

Fashion and Art: Diverse Possibilities in Creation

Bingrou Chen

Guangdong Peizheng College, Guangzhou 510830, China

Abstract: In contemporary times, the bond between fashion and art has grown increasingly profound. Designers are eager to showcase their individual artistic pursuits by employing fashion design either as a vehicle for art or as a means of artistic expression. Artists also have started to embrace the potential of transforming fashion into a tool for artistic creation. This paper endeavors to explore the interconnection between fashion and art. It does so by integrating historical records and the insights of theoretical scholars, and by incorporating the creative practices of fashion designers and artists from diverse cultural backgrounds. The aim is to analyze the feasibility and rationality of "considering fashion as a form or means of artistic creation", and to delve into its existential value.

Keywords: Art and Fashion Integration, Fashion Design, Artistic Expression, Conceptual Fashion Design, Creation.

1. Introduction

For centuries, fashion has often been criticized as superficial or devoid of deeper meaning. This perception largely stems from its emphasis on transient changes in appearance and its profit-driven nature, which prioritizes commercial success over substantive content. Consequently, fashion is rarely regarded as a subject worthy of serious intellectual engagement, let alone compared to the realm of "sacred art". However, a closer examination of the creative processes and cultural significance of fashion design reveals a more nuanced and meaningful dimension. By exploring the motivations of designers and the messages embedded within their works, it becomes evident that fashion design extends beyond mere ephemeral visual displays and commercial labels. In the contemporary context, fashion design has increasingly been recognized as a legitimate form of artistic expression, embodying the imaginations, reflections, and aspirations of designers and artists alike. Despite this growing recognition, the intricate relationship between art and fashion design remains underexplored in academic discourse. This paper aims to explore this relationship, as well as the potential and rationale for their mutual integration and promotion, through an analysis of cases where designers use fashion design as a form of artistic expression and artists incorporate fashion design into their artistic creations.

2. The Intricate Intertwining of Fashion and Art

In the categorization of professional traits, fashion has consistently been placed within the domain of design. The reason lies in the fact that, unlike artistic creation, fashion designers are unable to entirely ignore external influences and concentrate solely on fulfilling their personal "urge for self-expression." Instead, they must adapt to the sensory and psychological demands of their consumer demographics regarding fashion. Put simply, it is challenging for fashion designers to have full control over the creative process. Unlike in art, fashion cannot pursue unadulterated and extreme ideological manifestations. This is one of the key factors leading most artists to distance art from fashion. In their eyes, fashion is shallow. Moreover, the connection between fashion and business is also scorned by artists. This

disdain has two sources. On one hand, it springs from the sense of superiority that artistic creators possess. On the other hand, it stems from their eagerness to protect their creative autonomy from external interference. From this vantage point, it is entirely rational for people to classify fashion within the field of design. In relation to the creative impetus and objective of design in the traditional sense, fashion has minimal association with art. This is because the objectivity, service - orientation, functionality, and commercial viability emphasized in design are precisely what pure artistic creation vehemently rejects.

Theoretically speaking, the driving force behind design originates from identifying the needs of others. Its objective is to provide service or meet these needs, thereby generating commercial value. In essence, design begins with the aim of serving others and concludes with the same end. This obliges designers, when exerting their creative initiatives, to meticulously consider objective factors such as the demands and opinions of their target audiences. Moreover, they must evaluate the success of their designs based on the commercial value these designs accrue in the market. Thus, for design, functionality and effectiveness are essential. As Li Yanzhu, a professor of art at the Academy of Arts and Design, Tsinghua University, put it in *Introduction to Art and Design*, "Design is a creative undertaking through which humans transform existing entities, bringing about change, enhancement, innovation, and development. It represents a process in which designers formulate and solve problems, incorporating all goal - oriented and value - directed human activities."^[1] Evidently, design is intrinsically goal - oriented, striving to achieve objective value rather than being centered around the designer's self - expression.

Pure artistic creation is scarcely influenced by external factors. Its driving force and objective, to a large extent, are to satisfy the creator's personal impulse for self - expression. Through artistic creation, the creator can express their imagination, thoughts, pursuit of aesthetics, or understanding and perception of the world. These aspects are highly subjective, varying significantly from one individual to another. It is extremely difficult to appraise such works based on others' notions of usefulness or futility because artistic creation does not place objective functions or values at the forefront. The primary entity it aims to satisfy is the creator themselves, with those who appreciate the work coming

second. The creator's sole concern is how to convey their thoughts and ideas through appropriate means. Questions such as who the appreciators are, how many of them there are, and why they understand and resonate with the work lie beyond the creator's sphere of consideration.

In fact, art appreciation is frequently influenced by uncontrollable elements such as individual aesthetic disparities, knowledge levels, and personal experiences. As Ernst Hans Josef Gombrich, a British art historian, put it in the preface of *The Story of Art*, "Actually I do not think that there are any wrong reasons for liking a statue or a picture. Someone may like a landscape painting because it reminds him of home, or a portrait because it reminds him of a friend. There is nothing wrong with that." [2] These factors are beyond the control of both creators and appreciators. In other words, both the creation and appreciation of art are subjective endeavors, placing greater emphasis on ideological exploration. This renders the creation of artworks more like a process where the creator transforms what they have witnessed, thought, and felt into something visible and tangible, in search of resonance. It may lack an explicit purpose and is not involved in worldly value judgments. Consequently, the commercial value of a work in circulation cannot be employed as a yardstick for evaluating its artistic merit.

Considering what has been discussed before, design and art seemingly occupy two polar extremes within the realm of creation. Design emphasizes the comprehension and transformation of objective elements. It advocates that creation should be oriented towards serving others, generating useful value, and actively pursuing commercial viability. Conversely, art places emphasis on the exploration and articulation of subjective thoughts. It advocates that creation should be centered around self - gratification, often scorning the pursuit of commercial value and functionality. Nevertheless, through the deliberations of relevant modern theorists and commentators, as well as an examination of the creative development trajectories of design and art, it becomes evident that demarcating a clear - cut boundary between design and art proves to be quite challenging. This is particularly true within the domain of fashion design, which is highly contingent upon the creator's personal aesthetic inclinations and requirements for creative expression. In fact, the demarcation between art and design in fashion design has never been clearly defined from the very outset.

American anthropologist Ted Polhemus, in his analysis of the development and evolution of fashion, categorized the history of Western fashion into three distinct stages: the traditional, modern, and post - modern. The traditional stage extended from pre - history to the Middle Ages. During this era, people's clothing was completely dictated by customs. There was no such concept as fashion; instead, only traditional costumes prevailed. According to his view, fashion emerged during the Renaissance. Since then, over the past several centuries, fashion and art have been intertwined, albeit with varying patterns of connection. From the Renaissance to the early 19th century, the relationship between art and fashion was primarily sustained through one - way communication, with painters shaping the figures in portraits. In other words, artists regarded fashion as a technique for character portrayal. In the mid - 19th century, the advent of the first women's fashion designer, Charles Frederick Worth, bestowed a certain degree of initiative upon fashion in artistic creation^[3]. In 1871, when Worth commenced independently

managing the clothing store he had founded with his Swedish partner Boberg on the Rue de la Paix in Paris, he deliberately strived to manage his creations in a manner similar to that of an artist and build his personal brand into a star - like status. He designed a small fabric - made label, embroidered his name on it, and then sewed it onto the clothes, effectively signing his works. This act transformed the clothes he designed into something akin to artworks, and thus, a clothing brand was birthed^[4]. Subsequently, Worth launched a new fashion collection annually and introduced the concept that fashion required regular updates. From that point forward, fashion design became a medium for designers to exhibit their creativity and convey their understanding and pursuit of beauty. Fashion designers began to be highly esteemed, much like artists. As Karin Schacknat, a Dutch fashion critic, put it in *The Art of Mix - and - Match*, "If a women's fashion designer cannot be successfully regarded as an artist, he can only be a dressmaker. It's a binary situation with no room for ambiguity."^[3]

In conclusion, fashion, traditionally classified within the design domain, has had a convoluted and intertwined relationship with art since its inception. The emergence of fashion design as an independent entity from tailoring is attributable to the significant artistic component embedded in its creative process. This unique blend positions the fashion industry, with fashion design at its core, in a liminal space between art and design. Fashion's creation mirrors art in its reliance on the creator's subjective will, yet it also aligns with design in making concessions to objective factors. It deftly balances the creator's self - expression with the satisfaction of the audience's physical and psychological needs. While resistant to complete commercial market dominance, it actively explores the commercial potential of its creations. In essence, fashion defies strict categorization into either the realm of art or design. Its nature is a dynamic interplay of artistic expression and design - driven functionality, highlighting the blurred boundaries between the two disciplines.

3. Artistic Expression in Fashion Design

In contrast to art's ambiguous stance towards fashion, fashion's position on art is far more explicit. The vast majority of fashion designers hold art in high regard. They are keen to glean creative inspiration from artists and their works, and they also embrace the recognition of their own creations in an artistic guise. Consequently, during the design process, they frequently integrate elements of artistic expression. Some designers endeavor to transplant artworks directly into their fashion designs or engage in direct cross - disciplinary collaborations with artists. Others embed the content they aim to convey within the creative themes or processes of their design works and then present them to the audience in the form of conceptual designs. The former approach transforms fashion design into yet another medium for artistic expression, while the latter directly converts fashion design into a means of artistic expression.

3.1. Fashion as a Carrier of Artistic Expression

The form of cross - border integration between design and art, aiming to achieve artistic expression within fashion design, emerged at an early stage, and its means of expression are relatively straightforward. As far back as around the 1930s,

the renowned Italian fashion designer Elsa Schiaparelli garnered widespread acclaim within the fashion industry through her cross - border collaborations with artists such as Salvador Dalí and Jean Cocteau. Dalí successively crafted for Schiaparelli designs like "cracked" fabrics, a lobster motif adorning a white silk evening gown, and a velvet handbag shaped like a telephone with a gold - colored keyboard. Jean Cocteau, too, created romantic embroidery designs for Schiaparelli. These designs, birthed from collaboration, communication, and the sharing of inspiration with artists, rapidly set Schiaparelli's creations apart from those of her competitor, Gabrielle Bonheur Chanel, endowing her with a substantial competitive edge^[4]. Her collaborative works with Dalí, including *The Lobster Dress*^[5], *The Tears Dress*^[6], *The Skeleton Dress*^[7], and *The Shoe Hat*^[8], were subsequently appraised as her most celebrated masterpieces.

Following Schiaparelli's precedent, the viability of cross - border creative integration between design and art appeared to be firmly established. Artworks spanning diverse styles and genres commenced serving as wellsprings of inspiration for fashion design. Notably, Pop Art, which emerged in the mid - 1950s in the United Kingdom, was highly esteemed within the realm of fashion design, owing to its vivid visual impact and popular, uncomplicated modes of expression. Numerous fashion designers, including Gianni Versace, Franco Moschino, and Jean - Charles, marquis de Castelbajac, released fashion collections inspired by Pop Art works. The forms of artistic expression they employed were typically simple yet exuberant: directly converting paintings into printed patterns on fabrics or borrowing certain elements or color symbols from paintings with distinctive styles. For instance, in the Spring - Summer 1991 collection, Versace emblazoned gowns with a composite image of Andy Warhol's silk - screen prints. Warhol, one of the founders of Pop Art, had used Marilyn Monroe's visage in those prints^[9]. In the same year's Spring - Summer collection, Moschino directly transposed the painting *GOOD MORNING DARLING* by American Pop artist Roy Fox Lichtenstein onto women's suits^[10]. Certainly, some designers or fashion brands endeavor to make fashion convey art in a more understated manner or to incorporate relatively subdued forms of art. Nevertheless, given their need to draw inspiration from art, it is inescapable to reveal the connection between the two to the audience. Thus, it becomes arduous to conceal the artistic expression too profoundly within their works.

Although this creative approach of directly transforming fashion into a vehicle for artistic expression might seem less ingenious, as the wellspring of the direct intersection and collaboration between fashion and art, it has incontrovertibly rendered the connection between fashion and art increasingly robust and frequent. As American artist and critic Jonathon Keats remarked in the article *Sorry, Dalí. The Boldest Surrealist Was A Fashion Designer Named Elsa Schiaparelli*, "Schiaparelli created work that made the distinction between design and art irrelevant."^[11] Subsequent to this, the professional demarcation between art and fashion took yet another stride towards being blurred.

3.2. Fashion as a Means of Artistic Expression

Another mode of the intersection and collaboration between fashion and art involves directly employing fashion as a means of artistic creation. The connection between them is more implicit, yet the information conveyed is more profound. In the realm of fashion design, this creative

approach primarily manifests in the form of conceptual design, which emerged around the 1980s. Susannah Frankel, who has served as a fashion editor for numerous authoritative magazines and media outlets such as *The Independent* and *The Guardian*, stated in "The birth, death and re-birth of conceptual fashion", "Conceptual" first emerged in the 1980s, referring to assertive and even somewhat provocative clothing. She pointed out that the works of three Japanese designers, Issey Miyake, Rei Kawakubo, and Yohji Yamamoto, were of a conceptual nature. The article further explored the relationship among "conceptual", fashion, and artistic expression, along with the significance of conceptual design, through the creative concepts of the Maison Martin Margiela^[12].

In this type of design creation, designers prioritize the conveyance of ideas over the pursuit of commercial value. Their creations no longer merely concentrate on visual alterations but strive to express personal ideas, thoughts, and insights within their works, much like in artistic creation. For them, fashion creation is more akin to a process of seeking resonance, and the most rewarding feedback to their works does not lie in material gains but in the understanding and recognition of the audience. Issey Miyake, renowned as the "Picasso of the fashion world," has explicitly stated that he does not desire to be addressed as an artist. Nevertheless, this does not impede the yearning for and pursuit of art that are manifested within his design creations. Miyake has engaged in collaborations on numerous occasions with Cai Guoqiang, a Chinese pyrotechnic performance artist; Yasumasa Morimura, a contemporary Japanese artist; Nobuyoshi Araki, a photographer; and Tim Hawkinson, an American artist. He initiated the "Guest Artists" series, inviting artists to execute their creative works by utilizing his modular pleated clothing as a medium^[13]. What he is most celebrated for are his "Pleats, Please"^[14] and "A - POC" (A Piece of Cloth) series^[15]. The former disrupted the hegemony of polyester fabric in the Parisian high - fashion realm during that era and shattered the convention of fashion catering solely to the elite. It realized Miyake's ambition of crafting clothing that was not only practical but also met the demands of modern minimalist style within an egalitarian society. The latter nearly defied the entire production and business paradigm of the fashion industry. He employed computer - controlled machinery for weaving, allowing the clothing to be completed concurrently with fabric production. Users merely had to cut the desired garment from the fabric, obviating the necessity for machine - stitching of seams^[13]. At first glance, these two series of works may not appear to have an overt connection to art. However, when one manages to transcend the commercial context and thoroughly explore the impetus behind the creator's work, it is not arduous to unearth the artistic expressions concealed within these fashion designs. They encapsulate Miyake's comprehension and contemplations on matters such as the purpose and value of fashion design, the relationship between the human body and clothing, the connection between clothing and art, and the significance of materials and technology in the creative process. Additionally, they embody his affirmative perspective on the world: "I am inclined to focus more on things that can be created rather than destroyed, and those that can engender beauty and joy."^[13] When juxtaposed with the actual functional value, the concepts imparted by Miyake through his works are patently more poignant. Consequently, fashion critics and researchers invariably exhibit a greater inclination to depict him as an

artist.

Rei Kawakubo, a Japanese fashion designer contemporaneous with Issey Miyake, is also proficient in expressing art while operating under the mantle of a fashion designer. Similar to Miyake, she was initially averse to the "artist" label foisted upon her by the outside world. However, in recent years, she herself has come to view fashion as a form of art. "When fashion is impelled by creativity, I believe it can be termed an art form."^[16] "As long as something is unprecedented, I have no objection to people referring to it as art." Andrew Bolton, who was then the director of the British Museum and the curator of the Anna Wintour Costume Center at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, stated in *Rei Kawakubo/Comme des Garçons: Art of the In - Between*, a book co-written with Kawakubo, that ever since her debut in Paris in 1981, she (Kawakubo) has effaced the boundaries between art and fashion, thereby transforming the traditional interpretations of beauty, identity, and the body^[16].

As far as I am concerned, Kawakubo's creations bear more resemblance to "sculptures affixed to the exterior of the human body." She pays no heed to the requirements of human body structure for clothing - wearing, nor is she inclined to enhance and mold the beauty of the human body form through clothing, as is the case in Western classical design. She merely ensures that her clothing can establish a connection with the human body; in other words, it can be worn by a person. Regarding the method of wearing, the wearing effect, and the wearer's sensations, these do not serve as constraints on the scope for her to exercise her subjective initiative. In her "most gratifying" work, the Spring - Summer 1997 collection titled *Body meets dress, dress meets body*, Kawakubo unreservedly voiced her dissent against the narrow - minded definition of human body beauty in the conventional fashion sphere^[17]. She randomly stuffed cotton into the clothing, completely disrupting the wearer's original body curves. Through these peculiar structures, she granted the wearer's figure greater "freedom." Evidently, in Kawakubo's view, beauty is mutable and ought not to be restricted by a fixed standard. Her "eccentric" works are simply her means of presenting to the world her personal perception of "beauty." This does not stem from a rebellious or negative mindset. In her own words, "I earnestly desire to endeavor to alter the standards of beauty in a positive manner."^[16] Perhaps founded on such a design philosophy, her designs function more as a medium of artistic expression, with each series of works embodying her aspiration to convey her ideas.

Following the challenge posed by Japanese designers such as Issey Miyake and Rei Kawakubo to the fashion order established by Paris, the world's fashion capital at that time, with their distinctive creative methodologies and expressive content, "conceptual expression" and "ideological output" gradually assumed greater significance within the European fashion design realm. They even evolved into impetuses for designers' creativity. Designers commenced to consistently convey to their audiences their reflections on fashion behavior, perspectives on contemporary hot - button issues, or musings on problems encountered in daily life through the release of fashion design works. For instance, Martin Margiela, the "maestro among designers" hailing from Belgium, has repeatedly manifested his focus on "ordinary objects" in life and his contemplations on the essence of fashion creation through his works. His creations could be fashioned from broken porcelain shards, playing cards, or even fabrics sourced from old dress forms and discarded plastic bags. For

him, the selection of clothing materials serves the purpose of concept expression, and there are no limitations to this scope. The value of fashion design resides in discerning and applying the value of objects^[18]. Lee Alexander McQueen, the British design prodigy, was fervent about channeling his emotions regarding certain social phenomena through his creations. He once incorporated hair into his designs to imply the tragic plight of prostitutes during the Victorian era. He also employed cigarette butts to create irregular holes on the clothing and attached them to the bottom - wear as adornments to convey his indignation towards the *Highland Rape* in the 19th century. In his later collection, he audaciously explored the rights stripped from women and their counter - offensives^[19].

From Issey Miyake to Lee Alexander McQueen, the significance of artistic expression within fashion design has become increasingly conspicuous. In fact, within the evaluation criteria of certain critics, the "concept" carries far greater weight than the functional value that fashion design works inherently ought to possess. Today, people's requirements of fashion have long surpassed merely visual pleasure and physical - comfort - oriented creative needs. Instead, they aspire to convey their viewpoints and stances through the selection of fashion design works. For both designers and consumers alike, the expression of concepts has already evolved into an essential and inalienable element within fashion works.

4. Fashion Language in Artistic Creation

In 1917, Marcel Duchamp, a trailblazer of modern art, transformed a urinal purchased from a hardware store into *Fountain* and presented it as an artwork in an art gallery. Since then, the creative methodologies and values of art have been extensively challenged and questioned. Before this landmark event, the idea of blending artistic creation with commercial products was scarcely considered. Artists never envisioned that design, which is primarily focused on pursuing commercial value, could become a vehicle for artistic creation. Even the use of industrially - produced materials in traditional artistic creation was met with skepticism. For instance, in the late 18th century in the UK, tin or copper paint tubes were introduced to store watercolor paints. However, it was not until the 1830s - 1840s that oil paint tubes became available on the market. Their emergence was regarded as a menace to the painter's manual tradition, as it disrupted the long - standing practice of artists personally selecting and grinding materials^[20]. After Duchamp's experimental artistic endeavor triggered extensive public debate at that time, the demarcation between art and design, from the art perspective, also appeared to be showing signs of blurring. Some artists commenced to explore the potential of permitting and embracing design, including fashion design, as a means of artistic expression.

Andy Warhol, who had long advocated that art should be intertwined with money, was among the vanguard artists to pioneer and practice using fashion design as a medium for artistic expression. From 1966 - 1967, following the "disposable paper - dress trend" that emerged in the mid - 1960s, Warhol emblazoned his most influential work, Campbell's Soup Cans, onto a dress crafted from cellulose and cotton paper, thereby creating The Souper Dress. The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa described this

collection as follows: "This iconic garment is an excellent example of 1960s youth fashion inspired by the Pop Art movement. The dress is meant to be 'throwaway' fashion in that it was made of a type of paper. Its design was inspired by Andy Warhol's classic artwork featuring the repeating image of the label from a Campbell's Soup can."^[21]

Today, artists no longer grapple with the question of whether their creative approaches can be linked to commercial design. Instead, they can direct more of their focus towards exploring creative content and articulating their perspectives. Using fashion as a language for artistic creation is no longer a cause for astonishment. From 2015 - 2016, the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in the Netherlands, in collaboration with the Shanghai Suzhou Creek Bay Planning Exhibition Center in China and the OCT Art & Design Gallery in Shenzhen, held an exhibition entitled *The Future of Fashion is Now*. This exhibition presented fashion designs to the audience under the guise of artworks. Through the exhibition's eponymous publication, *The Future of Fashion is Now*, the artists' thought processes during the creative journey were unveiled to readers.

For instance, after the Chinese experimental artist Wang Lei twisted wet toilet paper into threads and wove them into various - shaped clothing, giving rise to the Hand - woven Toilet Paper series, he sought to convey additional messages through the same creative approach. In his 2009 work, Fabrication No.3, he utilized the pages of a Chinese - English dictionary to fashion two "dragon robes" reminiscent of those worn by Qing emperors or high - ranking officials. By marrying the absolute authority associated with emperors and high - ranking officials with the ever - collating nature of dictionaries, his work encapsulated a political metaphor imbued with the author's personal musings^[22]. The German artist Birgit Dieker perpetuated the tradition of 1960s sculptors who began using unconventional materials such as latex, cashmere, fabric, and hair in their creations. She endeavored to source inexpensive and ephemeral materials for her sculptural works to tell tales about the human body. In her works *Arme* and *Rosie*, the materials Birgit employed were chiefly old clothes donated by others and those she unearthed in second - hand markets. She first deconstructed the clothes into fabrics, then stacked these fabrics layer upon layer to form the desired shape. Subsequently, she sliced open the shaped form, revealing the internal structure of the sculpture and the diverse materials at the cut, enabling the audience to sense the concealed, sorrowful wounds beneath the seemingly perfect exterior^[22]. As is evident from this exhibition, there are numerous artists who employ the language of fashion to tell artistic narratives. For these artists, fashion can serve as both a material and a creative means, no different from traditional painting pigments and forms of expression.

"With the legitimization of Duchamp's readymades, a very different situation was seemingly made legitimate, a situation about which, I believe, one should never stop wondering and perhaps worrying: you can now be an artist without being either a painter, or a sculptor, or a composer, or a writer, or an architect—an artist at large."^[23] Undoubtedly, the definition of contemporary art is undergoing a transformation. The form of ideological expression is gradually superseding the level of refined craftsmanship as a crucial criterion for artistic value. People are seldom moved by a hyper - realistic painting that is as lifelike as a photograph, but are often astounded by works that are ingeniously conceived in terms of material

selection or form design. In this context, if the language of fashion can assist artists in better expressing their thoughts, then there is no rationale for art to rebuff fashion.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, whether it is designers' attempts to incorporate artistic expressions into their fashion designs or artists' use of fashion to achieve specific expressive effects, these are positive explorations within their respective creative fields. Such endeavors not only broaden the professional boundaries of each field but also open up more possibilities for their creation and development. Fashion is not necessarily superficial, nor does art have to solely pursue the esoteric. Only by accepting and inspiring each other can they expand the paths of their respective development.

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