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'Who needs to have so many clothes?'

Hussein Chalayan and Gavin Turk discuss commodity, celebrity and originality



Gavin Turk (left) and Hussein Chalayan

Hussein Chalayan is a fashion designer and artist who was born in Cyprus, moved to Britain and graduated from Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design in 1993. His innovative designs have included a wooden table that morphed into a skirt and outfits for Lady Gaga.

Gavin Turk is a British artist and a central figure in the YBA (Young British Artists) group whose famous sculpture "Pop" was included in the 1997 'Sensation' exhibition.

As part of the British Fashion Council's Britain Creates 2012: Fashion + Art Collusion project, which is marking the Olympics with collaborations between designers and artists, they

have created a record with the Vinyl Factory, an independent British company that aims to bring together art and music by creating limited edition handmade vinyl records with corresponding art work. Called "Four Minute Mile", the track begins with the sounds of running feet and breathing, and features Turk talking about art while Chalayan hums and chants.

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Making music

HC People have said to me, "You look like Gavin Turk," and it wasn't until I saw him that I thought maybe that's true. I have bumped into Gavin at events but we didn't really know each other before we started working on the Britain Creates project. The British Fashion Council asked who I would like to work with and I said Gavin. We met at his studio, we were having a good chat – and then I thought I'd record it.



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GT I was trying to explain my work. Partly because I thought that might be useful as a way of starting a relationship.

HC A lot of the things Gavin said were quite eloquent, and gagging to be a song, or sound piece. So in the end he recites his words and I kind of hum and sing them in the background. We had to link it to an Olympic situation so we thought it could be a running track.

GT It's quite surreal, like something going on in your head. The idea was that you could listen to it while you run.

HC Singing and putting out a collection are both like being naked, but in a different way.

GT In terms of a collaboration, we both wanted to make something that was one step away from each other's practices.

HC It was nice that the project wasn't a dress with one of Gavin's images on, say.

GT That's possibly what the BFC expected ... We had to make an object, so we have a copper disc pressed by the Vinyl Factory, and a video.



'Four Minute Mile'

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Deadlines

HC The object wasn't our starting point, it became a product of the project. I think our career paths are quite similar, as our profiles are not as flashy as some. Although Gavin's personality is in his work, I perceive Gavin as more about his work really than him as a persona, like, say, Tracey [Emin]. In this day and age it's very much about who you are rather than the work you do.

GT I would think with fashion it's incredibly commercial: there must be huge demands on designers to give a brand a signature style so buyers know what they are getting. It's hard to take risks.

HC If you have an operation where you have to pay people, you have to sell. Several years ago I hung out with some of the artists in London, and the drinking that went on! There's no way I could have gone to work at 9am the next day. Being a designer you have to produce a collection every six months and we do 10 collections a year. Fashion is so led by deadlines; it's hard to do something interesting as part of a system.

GT The boundaries are more flexible in the art world, some projects take years to come to fruition, others take a day.

HC There are fashion projects that take years to develop but most are much quicker. The fashion world is too accelerated; who needs all this product? Who needs to have so many clothes? I shouldn't really say that but I want to sell clothes for a good reason; there is an appreciation fatigue with most things.

GT There's a commodity factor to art too.

HC If you understand how things are made, you understand the value there.

GT It's trying to get people to slow down and see what's come before, a sense of looking a little bit harder at things. I think it's changing, but slowly.

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Influence and originality

GT All my art comes from artists and I am hugely motivated by art history. For me it's something that requires other artists around; it doesn't exist in a vacuum.



Two Chalayan designs

HC We are all products of what's gone before us even if it's subconscious.

GT It's been the case in fashion for a long time that there has been a crisis of originality. Around the start of the 1990s it was suddenly important to be original, people started putting the labels on the outside because you couldn't tell the difference between the real thing and the copy. We've gone from that into this hybridised moment.

HC It's almost styling with ingredients more than designing now. It's to do with the comment you make on something rather than always having to be an originator.

GT There is a sense of history repeating, and certain artists are there to sustain or keep those kinds of ideas alive.

HC To prolong the school, and then there will be a next generation to take over. I know

that the kind of people that like my clothes also like Comme des Garçons, Céline, Margiela, Balenciaga. There is a way of thinking. It's a horrible thing to have your position so specific but it helps people make sense of your work.

GT In terms of the YBA label that people apply to me, it's useful in marketing terms and as a context, although all the people in the group had very different aims in their art. They just shared the same time period.

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