



SALON 94

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Perchance to Dream

To be? To sleep? To die? For Rick Owens and his new furniture designs, these are the questions *by* ROBIN SAYERS

Two otherworldly funerary images, both found in tales of eternal sleep interrupted, made indelible marks on wee Rick Owens' psyche. "Sleeping Beauty's glass coffin and Jesus' empty tomb with the lid askew are my earliest memories linked to furniture," says Owens. "I did go to Catholic school, but that's still pretty ripe for analysis."

Given his fixation, it seems fitting that the fashion visionary would go with a sleep-centric theme for the latest exhibition of his furniture, *Pavane for a Dead Princess*. For the inaugural stateside showing of these intensely personal designs, he transformed Manhattan's Salon 94 into a boudoir, complete with floor-to-ceiling sheared mink curtains and a low-slung bed with a massive, arcuated alabaster headboard.

The show—which runs May 8 to June 25 and is cocurated by Rudy Weissenberg and Jeanne Greenberg Rohatyn—borrows its title from an 1899 piano solo by Maurice Ravel. "My parents always had Debussy, Wagner and Ravel playing," says Owens, a native of the Central California town of Porterville. "I was haunted by the beauty of the music and the mystery of its title. I like the idea of having liked it for 40 years. It makes me think of time and timelessness in the same way an alabaster slab makes me think of time and timelessness."

Timeless is a word often used to describe Owens' ingenious clothing. After moving to L.A., he enrolled in what is now Otis College of Art and Design. The tuition was insanely expensive for him, so he dropped out after sophomore year and completed a two-year trade-school program in pattern making. During those early lean years, one of the first to be dressed by the future sartorial star was not a person but a thing. "I remember buying a couch from the Salvation Army for \$25," Owens says. "It was parenthesis shaped and



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very long, with a graceful back that I covered in gray army-blanket fabric—very Art Deco Joseph Beuys.”

In the cosmic blink of an eye, Owens became one of fashion’s heralded figures. An eponymous line and a global cult following came in rapid succession. “There was virtually no transition from the Beuys bunker in L.A. to a five-story house in Paris,” he says. “It kind of happened overnight.” When it came time to furnish his capacious domicile, his taste proved prohibitively exquisite. “I couldn’t bear to buy anything that wasn’t [Émile-Jacques] Ruhlmann or Eileen Gray, but I couldn’t afford to fill a house with it. So I merrily set about faking it.”

Owens shares his home with Michèle Lamy, the gregarious nightlife doyenne who, in the 1990s, put Hollywood’s Les Deux on the map. “She’s my personal beautiful witch,” says Owens of his partner of 21 years. “The reason the furniture is moving forward is because of her cultivating it. She embraces artists and artisans in an almost mystical way. Where I can be impatiently and tediously pragmatic, she can coax things out of people with love. She has gut instincts I trust, so she edits the pieces.”

Those pieces run the gamut from ascetic and anthropomorphic to grand and luxurious. “I’m not trying to do anything particularly witty or startling,” contends Owens. “Same as my approach to clothes. I’m looking for rational, modest grace.”

The lines for his furniture pieces usually come to Owens first, but he lets the materials dictate the direction. “I have a fairly limited roster—plywood, concrete, marble, leather, fur and antlers. Adding a material like alabaster is a departure.”

The fact that people are responding so enthusiastically to his furniture shocks Owens, but only in the same way that the public embracing his clothing surprised him. “I never had jitters for either,” he says. “I think since I just couldn’t fathom either actually happening, I would have felt ridiculous acknowledging that it had. I figured both were flukes.”

Le Corbusier, Luigi Moretti and Donald Judd rank among Owens’ influences, but his reverence for committed design is boundless. “A neighbor, Dodie Rosenkrans, has an apartment that was the last project of Tony Duquette; every surface is covered with filigree, embroidery, gilt, mirror mosaic. It might be the complete opposite of what I do, yet it delights me to know it exists right next door.”

Nowadays, Owens could surely fill his house with Ruhlmann and Gray, but he’s not really one to splurge. “I’ve never actually bought anything significant,” he notes. And yet he does have a dream acquisition. “I’m keeping my eyes open for a perfect Egyptian sarcophagus like the one in the Yves Saint Laurent auction.”

Glass coffin, empty tomb, sarcophagus? Paging Dr. Freud.

Robin Sayers is a contributor to the Sundance Channel’s Full Frontal Fashion. She owns two pieces of furniture, one a bed.

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