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THE FABRIC OF YOUR LIFE: MEND



EVERYTHING UNDER THE SUN

Les Jesus' World View



Gabriel Brandon-Hanson and Jesús Herrera live in Xapala, the capital of Veracruz in México. Their first business, Vintage Jesus, sold through Etsy, finds unearthed throughout markets all over México. Les Jesus is their new brand of original pieces with their own silhouettes, sometimes using found embroideries and vintage fabrics. 'The name is a kind of tongue in cheek shot at haute couture with an intersection of a very common Mexican name like Jesús. Les Jesus is kind of like taking something common in México and addressing the couture establishment, which lends itself to how prolific and common excellent handcraft is, like couture, in México. If you go to the mountains, you can find weaves that are on par with Chanel tweeds—but there it is not seen as something elevated or out of the ordinary. Excellence here has different connotations, so the name addresses some of the social issues and stereotypes around handcrafts in México,' says Brandon-Hanson.

Their first collection caught the attention of Humberto Leon during Opening Ceremony's 2019 Year of México project and since then they have built a strong cult following. They define their philosophy as easy drama: 'Something that is dramatically beautiful but that is wearable and goes with what life looks like for a lot of people every day. Easy drama is a way of life, living out loud, casually ... there is a joi de vivre dailyness to it, appreciating the beauty of moments, living life to its maximum and most beautiful potential and for us, clothes are a huge part of the way we choose to express that.'

Andrés Navarro

Future vintage is another powerful concept that defines their brand and is linked to their take on sustainability. 'We want to make pieces that will last and will be wearable for 30, 40, 60 years. Our commitment is to work with materials and constructions that will enable a garment to last.' This is made possible by the way they construct garments based on their experience as custom designers for ballet companies in the US, combined with the extraordinary quality of Mexican textiles. Their garments are French seamed, and all of the cross-stitch panels on the dresses are lined with tulle which evidences the work of skilled hands. They take pieces of Mexican textiles or embroideries and apply them to contemporary silhouettes. After years of collecting and appreciating, The Vintage Jesus has led to Les Jesus, which has been a way of re-interpreting a lot of the ideas and values that they first admired in regional and Indigenous clothing.

In Herrera's words: 'The culture where they come from and the minds that produce them make Mexican textiles unique. There is a huge line of tradition and the constant elaboration in making something that is already good even better.' Les Jesus does not follow the fashion calendar, instead, it works in capsules or editions, 'we present our collections online whenever they are ready, when the clothes call to us, when we have something to say.' Les Jesus is offering a new point of view, a new way of presenting fashion in México, as well as widening the parameters of representation in México and abroad. Herrera is the official model and image of the brand, 'I've always appreciated ▶





and worn women's clothes for as long as I can remember. I want people to notice how liberating the physical sensation of wearing them is.' Their brand image echoes Virginia Woolf: 'Clothes have, they say, more important offices than merely to keep us warm. They change our view of the world and the world's view of us... There is much to support the view that it is clothes that wear us and not we them; we may make them take the mold of arm or breast, but they mold our hearts, our brains, our tongues to their liking.'

When asked about the future of Indigenous craft, they say that it is hard to predict. 'The sheer number of factors—climate, social, and economic—make a clear path difficult to see. But keeping in mind that these traditions have existed for hundreds or even thousands of years in some cases, it's precisely their resistance to change and their sheer resilience that has ensured their survival. Hopefully the resistance holds out! We think that there will be a re-ordering of the world of textiles, with a tech-facilitated renaissance of motifs and patterns that will be laden with significance to the person and community, where the fabric originated. We would like to see a future that has more variation and diversity in terms of story and a resurgence of meaning.'

Both of their business projects are indeed very personal and are born from their appreciation for textiles, culture and tradition. A trip that influenced them deeply was their visit to Juchitán in the Istmo de Tehuantepec, where the Zapotec Muxes (people assigned male at birth who dress

and behave in ways otherwise associated with women) are respected and are free to express their sexuality. 'This experience inspired us to present our clothes freely and authentically while at the same time demanding respect, love and acceptance.' Both brands are a reflection of their personal journeys. For Herrera, modeling the clothes freely allows for a reconciliation of his fluid gender and sexuality within Mexican culture. They see their personal point of view as an open space for queer people to be recognised. They also push the boundaries of Indigenous clothing in terms of class as often these are the garments of marginalised people often seen as poor or perhaps anti-colonial. Let's not forget that in this part of the world textiles are referred to as 'the book the colonisers couldn't burn'. Retaining textile traditions—the symbolism and storytelling as well as the skill—has come to be seen as a form of silent resistance to colonialism, particularly for Mayan weavers. Le Jesus wants to play a part in elevating and raising a voice for the marginalised.

As most designers, they have been affected by the pandemic. But not all is grim for them. 'We have learned new skills. It has taught us what we are allowed to consume, what kind of people we want to be in the world, what kind of designers, which resources of the planet we should respect and which we are allowed to use. This period has been ultimately good for us.' Right now, Brandon-Hanson and Herrera are working on their next capsule collections. Their journey is just beginning.

•• **Marcella Echavarría**
www.lesjesus.com

