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SAVE THE ROBOTS

The robots that strode down the runway this season were no hokey take on futurism. They had serious bite. here, V takes a look at the current obsession with anything robo. The future has arrived and it's got a mind of its own

1. Louis Vuitton Fine Jewelry Cosmonaute charms

The ancients wore charms to keep themselves out of trouble or to bring good luck. By the 1950s, this trend had filtered down to teenage girls dangling charms off bracelets to celebrate all those important teenage-girl moments. Epochs aside, these objects tell an intimate and illuminating story about a formative time in a person's life. Now, Louis Vuitton reworks the trend for its legions of bronzed and fabulous acolytes with its gem-encrusted robot charms, perfect for warding off evil spirits—or at least fake people. Creative director Marc Jacobs demystifies and re-enchants good-luck charms by addressing our current preoccupation with status symbols—out-festishizing the fetish—while creating them in the form of a foreboding yet cartoonish robot. Mr. Jacobs's vision of the future appears ironic: his charms are ancient talismans from the future, objects of glitzy worship. In the future, will we be thoughtless, diamond-mongering robots, or humans too lazy to collect trinkets from curiosity shops on our own? Only Marc knows for sure. Comes in orange and green. **Blythe Sheldon**
For info: www.vuitton.com

2. Robert Lippock's Robot EP

Kraftwerk exhausted the robot theme in the electronic music of the '80s, and it's taken nearly twenty years for anyone to come up with a worthy second act. The musician and To Rococo Rot member Robert Lippock is obsessed with robots, computer science, Alan Turing, and Solaris—all of which are apparent on his recent EP *Robot*. Unlike Kraftwerk, however, Lippock doesn't merely exploit the sights and perceived sounds of our hardshelled friends as decoration. Lippock's interests lie in 20th-century attempts to emulate life and creation, in art, in film, in science, and in politics. He sheds all contemporary technology in the production of his music, opting for the synths and high-hats of the early '90s, giving a curious retro tinge to the futuristic sound. On

SLIDESHOW >



SAVE THE ROBOTS

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"Unexpected Behavior No. 7," a cold synth takes the reigns and produces an eerily beautiful, almost apocalyptic, soundtrack for space. It's enough to stir a robot's emotions, if they had any. **Christopher Bartley**
Robot is out now from [Western Vinyl](#)

3. Dr. Josh Bongard's self-healing robots

The latest and greatest in robotic science seems to draw from a cinematic vision of the future, or The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy's koan-like revelation that the answer to the meaning of life is 42. Through the use of mathematical models, a team of researchers at Cornell University are investigating ways in which robots can "infer their own physical structure"—who they are—and locate themselves in the world. Just as humans work from a concept of themselves in order to plan future actions, robots navigate their actions through mathematical models that engineers program inside of them. Cornell researchers are working to allow the robots to program themselves and effectively grant them a kind of consciousness. In order to figure out the best future action, robots will generate a series of possible actions, choose the correct one, and act on it. The tidiness is enviable, but we humans will most likely be forever slob, still walking into walls and exercising sub-par judgment even after the reign of fire. **Blythe Sheldon**

For info: <http://ccsl.mae.cornell.edu/research/selfmodels>

4. Stelarc

Many artists show what the future will look like, but very few concern themselves with the actual application of advanced technology. For decades, the Australian performance artist Stelarc has blurred the line between man and machine, often using futuristic robotic and pneumatic appendages and often putting his own life on the line in the process. Stelarc's art plays with endurance and the use of machines, prosthetics, and the Internet to extend the physical capabilities of the body. His work presents the shock of human flesh working in tandem with technology, hardware, and computerized mechanisms. In one live performance, users logged onto his website to control hundreds of electrodes connected to his body. How's that for engaging your audience. Humanoid robots were pushed aside by NASA in the '60s, but Stelarc proves their continued relevance and possibility by creating one out of his own body. **Christopher Bartley**

Stelarc: The Monograph is out now from MIT Press

5. Hussein Chalayan S/S 2007 runway

If Balenciaga took the ornamental side of the robot obsession, Chalayan explored the honest-to-goodness possibility of spacewear and the technological enhancement of real clothes. What will humans wear on Mars? Who cares? Chalayan's computerized, self-adjusting, disappearing-hem contraptions don't fetishize the future as much as they seek to redefine the way we dress right at this moment.

6. Dolce & Gabbana S/S 2007 runway

If robots were preprogrammed with sexual desires, they would be wearing Dolce this season. Milan's most daring twosome channeled the plastic-fantastic, space-age insanity of Thierry Mugler for Spring, which culminated in the "is-it-metal, is-it-leather?" bustier dress shown here.

7. Balenciaga S/S 2007 runway

The pacesetter of Paris fashion week was Nicolas Ghesquière's Balenciaga collection, arguably the strictest, toughest, and most mesmerizing sartorial tribute to robots ever.

Runway photography Dan & Corina Lecca

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