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Portrait Of Fashion Designer: Richard Malone

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I declare that this **Critical Cultures Research Project** is all my own work and that all sources have been fully acknowledged.

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Introduction

Richard Malone is a contemporary Irish fashion designer who is paving the way for future young designers with his focus on sustainable high-end fashion. Malone is continuously pushing boundaries with his distinct sculptural Avant-Garde style that has been evolving since his time spent at one of the most prestigious fashion colleges in the world, Central Saint Martins. His garments connect the world of fashion and art because they are constructed like sculptures around the body. His designs are recognisable by his geometric patterns. His brand has gone from strength to strength since its launch in 2014. Malone rose to success immediately afterwards with the sale of his graduate collection to Brown Thomas, a large department store in Dublin. Since then, Malone has gone on to win the Woolmark prize in 2020. He has also become the youngest designer to have their work exhibited in the MOMA's permanent collection.

Within this essay, the themes discussed will be centralised around the attributes that Richard Malone has, being a contemporary fashion designer. Exploring concepts and ideas of sustainability in chapter 1. This chapter will focus on how Malone is sustainable through his processes and business model with examples of collaborative projects. Chapter 2 will discuss three major influences to his designs, family, Ireland and his work in the context of Irish design. Chapter 3 explores the key factors that make Richard Malone's garments Avant-Garde and the role of activism and gender within his work.

Chapter 1: Richard Malone and sustainability

Richard Malone is a fashion designer from Wexford, who implements sustainable practices into his designs. In order to understand how Richard Malone is a designer who actively promotes sustainability, the concept of sustainability must be explored. According to the book *Sustainable Fashion: Why Now?* sustainability is described as a system. “To be sustainable means that you take out of a system the same amount of energy as you put in, with no pollution or waste,’ a sustainable process is one you can do forever without exhausting resources or fouling the environment” (Hethorn & Ulasewicz, 2008, pg ix). Critically looking at sustainability and the fashion industry together, they act as an oxymoron. “After all, sustainability is about longevity, and fashion is about change” (Hethorn & Ulasewicz, 2008, pg xiii). The desire for constant change is evident in the fashion world from seasonal collections and fast trend cycles. “Trends run their course with lightning speed, with today’s latest styles swiftly trumping yesterday’s, which have already been consigned to the trash bin” (Joy et al, 2012 as cited by Paulins & Hillery, 2020 pg 273).

As of 2020, Malone announced his reduction in collections by not following the traditional seasonal collections, but rather collections labelled after the date they are showcased, limiting the contribution to trend cycles and quick disposable of clothing. This is in contrast to fast fashion companies that have created a model of disposal and overconsumption. “Fashion cannot and should not be taught of as a disposable product” (Morgan, 2015).

Biodegradable Designs

Malone has received recognition and praise for his sustainable approach to fashion, through various awards he has won. In 2020, he won the Woolmark Prize for his fully biodegradable collection. According to the Cambridge dictionary, biodegradable is described as “able to decay naturally and in a way that is not harmful” (Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary & Thesaurus, 2019). Creating biodegradable clothing is an important step in combatting the amount of discarded textile waste that remains abandoned in a landfill for many years. “The dumping of textiles in landfill is problematic, natural fibres will decompose but may release harmful chemicals and methane in the process; synthetics may take centuries to decompose” (Hethorn & Ulasewicz, 2008, pg 184). The collection is considered biodegradable because it is made from one hundred per cent merino wool. Wool is a natural fibre that makes it biodegradable. “Wool is composed of the natural protein keratin, which is similar to the protein that makes up human hair. When keratin is broken down naturally by microorganisms, the products do not pose any environmental hazard” (Anon(A), 2020). Garments were dyed with plant-based dyes. Water used in the dying process was then reused to fertilise and sustain new crops, creating a circular production. “Natural dyes can provide benefits such as lowered energy and water consumption, reduced allergenic effects, and easier biodegradability” (Hethorn & Ulasewicz, 2008, pg 307).

Fig 1 is a garment that featured in Malone’s six-piece collection for the Woolmark prize 2020. The garment is comprised of a navy and white striped hand-knitted jumper, with a cropped ice blue ribbed jumper overlay. Paired with slim-fit tailored

trousers with a pleated overlay. Malone promotes sustainable processes in a number of ways, some of which will be discussed below.



Fig.1

Malone, Woolmark Prize,2020.

Regeneration Fabric and Farmings impact on Fashion

Malone has made exceptional steps in creating a luxury brand, whose core beliefs are rooted in preserving the earth's natural resources. With the advancements of new technologies, Malone has collaborated with the Italian brand Eco Mill. Together the collaboration produced an exceptional method of reusing old fishing nets. Once fishing nets get ripped they are thrown into the ocean. "Malone has an unwavering commitment to sustainability and is strongly against the concept of mass production" (Anon(B),2020)

The net is simply spun to create a yarn. Although the yarn is polyester it can be broken down again and again. “Polyester, the most widely used manufactured fibre, is made from petroleum, the manufacture of this and other synthetic fabrics is an energy-intensive process requiring large amounts of crude oil and realising millions of tonnes of Co2” (Minney, 2003, pg 20). Thus this collaboration ensures that no new oil is used. This technique of creating polyester yarns then allows the yarn to be easily re-dyed or be re-woven and even the stretch can be regenerated. In 2020 well known fashion house Prada also adapted this regeneration technique to produce their Re-Nylon collection. When interviewed, Malone expressed his praise for Prada adopting the same processes along with being happy to be transparent about his processes with the fashion industry. “It’s easy to be upset that a massive company has it, but that’s a result, brands adapted in that way, to make a difference.” (Horan,2019).

Fig 2 is an image from Malone’s 2019 Spring/Summer collection. The full garment is made from regenerated yarn. The yarn was made into colourful jersey material and manipulated with a technique called ruching to create this silhouette. This is very different from techniques used by fast fashion companies of using synthetic materials that take many years to break down.



Fig.2

Malone, S/S collection, 2019.

Malone's reasoning for sustainability can definitely be traced back to influences in his formative years. His pursuit of a career in fashion became very enticing because of "experimenting about what it could be" (Curran, 2021). Experimenting with found objects such as the inside of furniture and structures allowed Malone to create forms and re-imagine materials. In Malone's words "Anything you had you were lucky to have" (Stewart, 2020). Taking pride or care of objects or clothes increases their life span thus creating a more sustainable lifestyle. Repairing of clothing to extend life span was common in Ireland and Malone would have seen this take place in his family

home as his granny was a seamstress. Influenced by his surroundings in rural Wexford, his consciousness of the environment was sparked from the awareness his community had for local wildlife. “It is a rural area and its wildlife protected, there is a sense of the people there look after the nature reserve and have an awareness of a cyclical nature of changing seasons” (Stewart, 2020).

Another way Malone actively promotes sustainable design is in his focus on non-harmful farming methods. Farming plays a massive role in the production of materials for garments. “Both natural resources and synthetic pollutants are required for a number of steps in the fashion production chain,” “Fiber crops such as cotton and linen require soil, water, and fertilizers that produce hazardous water runoff” (Paulins & Hillery, 2020, pg92). Malone’s research into more sustainable farming methods has created a partnership with regenerative farms in India. The Oshadi collective runs a regenerative farm. Malone discussed how the demand for cotton was affecting the land and the solution the partnership has created has helped combat the issue. From The United Ireland podcast “The amount of cotton they require causes the land to become barren after awhile. Harvesting the same crop over and over again, you have to do a crop rotation, planting cotton, on the side have a natural plant, that acts a repellent that the insects go to, they won’t harm the cotton and after a season replace it out with vegetables, and in two more seasons, you replant the crop and it kind of sustains itself” (Horan, 2019). Regenerative farming is a number of processes combined to help soil health, namely, water management, varieties of livestock and naturally grown plants alongside the cotton plant.

This farming method exports little to no waste because of the circular system regenerative farming creates. The Conscious Style podcast interviewed Nishanth Chopra, the owner of Oshadi, who shared the basic principle of how the collective works. “Make sure that the cotton grown on the farm, is dyed on the farm and if there is any waste, can it be made into compost” (Joy, 2021).

Malones sustainable collaboration projects

Another fantastic collaboration Malone works with is a community of weavers also situated in India. The group is government-funded. The foundation funds community development projects and ensures the weavers receive adequate wages. “They receive triple the fair trade wage and the money is re-invested into the community to help with education, water purification and water drainage” (Horan,2019). In Una and Andrea’s United Ireland podcast Malone discusses how important preservation of this skill is because of how fast fashion companies have decimated traditional techniques in the industry. “Fast fashion has taken up this huge part and this is partially why this foundation of weavers was started because the skill was being lost through fast fashion wanting things like denim and shirting” (Horan,2019). Skills and industries can be lost if not preserved and this can be seen with the linen and wool industries in Ireland. “The number of jobs lost in Wexford, where I am from, from the linen and wool industries being moved overseas” (Curran,2021).

“If you kept up the level of consumption that we’re doing and call it sustainability with a bit of organic cotton that’s not the same thing,” Malone said in The Business radio interview (Curran,2021). Malone’s remarkable business model is focused on providing high-quality luxurious garments. Unlike many other well-known luxury good brands such as Louis Vuitton, Chanel and Gucci to name a few, Malone does not do wholesales of his runway collections. Wholesale garments often lead to deadstock fabric. Richard Malone’s designs are more sustainable because he makes custom order original garments. Having a custom order business means less leftover fabric waste. This is in contrast to fast fashion companies which have a high and fast production rate. In Hands No.8: The Tailor “Machines and production has made us accustom to linings that don’t last” (Smith,1961). The support Malone has received from some of his biggest clientele such as Beyonce and Bjork has allowed him to progress in his research for producing sustainable textiles. This research has led to many collaborations like Mulberry.

In 2021, Richard Malone collaborated with British brand Mulberry to recreate two historic bags that are synonymous with the brand. The collaboration was launched in its Made to last manifesto in April, which included a commitment to creating a “hyper-local, hyper-transparent” supply chain and working with regenerative farms in Scotland to reduce its carbon footprint” (Chan,2021). The familiar scotch grain material, a classic from the Mulberry brand was designed using bio-synthetic materials. Making a hard-wearing lightweight material from repurposed inedible cereal

waste. The material was made to have the exact qualities of the textured leather previously used by the brand. The handle and body of the bag are made from environmentally accredited tanneries.

The bright colours feature Malone's synonymous colour palette of blues, reds and greens. "Two new, reimagined shapes for the Bayswater – the Triangle and Barrel bags – featuring interior details, such as pockets and key fobs, on the outside, for ease. But it's the bold colours that make the capsule (which also includes a classic Bayswater, Mini Bayswater, and Small Darley) true collectors' items, encapsulating Malone's aesthetic" (Chan,2021).



Fig.3

Chapter 2: Family Influences and Irish Heritage in Malones Designs

Influence of Construction on Structure and form in Malone's Designs

Family influences a lot of Richard Malone's work. In the words of Malone "I worked on building sites with my dad, I was very into the materials that we were around and I was very interested in using them in different ways" (Stewart, 2020). His towering exaggerated structures are an ode to many years of working in construction with his father. The structures protrude from the body which acts as a foundation, similar to a foundation for bricks and mortar on a construction site. Working within construction allowed Malone to learn principles of creating structure and mixing colour, the knowledge he applies to his garments. According to Malone "People always comment on my use of colour and they say you have come from Central Saint Martins but it doesn't come from that at all, it comes from my years on building sites," I've learnt how to mix colour in a very real way" (Curran, 2021). Fig.4 is an example of Malone's use of colour.



Fig.4

Richard Malone, Spring, 2019.

“Those who are familiar with Richard Malone’s designs may not immediately associate his avant-garde looks with the words ‘working-class Irish’ or ‘functional’ (Spellings, 2017). Functionality plays a role more in Malone’s seasonal collections compared to his more extravagant show garments. Although his showpieces are not primarily designed for functionality, they are designed in a clever way to hold their shape with the use of foam and form. Malone’s seasonal garments still sway from classic jeans, shirts and focus on alternative everyday wear. His use of pockets and well-positioned fastenings are what truly make his garments functional. “He credits his working-class background for this perfunctory approach to fashion.” (McLaughlin, 2019). Within professions like construction, clothing is designed to be functional for the worker with the use of additional pockets and fitted silhouettes. Fig.5 is a garment from Malone,s spring ready-to-wear 2020 collection, which shows the influence of functionality and construction work. The garment is comprised of an oversized vest

similar to a vest worn by builders with four large pockets, akin to pockets seen on cargo pants worn within construction. Construction work has also influenced Malone's designs to be sculpture like.



Fig.5

Malone, Spring Ready-to-wear collection, 2020.

"I do a lot of very sculpted pieces and sort of abstract shapes on the body" (Curran, 2021). During my interview with Caroline Okonkwo, a recent intern with Malone, we spoke about Malone's process of building abstract sculptural forms. Malone's more sculptural pieces act as an illusion to the eye, appearing more hard and structured, however according to Okonkwo the garments were soft, constructed mostly with wadding and foam. Over the foam or padding, Malone would then add the ruched or drape fabric on top. "It's incredible to make something so good that is so simple." (Hunt, 2021). Although the simplicity of designs is to make, it is the effect on the body that is breathtaking. Evidence of how breathtaking these abstract silhouettes are on the body can be seen in Malone's Spring 2020 collection. Fig.3 is a garment that features in Malones S/S 2020 ready-to-wear runway. The garment is constructed by

using a technique known as draping over organically shaped foam shapes in an ice blue colour.



Fig.6

Malone, S/S Ready-to-wear, 2020.

In his s/s 22 collections, his sculptural forms began to change with the use of rods. “showpieces have expanded upwards and outwards, into huge angular forms, almost like industrial scaffolding” (Mahlich, 2021). Fig.4 is a garment that featured within this collection showing the form becoming more fitted to the body with emerging panels. “They’re really large like curtain hangers, playing with wooden poles and sticking them on the form” (Hunt, 2021). Malone continued to use stretch jersey fabric in this collection. Sections of draped and small gathers create a frill effect cascading down the body. The full garment is an emerald green colour. By creating a monochromatic garment, the focus is placed more on the fabric manipulation techniques. It was interesting to hear of how playful Malone’s process is of creating garments and that shines through to his sculptural garments as they do hold a youthful

and playful essence. “I think being around the materiality on building sites really informed my reaction to how I make things and what kind of textiles and fabrics I like” (Curran,2021).



Fig.7

Malone, S/S Ready-to-wear,2022.

The influence of Malone’s grandmother Nellie and Eileen Gray on his work

In addition to working with his father Malone’s work is also inspired by his grandmother Nellie. Malone’s grandmother was a seamstress and it was another insight that Malone had of materiality. “I was always around those contrasting fabrications and also the different ways you see in Irish culture of male and female roles and those stereotypes that are played up too” (Stewart, 2020). Although not having any formal education Malone’s grandmother loved to make art. ‘Don’t think you need a knowledge of art to make art.’(Curran, 2021). This idea of the unfamiliarity of the art world can be

seen when Malone discusses how his unique perspective from living in rural Ireland benefits his interest in experimenting within the fashion industry. “Where I’m from is so far away from where my work is shown, you don’t get to see fine art, you don’t get to see the high fashion. I never grew up around it, so when something is brought to me, it’s very new and I question it and I think that’s inbuilt to where I’m from and my family” (Curran, 2021).

His grandmother was a source of encouragement and an important female role model who has been compared to late designer Wexford woman Eileen Gray with her radical style when making. Eileen Gray is a renowned Irish Artist whose practice merges the world of art and furniture design. Progressive for her time, she defied all odds by being brave enough to experiment with oriental lacquer, a technique that brought great success to her career. Although from different class backgrounds, Malone and Gray share similar ideologies, one being not letting their backgrounds prohibit their practices “Born into a privileged, provincial society, she broke away early” (Johnson, 1979, pg 66). “Working always within the framework of her vision, never within the confines of popular taste” (Johnson, 1979, pg 66). According to Malone he was drawn to the work of Gray because of “her affinity for function, simplicity, form, intimacy, and sensuality in furniture design to textiles and architecture” (O’Malley, 2022).

Fig.5 is an image of one of Eileen Gray’s rugs (left) alongside Malone’s drawings(right). Both designers are interested in playing with shape and scale. Malone’s drawings in contrast to Gray’s rug, uses more fluid, soft, round-edged shapes in his work,in comparison to Gray’s angular shapes. From inspecting the

images beside each other it is also evident that both designers favour colour and simplicity.

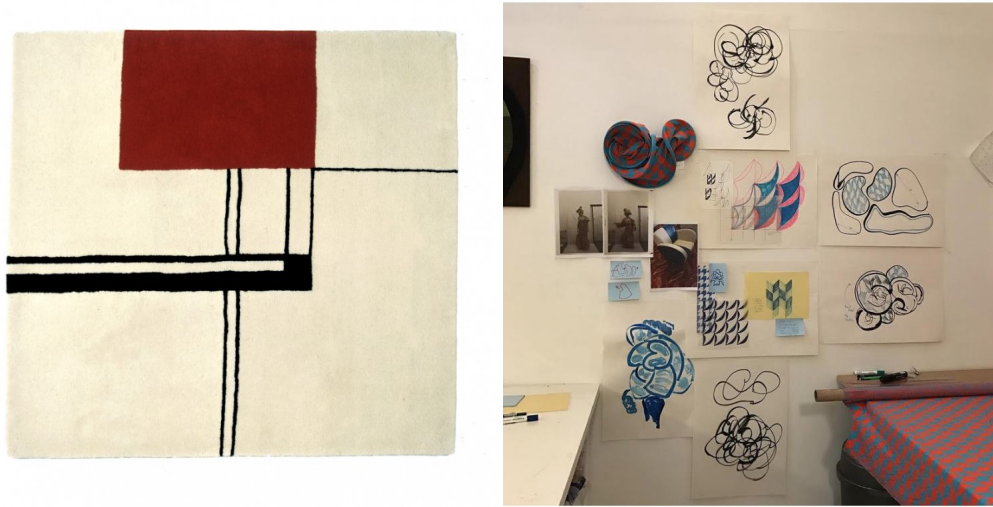


Fig.8

Eileen Gray, Wendingen Rug, 1920/30(Left).

Richard Malone, Studio drawings, 2017 (right).

In 2021, Malone curated 'Making and Momentum: In conversation with Eileen Gray'. An exhibition that features seven multidisciplinary artists and makers "to highlight imagination, excellence and influence of the modern Irish art and design world."(Pepper,2021). The Exhibition took place with the unveiling of Gray's restored French Villa 'E.1027' situated on the cliffs at Roquebrune, Cap Martin in France. This was an important project for Malone not only because of how influential Gray's work had been to him as a designer, but also the personal connection of an artist treasured by himself and his grandmother Nellie. "Her story is often told to me by grandmother Nellie as a kind of proof that anyone can become anything from anywhere, and in many ways, her work and her person resonated with Nellie." (Pepper,2021).



Fig.9

Making and Momentum: In conversation with Eileen Gray, 2021.

The Role of Ireland and Heritage in Richard Malone's work

Ireland and heritage play a huge role in the Wexford born designers Richard Malones' designs. I will discuss within these two paragraphs, two distinctly different collections

in which the designer gained influences from growing up in Ireland and how his designs are leading the way in Irish contemporary fashion design. “These rural roots affect even the most sophisticated designers, and very few have not, at some time, or in some degree derived some inspiration from the landscape, colours, or traditions of the Irish countryside” (McCrum, 1996, pg 119). In 2014, Malone became the first BA to win the LVMH Grand Prix scholarship. His sensational collection, although based on a serious theme of recession in Ireland, is combined with humorous elements. The cross-over of using humour in high-end luxury is not commonplace.

Fig.4 is a garment featured in this collection. Large scale buffalo style hats paired with white boots is a play on the Irish leprechaun. The use of oversized clothing is to emulate the use of hand-me-down clothing widely seen throughout working-class lives. Malone references his working-class background a lot throughout his work. When Malone was interviewed for Tara Stewarts, Dirty Laundry podcast, he criticised fellow students who would appropriate working-class culture for design inspiration. “They would look at women dressed in working-class communities or estates and think it was funny, wearing tight clothes and being sexy and think this was farce and of bad taste,” the ignorance of thinking, it’s just imagery for you to take from” (Stewart, 2020).



Fig.10

Malone, LVMH Grand Prix Award,2014.

At Malone's most recent showcase of this 2022 ready-to-wear collection, nostalgia played a role when creating the forms used in the collection. Circular forms communicate the decorative rosettes often presented at horse racing meetings. These rosette like shapes have sparked a memory for the designer of the handcrafted armbands his grandmother would make for the GAA committee awards. "A sense of romanticism also features in the work of many Irish designers of any age at home or abroad;" it often has a sense of allusion: historic, literacy or cultural" (McCrum, 1996, pg 119). These formations not only carried a sense of nostalgia, but they are also a symbol of previous celebratory times, ones we had forgotten because of the Covid-19 lockdown. These are reminiscent of mundane humble joys with their accents of colourful hues bringing a hopeful lightness to the viewer and wearer.



Fig.11

Malone, S/S Ready-to-wear collection, 2022.

From the two different collections by Malone discussed throughout this chapter, how does Irish design relate to Malone's work and the position he holds in being a contemporary Irish designer?

To gain a deeper understanding of Irish design, exploration of the historical context of Irish fashion is needed. In Malone's work, two aspects of Irish design that can be explored are the fabric and form. Irish fashion design has thrived for centuries and has been a source of inspiration for many European designers. The relationship between traditional Irish design and present day examples can be seen with the high fashion reimagining of traditional Irish designs. An example of Irish fashion designs major influence on European fashions would be the historical Aran wool jumpers. Wool was easy to source and the art of knitting could be done domestically. "By the late 1920s,

virtuoso knitters had invented an exuberant variety of over seventy Aran stitches” (McCrum,1996, pg 7). The fashion designer Lainey Keogh is one of the biggest names in Irish knitwear design, and models like Naomi Campbell were modelling her designs in 1994. Keogh continuously adapted her knitwear designs to combine tradition with contemporary. “Her floating deconstructed gossamer knits of the early nineties also form a contrast to the traditional view of Irish knitting” (McCrum,1996, pg 75). Malone also engages with using knitwear in his collections. Autumn/winter 2021 has seen the designer using ribbed (a knitting technique where stitches are short and long) top in a burnt orange colour gives a more contemporary feel in contrast to traditional cream Aran jumpers with decorative stitches. See Fig.12 for reference to the orange jumper.



Fig.12

Richard Malone, A/W Ready-to-Wear,2022.

Another majorly important craft seen in many rural villages in Ireland was tailoring. The mastery of tailoring can be considered one of the earliest uses of repurposing and sustainable clothing. “If a man got a suit made, it could last him a lifetime”; clothes were more personal, family heirlooms” (Smith, 1961). Tailoring was a craft traditionally passed down through generations of the same family. Sometimes, scraps of fabric were repurposed to add patchworks or applique. The job of a local tailor in Ireland in 1961 was not only to provide a service but there was also a social aspect of being present while a suit was being fit to your exact measures. “Business may be involved but it is a friendly social occasion” (Smith, 1961). High production of cheaply made garments overseas has meant the personal social element of making garments for clients has been lost. However, Malone’s business model of creating one of a kind custom order garments follows traditional principles of an in-person service like the tailor Tom Johnson seen in the series *Hands* by David Shaw-Smith (1961).

Critically looking at Malone’s work, tailoring is widespread over numerous collections, most notably in the Woolmark prize 2020 collection. His use of drop padded shoulders to achieve a more relaxed feel to the traditional tailored suit. A shorter lapel sits higher on the neckline however its width means it is placed across the chest. See Fig.13 for an example of Malones Tailoring.



Fig.13

Richard Malone, Woolmark Prize, 2020.

Chapter 3: Richard Malone's work and the Avant-Garde

Richard Malone's designs combine fashion with wearable art. However, Malone's designs provide a deeper meaning and connection to modern themes. To fully understand Richard Malone's designs we have to understand the beginning of how art and fashion began to push boundaries and experiment. Avant-Garde has been used to describe Malone's designs. Avant-Garde began as a movement in the 19th Century. It is used as a word to describe artists, writers and inventors who went against the norm or status quo in society. The nineteenth century was seen as a period in which art was used for revolutionary purposes. The term avant-garde was used to appoint radical or advanced activity in both the artistic and social realms.

Richard Malone's designs can be classed as Avant-Garde because of their unconventional form and the rejection of ideas of garments being constructed for one body type, i.e a taller slimmer body that is synonymous with the fashion industry. This can be seen from the material chosen throughout Malone's collections. Jersey is a stretch material he commonly uses and can easily be stretched around any body type. "Past collections, runways and models were a lot more diverse with age and size." (Hunt, 2021).

The influence of Constructivism on Malones work

A really exciting garment that can be considered avant-garde is Jumpsuit Specimen.

Jumpsuit Specimen is formed with the use of stripes spiralling downwards inspired by male and female uniforms. To generate a new fresh take on the jumpsuit, Malone took inspiration from the uniforms of Russian Constructivists in the early 1900s.

Constructivism was an art movement after the Russian Revolution of 1917. The ideology behind the movement was for artists and designers to make art that supported the new Soviet state which was practical and industry-led. Varvara Stepanova, a famous Russian constructivist designer adopted the constructivism style of geometric shapes and bold colours through to her design of everyday work uniforms. "Stepnova stressed universal traits in those clothes and proposed that differences relating to different types of jobs could be accentuated by choice of fabric and slight changes in the cut when it comes to work clothes. Colours, stripes, and emblems were supposed to differentiate uniforms." (Bartlett & Smith, 2010, pg 362). Uniforms were also used as an identity for people. "In the workplace, social class differences were being made increasingly explicit by uniforms and dress codes" (Crane, 1933). Malone's use of stripes and geometric form is evidence of his research of constructivist uniforms.

'Jumpsuit Specimen' was a framework of an image of what a jumpsuit could be. The piece was showcased in the MOMA in 2017.



Fig.14

Malone, Jumpsuit Specimen, MOMA, 2017.

Merging the World of Fashion and Activism in Malones work

In the past, we have seen many fashion designers make political statements through their garments, including Malone, Vivienne Westwood, Jean-Paul Gautier and Katherine Hamnett to name a few. In Djurdia Bartlett's book 'Fashion and Politics', she makes us aware of how everyday objects can act as political commentary. "As an embodied everyday practice, fashion is endowed with the capacity to bring pleasure, to incite and transmit effect" (Bartlett, 2019, pg13). Evidence of the crossover of the fashion world and politics can be seen in designer Katherine Hamnett's work. Hamnett rose to fame with her political slogan T-shirts, a poignant moment being the 'Choose life' slogan T-shirt worn by the late George Michael to promote a campaign against aids during the 80s.

The term Activism means “a doctrine or practises that emphasizes direct vigorous action especially in support of, or opposition to, one side of a controversial issue” (Merriam-Webster. com,2018). Throughout history art activism has been used, opening up ideas to how the world might look if a change was made.

Similar to the fashion designers mentioned, Malone is a designer who has combined activism within his work. His passion for women's rights has stemmed from growing up in Ireland with strong female influences. “In a lot of Irish families women are at the core of them, we were always thought things very politically, that everything had politics involved in it” (Stewart, 2020). In 2018 Malone published a letter in Vogue informing people of the current referendum in Ireland. At the time of the release of the letter, Ireland was experiencing a referendum to abolish the 8th amendment which denied women access to abortion. Within his letter, Malone expressed his anger and did not shy from sharing his true thoughts on the subject. “My anger stems, in part, from the astounding need to suppress, silence and discourage women – charges of which the Irish government is entirely guilty in this instance” (Malone, 2018).

Malone’s activism continued to his performative like display at the well known high-end department store Selfridges. “To be honest it severed my relationship with Selfridges but it's more important to have a voice than a store's endorsement of your clothes” (Horan, 2019). Instead of arriving with beautifully made garments for the display, Malone staged peaceful readings from Una Mullally’s book ‘Repeal the 8th’. In addition, he handed out pamphlets of information regarding the movement. With paint markers, Malone wrote facts about women's rights all over Selfridges shop window. Not being able to use the word Repeal itself on the window, Malone creatively spelt it

out in a hidden crossword formative. The display was shut down by the head office as it was deemed a political issue. “Selfridges wanted me to just show up with really nice showpieces, put them in the window, to get people into the shop but you can’t do that when something is happening in your home country, I just showed up with the facts and things that were well researched” (Stewart, 2020). Although Malone’s display at Selfridges was shut down, it gained a lot of media attention which resulted in more awareness especially to people outside of Ireland. Malone highlights the importance that as a designer it is important to engage with the world and not just be confined to creating showpieces for fashion shows. Fig.2 is an image of Malone standing beside his window display at Selfridges. Malone wears a t-shirt with the words Read, React, Repeal on it, similarly to Hamnett’s slogan t-shirts.



Fig.15 Richard Malone standing outside Selfridges Department store alongside activism work,2018.

The role of gender in Malones designs and gender performance on runways

Women's rights are important to Malone from his Selfridges window display, however does gender play a role within his designs?

For his design and process, the focus is more directed to the form of the garment rather than the body type. "Making a genderless thing you can function every day in" (Malone as cited by Spellings, 2017). Although gender is not at the forefront of Malone's brand, women are at the centre of his designs. "His target market is women but when it came to casting for the show, the clothes were put on men, put on women it didn't matter" (Hunt, 2021). With his recent collaboration with Mulberry, Malone is showing his garments are swaying more towards being unisex. "In traditional spectacle shows, normative ideals of male and female beauty tend to be displayed, substance shows often deliberately disrupt normal expectations by challenging the audience to consider alternative gender identities" (Lynch & Strauss, 2007, pg 53). Okowono spoke about how there was never any specification on whether the clothes were male or female when creating the showpieces.

Malone has said in an interview that often when designing for women he thinks to himself what he would like to wear as a powerful woman. "I've never really thought of gender being an important thing, but I've never tried to define it." (Mahlich, 2021). In his

interview with SHOWstudio, Malone expresses how often he has himself in mind when designing, thinking about what he'd like to wear if he was one of these women. There are many reasons why someone may wear the clothes of the opposite sex, fashion and perhaps pleasure they may feel of material from clothing deemed not suitable for their biological sex. "Crimplene material but I loved the repulsiveness of it: my body was responding to the ghastly strangeness of the texture." (Jones, 2006, pg 53).

Queer theorist Judith Butler approaches gender identity with having no gender expression, that expressions are just constructed within society and by association, we are performing these actions to almost fit our mould. "Identity is performative, constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler, 1988, pg 130). Malone's avant-garde structured showpieces are not designed with gender in mind. They are not tailored to a certain body type because their structure is quite loose and oversized. Often oversized garments are unisex and genderless. Simply from humans beginning to cover their bodies, clothing has become a way of differentiating genders. In another sense, clothing can be used to disguise one gender. As clothing has progressed it can prove harder to identify gender, both women and men share the same style or shape of garments making uni-sex clothing more popular, for example, baggy jeans can hide the curves of a woman's hips. "Many clothes disguise obvious sexual anatomy." (Bolich, 2002, pg 18). Visual differences between men and women became aids in helping identify people's gender.

Butler's idea of gender being performative can be seen with designers like Gaultier in the 1990s and millennium fashions. "Popularized trends, such as the wearing of innerwear as outerwear for women, and padded briefs for men, emerged out of this

continual renegotiation of gender performed on runways” (Lynch&Strauss,2007, pg 120). Similarly in S/S 22 Malone runways perpetuates the idea of gender being performative with Malone’s models wearing garments that traditionally would have been presented as feminine placed on a male model. See Fig.16 for reference.



Fig.16

Richard Malone,S/S, 2022.

Total Word count: 6019.

Conclusion

To conclude this research essay, the objective of this research was to gain an understanding of a portrait of Richard Malone and how his work makes him a contemporary fashion designer in today's world. The body of this essay is concerned with the processes and influences stemming from historic, family influences, growing up in rural Ireland, sustainability practices and the importance of activism in fashion. The topics discussed, allowed for a deeper understanding of how Malone's garments act as a conversation about sustainability, their context in Irish design and their influence of Avant-Garde. Other topics discussed included the influence of living in rural Ireland and the dynamic in comparison to the luxurious fashion world, the incorporation of family and working-class backgrounds into design details for Malone's garments and finally, how fashion can work as a form of activism and the role of gender in Malone's designs. From the topics discussed within this essay, it is evident that Richard Malone is an interesting fashion designer who is changing the world of fashion.

Appendices

NB No transcript for an interview conducted. The link is provided below.

Interview with Richard Malone Intern Caroline Okonowo, 22/12/2021, Duration: 26:06.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/13y5UtR9x6T4zLg9rNVwNI9H2VmQp5fz6/view?usp=sharing>

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