

EDGED IN BLACK



Audrey Hepburn – *Breakfast at Tiffany's*

It is the witching hour. In a dimly lit room, a group of ultrathin women, dressed alluringly in black, appear to be mingling at a fashionable party. The floor is strewn with glitter; and against their black dresses can be seen the glint of cut crystal or the gleam of pearls. Time stands still. But ageless as the various dresses may seem, each one is from a specific year, from 1900's to the present, for the party and its mannequin guests are part of the Valentino Retrospective past/present/future exhibition celebrating one hundred exquisite haute couture garments.

I revelled in the mastery of the elegant line, classic form and opulent detail. Each design approached me as I entered the room. More than five decades of geometric patterns, graphic prints, the skilful use of fabric to create dramatic silhouettes and the distinctive palette of black white and 'Valentino red' stood before me as visionary masterpieces.

A black velvet evening gown with applique white stain ribbons that pipe and stripe the black tulle bibs and train reminded me of the 20th-century fashion phenomenon known as "The

Little Black Dress." A woman dressed in black and white is like a cipher or a pictogram, like handwriting or calligraphy.

Most often black, occasionally white, both straight and soft contours take off and come together, in curves and lattices, or turn into arabesques that evoke a daring allure. Whether decorative or structural, this delicate interplay of lines creates an enchanting tension and captivates the beholder's gaze.

This idea that black and white can cause such a reaction within an individual ignited a flame

within me. As an aspiring artist and designer I invite the dull and uninteresting to break free from the confines of our daily life and travel to a place where the imagination is unencumbered. I am inspired and seduced by a dark palette. It has an honesty, longevity and complexity to it. Combined with shades of grey and white, the result ends up conveying a sense of rawness and drama, which I relish in.

A black and white photograph of Audrey Hepburn was the starting point for my fascination with the intricacies of black and white as a media, along with my ongoing admiration of Audrey's style.

The photo captures Hepburn in her most iconic film *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. It has been voted the most stylish film, due to the everlasting change Audrey's Givenchy-designed wardrobe has had on women and fashion, and how her portrayal of Holly Golightly is so widely known and copied. Women were scrambling to copy Audrey's distinctive "pineapple" hairdo and adopted orange-striped tabby faster than animal shelters could provide them.

Audrey's style and grace has not only inspired my artistic style and ideas but has also influenced the way in which I want people to view me and how I approach my work. Ideals of equality, fairness, human rights, brotherhood and social justice coloured Audrey's whole outlook and approach to life. She was attracted to the avant-garde, the latest advances in human thought and development, and she was eclectic and cosmopolitan in her tastes, a 'global citizen'.

Audrey Hepburn was an individual and refused to follow the social norm. I approach life

with similar morals and ideals. I always strive to be an individual who postulates ideas that challenge those of my peers. I strive to produce work that is consistently to a high standard, one that is above the requirements that have been set. I am determined to make my mark and be seen as an icon, a little black dress.

Although the photo unambiguously brings out the little black dress phenomena, it simultaneously succeeds in subtly striking the tenor of a more universal language; not only does it present a nuanced image of Hepburn but also delivers a revealing insight into the power, influence and impact that only a black and white image can create.

As we look at the world, we see it in colour, sometimes in monotone in particularly dim or flat light, but essentially in colour. It is only natural for us to represent this colour perspective on our images, especially at those times of the day or night when the lights and colours are truly spectacular.

Colour sometimes obscures the texture and form of subjects; it draws our attention the way flowers attract insects and birds, and ripe fruit catches your eye on a tree. But to me black and white can emphasize the structure of a scene. By removing colour from the photograph it can reveal detail that you wouldn't otherwise have noticed. The absence of light can be just as important as the highlights. Deep shadows give an image depth and solidity. I





Chanel Campaign inspired by LBD



Coco Chanel

see black and white images as the purest form of photography; it provides an interpretation of reality in 50 shades of grey.

Nanomi Cowdroy is a Sydney based artist who holds strong ties to her Japanese heritage. Cowdroy recalls the influence of both cities and the accompanying heritage as defining elements in her creative style. She creates as she feels and draws upon things from memory, with her childhood being a formative factor. It is not only the culture that she is engulfed in that creates such strong images within her art, but the imperishable fact that she is living it.

The monochromatic pallet that is evident in all of Cowdroy's works is a combination of her Japanese heritage contrasted against her Australian-European surroundings. The graphical design each image possesses is an influence from her father's background while the use of inks is a traditional Japanese art form. Cowdroy injects texture into her work and adds detail in miniscule proportions, achieving an unlikely level of depth that is as admirable as it is fascinating.

Cowdroy's artwork possesses a profound curiosity. She contests and provokes emotions by challenging childhood memories and the urban lifestyle and the mayhem it radiates. Her work threw me off balance, as does her hypnotizing use of black, white and grey. Her art is unashamedly girly and her monochromatic palette, obsessive detail and fragile images expose a charmed femininity that is somewhat disturbing.

In *Flower Shower* a confused expression on the young girls face suggests doubt towards

what she has to do, her rosy cheeks are glazed-over eyes expose exhaustion and we sympathize with her. Ribbons of flowers run from the showerhead and wrap around her, engulfing her in an act of protection. Oversized origami cranes, a lotus leaf, a gigantic hibiscus flower and gold fish are entwined within ribbons of black and white ink.

I was moved by Cowdroy's work and how her inspiration comes purely from the culture and environment she is exposed to now and as a child. Her work much like her passion of origami cranes is enhanced through unfolded, texturalised layers.

As an artist and designer, it gives me a great sense of freedom to get my ideas down on paper, and go wherever my imagination takes me – in whatever shape and form. I have adopted Cowdroy's attention to detail within my work.

I am relentlessly critical in the way I dole out words to a page, or draw an image - getting every detail right, getting the structure and rhythm and balance right, the shades and for want of a better word, the artistry. Plus I enjoy the wonder and sensation, which may not always be plainly visible. As a creative person my inspiration comes from the culture and environment I am exposed to – past/present/future. To be honest, it was never really a conscious choice or decision for me to be an artist. It's always been something I have done, and is a part of who I am at heart.

"Women think about all colours except the absence of colour. I have already said that black has it all. White too. Their beauty is absolute." In 1926 Coco Chanel

published photos of her short, simple black dress in American Vogue. The first little black dress was a calf-length, long sleeved straight dress, made in wool for day wear and crepe, satin or velvet for evening wear. Vogue dubbed the 1926 little black dress the “Chanel Ford”, due to its simplicity and accessibility for women of all social classes. It predicted that the little black dress would become a “sort of uniform for all women of taste”.

Coco Chanel’s quote refers to the beauty of the absence of colour. Black and white are as pure, simple and unostentatious as chic can be. They epitomize a unique blend of luxury and restraint – a potent dichotomy that has become a near universal style template. Coco Chanel was an innovator, and a forward thinker. She redefined style by liberating

women from unpractical garments, and introducing them to elegant and comfortable clothing to fit their daily lifestyles. Chanel’s timeless fashions reflect social and political changes worldwide. Coco Chanel represented freedom and self-expression through her designs. I aim to create timeless, essential and iconic designs and styles, ones like the little black dress will age gracefully through history, without a single wrinkle.

As an artist and designer I seek to explore and exhaust every possibility that presents itself. The idea of just creating astonishes some people. They think it that you need to find inspiration from a greater source. This is what distinguishes the gap between the artist and the amateur.

I have considered my work as

the one of a writer. Over time I wrote only one story, the one of my design, where collection represents a single chapter, with all of its emotions, ideas and motifs. The look may change with each chapter, but the main characters are the same, as are the people and the things that inspire me. This is a story with the same protagonist throughout. The design elements and themes evolve throughout as the story line progresses, but the colour of the page, the paint, the brush, remains the same. I am loyal to my own personal style. I follow my instinct.

Like Coco Chanel I reveal in the simplicity and versatility of one design and colour. Coco Chanel’s legacy and designs have travelled the world, to inspire women, designers and the like to say, *“every girl needs a little black dress”*.

