



## FUTURE SHOCKS

A museumgoer's spring 2014 wish list includes shows devoted to an Anglo-American costumer, a German iconoclast, and a semi-violent group of stylish Italians.

BY DAVID SALLE

**Y**EARS AGO, WHEN I SET ABOUT DESIGNING COSTUMES for a ballet by Karole Armitage, I turned to the work of Charles James for direction. A costumer has to give the choreographer shapes that move, which is harder than you might imagine. James made dresses that were all about shape—along with color and texture, their interdependence made to appear inevitable and indivisible. A bolt of blue serge, a few snips of his scissors: Somehow an essence is achieved. Never has a woman's body, the volume of it, looked so ennobled draped in cloth. And his designs worked offstage, too. I was once in the home of Dominique de Menil—the matriarch responsible for Houston's Menil Collection and the Rothko Chapel, among other examples of exquisite taste. Mrs. D, as she was known, lived in an austere brick and glass rectangle designed by her pal Philip Johnson, the geometric severity somewhat ameliorated by wall panels and cabinet doors covered in eccentrically colored velvet—all chosen by James, who also made most of her clothes. The head-turning impression when a truly well-dressed woman walks down the street—it's reassuring, like sunlight in fall. A suit by James, worn simply with, say, a string of pearls, seems to testify to the wearer's good character. Starting on May 8, a retrospective at the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute, "**Charles James: Beyond Fashion,**" takes the measure of this great costumer: Can clothes be profound?

I first saw Isa Genzken's work in the late '70s: fuselage-like wood forms that rested on the floor; the tapered ovoid shapes stretched to absurdly elongated points, like high-tech dugout canoes whose ends had been fed into a pencil sharpener. The sculptures were enigmatic,

provocative, and strikingly handsome, as was the artist herself. I remember a couple of nights at a bar across from Düsseldorf's Kunstakademie, watching her exert a strong gravitational pull on the room. People use the word *energy* to mean just about anything that's not dead, but she had that *thing*—an energized openness that you couldn't help being drawn to. A limitless future seemed in store. But the concision of those early sculptures was not to be repeated. That early formal unity gave way to extreme fragmentation, as

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Genzken turned to assemblage-type sculptures of mostly found materials that project a bad case of nerves. Her later work incorporates a great many things—shapes, materials, images, textures, gestures—some piercingly right, some dopey and obvious. There is a jangling live-wire quality to some of them, and the unlikeliness of the juxtapositions can be startling, dissonance in search of a new kind of beauty. But what holds all of these tenuous connections together—indeed, what energizes them—is a gift for form that she can't truly shake. It's the art version of living with neurosis, of being comfortable amid chaos, an approach that has proved enormously influential with younger artists. Her fingerprints are all over recent art, from Rachel Harrison to Ryan Trecartin. MoMA's comprehensive "**Isa Genzken: Retrospective,**" through March 10, will allow us to see this trajectory in stop-motion.

The Italian Futurists were just crazy *figli di puttana*, in love with fast cars, motorcycles, and war. The movement started as a literary provocation; the poet F.T. Marinetti was its front man and the author of the *Futurist Manifesto*, in 1909. But the rhetoric was way out in front of the art itself. Futurism was meant to be Italy's answer to Cubism, but the paintings they made lacked the gravitas of the Cubist enterprise of the early teens. Still, they had team spirit—unfortunately, the kind that led, more or less, to fascism. When a Florentine art critic blasted them in print, a posse of Futurists showed up as he was leaving the café one day for a little friendly persuasion. They left him in the gutter after a sound beating—and the guy later became a convert to the cause. (If you can't beat 'em, join 'em, I guess.) It has been suggested that the whole event was staged; in the area of public relations they were, admittedly, ahead of their time. So why am I looking forward to meeting the Futurists all over again at the Guggenheim in New York, on February 21? The real flowering of their aesthetic came about in the applied arts—ceramics, set and costume design, graphics—all of which are amply represented at "**Italian Futurism, 1909–1944: Reconstructing the Universe,**" the first show of its kind in the United States. They were Italians, after all, and design was in the blood. •

### ABOVE THE FOLD

Opposite: Charles James, at a private fitting for Austine Hearst, the gossip columnist and wife of William Randolph Hearst Jr., in 1947.  
Above: Francesco Cangiullo's *Large Crowd in Piazza del Popolo*, 1914.

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