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## **ART MEETS FASHION: AN INVESTIGATIVE STUDY OF MODERN ART INSPIRED FASHION BRANDS IN SRI LANKA**

Gayathri Madubhani Ranathunga<sup>1</sup> and S.P. Nilushi Madushani<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup> Fashion Design and Product Development, Department of Textile and Clothing Technology, Faculty of Engineering, University of Moratuwa, Katubedda, 10400, Sri Lanka.

Emails: <sup>1</sup>gayathrir@uom.lk/ <sup>2</sup>nilushi.madu@gmail.com

### **Abstract**

*Fashion shows a continuous change over time. Fashion represents the latest style of clothing. Inspirations assist fashion to create new designs to ensure they fit with the customers' view and satisfaction. A trend refers to a certain style in fashion. The symbolic aspect that transforms clothes into fashion is either an aesthetic attribute or brand attribute. Fashion has always sought inspiration from art, therefore fashion designers have been working with art throughout the years and now it includes contemporary and modern art due to the high demand for art inspired fashion in the world. This research is aimed to investigate the modern art inspired fashion brands in the world and find out decisive points in developing modern art inspired fashion brands in Sri Lanka. Information from primary and secondary sources has been gathered. Shop visits were carried out to collect information to study art inspired fashion. Secondary data were gathered by referring to books, journals, reports, and websites. It is expected that research findings would be beneficial for the stakeholders of the field of fashion in Sri Lanka.*

**Keywords:** modern art, fashion, brands, market, Sri Lanka

## **1. Introduction**

“Along with the art market, the other notable exception was the luxury goods industry” (Silvano & Nick Rees, 2015). French luxury fashion (including Christian Dior, Hermès and Louis Vuitton) articulates the financial relationship between luxury, fashion and the visual arts. The contemporary corporate tendency is to blur the lines between artistry and artisanship, between the so-called “fine” and “decorative” arts. The luxury/fashion industries increasingly look to the art world for stylistic inspiration, commercial partnerships, and commissioned collaborations, establishing the brand as an omnipresent patron. In the context of the Louis Vuitton brand, contemporary art is well suited to the cosmology of luxury fashion branding because it acts as a design tool in the creative process in that it simply “serves to aestheticize products according to the fluctuations of fashion and to produce an effective tension by manipulating the immaterial and symbolic nature of objects” (Silvano & Nick Rees 2015).

Art is suggested as a design tool in the creative process. Therefore, the objective of this investigation is to find out decisive points in developing modern art inspired fashion brands in Sri Lanka. It discusses how modern art is applied in world-fashion brands. Selected art inspired designers and fashion brands in the world have been studied to understand how they have forwarded modern art-inspired products. This study also observes and analyzes how Sri Lankan fashion brands are using modern art. First, the characteristics involved in modern art and associated world fashion brands are observed. Findings are analyzed with selected Sri Lankan fashion brands. This comparison and understanding will give ideas on what specifications are needed to consider in the development of modern art inspired fashion brands in Sri Lanka. Data were gathered and analyzed in a systematic process. First, interpretations related to international; branding is speculated through a literature review. What is a brand; Branding concept of World; Branding concept of Asia; Fashion Brands of Sri Lanka; Branding levels, customers’ social values associated with logo and image, aesthetic attributes or brand attributes are discussed. The research findings show that modern art adds value to high-end fashion brands.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. *What is modern art?***

Modern art includes artistic works produced between the 1860s and 1970s and expressed new styles and philosophies of art. Modern art is art in which the traditional practices of art have been experimented with. Fokt (2017) says that an artist is “a person with a great imagination” and that it is widely accepted that aesthetic properties depend on the context of a work's creation. Firstly, the concept “art” can have different meanings at different times, thus if Leonardo painted Black Square, his contemporaries would not think it was art, because it would not fall under their definition (Fokt, 2017). Art tries to persuade you to picture life as if through an unusual conceptual filter, to have you inhabit, at least for a time, a different mental landscape. Art wants you to recalibrate your basic outlook, to have you experience life through altered perceptions (Zaaiman, 2012). The everyday world with which we are already familiar is not the realm of modern art. Abstract art by Jackson Pollock (1912-1956) and Andy Warhol who presented a singular vision as well as the compelling world that they created, are some examples. Bright colours, their subject matters, and visual representation expressed novelty of thinking. The artistic novelty associated products gave a new lifestyle to people.

### **2.2. *What is an Art inspired Fashion Brand?***

Fashion is expressed through clothes. The symbolic aspects that transform clothes into fashion are either aesthetic attributes or brand attributes (Berthon et al, 2009). Fashion has always sought inspiration from art. Throughout the years it has been noticed that in fashion research arguably fashion's most important feature is the “Aesthetic” (Kim, 1998). “The essential aspect of clothing is its visual impact and all other considerations are occasional and conditional” (Kim, 1998). Modern art value is different from the conventional vision of art appreciation. It is a kind of commercial art that develops as a lifestyle.

A brand is explored as to its title, logo, design, symbol, or a collection of them. Kapferer (1994) has defined “the brand as an identity structure with six integrated factors”. It includes culture, build, personality, self-

projection, reflection, and relationship. Culture represents a set of values; the physical facet represents product attributes and symbols; personality represents character and attitude; relationship. The essentials of a fashion brand are considered as its title and identity (Fionda, 2009). It is the face of the whole company. The magnificence of a brand needs a clarified market strategy. These iconic products have exclusive characteristics. High-end fashion designers or a team enhance the creativity of the sequence of products to the current market. Brand personality shows a long-term relationship with consumer-centered emotions throughout a long period. In the industrial background, there is an important connection between brands with people's personalities and beliefs. Fionda (2009) lists some attributes that luxury fashion brands seem to share. They are higher hieratically, quality, exclusive design, heritage inheritance, uniqueness, personality, and value of the designer who created the specific brand (Iglesias et al, 2011). Customer satisfaction and identification of customer needs are vital in creating products related to a fashion brand. The influential communication in marketing is also considered as a fundamental of creating a luxury brand image (Fionda, 2009). Therefore, it is expected to observe how modern art promoted brand names.

The brand lives as an image in the consumers' minds. Maurya and Mishra (2012) have described the brand as an image in the consumer's mind of functional and psychological attributes. Bullmore (1984) says that "brand is a promise; it is a value offering to the customer. A product is something that is created, in a factory; a brand is something that is bought, by a customer. No object can generate the same set of feelings, the same sense of personality, in the minds of everyone. Every successful brand generates much the same set of feelings in the minds of those to whom the brand is designed to appeal. And that can be a group made up of many millions of individuals. Not only does each mind contain the image; it also creates it".

### ***2.3. Fashion Brands of Sri Lanka***

At the end of the three-decades-long war, Sri Lanka emerged as a strong economy in Asia. The end of the conflict marked a significant development in the country's social and economic environment

(Athukorala, & Jayasuriya, 2013, Hitchcock, 2016). Globalization brings more opportunities for luxury customers in Sri Lanka. Additionally, it is mentioned that Sri Lanka is topping South Asia in terms of starting and doing business. Sri Lanka is an attractive business environment and consumer market for South Asian luxury brands as well (Lakmali, & Kajendra, 2017). Fashion entrepreneurs are emerging around Colombo. A few local fashion brands are available around Colombo today. It is seen that fashion consumption is still with wealthy, fashion-aware people. KT Brown, Dilly's, PR, are Sri Lankan fashion brands that have built their own identity.

### **3. Methodology**

The research uses a qualitative approach. The objective of this investigation is to find out decisive points in developing modern art inspired fashion brands in Sri Lanka. Selected European and Sri Lankan modern art inspired fashion brands were studied. Data were gathered from primary and secondary sources. First-hand information was collected from shop visits. The researcher participated in in-shop visits as an observer participant. Art inspired fashion was gathered from shop visits. Modern art inspired designers and fashion brands in Sri Lanka were observed. Their artistic application was examined. The approach was well received by study participants and proved its value, revealing important contextual factors of art inspired fashion.

Secondary data was gathered from books, journal articles, magazine articles, internet web sites, brand websites, and blogs related to the subject. Indexed journal articles were referred to generate insight and knowledge on brand image and related factors. Many art magazines, and art exhibitions were observed to identify the characteristics associated with modern art.

In qualitative research, data analysis is simultaneous with data collection. Data analysis is essentially an inductive strategy where one begins with a unit of data (any meaningful word, phrase, narrative) and compares it to another unit of data, all the while looking for a common pattern across the data. These patterns are given names (codes) and are refined and adjusted as the analysis proceeds (Merriam, 2002). The

data was compared and found codes: modern art, bold colors/ subject value / graphic visual value/ decorative value to further proceed.

#### **4. Analysis and Discussion**

European fashion designers, in collaboration with artists, created incredible collections. Selected art inspired designers and fashion brands in the world have been studied to understand how they have forwarded modern art-inspired products. Elsa Schiaparelli (1890-1973), Rei Kawakubo (1942 to Present), Alexander McQueen (1969 - 2010), Versace (1946 - 1997), Calvin Klein (1942 to present), Prada (1913 to present) were studied.

The famous '*haute couture*' fashion designer Elsa Schiaparelli and Surrealist artist Salvador Dali pairing led to the famous hand-crafted Women's Dinner Dress named "Lobster Dress" inspired by Dali's series of lobster telephones. The creative symbolism was far deeper than a visual pairing. The designer also created the famous "Lobster hat" and striking abstract prints that are still referenced in collections today (Houglan, 2016). Thirdly, she created the "Skeleton Dress" (1938) based on Salvador Dali's drawing of a woman in a sheer and clingy dress that revealed her rib cage and hip bones. The skeleton dress was made out of black rayon, with tucks of fabric sewn on to resemble ribs (Houglan, 2016). She was known as the first Avant-garde designer who introduced the novelty and authenticity of her usage and presentation of art compared to her contemporary fashion designers.

Rei Kawakubo, the designer of *Comme des Garçons*, refused the direct traditional sense and added the modern sense to designs and created exploding deformed silhouettes. In her collections, most of the silhouettes were covered with artistic references from Manga artists to 16<sup>th</sup> century famous Dutch artist, Arcimboldo, who made surrealist portrait paintings comprised of vegetables and fruits proving that this enigmatic designer has no interest in moving away from her Avant-garde approach (Runsdorf, 2016).

Alexander McQueen in 1997 was influenced by the art "The Thief to the Left of Christ" painted by Robert Campine. The iconic art piece highlights the same proportion of real humans. At that point, the human is discarded. Art has come to life. Also, his typically crafted "silk

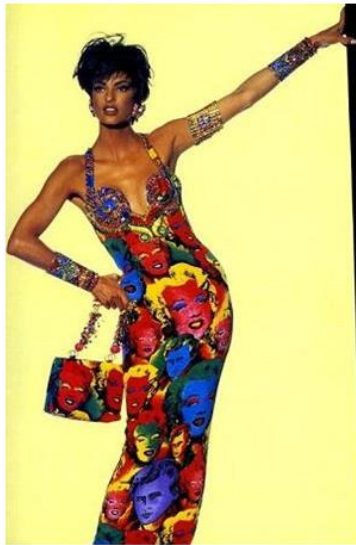
scarves", were covered in several different iterations of the human skull. This was courtesy of the ever-rare collaboration with celebrity contemporary artist Damien Hirst, who took his skilled hand to these amazing results. Gustav Klimt, the most famous Art Nouveau creative mind in history, and his aesthetic creations of signature gilt and jewel-tone mosaics have influenced John Galliano and Alexander McQueen in a sequence of designs of golden discs. The famous pop artist Andy Warhol transformed everyday objects into creative art pieces. Entire consumer products which got his attention could be transformed into creative prints on clothes. The famous "Souper Dress" inspired by Campbell's soup cans printing in 1962 marked the beginning of the long way of collaboration in the art and fashion market.

Andy Warhol's brightly colored, silk-screened portraits of Marilyn Monroe and other famous icons along with modern art became the inspiration for the printed featured outfit of Gianni Versace's Spring collection launched in 1991. The creative director of the famous fashion brand Calvin Klein presented an ominous collection enhancing the darker side of classic America. He added Andy Warhol's famous silkscreen painting "Tuna fish disaster" (1963) into Calvin Klein's design range of denim jackets, dresses, and tank tops (Carson, 1986).

Prada added some artistic graphic punch into her new spring collection by adding creations of dynamic illustrations of cartoonists and manga artists. The specialty of this was that all the artists who decorated her range of collections were women, a ringing endorsement of women power which is a rising topic in the world. Cartoon images of female artists made their way into her outputs (Kim 2014).

The research showed that modern art inspired designers and fashion brands in Sri Lanka are few. It was found that some design brands do art inspired fashion. Their artistic application was examined. Dilly and Carlo have introduced a range of art and fashion combined clothes in their "Artistic series", introducing an essentially creative environment in collaboration with talented local artists in contemporary abstract painting like Teruni Wikramanayake, Shiromi Soosaipillai. Colour, subject, medium, and style of modern art gave inspirations to design elements of fashion. The brand is available with "the artistic sense" under the painter category, which explores modern art inspired fashion

collections. Asymmetric lines, tan tones gave a unique essence to the collection. It was found that designers who create art-based collections made their brand unique. The PR fashion brand by Anika Fernando explores a unique approach combining modernity, originality, and the utmost in quality. However, the majority of Sri Lankan fashion brands have not been inspired by original European modern art. Designer Kanchana Thalpapwila (founder of the KT Brown brand) digs deep inspiration from Sri Lankan history, art, contemporary life, philosophy, and fashion and provides unique clientele products. Each piece of clothing has artistic value. She designs a sublime mix of international designs with traditional Sri Lankan crafts. Sonali Dharmawardena is a designer who works with many creative mediums to explore and create her heritage art of Batik. Her love of fashion and art covered her batik designs expressing her unique sense into those designs. Sonali has taken inspiration from Sri Lankan Artisan Crafts and put her stamp on it. Her brush strokes are abstract and bold. Experimenting with new technologies and innovations, she delights in adding more value to her designs.



**Figure 1**



**Figure 2**



**Figure 1:** Andy Warhol's brightly colored, silk-screened portraits of Marilyn Monroe featured outfit collection of Gianni Versace's Spring collection launched in 1991. <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/10625749104078660/>

**Figure 2:** Dilly and Carlo: an outfit from the collection of The Artist series: "The Painter" <https://www.dillyandcarlo.com/collections/the-painter/products/sleeveless-top-dln9to0884-gry>

#### **4. Conclusions and Implications**

The analysis showed that when modern art is applied to fashion outfits of the selected European brands, the brand identity has been surpassed. The art became prominent. It can be suggested that modern art gave added value to high-end designer brands. It was revealed that art inspired fashion already exists in Sri Lanka at a certain level. The research showed that Sri Lankan fashion designers create art inspired fashion but they haven't chosen well known modern art, which is the universal language of fashion consumers. Sri Lankan fashion designers tend to create more eclectic mixed "tradition into modernity" collections. Designers who were inspired by modern art were able to launch separate clothing lines that promote their brand name. It was observed that European fashion which uses an original piece of art has always transferred into a new piece of art or wearable art. The main characteristics of modern art that have been selected for fashion have bold colors/ subject value / graphic visual value/ decorative value. Notably, each piece has taken an attempt to forward an authentic style. Sri Lankan brand concepts with "the artistic sense" have been developed. Collections under the painter category show modern art inspired fashion collection. Asymmetric lines, tan tones are key characteristics of Sri Lankan art inspired fashion. It was found that designers who create art-based collections made their brand unique. It was found that designers paid more attention to mixed media exploration as visual art. It is expected that these research findings would be an initial platform for creating a new branding concept in the

fashion market of Sri Lanka with the huge usage of the beneficial power of art.

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