



Janaina Milheiro

Feather artist

By Elly Stemerink

At each February edition of the show, Première Vision Paris celebrates craftsmanship and excellence with a space dedicated to ultimate creativity: the 'Maison d'Exceptions'.

The goal here is to stimulate creativity by giving fashion brands and designers who are looking for unique products and specific expertise an opportunity to meet craftspeople and ateliers that focus on traditional artisanal techniques or technological innovations. One of the designers showcasing in the Maison d'Exceptions space this year was feather artist Janaina Milheiro. In her studio in Paris, Janaina Milheiro uses textiles and feathers in the works she creates for the luxury fashion and decoration sectors. Her experimental and technical approach results in very delicate feather creations for high-end brands such as Dior and Chanel.

Feather specialist

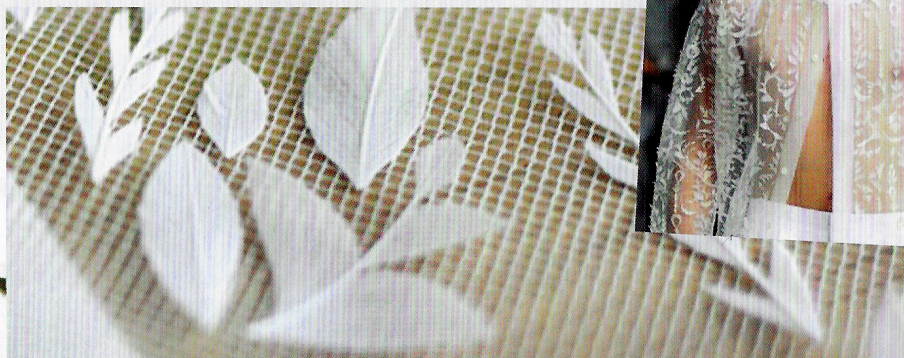
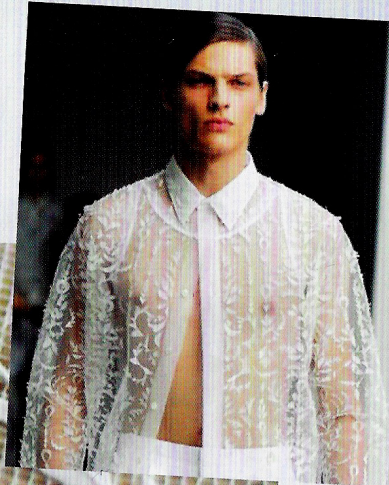
When she began studying textile design in Paris, Janaina never imagined that she would become a feather specialist. The seeds were planted, she remembers, only in the final period of her education, when students were asked to make a collection with whatever material they liked. "I had some very basic goose feathers at home, which I once bought just because they looked nice. For my final collection I started experimenting with them using a weaving loom and silk thread. I had never worked with feathers before, but ended up doing all my graduation work with feathers. I really liked working with the material so I continued making new feather designs and as a result I became a specialist in feather work. One year after I graduated, I presented my feather textile collection at Première Vision for the first time. At the show I was asked by my first client to make a feather demonstration piece for a textile exhibition and this was the

official beginning of my professional activities. Next came another new client, Chanel, and I did some feather work for one of their haute couture collections. I keep going to Première Vision every year, as that's the place where I get new clients from the fashion sector."

Janaina creates feather work not only for fashion collections but also for art designs and window displays. And for a wallpaper brand, she produced a collection of patterns inspired by feathers.

"To create feather designs suitable for wallpaper, we first made large compositions by taping feathers onto a surface. We photographed the results and then used Photoshop to create patterns with repetition of the photographed image, so they could be used as wallpaper. It was a very cool project. To secure projects of this kind, I have been working for four years now

"I work with different kinds of feathers like ostrich and rooster or sometimes pheasant"



"I always have one intern working with me. When orders start coming in from fashion brands for their couture shows, I contact my network of old interns to get extra help. They all have a creative background, in embroidery or jewellery-making, for example, so they are accustomed to the very skilled handiwork you need for small items. The time we spend on one single creation depends. We have just finished my biggest project on a couture piece so far: a shirt for a Dior Homme men's show that's covered with about 2,000 small feathers. It took us 900 hours to finish it, because each feather had to be cut very carefully before we could curve and mould it. The biggest challenge though was to first draw the pattern on the shirt. Couture pieces always cost a lot of time. I would say at least 200 hours for a medium piece, and anything up to 400 hours for bigger items. We also make smaller pieces like necklaces, which take far less time, of course. I work with different kinds of feathers: ostrich and rooster feathers, sometimes pheasant but I use mainly the feathers from common fowl such as goose and turkey. The feathers we source are primarily by-products from birds that are killed for their meat. How many feathers we use in a month depends on the amount of work we have. Something like the Dior shirt is not common and normally I don't use that many feathers for just one piece. Compared to plumassiers, my work is very economical. I don't work with layers of feathers; neither do I try to give a garment the same effect as the plumage on a bird. I make open designs, so I need much fewer feathers."

with an artists' agent named Thierry Kaufmann. He introduced me to big luxury brands like Guerlain, Cartier and Hermès. For these clients I work mainly on window displays. Some 50% of my feather work is for fashion projects and 50% for decoration."

Teamwork

There is a school in Paris that offers courses in feather work, called Octave Feuillet. Janaína never attended that school, nor did she do any internship with plumassiers. All the techniques

she uses for cutting, shaping and assembling feathers she developed herself. The only thing she does not do herself is the dyeing. For that part of her projects she works together with a French company specialised in dyeing feathers. As most projects are quite time-consuming, Janaína has a team of 3 people working for her. This can grow to 12 depending on the time of the year. Inventing and creating her own techniques is always ongoing so she spends a lot of time keeping her team up to date with her latest methods.

More information

www.janaina-milheiro.com

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