Daniel ARSHAM

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DANIEL ARSHAM

DIOR
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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 Galáns newspaper print – 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 handmade 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 with KAWS, 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 relief?

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...
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. The show 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.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Incredible.

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, 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 doing all of the things that he'd have wanted to do. People forget — Warhol's first job was doing advertising. He loved advertising. And he actually thought it was a beautiful idea to create imagery that could compel...
OFF-WHITE LAMBSKIN COAT WITH TROMPE L'ŒIL BUTTONS AND "SADDLE" CHEST POCKET AND SHIRT DIOR
GREIGE BOMBER JACKET WITH SHIRT COLLAR AND "CANNAGE" EMBROIDERY IN TONE-ON-TONE CONTRAST CHINTZ CANVAS. WORK WITH PLEATED TROUSERS IN BEIGE COTTON FAILLE AND SHIRT DIOR.
something to be desirable and fulfill that idea of drinking the Coca-Cola and making you happy. That simple idea... par-
OLIVIER ZAHM - You've been able to adapt to this world in a very exceptional way... white. What does it repre-
OLIVIER ZAHM - Because being an outsider is a way to dis-rupt the domain.
OLIVIER ZAHM - That's a good point. I'd love to speak about your obsession with white, and it's very difficult to repre-
OLIVIER ZAHM - You are? DANIEL ARSHAM - Yeah. [Laughs] I have a very lim-
OLIVIER ZAHM - With absolute urgency. So, you create col-
OLIVIER ZAHM - Is it because you're pessimistic about the future? DANIEL ARSHAM - No. I'm not pessimistic. I mean, you
OLIVIER ZAHM - As soon as a civilization starts... DANIEL ARSHAM - They start to think about the end. And now we have a global civi-
OLIVIER ZAHM - What about the present? How do you see this moment, as an artist? Do you feel confused?
OLIVIER ZAHM - You've been able to adapt to this world in a very exceptional way... in Versailles. The French government's, like, museum group - they want to pre-
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, tour-
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 truth-of-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 desta-
OLIVIER ZAHM - A dislocation.
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OLIVIER ZAHM - No way! DANIEL ARSHAM - And 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 sculp-tures from Louis XIV, and it's not the real one.
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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 - What is your position 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, my 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

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

DANIEL ARSHAM, STUDIO TEST CASTS