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11 News



Favoured motif: a silk gown with bamboo print and belted jacket with a wide sash

Armani looks east with elegant collection inspired by Asian style

Karen Dacre
Fashion Editor in Paris

GIORGIO ARMANI'S love affair with the Far East reached its peak in Paris as the designer unveiled a collection fusing Japanese and Chinese styles.

Closing the third day of the couture showcase, Armani last night presented kimono gowns, obi belts and bird of paradise prints on a catwalk lined with Perspex columns, which echoed sticks of bamboo.

The bamboo motif, which was continued on gowns, silk prints and transparent earrings, is clearly a favourite of the designer – and understandably so since China remains a key growth area for the Italian brand. Restrictive column dresses resembling those of geisha girls served as further evidence of the designer's adventure abroad, as did jackets cinched at the waist with brocade obi belts. Beautifully crafted cream culottes, boasting a bamboo print, were among the most wearable inclusions.

Of course, it is gowns that are the biggest draw for couture customers and Armani went all out to delight them. Showcasing a host of floor-sweeping styles with elegant scooped back lines, the designer went big on dazzling details to appeal to actresses with Oscars night in their sights.

One ice blue marabou feather gown looked certain to delight while the sexually charged, crystal-splashed creations that closed the show will undoubtedly



Star fans: Kristin Scott Thomas and Juliette Binoche were at the show, which featured a blue marabou feather gown, right, and a long, patterned silk jacket



edly please Armani ambassadors Reese Witherspoon and Anne Hathaway. Among the most popular pieces was a conical trimmed kimono gown, which received a round of applause.

While many Paris couturiers are tireless in their quest to push boundaries, Armani has little interest in shock value. For him, the point of couture is not to grab attention but to sell clothes to his highest paying clients – many of whom sat front row last night.

@karendacre

My life as a struggling artist inspired Girls, says Dunham's mum

Luke Crisell and Lizzie Edmonds

THE mother of *Girls* star Lena Dunham has revealed how the hit US series was inspired by her experiences as a struggling artist in Seventies New York.

Laurie Simmons, 65, says Dunham – whose ground-breaking HBO show follows a group of four young women living in New York – has "always been obsessed with that part of my life".

The artist, who lives with husband Carroll Dunham in Williamsburg, also revealed that a scene in the first episode of *Girls* – in which Dunham's character, a struggling writer, is cut off financially from her parents – was based on Simmons' experience.

In an interview with *ES Magazine*, to be published tomorrow, Simmons says: "When art school was over and I moved to New York, it was like, 'No more money.' And there I was, really hung out to dry – it was insane.

"I think Lena's always been obsessed with that part of my life. She loves hearing stories about the preposterous jobs I did because I wasn't qualified for a full-time job. She particularly loves the brief period I was going

ES
READ THE FULL INTERVIEW IN **ES MAGAZINE** TOMORROW AND FRIDAY

Muse: Laurie Simmons with her daughter Lena Dunham



out on dates with..." She corrects herself: "I just had to sit and have a drink with Japanese businessmen. It didn't last very long because they didn't like the dresses I wore. I was too much of a hippie. Lena has a real kind of love affair with that part of my life."

In the mid-Seventies Simmons, who currently has a mini-retrospective of her work on at The Arts Club in Mayfair, was one of a group of female artists who took on the male-dominated world of photography and experimented with it as a medium.

But the mother-of-two says she did not see her work as "courageous" at the time. Nor does she believe Dunham, 28, would call her show or autobiography *Not That Kind Of Girl* "brave" either. "I think that in hindsight I could see myself as having had courage, but at the time I was just doing my work," Simmons says. "I don't think Lena walks around the world feeling like a brave, courageous woman. I think she's driven to do her work and she's doing it the way she needs to."

■ *Laurie Simmons' show is at The Arts Club until April 25 on Wednesdays to Saturdays, 10am to 12pm, by appointment only. For more go to theartsclub.co.uk*

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