

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Dior explores ancient textiles for summer menswear

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The garment features kutnu in a shimmering striped pattern. Image credit: Dior

By NORA HOWE

French fashion house Christian Dior and menswear creative director Kim Jones have revived a 16th-century material, kutnu, to serve as a standout textile for the summer 2023 show.

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The material seemingly fell into a state of anonymity after it was worn exclusively by sultans of the Ottoman Empire throughout the 16th century. As a focal point in Mr. Jones' Dior Men Summer 2023 show in Paris last week, the brand now invites viewers to discover the fabric's journey from royal courts to the runway.

"Dior is on a mission to explore facets of regional culture that may have been forgotten," said Thoma Serdari, associate professor of marketing at NYU Stern, New York. "The brand has embarked on a series of projects through which they identify, explore and revive regional crafts by incorporating them into their collection.

"This approach creates a bridge between local craftspeople, their culture and a global contemporary brand such as Dior," she said. "That bridge allows the brand to partake authentically in a variety of cultures without misappropriating their cultural heritage but on the contrary to help revive it, strengthen it and make it known."

Textile treasure

Specially woven by textile maker and lifestyle brand **Kutnia** for Dior, kutnu made its runway debut in the form of shimmering fabric.

In classic Dior fashion, the brand released a short film uncovering the craftsmanship and intention behind the collection, the history of kutnu and its significance.

Kutnu originated from Gaziantep in southeast Turkey. It dates to before the 16th century, but was made popular during the Ottoman Empire, and has only really been rediscovered in the last few years.

"Dior appreciated our fabric and they wanted a traditional design but in Dior's colors," a designer for Kutnia said in the film. "The specific fabric they have chosen has a tie-dye process it is very hand laborious."

Kutnu is a 16th-century fabric worn by sultans in the Ottoman Empire

Once the tie-dyeing process is complete, the yarns go into unassembly machines, where each individual string must be separated by hand. According to the designers, this can take about 24 hours as one meter of fabric contains approximately 5,700 strings.

"Luxury brands today are seen as arbiters of culture," Ms. Serdari said. "They have tremendous responsibility in addressing cultures respectfully and from an educated perspective while also exploring ways to make these creative expressions known by offering their own global platforms for the cultural practice to become known and appreciated throughout the world.

"The role of cultural preservationist is one that luxury brands assume to showcase their ethics and humanity-driven approach to creation."

Following the unassembly process, the string goes into what is called a grieving process, where they must be reassembled according to the pattern.

For Dior, this resulted in a woven satin-striped piece, constructed into a flowy, sporty top.

"Every craftsman has their own signature that is weaved at the end of the fabric as a salve to honor their labor," the designer said.



The kutnu fabric came to life in a flowy, sporty top. Image credit: Dior

The fabric was featured in one of 52 looks as part of Dior's Men Summer 2023 show on June 24 in Paris. The show and collection were inspired by the landscape and colors of Charleston, the English countryside home of artist Duncan Grant.

In addition to the short film unveiling the history behind kutnu, Dior released a film in which Mr. Jones discusses the influence of Mr. Grant's work on him over the last several years.

Hand in high fashion

Luxury fashion houses often highlight the history and heritage that fuel their brands as well as the artisans who carefully craft the materials needed for the elaborate ensembles seen on runways.

French luxury conglomerate LVMH Mot Hennessy Louis Vuitton elevated the visibility of artisanship through a project in line with its Mtiers d'Excellence initiative.

For "Conversations Ex Situ," or offsite conversations, LVMH invited visual artist Jrmý Gob to work with five female artisans from around the world. The artwork alluded to LVMH's commitments to biodiversity and savoir-faire and was created from a series of individual pieces that form the complete, three-dimensional work a process that is detailed in books as part of the installation ([see story](#)).

Last year, Italian house Fendi unveiled a state-of-the-art exhibition honoring "hand in hand" craftsmanship.

The exhibit embodied Fendi's "hand in hand" campaign launched in 2020, highlighting how Italian artisans and

ateliers have interpreted the iconic Baguette handbag, introduced in 1997 by Silvia Venturini Fendi ([see story](#)).

"Artisans are at the core of luxury fashion design and, unfortunately, have remained unseen up until recently," Ms. Serdari said. "With initiatives such as this by Dior and others by Chanel and Herms, artisans regain their proper place in the value chain of exquisite garments.

"The artisans are seen, heard and observed, and they become vehicles of culture that otherwise may be lost forever," she said. "In that sense, the role of luxury brands in today's society seems to, at least, be as important as that of major cultural institutions."

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