



THE RELIGION OF RICK

La Triennale di Milano

A Milan retrospective honors the furniture and fashion design of industry icon Rick Owens.

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RICK OWENS is a fashion deity. As the creator of his own design universe that is far from the mainstream, he is worshipped for an avant-garde approach that challenges the industry's historically restrictive beauty ideals. The runway has been a space for Owens' sartorial response to what's happening in the world (consider his Spring 2018 collection, "Dirt," which Owens calls "the answer to our temporary chaotic human condition") that is as aesthetically compelling as it is socially impactful. Now, his signature subversion is being recognized in a retrospective at the Triennale di Milano.

"Although it's a psychological term, I like how it clinically applies to the self-doubt, highs, lows, and self-delusions we all forgive ourselves for every day," Owens says of the exhibition's title, *Subhuman Inhuman Superhuman*, which captures the 24 years of innovation, influence, and obscurity that define his career. The retrospective was suggested by Eleonora Fiorani, the Triennale's fashion curator, and runs through March 25. It features a

selection of pieces from Owens' archives of furniture, fashion, film, and graphics, as well as a new sculptural installation inspired by his interest in architecture and land art. "The idea of manipulating land to forge something that will last forever in a grab at immortality... I like the heroism and drive and poignancy in that effort," he explains.

In the same way Owens has eloquently penned every one of his press releases, the designer took control of his own narrative at the Triennale. The Owens world is an inclusive one, which was the driving force behind a retrospective that took the spirit of acceptance and kindness as its point of departure. *Subhuman Inhuman Superhuman* explores Owens' evolution as an artist, including the influences of Stéphane Mallarmé, Piero Manzoni, Carol Rama, and more. Considering museum shows to be a shared celebration of what's possible, he used this space to continue suggesting flexibility in society's standards of beauty. The hopefulness of this creative expression is like a religious experience

for Owens, who likens museums to his own kind of church.

While the Paris-based artist is commonly associated with France—his five-story atelier and mansion on the Left Bank, his fascination with Palais de Tokyo, his series of runway shows since 2003—Owens has a unique relationship with Milan. Paris is where he goes to be judged, whereas Milan has played a different role not only in his design process, but also in his upbringing.

"Once I moved my manufacturing to Italy, it became the home where I create... my parents listened to opera a lot and little did I know Milan would one day be important to me." Referencing the main railway station as his "rationalist, biblical, deco fantasy written in stone," Owens has a deep, multifaceted connection to Milan and its many sources of inspiration. Now the site of his first-ever retrospective, the city has new meaning. Although he is self-critical by nature, revisiting his oeuvre for the exhibition has been a revelation, he says: "Sometimes you just have to step back and allow yourself to enjoy a total pleasure."

BY AMANDA RANDONE

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