



From cheesemongers to miniaturists, blacksmiths to mixologists, we celebrate those who shape the world with their hands

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“The movement of a fish”



Tzuri Gueta's undulating, flexible outfits and accessories are sought after by consumers, collaborators and Hollywood costumiers alike. His secret? Some underwater inspiration and a very unusual material...

Words / Nicola Rayner → Photography / Laura Stevens



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Tzuri Gueta spent the summers of his infancy bobbing on the shores of the Mediterranean in a rubber ring while his older brothers went scuba diving. “It’s a strong memory from an early age,” the textile designer remembers. “At the beginning I was frightened; sometimes I used to keep my head under the water because it offered a kind of comfort not to see what was happening outside... This experience of being underwater, trying to define the different colours, the different shapes there, is a memory that serves me today.”

Step inside Gueta’s hushed atelier under one of the arches of the Viaduc des Arts, just a short distance from Paris’s busy Place de la Bastille, and his memory of that underwater world endures in physical form. It’s in the starfish and seashells that decorate the boutique, and the clutch bag that opens and closes like a clam; in the wearable sculpture that resembles a spiny-finned fish, and the coral that creeps over a motorcycle helmet, a bicycle and a fairy-tale carriage.

On closer inspection – and it’s hard to resist touching it – the predatory growth is not coral at all, however. It’s silicone – a polymer, composed mostly of silica, which has made Gueta’s name in the world of haute couture. »



Opening pages ✓
Tzuri Gueta's work
is inspired by the
underwater world

From left ✓
The designer uses moulds
and silicone beads for his
coral-themed jewellery

“Silicone is very different from a textile. It can be a mould, a yarn, a block, anything...”



In his 20-odd years in the fashion business, he's worked with every French fashion house you can name, as well as producing creations for films and the art world, and a commercially successful range of jewellery. It's a varied repertoire, but silicone is the material that binds it together.

“It's very different from a textile,” explains Gueta, who is thoughtful and softly spoken. “Something like cotton is a textile from the beginning, but silicone doesn't have a form – it can be a mould, a yarn, a block, anything.” One of his techniques involves blowing silicone into the fabric, in a patented and top-secret process he compares with glass-blowing.

In his atelier, he shows off the tools of his trade: huge tubes of silicone and reels of silk. He rummages through drawers of beadlike silicone parts, which are the building blocks of his jewellery. “It's like the notes in music – by mixing them differently they tell a different story,” he says, running a skein of the rubbery fabric through his fingers. The silicone

is warm to the touch and, though solid, it's a light, flexible and robust material. “I love the way it moves,” says Gueta. “It has the movement of a fish.”

This Parisian workshop is a long way from where Gueta was born, in 1968, near Hadera, Israel, to parents from Tripoli, Libya. He grew up in a kibbutz, the youngest of nine children. “When you're the youngest in a big family you don't always have the liberty to talk,” he says. “Drawing became my way of saying what I wanted to.”

Working in a textile factory from the age of 18 to 20 helped him to express himself further, and he went on to study textile design at Shenkar College of Engineering, Design and Art near Tel Aviv, where he was close to the ateliers of various brothers who worked in glass, metal and wood. Their workshops gave him access to more varied materials than his classmates.

“I experimented with lots of things and silicone was one of them,” he explains. “Twenty years ago, it wasn't a raw material you could find everywhere. »



From left ✓
Gueta's clutch bags open
and close like shells;
one of his experimental
techniques involves
blowing silicone into fabric

“At the beginning Hermès and Chanel didn’t want anything to do it with silicone. I was happy to see that change”

It was easy to use, something flexible, and the transparent effect immediately reminded me of the sea. I felt it reflected me very well, so I adopted it.”

Armed with a book of his early fabric samples, which he still keeps proudly in his atelier, Gueta arrived in France in 1997, straight from college, and began to show his ideas to French fashion houses. “A designer I really loved at the time was Thierry Mugler,” Gueta says, “so I came to Paris, presented my work and they wanted to use my fabric in a fashion show. It was one of the happiest moments of my life.”

Not all French fashion designers were welcoming initially, though. “Silicone was seen as something very different,” he says. “It can be brave to take a material that’s not considered by many people as a rich material, especially for the *haute couture française* – for them a rich material is leather or linen or wool or silk. At the beginning Hermès and

Chanel didn’t want anything to do it with it, but I was happy to see that change.”

Today, when asked which designers he’s worked with, he replies, without arrogance, “All of them.” It’s true: his website lists Chanel, Givenchy, Jean-Paul Gaultier and Dior, among many others. “In the beginning my work was too artistic for them. When the materials become too much like a sculpture it’s not that easy to integrate them into the garment.”

His work has appeared at the Pompidou Centre in Paris, the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. One of his most celebrated exhibitions in Paris was *Noces Végétales (Plant Nuptials)*, which the National Museum of Natural History hosted inside its Great Greenhouses in the Jardin des Plantes in 2013–14 – a fitting home for his leaf-like cascades, which blended perfectly into the natural setting. »



Silicone - or silicon?

Don't confuse silicone with silicon. The latter is the 14th element on the period table and the most abundant of Earth's elements after oxygen, while silicone, with an "e", is synthetic: a polymer first developed in the early 20th century.



While the properties of the metalloid silicon have led to its use in semiconductors and microchips - hence Silicon Valley - silicones often appear in liquid form, as gels or resin, or as a flexible, rubberlike plastic.



The key qualities of silicone are low toxicity, high resistance to heat and strong electrical insulation. In daily life, you'll find it in kitchen utensils or baking moulds, which can withstand high temperatures, or in the medical world where it's used for heart valves, and other surgical enhancements.

Passion for fashion?

Bag a front-row seat at Paris Fashion Week (25 February - 5 March), or soak up the style at these events...



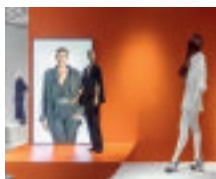
Christian Dior: Designer of Dreams

Opening at London's V&A on 2 February, this will be the largest Dior exhibition ever staged in the UK. vam.ac.uk



Exhibitionism

Marking its 50th birthday, NYC's Fashion Institute of Technology will celebrate by bringing back 33 of its most influential shows, with more than 80 looks on display from 8 February. fitnyc.edu



Margiela, The Hermès Years

Until 28 April, this show at Sweden's Artipelag looks back at the work of avant-garde designer Martin Margiela. artipelag.se



From top: Gueta at work in his atelier; one of his coral-like sculptures

Then there's his work for film, which he loves as it involves what he calls "diving into somebody else's brain". This has included *Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets* and *Beauty and the Beast*.

"For *The Three Musketeers* [in 2011], I had to create a Victorian costume for Milla Jovovich that had very modern technology, so when she pressed a button, a bomb would explode," he smiles. "The challenge was how I could create such a richly worked piece, with the lace and the Victorian detail, and how it looked underwater, too." The latter because, aptly, Jovovich ends up in the sea at one point.

Given the underwater connection that comes up again, and his memories of the past, it occurs to me that his work might be about escaping. "I think that's something I'm always looking for," he agrees. "Being in a bubble, being isolated, without all this noise." He glances outside at the busy Parisian street. "I don't feel like a city guy – I feel more comfortable in nature."

For all his success, he's never far away from the boy in that rubber ring, ducking his head in the sea. "I always come back to the same moment when I meditate," he says. "I see myself underwater because it always seems like a safe place." tzurigueta.com
Norwegian flies to Paris from 11 destinations. Book flights, a hotel and a rental car at Norwegian.com

PHOTOS: VIRGINIE BONNEFON; CHRISTIAN DIOR: DESIGNER OF DREAMS, SUPPORTED BY SWAROVSKI, AT THE V&A FROM 2 FEBRUARY - 14 JULY 2019 / ROYAL PORTRAIT OF PRINCESS MARGARET ON HER 21ST BIRTHDAY PHOTOGRAPH BY CECIL BEATON (1904-1980) © VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON; THE CORSET: FASHIONING THE BODY (JANUARY 28, 2000 - APRIL 22, 2000) © THE MUSEUM AT FIT; JEAN-BAPTISTE BERANGER