

Daniel ARSHAM

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March 2020

DANIEL ARSHAM

**DIOR
SUMMER 2020**

**A TIME-WARP SCULPTOR RECASTING OBJECTS
AS POSTAPOCALYPTIC RELICS: DANIEL ARSHAM, IN HIS
COLLABORATION WITH DIOR, PROJECTS KIM JONES'S
COLLECTION INTO A FICTIONAL ARCHAEOLOGY**

STYLE BY MASHA ORLOV

ALEXI DAHAN, PHOTOGRAPHER'S ASSISTANT
STORY SHOT IN DANIEL ARSHAM'S STUDIO IN BROOKLYN
ALL ARTWORKS COURTESY OF THE ARTIST
AND EMMANUEL PERROTIN GALLERY

DANIEL ARSHAM'S BEIGE JEANS A-COLD-WALL* AND
SNEAKERS A-COLD-WALL* X NIKE AIR FORCE 1
WORN THROUGHOUT THE STORY

**INTERVIEW AND PHOTOGRAPHY
BY OLIVIER ZAHM**



OPPOSITE PAGE: WHITE SILK CANVAS SHIRT IN ALL-OVER BLUE,
HAND-PAINTED TOILE DE JOUY PRINT DIOR

DANIEL ARSHAM, *BLUE CALCITE ERODED VENUS DE MILO*, 2019,
HYDROSTONE, 85 X 23 5/8 X 25 5/8 INCHES



OLIVIER ZAHM — Let's start with Dior because this collaboration is exceptional — it's a deep, interesting connection between the brand and your work. And you seem to have been left free to propose crazy ideas.

DANIEL ARSHAM — This is all Kim [Jones, artistic director of Dior menswear] pushing through all of these ideas. He's always had this ability to synthesize and bring together different types of groups. So when he called me about the collaboration, he said, "Come up with exactly what you'd want to do." I was very interested to look in the archives. Dior has some of the most incredible archives, in Paris, of everything that Christian Dior touched — all of the things from his house, the early designs, sketches, things that never made it to market. One of the amazing things that I discovered was that before Christian Dior was in fashion, he owned an art gallery in Paris. It was a failure. [Laughs] And the gallery was one of the first to show Salvador Dalí.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Really?
DANIEL ARSHAM — Yeah. The painting *The Persistence of Memory* [1931] — the one with the clocks melting — was first shown at Dior's gallery in 1930-something.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Incredible.
DANIEL ARSHAM — So, Kim and I spent a lot of time in the archive looking at that. And the other thing we thought a lot about was his house in the South of France — some of the furniture there. I also really concentrated on the clock in his atelier in Paris. I was looking through some old photos of him. Literally, the clock on the wall in the atelier is the same clock that was there in the photos that I found from the '50s.

OLIVIER ZAHM — It never moved?

DANIEL ARSHAM — It never moved.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Your obsession with time is always there!

DANIEL ARSHAM — Yeah! Kim and I started talking a lot about the idea of time. And his goal was to translate some of the material quality from my works into wearable pieces. So, the ideas of the

crystal, the cracks, taking some of the drawings and looking back to the older things that spoke to us. At the time, he was looking at this very famous Galliano newsprint — the Dior newspaper print. Kim wanted to do something with that, so I took the original and took out all the images, and made drawings of all of the Christian Dior stuff: his clock, his phone, the original "Dior" letters that were on the cover of his book — and we made the print with that. Even the idea of the clear boots.

OLIVIER ZAHM — So, it was based on your drawings? You redrew the original stuff and transferred it onto clothes?

DANIEL ARSHAM — Yeah. And then Kim, with his team, investigated how they could add the crystallization to some of the garments and even to the hats that Stephen Jones did — which were, like, so crazy — all hand-made with real crystal. Kim paid so much attention to make it as authentically part of my world and Dior's world as possible.

OLIVIER ZAHM — It's a real intersection between the two, with mutual respect. How did you two meet?

DANIEL ARSHAM — I knew him through all of the different people that are around. There's a kind of circle — Matthew Williamson, Virgil Abloh. I'm not in fashion, but most of my friends are in fashion or architecture. So, he reached out shortly after the show he did with KAWS [American artist/designer Brian Donnelly]. The first two shows that he did, I don't think he had that much time to really get with the materials and experiment. We had a whole year, so we really had time to experiment. We tried a lot of things that didn't work, actually.

OLIVIER ZAHM — And you also did a crystallized edition of the logo, like a relic?

DANIEL ARSHAM — Yeah. We probably spent as much time on the show as we did on the collection. Just because it was so much about framing the experience of the collection. What we decided to do was a complete re-creation of Christian Dior's office in Paris and



BOTH PAGES: DANIEL ARSHAM, STUDIO TEST CASTS

the house in the South of France, but totally calcified. So it was all white, made of plaster, with crystals embedded. This formed the entrance. And the show set itself was a gradient of sand, from white to pink. The pink comes from the Dior pink, which comes from his house in the South of France. I created these large-scale eroding Dior letters — which we've now turned into an edition. We're doing a couple of different editions, including some of the functional objects. We created a version of the Dior Saddle bag, but it looks like one of my works that's degrading. But it's actually functional — they managed to make it functional.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Incredible. So, you can really use the bag? Or look at it as an edition, a sculpture?

DANIEL ARSHAM — It can be a sculpture, but the line between these two things is so blurred that you don't know which one it is.

OLIVIER ZAHM — But you blur lines in all your work. You're part of this generation of artists who use all kinds of media: architecture, film, sculpture. Fashion as a medium, set design.

DANIEL ARSHAM — Well, partly it's because we get bored and want to push a little bit and challenge. But this isn't really new. Warhol was doing this in the '60s. And, as an example, [the gallerist] Emmanuel Perrotin is a close friend of both of ours, and when I first started doing some of these collaborations seven years ago, I did one with Adidas, and he didn't say it explicitly, but I could tell he was a bit skeptical. He was like, "Ahh, I don't know..."

OLIVIER ZAHM — Emmanuel saw it as a dangerous path?

DANIEL ARSHAM — Yeah, exactly. But he didn't really say anything. It was more like he was wondering where it was going to go. And now he looks at Dior — and any other collaboration that I do that involves a brand — as an extension of the work. Warhol was doing this in the '60s, and nobody thought anything about it. One of the things Emmanuel said to me in the beginning was, "Are you concerned

that you're allowing this brand to use your artwork, your name, and your image to promote their own thing?" And I said, "Yes, but Emmanuel, I'm also using *them* for their reach and ability to cross over into everyday life." And he was like, "Absolutely, you're totally right."

OLIVIER ZAHM — Good answer. DANIEL ARSHAM — Yeah! And he's one of those people who's willing to take those risks with me. It's not something every gallerist is interested in doing.

OLIVIER ZAHM — I agree. Though Warhol was using Coca-Cola, for example, as a brand, but it was more a symbol of pop culture, mass culture, consumerism, or even capitalism than working in close collaboration.

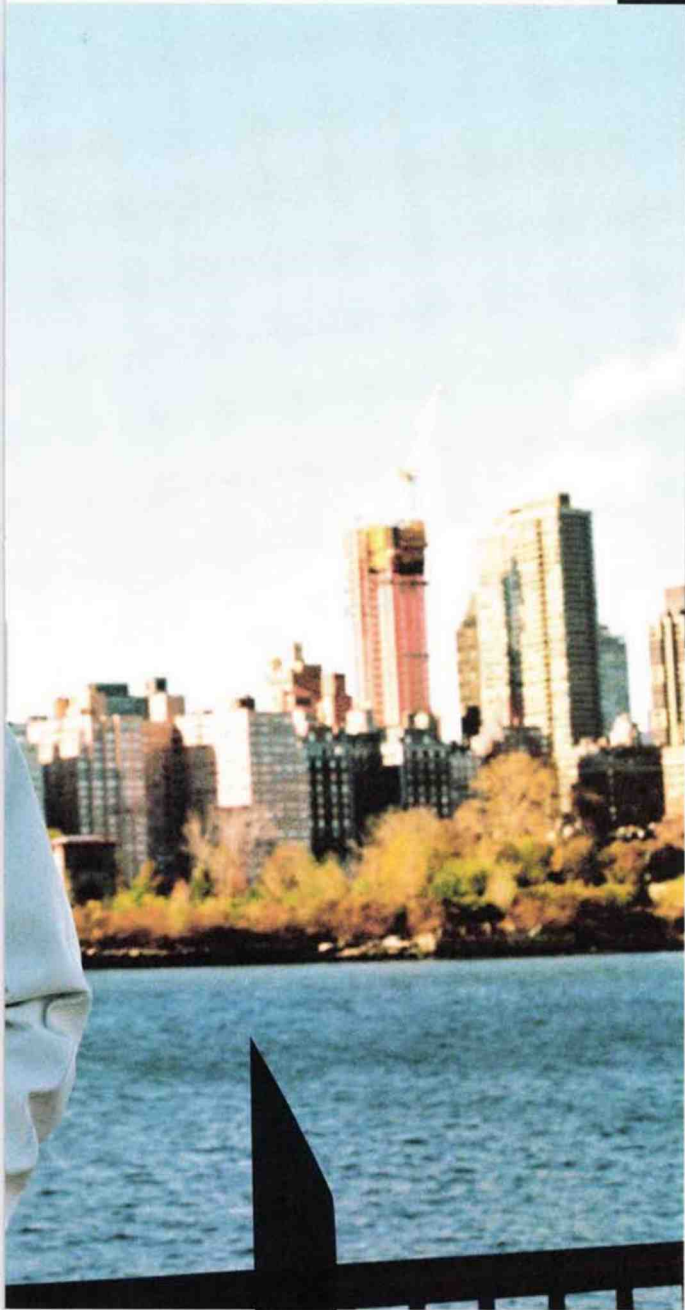
DANIEL ARSHAM — If Warhol were alive today, what would he be doing? He'd probably be working with Nike. He'd be doing all of the things that he'd have wanted to do. People forget — Warhol's first job was doing advertising. He loved advertising. He loved marketing. And he actually thought it was a beautiful idea to create imagery that could compel



I think my job — and the job of an artist — is to look at everyday life and show the invisible things that are just outside of it.



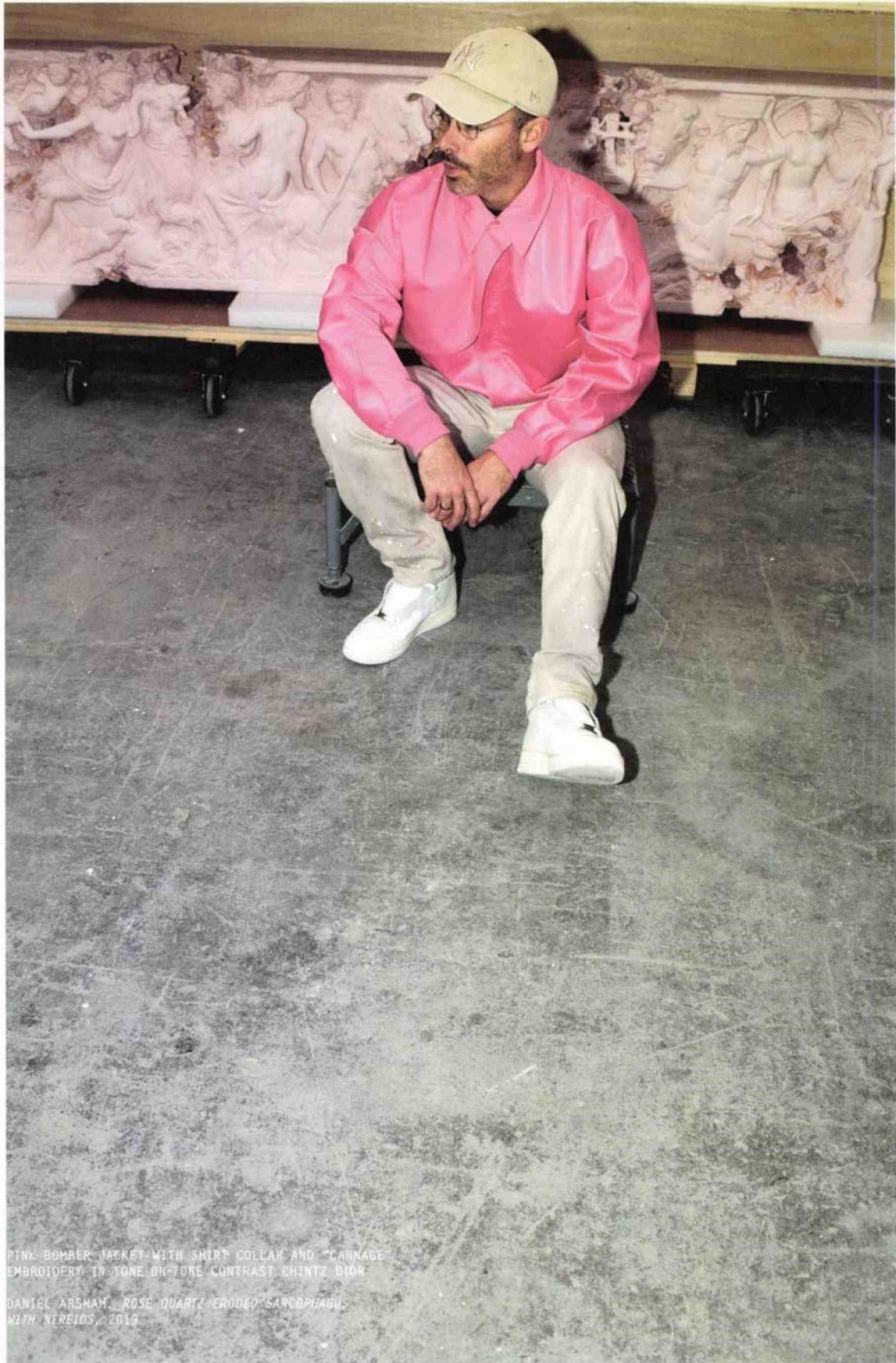
OFF-WHITE LAMBSKIN COAT WITH TROMPE L'ŒIL BUTTONS
AND "SADDLE" CHEST POCKET AND SHIRT DIOR



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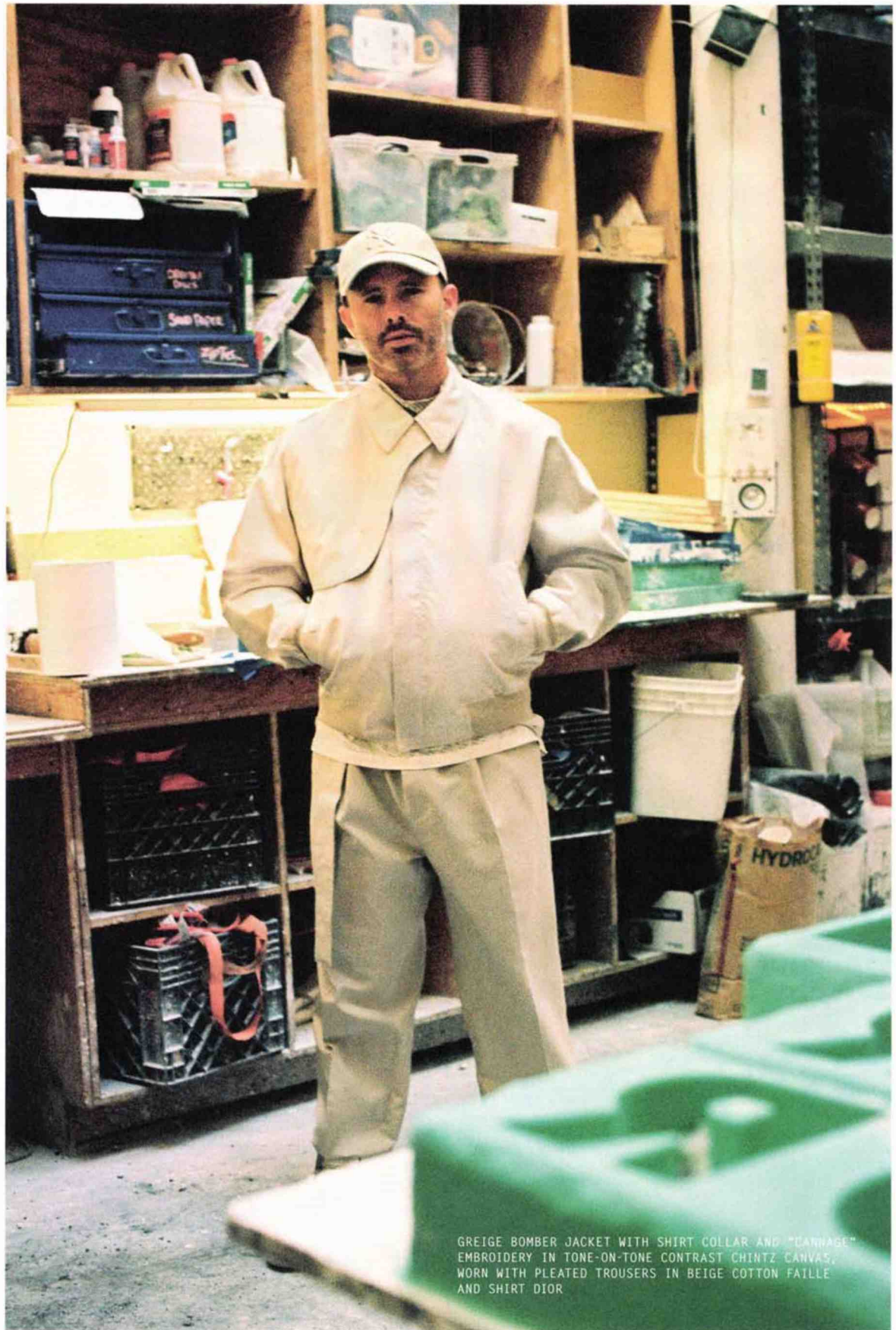
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PINK BOMBER JACKET WITH SHIRT COLLAR AND "CANNAGE"
EMBROIDERY IN TONE-ON-TONE CONTRAST CHINTZ DIOR

DANIEL ARSHAM, ROSE QUARTZ ERODED SARCOPHAGUS
WITH NEREIDS, 2019



GREIGE BOMBER JACKET WITH SHIRT COLLAR AND "DAMAGE" EMBROIDERY IN TONE-ON-TONE CONTRAST CHINTZ CANVAS, WORN WITH PLEATED TROUSERS IN BEIGE COTTON FAILLE AND SHIRT DIOR

something to be desirable and fulfill that idea of drinking the Coca-Cola and it making you happy. That simple idea was so beautiful to him, and people thought of it at that time as quite perverse to equate a commercial idea with an art object, because art was supposed to be sacred. And Warhol said: "No, art's everyday life. And this is the place where we need to engage some of those ideas." And I think the same thing.

OLIVIER ZAHM - So, a young artist like you today has no limits? Architecture, film, objects...

DANIEL ARSHAM - Yeah. I mean it's not like I'm accepted necessarily in the art world. And then in the architecture world, people think I'm an artist. And in film it's, like, you know... I'm never where I'm supposed to be. [Laughs] I'm always the outsider in every medium. And that's an interesting place to approach all of these things from.

OLIVIER ZAHM - Because being an outsider is a way to disrupt the domain.

DANIEL ARSHAM - It allows me to do things that are outside of expectations.

OLIVIER ZAHM - That's a good point. I'd love to speak about your obsession with white. What does it represent for you?

DANIEL ARSHAM - So, there are a couple of things. One is that I'm color-blind.

OLIVIER ZAHM - You are?

DANIEL ARSHAM - Yeah. [Laughs] I have a very limited color spectrum, in two areas of color. And it drastically reduces my ability to distinguish between colors in those ranges. This wasn't something that I consciously thought about - it was more that white and black and grays, when I see them, you're going to see the same thing. I know that what I'm making is objective. And so, white represents a base condition, obviously, but also a starting point. And the first show I did with Emmanuel, in 2005 - a lot of the works were pieces embedded in architecture. And because the walls were white, the works were white. So, it was more like making it disappear, making the work almost

part of the architecture, and in that way, it's part of everyday life. In some of the newer works, when the works are white, it's made of quartz; when the works are black, it's made of volcanic ash. But I have expanded into some color. Blue calcite in the *Venus de Milo* piece downstairs. Pink quartz for some of the Dior things. So the color comes in where it's a truth. I'm not painting a color - it's the color of the thing.

OLIVIER ZAHM - Okay, that's interesting. Let's speak about your obsession with the past. Where does it come from? You're developing this new work with [designer] Catherine Toloni, in Paris with the Louvre, where you'll have access to the molds of some original sculptures.

DANIEL ARSHAM - I'm working with the Musée Guimet for an exhibition that I started almost two years ago. They have a facility outside of Paris, where they keep a lot of the molds and things from the 19th century. I went there to visit, and in storage, there were molds of the *Venus de Milo*, of *The Winged Victory of Samothrace*, of Michelangelo's *Moses*. [Laughs] And I thought: "What is this? Can I use that for my work?" And they said: "Not really. I don't think so. It's part of France's patrimony. It's a government thing." And I was like, "I'm going to find a way." So, through a couple of different avenues - Emmanuel helped - we managed to get access and the rights. And one of the biggest concerns is, obviously, they don't want a denigration of French culture, but also, these molds, their original purpose was for study and archiving. And they don't want me to destroy the molds. So, I had to prove to them that when I use my materials, it's not going to damage the molds. They are basically using their original molds, but with my materials. And now that I'm in, I'm fully in - I have access to all of it! So, I'm doing the *Venus de Milo*, a version of Michelangelo's *Moses*, many different exteriors of sarcophagi. I'm doing a big show with Emmanuel in Paris. And it's not just things in the Louvre - it's things

in Versailles. The French government's, like, museum group - they want to protect the integrity of these works for the long term. And so, they make a mold of it, in case something could ever happen. They're doing something interesting now in Versailles: many of the outdoor works are showing damage from pollution. So they've made molds of all of them, and they're remaking them in synthetic marble.

OLIVIER ZAHM - No way!

DANIEL ARSHAM - And they take the original inside, and the copy stays outside. But if you saw it, there's no way you'd know. So, tourists will go to Versailles, and they're going to see these magnificent marble sculptures from Louis XIV, and it's not the real one.

OLIVIER ZAHM - [Laughs] It's all a copy! But why do we have this obsession with the original?

DANIEL ARSHAM - There's something about the hand. And one of the beautiful things that I love about the *Venus de Milo*, which I have downstairs, is the mold picks up all the damage in the marble - so, the scratches and breaks in the original are in the mold! And it creates this beautiful history that's embedded within the object.

OLIVIER ZAHM - So, this is your new work. You always go back and dig through the past, but also project into the future. And you create a sort of ambiguity or destabilization...

DANIEL ARSHAM - A dislocation.

OLIVIER ZAHM - Is it because you're pessimistic about the future?

DANIEL ARSHAM - No. I'm not pessimistic. I mean, you know, since the beginning of time, humans have predicted the end of civilization, of humanity, and...

OLIVIER ZAHM - As soon as a civilization starts...

DANIEL ARSHAM - They start to think about the end. And now we have a global civilization, so it seems a bit more concerning, but up to now, we've always predicted it, and it's never come. However, I do have a lot of concerns about the environment and ecology, and, certainly, in the

initial thinking around these works, my intention was not to provoke a conversation around climate change, or anything like that, but when you're looking at an object from your life as if it's in a kind of post-apocalyptic future, it can provoke these feelings about the potential of the planet to disappear. Roman civilization doesn't exist, but humanity's still here. So, I think *something* will last. Whether it's this civilization...

OLIVIER ZAHM - And survive in some form.

DANIEL ARSHAM - Yeah. Humans are pretty resilient. And also, I believe, need to be on the brink of disaster before they actually recognize... This may be a bad example, but during World War II, the US enriched enough uranium to build atomic bombs in three years, and it cost trillions of dollars and hundreds of thousands of people, and they managed to do that. Same thing if you think about flight: just over 100 years ago, there was no flight. Now there are spacecraft millions of miles away from the Earth, so I think solutions to a lot of these problems will come through science.

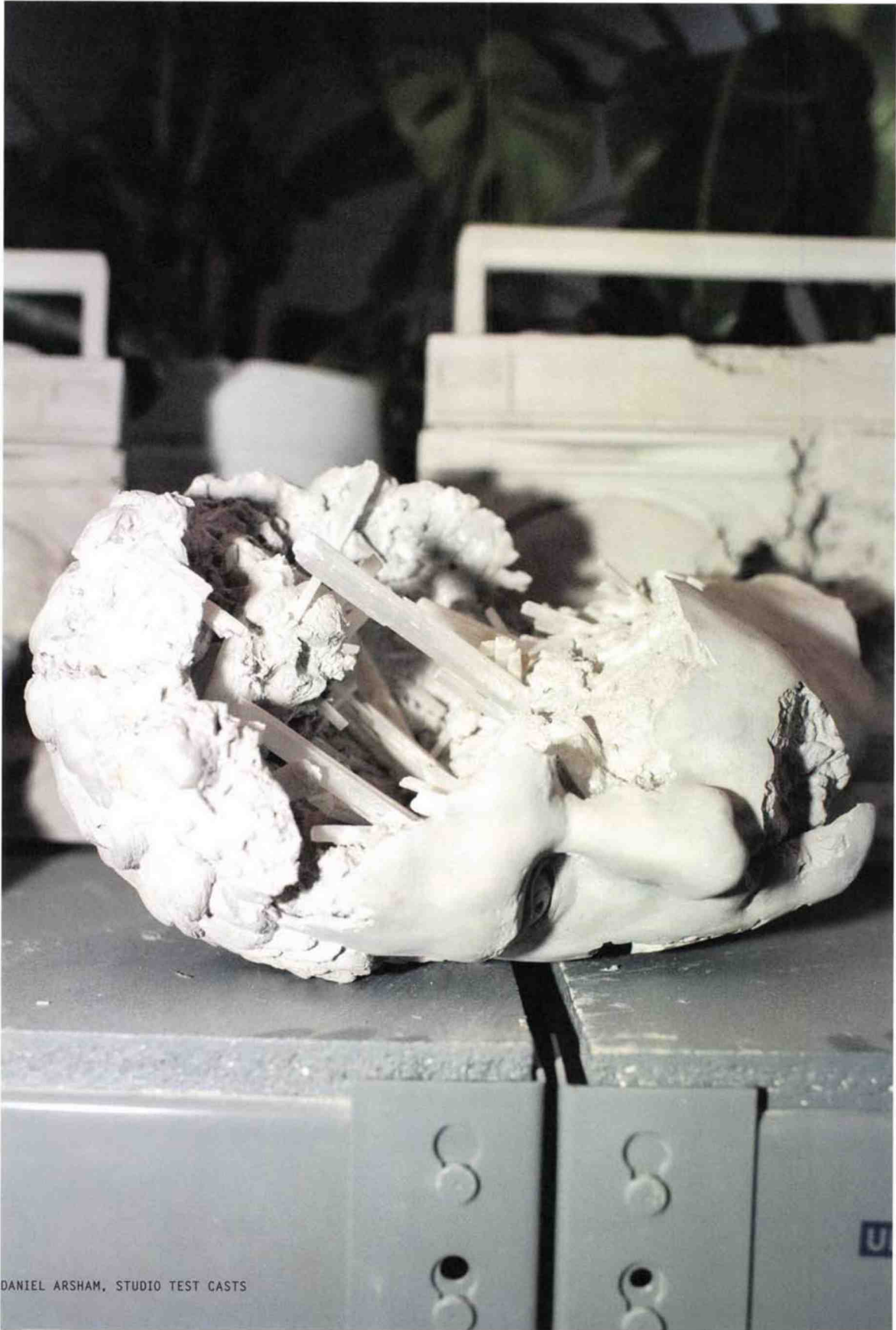
OLIVIER ZAHM - With absolute urgency. So, you create collaborations of sorts between the past and the future. Do you agree with the term "dystopic" for your work?

DANIEL ARSHAM - I've never thought about it as dystopic. There's a kind of inevitability. That camera that you have, it will still exist in a thousand years, but it'll be in some other form - maybe it's going to be calcified, maybe it'll be found in a dump or something like that? It doesn't mean that your life degraded into some dystopic future. It's a kind of inevitability. And there's a little bit of comfort in that idea. But I'm open to the ambiguity of this transformation.

OLIVIER ZAHM - What about the present? How do you see this moment, as an artist? Do you feel confused?

DANIEL ARSHAM - No, not particularly confused. [Laughs]

OLIVIER ZAHM - You've been able to adapt to this world in a very exceptional way



DANIEL ARSHAM, STUDIO TEST CASTS



because you're extremely young, you have a vision... DANIEL ARSHAM - I think my job - and the job of an artist - is to look at everyday life and show the invisible things that are just outside of it. The works that are white, when you walk into a room, you don't immediately notice them. It can be disturbing, but it's also very quiet. Same thing with the objects that are cast in these materials - it's really just a material shift from the original. So, it's this mirror image of our everyday experience, that's just on our periphery. And this is what I appreciate most in other artists, as well.

OLIVIER ZAHM - So your position is to interpret and shift. And you also like to include the public, right? DANIEL ARSHAM - There are certain artists who can be in a room and make paintings, and it's for them. The work I make is really for the viewer and the people who engage with it - it's kind of made by them. If not, it exists in this weird vacuum. It becomes something through their interpretation of it and their experience with it. This is why all of the exhibitions that I make are not just the work, but how you approach the work, what the light's like, even what the smell is like in the space.

OLIVIER ZAHM - This is why you're also sensitive to architecture and collaborate with dancers. Because you have to integrate all the movements in the room. DANIEL ARSHAM - Mm, yeah.

OLIVIER ZAHM - Do you have anything to say about the brain? Have you done any work about it? DANIEL ARSHAM - No, not really. I mean, it's a fascinating thing. When I started talking about this color-blindness idea... Vision is really an interpretation of the way that your brain understands information. And the reason why I'm color-blind isn't because of my brain - it's because, within my eyes, I'm missing some of the rods and cones that read certain spectrums of light. And so, when that information is translated to my brain, it's missing this part. Which is

interesting... Part of your experience is based on how you see, but another part is how your brain interprets this information.

OLIVIER ZAHM - And you love crystal. It has a lot of meaning, right? Because it's the transformation of time, through pressure. But it's also very mystical, a New Age element. Do you consider that aspect?

DANIEL ARSHAM - I consider it, but I don't speak about it in relation to the work. Generally, I don't say that the work is about anything in particular.

OLIVIER ZAHM - You leave it open to interpretation.

DANIEL ARSHAM - Yeah. But certainly, I'm aware of this universe of crystal healing. But, for me, when I make a work, the material should say as much as the form that it takes. And, you know, I didn't take a camera and paint it to look old and kind of destroyed. It's really made of a material that, when we look at it, it feels real that it's transformed over time. And because we associate crystal with this kind of geological time frame, our experience tells us that there's something confusing in this object: it's an object from now, but it looks like it's from the future. How did it evolve over this time? How did the crystals grow in it? And then, the other quality of it that I also find really interesting is, although the objects look like they're falling apart - like they're breaking - when we think about crystal, it's always growth. So, the object could be falling apart, or it could actually be growing to a kind of completion of the object. And that kind of ambiguity is really interesting.

END



DANIEL ARSHAM, *QUARTZ ERODED BUST OF ZEUS*, 2019, SELENITE QUARTZ AND HYDROSTONE

OPPOSITE PAGE: GRAY LAMBSKIN COAT WITH TROMPE L'ŒIL BUTTONS AND "SADDLE" CHEST POCKET WORN WITH GRAY LONG-SLEEVE T-SHIRT WITH FUNNEL COLLAR IN ERODED ALL-OVER "DIOR OBLIQUE" MOTIF DIOR

DANIEL ARSHAM, STUDIO TEST CASTS