

The Atopos Paper Dress Collection The Back to Front Story of a Paper Kimono

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Abstract:

Stamos Fafalios will introduce the RRRIPPI! Collection, explain how it came about and give a short tour of the collection's site specific installations. Particular emphasis will be given to the latest addition of the collection, a paper kimono from the Edo period that concludes a Japanese section of the exhibition and relates to the disposable Newspaper dresses of the 1960s. In 2005, Atopos cvc started collecting paper garments for research purposes and for experimenting with new exhibition concepts in an object-inspired manner. The research focused on the 1960s popular, but short-lived, American fad of disposable paper dresses. Destined to be worn once and then thrown away, these mass-produced paper dresses represent the main core of the RRRIPPI! Collection.

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Fig. 1:
1960s Paper dresses. ATOPOS collection.

Introduction

*There was a young maid from St. Paul,
Wore a newspaper dress to a ball.
The dress caught on fire,
And burnt her entire,
Front page, sporting section and all.*

So starts Alexandra Palmer's contribution to the 'RRRIPP!! Paper Fashion' catalogue of the exhibition held at the Benaki Museum, Athens in 2007. From her article, "The Sixties Paper Caper Fashions", we have learnt most of what we know about our collection of disposable paper clothing and accessories and for which we are most grateful.

History

Disposable paper dresses first appeared in the USA in 1966 when they were produced by the Scott Paper Company to promote its new products. The paper dresses were addressed to a consumer public that was already using disposable cups, plates, napkins and tablecloths and many other everyday objects. The unexpected success achieved by the first samples of these dresses led to the creation of 'paper fashion', which inundated the US market for almost two years (1966-1968). (www.rrrippcollection.gr)

Materials

Fun, modern and liberating, these paper garments were made in the spirit of their times, where experimentation in new industrial materials based on plastic or metal was applied to everyday life and fashion. The new, non-woven materials used to manufacture the dresses, gave the impression of paper, even though, apart from cellulose, their components included cotton, rayon, polyester and new-technology synthetic fibers.

Designs

The designs and images used on the paper dresses were taken from visual stimulants of the time, thus contributing to their popularity. Pop, Op art, psychedelic motifs, retro Art Nouveau designs, trademark logos and even the faces of the 1968 election candidates were used to adorn the dresses, thus creating an exciting and imaginative canvas of multi-colored motifs



Fig. 2:
Bandana. Dura-weve (cellulose-rayon mixture) dress, by Scott Paper Company, Paper Caper line. U.S.A., 1966. ATOPOS 2005.02.042.



Fig. 3:
Op Art. Dura-weve (cellulose-rayon mixture) dress, by Scott Paper Company, Paper Caper line. U.S.A., 1966. ATOPOS 2005.02.007.

Decline

After 1968 'paper fashion' went into decline because of its overexposure and the fact that the public was turning its concerns toward ecology and a 'return to nature' – a new trend that did not hold disposable products in high esteem. Since its decline, however, the paper fashion fad of the late 1960s has inspired contemporary fashion designers in experimenting with paper garments and recycling techniques.



Fig.4:
Cellulose (nylon-mixture) dress, by Kimberly Clark Corporation. U.S.A., c. 1969.
ATOPOS 2005.02.166.



Fig. 5:
The Souper Dress. Cellulose (cotton-mixture) dress, by Campbell's Soup Company. New Jersey c.1968. ATOPOS 2005.02.049.

Contemporary Pieces in the Collection

Apart from the main core of the 1960s paper dresses, the RRRIPP!! Collection includes key pieces from the following fashion designers: Issey Miyake, Helmut Lang, Maison Martin Margiela, Walter Van Beirendonck, Hugo Boss, and Hussein Chalayan among others. This new found interest in paper clothing also inspired Atopos to create the RIPPING ATOPOS project, in which contemporary artists and fashion designers are commissioned to create their own works of art, inspired by specific pieces or the whole of the collection. Artists and designers such as Robert Wilson, Howard Hodgkin, Demna Gvasalia, Jannis Varelas, Michael Cepress, Bas Kosters, Angelo Plessas and Maurizio Galante, have either created new works of art or have transformed and revisited original items from the collection in the spirit of creative re-cycling.

Ethnological Pieces in the Collection

During the course of its research Atopos cvc also acquired some rare examples of paper clothing and accessories from earlier historical periods and non-Western cultures, such as Japan and China. Most notably, the collection includes garments and accessories made in the Japanese manner of *kamiko* and *shifu*. The *kamiko* process has been known since the

tenth century, where strong sheets of paper are softened and then starched with vegetable juice to produce a durable material. Paper weaving, or *shifu*, was developed in 16th-century Japan; in this technique, strips of paper, often pages from old ledger books, are twisted into threads and are then woven.

The pages of ledger books were also used by novice kimono makers to learn their art. Instead of being cut into strips the pages were glued together on the longer sides thus producing a length of 'material' from which a kimono could be cut. The pieces would be assembled into a kimono and then stitched together. (Glue was only used on the horizontal seams and needle and thread on the vertical.) These 'Practice' kimonos were made full size or in miniature.

The addition to the Atopos Collection of such a kimono completes a section that had, up until now, ended without a satisfying conclusion. The ledger books, the strips of paper, the twisted threads used for woven garments make an impressive display, but the addition of this piece gives the *shifu* section an entirely different allure – and a wonderful story to tell. Also, and just as importantly, the text on this kimono relates directly to the printed Newspaper and Yellow Pages paper dresses in the collection – and takes the viewer back to the very beginning of the exhibition.

These rare pieces and other historic items of the RRRIPPI!! Collection serve not only as examples of the use of paper in the manufacture of clothing, but also as a surprise and a delight for the viewer.

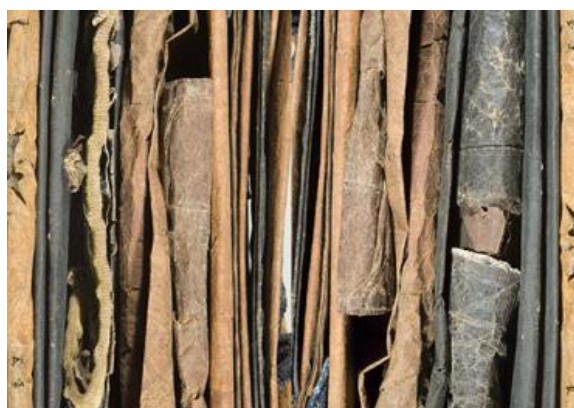


Fig 6:
Paper Kamiko coats. Japan, 18th-19th century. ATOPOS collection.



Fig. 7-8:
Paper Kimono, recycled pages from ledger books. Japan, 20th century. ATOPOS 2016.08.052.

RRRIPP!! Exhibitions (www.rrrippcollection.gr)

Based on the original idea and research of Vassilis Zidianakis and the Atopos team, “Paper Fashion” is a touring exhibition that adapts to the different visual angles and challenges of each venue. Always seeking new ways of presentation and placing particular emphasis on the ephemeral, fragile, humble and poetic nature of paper garments, Paper Fashion showcases key pieces from the RRRIPP!! Collection together with special loans from designers, collectors, museums and institutions.

Providing a comprehensive representation of paper clothing in the history of dress and design and numbering today more than five hundred items, the RRRIPP!! Collection forms the basis of the RRRIPP!! Paper Fashion exhibition, which Atopos cvc showed for the first time in Athens in 2007 at the Benaki Museum [Link address: <http://atopos.gr/rrripp-paper-fashion-the-benaki-museum/>]. The success of the show enabled Atopos to collaborate with European Museums on new interpretations of the exhibition, first in Luxembourg in 2008 at the Musée d’Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Mudam [Link address: <http://atopos.gr/rrripp-paper-fashion-at-mudam/>], then in Antwerp in 2009 at Mode Museum, MoMu [Link address: <http://atopos.gr/paper-fashion-at-momu/>], in Bologna in 2009 at Fast Fashion Festival [Link address: <http://atopos.gr/paperdress-fast-fashion-festival/>], in Zurich in 2010 at the Museum Bellerive [Link address: <http://atopos.gr/papier-fashion-at-museum-bellerive-design-museum/>], in Melbourne, Chadstone in 2011 [Link address: <http://atopos.gr/paper-dresses-chadstone/>] and most recently, in Waiblingen in 2013 at Galerie Stihl Waiblingen [Link address: <http://atopos.gr/papier-fashion-at-galerie-stihl-waiblingen/>]

From 2010 until 2014, Barbican International Enterprises had undertaken the exhibition’s touring and promotion.

Exhibition Catalogue

The RRRIPP!! Paper Fashion catalogue features essays by experts in the sartorial field: Vassilis Zidianakis, Christina Leitner, Marie-Claire Bataille-Benguigui, Alexandra Palmer, Christoph Grunenberg, Myrsini Pichou, Kyriaki Lentzi & Yorgos Facorellis, Lydia Kamitsis, Kaat Debo and Akiko Fukai.

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