

THE GENTEEL

April 23, 2013

DESIGN

Isn't That Dandy

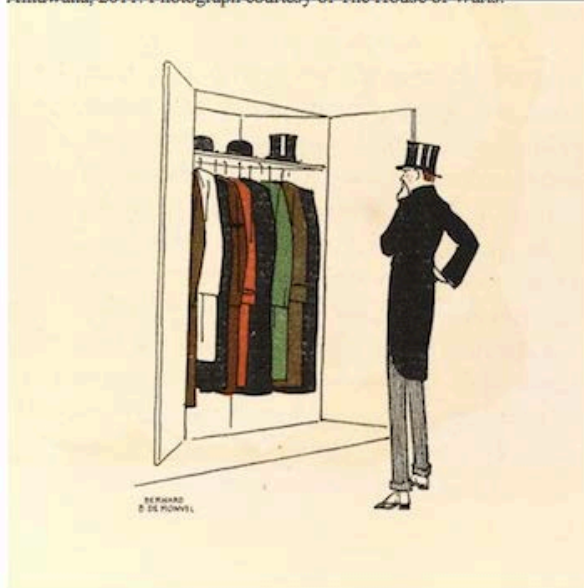
by Julia Parfenyuk | Posted April 16, 2013

Topics: Alexander McQueen, bulletin, CFDA, Converse, Dandy, Dandy Fashion, Dashing Tweeds, fashion, Florence, George Brummell, Guy Hills, Henry Holland, Hudson Shoes, Iké Udé, individual, Kirsty McDougall, London, Luciano Barbera, menswear, Motofumi, Thom Browne

(0 Comments)



From left to right: "The Original Suit" belonging to Guy Hills, ca. 2002. Photograph courtesy of the Dashing Tweeds Archive; Ignacio Quiles, 2011. Photograph courtesy of the artist; Sebastian Horsley, 2010. Photograph courtesy of Tom Medwell; Waris Ahluwalia, 2011. Photograph courtesy of The House of Waris.



Les Manteaux, published in Gazette du Bon Ton, 1913. Bernard Boutet de Monvel, illustrator. Source: risdmuseum.org.

A new exhibition at the Rhode Island School of Design - Museum of Art, *Artist/Rebel/Dandy: Men of Fashion*, will celebrate dandy personalities of the past and present, "tracing the variety of ways in which this personality has blazed through two centuries and investigating where he resides today."

He might seem like a rare specimen, but the dandy has never really gone out of style. The Oxford English Dictionary defines him as a man "who studies above everything to dress elegantly and fashionably." But the curators of *Artist/Rebel/Dandy*, Kate Irvin and Laurie Brewer, share in another belief: that a true dandy is not one who is "solely concerned with flamboyance and flash" but "a figure who is innovative, rebellious and profound in thought."

The exhibition, inspired by the charming style of painter, illustrator and RISD longstanding professor, **Richard Merkin**

(1938-2009), surveys the elegant and intricate dandy style through an array of paintings, photographs and garments spanning the 19th to the 21st centuries, beginning with George "Beau" Brummell (1778-1840) to

later manifestations of dandyism embodied by Oscar Wilde, W. E. B. Du Bois and contemporary style setters like *Vogue's* international editor-at-large Hamish Bowles, Nigerian-born artist Iké Udé and United Arrows' buyer and street-style star Motofumi "Poggy" Kogi.

These iconic dandies, as artists and rebels, are rightly included in this exhibition. Influential musician and author **Patti Smith** muses on Charles Baudelaire's sensuous and dreamy prose-poetry; biographer Merlin Holland offers his insight from decades-worth of research on his grandfather's - Oscar Wilde - socially-provocative writing. Writer, editor and men's "style guru," **Glenn O'Brien** offers his take on the simplistic yet elaborate style and exemplary social attitude of Beau Brummell.

"Bedford, do you call this thing a coat?" retorts Brummell in his infamous reply to the Duke of Bedford. The comment serves as a reminder that tailored, fine-quality garments are fundamental to the dandy's way of life. And it is still true of the style today. Some notable fashion designers and craftsmen stand out for their characteristically dandy approach. Since **Thom Browne** opened his first men's made-to-measure store in 2003 and received the CFDA "Menswear Designer of the Year" award in 2006, he has been championing a dapper, narrowly-tailored and shorter suit. Browne's design philosophy is deeply rooted in the dandy style approach: the garments are impeccably tailored (his Hudson Street shop in New York offers made-to-measure services by appointment) and come in classic silhouettes with a touch of whimsy - be it a **whale-patterned grey blazer** or a multi-pastel, **patchwork seersucker suit short**.

Similarly, photographer and co-founder of **Dashing Tweeds**, and himself a dashing man of style, **Guy Hills** is continuing the dandy style tradition in the UK. As one of Britain's latest tweed textile and menswear companies (offering fabrics, ready-to-wear and made-to-order), its mission is to "share a dedication to challenging the menswear market with elegance, colour, heritage, technology, innovation and humour, developing fabrics and garments that will last a life time."

Co-founder and designer **Kirsty McDougall** heads the Dashing Tweeds' weave studio, overseeing the design and production of woven textiles. The company has developed fabric qualities for such international clients as **Converse**, **Hudson Shoes**, **Henry Holland**, **Topshop**, Alexander McQueen and Tom Ford. A sample of fabrics and designs from Dashing Tweeds' archives are part of the *Artist/Rebel/Dandy* exhibition and shed light on this quintessential British brand of tweeds for the modern urban dandy.



Luciano Barbera.
Source: thesartorialist.com.

Speaking of quality clothing and taste, one must include **Luciano Barbera** in the conversation. For many, the man behind the eponymous fashion brand and the custodian of the Carlo Barbera textile mill is the embodiment of classic, seasoned and sophisticated Italian style. For Barbera, quality is everything. "If your suit is not performing well, it's like being in a car where you can feel every little bump in the road. If a suit is performing well, it's as though you drive right over the bumps and you feel nothing," he explained to the *New York Times*.

His devotion to the family business' artisanal approach to textile production and design is to be celebrated by the fashion industry - particularly in the face of globalisation and outsourcing. **Scott Schuman** seems to be especially appreciative of Mr. Barbera and his influence on men's style. Schuman features him frequently on *The Sartorialist* while photographing in the streets of Milan and Florence and has also contributed a chapter on him in the exhibition's **companion book** of the same name. The illustrated book presents a parallel discussion and contains essays by Irvin and Brewer, a preface by Browne and 15 additional contributors' "musings" on iconic artist-dandies.

The exhibition and accompanying book *Artist/Rebel/Dandy: Men of Fashion* present numerous manifestations of the dandy style and philosophy. From romantics to artists, writers, designers and thinkers, it's reassuring that these daring expressions of individuality and talent are propelling the dandy style - and enigma - into the future.

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