and loss very close to me. I am thinking a lot more about my own mortality and the life I've lived up until now.

And so I wanted to deal with that publicly, and it gave me an occasion to make very personal work that might invite others to make similar reflections in their own lives.

WW: *Work that can bring people in.*

DF: Yes, that's important.

WW: *Making paintings that were more personal, is that a first for you? Did that feel a little bit tapping into some vulnerability you hadn't before?*

DF: Definitely. My paintings deal with performance, and a lot of that is rooted in my own anxiety in performance in all the ways it shows up within my life. I enjoy the remove that painting gives me, where I don't have to actually perform or stand in the space. That distance is a kind of protection, in one way, being able to engage with illusion. The world of painting allows me to take on so many avatars in the figures that I select in my work.

So to make work that is directly pulled from my lived experience, and that is the undeniable source, it does feel a lot more vulnerable. But I also feel that it feels right that at this time I can do that.

WW: *From that more personal space, how do you want viewers to move through the exhibition?*

DF: It's about the total experience. I want to have enough offerings that someone can move through however they choose. I really don't want to dictate that. It's really about making a very honest offering and providing enough potential interaction in the various media that if someone was interested they have many points of entry into the work.

WW: *Can you tell us about the performance space, "Arena," which is a tented space with a packed dirt floor? For the performances that will take place there with dancers, you worked with choreographer Sidra Bell. What was that like?*

DF: I've had a movement piece in mind for a number of years. I wanted to make it enriching for both of us. I wanted the experience of learning choreography or collaborating to have a direct tie to my studio practice and the works that I'm making here. The point at which we began our collaboration was very intentional because we were starting a piece, and at the same time I was starting to make paintings and sculpture.

From our first conversation, it was such a refreshing process. The idea that Sidra Bell's, who is fantastic, her tool is her body and the bodies of others. Where she holds certain anxieties is physical and it's in the body, where a lot of my work and my anxiety happens psychologically, emotionally. So it was a wonderful alternate form to observe starting a creative process. It puts me in the position of a student to learn, and I think that's something that I find to be a great privilege and is something I enjoy.

The piece is entitled "Arena," and it's a collaboration between myself, Sidra, the wonderful ensemble of five dancers, and the musician Hannah Mayree of the Black Banjo Reclamation Project. The arena will be performed in twice daily at no cost. The piece is 29 minutes long. It is an intimate experience that can seat about 75, which is really generous and very tightly related to lots of the content in the show. It is a sculptural space that has three-tiered wooden seating structure in the round, enclosed in a tent, with a packed dirt floor on which the performers will perform. I'm interested in the sounds, sights, and smells that that can invoke.

WW: *Touching upon this word you used, "generosity." Why is that important for you to offer that to the viewer?*

DF: I'm learning and growing with each show. And I think from the very beginning of me exhibiting, I was interested in installation. I'm a painter, but I'm very moved by objects, I'm very moved by theatrical performance, I'm very moved by acts of creativity. This is the most honest and full expression that I can offer that reflects my internal motivations, thinking, obsessions, and curiosities. It really is more about, what's my most full expression? It turns out that it is a generous offering, but I think that's in comparison to what we've become accustomed to with gallery shows.



Laetitia Lumbroso and Géraldine Guyot-Arnault, portrait courtesy of DESTREE.



Derek Fordjour, *Flack*, 2023, courtesy of the artist and Petzel Gallery.

WW: *In your painting, there is so much movement and even depiction of performance. So right there is an obvious connection between the painting, sculpture, installation, and performance.*

DF: Performance is rich terrain for me to explore lots of my concerns. I had these separations where I considered my interest in theater or acting or filmmaking was a prior stage in my life. When in fact, I think what's more accurate and what's more honest is that I allow them to all exist on the same plane. I'm now at a point and I have a team that provides wonderful support and understanding for the vision.

WW: *Can you walk us through the other installation, the multifloor "Wunderkammer"?*

DF: "Wunderkammer" means "cabinet of curiosities" in German. When you enter that installation, you ascend to an upper level that is really posh and evocative of luxury. It's very well designed and well lit, and in each of the recesses of the corridor live sculptures made specifically for this show. When you have completed the corridor, you end up in a room with two dioramas that are kinetic sculptures: One is of rocking racehorses and the other are Black cyclists that go in and out of the frame. Hopefully, that is a magical moment.

After you spend time in that room, then you will descend into the basement area that is designed to look like you have entered the back of the gallery or backstage—somewhere you shouldn't be. You're kind of looking for the exit and on the way out you encounter an industrial cage wherein two actors are powering the dioramas you just saw upstairs. That is somewhat of an institutional critique wherein the top levels are more manicured and well maintained, and the sublevels out of view are where you see labor in its raw form.

WW: *How were you thinking about the role sculpture plays in this show and in your practice?*

DF: I've been known as a painter, and I've always made and presented sculptures. I now have the ability to really dig into sculpture more substantively. Sculpture is a way for me to get closer to the poetics of my content. They are highly cathartic, and they feel very honest.

There are some pieces that include crushed glass, coal, dyed wood. I'm also working with ceramics and porcelain, which is its own universe. I'm learning so much about underglazes and firing.

WW: *Have you liked working in ceramic?*

DF: I have. I mean, it's humbling, because it's such a sensitive material and it's also very processed-based. As I mature, thinking about how my stage in life now is relevant, I don't think I had the patience for the process that many of these works require in order to be good. I think on some level—and I haven't thought about this before—this show is a celebration of a certain kind of creative maturity, where I can now follow the steps and sequences and be patient and see things evolve.

WW: *And what can you tell us about the new paintings on view? The more personal stories we'll see there?*

DF: Right now I'm working on a painting called *Confidence Man*. I'm really attracted to the first three letters of the word "confidence." It's of a guy who is really dapper, holding tons of balloons for sale. It is a simple presentation, but for me, there was a long part of my life—probably in my thirties—where I was just selling hot air. It was all appearance and I loved my words so much, and they were backed by so little. It's a very satisfying painting to make because it's a way to look at myself and to celebrate the fact that I'm at a different place. And to give myself some sort of caution, that maybe this is a guy that I don't want to be, the guy that I was. But the guy that I am is also at peace with him and can kind of laugh at him now.

There is another painting called *Swimming Lessons*. In our family, we lost a very dear friend who babysat my oldest brother and was a friend to all of us. His name was Russell, and when Russell passed, my older brother Ike said five words over and over. He said, "Russell taught me to swim." And that's what he would say in these moments of reflection. "Man, Russell taught me to swim."

Russell had a PhD in philosophy, in theology. We had so many conversations as adults. For twenty-five years we've been talking to Russell, and for Ike to say repeatedly "Russell taught me to swim" prompted me to investigate a little more around the idea of swimming.

I had done some sort of nautical works, and I had a book or two about the disparities in access to public pools in Black communities and how that traces back to integration and many communities draining the pool and that kind of thing. But I was really thinking about the transfer that can happen in teaching. That what you can gift someone by giving instruction at a critical stage in development, it's not something we take stock of, it doesn't go on a shelf, there is no trophy, but it's embodied. I was thinking about the empathy in our bodies. It made me think about all the gifts that we might possess and carry that we don't give sight to. So my brother's grieving was a way to direct me to the marvel that happens particularly with Black kids learning to swim and how empowering that can be. It's a straightforward painting of multiple groups in a pool getting lessons, but what I'm thinking about is that transference in tutelage that's a form of love.

WW: *And thinking about how we age, that you can still learn. But not everyone feels confident to be a novice in something. That makes me think of you taking on something like ceramics.*

DF: That's very true to who I am and probably the position that I'm most comfortable in. I'm skeptical of the expert. And so to be constantly learning, it does help me believe in the notion of progress, because development allows you to see various stages of growth. I don't know if it's my strategy for doing life, that I can continue to learn things, but I think as a creative it definitely is part of the spark that gets me going.

I'm showing my hand. You have all of my thinking. The paintings are these kinds of annotations to everything else, like pages out of my journal. I came to New York to be the next great painter, and what I thought that looked like was the smell of turpentine and old paint and dirty rags and some fantasy of a British painter in the dark. I tried that for years, and I was miserable. I worked very slow, I was tortured.

So now to have found a form that has spontaneity and invention and irreverence and imperfections, I really celebrate the arrival at this language. I don't really need every painting to be a masterpiece. I found that pressure to be limiting and impossible. Paintings are a part of my creative life. But my life is not defined by the merits of one painting or another. And hopefully, in this new arrangement that I've arrived at for awhile, I'm able to make a great painting. So the joy that hopefully you can experience in creation is what gets me on the frequency that allows me to be relaxed and joyous and honest and truthful about the works I'm making.

I deal with a lot of dark things in my work, and I'm probably a dark character, so my work is cathartic. But the act of painting, rather than the content of the work, deserves to have a component of enjoyment or pleasure.



Derek Fordjour, *CONFIDENCE MAN*, 2023, courtesy of the artist and Petzel Gallery.

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**THIS SHOW IS A
CELEBRATION OF A
CERTAIN KIND OF
CREATIVE MATURITY**
”



Derek Fordjour, *Swimming Lessons*, 2023, courtesy of the artist and Petzel Gallery.

LAST PAGE



Wolfgang Tillmans, *Icestorm*, 2001, courtesy of the artist, David Zwirner, New York / Hong Kong, Galerie Buchholz, Berlin / Cologne, Maureen Paley, London.

Wolfgang Tillmans's "To look without fear" will be on view at SFMOMA from November 11, 2023, to March 3, 2024.

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