

A LINEAGE IN BLACK FASHION

CONTROVERSY



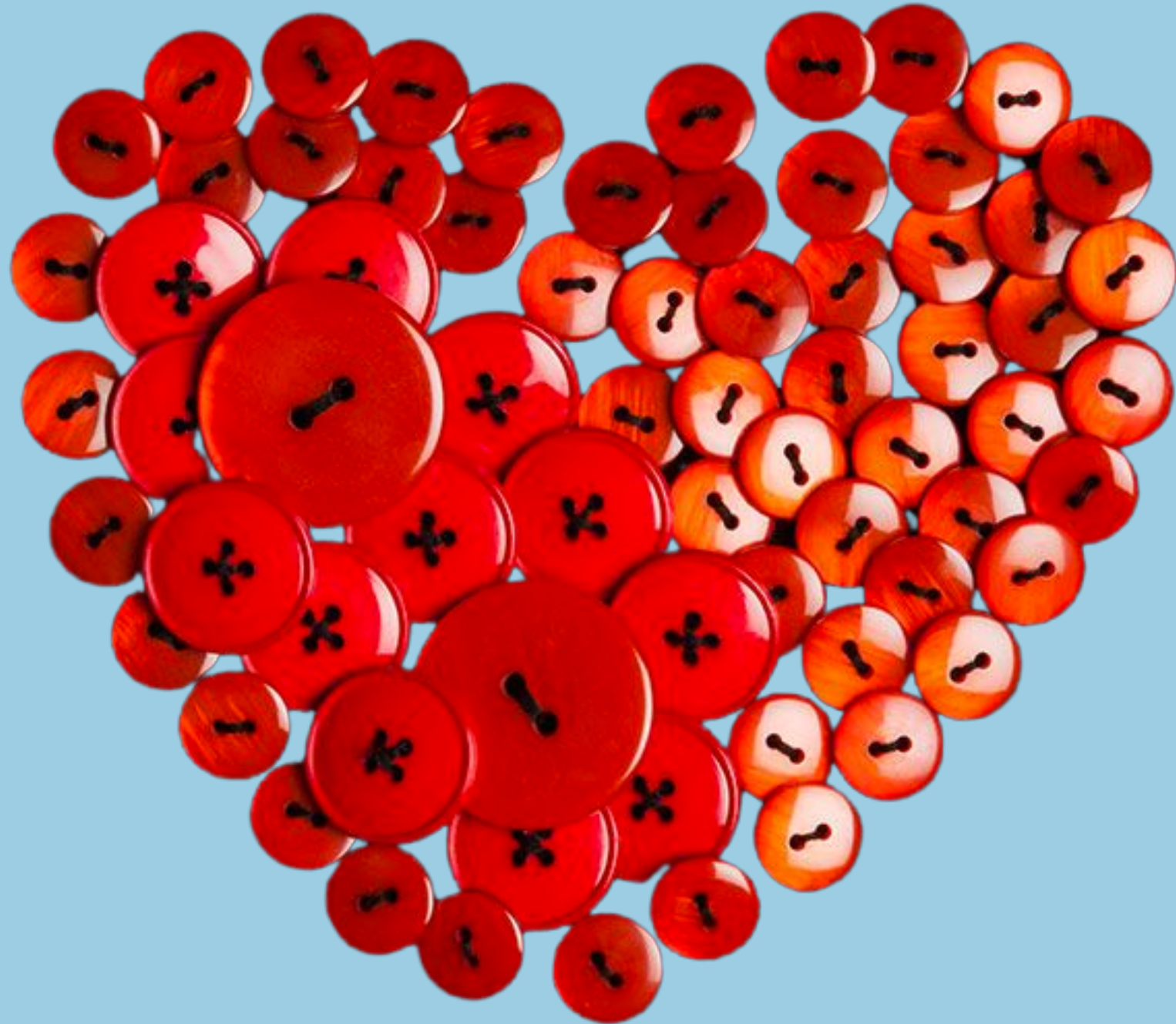
PATRICK KELLY

DESIGNED AND EDITED BY TATUM OWENS

MOWALOLA OGUNLESI

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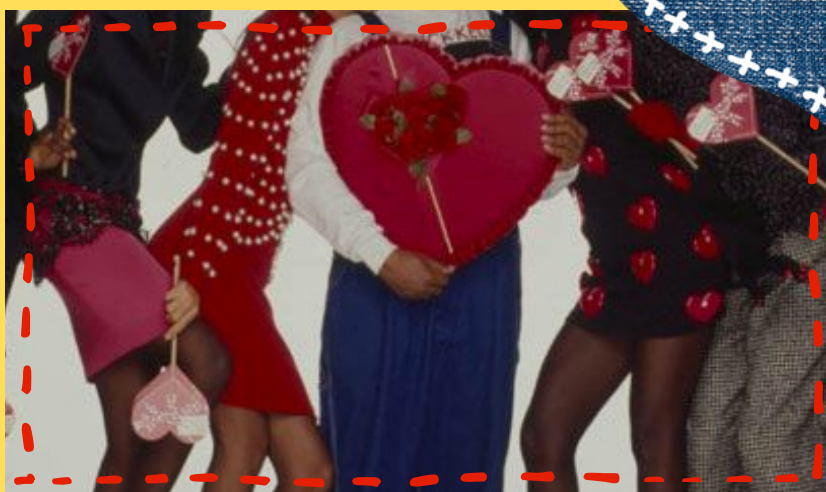
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CITATIONS

The works we used to construct this dialogue

PATRICK KELLY

Known for his enthusiastic usage of buttons, reclamation of anti-Black iconography, and the inclusion of Black models at a time when that was not an industry goal, Patrick Kelly is an icon in fashion and artistic expression. Through this presentation, we hope to delve into what constituted his sense of style and how he imbues Blackness and resiliency within his visual narratives. While a piece like this might have once appeared in a magazine like Vogue, which inspired him, we will modernize this examination of fashion by displaying it over a Canva zine presentation.



MOWALOLA OGUNLESI

Additionally, in that contemporary transformation's vein, we will compare Kelly's legacy to an upcoming British-Nigerian designer, Mowalola Ogunlesi, to illustrate two instances of Black creativity over time.

This comparison should be heightened and emphasized by the fact that both designers are famous for how the fashion industry perceives them

to be controversial in their industry.



FEATURE ON PATRICK KELLY

BUILDING COMMUNITY

A chronological look into Kelly is available several pages from here in our timeline. This feature should instead focus on what constituted Kelly's persona. The first defining feature of which was an overflowing sense of community. Between Ethel Rainey (the Grandma that raised him and served as his main source of inspiration in fashion), Josephine Baker as an icon, and other Black women as (role) models, not to mention the queer and nightclub cultures he was a part of, Patrick Kelly's incorporation of his identity was informed by the communities he existed in (Camerlengo). He brought pieces of himself, his southern roots and New York friends, into his shows.



PARIS AND FAME

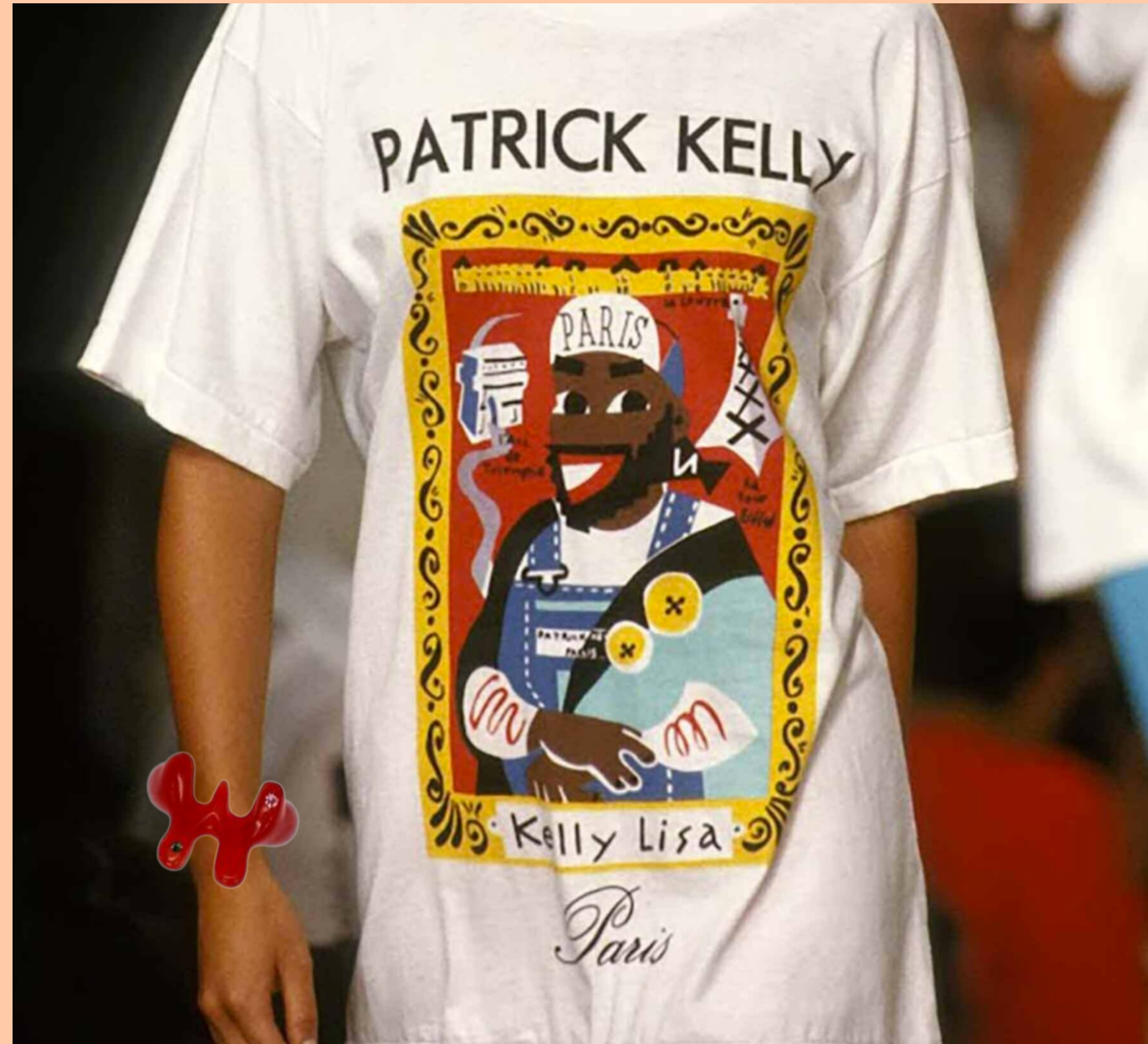
That translation of Black community to the fashion world was vital to his success because the friends he made helped to push him along, like Pat Cleveland who was the first person to send him to Paris, achieving his dream (Harper 06:00). Amongst other perks of having these famous friends, he had walking advertisements for his brand in the hands of supermodels. With that and his knack for grabbing attention through novel stylistic achievements, he made it in Paris. There, he became "the first American admitted into France's Chambre syndicale du prêt-à-porter des couturiers et des creatures de mode" (Pritchard 261).



BLACK PERFORMANCE

It was clear he was different from other designers in the way he commanded attention. His shows as one example, paled in comparison to contemporaries in the way that they had a sense of liveliness that aided in the interpretation of the designs presented. A Kelly demonstration would be directed by him, started with a prayer and graffiti heart drawn, and ended with the queen Aretha Franklin (Harper 12:00). However, these hallmarks of his eccentric performances are not what brought him the most attention. No, the star of his shows was the racist iconography that he consistently fashioned into his work. That leads me to another aspect of Kelly's persona: he was quite the controversial figure for his unique approach to reclamation.

FEATURE ON PATRICK KELLY



ANTI-BLACK SMBOLS

Kelly argued that he could reclaim anti-Black memorabilia into his designs in a way that explored racism "through love, [to] tell his own story" (Harper 15:00). That story included growing up in the US South and being privy to countless examples of offensive caricatures, one of which he made his logo: the golliwog. He worked that into the design to the right through his signature buttons, while other symbols included "a Josephine Baker-inspired bandana skirt. . . [and] the graphic "Mississippi Lisa" T-shirt, depicting a black woman resembling Aunt Jemima. . . Kelly developed a near obsession with trying to neutralize racist imagery by re-appropriating it into his fashion" (Sargent).



RECLAMATION

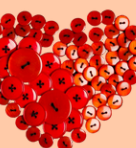
For him, it seems that removing the negative associations is complex because while these were traumatic visuals to witness, (and it could be argued that revisiting them was just a ploy for attention, bringing up old wounds for attention) Black people were subjected to them nonetheless. His aim was to add in connection and joy to these harsh figures that have only so far caused and represented Black people's pain and suffering. He's related these figures to his origins, how they are intertwined. It's like coming back to these pieces of history shows two sides of the same coin. Take his golliwog sewn in buttons as an example: on one end, you see the constant struggle Black people were faced with in the form these buttons take.

FEATURE ON PATRICK KELLY



RESILIENCE

On the other, you see the people who made the buttons meaningful, who survived and lived in spite of those symbols, like how “when buttons would go missing from Patrick's clothes, his grandmother, who worked as a maid for a white family, would sew new buttons of various colors, sizes, and shapes on them” (Sargent). It is a mixed process of pain and survival, and Kelly hoped he could add into that mix some joy. This process of reclamation is informed by his experience being Black and queer in the US: to be resilient in the face of opposition, to be camp, to be vibrant and imbue meaning. And any depictions of that are his to make, because he lived through it to tell. He did, until we lost him to AIDS, something that hit the fashion world hard because of the contributions queer people made to it.



FEATURE ON MOWALOLA OGUNLESI

UPBRINGING

Next, we will focus on our contemporary analog to Kelly, Mowalola Ogunlesi. As a self-described "DRiP Gawd", she has been known for designs that explore gender non-conformity and reflect on being British-Nigerian, with an Afrofuturist lens. With that, her entrance to fashion caught the eye of many prominent celebrities, including Solange, Drake, and Kanye West. One main example is the bullet-ripped dress she displayed at Naomi Campbell's gala, worn by the namesake, as a representation of how being Black can feel like being a walking target. Not only that, but she has inspected intersectional identity, looking at race and gender. Mowalola Ogunlesi states that "I try to push the boundaries of showing skin, being comfortable with your sexuality, with menswear as well as womenswear" (Adegoke and Banjo).



UP AND COMING

In 2020, Kanye West announced a partnership signed between his brand Yeezy and GAP and appointed Ogunlesi as the design director. This was initially a 10-year contract, but due to recent anti-semitic comments made by Ye, GAP has decided to end its partnership as of September 2022. Ogunlesi continues to make her mark in the industry with her collaboration with Bratz that dropped at the beginning of December. This collab includes 2 Bratz characters wearing custom designed and styled Mowalola garments, accessories, make-up, and hair. Even with only 3 years since her fashion week debut, she has shown noteworthy potential in being a leading designer with her bold use of bright colors, punk motifs, and cybercore influences



FEATURE ON MOWALOLA OGUNLESI

To our right we have an assortment of defining features of Ogunlesi's brand, the first being bright pops of color as influenced by the consistent inspiration she takes from the 80s (Kelly's era). Additionally, you can see the great dependence Mowalola takes in two other themes. First, is a sense of celebrity culture proliferated by support from notable famous Black famous figures. It is also apparent that black culture is integral to her brand with the extensive support and use of her opportunities to bring more black creatives into the spotlight. Her closeness to this culture is also notably part of generations of influence in the fashion world, with parents as designers. Further, she emphasizes the body, not gender. This is powerful considering the status of conventional beauty standards being impacted by whiteness which she most likely witnessed in her transition from living in Nigeria to living in London. Embracing this loud celebration of Blackness continues to be necessary and notably desired in the still white-dominated fashion industry.



CELEBRITY CLIENTELE

Even with some celebrity support right out the gate, it's no secret that Ogunlesi had a fresh take on black fashion that caught the eye of many other artists, models, and celebs. Ye, previously known as Kanye West, seemingly saw the vision of the Mowalola brand and offered Ogunlesi somewhat of a foot in the door as the design director of the Yeezy GAP partnership. The summer of that year, the Kardashian-West's were seen sporting Mowalola at North West's 7th birthday party. In December, Nigerian rapper Deto Black posted on social Media wearing Mowalola and went on to collab with Ogunlesi in August 2022 on a music track (seen left). Her art seems to transcend mediums working on fashion and music, while also supporting up and coming photographers like the London-based Samuel Ibram (Mowalola photoshoot seen top left).



FEATURE ON MOWALOLA OGUNLESI

In early 2022, the Mowalola brand signed with MGA Entertainment allowing her the opportunity to collab with Bratz and design her own version of 2 of their dolls. These dolls included the characters Felicia (top left) and Jade (top right). Fashion magazine i-D casts that "it just makes sense that [their]... next collaboration is with Mowalola, the cult fashion designer known for her transgressive, slutty designs." Ogunlesi herself also revealed that "This collaboration with [Bratz] gave me the opportunity to re-examine the ideals of beauty and femininity and how I could bring Bratz into my world and make them reflect my own ideas of beauty," coinciding with the gender non-conformity found within her main fashion line.

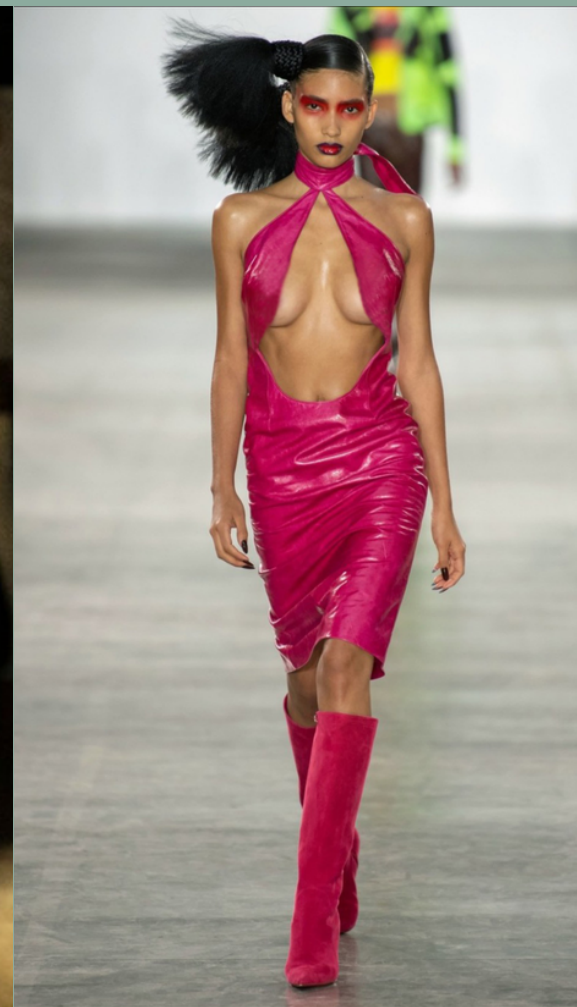


Additionally, much of the gender non-conforming portions of her designs, are said to be inspired by Nigerian rock scenes from the 70s, which highlight sexuality and erotic zones. Ogunlesi is not afraid to explore and embrace sexual aspects of clothing by the use of short skirt hem lines, creatively shaped cutouts, plunging necklines, bare midriffs, and even sexual iconography. This of course applies to all of her clothing as she does not differentiate her garments by gender as seen on the runway and on her brand's website.



WHO WORE IT BEST?

Patrick Kelly and Mowalola Ogunlesi designs



In these comparisons, we see the difference between the designers Patrick Kelly and Mowalola Ogunlesi. Kelly tends to focus more on expressions of racial identity, his Blackness, of his designs while Mowalola tends to lean more on gender, or rather beyond it. As you can see Mowalola's pieces are highly controversial as they are sexually based pieces with all of these above tend to focus on body parts. Where both designers examine some hegemonic structure, they also have a sense of Black joy and agency being articulated. Where Ogunlesi uses thongs and blob rings, Kelly has design pieces like bows, buttons, hearts, and other embellishments.

TWO MANNERS OF EXPRESSION

PAGE ELEVEN BY ALISSANDRA





Patrick Kelly

FASHION DESIGNER

Early Life and Education

Studied Art and African-American history at Jackson State University

Atlanta 1974

"ACTIVELY TRIED TO RECLAIM RACIST ICONOGRAPHY FOR BLACK PEOPLE"

New York- 1979

"PATRICK WAS CHARISMATIC, AND HIS DRESSES WERE ELEGANT, AND COLORFUL, AND UNPRETENTIOUS."

Paris- 1979

Was very successful and developed his signature jersey dresses with colored bows and buttons referencing the sophisticated cut-rate style of Southern women

Recognition 1988

First American designer ever to be admitted to the Chambre Syndicale du Prêt-à-Porter, which governs the French ready-to-wear industry.

1989

The height of Kelly's success, producing his line for Warnaco as well as other contracts all while also developing plans for lingerie, perfume and menswear lines



Patrick Kelly

Born: September 24, 1954
Died: January 1, 1990

Designed window displays for a Yves Saint Laurent Rive Gauche boutique and set up his own vintage store.

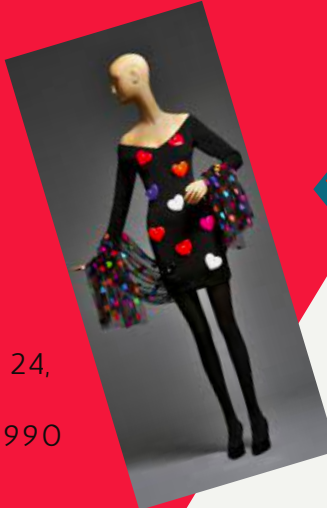
Enrolled in Parsons, who revoke his scholarship for being black and has a lack of support in NY overall.

Paris- 1985

Patrick Kelly Paris" commercial collection was featured in a six-page spread in French Elle magazine. Led to critical acclaim and the fashion conglomerate Warnaco investing in his business in 1987.

1990- Present

Kelly died of AIDS in 1990 but his legacy lives on. Many museum exhibits exist which display his work, new generations are able to learn of his work and he is still celebrated as a trailblazer for the black fashion industry as he united communities around the world.

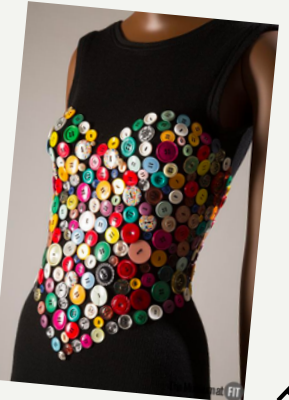


"I'VE NEVER FELT LIKE THIS IN TERMS OF HAVING A COMMUNITY, IN FEELING SO MUCH LOVE."

"NEW YORK PUT HIM THROUGH THE HOOPS OF FIRE, YOU KNOW," SAID ANDRE LEON TALLEY,

"I MAKE CLOTHES TO CHALLENGE PEOPLE'S MINDS."

"THE WAY HE PLAYED WITH BUTTONS IS STILL BEING COPIED AROUND THE WORLD."



Mowalola Ogunlesi

FASHION DESIGNER



Early Life and Education

Born to two fashion designers. Earned her Bachelor of Arts in Fashion at Central Saint Martins - University of the Arts London, Enrolled in the Master of Arts program at Central Saint Martins but dropped out in 2018



Mowalola Ogunlesi

Born: March 25, 1995

2018

Her London Fashion Week debut took place on Fashion East's stage. She showed womenswear for the first time. The theme was exposure, emotional or physical

September - 2019

Came under scrutiny when Naomi Campbell was spotted wearing a Mowalola gown with a bullet wound design. She clarified the gown was meant to convey a sense of being a walking target.

October- 2020

Named by Elle as one of "10 Trailblazing Women Changing The Future You Need To Know"

2022



GENDER FLUID AESTHETIC AND INTEREST IN TREATED LEATHERS.

Applied to the Fashion East mentorship and support programme

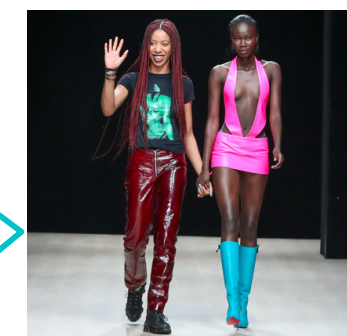
2019

Created outfits for Skepta's "Pure Water" music video and was one of six designers approached by British Vogue to style Barbie dolls for the brand's 60th anniversary.

June 26, 2020

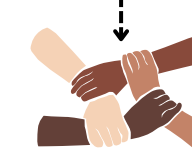
June 26, 2020 the Yeezy GAP 10-year partnership was officially announced, with Ogunlesi appointed by West as Design Director

MOWALOLA DECONSTRUCTS MAXIMALIST GLAM THROUGHOUT ITS COHESIVE DISPLAY OF READY-TO-WEAR AND CROSS-CULTURAL INFLUENCES



She joined with MGA Entertainment as a designer for a line of their Bratz dolls featuring two of the doll franchise's characters: Jade and Felicia. The collaboration line is set to be released in fall.

BY NANDINI PARIKH
PAGE TWELVE



— SO, WHAT'S CONTROVERSIAL? —

REBELLION

&

EMPOWERMENT

THE FASHION INDUSTRY IS ROCKED WHEN
BLACKNESS IS CELEBRATED

WHO WORE IT BEST?

PATRICK KELLY AND MOWALOLA OGUNLESI BOTH MADE VARIOUS HEADLINES FOR THEIR CHOICE OF WORK IN THEIR DESIGNS.



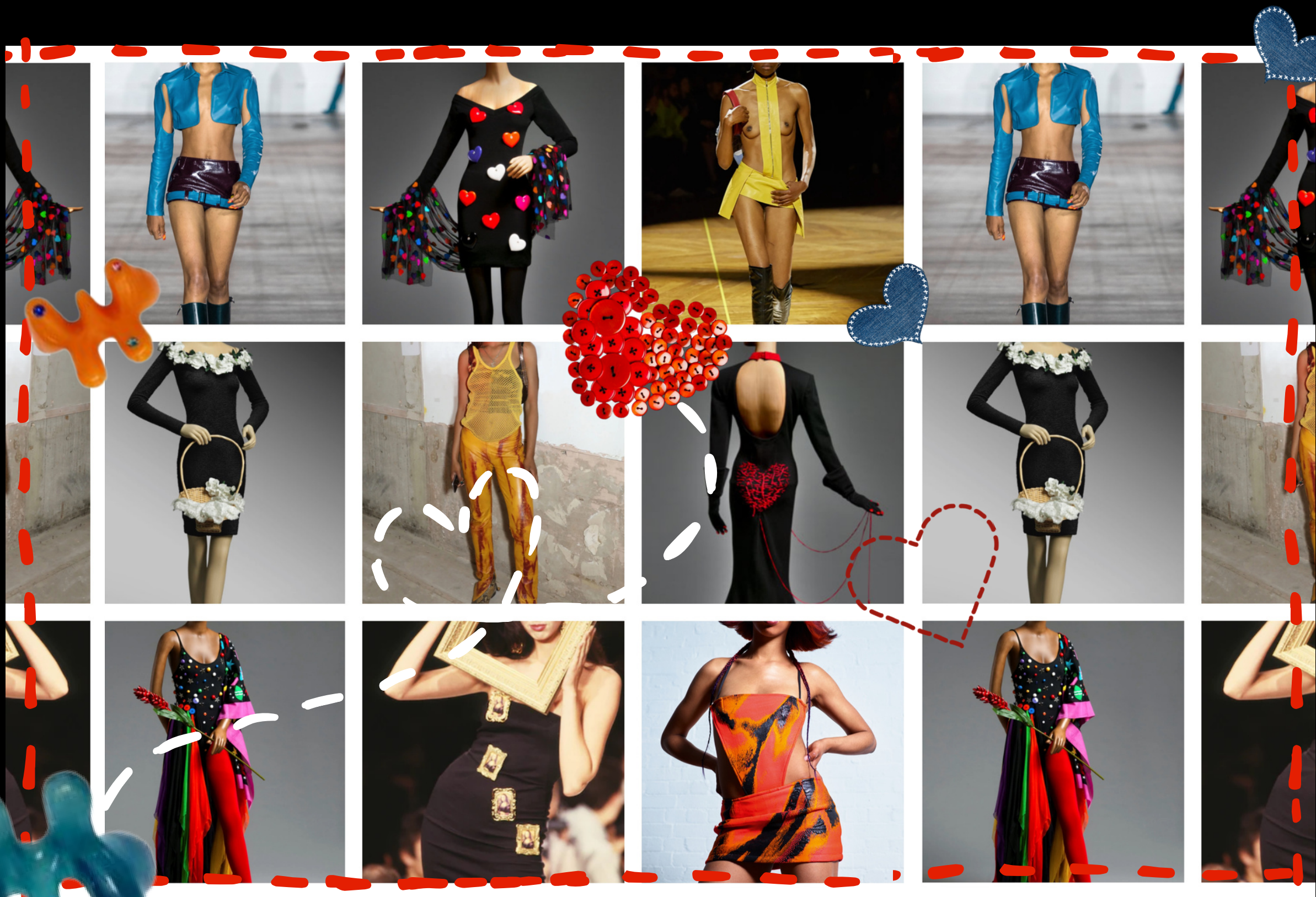
In comparison to Mowalola's designs that were also controversial as she created an intersectional wave of fluid masculinity in her work. She articulates her work thriving off of rebelling against the current system and allowing society to embrace both their masculine and feminine urges.



The designs above that Kelly was known for began to be seen as controversial as many thought his depictions were a simulation of the term Black face which was thought of to be an offensive form of blackness.



COLLAGE



PATCHWORK COLLAGE

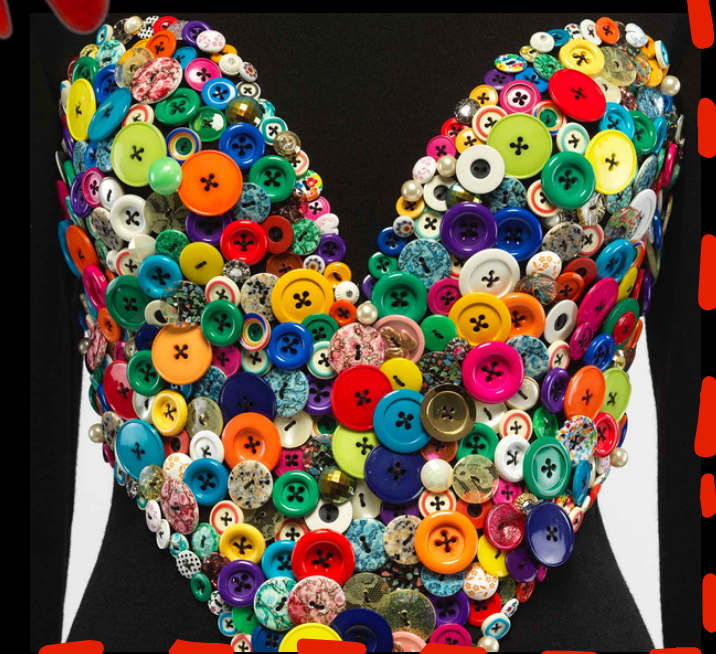
The collage is emblematic of the home-grown and refined style of design which Patrick Kelly was so well-known for expressing a political statement through, and Mowalola's modern-yet-traditional rendition of Nigerian dress as a modern look.

It is possible to imagine an upcoming fashion scene in which fashion becomes increasingly more bold, following a period of cool-down of designs featuring bold colors, striking patterns and print. Mowalola is one of the designers putting her foot in the door to work towards a similar fashion scene, with the use of eccentric fabrics, cuts, and hair. It can be perceived as a nod towards the impact of Kelly.

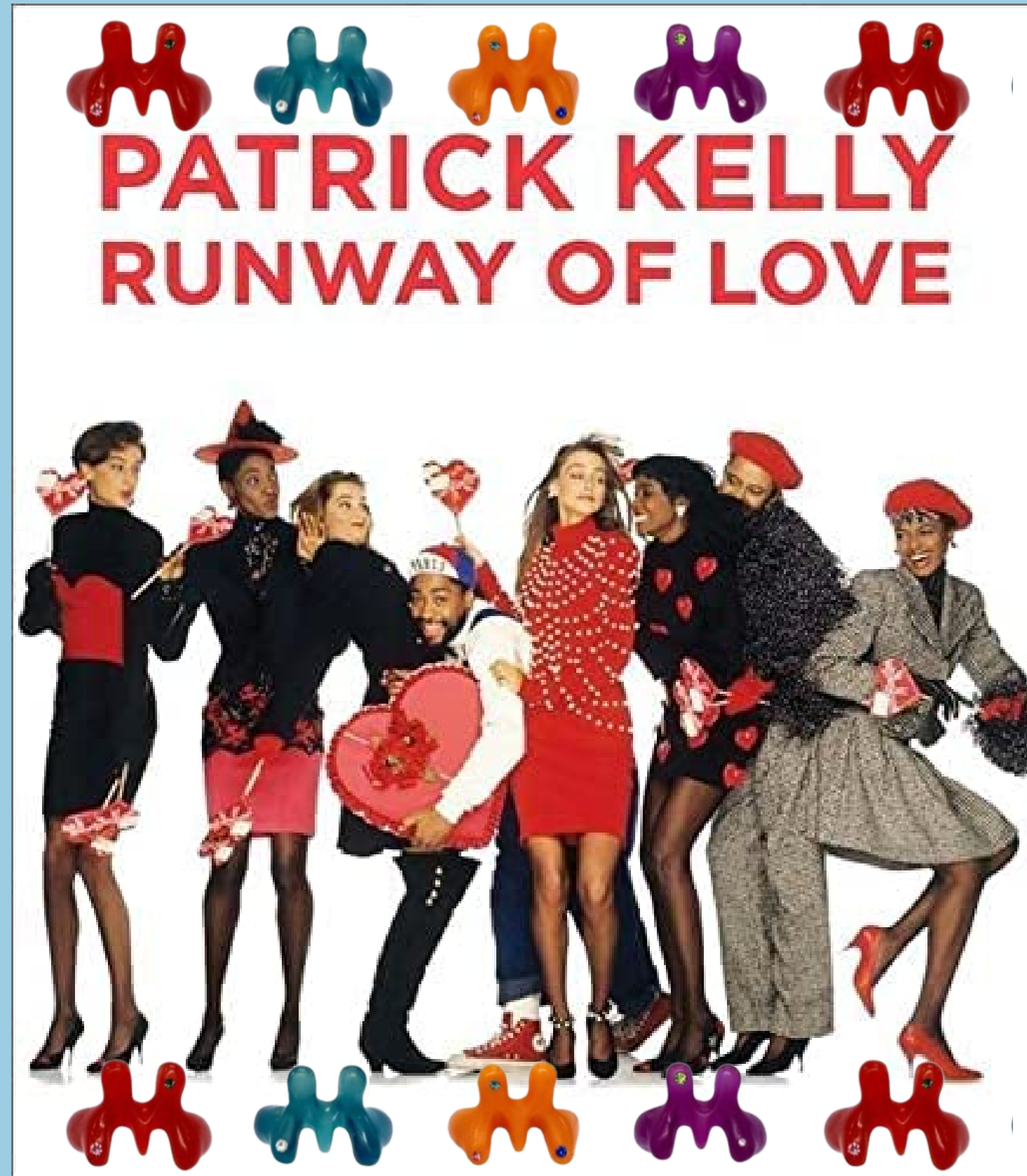
COLLAGE

"CONTRIBUTING ENDLESSLY
TO FASHION'S LITERAL AND
FIGURATIVE FABRIC, OUR
HANDS HAVE PICKED COTTON
AND CRAFTED COUTURE,
SKETCHED FLOU AND PAINTED
FACES; TODAY THEY SHALL
SEIZE THE STEERING WHEEL OF
OUR DESTINY WITHIN THE
INDUSTRY."

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