

# KAMBRIEL

## A MODERN, MYSTERIOUS MUSE

By Cara Shahin

**If mystery lies at the heart of beauty, then Kambriel's collection of Gothic clothing is mysterious indeed.**

Her designs are diverse, striped and colorful—pirates meet saloon dancers meet Victorian aristocrats. Soft and romantic, dangerous, though innocent, Kambriel blends the spirit of the old world with the form of the new: 18th century French cuffs, priestly collars, bewitching corsets, arabesque crop tops, and phantasmal, off-white, gowns, draping—nearly dripping—across the floor. Eccentric, though natural, Kambriel is a

Gaudi for theatrical attire. Her intricacies and strategic embellishments command the attention of the global and naked eye.

Finding her animus from the ground up, Kambriel pays close attention to the natural world, discovering fashion opportunity in the environment. “I’m inspired by color and shadow, dreams made flesh, ghosts of past lives, silhouette, mystique,” said the versatile designer, “whether it be the feathers of a crimson red cardinal perched outside a window, or the way the branches of a weeping willow sway sinuously in the wind.” A lover of music and science, art and beauty, Kambriel is a contemporary Renaissance woman, a master and Muse. Despite her success in the industry, however, she never saw herself working in fashion.

“I never set forth with a matter-of-fact decision of becoming a fashion designer,” she said. “A variety of my interests just naturally morphed through the years from one thing into another until I began blending many of my personal interests, inspirations, and talents.”

Creating clothes for herself since she was a child, her skills and eye for gothic design began to surface when she was in junior high, waking up early to put together the perfect outfit for the day. “I’d play a Cure tape, some new wave, or a punk bootleg while working on these projects, and just completely delve into whatever it made me feel.” Like an actress, the clothes she put on defined the persona she’d play, carrying on the feeling of her music, her thoughts and impressions, in the seams of the outfit she chose. “Back then, it never occurred to me that someday all this would possibly lead to a future fate,” she emphasized. “I actually thought I would end up being a scientist or a violinist for the London Symphony Orchestra... just a rather unique, creatively anachronistic looking one.” A professional designer since 1994, Kambriel launched her first collection, “Atrocities,” while working with former partner Curse. She doesn’t often collaborate with other designers, but when she does, she does so brilliantly.

“Marrying” their vision with hers, she takes into account their personality, presence, and their current influences. This fine-tuned catharsis is based in the same imagination that births her individual creations and designs—be it through daydreams, or by the night.

“Sometimes,” says Kambriel, “I’ll have a dream wherein I see something incredible and feel, ‘That’s perfectly my style... why didn’t I think of that?’ only to awaken and realize, ‘I did!’” Bringing her visions to the drawing table, she sketches her fantasies, putting forth the em-

bryonic stage of her fashion, deciding whether it was best suited for her own collection or an occasion.

If made for a customer, Kambriel will “start sketching whatever comes to mind, inspired by the feel of the event, or envisioning the specific landscape it’s going to be worn in.” Channeling, like a medium, the personalities and places of the artists she sews for, Kambriel pulls what’s inside them and presses it to the out. “If it’s for a musician, I’ll think of how they like to move around on stage, the power and delicacy of their voice, and if there’s a cohesive theme to an album.” When designing for authors, she’ll consider “the worlds they dream up alongside their own ‘real-world’ personalities,” evoking the sappy in-between of their fantasies and realities.

Kambriel did this for award-winning author Neil Gaiman, whose particular sap is “subtly dark and elegantly practical.” His trademark jackets have been sported everywhere from the red carpet to the Sydney Opera house to, “touchingly,” his New Years Eve wedding ceremony to Amanda Palmer.

The Gaiman- Palmer marriage is far from the





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only espousal Kambriel has been involved with, however. Releasing a collection labeled “The Havisham Gowns,” a series of wedding dresses layered with timeworn, laced fabric, Kambriel gives antiqued relics an elegant new life. Her countless hours of stitchery are sealed with myth, threaded with fate and promises of good fortune— better fortune, that is, than the woman they’re named after.

Ms. Havisham, in legend, was abandoned at the alter, refusing to undress from her “decaying yet exquisitely haunting wedding gown.” Tragically clinging to a lonely-- though everlasting-- love, she wore the dress everyday for decades. Because of the symbolism and style of the “Havisham Gowns,” Kambriel considers them amongst her finest pieces, alongside her memorial work with “The Pale Court.” Laboring to prolong the legacy of Laura Purdy, a friend and fellow designer who passed away in 2005, Kambriel invested a year of her time to help complete her unfinished work.

Kambriel’s altruism and good-natured spirit doesn’t stop there, however-- it reaches to the very fabrics she decides to use. “As a vegetarian, I don’t work with leather or fur,” she stated. “But other than that I have a very open mind towards working with different materials.” Loving to use her artistic eye, Kambriels adaptation of unexpected objects and textiles are a key component to her unique designs. In a recent collection, she deflowered old videos and new wave cassettes, weaving the tape-bound insides into Victorian chokers and reflective, black shawls. Utilizing abundant materials “which otherwise goes to waste in our digitally-driven society,” Kambriel recycles with purpose. “I transform something that could otherwise end up in a landfill into something wor-

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thy of being worn down a catwalk in Paris tomorrow.” To Paris, and beyond.

With a widely recognized variety of work, Kambriels collections have been featured in everything from fashion shows to stage performances-- from actors’ antics to dancers’ acrobatics. This past year, a full ensemble of her pieces were even featured at the Allentown Art Museum, part of an exhibit called Gothic to Goth: Embracing the Dark side.” Currently taking part in an up-and-coming, Portland based feature film entitled “My Summer as a Goth,” the dexterous designer is creating a versatile line of costumes for the characters to use. The film is scheduled for release in summer, 2013.

Though in a constant state of evolution, Kambriels designs maintain a remarkable connection to her first works. “Much like in life’s grand scheme,” she said, “I believe that all our yesterdays combine together to lay a foundation for what becomes our path into the future.” This ethereal clothing line, whether made for the new or embellished with the old, summons a timeless wisdom, cultivating femininity and empowering today’s women. It’s a fabric, a style, for tough and modern dark goddesses —melancholy, yet sublime-- looking forward with their chin up and backward with a half smile; the mysterious, and the Muse.