

“Artifashion Intelligenzia” – The Virtual Journey of the Mask

by Artoldo – Sara Ferro and Chris Weil

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Interactive Web VR installation: <https://artoldo.com/mcqueen>

Trailer: https://youtu.be/No_439hKn6Y



Artifashion Intelligence™

The Virtual Journey of the Mask

**Featuring Alexander McQueen, Joel-Peter Witkin,
David Bowie, Kanye West, Lady Gaga, Isabella
Blow, Sarah Burton and many more**

Abstract

To address the perceived evasiveness of actors within the fashion system—both in production and in reception—regarding the distinction between fashion and art, a paradigmatic case was selected. This case is presented in a synthetic virtual reality environment using mixed media, showcasing its documentation, sources, and analyses audiovisually.

The focus is on Alexander McQueen’s use of inspiration from photographer Joel-Peter Witkin, tracing a historical reconstruction that includes key figures from the fashion and star systems, spanning from the original events to the present.

Artifashion Intelligenzia is a virtual reality installation blending digital visuals, 3D objects, AI-generated text, and voice cloning within an immersive 360° space. Crafted using code like JavaScript and HTML, it brings together various artistic elements into a dynamic, evolving experience.

Keywords

#A-frame #fashion #art #AlexanderMcQueen #Joel-PeterWitkin

Biography

Artoldo, a moving images arts duo, featuring Sara Ferro and Chris Weil, creating documentaries, multimedia projects and experimental arthouse movies with focus on video poetry, essay film and fine art prints from their works as well as VR and net.art 5.0 installations. Their research extends from fashion, media and cybernetics to old doctrines, alternative life styles and worlds, esotericism, upon system criticism. With a mixed media approach they try to cover visible and invisible, above and below. With a M.A. in Sociology of Communication in Milan her and him graduating and working as Film & Video editor in Munich, they are two raiders and a commando in the art world.



Fig.01 - Screenshot: Artifashion Intelligence – The Virtual Journey of the Mask | Artoldo

Unanswered Question: the Divide Between Fashion and Art

In the ever-evolving conversation between fashion and art, the boundaries remain fluid and open to interpretation. This exploration seeks to capture the tension between these two realms, focusing on how their intersecting histories, aesthetics, and practices shape the culture around us. Through visual and emotional fragments, it raises questions of identity, meaning, and the complex systems that govern fashion's creation, production, and consumption.

Drawing on D'Aura's (2023) notion of fashion as a floating signifier, the installation reflects on how fashion, like art, adopts shifting and often conflicting meanings. The installation uses visual elements to express this ambiguity, questioning whether fashion can truly be considered art, or if it simply borrows from it. These questions are not answered directly, but are instead conveyed through fragmented expressions and dynamic, evolving forms, much like the way collections, photographs, and fashion films often speak more powerfully than words.

At the heart of the installation is the case of Alexander McQueen's reinterpretation of Joel-Peter Witkin's crucifix mask in the series *Journeys of the Mask*, within the specific photo *Helene Fourmet* (1984) and *Sanitarium* (1983) photo. This iconic image, which resonated with the avant-garde, became pivotal in McQueen's ascent, capturing the symbiotic yet contradictory relationship between fashion and art. What began as niche art photography in the 1980s evolved, through McQueen's lens, into a defining symbol of contemporary culture.



Fig.02 - Screenshot: Artifashion Intelligence – The Virtual Journey of the Mask | Artoldo

The mask's influence spread beyond the fashion world, appearing in music videos by figures like David Bowie, Marilyn Manson, and Nine Inch Nails, and continues to be reinterpreted.

ted in today's culture. This mask became part of a creative network, a “Golden Chain”,¹ that carried it from art into pop culture, shaping how we understand both art and fashion today.

As Uhlírová (2004, 89) observes, the contributions of designers, photographers, and curators have dissolved the boundaries between fashion and art, reflecting a postmodern ethos that elevates fashion's cultural significance. Through this journey, the mask transcended its origins, becoming an enduring symbol of the fluid, ever-shifting relationship between fashion and art.



Fig.03 - Screenshot: Artifashion Intelligence – The Virtual Journey of the Mask | Artoldo

Case Study: Story and Representation

The inspiration for this work comes from British designer Alexander McQueen's incorporation of elements from controversial American photographer Joel-Peter Witkin, particularly in his FW '96 *Dante* and SS '01 *Voss* shows. McQueen drew from Witkin's *Journeys of the Mask* series (1983–1984) and the photograph *Sanitarium* (1983), transforming these references into live runway installations.

Key figures include beyond McQueen and Witkin, fashion designers Sarah Burton, Séan McGirr, influencers Isabella Blow, Fecal Matter, pop-stars David Bowie, Lady Gaga, and

¹ A “Golden Chain” serves as a visual element in the installation. See the related paragraph for details.

Kanye West. Also integral to the narrative are creative director Simon Costin, jewelry designer Shaun Leane, milliner Philip Treacy, streetwear brand Supreme, retailer Byronesque, and auction house Kerry Taylor Auctions.

This project traces Witkin’s mask from the mid-1980s to 2024, exploring its evolution through a virtual journey. The subtitle, *The Virtual Journey of the Mask*, references both Witkin’s series and Artoldo’s artistic process in rendering the mask virtually.

“Virtual” here has three meanings: 1) created through virtual reality techniques, 2) shaped by early AI technologies, and 3) something existing in potential.² The term also echoes “virtue”, representing Artoldo’s innovative approach, extending the museum space into virtual realms, a fresh perspective on museality.³

This concept resonates with discussions from the “Summer School in Fashion Media Studies” (Biella, Città Studi, 26-29 September 2024), where either constructive, undertoned, disguised or sharp critiques of fashion exhibitions, such as those of Gianfranco Ferré⁴, Salvatore Ferragamo⁵ and Dolce&Gabbana⁶ and others inspired Artoldo’s response.

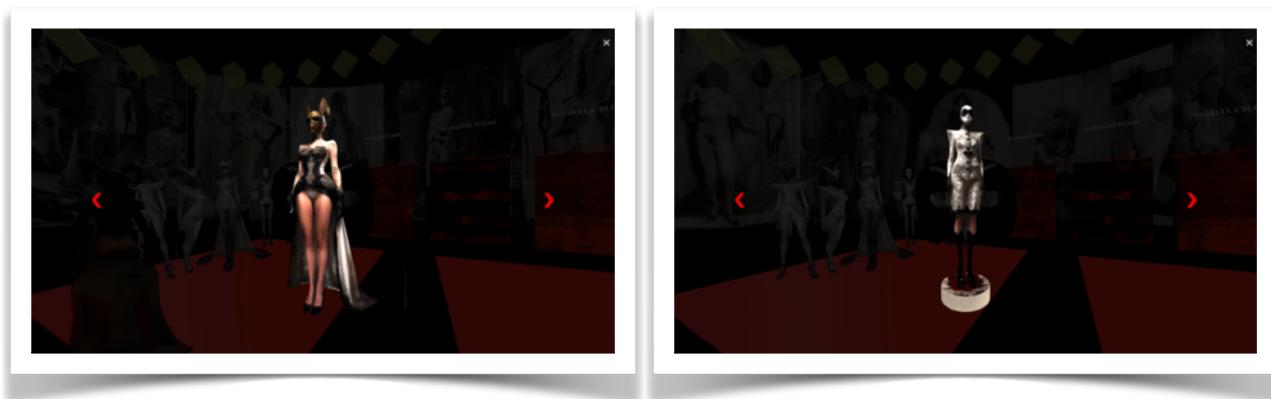


Fig.04|05 - Screenshot: Artifashion Intelligence – The Virtual Journey of the Mask | Artoldo

Serendipitously, Artoldo’s focus on Witkin’s mask aligned with a talk by Alessandro Amaducci and Eleonora Manca during the Biella days - furthermore, they authored a book which features Floria Sigismondi’s works as pivotal to fashion film, the same Sigismondi who Artoldo independently recognized crucial to the present analysis on the circulation of Wit-

² “Treccani”, Vocabulary, accessed October 23, 2024, <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/virtuale/>

³ Refers to the paragraph of the chapter *The McQueen After Life Collection*.

⁴ *Gianfranco Ferré. Tra ragione e sentimento*, Palazzo Malinvern, Legnano, October 2024, an installation curated by the Gianfranco Ferré Research Center at the Politecnico di Milano.

⁵ *Salvatore Ferragamo 1898–1960*, Palazzo Spini Ferrone, Florence, October 2023–November 2024, curated by Stefania Ricci.

⁶ *Dal Cuore alle Mani*, Palazzo Reale, Milan, July-August 2024, curated by Florence Müller.

kin's oeuvre. Sara Ferro, who first encountered Witkin's work in February 2024, later recognized the mask in McQueen's show, confirming its connection. This coincidence affirms the relevance of the mask's virtual journey.

Behind the Scenes

A mixed-media installation unites virtual reality, 3D modeling, and AI-enhanced text with human research. Through voice-cloned interviews, dialogues, monologues, and digital collages, it blends archival material with cutting-edge technology, reimagined via video and net art.

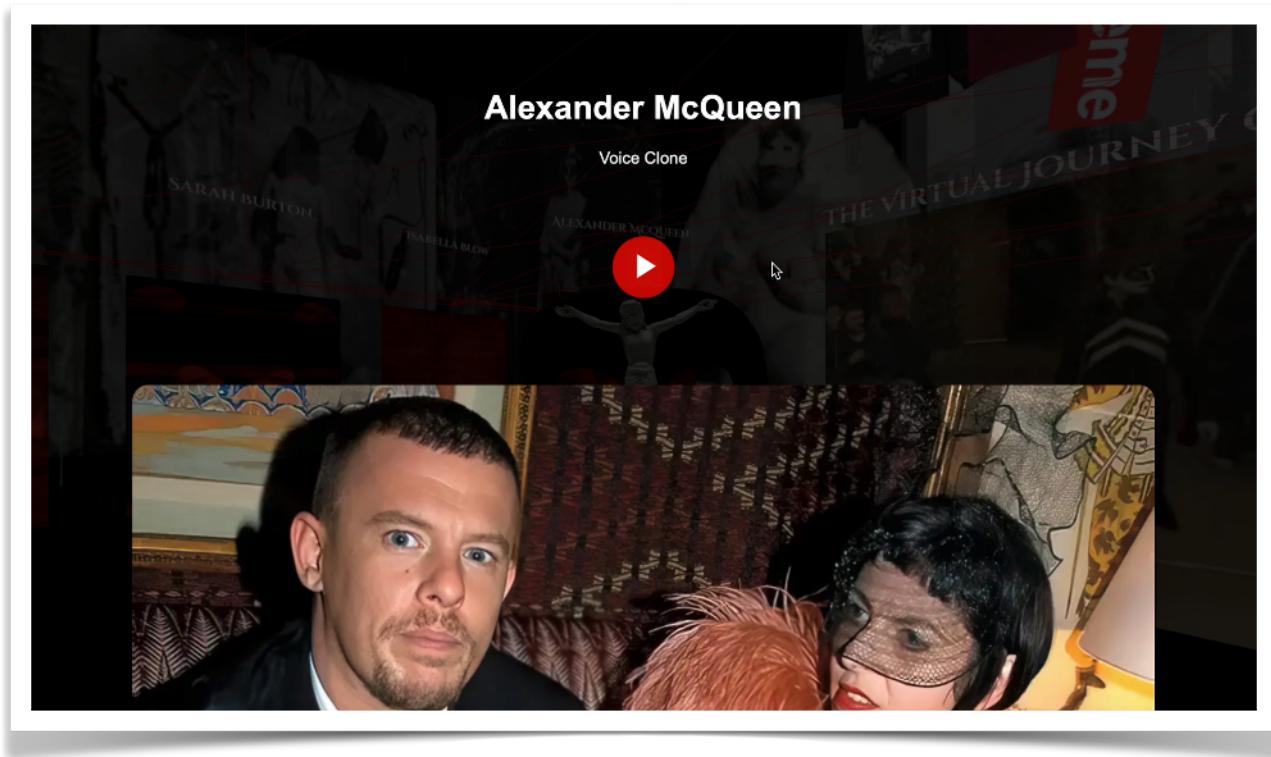


Fig.06 - Screenshot: Artifashion Intelligence – The Virtual Journey of the Mask | Artoldo

The project delves into fashion's archival obsession, using VR to reimagine lost narratives in a “cinema vérité 5.0” style. Sourced from online articles, magazines, blogs, and forums, the stories unfold through innovative non-linear storytelling, videos, and excerpts, creating a cohesive and immersive experience.

Creative archiving leverages text-to-3D and image-to-3D tools, blending functionality with aesthetics. Powered by WebVR and HTML5, the expandable framework redefines virtual exhibition design, setting a new benchmark for synthetic environments.

Visual Description of the Artwork

The homepage introduces the installation with its title, subtitle, a brief abstract, and access instructions alongside an “ENTER” button. Key points addressing the relationship between fashion and art are presented audiovisually, avoiding didacticism. The original “backstage pass” for a McQueen’s runway (referencing Dante’s Inferno, 1996) invites users to enter.

Clicking “ENTER” transitions through a black loading screen with a red infinity spinner into a 3D virtual space. Users navigate using a cursor shaped like Witkin’s mask with a white crucifix, exploring looped portraits featuring audio monologues, descriptions, and reconstructed dialogues on fashion and art. These voices, processed with AI text and voice cloning, represent “intellectuals of fashion” who reflect on creation rather than theory.



Fig.07 - Screenshot: Artifashion Intelligence – The Virtual Journey of the Mask | Artoldo

The installation expresses the connection between fashion and art through evolving garment designs as living, dynamic thoughts. While academia debates the distinction, creators distill it into slogans that elevate fashion as an art form deserving reverence.

Research into McQueen’s iconic FW’96 *Dante* and SS’01 *Voss* collections, and figures like Elsa Schiaparelli, underscores this intersection. Pop culture’s role, through media like music videos, further reveals fashion’s overlap with art.

Blurring traditional boundaries, the installation offers an immersive experience that highlights fashion's artistic essence through layered meanings and interactions.

Unlockable Content

The installation showcases six interactive portraits that seamlessly blend GIFs, video art, and moving image traditions, uniting analog and digital aesthetics. Hovering the cursor-masked icon over a portrait for five seconds unlocks multimedia content, a deliberate delay to prevent accidental activation.



Fig.08 - Screenshot: Artifashion Intelligence – The Virtual Journey of the Mask | Artoldo

The portraits represent key figures bridging fashion, music, and art:

1. Joel-Peter Witkin – The Controversial Artist
2. Lee Alexander McQueen – The Arty-Crafty Artisan Fashion Artist
3. David Bowie – The Iconic Musician
4. Isabella Blow – The Fashionista
5. Lady Gaga – The Fashion-Music Artist
6. Sarah Burton – The Former Creative Director
7. Séan McGirr – The Current Creative Director
8. Kanye West – The Hip-Pop Stylist
9. Fecal Matter – The Fashion Influencers

Each portrait loops continuously, inviting exploration and deeper engagement with the multimedia layers embedded in their narratives.

Hidden Secrets Behind Each Portrait

1. Audio Files

- Voice Cloning: Artificially replicated voices bring the subjects to life, narrating texts rooted in two main sources:
 - AI-Generated Texts: Created using detailed instructions collaboratively crafted by the creators and AI.
 - Historical Documents: Archival material from online repositories, such as a re-enacted phone call between David Bowie and Alexander McQueen.

2. Multimedia

- Visual and textual content provide contextual layers, combining photographic imagery and videos with detailed background information on the figures and themes portrayed.



Fig.09 - Screenshot: Artifashion Intelligence – The Virtual Journey of the Mask | Artoldo

Enhanced Immersion

These elements—voice cloning, AI-generated content, historical records, and visual media—create a richly immersive experience. Each portrait offers unique insights into the su-

bject's influence across fashion, art, and music, inviting viewers to explore multifaceted dimensions of their legacy.

Joel-Peter Witkin

Joel-Peter Witkin, a celebrated American photographer, is renowned for stark black-and-white images blending classical references with macabre themes. His works, often evoking “vanitas” or still-life motifs, feature marginalized subjects depicted as art, challenging societal perceptions of “monstrosity”.

Exploring themes like death, deformity, diversity, and religion, Witkin’s photography reflects his Catholic-Jewish heritage and reimagines motifs from masters like Picasso, Goya, and Velázquez in striking tableaux vivant. His art is part of prominent collections, including MoMA, the Victoria&Albert Museum, and the Getty Museum.



Fig.10 - Screenshot: Artifashion Intelligence – The Virtual Journey of the Mask | Artoldo

Unmasking Witkin

The Witkin portrait in this installation honors his profound influence on music videos. Directors like Floria Sigismondi (Marilyn Manson, David Bowie), Mark Romanek⁷ (Nine Inch Nails), and Samuel Bayer (David Bowie) have drawn heavily from his grotesque aesthetic.

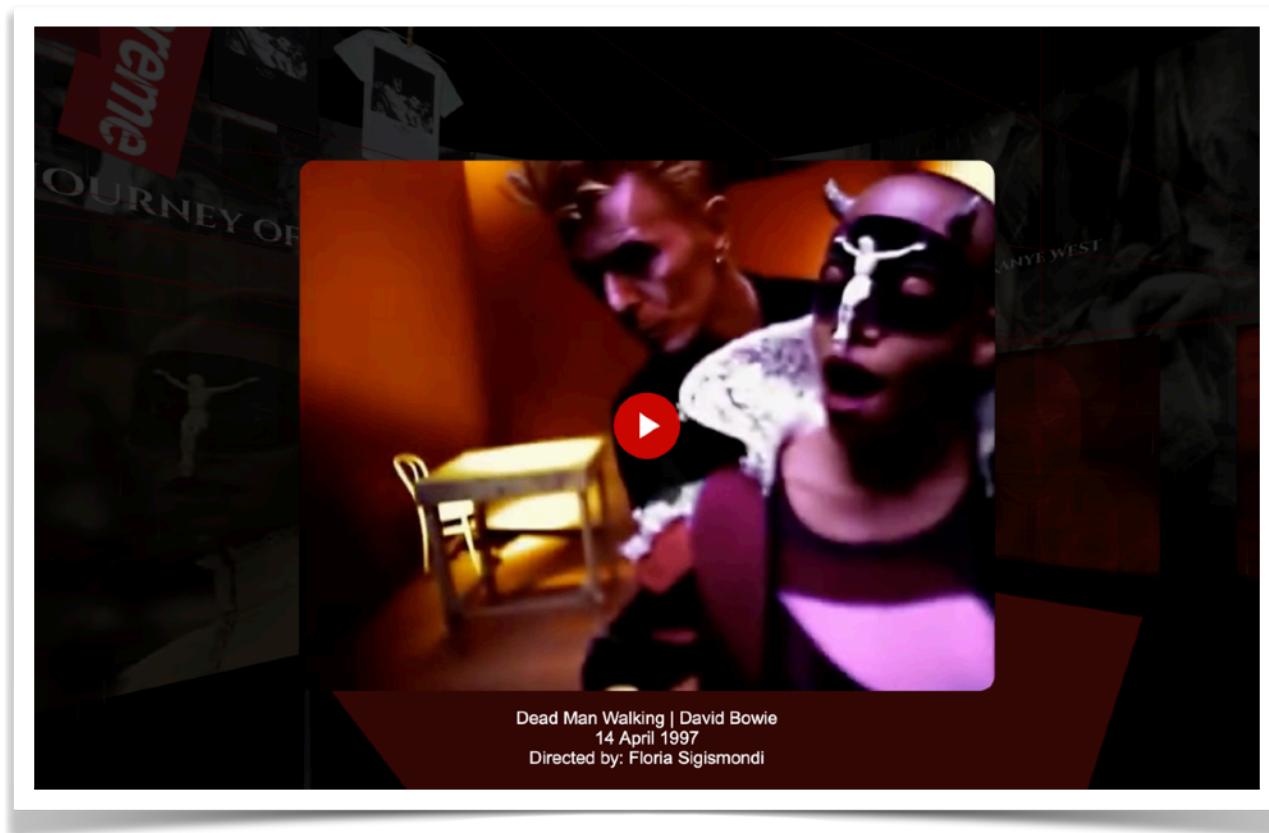


Fig.11 - Screenshot: Artifashion Intelligence – The Virtual Journey of the Mask | Artoldo

Sigismondi's work with Bowie, particularly *Dead Man Walking*, incorporates Witkin's signature imagery, including the iconic black mask with a white cross.

Romanek's *Closer* video also nods to Rudolf Hausner, Paul Saudek, and the Brothers Quay, but Witkin's distorted citations dominate. In case of Witkin, Demopoulos (1996) remarked that the work's lack of mainstream recognition made it a potent, unseen influence in the medium.

⁷ Romanek is featured in the permanent collection of the MoMA with a contemporary video for Madonna, *Bedtime Stories* (1995), and an earlier one for Bowie, *Jump They Say* (1993). He has also worked with Lenny Kravitz, R.E.M., Beck, Fiona Apple, Michael and Janet Jackson, Sonic Youth, Macy Gray, Johnny Cash, Mick Jagger, Audioslave, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Linkin Park, Jay-Z, U2, Coldplay, Taylor Swift, Beyoncé, Justin Timberlake, and many others.

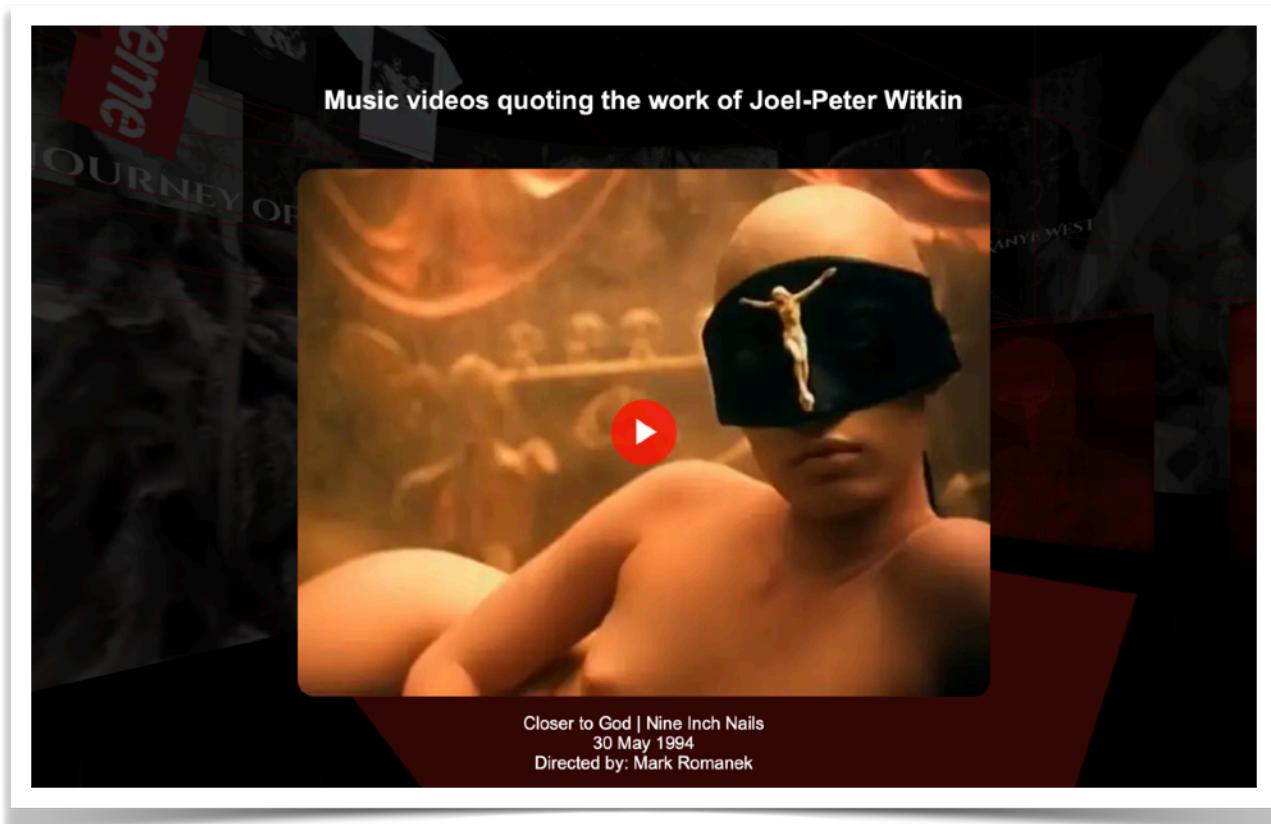


Fig.12 - Screenshot: Artifashion Intelligence – The Virtual Journey of the Mask | Artoldo

“Performers who add visual imagery without permission...fall under a truth biblical: by their own works you will know them. Real, serious artists are people whose spirits or souls are burdened heavily if they don't elevate consciousness. A real artist, in the best sense of the word, creates from inside themselves and by not creating something original, they are admitting something is lacking in their character.”

Romanek’s *Closer* video for Nine Inch Nails, like a found footage object,⁸ evokes a relic of a bygone film era,⁹ using a vintage Bell & Howell hand-crank camera, expired Kodak film stock, and Charlie Chaplin’s soundstage to channel the silent film spirit. Producer Krista Montagna noted that assistant camera operator Findlay Bunting¹⁰ operated the camera

⁸ As Mark Romanek explains in the making-of video. His studio wall was covered with countless photographic references, though the authors of this article could not identify an image by Witkin. However, the photographer’s influence seems to permeate the set’s atmosphere, settings, and some props. In an NPR interview, Romanek addressed this: “I bristle a bit at it sometimes being labeled ‘a Joel-Peter Witkin rip-off.’ For one, the nods to Witkin are few. Also, Witkin’s own work is full of recontextualized work by other artists.” Nine Inch Nails, “NIN: The Making of the Closer Video”, March 17, 2009, Vimeo, <https://vimeo.com/3704806>

⁹ “I wanted it to feel like a found object, almost like some old film found in a closet somewhere, in a science institute in Prague or somewhere.” Kerrang, “A deep dive into Nine Inch Nails’ NSFW music video for Closer”, accessed October 25, 2024, <https://www.kerrang.com/a-deep-dive-into-nine-inch-nails-nsfw-video-for-closer>

¹⁰ Wes Craven’s *The Serpent and The Rainbow* (1988) and David Fincher’s *Seven* (1995) feature aesthetics influenced by Witkin, albeit indirectly. Director of photography Joseph Kahn attributed this to Romanek’s influence, possibly via Findlay Bunting or connections through Propaganda Films, Fincher’s production company, where Bunting worked.

tirelessly, creating a rhythmic, antiquated feel.¹¹ The video, censored for nudity (including 19th-century anatomical prints) and alleged animal cruelty, reflects themes from Joel-Peter Witkin’s work.¹² It showcases moving images inspired by Francis Bacon’s *Figure with Meat*, itself rooted in classical influences from Rembrandt to Chagall, and echoed in Floria Sigismondi’s *Dead Man Walking* for David Bowie. Both videos highlight Joel-Peter Witkin’s works, particularly *Journeys of the Mask* and *Sanitarium*, which later influenced various media and Alexander McQueen’s runway shows. In *Dead Man Walking*, Bowie’s entrance resembles a runway walk, hinting at his real-life connection with McQueen, documented in the installation via a phone call where Bowie commissioned custom pieces from the designer.

Samuel Bayer’s *The Hearts Filthy Lesson* (1995) for David Bowie draws on Hermann Nitsch’s *Das Orgien Mysterien Theater* and Joel-Peter Witkin, recreating rituals with a pagan, neo-millennial aesthetic.¹³ Trent Reznor of Nine Inch Nails remixed the track in 1995, appeared in Floria Sigismondi’s *I’m Afraid of Americans* video for Bowie, and toured with him in 1996. These connections highlight the circulation of Witkin-inspired imagery in these works, many of which have been showcased in exhibitions like MoMA, alongside pieces by Witkin and Romanek.

In *The Hearts Filthy Lesson*, David Bowie oversees the ritualistic creation of a Minotaur, blending body art with body horror in the murder of thirteen-year-old Baby Grace “for artistic purposes” (Ronchi, 2018). As the millennium approached, Bowie and Bayer explored “neo-millennialism,” evoking primal rites of death, violence, and chaos. Amplified by the rise of technology, this revival symbolized the collapse of authority and a perpetual present.

Floria Sigismondi, a photographer, artist, and filmmaker, transitioned from alternative musical circles to collaborations with established artists early in her career.¹⁴ She described

¹¹ Krista Montagna (kristamg_poe), Instagram photo, May 12, 2021, https://www.instagram.com/kristamg_poe/p/COyOltXpxvI/

¹² Kyle Anderson, “Up All Afternoon”, April 04, 2017, <http://upallafternoon.com/blog/2017/4/4/song-of-the-day-nine-inch-nails-closer>

¹³ Director of videos for Nirvana, Ozzy Osbourne, Ramones, Iron Maiden, Hole, The Smashing Pumpkins, Garbage, Metallica, The Rolling Stones, Green Day, The Strokes, Justin Timberlake, My Chemical Romance.

¹⁴ Regular collaborators include Living Things, The Cure, The Raconteurs, Tricky, Interpol, Christina Aguilera, Fiona Apple, Leonard Cohen, Katy Perry ft. Kanye West (featured in Artoldo’s installation), Sigur Rós, Lawrence Rothman, Björk, The White Stripes, Justin Timberlake, Pink, Rihanna, Perfume Genius, Dua Lipa, Alice Glass, Yves Tumor, Sam Smith ft. Kim Petras, beyond those with Bowie and Manson, for which the works, the hypothesis debated in this paper, appear influenced, directly or indirectly, by Witkin’s artistry.

her work as “anthropic underworlds of tortured souls and omnipotent beings, parallel worlds tied to reality like shadows of ourselves.”¹⁵ In television projects with Bowie and Marilyn Manson around 1997, for whom she directed multiple videos, Sigismondi cited Francis Bacon, German expressionist Gottfried Helnwein, the Brothers Quay, and David Lynch as key influences, reflecting her surreal and unsettling visual style.¹⁶

In her *Dead Man Walking* (1997), part of MoMA’s collection, angular perspectives and vibrant flashes of color set the stage. A Black vocalist dons a Witkin-inspired mask, echoing McQueen’s Dante finale. The quartered beef carcass from Bacon’s work and *Closer* reappears, while a cubic structure recalls Witkin’s *Sanitarium*, later reimagined by McQueen in *Voss*. This recurring dialogue unites art, fashion, and performance.

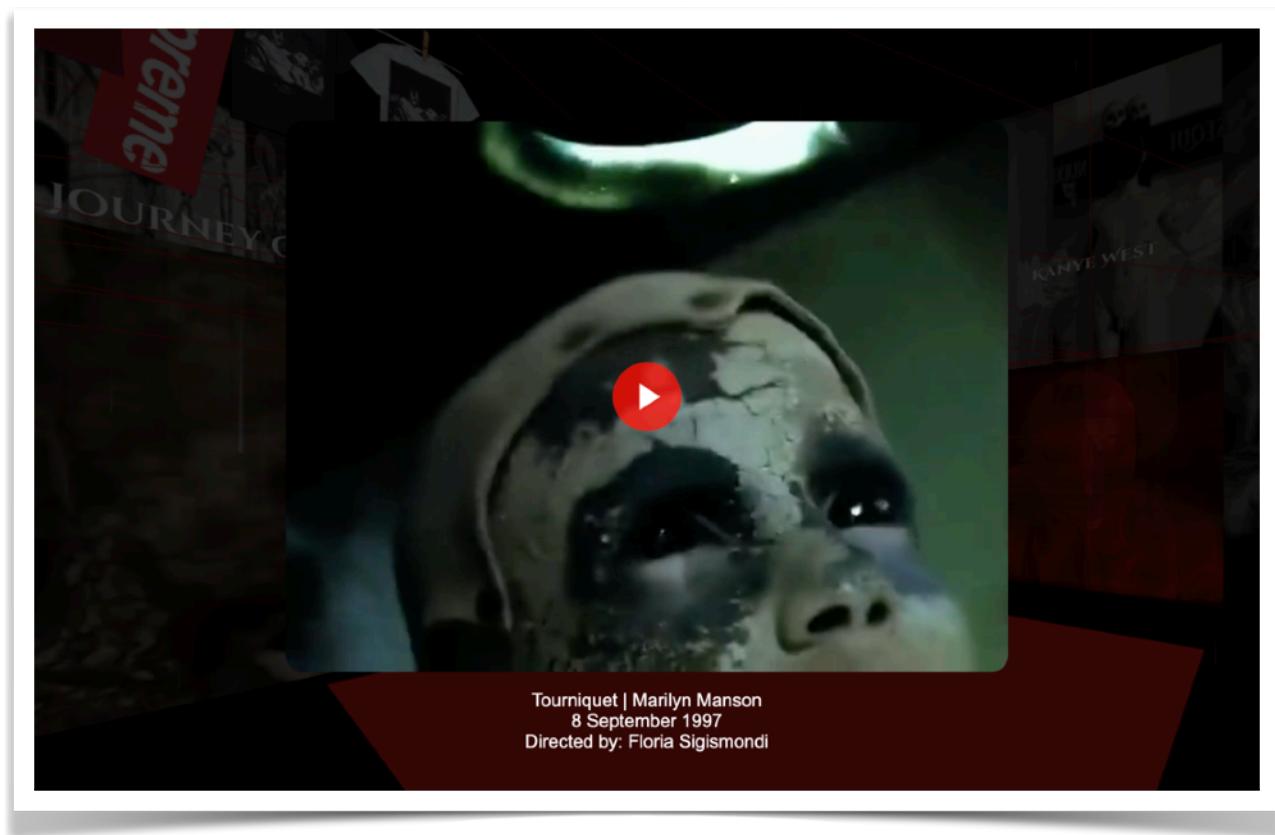


Fig.13 - Screenshot: Artifashion Intelligence – The Virtual Journey of the Mask | Artoldo

In Sigismondi’s *The Next Day* (2013), themes of torn-out eyeballs reappear, previously-seen in her *Little Wonder* (1997). There, Ziggy Stardust’s clone dons Freddie Burretti’s

¹⁵ Dodo, “Femiconism | Flora Sigismondi”, December 14, 2011, Ink, <https://inkiostrando.blogspot.com/2011/12/f-e-m-i-c-o-n-i-s-m-floria-sigismondi.html>

¹⁶ MTV Interview, “Floria Sigismondi discusses her dark aesthetic”, 4th April 1997, MTV News, <http://www.-bowiewonderworld.com/press/90/970404floria.htm>

iconic jumpsuit amid decaying backdrops, sometimes linked to Witkin’s style, though the authors of this paper disagree.¹⁷

The imagery of obscured eyes with black lenses seen in *Dead Man Walking* recalls Fecal Matter’s Hannah Rose Dalton in a Witkin-inspired mask, emphasizing the link between Bowie’s visuals and Witkin’s macabre aesthetic. In Sigismondi for Manson *Beautiful People* (1996), motifs include pipes, mannequin-like figures, cast heads (as in Romanek’s *Closer*), and prosthetics. Her *Tourniquet* (1997) features black-lensed eyes, prosthetics on an androgynous Marilyn Manson, cockroaches (like in her *The Hearts Filthy Lesson*), and medical curiosities. Manson appears as a butterfly-moth hybrid with gas masks (*Sanitarium*, McQueen’s *Voss*) and childlike assistants. Butterflies, iconic in McQueen’s work and Philip Treacy’s designs, echo these motifs.

Directors like Floria Sigismondi and Samuel Bayer adapted this aesthetic for brands like Gucci, while from 1995–1997 and later in 2013, Witkin-inspired imagery influenced McQueen through art director and McQueen’s collaborator Simon Costin, bridging fashion, art, and music.

These videos often reflect indirect echoes of Witkin’s work, unlike McQueen’s runway shows, where his influence is explicit.

McQueen’s connection to Witkin likely emerged via Simon Costin, contradicting claims that music videos were the source. Music videos may have amplified this discovery, further explored in Kanye West’s portrait under Costin’s section.

Fashion critic Suzy Menkes¹⁸ noted the *Savage Beauty* exhibition overlooked McQueen’s ties to British artists like the Chapman Brothers¹⁹ and Damien Hirst, who also explored death and decay. Sølve Sundsbø’s *I Like* video for McQueen highlights shared inspirations with British artists, showcasing nature’s micro-fauna in kaleidoscopic patterns, seen in both music videos and McQueen’s collections. Hirst’s diamond-encrusted skull (*For the*

¹⁷ Freddie Burretti designed the suit for *Life on Mars* (1971), the *Starman* (1972) jumpsuit, and the *Ziggy Stardust* album cover (1972), inspired by *A Clockwork Orange* (Kubrick, 1971), and the velvet suit for *Aladdin Sane* (1973). The Darksided Fashionista, “Alchimie: Freddie Burretti”, January 22, 2018, <https://thedarksidedfashionista.wordpress.com/2018/01/22/alchimie-freddie-burretti>

These pieces were featured in the *David Bowie Is* exhibition at the V&A Museum (which will house Bowie’s archive from September 2025) in 2013, touring twelve cities until 2018, as well as in *Savage Beauty* (2011, V&A 2015) and *Anglomania* (2005, MoMA). Marcus Bunyan, “Text/Exhibition: ‘David Bowie is’ at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI), Melbourne”, October 15, 2015, Art Blart _ art and cultural memory archive, <https://artblart.com/tag/freddie-burretti-ziggy-stardust-jumpsuit/>

¹⁸ Suzy Menkes, “Suzy Menkes: Alexander McQueen Savage Beauty Review”, March 16, 2015, British Vogue, <https://www.vogue.co.uk/gallery/suzy-menkes-on-alexander-mcqueen-savage-beauty>

¹⁹ Svendsen (2006, 108) recalls that in the January 2000 issue of Vogue, the Chapman Brothers created a work featuring Kate Moss as part of a call inviting young British artists.

Love of God, 2007) appeared in McQueen's SS03 *Irere* and inspired collaborations, such as a scarf project and Burton's Fall/Winter 2013 collection, with motifs linked to Dante's *Inferno*.²⁰

Witkin's “talking portrait” in the installation highlights his artistic journey and collaborations with McQueen and Supreme, emphasizing his broad influence.

Alexander McQueen

Over a decade after his 2010 death, Alexander McQueen remains a fashion icon. A four-time British Designer of the Year and 2003 Fashion Designer Award winner, his brand, founded in 1992, continues under Creative Director Séan McGirr as “McQueen” since Fall 2023. The house joined the Kering Group in 2001, with Sarah Burton succeeding McQueen after his death in 2010, having worked alongside him for fourteen years. Known for its individuality, subversive strength, and uncompromising quality, McQueen is celebrated for its bold creative vision.²¹

McQueen's collections have been featured in major publications, documentaries, and retrospectives. His work was showcased at MoMA in 2011 and the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2015, where ten pieces from his Central Saint Martins graduation collection, *Jack The Ripper Stalks His Victims*, are displayed. This collection garnered attention, including from Isabella Blow, to whom part of the exhibition is dedicated. Before becoming a designer, McQueen trained as a tailor, starting at sixteen in London's Savile Row and later apprenticesing with Romeo Gigli in Milan.²²

In the installation, McQueen's moving portrait with the Witkin mask opens a page featuring a “PLAY” button to hear Artoldo's monologue, cloned to represent McQueen on the topics “Witkin's mask” and “art/fashion differences”. The page also includes a photo of McQueen

²⁰ Icon Icon, “Alexander McQueen's Skull Foulard in a Damien Hirst Version”, November 26, 2013, <https://www.icon-icon.com/en/alexander-mcqueens-skull-foulard-in-a-damien-hirst-version/>; Por Mario Ximénez, “Damien Hirst diseña una colección de pañuelos para Alexander McQueen”, November 13, 2013, Vogue Spain, <https://www.vogue.es/moda/news/articulos/damien-hirst-para-alexander-mcqueen-bufandas-y-pañuelos-para-el-decimo-aniversario-de-la-calavera/18579>, <https://www.vogue.fr/video/mode/videos/damien-hirst-pour-alexander-mcqueen-dans-loeil-de-slve-sundsb/6017>

²¹ Kering, “House History”, accessed October 22, 2024, <https://www.kering.com/en/houses/couture-and-leather-goods/alexander-mcqueen/history/>

Kering is an international group listed on the Euronext Paris market, whose name until 2013 was directly linked to the Pinault family dynasty, owners either wholly or partially of brands such as Gucci, Yves Saint Laurent, Balenciaga, Bottega Veneta, Boucheron, Brioni, Pomellato, Puma, and Stella McCartney.

²² Paola Cacciari, “Savage Beauty. Alexander McQueen a Londra”, May 15, 2015, Artribune, <https://www.artribune.com/attualita/2015/05/savage-beauty-alexander-mcqueen-a-londra/>

with his muse Isabella Blow, a biography, a list of his collections, and highlights of his cultural legacy, particularly through Lady Gaga.

David Bowie

In this VR experience, Bowie’s connection to McQueen is explored through two main threads: the Witkin-inspired aesthetic in music videos, which likely influenced McQueen, and their direct collaboration, leading to the iconic outfits Bowie wore during his 1996 *Outside* and 1997 *Earthling* tours featuring:



Fig.14 - Screenshot: Artifashion Intelligence – The Virtual Journey of the Mask | Artoldo

“A dark, wool frock coat veiled with torn embroidered tulle, and a pair of high-waist, full dark trousers dribbled and smudged with paint. In addition, he created a frock coat out of a giant Union Jack flag with frilly black-lace cuffs. To give it more character, he and Danan distressed the fabric.”²³

Ruti Danan, McQueen’s studio director from 1994 to 1996, played a key role in the designer’s early years, contributing to iconic designs like Bowie’s *Earthling* tour outfits. Her connection to McQueen continued beyond her time at the fashion house, with an extensive archive of items, including authentic pieces, showcasing McQueen’s creative process. These materials were sold at a 2020 RR auction, highlighting the lasting interest in Mc-

²³ Dana Thomas, “David Bowie, Alexander McQueen, and the Making of That Iconic 90s-Era Union Jack Coat”, January 11, 2016, Vanity Fair, <https://www.vanityfair.com/style/2016/01/david-bowie-alexander-mcqueen-era-union-jack-coat/>

Queen's legacy²⁴ as auctions (Byronesque, Kelly Taylor Auctions), here pivotal to the discourse, show, and moreover, the “cultural turn” in fashion and art from “recycling” to “upcycling”, the latter interpreted as “luxury recycling” (Chiais, 2022).

The backstage pass from McQueen's Dante show is reimagined as a virtual entry to Artoldo's immersive VR experience, linking McQueen's legacy with modern storytelling. An original conversation between Bowie and McQueen, inspired in Artoldo a pendant to MoMA's *Schiaparelli and Prada: Impossible Conversations* (2012); the transcribed call²⁵ has been voice cloned to simulate a phone call between the two icons, blending reality and imagination for a speculative glimpse into their minds.

Isabella Blow

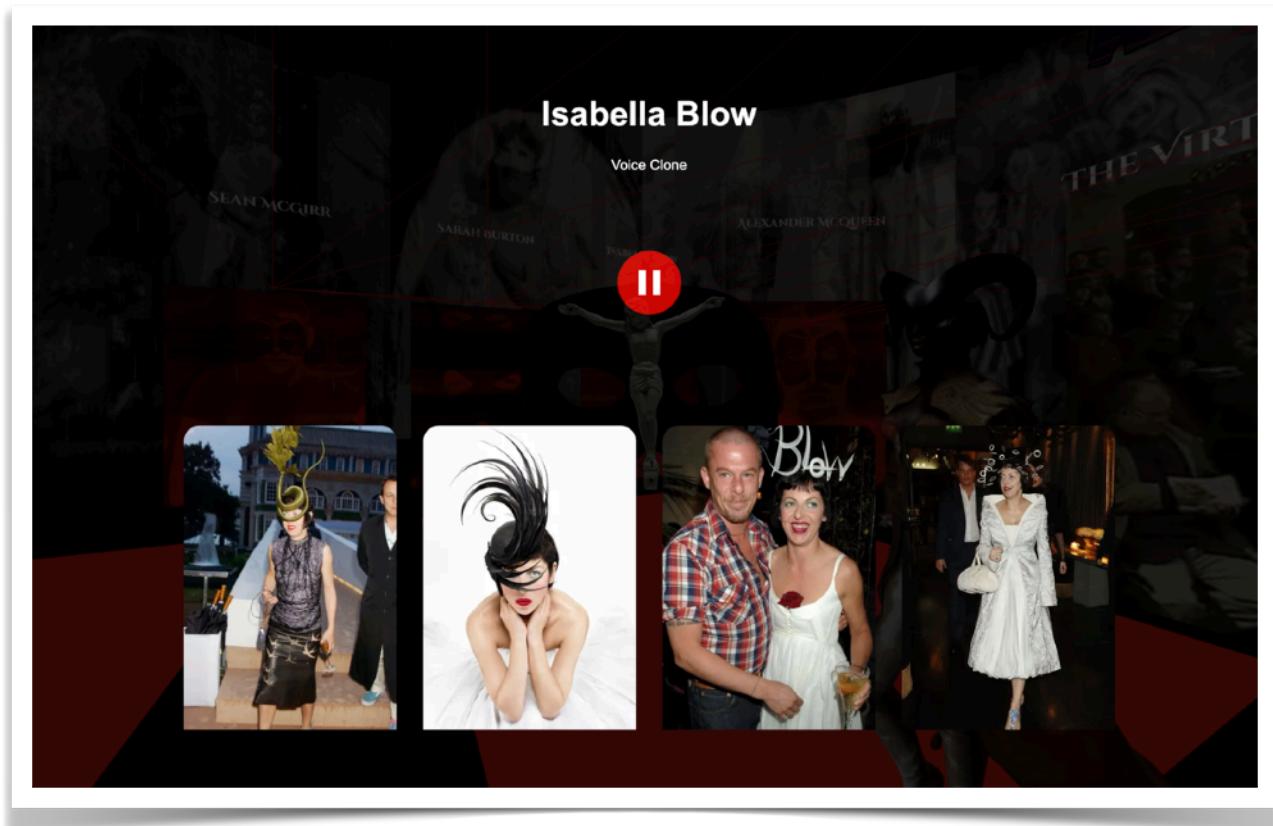


Fig.15 - Screenshot: Artifashion Intelligence – The Virtual Journey of the Mask | Artoldo

²⁴ RR Auction, “Dante Backstage Pass AW 1996”, accessed October 25, 2024, <https://www.rrauction.com/auctions/lot-detail/342307505775063-dante-backstage-pass-aw-1996/?cat=556>, Flaunt, “Archive of Fashion Legend, Alexander Mcqueen's, Early Works | Ruti Danan's Preservations”, accessed October 25, 2024, <https://www.flault.com/blog/alexander-mcqueens-ruti-danan>

²⁵ Dazed Digital, “David Bowie vs Alexander McQueen”, January 13, 2016, Dazed, <https://www.dazedsdigital.com/fashion/article/15910/1/david-bowie-vs-alexander-mcqueen>

Blow, a fallen aristocrat and self-proclaimed fashion critic, encouraged McQueen to use his middle name, Alexander, instead of his first name, Lee.²⁶ Through her journalistic work and influential friendships, she played a significant role in shaping fashion, known for her refined taste, eccentricity, and boldness in challenging conventions.

Blow, a key talent scout who discovered figures like Stella McCartney and McQueen, was known for her iconic style, including hats and headpieces by Philip Treacy. McQueen dedicated pieces to her, such as the *Dante* collection (which she bought entirely) and the SS 2008 *La Dame Bleue* collection, a tribute after her death.

McQueen collaborated with artists like Shaun Leane, known for iconic designs like silver corsets and a crown of thorns for AW '97 *Dante*, and skeletal armatures for SS '01 *Voss*.

Artoldo's recreated phone call between Bowie and McQueen reflects McQueen's time at Blow's Arts and Crafts estate, a setting influenced by Pre-Raphaelite aesthetics and linked to McQueen's SS '99 No. 13 collection.

Lady Gaga

Lady Gaga successfully acquired an ivory Empire-style dress from McQueen's collection, which was part of a 102-piece archive²⁷ belonging to the heiress Daphne Guinness. Guinness, a stylist, friend of Isabella Blow, and style icon, was also the founder of the Isabella Blow Foundation. The auction, announced as a charity event for the foundation, drew significant attention.

Bad Romance was the opening piece of the FW '10 *Plato's Atlantis* runway show, later becoming the iconic music video with Lady Gaga in a full McQueen outfit. Another iconic moment in her career dedicated to the designer occurred during her performance at the Brit Awards 2010.

²⁶ Vincent van Goyard, “Alexander McQueen and Damien Hirst Collaboration 2013”, accessed October 26, 2024, <https://www.vincent-vangoyard.com/alexander-mcqueen-and-damien-hirst-2013/>

²⁷ Anna-Lisa Yabsley, “Daphne Guinness, The Heel-Less Wonder”, December 19, 2015, Fairchild Media, <https://footwearnews.com/fashion/celebrity-style/daphne-guinness-heel-less-shoes-fashion-style-alexander-mcqueen-isabella-blow-37085/>

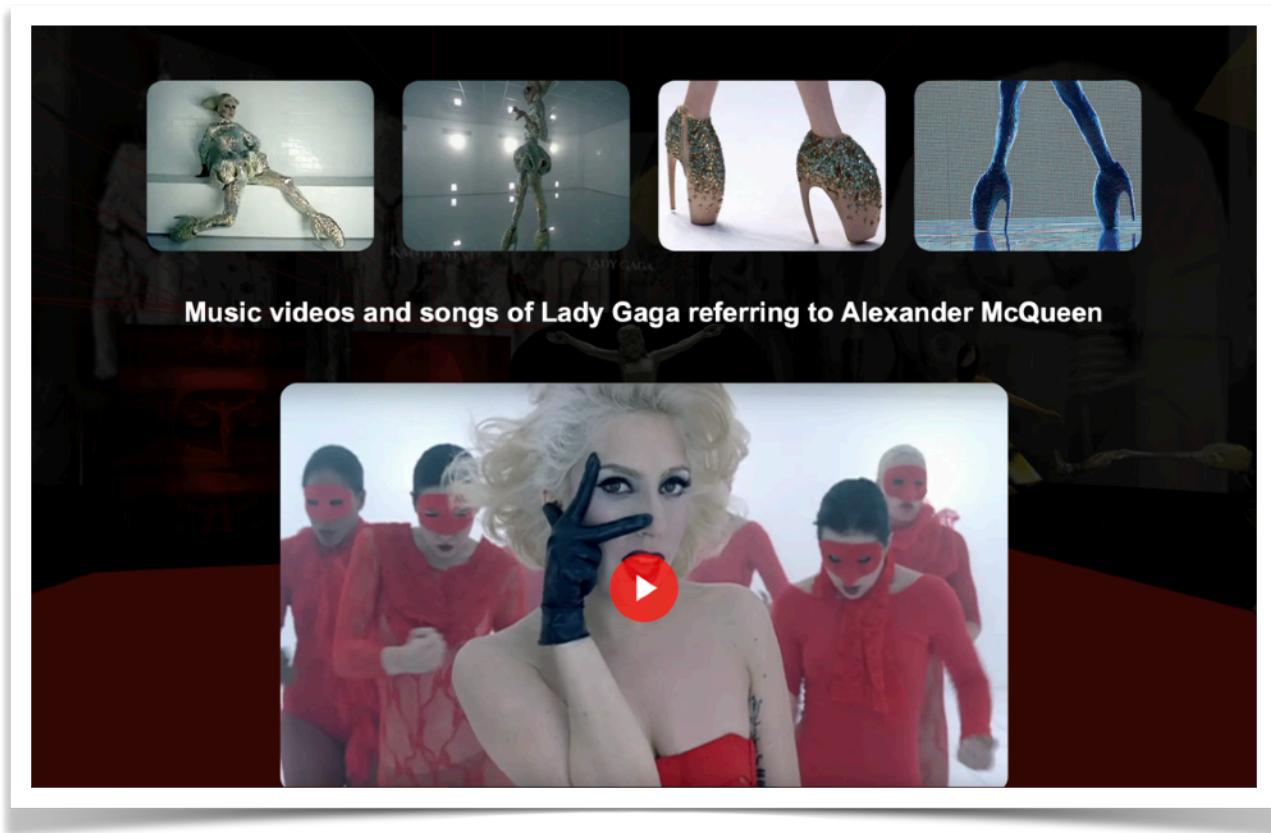


Fig.16 - Screenshot: Artifashion Intelligence – The Virtual Journey of the Mask | Artoldo

In the 2024 photo for the installation, Gaga wears a Philip Treacy²⁸ headpiece and a dress from McQueen's FW 2002 collection, titled *Supercalifragilistic-expialidocious*. The outfit in the photo is a reconstruction of the runway look. Gaga is known for revisiting vintage McQueen pieces, as seen in her appearance at the Autumn-Winter 2021 collection by Sarah Burton for McQueen.

In Artoldo's installation, a live portrait of Lady Gaga is accompanied by an interview in which she discusses her strong connection with the designer.

²⁸ Daphne Guinness, like Isabella Blow, is a long-time friend of milliner Philip Treacy. Matthew Velasco, “Lady Gaga Wins the Vintage Battle In Daphne Guinness’s Archival McQueen”, May 30, 2024, W Magazine, <https://www.wmagazine.com/fashion/lady-gaga-vintage-black-cape-coat-eye-mask>

Sarah Burton



Fig.17 - Screenshot: Artifashion Intelligence – The Virtual Journey of the Mask | Artoldo

Sarah Burton, McQueen's longtime collaborator, succeeded him as creative director from 2010 to 2023, shaping the brand for twenty-six years. In the installation, her portrait features a quote about motherhood's influence on her work, which she addressed replying to the central question: is fashion art?²⁹

The portrait's looping video originates from *Proud to Protest* (2014), an Amnesty International campaign by SHOWStudio supporting LGBT rights in Russia. Burton appears wearing a *balaclova*, part of a series involving designers, models, and activists. The campaign was inspired by a short film by designer Gareth Pugh and filmmaker Ruth Hogben.³⁰

Motion graphics of butterflies in Burton's video, created by Artoldo, echo Witkin's imagery, influencing music videos and installations such as *Sanitarium* and *Voss*.

²⁹ Christa Claire D'Souza, “The Visionary: Sarah Burton”, November 4, 2014, Glamour, <https://www.glamour.com/story/sarah-burton>

³⁰ SHOWStudio, “Proud to Protest”, February 10, 2014, https://www.SHOWStudio.com/projects/proud_to_protest

Séan McGirr



Fig.18 - Screenshot: Artifashion Intelligence – The Virtual Journey of the Mask | Artoldo

The day after Sarah Burton's departure to Givenchy — the same brand where McQueen had worked from 1996, replacing John Galliano, until 2001, when he left the group due to vision differences and fully dedicated himself to his own brand — the Irish McGirr became the creative director of the Alexander McQueen brand, which, by decision of the Kering group, stopped being called “Alexander McQueen” and was simply named “McQueen.”

The text, created through human-machine collaboration, highlights McGirr's influences, including cinema and comics, as mentioned in his interviews. Similarly, McQueen's work drew extensively from film, seen in collections like AW'93 *Taxi Driver* (Scorsese), SS'95 *The Birds* and AW'05 *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (Hitchcock), SS'96 *The Hunger* (Tony Scott, with Bowie), AW'99 *The Overlook* (Kubrik, *The Shining*), AW'01 *What a Merry-Go-Round* (*Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, Bob Fosse's *Cabaret*), AW'02 *Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious* (*Sleepy Hollow*), SS'04 *Deliverance* (*They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*), AW'04 *Phanteon ad Lucem* (Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, Kubrik's *2001: A*

Space Odyssey), SS’05 *It’s Only a Game* (*Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*), and SS’97 *La Poupée* (Hans Bellmer).³¹

The media content behind McGirr’s portrait highlights how he has been paramountly inspired by cinema and films.³²

Kanye West

Kanye West, renowned rapper, producer, designer, and twenty-four-time Grammy winner, is celebrated for his artistry and influence. Beyond music, he built a media presence through Yeezy Season and collaborations with brands like Adidas, Gap, and Balenciaga. Despite facing setbacks due to controversial views, in 2024, he made headlines at the Super Bowl wearing a balaclava with a recreation of Witkin’s crucifix mask from McQueen’s *Dante* collection, sparking debates about authenticity.

The mask’s history traces back to Simon Costin, a McQueen collaborator who introduced Witkin’s work to him for the *Dante* show. Costin later auctioned Witkin-inspired masks, and West revealed his was a replica made by his team due to the originals’ cost. The installation explores fashion appropriation through AI-reconstructed reports, with Costin noting that such practices once went largely unchallenged:

“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

³¹ Daniel Rodgers, “Seven times cult films inspired the runway”, March 17, 2021, Dazed, <https://www.dazedsdigital.com/fashion/article/52179/1/cult-movies-films-inspired-fashion-alexander-mcqueen-david-lynch-raf-simons-mubi>,
Vogue Runway, “Alexander McQueen – Fall 1999 Ready-To-Wear, October 3, 2015, <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/fall-1999-ready-to-wear/alexander-mcqueen>,

V&A, “Encyclopedia of Collections: What a Merry Go Round”, February 21, 2001, The Museum of Savage Beauty, <https://www.vam.ac.uk/museumofsvagebeauty/rel/encyclopedia-of-collections-what-a-merry-go-round/?srslid=AfmBOopBuqKTAM0bNMZ7iEFiTZYIITjFGFx1GjcSJW5igI-tYKyeVpvD>,

The New York Times Style Magazine, “A Bucket Bag with a Back Story”, accessed October, 21, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/05/t-magazine/alexander-mcqueen-bucket-bag.html>,

Sarah Mower, Alexander McQueen – Spring 2004 Ready-To-Wear, October 9, 2003, Vogue Runway, <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-2004-ready-to-wear/alexander-mcqueen>,

V&A, “Encyclopedia of Collections: Pantheon Ad Lucem”, The Museum of Savage Beauty, March 5, 2004, <https://www.vam.ac.uk/museumofsvagebeauty/rel/encyclopedia-of-collections-pantheon-ad-lucem/?srslid=AfmBOoo4Z50CaSW4LLwY0jDGtXVz-4VfHnOEtz-nHcSbT4s5y6nBop>,

MET Museum, “Alexander McQueen – Savage Beauty”, May 4, 2011, <https://blog.metmuseum.org/alexandermcqueen/tag/only-a-game/>,
Vogue Runway, “Alexander McQueen – Spring 1997 Ready-To-Wear, September 18, 1996, <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-1997-ready-to-wear/alexander-mcqueen>

³² Nicole Phelps, “At Alexander McQueen, Seán McGirr wants to ‘let the light in’”, March 2, 2024, Vogue Business, <https://www.vogue-business.com/story/fashion/at-alexander-mcqueen-sean-mcgirr-wants-to-let-the-light-in>

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...”³³

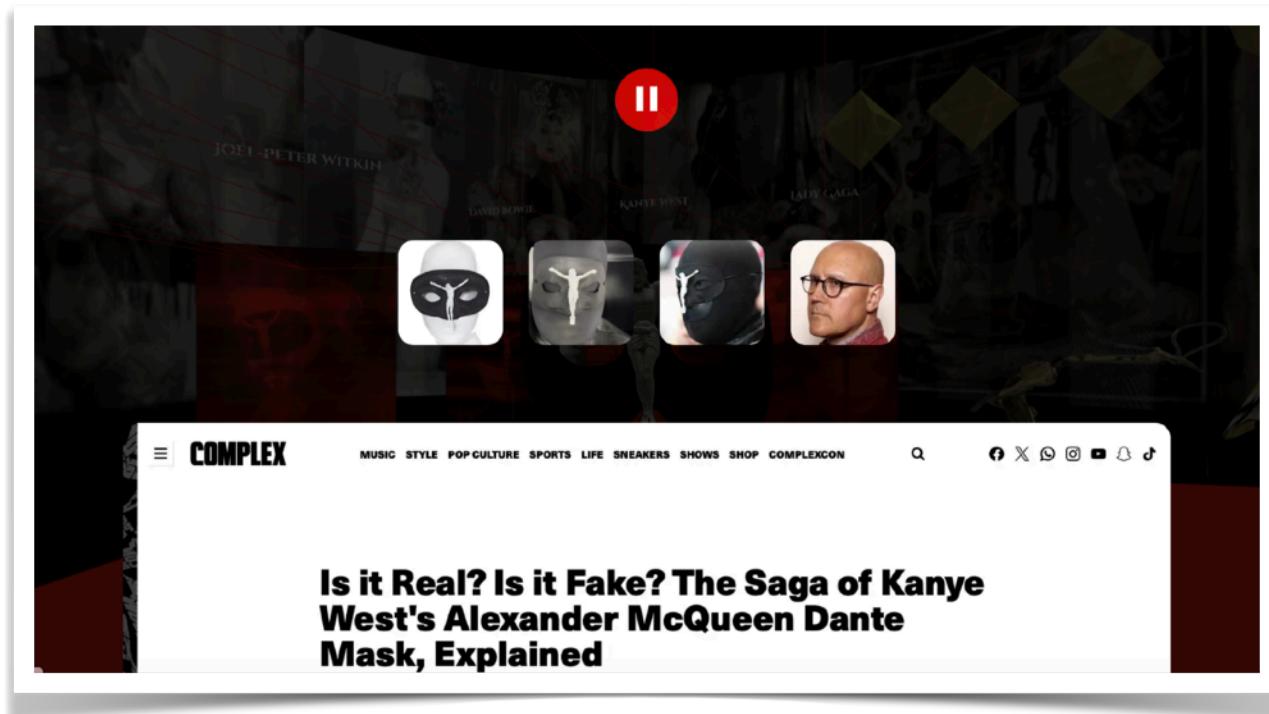


Fig.19 - Screenshot: Artifashion Intelligence – The Virtual Journey of the Mask | Artoldo

American photographer Don McCullin, known for his Vietnam War portraits, had his work featured on t-shirts in McQueen’s *Dante* collection too. These dark-themed T-shirts appear in Artoldo’s edited video of the runway show.

Fecal Matter

After earning their fashion diplomas in Canada, Hannah Rose Dalton and Steven Raj Bhaskaran formed their provocative duo, Fecal Matter, in 2016. Known for their unconventional approach, they challenge traditional fashion communication while embracing luxury vinta-

³³ Kerry Taylor Auctions, “Passion for Fashion”, December 12, 2023, <https://www.kerrytaylorauctions.com/auction/lot/311-a-simon-costin-foralexander-mcqueen-crucifix-mask-dante-collection-autumn-winter-1996-97/?lot=33903&sd=1>

ge 4.0, often collaborating with the online editorial-based retail Byronesque. Their name, inspired by Kurt Cobain's first band, reflects their serial appropriator ethos.

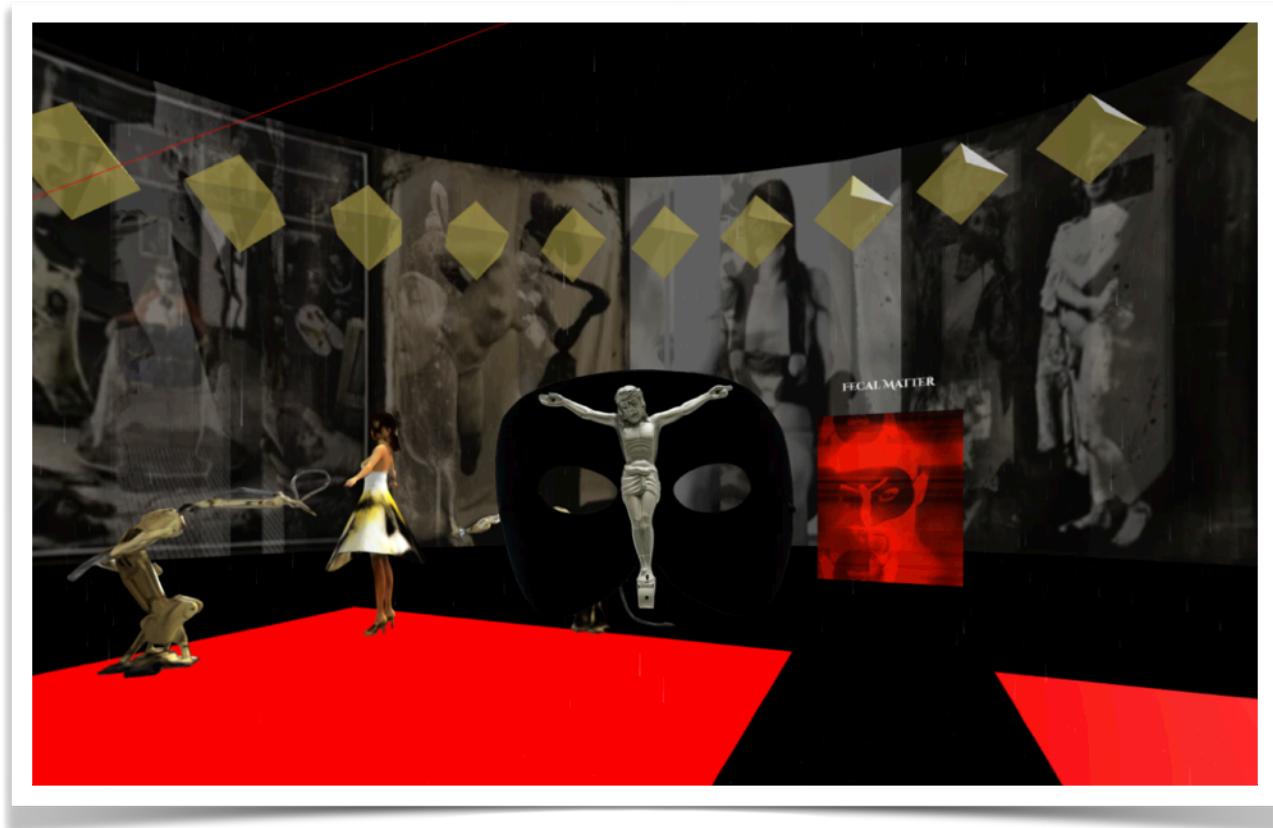


Fig.20 - Screenshot: Artifashion Intelligence – The Virtual Journey of the Mask | Artoldo

However, in an interview with Vogue, they explained that the name was meant to represent their critique of materialism,³⁴ symbolizing the cycle of consumption. Their designs are sensationalistic, featuring flesh-colored silicone boots, alien-shaped heels, tails, and body modifications. Rooted in transhumanism and anthropocentric criticism, they celebrate alienation with prosthetics and non-conforming sizes. According to SHOWStudio³⁵ “presents an alternative to restrictive beauty standards by offering products that connect fashion, film, politics, music and everything that is forbidden in order to promote critical thinking.”

In the installation, Fecal Matter promotes reusing McQueen pieces, with Dalton mimicking a model from the Dante collection wearing the Witkin mask. Their unfiltered media content, like the controversial *Ad Campaign Prototype - Eliminate White Power*, includes shocking

³⁴ Italo Pantano, “Fecal Matter presenta la collezione Non Human”, October 31, 2018, Vogue Italia, <https://www.vogue.it/moda/news/2018/10/31/fecal-matter-collezione-non-human>

³⁵ SHOWStudio, “Fecal Matter”, accessed October 21, 2024, https://www.SHOWStudio.com/contributors/fecal_matter?page=1

images of cadavers and anatomical parts, critiquing white cultural dominance. Artoldo critiques the work as sensationalistic but highlights its thematic ties to Witkin's usage of cadavers and anatomical parts - although, the latter, informed by a much more superior significance, not only provocative but truly artistic. The installation contrasts this with McQueen's SS'97 *Elect Dissect* collection, which also explored macabre, provocative imagery, reflecting society's fascination with dark visual narratives as otherwise already portrayed by his collection *Jack The Ripper*.

A Fusion of Media: Collage, 3D Elements, and AI-Generated Models

The McQueen After Life Collection

There are over thirty models created through human-conceived prompts (text to 3D) and processed by artificial intelligence, representing the imaginary *Afterlife* collection of Alexander McQueen.

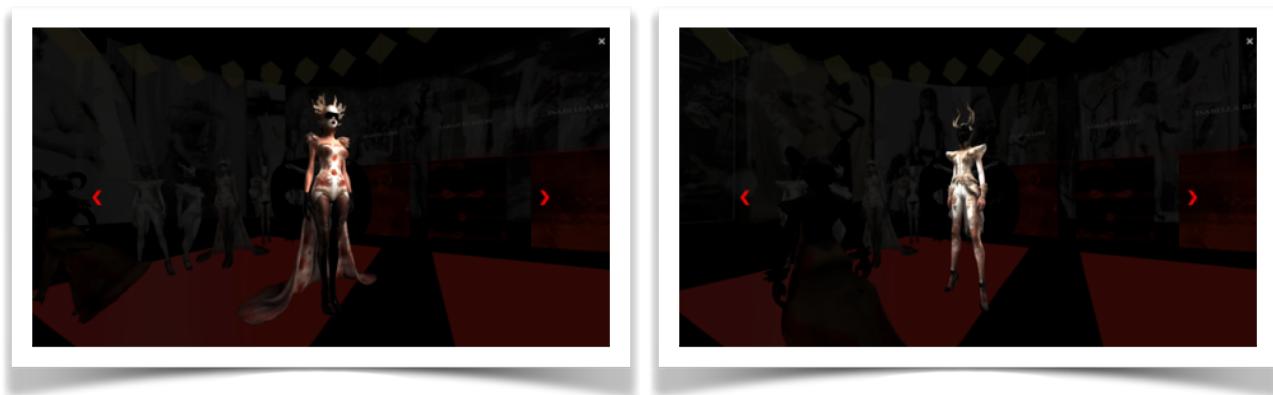


Fig.21|22 - Screenshot: Artifashion Intelligence – The Virtual Journey of the Mask | Artoldo

In collaboration with AI, the team created the “After Life” collection, virtually capturing McQueen’s aesthetics.

Comprising over 30 models, the VR experience is accessible via web browser on multiple devices, with no additional software required. This multi-platform approach overcomes traditional VR limitations, using WebVR and Web3D technology to animate five models simultaneously, with a sixth randomly selected, setting a new standard for immersive digital experiences.



Fig.23 - Screenshot: Artifashion Intelligence – The Virtual Journey of the Mask | Artoldo



Fig.24 - Screenshot: Artifashion Intelligence – The Virtual Journey of the Mask | Artoldo

Shalom Harlow and the Robot



Fig.25 - Screenshot: Artifashion Intelligence – The Virtual Journey of the Mask | Artoldo

The 3D AI reproduction captures McQueen's SS '99 N°13 runway moment, where model Shalom Harlow, secured to a rotating stage, becomes a canvas for robotic arms spraying eco-friendly paint. This performance draws inspiration from German artist Rebecca Horn, specifically her 1994 installation *High Moon*, where rotating rifles shoot paint at each other. Artoldo links McQueen's performance to Horn's *Pencil Mask* (1972) too, where a body covered in paper extensions leaves marks on a wall, blending both works in McQueen's unique vision.



Fig.26|27 - Screenshot: Artifashion Intelligence – The Virtual Journey of the Mask | Artoldo

The Red Thread, The Golden Chain, The White Noise, The Pun in The Title

The installation's overwhelming red thread, symbolized as a cybernetic spiderweb, represents the idea that media often fail to convey meaningful information and are poorly controlled. The connection between Witkin and McQueen, likely through collaborator Simon Costin, is explored, showing Witkin's influence on 1990s music videos and the fashion and art worlds. Artoldo recreates this circuit, highlighting how media can become “white noise” lacking foundation. The golden chain spiraling upward represents the informational spiral and the linked chronology of events in the installation as well as the “golden chain of initiates” to the art world and fashion system, therefore the pun in the title, referring to the “fashion intellighenzia” and its connections and hence, due to the use of AI in the project, the other wordplay between “intellighenzia” and “intelligence” as well as the calembour between “artificial” and the invented word “artifashion”.

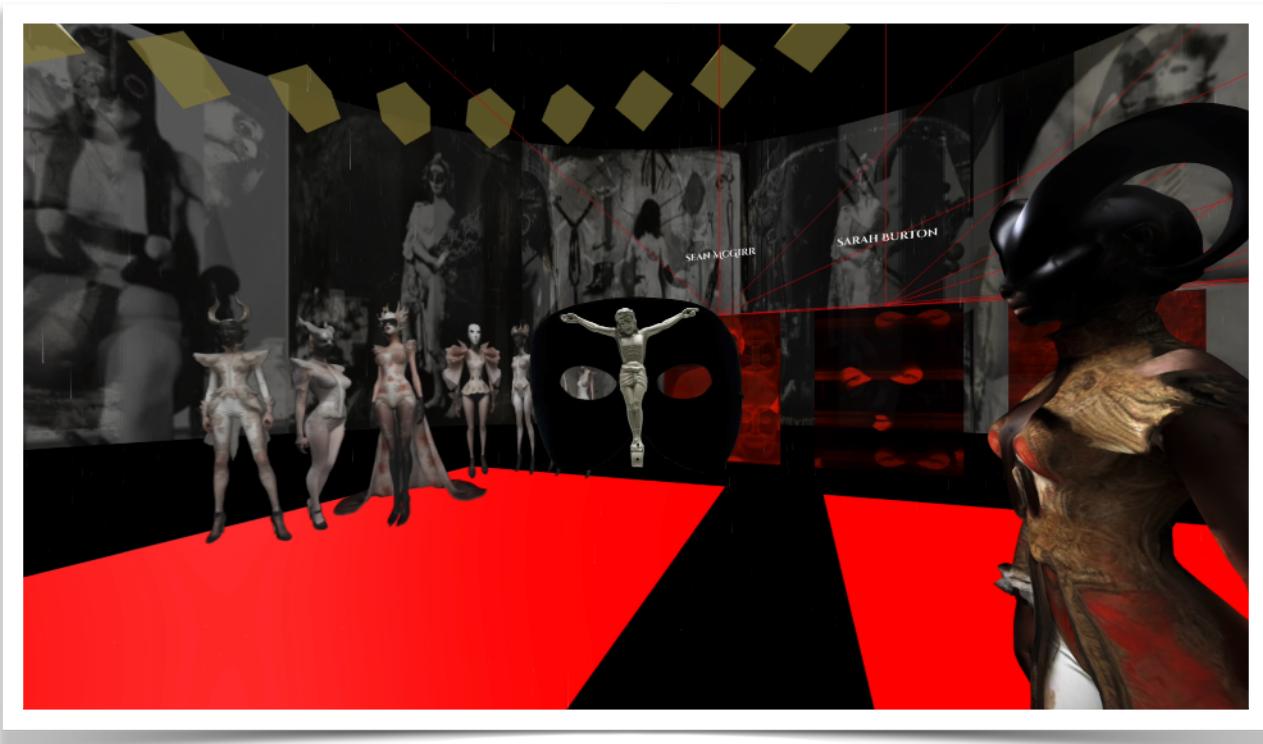


Fig.28 - Screenshot: Artifashion Intelligence – The Virtual Journey of the Mask | Artoldo

Theoretical Appendix

Circulation of Inspirations Between Media: Quotation vs. Appropriation

Javier Panera, in *Video Killed the Painting Star*, argues that music videos, since the 1980s, have “cannibalized” ideas from film, art, fashion, and digital media, transforming rather than replacing previous media. This contrasts with Nam June Paik’s apocalyptic view that video permanently replaced traditional art forms. Panera highlights a new paradigm driven by online viewing, leading to an accumulation of remakes, homages, and plagiarism, a practice already seen in cinema’s borrowing from art history.

Artoldo, in creating *Artifashion Intellighenzia*, believes that our aesthetic practices lead to an accumulation of artistic means, with each medium experiencing revivals after their “apparent death”. Lars Svendsen observes this shift in fashion, where new styles no longer replace the old, but simply add to them (2006, 34). This change in mechanics, Svendsen notes, was already evident to Andy Warhol, who famously said, “there’s room for everyone”—Warhol, who began his artistic career as a fashion window dresser (Jameson, 1991, 15).

Panera notes that 1980s music videos heavily borrowed from video art pioneers like Paik, who used eclecticism, parody, and reinterpretation of art history and mass media—strategies later seen in music videos. Paik’s collaboration with pop stars strengthened the connection between video art and the music video genre. Panera argues that appropriation from art forms like painting, photography, Dada, and surrealism helped legitimize music videos. This raises the question: does fashion follow a similar strategy? Blumer (1968) suggests that fashion no more a mean of class differentiation is much more a sort of collective selection, with designers drawing inspiration from fine arts, literature, politics, and modern discourse (Blumer 1969, 283).

Art critic Roberta Smith (cited in Kim, 1998, 56) observes that the art world is drawn to fashion, often to extract satire or parody. The fashion/art pairing became “sexy” in the 1980s when fashion gained symbolic significance in popular culture.³⁶

The variety of social interactions and styles defines the collective movement and transformation of taste. Svendsen’s concept of suppleness contrasts with Blumer’s view, which still emphasized novelty over the accumulation of styles. Lipovetsky, as noted by Stern (2004,

³⁶ Roberta Smith, “Art After a Fashion” *Vogue*, January (1996): 164–5. Cited in Sung Bok Kim, “Is Fashion Art?”, *Fashion Theory*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (April 1998): 51–71.

13), suggests a historical approach to fashion, viewing it as a sign of the end of the traditional world and a driver of modern cultural values like novelty and individuality.

Artoldo argues that a Weberian perspective better captures how modernist values in art and fashion blended, leading to a postmodern fusion. Revisiting Jameson's Postmodernism, or *The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Artoldo highlights fashion's role as a central figure in the cultural logic of postmodernism, influenced by late capitalism.

This reflects the idea that the masses are now expected to “make of themselves a work of art” (Maffessoli, cited in Marchetti, 2004, 117). Artoldo sees the elements which Marchetti defines of the “postmodern canon” (syncretism, citationism, irony, emotionality, baroqueism, multiplicity) rather as the result of two worlds merging, each seeking to create something “larger than life” and turning individuals into legends within a collectively individualistic narrative.

In this shift, the author is not dead but has transformed, now thriving in fashion rather than art, which has expanded its influence to accommodate a broad range of creators. This merging of art and fashion, as seen in postmodern culture, helps explain the shift better than Kim's (1998, 54) suggestion that art simply changed under postmodernism. Like Kim and Svendsen (2006, 119), Artoldo agrees that the boundaries between art and fashion are increasingly blurred.

The reference to appropriative gestures highlights how some cultural critiques, which oppose authorship as a capitalist symbol, challenge the idea of the “genius” author.³⁷ This opposition, echoing Barthes' *Death of the Author* (1967), is further explored by Derrida in his ironic response *The Death of Roland Barthes*, 1980, maybe prophetizing the long-lasting decline of semiotic interest in fashion after Barthes. Jameson suggests that “the death of the author” signifies the end of romantic subjectivity and the breakdown of the individual ego (Jameson, 1991, 305).

This shift can also be seen in critiques from the Frankfurt School and post-structuralist thinkers, who, like Horkheimer and Adorno, denounced the “Culture Industry” for blurring the lines between high and commercial culture and for its alleged tyranny on a just passive

³⁷ Svendsen (2006) notes that, according to Benjamin, the loss of the aura leads to the abandonment of the concept of beauty, advancing the idea of an aesthetic experience freed from the category of beauty. By analogy, in the era of the technical reproducibility of art, the same occurs in fashion, where the reproducibility of prêt-à-porter garments strips fashion of its aura. While some aura may still persist in haute couture through branding, the requirement for garments to be beautiful is diminished. Following this observation, Svendsen begins his reflection on McQueen as an enigmatic designer with an avant-garde aesthetic.

consumer. Jameson refers to this as “Aesthetic Populism”, which involves an “aestheticization of the social bond” (Marchetti, 2004, 117).

Critiques within art, aesthetics, and sociology, such as those by Hebdige’s *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979) and de Certeau’s *L’invention du quotidien* (1984), emphasize the role of subcultures or generally individuals in rewriting cultural products. These subcultures creatively reuse commodities, highlighting the shift in attitudes towards fashion in the 1970s compared to the 1960s, from acclamation to political reprimand (Svedsen, 2006, 107).

Support for cultural appropriation persists today, legitimized by both popular and academic countercultures. Examples include the copyleft vs. copyright debate, led by the anonymous collective Luther Blissett³⁸ in the 1990s, and Naomi Klein’s 2000s campaign against branding in *No Logo*. When branding, a symbol of American capitalism, evolves into self-branding—especially among minorities or disadvantaged groups—the critique of image-driven society and capitalism often transforms into an endorsement of appropriation by subaltern cultures. This practice is socially sanctioned, especially when referring to “abusing” non-Western cultures, a stance rooted in postcolonial studies, beginning with Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978).

Moreover, some view these practices as labor, advocating workers’ rights for creatives; this perspective aligns with how those practices are seen by business studies, which paradoxically and non-ideologically recognize the value of appropriation as a strategy for maximizing individual social value through public image investment.

It’s often deemed acceptable for artists or designers to “plunder”, “pay homage to”, or “cite” commercial products, especially when the artist isn’t famous, as this is viewed as a legitimate, artistic protest. The acceptability depends on how much one supports the idea of an “open-sourced” society and culture.

For the fashion industry to avoid criticism from anti-capitalist perspectives, it would need to transition from being a mere “fashion system” to a “contemporary art world”, where artistic production is seen as collective labor.³⁹ In this environment, anything is permissible, as art

³⁸ Artoldo has reimagined Luther Blissett’s legacy, building on his media pranks with a 5.0 twist, reinventing Blissett as a crypto culture champion, NFT advocate, and creator of new ideological protocols, Proof of Workerism (POW) - from the Italian political view *operaismo* - and Proof of Prank (POP), ultimately presenting him as the reincarnation of Satoshi Nakamoto through miseducation and reformation. ARTOLDO crypto, “The Luther Blissett Legacy”, October 1, 2022, <https://lutherblissettlegacy.github.io/collection/>

³⁹ See Samuel Becker’s *Art Worlds*, 1982. Generally, in the tradition of cultural and sociological studies “worlds” is the realm of art and “system” of fashion and, realigning with the debate around the “Death of the Author”, art is the fruit of collective action, later transferred to the artist, who is so diminished by this view. See also hereabouts in general Bourdieu.

is intrinsically tied to critiques of capitalist economy and culture. Paradoxically, when an artist makes money from their work, they seem legitimized, although the criticism becomes more prominent when there is a gap between the creation and sale of the work. This aligns more with creative commons guidelines and private property norms.

The claim by fashion designers to be “artists” often increases the commercial appeal of their creations (Negrin 2012, 51), with due respect to critical theory.

Fashion critics like Diane Vreeland and art critics furthermore argue that fashion lacks the spiritual depth of art and is merely a commercial enterprise (Kim 1998, 53-54).

Elsewhere, Bourdieu, places fashion between art and bureaucracy, noting that while designers benefit from the charisma of artists, they remain replaceable in their roles, because of a law operating in cultural production (Giusti 2009, 78).

If fashion is defined as art, it risks losing its social and utilitarian function, which is central to its identity. Fashion provides protection—whether against the elements, societal structures, or cultural expectations. Without this practical function, fashion could lose its connection to its social roots and become a purely aesthetic form devoid of meaning.

Negrin (2012, 44) argues that the Kantian idea of art as “useless” was a later misinterpretation of Kant’s true focus on the form of aesthetic judgment, not its lack of purpose. Craftsmanship serves life by adding beauty, practicality, and functionality, distinguishing good craftsmanship from bad. For fashion to be considered a pure object of aesthetic judgment in the Kantian sense, it would need to lose its practical purpose. Svendsen (2006, 117) suggests that this question may be misframed, advocating for a deeper reflection on the relationship between art and fashion, particularly within postmodernism.

Svendsen (2006), 83-84 also highlights that for Simmel, clothes stripped of their practical function would represent a cultural tragedy, as they would objectify the subject. Hegel, in contrast, viewed fashion’s dependence on human will as preferable to natural necessity. In Hegel’s progressivism, fashion could be excessive or even a symbol of capital’s ugliness, acceptable also only when used for display, such as in photography, and potentially flattening into a two-dimensional form.

While Svendsen (2006) suggests that new questions about fashion don’t necessarily require philosophical or aesthetic theory but should be approached with sociocultural methodologies, Miller (2007, 34-35) emphasizes that, given fashion’s connection to everyday life,

its aesthetic reflection can shift from dimensionality to movement—both real and virtual. Miller compares fashion to stage design, highlighting its ephemeral nature, temporal limits, expensive materials, and poor documentation, which are shared traits with cinema, a form that only gained recognition as art in the 1980s through Russian formalism and André Bazin’s writings.



Fig.29 - Screenshot: Artifashion Intelligence – The Virtual Journey of the Mask | Artoldo

Artoldo’s installation aims to visually explore these issues by integrating both two-dimensional (videos, moving images) and three-dimensional (3D models, motion graphics) elements. Indeed, the differences between fashion and art cannot solely be judged by fashion’s functional utility or craftsmanship, which, while necessary for beauty and wearability, may not always apply. Although, the dimensionality of fashion—whether physical or virtual—raises questions about the dimension on we perceive its artistic value, as explored through new media like virtual reality and 3D technologies, featured in the installation.

Artoldo, drawing from video art and postmodern perspectives, advocates for analyzing fashion through the concept of movement, which fashion shares with cinema. He proposes that fashion could be considered an art form not only because of its motion—presupposing a constant “time”—but also due to its inherent temporality. This perspective contrasts with

Svendsen's view that fashion, while artistic in certain instances like Alexander McQueen's work, is generally irrelevant from an artistic point of view (2006). Instead, Artoldo provocatively likens fashion to cinema, the 7th Art, calling attention to its shared “movement” and as Negrin (2012, 43) suggests, to the unique role the body plays in fashion, setting it apart from static visual art.

In the era of AI and digital reproduction, the body's movement may render previous reflections obsolete, as artificial intelligence can reproduce artwork in new dimensions. *Artifashion Intellighenzia*, therefore, aimed to explore these themes through a 3D perspective, visually representing the interplay of fashion, movement, and intellectual elite culture, with a backdrop of “white noise” that echoes the complexity of this intersection.

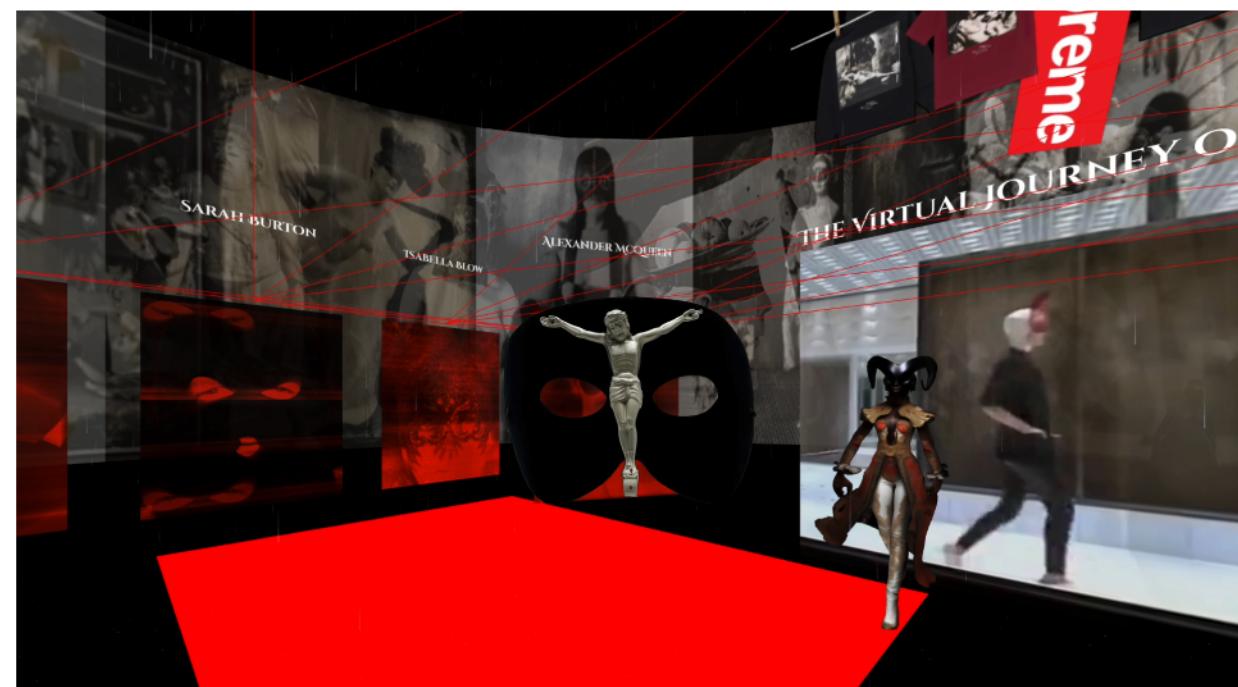


Fig.30 - Screenshot: Artifashion Intelligence – The Virtual Journey of the Mask | Artoldo

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