

Via Loewe, American artist Richard Hawkins has a new platform to tempt us with porn stars and heartthrobs.

Running Towards Creativity

What do Justin Bieber, OnlyFans and classical Greek sculptures all have in common? They amalgamate in the kitschy and kinky world of contemporary American artist Richard Hawkins. Found at the likes of the Art Institute of Chicago and New York’s Museum of Modern Art, his art casts an erotic tinge on pop culture, celebrity and art history references. In one of Hawkins’ works titled *Sprinkler*, a paparazzi image of Nick Jonas holding a water hose is reimagined as a nude. Surrounding the former teen heartthrob, flowers and butterflies in vibrant pinks, yellow and cobalt are depicted in the style of French symbolist artist Odilon Redon. According to Hawkins, who also doubles as a professor of Painting and Drawing at the University of California, Los Angeles, this “subjectively perverse” lens runs through his growing body of work. But sheer provocation isn’t his aim. Rather, Hawkins’ mishmash of thirst traps and abstract forms resonate more like an unapologetic ode to parts of the self he once had to minimise. Born in a small town in Texas in 1961, the artist recounted feelings of alienation as he grappled with his identity and sexuality. “I basically failed every attempt to be masculine and so I had no other option but to get into some impractical creative field,” Hawkins shared. “It was better to be odd and misunderstood than to be bad, sinful and wrong,” Hawkins said. “And that still affects me today... 50 or 60 years later.” At the age of 11, the artist discovered collaging. Using his favourite monster magazines, he would cut up and organise images of villainised characters like Frankenstein and Dracula. “I think I was identifying with

the monster,” Hawkins shared. “What’s Frankenstein but the guy who is created but doesn’t fit in?” Along with paintings and sculptures, this art style evolved to be central to his work. “Collage is like the perfect medium to express what the self thinks of the self,” Hawkins explained. In January, the artist boarded a flight to Paris to witness his art displayed not at a museum or a gallery but on a Loewe runway. Turns out, Hawkins was tapped as the latest artist collaborator for the house’s fall-winter 2024 menswear collection. His avant-garde paintings were translated onto garments using beaded embroidery on trousers and hoodies as well as jacquard knit for maxi dresses and cardigans. Jewellery, and the hallmark *Squeeze* bag and *Puzzle* tote, also got a Hawkins’ upgrade. For the show space, the artist electrified with 12 bespoke digital collages that mimicked arched stained glass windows. Made using AI, the intentionally glitchy videos quirkily interspersed ambassadors and friends of the house such as Taeyong, Manu Rios and Omar Apollo, with crustaceans, porn stars and echoes to José Pérez de Rozaé 1960s window designs for the brand. “This experience with Loewe was very validating,” Hawkins shared. “To see my work inspire creativity in others was a really humbling and confirming event.”

Text/
MADELEINE MAK
Photos/
Loewe and
RICHARD HAWKINS

has a new platform to tempt us with porn stars



RICHARD HAWKINS



MANIFESTO: Why are media and celebrity culture consistent influences in your art?

RICHARD HAWKINS: I always gravitated towards movies that had nudity. Back in undergrad, VCRs didn't have a pause mechanism. I remember trying to grab stills of the shower scene of Tom Cruise in *Taps* using my Polaroid camera. It took at least two boxes of Polaroids just to get a blurry image. I was very conscious of the fact that I looked for erotic content in movies or magazines or that I was looking at media wrongly... or perversely.

To tie it to the videos [for Loewe], Omar Apollo was the first [photoshoot] I got. The Loewe team and Jonathan [Anderson] were kind enough to do their own photoshoots with their brand ambassadors; some of which were video footage. I asked for something if not erotic then salacious. For Omar's, he was fully clothed and had a vest on. But luckily enough, he lifted his arms a lot. So I perversely edited the videos so that the zoom would just focus on his armpits. (*Laughs*)

M Did you ever imagine seeing your work intersect with fashion?

RH No! (*Laughs*) Fashion is only there for me to cut out shirtless pictures from magazines. Put on a pair of New Balance and a button-down shirt and I'm ready to go. I'm too self-conscious to wear anything fashion forward. But I have to say that even from the initial conversation [with Loewe], there was so much attention to my own personal wants and needs – a great amount of respect that I didn't necessarily expect. You know, [Loewe] is such a goliath of a thing!

And there was some reticence on my part: Are they going to cherry pick my most iconic images and make money off that? Is this what my career is going to be known for? The guy that once did the Loewe thing? There was a paranoia, but they were so generous and still are... they really surprised me.

M So when the conversation started, was it quite clear how they wanted to incorporate your work or was it a continuous conversation?

RH It was a continuous conversation! I had been fiddling with video-like stuff just through Instagram and some side projects, but I'm not trained and was using the most basic programmes.

I sent them some moving GIFs. They said, go for it and that they'd help photograph the brand ambassadors with my specifications. It was also my idea to move the audience to the middle of the runway. In the past, they put the sculptures in the middle and so I was like, "Let's mess this up." Immediately, Jonathan [Anderson] said we can do that without any hesitation!

M The digital collages are inspired by José Pérez de Rozas' window designs for Loewe in the 1960s. What about his work spoke to you?

RH I thought I recognised an affected fabulousness there. A dog whistle to gays. (*Laughs*) Maybe it's also because I can't describe its interest to me, but it seemed like a straight man would not make windows like this. Like a purse with an acrobat? So I immediately responded to that dog whistle and wanted to use them. Through conversations with Jonathan, it would develop into this idea of a sanctuary.

Another influence I keep forgetting to mention is *The Masque of the Red Death*, an Edgar Allen Poe story. It has colour-coded rooms and this hedonistic activity goes on with death looming.

So, I tried to colour code the videos. Initially, I wanted to colour each video individually, but at the end, it felt better to mix them up and have them all going at one time. That was an influence plus some reverent sanctuary feel...



M A sanctuary for?

RH I think a sanctuary of male bodies on display... a sanctuary for the perversity of looking. The videos move so fast that you can't really tell the concentration on Omar [Apollo]'s armpits or that I cut Manu Rios' head off. It's just a barrage of things. At the end, it's the people that feel the most affinity for it who feel the outré risqué elements.

M What was the development process like for the digital collages?

RH Fascinating but difficult as hell! What I definitely didn't want to do was something seamless, polished and that looked commissioned. I wanted it to still look handmade even though it was digital. I really pushed the glitch. We talk about facture in painting. We leave the evidence of the brush or the tooth of the canvas; the non-illusionistic qualities. I didn't want just surrealism but an attempt at it that was full of flaws. Rather than being fascinated by the illusion of something, you get a sense of the obsessiveness of how it was made.

M What was the process like transforming your paintings into ready-to-wear? Were there restraints?

RH One of the motifs in the paintings is of a porn model with his tongue out. That seemed to be kind of risqué to put on a purse. (*Laughs*) Also, the thing about the bead work is that it's handmade and includes different sizes of beads... it's that intricate. Perhaps, the more erotic parts of the body represented in those painting have a different feel when you run your hand across them. I wouldn't call it perverse, but they are very sensual objects.

In that sense, they are better than the paintings. They are an actualisation of what's only indicated in the paintings. I didn't have that much to say over which images [Loewe] picked or how they treated those images when they did. When I saw the first couple photographs and samples, I was like, go ahead, go crazy. It came from such a generous expansion of the work into their own medium. It was so gratifying!

M What about your experience seeing the garments and accessories in motion at the show?

RH I had the chance the day before to see all the pieces in the flesh. The [Loewe] design team were so giddy about what they had done with my work. They got it, absolutely! The jacquard sweaters up-close show the nipples protruding. Armpits also had these loose pieces. I converted these people into fans and they wanted to communicate with me through their materials. At the runway show, I was surprised by how much of my work

was featured. I can't reveal what will be in the ready-to-wear but there is a lot to come. It's incredibly gratifying to see how much they wanted to integrate my work so respectfully into their collection.

M We saw that you sat next to Manu Rios! Was it odd breaking the fourth wall with one of your digital collage muses?

RH There was a little fear, you know? I work in my little cave manipulating things... maybe Manu didn't realise that I cut his head off but he did realise that I had put him in a monkey cage! After meeting Kit Connor, I really wished he was one of the brand ambassadors that they had photographed. He was so sweet, had looked up the work and actually wanted to have a conversation while we were sitting there.

M Is fashion art?

RH To me, the conventional division of art and craft into disciplines has a purpose and there are integrities specific to each discipline. If there is a debate, it sounds like its primary purpose is to employ fashion writers and sell fashion magazines. So, no, fashion is not art. What's wrong with it being a craft capable of incredible brilliance and transformative power? On the other hand, why isn't art fashion?

M What message do you want your art to convey?

RH I've come to realise how powerful creativity can be once you kind of tap into it and identify with it. That sounds so generic but it's about growing up to think of myself as a creative individual no matter what I make, talk about or read. Being able to move forward in the world knowing that I can find a creative way to approach even hurdles and obstacles has helped me in this life.

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