

Alicja Kwade x Galvan: A Space for a Secret

An artist and a fashion house meet not in spectacle, but in trust—where materials carry memory, ideas become wearable, and meaning is shaped by what is quietly held back.

By Ana Novi

Some women make history not by announcing it, but by insisting on integrity—by refusing shortcuts, surfaces, and substitutions. That ethos underpins *A Space for a Secret*, the collaborative capsule between Alicja Kwade and Galvan, unveiled during Paris Fashion Week in October 2025 alongside Galvan’s Spring/Summer 2026 collection. Comprising eight made-to-order pieces in numbered editions, the project does not treat fashion as a vehicle for display, nor art as a source of visual extraction. Instead, it unfolds as what art consultant Anna Deilmann describes as “a shared process rather than a transaction.”

For Deilmann, the collaboration emerged from a sustained inquiry into how artistic practice might enter the language of fashion “in a respectful way.” In recent years, she notes, too many collaborations have reduced art to “visual elements, shapes, or color codes,” resulting in outcomes that feel “reductive.” The question she and Galvan’s Creative Director Anna-Christin Haas kept returning to was more demanding: how to “make something genuinely new with an artist,” building a process that treats the artist’s work “with integrity, while still producing something that belongs to fashion on its own terms.”

That sense of clarity began to take shape in Kwade’s Berlin studio, where Deilmann introduced Haas and Kwade—two women, as she puts it, “operating in different artistic spheres, yet already connected.” Haas had long been inspired by Kwade’s work; Kwade, in turn, had been wearing Galvan “intuitively,” drawn to its “purity and unpretentious, flattering cuts—something you feel yourself in.” What emerged from that first encounter was a shared conceptual ground linking Kwade’s analytical, science-based, and historically rooted practice with Galvan’s own commitment to clarity and restraint.



Anna-Christin Haas, Galvan's Creative Director, and Alicja Kwade developing the design concept around *Atropa Belladonna (Emergency Pill)* (2014) in Kwade's Berlin atelier. Photo by Sven Eul.

Their dialogue crystallised around galvanisation—what Kwade and Haas describe as “the alchemical transformation of materials, a way of preserving an object as a frozen moment in time.” In Kwade's studio, galvanised tests of *Atropa Belladonna (Emergency Pill)*, 2014 lay across the table: organic forms rendered in metal, caught mid-process. The deadly nightshade condensed what Haas calls “a specific tension in a single form: danger, toxicity, transformation and beauty,” sharpening into the conceptual core of the collaboration. Its history—traced from medieval medicine to Renaissance beauty rituals—introduced themes of intoxication, power, and perception that felt, as Haas observes, “surprisingly contemporary,” shaping a process that unfolded across concept, material, and form in a genuinely 360-degree inquiry.

Material truth became non-negotiable. “If something read as gold, it had to be real gold,” Haas insists, ruling out surface illusion in favour of literal solutions. The challenge was precise and technical: galvanising fabric in 24-carat gold while keeping it flexible, returning to Galvan's own design language of engineering materials “to hold structure with flow.” Practicality and easy reproducibility were consciously placed behind the artistic premise, allowing the collection to exist as a limited series of valuable objects rather than a commercial compromise.



The *Space for a Secret* coat's lining has been engineered with brilliant 24 ct gold leaf. Each 18 x 18 cm sheet of gold leaf has been hand-applied by a master textile artisan. Model Anthi Fakidari. Styled by Julia Sarr-Jamois. Hair by Claire Grech. Makeup by Anne Sophie Costa. Produced by Heather Hyein Lee. Photo by Vitali Gelwich.

What results, Deilmann suggests, is not a conventional artist–brand collaboration, but something “more autonomous and deeply considered”—a body of work shaped by trust and respect, where neither discipline overtakes the other. The collection's title, *A Space for a Secret*, names this sensibility directly. Across the pieces, meaning is never fully revealed. As Haas puts it, “the power sits in what is kept back, and in the moment it is shown or discovered.”

In the conversation with Whitewall that follows, Alicja Kwade reflects on how this first engagement with fashion did not dilute her practice, but allowed her to re-think long-held ideas through the body, intimacy, and objects made not only to be seen, but to be lived with.

WHITEWALL: This project begins with your edition *Atropa Belladonna (Emergency Pill)* (2014), a real *Atropa belladonna* berry electroplated in gold, and expands into eight made-to-order pieces in numbered editions. What did you feel needed to remain intact from the original logic of *Atropa Belladonna (Emergency Pill)* (2014), or of your artwork more broadly, as it moved into a wearable language, and what inevitably shifted once the work became something lived rather than exhibited?

ALICJA KWADE: They are really two different stories. What connects them is me—as an artist—and the way I work. I try to be as honest with myself as possible, and therefore with my work and everything I engage with.

The belladonna berry was a starting point, but the project actually began earlier. Anna-Christin and I met through a mutual friend, Anna Deilmann, who showed me a Galvan collection that had been inspired by my work. I was curious about the person behind it, and that curiosity led us to meet in my studio. From there, conversations unfolded very naturally—about materials, galvanic processes, metal, fabric, and transformation.

I had never been particularly interested in collaborations in the traditional sense. Often they feel like branding exercises rather than genuine exchanges. What interested me here was the possibility of stepping into a new field, where I can encounter completely different things and learn from them.

Entering fashion not as a surface gesture, but as a different kind of public event—thinking through ideas I already carry in my practice, but that would never really fit within my artistic work.

For me, sculpture and fashion remain distinct languages. They require very different approaches. But conceptually, I try to be just as precise in fashion as I am in my art. I was grateful that Galvan was open to certain requirements—such as using real gold—and to rethinking things from the ground up. The *Atropa Belladonna* functioned as a kind of red thread, but the work was always meant to be worn. That changes everything.

WW: Galvanisation appears here both as a chemical transformation and as a way of preserving objects—as a frozen moment in time. In your practice, how do you think about transformation versus fixation? What is gained by freezing a moment, and what becomes newly visible through that act?

AK: A large part of my work is about how objects are perceived—how they are defined, who assigns meaning to them, and how time acts upon them. Time is one of the most fundamental forces we encounter, and as humans we constantly attempt to resist it, to stop it, to preserve something before it disappears.

With galvanisation, there is this paradox: organic matter is preserved on the outside while it decays within. The surface remains beautiful, almost monumental, while inside everything continues to rot. Sometimes small openings remain, and traces emerge—dark residues that suggest what is happening beneath. That tension fascinates me.

In this sense, galvanisation is less about transforming something organic into something inorganic, and more about suspending an object in time—granting it a kind of temporary eternity. Transformation, more broadly, runs throughout my work, but here the emphasis is on fixation: on holding a moment still, even as its inner life continues.

WW: The title *A Space for a Secret* becomes literal in the ring—a solid gold piece with a hidden compartment beneath a sculptural nightshade berry. What does the idea of the “secret” signify for you here?



Two-Finger Ring, solid 18 ct gold, in the likeness of the *Atropa Belladonna* plant. The ring contains a compartment hidden beneath the berry, which opens to reveal a space for a secret. At its centre, the berry is finished with deep nightshade-coloured fire enamel. Photo by Sven Eul.

AK: The ring is only one expression of the idea. For me, the notion of a “secret” is something much broader. We all carry things that remain unspoken—in our conversations, our identities, our relationships. There must always be space for that.

In art, this is essential. You can explain many things, but you can never explain everything. There should always be something that resists full disclosure. With this collection, the secret also becomes physical. The ring contains an empty compartment—it can hold anything or nothing at all. A dream, a memory, something practical, something good or evil, or simply emptiness.

The nightshade itself is significant: a plant associated with healing and poison, protection and danger, historically linked to medicine, witchcraft, and myth. That ambiguity felt important. The secret is not fixed; it belongs entirely to the wearer.

WW: The collaboration returns repeatedly to the eye and the gaze—through *Atropa belladonna*, historical ideas of dilated pupils as beauty ideals, and garments such as the *Delirium* coats with ocular elements. When the eye appears on the body, what kinds of looking are you thinking about?



Two master prosthetic eye artisans created the 200 bespoke irises, spanning the full spectrum of human eye color. The pattern on the coat reflects Haas's and Kwade's star maps merged, reflecting their closely developed relationship. Ocularist Eye Prosthetics: Fischer & Kind Eye Prosthetics. Model Anthi Fakidari. Stylist Julia Sarr-Jamois. Hair by Claire Grech. Makeup by Anne Sophie Costa. Produced by Heather Hyein Lee. Photo by Vitali Gelwich.

AK: I've been fascinated by glass eyes for a long time. I collect them, but until now I never found the right context to use them. This collaboration allowed that freedom.

Eyes are incredibly powerful symbols. We recognise them immediately—even from a distance—and they carry an intense emotional charge. In garments like the coats, they become public elements. Fashion is inherently social; you move through the world wearing it. When eyes appear on the body, there is a reversal: people look at you, but something is also looking back.

There is irony in that exchange, but also awareness. The different pupil sizes suggest varying emotional states—excitement, fear, calm, intensity. It creates a heightened sense of being seen and seeing at the same time.



Vanity Void. Handcrafted from Aô's sequins. The intricate embroidery motif sits anatomically at the location of the human heart, capturing an exploding iris referencing the chemical effect of *Atropa Belladonna*. Model: Anthi Fakidari. Styled by Julia Sarr-Jamois. Hair by Claire Grech. Makeup by Anne Sophie Costa. Produced by Heather Hyein Lee. Photo by Vitali Gelwich.

WW: One of the garments is titled *Aiónic*, drawing on a sense of time that exceeds linear measurement. How did you translate that idea into form and material?

AK: The dress with the clock hands arrived relatively late in the process. I often hesitate to repeat elements that are very recognisable in my sculptural work. But I had always wanted to stitch clock hands into fabric.

Galvan embraced the idea fully. The execution required immense precision—people worked through the night to attach each element by hand. What I like is that the clock hands do not measure time; they simply exist. They hang loosely, almost like rain.

The piece doesn't make you experience time differently, but it reminds you of it—of your physical presence within it. Unlike my sculptural clocks, which are exact and calculated, here time becomes something softer, something that moves with the body.



Aionic Dress, adorned with 683 gold-plated watch hands. Each element was individually positioned and hand-sewn in the Galvan atelier. Model: Anthi Fakidari. Stylist: Julia Sarr-Jamois. Hair: Claire Grech. Makeup: Anne Sophie Costa. Producer: Heather Hyein Lee. Photo by Vitali Gelwich.

WW: You've spoken about the freedom you found in designing fashion for the first time. Where did you feel most free, and where did constraint become productive?

AK: I would not dare to say that I am designing fashion, but I was allowed to contribute. Making art is not effortless. It involves doubt, repetition, and constant questioning. Fashion offered a different rhythm—faster, more intuitive. I was able to use ideas I had carried for years but never realised because they didn't belong within my sculptural language.

The collaboration worked because of trust. I have very clear ideas about what I want and what I don't want, but I relied entirely on Anna-Christin's expertise when it came to the body, movement, and construction. She works with extraordinary precision and commitment—often directly with the material herself.

That exchange was energising. It never felt heavy. It was focused, intense, and joyful. The result reflects that shared dedication.