

MEET THE FIVE BEST-DRESSED ARTISTS TO HAVE EVER LIVED

by Charlie Porter



I've spent the last five years thinking about the clothing of artists. It's not just what they wear, it's why they wear it, in what circumstances, and the lessons we can learn from their way with style. The result is my book, *What Artists Wear*, which explores the language of clothing worn by artists such as Andy Warhol, Barbara Hepworth, Joseph Beuys, Cindy Sherman, Mark Leckey, Sarah Lucas and Martine Syms.

Writing the book has changed the way I look at both fashion and art. I'm ready to go deeper, to explore further the subconscious messaging in the clothing we wear and the art we experience. But I'm also left with an even greater appreciation of artists with great style, who make the active choice to dress with purpose. Especially for GQ, here are fresh thoughts on five of my favourite male artists that feature in *What Artists Wear*.

Frank Bowling

Following his Tate Britain retrospective in 2019, Frank Bowling is now recognised as one of this country's greatest. When this photo was taken in the mid-1960s, he was fresh out of the Royal College Of Art, energised by the possibilities of what paint can do. His Breton sweater captures this freshness of youth, a garment that had not long switched from a garment of function to one of fashion. It's the grid of the lines and the clarity of the design that makes the Breton such a pleasure to wear today.

Richard Hamilton

The British artist Richard Hamilton was a man dedicated to denim. Look through images of him and over and over again you'll find double-, even triple-, denim looks. Hamilton wears denim with crispness and an appreciation for the beauty of mass-product design, as seen here by the Braun TV designed by his hero Dieter Rams. I love the flourish of this denim look that Hamilton wears, from the denim cap down to the super-specific white socks.

Francis Bacon

When I was writing my book, I was fascinated by portraits of Francis Bacon in his studio. All around him was absolute chaos: why did he always look so clean? Bacon's clothes show how much he was all about control. These were the pieces he wore to be glamorous and in which he drank at the Colony Room and other bars of Soho. It was also these pieces he wore when he invited photographers into his studio, to send the message that he was master of his disorder. What did he wear when he was alone, just him and his work? Paint-covered dressing gowns, old sweaters and slacks, filthy and glorious slippers.

Jean-Michel Basquiat

Jean-Michel Basquiat loved Comme Des Garçons. His friend, the stylist Karen Binns, told me Basquiat would say he'd spend hundreds of thousands of dollars at their New York store every year. Basquiat wore the clothes the same way he would a sweater from a thrift store: with freedom and abandon. Paint would get on everything, joint burns too. So many of us treat fashion as this deified form, the clothes to be kept pristine. Why? If you have something you love, wear it with full vim and vigour. This is Basquiat walking at a Comme Des Garçons Homme Plus catwalk show in Paris in 1987, a mutual mark of respect between brand and artist.

Tabboo!

The New York artist Tabboo! wears clothes with full vivacity. This is him in his own Gucci green velvet flared suit; Tabboo! told me that every day he dresses "to the nines. The twelves! The fifteens!". Since he was a child, Tabboo! has connected art with music and style. For him, they all feed into each other, the sass and joy of his canvases reflected in the lip-synch posts on Instagram (follow him at @tabboonyc) and the vivid, effervescent fashion that he buys and wears. Fashion loves him back: he has collaborated with both Supreme and Marc Jacobs. His is a lesson in the joy of dressing. "This could be the last day of my life," he told me, "and this is how I'm living."