



‘A New Heartbeat’: Decoding Duran Lantink’s Gaultier Debut

To keep his Jean Paul Gaultier as new as possible, Lantink decided he would stay away from the archive, the designer told Tim Blanks in an in-depth interview.

By Tim Blanks



PARIS — “Junior” was the name Duran Lantink chose for his debut collection as creative director of Jean Paul Gaultier, after the sporty, lower-priced line Gaultier launched in 1988 to seduce a younger audience. Like Junior, Lantink was also born in 1988, but his connection with the label runs deeper than mere calendar coincidence. His parents were part of a fast, fashionable young crowd that patronised the RoXY, a club in Amsterdam, which *also* opened in 1988, and some of his earliest memories are of them and their friends dressing up to go out.

“They were the sort of people that you don’t see during the day but they flourish in the night life, and they were always so inspiring, because it felt like there was a community that wasn’t necessarily seen in my elementary school, or when I would go to tennis or rugby or ballet or whatever,” Lantink said. “I would go home, and then it was like, Friday evening, and there was house music and cat suits, party outfits, gold cone bras. Very much in the Gaultier spirit. There was one guy called Johnny, and I would say, ‘Hello, Uncle Johnny’, and he would say, ‘It’s *Auntie* Johnny for you.’ It made me feel a bit scared, I think, but it also made me feel there’s more in this world than just defining a male-looking person as uncle. They can also be auntie.”

It was that spirit of anything goes that Lantink wanted to capture in his first collection for Gaultier. It was a significant schism from the repertoire of guest designers — Chitose Abe, Glenn Martens, Simone Rocha and more — who have been keeping Gaultier’s name alive for the past four years. “It feels like a new heartbeat,” Lantink agreed during a preview last week. And, to keep it as new as possible, he decided he would stay away from what must surely be a formidable archive. “I mean, I’m dying to go into it, but I also think it’s better if I stay away for a bit.”

But Lantink acknowledged it would be difficult to maintain that kind of innocence. “Somehow we live in a society where everybody knows what Gaultier is, but everybody has a different perspective of it, because he tapped into so many different subcultures. There’s the bourgeois lady who was into the





tailoring and the sailor stripes, and there's the world that was more focused on Junior and clubbing." And that was where *he* went in his presentation on Sunday afternoon.

One lesson we learned from Gaultier over the decades was to expect the unexpected. That's only one reason why Lantink is his ideal spiritual heir. He showed in the Jean Nouvel-designed Musée du Quai Branly, whose halls are filled with unparalleled collections of indigenous art and artifacts from Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas. But the audience was steered underground, away from all that splendour, through the detritus of a rave into a long, grim tunnel lined with metal ducts, the kind of environment that demanded pounding techno. "I don't have time for it at the moment, but I love to go to a rave," said Lantink. "When I was 15 or 16, I started really being into the whole Cyber Dog situation, I got super obsessed by the Japanese streetwear things and Walter Van Beirendonck. And I started seeing all these people combining different colours and patterns, being completely overexaggerated in their looks. And I thought, 'Oh, that's very nice, it's like your body is kind of transformable into whatever you want to be at whatever stage in life.' I was always very drawn to that. I guess it shaped me as a designer."

The sculpted anatomical exaggerations of his own collections sometimes feel like Lantink is trying to create a new human. He's just not that interested in conventional forms, something else he shares with Gaultier. But he refined his experiments in this collection. In his pomp, Gaultier also mutated silhouettes, most famously with Madonna's cone bra. Its ubiquity made Lantink wary, but he felt compelled to acknowledge its importance as *the* house icon by opening the show with his version, rounded and pushed to the side. It was the best possible way to announce his arrival. He followed it with Leon Dame in a cropped black leather bomber that devolved into a jockstrap, looking like a cross between a Colt Man and a Superman, a hybrid that Gaultier himself exalted when he had muscled Adonises John Francis and Cameron Alborzian opening his shows in the 1990s.

Gaultier often fetishized the body with belts, straps, harnesses and extreme forms of tailoring. The difference here was that Lantink's celebration of body consciousness felt younger, somehow healthier and more rooted in the unselfconscious Nirvana of his clubby youth. Carved-out bodysuits, sculpted breastplates, bikinis and cycling shorts pared looks back to bare essentials. A backpack formed one piece with a broad, pocketed belt that linked to the ankles. "I'm very much thinking about this guy going to a rave outside," Lantink daydreamed, "and it's like 40 degrees, and he's only wearing a belt with pockets and a backpack, and he's completely naked with a pair of sunglasses. Who doesn't want to just wear a belt and go to a rave?"

There were varying degrees of nudity – or opportunities for more baring of flesh – throughout the collection, culminating in a matt-chested, hairy-legged, anatomically correct male form printed on a body stocking. The exquisite Lulu Tenney also sported one, though her "modesty" was protected by a pair of flaring shorts based on a trawlerman's hat. "I don't even know if I'm challenging things," Lantink mused, "but I just want to show where I find beauty. Somehow people see that as challenging, but I just feel like it's really beautiful, and I want to show it."

As Lantink conceded, Gaultier has been imprinted on him, archives or not. When he first looked at the Spring/Summer 1994 collection "Tatouage," Jean Paul's monumental paean to inked skin and one of the greatest fashion shows ever, he said his initial response was to try and do a new tattoo. "But it didn't work at all. So I was like, 'Okay, there's things that we use without changing. Only change the technique of it.' And we did 3D printing, so the tattoo becomes three-dimensional." On a sheer bodystocking, it was one of the most striking syntheses of Lantink and Gaultier in the collection, for this old fan at least.

There were others. The daisy jeans were a reminder of how much Gaultier loved Deee-Lite (who were also favourites at the RoXY). The diagonally-printed Junior tops echoed his affection for Russian Constructivism. The stripes were an op art nod to the marinier. Bomber jackets, of course. Lantink even managed a trench coat, truncated to create that essential bared midriff. And the pleated "Marilyn





Monroe” dress was a quote from an ad for Junior. (People would eagerly anticipate Gaultier’s ad campaigns. Those truly were different times.) Lantink also did an excellent job with Gaultier’s sunglasses and shoes. You could feel his sheer pleasure in finally having the budget to create accessories, although he had the common sense to leave the men’s sandals designed for Gaultier by Stephane Kélian in 1988 exactly as they were. You don’t mess with perfection.

All of this is mere trainspotting on my part, when the main event is Lantink assuming the creative director role at Gaultier. He said they have lunch maybe once a month. “We don’t talk much about fashion. We talk more about movies, music, vacations, sometimes he tells stories about Pierre Cardin or Courrèges. We have nice conversations, but not necessarily about what I’m going to be doing.”

“But it’s nice to merge these identities into each other,” Lantink added. “I think it’s a very important moment in time. The late 80s and 90s knocked down doors for people like us. And now we’re in this situation in life where it feels like people are trying to take that away.”

