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INTRO 


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ERIC CHARLES-DONATIEN
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SEARCHING FOR HIS WINGS

ERIC CHARLES-DONATIEN IS A PLUMASSIER, THE LAST ONE IN PARIS.
THE COLOURFUL WORLD OF HAUTE COUTURE IS HIS HOME.

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PROFILE





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Now it's happened after all. It's raining in PARIS. The sky is gloomy and overcast, and we're standing soaked in front of a weathered, wrought-iron gate next to a Turkish fast food restaurant. Floor-fastened Resopal tables, gyros for three euros. Probably the cheapest meal in Paris. Maybe we should push back the meeting. BIRD FEATHERS and RAIN – how are those two things supposed to go together? The doorbell buzzes. Eric arrives five minutes after us. He welcomes us by saying, *“One should never come too early, not even for one's own interview”*. He grins and adds, smiling, that he learned that from his famous role models. He shakes my hand and asks us if we want a coffee. First thing's first.

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**I HAD A SHOP AT THE GRAND PALAIS,
RIGHT BEHIND THE LOUVRE.**

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“I had a shop at the GRAND PALAIS, right behind the LOUVRE. It was very small, I mean, very small. Everything here”, he points at his new loft-like atelier with its half-dozen work tables and deeply staggered shelves, filled with all kinds of material and bric-a-brac, *“all that was once packed into a tiny store, that was about the same size as our current bathroom. The area around the Grand Palais is bourgeois, established, filled with tourists, in the middle of everything that has to do with fashion”*. But he wanted to get away from it.



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ERIC CHARLES-DONATIEN, JEWELRY AND ACCESSORIES





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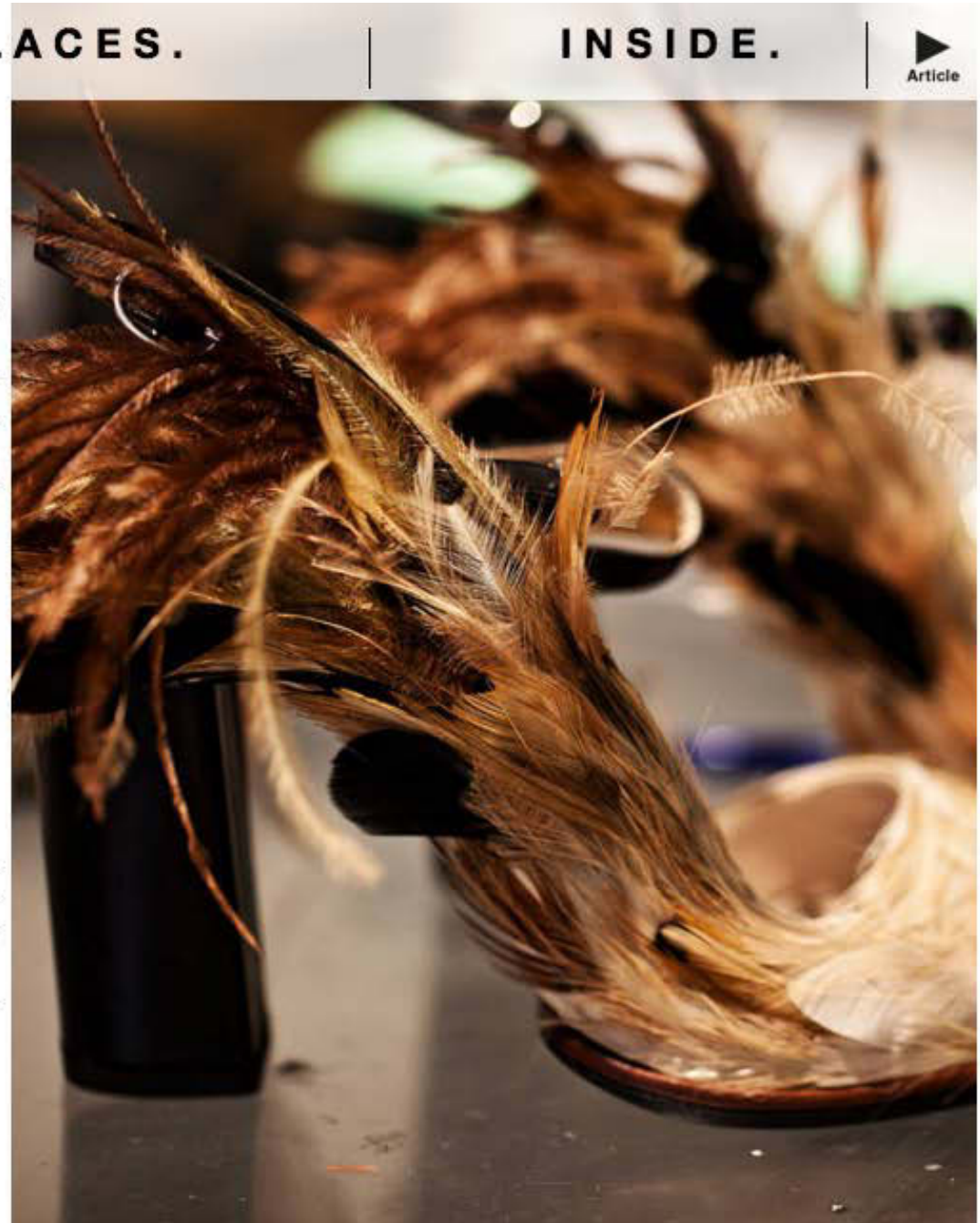


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“Paris can sometimes be very oppressive, HISTORICALLY. I always notice that when I come back from travelling. I travel a lot, you should know. Berlin, New York, London, Dubai. There is action there. Oberkampf is a bit like that, filled with interesting places and restaurants. The people in this neighbourhood structure their day: Make the best of it. We’ve been here for six months. It has changed a lot of things. For me too. This here is my studio. It fits my work better”.

**EVERY PIECE IS UNIQUE.
YOU NEVER COME INTO CONTACT
WITH THE SAME THING TWICE.**

What’s a plumassier? *“A plumassier is a person who works with feathers. It’s a very simple job. The only thing we need to do it is a few old sewing machines, and that’s it. Everything else is handmade. Every piece is unique. You never come into contact with the same thing twice. The material – feathers – is as transitory as ideas themselves, and obeys in unexpected ways. That’s very hard to understand today with all the computers and machines”.*





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Where does it come from, the love of this job? *"I learned everything from a master, André Lemarié. Everything I am today I owe to him. He discovered me at HERMÈS. I was a tailor there. He took me on".* Eric suddenly found himself in one of the last craft businesses in the city that worked with feathers.

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**I LEARNED EVERYTHING FROM A MASTER,
ANDRÉ LEMARIÉ.
HE DISCOVERED ME AT HERMÈS.
I WAS A TAILOR THERE.**

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André Lemarié, who had taken over his father's business, was the person who integrated plumage into haute couture in the 1940s. His collaboration with Coco Chanel created a small revolution. He placed feathers on hats, but his main income came from the use of feathers in the haute couture of the time. There were a sign of class and taste. Suddenly the feather specialists were EN VOGUE. Over 60 small craft businesses popped out of the ground, everywhere, like mushrooms, but then tastes changed, especially in the '80s and '90s. Finally, there was only Lemarié left. Chanel bought his business in 1992. Since then, there is only that division and MOYE & DA, Eric's own company, which he founded in 2010.



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"Through André Lemarié, I met big designers and had the opportunity to work with these artists, to understand them, their language, to grasp their visions. That they may mean 'no' when they say 'yes'. I owe all that to him. And how to interact with them, win their trust, dive into their world, but keep my distance and be able to escape. That's how Beyoncé, Nicole Kidman, Jean Paul Gaultier, Galliano and Yves Saint Laurent have all left their marks, in one way or another, on my work."

.....

**THAT'S HOW BEYONCÉ, NICOLE KIDMAN,
JEAN PAUL GAULTIER, GALLIANO
AND YVES SAINT LAURENT
HAVE ALL LEFT THEIR MARKS ON MY WORK.**

.....

One of Eric's colleagues brings me an espresso. The others, I count five, work unperturbed, maintain their concentration. Their job requires patience. They only say what it necessary. On the tables, there are small containers with different kinds of feathers. Some glue, tweezers, scissors...the stillness is contagious.



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The studio as microcosm of the artist's life. Nothing is random. Pieces of jewellery lie on expense reports, earrings with delicate tufts of feathers, tone in tone, Styrofoam mannequins hung with flamboyant feather boas, bangles – necklaces, each shot through with a little something extra that moves with the air when you pick it up. Feathers are alive, are simultaneously ornamentation and protection. They are always moving, surprising. Eric takes several into his hand, to show them to me. His eyes sparkle. He sees much more than the rest of us. You notice that with him. These are mostly pieces from old collections, he says. Models have worn them. The jewellery is heavy and large, organic, a lot of Art Nouveau with obvious influences from Fauvism and the Belle Époque – the greatest Paris era, LE GRAND SIÈCLE.

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**FEATHERS ARE AMONG THE OLDEST MATERIALS
WORN BY HUMAN BEINGS.**

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Eric's imagination wanders backwards in time in front of us. A true artist. One can't pull away from him. *"Feathers are among the oldest materials worn by human beings. In order to warm themselves, to impress. But look in any historical museum – feathers were mostly used in order to make oneself look nice".*




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"WE AREN'T CREATING FASHION TRENDS HERE. At best, we are following them. What we do goes by the rules of others. A woman's taste, a designer's vision, a woman's complexion. We are only interested with the experience itself. That, which our feathers make come alive. The smell, the touch, the sound...that is what steers our work. That and the desires of our clients, which, of course, are always changing – with the current trends as well."

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**WE ARE ONLY INTERESTED IN
THE EXPERIENCE ITSELF.
THAT, WHICH OUR FEATHERS MAKE COME ALIVE,
THE SMELL, THE TOUCH, THE SMELL...**

.....

The loft-like studio is located on the ground level in the inner courtyard of an old, weathered Art Nouveau apartment building buried deep in the quartier. It's functionally decorated. Dozens of lamps turn the grey, rainy day into a sunny one. A workshop in the best sense. No glamour, and without any concession to potential clients. Eric's world is colourful, and his face speaks volumes. He could work anywhere if he had to – even without windows, in some basement. He would light up the room with his own brightness.





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No wonder he was able to build up his career so quickly in this glitzy, superficial world, where transcendence is everything, where will and imagination has become the credo of an entire industry. Eric fits in here, in Paris. Even in his condemnation of the city, he accepts its rules, the rules of a congealed bourgeoisie. I suspect why Paris has become the heartbeat of an entire fashion industry. *"I think, in the end, I've remained a child – un petit ange – a little angel – like my mother always called me. I'm an angel wanting to find his wings again".*

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**I'M AN ANGEL, WANTING
TO FIND HIS WINGS AGAIN.**

.....

You only make fashion for women? *"I look for the woman in the man, the man in the woman – a very time-consuming search..."* Would he wear this feather jewellery himself? I point to an androgynous, faceless Styrofoam head wearing a small, shaggy piece of feather jewellery. *"Of course"*, he says, fast as a bullet. I ask him to come outside into the rain with me. Or would that be a problem for the feathers? He smiles at me defiantly and puts on the headpiece. *"I'm working on a new collection, for men. One day I will succeed. Look at the American Indians. What the men there wear on their heads, when they're going to war..."*

Text by Jo Weissgerber

Photos by Martin N. Kunz, Jo Weissgerber

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