

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Balmain films hybrid music video and campaign for fall

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Kanye West for Balmain fall/winter 2016

By SARAH JONES

French fashion label Balmain's fall/winter 2016 campaign film has gone viral thanks to the celebrity of collaborator Kanye West.

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Released as a music video for the recording artist's song "Wolves," the video stars a cast that includes Mr. West's wife Kim Kardashian-West and a bevy of top models. Since its July 29 premiere on the rapper's YouTube channel, the campaign has been viewed more than 4 million times, giving the house a platform to reach an audience that extends past its own social followers.

"Kanye and Balmain have had a relationship since 2014, with he and his wife Kim Kardashian being featured in their seasonal campaigns," said Michael Miraflor, senior vice president, global head of futures & innovation at [Optimedia Blue 449](#).

"It's been interesting to see the partnership evolve over time, especially for this fall/winter 2016 campaign and Wolves video debut," he said. "It's an acknowledgement of the effect that hip hop and crossover pop music has had in fueling the fashion industry (and vice versa), especially with new guard designers like Olivier Rousteing."

Mr. Miraflor is not affiliated with Balmain, but agreed to comment as an industry expert.

Balmain did not respond before press deadline.

Wolf pack

Balmain's campaign was first teased a week ago, with images of Mr. West along with model Joan Smalls shared to the brand's Instagram account ([see story](#)).

A few days later, Balmain released the full seven-minute campaign film, which plays on Mr. West's official YouTube channel as well as the brand's Web site homepage. In addition to Mr. West, the track features vocalists Vic Mensa and Sia.

The black-and-white film opens with a shot of the moon through tree branches, which is contrasted with a following glimpse of pulsating lights in a dance club.

As a single light swings from a ceiling, a man walks behind a row of models who are lying on the floor. One by one, he lifts them up into a standing position, controlling their rag doll-like bodies.



The #BalmainArmy in "Wolves"

The #BalmainArmy assembled, they begin to strut as a unit. Amid the Balmain-clad group, Mr. West appears wearing a Balmain jacket and vintage jeans from Fear of God. When the camera gets a close-up of his face, there are visible tears streaming from his eyes.

Models are seen dancing and partying as a strobe light catches glimpses of the revelers, including Balmain's creative director Olivier Rousteing and Kylie Jenner, Ms. Kardashian-West's half sister.

Making comparisons between the biblical Mary and Joseph and himself and Ms. Kardashian-West, the video shows Mr. West's wife and mother of his two children being symbolically preyed upon by wolves. As she stares ahead unmoving, hands smear her tears into her makeup.

At the end of the video, the couple is seen exiting the club and getting into a car as clicking cameras can be heard and seen.

Kanye West - Wolves (Balmain Campaign)

The campaign, which was shot by Steven Klein and creative directed by Mr. Rousteing and Kids Creative's Pascal Danguin, includes still images that focus in on key moments in the film. These include shots of teary models and the army on the move.

Mr. Rousteing has a personal friendship with the Kardashian family. He has cast members of the family in ad campaigns before and he dressed the entire clan in custom Balmain for Mr. West's Yeezy Season 3 fashion show earlier this year.

"The #BalmainArmy is one of the most powerful online tribes, period," Mr. Miraflor said. "One only has to look at the H&M x Balmain frenzy to see how Olivier can leverage social media and the accounts of his famous and culturally relevant friends to activate at scale, and generate sales.

"Kanye West is one of the very few contemporary artists (let alone rappers) who have made a serious, legitimate cultural impact beyond music," he said. "The mutual co-sign is a powerful one. People will talk about this campaign; everyone will have an opinion about it."

Fashion meets music

Music videos are vehicles for brands to express themselves through the lyrics and music of artists. By aligning with musicians, brands also have the opportunity to reach the artist's fans along with their own.

U.S. menswear brand John Varvatos is reiterating its rock n' roll appeal through an original music video featuring pieces from its fall/winter 2016 campaign.

For the fall/winter 2016 advertisements, the menswear label worked with Irish singer/songwriter Andrew Hozier-Byrne, known as Hozier professionally. Since debuting its "iconic rock star" ads in 2005, the brand has used only black-and-white imagery, but for fall/winter 2016, John Varvatos opted for color photography, a move that is likely to give pause among enthusiasts who have become accustomed to its grey-scale aesthetic ([see story](#)).

French fashion label Givenchy's Riccardo Tisci brought his creative touch to a different industry with the art direction of a music video.

The designer was the creative mind behind the video for Anohni's "Drone Bomb Me," which features supermodel Naomi Campbell dressed in head-to-toe custom Givenchy. Showing the interconnected nature of brand and creative

director, Givenchy shared the video on its own social channels, showcasing the work of its brand leader ([see story](#)).

"It's not surprising that Kanye is doing something unconventional," Mr. Mirafior said. "He treated TLOP (The Life of Pablo) as sort of an open source project, with updates to multiple tracks being announced post-official release.

"To debut the 'Wolves' video as a fashion campaign is not 'killing two birds with one stone,'" he said. "Rather, the two things combined feel like the whole is greater than the sum of its parts."

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