



Schiaparelli: A Swan Song That Fused Then and Now

Daniel Roseberry plans radical changes at the house, so he saw Monday's couture show as a farewell to the old Schiap, making peace with the past to clear the decks for things to come.

By Tim Blanks



PARIS — Daniel Roseberry insists that he has swerved the Schiaparelli archives, until now. “I just wasn’t interested,” he confessed on Monday morning, after his latest couture show for the house. So what changed? One thing: He felt he’d needed time to build up some legitimacy before he took a deep dive into Elsa’s formidable legacy. And another: Roseberry wants to make a major change in Schiaparelli. “To rediscover and restructure the atelier, the whole way in which we create. If you want to change the result, you have to change the creative process,”

If such a notion sounded poignant, the collection itself was anything but. “Last season was more emotional,” Roseberry said. “This one, I wanted to be harder, more direct, more confrontational.” The colour palette he found in the archives didn’t look modern to him. One easy fix: the timelessness of monochrome. Fade to black and white, which encouraged the silhouettes to be equally graphic. “Less body modification and radical corseting, less exaggeration,” Roseberry added. The occasional grand floor-sweeping volume still spoke to classic couture, but there was also bias-cutting, rather than corseting, to create shape, and a new moulded shoulder and hip, a pared back, more rational Schiap. As Roseberry pointed out, Elsa herself was “rigorous and controlled during the day and then at night, she’s a swan, a radish, a surrealist...”

Swan? Radish? Why stop at “modern”? Roseberry decided to head onwards and upwards and make the archives feel futuristic. There was a sci-fi silveriness to the strongest looks. A matador outfit — silver patent Perfecto and matching torero pants — fused Schiap and Ziggy Stardust. A sumptuous black tulle cape embroidered with Versailles’s Fountain of Apollo (originally designed by Elsa for Lady Mendl in 1938) duplicated the water in a cosmic starburst of silver pearls, sequins and rhinestones, like something the Vera C. Rubin Observatory will capture in deep space. Maggie Maurer’s sheath of lamé chiffon featured tulle cut-outs that seemed to have drawn a cornucopia of silvery slugs (haute body horror). Elsa’s old collaborator Salvador Dalí would have appreciated that, as he would have enjoyed the necklace which ended in a human-heart-shaped ball of red rhinestones that pulsed as the model walked.

Schiap’s surrealist roots probably run too deep for Roseberry to dispense with them in his “restructuring,” especially when they loaned an invaluable edge to Monday’s swansong. Kudos to Stephen Jones’ upended flower pot hats, Pat McGrath’s monochrome makeup and an armful of gorgeous





bracelets that were a futuristic interpretation of Nancy Cunard's accessories in her iconic 1927 portrait by Man Ray. In his lyrical show notes, Roseberry told the story of Elsa's flight to New York as the Nazis closed in on Paris in June 1940. He dedicated his collection to that period, "when life and art was on the precipice: to the sunset of elegance, and to the end of the world as we knew it." Dada and surrealism were artistic responses to a world gone mad. In naming his presentation "Back to the Future," Roseberry was, in his own way, acknowledging certain inescapable geopolitical parallels. (He felt the fact that there is a major Man Ray retrospective opening at the Met in September offered subtle confirmation.)

On a personal level, he saw looking back to move forward as a way to counter what he himself clearly feels has become overly predictable. "I was really interested in trying to achieve something that looked identifiably Schiap without needing corsets and even sometimes an overdose of embroidery." Hear, hear. And mission accomplished. I guess we can wave goodbye to the past and say hello to a brave new Daniel Roseberry.

