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Research Paper

## **The Motorcycle Corset**



Thierry Mugler's Les Cowboys Spring 1992 collection, is one of his most impressive. His motorcycle-inspired bustier, is a quintessential example of his work in this collection. In 1992, Mugler sent an army of bikers down the runway, all dressed in leather, from a corseted biker jacket with fringes, to thigh high boots attached to the waist, as well as cowboy hats, leather, and cowhide. Unlike many designers of his time, Thierry Mugler explored a material that had minimal exposure, in luxury ready-to-wear: rubber. The notorious "Harley Davidson" bustier complete with handlebars and wing mirrors, was a nod to Mugler's earlier bodywork-bustier of 1989. This piece would become famous, thanks to George Michael's "Too Funky" music video, directed by Mugler himself.

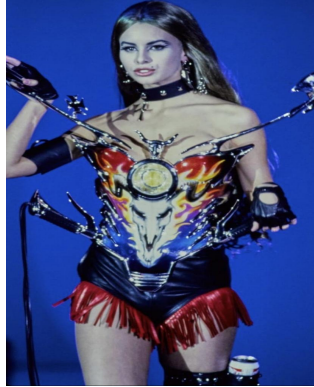
## **Biography**

Known for his spectacular runway shows, and sexual fetishistic fashions, Thierry Mugler

started his career in fashion design, via dance, and photography. He studied at the Lycée Fustel de Coulanges, from 1960 to 1965, and at the School of Fine Arts, from 1966 to 1967. He performed as a dancer, with the Rhine Opera Ballet, from 1965 to 1996. He moved to Paris, and began working as a professional photographer, while simultaneously working as an assistant designer, for a number of fashion houses in Paris, London, and Milan. Mugler's first ready-to-wear collection was released in 1973. The collection was coined, Café de Paris. Through that collection, Mugler obtained the financial backing to open his own company, (Thierry Mugler), in 1974. In 1986, he bought out his investors, to obtain full ownership of the company. He opened a fragrance company in 1990, and scored considerable success, with the perfume Angel in 1992. In that same year he showed his first couture collection.

Mugler's eccentric style is inspired by sexual fetishism. In almost every show, his models frequently resemble dominatrices. From their towering high-heeled boots, and corseted curves, to such accessories as neck corsets, and riding crops. No matter the theme of his show, there's always a connection to sado-masochistic culture. One of his most notorious pieces, is the motorcycle bustier, inspired by 1950s Detroit motorcycle, and car styles. Mugler frequently made garments, of leather and rubber, some of which make their wearers resemble giant insects, drawn from science fiction. Examples of his less-theatrical outfits, such as his colorful, and sharply tailored suits were extremely popular, especially in the 1980s. As of 2004 Mugler retired, although he continues to produce special pieces.

**Spring-Summer 1992 ready-to-wear: leather and rubber with the Cowboys**



The Motorcycle Corset is a popular garment, created by French designer, Manfred Thierry Mugler. The “Harley Davidson ” inspired bustier, is favorable, and a memorable piece from his spring/summer 1992 show. The dramatic corset was fashionable, if not wearable, and has since been praised for its fierce dramatism. Mugler was constantly inspired by the brilliant and the dramatic world that he lived in. A motorcycle rider himself, Mugler found real inspiration in the rough biker aesthetic.

Thierry Mugler’s motorcycle corset received worldwide popularity, after appearing in George Micheal’s video “Too Funky.” The video was directed by Thierry Mugler, and included supermodels Linda Evangelista, Tyra Banks, Nadja Auermann, Emma Sjöberg, Estelle Hallyday, Shana Zadrick, Eva Herzigova, as well as actresses Julie Newmar and Rossy de Palma. The original lineup for the music video were, Supermodels Linda Evangelista, Naomi Campbell, Christy Turlington, Cindy Crawford, and Tatjana Patitz, but both Mugler and Michael agreed to show some newer faces in his video. Later, Mugler decided instead to keep Linda Evangelista, and use new models. The motorcycle corset/dress was a part of Thierry Mugler’s spring/summer 1992 haute couture collection.

This striking bustier is composed of plastic, metal, and Plexiglas. The back has leather

belts, and metal buckles, designed to wrap around the model's body, to keep the bustier secure. The front features a graphic flame design, in red, orange, and blue. The motorcycle influence is apparent in the shiny, silver, plastic outlining, the graphic in the center, the black leather tassels dangling from the motorcycle's 'handlebars', and the prominent rear-view mirrors, extending past the wearer's shoulders. In its center, there is an image of a ram's skull, conveying the vibe of an edgy biker chick. There is a yellow light bulb, in the top center front, representing the headlight of a motorcycle. While wearing this, the wearer is transformed into an edgy machine. In the music video, model Emma Sjöberg is seen wearing it, and during the actual fashion show, Niki Taylor was seen sporting it. Both models sported the corset, with red-fringed black hotpants, and black leather accessories.

## Reviews

The 1992 motorcycle bustier, perfectly exemplifies Mugler's campy and eccentric aesthetic. This piece represented everything, Mugler was known for: creative silhouettes, vibrant colors, campy inspiration, and drama. The bustier alone is a work of art, but when styled by Mugler, the entire ensemble came alive. Mugler not only stayed true to his aesthetic, but also showcased the prominent trends of the spring 1992 fashions. Below are reviews, of the garment, some of that time, and a decade later.

\*In 2001, the bustier was purchased by the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The museum describes Mugler's design on the object page:

*"The citing of motorcycle imagery for a bustier melds the concepts of chassis and the female torso. The implication of the body as a vehicle to be driven or ridden inevitably raises the possibility of sexist interpretation. On the runway, however, the model, gripping her*

*handlebar panniers, steered herself.” (Met)*

\*In Mugler’s exhibition catalog *Superheroes: Fashion and Fantasy* (2008), Andrew Bolton lines this Mugler piece up alongside designers, like John Galliano, Alexander McQueen, and Walter van Beirendonck, and discusses their most dramatic works:

*“Adorned with skulls, hellfire, and other symbols of mortality, they embody both the multifocal eclecticism and semiological complexity that characterize the Postmodern body of both fiction and fashion and the darker terrors of our contemporary world.”*

\* Thierry Mugler always stuck to dramatic inspiration, and flair when designing clothing. Mugler is known in the fashion world, as producing extravagant fashion shows, in which to exhibit his costume-like designs. In *The History of Modern Fashion* (2015), Daniel James Cole and Nancy Deihl introduce Mugler:

*“Thierry Mugler had training in dance and experience in the corps de ballet of a regional company, a focus that informed his theatrical, body-conscious fashions... His aesthetic was dramatic at times, even campy.”*

\*An article for *Women’s Wear Daily* (1992) by Amy Spindler explained that Mugler did not suddenly find biker chic in the nineties:

*“Thierry Mugler designed his first couture outfit almost a decade ago: a black suit with metallic Cadillac ornaments, to look like a car or a motorcycle”*

\* Multiple publications reviewed Mugler’s spring 1992 show *Les Cowboys*. In *Women’s Wear Daily* (1992), Spindler describes the environment of *Les Cowboys*:

*“In his usual theatrical style, Mugler filled the runway with saucy saloon girls, takeoffs of*

*Miss Kitty and Mae West, Las Vegas showgirls, flashy L.A. cowgirls and a few Harley Davidson toughs. Theatrics aside, Mugler did manage to get a firm grip on the season's trends: fringe skirts, a herd of cowpoke chaps, calfskin prints, long shirt dresses, transparent looks, bi-level lengths, bare midriiffs and even some bare bottoms."*

\*While stylish clothing in the early 1990s was often meant to be minimalistic and practical, designers often made wild accessories and ensembles just for the fun or to show the quality of it. Mugler specialized in these kinds of designs. In an issue of Vogue (1992), journalist Jody Shields discusses this trend:

*"Sometimes one of a kind, the clothes and accessories in this category are easy to spot: they're the wild cards, the icing on the cake, sometimes the fashion equivalent of a practical joke. But practical they aren't. They don't have to be – since nothing has to be worn longer than it takes to hoof it down the runway... Thierry Mugler is the master of specially made goods. All of his theatrical pieces can actually be ordered if you're willing to pay the price, but most are given away to prominent fans, friends, or the models who wore them... Probably destined for the museum: Mugler's metal-and-Plexiglas Harley-Davidson bustier equipped with rear-view mirrors and a beer-can-holder garter."*

### **Afterlife**



In 2001, the bustier was purchased by the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In 2008, at the annual Met Gala exhibition, an exhibit titled “Superheroes: Fashion and Fantasy”, organized by Andrew Bolton, featured Mugler’s design. Bolton describes the creative aesthetic behind, Mugler’s bustier, and brings it together with famous comic-book personalities:

*“Both Ghost Rider and the Punisher embodied the Iron Age’s focus on death, a focus that finds resonance in the costumes of John Galliano [and] Thierry Mugler...” One of Mugler’s famous fans was given the chance to wear this iconic bustier: Beyoncé. The star donned it in 2008 in a set of promotional images for her I Am...Sasha Fierce world tour. Her version of the ensemble is minimalist in comparison with Mugler’s original styling, and simple background and black-and-white treatment of the photo let the bustier stand out as the most dramatic portion of the look.*

In 1992, Mugler’s show was casted of supermodels, actresses, a male porn star, Dianne Brill, and even the recently divorced Ivana Trump. A colorful fashion show, of so many different and interesting characters, but the real star of the Western-themed show, was Mugler’s bustier. It caught Beyoncé’s attention, when it was included in the Met’s “Superheroes” show. Beyoncé had contacted Mugler, after seeing the piece displayed at the Met exhibit, earlier that year. After meeting with him, she invited him to be the costume director, for the concert tour in which Beyoncé wore all Mugler designs.

Again quoting Shields, “*Mugler is the master of specially made goods. All of his theatrical pieces can actually be ordered if you’re willing to pay the price*”—and Beyoncé was. Not only was she photographed in the motorcycle bustier, but she hired Mugler to create stage

costumes, and direct parts, of her I Am Sasha Fierce tour. “I was very touched that she asked me,” Mugler told The Telegraph, “because she could have asked younger people. But she recognized, that I was pretty much at the origin of this moment, now about superheroes, the structured silhouette, and the extreme silhouette, and she wanted that”.

This famous motorcycle corset by Mugler, is a perfect example of his theatrical design aesthetic, as well as several important fads of the early 1990s. It was lauded as cheeky, and extravagant, by the fashion community during its debut, and has been celebrated since, as art in its own right. The iconic bustier will be remembered as some of Mugler’s finest work.

#### Annotated Bibliography

( MLA Format )

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