



S\*UCE's Spring/Summer 2013 Campaign.  
Image courtesy S\*UCE

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# CONVERGENCE *of* CREATIVITY

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By Sophie Kazan

Fashion, the visual arts and design have developed side by side for centuries. Recently, such collaborations have progressed beyond mere artistic partnerships to impacting the luxury goods market. Sophie Kazan looks at the increase in collaborations between fashion designers and visual artists in the Middle East.

The sixties were a pivotal time for the advent of creativity between the visual arts, fashion and celebrity culture. American artist Andy Warhol may have been the first to see the potential for art to overlap with popular culture and design. Known to incorporate the ancient silkscreen method of printing through mesh to create the portraits of iconic celebrities such as Marilyn Monroe, Muhammad Ali, Elizabeth Taylor and Elvis, Warhol's colorful renditions now characterize his art career and have become synonymous with the art and culture of the sixties. Moreover, Warhol's creations show how fashion, art and design can converge to reflect the excitement and fantasy of popular culture.

In the Arab world, the distinction between the visual arts and fashion has seldom been made. For centuries, the region has been known for its high regard for opulence, which seemingly pervades all facets of life and adds value to a variety of social engagements. But in recent years, there appears to be a growing interest in the distinction between various creative disciplines and their value as art forms. Similar to the sixties of Warhol, today there is a recognizable and increased awareness of fashion, art and popular culture across the Middle East found in the myriad of collaborations between different artistic disciplines.

*"Art, design and fashion are inextricable; they feed into, influence and inspire each other."*

Zayan Ghandour



Out of all Arab countries, the UAE, with its diverse population of local Emiratis, visitors and expatriates, is not an easily defined target audience for a fashion or lifestyle marketer. And while fashion brands often label themselves as sought-after and luxurious by stepping away from popular culture, Dubai-based luxury and fashion concept S\*uce focuses on bringing people together with clothes that they have helped design and which they feel reflect a broader audience. "We launched our annual Design a Dress competition a few years ago because we believed in the potential of regional talent and wanted to give everybody the chance to start something they were truly passionate about," says co-founder and creative director of S\*uce, Zayan Ghandour. "Art, design and fashion are inextricable; they feed into, influence and inspire each other."

Ghandour also designs her own label, Zayan. Reminiscent of Warhol's glamorized Campbell soup cans and Brillo soap pads, Zayan's Spring/Summer 2013 collection was photographed in a supermarket, with models dressed in S\*uce clothing pushing shopping carts stacked with familiar household brands. "The collection is called Electric Wonderland and was partially shot in a supermarket because the idea is that you can make any place your very own wonderland," explains Ghandour, "And that's very much what S\*uce is about—creating your own wonderland, wherever you are, every single day."

Lea Sednaoui, owner of The Running Horse Gallery in Beirut, has been following the collaboration between artists and fashion for many years. "It is always stimulating to watch brands and artists collaborate," she says. "Such partnerships enhance both creative entities." Sednaoui highlights the collaboration that recently took place in Beirut between the luxury shoe and handbag designer, Johnny Farah and painter and sculptor Ranya Sarakbi when they launched their "Serpent" capsule collection at Johnny's Saifi Village Boutique in Beirut. The collection featured handbags with handles decorated with scales and gold. The event also unveiled Sarakbi's 11-meter long Ouroboros sculpture of a bronze serpent made of over 16,000 hand-woven metallic scales.

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*Florence and the Machine wearing Bodyamr during her performance at the MTV Video Music Awards in 2010. Image courtesy Bodyamr.*



*King Cobra Bag by Johnny Farah and Ranya Sarakbi. Image courtesy Johnny Farah.*



*A detail of Ouroboros by Ranya Sarakbi. 2012. Bronze with 16,000 hand-woven metallic scales. Image courtesy the artist.*



*Mercedes Benz advertising campaign with Bodyamr. Image courtesy Bodyamr.*

Fashion designers often look for inspiration in art and popular culture—particularly when they are putting together a new collection or thinking about how customers will relate to their clothes. Bahraini-Omani fashion designer Amr Ali, creator of label Bodyamr, is no stranger to this concept. The Bodyamr image has become a firmly established luxury brand through Ali's involvement as a creative director in advertisements for Harrods and Harvey Nichols. Bodyamr has also been featured in car advertisements for Rolls Royce and Mercedes as well as in collaborations with Christian Louboutin, Graff jewelers, Asprey, Amouage perfume and The Sanderson Hotel in London. In addition, the brand has been worn by film and pop stars for red carpet events and advertisements including Florence Welch, Kylie Minogue, Katie Perry and Kelly Osbourne.

When asked what inspired him to design clothes for women, Ali laughs, "The Bodyamr identity is born out of two almost contradictory concepts: Orientalist art and the Western visual interpretation of the fantasy and exoticism of the Middle East. I am inspired by the artworks and paintings of Delacroix—an inspiration evident in my designs and particularly in my Abaya collection. On the other hand, I am equally moved by modern photographers like Helmut Newton, Emma Summerton and Guy Bourdin." Ali

underlines that his clothes are made for a powerful and mysterious woman who is in control of her world. While many abaya designers have sought to make the traditional female Islamic dress shapely and more Western in style, Bodyamr's approach has been to focus on the way that the abaya hangs, accentuating the shoulders and neck and thus elongating the female form.

Ali's Omani heritage allows him to understand the needs of women from the Gulf, who, he believes, appreciate the comfort and femininity that his clothes afford as well as the seduction and empowerment that he incorporates through his use of materials and shapes. "Gulf women were the first to relate to Bodyamr," he says. "And [they] are key in inspiring and understanding my reference points as well as the concept of the Bodyamr brand."

Fashion, like art, often gives visual expression to the cultural zeitgeist. Collaborations between the worlds of fashion and Contemporary art reflect a market ready to join forces in increasingly creative ways. Particularly in the Middle East, these newfound partnerships seem to come at a time when the region is exploring new ways to reinstate its various cultural and social identities within the global market.



*Bodyamr's Spring 2011 Abaya Collection. Image courtesy Bodyamr.*