

BURBERRY RECONFIGURES THE FIGURE IN SCULPTURAL ARRAYS

By Sarah E. Braddock Clarke

Christopher Bailey demonstrates, with his 78-look Burberry collection, direct inspiration from renowned British 20th century sculptor Henry Moore - the man himself, the process and the work. His monolithic, semi-abstract figurative sculptures have been on Bailey's radar for many years. Both were born in Yorkshire (Moore - Castleford, Bailey - Halifax). Ironically Castleford is where Burberry began manufacturing many of its designs in the 1880s including the iconic trench coat. From his early teens Bailey visited the Yorkshire Sculpture Park where Moore's monumental sculptures are on permanent display. They clearly made a lasting impression and, together with the fortuitous connections, starting points for the collection were provided. By uniting Burberry with Henry Moore Bailey links the brand firmly to British high culture but it also brings together his over-riding passions - the heritage of Burberry, the British countryside and British art.

A voluptuous aesthetic is typical of Moore's larger-than-life, bronze figures – his elemental forms include mother and child, reclining and draped bodies that are simultaneously classic and contemporary. Proportions are frequently shifted and Bailey pays homage to this by dislocating and displacing both structural lines and designed details, repositioning waists and hips. Reference to the organic is made with the undulating shapes of the Burberry fashions that encompass and encircle. Zones of the human body, concave and convex are enlarged/reduced in scale or move in unexpected directions. The sculpture's curves influence the silhouettes for knits and outerwear. Bailey zoomed in on shoulders as a distinct focus, as indeed, did Moore, Burberry showed exaggerated forms, slashed areas to view shoulders beneath and sensually sloped lines. The sculptural aspect of the sleeve does not go amiss with voluminous forms, where circular cutting achieves frills and flounces to grab attention and (detachable) cuffs are dramatic. Moore's leaning towards asymmetry follows through at Burberry where off-balance, 'yanked about' forms challenge - one-shoulder dresses slide off-kilter, sweaters are angularly cropped and sport extra panels, askew layered ruffles cascade to contrast with tailored aspects, and hemlines dip and rise.

Obsessive with his research and attention to detail, Bailey worked closely with Mary Moore, daughter of the artist and with the Henry Moore Foundation in Hertfordshire. Having full access to the private work and studios allowed Bailey to scrutinise and further understand Moore's conceptual reach and creativity where form is eloquently described in line drawings. Staple pieces such as trench coats, car

coats, sweaters and capes are reconfigured with a contemporaneous slant to bring them into the 21st century. The loosely-cut car coat, reworked in a lighter weight 'tropical' gabardine, slouches over the body - roomy for layering beneath; details such as wide collars, lapels and cuffs feature, while chunky half-belts at the back waist pull the silhouette in. The oversized scale calls to mind the work of Moore, but also fits with the unisex genre portrayed.

Wonderful, relief cable- and rib-knits resemble collaged constructions for panelled cotton/wool/cashmere sweaters - rarely traversing traditionally they slice unexpectedly across the body while 'cuffs' are not necessarily to be found at the end of sleeves. Cut-outs reveal the layer beneath - the collar, a shoulder, a sleeve and part of the hem of white cotton/lace shirts and shirt-dresses. Lace gives a sophisticated sense of couture while also implying the textured webbing that Moore used to start a piece. Feminine delicacy is contrasted with the look of a gentlemen's cricket-style jumper and applied lace gives a twist to menswear T-shirts and sweatshirts.

The palette remains neutral - white, cream, beige, grey and black but with the interruption of blue that references workwear and notably the butcher's aprons donned by Moore while creating. Bailey's strong use of white-on-white was taken directly from Moore's white plaster maquettes. The collection exudes materiality – Moore experimented widely with clay, plaster, wood and bronze and Bailey's selection of fabrics offer both function and aesthetics – providing protection when necessary and holding a shape or draping against the body when required. Bailey's choices offer a wide range of qualities - the seduction of silk, the crispness of cotton poplin, the softness of cotton chambray, the give of stretch cotton, the delicacy of lace, the keep-me-warm quality of double-faced military wool twill and the supreme plushness of wool/cashmere blends. Patterning in the form of stripes allude to the aforementioned blue/white butcher's apron - some designs play with the orientation of the stripes while printed textiles reproduce designs by the sculptor himself - framed heads and reclining figures for both womenswear and menswear. The artisanal is evidenced with pin-tucks, macramé, ruffles, embroidery, and hand-looped rope.

With an eye for detail, Bailey designed mid-calf knitted boots to accompany - the sculpted heel made from moulded plastic features rounded holes that echo Moore's hollowed-out forms. To complete the collection 78 unique couture capes pivot on shoulders, pronouncing an almost theatrical look. The cape has been a symbol of protection for Burberry for a long time but here, this truncated and unisex garment is rethought and reworked. They resonate with the early 20th century travelling capes for men and women that gave comfort and shelter when venturing by car, boat or aeroplane while Medieval armour and

the high-necked ruffles of Elizabeth I or Dutch 17th century male portraits are also conjured up. These 21st century capes are elaborate and eye-catching, imparting a sense of regality. Constructed from a variety of materials they celebrate craftsmanship, an aspect of the Burberry heritage that Bailey perpetuates – silver feathers, layers of lace, metallic leathers, thick knits, glass from chandeliers, passementerie tassels, dripping pearls, mixes - shearling on the front/cable-knit on the back and hoods made from rhinestones or chain-mail. Henry Moore collected found objects - pebbles, twigs and animal bones, holding and turning them in his hands to gain further insight and observing them upside down to reappraise. Likewise, the capes are inspired by objects found in the Burberry design studio. Sculptural and conceptual, but also wearable, Christopher Bailey's capes emphasise chance, resourcefulness and intuition – all essential components of the creative process.

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