

Now Showing | 'Artist/Rebel/Dandy: Men of Fashion'

CULTURE, MEN'S FASHION | By BRUCE PASK | APRIL 22, 2013, 1:45 PM | [Comment](#)



Courtesy of the artist and Leila Heller Gallery

Iké Udé's "Sartorial Anarchy #5" (2012) is part of "Artist/Rebel/Dandy: Men of Fashion" at the Museum of Art Rhode Island School of Design.

Peacocking, the preening of fastidiously dressed males of the fashion flock, has been exhaustively documented of late by international street fashion photographers who track willing prey in their natural habitats: outside fashion shows, fabulous parties and glitzy store openings where the rare birds tend to gather. The origin of this dandy species, Beau Brummel (1778-1840), and his fanciful progeny are the subject of the exhibition "Artist/Rebel/Dandy: Men of Fashion" at the [Museum of Art Rhode Island School of Design](#), opening April 28. The curators, Kate Irvin and Laurie Brewer, from the school's department of costume and textiles, have capitalized on this recent surge of interest in the artistry and craftsmanship of men's wear with their study of clothing and ephemera honoring the aesthetic provocateur. Aided by an archive that includes the personal wardrobe of Richard Merkin, a legendary RISD professor, painter and dandy-in-residence, the curators constructed a thematic, rather than chronological, exploration into what they term the "always provocative dandy stance." Delving deeper than the decorative surface, they contrast the social subversion of dandy "revolutionaries," who express political views through their personal wardrobes, with a dandy "historian's" appreciation of tailoring tradition, while a "connoisseur" prides self-expression over societal conformity. Thom Browne says in the accompanying catalog's preface that "Rebellion comes from being perfectly comfortable doing my own thing and having the drive to make challenging statements in men's wear." According to the curators, by "kicking at the boundaries of taste," the dandy is indeed much more than the commonly criticized "superficial person devoted only to the outer shell."