Unreal visions

by JWT Intelligence - Wednesday, February 03, 2016

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Fairy tales, magic, Utopias—after a seemingly unending obsession with unfettered realism and user-generated content driven by the rise of social media, a new series of exhibits, platforms, and stores are turning to the world of fantasy and imagination for inspiration.


Fairytales

This spring The Museum at FIT New York has staged exhibit: Fairy Tale Fashion, described as “a unique and imaginative exhibition that examines fairy tales through the lens of high fashion.”

The exhibit features more than 80 objects placed within dramatic, fantasy-like settings designed by architect Kim Ackert, as well as garments and accessories dating from the 18th century to the present by 21st-century designers and brands such as Tom Ford, Giles Deacon, Mary Katrantzou, Alexander McQueen, Rick Owens, Prada, Rodarte, Marchesa, and Walter Van Beirendonck.
Clothing and accessories illustrating *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. From left to right: dress by Dolce and Gabbana, 1980s dress by Louis Féraud, shoe by Nicholas Kirkwood, dress by Manish Arora, 1990s waistcoat by Audrey Buckner, dress by Undercover, man’s ensemble by Walter Van Beirendonck, ensemble by Hideki Seo. Photograph © 2016 The Museum at FIT.

**Utopia revisited**

Meanwhile, in London, Somerset House has launched [Utopia 2016](#), a season of events, art exhibitions and new commissions celebrating the 500th anniversary of Thomas More’s influential text. The exhibition aims to “imagine Utopia for the 21st century and explore its relevance today,” according to organizers.
Fantasy images

In **Future 100**, our trend Plastic Montage charted the wave of fashion and beauty influencers creating surrealist and cartoonish images where lips are glossily painted, gloss is lacquered on, and plastic can be applied to the skin.

Meanwhile, Pam Grossman, director of visual trends at Getty Images at the time, prophesied this was just the beginning of a return to fantasy. “Even the biggest brands are trying to create campaigns which have that ultra-real, user-generated feel. That aesthetic has become ubiquitous and difficult to differentiate between,” she observed.

“The reaction to this will inevitably be a resurrection of the imagination,” Grossman continued. “Images that have a sheen of the fantastical, the surreal, or the speculative are already starting to surface. Brands that put artistry and vision at the forefront again will be the ones that capture the most attention.”

The shift comes amid a general transition in consumer sentiment—one that embraces and gives reverence to previously unorthodox practices and belief systems. Increasing numbers of consumers are defining themselves as spiritual, not religious. Meanwhile crystals, mysticism, and astrology are being repackaged by lifestyle brands for millennial audiences (see our trend Mystic Beauty, again featured in **Future 100**.)
At the same time, there’s a growing intersection between technology and storytelling, using immersive connected environments and VR to create new landscapes. The next stop of this, of course, after the VR revolution this year will Magic Leap, which this week announced $793.5 million in funding to create a “cinematic reality device.”

What’s clear is that there’s an emerging desire once again for escape, and more platforms than ever to make those escapes more immersive. In an era of microscopic data, instant feedback, and transparency, there also seems to be a growing regard for the intangible, the imaginative, and the knowingly unreal.
Textile and dress illustrating “Rapunzel.” Curtain by Nicolette Brunklaus Amsterdam, dress by Alexander McQueen. Photograph © 2016 The Museum at FIT.
Ensembles illustrating “The Little Mermaid.” From left to right: dresses by Thierry Mugler, Norman Norell, and Rodarte. Photograph © 2016 The Museum at FIT.

Main image: Kirsty Mitchell, The Storyteller, from the Wonderland series. Photograph © Kirsty Mitchell

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