

MARKETING

Primacy of image in luxury

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Reality is clashing with fantasy in fashion. Image courtesy of More or Less Magazine. Photography by Joshua Aronson

By **Mooks Hanifah**

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We have seen a shift from artistic and abstract representation to tangible and real imagery in fashion campaigns, and with it a raw, real lens of life.

Are we living in a post-fantasy world?

Art versus commerce

Campaigns became more commercial because they needed to be about selling the product.

I suppose the financial crash had a lot to do with this shift from fantasy to real world things needed to be sold, and they had to sell fast.

Campaigns had to get straight to the point. Models show everyday, relatable expressions. The setting is the home or a place where you can be social, somewhere familiar, somewhere you have been to and remembered how great it felt being there.

These are in contrast to previous campaigns, which were more "artistic": dreamy, unfamiliar, romantic landscapes populated by gorgeous fashion beings wearing gorgeous things unattainable fantasy landscapes with unattainable clothes.

These campaigns were shot in fantastical settings and images were treated like works of art using illustration and mixed media. They challenged what you could do with a camera.

Only luxury brands such as Louis Vuitton and Prada have stuck to their guns by showing campaigns that are a piece of fashion-art. They kept with this painterly approach, by depicting abstract landscapes hoping to still create desire by offering something you currently do not have and want oh-so-badly.

Eventually though, the models they used started to be more mainstream too, and the level of "art" was skewed to be something that consumers could understand in an easier and more immediate way. They wanted people to "get it." If they get it, perhaps they will buy it.

Art versus authenticity

Recently, art is battling with this most notorious word in advertising: authenticity.

Real people. Real occurrences. Real feelings. Honesty. Rawness. Un-retouched. Real moments. Just like you. I am. We are.

We are seeing less and less original image-making and more reality.

Images are less about craft, more about documenting.

Everything now appears familiar, just a little nicer, like that top 5 percent moment in your life.

Are people starting to fear the unfamiliar?

The idea of cool was something unfamiliar that people found interesting, so how can cool come back to being something that you have never seen or experienced before if there is not anything different being shown right now?

Models to real people

With images now showing "real" situations models riding a camel on a beach or models in a camper van in some Instagram-worthy wooded environment, it is not surprising that models themselves have moved away from looking like the other-worldly beings, to better versions of everyday people.

The supermodels of the 1990s and 2000s did not offer us a view of reality they did not speak or share pictures of their fridge on social media.

Now models can be relatable, sharing how they apply their make-up, where they go on holiday and their thoughts and feelings on mental health issues.

Of course, they are cast for their looks and the ability to make anything look cool that is their job but a healthy Instagram following helps, too.

Where modeling was once something available to a very small percentage of the population, it is now something that anyone can do providing they have enough of a following.

Influencers, of course, often have a reach bigger than many magazines and models combined. It is the ultimate show of a regular person selling regular things to regular people.

Style tribes used to be an identifier. You could be a mod, a rocker, a punk, a Britpop kid, an urban warrior, a goth, and so many more but now style identifiers change and move quickly.

If you see a piece of clothing that you like you can buy it and have it delivered to you on the same day.

There is no allegiance to a particular brand or singular look uniqueness is no longer a qualifier for having a sense of style, but being part of one uniformed, homogeneous look that morphs through seasons is.

There is another element to the model/real person trifecta: the pop star.

Long has the pop star been the vehicle to shift goods, but where once you picked a pop star for his or her unique voice, a new generation of pop stars are virtually interchangeable appealing to a diverse range of races, genders and ages with their own fluidity in those departments.

Artistic craft of image-making to the raw lens

When did we last get excited by a fantastical fashion image, the sort that Tim Walker or Nick Knight produce?

Almost all of what is deemed exciting or coveted in new photography is unlit, unstyled, candid, "spontaneous," home-videosque, do-it-yourself, fortuitous.

Technology has made everything easy to achieve.

Images can be captured quicker and mistakes can be avoided. This has definitely eradicated the naivety in the process of image-making: nobody arrives at anything new, as the outcome of the image-making process ends as expected.

Also, technology is readily available in "light" form to the masses.

What takes two days in getting the lighting right on set and color tweaks in the post room is now an Instagram filter one click and your selfie looks like it has been shot by Irving Penn.

High fashion or fashionable?

Previously, real people wore clothes differently than people on catwalks and fashion editorials. There were certain expected or socially acceptable looks that are worn in certain places.

Now, everything and anything goes.

Fashionable no longer just means wearable. It means being able to use clothes to express yourself and not having to conform to familiar apparel codes.

Are clothes now a form of art for the masses, a way everyone can express themselves through art?

It is rather normal to wear an element of couture to a lunch with the girls.

Everyone mixes high and low, Chanel and Primark in one look.

Craig McDean shoots androgynous models wearing full couture looks walking down the busy streets of Chinatown. Is this reality or fantasy?

Even the craft of styling plays this game: is that large tulle skirt worn over a glittery bodysuit Elie Saab Couture or Urban Outfitters?

People will always love clothes, and all of these items have an equal opportunity to acquire the level of desirability and respect they deserve.

Nowadays, a Chanel jacket has to work equally as hard to gain popularity as a nylon parka from Cos.

Because people mix high and low, every type of garment means the same to most people.

Where Topshop garments and campaigns used to look like Gucci, now Gucci looks like Topshop.

You get the same feeling wearing garments at any price point that extra bit of special that you get from your cashmere camel Crombie coat from Max Mara is not really that marked compared to the grey wool one from Arket, right?

From a fashion advertising/campaign perspective, mystery is not an approach that is prevalent anymore.

You have already seen it on the catwalk and then immediately on social media, worn by someone notable at an event and sometimes it can already be bought a week after the show the job of showcasing the garment has already been done.

Perhaps this is why there is more value in telling a wearability story with a garment, so that people can appreciate its value in every day life.

The challenge now would be to inject mystery well before the point of advertising: the campaign.

Do the shows need to work harder?

How do we tease product at production to make this more desirable?

Should ideas/moods from the design houses be showcased early, or even showcased at all? Because by the time it comes to the campaign, it has been seen and used by the customer already, right?

TRENDS COME and go.

It is highly likely that fantastical images will start to reappear once again. But then again, the world we live in is so weird that maybe we do not need a fashion fantasy to keep us going.

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Mooks Hanifah is creative director of [Wednesday Agency](#), London. Reach him at mooks@wednesdayagency.com.