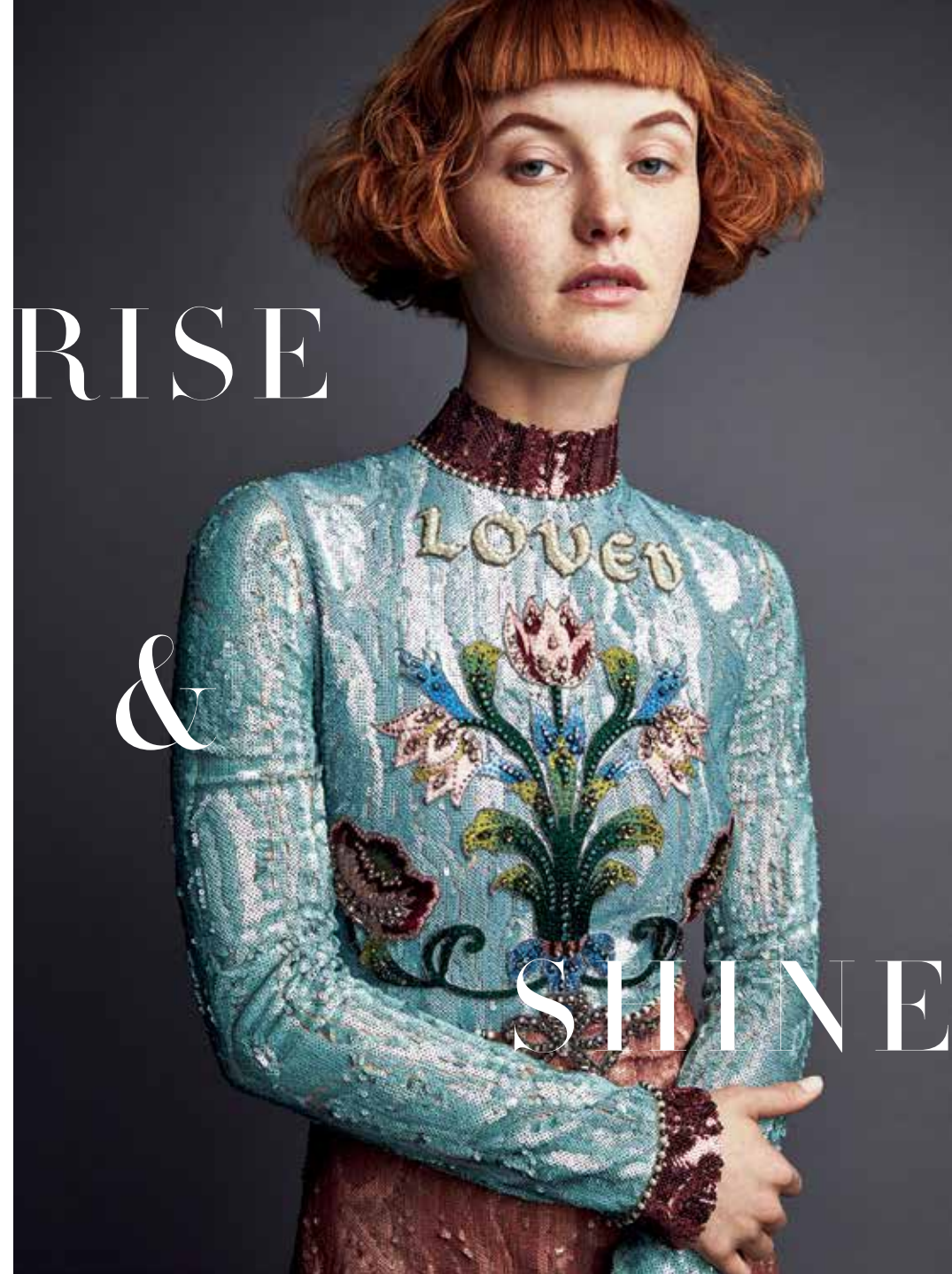


RISE

&

SHINE



With a flick of the ankle, a galaxy of shimmering flecks is revealed. The mint green flashes enticingly, a hint of pink and yellow at the top. But this cheerful sequined item is not a red carpet creation or evening couture. It is, in fact, a sock.

'Tis the season of the sequin, that most jolly of embellishments that gets dusted off whenever celebration is in the air – and the most fun and whimsical interpretation in recent years has to be Gucci's statement sequin socks. Worn with strappy sandals, the shiny numbers are an accessible and lighthearted entryway for those who might not be able to pull off the full runway look; a tongue-in-cheek ticket into Alessandro Michele's fantasy world. Suffice to say the old socks-and-sandals taboo has been thoroughly upended.

Sequins might be showing up in unconventional ways – Halpern's glinting bell-sleeved minidress here, Erdem's calf-skimming pencil skirt

Carefree and joyful, it's time again to break out fashion's glossiest embellishment

Words **CHRISTINE VAN DEEMTER**

in winking pink there – but their history stretches as far back as King Tutankhamun. When his tomb was opened in 1922 – after being sealed for 3 000 years – gold sequin-like disks were found sewn onto his lavish garments, presumably to earn him secure passage to the next realm. Evidence of gold sequins have been discovered in India on clothing fragments dating back 4 500 years. Sketches have also been found purporting to be Leonardo da Vinci's plans for what appears to be a sequin-making machine, working with pulleys and weights to punch holes into small metal disks. What the Italian inventor and artist was planning to do with this in 1480 is sadly lost to history.

Unlike buttons or rivets, sequins have no function other than embellishment. The word has always alluded to wealth, with ties to the Arabic *sikka* and the Italian *zecchino*, both referring to gold coins. For centuries, sequins were made from metal, rendering them heavy and unpractical for all but the richest members of society – and the



ABOVE RAMI KADI FW18 CAPSULE COLLECTION FEATURING LASER-CUT SEQUINS AND MIRRORS
RIGHT A SEQUINED CLUTCH FROM LEBANESE BRAND SARAH'S BAG
FAR RIGHT CATE BLANCHETT AT THE LOS ANGELES PREMIERE OF THOR: RAGNAROK WEARING GUCCI



Roma, who sewed their coins onto their clothes for safekeeping. That all changed in the 1920s, when a New York costumer and embroiderer named Herbert Lieberman revolutionized sequin-making forever. His breakthrough? Plastic sequins. There was one catch, though – in the early 20th century, plastic was still in its infancy, and one of the first forms of it was gelatin. It could be rolled into sheets, punched, plated, and sewed onto clothes. It was light and colorful. What it wasn't, though, was water- and heatproof. Stood a bit too close to the stove? Melted. Walked in the rain? Melted. This made sequins only really practical for performers, dancers, figure skaters – and Elizabeth Taylor. Anna Pavlova stunned audiences with her goose feather and sequin ballet dress, created by Léon Bakst for her landmark performance in *Swan Lake* in 1907.

The second world war brought gelatin sequin production to an abrupt end, but it was revived in cheap, washable vinyl plastic in the 1950s. Finally, the sequin was liberated and democratized. It ruled the dance floor, turning people into living disco balls. Mick Jagger, David Bowie, and The Supremes shimmered on stage, the light bouncing off their exaggerated shapes and loose limbs.

This antidote to beige and blandness is still going strong on 2017's runways. Nothing can put doom and gloom in the shade like a bit of sparkle, after all, and Prabal Gurung, Gucci, and Céline lit the way with opulent glittering creations. "As an Arab woman, I always love a bit of sparkle," says Lebanese influencer Lana El Sahely. "A statement dress always leaves me in awe. Sequins and intricate work add a wonderful glow to the look, especially when hair and makeup are kept simple." Style blogger Nadya Hassan doesn't save her sequined pieces for

Glam rocks



1 GIUSEPPE ZANOTTI KNEE-HIGH BOOTS 2 PREEN BY THORNTON BREGAZZI ASYMMETRICAL DRESS 3 ERDEM DRESS

nighttime: "I pair it with casual jeans and a simple bag, or an oversized sequined dress with basic black shoes. It needs to look understated and elegant at the same time"

Lebanese designer Rami Kadi uses innovative techniques like heating and cutting to keep sequins interesting. "I have baked sequins at high temperatures to get a vintage 3D effect. Sequins awaken my passion for new technological innovations that push the borders of my imagination. They not only reflect light, but also a personality that's not afraid to shine."

“In this CRAZY world, I find a heavy dose of SHINE is a respite from the MADNESS”

If you're feeling a bit blinded by the light, you don't have to go all out luminous, like Cate Blanchett did with such aplomb at the Los Angeles premier of *Thor: Ragnarok*, wearing a mid-length gold Gucci turtleneck dress. Sometimes, a simple shimmering shoe or bag will do. Lebanese social initiative and fashion house Sarah's Bag works with disenfranchised women to create luxury handmade accessories, including a standout clutch with undulating waves of silver and gold sequins. "I've always worked with sequins, and until something shinier comes along, they're here to stay!" says founder and creative director Sarah Beydoun. "We have a group of master artisans who specialize in working on our sequined clutches and bags. It's a very intricate process that requires meticulous, precise work to create an even canvas. This is why it takes up to 25 hours to finish each piece." As for their eternal appeal, Beydoun sums it up best: "In this crazy world, I find a heavy dose of shine is a respite from the madness." □