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Gianni Versace and Street Chic: High and Low in the One Show - paper

Few fashion designers in the Twentieth Century have so successfully walked the tightrope between conceptualization and commodification than the late Italian designer Gianni Versace (1946-1997). Likewise, few designers encapsulated the nexus between artistic inspiration and fashion. Versace is the most recent exponent of fashion promoted as art and lifestyle - a blend of the past with the present, of the high with the low. Versace's *alta moda* creations manage to combine the very best of Italian high sensibility with an outrageous sense of street style and irreverence. Versace's art introduces us to a creative vortex that dissolves artistic boundaries as it blurs aesthetic distinctions. Versace's Post Modern disdain for categories had enabled him to revisit Italian history and plunder its excesses in ways that are eclectic in origin and Mannerist in form. His day-glo goddesses teeter on the edge of shameless self-promotion whilst they trade in fantasies based on money, sex, and celebrity. Versace audaciously introduced stereotypes of vulgarity, especially in the use of gaudy accessories and his seemingly improbable combinations of fabrics, colours, and prints. His art transforms the swirl and the superficial chic of the happy hooker with both bravura and brashness - this is an essential factor in the bracing shock of his work. We have Versace to thank for a new visual wildness and for reminding us of the unexpected ways in which original and authentic creativity may still surprise. Versace's work is not normal fashion, it is not merchandise, it is not clothing and it is not just another part of the rag trade – it differs from these in the same way that mere building differs from architecture, and take-away food differs from gourmet cooking. Versace's work is about fashion as art; about fashion being related to art and about fashion design as an artistic life style for rich or for poor.

I am a lecturer of fashion design, history, culture and theory in the undergraduate and postgraduate programs at RMIT University in Melbourne. I have a passion for Twentieth Century haute couture and my Masters thesis analysed and discussed the contributions, originality and significance of the well known couturier Karl Lagerfeld.
