Johanna Seban: This is the first time you have met. Do you know each other’s work?

Julien Dossena: I discovered the Bouroullec’s just after high school, in 2001, when I went to Rennes to study art history. I immediately liked their work. I was undoubtedly attracted by their Breton side, which I share.

Ronan Bouroullec: I don’t know much about fashion culture, but I know a little about the house of Paco Rabanne. At the beginning of our careers, when we were struggling to survive, we designed perfume bottles to make some money. We did five or six projects for Paco Rabanne, but none were accepted. More recently, I have encountered Julien’s name, image, and some of his work.

Erwan Bouroullec: I have never been too aware of other people’s projects. I am really focused on what I am doing and don’t pay much attention to what is happening around me. And I am far from being an expert on fashion. I wear the same clothes all the time. I buy four of each and wear the same thing. I hate shopping.

You all grew up in southern Brittany, far from the design and fashion worlds you belong to today. How did you get where you are now?

Julien Dossena: Originally, I wanted to study art history and went to college in Rennes. I have been drawing since I was a child and thought that theory would be enough for me. But I missed drawing right away, so I switched to applied arts at the École Duperré, which I liked less. In the end, I went to La Cambre, an art and design school in Brussels.

I was born in 1971. It was another era. Without digital technologies, we had much less access to images. My parents were not a}
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Ronan Bouroullec

How do you create designs that will contribute to people’s daily lives?

I often ask myself this question, especially right now, since I am designing only women’swear for Paco Rabanne. I think I look for a balance between personal satisfaction on the level of aesthetics or formal expression, and functionality. I try, at the same time, to touch the personal and to think of a garment as a tool to help a woman adapt to modern life. I realize, more and more, that the functionality of a piece nourishes my real research.

One of the most important experiences in my career was a meeting with Rolf Felibaum at Vitra, who offered us very serious projects at a time when we had little experience. Among the topics we worked on was the issue of workspaces. Laptops were showing up everywhere and changing the way people worked. At first, I thought we were a casting error. I had never worked for anyone else, and Erwan had only worked for me. Finally, I realized that he was fishing for new solutions in our naïveté. So yes, of course, I think of the user, whether it’s a friend, my parents, a Japanese person, or a very tall Dutchman. But it must remain rather vague. You have to keep your intuitive confidence.

When I get up in the morning and have a smoke at the window, questions immediately start popping up: How to find a solution for a certain project, how to succeed with contemporary methods. All that obsesses me. Design and fashion are very present in our daily lives. Unfortunately, there is little interest in it, and not much is provided in the way of means to develop major projects.

At one time, everything I did – going to an exhibition, reading a book, seeing a movie – had to have a reason, a meaning. It had to nourish my work. I have learned to let go a little. It was getting too forced; there was no longer any real research.

Ronan and Erwan, you are known for the flexible, adjustable office furniture you designed for Vitra, which allows movement in the workplace. Julien, your work also favors movement through the fluidity of the garments. In what way is movement at the heart of your work?

A body is in movement, so clothing must move. At Paco Rabanne, there is, of course, a history of heavy garments, yet all those articulated pieces create another type of movement. Chainmail is like liquid metal on the body.

We live in a world so complicated that if we have to struggle with non-portable furniture or tight clothing, it becomes complicated. But there is a time for everything, and there is surely a time for high heels. Still, every time I create an object, I wonder if Jacques Tati would mock it because it lacks humanity or charm.

Our world is becoming more digital and virtual, so what does it mean to practice a profession that consists of creating an object and working with your hands?

I can’t imagine my work if I didn’t create the objects with my hands. Designing and drawing are important, but you also have to work on the prototypes, correct it, take it somewhere else, play it. This is the part of my work I am most in tune with, when I try to correct the lines or accentuate or minimize an effect. It is only through my hands that I can really focus for the intention and passion, which allows me to delegate.

There is an analogy between film credits and what we do. Our projects are the result of collective intelligence. Certainly, we have an intuition and a vision, but it is transformed by the good work of the team supporting us. Our conversation has been translated from French.