

# Model

By Colleen Rodgers

# Mosaics



Dress: Enya Hung Studios  
Finger guards: Natasha Ho

The theatrical world of fashion is dead, and Thierry Mugler was the last of the greats. Before fast fashion took over the runway, fashion shows used to be an all encompassing experience—a chance for designers to bring their wildest ideas to life. Known for his avant-garde approach to design, Thierry Mugler changed the idea of what fashion could be a tool of sensuality and dominance. Innovative and visionary, Mugler created wearable art that would change the game of Haute Couture.

Born in France in 1948, Mugler had a knack for the theater from an early age. At age 8, he joined the ballet and by 14 he had already progressed to the National Rhine Opera, a ballet company in France. Throughout his career, Mugler incorporated whimsical theatrics into his fashion shows. The designer experimented with various themes of science fiction, nature, and animals to create extravagant designs that channeled the aesthetic of Camp.

Collaborating with artists like David Bowie, Lady Gaga, Celine Dion, and George Michael, his avant-garde designs bridged the gap between theater and fashion. His compelling shows lured in audiences for sometimes hour-long shows, as he told a story with each collection.

Mugler's first ready-to-wear collection in 1973, Cafe de Paris, jump started his career and set the tone for his iconic fashion house. Using his ballet background as inspiration, the collection was full of wide shoulders, cinched waists, and emphasized hips—an in-your-face, feminine silhouette that would become recognizable across all his work.

His use of exaggerated hourglass figures, deep necklines, and broad shoulders paved the way for the 80s power suit for women. From his first show, he turned his models into femme fatales, teaching them to embrace their bodies as a tool of dominance, rather than impotence. He merged sadomasochism and fashion by regularly using latex suits, hats, and gloves; never shying away from utilizing sex appeal to make a statement on the runway.

The designer's 1997 Spring/Summer show, *Les Insectes*, brought us one of his most iconic designs, the Butterfly Dress. This form-fitting, sequined dress modeled by Jerry Hall resembled the intricate wings of a butterfly complete with long black gloves. The designer once told *Interview Magazine*, "I think nature is endless and beautiful, so I try to occupy nature and never contradict it." Mugler would carry his captivation of nature throughout his work.

A common theme among his work, Mugler was fascinated by the beauty of nature all around us. His *Chimeres* (1997) honored this theme by merging humans and animals into fantastical hybrid creatures. Using sci-fi and surrealist elements, Mugler dressed models in half-animal costumes as a message that humans, animals, insects, and clothing all exist in one entity.

The absolute highlight of the show was the Chimera dress worn by Adriana Karembeu covered in rainbow mermaid scales adorned with feathered wings. The use of transgender models, porn stars, comedians and drag queens on the runway had never been done before, but Mugler pushed the world to reimagine what a supermodel could be. He looked beyond the barriers of runway fashion and was more concerned with finding innovative and unique women to showcase his designs than picking from the "cookie cutter" models who already flooded the runways.

One of Mugler's most famous muses was Connie Fleming, a queer icon who stunned the crowd in a glitzy, red cowgirl outfit in Mugler's Spring/Summer 1992 show. After her debut, she continued to make a name for herself and began to model for other designers like Vivienne Westwood, Jean-Paul Goude, and Steven Meisel, while also being known as the toughest doorwoman in New York City. You could find her managing the door of the hottest clubs in town, but very rarely would you be lucky enough to get past her.

Mugler recognized talent in those typically excluded by the industry and gave them a space to express themselves. His innovative designs remind us of what fashion can be: a mode of artistic expression to find beauty in everyday life and people.

After officially retiring from the brand in 2002 he stepped back from the fashion house but continued to dress celebrities like David Bowie, George Michael, and Beyonce in their music videos, as well as celebrities on the red carpet. Most recently Cardi B wore his iconic *Birth of Venus* dress inspired by Botticelli and Kim Kardashian's latex wet dress look at the 2019 Met Gala. His use of draping accentuates the curves of a woman's body and is still as recognizable and empowering today as when he first began.

Cadwallader's goal is to make Mugler more wearable for day-to-day, while still preserving the quality and craftsmanship of the brand. However, the French fashion house has become one of the most recent brands to be swept up into the fast fashion world, announcing a collaboration with H&M. In a world in which an idolized brand can trickle down to the sale rack in a mall, it raises the daunting question: is haute couture dead? With the legacy of the French house in Cadwallader's hands, we will have to wait to see if he can balance both accessibility and exclusivity in a modern world.



Outfit: Naythan Doan



Models: Anastasia Homenides, Isabella Duggan  
Photographer: Todd Minor II  
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Co-Stylist: Jessica Anderson  
Assistant Stylist: Rose Schierlitz  
Makeup Artist: Jade Burdman  
Hair Stylist: Ally Dreyer  
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