



THE PURPOSE

The designer: Kolia Co

The purpose of the World Of Wearableart, says Rohit Chawla, is "a reinterpretation of the three phases of life – birth, youth and old age. The garment is like a trilogy of images and can be worn in three different ways."

What does an ace photographer do when he is finished with the bread-and-butter shoots and is yearning for something more? He goes to a country of breathtaking beauty, and becomes part of a project that celebrates outstanding creativity.

And so it happened that Rohit Chawla collaborated with the World Of Wearableart (WOW), an annual show in New Zealand, creating a 2011 calendar for Birdgroup by photographing dresses made of sofa upholstery, sculpted leather and even automobile parts. These are garments that are stored in crates, not in boxes, and are really wearable sculptures, not threads that just cover you up. The project allowed Chawla to unite two media that inspire him – fine art and photography. Great art speaks to the viewer, and he figured that WOW is meant to provoke.

THE WOW FACTOR

It is a movement that focuses on the 'artability' of a garment, not 'wearability'. He is a photographer with a taste for fine art. Fashion and passion unite as **Rohit Chawla** collaborates with the World of Wearableart

The thought behind WOW – an event that began in 1987 – has been to “take art off the wall and out of static display and adorn the body in wildly wonderful ways,” as founder and artistic director Suzie Moncrieff puts it.

The spectacular pieces make one stop and stare. Every year in September, they are presented in the Kiwi capital of Wellington through a theatrical extravaganza attended by roughly 35,000 people. In Chawla’s photos, they acquire an even grander feel, set as they are against the natural beauty of New Zealand. He says, “Apart from the physicality of carrying the garments to the outdoors, what was also challenging was planning the shoot – there had to be a certain synergy between the garments and the backdrop.”



PREHISTORIC PRINCESS

The designer: David Walker
One of the challenges for Chawla was to find the right synergy for the background and the garments. Most of the garments are in sync with the background they have been shot in. There is an oblique method to the madness.



SECOND SKIN

The designer: Hayley May and Fiona Christie
The garment is “like an extra-terrestrial being in a forest – the purity of white reflected against the green forest,” says Chawla. “It is an extremely graphic outfit almost like Japanese origami and borrows designer Issey Miyake’s sensibility.”



ALPHA ROMEO TANGO ARTPHOLSTERY

Designers: Sylvia Campbell and Wendy Burtorn
To find a setting for this dress, the photo shoot team went looking for a Dakota aircraft that “would set the right mood for this extremely graphic garment,” says Chawla.

Participating artists at WOW represent the worlds of film, fashion, photography, craft, design, sculpting and drama, and there are no rules about following traditional handicraft or sewing techniques.

The challenge lay in juxtaposing the garments with the background – in some cases they are in sync; at other times, they clash. “The Crystal Candela Bra – a play on ‘candelabra’ – was a garment was made in a welding shop, and so the background reproduces the physicality of where it was made.

“To shoot the Alpha Romeo Tango Artpholstery, the team went looking for a Dakota [aircraft] that would set the right mood. The Second Skin is designed like an extra-terrestrial being in a forest – the purity of white reflected in the green surrounding.”



RATTLE YOUR DAGS

The designers: Ursula Dixon and Paula Coulthard
This garment is made from old sofa parts. The team spent three hours herding sheep in a manner that they matched the shape of the dress.



CRYSTAL CANDELA BRA

The designers: Violet and Charleen Oliver
The bra is a playful take on the candelabra. "The garment was made in a welding shop," says Chawla, "and so the background echoes the physicality of where it was shaped."

Moncrieff calls the movement "a rebellion against the mundane". Designers are challenged to create something that has impact on a large stage and can withstand detailed scrutiny, but there are no rules about following traditional handicraft or techniques. From India, the National Institute of Fashion Technology and the National Institute of Design, among others, participate in WOW.

The clothes later find space at the WOW museum in Nelson, the New Zealand city where the event was born. The collection includes Manish Arora's 2008 'Butterfly Dress', made from 1,000 hand-embroidered butterflies. "WOW lets designers challenge creative boundaries," says Arora.