



Jean Paul Gaultier

By Claire Naa and Lynn Morgan



(Top left and right): Jean Paul Gaultier, costume design for Luc Besson's *The Fifth Element*, 1997. Image courtesy Jean Paul Gaultier. (Top right): Jean Paul Gaultier, costume design for Pedro Almodóvar's *Bad Education*, 2004. Image courtesy Jean Paul Gaultier. (Opposite right): Jean Paul Gaultier, from spring/summer 2003. Photograph courtesy of Chris Moore.

It was a career-making dress—for the woman who wore it, Marion Cotillard, and the man who designed it, Jean Paul Gaultier. When the French actress walked the red carpet and later accepted the Oscar for Best Actress at the 80th Annual Academy Awards this February, dressed in a *la petite sirène* gown of ivory crepe embroidered in silver thread, it catapulted Jean Paul Gaultier, *l'enfant terrible* of French fashion, from a figure of cult status, known mostly to the cognoscenti, into the rarefied realm of designers whose names, signatures and styles are globally recognizable, even outside of the world of fashion.

Cotillard's Oscar gown, from the Spring collection, was pure Gaultier: a playful reinterpretation of a 1930s silhouette, bias-cut and seductively draped, the kind of high-glamour gown that would have adorned a screen vamp like Harlow or Garbo in some forgotten black-and-white film. Typically, Gaultier made it his own, with overlapping layers of silvery "fish scales" creating a surrealistic version of the little mermaid.





Marion Cotillard at the 2008 Academy Awards. Dress by Jean Paul Gaultier. Image courtesy Jean Paul Gaultier.

Jean Paul Gaultier has been playing visual practical jokes on the world since he launched his own fashion line in 1978 in France, designing clothes that were often androgynous, inspired by global costume and camp clichés like body builders and buffed-out sailor boys, all underpinned by the detailed workmanship and exquisite tailoring that is the definition of *haute couture*.

By the late 1980s, Gaultier's madcap style had made him the favorite designer of fashion's international avant-garde. His runway shows were performance art, delighting his audience by subverting their expectations of what a fashion show should be. He attracted an adventurous and daring clientele who both understood and appreciated his artistic, creative and complex

designs. His clothes spoke to other creative spirits: some of his best-known clients are performers like Madonna, who wore his renowned pink satin corset and sculpted, conical bustier on stage during her 1993 "Blond Ambition" tour; and the supremely transgressive rocker, Marilyn Manson. Gaultier has collaborated with filmmakers like Pedro Almodóvar and Luc Besson to bring style to their characters on screen; the actors he has dressed delight in his inventiveness and describe Gaultier as "unpredictable."

In 2003, the bad boy of French fashion was tapped to become the design director at Hermès. On the surface, it was an outlandish choice—Jean Paul Gaultier taking the reins at Hermès, the haughtiest of the *haute bourgeoisie* fashion houses, was as outrageous as putting Jeff Koons in charge of acquisitions and exhibitions at the Frick! Hermès was hugely successful and embalmed in its own elegance, dressing dowager aristocrats in its traditional silk scarves and equestrian-inspired clothes and accessories.

Gaultier infused the stodgy label with a fresh and irrepressible energy and irreverence, taking such traditional styles as the trenchcoat, the business suit and the ballgown and making them over in his own image and with a subversive wit. In his hands, Hermès, once the favorite label of the well-heeled but unimaginative, has become one of the hottest and most in-demand names in high fashion, attracting a new generation of jet-setters, rappers and rock stars.

That same year, Jean-Paul Gaultier entered the realm of high culture: his work was showcased in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute exhibition, *Bravehearts: Men in Skirts*. This spring, he returns to the hallowed halls of the Met as a part of the Costume Institute's show, *Superheroes: Fashion and Fantasy*, which opened with the Costume

Institute's annual gala on May 5th, chaired by George Clooney and sponsored by Giorgio Armani. According to curator Andrew Bolton, the exhibition celebrates "fashion's ability to transform and empower" and includes an aerodynamic "skinsuit" worthy of The Flash, designed by Jean Paul Gaultier.

Using the body as his medium and textiles, leather and even perfumes as his palette, Jean Paul Gaultier is an artist in *haute couture*. He continues to draw inspiration from all over, freely mixing genres, influences—even functions. "There is not just one kind of beauty," he insists. "But there are many kinds of beauty." ■

Jean Paul Gaultier, costume design for Madonna tour. Image courtesy Jean Paul Gaultier.



PARMIGIANI

HAUTE HORLOGERIE AUTHENTIQUE



LA COLLECTION
KALPAGRAPH

main partner of
Montreux Jazz Festival

Parmigiani Fleurier North America, tel. 949 489 2885

PARMIGIANI FLEURIER SA • SWITZERLAND
WWW.PARMIGIANI.COM