

Design Essay Question

Social + Cultural (part B)

In part A you have already discussed...

- 'the coiled corset' by Shaun Leane for McQueen, 1999
- 'the thistle brooch' by Shaun Leane, 2006
- 'the ivy brooch', by Rene Lalique, 1900

You must refer to these same pieces in Part B.

Shaun Leane is a London based jewellery designer who is inspired by traditional jewellery, in particular, Art Nouveau and its pioneer, Rene Lalique. He is also well known for his collaborative work with fashion designer Alexander McQueen on his theatrical and elaborate fashion shows.

His designs have been called 'Antiques of the Future', due to their acknowledgement to traditional, fine jewellery combined with their futuristic, contemporary style.

Function / Fitness for purpose

Laura Morgan modelled the corset piece, which took 15 minutes to put on, and almost as long to take off. The corset limits motion due to its high neck. It was influenced by the Ndebele tribal neck pieces and Victorian corsetry, it was meant to be uncomfortable and restrictive making the wearer and the audience realise what women went through in the name of beauty and fashion.

The thistle brooch by Leane was a piece created specifically for Sarah Jessica Parker to wear at the Met Gala in 2006. It was an event to celebrate British design and style. SJP wore it along with a tartan draped dress. As it was holding heavy draped fabric it had to be a fairly large piece in terms of scale as well as being substantial, influenced by the larger pieces designed by Lalique such as the ivy brooch, larger jewellery communicates wealth and social status.

Aesthetics / Style



The coiled corset, 1999

The Coiled corset - savage beauty was the title of the recent exhibition of McQueen and Leane's work, the title very much conveys his design aesthetic. He was influenced by many things from African tribal costumes to Victorian corsets and bustles. This is evident in the coiled corset.

The coiled corset was inspired by the coiled brass and copper neckpieces worn by Ndebele women in South Africa, their elongated necks indicating wealth and status. The coiled corset is an expansion of this ideal, scaled up in size up to include the entire torso.

The coiled corset has the appearance of armour, symbolising strength and protection but a silhouette that shows the beauty, softness and curves of the female form. A contradiction in style.

The restricting corset was also inspired by Victorian corsets. McQueen and Leane were intrigued by the idea of woman suffering pain.

Both McQueen and Leane were surrounded by strong women in their lives. They were intrigued by the fact that woman in all societies were to conform to their ideal of beauty. This is very much reflected in the coiled corset, although the piece is beautiful, constructed from the wonderfully smooth and high shine coils, it looks like the wearer would suffer, unable to breath or move freely.



Shaun Leane, Thistle brooch, 2006

The thistle brooch - He chose the thistle as it is a symbol of Scotland and Britain, this is why it was teamed with the tartan to be worn at the Met Gala to celebrate British design. The organic and natural influence for the brooch comes from Leane's love and appreciation of Art Nouveau jewellery, in particular Rene Lalique.

Materials / Techniques

The corset is made of 97 handcrafted aluminium coils and has a 15-inch (22 cm) waist.

This was a physically demanding piece to make; Leane was only able to craft eight coils in a 16-hour day, curving, shaping, hammering and polishing the aluminium to achieve the final result. However Leane was used to precision and taking his time over his pieces due to his traditional jewellery background.

Leane's techniques were learned through his apprenticeship in London's renowned Hatton Garden.

The thistle brooch techniques were very much inspired by Leane's time at Boucheron and Cartier, and the work of Lalique. The natural form of the thistle shows a strong link to Lalique's jewellery in particular "the ivy brooch", the soft, flowing organic lines.

The construction of the brooch would have been learned from his apprenticeship at Hatton Garden, techniques such as pave and lost wax casting would have been used to create this piece.

Target market / Audience

Leane made two of the thistle brooch. One for McQueen and one for Sarah Jessica Parker. They were designed to be worn at the Met Gala in New York (see above) they were created to accessorise a McQueen fashion creation inspired by traditional Scottish dress. The Met Gala attracts the attention of the world's fashion press. By wearing the brooches to this well-publicised event Leane and McQueen knew that everyone would see it; thus heightening the McQueen brand.



Lalique incorporated many materials not widely used in his time for high end jewellery including glass, horn, semi-precious stones like pearls, enamel and ivory, this influence is evident in the thistle brooch.

