



LET'S GET PHYSICAL

In the age of AI, Jonathan Anderson is hell-bent on counteracting the virtual at Loewe – a house simply bursting with energy despite its 177 years – by embracing tactile human 3D craftsmanship, writes GRACE CAIN

Ever found yourself lost among the Victorian crinolines, hand-painted Tudor miniatures and 13th-century Iranian tiles of London's V&A Museum? If it's a yes, you won't be surprised to learn it's a regular haunt of the equally multifaceted Jonathan Anderson. "There's something special about being able to see a Renoir and an incredible embroidered sleeping cap in the same place," he muses. And the way the V&A builds dialogues between seemingly disparate objects, eras and cultural movements feels like an apt metaphor for Anderson's philosophy at Loewe, where he has been creative director since 2013. "My aim is to create and curate a platform where various disciplines – craft, fine art, dance, film – can interact and cross-pollinate in a non-hierarchical way," he explains. "I want to find interesting ways to ensure that a house founded more than 177 years ago will always have a sense of excitement and newness."

Anderson has distilled elements of Loewe's heritage as a collaborative craft workshop, moulding them to fit the zeitgeist in a way that has proved fundamental to its ongoing success. "The first thing I wanted to do when I joined the brand was to revive the focus on craftsmanship," he reflects. "I think of craft as a gauge for knowing and understanding the values of a society. It has the power to awaken our senses against the current mainstream... I think it's crucial that we protect and preserve this power."

That feels like an eerily prescient comment relating to the dawning of the AI age. "We are so dependent on digital media that I think we need to counteract the virtual with something more human," Anderson reasons. "We see so much two-dimensional imagery online and it's becoming increasingly difficult to connect emotionally, so I see craft as a three-dimensional antidote to that. I want to promote the tactile. And maybe craftsmanship can be part of our collective healing from digital disconnection. Ultimately, I believe the metaverse is about escapism. But for me, there are so many things to do in the physical world right now that

Getty Images, Loewe

"Craft has the power to AWAKEN our senses against the current mainstream... it's CRUCIAL that we PROTECT and preserve this power"

are more rewarding." So does that mean we won't be seeing any more virtual Loewe presentations? "Runway shows are still important because they're an end point for a creative process," Anderson says. "Without this form of presentation, I think there's a risk of repeating yourself. A show is more than a clothing parade; it's a story with a beginning, a middle and an end. Each designer and brand approaches this differently, but I use it to reflect. To break a cycle and head in a new direction."

In recent seasons, Loewe has taken a turn toward the origins of surrealism, a movement born amid the social, cultural and economic turmoil following the First World War. "I wanted to investigate why we look to surrealism in troubled times," Anderson says. "Today, I think the intensity of our reality is creating a desire to escape into a fantasy world."

Anderson talks more about this idea of 'escape' in relation to Loewe's annual Paula's Ibiza collections, a playful deviation from the cerebral spirit of his main-season collections. Inspired by the Old Town Ibiza boutique that became a hub for the hippie revival of the 1970s and '80s, these capsules are, says Anderson, never "too heavy or intellectual". Reflecting further, he says, "Paula's is all about freedom. It shows a more hedonistic and liberated side of Loewe. There are many parallels in the connection to craft, but Paula's is – in essence – a statement on the lightness and joy of summer."

Moreover, it's a prime example of another pillar of Loewe's DNA – the importance of creative partnerships. "For me, collaborations are about sharing a common message and creating something new with people who do things that you cannot," Anderson says. "The best part is the exchange of ideas. Loewe is almost 180 years old, but it's so full of energy – and as a house with a cultural landscape, it's important for us to work with artists as a way of enriching our world." □



Loewe's SS23 ready-to-wear show – complete with huge fibreglass anthurium



Scan for more on Loewe, and to shop the brand's latest fashion and accessories