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un **FLOP** paper 1



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C

Chador

unFLOP def.

A controversial garment transformed into a fashion item

The Chador is the world's most controversial garment yet also one of the simplest. It is only a semi-circle of opaque black fabric secured over a woman's forehead and attached under her chin.

Its function is to cover her body completely according to hijab law, the rules of Islamic dress.

Variations in fabric, length and even colour distinguish different sects, generations, ethnicities and degrees of observance among Muslim women. Many Muslim women wear the chador as a statement declaring their pride in their cultural heritage and investment in contemporary Islamic ideals. However, it is typically viewed as a symbol of Islam's restrictive attitudes towards women and opposition to Western values.

Although the chador currently symbolizes the clash between progressive and traditional Muslims, the actual historical origins of the garment are in dispute. Egyptian-born anthropology scholar Fadwa El Guind, claims that the chador originated in ancient Mesopotamia as a signifier of male social rank. A man of high status veiled his wives and concubines thereby demonstrating his authority over them. Yet the chador only began generating controversy during Reza Shah's attempts to Modernize Persia in the nineteen-thirties.

The garment became a normalized, even mandatory part of Iranian life only after the Islamic Revolution.

These controversial conundrums have inspired challenging Middle Eastern feminist artists such as Shirin Neshat, Shadi Ghadirian, Hayv Kahraman and Sara Rahbar. Yet few fashion designers address the powerful symbolism of this simple cloth garment. Isabella Blow's last planned project was a book commissioning top Western designers to produce bespoke chadors. Since Blow's project was never realized however, Hussein Chalayan remains one of the only top international designers to directly address the delicate history of this culturally sensitive symbol. The young Turkish designer Erkan oruh focused on the chador and burqa as elegant fashion garments in his experimental collection *The Men and Women of Allah* and Junya Watanabe's expressionistic version of hijab recommended new forms that adhered to Islamic law. Yet Chalayan's work stands out most of all. In 1998, the British-based Turkish artist used the catwalk as a site for fearless political inquiry by creating a performance installation consisting of nude women modeling gradually shortened chadors. As the chador got smaller and more basic, it became ever more polemical.

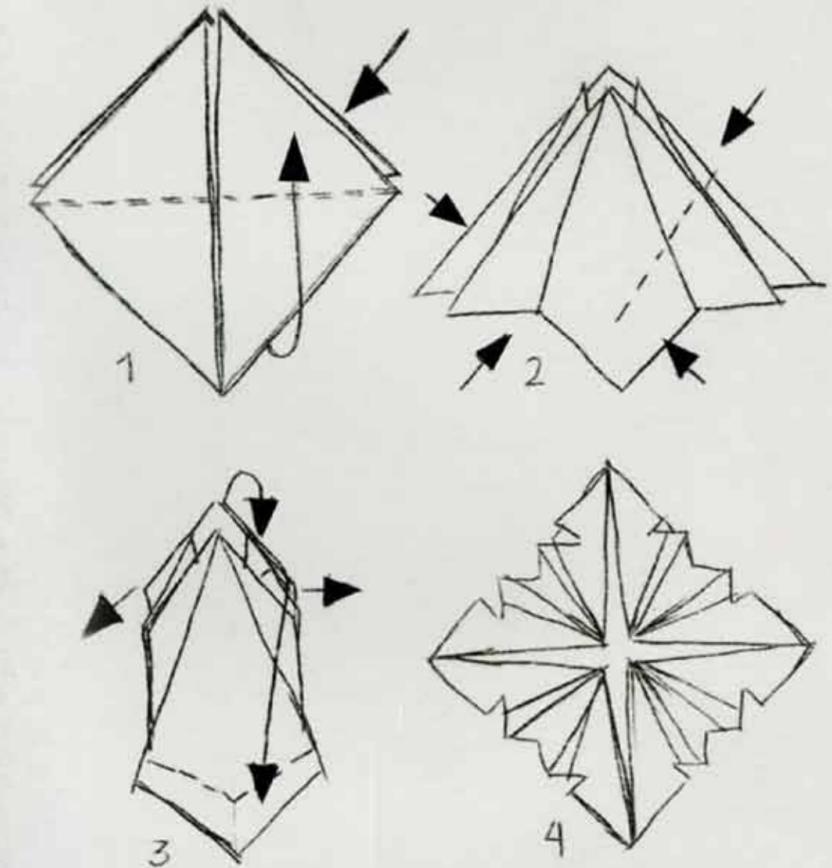
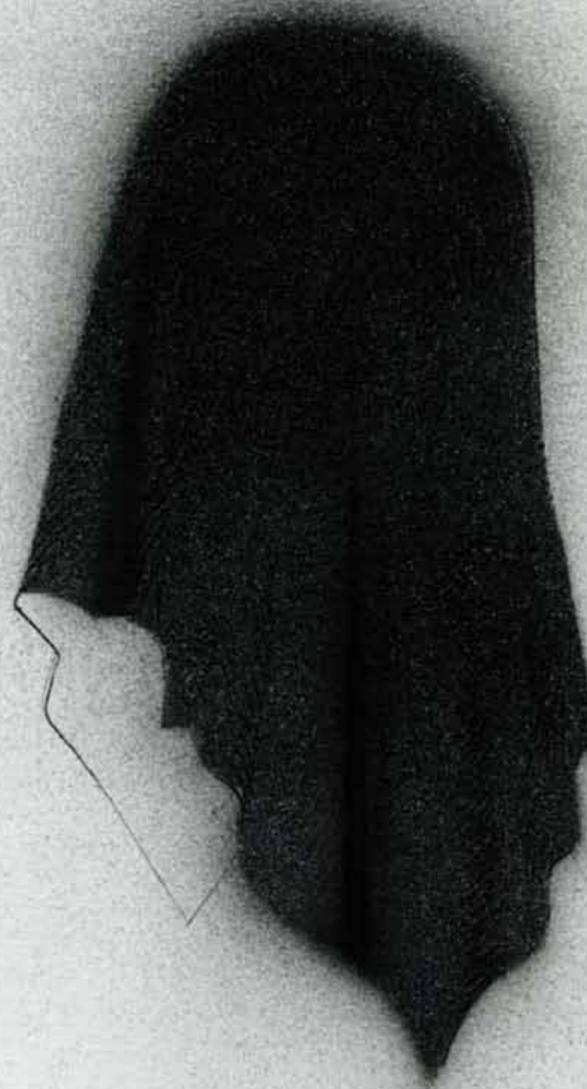


Illustration inspired by **Hussein Chalayan**, woman collection, S/S 2011.
husseinchalayan.com

H-F

Hand Fans

unFLOP def.

Canvases for extraordinary artistic creativity

Hand fans are intended to cool their owners and inflame onlookers. The earliest fans, which date from China's Song dynasty, readily demonstrate their practical, social and artistic purposes. A simple fan's broad, flat and curved-edge surface is traditionally made from thin fabric or feathers stretched over slats. It folds into a slender strip when slipped out of sight but can expand to a foot in width when it is fully open.

On the most perfunctory level, fans agitate the air to cool their users in hot and humid environments. Yet their basic physical function quickly became subordinated to their social significance. From their outset, fans were canvases for extraordinary artistic creativity. During the Ming dynasty, Chinese painters adorned the fan fabric with exotic creatures, allegorical scenes, romantic tableaux and inspiring landscapes. The slats themselves were carved from ivory, bone, mica, mother of pearl and tortoiseshell.

Social status was immediately conveyed not only by the quality of fan that a woman carried but by her graceful management of its movements. Fans became articulate social signals. A woman could flirt with a flick or rebuff with brush of her fan. Fans were

imported from East Asia to 17th century Europe, and after a fashion hiatus between the times of Ancient Greece and the Middle Ages, the complex social maneuvering made possible by these delicate objects once again gained cultural currency. England's Queen Elizabeth 1 was an admirer of stiff jeweled fans dripping with feathers.

Yet Elizabeth had modest tastes compared to her successors in the 18th century. French, Spanish and Italian aristocrats competed to import opulent fans from Asia and commissioned their own local artistic extravaganzas. The language of wrist movements developed into an extensive vocabulary and both genders defined themselves in Europe's courts by how well they held their fans.

The sensual lace fans worn by models in matching slinky skirts for Louis Vuitton beautifully replicate the signature 17th century Spanish style. These layers of silk and lace are associated with the erotic flamenco tradition, rich in charm and chic. The romantic aesthetic that was best captured by Diego Velázquez is kept elegantly alive today by Diane Pernet, adding timeless grace and mystique to Louis Vuitton's catwalk (S/S 2011).

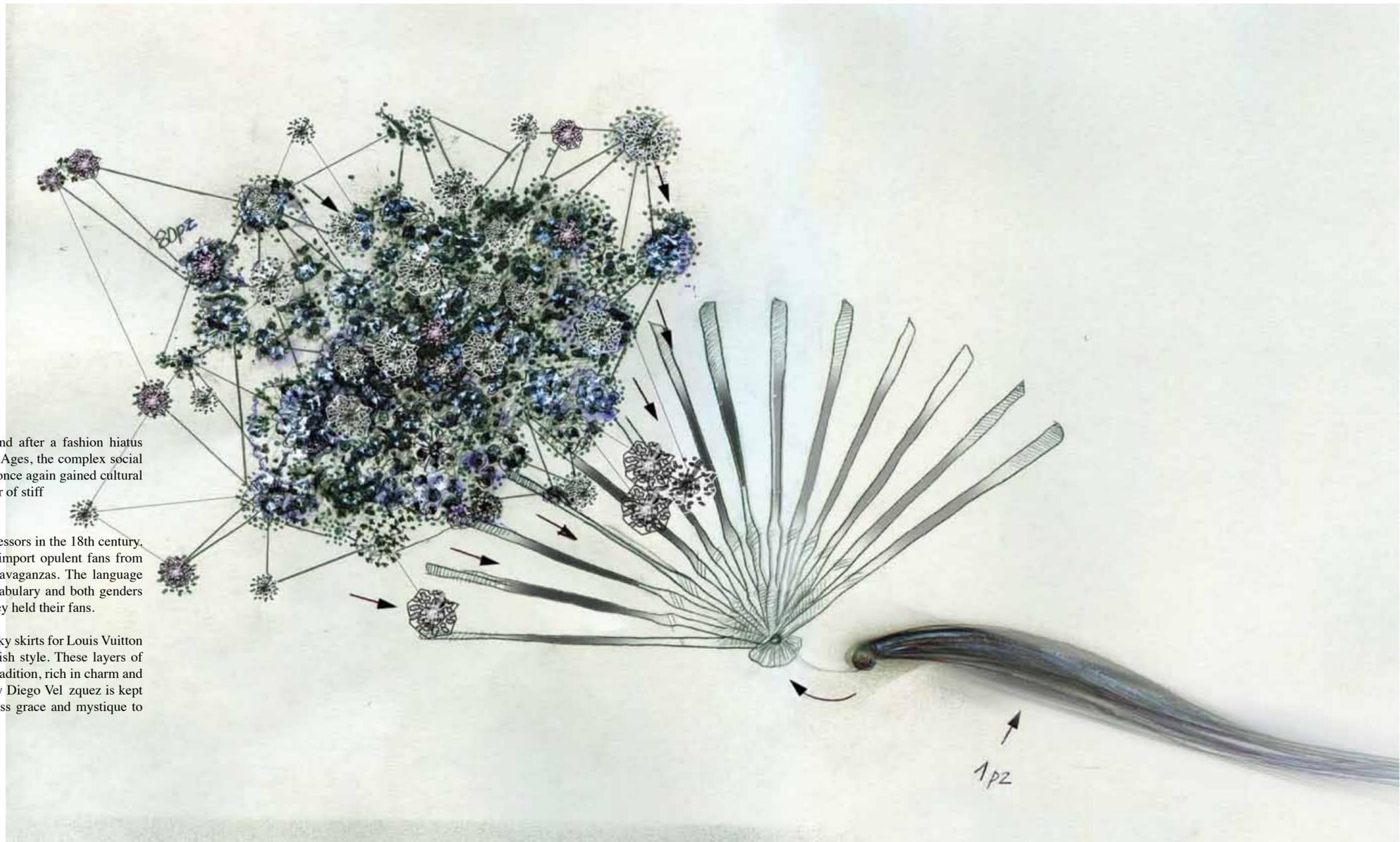
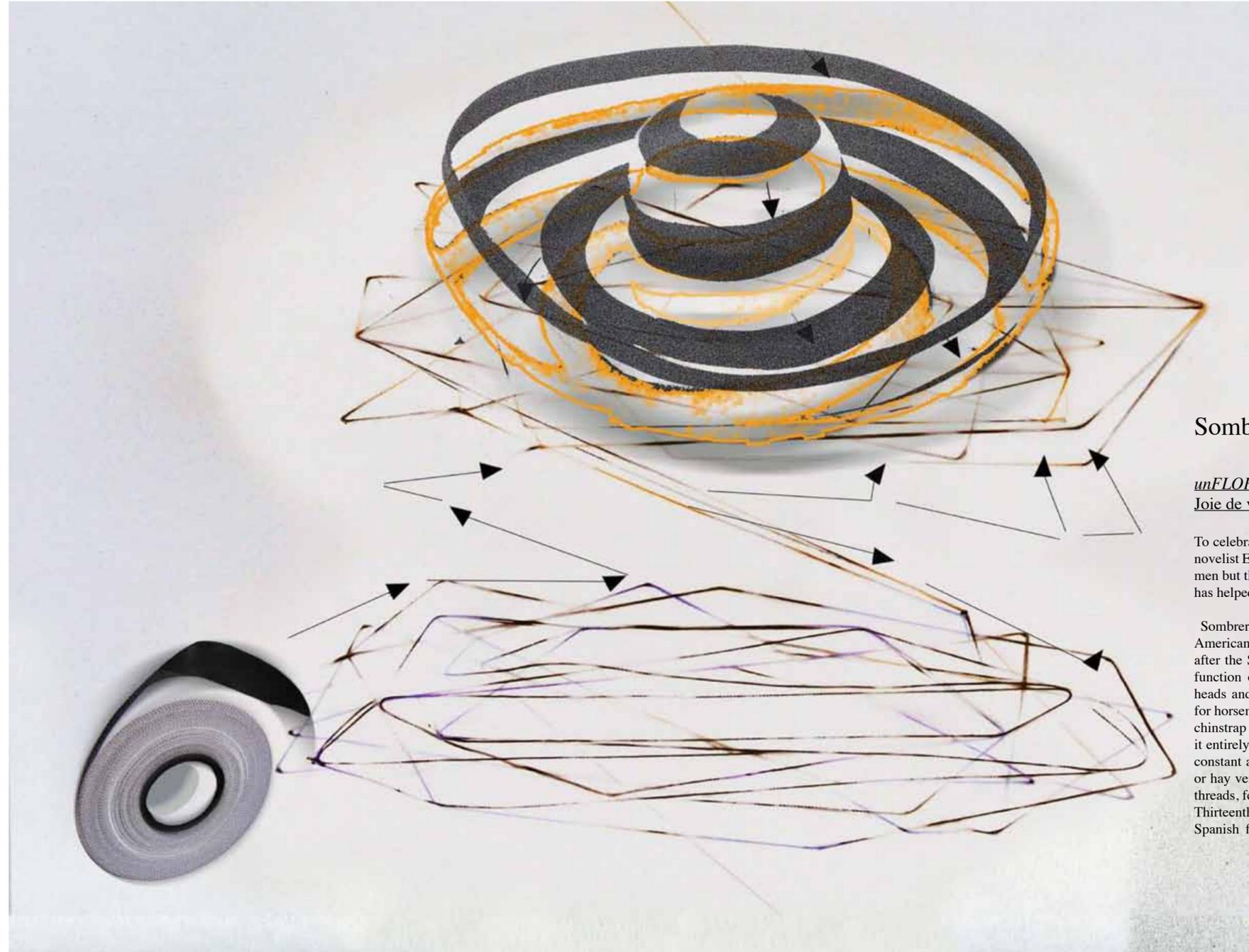


Illustration inspired by **Louis Vuitton**, woman collection, S/S 2011. louisvuitton.com



Sombrero

unFLOP def.
Joie de vivre and luscious sensuality

To celebrate America's multi-ethnic and feminist roots, early twentieth-century novelist Edna Ferber was moved to declare, "I am not belittling the brave pioneer men but the sunbonnet as well as the sombrero has helped to settle this glorious land of ours."

Sombrero—the word representing Latin American culture for the North American imagination—is a Mexican twist on a traditional Spanish hat named after the Spanish word for "shade." This simple descriptive word sums up the function of the vast cloth hats which cast protective shadows over wearers' heads and bodies. As the cowboy hat's precursor, the sombrero was designed for horsemen to be worn when riding across sun-baked stretches of land. A cloth chinstrap allowed the wearer to toss the hat back off his head without removing it entirely. The utilitarian form with its peaked crown and broad brim remained constant across social classes, although peasants were relegated to straw, grass or hay versions while wealthier people wore opulent hats decorated with silver threads, felt, velvet and silky embroidered cord.

Thirteenth-century Mongolian horsemen wore similarly shaped hats. But the Spanish flat-topped Poblano sombrero was invented later and later still was

brought to Mexico. Associations with Mariachi musicians and the official jarabe tapatio folk dance of Mexico add an aura of fun and festivity to the essentially practical item. For Americans, the sombrero has become equated with "joie de vivre and luscious sensuality." Although the sombrero was initially a symbol of masculinity, power and agility, it became a popular accessory for super-sexy female pin-ups. By the 1950s, the image of a pin-up preening under a massive sombrero was heating up young men's imaginations. Jane Russell smoldering under her sombrero was hotter than the sun it shielded her from.

This fiery fashion was replicated on Prada's catwalk (S/S 2011) when a model sported a slinky green sundress and a vast yellow striped sombrero slung down her back. Prada's version is devoid of glitz yet is still strikingly different from utilitarian peasant versions. It is an uncommonly classless take on the remarkably timeless item that guards wearers from the sun while enabling their identities to shine.

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