

WHERE FASHION AND ARCHITECTURE COLLIDE: THE DESIGN AESTHETIC OF SHINMI PARK

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Fashion and architecture have always shared a reciprocal relationship based on common visual and intellectual principles. Both produce environments defined through spatial awareness and create structures founded on volume, function, proportion and material. Architecture is making its presence felt in fashion through the use of pliable metals, membrane structures, lightweight glasses and flexible plastics. At the same time, contemporary architects are borrowing the techniques of pleating and draping from traditional tailoring to design buildings that are interactive, inflatable, and even portable. Comparisons of architectural gurus like Rem Koolhaas, Zaha Hadid and Frank Gehry with those of fashion designers including Alexander McQueen, Comme des Garçons, Hussein Chalayan, Junya Watanabe and Issey Miyake reveal that the disciplines have much in common. Architects and fashion designers have been speaking the same language for a long time.

Shinmi Park is one such designer whose work explores the connections between fashion and architecture. Taking fashion beyond the expression of trends, Park's work develops types of fashion structures that reinvent the garment as a sensual transaction between the body, interior space and the eye. Obsessively detailed, the intricately layered textures of Park's designs appear deceptively light and playful. Each garment is constructed by a kind of modular interconnection between individual pieces that can be disassembled and recombined into multiple sculptural forms according to the will of the wearer. "Fashion fulfils its fundamental function when worn by humans", she says. "Whether that function is to protect the body or to create a symbolic meaning, it displays its worth when met by a body." But Park's work is not just about constructing human shape and form to fabric and scale, she designs her garments according to basic architectural principles; function, volume and proportion. By considering the dialogue between modern architecture and contemporary fashion in concept as well as in practice, Park's designs cease to function as fashion garments and become three-dimensional landscapes that capture the body in modular spaces. In broader terms, Park's garments act as complete and individual structures consisting of elements distinguished by mass, volume, support, line, rhythm, simplicity and complexity. "It is these architectural elements that are also connected", says Park in defining her signature mode, "to the visualization of individual structures in the silhouette of fashion design."

The place to which the designer travels has its own objective reality as well as an imaginative reality. But there is also a place from which the designer travels, shuffling between here and there, from inspiration to concept, from design development and experimentation to the final design outcome. It is here, in this space, somewhere between the design idea and the design outcome that subjectivity forces to the surface and speaks of who we are and who we are not as design practitioners. "Design", says Park, "is a method of providing ideas". It is these ideas that form the basis of Park's design oeuvre.

In creating environments defined by spatial awareness, Park uses materials to establish a dialogue between the wearer and the landscape, whilst exploring the extent to which fashion, art and architecture can be integrated into a single design. According to Park, "The action of choosing clothes and wearing them - the action of making style - is a kind of art as well a sphere within design. I think that all individuals are a living form of artwork." In this way, Park considers the dialogue between fashion and architecture as a form of cultural expression in her everyday design practice and thinking. "From my perspective, fashion and architecture are by-products of a haunting artistic beauty that expresses, through the combination of materials and styles, a vision of desire in modernity's search for perfection".

Shinmi Park does not consider herself a fashion designer in the traditional sense of the discipline. She does not design fashion for a market or for a select clientele. Some could even go as far as to call her work *haute couture*, a label that makes Park uncomfortable. Instead, Park identifies as a designer foremost, then as an artist who creates 'soft sculptures' that she calls '*Visual Pun/Fun*', flexible

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structures with interchangeable components that can be recombined with each part to expand the boundaries and perimeters of the body.

Changeability, The Fashion Trace, intentionally sets out to blur and question the limits of the body whilst simultaneously resisting, almost playfully, the sensual dialogue between dress and the lived fashion experience, between the wearable garment and urban space. By borrowing devices from both disciplines such as the spiral, the fold and zippers to provide the structural basis for her soft sculptures, Park's designs are no longer static structures for wearing but metaphors for urban life. Light, almost shapeless organza fabric, gothic in its fashion aesthetic, yet modern in its design application appears to swallow the entire body, whilst at the same time, the padded cloth and the interlocking zippers acts as a shield or armor, protecting the wearer against the environment.

Body Architecture, Body Sculpture and Fashion Sculpture are a series of works that make up Park's designs in *Changeability, The Fashion Trace* at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) Gallery. Peter McNeil writes elsewhere in this catalogue, Park's "work makes us reconsider the interaction of dress, body, textile, furniture, lighting and space. Although she invokes a primarily architectural framework, her work prompts reconsideration of many other domains of design". While Park conforms to fashion's processes and methodologies, her work goes beyond the garment and the wardrobe and into the domain of the everyday. Through her engagement with architectural techniques and innovative design, Shinmi Park has succeeded in defining a niche aesthetic between contemporary design and art practice and architectural style.

Most importantly, Park's work explores ways of conceptualising the division, containment and struggle concretized in and between design disciplines, where the limits of design concepts and practice are transgressed, crossed and broken. Her work breaks away from the dialectics of conceptual and material design and interprets design as metaphorical, empirical and theorizable, instrumental and strategic, where volume and function, scale and proportion are elements that map and remap the real-and-imagined worlds of the designer.

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