

The Monster Mash



Maxime Dufour

"ARRRGH! Monsters in Fashion," an exhibit at La Gaîté Lyrique in Paris, is exploring the phenomenon of contemporary characters in fashion, art and design.

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Through disfigured silhouettes, reworked fabrics and glitzy sophistication, "ARRRGH! Monsters in Fashion," an exhibit at La Gaîté Lyrique in Paris, is exploring the phenomenon of contemporary characters in fashion, art and design.

As Vassilis Zidianakis, the exhibition's curator, explains it, he began noticing characters on various designers' catwalks in the 1990s — sometimes models in masks or clothing that gave unusual shapes to the body, treatments that he believes show the impact of video games, graphic design and other modern influences on fashion.

"Can we accept something different or do we only accept what is similar to us?" Mr. Zidianakis said. "When designers propose new shapes, for instance, there is a need to communicate. This is what the exhibition is about, accepting the 'other.'"

For the exhibit, such characters are mixed with fashion by 58 designers, including Alexander McQueen, Issey Miyake, Maison Martin Margiela, Rick Owens, Gareth Pugh, Bernhard Willhelm, Charlie Le Mindu and Walter Van Beirendonck.

The show is based on research by Atopos, a cultural organization founded by Mr. Zidianakis and the architect Stamos Fafalios in Greece in 2003. It also led to the

publication of "Not A Toy: Fashioning Radical Characters," published in 2011 in Berlin by Pictoplasma.

While the exhibit was initially displayed at the Benaki Museum in Athens, several new pieces were added for the Paris show, which ends April 7.

The current display was tailored to the show's needs, allowing the "extraordinary items to speak for themselves," said Mr. Fafalios, who undertook the exhibition's design. He asked La Gaité Lyrique, a digital arts and music center, to remove a string of ceiling lights and make other alterations, "turning something beautiful into something which looked like a bomb had exploded." Also, the French artist Freeka Tet devised a three-zone sound system.

"I dislike fashion in terms of the fashion industry's system. It's inhuman to be obliged to come up with so many collections per year," Mr. Zidianakis said. "But what I find fascinating is that the system is based on the profound human need for change, man's never-ending desire to redesign his body and reinvent himself."