

TEXT BY SARAH HAY | PHOTOGRAPHY BY KARIM SADLI | STYLED BY NICOLA FORMICHETTI

*WHEN A
MAN WALKS
INTO
A ROOM,
HE BRINGS
HIS WHOLE
LIFE
WITH HIM*

NICOLA FORMICHETTI IS THE STYLIST WITH THE MIDAS TOUCH WHO HAS TAKEN OVER AT THE HOUSE OF MUGLER, TATTOOED MUSE IN TOW. WITH HIS DEBUT SHOW SMASHING RECORDS, AND LADY GAGA COLLABORATIONS A-GO-GO, THIS IS THE BEGINNING OF A MASSIVE MUGLER MOMENT. IF NICOLA FORMICHETTI SAYS IT'S COOL, THEN IT IS



BLACK COLLARLESS ANGORA-SILK MIX SUIT JACKET; WHITE SHIRT WITH ATTACHED PEARL NECKLACE; TAILORED BLACK COTTON SUIT TROUSERS, ALL BY MUGLER



PLEATED AND FLARED WOOL TROUSERS WITH ATTACHED BLACK SILK VEIL BY MUGLER.
ULTRALIGHT SEE-THROUGH FABRIC, STYLIST'S OWN



PLEATED SEE-THROUGH WHITE SILK SHIRT BY MUGLER

**'You go to Mugler
if you want
to look like
a creator...'**



RICK GENEST AND NICOLA FORMICHETTI

Rick Genest is from Montreal. He is 25. He listens to death metal, grindcore, speed metal – anything that's fast, hard and ear-shredding. He is wearing only boots and trousers, and every bit of exposed skin is tattooed. With the ritual of head-shaving just completed, the tattooed brains, veins and bone etched on his skin have crystal clarity.

Why the skeleton, I ask the new muse of Mugler menswear. 'It's just my story,' he says, in his French-Canadian accent. 'A good 80 per cent of my body is tattooed. I'm going all the way. It's all one tattoo, one memory, one idea, one homage.' And the bugs? 'They're my friends. I have over 100 bugs tattooed on my body. It comes from the decomposing cadaver – it's wormy. Bugs eat the dead.' What are your dreams? 'I want to be in the big league in freak shows and, one day maybe, perform at Coney Island. There's also Carnival Diablo in Ottawa, I want to be part of that, too. Fire, stilts, beds of nails – these are all dreams I could be realising soon.'

Earlier, while Rick was having his head shaved here in a photographic studio in eastern Paris, I met Nicola Formichetti. As the newly appointed creative director of Mugler, he's the centre of gravity for Romain Kremer and Sebastien Peigné, who design the newly relaunched menswear and womenswear respectively. It's seven days after the debut men's fashion show and less than a month before the women's fashion show, arguably the most highly anticipated fashion event of 2011. Beady-eyed critics are preparing arsenals of diplomatic derision. Fans across the globe are about to unleash Mugler mania. Nicola? He's checking his Facebook. He's not fazed but then, if you've ever worked with Nicola you'll know neurosis just isn't his thing.

Nicola Formichetti is acknowledged as one of the biggest stylists in the business. Besides Mugler, he's also fashion director for Lady Gaga, *Vogue Hommes Japan* and Uniqlo. He works hard, plays hard, and he invites creative input from every member of his team. Everything he does revolves not just around fashion but also good

humour; a day with him is a day spent laughing, and connecting with his gentle, non-vampiric energy.

Ten years ago, at 22, he was a buyer for London avant-fashion store The Pineal Eye, where he championed cutting-edge designers such as Bernhard Willhelm, Ann Sofie Back, Hedi Slimane at Dior Homme, Noki and Jeremy Scott. His talent was recognised by Katy England and Alister Mackie, out shopping, who duly offered him the chance to shoot a page for their magazine, *Dazed & Confused*. 'Slowly, slowly, I began doing my own thing as a stylist,' says Nicola. Since then he has collaborated with established photographers including Steven Klein, Mario Testino and Nick Knight, as well as newer names such as Brett Lloyd, Mariano Vivanco, Matt Irwin and Karim Sadli.

In August 2010, Nicola was approached by Joël Palix of Clarins (who now owns Thierry Mugler the company) to relaunch the Mugler brand. The originator, sartorial genius Thierry (now known as Manfred Mugler) left the label in 2003, though he still consults on the perfumes, launching Womanity with Clarins in 2010. During the 1980s, Mugler was a juggernaut on the world fashion map, with fashion shows that cost millions; Mugler now works on his own creative projects, such as costumes for Beyonce's 'I Am' world tour.

I was at home in NYC watching some random TV,' says Nicola, describing the exact moment he received the call from Palix. 'I was so excited, but I completely refused it. I thought, how can you do something so amazing, Mugler is a fashion god, he cannot be bettered, so I declined. I was really scared of the idea. Then I started researching him as a person, looking into his story. He didn't have fashion training, like me. Mugler was always a punk, an outsider – yes, it was a French brand but it wasn't like the other luxury brands. I love the idea that Mugler is global: I live between New York, Tokyo, Paris and London; my accessory designers are in Germany; some people are in Paris

and others are in London.' In addition, Thierry Mugler liked mixing elements from various subcultures and underground club scenes with music, fashion and glamour, an approach with which Formichetti is more than familiar.

Romain Kremer, Toulouse-born and a winner at the prestigious Festival d'Hyères, which supports young talent in fashion and photography in France, arrives to tell me how the debut menswear collection came to light in the Mugler building that looks out onto the grand Opéra Garnier in the centre of Paris. A handsome, pale 28-year-old, he grins. 'I'm exhausted,' he says. 'I've just got to check the samples are OK; then I'm getting a massage.'

'We spent the first month with the menswear and womenswear teams working together in the same space,' says Romain. 'In one huge room, seeing the collections evolve, looking at fabrics together – real team spirit, not two separate stories.' They travelled to the Mugler archives, diligently stored and catalogued in a temperature-controlled building outside Paris. All the robot suits, the Chimera couture dress, the alien beauty freak gloves and the body fabulous suits, neatly waiting, one imagines like messages from the future, sitting in digitally incubated pods.

A styling session ensued: a jacket from '92, women's trousers from '87... The team found looks they liked and began to deconstruct them, keeping the Mugler silhouette but minding their own affinity with simplicity. 'I wanted to give power like Mr Mugler, but not only with shoulder pads,' says Nicola. 'I wanted to give power inside, so just by wearing it you feel strong. The fabrics we used are very classic; then we took all the fabrics Mugler worked with, like latex and neoprene, and combined the two. We have lots of ideas in store; this is just the beginning.'

Having worked together since 2008, when Nicola began styling Romain's own menswear shows (quite avant-garde, melding male anatomy with technology), the pair communicate in shorthand. Creatively, Romain says Nicola takes him to places he

**'...a kind of
freak – but a
beautiful freak!'**

**Nicola Formichetti,
creative director, Mugler**



SEE-THROUGH LIGHT-YELLOW LATEX T-SHIRT WITH SIDE ZIPS; PLEATED, FLARED THICK NAVY WOOL PANTS WITH ATTACHED SEE-THROUGH BLACK SILK VEIL, BOTH BY MUGLER. BLACK LATEX GLOVES, STYLIST'S OWN



PLEATED, FLARED THICK NAVY WOOL PANTS WITH ATTACHED SEE-THROUGH BLACK SILK VEIL BY MUGLER. FASHION ASSISTANTS: SOPHIE RUTHENSTEINER, MATTHIEU BREDON-HUGER. PHOTOGRAPHIC ASSISTANTS: JULIA CHAMPEAU, HERMINIE. DIGITAL: EDOUARD MALFETTES AT DIGIT'ART. GROOMING: KARIN BIGLER AT ARTLIST. PRODUCTION: JULIE BERTON AT ARTLIST. SHOT AT DOOR STUDIOS, PARIS

would never go otherwise. 'I trust him so much, and vice versa. I need to feel confident with people I work with, and we won that through experience.'

Working with a large French house (and the team, contracts and structure that come with it) is new to both Nicola and Romain, but they've been given the freedom to do things in their own way. Images and ideas are sent back and forth over the internet; Nicola's schedule means he's as often in the air as he is on the ground. But that's not a big deal: his father was a pilot for Alitalia and his Japanese mother an air hostess, so travel, being on the move, crossing from culture to culture, is in his blood. He's done it since forever and, besides, for Nicola, who

has never had a job outside fashion, this particular project is pure delight.

Nicola's admiration and respect for Mugler's work has been on public record for years. He has dressed Lady Gaga in so many Mugler outfits that he can't put a number on them. 'The Mugler woman knows what she wants, and it's the same for the men,' says Romain. 'For those who really want to be different, you go to Mugler if you want to look like a creator, like a kind of freak – but a beautiful freak! I think that's what Mugler was talking about in his work, and that's where I'm trying to get to with my designs.'

The final piece in the puzzle was the presentation of the collection. The original plan was to do a 'tiny, tiny' presentation for buyers, using a few models. 'But then, just

after the Christmas holidays I found Rick on Facebook,' says Nicola. 'I had his picture from a couple of years ago on my wall – I can't remember where I found it but I always kind of assumed it was amazing make-up. But then I started researching Rick, and it turned out the designer of the new Mugler logo knew him from Montreal. So I messaged him via Facebook and invited him to be part of the presentation.'

Rick Genest, it turned out, didn't own a passport and so the Mugler team, along with the collection, flew to him. 'He was so incredible with the clothes, we made the film,' says Nicola. 'He brought so much into it all. Not just the way he moves in front of the camera, but with the whole concept: the apple, death, rebirth...'

The campaign launched virally (Nicola

fully embraces new technology, and has a website and massively popular blog). 'I decided to do digital teasers on the net. I just wanted to do something different – not just to be wacky. We really wanted to show Rick to people, the mystery of it all. We covered him in black latex so you couldn't really see that it was him and had him slowly, slowly peeling it away.' It's easy to see why Lady Gaga asked to be involved, offering to become musical director and remixing her album track 'Scheiße' for the accompanying film, directed by a long-time Formichetti collaborator, the photographer Mariano Vivanco.

This story shows how Nicola works. He may not be a trained couturier but he's a curator who exists at the extreme peak of what's happening today, tomorrow, next

week; he's a conduit for creativity. 'I love collaborating with my friends,' he says. 'Gaga's a big part of the womenswear because she wears the clothes – like me, Romain and Sebastian.' And indeed he's wearing a Mugler top with customised jeans and Bottega Veneta boots. 'All the friends I've made over the years in London and Japan, I want to work with them all, so it becomes more of a collective. We've changed the logo to say simply Mugler. So straight away it becomes more of a 'House of Mugler' rather than just one person's point of view.'

'I hate elitist fashion,' says Nicola, when we discuss the Gaga fans that descended on the menswear show. 'I mean, I was one of these young kids. When I first moved to London I was trying to get into all the shows but I couldn't, and it was so exciting.

I wanted the kids to get excited again. It was the first time they were going to hear Gaga's new song, so I tweeted in the morning: 'If you look cool, we'll let you in.' I just wanted to include people. It's like that feeling I had when I first saw Mr Mugler's clothes in music videos – that excitement. It's more than fashion, it's fashion without borders, global fashion. We tried to deliver that in the menswear but without the wearer becoming a peacock.'

Funnily enough, in 2009, during one of the last interviews Thierry Mugler himself has given to date, he said of his self-imposed curtain call in fashion: 'I left when I did because I didn't want to become a monster.' If the rebirth of the House of Mugler were a work of fiction, no writer could have written a better opening line. ♦