The house of Alexander McQueen has linked up with not one but a dozen women artists for its pre-fall 2022 collection, inverting the classic connection between fashion and fine art.

Where fashion is permanently inspired by artists, it’s a lot less common to experience artists taking their inspiration from la mode. Not this season at Alexander McQueen, where creative director Sarah Burton assembled a dozen artists from multiple countries and cultures – whose ideas were collectively unveiled exclusively to Fashion Network on Tuesday.

Presented inside the house’s duplex Old Bond Street boutique in London, the artworks were revealed beside the fashion that ignited the artists imagination. The assignment was clearly galvanizing – creating artworks that are bold and brilliant or disturbing and dark. Not so surprisingly from a house whose founder’s second show was entitled Banshee and whose fourth named Highland Rape.

The artworks, like all the fashion, can be purchased inside the store or online, while the exhibition, which is a must-see if you are in London, is available until June 21.

On two occasions, artists chose the same look. Like Marcela Correa and Beverly Semmes, who both worked with a canary yellow décolleté frock. But where Chilean-born Correa dreamed up a pair of surrealist sculptural heads made of magazines, stone and paper, America’s Beverly Semmes linked the actual dress into a pool of pink organza. Where stands an exact copy of her black Labrador dog, a permanent presence during the making of the artwork – proudly sporting a metal dog collar, culled from a nearby McQueen handbag.
Famed former model Guinevere van Seenus, a veteran catwalk star of McQueen shows, selected a relatively simple silver dress, as did Cristina de Middel. The latter developing a mini video called The New Domestic, a meditation on how women were previously reduced to the status of being housewives, trapped in four walls from which they explode. While van Seenus created a series of oxidized Polaroids, finished in metallic couture embroidery from the house’s atelier.

Fabric was a key leitmotif – as in a raw cotton tapestry by Ann Cathrin November Høibo, inspired by a delicate pink gown. Or with Chinese artist Bingyi, whose romantic vision reinterpreted a white frock as a wedding dress made in crushed ecru paper that gradually unravels as the bride reaches the altar almost naked.

“I wanted to engage in a new creative dialogue with the collection this season and see how the artists interpreted the work that we created in the studio… We wanted the artists to have total freedom to respond to the looks, creating bold and thought-provoking conversations with their works. I hope that viewers will be as inspired as we have all been by witnessing these creative processes,” explained Burton.
One suspects art collectors will be inspired by a great display by Marcia Kure, who is based between New Jersey and Nigeria. Extrapolating brilliantly from her own huge carbon-on-canvas drawing representing a female warrior ruler, Kure then constructed 18 headpieces made of relics of wars in Africa.

Burton’s ability to meld elements of several dresses into one coherent look was apparent in a brilliant bustier-meets-negligee dress, chosen by Marcia Michael. A fellow Brit who molded together a cement and acrylic sculpture of a black woman; then finished it in wax and shellac; before embroidering it with beads that replicated those used by Burton’s design team.

Elsewhere, Jackie Nickerson’s take on an orange flamenco dress produced four large-scale photos of a single woman draped in black packing paper – representing a carbon footprint – in a reference to marine pollution. As a racy red leather dress led to Jennie Jieun Lee’s beautiful installation, with a colored melted vase and matching flowers at its center. A handkerchief-hemmed denim dress reappeared in Høibo’s vision of a neighbor called – by coincidence - Katherine McQueen in a colorful painting that included a cage seen in an autumn-winter 2013 runway show.
Finally, and most punchily, Judas Companion took a classic blazer and pants in blue and black and fused the colors into a series of life-sized surrealist masks, whose blend of crystal, ceramic, shells and wool suggested the subconscious nagging constantly.

Burton dreamed up the concept over Christmas, and began talking to the artists in January, giving each of them several months to live with their fashion picks, as they developed their ideas. A process covered in video documentaries on display in the store.

The net result was a highly novel experiment where the creative process is considered in a very different way, which is what this house; its founder and McQueen's successor are all about.

By Godfrey Deeny

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