

*Fashion is alchemy.
Ritual and magic.
Faith and religion.
Sacrifice and devotion.*

Fashion has large similarities to religion and might be seen as a religion of today, at least in the sense of how we treat it and let it influence our dreams and conception of reality. It is a mystical system of visual power that we pay respect to, even if we sometimes make our own version of it, in the form that comes closest to our heart and beliefs.

The fashion system is a metaphysic system closely guarded by sects and hermeneutic schools. These are all ruled by a small elite guard of professional mystics and interpreters – a leading group of cardinals and priests, following the directions and rules of a higher ideal. A higher aesthetic culture that during ages has been inherited and gently transformed through ages of trained connoisseurship and metaphysic expertise. The practice of this system is magical – between natural and supernatural, concerning with the aura around the matter. This magical shimmer which floats on the surface of things, bringing dead objects to life and blinds our eyes with desire.

But the most magical parts of this belief system do not come from the structure of the system itself but from the every day ritual in the production of belief. Through a long history and tradition the priests gather for a ceremony, summoning the very spirit of the mystic force of aesthetics and substance it into matter. Of this mystic moment of materialization of the high ideal there is produced an icon to worship – a fashion photograph.

A whole guard of priests, usually from the same network of sect, is gathered in the studio, the hidden backroom in temple of fashion. There they call down the spirits of beauty to materialize onto the virgin looking model for a microsecond. Treated by the most sacred of oils and potions from exotic places and with secret ingredients she steps forward as something divine, beyond the doomed human flesh. In front of the lenses she is transformed into a phantasmographic and unique representation of the most beautiful specimen of the imperfect human race. No unwanted hair, no smell, no uneven skin, no undesirable characteristics, maybe even nothing “real” at all. Everything we need for believing in an icon.

And in this glorious 100th of a second, when the optics are open for the digital icon painter and in flashing of lights, the angels are playing fanfares. A religious moment occurs – the high ideal of the ideal of beauty is materialized before their eyes. The model will never again look as good as when the whole staff of aesthetic priests was gathered: photographers and stylists, creators and designers, light setters and image manipulators. This holy moment is totally unique, but later reproduced into millions of copies, and made for us believers to be used as an ideal for a living. This unique materialization of an idea becomes our visual guide

in our everyday life and we expect ourselves and our surrounding to look like this holy image.

If we believe and sacrifice enough the fashion system promises us eternal life. We give our life into the hands of this system and we preserve ourselves with the same sacred oils and secret potions. Through these images we are expected to manipulate our imperfect bodies to live up to the ideal of the icons, and thus live in the spotlights in what seems to be eternity. At least another season.

The fashion system itself lives beyond the pure world of images and can also be seen as liberal capitalism turned into the most refined magical system. The mystics of the “Market” may have their own iconology with ribbons of information passing the world’s news screens like prayers to the wind, but fashion is having unquestioned power over the image. This power stretches into our concept of reality, our deepest consciousness, and further into our dreams. The fashion system is showing us that it is *in their* vocabulary the meanings of freshness, sexiness and beauty resides. Outside of that world everything is doomed to be ugly, dull and grey. It is *in* this Market we can live freely, popular and prosperous, but outside the borders of *in and out* resides only a wasteland of discarded dreams.

The fashion system is the spirit of capitalism and maybe the core of western visual civilization, merging populism and high culture. Constantly breaking its own borders and acts as the arrow head of time, breaking the thin membrane to the future. In no other time has so much money and energy been put down into the concept of beauty and no other civilization has produced such variety and nuances of visual expression saturated of meaning. Or to be clearer: fashion cannot have any meaning, because then it would already be out of fashion. But onto its ever-changing blank surface of the latest beauty trend we project our dreams of deepest meaning, because that is the true meaning of fashion – to be constantly fresh, beyond the petrifying prison of fixed denotations. It is a deep surface saturated of ephemeral projections of all our longing eyes full of desire.

What we are seeing in the project Artist Clothing is an approach to the land in-between fashion and art, examining magic systems from within with other eyes. In this case of artists analyzing the worn identity they are using the field of fashion and clothing as material for exploring the realm of the second skin and the projections lit unto it. Closing in on fashion from the side of art gives a freedom of being outside of the production of the system and can reveal this landscape under a fresh view. By questioning the roles and modes of identity production there is a possibility through this approach to raise a more concerned and deep debate about the implicit phenomenas and forces of interest in fashion. Thus the space to act is wider than in the passages connected to the fashion market, and the concepts we see here freer than could be expected from the fashion system itself. Artist Clothing is no enlightenment to end the alchemy or magics of fashion. But more like in the case of Linneaus mixing of old rural beliefs with new botanical systems – a wider world view spanning two mystical worlds merging to into one.