

Helmut Lang shredded his clothes

(Cordula Reyer / The Standard/rondo/12/08/2011)

The fashion he has left behind, meanwhile, Helmut Lang busy with Art Helmut Lang's third solo exhibition opened on a bright, hot July day in a gallery on Long Island. Despite the sweltering heat to make some visitors a face like a hundred days of rainy weather. "I can not believe it," says an elegant New Yorker about "all the nice clothes, bags ... he just destroyed everything!" If it is true that art to be art, must be shocking – then, the exhibition is a success. For at least the many fans of the former Austrian fashion designer, have found to this day the way into the gallery The Fireplace Project, the air stays away in the face of the 6000 pieces of clothing from twenty years of fashion design, which has formed the now artists are shredded and columns. At our meeting we met Helmut Lang a few days after the opening on his estate in East Hampton (where he lives and works). He preferred to conduct the interview in English.

THE STANDARD: You have 6000 pieces of clothing from your library shredded in order to use them for your art project. Why?

Helmut Lang: I have 2009 and 2010 a large part of my archive donated to various museums. In February 2010, in the building where our studio is located, a fire broke out which destroyed almost the archive. Many pieces were damaged. When I followed for six months through the collections, went to see in what condition the individual items of clothing, the idea slowly grew, destroying everything themselves, and the collections in this way to some extent to give a new shape. The more I thought about it the better I liked this idea.

THE STANDARD: What materials do you shred?

Helmut Lang: : All. Of leather, fur and feathers of materials to plastic and metal. Actually, just about any subject I've ever designed. Clothes, bags, shoes, watches, belts. Everything was transformed with a *Industriezerkleinerer* in raw material.

THE STANDARD: Are all columns of shredded clothes?

Helmut Lang: : Yes. In these 25 years design work, pigments and resins are included. With only 16 of the 100 columns in the Gallery Fireplace Project can be seen in the Hamptons.

THE STANDARD: What does the title of the exhibition: "Make it hard"?

Helmut Lang: : He refers to the process of soft material to make something hard. The title also has a sexual side.

THE STANDARD: Further exhibitions are planned?

Helmut Lang: : The exhibition in the Hamptons was found by my friend and curator Neville Wakefield. Other exhibitions will in London, Los Angeles, New York and maybe even give in Berlin. Either the whole plant, so all 100 sculptures, or just see some of it.

THE STANDARD: You felt the destruction of your past work as a liberation?

Helmut Lang: : Absolutely. I stopped in January 2005 to work as a designer. This was followed by two to three years in which we in New York all the archived collections and wondered what pieces should come in that museum. That was not very much work, but also a difficult process.

THE STANDARD: Can you get rid of the past simply by the fact that they destroyed 6000 items in the collection?

Helmut Lang: : It was never my intention to strip, my past. I stand by my past. It gives me the opportunity to do what I do today. And my whole past, not only my time in the fashion world. I've learned a lot and am grateful for all opportunities that have given me. There were the before mentioned external circumstances which prompted me to convert raw material into the archive. I also wanted to dedicate more of my work as an artist.

THE STANDARD: As an artist you had a great 2008 solo exhibition at the Kestner Gesellschaft in Hannover. The reviews were "mixed". How much has your work changed compared to back then?

Helmut Lang: : My work has become stronger, which is a natural development. The transition from fashion to art is difficult – but I think I am the first fashion designer, who has managed to really be successful with art. As a designer, I started in 1978, my first runway show in Paris took place in 1986, but the international success came only in the early 90s. The current process is my beginnings as a fashion designer is not dissimilar. Even then it was what I made, new, unusual and different, so are a lot of people were not initially sure if they should find it good or not. Good art comes not from one day to another. I work hard and continuously since 2005. In art, I will continue to listen for yourself and only me realize my own ideas. Neville Wakefield said: "It takes time to find his own language, but with this work it has been found."

THE STANDARD: Your current work process is similar in some way that the fashion designer?

Helmut Lang: Inspiration for me as a starting point in the first place the material. And actually, I always start with black. That was already in vogue. Based on the material I see most often, in what direction I should go. As such there is the real challenge to find the right form. From a wealth of ideas that must be filtered out, which is most

interesting. In art, the selection of materials is much greater than in fashion. This one does not have to worry about whether something is acceptable or functional.

THE STANDARD: The most important parts of your collections, donated to international museums like the Metropolitan Museum and the Louvre are available. Have you also considered Austria?

Helmut Lang: : Yes, my friend Verena Formanek, the “Design Info Pool” founded in MAK, has endeavored in the past, much of it. Having worked with Peter Noever (former head of Mak’s note) in recent years in an exhibition for the Mak, I’ve decided to give the most important parts of my archive this museum. So all the videos from the fashion shows, the entire graphic arts and architectural materials, look books all, Polaroids and show programs. All motifs, we’ve switched from those of Robert Mapple-thorpe, Bruce Weber and Elfi Semotan to those of Juergen Teller and David Sims. But also the entire graphic material and even advertising signs that were on display at the New York taxis. The MAK seemed to be the right place, not only because I have previously taught at the University of Applied Arts, as well as design and architecture have a strong presence there.

THE STANDARD: The exhibition, of which you spoke was planned for December. It takes place not now. Why?

Helmut Lang: : When I learned that Peter Noever has resigned as director of the MAK, I canceled the entire project. The idea for the exhibition came from both of us, together we developed the concept and worked on it. Without him, the whole thing makes no sense. It was the right decision.

THE STANDARD: Can you imagine the future in another project with the MAK?

Helmut Lang: : Yes, another new project very well.

THE STANDARD: It was rumored that the fashion house Hermès has approached you, to you as a successor to Jean Paul Gaultier. Is that true?

Helmut Lang: : Yes. But I get every year at the four to five inquiries from various major fashion houses who want to take me as a designer under contract.

THE STANDARD: Irritating. Do you not want to do more?

Helmut Lang: : No. I feel no desire for it. I really enjoy it, to work according to my own rhythm. Today I want to express by something other than fashion. A collaboration with a fashion house as an artist I can think of it quite respectable. Thus, a art project is already under discussion.

THE STANDARD: Plugged into each designer an artist?

Helmut Lang: : I can not answer that question. But I can assure you that it takes great courage to make a good and secure position in the fashion world – with all that money, glamor and fame – to leave behind in order to try something new.

Helmut Lang, born in 1956 in Vienna, he is still regarded as the Austria's most famous fashion designers. In 1997 he moved to the United States. After selling his company to Prada, he withdrew from the Fashion back and succeeded in becoming an artist. His third so far Exhibition, Make It Hard was only good for two weeks in the To see Fireplace Project Gallery in East Hampton.