

LUCAS OSSENDRI- JVER



"I love everything that has to do with construction," designer Lucas Ossendrijver declares. The longtime head of menswear at Lanvin is not a man to design with pencil and paper but rather to build as an architect might, in three dimensions. It's a passion that started well before an interest in clothing. Growing up, Ossendrijver had a father who ran a construction company in a rural town 30 miles south of Amsterdam; the designer's playthings were wood and tools, crafting his pastime. Today, the 48-year-old still puts his hands to work.

He just rebuilt a wooden bench, in fact. It took 10 days to fix and reassemble, but it's sturdier and more beautiful than ever, according to the designer. He beams, amused with himself.

"Fashion for me is about making things—being creative and doing things with your hands," says the low-key, lanky Dutchman with a moon of sandy hair. To devise the clothing of his *métier*, he begins by dismantling an existing garment, unraveling the seams of a vintage piece, perhaps, or something from one of his previous collections. "I'm just looking for new technical solutions to a lot of problems," he says. "That's basically the process of creating fashion." Ossendrijver reconfigures the clothes, shifting them and pinning them on a mannequin until he's satisfied and a toile pattern can be made to produce the garment in its ultimate fabric. He draws the final design only when the piece is complete, he says, a frill "just for the sales catalog."

"With menswear, it's all about construction," he says. "It's all about what's on the inside." Sculpting and shaping the materials

Discussing his longevity at Lanvin, the Dutch designer says 11 years in fashion amounts to three lifetimes in human years. "Knowing what the turnover is like at design houses," he told *The Telegraph* last year, "I never thought I would stay so long."

in three dimensions, Ossendrijver is the rare designer who does not start by conjuring a style or type of man he's designing for. Rather, his starting point is the clothing itself, some classic menswear staple or another. He will study it, taking out the stitching to peer into its innards and find ways to adjust the tailoring, creating through his very shapes something that perfectly defines the modern man: slim, rigorously precise, but effortless and multivalent, simultaneously formal and casual. He has devised sneakers and sportswear that pair perfectly with suits, for example, and suits relaxed enough to couple with T-shirts. It's a successfully unstudied style now enshrined in the canon of contemporary menswear.

Part of the charm is a circumscribed dishevelment that Ossendrijver injects into his designs—a few real-life effects like creases and pleats pressed into the clean shapes that soften the garb and provide "fun surprises for the wearer," he says. "At the runway show, everything goes by so quickly that you don't perceive these little flourishes, but fashion is about giving pleasure, so you need to create things to discover in the details."

Lanvin is Paris' oldest surviving fashion house; its town house of offices faces the rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré flagship store that has remained open since Jeanne Lanvin launched the brand back in 1889. In this century, Lanvin has reblossomed as a leading style maison under the creative direction of Alber Elbaz, who brought Ossendrijver on board to head menswear in 2005. After a long, lauded run, Elbaz was suddenly and controversially fired in 2015, plunging the brand into chaos, but Ossendrijver's department has



I never feel blasé. Everything is always evolving.

endured peacefully, and the two designers remain close friends. “It’s such a journey we went through together,” he says. “But I felt ready to step out on my own and do things with my team, so my way of working hasn’t changed.” In fact, his steadfast engineer’s approach to fashion has managed to withstand the storms of a capricious industry, and his enthusiasm remains intact. “The chaos makes me more sure,” he says. “You just learn to trust your intuition even more.”

It takes a certain talent to thrive amid tumult, but Ossendrijver seems completely consumed by the task, as evident by the four collections he produces a year. (Until 2013, the standard was a collection for spring and one for fall, but twice yearly “pre-collections” have since been added to the schedule at Lanvin and most major brands.) “I never feel blasé,” he says. “Everything is always evolving. If I presented a collection two days after the show, it would probably be different already.”

“People think fashion is about trying to realize an idea,” he says, “but the idea that I start with is almost never what’s going to end up on the runway. There’s a whole process of input from the team.” Ossendrijver is both the first and final voice in the studio, of course, but he still sees designing as a group activity, one that flourishes thanks to the strong opinions of his fellow designers, who infuse his initial concepts with new directions.

“Designing is about letting go of preconceived concepts,” Ossendrijver says, his voice firming up with conviction. “The most important thing is the creativity, to always keep pushing forward.”*



→ High fashion is about a dream, Ossendrijver explained while launching Lanvin's 10-year anniversary collection in 2016.

TELFAR CLEMENS

TELFAR

As is so often the case, the designer Telfar Clemens is ecstatic with laughter. In Milan for the Italian presentation of his namesake brand, he finds that the tendencies of the local fashion denizens offer him much to appreciate. “Men wear suits to parties!” he squeals, sipping a plastic flute of champagne at a magazine soirée. Men wear suits everywhere in Italy, of course, but it takes an outsider to notice. Clemens, the only casually dressed man at the party, sports his own creations: a black-and-white baseball T-shirt, boot-cut jeans with legs made of knit sweater material and his graphic TC logo as a gold necklace and earrings. A woman festooned in head-to-toe sequins glides past. “These people are so into sparkling,” he gushes. More laughter.

But his commentary is affectionate, even motivational—he suggests later that he should make suits. The Queens-based designer, who spent his early childhood in his family’s native Liberia, is a keen observer of style norms. As such, he’s fixated on deconstructing—and subverting—the conventional ways people dress. Created in collaboration with the artist Babak Radboy and stylist Avena Gallagher, his satirically nonconformist designs—often twisted reinventions of American classics such as polo shirts, cargo pants, jeans, tracksuits

→ For much of his career, the Queens native has lived in the same home where he grew up.





←
In 2017, the hamburger chain White Castle commissioned the designer to make the uniforms for its employees nationwide.

and more—won him the 2017 CFDA/Vogue Fashion Fund prize, a prestigious award that includes \$400,000 and mentoring from an industry giant. Clemens showed his first collection more than a decade ago at age 18, but, frustrated by a lack of momentum, he nearly called it quits before the CFDA crowned him a leading light in American fashion.

“I feel like I was really smart in the early years of my brand,” he says, sipping a rosé while watching the Saturday afternoon sidewalk parade of locals from a Porta Nuova café. “People are really open after the CFDA, because they need that kind of validation from an institution, but my codes were all there already in the beginning. It’s still about me looking at what really regular people are wearing,” he says, “and transforming your perception with my take on it.” A round-faced infant in preppie nautical gear waddles by the table. “That baby looks *amazing*,” he giggles. “Everyone’s so into looking ‘rock’ now in America, even grandmas,” Clemens says. Outside the window of the café, he spots a ponytailed blonde woman wearing what in Milan constitutes a run-of-the-mill “rock chick” outfit: a studded wool overcoat, a studded sweater and studded black cowboy boots. The designer whistles, then lets out a storm of laughter. “I could turn that into such an amazing look!”*

CENTURY 21

As a teenager, Clemens would track down his favorite European fashion labels at Century 21, New York’s beloved discount department store chain. Its downtown Manhattan flagship is a one-stop shop for the city’s bargain hunters and as Telfar’s ebullient creative director Babak Radboy, pictured here, told *Dazed*, the kind of place where you could “buy a microwave and Helmut Lang.” In 2017, Clemens launched a capsule collection for the store’s conceptual showroom Next Century. The designer described it as a “democratic fashion experience” where customers could shape the upcoming Telfar collection by voting for their favorite pieces on Instagram.



ALEXANDRE DE BETAK

BUREAU BETAK

Alexandre de Betak is a showman, one of those masters of spectacle who pop up periodically to intuit what their fellow humans are craving—the type that speaks to the times and propels them forward. De Betak is more than a fashion show producer; he has refined the medium altogether over the course of his career, transforming the industry's standard catwalk presentation into an extravagantly multisensory, multiplatform media event.

“There is a global interest and audience for fashion shows today. Presumably, I helped make that happen by making those shows more memorable and mediagenic,” he muses. De Betak is seated in his Paris office, a snug box of a space plastered with bright white acoustic foam; behind him are piles of oversized hardcover books. He wears pale tinted glasses, and his hair is swept back. His beard is short and stubbly. “The fact that the catwalks were mediagenic made the media want to show them, and the fact that they were showing them made me want to make them more fantastic,” he says. And thus the contemporary fashion show became a pop culture phenomenon.

To witness a de Betak show today is to observe fashion at its most communicative, its most interpretive, its most highly charged.

→
“There’s not one ounce of nostalgia in me,” de Betak told CNN last year. “I’m only interested in the future and I want to help it come faster.”







When he first launched his studio in 1990, shows were simpler in-house productions run by staff or the PR team, and directed solely at media, buyers and industry bigwigs invited by the brand. A handful of the more theatrical designers in the late '80s—Mugler, Gaultier, Alaïa—ramped up their live presentations, but the events otherwise continued as they had for the entire 20th century: as staid affairs for a prescribed room of insiders.

Today de Betak has produced more than 1,000 of his high-impact, abstractly arresting shows—for houses including Givenchy, Céline, John Galliano, Michael Kors, Lanvin, Miu Miu and Rodarte. He sent a genuine tornado whirling down the catwalk at Hussein Chalayan, crafted a giant glowing sun overhead for Jacquemus and sent John Galliano's models striding through a sci-fi tunnel of lasers filled with fake snow and iridescent haze. He created the first-ever webcast for Victoria's Secret, and later mastered the art of "Instagram timing" so guests could prepare their phones for the climax. He constructed a spaceship-like dome and installed wooden Swiss chalets around it for Louis Vuitton, topping off the surreal event with a performance by Grace Jones.

Though the installations are always fleeting, de Betak's work is frequently like that of an architect, creating environments or changing the way a space is perceived. It's perhaps most tangible in de Betak's decade-plus partnership with Dior, where he's executed his tropes of florals and mirrors on a grand scale—blanketing an entire tent in the courtyard of the Louvre with a mountain of blue delphinium flowers, re-creating the legendary hanging gardens and, later, building crystal ice caves from a mosaic of mirrors inside the Musée Rodin. For a Dior show in Moscow, de Betak installed a warehouse-sized

mirrored box in Red Square with a surface camouflaged uncannily by reflection. De Betak's art is one of interpretation and reimagination that begins with an almost scientific study of a brand's DNA and clothing, but after all the research, it's his eye for the fantastic, his gut feeling about the visuals that shapes the show. "What you make of this is artistic and intuitive," he explains. "It's completely free-form."

Fashion Show Revolution, his aptly titled 2017 book, is a compendium of those playful experiments with light, reflection, performance and in-situ constructions that established his groundbreaking form—yet de Betak says it's not meant to celebrate his art but "to mark the closing of a chapter for fashion shows." The events as we've come to know them are dead, or at least dying, he says. The brutal fashion calendar, with its endless travel and enormous costs for magazines and brands, no longer makes sense when the real audience is not in the room. Coming next, according to de Betak, are fashion shows produced as digital content, created expressly to be consumed by a digital public.

But de Betak is not sounding the death knell for his métier. "You can't replace the magic and emotion you get from live performance," he asserts. "We're all interested in live moments, but we're getting more and more used to consuming them virtually." The live aspect is palpable in the spontaneity of the images, he says. In the future, those images will be the most important part of a show.

Change, for a showman, equals opportunity. "I'm ecstatic to be a part of a new era, and ecstatic to help revolutionize it faster," he enthuses, leaning forward as he looks up. "Newness for me means new opportunities for creative freedom." And the show goes on. *

De Betak is responsible for many notable fashion moments, from a 59-foot mountain of blue delphiniums at the Louvre to a vast scaffolded structure on a pier in Monaco.

*Newness for me means new opportunities
for creative freedom.*