

# The story behind how Cardi B ended up in that half-shell-inspired Mugler gown

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FEB. 11, 2019

One of the biggest winners of Grammys night wasn't just Cardi B, who was the first female solo artist to win for rap album, but Kollin Carter, the stylist who put the singer into a series of internet-breaking outfits by the French designer Thierry Mugler.

“One day I was with a friend and I was like, ‘What if I could go through the archive of Mugler?’” an exhausted Carter told *The Times* by phone on Monday, the day after the 61st Grammy Awards, where his star client stole the show in three archival Mugler looks. The first of which was a pink satin and black velvet sheath dress with a bodysuit — think a shimmering mermaid-meets-Venus de Milo — from the designer's 1995 couture collection, which was easily the most talked-about outfit on Grammys night. The friend's response? “‘Good luck with that,’” Carter said.

That Mugler show remains one of the most memorable of recent fashion history. Clocking in at just under an hour, the 20th anniversary show took place at Paris' Cirque d'Hiver (the same locale where Richard Avedon's famed “Dovima with Elephants” Dior photo was staged) and featured 109 looks. There was a James Brown performance and catwalk turns by Naomi Campbell, Veruschka and Tippi Hedren, to name a few. (The first post on [@thierrymugler\\_archives](#), an Instagram account devoted to the designer's vast treasure trove of fantasy-fueled wares, features Claudia Schiffer from that iconic 1995 Parisian presentation.)

An initial ask by Carter on Instagram to dress his songstress client in archival Mugler pieces for her “Money” video, which dropped in December, was rebuffed.

Undeterred, Carter tried again, this time bringing up the impending Grammys and floating the idea of doing a label exclusive for all of Cardi's night of outfit changes. Suddenly, there was interest. And Carter himself got an opportunity to go deeper.

“By Jan. 12, I was in Paris looking through the archives,” said Carter, who had attended Mugler’s spring/summer 2019 show in September with Cardi B.

Although he flew Paris to look at the Mulger archive without his famous client, Carter wasn’t in the City of Light by himself. He had pitched an idea to document the dressing process — and the fact that Mugler would be opening its archives for a celebrity for only the second time in 25 years. Cardi’s publicist, Patience Foster, orchestrated the production of an 8 ½ minute-long docu-style video with Vogue, which debuted online today and was shown during a private Carter-hosted West Hollywood screening on Monday night.

Carter trusted his gut when it came to the famous-and-rather-outlandish clam-shell look that Cardi ended up wearing on the Grammys’ red carpet on Sunday. (Cardi B wasn’t alone in Mugler as Miley Cyrus wore a black pre-fall 2019 Mugler duchess satin evening jacket and trousers to the Grammys.)

“I put it in the universe — this is our piece,” Carter said about Cardi B’s look.

His client wasn’t sold. “Cardi was like, ‘Uh, it’s a lot,’” Carter said.

However, the budding super-stylist — he worked for three years under Zendaya and Celine Dion image architect, Law Roach, before setting off on his own — once again used his powers of persuasion.

“She was able to sit with the idea for a minute, and she had done all the research. She watched the show over and over again several times, like in her free time. Within a week and a half she was able to really study the other pieces and she was like, this is it. This is the piece.”

Vogue’s short film offers a glimpse into the fitting process, showing Carter, Cardi and Mugler’s Parisian team in L.A. mere weeks before the Grammys.

It’s here where they dabbled in details, ranging from whether they would re-create the iconic pearl runway up-do sported by Mugler muse Simonetta Gianfelice in 1995 (“Oh, we’re doing the pearls in the hair, for sure,” Cardi says in the video) to how her signature artful talons could be minimized to fit into the look’s cocktail gloves (better plan — alter the gloves).

Cardi B performs onstage during the 61st Grammys on Sunday.  
(Kevork Djansezian / Getty Images)

The challenge for everyone involved? Keeping the original integrity of the museum-quality pieces intact while fitting them to Cardi — and in the case of the sprawling set of peacock feathers attached to her performance jumpsuit, modifying the pieces for easy stage access during the extremely high-stakes act. (After her Grammys win, Cardi B deactivated her Instagram account featuring photos of her vibrant looks and more.)

Mugler, which is scheduled to show its fall/winter 2019 season collection in Paris later this month, is clearly having a moment. On March 2, the “Thierry Mugler: Couturissime” exhibition will open at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. However, those wanting to see the Venus dress up close are out of luck because the ensemble won’t be part of the upcoming exhibition. It will make an appearance elsewhere, but Carter was mum on those details.

“[Thierry Mugler] was one of the first to do so many things,” Carter said, continuing his love fest for the history and artistry of the notoriously hard-to-pin-down designer whose legacy includes stints working with George Michael, costuming Cirque du Soleil and taking a turn as Beyoncé’s artistic advisor in 2009.

Mugler’s namesake line was shuttered by parent company Clarins in 2003 before being revived as ready to wear under creative director David Koma in 2013. In late 2017, American designer Casey Cadwallader took over the label’s top creative spot.

“[Mugler] was one of the first to dress [transgendered] people, one of the first to dress exotic dancers and have exotic dancers in his show,” Carter said. “Areas that so many other were afraid to touch on or be associated with. He was the first one to say, ‘I’m gonna do it.’ I feel like that’s everything [Cardi B] represents as well. The whole situation felt legendary.”