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### As 200 pieces of rare Martin Margiela are offered in an online auction, is the closed world of vintage fashion finally opening up?



Maison Martin Margiela's fall/winter 1996 ready-to-wear show. Pieces from the house's history are to be sold online in an auction held by Artcurial

Follow **By Eilidh Hargreaves**  
25 FEBRUARY 2019 • 1:30PM

Once upon a time, serious collectors of vintage fashion, designers and insiders would attend exclusive private sales and scour the rails of appointment-only vintage shops in order to purchase the most desirable archive pieces from catwalks past.

To know about exciting pieces up for grabs, you had to be connected. Access to archive pieces came with a certain mystique: paparazzi shots of the doors of Rellik, Notting Hill, being unlocked for Kate Moss, or news of Daphne Guinness purchasing her friend Isabella Blow's entire fashion estate. (Guinness thereby preventing an auction where pieces were set to be sold off separately.)

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Daphne Guinness poses alongside designs at the launch of Isabella Blow: A Fashionable Life CREDIT: DON ARNOLD/WIREIMAGE

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But from 6th March, contemporary Parisian auction house Artcurial is launching a sale of over 200 pieces by the legendary Belgian designer, Martin Margiela, online. There will be no catalogue released before the auction begins, but if you'd like to see the pieces before then, Artcurial will be hosting an in-house exhibition from 26th February.

The 65-year-old designer, who is rarely seen in public, left his own fashion label in 2009 and John Galliano is now creative director of the house. The Artcurial auction comes at a time when Margiela's original designs are enjoying exceptional popularity, following two recent exhibitions dedicated to his work - Margiela/Galliera, 1989-2009 (a 2018 retrospective at the Palais Galliera) and Margiela, les années Hermes (also in 2018 at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs).

Alexandre Samson, the curator who worked directly with Margiela on the Galliera exhibition, explains why interest in his designs is so intense now, 30 years after Maison Martin Margiela was founded in Paris in 1989.

"Most Martin Margiela pieces are rare in the market," says Samson, "Especially some of the great pieces from the 1990s. But it's also the timing. Martin Margiela is now trendy, due to the two recent exhibitions in Paris."

But Samson also points to the demand among fashion designers themselves, hungry for inspiration. "When we started to work on the Palais Galliera retrospective in 2016, there was a lot of buzz through Vetements and [Balenciaga designer] Demna Gvasalia.

"In this last decade, a lot of designers have been inspired by the Martin Margiela archives."



Look One from Martin Margiela's autumn/winter 2007-8 collection, entitled "Sexy Punk - 80" is up for auction CREDIT: ARTCURIAL

Other than Vetements, a number of high-profile designers have emulated elements of Margiela's rigorous yet witty approach to fashion. Among them, in Samson's opinion, have been Céline by Phoebe Philo, whose collections often contained Margiela-inspired details, and Riccardo Tisci during his years at Givenchy.

If you've been buying into luxury fashion for the past decade, the chances are you've happened on something derived from an original Margiela piece.

"As Cristóbal Balenciaga was the greatest designer of the 20th century," says Samson, "Margiela is the greatest designer of the early 21st century. It's in his way of thinking and constructing things; he is one of the kindest people I know and has been very generous with his knowledge at every point."

Some of the most notable pieces up for auction include pumps from Margiela's spring/summer 2006 collection, covered with hand-applied "Fragile" adhesives (estimated to sell at €1,200-2,000), the Ligne Blanche brown suede skirt from autumn/winter 2000-01 (estimated at €1,000-1,500) and Look One from autumn/winter 2007-8, entitled "Sexy Punk - 80".



Pumps from Margiela's spring/summer 2006 collection, covered with hand-applied "Fragile" adhesives are estimated to sell at €1,200-2,000 CREDIT: ARTCURIAL

While noting that, despite the Margiela-mania of this decade, there are still very few collectors in the world, Samson suggests that designers are among the keenest.

"One of the greatest Margiela collectors is Raf Simons," says Samson. Simons worked with Margiela early in his career. "He has collected it since the very beginning, and he has been inspired by it. Adrian Appiolaza, a designer for Loewe under J.W. Anderson, is also a great collector. Not only of Martin Margiela, but of contemporary fashion."

"Of course, there are also museums who will be interested, and women who just love the pieces and can afford the prices. And why not?"

While the full catalogue is not yet released, Artcurial has made it clear that some of the pieces have previously appeared in museums.



ceintures en PVC (312R022). Bottes tabi (312R001)// Wool coat with cap  
 facing. Double layer wool skirt. 3-belts necklace-belt in PVC. Tabi boots.

This online auction challenges the MO of the past century of fashion auctions - it's open to everybody with online access CREDIT: ARTCURIAL

Could online auctions like these be a threat to the longstanding ecosystem of high-end vintage fashion?

“The inspiration for Artcurial seems to come from eBay,” says Samson. “That auction houses are now looking to the mass consumer model, as eBay has been since the beginning, is an interesting link for me; it will publicise the auction to the biggest audience possible.”

Artcurial says that its recent online fashion arts auctions have been a success. One sale of note was C.R.E.A.M., which took place in May 2018 and was the first auction ever entirely dedicated to New York’s street culture and Supreme.

Named after the song Cash Rules Everything Around Me - as an homage to the Wu Tang Clan song from 1994 that coincides with the foundation of Supreme by James Jebbia - it broke the codes of the auction world.

While tapping into an online market will certainly increase the visibility of items up for auction, there is not, as of yet, overwhelming evidence that the fashion auction system will shift its traditions just yet. As with everything digital, time will tell.

*The Martin Margiela online auction will take place from 6-11th March 2019, with an in-store exhibition from 26th February-6th March 2019; 7 Rond-Point des Champs-Élysées, Paris; [artcurial.com](http://artcurial.com)*

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