

The Met Spotlights Fashion and Technology in OMA-Designed Ghost Cathedral



Ryan Waddoups | May 19, 2016

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As we progress further into the digital age, technology is playing an increasingly crucial role in fashion production. Fast fashion—a phenomenon behind industry leaders like H&M, Zara, and Topshop—has seemingly captured the forefront of the mainstream consumer market by streamlining production techniques and quickly turning around the latest trends at lower price points. Haute couture is slowly merging with prêt-à-porter, and independent designers must mobilize to mechanize and reconcile manual techniques if they wish to stay afloat.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art's new exhibit with the Costume Institute, Manus x Machina:

Fashion in an Age of Technology, closely examines this intersection. “Fashion and technology are inextricably connected, more so now than ever before,” says Thomas P. Campbell, Director and CEO of the Met. “The hand and the machine, often presented as oppositional, are [now] mutual and equal protagonists.” But the museum’s Lehman Wing, often used for fashion exhibitions, didn’t seem like the ideal space for showcasing the exhibit’s 170+ garments in the right light. Curator Andrew Bolton commissioned OMA’s Shohei Shigematsu, in collaboration with the Met’s Design Department, to design an exhibition space that both embodies Manus x Machina’s principles and sets a serious yet ethereal atmosphere.

Although the Lehman Wing’s rigid geometric structure posed design challenges for Shigematsu, he devised a heavenly solution that encapsulates the garments’ sensational theatricality and design details. He installed a translucent domed volume that contrasts the building’s brick and stone corridors and adds square footage for extra exhibition space—an unprecedented intervention. Dubbed the “Ghost Cathedral,” the building-within-a-building transforms the wing into a central cocoon-like space in the atrium, drawing curious eyes inside. The centerpiece? A haute couture Karl Lagerfeld wedding dress for Chanel, whose stunning detailed embroidery projects onto the volume’s domed ceiling. Surrounding cells display niche designs, presented as workshops of embroidery, florals, and featherwork.

“The diverse range of garments required a neutral, integrated environment to focus on the pairings of manual and mechanical processes,” remarked Shigematsu. Setting this neutral atmosphere throughout the structure is a high-performance foamy-white fabric that offers both tensile flexibility for the dome’s curvatures while providing balanced opacity and translucency for ideal lighting—particularly crucial, as most of the exhibit’s garments are sensitive to natural light.

The museum’s annual Met Gala fundraiser on May 2 marked Manus x Machina’s debut, which officially opened its doors to the public on May 5. The exhibit will run through September 5 and features renowned fashion giants such as Cristobal Balenciaga, Christian Dior, Stefano Gabbana, Hubert de Givenchy, Helmut Lang, Yves Saint Laurent, Yohji Yamamoto, and Marc Jacobs, among many others.

