

# Sur-reality overtakes fashion reality

That's what Dalí predicted 30 years ago. Matthew Temple asks for today's designers' views

Fashion prediction is a surreal art, so it's fitting that 30 years ago a Belgian men's wear outfit asked Salvador Dalí to predict men's fashions today.

The year was 1971. The company was called Scabal, run by a man named Peter

Thissen, and made suit cloth. Thissen reckoned a famous painter was needed to prophesy men's fashion, and Dalí was first choice.

Thissen's PR knew Dalí's secretary, "Captain" Moore, and the artist's fashion gene was well chronicled. He'd collaborated with Chanel and Schiaparelli, and in the book *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí* (Alkin Books/Dover, £16.95/\$10.17), he recalled art student days in Madrid with velvet jackets, pearl necklaces, gilded canes and "hair like a girl's", sometimes set with paint varnish: "The age of the dandy had begun, and for me it was never to end."

Though small talk was scarce - "He didn't listen. It was more monologue than dialogue," says Thissen - Dalí accepted the commission. Inspired by paintings from the 15th to 18th centuries, the golden ages of men's wear, Dalí created 12 sartorial canvas visions, all surreal, many prophetic. A blue-faced man with butterfly-decorated headpiece is "Man of the year 2000 who will be gastronomically stereoscopic and stereochemical", and a youth in green cravats with butterfly in mouth is "A maximum of 4 cravats worn by anaemic nympholeptic high school kids of the future".

"When I saw them, I wasn't very impressed," says Thissen. But after staring at it for 30 years on his office wall, he now appreciates Dalí's vision. "It's like haute couture. You can't believe someone's wearing it, but it shows a tendency."

Dalí's "plastic and mica hat filled with helium elevating the spirits of depressed

beggars", for example is not that far from Galliano's top-hatted *Oliver Twist* look, while his butterfly decorations presage McQueen's ornate Indian garb on blue-faced models. Dalí's frock-coated "chambèrlain in charge of the ex-hippies pilgrimage" looks not dissimilar to an Ozwald Boateng jacket, and his pink dandy with "useless lyrical appendages" bears an eerie resemblance to rose creations from Rykiel, Commes des Garçons, Conran and Cavalli.

And this merging of sur-reality and fashion reality may not be a fluke. Surrealism is born of the subconscious and so too is fashion prediction, says Scabal's Michael Day, who helps divine the colours, textures and patterns of the company's current men's wear, and who recently translated Dalí's dreams into a suit-cloth collection. What has made the label "hot" six months hence comes to Day



Tendency: or haute couture?



Made from Dalí cloth: a Pal Zileri outfit with one of the drawings

anywhere, any time: sitting on a train to Paris or plane to Tokyo, or reading a newspaper about something unconnected with fashion. "I'm convinced the subconscious plays a part," he says emphatically.

But whereas Dalí advocated critical paranoia and total abstraction, Day's subconscious is fuelled by sales statistics. "There's an evolution. We can smell a trend," he says. Add that to informal chats with other textile makers and the bottom line, and you get a collection. That non-aesthetic influences such as politics, philosophy and technological inventions can be woven into cloth may sound warped but then consider Scabal's Dalí collection.

The moving drawers of his "cybernetic gentleman with cassette drawers attached" become a geometric herring-

bone (the drawers) traversed by fine blue threads creating the illusion of movement, while the spring heel of a "shoe for Mercury" becomes a diagonal hatch amid twilled base. By translating external forces on a designer's psyche into something tangible, cloth becomes a "good chronicler of the times", says Day, reflecting Dalí's assertion that through fashion, "you always see war coming".

Still, capturing the zeitgeist only creates successful fashion trends if wearers recognise that spirit, says Lorenzo Della Croce of Pal Zileri, which makes suits from Scabal's Dalí cloth. Della Croce reckons the revival of bold colours, for instance, subconsciously accesses our desire for happiness in difficult times. However, astute prediction requires distance between

creator and wearer. "Clients always say they like what they bought last year," says Croce. "We have to say what will sell in five years. That's intuition."

When trend forecaster Anne-Lise Kjaer came across French mathematician Henri Poincaré, she knew she'd found her hero. Poincaré's assertion that intuition can be proved influenced Kjaer's own methodology. She calls it multidimensional thinking; a mix of the scientific, social, spiritual and emotional, with the intuitive dimension being the part that Kjaer argues begets cogent predictions. "As Poincaré said: 'By logic we prove; by intuition we discover'."

Kjaer's world is as fertile as Dalí's, only she creates social prototypes - speed hunters, karma tourists, eco gatherers - based on nascent trends. For each pro-

TOTYPE, she then creates lifestyle scenarios (what they eat, favourite colours, etc) that become "like small films", and out of these imaginative extrapolations come future trends. "The future is not some place you go but one you create," explains Kjaer.

"Fashion creates these small dreams, these princes and gods," she goes on. But while the fashion designer's dream "reflects a trend as it has affected him in his own personal way", the end result must touch something within us all, even if we don't yet know what.

Which raises the question: if predicting the future creates the future, will men soon wear butterflies to work? Della Croce says men are "100 per cent not ready" for Dalí extremes, but adds, "Dalí's paintings are about man and his personality. Individuality is definitely coming back."

And 30 years from now, he says, he imagines greater surrealism: suits that retain body temperature or alter colour, more fabrics incorporating precious stones and metals, as men embrace Dalí's notion that fine clothes make them feel like kings, and ignore the artist's less marketable strapline: "The constant tragedy of human life is fashion."

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