

The
Sehiaparelli
Dialogues

The Schiaparelli Dialogues

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Unit: Realising your Tactics
Element: Tactical outcome
Tutor: Agatha Connolly

A Note from the editor

“Fashion is born by small facts, trends, or even politics, never by trying to make little pleats and furlongs, by trinkets, by clothes easy to copy, or by the shortening or lengthening of a skirt.”

- Elsa Schiaparelli

I have often heard discussions on the exact nature or purpose of art, in a way that more “practical” disciplines - say science or IT - aren't questioned. Fashion is constantly asked to justify its place in the world, but what if we rephrase this question? So, I would like you to pose this question to yourself: What does fashion mean to you? How does it shape your reality?

Perhaps, you imagine your favourite shirt, which makes you tap into your fast-talking, confident, sexy alter ego? Or the pair of jeans that you've worn to death, but still gravitate towards every Monday morning when you have to drag yourself out of your warm and comfy bed? Fashion can be theatricality, escapism, nostalgia. Or maybe fashion is too fickle, serving solely as a mirror that reflects the changing tides of history.

Elsa Schiaparelli wasn't one to limit herself to conventional ideas of what a garment of clothing ought to be. Hers was a work of experimentation and obsession. She didn't care for predictability - she designed to shock and disrupt, but also to adorn and empower. It's giddy to look at archival Schiaparelli. A shoe hat? A dress with an excessive number of pockets? Yes, and yes. Elsa's bold approach underlined the fluidity of fashion, and her legacy still permeates the spirit of the practice.

One doesn't need to look for the apple too far from the tree. Elsa's successor, Daniel Roseberry, has managed to modernise the iconic Maison with his fabulously surreal designs. Every collection presents a fresh take that blends artistry with glamour, infused with the flavour of humour so particular to Schiaparelli.

This book is somewhat of a love letter to Schiaparelli, tracing its work throughout the past century. It's a dialogue between the brand's past and future, between the worlds of imagination and reality. Welcome to the universe of Schiaparelli, where fashion draws outside the lines.



1.

A dialogue in TIME

The Body



To the untrained eye, it might seem that Elsa Schiaparelli had absolutely no grasp of human anatomy. Her deconstruction of the human body pervades the early collections, as well as Roseberry's iterations. Wandering eyes are taken literally; in fact, some wander all the way to the earlobes or fingertips.

In the late 1930s, Elsa Schiaparelli was introduced into the surrealist circle. Her daring and inquisitive personality led to synergetic partnerships with the likes of Man Ray, Jean Cocteau, and Leonor Fini. However, this chapter will focus on her work with Salvador Dalí and Meret Oppenheim. Schiap and Salvador had a prolific history of collaborations, drawing on an irreverent and absurd vision that warped traditional perceptions of the body.

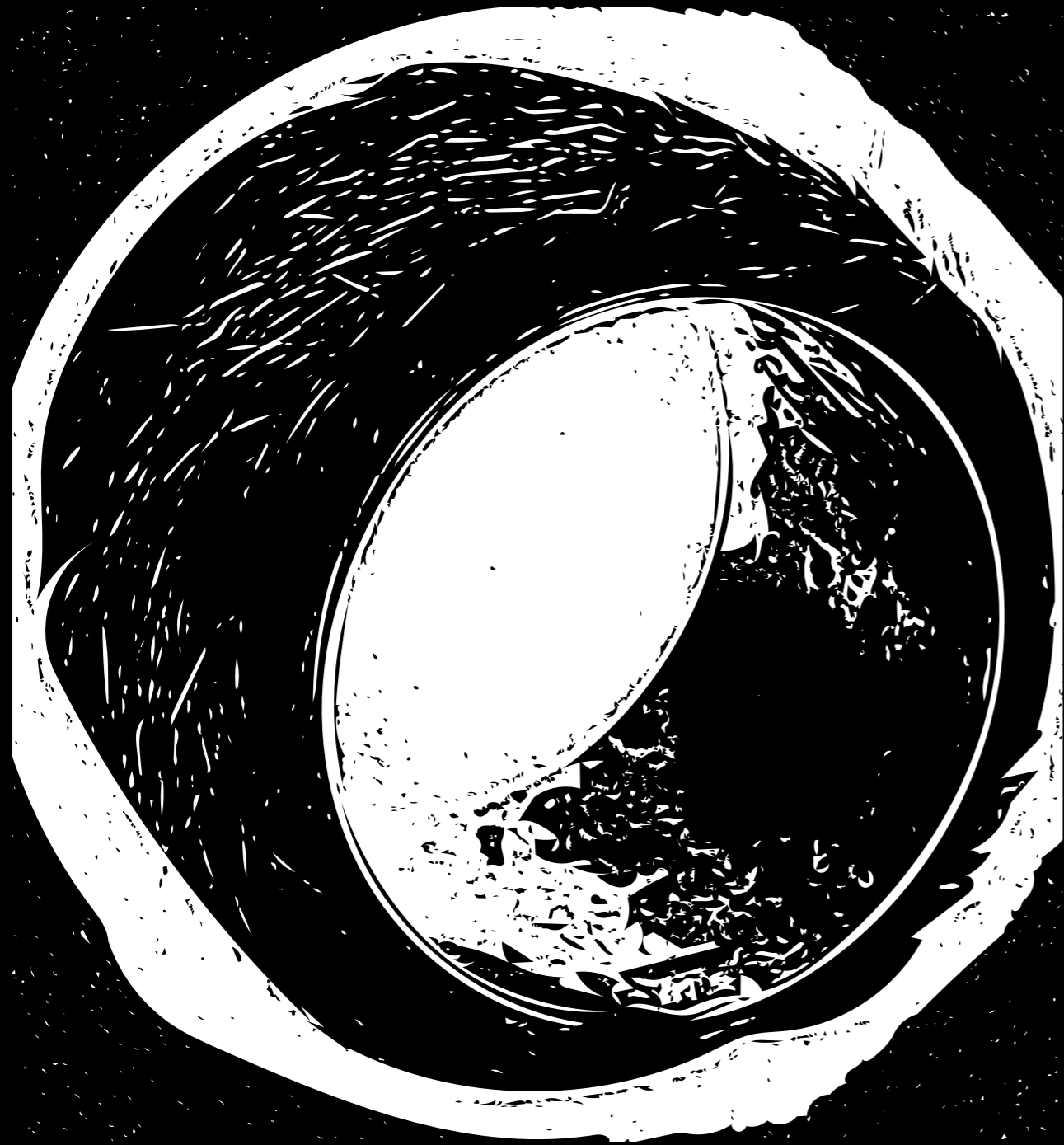
One of their first wearable creations was made in 1936 and later immortalised by legendary photographer Cecil Beaton. It was the so-called "Bureau Drawer Suit". Thought to be inspired by some of Dalí's earlier paintings, the suit incorporated ideas from psychoanalysis, materialising the "cabinets" of the inner psyche. However, it was also made during the advent of the New Woman, as women were moving into the workplace. Schiaparelli created a smart, office-appropriate set, with a maddening number of pockets, of which only some were actually functional.

For Schiaparelli's Winter 1937-38 Haute Couture collection, the artistic pairing produced a most unusual hat, in the shape of a shoe. One iteration had a heel in the colour of Schiap's staple Shocking Pink. The idea was purportedly born of a photo taken by Gala Dalí of her husband with a dress shoe on his head, balancing precariously over his famous moustache. Under Elsa's guidance, the Shoe Hat took on an elegant and sensual silhouette, and made for an unexpected accessory that turned the wearer head over heels (or heel over head, as it were).

In 1938, the Skeleton Dress also emerged for the Circus collection. It was a black evening gown of fine, matt silk, with padded inserts in the shape of a ribcage and hip bones. Uncanny, yet elegant, this piece can most aptly be described as "scary chic". The skeleton dress is a classic example of how Elsa picked and prodded at the concept of fashion.

If a garment's purpose is to cover the body, what will happen when it exposes it instead? In an industry such as fashion, obsessed with youth and perfection, the dress explores a deeper underlying conversation about mortality, authenticity, and vulnerability.





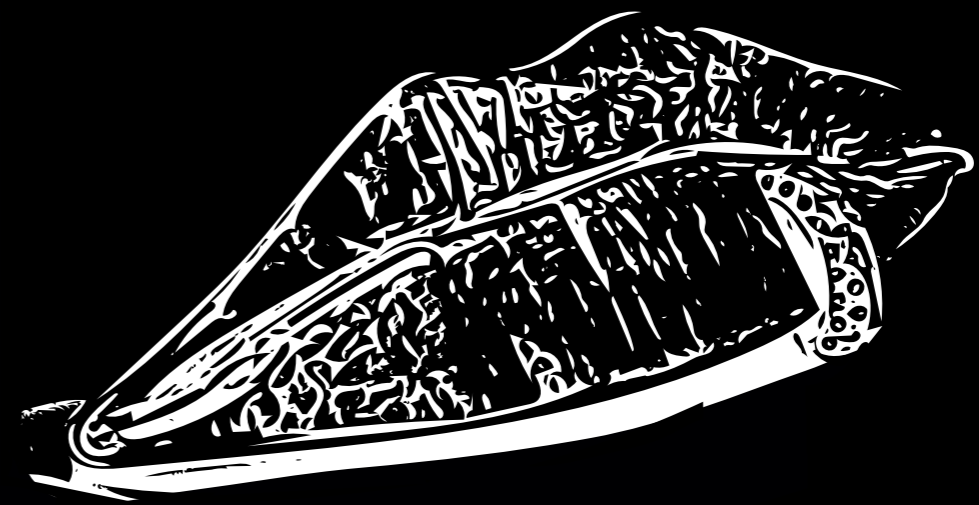
Finally, there is Elsa's work with Swiss artist Meret Oppenheim. One of the objects Oppenheim made for Schiaparelli was a thick, golden bangle covered in hair. While wearing one of the bangles at a café with Pablo Picasso and Dora Maar, the idea for Oppenheim's Object supposedly arose, and the artist later produced a porcelain cup, saucer, and spoon covered in fur.

Elsa enjoyed using hair in unexpected places (re: her 1938 monkey fur boots and sweater).

This allowed her to subvert conventions about body hair and femininity, in her characteristically playful and stylish way.

Daniel Roseberry isn't one to shy away from exploring the body either, picking up Elsa's conversation in a manner that feels fun, sexy, and wearable (depending on your appetite for the whimsy, of course).

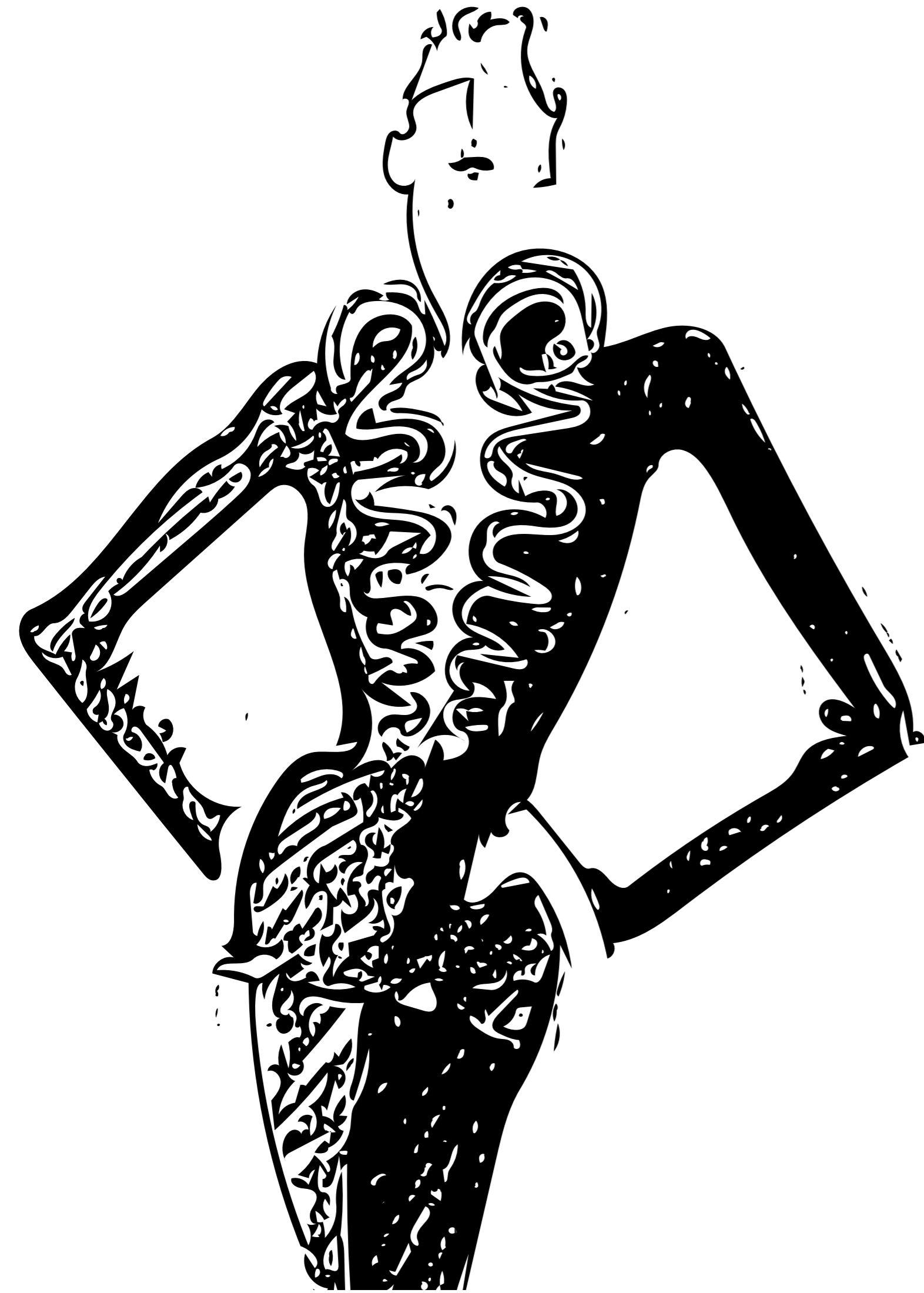
When it comes to accessories, Roseberry's got the Midas touch: eye-shaped earrings, brooches that look like mouths, and articulated rings in the shape of fingers, are all made in a luscious and baroque golden hue. The jewellery is a nod to the brand's surrealist origins, and Elsa's penchant for putting body parts in places they don't belong. Like in Gogol's story, the risk of misplacing your own nose is very real at Schiaparelli.



While some of Roseberry's references are direct, like his recreation of the skeleton dress, others are more oblique. One visceral piece is a black velvet dress made for Spring/Summer '21 Haute Couture, with padded shoulders and a round hole in the centre of the chest.

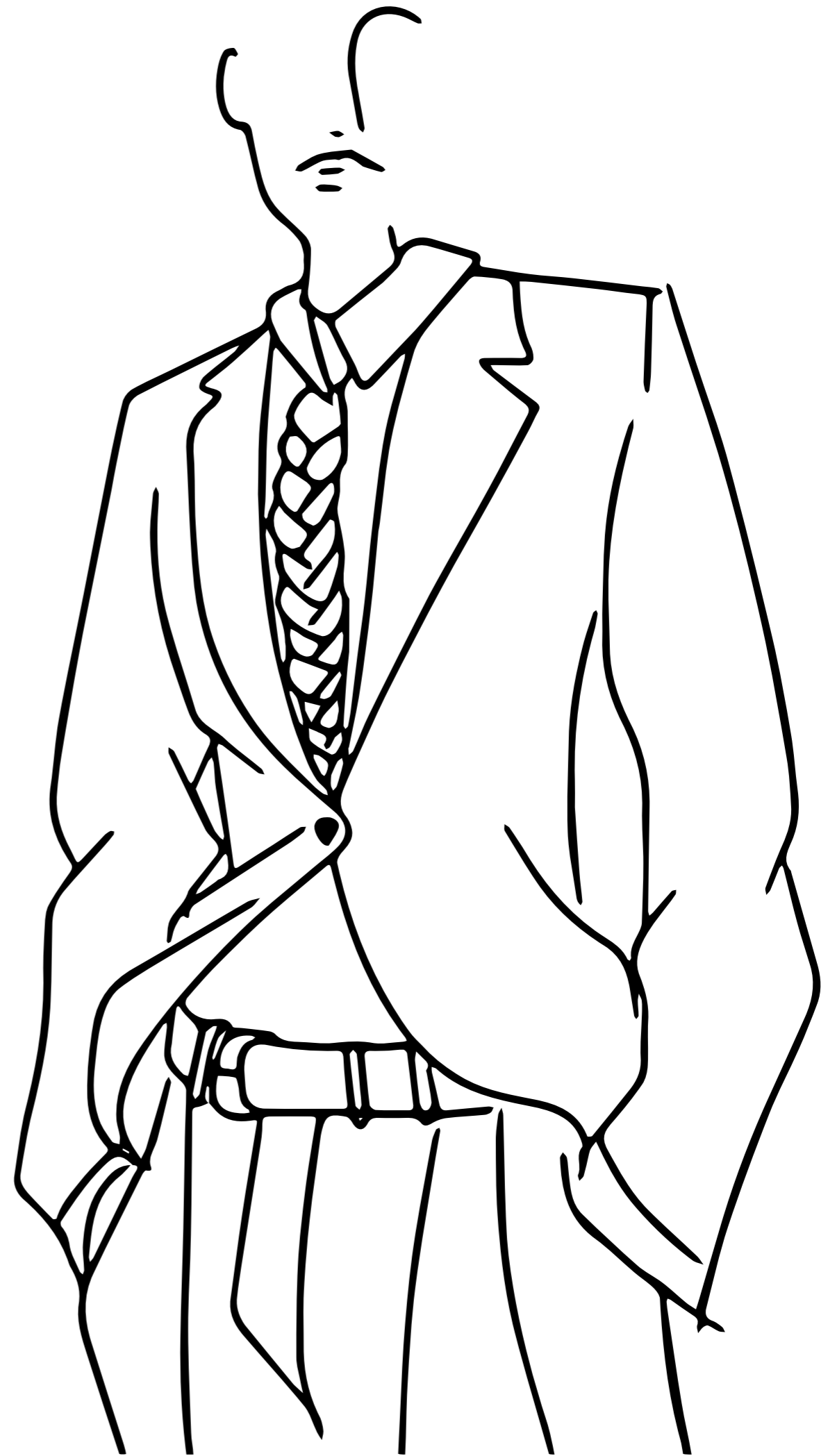
The garment is particularly dramatic because the cut-out is surrounded by golden molar teeth - a very high fashion, Cronenbergian take. The same collection featured a dress and breastplate in the shape of a stylised, muscular torso, the shape hyper-defined and exaggerated to the point of absurdity.

These garments show how Roseberry takes on Elsa's questions on beauty and clothing with wit and style.



Schiaparelli's Ready-to-Wear Fall/Winter '24 collection included a series of beautifully tailored suits in black, beige, and denim blue. But upon closer inspection, one can spy a cheeky braid of hair in place of a traditional tie. Uses of hair, and incredible, voluminous shapes that redefine the body, are hallmarks of the designer's collections. Roseberry's forays into surrealist office wear incorporate Elsa's motif of using hair in strange places, and bring her designs for the New Woman into a contemporary context.

There is a certain difficulty in toeing the line between remaining true to the essence of a historical fashion house, and bringing in a new perspective. But even a cursory glance at Roseberry's Schiaparelli will convince you that the spirit of surrealism and Elsa lives on, reinvented, but not forgotten.





2.

A dialogue in SHADOWS



The New Woman



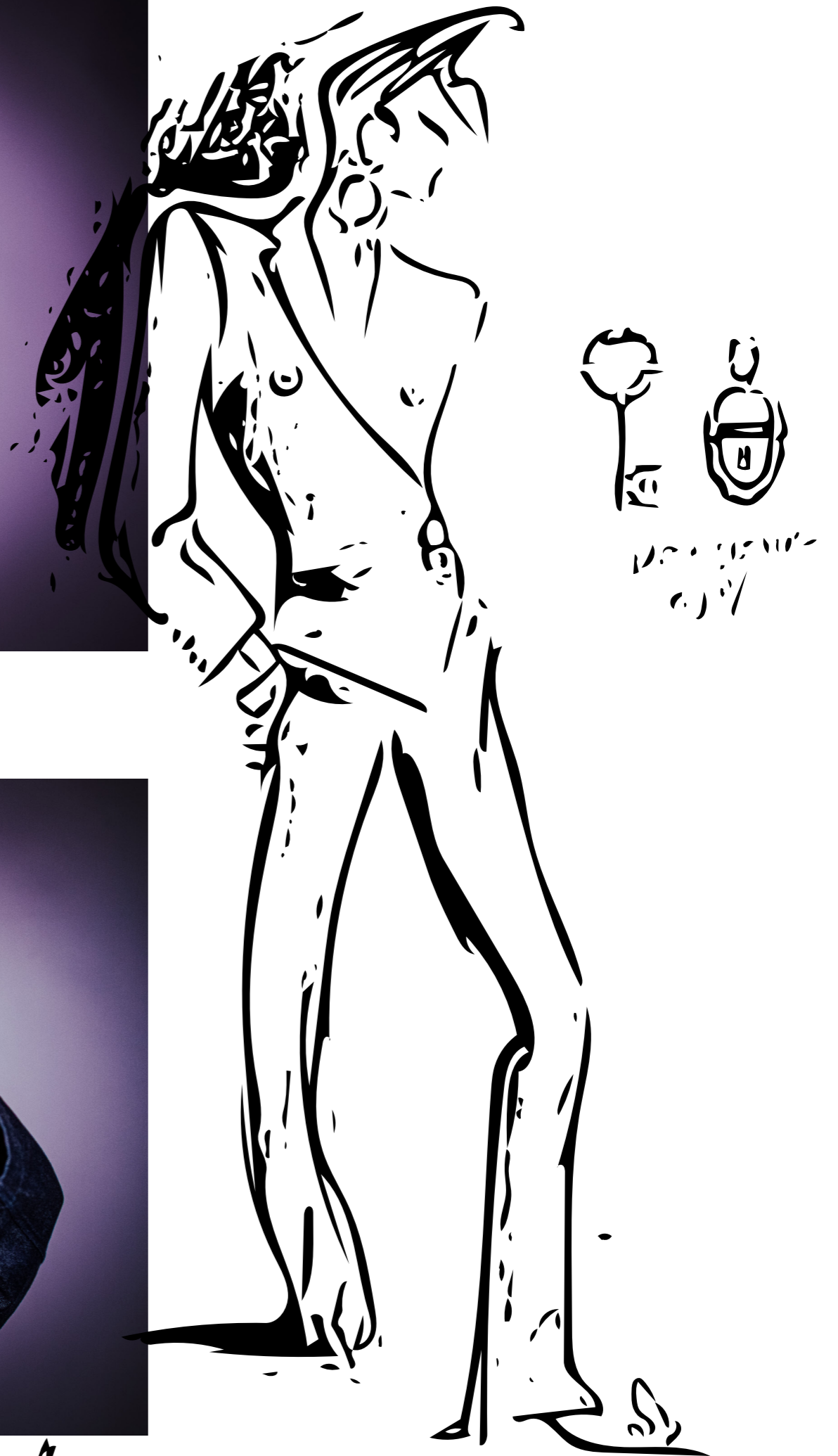


Denim & Gold





عبدالمجيد







Fringe & Velvet

Clad in Fur



Strange Silhouettes



Photography: Amelia Hrebenar

Makeup: Kateryna Surova

Models: Svetlana Grishina, Kateryna Surova, Paulina Grishina

Creative direction: Kristina Valdez Campoverde, Paulina Grishina

Styling: Paulina Grishina

Assistance: Kristina Valdez Campoverde



3.

A dialogue in SPACE



The Forest

This September, for the first time since Elsa opened her Paris boutique at 21 Place Vendôme, Schiaparelli ventured into establishing an independent retail space at 6 Warwick Street, in the heart of London's Soho. "The Forest" was born of a dialogue between the craft of British-Liberian artist, Lina Iris Viktor, and Schiaparelli's own Daniel Roseberry, a dreamscape of blue, white, black, and gold.

As you wander into the forest through its baroque doors, you find yourself in an ultramarine blue corridor, lined with huge golden trees. A soft white carpet lies underneath, recalling a magical beach - Lina Iris Viktor's Procession of the Solar Angels, which uses organic materials such as raffia and linen as well as gold, deliciously at odds with the metallic singing birds that perch atop the trees.

"When I started working with gold it was an intuitive thing. But I'm also interested in our joint history as humans with gold and bronze; these are materials that we've always used. West Africa has a huge history of bronze and gold, silk was also a huge commodity. I'm drawn to things that we already have imbued in our psyche because we've had a long history with them and we've sought after them for long periods of time." - Lina Iris Viktor.



Next comes the bar, all black and gold, and elegant hedonism. The trees persist here, their branches stretching and warping into stars and galaxies on the ceiling. Here, both Viktor and Schiaparelli's interests in astrology and cosmology come out to play. The artist's series, Constellations, delves into cosmogenic theories from a variety of cultural histories: from Dogon traditions from West Africa, to Western astronomical developments, creating a complex grid of interwoven gold.





“Within Viktor’s cosmology, black as matter and as colour plays the lead role of materia prima or the primordial source of life, a provocation and a challenge to the sociopolitical and historical preconceptions surrounding ‘blackness’ and its universal implications.”



En Arche En Khaos

Finally, the showroom: Schiaparelli's Sunday best displayed in a strikingly light and airy space.

The area feels like a living organism, its golden eye-shaped windows looking out onto a busy street in Soho, while two bold red Dali-esque couches smirk at you.

Lina Iris Viktor's *may the light of dying stars reveal the path* covers the floor, while her *En Arche En Khaos* (In the beginning was Chaos) extends over the ceiling.

Lina Iris Viktor has often explored the themes of culture and heritage, drawing from a variety of historical sources. Her work with Schiaparelli expanded her conceptual approach to spatial design, building a surrealist world from scratch.

In *The Forest*, there coexist in harmony the motifs of nature and the artificial, fantasy and history, and a multiplicity of cultural influences.

Lina Iris Viktor and Daniel Roseberry's partnership breaks down barriers: aesthetic, cultural, and temporal, in a characteristically Schiaparellian manner.





“What I gleaned from experience more than anything, is that it doesn’t matter how disparate one culture may be from another, or how different someone’s religious beliefs may be...at the end of the day, the human experience trumps it all. We are more similar than we are different, and I feel my work is trying to speak to that reality.” - Lina Iris Viktor.



