

Celine & David Kramer

*A union that brings wise words
to stylish effect*

HEDI SLIMANE HAS A THING FOR art. Since joining Celine as artistic director in January 2018—a post that followed his high-profile roles with Dior and Saint Laurent—the Parisian designer’s penchant for working with contemporary artists has shaped the brand’s DNA.

In Celine boutiques worldwide—from its rue de Grenelle address on Paris’ Left Bank to the storefront on Rodeo Drive—Slimane’s Triomphe Canvas accessories, penny loafers and signature tailoring sit next to David Adamo’s wooden sculptures and monochrome paintings by Shawn Kuruneru. For Celine’s *dépendance* on Manhattan’s Madison Avenue, London-based artist James Balmforth created *Surface Response (Stack)*, a Brutalist column of steel cubes.

Then there is Celine’s SS20 menswear collection. Premiered earlier this year during Paris Fashion Week, Slimane’s designs featured collaborations with a quintet of artists, as Zach Bruder, Darby Milbrath, Carlos Valencia, André Butzer and David Kramer all signed up to work with Slimane.

The artistic director also has a thing for the 1970s and America’s West Coast (he famously located his Saint Laurent atelier in Los Angeles). Both are passions that Slimane has in common with Brooklyn-based artist David Kramer. “Hedi and I share a love for the styles of the ’70s,” says Kramer. “I think he leans more into the rock ’n’ roll glamour side; I lean more towards the Hollywood, Playboy Mansion depictions.”

At his studio in Williamsburg, Kramer creates works that in color, style and subject matter nod to the magazines and advertisements he admired growing up in ’70s New Rochelle. “We would get *Look*, *Life* and *Esquire* magazines delivered to our house every week,” he says, remembering his childhood in the Manhattan suburb. “I would go through those magazines and daydream about what my life was going to look like when I was an adult who lived in New York City.”

In Kramer’s pieces—which have included collages and paintings made using graphite, gouache, watercolors and oil paints—



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aspirational Pop Art motifs are superimposed with text. Exhibited earlier this year at the Owen James Gallery in Soho, Kramer’s 2019 painting *Better in the Future* couples a film-still portrait with the phrase ‘I am hopelessly optimistic’. The same exhibition included circular hook rugs reading ‘The circus is running the circus’ in colored yarn and burlap; elsewhere, Kramer added text (‘I always want more’ or ‘I am still waiting for the trickle down’) to Instagram-sourced snapshots of sunsets, recreated in oil, acrylic and pencil.

Upon graduating from The George Washington University in Washington, DC, where he majored in Fine Arts, Kramer returned to New York and enrolled on a course in sculpture at Brooklyn’s Pratt Institute—the art college whose alumni include photographer Robert Mapplethorpe and painter, sculptor and printmaker Ellsworth Kelly. “I came of age in New York



City’s art world of the late ’80s/early ’90s, so I got to witness firsthand the later days of Andy Warhol, *Interview* magazine, and artists congregating around clubs like Palladium,” he recalls. “Fashion and pop sensibilities always had a back-and-forth relationship.”

Kramer has exhibited widely and internationally; Slimane first came across his name at an art fair. Slimane then chose from the artist’s back catalog. The partnership was first revealed via Instagram, as posts of Kramer’s paintings and *bon mots*—‘Yesterday was better’ and ‘I am still waiting on my Hollywood ending’ among them—announced the brand’s fashion show in January. Says Kramer, “Even though I had never thought to dream of it before it happened, working with Celine has been like a dream come true.”

This warm season, choose from Kramer’s Celine accessories and clothing. A white satin baseball jacket announces, ‘I have a nostalgia for things I probably have never know’; raffia baskets, leather wallets, Shetland wool sweaters and nylon duffel bags are emblazoned ‘My own worst enemy’.

The latter slogan comes straight from the artist’s studio. “Text has always been the central to work,” Kramer explains. “Often, the text will reveal a sort of background story of what I went through in arriving at the finished piece. I was referring to the moment in the studio when a painting goes from being perfect, to me not stopping myself and ruining it.”

Story by FELIX BISCHOF