



TOKYO TRASH UTOPIA

by Silvia Bombardini

Balmung was once, long ago and far away, the name of a spellbound, mighty sword: of the kind you could kill dragons with, back in the day. Yet when I ask Hachi about his brand, he tells me it's named after his favourite video game, loosely set in a Medieval landscape. I shouldn't be surprised. Hachi was, after all, a Japanese kid in the 1990s: video games are to him, the ultimate art form. "It's contemporary creative work", he says, and he knows what he's talking about. In fact, Hachi studied Electrical Control Engineering in high school, and I wonder if that's where the expertise behind his highly defined, crystal-like digital prints comes from. "My way of thinking is certainly influenced by my mathematical studies," says Hachi. "It's in almost all my abstract designs. It concerns how to make, how to think, how to watch. My experience studying mathematics made me who I am, exactly." In his newest collection, TOKYO TRASH UTOPIA, the graphics are a splintered, delicate morphing of rubbish bags, cardboard, and crows. "The one with the huge garbage mountain design, in Japan we call that The Island of Dream," he explains. Hachi took his inspiration this season from the Tokyo neighborhood of Shinjuku, one of the most urban areas of the Japanese capital. It is an

area where the soft and mellow underbelly of the city rises closest to the surface – the disreputable, raw feel of the red light district juxtaposed against the gleaming spires of skyscrapers. It's nearly a form of romance. "I think of Shinjuku like some sort of Japanese realistic fantasy," says Hachi. "It's where people disapprove and feel relieved and at home at the same time." The mood translates in the selection of pastel furs and unisex pellucid wraps, a warm, crystalline cocoon of oversized plastic and tinsel. "My favorite piece is the gray blouson with the purple fur and the leather patch with printed graphics," says the designer. "And I love the layers of plastic and the garbage motif." Balmung's futuristic aesthetic, which has won fans such as Lady Gaga, Terence Koh and Tokyo music icon Mademoiselle Yulia, conceals its artisanal roots. Everything is handmade in Hachi's atelier. "I make all clothes patterns myself, then my assistants cut the fabric, and we sew them up," he says. "It's always the reality of everyday life that inspires me."

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