

Dirty Looks

25 September 2025 – 25 January 2026

Desire and
Decay
in Fashion

Index

UPSTAIRS

Hussein Chalayan:	
Future Archaeology, 1993–2002	7
Nostalgia of Mud	11
Romantic Ruins	19
Spectres of Dirt	25
Stains as Ornament	35
Leaky Bodies	41
Glittering Debris	47
Ma Ke: The Earth	56

DOWNSTAIRS

Elemental Creation	59
Alice Potts	63
Solitude Studios	65
Elena Velez	67
Michaela Stark	69
Paolo Carzana	71
Yaz XL	73
Fashioning Excess	75
Yuima Nakazato: Dust to Dust	82
IAMISIGO: Of Land and Body	86

Acknowledgements	92
Events	97

Dirty Looks: Desire and Decay in Fashion

The human desire to reconnect with the earth – a romantic longing or ‘nostalgia of mud’ – finds many expressions, as these pairs of rubber wellington boots owned by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and London’s supermodel Kate Moss exemplify. Spending time in nature, whether on horseback or trawling through the muddy fields of Worthy Farm at Glastonbury, is often seen as a welcome antidote to our sanitised and digital lifestyles.

Fashion has long been characterised by glamorous and perfect surfaces that will not tolerate any form of ‘dirt’, defined by anthropologist Mary Douglas as ‘matter out of place’. However, over the past fifty years, forms of both real and fake dirt have infiltrated and decorated fashion, symbolising rebelliousness, romanticism and decay as well as concepts of transience, spirituality and regeneration.

Dirty Looks explores the many ways in which fashion has embraced ‘dirty’ aesthetics, from the poetic and the political to the subversive and humorous. The exhibition traces an ongoing nostalgia of mud, from ancient landscapes such as the bog to new horizons where a spiritual connection to the earth is expressed through

garments. Examining the influence of decolonial attitudes and indigenous perspectives, it also demonstrates what alternative practices – from upcycled materials and repurposed deadstock to regenerated textiles and reinterpretations of natural resources – could offer the industry.

Fashion, as a deeply meaningful cultural practice of adornment, is also the third most polluting industry in the world. By taking a 'dirty look' at fashion, we might begin to reckon with what this says about our relationship to the earth, salvaging the connections eroded by industrialisation and colonialism.

Personalised Hunter wellington
boots belonging to Kate Moss
c. 2000

KATE MOSS

Wellington boots from the
wardrobe of Queen Elizabeth II
c. 1960

Lent by His Majesty the King

Upstairs

Hussein Chalayan: Future Archaeology, 1993–2002

The work of Turkish Cypriot designer Hussein Chalayan offers a deeply poetic introduction to fashion's relationship with the earth and the dirt it produces. The process of burying and exhuming clothes, often with metal filings, is one Chalayan began for his 1993 Central Saint Martins graduate collection, *The Tangent Flows*. This process became characteristic of his early design methods, where garments carried the traces of an event. In *Temporary Interference* (Spring/Summer 1995), a dress coated with copper filings was buried near the Thames, creating an intensely pigmented, alchemically transformed green garment.

He returned to the practice of burial in 2001, addressing themes of time and mutability. In *Map Reading* (Autumn/Winter 2001), each look was viewed as a journey to the next, gradually transforming classic garments and culminating in four buried pieces. Soft chiffon came to resemble petrified wood after burial, while tarnished and corroded sequins suggested the ravages of time.

Finally, in *Medea* (Spring/Summer 2002), Chalayan scrambled the idea of linear time by imagining 'a wish or a curse that casts the garment and its wearer in a time warp through historical periods, like a sudden tumble through the sediments of an archaeological dig.' This resulted in looks made from multiple layers of fabric, which incorporated buried and degraded elements.

All works courtesy of Hussein Chalayan

1–2 Hussein Chalayan
Temporary Interference
Spring/Summer 1995

3 Hussein Chalayan
Map Reading
Autumn/Winter 2001

4 Hussein Chalayan *The Tangent Flows* Central Saint Martins Graduate Collection 1993

Hussein Chalayan's 1993 graduate collection, *The Tangent Flows*, was based on a story he created in which followers of the rationalist philosopher René Descartes threw iron filings at, and then murdered and buried, the supporters of an imaginary female philosopher who sought to incorporate Eastern philosophy into Western thinking.

On the label of this jerkin, Chalayan included a poem: 'They threw iron filings / on to the dancers to / confuse them, and many / violently shouted to / overcome the music. The / show was described as / an "amusing catastrophe"'.

5–6 Hussein Chalayan *Medea* Spring/Summer 2002

7 Hussein Chalayan
Map Reading
Autumn/Winter 2001

VIDEO

Medea runway footage
2000

Excerpts, 04:25 min
Courtesy of Hussein Chalayan

Nostalgia of Mud

The phrase 'nostalgia of mud' was first coined by French playwright Émile Auger in 1855 and popularised by American writer Tom Wolfe in his 1970 article 'Radical Chic' for New York magazine. It described a sensibility whereby those in industrialised societies longed to associate themselves with the rural and rustic, or what modernity and colonialism had labelled as 'primitive'.

In 1982, Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood used Nostalgia of Mud as the title of their Autumn/Winter collection. McLaren intended the collection to show how 'the roots of our culture lay in primitive societies'. This was depicted via a transhistorical, global mixture of references including ancient Grecian togas, cowboy-inspired sheepskins and the appropriation of forms of traditional Latin American dress.

The collection typified an outlook that would continue throughout the avant-garde fashion of the 1990s and 2000s, where 'dirt' symbolised ways of life perceived as more authentic and in tune with the natural world. Today, greater sensitivity is shown to the romanticisation of traditional cultural forms of dress. A nostalgia of mud remains, however, in the evocation of natural landscapes and folkloric motifs as a form of rebellion against mass-produced fashion. Amid the increasing digitisation and

dematerialisation of culture, motifs such as the bog, swamp and witch have returned, representing the disobedient figures and ideas pushed to the margins of industrialised society.

1 Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood *Nostalgia of Mud* Autumn/Winter 1983

Steven Philip Personal Collection

The *Nostalgia of Mud* collection by Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood blended references across history and cultures. Around the base of this ensemble's skirt is a print from the cover of a Folkways record titled *Dances of the World's Peoples*, which also informed McLaren's album *Duck Rock* of the same year. The collection's puffed, layered skirts, as well as the now-iconic Buffalo Hat, were appropriated from the dress of indigenous Aymara and Quechua women in Bolivia known as *cholitas*, who had adopted the bowler hat after the style was brought into the country by British railway workers.

2 Issey Miyake Spring/Summer 1983

MIYAKE DESIGN STUDIO

Japanese designer Issey Miyake is well known for his material innovations in the 1980s and 90s. This look, famously photographed by Irving Penn for *American Vogue* in 1983, features a top, skirt and arm covers which have been mud-dyed, a traditional Japanese technique. The jacket is made from a heavy linen fabric known as elephant-yoryu (wide-width crêpe) with distinctive vertical crinkles in its surface.

3 Maison Margiela Women Collection Autumn/Winter 2006

Maison Margiela

4 Alexander McQueen *Eshu* Autumn/Winter 2000

Alexander McQueen

5 Miguel Adrover

Birds of Freedom, MeetEast

Autumn/Winter 2001

Miguel Adrover

Inspired by his experience of living in Luxor and Cairo, Spanish designer Miguel Adrover presented the collection *MeetEast* in 2001. The collection took a political stance, introducing alternative visions of female beauty to the New York stage. This look, titled *Birds of Freedom*, was hand-painted by illustrator Richard Gray on Egyptian cotton, which had been buried along the banks of the river Nile for two weeks to gain a sandy patina.

6 Dilara Findikoglu

Waking the Witch, Femme Vortex

Autumn/Winter 2024

Dilara Findikoglu

Turkish British designer Dilara Findikoglu used the figure of the witch to highlight a contemporary issue: 'It's about toxic masculinity ... tonight we are doing a mass ritual to end it ... I wanted to create a different reality, outside politics, borders, gender norms, any kind of systematic rules that have been created by hetero-patriarchal men.' *Vogue* described the silhouette *Waking the Witch* as 'made of stiffened fabric apparently mid-flutter (or wrenched) as if to appear frozen in time'.

7 Yodea-Marquel Williams

Ulmi, Elm

Central Saint Martins Graduate

Collection 2024

Yodea-Marquel Williams

- 8 VIN + OMI x King Charles III
Horsehair and Linen Dress,
Resist, Autumn/Winter 2020
VIN + OMI
- 9 Elena Velez
The Longhouse
Spring/Summer 2024
Elena Velez
- 10 Solitude Studios
Hibernating Hopes
Autumn/Winter 2024
Solitude Studios
- 11 Piero D'Angelo
Physarum Lab
2014
Piero D'Angelo

12 Piero D'Angelo
Grow Your Own Couture
2024

Piero D'Angelo

13 Ivan Hunga Garcia
Cariatide No.2
2025

Ivan Hunga Garcia

Portuguese designer Ivan Hunga Garcia calls themselves a 'haute gardener', pointing to their multidisciplinary practice which encompasses fashion, speculative design and biotechnology. This garment is made of SCOBY (Symbiotic Culture Of Bacteria and Yeast) a biological membrane resulting from kombucha production, which Garcia applies as an alternative to leather and synthetic materials used in fetish clothing. As a form of 'bio-couture', this work points to new ways in which we might live in and alongside our clothes.

VIDEO

Vivienne Westwood,
The Southbank Show, series 13
1990

Excerpt, 01:00 min
ITV Archive

Nostalgia of Mud runway footage
1983

Excerpts, 06:23 min
Malcolm McLaren Estate

Romantic Ruins

Since the 1990s, designers skilled in draping and tailoring, including Alexander McQueen, Olivier Theyskens and Viktor&Rolf, have explored the idea of beautiful yet decaying evening gowns. These dresses recall the Victorian flair of the literary character Miss Havisham in Charles Dickens' novel *Great Expectations* (1861), a widow who lives in a gothic mansion, forever wearing her bridal gown. They are examples of an aesthetic of ruin, which reflect the deepening cultural and ecological crises which lay behind their glamorous surfaces.

These creations allow designers to experiment with elevated craftsmanship through elaborate *trompe l'oeil* effects, including faux patina, shredding and tearing, appliqués, embroideries and burn marks, spectacularising the dresses' artificial ruination. They act as reminders of mortality and beauty's transience, yet they can also be a liberating device, rejecting the ideas of glossy perfection and linear time. As author Brian Dillon wrote in *Ruin Lust*: 'the ruin outlives us, and loosens us from the grip of punctual chronologies, setting ourselves adrift in time'.

1 Alexander McQueen

Irere

Spring/Summer 2003

Alexander McQueen

Ideas of mortality and decay were frequently explored in the work of British designer Alexander McQueen. For *Irere*, inspiration came from the 15th to 17th century, known as the 'Age of Discovery'. The collection referenced the people and animals of the Amazon rainforest as well as pirates, alluded to here in a torn tulle dress that was designed to mimic an undergarment found on a shipwreck.

2 Giles Deacon

The Vesper Pyre

Autumn/Winter 2012

Headpiece by Stephen Jones
for Giles Deacon

Giles Deacon

3 Olivier Theyskens Autumn/Winter 1998

Olivier Theyskens

For his Autumn/Winter 1998 collection, Belgian designer Olivier Theyskens used upcycled linens from his family's Normandy home. 'My family in France were very simple people who lived on a farm,' he said. 'I always loved it as a child, because it was like experiencing living in the 19th century, with all these old linens in the bed.'

4 Comme des Garçons *Broken Bride* Autumn/Winter 2005

Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris

Rei Kawakubo often returns to the stages of life: from innocence to maturity and old age. In the collection *Broken Bride*, she transformed off-white bridal dresses gradually into more age-worn and finally blackened widow's dresses, referencing the Mexican Day of the Dead. This satin dress with *trompe l'oeil* patina from vertical creasing resembles a deconstructed tea gown, a relaxed form of dress worn at home by wealthy women in the late 19th century.

5 Viktor&Rolf

Hyères

1993

Centraal Museum, Utrecht

Dutch designers Viktor Horsting and Rolf Snoeren, known as Viktor&Rolf, created this voluminous dress as part of their winning collection for the Hyères festival in 1993, based on the idea of 'fragments of clothes'. The silhouette of the dress evokes an archaeological landscape with a heavily distressed wool covered in silver sequins. The collection became definitive of the designers' practice, which straddles fashion and art.

6 Diesel

Autumn/Winter 2025

Diesel

7 Robert Wun *The White Moth, Time* Haute Couture, Autumn/Winter 2024

Robert Wun

For his Autumn/Winter 2024 Haute Couture collection *Time*, the Hong Kong-born, London-based designer Robert Wun explored ideas of transience and decay. Wun described it as an attempt to 'accept that one day everything ends – and that's ok'. In *The White Moth*, a gown of boiled wool appears to have been partially consumed by the delicate feathered moths affixed to its surface, with the resulting shredded areas seen not as ruination but as a form of beautiful deconstruction.

8 Alexander McQueen *Highland Rape* Autumn/Winter 1995

Alexander McQueen

In McQueen's controversial collection *Highland Rape* (Autumn/Winter 1995), floral lace dresses were torn and encrusted with mud, materialising the gendered politics of dirt. The collection referenced McQueen's Scottish heritage, specifically the Jacobite Risings and the Highland Clearances, which McQueen referred to as 'England's rape of Scotland'.

Spectres of Dirt

Torn, worn and artificially aged fashion has long been a means of aligning oneself with ideas of authenticity, rebellion and romanticism. In the 19th century, Parisian Bohemians – urban artistic types from educated and wealthy backgrounds – favoured ‘lived-in’ garments, which they believed spoke to worldly experience and a rejection of industrialisation. In their wake, faux or real dirt became a badge of honour for many: from the Surrealists of the 1930s to the Beats of the 1950s; hippies of the 1960s; punks of the 1970s; and proponents of grunge in the 1990s. Fashion today frequently mines these different historical periods and social groups for inspiration, taking the artifice and craftsmanship of ‘fake dirt’ or wear to new extremes. Torn denim has become the most familiar expression of this bohemian allure, and an example of how the idea of luxury has been turned on its head.

Fashion also demonstrates how our understandings of dirt and wornness are culturally dependent, exemplified by the work of Rei Kawakubo and Yohji Yamamoto. Their ‘imperfect’ garments with fraying textures shocked the establishment when they were first shown in Paris in 1982. Fashion curators Harold Koda and Akiko Fukai connected their approach to the Japanese philosophy of *wabi-sabi*: ‘a consciousness of seeking spiritual

contentment in austerity and insufficiency, and the beauty of nature acting on itself, such that profundity and abundance are spontaneously felt in the quietness’.

- 1 Miguel Adrover
Star of David, MeetEast
Autumn/Winter 2001

Miguel Adrover

- 2 Christian Dior by John Galliano
Haute Couture
Spring/Summer 2000

Alexander Fury

Dior’s controversial Spring/Summer 2000 Haute Couture collection by British designer John Galliano took inspiration from unhoused people he had seen sleeping along the Seine, incorporating newspaper prints, frayed fabrics and repurposed items, such as belts made using old ties. While Galliano described the collection as an attempt to demonstrate how ‘a tiara made of candy wrappers is as valuable as one made of diamonds’, the collection’s romanticisation of poverty was widely criticised.

3 Carol Christian Poell

Attraction

Autumn/Winter 2002

Westminster Menswear Archive,
University of Westminster

4 Maison Margiela

Artisanal Co-Ed designed

by John Galliano

'Artisanal Co-Ed' Collection

Spring/Summer 2024

Maison Margiela

John Galliano's 2024 Artisanal collection for Maison Margiela was inspired by the gritty underworld of 1920s Paris, particularly the photographs of Hungarian French artist Brassai. The collection also included several *trompe l'oeil* techniques in a nod to the work of the house's founder, Belgian designer Martin Margiela, including in this look a cotton skirt that has been pleated to resemble corrugated cardboard.

5 Jean Paul Gaultier
Autumn/Winter 2004

Jean Paul Gaultier Archives

6 Miguel Adrover
The Bank
Spring/Summer 2001

Miguel Adrover

7 Acne Studios
2023 jeans Trompe L'oeil Torn
Spring/Summer 2025

Acne Studios

8 Maison Margiela Artisanal Co-Ed designed by John Galliano 'Artisanal Co-Ed' Collection Autumn/Winter 2022

Maison Margiela

A different *trompe l'oeil* technique was applied in John Galliano's Artisanal Autumn/Winter 2022 collection for Maison Margiela, inspired by Western films and 1950s Americana. The collection featured sandstorm-weathered coats, created with micro-beading, jacquard weaving, and flocking to imitate the craggy texture of desert patina. The collection was staged as a multidisciplinary performance titled *Cinema Inferno*, in which the models were actors in a Western psychodrama with Gothic overtones.

9 Diesel Spring/Summer 2023

Diesel

10 Balenciaga by Demna
'Destroyed' Paris High
Top Trainers
2022

Private collection

11 Comme des Garçons
Autumn/Winter 1982

Collection of Octavius La Rosa,
dotCOMME, Paris

Explorations of intentional decay emerged at the beginning of Japanese designer Rei Kawakubo's career. In the 'lace' jumper, the purposeful creation of numerous holes – an effect Kawakubo described as 'Comme des Garçons lace' – was initially achieved through the loosening of screws by hand in knitting machines. While these holes allude to wear and decay, they are in fact highly finished, enabling the garment to exist in a state of permanent or suspended wornness without entirely unravelling.

12 Vivienne Westwood
Cut, Slash & Pull
Spring/Summer 1991

18.01LONDON Archive

British designer Vivienne Westwood's collection *Cut, Slash & Pull* contained slashed cotton voile dresses and heavily distressed denim garments, evoking the language of punk. Yet the violent tears in this dress reference a historic practice, that of 'slashing' the sleeves and bodices of garments in the 16th century to reveal the luxurious white shirts worn below. Westwood was inspired by Tudor portraiture she had studied at the V&A South Kensington in London, featuring examples of this practice.

13 Shelley Fox
Collection 14
Spring/Summer 2003

Shelley Fox

14 Junya Watanabe Spring/Summer 2019

Collection of Octavius La Rosa,
dotCOMME, Paris

Japanese designer Junya Watanabe makes frequent reference to the historic technique of *boro* in his collections. Named after the Japanese term *boroboro*, meaning something tattered or repaired, this technique originated as an economical means of repairing, patching or reinforcing garments, which were then usually dyed indigo due to the cheapness of indigo dye. Here, it is combined with the familiar motifs of frayed or worn denim.

15 Yohji Yamamoto Spring/Summer 1983

Zaha Hadid Foundation

The deliberate holes, or 'negative space', in Japanese designer Yohji Yamamoto's Spring/Summer 1983 collection combined the delicate motif of a cut-out flower with oversized draping, making them appear more like rips or tears. Yamamoto expressed at the time: 'if one has only one piece of clothing in life, it becomes patched together, exposed to sun and rain, frayed from the course of daily life. I wanted to create clothing with the same kind of unconscious beauty and natural appeal.'

16 Zandra Rhodes

Conceptual Chic

Autumn/Winter 1977

Zandra Rhodes

Zandra Rhodes was a pioneer of turning punk street culture into couture. For her Spring/Summer 1977 *Conceptual Chic* collection, she presented a 'punk wedding dress' look with safety pins and sink chains, inspired by Elsa Schiaparelli's surrealist couture masterpiece, *The Tears Dress* from 1938.

Stains as Ornament

A stain on clothing is usually seen as a shameful mark, indicating a failure to uphold standards of cleanliness, control and propriety. While we might often rush to remove them, many designers have explored the contradiction in making these accidental blemishes an intentional feature of their clothing. Lipstick, red wine, burns from ironing and even pizza stains have all been given their runway moments, often contrasted by pristine white fabrics, which remain a key symbol of bourgeois respectability.

The highly crafted nature of these purposeful stains subverts their association with carelessness or impropriety. These ornamental marks reveal the beauty of the accidental and highlight the paradox in our willingness to accept them, provided they have been intentionally designed – even though it might be hard to tell the difference.

Other types of stain, however, point to a life well-lived. Paint, mud and chemical treatments such as bleach speak to a more distinguished form of dirt, as the byproducts of creativity, labour and achievement. These contradictions underscore many cultural hierarchies about who is permitted to look dirty and how the presence of dirt, whether real or fake, is interpreted by others.

1–2 SR Studio L.A. C.A. by Sterling Ruby *Apparitions*, Haute Couture Spring/Summer 2021

Palais Galliera – Musée de la Mode
de la Ville de Paris

Bleaching, acid-washing, heat-pressing and painting garments are a signature of American designer Sterling Ruby. For his Spring/Summer 2021 Haute Couture collection, Ruby presented ‘apparitions’ of past and present America, merging historic and religious dress with elements of work and business wear. Here, a multi-coloured, hand-dyed look is finished with spots and splashes as well as tangled yarns, while a green and cream look was created by hand-bleaching bull denim that was roll-dyed green.

3–4 Phoebe English x Helen Bullock Spring/Summer 2015

‘Smoosh’ print in collaboration
with Helen Bullock
Styled by Ellie Grace Cumming
Phoebe English

5 Maison Margiela
Women Collection
Autumn/Winter 2004

Maison Margiela

6 Rick Owens
Mastodon Men's
Autumn/Winter 2016

OWENSCORP

7 Helmut Lang
Painter Jeans
Spring/Summer 1998

Mysterium Museum / @mysteriummuseum

First introduced in 1998, the iconic 'Painter Jeans' by Austrian designer Helmut Lang reframed paint-splattered workwear as a form luxury. Taking a simple denim jean modelled on Levi's 501XX, a garment that originated as workwear, the addition of white paint splatters alluded further to ideas of labour and creativity. Ironically, these being designed stains, the paint was mixed with rubber to ensure it did not easily wear or wash away over time.

8 Acne Studios

1981 jeans Trompe L'oeil Paint

Spring/Summer 2025

Acne Studios

9 Maison Margiela

Women Collection

Spring/Summer 2006

Maison Margiela

Martin Margiela's collection for Spring/Summer 2006 was an exercise in creating purposefully incomplete and unfinished garments, with models pushed along the runway on scaffolding carts to appear as if they were under construction. For this look, the model wore large earrings made of pink and purple ice cubes, which melted and left coloured streaks on the white fabric as she was wheeled along the catwalk.

- 10 Maison Margiela
Men Collection
Spring/Summer 2005
Maison Margiela
- 11 Maison Margiela
Women Collection
Spring/Summer 2007
Maison Margiela
- 12 Moschino by Adrian Appiolaza
Resort 2025
Private collection
- 13 Robert Wun
The Wine Stain Gown, Fear
Haute Couture Spring/
Summer 2023
Robert Wun

14 Hamish Morrow

From Function to Decoration

Spring/Summer 2002

Hamish Morrow

In this collection by Hamish Morrow, models wearing cream and white garments walked on a runway that included a shallow pool of violet ink. As they walked, dress hems and shoes became stained by this ink, which they absorbed and smeared like paintbrushes across a canvas-covered runway. For Morrow, the dresses were only finished once this performative act had taken place, 'allowing the audience participatory entry into the completing of the work.'

Leaky Bodies

Bodily fluids, often viewed as the 'dirt' coming from our own leaky and porous bodies, seem to be the last taboo in fashion, which prefers immaculate surfaces that conceal the messy realities of life. In many different cultures, the female body in particular has long been associated with virginity, passivity and purity, whereas the presence of dirt suggests activity, agency, autonomy and impurity. As the anthropologist Mary Douglas wrote, 'holiness and impurity are at opposite poles' or, as the saying goes, 'cleanliness is next to godliness'.

'Wet look' dresses, which hark back to the draped garments of classical Antiquity, allude to the sealed, slick, and erotic nude body beneath. Recently, catwalks have seen a proliferation of these wet look garments, as well as garments with ornamental, artificial stains referring to 'shameful' or abject bodily fluids: blood, sweat, breast milk, urine, semen, and tears. Though often these substances are considered 'dirty', for Bulgarian French philosopher Julia Kristeva it 'is not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order.' The judgements we make about dirty clothes, what is revealed and who is permitted to reveal it, reinforce multiple hierarchies and systems of power.

1 Maison Margiela

Artisanal Co-Ed designed by John Galliano

'Artisanal Co-Ed' Collection

Autumn/Winter 2020

Maison Margiela

Maison Margiela has a history of creating *trompe l'oeil* 'wet look' garments, starting with Martin Margiela's wrapped looks for Spring/Summer 1990. For his 1985 *Fallen Angels* collection, John Galliano doused models with water and dragged dresses through the mud, referencing the so-called mythical 'muslin disease' of the 1790s whereby French women died of hypothermia after dousing their linen dresses with water. For his contemporary collection for Maison Margiela, the wet look is achieved by 'the highest form of dressmaking' – an intricate scheme of circular cutting, draping, pleats and tucks'.

2–5 DI PETSA

My Body is a Labyrinth Spring/Summer 2025

DI PETSA

DI PETSA, the brand of Greek designer Dimitra Petsa, celebrates sexuality through ideas of wetness, self-love, and exploration. The *Period Pants*, frayed *Masturbation Jeans* *Lactating Top* and *Pee Stain Jeans* reclaim the 'dirty' bodily fluids and sexual acts commonly hidden away as symbols of pleasure and desire.

6 JORDANLUCA

Resilience

Autumn/Winter 2023

JORDANLUCA

JORDANLUCA's pee-stained jeans were the opening look of a collection that explored the subversion of hyper-masculine archetypes. While the collection tweaked ideas of work, office- or sportswear, the pee-stained jeans offered commentary on what the brand refers to as our 'fetishised capitalist state'. They toy with what is acceptable and with ideas of sexuality, fetish and bodiliness, but also comment on how 'we don't really need more clothes, but we have an obsessive love affair with stuff.'

7 DI PETSA

My Body is a Labyrinth

Spring/Summer 2025

DI PETSA

8 Louis Gabriel Nouchi

Spring/Summer 2023

Private collection

VIDEO

Dirty Girls

Directed by Michael Lucid, 1996

Excerpts, 05:22 min

Courtesy of Michael Lucid, Amber Willat
and Harper Willat

Wet Brides by DI PETSA, 2021

Excerpts, 01:22 min

Videographer: Petros Ioannidis
Courtesy of DI PETSA

My Body is a Labyrinth, DI PETSA

Spring/Summer 2025

runway footage, 2025

Excerpts, 44 seconds

S.W.A.L.K, Maison Margiela
Artisanal, Co-Ed Collection
Autumn-Winter 2020

Based on an original idea by John
Galliano. Directed by Nick Knight
for SHOWstudio
2020

Excerpts, 05:47 min

© MAISON MARGIELA / All rights reserved

Glittering Debris

Since the creation of synthetic materials and mass-produced ready-to-wear fashion in the 1960s, several generations of designers have critiqued fashion's increasing ephemerality by transforming found objects from daily life into new creations. Turning trash into treasure, these designers introduce an artistic motif which resists categorical ideas of beauty, value, and the notion of 'waste' itself. In their hands, everything from discarded fabrics to cutlery and household waste are transformed into glittering assemblages, dressing the wearer in defiant joy. The shiny, often synthetic surfaces of these salvaged materials stand in contrast to organic materials, but there is an inherent sustainability in the 'no-waste' approach of their new applications, and in the democratic idea that every material can be valuable and become beautiful.

Harking back to the 19th century trope of the fashion designer as a Parisian ragpicker, these foraging designers combine an eye for beauty with a spiritual longing to imbue the discarded with a deeper meaning and purpose.

1 Paco Rabanne

Haute Couture Autumn/Winter 1992

Service Patrimoine et Archives – Maison Rabanne

Often regarded as the 'metallurgist' of fashion, Spanish French designer Paco Rabanne was a pioneer in transforming household materials, first transforming metal and PVC into handmade disks and ringlets for his groundbreaking 1968 collection *12 Unwearable Dresses in Contemporary Materials*, which caused a sensation in the fashion world. In this look, the tops of plastic bottles have been cut and hung from chains to create a layered top.

2 Hodakova

Conventional Collection 112303 Autumn/Winter 2023

Hodakova

3 Maison Margiela

Women Collection Spring/Summer 1989

Maison Margiela

4 Maison Margiela
Artisanal Co-Ed designed
by John Galliano
'Artisanal Co-Ed' Collection
Autumn/Winter 2021

Maison Margiela

5 Maison Margiela
Artisanal designed by John
Galliano. 'Artisanal' Collection
Autumn/Winter 2018

Maison Margiela

6 Tom Van der Borgh *7 WAYS TO BE T.VDB* Hyères Collection 2020

Tom Van der Borgh

Belgian designer Tom Van der Borgh – whose garments have been described as ‘haute trash’ – incorporates unconventional materials such as Plexiglass tubes, rope stoppers, and cable ties into colourful, sculptural garments. The collection *7 WAYS TO BE T.VDB*, informed by Van der Borgh’s identity as a queer person living with a progressive muscular disorder, embraced ideas of non-normativity, which he described as an exploration of the ‘tension between wearing and being worn, between carrying and being carried.’

7 Matty Bovan

XV

Spring/Summer 2024

Shoes by GINA Couture
MATTY BOVAN STUDIO

British designer Matty Bovan describes his practice as an attempt to 'do real stuff' amid a landscape of increasing digitisation. For his fifteenth collection, XV, Bovan presented what he called a 'cacophony of monstrous beauty'. Chopping up and reconstructing the forms of 1980s American party dresses, the often-uncomfortable collisions of colours and textures are intended as an act of defiance: 'this is a fantasy lucid dream of America; scratch the surface and there is something darker underneath.'

8 Manon Kündig

Bowerbird

Royal Academy Antwerp Graduate Collection 2012

Manon Kündig

For her 2012 graduate collection, Swiss designer Manon Kündig was inspired by bowerbirds, which collect and incorporate colourful rubbish into their nests to attract mates. Embracing a kitsch combination of colours, prints and fabrics from local stores, Kündig was guided by how the bowerbird embraces 'trash', ignoring hierarchies of beauty to make selections based on visual effect. She states: 'rubbish can be beauty ... The bird picks whatever is in his surroundings. It is what I did or always do.'

9 Ayumi Kajiwara

Crocodile Tears Liqueur

Central Saint Martins Graduate Collection 2023

Ayumi Kajiwara

For her 2023 Central Saint Martins BA graduate collection, London-based knitwear and fashion designer Ayumi Kajiwara created a collection of wearable art pieces made from found objects. This look was made from bottle caps and waste yarn, with a birch tree bark hat. Encapsulating the memories, dreams and desires of those who discarded these materials, Kajiwara creates 'emotional haute couture'.

10 Ronald van der Kemp
Nikita, Let the Sun Shine In
Haute Couture, Spring/Summer
2025

Tia Collection

RVDK is the brand of Dutch designer Ronald van der Kemp, who has been focussed on developing a 'new ethics for luxury fashion' since 2014 and is known for his sustainable practices, such as using exclusively vintage and surplus fabrics. This Haute Couture look is made of handwoven panels of discarded vintage trimmings, pearls and metal chains. The ballgown skirt is made of black raffia embellished with metal chains.

11 JW Anderson
Pigeon Clutch
Autumn/Winter 2022

Private collection

12 Maison Margiela
Women Collection
Spring/Summer 1990

Maison Margiela

13 Andrew Groves
Cocaine Nights
Spring/Summer 1999

Andrew Groves

British designer Andrew Groves presented this dress made of razor blades on the catwalk of his 1999 collection *Cocaine Nights*, named after the J.G. Ballard novel. As the dress moved down the runway it 'cut' a line of white powder resembling cocaine, alluding to former US president Bill Clinton's criticism of the fashion industry as 'glamorizing drug use' – with the reigning aesthetic of the time being one the press had labelled 'heroin chic'.

Ma Ke: The Earth

Chinese designer Ma Ke made her Paris Fashion Week debut in 2007 with a collection titled *The Earth*, launched under the label *Wuyong*. Based in Zhuhai and employing a team of workers skilled in traditional techniques, the label was a response to what Ma Ke called a 'heartbreaking loss of craft and tradition' in China. The name *Wuyong*, which translates into English as 'Useless', references how these traditions and the rural communities that practiced them were perceived by the pursuit of industrialisation.

For *The Earth*, garments were hand-stitched from natural, plant-dyed fabrics that could ultimately return to the soil. Ma Ke describes: 'These materials, like human life, participate in nature's eternal cycles through the Daoist principle of *ziran* (natural spontaneity), continuing the infinite circulation of all living things.'

Here, three ensembles representing a mother, father, and child lie on the earth around a centrepiece entitled *Mother Earth*, the cracked, weathered dress of which is worn beneath an expansive overcoat. Ma Ke describes this as representative of how 'Mothers, despite enduring hardships, always offer children warm embrace and steadfast support through their protective outer layers.' The surrounding garments were created from linen,

cotton, and wool, combined with elements in black plastic that reference the piles of waste Ma Ke saw in rural China, which here symbolise humanity's continuing 'intrusion into nature'.

Downstairs

Elemental Creation

Just as the more gradual processes of decay and wear have inspired designers, so have the immediate and forceful impacts of elemental destruction. Fire and explosives have been used as design agents for their ability to dramatically and permanently alter fabrics, channelling natural unpredictability into a form of creation.

Shelley Fox transfigured fabrics by introducing often violent forces – burning, melting and laser-treating – that speak less to ideas of ageing than to trauma. Fashion historian Caroline Evans described this aesthetic as being ‘reflective of the run-down urban fabric of the East End of London where [Fox] lived and worked’.

For others, fire takes on a poetic aspect. In his collaboration with Issey Miyake’s *Pleats Please* line, Chinese artist Cai Guo-Qiang used a dragon – a symbol of life in Chinese culture – as the basis of a performative artwork in which an explosion was not destructive but generative. For Robert Wun, the presence of fire speaks to the inevitable loss of beauty, while its elemental opposite, ice, is depicted on a gown that speaks to the aftermath of a sudden, violent snowstorm.

1 Issey Miyake
PLEATS PLEASE ISSEY MIYAKE
1998
Guest Artist Series No.4
Cai Guo-Qiang
MIYAKE DESIGN STUDIO

Between 1996–1999, the *Pleats Please Guest Artist Series* by Japanese designer Issey Miyake invited artists to create prints for garments. For the fourth edition of the series, Chinese artist Cai Guo-Qiang created *Dragon: Explosion on Pleats Please*. This performance saw sixty-three garments laid flat in the shape of a dragon and dusted with a trail of gunpowder that was then detonated. The clothing was left imprinted with the trace of fire, which was then turned into a series of prints for the collection.

2 Shelley Fox
Burnt Elastoplast Ensemble,
Collection 6
Spring/Summer 1999
Shelley Fox

3 Shelley Fox

Peat Blowtorched Sequin Twinset,
Collection 9
Autumn/Winter 2000

Shelley Fox

Ideas of destruction and ruination are a running theme in the work of British designer Shelley Fox, often through violently physical techniques such as scorching, burning, smashing, scarring and disintegration. For *Collection 6*, a leg injury led Fox to explore medical materials such as bandages and Elastoplast, which were burnt and melted using lasers. Continuing these techniques, in *Collection 9*, several pieces were covered with sequins and then blowtorched, creating scorched patches that revealed the fabric underneath.

4 Robert Wun

The Snow Gown, Time
Haute Couture
Autumn/Winter 2024

Tia Collection

5 Robert Wun

The Yellow Rose, Time

Haute Couture

Autumn/Winter 2024

Robert Wun

Robert Wun's Autumn/Winter 2024 collection *Time* took as its central focus the acceptance of mortality and the passage of time, urging people to enjoy life while it lasts. This was translated into the progression of the seasons with the embroidered opening look, covered in thousands of crystals depicting 'the first falling of snow'. In *The Yellow Rose*, a technique of burning was used to visualise the irreversible erosion and decay caused by time, presenting this as something beautiful rather than something to be feared.

VIDEO

Dragon: Explosion on Pleats Please
Issey Miyake by Cai Guo-Qiang
1998

01:55 min. Videography by Araki Takahisa
Courtesy Cai Studio

Alice Potts

The stains left by bodily fluids are not usually static, and over time can become transformative agents. In the work of bio-designer Alice Potts, the liquids of the body are shown to be generative and full of potential. Human sweat becomes a means of creating wearable art, used to grow a delicate coating of crystals on dresses, bags, and shoes. Potts collects both her own sweat and the sweat of others, which is then filtered to remove external impurities and turned into a salt solution. Once absorbed by textile fibres, the solution begins to grow crystals over the course of several hours, which vary in appearance depending on the biological makeup of a person's sweat.

The bodice of this mid-20th century Madame Grès Haute Couture dress, once darkened with dirt, now glitters with jewel-like crystals. In using her bodily fluids to generate the materials of fashion, Potts's work speaks to the porous nature of bodies and the inescapability of the personal traces we leave on the world; the ways that we are continually mingling with the surfaces and substances that surround us.

Alice Potts

Perspire Madame Grès: Biocouture
2025

Commissioned by Barbican Art Gallery

Solitude Studios

Danish brand Solitude Studios, led by Jonas Sayed Gammal Bruun and Sophia Martinussen, draws on the Iron Age practice of using bogs as a site of votive offering. Inspired by the discoveries made in Denmark's ancient bogs – jewellery, weapons and preserved 'bog bodies' – the studio treats the bog as a natural collaborator that consumes and transforms the fabrics submerged within it.

Prior to being constructed into garments, Solitude Studios 'offers' pieces of fabric to the bog for several months, during which they are naturally dyed and partially consumed by microorganisms. The resulting transformation of these materials are seen not as damage but rather embraced as an unpredictable part of the design process.

In this installation, several looks from *Before the Orgy* (Spring/Summer 2026), have been frozen and suspended to create what the studio call 'modern day bog bodies,' stating: 'In contrast to the traditional Nordic bog findings, where all that remains is the organic body, we created these bog bodies in the image of the modern world's weightlessness, remaining only as a shell of themselves, the clothes they wear.'

Solitude Studios

After the Orgy

2025

Commissioned by Barbican Art Gallery
Creative direction, design & production by
Sophia Martinussen and Jonas Sayed Gammal Bruun
Bog Body: Josefine Falbe-Hansen

Elena Velez

The work of American designer Elena Velez seeks to subvert fashion's female archetypes, instead offering what she has described as 'imperfect depictions of female power'. Central to this approach is a subversion of the sanitised versions of feminism that are often portrayed and promoted by fashion, with Velez instead offering 'archetypes of wasteland heroines'.

Velez draws on the industrial landscapes of her Midwestern upbringing in the incorporation of raw, salvaged, and at times violently damaged materials into her collections. For her Spring/Summer 2024 runway presentation, *The Longhouse*, this idea was furthered by the show itself culminating in a mud-wrestle, leaving the models and their clothing covered in dirt. Intended to create a sense of discomfort, these materials and performances act as affronts to the pristine fabrics and idealised forms and behaviours we would usually associate with fashion.

In this newly created work, two white garments that symbolise these perfected ideals of fashion and femininity gradually become 'overwhelmed' by dirt, in a film described by Velez as a 'chronology of deterioration'.

Elena Velez
2025

Commissioned by Barbican Art Gallery

(Opposite)

Yodea-Marquel Williams
Ips typographus, Elm,
Graduate Collection 2024

Yodea-Marquel Williams

Michaela Stark

Michaela Stark is a London-based artist and designer whose work focuses on what society has deemed 'imperfections' in the female body. Stark's design process is deeply personal, using her own body as both inspiration and photographic subject in the creation of clothing that morphs the human form. Flesh appears rippling, bulging and oozing through ribbons, laces, and corset boning, subverting the role of shapewear and undergarments as something intended to contain the body.

Responding to ideas of desire and decay, these newly created garments were designed to have a 'sense of history and vulnerability', incorporating delicate, distressed silk, laddering, holes, dirt, and debris. Lavender coloured thread used to embroider a pair of stockings resembles veins or roots, while each garment is embellished with century-old artificial flower stamens used by milliners.

A series of self-portraits show these garments being worn, left with the imprints of having been shaped around Stark's body. Torn fabric and broken threads here speak not of damage and destruction, but of a process of moulding and transforming a garment in close dialogue with the body.

Michaela Stark
Growing Pains
2025

Commissioned by Barbican Art Gallery

Paolo Carzana

The namesake label of Welsh Italian designer Paolo Carzana is deeply rooted in the natural world and its elements. Raw finishes and natural dyes emphasise the inherent fragility and transience of organic materials, while careful, handmade construction demonstrates how they can be transformed.

Trilogy of Hope is a sequence of three collections united by a narrative that journeys through natural and biblical landscapes. Beginning with *Melanchronic Mountain* (Autumn/Winter 2024), an ascent to heaven is represented by a mountainous trek, 'amongst the dirt amongst the mud amongst the grass amongst the water', rendered in craggy, wax-coated fabrics. In *How to Attract Mosquitoes* (Spring/Summer 2025), this is contrasted by a descent to the underworld via the myth of Narcissus, using a water-inspired palette of indigo, purple logwood, and black walnut. In *Dragon's Unwinged at the Butchers Block* (Autumn/Winter 2025), dragon fire and purgatory are represented by warm shades of pink, yellow, and purple.

Trilogy of Hope

1–4 Paolo Carzana
Melanchronic Mountain
Autumn/Winter 2024

5–8 Paolo Carzana
How to Attract Mosquitoes
Spring/Summer 2025

9–12 Paolo Carzana
*Dragons Unwinged at the
Butcher's Block*
Autumn/Winter 2025

All headwear by Nasir Mazhar for Paolo Carzana
All works courtesy of Paolo Carzana

Yaz XL

The practice of multidisciplinary designer Yaz XL spans fashion, sculpture and prosthetics, frequently exploring material transformations through cycles of life and death, and the relationships between the natural and the artificial. Considering decay to be a process of 'stripping back', *Corrosion Perversion* emerged from Yaz XL's observation that the organic forms that feature in her work are only achievable through invisible, rigid structures beneath the surface, often made from metal.

Contrasting with the common perception of decay and decomposition as 'soft and organic' processes, here a series of metal garments have been left partially submerged in water to gradually rust over time. The resulting process of corrosion sees the material transform and begin to visibly reflect its interactions with the world; a process Yaz XL describes as the synthetic interfacing with the organic: 'the changing patina and texture of metal documents the passing of time in a way that still feels synthetic.'

Yaz XL
Corrosion Perversion
2025

Metal fabrication with Oscar Saurin
Commissioned by Barbican Art Gallery

Fashioning Excess

The waste streams associated with fashion consumption have seen the idea of 'dirt' take on an urgent new meaning. Fashion is the third most polluting industry on the planet today, driven by overproduction and consumption. Vast quantities of both second-hand and unsold new garments are piled high in areas known as sacrifice zones. Located in resource-rich areas that are distant from the centres of fashion production – notably Ghana, Kenya and the Atacama Desert in Chile – these zones bear the burden of what is termed 'waste colonialism', their landscapes permanently altered by consumer trash sent predominantly from Europe, the UK, the USA and China.

In response, the past decade has seen an uptake in the repurposing of discarded materials. Numerous designers now fashion excess fabrics into their creations, either intercepting them within supply chains or sourcing them directly from sacrifice zones. Born from this waste, the work of these designers is inherently political, highlighting the injustices that result from rampant, excessive consumption and the value that can still be found in the discarded. The resulting 'accumulated' patchwork look is often celebrated, with each recovered garment telling the story of its previous life and subsequent rebirth.

1 Ahluwalia

Spring/Summer 2023

Ahluwalia

British Indian Nigerian designer Priya Ahluwalia created her brand Ahluwalia after witnessing the impacts of fashion's waste streams and vast 'sacrifice zones' in Panipat and in Lagos. The brand aims to raise awareness of the fashion industry's waste problem and use it as a creative force, with a mixture of deadstock, damaged, excess, donated and recycled fabric forming the basis for new designs which make a virtue of their patchwork nature.

2–4 Buzigahill

RETURN TO SENDER, 2025

BUZIGAHILL

Ugandan designer Bobby Kolade returned from Berlin to Kampala to found BUZIGAHILL. The brand's first project, named RETURN TO SENDER, critiques the use of sites in Uganda as dumping grounds for clothing waste. BUZIGAHILL takes these garments, reconstructs them, and sells them back to the countries that discarded them in the first place, thereby refusing to 'remain stuck at the end of the global second-hand supply chain'.

5 XULY.Bët, 2023

XULY.Bët

Lamine Kouyaté, the Malian designer behind XULY.Bët, was an early pioneer of upcycling, labelled by the *New York Times* as the 'prince of pieces'. Creating assemblages of discarded clothing and factory surplus materials, his garments often subvert the original uses of their components, drawing on how Kouyaté observed people in Mali and Senegal alter European clothing: 'A sweater arrives in one of the hottest moments of the year. So you cut the sleeves off it to make it cooler.'

6 TRASHY Clothing *Humiliation Rituals* Autumn/Winter 2025

Private collection

The Jordan-based Palestinian brand TRASHY Clothing, led by Omar Braika and Shukri Lawrence, artfully upcycles deadstock fabrics with custom prints addressing geopolitical tensions and the occupation of Palestinian land. In their Autumn/Winter 2025 collection *Humiliation Rituals*, they confront what they describe as 'the contradictions of power – where control is fragile, dominance is desperate, and authority, in its attempt to impose order, exposes its own humiliation.'

7 Miguel Adrover *GAP Look, Out of My Mind* Autumn/Winter 2012

Miguel Adrover

8 Miguel Adrover

*Dress With a Soul Inside,
Out of My Mind*
Autumn/Winter 2012

Miguel Adrover

A pioneer of upcycling and customising existing garments into one-off creations, Spanish designer Miguel Adrover, who showed in New York, assembled found baseball caps, varsity t-shirts, interior fabrics, family linens and personal wardrobes into new silhouettes. An advocate for social justice and sustainability in fashion, he criticised overconsumption and corporate interests in his work. His appropriation of logos and used garments creates a layered accumulation of material and personal histories, threading the human connections between the garment and the wearer.

9 Marine Serre

Hard Drive

Autumn/Winter 2022

Marine Serre

Upcycling and material regeneration sits at the core of the brand of French designer Marine Serre. In the collection *Hard Drive*, among nods to the DIY nature and plaid fabrics of punk, were skirts and dresses assembled from cut-up and reassembled t-shirts, bearing heavy metal band motifs. A feminist and sustainable ethos underpins this work: the designer shared the *savoir-faire* behind her collection in an effort of transparency, education and community care.

10 Nina Hollein
Suit-Up Dress, 2020

Private collection

In Austrian designer Nina Hollein's series *Suit Up*, the fabrics and lapels of cut-up blazers and pinstripe suits are immediately recognisable, sourced from Goodwill stores in New York or raided from her husband's closet. Hollein's autodidactical fashion practice originates from her hometown of Linz, where she started to upcycle deadstock linen and household fabrics into sturdy childrenswear.

11 Miguel Adrover
Out of My Mind
Autumn/Winter 2012

Miguel Adrover

12 Maison Margiela
Women Collection
Autumn/Winter 2004

Maison Margiela

Yuima Nakazato: Dust to Dust

Yuima Nakazato is the only Japanese designer currently showing at Paris Haute Couture week, invited since 2016 as an official guest designer by the Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture. Working at the forefront of sustainable fashion production, in 2022 Nakazato travelled to the Dandora dumpsite in Nairobi, Kenya, to witness the impact of the fashion industry's waste. This trip would become the impetus for the collection *INHERIT* (Haute Couture Spring/Summer 2023), documented by Kosai Sekine in the documentary *Dust to Dust*.

Nakazato returned to Japan with bales of fashion waste, which became the raw materials for *INHERIT*. In partnership with printing company Epson, discarded clothing was used to create recycled fabrics via Dry Fiber Technology (DFT). Typically used to recycle paper, this process mechanically disintegrates and re-binds waste fibres, creating new fabric that is a kaleidoscopic reflection of its discarded components.

For the collection *FADE* (Haute Couture Spring/Summer 2025), Nakazato was inspired by a visit to the chalk rock foundations of the Sahara el Beyda in Egypt, a desert which once sat at the bottom of the sea. Imagining how

climate change will one day transform a city like Tokyo in the same way it had transformed this desert, the collection blended technological elements such as Epson DFT fabrics and lab-grown protein fibres, with ideas of ageing and weathering depicted using metal chains and ceramics.

1–3 Yuima Nakazato

FADE

Haute Couture Spring/Summer 2025

Yuima Nakazato

Yuima Nakazato's Spring/Summer 2025 Haute Couture collection *FADE* was inspired by the eastern Sahara and its history spanning millennia. The collection was created using Brewed Protein™ developed by Spiber Inc., a material made from sugarcane protein which can be broken down and re-used as feedstock for BP, making it circular. The collection also used 'Biosmocking', a term coined by Nakazato to describe a digital modelling technology, which allows for customising fabric without creating waste.

4–6 Yuima Nakazato

INHERIT

Haute Couture Spring/Summer 2023

Yuima Nakazato

Japanese designer Yuima Nakazato's Spring/Summer 2023 Haute Couture collection *INHERIT* responds to the fashion industry's systemic overproduction, resulting in mountains of discarded clothing, which the designer encountered in Kenya. The collection was created in partnership with Epson, part of a long-term collaboration to develop sustainable processes that reduce fashion's environmental impacts. Prints for *INHERIT* were produced with Epson's direct-to-fabric printing, a digital textile printing technology which uses pigment ink and saves water in pre- and post-treatment of the fabric.

VIDEO

DUST TO DUST

Directed by Kosai Sekine
2024

Excerpts, 11:56 min
YUIMA NAKAZATO Co. Ltd

IAMISIGO: Of Land and Body

Founded by Nigerian designer Bubu Ogisi, IAMISIGO is a brand based across Lagos, Nairobi, and Accra. Guided by three sacred forces from the West African spiritual tradition Ifá – the ancestors, the earth, and the supreme energy – Ogisi describes her practice as ‘an act of honouring the land, those who came before, and the unseen forces that shape our paths’. Each IAMISIGO collection is grounded in the many different cultural and spiritual stories that natural materials hold, highlighting and preserving their precolonial histories and drawing them into contemporary fashion practice.

Barkcloth, encountered by Ogisi in Kampala where it is used in coronations, funerals and healing ceremonies, was worked into a series of dresses for *Supreme Higher Entity* (Spring/Summer 2020) and *Shadows* (Spring/Summer 2024). Raffia, a natural fibre central to many traditional textile techniques, was transformed into contemporary silhouettes in *Chasing Evil* (Autumn/Winter 2020). Long, loose sisal strands were used to evoke the appearance of a ‘god or deity’ in *Celestial Being* (Spring/Summer 2024).

Tensions between the natural and synthetic are explored through the unexpected use of plastic in *Green Water, Blue Forest* (Spring/Summer 2022), informed by Nigeria's role as a significant producer of crude oil. Ogisi states: 'People demonise plastic, but it's a material that also comes from the earth – crude oil is the result of millions of years of organic decay.'

Soundscape by Sunny Dolat

1 IAMISIGO

Chasing Evil

Autumn/Winter 2020

IAMISIGO

In *Chasing Evil*, Bugu Ogisi, founder of IAMISIGO, explores the colonial exploitation of the Congo and pays homage to the Congolese Sapeurs, who used clothes to out-dress their oppressors as an act of resistance. The colours and forms of the collection reference 'la sape', using palm leaf raffia, unbleached cotton from Uganda, juxtaposing acrylic yarn and recycled cotton. Shoes were created from dyed vegan leopard skin and bag accessories were made from banana leaf raffia.

2-4 IAMISIGO

Green Water, Blue Forest Spring/Summer 2022

IAMISIGO

The Spring/Summer 2022 collection *Green Water, Blue Forest* was made for 'a future of the past, where the freethinking continent of Africa, a truly decolonised world, embraces and finds the balance between the natural and synthetic worlds.' Contrasting handwoven hemp with crocheted and patchwork recycled plastic, the collection comments on how human activity has altered the nature of the earth, and how 'ever present' synthetic fibres can be reclaimed for the future.

5 IAMISIGO

SHE (Supreme Higher Entity)

Spring/Summer 2020

IAMISIGO

Addressing the impact of fashion industry waste on Kampala, Nairobi and Lagos, Ogisi collaborated with bark cloth artist and historian Fred Mutebi for this collection. Bark cloth is an ancient fabric created from the Mutuba tree, central to the culture of the Ganda people of Uganda. In this collection, bark cloth was combined with handwoven cotton elements created by an all-female weaving community in Nairobi, as well as pieces made from recycled PVC.

6–7 IAMISIGO

Shadows

Spring/Summer 2024

IAMISIGO

Shadows, IAMISIGO's Spring/Summer 2024 collection, invokes the spirit of Queen Nyabingi, who spoke through priestesses wearing bark cloth veils to protect them against evil. Bridging fashion, art, architecture and spirituality, this is an exploration of the cultural heritage of Africa across its past, present and future. Here, bark cloth is used as a form of resistance against the dominance of foreign-made textiles brought into Africa through (neo-)colonialism. Accompanying accessories were created using bronze from Benin City.

8 IAMISIGO

Umale Okun Flow, Celestial Being Spring/Summer 2023

IAMISIGO

Reflecting on the role of witchcraft and divination in both pre-colonial and modern-day Africa, this collection seeks to 'find God or the Sublime for the modern age'. This look, named after Umale Okun, god of the sea in Itsekiri religion, was created using the elements of glass and sisal. Sisal is the sturdy fibre extracted from the sisal plant, considered to have healing properties, and used traditionally for rope and twine.

Acknowledgements

EXHIBITION

Curator

Karen Van Godtsenhoven

Assistant Curator

Jon Astbury

Exhibition Organiser

Kate Fanning

Exhibition Assistant

Joe Shaw

Research Associate

Hester Mauduit

Production Manager

Maarten van den Bos

Technical Supervisors
(Art and Lighting)

David Corbett

Brigitte Parusel

Cai Bellis

Technical Supervisor
(Art and AV)

Dan Gunning

Technical Supervisors
(Health & Safety)

Christopher Spear

Nick Davies

Crew Supervisors

Josh Wright

Lisa Penny

Gallery Manager

Priya Saujani

Costume Mounting

Gesa Werner

Jane Forrest

Rachael Lee

Soteria Conservation

Dressing Technicians

Emily Harwood

Marie-Louise Jones

Natasha Moody

Dan Bennett

Exhibition Design
Studio Dennis
Vanderbroeck

Graphic Design
Wolfe Hall

Exhibition Build
Raskl. Art + Architectural

Graphic Production
Omni Colour

Signpainting
Louis Musk

The curators would like
to thank the catalogue
authors whose work has
informed the narrative
of the exhibition texts:

Sara Arnold
Fabio Cleto
Stefania Consonni
Sunny Dolat
Caroline Evans
Akiko Fukai
Sandra Niessen
Ellen Sampson
Lou Stoppard

With special thanks to
our Lead Philanthropic
Supporter:



Media Partner:

DAZED

BARBICAN

Interim Chief
Executive Officer
David Farnsworth

Director for Arts
and Participation
Devyani Saltzman

Head of Visual Arts
Shanay Jhaveri

Deputy Head of Visual Arts
Katrina Crookall

Senior Manager,
Exhibitions and
Partnerships
Alice Lobb

Front of House Manager
Ian Fowles

Assistant Front of House
Managers
Chinenye Ezeuko
Jacob Harrison
Adam Holdaway
Katerina Sotiraki

Communications
Ariane Oiticica
Hannah Carr
Abigail Francis
Lily Booth
Saffron Brown Davis

Director of Development
Natasha Harris

Marketing
Isobel Parrish
Rachel Shnapp
Georgia Greenburgh

Creative Collaboration
Karena Johnson
Susanna Davies-Crook
Josie Dick

Head of Retail
Jo Davis

Events
Sharon Kent
Amy Cranston

Our thanks also to the
Barbican Art Gallery
technicians, Gallery
Assistants and Invigilators

LENDERS

18.01 LONDON

Acne Studios

Miguel Adrover

Ahluwalia

BUZIGAHILL

Centraal Museum Utrecht

Collection of Octavius La

Rosa, dotCOMME Paris

Diesel

DI PETSA

Paolo Carzana

Hussein Chalayan

Piero D'Angelo

Giles Deacon

Phoebe English

Dilara Findikoglu

Shelley Fox

Alexander Fury

Andrew Groves

Zaha Hadid Foundation

Hodakova

Ivan Hunga Garcia

IAMISIGO

JORDANLUCA

KATE MOSS

Ayumi Kajiwarra

Ma Ke

Manon Kündig

Maison Margiela

Alexander McQueen

Hamish Morrow

His Majesty The King

MATTY BOVAN STUDIO

Musée des Arts Décoratifs,
Paris

MIYAKE DESIGN STUDIO

Mysterium Museum /

@mysteriummuseum

Yuima Nakazato

OWENSCORP

Palais Galliera –

Musée de la Mode de la
Ville de Paris

Jean Paul Gaultier

Archives

Alice Potts

Service Patrimoine
et Archives –

Maison Rabanne

Zandra Rhodes

Marine Serre

Solitude Studios

Michaela Stark

Steven Philip Personal
Collection

Olivier Theyskens

Tia Collection

TRASHY Clothing

Tom Van der Borgh

Elena Velez

VIN + OMI
Westminster Menswear
Archive, University of
Westminster
Yodea-Marquel Williams
Robert Wun Studio
XULY.Bët
Yaz XL
And all those who wish to
remain anonymous
We would also like
to express our gratitude to
the
below individuals
and organisations
for their invaluable help in
the development and
realisation of this
exhibition:
Christeene
Stevie Cannell
Dal Chodha
Judith Clark

Aymar Crosnier
Oriole Cullen
Amy De La Haye
Sunny Dolat
Matt Domescek
Eilidh Duffy
Alla Eizenberg
Sarabande Foundation
Alice Gomme
Amelia Haney
Angela Jansen
Gaël Mamine
Eugene Rabkin
Olivier Saillard
Carla Sozzani
Sonnet Stanfill
Andrew Taylor-Parr
Kerry Taylor
Dan Thawley
Trino Verkade
Sian Westerman
Ben Whyman
Cherry Xing

Events

Future Archaeology: In Conversation with Hussein Chalayan

Friday 26 September 2025
Frobisher Auditorium 1, 7pm

To celebrate the opening of *Dirty Looks*, join us for a discussion between designer Hussein Chalayan and curator Karen Van Godtsenhoven.

Hussein Chalayan's pioneering oeuvre anchors the exhibition's narrative about the ruin and regeneration in fashion. His buried garments – a practice which began in his Central Saint Martins graduate collection *The Tangent Flows* (1993) and evolved through later collections – are potent expressions of fashion's life cycles, what he considers a form of 'future archaeology'.

Dirty Weekend

Saturday 29 & Sunday 30 November 2025

Centrewide

Rebellious bodies, radical fashion and joyful disruption: Dirty Weekend takes the ideas at the heart of *Dirty Looks* and dials them up – celebrating sex, sweat, protest and pleasure through performances, conversation and community. Curated by Susanna Davies-Crook, Curator of Public Programmes, this two-day takeover will fill the Barbican's public spaces with looks, talks, screenings, live art and club energy. Artists include Di Petsa, Sinéad O'Dwyer, Vex Ashley (Four Chambers) and Content Warning (Helena and Harlan Whittingham). Alongside performances, talks by authors including Amelia Abraham will explore themes like bodily autonomy, collectivity, queerness and how we wear – and resist – norms around fashion and the self. An exhibition in our public spaces will present a view on fashion and filth, co-curated with Matt Skully and looking at a spectrum from basement club and kink culture to couture.

Wedding Dresses Always End Up Single (Les robes de mariée finissent toujours célibataires)

A Performance by Olivier Saillard/ Moda Povera

Friday 16 January 2026
The Pit

Fashion historian Olivier Saillard poetically evokes women's intimate feelings and thoughts surrounding marriage, love and life, in this performance with experienced couture model Axelle Doué. He explores the destiny of wedding dresses, especially the cheaper kind, in the aftermath of the wedding celebration. Saillard has acquired these dresses by trailing on eBay and Emmaus (French charity), where he often also encountered fragments of personal stories. Throughout the performance, he shines a light on the fragility of tulle, the traces of the party, and the enduring humanity behind each piece.

With Axelle Doué, Olivier Saillard and
Rachida Brakni

Membership

Join as a Member today.

Visit all our exhibitions for free, as many times as you like. Plus, get exclusive benefits across the Barbican. Sign up today and save the price of your exhibition ticket.

barbican.org.uk/join-support/membership



Please return this guide before leaving the exhibition

An online version of this guidebook can be accessed via the QR code, or visit: barbican.org.uk/exhibition-guides/dirty-looks-exhibition-guide

