

Historic travels through time - past and present

Contemporary art and fashion reviving the Eighteenth Century in the

‘Rokoko-mania’ – exhibition at Designmuseum Danmark

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Introduction

This chapter intends to focus on how creative and innovative ideas are adapted across time and space and how the culture from another century can still inspire contemporary artists and designers in their work. In the framework of the exhibition ‘Rokoko-mania’¹ launched in May 2012 at Designmuseum Danmark, artists worked alongside historians in their interpretation of a chosen century – namely the eighteenth century, in order to emphasize how this century still feels relevant today.

By instigating a dialogue between contemporary artists and the museum’s collection of eighteenth-century objects, mainly textiles and dresses but also other fashionable items such as fans, china, vinaigrette and snuffboxes, the museum aimed to draw parallels between the two centuries. The aim was to highlight selected themes and once-current elements in new ways, to show their continuing influence in the modern-day world. The exhibitions revolved around the self-staging of three themes: ‘Mirror, mirror on the wall...’; fascination and ideas termed ‘Wonderment and whims’; and finally the migration of motives from the East to the West and back again, titled ‘Lost in translation’.

¹ The title of the exhibition alluded to the phenomenon of the rococo with its characteristics of lightness, airiness, playfulness and refinement, while at the same time focussing on the later criticism of the period as being overly ornate and superficial.

By drawing parallels between the past and present and by showing the mutual exchange of ideas between the East and West in the eighteenth century and today, the museum hoped to establish a reflective communication between museum and the audience. As it was stated in the catalogue for the exhibition, it was the intention to show that although ‘people [today] in most parts of the world take inspiration from one culture to another as if it is the most natural thing in the world’² this also took place in the eighteenth century. To get behind the eighteenth century and to offer another interpretation of history, the museum invited four contemporary visual artists to work alongside the historians.

As a brief introduction, this paper refers to the importance of the eighteenth century in Danish history and the logic behind engaging contemporary artists in the exhibition ‘Rokoko-mania’. After a general introduction to the work of each artist and their specific artworks for the exhibition, this chapter discusses the result of dialogues between the three Danish designers and their inspirational sources. Focus will be directed towards their educational training, their inspirational sources, their design methods, and the question about employing modern technology in the artworks. The chapter ends with a reflection on the use of the eighteenth century as inspiration.

The artists

To represent present times the internationally renowned British-Nigerian artist, Yinka Shonibare MBE³ (b. 1962) was invited to participate with the film ‘Un ballo in maschera’ along with selected costumes from the film. Produced in 2004 in cooperation with Swedish Television and the choreographer Lisa Torun, ‘Un ballo in maschera’ was created for an

² Kirsten Toftegaard, *Rokoko-mania* (Design Museum Denmark, Copenhagen, 2012).

³ Since 2005, Yinka Shonibare has added the letters MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire) to his artist name. As he himself sees it, this is something of a self-ironic comment on his status as political artist.

exhibition at Stockholm's Moderna Museet, 'Fashination: Art and Fashion'.⁴ The film retells the events that took place on 16 March 1792 at a masquerade ball held at the Stockholm Opera, when the officer and aristocrat, Jacob Johan Anckarström (1762-1792) shot the Swedish king, Gustav III (1746-1792).⁵

Three Danish clothing designers were invited to create artworks for the rococo exhibition; Nikoline Liv Andersen (b. 1979), Laura Baruël (b. 1975) and Anne Damgaard (b. 1968) who are considered to be among some of the most talented clothing and fashion artists in Denmark.⁶ Both Damgaard and Baruël have previously worked in commercial fashion and both have taught at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts – the School of Design and other fashion design schools in Denmark. Instead of following trends and considering target groups, which is the norm in the world of clothing design, today all three Danish fashion designers aspire to move the frontiers of our perceptions of design and clothing and aim to challenge the audience in our perception of fashion. They all work with fashion which is exhibited at museums, exhibition halls or galleries separately or at group exhibitions.

⁴ Salka Hallström Bornold, Lars Nilsson, Lars Nittve and Magnus af Petersens eds., *Fashination* (Stockholm, Moderna Museet, 2004).

⁵ The film 'Un ballo in maschera' takes its title from the Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901) opera on the same subject.

⁶ Previously, the three artists had exhibited separately at the Designmuseum Danmark. Anne Damgaard in 2001 with the project: 'Prolog Princip Proces Produkt', Laura Baruël in 2007 with 'Wilderness' and Nikoline Liv Andersen in 2008 with the project 'Goddess of Leisure and two shouts and magnificence'. Anne Damgaard graduated as clothing designer from The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts School of Design in 1997 with the project 'Dresses for Bright Days and Dark Nights'. In 2008, Anne Damgaard received the Nordic Textile Award, followed by an exhibition at Borås Textile Museum in Sweden. Laura Baruël studied art history at Copenhagen University and also graduated as clothing designer from The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts School of Design in 2006. In 2007, she participated in the Danish Crafts and Design Biennale. In 2010, she held an exhibition 'Cosmic Garden' at the Beijing Studio Gallery, China.

Why choose the eighteenth century?

First it is relevant to dwell on the museum's choice of the eighteenth century for the exhibition. For Designmuseum Danmark, the eighteenth century is unavoidable, partly because the historical museum collections from the eighteenth century are very rich. Since the 1920s, the museum has been housed in a historical eighteenth century building, the former premises of the Royal Frederik's Hospital based on drawings by the Danish architect Nicolai Eigtved (1701-54). The hospital is situated in the middle of the district of Copenhagen called 'Frederiksstaden', which in the eighteenth century was a new part of the town built mostly from fortunes earned by noblemen and merchants from overseas trade. The second part of the eighteenth century was considered to be a golden age in Danish overseas trade and the period is often labelled 'the blooming period' [Den florissante periode], in contrast the first half of the century was inflicted by plague, wars and agricultural crisis.⁷ Around the 1750s, the Enlightenment soaked through the upper strata of Danish society and reason and tolerance became the core of modern thinking.

The European colonial expansion and subsequent commerce with new and exotic commodities offered the Danes new consumer possibilities, from imported tea from China to the trade of people as slaves. New luxury goods began to influence how people lived their lives – both their outwards, public lives, and more intimate lives lived within the four walls of their homes. The interior decoration of the home became characterised by the comfortable, light and vital furniture that could easily be rearranged. The home became divided into representative rooms – an opulent salon or parlour for receiving guests, and other personal rooms where the emphasis was on comfort and a cosy, homely ambience.

⁷ The last bubonic plague epidemic ravaged the city of Copenhagen and caused the death of around one third of the population in the summer of 1711. The Great Nordic War lasted from 1709 to 1720, and finally in the 1730s, an agricultural crisis was caused by bad marketing conditions the Danish corn trade.

For women, the eighteenth century is characterized by heavy silk gowns, such as the *robe à la française*, the back sack gown, and from the 1760s the *polonoise* and the *robe à l'anglaise* a decade later, when panniers with flared skirts, stays and a deep décolletage modelled the silhouette. Both the chemise and tunic dress, which ended the stylistic language at the end of the century, were not considered to be part of the rococo style of dress. In comparison with today, the dress style changed at a much slower tempo. However, the colours and design of the silk fabrics changed from year to year – even from season to season. It was the fabric and the composition of the milliner's commodities such as hats, shoes, ribbons, bows, laces and embroideries that allowed the consumer to create a more individual style of dress, and to show whether the person was up to date with the latest fashion - at least for the upper classes.

In Europe, this consumption of items both from home and from foreign destinations was used by people as a means to fashion their lives – or even used to create a stage within which they played out their lives. Morning ablutions developed into a full-scale performance and ritual of consumption and taste. The time it took a person to get dressed was in itself a luxury, as was the number of people that could be required to assist in the undertaking of such a daily ritual. Whilst a hairdresser attended to the hair (or wig), business affairs were conducted, correspondence was kept up to date, instruction in the playing of music was taken, breakfast was eaten and guests were received. Perfumes and *eaux des toilettes* were used in copious amounts, as were cosmetics, which until now had been produced in the home. Cosmetics became available to everybody in shops and became synonymous with beauty, which was something that was said to cease at the age of thirty.

The eighteenth century - back in fashion – again!

Since the turning point of popular, mass culture in the 1950-60s, slowly fashion has been accepted alongside other genres of decorative art. As the borderline between the visual

arts and decorative art have been challenged for the last twenty years, so has the distinction between art and fashion. The relationship between art and fashion is complicated. Whereas art is supposed to be timeless and serious, fashion has been put down as shallow and populist, often without considering that fashion can appear in many forms from fast fashion to haute couture. Fashion has approached art in order to be associated with the intellectual status and respect that encompass art. In the hope to raise the number of visitors, art museums have been tempted to draw closer to fashion to share some part of the money and glamour that surrounds fashion.⁸

Recently this grey area between art and fashion has been explored at exhibitions, while Fashion at museums has been executed differently. The simple solution has been to empty rooms and invite one or several fashion designers to exhibit.⁹ Another version, and perhaps a more interesting one, is to match fashion and visual art as it was done in 1996 at the National Gallery of Denmark [Statens Museum for Kunst] in Copenhagen. The Danish couturier Erik Mortensen (1926-1998) exhibited around 120 couture dresses from his period as *directeur artistique* and chief designer at the two Parisian fashion houses respectively Balmain and Jean-Louis Scherrer from 1982 until 1994.¹⁰ The haute couture dresses were exhibited together with paintings from the renaissance to the twentieth century. The couturier

⁸ Salka Hallström Bonold, Lars Nilsson, Lars Nittve and Magnus af Petersens eds., *Fashionation* (Stockholm, Moderna Museet, 2004), p. 14-25.

⁹ The first time this happened at Designmuseum Danmark was in 1988 with the exhibition 'Stars in French Fashion' [Stjerner i fransk mode] - one of the most celebrated exhibitions at the museum. The exhibition was part of a cultural campaign between Denmark and France 1987-88 and was arranged with loans mostly from Musée des Arts de la Mode in Paris, together with loans from several Parisian fashion houses and composed of different kinds of accessories for example, hats, shoes, gloves, belts, bags, fans, glasses and parasols. Lars Dybdahl and Charlotte Paludan eds., *Stjerner i fransk mode* (København, Kunstindustrimuseet, 1988).

¹⁰ 90 of the 120 exhibited haute couture dresses are now in the collection of Designmuseum Danmark.

and the curator matched the individual dress with a single or a group of paintings and with more or less success, a dialogue was attempted between the two different media.¹¹

Another step was to match fashion with fashion from different historical periods – the eighteenth, nineteenth, twenty, and twenty first centuries - as it was the case with the exhibition ‘The 18th Century back in Fashion’ in Grand Trianon in Versailles in 2011. At the exhibition, couturiers and fashion designers showed their haute couture models alongside original eighteenth-century clothes from the Musée Galliera in Paris. The promoters of the exhibition expressed in the catalogue that, ‘this exhibition by initiating a conversation between past and present creations will undoubtedly inspire future generations of designers enamoured by the eighteenth century’.¹²

The exhibition focused on chosen periods in the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries focusing on the last two decades, highlighting in every period where fashion had been influenced by the eighteenth century. The exhibition showed creations designed by Jacques Doucet (1853-1929), Boué Sæurs (1899-1935), Pierre Balmain (1914-1982), Christian Dior (1905-1957), Karl Lagerfeld (b. 1933), Vivienne Westwood (b. 1941), Yohji Yamamoto (b. 1943), Thierry Mugler (b. 1948) and Christian Lacroix (b. 1951). The inspiration from the eighteenth century was most obvious when it came to couture from the 1990s until the present day, exemplified by Vivienne Westwood’s spring/summer collection 1990/91. Vivienne Westwood, a cutting edge of fashion designer, who sets trends for years ahead, swept away years of black fashion, headed by the group of Belgian avant-garde

¹¹ Else Bülow, *Erik Mortensen – Klassisk kunst* (København, Statens Museum for Kunst, 1996).

¹² Quotation taken from the foreword by Laurence Engel, Directrice des Affaires culturelle de la Ville de Paris. *Le XVIIIe au Goût du Jour – Couturiers et Createurs de Mode au Grand Trianon (The 18th Century Back in Fashion – Couturiers and Fashion Designers in the Grand Trianon)* (Versailles, Éditions Artlys, 2011).

fashion designers called the Antwerp Six¹³ and the Japanese designers Rei Kawakubo (b. 1942), Issey Miyake (b. 1938) and Yohji Yamamoto (b. 1943). She revived panniers and stays in new and technological fabrics with printed references to the eighteenth century.

Designmuseum Danmark chose a more proactive solution by inviting fashion designers to be inspired by the original eighteenth century dresses in Designmuseum Danmark's collection.

Yinka Shonibare and 'Un ballo in maschera'

Yinka Shonibare was born in the UK in 1962 to Nigerian parents. After attending school in both Nigeria and London, he went on to study art at London's Goldsmith's College of Art. To convey the message of his works, Yinka Shonibare makes use of a variety of media. These include not only three-dimensional 'tableaux vivants' with a twist¹⁴ for which he is known, but also two-dimensional media such as photography, collage, drawing and painting – or a mixture of one or more of these. Taking inspiration from his multicultural upbringing, Yinka Shonibare creates seductive works that raise questions on issues such as power, identity, gender and social class.

Three qualities are characteristic for the artworks of Shonibare, his unrestrained yet persuasive use of history, the use of printed colourful textiles and the headless mannequins in

¹³ Between 1980-1981, the Antwerp Six graduated from Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp. The group is Walter Van Beirendonck (b. 1957), Dirk Bikkenbergs (b. 1959), Ann Demeulemeester (b. 1959), Dries Van Noten (b. 1958), Dirk Van Saene and Mariana Yee (b. 1958). Some consider Martin Margiela (b. 1957) also to be part of the group.

¹⁴ '*Tableau vivant*', which means 'living picture' is a term borrowed from the French language. It describes a group of actors or models suitably dressed in costumes posed and often theatrically lit. It was an art form popular at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, often miming scenes from Roman and Greek mythology.

his static installations. Shonibare has often formed his installations as a response to the works of well-known artists (both from the world of literature and visual art) and to historical situations. The headless mannequins can be interpreted in a number of ways; for example, it has been suggested that they can be perceived as having an absence of individual identity thus allowing the audience a greater degree of possible affinity with them. Another suggestion has been that it is a playful reference to the beheading of the French aristocracy during the French Revolution.¹⁵

A signature characteristic of his works is his use of brightly printed textiles – textiles that we usually think of as being African. Originally at the end of the nineteenth century and in the beginning of the twentieth century, these printed textiles were produced in the Netherlands as industrial versions of Indonesian batik and were originally aimed at the Indonesian market. When little interest was shown in Indonesia for these cheaper copies, new markets were found in Africa – to such an extent that we today see these textiles as being an integral characteristic of West African culture. The people of West Africa have embraced these textiles and now consider them part of their own cultural heritage. Shonibare himself says that he uses these printed textiles to examine international contexts in a post-national world, prejudiced opinions and claims to ethnic identity.¹⁶

In several works of art, he has shown his fascination with the eighteenth century and its aristocrats, their love of frivolity and excess, and used it as catalyst for his artistic

¹⁵ Rachel Kent, *Yinka Shonibare MBE* (Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Brooklyn Museum, New York, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC, Prestel Verlag Munich, Berlin, London, New York, 2008) p. 13.

¹⁶ Rachel Kent, *Yinka Shonibare MBE* (Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Brooklyn Museum, New York, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC, Prestel Verlag Munich, Berlin, London, New York, 2008) p. 12.

message.¹⁷ In 1998, Yinka Shonibare created the installation ‘Mr and Mrs Andrews Without Their Heads’ after the English portrait and landscape painter Thomas Gainsborough’s (1727-1788) painting from 1748-1750 ‘Mr and Mrs Robert Andrews’. Gainsborough portrait was a statement about Britain’s landed gentry, and the young couple were portrayed in front of their vast estates. From 2001, Shonibare’s installation ‘The Swing’ was a response to the painting from 1769 of the same name by the French painter and printmaker Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732-1806).¹⁸ Again in 2007, Shonibare recreated a suite of allegorical paintings by Fragonard from 1771-1773 by the title ‘The Progress of Love’ for an exhibition at Musée du quai Branly in Paris.¹⁹ His labyrinthine installation was titled ‘Jardin d’amour’. In the catalogue for the exhibition, Shonibare said about his fascination with the eighteenth century as an inspirational source:

‘It was a period when the aristocracy was still enjoying a luxurious lifestyle; before they really got challenged by the people.....I am deliberately taking this period as a metaphor for a contemporary situation...And what I am really doing is showing very wealthy Europeans in very wealthy clothes, but because I changed their clothes into African textiles, I give an indication that the luxury that they enjoy, the labour of the making of the clothes is supplied by others who are less fortunate. So this installation is a way to bring the two together, using, as I mentioned, the eighteenth century as a metaphor, although these things are actually here now.’²⁰

¹⁷ From 1797, an almost similar Danish painting called ‘The Ryberg Family Painting’ [Det Rybergske familiebillde] by the Danish painter Jens Juel (1745-1802) portrayed the wealthy merchant Niels Ryberg with his son Johan Christian and daughter-in-law Engelke in an outdoor landscape with the family works in the background. Many wealthy European families prospered from trade with the colonies – perhaps even from the slave trade.

¹⁸ Fragonard’s paintings are characterized by the depiction of the wealthy aristocracy while there are pursuing all the enjoyments of their material comfort.

¹⁹ Fragonard’s allegorical paintings were commissioned by King Louis XV’s mistress Madame du Barry for her chateau Louveciennes. Like other members of the royal family she went to the guillotine in 1793 during the reign of Terror.

²⁰ Yinka Shonibare, MBE, *Jardin d’amour* (Paris, Musée du quai Barnly and Flammarion, 2007) p. 12.

The backdrop for the elaborate costume drama ‘Un ballo in maschera’ was Sweden’s oldest theatre interior, Confidencen, which dates from 1753 and is part of the Ulriksdal palace near Stockholm. Without music and any form of dialogue, the film’s story is told through dance at a masquerade ball, which was highly popular during the eighteenth century. The dancers are wearing Dutch wax gowns in eighteenth-century fashion and ornate Venetian-style masks. The only sounds in the film emanate from heartbeats, the breathing of the dancers, footsteps, the flicking of fans and the swish of outfits. Together with the choreographer, Shonibare combines contemporary and classical dance to create a new dance form.²¹ In ‘Un ballo in maschera’ the assassination of the king is repeated three times, each at a slightly increased pace with slight alterations to the details. After each ‘final’ shot, the film jumps back in time to the starting point. By allowing the king to come back to life, Shonibare challenges the boundary between reality and fiction, and the film becomes open to the audience’s own interpretation.

Shonibare is an exciting artist to engage for an exhibition representing past and present and he is frequently cited for his use of beauty as a device to gain the audience’s attention before confronting them with the many layers of interpretation of his work both in a historic and in a contemporary perspective. One of these layers in the film is the costumes which has a reference to the Swedish court dress imposed on the royal court by Gustav III in 1778. His ambition was to extend the dress reforms beyond the court to citizens in all social classes because of the ban of excessive luxury and the expected use of cheaper Swedish woven fabrics, the anti-fashion of the clothing and its practicality. He never succeeded in his ambition. The style of the dress was retrospective and revived fashionable features from the

²¹ *Interview with Ph. D. in Theatrical History Karen Ved*²¹ Rachel Kent, *Yinka Shonibare MBE* (Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Brooklyn Museum, New York, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC, Prestel Verlag Munich, Berlin, London, New York, 2008) p. 12.

seventeenth century. In reality the court dress, especially the male clothing acquired so many accessories that it became quite expensive. And the female creativity regarding small changes and additions to the dress created new whims in dressing.²²

Anne Damgaard and ‘Melankolyst’

For the exhibition ‘Rokoko-mania’, fashion designer Anne Damgaard (b. 1968) created five unique sculptural dresses that highlighted the century’s most important style – rococo. Her eighteenth century project was called Melankolyst and the individual dresses Lady Lyndon, Wedding Dress, Cytheria, Fall and Ludomania. In the case of the project Damgaard has been most influenced by states of mind such as escapism, indulgent reverie, melancholia and fear of death. In her opinion, the eighteenth century offered the royal courts of Europe and the upper classes relentless opportunities for pleasure, self-staging and consumption, not to mention an endless resource of people for them to use. Often the result was a kind of despondency, loneliness and loathing of life – a scenario that Damgaard recognises in our own era and in our own overindulgent part of the world. The dresses made for the exhibition was light and elegant, avoiding sweeping lines and ornamentation by intricate cutting, which bordered on the opulent.

A common trait shared by all of Damgaard’s dresses is their sense of sensuality, lightness, vitality, naturalness and great femininity. Damgaard pushes the boundaries of the well-known dress in terms of modern fabric expression, and each work exists on the crossover point between classic dress and modern art. Although often part of a small collection, each individual dress is an artwork in its own right and tells its own story – and each dress always relates to one singular basic form: the woman’s body.

²² Lena Rangström, *Hovets Dräkter* (Stockholm and Höganäs, Livrustkammaren and Bra Böcker/Wiken, 1994) p. 9-33.

In Damgaard's work with fabric, an important element has always been transparency, the flow of light and the glazing of colours, obtained by adding one transparent textile on top of the other. Recently, she has begun working with a nano technological fibre, Morphotex-polyester. Scientifically developed in Japan by the textile firm Nuno Textiles, the fibre can be used for industrial products and for clothing. Morphotex has the same qualities as the wing of a butterfly which do not contain colour pigment but obtain colour in refracting the light which opens up for more sustainable fabric production methods. However, Damgaard renounced the use of Morphotex for the rococo-project because she lacked experience working with the fabric.

Damgaard chose to work with man-made fabrics because she wanted to take advantage of laser cutting techniques. This allowed her freedom to choose elaborated forms and provide her with accuracy in the process of work. In man-made fabrics, one of the advantages of laser cutting is the burning of the edges which prevents the raw edges from unravelling and the need for any further processing.

Often Damgaard sets herself the task to work with certain geometrical forms, such as circles, squares, rectangles or spirals – for the rococo project she chose the oval form. Photographing the successive stages, the geometrical forms are draped and assembled on a dummy in a process of alternately adding more forms or removing or changing the position of a piece on the dress form.²³

When asked about her inspirational sources, Damgaard admits being inspired by the Antwerp Six and the Japanese designers Rei Kawakubo (b. 1942), Issey Miyake (b. 1938) and Yohji Yamamoto (b. 1943), who are known for draped asymmetrical clothing with the

²³ The section is written against a background of two interviews with Damgaard. *Interview with Anne Damgaard in her studio February 17 2011 and at Designmuseum Danmark March 6 2013.*

reverse side visible with seams and hems and even unravelled edges – constructed and deconstructed - a way of expressing instead of suppressing.

Another inspirational source for the rococo project has been film which to Damgaard, conveys feelings and moods. She mentioned the American film director Stanley Kubrick's (1928-1999) film from 1975 'Barry Lyndon'²⁴ and the modern take on the history about Marie Antoinette's (1755-1793) transformation from Austrian archduchess into French queen in the years before the French revolution in 1789. A film of Marie Antoinette's life was directed by the American film director Sofia Coppola (b. 1971) in 2006.²⁵

Like many other clothing designers before her, Anne Damgaard has been influenced by impressions of fashion and costume history. Although she received very little training in historical dress making, and only attended a short series of lectures in dress and fashion history, she has in the past worked with deconstructing both the corset and the bustle.

Laura Baruël and 'Rocky Landscape'

Each of the five dresses Laura Baruël (b. 1975) made for the 'Rokoko-mania'-exhibition represented archetypical concepts or elements of nature, including clouds, water and waves, flowers and hills. One of the key influence was the rocky landscape, an element in Japanese and Chinese art that dates back hundreds of years, the perception and implementation of which has long since spread to the art of other cultures. With the dress sculpture, Baruël wanted to attract attention to the common cultural elements which she thinks people from both the East and the West shared and still share and that she believes

²⁴ 'Barry Lyndon' is about a young Irishman's social endeavour and his fall from zenith. The history takes place in Ireland, the continent and Britain from around 1750 until 1789.

²⁵ *Interview with Anne Damgaard in her studio February 17 2011 and at Designmuseum Danmark March 6 2013.*

connect us as human beings. In Baruël's opinion, the meeting of East and West is as relevant today as it was centuries ago.²⁶

Since Baruël in 2005 studied in Tokyo with the Japanese clothing designer Yoshiaki Hishinuma (b. 1958)²⁷, she has always been fascinated by Asian art, design and culture. For Baruël, the intern period confirmed her inspiration from the experimental part of international fashion design combined with traditional textile techniques known for several hundred years.

Another inspiration for her dress installations came from the two-dimensional world of textiles: partly from the eighteenth-century French, luxurious silk-woven textiles with exotic flowers and garden motifs; and partly from the Chinese textiles of the same period, with their stylised lineation portraying dragons and mountains, and animal, flower, wave and cloud motifs. Her first intention was to sample patterns directly in two dimensions and multi-colours. This would have included the use of modern technology as digital scanning and printing. Instead, Baruël translated lines and motives of three-dimensional forms into five monochrome dresses. She challenged herself to work with more solid forms inspired by the Japanese technique of kirigami, a paper cutting and gluing that is a variation of origami.²⁸

The installation evolved from the basic shapes of the dresses with added stylistic elements from eighteenth-century clothing history, including the voluptuous fishbone skirts around the hips, a type of architectural embellishment, which she has further developed. Baruël did not receive any training or lectures in dress and fashion history in her time at the

²⁶ The section is written against a background of two interviews with Baruël. *Interview with Laura Baruël in her studio March 22 2011 and March 3 2012.*

²⁷ Yoshiaki Hishinuma is known for his work with pleats and traditional Japanese printing techniques.

²⁸ *Origami* is the art of folding paper, a traditional Japanese art-form known from the seventeenth century, *Ori* means folding, *kami* paper. In *kirigami*, *kiru* means to cut and *kami* paper.

design school, but she did graduate from the Bachelor programme in art history at the University of Copenhagen.

In her previous work, Baruël has as we saw with Damgaard, been occupied with transparency. Another strong influence was patterns embedded in nature, in plants and flowers. Nature is not only a physical picture but also a mental landscape of art, philosophy and nature's motifs coded into our bodies. Baruël explores the relationship between the human body and clothing and the local nature and culture through traditions, rites and forms of lives. In previous works, her ambition has been to mix both Nordic prehistoric clothing with national costumes and a modern global fashion expression, and to combine classical textile fabrication methods with more experimental techniques.

Also Baruël teaches at several private fashion and textile design schools and besides her more artistic projects, she produces a small collection of unique clothing, where every item is specially fabricated both when it comes to decoration of the fabric and the cut of every single piece of clothing – a kind of craftsmen's clothes.

Nikoline Liv Andersen and 'Dance with the deaf and dumb eye'

Taking the form of three cohesive clothing sculptures, Nikoline Liv Andersen's (b. 1979) rococo project was a contemporary spin on the French court under Louis XVI, in her own words, 'where extravagant consumption and poor communication between the nobility and common citizens resulted in the French Revolution.' The three sculptures took the form of women in clothes with rococo references with wigs like monkeys, based on the classical Japanese monkeys who naïvely shut out the outside world by not seeing, not hearing and not speaking. From Andersen's point of view, the installation was meant to stand as a contemporary, harsh and poignant comment on the West's consumption at the expense of human lives in other parts of the world. The monkeys became the fable's symbol of today's

blind consumer and history's infamous Marie Antoinette.²⁹ To the audience, Andersen often allows her clothing installations to express an ambiguity that shifts between the theatrical, strong, self-staging and sometimes repulsive and the childlike, beautiful and a romance that occasionally seems tragic. Through her work, Andersen manages to purvey a mixture of emotions ranging from the exclusive and feminine to the dour and terrifying.

Characteristic of Andersen's work is the surprising, expressive and experimental textile surfaces and structures, the material constructions and collisions. She processes fabrics and other materials into surfaces, which to the eye look as something else. A kindred spirit in this line of work is the Indian fashion designer Manish Arora (b. 1972) who in his couture works with surfaces that at a distance looks like feathers but on close inspection turns out to be thousands of small pieces of silk dyed into many nuances of the same colour.³⁰ Andersen builds up textiles by adding layer after layer of fabric, knitting, lace, thread and yarn, including fur, leather, plastic and occasionally nails. She decorates with beads, sequins and embroidery, and sometimes she paints directly onto the textile. Andersen's use of unexpected materials and her experimental work with cheap, mass-produced everyday items brings in mind the American artist Tara Donovan (b. 1969), who creates site-specific installation art that utilizes everyday materials.³¹ Occupied by the fragility of life, Andersen initiates a process of decomposing the finished work, alternately tearing and adding new layers and paint – constructing, destroying and dissolving over and over again in order to create a three-dimensional structure on the surface.

²⁹ *Interview with Nikoline Liv Andersen in her studio March 2 2011.*

³⁰ In autumn/winter 2012/2013, the work of Manish Arora was exhibited together with clothing by several Indian fashion designers at the Danish art museum *Arken* at the exhibition '*India: Fashion Now*' alongside the exhibition '*India: Art Now*'.

³¹ From February 8 to May 20 2013 as a part of a series of exhibitions called '*Louisiana Contemporary*', Tara Donovan exhibited at the Danish art museum *Louisiana*.

Andersen has totally devoted herself to work with fashion as art. The period as an apprentice at the French haute couture house Dior, at that time led by the British fashion designer John Galliano, gave her an insight into working with materials and surfaces. Most of all, she was taught not to follow the line of least resistance. Most of her work is done by hand and time and toil are not negotiable. Not to be observant of time, is in fact a motive force for her and allows her freedom to develop her craft.

Graduating in 2006, Nikoline Liv Andersen attended the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts – The School of Design at a time when the school no longer offered the students courses in fashion and dress history. However entering a new project, she is totally devoted to all kind of inspiration also historical-fashion inspiration not limited in any way.

The design process of the three Danish clothing designers

When the museum and Damgaard, Baruël and Andersen engaged in the collaboration for the exhibition, we met for small workshops studying original eighteenth-century dresses at Designmuseum Danmark, to watch and discuss films and listen to individual presentations of inspirational sources. It was a part of the curatorial work to keep in close contact with the three designers, who made special artworks for the exhibition and to know which path that wanted to pursue artistically. This was important in order to choose items from the museum collection which would correspond to the chosen themes and the modern artwork.

When eighteenth-century clothing inspires fashion designers, they usually work with two features the corset and the characteristic silhouette of the bustle - in this case the hooped skirt. Apart from these two inspirational sources, all three of them have been fascinated by mental and social similarities between the way of living in the eighteenth century and the modern day.

At the design school, Damgaard attended few lectures in dress and fashion history whereas when Baruël and Andersen attended the school, lectures in fashion history were abandoned. Although no lectures were given in fashion and dress history at The University of Copenhagen, Baruël had her graduation from the Bachelor programme in art history to lean against. None of them were taught to copy historical dress in order to study the subject in depth. On the other hand, their ambition in their artistic work has never been to copy historical dresses but rather to recreate and interpret, and to take their inspirational point of departure from a historical period.

Furthermore they were not taught how to process inspiration – they were simply not given the tools. Although they drew up mood boards in connection with the school exercise, they never discussed the content of the board during the working process until the final evaluation between teacher and student.³² To the students, this felt as post rationalizing.³³ In 2011, the Danish Design School and the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, School of Architecture and Conservation merged and became the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Schools of Architecture, Design and Conservation. The status of the design school changed from a technical based school to university, which since has affected the education.

Regarding the ‘Rokoko-mania’-exhibition, both Damgaard and Baruël have been concrete in their information regarding influence. Damgaard talks about feelings, moods and films, Baruël about Asian culture and the encounter of European and Asian cultures.

³² A mood board is a display or collection of sketches, photos, pictures or any other inspirational material such as fabrics, colours etc.

³³ *Interview with Anne Damgaard in her studio February 17 2011 and at Designmuseum Danmark March 6 2013.*

Interview with Nikoline Liv Andersen in her studio March 2 2011. Interview with Laura Baruël in her studio March 22 2011 and March 3 2012.

Compared to Damgaard and Baruël, Andersen is more reserved in her information about inspirational influence. Perhaps this is a deliberate choice on principle, a matter of design method or perhaps she engages in a more intuitive design process. The fact that both Damgaard and Baruël are more conscious and informative is emphasized by their experience as teachers in design practice.

Talking about the design process, Damgaard says ‘the process is an interaction between intuition and research’.³⁴ For the project, they created a mood board or in the case of Andersen a mood book. To gain the most from the inspiration, it was crucial at the same time to maintain the general view and to move deeper into the centre of substance. Theory, sketching, collecting and studying and experimenting with materials and fabrics increased the parallels.

Since the start of the industrial revolution the use of ‘modern’ technology has been linked to the issue of time in order to make the production effective and to lower prices. This was not relevant to the designers. Damgaard used modern technology in her work both in techniques and in materials but only if it served a purpose and added positively to the expression that she wished to obtain in the final result. Baruël’s first intention was to use computer scans to sample Asian and Western patterns and to have it digitally printed into new motifs as an integrated part of her rocky landscape-dresses. But in the design process she changed her mind and ended up by translating motives, lines and patterns into three-dimensional monochrome forms in the dress installation. Pieces of paper in many different forms were cut by hand and after covering the pieces with thin white fabric, they were sewn together by hand. Every small detail was done by hand. Andersen did not directly use modern technology in processing the fabric, materials and surfaces into pieces of clothing, but many

³⁴ *Interview with Anne Damgaard at Designmuseum Danmark March 6 2013.*

of the materials she included in her work were produced using modern technology. For instance the many thousands of straw used in her dresses for the ‘Rokoko-mania’ exhibition.

Conclusion

To work with a historical period as an inspirational source is one of the characteristic features of the Nigerian-English artist Yinka Shonibare. Both he and the three Danish clothes designers use the eighteenth century as a metaphor for contemporary time. The film ‘Un ballo in maschera’ introduces several possibilities of interpretations. The choice of which is left open to the spectator by Yinka Shonibare. Taking their inspiration from the rococo period, the three Danish designers, Nikoline Liv Andersen, Laura Baruël and Anne Damgaard presented a contemporary interpretation of the eighteenth century and the themes of the exhibition. The works of all three Danish artists were presented in the form of either artistic, experimental garments or three-dimensional sculptural installations; all of the works exist in the realm where art, handicraft and design converge.

Whereas the historian is bound to written sources, preserved objects and artworks and to the illusion/delusion about communicating the truth, the artist is not restrained by boring facts but can interpret the past more personally and in a very innovative and creative way. Both the audience and the historian should not underestimate the artist’s creative contribution to interpret the past, as quoted in the catalogue: ‘When we encounter the unfamiliar – and sometimes the unknown – a positive dynamic is unleashed that is instrumental in transporting us to new places’.³⁵

Through their works, Andersen and Damgaard aimed to bring today’s relentless consumption of luxury products and the way we stage-manage our lives to the attention of the audience, making us all reflect on the consequences. Furthermore, Andersen includes fur in

³⁵ Kirsten Toftegaard, *Rokoko-mania* (Designmuseum Danmark, Copenhagen, 2012).

her works, which in some countries is still considered controversial. Baruël mixed the imagery of eighteenth-century Europe with those of the Far East in her own contemporary interpretation. On a scale, Andersen and Baruël represent the two extremities, Baruël being more absorbed in the aesthetics expression, Andersen the most political and morally affected in her work. Regarding the radical criticism of social structure she is much more in line with the work of Yinka Shonibare than Baruël and Damgaard.

In the description and reflections of the ‘Rokoko-mania’-project, Damgaard and Baruël have offered invaluable information. Due to their work as teachers, they are much aware of design methods and the design process, for instance how to absorb, process, and interpret an inspiration.

As we have seen, at regular intervals, several well-known both deceased and living British and French fashion designers have been inspired and have designed haute couture dresses on the basis of eighteenth-century inspiration. From the beginning, both Damgaard’s, Baruël’s and Andersen’s dresses were intended to be shown at an exhibition – the ‘Rokoko-mania’. In the case of the three Danish designers, the exhibition becomes a kind of market place for their work.

Although all three Danish fashion designers distinguish between fashion as its understood in following trends and pandering to target groups, and fashion as art, where functionality is not an issue, they see no problem in working with every aspect of fashion at the same time. For Andersen however, it is a hypothetical situation for the time being. The three Danish clothing designers in the ‘Rokoko-mania’-project represent three different stages of wearability in clothing from Damgaard’s dresses that are possible to wear, to Andersen’s straw dresses, which are wearable but probably do not offer the wearer any comfort and room for movements, to Baruël five monochrome paper and fabric dresses,

which offer no room for the body to dress or undress. They are not intended to be worn in any way but are rather made as sculptures.

Neither of them wishes to establish a hierarchy saying that fashion as art is more valuable than fashion as fashion. However, they are careful not to describe themselves as artists, keeping it an open question. But it is absolutely fair to say that their design and working methods are similar to artists' working process.

When designers turn to the eighteenth century for inspiration they almost always become fascinated by panniers and stays. However, has it become a cliché and a hackneyed phrase to invoke the eighteenth century as inspiration every time a flared skirt or a narrow waist is spotted on the catwalk or for that matter at an exhibition? The fact is that the eighteenth century never stops to surprise and fascinate us, although the century has had to endure every feeling from love and fascination to ridicule. Perhaps the love-hate relationship with the eighteenth century has to do with the fact that this bipolar century went from one extreme to another, political, socially but also when we consider the fashion of the period. And talk about contradictions and extremes! On the one hand, the French queen Marie Antoinette lived her life in lavish luxury and on the other hand played a simple shepherdess.