

Farrel, Aimee. 'In Conversation: Jonathan Andersons & Anthea Hamilton'. *New York Times Style Magazine* Online. 16 March 2017

T THE NEW YORK TIMES STYLE MAGAZINE

In Conversation: Jonathan Anderson & Anthea Hamilton



The British artist Anthea Hamilton and the fashion designer Jonathan Anderson inside “Disobedient Bodies” — Anderson’s curatorial debut which opens this weekend at the Hepworth Wakefield in West Yorkshire. Around them are sheer designs from the Loewe and J.W. Anderson archives, in a room titled “Revealing and Protecting. Wipe Clean.” Credit Mel Yates

“This is the most unbelievably comfortable seat,” says the Irish fashion designer Jonathan Anderson as he nestles into a Modernist Danish chair at the Hepworth Wakefield gallery in Yorkshire, in the north of England. “I could just sit here forever,” agrees the Turner-nominated artist Anthea Hamilton softly, as she settles in alongside Anderson. They are immersed in Hamilton’s exhibition there, where she explores early British Modernist works from the Kettle’s Yard house — an art gallery and onetime home of the influential late collector Jim Ede in Cambridge, England. (Hamilton curated pieces from the space, which is currently closed and being remodeled, for the installation, which also includes contemporary works). Her show has a certain stillness — a stark contrast to the gallery rooms next door, where the finishing touches of Jonathan Anderson’s curatorial debut, “Disobedient Bodies,” are being put precisely into place.

Anderson’s art and fashion exhibition offers a sublime assortment of more than 100 works by some of his favorite artists and designers — Barbara Hepworth and Christian Dior, Henry Moore and Rick Owens, Alberto Giacometti and Helmut Lang are all thoughtfully (and thought-provokingly) paired in the show. One of Issey Miyake’s 3D pleated dresses is shown alongside a cluster of 1950s paper lanterns by the Japanese artist Isamu Noguchi — who

influenced Miyake's seminal Pleats Please designs. "I believe that collaboration is one of the most important things in any field," Anderson says. "Everyone has something to learn from one another. When different disciplines meet it creates this amazing unpredictability. I'd like to be able to show fashion and art obsessions of mine on one even playing field."

Each of the four gallery rooms have an intimate, warrenlike feel thanks to a series of curtain partitions, conceived by 6a Architects, some featuring fabrics from Anderson's own archive — including a cutesy bunny-print corduroy. There are further playful touches, including 28 elongated jumpers suspended from the ceiling that visitors are invited to touch, feel and mess around with.



Works by the artists Sarah Lucas and Hans Bellmer sit alongside clothing by J.W. Anderson in "Disobedient Bodies." This room is titled "Soft Bodies. Desiring Monsters." Credit Mel Yates

Included in Anderson's eclectic display is a work by Hamilton titled "Leg Chair." The acrylic portrayal of the artist's own flexed legs is filled with sushi paper and piled with rice crackers that are wrought from glass. It's positioned with a pair of tabard knits from Anderson's spring 2015 men's wear collection for Loewe, which depict landscapes by the textile artist John Allen — and a series of Kraft paper and acrylic vests that are filled with badges and pictorial ephemera by a French designer called Elisabeth de Senneville. "I found them in Paris. They're very, very rare," Anderson says, pointing to a woolen waistcoat that's encased in clear plastic. "This one I'm obsessed by. It's just raw, shaven sheepskin. There are even little bits of straw still in it. It's kind of twisted. But someone was buying that in the 1970s." Hamilton leans in to inspect it, before clarifying: "It's cased in plastic, so I guess it's fine."

Anderson and Hamilton first met in 2015, when he commissioned her to create a trio of works as part of a Loewe Foundation project that went on display at the Miami Design District. And when, earlier this week, the two sat down with T to discuss art and fashion, their similarities came to light: Both collect fabric obsessively. Both create clothes. Newly fascinated by the fashion industry, Hamilton is in awe of the frenetic pace of Anderson's creative output. And the energetic clothing-designer-turned-curator confesses to being envious of the slower-paced practice of the art world. It's a contrast that's matched in their mode and manner: Anderson is effusive and decisive, and is dressed in black. Hamilton is considered and serene, and wears a white T-shirt and pale, flared denim. Both readily admit to having much to learn from one another. And though the prospect of a job swap is met with stony silence, otherwise the conversation flows freely, running from the meaning of luxury today and the commercialization of creativity, to the power of collaboration.



Hamilton's "Leg Chair," 2012, is constructed from acrylic cutouts of her own legs and features rice cakes, made from glass, at the crotch. Credit Mel Yates



The artist and the fashion designer seated inside the show "Anthea Hamilton Reimagines Kettle's Yard," featuring Hamilton's "British Grasses Kimono," 2016, at left. Credit Mel Yates

Jonathan Anderson: We first met at your studio when I was doing a project for the Loewe Foundation.

Anthea Hamilton: You commissioned me to make three works: The “British Grasses” kimono, an alabaster leg and another leg chair that was part of a series I’ve been working on for awhile.

Anderson: After that meeting I kept seeing your work everywhere [laughs]. That feels like 10 years ago.

Hamilton: It was in 2015. I’d just finished another exhibition in New York and I was on a real high. A lot of the works that I did for that Miami project turned into ideas for this Kettle’s Yard show.

Anderson: Andrew Bonacina [chief curator at the Hepworth Wakefield] introduced me to your work and I fell in love with it. There’s a real tactile quality and a humor to it that I really liked. It was amazing coming to your studio to see the works being made.

Hamilton: Though I don’t remember there being a brief.

Anderson: That’s because there was no brief [laughs].

Hamilton: No brief is always the hardest brief somehow. But I’d already been working on a series of kimonos. The image from this one [“British Grasses” kimono] comes from botanical photographer Roger Phillips. I’d seen them in a book and I was figuring out how to play with them.

Anderson: It’s really beautiful. I love textiles from throughout the centuries and I think the way that you use fabric is so genius. It’s incredibly tactile. You want to know what it’s made from. You want to touch it.

Hamilton: It’s funny. I’d never consciously followed fashion before but I’ve started watching all of the shows online. I can’t quite fathom the speed at which fashion runs. It’s the opposite to the way that I work. I’m incredibly slow in my thinking.

Anderson: As you say, fashion moves at such a speed. I always see research as just everyday. It’s about these continual obsessions. It’s obsessions on top of obsessions on top of more obsessions. You’re building all these layers that in the end become a running dialogue. Sometimes I get very jealous of art because there’s a lot more time.



“Anthea Hamilton Reimagines Kettle’s Yard” takes pieces from the 20th-century art collection of the late Jim Ede. They are on loan while the Kettle’s Yard gallery is closed for redevelopment. Credit Mel Yates

Hamilton: Yes. It's quite devotional. I had to really dedicate myself to understand the Kettle's Yard collection. I worked on this show for about 18 months.

Anderson: Wow. I'll work on a clothing collection for 30 days. I produce 12 collections a year. In the end fashion doesn't go deep, it sits on the surface level. We try to be deep [laughs].

Hamilton: It's not like I'm some extreme scholar either [laughs].

Anderson: You could be. There's an incredible flow to this show, which is so difficult to create. You make it look so effortless. We're doing the exhibition next door and it's very difficult. Museums like to work to a timetable. But I like improvisation.

Hamilton: Me too, there's something performative about a show. Even though I'm slow in preparation I always try to wait until the latest moment to place everything. It seems very still, but when I install it's quite quick. Suddenly everything opens up to you and things just fit together.

Anderson: I think you need that spontaneity. When I do a fashion show it's not done until it exits out of the door. When people see a show that's the end point. That's when it comes to life.

Hamilton: Oh yeah. The way people respond is primary for me, too. I see exhibition spaces as theatrical — although I definitely don't make, or produce, as much as you.

Anderson: No [covers his face with his hands].

Hamilton: I'm learning a lot from you about how you use material. It has been so great to see your runway shows. When I say my work is devotional, normally I think of one person while I'm making it. So I was very excited to see that your last London Fashion Week show was based around the idea of one woman. I thought that was a genius move.

Anderson: Yeah, we had one uniform hair look. When I look at your work I'm always fascinated by this idea of reduction. It all gets reduced down into the essence of one thing. One object holds as much as 400 fashion looks.

Hamilton: Thank you.

Anderson: Take this kimono [he gestures to a piece made by Hamilton, inspired by a painting by Christopher Wood]. That piece can speak for itself. There's nothing that needs to be said, whereas with fashion it's got to sell and be commercially viable and answer all these other questions. I admire just watching artists and people who are free from that.

Hamilton: I only know when something is done, or succeeding, when it has a multifaceted way of being read. When there is no one meaning. But I have a question for you — I want to know what you mean when you use the term "luxury."

Anderson: I work for a luxury group, LVMH, but when I took on the job at Loewe my whole belief was that luxury doesn't exist anymore. So I went on this crusade. I looked at the people who I really admire, artists like Ben Nicholson, Barbara Hepworth, Henry Moore — and they all worked with fashion. When you look back, people collaborated or admired things not for worth, not for monetary value, but just for creative intent. It was so liberal. That has disappeared a bit in the past 30 years. I hope it's coming back.

Hamilton: I think I have quite a skewed idea of luxury.

Anderson: During the 1990s luxury became something exclusive and elitist. I think fashion got lost. It forgot about craft and culture. It's probably to do with greed. I believe that the art world went through that too. It became about how high the price can be. For me, you have to try and remove all that and think about creative output and community and people. Then you can learn.

Hamilton: Did you work very differently putting together the exhibition knowing that unlike a runway show it was static?

Anderson: You definitely have to chill out a bit [smiles]. I'm high energy all the time. Fashion is about movement. It's always an action thing. That's the whole idea of having the jumpers on display in the exhibition so that people can play with them and touch them. I wanted to create the feeling as you go through the rooms that even if you can't touch it, you're consumed by it.

Hamilton: That's what really worked for me with this space, too. It's the idea that the room touches you first, before you even look around.

Anderson: If you think about Kettle's Yard — and I think it's probably my favorite collection in the world — it's about the domestic space. I did a resort 2016 presentation there and we were in the house for three days. There's a real equilibrium between the art, the fact that it's a domestic space and the way it has been curated.

Hamilton: Yes. You can feel comfortable in there. It makes you feel like you're at home. But it's a universe of its own logic.



Hamilton's "Volcano Table," 2014, is made from blown glass, Ferrari-red pigment, limestone tiles and powder-coated metal, and is seen here alongside a series of handwoven grass mats that she created as part of the "Anthea Hamilton Reimagines Kettle's Yard" exhibition. Credit Mel Yates

Anderson: I always think of it as a religious place. It's very Zen. I thought it would be so amazing to show high fashion in such an antifashion environment. It became like a tutorial or a salon. The girl would come out and we would explain everything about the look.

Hamilton: It's the perfect place for that. There are so many reasons that every single object is placed where it is: social and religious and political and aesthetic. It's not just about the house, it's how it has been documented.

Anderson: It's a perfect type-A example of middle-class Britain. It's a very abstract type of living. Jim Ede slept downstairs and his wife Helen slept upstairs. Though they could talk to one another through a hatch.

Hamilton: It was very chaste.

Anderson: There was no sex there [laughs].

Hamilton: Before working on this show, I'd just done a lot of juicy, lascivious works so it was a welcome break to be running through the idea of what Britishness could be or middle-classness could be.

Anderson: Now you're ready to be playful again. That's one of the things I like best about your work. This interview has been edited and condensed.

"Disobedient Bodies: J.W. Anderson Curates the Hepworth Wakefield" (March 18-June 18, 2017) and "Anthea Hamilton Reimagines Kettle's Yard" (until May 1, 2017) are on view at the Hepworth Wakefield

A version of this article appears in print on March 19, 2017, on Page ST3 of the New York edition with the headline: In Conversation; Art and Fashion.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/16/t-magazine/jonathan-anderson-anthea-hamilton-conversation-art-fashion.html>