

# Is it Real? Is it Fake? The Saga of Kanye West's Alexander McQueen Dante Mask, Explained

Kanye West wore an Alexander McQueen Dante mask to Super Bowl LVIII. Some people questioned its authenticity. We break down the controversy.

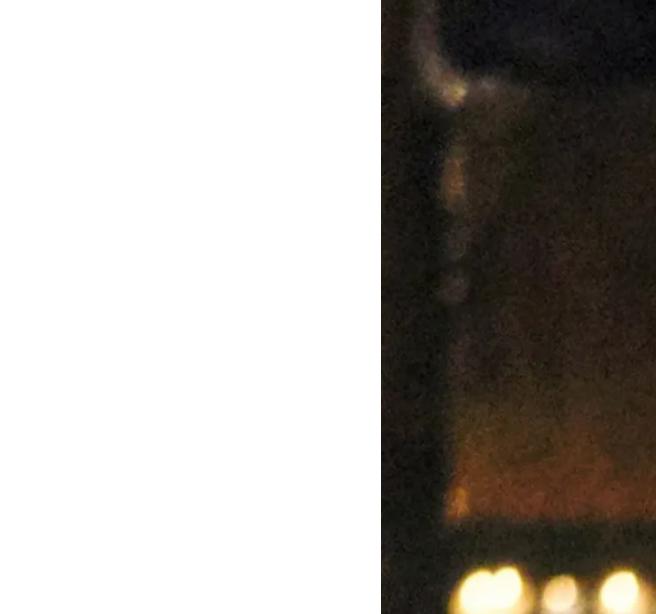


BY MIKE DESTEFANO

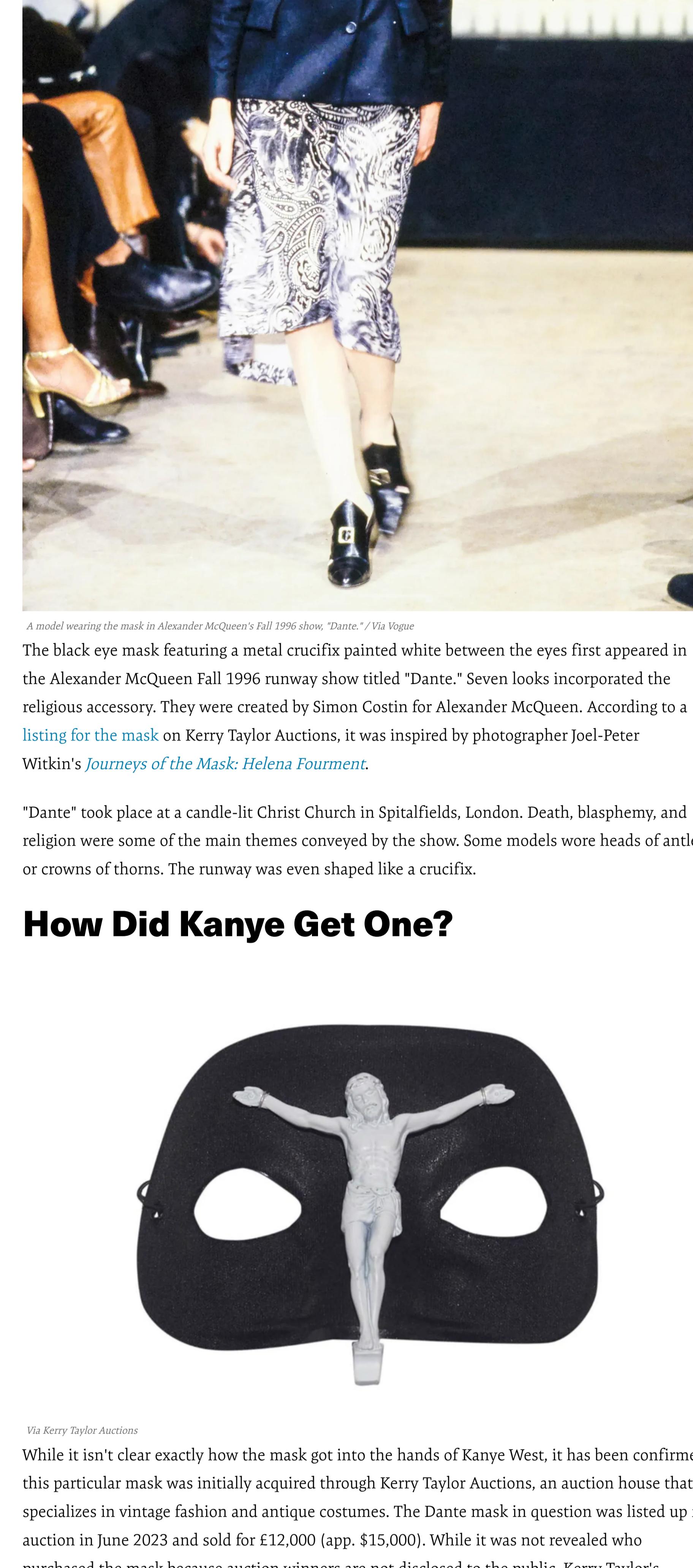
February 13, 2024



COMMENT



## Where Is the Mask From?

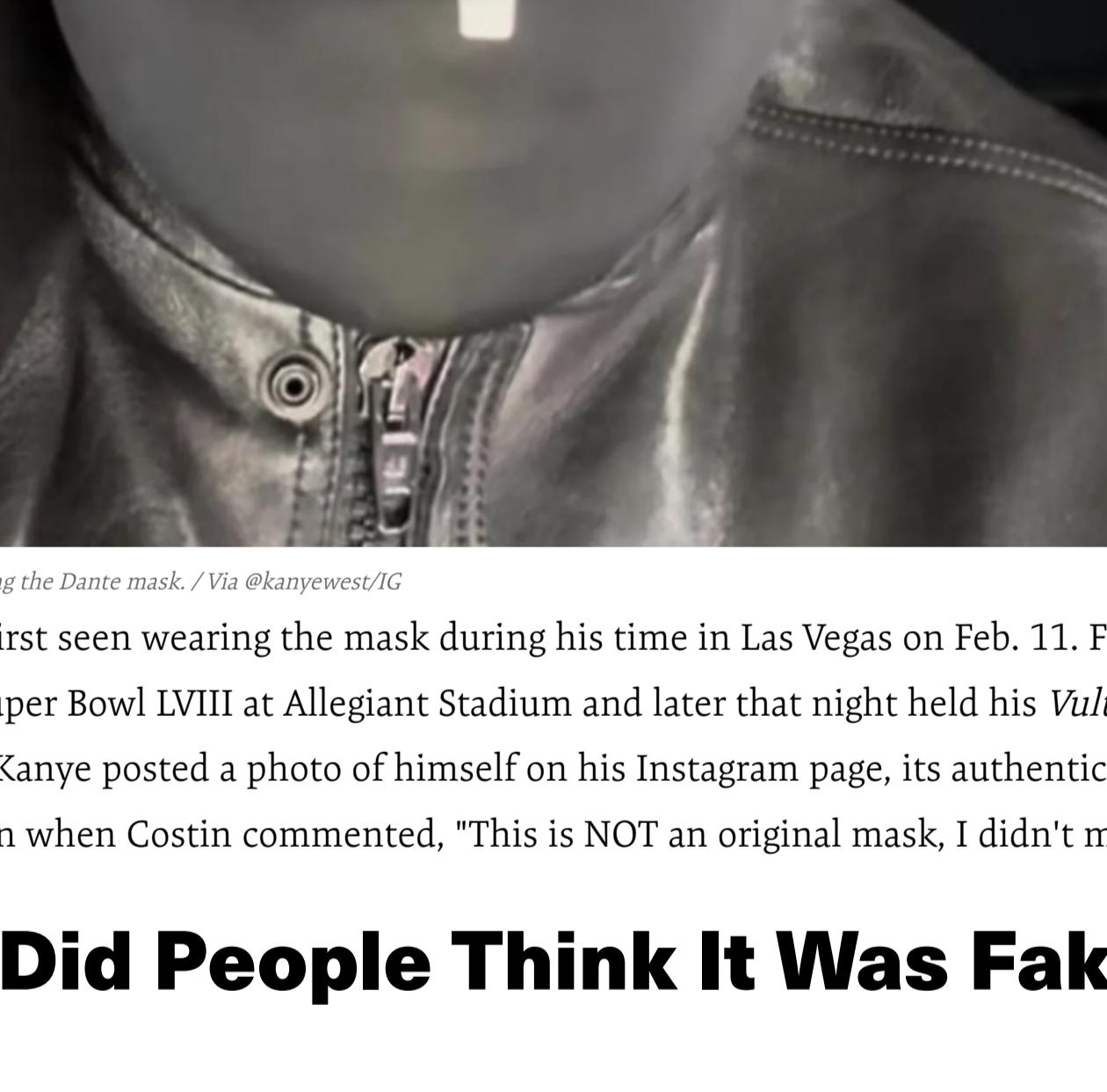


A model wearing the mask in Alexander McQueen's Fall 1996 show, "Dante." / Via Vogue

The black eye mask featuring a metal crucifix painted white between the eyes first appeared in the Alexander McQueen Fall 1996 runway show titled "Dante." Seven looks incorporated the religious accessory. They were created by Simon Costin for Alexander McQueen. According to a listing for the mask on Kerry Taylor Auctions, it was inspired by photographer Joel-Peter Witkin's *Journeys of the Mask: Helena Fourment*.

"Dante" took place at a candle-lit Christ Church in Spitalfields, London. Death, blasphemy, and religion were some of the main themes conveyed by the show. Some models wore heads of antlers or crowns of thorns. The runway was even shaped like a crucifix.

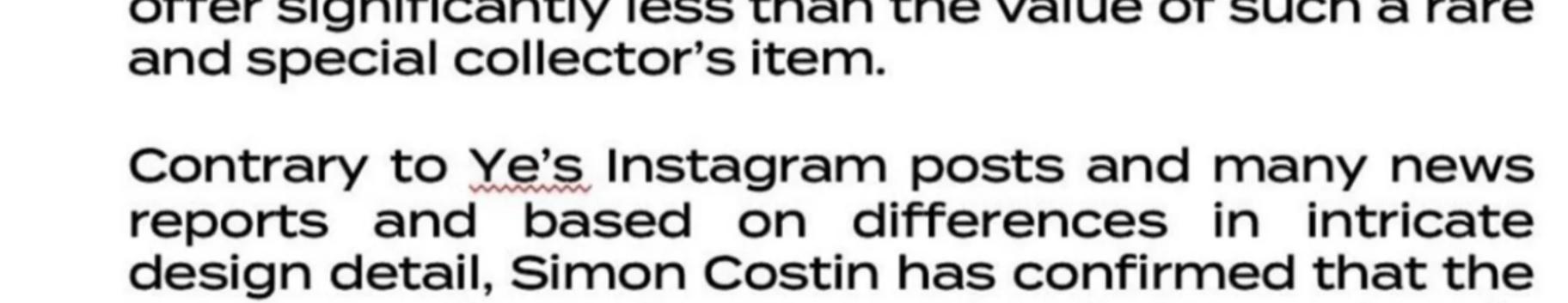
## How Did Kanye Get One?



Via Kerry Taylor Auctions

While it isn't clear exactly how the mask got into the hands of Kanye West, it has been confirmed this particular mask was initially acquired through Kerry Taylor Auctions, an auction house that specializes in vintage fashion and antique costumes. The Dante mask in question was listed up for auction in June 2023 and sold for £12,000 (app. \$15,000). While it was not revealed who purchased the mask because auction winners are not disclosed to the public, Kerry Taylor's official Instagram page did comment on a post by @pechuga\_vintage stating, "We can confirm Ye's is genuine, as we know who bought it..." Costin commented on a post from London-based vintage store Nordic Poetry to clarify that Kanye does not own the mask. It was a rental.

## Where Did Kanye Wear It?



Kanye West wearing the Dante mask. / Via @kanyewest/IG

Kanye was first seen wearing the mask during his time in Las Vegas on Feb. 11. First, he was attending Super Bowl LVIII at Allegiant Stadium and later that night held his *Vultures* listening party. After Kanye posted a photo of himself on his Instagram page, its authenticity was called into question when Costin commented, "This is NOT an original mask, I didn't make it."

## Why Did People Think It Was Fake?

BYRONESQUE.

### IN DEFENSE OF THE MAKERS YE'S DANTE MASK IS A FAKE

Simon Costin is the original designer and maker of Alexander McQueen's Christ masks from the Dante collection, 1996. Ye's team contacted Byronesque in September 2023 to source an original McQueen Dante mask. We were able to quickly source this from Simon Costin himself, with full confidence of its authenticity.

We shared detailed condition photographs with Ye's team who confirmed the purchase and to offer significantly less than the value of such a rare and special collector's item.

Contrary to Ye's Instagram posts and many news reports and based on differences in intricate design detail, Simon Costin has confirmed that the mask worn by Ye is a recreation, is not authentic and should not be credited as such.

A now-deleted Instagram post from Byronesque on Instagram claiming that Kanye's mask was fake. / Via @byronesque/IG

The authenticity of the mask was further questioned after Byronesque, a company who helps source vintage fashion pieces, posted on its Instagram defending Costin and proclaiming Kanye's Dante a fake. The now-deleted post detailed how Byronesque sourced an original Dante mask from Costin in September 2023 for Kanye. The rapper's team offered "significantly less than the value of such a rare and special collector's item" and the purchase was never finalized. The post concluded stating, "Contrary to Ye's Instagram posts and many news reports and based on differences in intricate design detail, Simon Costin has confirmed that the mask worn by Ye is a recreation, is not authentic and should not be credited as such."

KANYE WEST ALEXANDER MCQUEEN

21st Jun, 2023 14:00 GMT+1/BST

## The Mr Steven Philip Collection (part 1) & Passion for Fashion

Lot 462



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### A Simon Costin for Alexander McQueen crucifix mask, 'Dante' collection, Autumn-Winter 1996-97

of pressed plastic covered in black polyester jersey, the white painted metal crucifix attached with copper wires and secured with resin on the back, width 18cm 7in

The Simon Costin Archive sold in aid of The Museum of British Folklore

*"Some years before the Dante show, I had shown some artworks in Milan at an exhibition, alongside an American photographer called Joel Peter Witkin. I was a huge fan of Witkin's work and was totally in awe of him. Thinking Lee might find his work interesting too, I bought him the catalogue. In one of the images, 'Journeys of the Mask: Helena Fourment', Witkin had a model wearing a black party face mask with a figure of Christ attached to it, taken, I presume, from a crucifix. Lee asked me to make up half a dozen of them for the show. I have to say I felt uneasy about doing this at the time but seeing as Lee was busy lifting Don McCullin's photographs to make into printed fabrics at the time, 'homages' seemed to be the order of the day...." Simon Costin.*

McQueen's mother Joyce was an amateur genealogist who discovered that their family was descended from Huguenots who had settled in the Spitalfields area. Many of McQueen's ancestors are buried in the graveyard at Christ Church in Spitalfields, the setting for the Dante show, held March 1<sup>st</sup> 1996. The then rundown church was built by Nicholas Hawksmoor between 1714 and 1729 and McQueen delighted in the rumours that he had been a secret satanist. Its decaying interior with its spooky ambience was the perfect backdrop to the collection which contrasted the fragile beauty of lace with Victorian silhouettes and fabrics in mourning colours. The setting, and particularly the accessories worn by the models added a disquieting provocative and subversive undercurrent to the show which was dedicated to his friend Isabella Blow.

Death, blasphemy, religion, memento-mori were interwoven as themes with a catwalk made in the shape of a crucifix. Headresses, masks and jewellery were designed and made by Simon Costin with a set of head antlers by Phillip Treacy and beautifully crafted silver jewellery including a Crown of Thorns by Shaun Leane. In an interview with WWD McQueen stated that the show was about

*'war and peace through the years, I think religion has caused every war in the world, which is why I showed in a church'.*

Catwalk image courtesy of Robert Fairer. Additional archive images of Simon together with Joel Witkin at the exhibition in Milan and of Joel Witkin wearing the mask, both courtesy of Simon Costin.

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