

Libertine and MOCAD Collide

A sense of whimsy, nostalgia and history. Skulls, motorcycles and library print.

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WHILE ATTENDING A MOCAD BENEFIT hosted by Neiman Marcus, I found myself in a conversation with the talented and outrageous Johnson Hartig, creator of internationally renowned Libertine clothing. Wearing red-feathered, open-toed slippers with street socks and a baseball jacket adorned with recycled items, he was easily identifiable. Hartig is the uncontented genius of contemporary graphic design in fashion. Everyone from East Coast socialites to celebrities ranging from Mick Jagger to Taylor Swift chase his style and many other top clothing brands try to “borrow” his Promethean designs.

Hartig gets his inspiration from a self-study hon-



became art. Large-scale designs and sublime screen-printing techniques became hallmarks of his collections. He created the first motorcycle jacket covered with “text,” still one of his most coveted

pieces. This season, his colorful, textured patterns are adorned with technology-themed, 3-D icons such as reproductions of cell phones and computers in crystals.

Libertine has also cultivated collaborations with Damien Steven Hirst, a member of the Young British Artists, and Goyard, a French trunk-and-leather-goods maker established in 1853 in Paris. The brilliance of Hartig’s pedigree is that he also collaborates with Converse and Target because, after all, why shouldn’t high-end luxury mesh with mass appeal?

While we browsed the colorful racks of the fall collection, he selected a piece for me that represented “the editor of a life-style magazine who loves fashion-forward design.” It’s a swing jacket with an all-over book print pattern displaying book titles with a twist on the old and new, such as *Eat, Sleep, Pray, Libertine* and *A Tale of Two Libertines*.

Hartig was championed by Anna Wintour and Karl Lagerfeld since the start of his career and Hartig’s 15-year longevity is a testament to nothing other than pure genius. He may be a designer ahead of his time, but his artistic creations will remain as classic commentary on this era for decades to come.

As customers lined up to have their purchases autographed by the designer, I made a note to visit the new Libertine assemblage each season. No need to travel to New York City or LA; the Libertine brand is always in store at the Neiman Marcus Somerset Collection in Troy. **NS**

Top: Johnson Hartig talks to the audience before the runway show about the contemporary art of both MOCAD and Libertine. **Right:** The back of a “Joie de Vivre” blazer. **Bottom:** Example of applique, 3-D and large print. **Middle:** Patterned tights and decorative shoes were worn by the runway models.



ors course in art, fashion, history, design, travel, culture, florescence microscopy cell research and a deep appreciation of dogs. A close look reveals that all these topics ricochet off each other in his designs; the joy of Libertine is in the detail.

Most interesting is his juxtaposition of old-school classics with new school antics. He was the first to introduce “skulls” into his brand, which are now wildly copied by other designers. Hartig’s penchant for delivering ready-to-wear clothing reflects an “of-the-moment” aesthetic, breathing new life into every aspect of design. The clothing