



# Giorgio Armani's Staying Power





# LOEWE





Spring Summer 2015 Hemp Canvas Peeling Tote, 2015 loewe.com





**PRADA** 

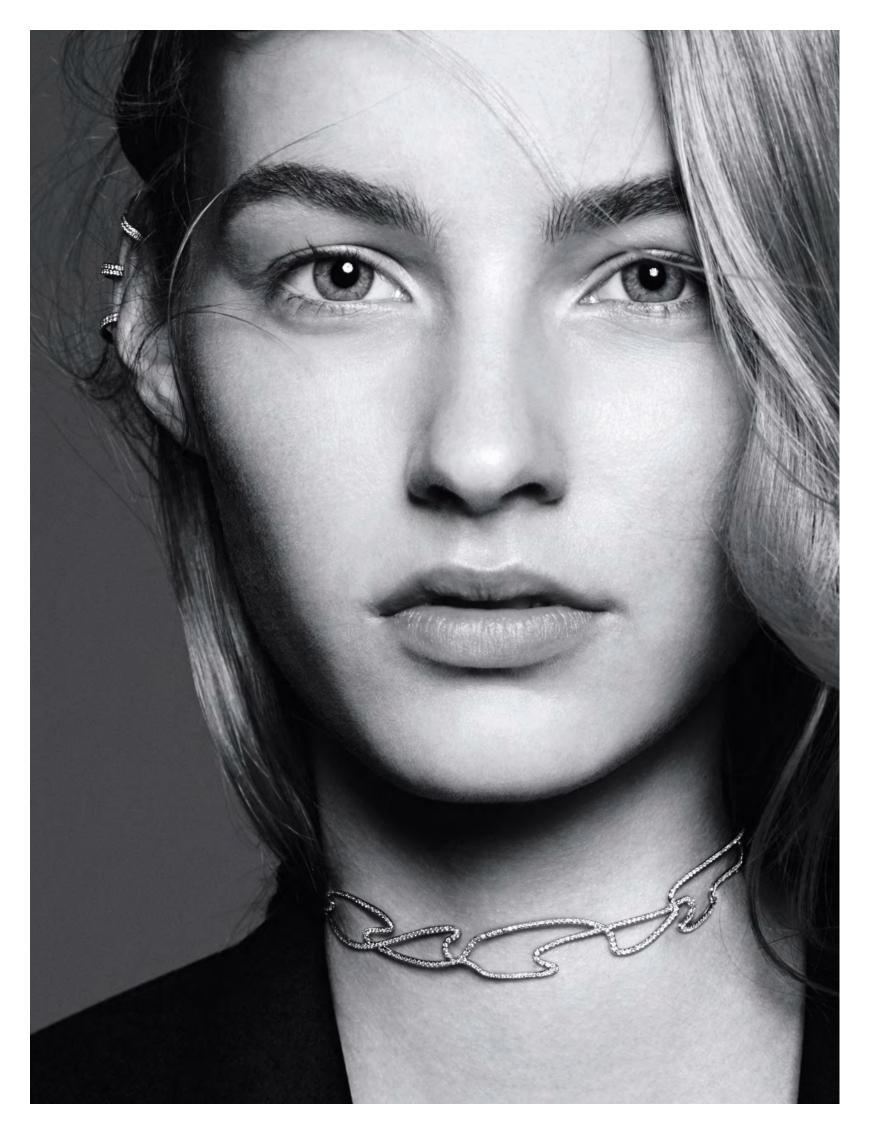


CHANEL



# MIU MIU

STEVEN MEISEL NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 22-24 2014 MIA GOTH





6 PLACE VENDÔME

### REPOSSI

PARIS











Ermenegildo Zegna COUTURE





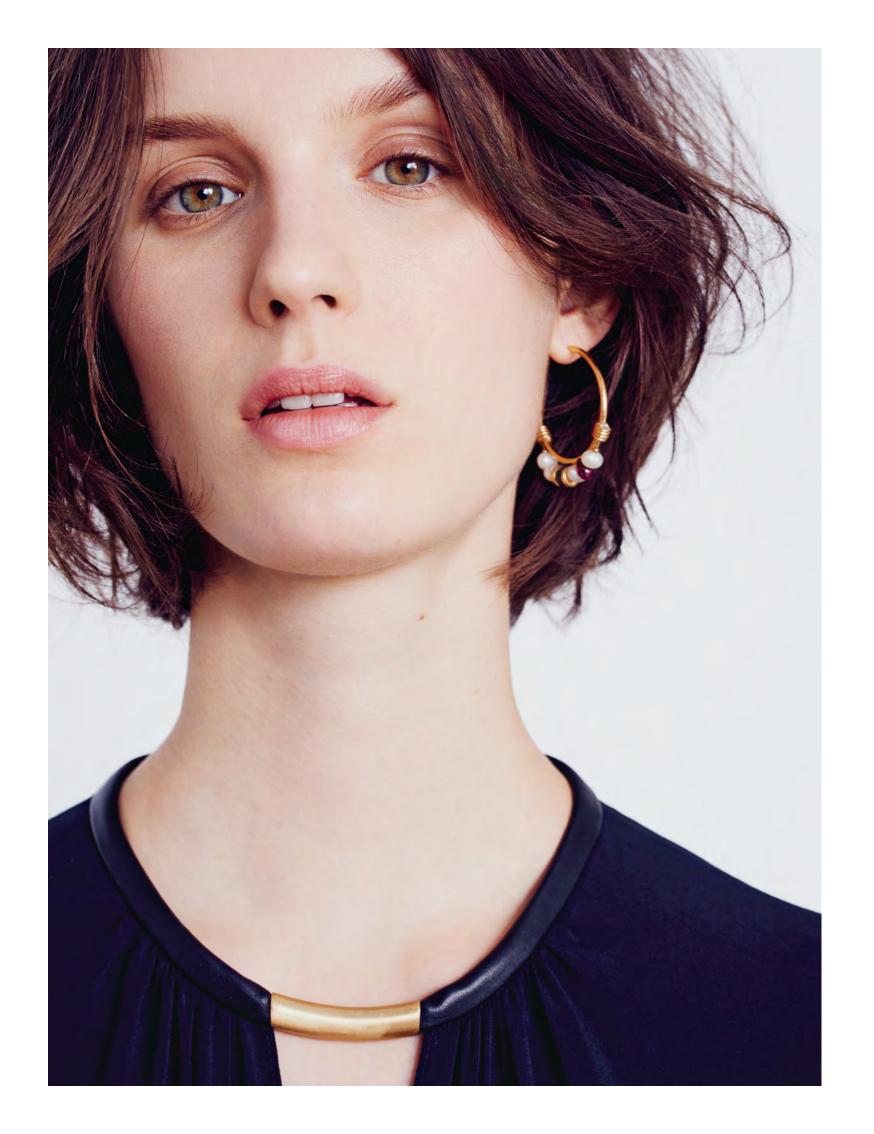
### Berluti Paris

Bottier depuis 1895

### LONDON

43 CONDUIT STREET – 4 HARRIET STREET HARRODS, KNIGHTSBRIDGE MEN'S TAILORING







### vanessabruno



MUGLER



New-York Shooting

### 38 Staying power. Giorgio Armani. By Giampietro Baudo. Photographs by Juergen Teller.

### 88 A letter from... Beijing: The dinner of discontent.

By Hung Huang. Illustration by François Berthoud.

### 90 A letter from... London: The visually super literate.

By David Owen. Illustration by François Berthoud.

### 92 A letter from... Paris: Luxury quantity.

By Mesh Chhibber. Illustration by François Berthoud.

### 94 Face à face. Mirror Image.

### 96 Archive. Katy England.

By Jerry Stafford. Photographs by Willy Vanderperre. Styling by Katy England.

### 122 Chronicles of colour. Victoire de Castellane.

By Eric Troncy. Portrait by Juergen Teller. Photographs by Antoine Seiter.

### 136 The legendary... Valentino. By Hans Ulrich Obrist. Photographs by Zoë Ghertner. Styling by Camille Bidault-Waddington.

### 156 In the words of... Cathy Horyn.

By Jonathan Wingfield. Photographs by Juergen Teller.

### 192 Retrospective. Roman Cieslewicz.

By Thomas Lenthal. Images by Roman Cieslewicz.

### 228 Behind the scenes. Hermès.

By Thomas Lenthal. Photographs by Antoine Seiter.

### 242 The edit. Stefano Pilati.

By Jonathan Wingfield. Photographs by Pieter Hugo.

### 254 The colour questionnaire. Haider Ackermann.

By Loïc Prigent.





Camille Bidault-Waddington is French with some English and Spanish. She describes herself as "a fashion midwife" as well as an art director, photographer and fashion editor. Camille doesn't have a favourite colour, but she really doesn't like yellowy-aniseed green.

**Cathy Horyn** is from Coshocton, Ohio. She is a journalist. Cathy's favourite colour is blue because it's calm, cool and cheerful.

**David Owen** is from 2c Billet Avenue, Suburbia where he grew up on Channel 4 and books. He runs IDEA with his partner Angela Hill where together they discover, sell and publish books. David used to have a Saab 900 that was metallic silver – this is his favourite colour and also his favourite car.

**Dick Page** is from the west of England, not far from Bristol. He is a make-up

artist and the Artistic Director of Shiseido. Dick doesn't have a favourite colour but is drawn to colours like Venetian Rose or ashes of roses. He loves brown and grey-based pink shades but doesn't know why.

Hans Ulrich Obrist is from Zurich, Switzerland. He is the Co-Director of The Serpentine Galleries in London. Hans' favourite colour is red.

Hung Huang is very confused about where she is from. She wishes she was from Costa Rica but instead was born in China. She carries a US passport and lives in Beijing. She does a lot of things but none of them are what she wants to do—which is nothing. According to her fortune-teller, Huang's favourite colour should be blue.

**Jerry Stafford** is from Bromley, in the south of England. He is the Creative Director at Premiere Heure, and a

journalist and fashion consultant. Jerry's favourite colours are the iridescent jewel tones produced by the microstructures of humming birds' feathers, which he finds both exotic and erotic.

**Katy England** is from Cheshire, England. She is a fashion stylist and consultant. Katy's favourite colour is green.

Mesh Chhibber is from London. He is the co-founder of Peau de Chagrin. Mesh's favourite colour is black because he finds it comforting.

**Pieter Hugo** is from Cape Town. He is an image merchant. Pieter's favourite colour is the white light of late-night television.

Willy Vanderperre has lived in Menen and Antwerp in Belgium, and would at some point like to live in Los Angeles. Willy's favourite colour is white – for him, it is all the colours combined.



#### **Editorial Board**

Alexia Niedzielski Elizabeth von Guttman Jonathan Wingfield Thomas Lenthal

Art DirectorAssociate EditorMathieu PerroudRana Toofanian

Editor-at-LargeCoordinationNatasha GoldenbergVeronica Latourrette

Contributing Editor Layout

Xerxes Cook Antoine Seiter

#### **Contributing Writers**

Giampietro Baudo, Mesh Chhibber, Hung Huang, Hans Ulrich Obrist, David Owen, Loïc Prigent, Jerry Stafford.

#### **Contributing Creatives**

François Berthoud, Camille Bidault-Waddington, Katy England, Dick Page.

#### **Contributing Photographers**

Zoë Ghertner, Pieter Hugo, Antoine Seiter, Juergen Teller, Willy Vanderperre.

#### **Special Thanks to:**

Billy Albores, Anoushka Borghesi, James Campbell, Rebecca Catt,
Karen Clarkson, Lindsey Cooper, Marie Déhé, Floriane Desperier, Mimi Fraser,
Isabella Capece Galeota, Audrey Houssin, Guillaume Hery, Joy Hart,
Natalie Hand, Sven Kauffmann, Sylvia Farago, Justinian Kfoury, Alexandre Lamare,
David Mallet, Salvo Nicosia, Francesca Pacciani, Karla Otto, Matthew Owyang,
Jean Pigozzi, Thomas Prees, Pierre Rougier, Georg Ruffles, HRH Reema Al-Saud,
Christoper Schönefeld, Pierre Seiter, Big Sky, Olivia Gideon-Thomson, Anya Yiapanis, Karin Xiao.

Publisher
Tartan Publishing Ltd

System

Tartan Publishing Ltd, 29-31 Brewery Road, London, N7 9QH, United Kingdom, +44 (0)20 7619 6617.

For subscriptions please visit www.system-magazine.com

Follow System on Instagram @systemmagazine

Distribution by COMAG. Tavistock Works, Tavistock Road, West Drayton, UB77QX, UK, +44 (0)18 9543 3811.

Colour reproduction and print supervision by LBH labs. Printed and bound by Grafica Nappa Srl in Aversa, Italy. © 2015 Reproduction is strictly prohibited without permission from the publishers. ISSN No.: 2052-0808

For more information, please contact info@system-magazine.com or visit www.system-magazine.com



Throughout the 1980s and '90s we saw the rise of 'indie'. Indie music, indie flicks, indie magazines, indie fashion. While the word was first associated with the UK's alternative music chart – for records released on independent as opposed to major record labels – of course, it gradually emerged as a broader badge of honour, loosely implying that independence was for artsy outsiders; and ultimately became a generic term employed to describe pretty much anything that wished to express more soulful values.

And along the way, indie hijacked independent.

But why should independent mean small? Why does willfully reigning in one's ambitions mean you're more soulful? Surely independent means being self-sufficient, individualistic, headstrong... (we know it does because we've just looked it up in the dictionary).

There's certainly nothing indie about Giorgio Armani's independence. Our 80-year-old cover star epitomises the idea that independence can mean power. And when you sit down with Mr Armani (and get Juergen Teller to snoop around his personal residence) you soon understand that, besides the obvious trappings of owning his 40-year-old global empire outright, what fuels him is a stubborn refusal to dilute his ideas or be swayed by influence.

The same could be said for Cathy Horyn, probably fashion's most-feared – and respected – critic, and the subject of this issue's long-form interview. (It turns out that Cathy's father was himself a newspaper reporter, who made a living covering public executions in Ohio penitentiaries. Now we wouldn't want to presume there's a link, but...)

And then there's Hermès, the original independent luxury house. We took a look inside their 'colour kitchen', the psychedelic service that transforms their silk *carrés* into a global money-making machine (reportedly one sold every 25 seconds).

Indie never felt so big.



# 'I had to take things into my own hands.'

There's nothing 'indie' about Giorgio Armani's independence.

By Giampietro Baudo Photographs by Juergen Teller



Over the course of 40 years in an industry of change and reinvention, Giorgio Armani has marched to the steady beat of his own drum. Describing the essence of what he does as a search for "linear and ostentatious elegance" applied across an empire that spans ready-towear, couture, numerous diffusion and cosmetics lines, furniture, hotels and even food – it's an aesthetic fidelity that turns over €2 billion for the company each year. And crucially, it's a company that is neither publicly traded, nor part of an ever-expanding international luxury conglomerate – instead, Giorgio Armani S.p.A. remains entirely in the hands of the man whose name adorns its labels; a man with no formal business training, whose first foray into fashion, following a stint in the army in the early 1960s, was as a window dresser.

personal residence, just moments away from the company's headquarters situated on via Borgonuovo in the Brera district of Milan. This trust is formed between his brand and its audience, one that has been cultivated by the unwavering desire and discipline of its founder and CEO. In the following conversation, Mr Armani takes a rare moment to sit down and discuss risk and regrets, what will happen to the company beyond his lifetime, and those moments when it gets lonely at the top.

### Mr Armani, after 40 years of work, are you happy today?

Yes, I have to say that I am just as happy today as when I began 40 years ago...

So how do you manage to cope with what must be an extraordinary work-

#### Do you ever take time off?

I only allow myself short holidays in August and December – to recuperate.

### Do you still enjoy the punishing work rate you've given yourself, after so many years?

All I can say is this: when I know I have a work appointment the following day — to visit one of our workshops or ateliers — I honestly can't sleep the night before. I'm constantly getting up to check my alarm clock. And when it finally goes off in the morning, I'm happy. I just love being in contact with the people who are actually working to make the clothes; I enjoy the manual nature of the work and being able to spend time in the workshop. Even today, after 40 years, my enjoyment is like that of a child.

# 'When I know I'm visiting our ateliers the following day, I honestly can't sleep from excitement. I'm constantly getting up to check my alarm clock.'

It was in 1980 that the name Armani stamped itself on the world. Having dressed a young Richard Gere in Paul Schrader's *American Gigolo* – in which he designed a "jacket to be as fluid as a cardigan; elegant, but loose"; an unstructuring of the male uniform that changed both the way men and women across the world dressed – the big screen's global resonance gave rise to ensuing Armani-mania, from which the 80-year-old Italian icon has amassed an estimated personal fortune of €7.8 billion.

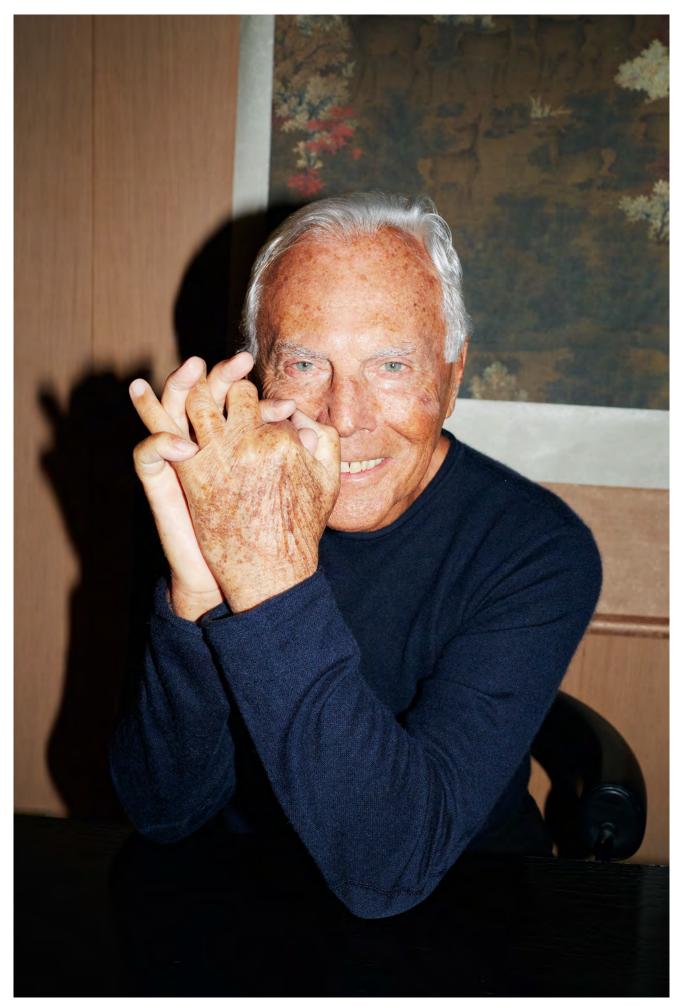
Creativity and commerce: both are under Giorgio Armani's control – but despite the self-proclaimed designer-businessman's decades of experience and success, he still has doubts the night before a show. It's an issue of "trust", he tells *System* from the comfort of his

### load? And how have you structured the

More than 9,500 people work for the group throughout the world. And obviously, the management of a business so extensive and complex requires complete and constant attention. So, my alarm clock goes off every day at seven a.m. and, after physical exercise and a healthy breakfast, I arrive at my office more or less at nine. I spend my day at the company's various headquarters and offices, giving equal attention to the management of the business as to its creative elements — I think of myself as a 'designer-businessman'. Between the seasonal fashion shows in Milan and Paris, and the numerous other events connected with the fashion house, the weeks pass by pretty quickly as I constantly follow this schedule.

## Was creating a company like the one you have now a childhood ambition? What do you think triggered the desire to do this?

Absolutely not, the idea came much later. I was a timid child, not at all outgoing. Part of that was down to the dominating presence of my brother, a person with great charisma and extraordinary beauty; and I certainly felt a bit of a latent rivalry between us... As I grew up I didn't know what my career would be for years and years; perhaps I wasn't fully aware of what was going on around me. [Thinks out loud] What did I want to be as a child? I didn't think of becoming a designer... No, I mainly wanted to become a doctor, but perhaps also a writer or traveller. I love this world and the idea of being able to go out and explore it certainly appealed



 $oldsymbol{40}$ 

to me – even though that's never been enough for me.

# How have you managed to create and oversee such a successful fashion company — and maintain that for 40 year, despite having no formal business training whatsoever?

I can only talk for myself, but I'd have to say that learning on the job is often more effective than what any traditional training can offer you. I learnt about business day-by-day – while it was happening. So just going to work every day was my training college; and I'm so lucky to have had it like that.

### Did you have a specific business model in mind when you started your career? Liberty always had a strong burning

I have always had a strong, burning desire to realise my full potential – fash-

### giving in to the temptations of outside investment?

The decision to keep complete control of my business – of my independence - for me was, and is, both quite natural and quite necessary. I am a designer-businessman, and my vision of the business is integral to my way of working in the design sector. I must admit that maintaining my independence is not easy today, and I am constantly courted with ever-increasing insistence. Staying independent requires a tremendous amount of effort, as I find myself having to deal on a daily basis with competitors who are true titans of the business world. The temptation to give in is always there, but then I think I'd end up losing control — and that I'd no longer be able to create anything how I really want it — and so I resist.

experiencing on the very first day of the company, and I'm working like a maniac to ensure their success.

### You mentioned consistency before. What's been the one constant in the 40 years of your company?

If I look back, I have to say that there has only ever been one consistent thread running through my life: I've never let even the smallest detail pass by without checking it. I've never ever said, 'Who cares?' even if it was only something that appeared to be insignificant.

### Let's talk about how you took the Armani brand to the world. What motivated you, and how did you manage this?

The expansion of my business, across all the different areas, has been driven by my desire to produce not just fash-

# 'I have no formula to pass on to others because I didn't follow a formula myself. I've done everything my own way and stubbornly continue to do so.'

ion only came into the picture once I'd abandoned the idea of becoming a doctor. I immediately understood that this was the field in which I'd be able to fully express my vision. Once I'd realised that, everything happened in a natural sequence of events. I have no formula to pass on to others because I didn't follow a formula myself, nor was I inspired by any other existing business model. I've always done everything my own way and continue to do so with a stubbornness that means even now I keep hold of my independence – it's the most precious thing of all. If I had to describe my career using just a few words, I would say passion, risk, tenacity and consistency.

Am I right in saying that it's this risk and tenacity that's prevented you from

### Do you still have dreams, or regrets, after 40 years of your business?

I look to the future in different ways now. 40 years is a long time to be in the fashion world — a long, long time especially the way I have lived them. I'm still always thinking of the future; maybe it's a future on the decline as opposed to a healthy future, but that's the way life goes. And it's a life that's dealt me a great hand. I feel today like I did ten, even 30 years ago: confronting the same issues I've always had about establishing my brand across the world, and I still experience the same doubts the night before a fashion show that I've always had. But the excitement never leaves; right now I'm excited by the great Expo2015<sup>1</sup> event in Milan, and by the opening of my museum – they're no different from the challenges I was ion, but an all-encompassing Armani style. I wanted my aesthetic vision to be applied not only to clothing, but to many other contexts. From a business perspective, this made it possible to establish diverse profit flows, all stemming from the value and identity of the Armani brand, and that would never have been achieved had we operated in clothing alone.

### But was there a specific moment, or event, which lit the fuse for the brand to expand internationally?

I think it was the decision to contribute to creating the costumes for *American Gigolo*. It seemed a perfectly natural move for me at the time, because I'd always had an interest and passion for cinema. It was a decision motivated not by business strategy – even though



it translated into a phenomenal success – but through the immaterial world of cinema. And it was thanks to cinema that my style entered the public consciousness and captured people's imagination. I could never have imagined that costumes in a film would have led to the growth of my business, but that's just how it worked out.

It led to Armani becoming a universal style reference – everyone in the world soon knew what the Armani aesthetic was all about. How have you managed to stay true to the codes and values of your house over the years, as the business has evolved?

By staying on a consistent path, dictated by a never-ending search for new yet harmonious lines, innovative materials, sophistication and quality. My idea

this with a collection, 10 percent of customers will praise that change to the skies, while the other 90 percent are confused. It's the 90 percent that terrify me, and I feel the whole responsibility of estranging such a large number of people who are so important for the stability of my Group – those customers who want something from us which, at first glance, is immediately recognisable as Armani. When I travel, I look around at what my colleagues in the fashion industry are doing and I see the most beautiful things; things that make me realise that the world has changed and is continuing to change. I'm not talking about those designers who are simply puppets in thrall to a particular kind of trendiness, but those designers who have a healthy alter-ego, capable of making the sums add up; so that realised immediately that in order to grow the business as I wanted, I had to maintain my independence — and to achieve that, I had to take things into my own hands, including from an economic perspective. It was a natural development, albeit a highly demanding one.

#### Does it ever feel lonely at the top?

A bit, yes. Success like mine requires total commitment, so much so that it takes up my entire life. For the most part, I've had to give up affection and time for the sake of work. In reality though, I have no regrets.

If you had to draw up a balance sheet, what have you missed the most over the past 40 years?

Giving attention to the people around

# '10 percent of customers would praise me if I revolutionized my style; the other 90 percent would be left confused. It's the 90 percent that terrify me.'

of style and taste is no different from when I started out; I've always sought to express a deep appreciation for all that is simple and linear. Times have obviously changed since 1975: men and women have gradually freed themselves from the protocols and rigid attitudes of the past, and found different ways to express their own personalities. I've always wanted to keep up with the times, but without distorting the essential characteristics of my philosophy and aesthetics.

But wouldn't you like to write a new chapter of your aesthetics today, one completely different from that of the past?

Yes, I'd be really happy to: sometimes I think about changing, and about revolutionising my style. If I were to do

it's then possible to convert a beautiful object into something successful.

On precisely that point, many successful fashion brands have been the fruit of two people working in a great creative and business synergy: such as Miuccia Prada and Patrizio Bertelli, Yves Saint Laurent and Pierre Bergé, Tom Ford and Domenico De Sole – yet you are in command on your own...

I don't consider the artistic component to be in conflict with the business component. I define myself as a designer-businessman, and my vision of the business is integral to my way of working with fashion. When we started the business there *was* a divided model: Armani on the creative side, Sergio Galeotti<sup>2</sup> on the business side. Sergio's early death forced me to revaluate everything. I

me. I have always loved my work dearly, which in turn has led me to committing to even more work, and with the most blurred of lines between my private life and my business. Once you are a businessman, you never stop being one. If I'm honest, I must admit that I'd have liked to have had a bit more quality time with the people around me; to have enjoyed myself in moments of healthy and simple pleasures. I don't like transgressive behaviour of any kind; I consider infidelity to be too precarious, volatile and dangerous. My work has had an important role in my life, it has been defined by it. It hasn't allowed me breaks, but it has nonetheless given me great success. Ultimately, when I'm brought the bill, I can see my life as having been punctuated by the occasional difficult moment, but these have



been set off against the regularity of the it comes down to is that stress is a chalwonderful ones. lenge: it only becomes negative when

### How do you manage to delegate while maintaining control over your creative and business worlds?

Surrounding myself with the right kind of people in whom I can place the greatest trust. At the same time though, I am still the one who makes the final decisions.

### Doesn't it become a bit of an obsession managing a business like yours?

I wouldn't call it an obsession although it is certainly a constant and total commitment. I have to say, it is very rare for me to lose sleep or wake up in the middle of the night because of work. When it happens, it's only for the most serious of reasons.

it comes down to is that stress is a challenge; it only becomes negative when you lose control of the situation or when you've been unaware of serious problems. I do my best to avoid both these kinds of situations.

### What do you know about the business that you didn't 40 years ago?

I understood from the start that communication is important, but the true basis for success is the authenticity of the product. By product I mean a jacket or pair of jeans just as much as the environment or the service found in my hotels.

### What is the greatest risk you've faced in growing your business?

Maintaining my independence is a constant risk but it's something I'll never

six months; it's futile. I love the idea of having succeeded in making my own aesthetic outlook unforgettable.

### What are you most proud of in your career?

There are obviously the times where I have been given recognition; such as the cover of *Time* magazine in 1982 and, more recently, the Giorgio Armani Day³ in New York in 2013. This served as confirmation that my work has gone in the right direction, and that I have genuinely touched peoples' lives. However, the thing I am most proud of is the fact that over 40 years I have been able to create the complete Armani lifestyle, which mirrors my ideas and can be applied to many sectors beyond the fashion world; such as interior design and hotels. Over all these years I've

### 'Italian brands being absorbed by French luxury groups has impoverished our industrial fabric. Each time it happens, a piece of Italy goes with it.'

### And you never wake in the middle of the night with an idea you have to write down there and then?

No. If inspiration is deep enough it is well-rooted, and it's still there when the morning alarm goes off. I sleep only as much as is absolutely necessary, but it is restorative sleep. As I said before, I'm always awake by seven. I've always got up early – I used to think it was out of duty, but I've discovered it is actually a great pleasure because it follows the natural rhythm of the day.

# Have you ever had moments when you have been under great pressure or stress? And how do you deal with this? I'm responsible for a big business so I'm only too aware of what stress is. Normally though, I find it a positive experi-

ence, something that stimulates. What

give up. I'm proud to have believed in it so strongly and to have done everything to defend my uniqueness; I'm proud of the fact I've always believed in my approach to fashion, and been faithful to that idea.

### How important are the values of consistency and fidelity to you?

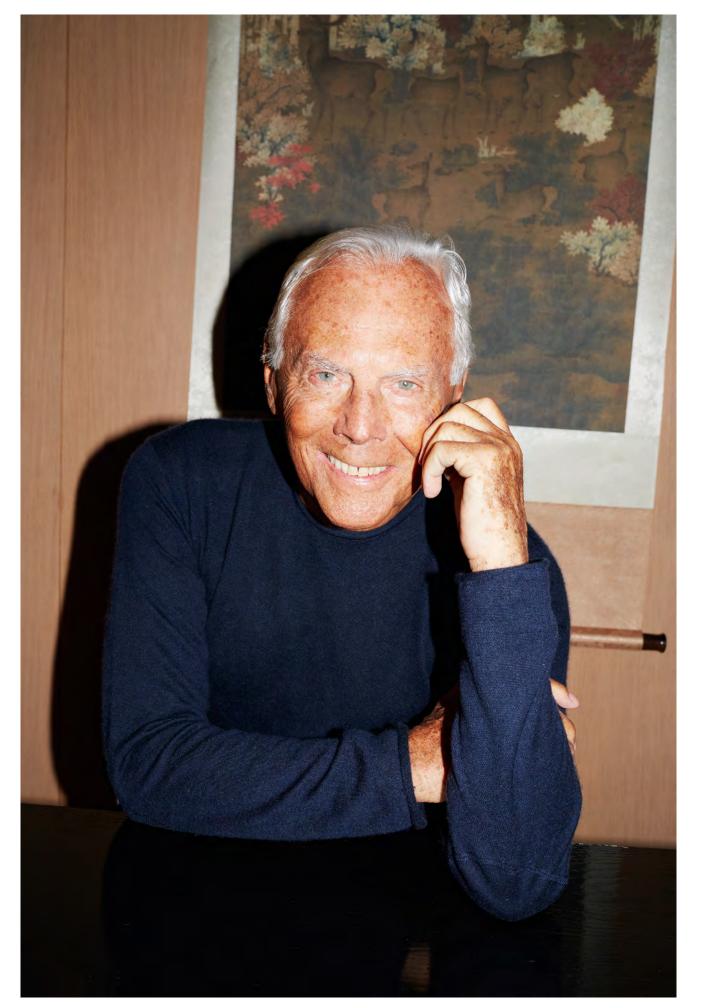
They are of fundamental importance whether one is talking of love or work...

The things I care for passionately are long-lasting and deep-rooted: consistency has been a thread throughout my life. This is true both in business and on a creative level: the marriages with my production partners and managers are always long-standing, and it's also true at the creative level. I hate this idea currently popular in some areas of fashion where everything has to change every

tried to create atmospheres, going beyond simply clothing: atmospheres to surround people, to bring them into my aesthetic universe, the universe that occupies my mind.

### What are your general thoughts on the fashion industry today?

Nowadays finance dominates the fashion industry, and the monopoly of large companies is a clear indication of this. Many historic brands have changed hands and the reasons are different every time: generational hand-downs, conflicts between heirs, divergence of strategies; all of this has led to the absorption of significant brands – Italian above all – into French luxury companies. While these companies have given the brands an international dimension, they've also impoverished our industrial fabric.



Each time this happens, a piece of our country goes with it. Personally, I will never betray the relationship of trust I have with my clientele; because that is my strength and the basis of my style.

### How would you define the difference between fashion and luxury?

Luxury is an overused term. I prefer the word authenticity: my creations express the true culture of Italian know-how. Fashion is simply the system which conveys these values.

# In terms of business and strategy, what would you say distinguishes fashion from other sectors, such as smartphones, computers or hotels?

Fashion is always based on frivolous yet extremely profound impulses. It is the industry of change and renewal; it

### Is success measured purely in terms of size and turnover – or are there other, perhaps intangible, values?

No, success is not purely defined by turnover. If I look at all the young designers I have supported over the years by allowing them to exhibit at the Armani Teatro<sup>4</sup>... While they're clearly small by comparison to me, I've been impressed by their ability to create their own niche in the market, and how they've achieved success through great perseverance.

### Why have you set up this mentoring project within the Armani Teatro?

Having got to this point in my career, I understood it was vital to give young people — the designers of tomorrow — some help. A designer's job is so tough: every six months, no, every day,

### business-minded? And then, conversely, those working in the business side of the industry must be more sensitive to creativity?

This issue has always been important to me. Our job is one which balances creativity and commerce, because alone each one is crippled. Creativity alone can become an end unto itself, and excessive commerce can lead to [creativity] drying up. Finding a link between the two requires a lot of attention, but above all the will to question yourself – and that's the same for both creative people and business people.

### What piece of advice would you give to a young designer?

Remember that a collection is an idea that's grown over six months, and it needs six months of commitment, and

# 'I'm surrounded by very capable colleagues who I've trained with succession in mind. Many of them are, paradoxically, even more 'Armani' than I am.'

promises beauty and makes it a reality, with infinite changes every season. It is a business made from both extreme concreteness and volatility – it is so exciting, a continuous challenge, with parameters which never stay the same.

### What do you think of the democratisation of fashion by 'fast fashion' brands?

I believe that fast fashion has brought about a concept of speed and low-cost that has effectively changed the world of clothing. Personally, I thought about this market – which is a very interesting one, not just because of the price points – back in 1991 with the A/X Armani Exchange. It was not a low-cost collection, but a complete fashion line: a total urban look for consumers between the ages of 16 and 25, based on the fast-fashion formula.

you have to question yourself in order to understand whether you're creating the right thing; to understand whether a particular *coup de théâtre* is right. I believe, however, that there is one ultimate secret of thought, of creation, of product — and that is truth.

### Are people born designers, or can these skills be acquired over time?

I think you pick up skills with experience, but the initial talent is innate.

### Are there other brands or designers that interest you today?

I am interested in authentic businesses, which push forward the values of their respective fields.

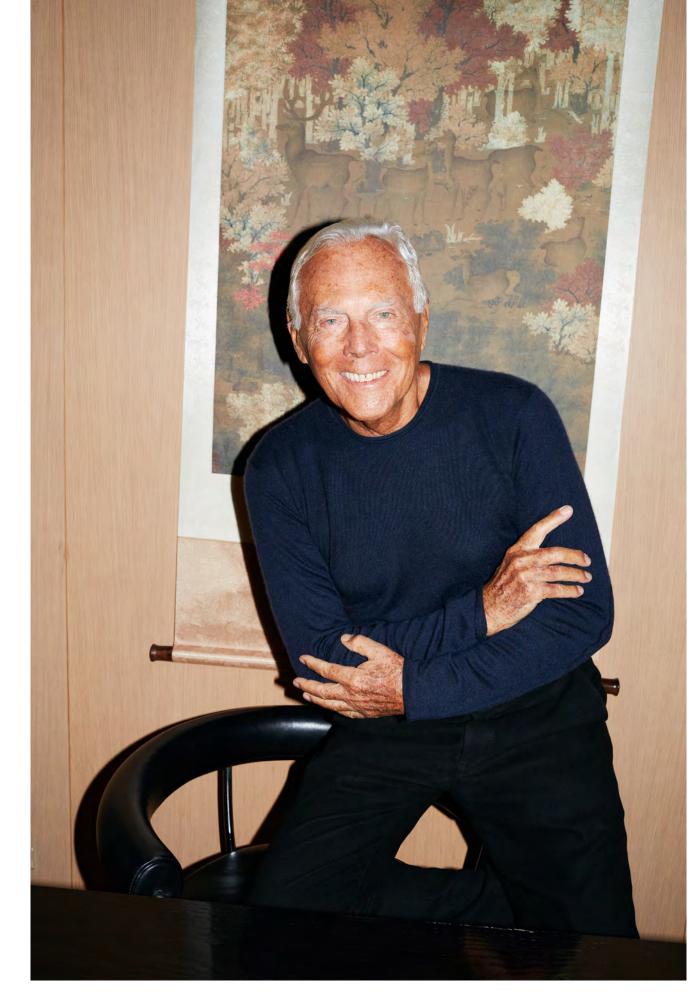
Do you agree that today's fashion designers need to become increasingly

of work. From an economic standpoint also remember that, when creating an object, you need to think about its marketability. Also, try and create for tomorrow, because these days things are so unpredictable.

# To what extent does human management, of both creative and business staff, take up your time and energy? And in what ways does good people management drive a successful business?

Managing staff takes a lot of my energy, but it is vital. By feeling involved with me, my staff really become part of the company; thus they all work together towards a goal.

Have you ever thought about taking a step back?



 $\mathbf{48}$ 

Honestly not. My life and my work coincide, so taking a step back is something I've never contemplated.

# How much more can your company grow, while maintaining the balance between quality and your values? Can the Armani universe ever get too big?

The constant growth has never involved me turning my back on quality. I have never looked for growth for growth's sake. There is not a size which is too big for the Armani brand, but for me, everything needs to happen in an organic manner.

### What maxim has guided the company

#### over the years?

I can sum this up with one word: independence. It is the only value I believe in; it allows me to grow and to express myself authentically.

#### How do you see the future of the brand?

I have had many different people approach me to propose partnerships... and each time I ask myself one simple thing: 'Is it worth it?' My response has always been guided by one certainty: I don't like being a spectator, or having to accept the thoughts of others.

It's very clear that you are an exceptionally organised and disciplined

### individual – do you have a specific plan in place for how the company will look and operate beyond your lifetime?

Nowadays, I am surrounded by very capable colleagues: people that I have trained and helped grow with succession in mind. In this company there are many people who work with me who are, paradoxically, more 'Armani' than even me. Everything will depend on how they manage the absence of the, let's say, 'genius' – the creator of atmospheres – in keeping the business going. I can, however, assure you that everything is in place for, when the time comes, my team to operate completely independently.

- 1. The World Fair (also referred to as 'Expo') is a large public exhibition held in varying cities across the world, the first and most famous of which known as The Great Exhibition was held in London's Crystal Palace in 1851. Expo 2015 opens in Milan in May under the theme "Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life." In conjunction with Expo 2015, Armani will
- open its own archive and exhibition space, entitled the Armani Silos.
- 2. Sergio Galeotti (1945-1985) was the co-founder and chairman of Giorgio Armani S.p.A.. He was a menswear buyer before meeting Armani in 1996, at the Italian seaside resort of Forte dei Marmi, after which they become lovers and business partners. Gale-
- otti is often credited with convincing the designer to open his own company in 1975.
- 3. In 2013, the Major of New York, Michael Bloomberg declared October 24th 'Giorgio Armani Day' to celebrate the designer's longstanding relationship to the city, and his contribution to its economy.
- 4. The Armani Teatro is situated on via Bergognone in Milan. A former Nestlé chocolate factory, Armani commissioned the Japanese architect Tadao Ando to convert the industrial building into the Armani headquarters and showspace in 2000.











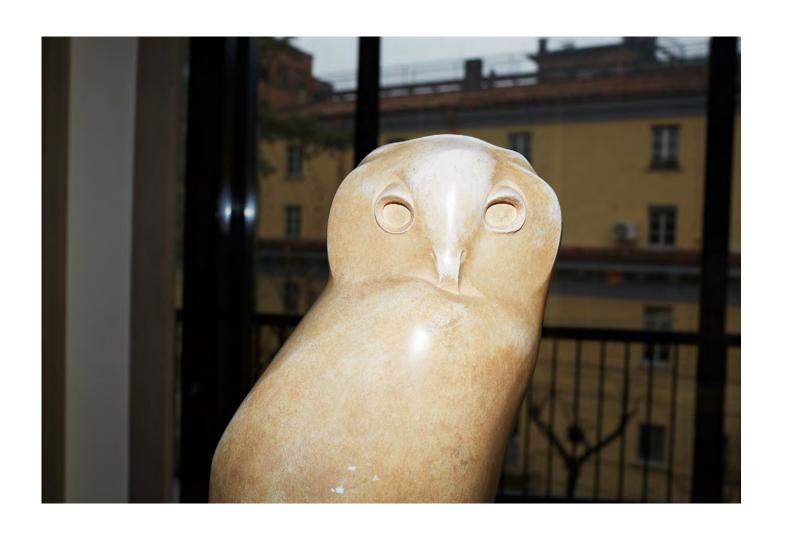








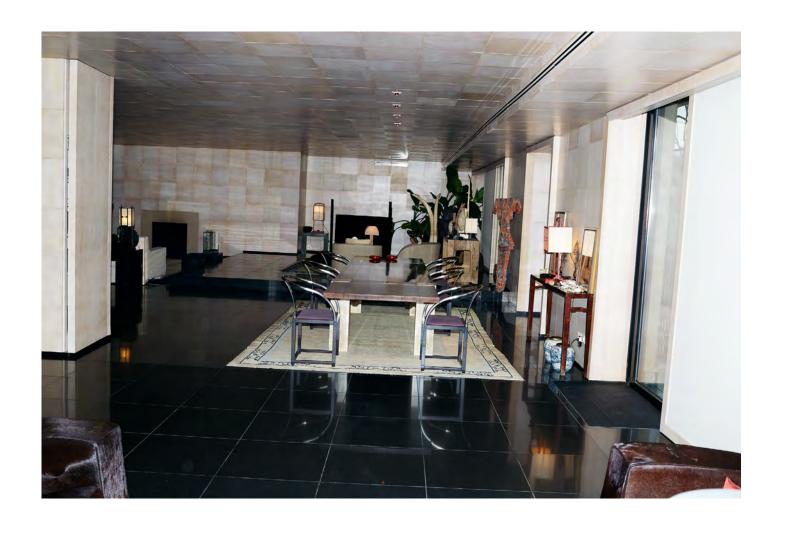










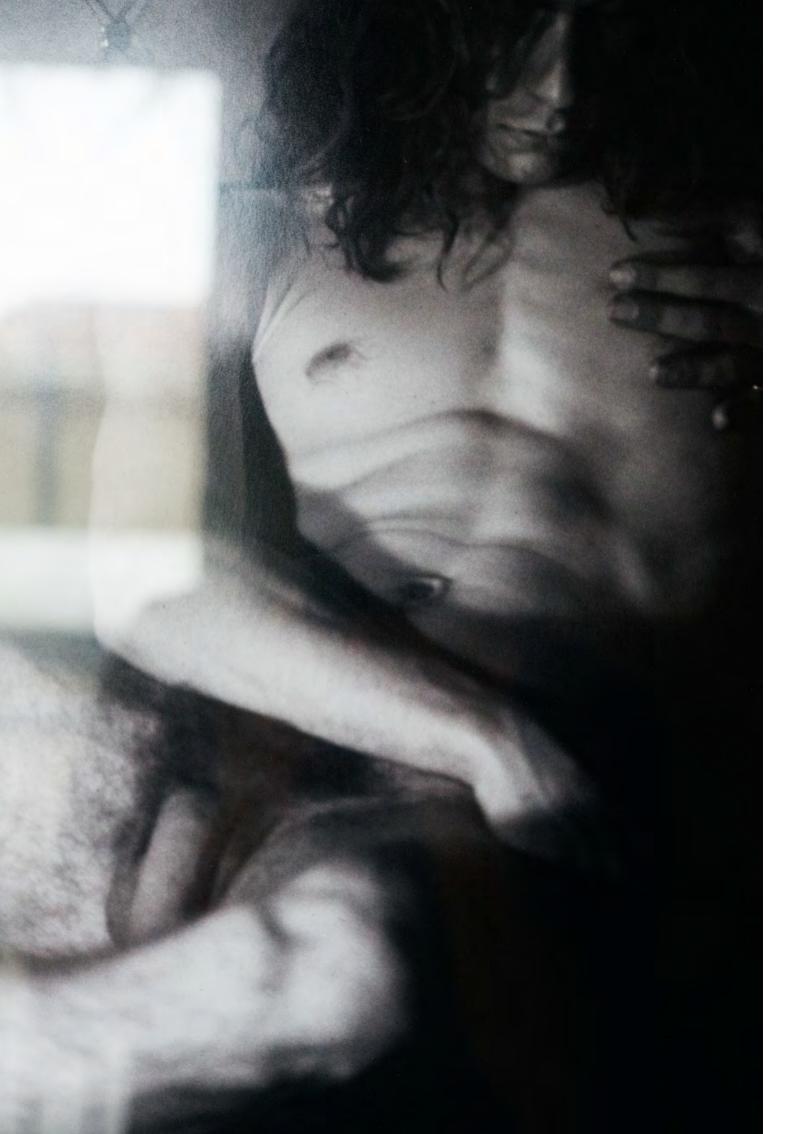




































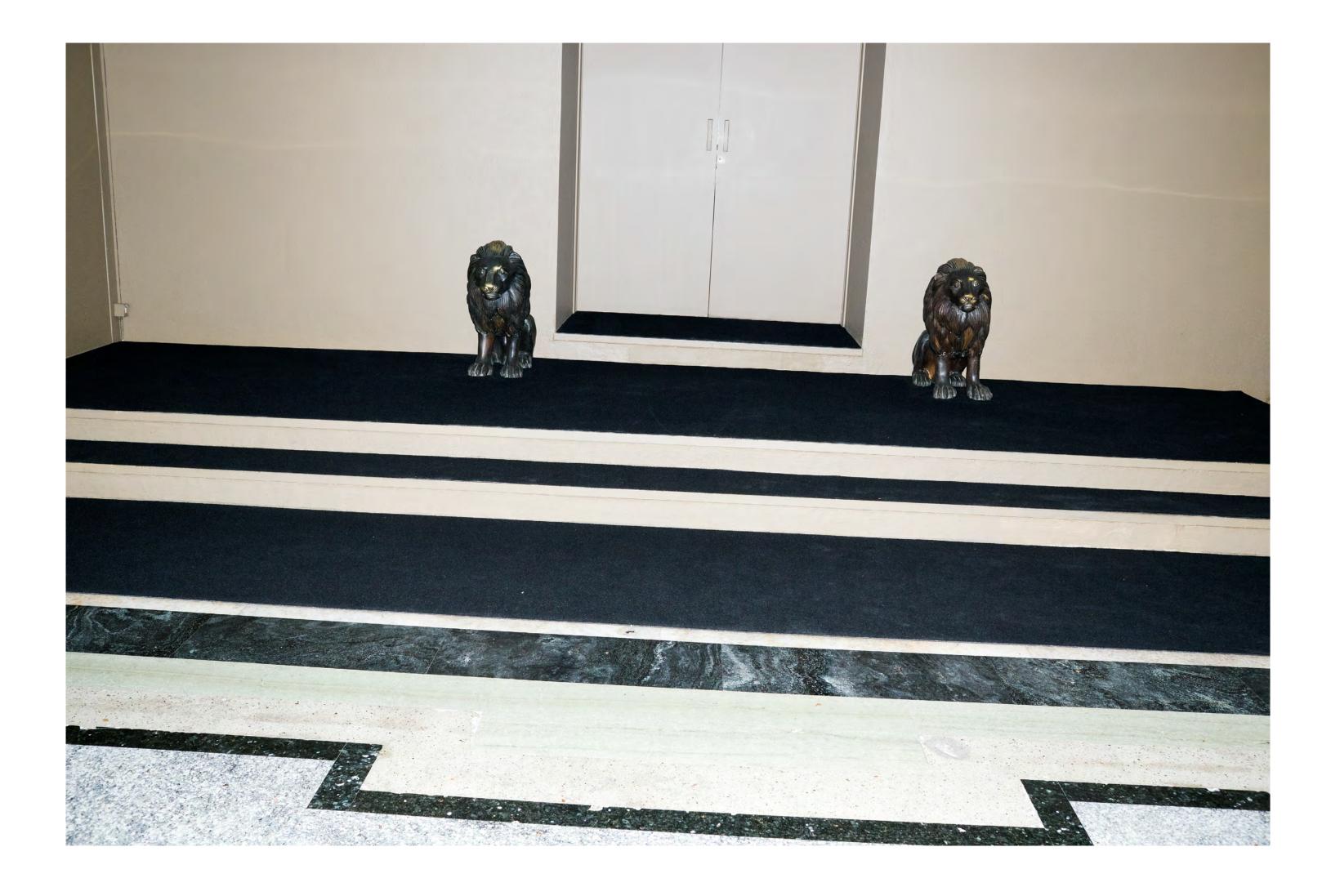








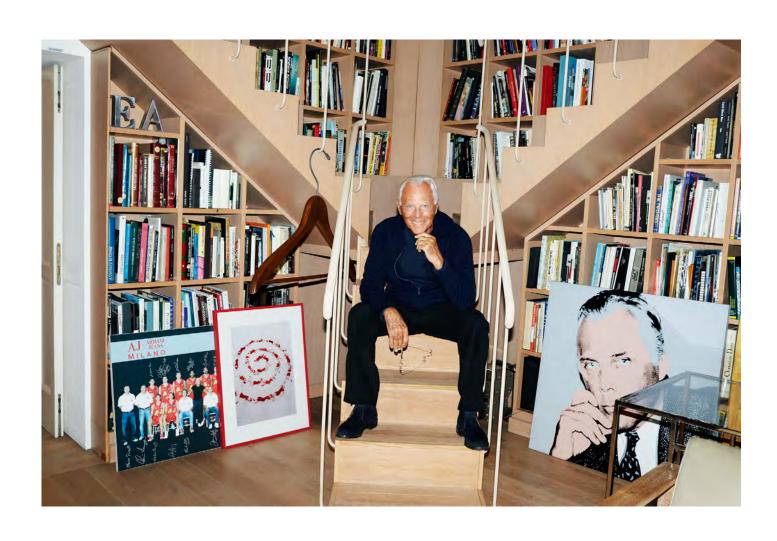














# The dinner of discontent

In China, Uncle Xi's new regime means tycoon spending is over. By Hung Huang. Illustration by François Berthoud.

Couple of days ago, I went to a dinner party full of very prominent people. The CEO of an investment banking firm was hosting, and among the guests was a musician whose music has been played in every single major symphony hall around China, a stealth tycoon who made billions taking Chinese companies public, and a princess whose blood connection is totally communist royalty – I mean, if she were British, you would need to curtsey in front of her.

These kinds of small dinner parties are usually full of merry-making and gossip. There is always some sexual scandal to talk about. Take the tycoon at the table; he is the most illustrious bachelor of Beijing and has been the ruin of many a fashion editor here. Normally he would have some antic about how he narrowly escaped being tied down by an ex-girl-friend, or how he nearly double-booked himself in the same hotel room. But the night we had dinner, the tycoon was not a happy man.

"What the hell are they thinking about?" he demanded. The "they" he was talking about was the Industrial Commerce Alliance, kind of a national rotary club for private Chinese business owners – except in China, the rotary club is financed by the government. "They want me to register all my assets! I mean down to the last penny! That's ridiculous! It is really going too far."

The tycoon was talking about the ongoing anti-graft campaign by Xi Dada [Uncle Xi], the new Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party. One of his measures is to request all government officials to register their assets. The tycoon is at the same time an official, albeit a lowly one; but such a title has helped him gain credibility with his local IPO clients.

When Dada first came to power, the tycoon was very happy. He boasted that they came from the same province and their fathers were mildly familiar with each other. He had found pictures of the two families together and had them re-scanned, enlarged and nailed to the wall for everyone to see. At a gathering of princelings, he shook Dada's hand and introduced himself by whispering his childhood nickname. But Dada responded with a confounded look and a rather loud, "Who?"

We all laughed at the tycoon's self-deprecating story. So he does not remember you, big deal, we comforted him. "Yeah, but I do care about this registration shit," he said. "Quit," I

said. "Why do you need to be a little division chief?" The whole table laughed at me. "You see," replied the tycoon, "this is what American education does to people, it dumbs you down. Actually, it makes you too dumb for China."

"Wait. If I am dumb, explain to me why you need to be a division chief," I asked. "If you don't get it now, don't bother. It's too late anyway. The party is over," he sighed. I vaguely understood what he was taking about: it has been a desperate year for luxury brands in China. The glory days are so over that brands are closing stores instead of opening them. Marketing budgets are being slashed a million different ways, and people are fleeing the industry for other growth opportunities.

"So, do you think the luxury market will bounce back?" I asked the tycoon. "No way. Haven't you heard? This is the new normal. The days of tycoon spending are over," he said. "But what about the new middle class – won't they make up for the drop in sales?" I asked. "Hahaha!" laughed the tycoon. "You cannot do the math, can you? Someone like me can walk into a store and spend a couple of million yuan in one visit; how many middle class consumers will it take to make up that couple of million? And in what period of time?"

The musician also has his woes with Dada's new regime: "They want to know why my wife has Hong Kong status," he complained. "Isn't Hong Kong part of China?" I asked. They said yes. "So why is it different if your wife is Hong Kong or Hunan?!" He replied, "You know what they said; you know what we mean. Fuck that." Part of the anti-graft campaign is to weed out so-called "naked officials" in the system. Naked means their families have all emigrated abroad and taken up citizenship in a country where they are beyond the reach of Chinese authorities.

The musician has a government job as well. Lowly but powerful, he serves on several committees where he can make or break other musicians careers. "So resign." I told him. "Why should I?" he retorted, "I spent my best years building this thing, now I resign?" The investment banker did not comment much, he simply said that he's thinking of doing more writing than business, and maybe moving to Hong Kong because the air is cleaner. The princess smiled and giggled throughout this conversation, cleverly avoiding any comment. She just said she was enjoying her family life.



# The visually super literate

Why fashionistas and 15-year-olds all 'like' IDEA Books. By David Owen. Illustration by François Berthoud.

Instagram is the social medium of choice for the fashion industry. It is also the technology of choice for our company IDEA Books. We were by no means the first to adopt it but when we turned up late, in 2012, we did at least immediately see the potential for what we do. We didn't have to adapt to the technology or the format. Instagram already did what we did — just better.

My partner Angela and I have been sharing images and describing/selling them in the least amount of words since the mid-nineties. It is what we do. When we are in our office with an appointment, we pick up books and open them to certain images that we know just work. These are the images that inspire, and to which people aspire to.

The customers we had before Instagram are the same customers who follow the account now – albeit there are now a lot more of them. Fashion designers, stylists, art directors and photographers didn't have to adapt to the technology either. They were already visually super literate. They always did communicate in images – between each other, as well as to the world at large.

In some ways what is being created now is a new visual currency. Images have a value (numbers of likes/new followers attracted) and can be swapped and traded (regrammed). Having a good eye can now bring popularity, and that in itself has a real value. Of course everyone has the same technology and the same opportunity – whether that makes success more or less likely is hard to say.

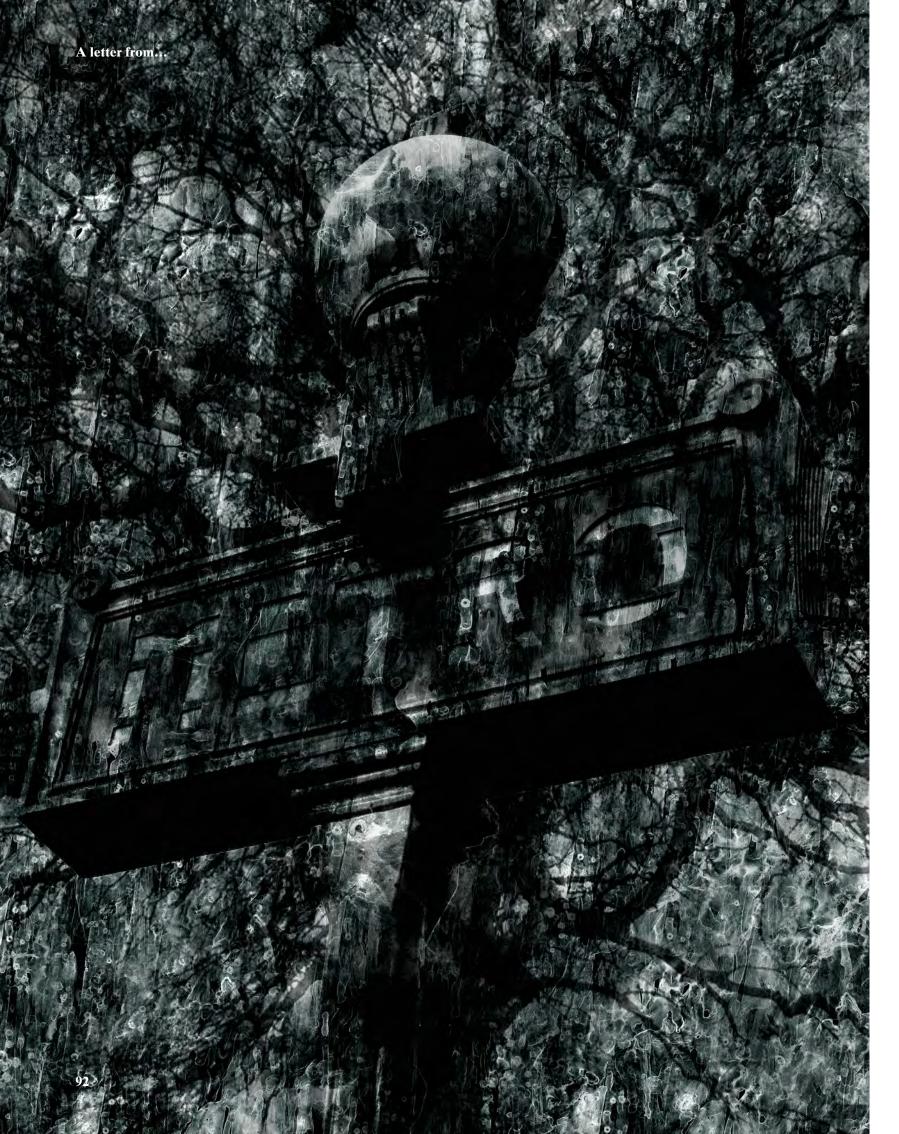
If I were 15 now and following the IDEA account, I would be fairly certain that I would see more diverse and remarkable visual references in one day than I would have seen in a year when I was *actually* 15 and growing up in the suburbs. A quick look back at the last 24 hours on IDEA brings up Joseph Tricot with Herb Ritts and Michael Roberts using Greek iconography and jumpers worn as skirts on men; Kate Moss for Margiela in the white collection of 1993; Andreas Gursky's photographs of Prada stores; Diane Keaton's 1980 photobook of hotel interiors; Bill Cunningham's 100 page

plus collections specials for *Details*; David Hicks circa 1972; and a lot of River Phoenix books from Japan. That's one day! We can't say what effect this will have on anyone but surely it is a good thing – as it's unlikely the new visually super literate will use their powers for evil doing!

'Everything' as in 'This is everything' is the highest accolade an image can attain. The truth is that the edit is everything. It is a little bit mind-bending, but our collective appreciation of visual culture is actually shaping what that culture is. It is best explained by example. To start with, consider that of the 100,000 plus followers of the IDEA account, 99.9 percent of them will see three pictures of a book on Instagram but not the book itself. The book may have 200 pages of images, but they see three. We always show the cover and two images from inside the book. We choose the images we think will sell the books – these are the images we think are 'the best'. So the edit begins with us.

Of course, if you take Kate Moss as an example, images of her are far too prevalent for us to really shape anyone's understanding of who she is or what she looks like. But take Charlotte Rampling, and it is quite possible that a 15 year-old's idea of her is entirely shaped by our choice of images from her 1987 book *With Compliments*. Obviously, there is a whole world of Charlotte Rampling they can then go and explore for themselves.

However our edit is not everything. It is influenced by two other factors. Firstly, we sell certain books again and again but don't like to repeat ourselves too much on Instagram, so we vary the selection. And secondly, it is beneficial for us to be popular. The most liked images are the most shared and attract more new followers. So when we vary the selection we respond to the popularity of the images and we will return to those that are most successful. This means that it is not just us that determines which pictures of Charlotte Rampling anyone sees, but it is everyone who determines which pictures of Charlotte Rampling that everyone sees. And that is a weight off our shoulders!



# Luxury quantity

Why making higher quality products in fewer numbers makes sense. By Mesh Chhibber. Illustration by François Berthoud.

After over more than 20 years working in fashion communications, first for John Galliano in Paris (1993-2000) and finally with my own agency, I decided to quit PR and launch a label that makes beautiful objects in leather, with my friend Sofie C. Guerrero, a visual artist and dancer. Fashion in Paris in the 1990s marked the tail-end of a culture and scene that began in the '70s with Kenzo, Yves Saint Laurent and Karl Lagerfeld, and continued through the '80s at nightspots like Club Sept and Le Palace and with the designers Claude Montana, Azzedine Alaïa and Thierry Mugler. By the end of the '90s, the creative scene was replaced by a far more businessminded environment, with conglomerates like LVMH, PPR (now Kering) and Richemont being joined by private equity firms in investing in luxury brands.

As the industry became more financially hard-nosed, it focused on marketing and advertising, where once the emphasis had been design and craftsmanship. It's extremely hard to produce beautifully crafted products to meet the demands of an ever-increasing audience: Louis Vuitton now has over 400 stores, compared to two in 1970. Gucci, having experienced strong growth under Domenico De Sole and Tom Ford, now has nearly 300 stores, compared to 78 in 1997. However, ecommerce has created an incredible opportunity: as the luxury industry moves to manufacture in lower wage countries in order to increase their profit margins, a space for small-volume brands that care about design and European craftsmanship has emerged.

Sofie and I spent the first eight months after I left my company slowly travelling around Europe by train – with time being a true luxury – as far afield as Ljubljana, and as close as the Cotswolds in England, looking for small ateliers and individual craftsmen who use traditional leather making techniques. One of the things they had in common is that each individual will make the entirety of our first bag, not just a part before handing it over to another person like on a car factory assembly line – and the individual dedication shows.

The work the artisans do is made to last, and the bags they make will be passed on from one generation to the next – something that cannot be said of luxury bags being made

today, even when they cost over £1,000. It's not an issue that these production methods can yield only small volumes for my partner and I. We believe it ensures quality, and our intention is to offer up to four objects a year, each limited to editions of 100. There is little commercial need for vast accessory collections twice a year: brands often refer to the hero bags in their large collections, which makes me question the purpose of the non-hero bags.

Having found skilled craftsmen, we applied the same high standards to the leather. The overwhelming majority of tanneries use the modern chrome tanning method, which is the worst for the environment as chrome is a heavy metal, and during the tanning process forms the carcinogenic compound Chromium VI. We use vegetable tanned leather – a millennia-old process with the least environmental impact – from a Belgium tannery. The vegetable tanned skins come from European cattle farms where the animals are well looked after, which in turn results in skins that are less damaged. Our choice of leather is also aesthetic, as this process shows the skins' grain, pores, folds and sometimes wounds: a metaphor for life and time which contrasts well with the architectural form of our first object.

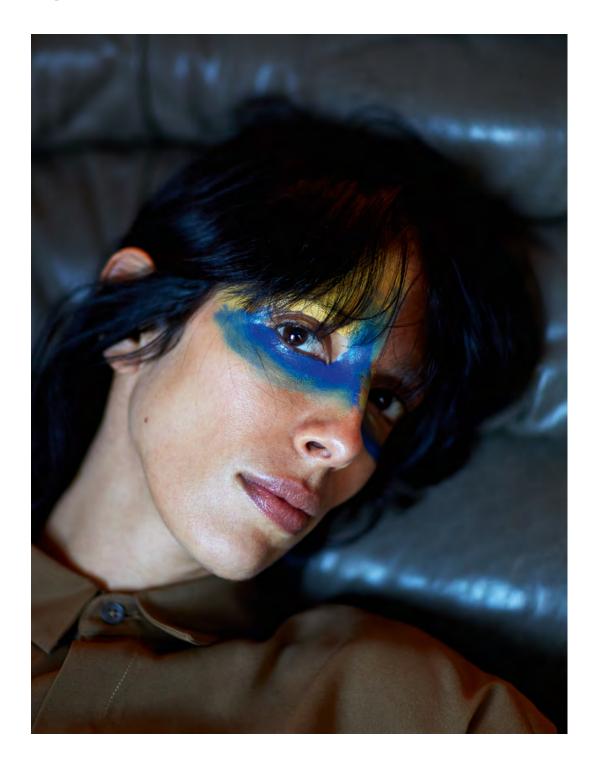
The decision to launch the label was fuelled partly from being underwhelmed by the hyper-consumerist society that we've become; one reflected in Balzac's *Peau de Chagrin*, and its concerns with status, *arrivestes* with fortunes of dubious origin, and obsession with the decadent consumption of luxury goods. We've taken the book's title as our brand name.

These European craftspeople have a knowledge of and a pride in their work that I fear will disappear within two generations. Their skills will be difficult to revive. Wouldn't it be more rewarding to buy fewer goods in the knowledge they are genuinely well-made, using methods that have been honed over centuries and, like a Savile Row suit, be treasured from one generation to the next? Real luxury is being able to travel, to read and reflect, and to design and produce beautiful objects crafted to standards of excellence, without thinking of collection plans and seasonal deadlines. Our first bag is being made by a single artisan living in the Swiss Jura.

Face à face Dick Page

# Mirror image

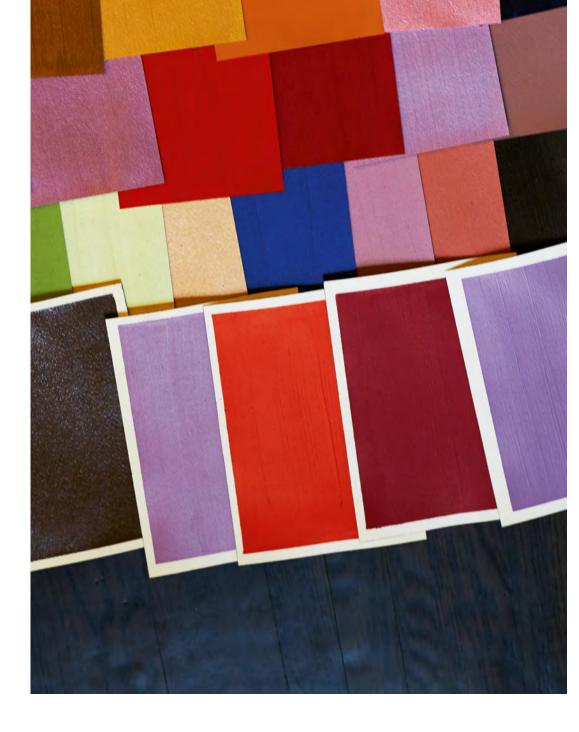
by Dick Page



#### Jamie in yellow, blue and brown, 2015.

I wanted to do something quick and loose that played with the idea of colour, so I shot Jamie Bochert in my apartment using colour-cream prototypes by Shiseido to frame her eyes. She acrylic sample in the image on the opposite page.

wasn't wearing any foundation, and the blue colour-cream prototype in this portrait is the closest likeness of the blue



#### Acrylic paint samples, 2008-2014.

In 1997, I began my process of colour creation by painting solid areas of acrylic and watercolour onto sheets of canvas taped onto wooden surfaces. I paint up to twelve panels a day and once I'm done I trim them into squares to use as colour formed into colours and prototypes.

samples. I have hundreds and hundreds of these samples. The ones with a masking tape border are my final selections and will be sent to the Shiseido laboratory in Japan to be trans-

# We weren't excited by the catwalks.'

The personal archive of Katy England.

By Jerry Stafford Photographs by Willy Vanderperre Styling by Katy England

























Katy England knows how to work a look. Stylist and creative consultant to Alexander McQueen from his earliest collections until a few years before his untimely death, England now collaborates closely with designer Riccardo Tisci, Creative Director of Givenchy, on both his women's and men's collections. She also continues to work as a freelance fashion editor and consultant to an intimate family of collaborators and friends.

England first met McQueen when she was the fashion editor of London's *Evening Standard* newspaper in 1993, and he had just presented *Taxi Driver*, his first collection after graduating from Central Saint Martins. He saw something in the way she dressed, and asked her to come on board as his stylist, even though she had no previous experience

Strange were born of a particular London street culture: a sexual and social underground whose multi-layered substrata has constantly influenced the regeneration and reinvention of the city and its hybrid self-representation.

And it is exactly this enigmatic, intangible and indefinable quality which England has sourced and explored over the years in her work as a stylist and image-maker. She is constantly cross-referencing the posture and pose of rock iconography, and the sexual and social subversion of the street, reinterpreting fashion's past through its present in order to create a spontaneous, emotional document.

In the shoot for *System*, made in collaboration with photographer Willy Vanderperre, England drew upon her considerable personal archive and

rules. And I sometimes question that and ask; why do we need to do that? It's very clever and he is a very clever guy. I've spoken to people afterwards, to Bobby [Gillespie, England's husband] and Alistair [Mackie, stylist] and friends who watched it, and they've said it was so well executed, and his is a formula that works. But perhaps because this was the first time I've worked with him on womenswear... it was interesting for me as I am more confident at womenswear.

## It seemed more like a couture collection than prêt-a-porter ...

I love the fact that he can give people both. We want ready-to-wear – I want ready-to-wear – and girls can really wear it, and it's shown in a manner that's cool, easy and wearable. I also think

# 'The first shoot I ever did was glam rock, because it was my base level. I grew up in the Seventies and that stuff was all over the bloody telly.'

of working with a designer. McQueen was right to follow what he intuitively saw in England – she became his 'second opinion' on every stage of the creative process: the research, the collections and spectacular shows.

System interviewed Katy England the same day London paid homage to McQueen at the opening of Savage Beauty – a retrospective of the designer's work at the Victoria and Albert Museum – and the legendary Blitz Kid and Visage singer Steve Strange was mourned at a funeral service in his hometown of Porthcawl, Wales. In some way these two events seemed inextricably linked: celebrating the influential lives of two people whose creativity changed the way their generation considered ideas of gender, beauty and identity. Both McQueen and

sourced clothes from across London's best vintage collections in a response to the city's convulsive urban beauty; to the music, attitude and energy which powers its cultural motor.

### Jerry Stafford: Congratulations on the Givenchy show! It seemed so controlled and precisely executed – how did you feel about it?

Katy England: I think Riccardo [Tisci] is very mathematical, very logistical and he likes this tight control. He has proven methods of how he likes to approach his looks and his styling, and I've been working with him for about three years now, so I've learnt these and I've got used to his methods. Sometimes I find them a little too controlling and I sort of encourage him to break the rules a bit – because he sets himself the

people want the beautiful workmanship and they also want the drama, and he manages both. I think it's good to be like that. Why should they be separate?

# So this is the first Givenchy women's collection you've worked on? How does it differ from working on the men's, aside from the fact you are clearly working on a different silhouette?

Givenchy has two completely different production methods, so it's quite complicated. For the menswear, we have a lot more clothes that we style at a later point, whereas the womenswear is designed as outfits from the beginning, so there's a totally different approach to each one. I think Riccardo enjoys the menswear, he has so much fun with it, and it's very true to him – I feel like there's a fun and enjoyment with that.

Archive Katy England

But for me, it's a little bit harder because I am not a man wearing it, and I think that's the advantage of a woman coming to help a male designer with womenswear, in that we can wear it and say how we feel about wearing it – we have that opinion, and I think that's why we are all doing these jobs!

What is it that draws you to a designer like Tisci? Where do you think his strengths as a designer lie, and what is it about his character as well as his creative acumen that really appeals to you? I have an attraction to strong women — I think I've just about worked that out now. In all of my work the girl has been quite tough and powerful, and that was something I did at the beginning with Lee [McQueen]. That was my connection with him back then; we liked the

#### How did you first meet Riccardo?

Jefferson [Hack] asked him to do a Givenchy special for *Dazed & Confused*, and he said he would do it, but only with me. So I said, 'Okay, let's give it a go'. And we did a great shoot together with [photographer] Matthew Stone, and it was under quite tricky circumstances; it was just before the holidays when everyone disappears. We got on so well, we just clicked and we made some great pictures – and then right after that he just asked if I would do the menswear, and that was the beginning.

You've always been interested in a fashion aesthetic that is cross-pollinated with music, art, subcultures and the street – how does this work with Tisci, who can have a very refined couture aesthetic? Do you help to counterbal-

on. He really wants that, he really welcomes it. It's an important thing to have those people around him, and he takes opinions from all of the team. He surrounds himself with really young people as well, and I think he's a very open guy. I think that adds to the strength of the brand.

It's a very different world now working in Paris with Givenchy to when you started at the *Evening Standard* in the 1990s and worked on the early Alexander McQueen shows. What was the first McQueen show you worked on?

It was called *The Birds* and it was in 1994 – we had just met a few months earlier, quite randomly, and he asked if I would style the show. And I had never styled a show before, but we connected and boom – that was the beginning.

skirt, and a pair of shoes from Vuitton. He'd buy me these amazing things because he wanted to see someone in them. We were both obsessed with Margiela, and we would love to go looking at the all the designer stuff. I think it was just being out there and absorbing stuff on the streets. And he would get so excited when you'd see a great girl walking down the street who looks fierce and has got a major look – we all like that.

Totally. And in your case, music has always been a driving force in how you put clothes together. Was this rock aesthetic already there when you worked with McQueen, or did it develop later as a personal signature?

I think it is something you already have in you. I remember the first shoot I ever did: I was still at the *Evening Standard* 

was your role at McQueen? Was it to interpret the work of the designer – to inspire him or her to create in a particular way?

I think we are helping them, essentially. I mean, being a woman is part of the equation: they like looking at the way you wear clothes. I think we just need to inspire them, to come up with suggestions, inspirations, ideas, to be someone to talk to, to bounce with – is one part of the job. But then another part of the job is helping them to edit their own stuff, and as you go through the process to help them edit because there is always too much, too many ideas – and then sort of refine it all. They've got to value and like your taste, otherwise what are we doing?

Going back to the earliest part of McQueen's career – which was miss-

hometown – you can't be here and not talk about what he did in London at the very beginning.

# How did you work with Claire Wilcox, the curator of the V&A show, on this particular section of the show?

We had to look at what archives were available, because not many pieces had ever been produced, or had been given away to people to wear; to friends, to wear in nightclubs, to models to pay them. Everything disappeared, so it became like, 'Okay, what we can get our hands on?' I actually had quite a bit from that time, myself, but if they did try to exhibit looks from every London show it would be a bit of a jumble. So in the end it was decided: *Highland Rape*, *The Birds*, and *The Hunger* [collections], and unfortunately they're only

# 'It's great when you have gay friends who buy you extravagant odd things. Lee [McQueen] bought a Comme skirt just to see how it would look on me.'

same type of girl. And now I'm finding that's the same kind of thing with Riccardo, and so we connect with that.

# Do you have similar cultural references in art, music, and photography – or is it more about the woman?

His woman is the Latino woman, and that's quite new for me because that's not been my woman, but I love it. He always, throughout the whole process, wants it to be real and he wants this reality so he doesn't like it to get too theatrical, and I think I like that too. I mean obviously I love the theatrics, but even when I approach an editorial I want it to be desirable to the viewer, I want there to be a thread of something they can take away so it's not just fantasy. I love fantasy, but I feel like I am more drawn to this reality as well.

#### ance this, or does he already have this more subversive aesthetic embedded within his vision?

I think he already has this subversive aesthetic. He is really aware of the street, you know, for example, the show we just did [Autumn/Winter 2015/16] was all about Latino gang girls. He is amazing at the research – it's from everywhere...

# Do you also bring your own research when working with him?

Yeah. With the men's, I'm there from the very beginning; so we go through all the ideas and that's the process I love. It's just so much more satisfying to be involved from the beginning and not just come in five days before the show, but to have been there all of the way, and to have helped on the shoes and so

## How did you function as a team? Where did you find that first common ground – what were those shared interests, where did you go, what did you do together, where did you hang out?

Oh wow. At that time he was so innocent and it was just creatively led; it was never this discussion of production or the worry of selling. It was amazing! It was a total dream world. What did we do? He loved London; it was all very London-based. And where did we go? Um... clubs, London gay clubs really - but we were always milling around bookshops and galleries. I would come in and he would start talking about the collection, and then he'd get bored so easily bored – so it'd be like, let's go shopping! He liked to look round all the designer stores and, you know, I remember him buying me things like a Comme

# 'Joan Jett is one of my all-time inspirations. Every time I see pictures of the Runaways, they have that attitude I love – they are just ballsy girls.'

but Rankin said, 'Come and do a shoot with me at Dazed and Confused'. I really wanted to do that kind of magazine, and he gave me the opportunity. The first shoot I ever did was rock, because it was my base level, let's call it, and it was all about leather. There was this amazing jacket which funnily enough has been copied – it's a very famous jacket by the General Trading Company, a beautiful appliquéd metallic jacket with a bird's head on the collar; very glam rock – Miu Miu once did a whole season on it, and Riccardo actually had it in his references too. And that was my first shoot. You can't get away from it: I grew up in the bloody Seventies and glam rock was on the telly.

In a more general sense, what do you believe the role of the stylist is? What

# ing from the New York retrospective – and will be justly celebrated in Savage Beauty here in London: how involved were you when it came to informing the V&A's curators around the early period of McQueen's career?

I wasn't involved in Savage Beauty the first time around, at all. It was very close to his death and it was quite strange in that respect; I don't know, a lot of people just felt quite closed and didn't really want to deal with things. So I think it was interpreted at the Met in a very romantic way; obviously the most exceptional pieces, romantic and beautifully crafted pieces were used, because they are so impressive, and that was perhaps the angle there. I know that Sam Gainsbury [of production company Gainsbury & Whiting] and the brand felt that as he's back in London – his

on ten mannequins. I wish there were more because there is so much more to tell, but with ten you can somehow make a bit of coherence.

## It kind of reminds me of the show that Tilda Swinton did with Olivier Saillard in Paris, where she held Napoleon's jacket and smelt it as if to say, 'If only this jacket could talk...'

It's been amazing actually in that respect. Each of the pieces has a story for us – they have huge memories. I did a shoot for *AnOther* with Nick Knight, and I called upon all those colleagues and friends from the early days to get the pieces back from them for the shoot, and it was just like going on that journey again. Before that I wasn't ready to do it, but now I was ready to embrace it, to re-look at it, to remember it all and to

Archive Katy England

celebrate all the amazing times we had, and to try and enjoy and talk about it, because it's so interesting.

## Are there pieces of your own in the showitself?

Yeah, from *The Birds*. He made a lot of plastic stuff for *The Birds*, and it's all really raw, like little t-shirts that were sewn together by himself made from this strange plastic. He always liked really odd materials because he couldn't really afford Italian fabric companies, so he was in Berwick Street finding crap and dyeing, bleaching, and spraying it—that I think is really the London bit. What did I have? A skirt and trousers from *The Birds* show that are [made from]... we called it foil—but they're white cotton 'bumsters', that he put through this foiling process,

styling so well, and I feel like I've got a bit of a partner.

# Is this the first time you and Willy have worked together?

No, we did a couple of great stories for V magazine, which went well; and we love working together. I love the way he gets his head around the styling, he doesn't just wait for you to present the look to him and be like, 'Okay, now I'll photograph it'. He is in the styling room and he's enjoying it with you.

## Looking at these pictures of Jamie Bochert, please can you give us a bit of the back story to them: what are the references, musical, cultural or street references that you are sourcing there? I looked at my clothes, my higgledy-

piggledy archive, and I thought about

and she fits the clothes I can't fit into anymore [laughs].

# For me I am also seeing a bit of Alice Cooper in there...

Oh yeah, that is Alice Cooper. The bow tie actually belongs to Johnny Thunders [from The New York Dolls] – we called her Johnny that day because of it. Bobby [Gillespie] has Johnny Thunders' bow tie. He owns it.

#### Where is the top from?

It's a little dress and it's from Mr Freedom. It's quite a famous little dress – Alistair Mackie bought it for me. It's great when you have gay friends who want to buy you extravagant odd things.

Was this Mr Freedom dress made in 1973? If so, was it an explicit reference

#### When did you guys first meet?

We probably got really pally when our kids were born and she started her relationship with Jefferson, which is now 13, 14 years ago. I was very close to Jefferson, I grew up with him in the magazine and he was very friendly with Kate, so she got more friendly with me, and then we both had children very close together – and you know that's what happens when you have kids: you want to be with other people who also have kids.

# So let's look at the pictures of Kate here, what are these pieces and why these pieces?

You know what, it was very spontaneous this shoot; I didn't plan ahead. I just bought along tonnes and tonnes of stuff that I dug out of my wardrobe I was sort of playing with, and I just wanted it

#### the Givenchy collection.

Joan Jett is one of my all-time great inspirations because I guess it's that tough girl thing. Why that is attractive to me, I just don't know, but she is. The leathers, every time I see pictures of her, the Runaways—they are just ballsy girls and they don't give a shit—they just have that attitude I love.

# Tell me about the casting? Were you looking for a particular physiognomy? Well, the New York Dolls thing: that's why the guys got the make-up, and why I picked little Josh Quentin, the guy with red hair – he is so cute and inspiring, and I know him from around London. He looks like one of the New York Dolls, and he lives his life like that, so I thought I've got to have him. The other boy, Jake, is just quite beautiful and I

#### has a long-standing love affair with rock as a style reference as well. Where do your tastes or aesthetics diverge, or are they really that close?

Kate is more classic, I would say, as she is in the public eye and so has to be so aware of what flatters her because she is going to have her bloody picture taken all the time. Whereas I love a more Japanese fit and aesthetic—I don't think she likes that so much. The rock thing is connected, I guess the 1970s connection too; but she goes more feminine than I would. I think we feed off each other like that; we like bits of each other's styles and then we put it together.

# You both have musician boyfriends; what is it is that attracts you to that mode of expression?

I am attracted to people who wear their

# 'I think stylists need to inspire designers. They've got to value your ideas and like your tastes. Otherwise, what are we doing?'

which is like a black layer of plastic that goes over them and it looks like a print. There's that, and *The Birds* show was all about road kill, so we had the car tyre print.

#### Let's have a look at the shoot you just did with Willy Vanderperre. Why did you choose a Belgian photographer, rather than someone more associated with London's cultural soil?

Because Willy is hugely fashion, and so knowledgeable about fashion, he is inspiring to work with because he understands all these references. He has been around fashion for like 25 years. I don't know his origins...

#### He was at the same college...

...as Raf [Simons]. What I like about working with him is that he understands

the New York Dolls because there's so much of this glam rock in there, and I started thinking, 'Well what have I got and how do I do it?' I just felt that this shoot should be my thing; just trying to get to the essence of my old wardrobe I suppose. I love vintage and am always going round to my little sources in London, and you know, I bought that body suit about seven years ago and it had a beautiful little waistcoat that went with it which Kate Moss once wore on a cover of *Esquire*. And obviously it is tiny, and I could never wear it, but I wanted to put it in a frame I thought was so cute. Anyway, Jamie saw it and was like, 'Wow'. She was so sweet – she was in the middle of the New York shows and she flew herself here for one day and had to leave the same day – and I am just impressed because she is just so tiny,

#### to the iconic Bowie stripe?

It's got the Mr Freedom label from back in the day.

#### Now let's come to someone who we are both very fond of... Why did you cast Kate Moss in this shoot?

Because of our history, and we have the same style in some respects; we have similar tastes. I tried to go on being true to myself, and she is part of it all.

# You have a long-standing relationship with her, and have done many projects with her

I also know we look good in the same clothes because of the length of our bodies. Her legs are longer and skinnier, but when she did all the fittings, I would fit into all her dresses before knowing that they would be for Kate.

# 'Kate is more classic – she's in the public eye so has to be aware of what flatters her. Whereas I love a Japanese fit. The rock thing is our connection.'

to be spontaneous because I miss that way of working... I bought this Junya Watanabe jacket because I love jackets, like most designers or stylists - that was one that Steven [Phillip] from Rellik showed me and it fitted perfectly. I think I bought that last year; the Victoriana jacket with a tulle coat over it, which you can't see so well. It's lovely, because I think there are two sides to me; I love pink fluffy dresses with roses and tulle. And so I have this collection of romantic, long, tulle-y type things. And this is one of them over the leather jacket – so that is the combination of my taste, let's say with the rock t-shirt underneath.

I was going to come to the t-shirt, a signature aspect of your work – and I think there's a Joan Jett one somewhere in love a classic man in make-up. I just feel like, boy or girl, it doesn't really matter – It wasn't defined as menswear or womenswear; it is all mixed up.

And just going back to this London

thing—what is the obsession with London? Why not further north, places like Manchester, or Liverpool, where there have been other equally influential musical and cultural movements? Well, I grew up in Manchester and was at Manchester Polytechnic studying fashion there for four years, but it was only in London when I clicked. I came here and thought, 'Okay, this is it, this is my place', and you meet like-minded people and you feel comfortable.

You were saying that you and Kate have very similar tastes in style – she

clothes really well, when you see that character and you think, 'Oh my god, they look amazing'. They know their shape, they look confident... I think it's the energy, and the don't-give-a-shit confidence.

Just going back to street style, which has always existed on a social level and was a key fashion influence in the 1970s and '80s – and then it permeated fashion globally with the whole network of magazines. What was your first experience of street or club culture? Where did that first frisson of energy and excitement come from?

Apart from *Top of the Pops*, the very taste was in a small village called Betley near Crewe, where I was brought up – and we'd heard there was this nightclub called the Cheshire Cat on a Sunday,

Archive Katy England

but it was for youngsters. I think I was 14. So me and my friend, who was also really into fashion, thought to go to this club, and we spent the whole afternoon getting ready. I was into Adam and the Ants, and she was into Toyah Wilcox; and she painted her face like Toyah, and I had tight trousers with a big blouse, and feathers and belts, and it was all a bit Spandau Ballet, Bowie, Adam. So off we went on the bus to this nightclub and we got there, and everyone was like, 'Who are these people? Look at them', and everyone started taking photographs of us. I walked into the club feeling really confident, and I thought, 'Ooh, I love this, this is amazing'. And so that became our thing, it was our regular little haunt, but it wasn't really that inspiring, we were almost the ones that were 'out there'. I think when

#### through prisms of gender. How have these kind of figures affected your own creative vision having experienced it personally, at this formative age?

Hugely. I remember the first time I saw Boy George, it was on *Top of the Pops*, and I thought, 'Oh my god! I don't know if it's a man or a woman'. I really didn't know – I don't think it was something I was that bothered about – I just think it was really, really intriguing. And I mean, god, they are like icons really aren't they? I mean, what can I say?

# Has their cultural legacy become part of your DNA, and the way you approach styling?

Oh yeah, I did that Michael Clark story once in *AnOther* and that was one of my favourite stories I have ever done. But I have to say, I try to be natural with

me. So I remember working with Phil Povnter and going to a New York hotel called Hotel 17, where all these club kids lived and hung out, and that kind of thing was the inspiration for my story. It wasn't 'Okay, let's look at the runway and they've got x, y, and z'. Never. It was about living it, you were part of it – I was going to clubs, I was doing the door of the Dazed & Confused nightclub, so I'd see these great kids. I remember Keith Martin, the model, dyeing his hair leopard print, and putting people from the clubs in shoots because they were on your doorstep, and you didn't have the facilities to be paying models anyway.

Do you think the YBA phenomenon that came to the fore in the 1990s had a big influence on you and the people you worked with then? People like Damien

# 'I love a classic man in make-up. I just feel like, boy or girl, it doesn't really matter; it's all mushed up. I don't feel like there are any boundaries.'

I went to Manchester Poly, I remember Michael Clark came and did *Performing Clothes*. He was touring and all these kids from London came up, and I met Alix Sharkey from *i-D* magazine, he was the editor at the time. And people looked incredible; it blew my mind.

It's funny you should say that because it's Steve Strange's funeral today, who was one of London's club culture's iconic figures, and he led that whole New Romantic movement which you are alluding to – and its leading players have been reappraised recently, particularly with another exhibition at the V&A last year. And of course some of the other cultural phenomena at that time, like Boy George, Michael Clark, artists and club personalities like Leigh Bowery, didn't view fashion

my approach – I don't like references, but they are there, so I pull the natural ones that are in there and are mine – but I don't really go off on a reference hunt. Maybe that's it; I try to be spontaneous and true because I want it to be personal. Because if I don't do me, then what's the point? You know what I mean?

# Moving on to the 1990s, how did they differ from the previous decade?

I know I was starting out trying to produce, trying to be creative in my own little way. I know we weren't excited by the catwalks – it was as if Versace, Mugler, all those labels seemed too far away, and I don't think I could have even laid my hands on those clothes anyway because I was really junior. I never started my approach to a fashion story with the catwalk. I started with what was around

Hirst, Jake and Dinos Chapman, Sam Taylor-Wood...? This was something that hadn't really happened before in London, and it kind of merged intrinsically with the fashion world.

I think we really felt it because it feels to me that Dazed & Confused, the artists and Lee McQueen, were all part of the same thing. I remember doing a *Dazed* interview with Lee, and Lee was making clothes for the Chapmans' mannequins – it's incredible, the guys with the cock faces and stuff. And there was one mannequin with all these conjoined bodies and Lee was making 'bumsters' for them, and we took the 'bumsters' -Jake has a film of this – Lee, Jake, Dinos, me, a load of dogs and Lee's dog, went to a wasteland in the East End and filmed the dummy with the 'bumsters' on. And I feel that Lee was one of those artists.

All this was going on, and we knew them and just saw them walking down the street; just down Old Street, because it was all happening in Old Street anyway – that was a new area that was coming up away from the city, and all the cool guys were living in warehouses and that was the thing to do. *Dazed & Confused* was there; it was all around.

# That was very '90s I think. Going back to something we were talking about: the past and how vintage plays a key role in your approach to styling. Does the term 'vintage' have any significance now that people refer to an outfit from 2010 as vintage? How do you work with vintage clothes?

I'm just so excited by the techniques. [When you look at] clothes that are over 100 years old, it's the technical side which I think, 'Oh my god, look at the embroidery, look at the shape of the sleeve, look at the buttons' – you appreciate it in a very detailed kind of way.

# It comes back to the rock t-shirt we touched on earlier, because they are sort of a vintage staple in your aesthetic. Why? Are they like postage stamps, little cultural signifiers, little ways into a particular time or place?

I think since living with Bobby – 15 years or whatever it is – his are very much that; they are memories, like his record collection. And he is a music collector, so that has infiltrated into me through my relationship with him. But the one in the shoot, the Guns N' Roses

t-shirt – and this is a point where we differ – is that I really do like AC/DC, Guns N' Roses, Aerosmith.

#### Without irony?

Yeah, I love them. I've seen AC/DC three times – it's my favourite gig! I'm a real fan; it's the basic core-level rock. When I was at school, on the bus, it was Led-Zep, so it's not pretend. I love it.

# Do you see yourself – sorry to use this rather bombastic term – as an iconoclast in terms of the vision you strive to create? Where do you want to take the spectator when you are making fashion images? Is it to question our perception of others, the body, our appearance?

Oh god... I just want to be open. I want to think that anything is possible, you know, voluptuous big girls can look fantastic. Boys wearing women's clothes, girls wearing men's clothes, people that don't have the perfect bodies: I just think that we can do anything, and I don't feel like there are any boundaries. The most difficult shoot I did was the McQueen issue of *Dazed*, the disabled—'Fashion-able'—issue, with Aimee Mullins. But when we came out of it, one of the girls who was modelling said, 'Oh, I never thought I would look so beautiful'. That was it.

How do you feel when you walk through the Savage Beauty show? How do you feel about McQueen being elevated to historical importance in a museum like the V&A?

Kind of mixed because you feel so sad that he is not still here, because if he was we wouldn't be at the V&A – he would probably have done an exhibition, but it would be completely different. So I just feel sadness that he is not here anymore with us. But [also] immensely proud, like, wow this guy achieved all this; and when you see it together it is quite unbelievable. I feel sad I think, yeah...

# How have you changed as an artist and collaborator in recent years – what is it that's important for you to express in your work now?

Well the industry has hugely changed, so when we set out twenty years it was purely about creativity - like my beginnings with Lee, my beginnings at these new magazines - we weren't interested in advertising sales or anything, it was purely, purely creative. Now the business has changed and the digital age has changed it. I took a bit of a break and came back, and was like, 'Whoa, what is going on?' It is so different, so businessy and really, I just want to keep trying to hold onto my original creativity. I can't be a fashion editor at a magazine [anymore], because there are all those obligations, and I'm not that kind of girl. If people want me to do a shoot for a magazine like System or AnOther and they want a little bit of something that I can bring, something that is quite personal and not constrained by the advertisers and isn't the catwalk looks that magazines have to do, then I am really happy to do it.

# We're missing neon people!'

For fine jeweller Victoire de Castellane, life is a box of Caran d'Ache.

By Eric Troncy Portrait by Juergen Teller Photographs by Antoine Seiter





"I think there is a naïve and widespread misunderstanding about theories of colour. Take the colour circle, or rather the function of the colour circle: it is a purely theoretical concept existing in the mind but not in our actual experience. Nobody can ever paint it out 'correctly' because the moment one tries to visualise what has been proved by optical experiment you get involved with pig*ment* – *and all the scientific purity is lost.* I could teach the so-called principles of my work to anyone in, say, half an hour, but I doubt if it would be of much use. Because once you get involved with colour reality you are immediately faced with an immense range of variables which govern your vision. These cannot be isolated intellectually without distorting the facts of sight." **Bridget Riley** 

andradite and spinel. It's a lexicon whose very utterance whets the appetite of an imagination deeply anchored in childhood memories, faraway impressions and happy accidents.

For those who've developed great expertise in any discipline, theory is nothing but an element among others in the exercising of this discipline. You must know how to trust yourself and oppose a world that seeks to rationalise a state of mind that's necessarily less so. Ultimately this is how it becomes less a question on the theory of colour and Pantone charts, and more about animation and memories of mint and grenadine, of a perfumier and a florist. Without these collective experiences, theory isn't worth much and technique lacks that disposition for storytelling, without which, the truth be told, boredom would

## from the lightest to the darkest, from red through to blue...

The gradation! The infinity of possibilities promised by that gradation, the blue, the turquoise, and of course that gesture; pushing on the end of the pencil in the box to lift it and make sure you don't damage the tip.

#### Did you grow up in Paris, Victoire?

Yes, in Paris. On the Avenue d'Eylau, at Trocadéro, at my grandmother's apartment. I must have been six or seven years old. It was there – I remember it very precisely – that I discovered those Caran d'Ache colouring pencils. I said to myself, 'It's magic, the people who made these must be very kind people.' Then I'd always wonder, 'How could you reproduce that photograph with these pencils?'

# 'I knew all the darker colours had to exist as opposites to the light ones. It's like in real life: there are serious people and there are fun people.'

When she revealed this secret in 1978, the British painter Bridget Riley already knew that uninterrupted exploration of colour and its illusions formed the heart of the oeuvre she'd started more than ten years previously. Like her - and others before her - the fine jeweler Victoire de Castellane has no intention of renouncing the frenetic exploration of colour: its deceptions and declensions, its wisdom and scandalous potential. Instead of painting, de Castellane, who is Creative Director of Christian Dior fine jewellery, and has exhibited her *objets d'art* at Gagosian galleries in London and New York, prefers another medium – a combination of precious stones and lacquer – and she's substituted scientific pigment references for the folklore of gem names: kunzite, opal, Paraiba tourmaline, spessartine garnet,

triumph. Even the most abstract paintings must have a story to tell in order to be unique.

# Eric Troncy: Could you start by sharing a colourful childhood memory with

**Victoire de Castellane:** The giant box of Caran D'Ache, with 96 colours...

# Easy but acceptable. 96 colours is a lot! It certainly is!

# But oddly I can visualise them too, all those colouring pencils.

That metal box with a photo of the mountains on the lid – probably a Swiss landscape.

And most of all, the wonderful gradation: the pencils organised by colour,

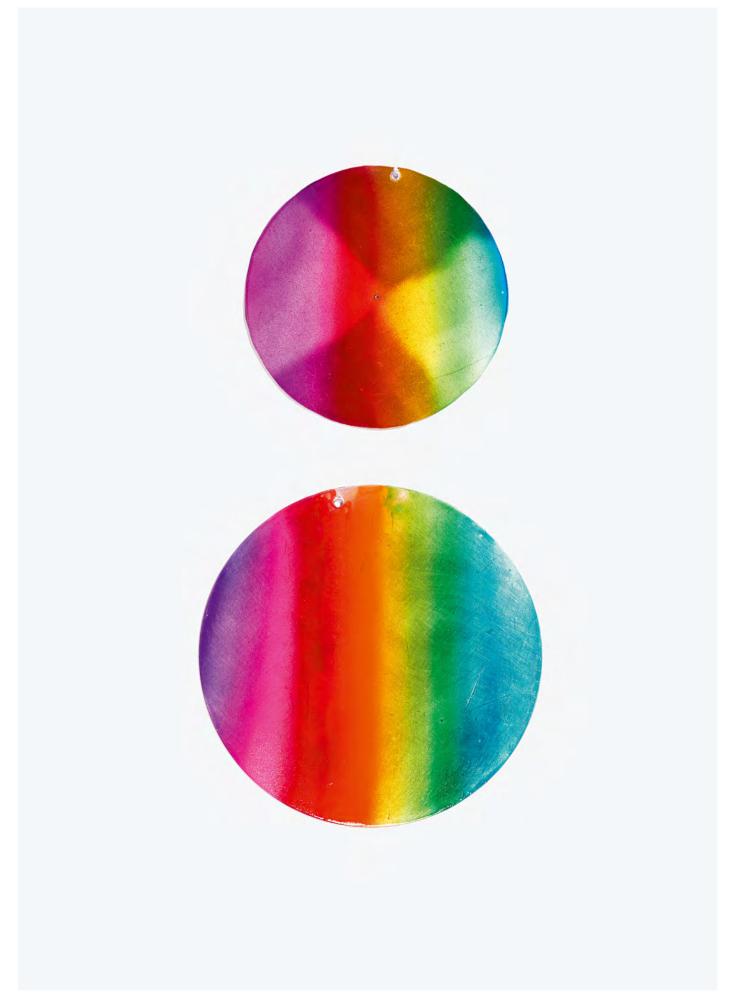
# But not only did you find these boxes wonderful, you also knew what you wanted to do with them.

Oh yes! It wasn't the object itself, but what could be done with it. There were colours that I didn't like, colours that I found a bit too serious – the browns, tobacco, khaki...

#### Navy...

Yes and the navy, exactly. All the darker colours in fact, but I knew they had to exist, as opposites. I imagined it was the same thing in real life: in life there are serious people – so hence these serious colours – and then there are fun people; and thus less serious colours. I thought, 'That's what the world is like!'

You're right, the world is like that. I don't need to sketch that out for you!



# What were you drawing back then with the colouring pencils?

Landscapes, animals, ladies, dresses... but mainly landscapes I seem to remember. Self-portraits, situations. I loved the Technicolor of Hollywood comedies; that very saturated effect. For me those colours represented a sort of magical, very kindly world.

You mention Hollywood comedies, but I believe you were also touched by animated films. In fact we're both great admirers of *Aglaé et Sidonie*<sup>1</sup>, with the pink pig and the bright orange beak of the goose...

The headscarf, the banging doors of the barn, which are brown. And the fox too.

The fox! All those animated films from our childhood – let's not forget *Colar*-

[a French children's television show], there's a fakir, I think, whose name is "le Grand Yaka", an oriental turbaned prince who wears lots of rings, very big rings, not at all subtle, which are a symbol of power.

#### Ah, so it's a man who wears rings.

Yes, you know that in these animated films there is always a fakir who wears a big ring with a red stone and I thought it was the most beautiful jewel in the world. It was like a solid pomegranate. And that's also why I liked these jewels: they looked to me like frozen pomegranate or mint water... My relationship to colour developed through my taste buds.

You're right: whether we admit it or not, yellow is obviously lemon!

Yes, you're right. All the white opals, absolutely.

# Are the colours of the stones you use today linked to childhood memories, flavours or experiences?

Of course! There's the *L'Oiseau bleu* ring, the sapphire. I had a book of fairy tales by Charles Perrault<sup>3</sup>, which was amazing. All of the illustrations were in black-and-white but I'd always imagine them in colour. When I opened the book again a few years later, I was convinced the illustrations were in colour.

#### Your mind coloured in the film...

You have no idea how depressing I find black-and-white films. Then again, I'm not convinced colouring them at a later date is such a good thing either. They should have been in colour to start with.

# Black and white is good for radio. I prefer to listen in black and white, and watch in colour. You've no idea how depressing I find black-and-white films.'

gol! – have something of the Caran d'Ache about them. Measured, well-placed and essential blocks of colours, with rarely any gradation...

Oh yes, I also loved *Hector's House*, The Magic Roundabout...

# There is a little something of *The Magic Roundabout* in some of the jewellery you created later on...

That's right! Bringing the jewellery to life, giving life to something inanimate.

When you were little, what sort of jewellery did the people around you wear? Classic colourful jewels, but I thought they were extraordinary. I thought the jewellery was a bit serious but the colours of the stones in the middle absolutely fascinated me. My first memory of jewellery comes from *Titus le petit lion* 

It can be honey too! But red is, without a doubt, pomegranate. And green, obviously, is mint – it's better than broccoli.

# Yes, although for future generations, green could also be kale!

Do you remember Coucoulina<sup>2</sup> ice cream?

# Of course! Haven't we already chatted about that before? I don't often get the chance to talk about Coucoulina...

Do you remember how you had to put the bottom of the box in hot water so that the chocolate would melt over the pistachio? That was the trick! Brown over green, and there was also caramel over white

And actually that's very close to the opals you like so much!

I'm less enchanted by black-and-white films than those in colour. Black and white is good for radio. I prefer to listen in black and white, and watch in colour.

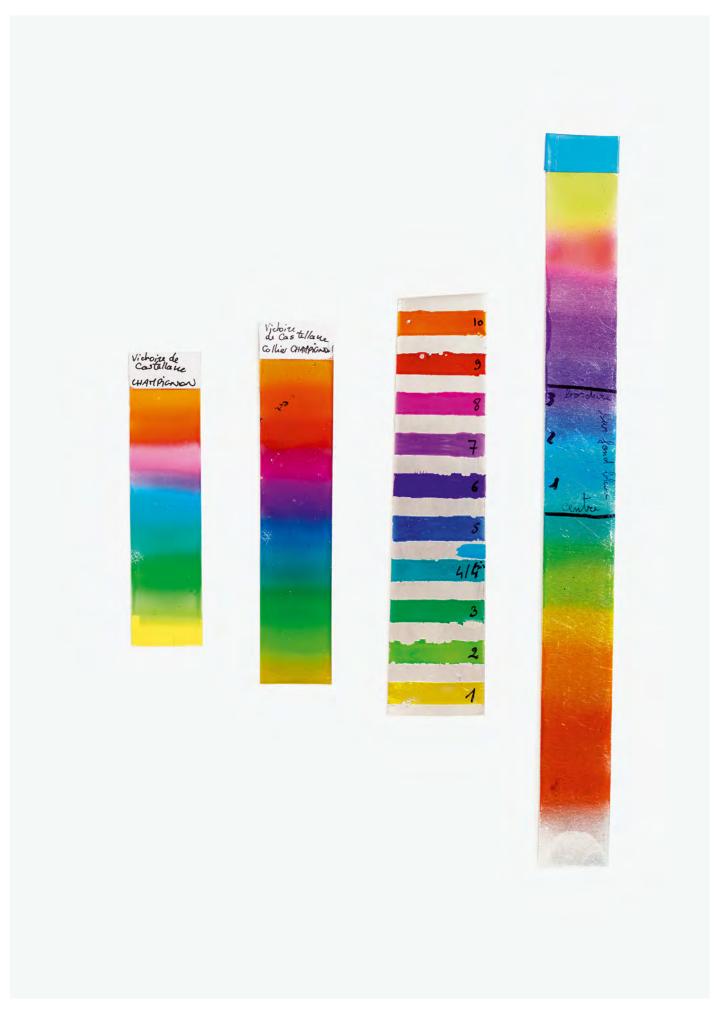
What about the Sistine Chapel, do you prefer it before or after its restoration? The colours are totally different.

Probably before.

# And yet, when you use colours they're far from being as faded as those of the Sistine before restoration.

Yes, but I'm starting something. My starting point is very vibrant, but maybe over time my colours will fade. That is part of life, it doesn't matter, and they won't be colourised later on. Touching them up would be to start from scratch.

You say that, but the chance of a stone



#### losing its brilliance is almost zero.

There's little risk; it's true. But you know some stones don't tolerate light very well-Kunzite, for example.

#### Jeff Koons gave his name to a stone?

Kunzite is a stone whose colour is very close to baby pink – a pink which leans more towards grey or blue than salmon or yellow, which when exposed to light can start to fade.

#### Do you like complex colours?

Absolutely. That's what I like about opals, with several colours being present all at once in a single colour and that's pretty indefinable. It's never boring, it changes according to light—it gets redder, bluer, and then pulls out more green; all depending on the time of day and the ambiance luminosity. Obvi-

Sometimes I like trying to give them a chance to go it alone, when I think they want to have that experience.

I often associate your creations with a very precise object, because we've talked about this together and I know that when you were younger you came across that extraordinary neon chandelier which dominated the ceiling of Le Palace, the legendary Paris nightclub of the 1980s. That tangle of coloured tubes formed a sort of disproportionate ball.

It's true I often got to see that chandelier! Maybe a memory of it crosses my mind, like other colourful memories that I've gathered since, or not.

Do you believe in the esoteric virtues of colour? That green is bad luck...

charming when someone likes a colour so much that they actually wear it. It's like a primal desire, innocent and rather touching. I think it's nice when someone arrives in an improbably coloured sweater. Some really have the guts to move beyond the idea of dressing in black or navy blue, and really go for it.

Do you yourself live in an apartment surrounded by colours? Like those art collectors who gather completely mad paintings and yet live in a sea of beige...

There is quite a lot of colour. There are various Joseph Frank<sup>4</sup> prints on several sofas – they correspond perfectly with who I am and what I like.

Yes, you've been mentioning Joseph Frank to me for a while now. What is it about him that you like?

# 'My relationship to colour developed through my taste buds. Red is, without a doubt, pomegranate. And green is mint – it's better than broccoli.'

ously it has a magical aspect. You know what, I like making colours battle with each other. Some people in jewellery don't know that a certain colour doesn't go with another. And they end up killing these poor unsuspecting colours by associating them with much stronger colours that take over and crush their personality – all when they could be made so interesting if only they'd been put with something different.

# You however, never hesitate to use lots of colours on the same object...

I just try and achieve some kind of harmony, so the colours are happy. I don't like leaving them in the lurch. I like them all to be happy.

When you do suddenly use one single colour it becomes a real statement.

Not at all! When I see greens together in nature I find it the most beautiful harmony possible. I don't believe in 'new age' interpretations of colours, crystals, energies etc...

# Do you remember a time in your life when you were deprived of colours?

Maybe when I watch a menswear runway show – in men's clothing I feel deprived of colours.

#### But with womenswear you can end up thinking of what Jacques Tati said: 'Too many colours distract the spectator'

In an outfit I'm not convinced that colour should come with the clothes. With jewellery however it's vital... Jewellery is the place for colour. On oneself it's difficult, but then again I find it It's like children's drawings, and I really like that idea of the imaginary flower. For me it's the idea of nature in the mind of a child but seen through the eyes of an adult. When I see his face, his quite severe physique, I superimpose them with this freedom of drawing. I really find it amazing.

# If you were forced to choose between shape or colour...

I would choose colour, of course.

## You must have taken a lot of acid to be this addicted to colour?

When I saw Mary Poppins who jumps into chalk drawings by the chimney sweep. You know that scene; when she goes to the park? I think it's with the chimney sweep and she has this outfit and a little hat with cherries on it...



Victoire de Castellane **Chronicles of colour** 

#### Yes, but she's dressed totally in black and white!

Look closer! Underneath her black coat she's wearing the most wonderful redand-white dress!

#### I'm confusing her with Bécassine<sup>5</sup>, whose dress is green.

Yes, Bécassine is green! Mary Poppins wears a red-and-white dress, with little booties, a corset and a parasol. But the character I'm thinking of is a chimney sweep – or maybe he just works in the street – anyway, he becomes Mary Poppins' friend. He draws chalk landscapes on the pavement and they jump right into these colourful landscapes which then become real. It's marvellous! As a little girl I imagined a world just like that. I'd jump into imaginary landscapes drawn with chalk!

#### Worse than that, greige people...

And dusty pink people! Tea rose...

#### A bit Georges Sand<sup>7</sup>...

There are other people who are billiards green. It might be women who work in libraries. Russian librarians. Some people might be a hard blue, a bit like an Air France suitcase.

## Who in your eyes is an 'Air France suit-

Oh... you know, those people who work at Bercy? And then there are fuchsia people. Mainly children, though. Those unlucky children who are forced to wear outfits... in fuchsia and purple. And a child who is forced into fuchsia and purple is obviously screwed for colour for life. I've also seen them dressed in orange and rust.

To tell you the truth, I never use a colour chart. I like inventing colours. I can see them instantly.

Some colours you use – I'm thinking about the very complex pinks that draw from Parma violet – exist only because you made sure of it. In fact, you showing interest in them saves these colours from being totally abandoned.

Yes I do take care of rejected colours, orphaned colours.

#### You buy colours up a bit like how Bernard Tapie<sup>8</sup> bought up bankrupt businesses in the 1980s.

I hope they'll have a more peaceful destiny with me.

In any case, you've liberated quite a people by celebrating the virtues of

# 'My starting point is vibrant, but maybe over time my colours will fade. That is part of life, it doesn't matter, and they won't be colourised later on.'

#### Okay, so no need for any acid then! I It's like a sort of Wizard of Oz gone only mentioned it because delirium is often linked to colour which has euphoric virtues.

Apparently you see pink elephants... I've long used colour for its euphoric virtues but I've kept my distance.

#### Are there any colours you haven't experimented with, perhaps because there are no existing stones that do them justice?

Neon shades are difficult to find. The Paraiba tourmaline<sup>6</sup> is verging on a neon turquoise; it's the one that looks the most fake. You've also got acid greens, grass greens, but, bizarrely, no neon green – we're missing neon green in life in general. We're missing neon people! There are so many grey people, and beige people...

# wrong - what can anyone dressed in

Get undressed straight away! Take off that dreadful sweater, that awful down jacket! And if possible do it in an entrance hall. Yet there are some people who manage to freely associate colours very well, they stand by it and it's great. On others however... that shocking pink down jacket, let's not go there.

#### I've noticed that colour often materialises around you in the shape of butterflies. There are huge numbers of them on the wall in your office, mainly blue. I love the idea that nature can produce the colours of opals.

Are butterflies like your Pantone colour chart?

## colour - by using them a lot, and in such joyful ways. You've done them a favour, a bit like when Saint Laurent mixed pink with red...

It should be understood there's nothing wrong with using colour. It has an effect on people that's very liberating and as we said earlier, a bit euphoric.

#### Do you think you learnt that from someone in particular? Like when you worked at Chanel maybe?

No, I think mainly it's because when I was a child I was very obsessed with colour. As I said, I associated colour with taste. I'm thinking in particular of this lady whose name was Irène – she was a florist and her husband was Barbara Hutton's chauffeur. Irène wore a lot of jade, gifts that Barbara Hutton had given her. Whenever my mother took



me to see her, I was fascinated by her countless jade green brooches; suddenly I imagined they were made from marzipan. I also remember Michèle, a perfumier who all year long wore a pill-box hat in leopard fur, and whose finger nails were bright red—she'd wrap up little parcels and I'd see her scarlet nails performing this pretty little ballet. I remember she also wore a bracelet with gold charms and Buddhas in hard stone. The sound of that jewellery with those perfectly manicured little hands folding white paper... I could spend hours, still today, watching that.

# An image of Endora [the mother in the TV show *Bewitched*] has just flashed through my mind...

Exactly! I loved Endora, and the colours of her eye shadow! Turquoise, lavender, aqua... And that red hair. All drawn together with black eyeliner. That connection between pastels and black is very interesting. Michèle was

always dressed in black in fact. Black sweater and pencil skirt. I think I also liked the idea that she had no idea how much pleasure I gleaned from her jewels and gestures. I liked watching, like a voyeur. I didn't want to be spoken to; I wanted to enjoy it with total concentration.

# I've noticed how often you associate colour with people when you talk about them – more than with situations or landscapes. If I say 'yellow' you might not think of the sun but an actual person, who you know well, or who you might remember from long ago...

Yellow can make me think of Winnie the Pooh. That's how I like gold to be; when it reminds me of acacia honey. In those boxes of Caran d'Ache there used to be bronze colours! I love the word 'mordoré' [bronze]: it shimmers with promise. It's very much an '80s colour: a time that was sympathetic in terms of colour and no one doubted it. Yes, make

no mistake; colours make me think of eras just as much as people. I remember a particular car journey when I got ill. That day I was wearing a grass green bag: I've never looked at a green leather handbag since. I was also ill the day I wore sky blue earrings: aquamarine always brings back that memory.

# Do you think you've reached the limit of your possibilities with colour?

Let's just say I've always felt very free. Have I reached the limit? I don't know, but if nothing else I've gone all out, I've never held back. Why would I have done anything else?

## And to fit in with an era? To satisfy a clientele?

Well no, actually. I hate the idea of fitting in with an era, I hate the idea of being 'on trend' and I hate the idea of doing what should be done. That just isn't me. I don't know how to be any other way.

- 1. Aglaé et Sidonie was a 1960s French animated television show developed by André Joanny. The series, adapted from a story by Guylaisne, comprised of 65 five-minute episodes created using stop-frame animation.
- 2. Coucoulina was a French ice cream brand popular in the 1970s.
- 3. Charles Perrault (1628-1703) was a French writer and the author of *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Cinderella*, *Puss in Boots* and *Sleeping Beauty* works derived from existing folk stories, and which gave birth to a new literary genre: the fairytale.
- 4. Joseph Frank (1885-1967) was an Austrian architect, artist and design-
- er who founded the Vienna School of Architecture with Oskar Strand in the early 1900s, and designed a number of Austria's early social housing estates. Having emigrated to Sweden in 1933, Frank became the most prominent designer of the Stockholm design firm Svenskt Tenn, who continue to sell his furniture, haberdashery and cutlery to this day.
- 5. Bécassine is a French comic strip named after its heroine, a young Breton housemaid, usually depicted wearing a green dress with a white lace coiffe and clog a pastiche of traditional Breton peasant costume. The first strip was published in 1905 in the girl's magazine La Semaine de Suzette, and as such, Bécassine is considered

- the first female protagonist in the history of comics.
- 6. Tourmaline is a semi-precious stone composed of a trigonal crystalline structure that was used by chemists in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to polarise light. Tourmaline comes in a variety of colours, of which the blue and green hues of Paraiba tourmaline are amongst the rarest. First discovered by miners in 1889, Paraiba tourmaline takes its name from the Northeast Brazilian state of Paraiba, whose high prevalence of copper in the earth determines shades of blue and green in the stone
- 7. George Sand is the pseudonym of the French writer Amantine-Lucile-

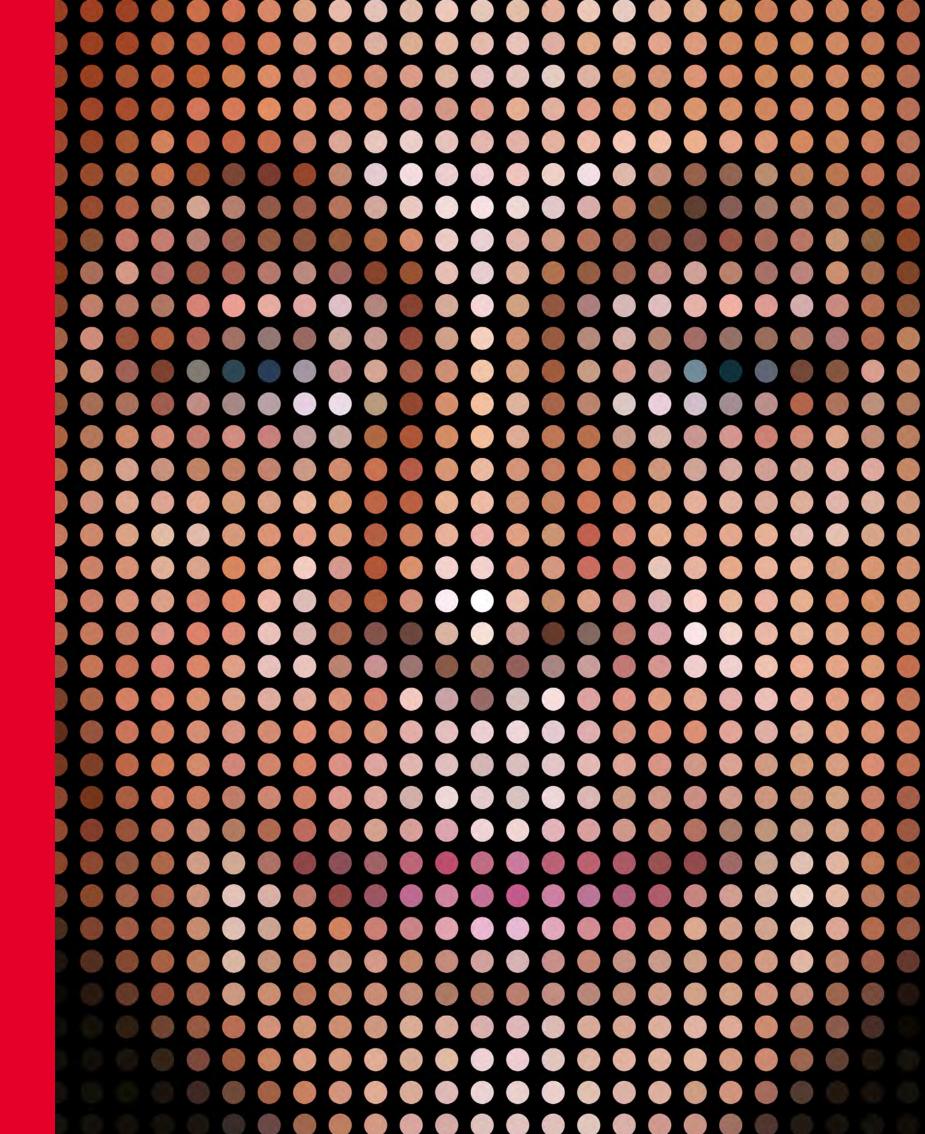
- Aurore Dupin (1804-1876). In addition to a number of novels which draw on her childhood experiences of the countryside, Sand is known for her affair with the composer Chopin, which she describes in her book *A Winter In Majorca*. Her portrait appears on the French 50 cent postage stamp against a pink rose background.
- 8. Bernard Tapie was a notorious French businessman and politician who served as a minister under François Mitterrand. He was the owner of cycling team La Vie Claire and the Olympique de Marseille football club. In 1997, he served six months in prison for match-fixing. Shortly after, he lost his fortune and later recreated himself as a television personality.

Veris Mat EXTASY coeurs

# 'I was drugged by this sort of life.'

Mr Valentino on 45 years of seeing red.





The legendary... Valentino

A figurehead of fashion aristocracy, it's easy to forget that behind the immaculately groomed, bespoke-suited veneer, Valentino Garavani was once a young couturier struggling to find his way on his return to Rome in 1960 after a stint as an apprentice to Jean Dessès and Guy Laroche in Paris. The year Fellini filmed La Dolce Vita was a fateful one for Valentino – as not only did Rome become a destination for the international glitterati, delivering the great and the good to the doors of his atelier – it was the year he met the architecture student Giancarlo Giammetti. It was a meeting of minds, and spirits, that would form one of the most significant professional and personal partnerships in fashion: one that would last for a lifetime.

Recognising fashion's future was in Roman glamour.

leather companies, the first brand to publicly collaborate with an artist in a marketing campaign (the artist being Andy Warhol, no less), the first fashion designer to be given a retrospective at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art. And to look forward, at his legacy continued today by Valentino's creative directors Maria Grazia Chiuri and Pier Paolo Piccioli. Or, he could just sit back, relax and gaze upon the vast art collection he has amassed in homes around the world; like the one in London's Holland Park with its late Picassos and works by Jean-Michel Basquiat and Damien Hirst, where he is joined by the Swiss curator Hans Ulrich Obrist to discuss the search for perfection, the colour red, and how he really feels about being called the "last emperor" of

they were like a dream. Automatically, without any reason, I just had a passion for designing. I was very good at design at school, and so I started to make some fashion drawings, without any particular style. I did some marionettes, but my big relaxation was just to draw dresses. I didn't have anything else on my mind, just dresses, beauty, films, and very well dressed beautiful ladies. I naturally went in that direction: I told my parents that I didn't want to go on studying Latin and Greek and would love to be a fashion designer.

# You have also mentioned that colour was an early inspiration.

That started later. Red was the first colour to have a big impact on me. I had seen several things in red and I was fascinated with this colour. Later on I put

# 'I am crazy about beauty. To be in a room where you look around and you see so many beautiful people and things, gives you force and strength.'

ready-to-wear, Giammetti structured a series of manufacturing deals that laid the foundations of the brand's international expansion, while Garavani focused on creating beautiful clothes whose simplicity belies the perfection of their cut. Timeless elegance, impeccable taste, cinematic glamour - such was Garavani's talent, that trying to define Valentino in these terms today is an exercise in tautology for the house, and its relationships with some of the most iconic personalities of the past sixty years have done as much, if not more, to define these visions of beauty as any medium or imagination.

Today, seven years after he 'retired' at the age of 75, Garavani can look back on his 45-year career, and marvel at its many firsts for fashion; the first brand to license its name to perfume and

Hans Ulrich Obrist: So let's start at the beginning, how it all started and if you had an epiphany which brought you to fashion because as far as I understand it was cinema...

Valentino Garavani: Yes cinema, I've always had this passion for beautiful dresses from when I was a little child. My cousins used to dress very, very well, and every time they wore an evening gown, I was there staring at them. I was six or seven years old, not more, and then I automatically grew interested in the movies. I was not supposed to see them, but I had an older sister whose boyfriend would take her to the cinema, so she used the excuse of bringing me along as somebody who could keep an eye on her. So film, silver screen, beautiful films with beautiful stars wearing beautiful dresses; for me at that time,

it in my collection, and I realised then that red is one of the most becoming colours...

# Because red is the strongest colour. As Etel Adnan<sup>1</sup> says, in a painting, red is always the colour that stands out...

Red was the first colour to stand out. Then with age and a different approach, I started to love art very much. My first things were the [Lucio] Fontana² and the [Arnaldo] Pomodoro³ sculpture. And the first big thing I bought was a Picasso with beautiful colours. Automatically when you see a beautiful painting, a Picasso or a Basquiat, you try and put it into your collection – especially Basquiat because I did a collection a not very long time ago in the 1990s where I showed several Basquiat details in the dresses.

#### Did you know Basquiat personally?

I met him because he came to my shows: he was in love with a girl who was doing my collection, and he came with her. He was sitting in a corridor of the fashion house and he fell asleep – but you know the most amazing thing is that we all left him there, and he stayed all night; they locked him in the fashion house. He was a charming, charming guy and very sadly, he died very young.

## Did you collect his paintings in the 1980s?

No, no, his paintings I collected 15 years ago, ten years ago.

They are amazing. There are so many connections between fashion and art; Yves Saint Laurent with the Mondrian dresses, Chanel-not very much has

beautiful painting of his. And of course, I love Andy [Warhol] because I met him and we used to see each other a lot. He also did my portrait.

## How was it with Andy and you? Can you tell me about this?

He was very nice all the time with me, he invited me to the Factory many times, and I was admiring all the paintings on the floor – you had to be careful not to step on them. He was a charming person with lots of intriguing ways to talk. He was very, very nice.

#### How did he do your portrait?

He asked me in 1970-something. He took a Polaroid: he was constantly taking Polaroids, and he said 'I am making a portrait', and he did four of them. But you know strangely enough, when

[collecting] maybe a little late. Before I always talked about a piece of furniture, china, or lots of beautiful objects because I am crazy for beauty like this – but when I started to think about art, I started very strongly.

# You capture beauty and the essence of beauty when you make clothes; but how can one define beauty?

It is very difficult for me to explain this, because I honestly think it is just something that I learnt automatically. I woke up one day and my eyes just went to the corner or the panel or the house or the street and could see something that was beautiful. It is very difficult to explain in words. Also these days, I just want to fill my eyes with beauty. I want to see beautiful flowers, beautiful objects, beautiful human beings – beautiful everything.

# 'Automatically when you see a beautiful painting with beautiful colours — a Picasso or a Basquiat — you try and put it in your collection.'

been written about your connection with the arts, and I thought it would be interesting to talk a little more... So you took details of the paintings and put them in the clothes?

Yes, I did that with little short dresses for cocktail time, and I did some shirts with the print.

#### What is it that attracts you to Basquiat?

His use of colour is the strongest out of all those figures. He has always fascinated me. I am very happy because with time he has become one of the most important artists of the 20th century.

# As well as Picasso and Basquiat... Are there other artists?

I love [Willem] de Kooning; I love Peter Doig very, very much. I love [Gerhard] Richter very much – I have a very one of his assistants said the portraits were ready, I was not crazy about them. And I said let me think about it, and I didn't buy it right away. I bought it several years after—two were available and two were in the museum in Chicago, I think. So I have two, which are here by the way.

# And what about the connection to society? Because I am interested in how art and fashion can go beyond the realm of aesthetics because it goes into society... How do you see that?

Oh my gosh, I have met so many people and been involved with many, many occasions. When I was a young boy in fashion I had already been to many beautiful homes and saw beautiful paintings. This was a dream. But you know, I am not upset that I started

# one of his assistants said the portraits were ready. I was not crazy about them. That now leads us to the Valentino woman...

I always used very, very good models. I was very choosy when the girls would come to the fashion house, but I was just attracted by beauty and I was designing for that. For instance, one of the last ones is a big star, and that is Gisele [Bündchen]. When I saw her for the first time, I thought she was one of the most beautiful women in the world. When you are around beauty, you are fascinated by it and you enjoy to see it and participate in it. To be in a room where you look around and you see so many beautiful things is not only enjoyable – it also gives people lots of force, lots of strength, from looking at them.

Do you think this idea of aesthetic perfection is achievable? Is there such a

The legendary... Valentino

#### thing as perfect beauty?

In fashion? Firstly, I think I am speaking for myself and for other designers; you have to believe in what you do and what you draw. You have to understand what it is when you do a drawing and you look at a drawing and you say, this is a dress that is going to be on the runway for my future collection. I have always been quite lucky because I always looked at my drawings and said this is going to be extraordinary in my shows, and automatically I was very careful to choose the most beautiful materials, because you know they go together. For a beautiful drawing you need a beautiful material, you need the beautiful woman who is wearing this and the beautiful décor for when you show this on the runway – the runway has to be beautiful; the atmosphere, the music

## Have your drawings ever been pub-

No, I do it for myself. When I stopped designing, I did a big gala for the New York City Ballet where I made costumes for the ballet, and I had this huge evening where they gave a standing ovation for the clothes that I made. So I draw automatically ballet things. It was the second time, just after I stopping working, that I did the Vienna ballet. I did lots of exhibitions, everywhere, and also the documentary they made about me – do you know about this?

#### What did you think about it, because it was called The Last Emperor...

I have to tell you, that when they started to film all my life and all of my story and everything, it was non-stop, and stupidly I didn't pay attention because

#### It is non-stop, 24 hours...

I have to admit that after Venice, after Toronto and then the Metropolitan – I did lots of tours - I started to like the

#### In the film there is a very big role played by Giancarlo Giammetti<sup>3</sup>. It would be interesting to hear about your relationship with Giancarlo...

Giancarlo was close to me, he would organise the collection, organise the layout of pictures in magazines, the fashion shows. He did a lot and gave me the possibility to work very calmly and without shocks. I was locked in my studio, drawing, and doing fittings. I try to love my clothes as much as possible.

#### So you were free.

# 'I don't think you can create beautiful, subtle, full of charm drawings on a computer. But what do I know? I still love to have a telephone with holes in.'

– there are so many things involved all around you.

#### Do you still draw?

Oh yes all the time. All the time. It is one of the things I like the most with design.

#### Because with the computer we are losing handwriting.

Yes, but with a computer I don't know if you can do a beautiful, subtle, full of charm, drawing. I don't know. I am not capable to do anything. I love to have a telephone with the holes because I am not capable of using anything.

#### Do you still draw every day?

Every day, because I absolutely love to draw. With a good pen I can do it very, very fast, in five seconds.

I was working and doing fittings and I am very interested in the magical being taken from my job constantly and of course I remembered I always had somebody behind my shoulders, but I didn't give lots of importance to it, you understand? Finally, they did lots of work and in the end when I saw the film in New York, I was not crazy about it.

## And the title, who chose that? Was it

No, they chose that. I was not so crazy about it, but after the first evening when we presented the documentary for the gala of the second night in Venice to a huge, huge crowd, they gave a standing ovation at the end of the film.

There is something very interesting about it; it is very Andy Warhol, this idea that everything gets documented.

## moments of cities, and there was clearly a magical moment in Rome in the 1950s because there was Fellini...

This was around the time of the opening of my fashion house, my debut – I was drugged by this sort of life. I was extremely young. You have to understand that at that moment, to be 26 and to have on your shoulders a huge fashion house with lots of workers and this and that: it was a big thing. But I was very happy and I went on and on, and in 1968 I had a huge success and my name went around the world.

## So it was in '68 that it all exploded?

Yes with the White Collection<sup>4</sup>.

Before we talk about the White Collection, I wanted to ask you a bit more

## about Rome in the 1950s and early '60s. This is an incredible moment, such an amazing one that even artists like Cv Twombly and [Robert] Rauschenberg came to Rome – what was it about the city then?

We were involved because we were very close with a lady who was the directrice of the Marlborough Gallery. We sold the first Fontana, the first sculpture of Pomodoro; we sold lots of little things and we were attracted by this. But money was not such a big drive, though I did buy some Fontana[s], some sculptures that I have today and that I am very happy to have because they touch the roof. They are so amazing for what they cost today, you wouldn't believe it.

#### Why do you think that Rome was so amazing then, so magnetic?

guys and girls doing the same job – and automatically this was a big fascination because I loved it so deeply. After one year I had the chance to go to Jean Dessès, and he was – with Fath and Balmain and Dior – one of the biggest designers at that time. He was Greek originally. I stayed working with him for five years.

#### What did you learn from him?

What I learned from him was to perfect my drawings. I learned from looking at the collections. Later on, after four years, he asked me to go to the studio privately when he was making the collections, so I breathed in the atmosphere of what to do when you do a collection. After a little while I moved to Guy Laroche, from him I learned a lot and after two years I learnt maybe

## Can you tell me about your debut at the Pitti Palace<sup>6</sup> in 1962?

I was there but I was not so well known at the time – they put me on the last day and at the last hour so I was quite, not sad, but quite upset. I had the hugest chance with this collection but I thought no one would stay because it was so late, but it was the opposite; all the buyers stayed and said, 'This is a new person, let's see what he does'. And I had huge success. They bought even though it was after 11.30 at night; they bought numerous things. The following year, they gave me the right time on the right day in the right room. But I have to tell you, I was very lucky. Thank god, I have to thank life and the people in my life, everyone and everything, because I was extremely lucky and I have to tell you something; I didn't meet deception.

# 'After Mrs Kennedy bought that dress, we sold the same model 30 times! Selling one couture dress 30 times is like selling 30 Basquiats in one second.'

Well Rome is a beautiful city. There is also something magical with this city all the people used to go there to watch everything, the museums - you have to understand that in Italy we have the best museums in the world, though they are not very brilliantly kept...

#### But you were very prepared to start because you had amazing teachers and mentors; Balenciaga, Jacques Fath, Guy Laroche...

Yes, but this was when I was 17.

#### Can you tell me what you learnt from them?

I was 15 when I arrived in Paris. When I was 18 I went to the academy for the Chambre Syndicale de la Couture, the school where I learnt to draw, and where I was in touch with all the other everything – and thought, why not go back to Rome and open my own fashion house?

#### In the early 1960s in Rome you became very famous for your red dresses, and I am interested in this because in art we talk about Klein Blue<sup>5</sup>, and with you we talk about a Valentino red...

I do not want to say much about this because it is too much about me – but yes I came out with this Valentino red, and I loved it so much because I told a lady when she dressed in red that if she arrived at a party, all the people are already there will see something amazing in her. If you do the right red it touches everybody.

#### So it is bright shade?

Yes, a very bright red, a little orangey

#### So you have no regrets, there are no unrealised projects?

No, no, no, everything went well and I was extremely happy. I was somebody who was designing lots of collections – at one point I was doing ten collections per year and that was very important. But you know, I was quite easy going, and I remember on a Friday, I was like, 'Let's take a day off'. And then on the Monday I had to start work on my show, but that was no problem: I would sit down at my table and start to draw, and I put together my collection without any anguish. It was very easy and I was extremely happy.

In a way your moment of international fame arrived in 1968 with the White Collection - it went completely global. Do you remember the day you came up

# with the White Collection? Was there an epiphany?

The White Collection is something that came to me, and I said I had to show-case something white – I took my ideas and I said I am going to do almost the whole end of the show in just white. And nobody was expecting to see a white collection. It was a big, big success and it was the best moment of my life.

# As the artist Absalon often told me; white has very different meaning in the West than in the East. What did it mean to you? And how does red fit into that? In 1968 when I did the White Collection, I didn't have any red dresses. I started

In 1968 when I did the *White Collection*, I didn't have any red dresses. I started them immediately afterwards... no I am wrong, red is earlier. One of the dresses that did a tour of the world and could be worn right now, I did it in 1961.

what she was wearing in the press when she married [Aristotle] Onassis, and all the newspapers called to ask whether it was me who made the dress, and I said I had no idea. And then they said, 'Ah, but we know she was in New York and she ordered a creamy coloured dress, it must be you!' They knew before me that she was wearing that fabulous dress. And I have to say that after Mrs Kennedy bought this dress, we sold the same model in the collection 30 times! In high fashion, selling one dress 30 times is like an exhibition selling 30 Basquiats in one second.

# And what about Audrey Hepburn, because in interviews you often mention her?

Audrey became a great friend of mine, because at a certain point she left

and I was down, and she would come down. She would come for New Year's Eve for dinner.

### Do you remember any special dresses you made for Elizabeth Taylor?

Oh my god, so many. From the White Collection I made a dress with ostrich feathers which she wore for a huge, huge party for the film Spartacus. And she had this dress with a white satin coat on top. And at a certain point — this was really at the very beginning — I said Elizabeth, no Mrs Taylor, may I have a picture taken with you? And she said, 'Oh yes, of course'. And I went close to her and they took the picture, and she said, 'You must give me one dress for free'. And I said, 'Yes of course, of course'. Two days later, she arrived there in the middle of the fashion show

the message from my secretary saying Mrs Taylor had called from the Grand Hotel, and she asked if you can have lunch with her in two days at 12. So I was like, 'Oh my gosh, after so many years, suddenly she's calling me again' – and as she was kissing me like I had only seen her three days before. So we became Elizabeth and Valentino, and she told me she was invited by the Rothschild family to a big ball in Paris, and I made the famous black dress that was photographed by [Richard] Avedon. Finally, a few years ago, there was the big sale of all her dresses and her jewellery, and that dress was sold for a very big sum of

#### I have one more question about display, because as well as clothes you are

money. Oh, my dear, I could go on until

tomorrow morning!

# I remember the show with the dune landscape...

Ah yes, I was fighting with Giancarlo about this one, which you see in the film. But then afterwards I loved it – but that's fashion...

# The fashion industry has changed throughout different moments of your career – I was wondering if you could talk about that change, and how fashion has become so much bigger? How do you feel about it now?

I feel I am one of the luckiest people in the world. I have to admit it, and also to thank Giancarlo Giammetti because he always gave me the time to concentrate and think about my creations; he never said to me, 'You cannot use sable, or seal', you know? I did what I wanted, all of the time, with everything. At that

'Elizabeth Taylor came up to me during the show

always big admirers of mine, and they still are, and I go to see the shows, and we are very, very close.

### So it was a happy moment for you when they took over?

Oh yes, very happy. Absolutely.

# In relation to art and fashion, I was wondering if you could tell me a little bit about your Accademia Valentino in Rome, which is a space for exhibitions...

It was a part of a Roman palazzo, and I have to tell you that we did a beautiful thing with this unbelievable space. Straight away I did an exhibition with the amazing Swiss artist, Balthus.

What would be your advice to a young fashion designer in 2015?

# 'I told the lady that if she arrived at a party dressed in red, people would see something amazing in her. If you do the right red, it touches everybody.'

# At your great 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary show<sup>7</sup> you presented your most legendary dresses, and I was wondering if you could possibly talk about one or two of your favourites?

Oh my gosh, there are so many, it is very difficult... I was one of the first to start using animal print; the zebra, the leopard, the giraffe – and I have all the dresses of that moment and they are in exhibitions around the world all of the time. They are very popular now, too.

# Maybe we could talk about the dresses you did for Mrs Kennedy?

They were from the *White Collection*. I had this almost white, creamy dress in which I was automatically thinking of Mrs Kennedy, and she bought that dress one summer in the month of September, or October. They announced

behind all the life that she had in America when she married an Italian doctor. And she used to really draw. She was the biggest customer of Givenchy, but then she became one of the biggest customers of Valentino. We became very good friends, she was so sweet; one of the sweetest I ever met. Oh my god, I remember off by heart what I did for her – she wore so many amazing pieces, amazing pyjamas and a beautiful organza dress all in white. I remember everything I did for her. I have so many memories of her, ahhh...

#### Did you ever write an autobiography?

No, but many have been written about me. Also, one very close friend, who marked me a lot in my life, was Elizabeth Taylor. She used to come to the chalet in Gstaad because she was up

before we had started – all the ladies were in two big rooms, and they were all so happy to see Elizabeth Taylor – and she came and said, 'I have come to choose my dress.'

#### Amazing.

I had the new collection, and I showed her a few things and she chose the most expensive one!

#### Which was one it?

It was a coat in brown velvet with zebra around, and a dress in pale, pale green with some embroidery. It was very expensive! So I made it for her and we became very close friends. These were my early days. I didn't then see her for several years, until finally one day she appeared – and of course by then I had become Valentino – and one day I got

# and said, 'I have come to choose my dress.' I showed her a few things and she chose the most expensive!'

#### very big on display and how to present the garments on a runway, in exhibitions and so on...

I mean, we always try to make the runway appear as spectacular as possible. At the beginning the runway was very clean with beautiful girls showing the clothes. But after that, from about 1975, we started to give the runway some colour and amazing lighting – also because in the 1980s, and the '90s, we had the most amazing girls in the world; we had the top, top, top models and it was extraordinary. I remember my last collection in 2008: the floor was lit up with the most extraordinary light, I did the room in all white and I did gigantic pictures like the Basquiats with the most important clothes and the most important people in my career, all like a private home. This was extraordinary.

moment I remember I used cashmere material by the 100 yard, but now people do this less and less because the cost is so amazingly high.

How do you feel about this idea now of how fashion houses are brands? As it is very different from art and architecture: when an artist or an architect stops, the studio usually stops – but in fashion, the brand continues for a long time. How do you feel about that and about Maria Grazia Chiuri and Pier Paolo Piccioli [current Creative Directors of Valentino]?

I love them, because I trained them. They were with me almost 13 years, a long, long time in fashion. They were in my office during the fittings and during the collection they were there. They learned a lot and I think they were

My advice would be, I don't know if it fits a lot with today... because before, I would naturally choose the most amazing materials. I didn't follow the speediness of the working room to make the clothes so quickly, and now everything has to go so fast. Sometimes, creatively speaking, that can be wrong. Everything used to be made with lots of love and lots of time – it was a different way to work back then.

#### What about your little dogs?

I love them. You know, I didn't sleep last night because she was coughing all night and I was so worried, and now today, finally, she is feeling better. But she is always close to me. Tomorrow I am going to Qatar and I have to leave her—I cannot take her with me and normally I take her everywhere. I have two

more in France and they normally travel with me everywhere as well.

# And they cannot come on the trip with you?

No, they cannot. So I am sad and crazy because I need her.

#### But in the film there are so many...

I know. But they die – in the film there were six; I had the mother and four

puppies, two girls and two boys. The two boys died last year, and the two girls are now almost 15 years old.

#### What is this type of dog called?

It is a pug! I always have pugs, all of my life. I love all animals.

One very last question, can you tell me about the Valentino Virtual Museum and the digital archive, which you can

#### access from anywhere?

I started it with the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary when we exhibited all my drawings, everything that I did, all the articles, all the drawings that I made for very well-known princesses or a very well know actresses, everything was there. And so this is a sort of Valentino drawing museum.

Thank you so much.

- 1. Etel Adnan is a Lebanese-American poet, writer, novelist and visual artist who resides between Paris and California. Adnan is one of the leading voices in contemporary Arab American literature with works published in over ten languages. Adnan's brightly coloured abstract paintings have been exhibited at the Whitney Museum of American Art and White Cube gallery, and she has received numerous awards for her contribution to culture, including France's highest cultural honour, the Ordre de Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres in 2014.
- 2. Lucio Fontana (1899–1968) was an Italian painter, sculptor and theorist who collaborated with a number of architects in the rebuilding of Milan after the Second World War. As the founder of Spatialism, an art movement which sought to unite art and science in projecting colours and forms into real spaces using the new technologies available in the post-war period, Fontana is best known for his *Tagli* ("slash") paintings of the 1950s, in which he cut into paper or oil painted canvases in order to foreground the negative space behind them.
- 3. Arnaldo Pomodoro is an Italian artist known for his engagement with geometric shapes such as the column, cube, pyramid, sphere and disc. Rendered in bronze, his sculptures explore notions of travel, self-destruction, re-

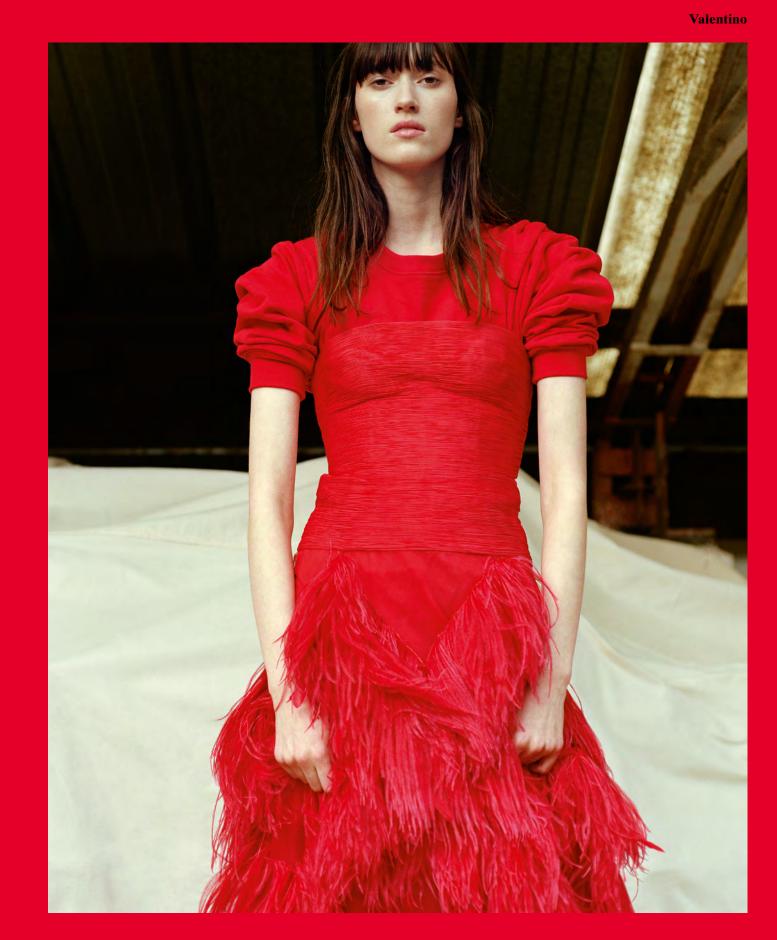
generation, and the transformation of their settings. He is best known for his *Sphere Within Sphere* series of architectonic arrangements which can be found in locations as diverse as the United Nations in New York, and the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art in Iran. In 1999 he founded the Fondazione Arnaldo Pomodoro in Milan that has since hosted exhibitions by artists such as Jannis Kounellis, Lucio Fontana and Robert Rauschenberg.

3. Soon after meeting Valentino, Gi-

- ancarlo Giammetti abandoned his studies at Rome's Universitá di Architettura to help build the House of Valentino. His structuring of the company, maximising the 'V' logo, and the value licensing deals - from fragrance and leather, to furniture and cars could bring to Valentino, were instrumental in establishing the brand as a business attractive to investors. Giammetti and Garavani were lovers for the first decade after they met, and consider one another today as family. Together, they have been dubbed "the kings of high living" – as not only did they know how to make money, they knew how to spend it. In 2012, Valentino SpA was sold to Mayhoola for Investments Spc, a company owned by the royal family of Qatar, for a reported €600 million
- 4. Going against the decadent even garish colour palettes that defined

- much of 1960s fashion, in 1968, Valentino presented a "no-colour collection" of couture rendered in cream, white and ivory hues. Celebrated for garments such as the now iconic white-fringed mini dress, and the pale cream lace bodice and pleated skirt worn by Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, the collection also debuted the signature "V" trademark of the house. In 2014, Creative Directors Maria Grazia Chiuri and Pier Paolo Piccioli unveiled a one-off, all-white Valentino haute couture collection titled Sala Bianca 945 in homage to Garavani's 1968 collection to inaugurate the brand's largest global flagship store on Fifth Avenue, New York.
- 5. Developed by the French artist Yves Klein (1928–1962), International Klein Blue is a shade of deep blue that became a signature motif across the artist's paintings, furniture and works of performance art (where he often painted model's bodies in the hue and had them walk and roll across blank canvases). Patented in 1960, the closest pantone approximation is #286c, a 96 percent match to International Klein Blue.
- 6. The Palazzo Pitti is a vast Renaissance palace in Florence which was the former residence of the Dukes of Tuscany, and later, King Victor Emmanuel III, who donated the building to the public in 1919. As Florence

- became known for its textiles and tailors in the years following the Second World War, in 1951 the palace hosted its first fashion show in the Sala Bianca, and by 1955 "Pitti" had become the largest trade fair in Europe with 500 buyers and 200 journalists in attendance, giving credence to the Made In Italy label. The success of the fair gave birth to the Pitti Immagine organisation of fashion shows and trade fairs in Florence and Milan across the fields of mens, womens, childrenswear - in addition to food, wine and wellness throughout the year. Today, Pitti Immagine Uomo, held every January and June in Florence, is widely regarded as one of the most important exhibitions of menswear in the industry.
- 7. In 2007 Giammetti and Garavani celebrated 45 years of Valentino and their intended retirement the following year by holding what they described as "the largest and most lavish event in the history of fashion": a three-day-long series of parties, and a haute couture show in Rome, attended by the great and the good. A retrospective of Valentino's career ran concurrently at the city's Ara Pacis Museum, attracting over 200,000 visitors, and Taschen published a multivolume anthology of the archives. Of his decision to retire, Valentino Garavani stated that he saw the right time to leave the party was "when the room is still full.'



Autumn/Winter 2002-2003





Autumn/Winter 2005-2006 Spring/Summer 2002

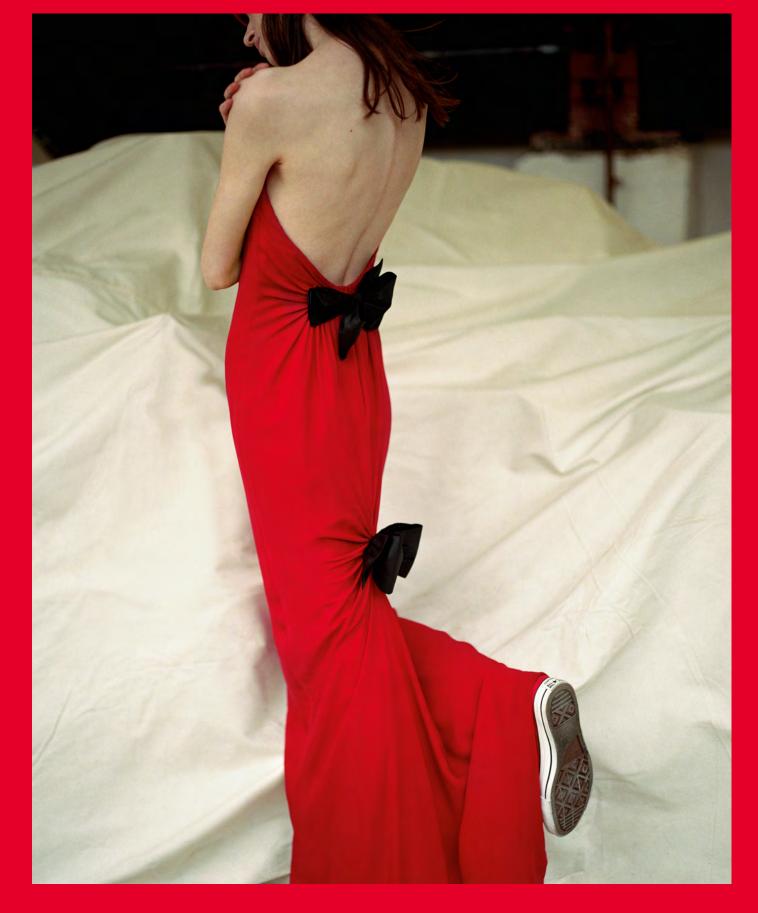




Spring/Summer 2007

Autumn/Winter 2002-2003





Autumn/Winter 2000-2001 Spring/Summer 1985





Spring/Summer 1988 Spring/Summer 2006





Dress: Autumn/Winter 1996-1997
Autumn/Winter 2004-2005
Feather jacket: Autumn/Winter 2004-2005

# You just have to say what you think.'

Cathy Horyn on all the news that's fit to print.



By Jonathan Wingfield Photographs by Juergen Teller

Fashion in 2015 is a wonderfully topsy-turvy place to be. With more designers, more brands, more media attention, more product, and more consumers than ever before, it's now a global industry generating sums of money with more digits than we know what to do with. In the midst of all this expansion and acceleration, we felt it was worthwhile trying to make some sense out of the hyperbole. Cue Cathy Horyn.

As perhaps fashion's single most authoritative (and opinionated) journalistic voice, her 30-year newspaper and magazine career has been anchored in old-school reporting, a profound understanding of the creative process, and an unerring ability to cut through the industry's smoke and mirrors.

After tenures at the Washington Post and then Vanity Fair, it was Horyn's 15

critical eye and unique voice while others, principally those who'd been on the receiving end of a legendary Horyn slap-down, possibly heaved a huge sigh of relief.

But with fashion becoming more newsworthy than ever before, it seemed inevitable that Cathy Horyn's byline would return to the fore. This past season was her first as critic-at-large for *The Cut*, *New York* magazine's lively online fashion platform, and once again, her dispatches from the shows have proven as thought-provoking as they are polarising.

Back in February, the day before she would formally return to New York fashion week, Cathy generously invited *System* over to her snow-clad, Hudson Valley home for lunch (homemade soup followed by gingerbread) and a

inflammatory comments will no doubt become extracted, headlined and sensationalised on social media. Nonetheless, on the subject of fashion in 2015, we feel it offers, to borrow the *New York Times*' maxim, "All the News That's Fit to Print."

### Part One From Coshocton to the *Times*

# As a girl were you a bedroom fashionista, cutting out pages of *Vogue* and sticking them on your walls? Or were you more of the bookish type?

Fashion was of *no* interest to me whatsoever, even though my mother took *Vogue* and *W*. I grew up in a little town in Ohio, the tomboy type, who had horses and loved hanging out with her friends. I have a great photograph

# 'Fashion was of no interest to me whatsoever, even though my mother took *Vogue* and *W*. I grew up in a little town in Ohio, the tomboy type.'

years as the *New York Times*' chief fashion critic that provided her with the platform to observe, judge and sometimes publically scrap with fashion's most significant players. What started as a traditional role, reviewing collections from the front rows of New York, Paris and Milan, evolved with the ages – Horyn launched one of fashion's earliest blogs, the *Times' On The Runway*, and, on occasion, found herself reviewing shows from the comfort of her home, via online slideshows (having been banned from attending by disgruntled fashion houses).

When, in January 2014, she announced her decision to step down—to spend more time with her ailing partner Art Ortenberg, who subsequently passed away—a void was felt throughout the fashion community. Many missed her

chat about her life, career and today's fashion landscape.

Several hours later, what emerges isn't so much a summary of her well-documented spats with certain designers as it is a love letter to newspaper journalism, American style. Talk of post-Watergate era Washington Post, and of "covering your beat" segues into Horyn's recollections of observing the likes of Oscar de la Renta, Bill Blass, Azzedine Alaïa, Alexander McQueen, Karl Lagerfeld and Raf Simons at work. From there the conversation turns to her (and fashion's) acclimatisation to the digital age, and finally her thoughts on a fashion industry in flux.

Clocking in at some 15,000 words, you'd be hard-pressed to resume the following conversation in a bite-sized tweet, although Horyn's more

of me and my two friends, Peggy and Jane, when we were about six years old. We're already looking like the women we would later become: Peggy was wearing nail polish and lipstick – obviously gotten into make-up – and she went on to become an airline stewardess; Janey is sitting there holding a doll, she went into childcare; and I've got a newspaper spread out in front of me. I was one of those lucky kids that always knew what she wanted to do; I wanted to be a newspaper writer.

#### What sparked that interest?

My father had been a newspaper reporter in Cleveland, and later on in Columbus, but then he got a real job making real money. He was a huge influence on me though; he used to correct all my school papers.

#### What was he writing about?

Cops and robbers; he covered executions at the Ohio penitentiary. I had his scrapbook for a long time but I lost it in a move somewhere. He was a really good writer, and a really good editor; he wrote in that sort of punchy police beat style.

# What advice did he give you when it came to writing?

He read my first general news stories, in the early '80s, and he used to say, 'As an exercise, you should reduce your copy by 50 percent, just to see if you can.' I always thought that was a good idea.

# Did you find yourself romanticising being a reporter because of your father?

That whole romance of being a for-

#### Was New York a fascination for you?

Completely. I've written about this before, the eight o'clock train to New York stopping through Coshocton, Ohio. My parents were great in that they encouraged my brother and I to leave; there was just no doubt that you were supposed to leave Coshocton. And I couldn't wait to be on my way. I wanted to go to the University of Carolina, Chapel Hill; they have a really good journalism program there. All the great journalists and modern editors of the *New York Times* came from the South.

#### Is that a personality thing?

I don't know, maybe there were just better stories down there, maybe they were quiet and persevering, maybe they were good at listening, not so aggressive, maybe they were smart but didn't singer but she got sick and her voice got wrecked. So she learned to write by the 'sound of word', which is something I very much believe in. So that and being accurate were important lessons I learnt from her.

### Who was the other woman you worked for?

A very wealthy lady called Mary Loeb, who lived at No. 2, Sutton Place. Her husband – who was long gone by then – had been a banker or something, and was first cousins to Peggy Guggenheim. Mary was great: she had gone blind in her later years, so I'd spend the weekends with her, both of us smoking Marlboros and drinking Diet Coke, and me reading things like *Lolita* and all of [Norman] Mailer's books to her, which she loved.

# 'My father had been a newspaper reporter: he covered the police beat, the cops and robbers, public executions at the Ohio penitentiary...'

eign correspondent never really meant that much to me; I just wanted to be on newspapers. I got on that track at a pretty early age – I was editor of both my high school and college newspapers – and I've never come off it.

# If your mother read *Vogue* and *W*, presumably she followed fashion quite keenly?

She was really great looking, very tall, long legs, boobs; never wore makeup, always looked amazing, and she was very capable with clothes. She wore really good-looking, very simple, tailored clothes. She went to New York every other year on the train, firstly to see her parents in New Jersey, and then to shop. My father did too. So we grew up with Saks and Brooks Brothers. It was how they dressed.

let on. The surface was more modest.

#### So you studied in the South.

No, after all that I didn't get into Chapel Hill but ended up in New York, which I loved, graduating from Barnard in 1978. When I wasn't studying or reading, I worked for two great New York women, one of which was Diana Trilling<sup>1</sup>.

#### How was she?

She was imposing and very strong, a real taskmaster; you had to be accurate and on your toes. I would be sitting there in this amazing living room and she'd dictate all her correspondence to me because she had tendonitis and couldn't write anymore.

#### Did she give you any writing tips?

She'd originally wanted to be an opera

#### And she paid you to do that?

Very well paid. She would tell me these great stories about Peggy Guggenheim. She was second cousin to Thomas Wolfe<sup>2</sup>, and had met Fitzgerald. It's the world of New York that's gone now.

#### You caught the tail end of it.

It was a world populated by people who lived in the same apartments their whole lives; people who had memories that went back to the '20s; people who had been in World War II; people who had come out of concentration camps, survivors. They had a stronger connection to the city, and the city operated at a slower pace. I'm not complaining about today, things have just changed...

# Tell me about your first job on a newspaper.

I went as a reporter to the Virginian-*Pilot*, which I loved; a great, great paper. It's still published but I was there in its heyday. There was a woman at the paper whose name was Cammy Sessa; an older woman, kind of cute and funny and particular, always had a joke. She was the paper's fashion writer and would go to New York twice a year to cover the shows, which I thought seemed like a great job. In the summer of 86, I saw an ad in Editor and Publisher for a job at the *Detroit News*; it said 'Fashion writer, no experience necessary.' I had to write two fashion stories, based on my own ideas, as a try-out – the first time I'd ever written about fashion - and then they hired me.

#### What were those stories about?

One story was more newsy, about the

#### Did you find yourself having to selfschool in fashion pretty quickly?

Very quickly. But I didn't exactly come to it empty-handed because of W magazine being in our house all the time. I loved reading W because I've always loved the society pages: The Mitfords, Evelyn Waugh, between the wars stuff, American aristocracy... I loved it all. And John Fairchild [Founding Editor of W magazine, launched in 1972] always had the secret to writing about fashion: just write about great people. It's not about the clothes, the clothes are the most boring part, and they still are. So, to me, fashion was about people.

# Who were the first designers you interviewed, or whose shows you attended? Bill [Blass]'s first shows, Oscar [de la Renta]'s shows, Isaac [Mizrahi]'s first

two or three from Chicago, two or three from Dallas, two or three from Houston. We'd probably all been on other sections of our respective newspapers before arriving on the fashion pages, and we just looked at it as another job, as another beat.

# For someone who, by their own admission, was badly dressed and self-schooled in fashion, Paris and Milan must have been...

...absolutely petrifying! I felt like such a hick. I remember the travel agent telling me that the hotel I was staying in – the Leonardo di Vinci – was really central. It was actually situated *beyond* Milan airport! So I had to get in the taxi and have everything with me for the entire day because I couldn't go back and forth. I was going to the A.P. [Associat-

# 'I said, 'Bill [Blass], I want to do something different with my hair, what do you think?' and he looks at me and says, 'Ever thought about combing it?"

shocking fact that black and blue were being worn together in fashion. That was an odd combination at the time, and worthy of a story. Then, as it was the era of Thierry Mugler, I did a story about my mother who had hip pads put in all her clothes. I have no idea what I wrote about it, but it was fun to do something that was personal. And it landed me the job.

# Can you remember your earliest days arriving in Detroit?

I remember going there with all these horrible clothes that I'd bought in Virginia Beach, because I didn't really know any better – just whatever I thought was fashionable. Unfortunately it was a bunch of crap. But Detroit was fun and I could do pretty much what I wanted at the paper.

shows... I *loved* Bill Blass. I got to know him really well.

# He was like American fashion folklore at the time, right?

He was like the dean of American fashion, such a great guy. He was from the Midwest so we had a lot in common; he laughed, and he'd tell you off. I once went to see him in Connecticut – we were working on his book – and I said, 'Bill, I want to do something different with my hair, what do you think I should do?' and he looks at me and says, 'Have you ever thought about *combing* it?'

# When did you start covering the shows in Paris and Milan?

1986, '87. There were so many more journalists going from all the smaller cities in the US compared to today:

ed Press, newsgathering organisation] office in Milan to use their machines to file everything. Meanwhile, all the girls from the papers in Philadelphia, L.A. and Miami were so smart-looking and accomplished. They'd all meet for dinner and it felt like high school, you know, like they wouldn't accept me in their group!

#### What about the front row scene?

I'd sit there and stare in wonder at people like Carlyne Cerf [de Dudzeele]. It was great for people-watching, great theatre, a great big circus. I loved thinking about all the people who influenced me – writers like Joan Didion and Tom Wolfe and Gay Talese – and thinking to myself, 'How can I write about fashion in the same way those guys write about their subjects.'

# Did the number of journalists covering fashion in the provinces reflect the appetite America had for fashion at the time?

It reflected the advertising spend. But there was an insatiable readership for sure; there's a huge market in all those cities, particularly Texas, with Neiman Marcus starting there, with all those specialty stores, and all that oil money. Great fashion is always made by two things, I think: money and racial diversity. Detroit has got style because of an industry like cars in its history, plus it's racially mixed; it's got black West Side, black downtown, Jewish North Side... But go to Washington DC and it's just the most boring and least stylish place.

# Ironically, your next move was from Detroit to Washington, right?

Two pieces stick in my mind, and they were both profiles. I don't remember any of the reviews because there were so many of them. In keeping with the whole ethos of the paper's Style section – doing great take-outs on people - there was a profile I did on [Arnold] Scaasi<sup>4</sup>. We went to La Grenouille<sup>5</sup> restaurant, which was a lot of fun, and then I spoke to his older sister in Montreal who told me a lot of stuff that was brutal to Scaasi – like Scaasi being Isaacs spelt backwards, and what she used to call him, 'Little Jesus'. It was a fun piece to write, but he wouldn't speak to me for a long time after that. I mean, we weren't there to protect the designers, we didn't protect artists, we didn't protect filmmakers. We just wrote what we wanted and I think a lot of that stuff would shock people today.

# Would these things have slipped through the net, or would there have been a stern phone call from the publicist the following morning?

Never a phone call. Never.

#### Why:

I think there was nothing they could ever refute and they knew they couldn't bully the Washington Post. When Ben Bradlee<sup>6</sup> died, there were a lot of great tributes to him, one of which was so great I saved it. It's a letter Bradlee had written some time in the late '80s to this PR guy who represented the the Ringling Brothers Circus. The PR had kept nagging Mary Hadad, who was my editor on the Style section, about doing yet another story on the circus. It was just really annoying, you know, threatening to take this matter to the top, wanting to

# 'I loved thinking to myself, 'How can I write about fashion in the same way Joan Didion and Tom Wolfe and Gay Talese write about their subjects.'

The Washington Post had been in touch with me while I was in Detroit – not for fashion but just for a general assignment job in the Style section. They stayed in touch with me, and then when Nina Hyde<sup>3</sup> died they called me up.

# Did moving to the Washington Post feel like a step up the ladder?

Totally. Because of the reputation of the paper, obviously, but also Nina Hyde's great reputation; she'd had the job for about 20 years. Also, all the journalists I knew in that era wanted to work on the paper's Style section because it had great space for features writing; it was a space where you could have a point of view and just do whatever you wanted.

### Give me an example of a piece you wrote at the *Post*.

# Who was the other profile you mentioned?

Ralph Lauren. It was probably his 20th anniversary and I interviewed him twice for the piece. He told me this story about how he'd gone to the Duke and Duchess of Windsor's house, outside of Paris – they were both dead by this stage – because he was always obsessed with the Duke of Windsor's style. Ralph was telling me about trying on the Duke's jackets and I'm thinking to myself, 'What? How would you just take it upon yourself to slip on this dead Duke's jacket?' Anyway, I called his personal assistant and asked, 'Did that *really* happen?' and he said it never had. Ralph just had this whole fantasy about trying on the clothes. But it was a fun piece to write, I remember focusing on these perfect little holes in his jeans, because he's such an obsessive guy.

have lunch with Ben. So Ben wrote this guy the greatest letter, basically saying, 'Don't call us, we'll call you. We've done plenty of stories about the circus and the day that you think you can tell us what to do...' It was really funny and brilliantly written. You know, this was the newspaper behind Watergate being threatened by the fucking circus!

# Was the Washington Post still basking in the glory of Watergate when you got there?

Sure, so nobody *ever* complained about what we wrote. They may not have spoken to you anymore but you didn't care. I remember when I wrote that Scaasi story, Bill Blass called me to say they'd been passing a copy of the *Post* all around the 550 building [550 Seventh Avenue]. It went to Oscar, all of them





read it and they were delighted, because nobody could stand Scaasi.

# Why, as you refer to it, 'do a take-out' on the designers?

This was the early '90s, and these guys were total kings. So it was like, 'Let's write about these guys as rock stars with their big egos, let's turn the knife a little bit.'

# What better place to assassinate people's rock star egos than at *Vanity Fair*. That's where you went next, right?

Right, I had four years at *Vanity Fair*. I met Graydon Carter at a Donna Karan show and he was very complimentary. He said, 'I'm addicted to your writing, come and write features for me'. Graydon would tell me what he wanted and I would go and do it. I did Hollywood

Anna, she tried the exclusive and we said no; but I think she was just never happy that Graydon got the better stuff. But, you know, Graydon assigned me those great stories; it wasn't like I pitched them.

# But would you have been able to write that stuff for *Vogue*?

No! It was a bad thing for me, *Vogue*, I should never have done it. Anna and I never had a rapport. I mean, I love *Vogue*, I have great respect for what she does, but we never bonded at all.

# Was moving from *Vanity Fair* and *Vogue* to the *New York Times* about wanting to write more straight-up fashion criticism?

It was very simple really, the *Times* was all I'd ever wanted. You asked earlier

appointed Fashion Critic at the *Times*. It was a big deal because when you're a critic you have all different kinds of rights that a normal reporter doesn't have.

#### What sort of rights?

Basically, when you're a critic or a columnist, people can't change your copy. They obviously do if it's a typo, but they can't tell you what to write about. If you want to go write about how that tree looks, then you can write about how that tree looks.

# Did you feel that you had to up your game at the *Times*?

Oh ves.

And was that a conscious decision?
Very much so

# to places like 550, in the days when all the big designers were in their studios. Bill was on the fifth floor, Oscar was on the eighth and I would just go and drop in. I'd go see Ralph Rucci who was in the next building. That's gone now; it doesn't feel quite the same because everything's fractured.

#### What about in Europe?

One of the best pieces of advice I received when I got to the *Times* was from Carlyne Cerf: go and see Azzedine [Alaïa]. He was not where he is today; he was going through a difficult period. I'd never got to meet him before, and all of a sudden I could go hang out with Azzedine all day; this was the late 90s, it was still a much slower pace. The *Times* gave me a new level of access to creative people: what they were doing in

Chanel and Dior. If I want to go see a factory in Italy, I can do that. I like the Max Mara people a lot, because they are very open and you can go see what's happening in their factories. The same thing with Azzedine, just on a different scale: one man living above his shop with an amazing atelier. I just want to go and hang out, sit in the corner of the studio, and observe. I love doing that. Sometimes I think the younger publicists don't understand that.

#### Why? Because they are fearful?

They are more regimented and they probably have bosses who are like, 'What did she say? What was she asking about?' I think they probably control that more than they need to. If I go to a showroom, I'm like. 'I just want to look at the clothes; I don't want any-

'When you're seeing all those collections – season

after season – you can sit at a show and know in

a heartbeat what's new or striking, or newsworthy.'

#### what used to be a matter of hours, but is now probably a matter of minutes, maybe even seconds.

First of all, I should say I don't go to a lot of shows, not nearly as many as other people do, because I only want to write about the newsmakers. I don't want to feel like I have to go, believe me I've done that. But when you're seeing all those collections, season after season, you can sit at a show and know in a heartbeat what's new, what's striking, what's newsworthy.

# You say you only want to write about the newsmakers. What constitutes a newsmaker?

It changes. I mean, Dries [Van Noten] might be a newsmaker, but maybe not an innovator. Raf [Simons] is ideas driven; he's going to put the information out

# 'In the early '90s, the designers were total kings. So it was like, 'Let's write about them as rock stars with their big egos, let's turn the knife a little bit.'

covers, I did some fashion, like the story about Madame Grès, and her daughter hiding the news of her death. That was actually Laurence Benaïm's story idea, she was at *Le Monde* at that point. I also did a big piece on Rudi Gernreich, something on Isaac, a really early piece on Helmut Lang...

# Did you have a lot longer to write those pieces for *Vanity Fair*?

I think I did six stories a year. But I actually had a double contract, so maybe I did four for Graydon and six for Anna [Wintour] at *Vogue*. But Anna was never very happy about that arrangement.

#### Why, because she wanted exclusivity?

Yes. Graydon had called me first and I already had a relationship with him, and it was fun to write for him. But with

about the romance, well the *Times* was the romance: I really loved what the institution was about and I still do. Everything goes at a faster pace at a newspaper and that was what I'd missed. *Vanity Fair* was great but you don't go to the shows, you parachute in and then leave, so you kind of lose contact a bit.

### Were you immediately given the post of Fashion Critic for the *Times*?

Amy Spindler [former Fashion Critic and Style Editor of the *New York Times*] was already the critic, it was her natural bent, but then she got breast cancer. They called me in March '97 and said Amy wants to get off this beat and we want you to take it on. I started in December of '98, then they made me the critic the following year. Amy was actually the first ever person they'd

#### How did you go about that?

A couple of things: I always made a point of doing showroom appointments, and I'd always go out four nights a week – parties, events, whatever... – because I wanted to know what was going on. It was wonderful but it meant, paradoxically, that I didn't have a big social life going on. I worked, really worked, for those 16 years. My son went to boarding school and I went to the city and worked.

### Looking back, did those things pay off?

I learnt most of what I now know about fashion in my 16 years at the *Times*: I went out, I talked to a lot of people, I went to factories, I went to showrooms, I talked to designers. I loved walking down Seventh Avenue and going

the studio, what their thought process was, and how they were making clothes. I loved it.

# Has access to designers become an issue as time has gone on?

Well, if Oscar were still alive today I'd need to make an appointment to see him, I'd need to get through security. Whereas in London in the early '90s, when I met McQueen and Hussein [Chalayan] for the first time, you'd just go and visit them in these totally crappy places where they'd be living and working.

# As media interest has grown, has the role of the publicist become increasingly that of the gatekeeper?

Yes, I think that's just the nature of things. I'm lucky, I still have tonnes of access; I can still go up to the ateliers at

one holding my hand.' But some people are scared and you get the feeling that someone is leaning on them to control the situation. And for what? Why? They don't understand that newspaper reporting requires that time and effort. You remove that and you encourage laziness and bad reporting. But, you know, there's a new generation of people who are used to getting all their news and information through a cell phone, and for them speed probably eclipses the actual quality of reporting. It's a problem.

### Part Two The Role of the Critic

Let's talk about the role of the critic. I'm fascinated by how fashion critics are able to assimilate and pass judgement in there for you to think about. Miuccia [Prada] is the same; you go backstage and she's got something interesting to share that usually makes you think.

# What do you make of that whole charade of everyone dashing backstage to bow down to the designer?

I hate going backstage. I go to hear what Miuccia has to say, but mainly because I also want to talk to Fabio [Zambernardi, Design Director of Prada] and Olivier [Rizzo, stylist], whoever else is back there. But for me Miuccia is almost a separate world. Miuccia and Raf – maybe Marc [Jacobs] and a few others – but those two always come to mind because they are food for thought. I mean, you sit there today and see a Yohji [Yamamoto] show – after I don't know how many I've seen – and they're





just not the same thing that we saw in the '90s. You decide whether it's worth writing about it, or just moving on.

#### Do you think a designer can be important or significant without being newsworthy? Or rather, are there different levels of being newsworthy?

For me, there are those New York designers like Oscar and Bill who had great businesses and they made great stories. You can't compare what they did to what Helmut Lang did. If I was Women's Wear [Daily] and felt like I had to cover the industry then I would look at it differently, but I'm not Women's Wear. I'm looking to write stories that are newsworthy. Amy used to say the same thing: 'Designers call me up all the time and say, 'Why didn't you come to my show, why didn't you write

#### Does that make you feel proud?

I just like saying what I think. Amy used to say to me all the time, 'Cathy, shut the fuck up, you're always sat in front of your screen, laughing at your own jokes.' And she was right: I love to see things that are really great – really great *or* really bad – that make you think, and I love going back and writing about them.

Do you think that the rigor and thought process of being a critic is something that can be transferred into other fields? If given time to learn those particular fields, could you become, say, a theatre critic or film critic or an art

Yeah, I think so. I mean, I could never become a TV critic for instance, but with enough time and patience maybe I

it, too. But they are old-school guys. Today I think that the economics of fashion has affected everything in the industry. It's not about aesthetics, it's not about pleasure, it's certainly not about charming people...

To what extent do you take into consideration a designer's scale of business, or their sense of history, when it comes to reviewing a show? Armani and Thomas Tait, for example, are almost two different industries.

Yes, that's a good question. I mean, I really like Armani: I like the business, I like him as a guy. I like that he has achieved so much, I like all the crazy people who work for him. But honestly, it's very difficult to write about the clothes. I think for a critic it's almost better not to attend; I can't write in a really think, he doesn't go crazy, and he listens to what you're saying. He said to me, 'Look, you're not the only one buying these clothes, it's not just about you, I have clients all over the world.' And there's your answer. I like him, but I just wish I'd known him in the early days.

#### You say there's nothing you can write about Armani, but isn't that just neutering your role as a critic?

I guess it is, but sometimes the critic has to just bow out and say, 'I love what you do and I'd love to come to the show, but it just isn't for me anymore and I don't want to disappoint you.'

By being selective about the number of collections you review, is there a fear that you might miss something that's really interesting or relevant? Or do Do you think that today's fashion press

from the past that you can't find on the market: a beautiful skirt, a great shirtdress, an old riding coat, a lot of things that are based on her grandparents. She has good taste, but then I ask myself, 'Does anyone care about taste any more?' I looked at her clothes online and thought, 'Hmm, I kind of like that. It's simple, it's soft, let's go see it.' Her publicist is pushing her whole aristocracy angle; like I really give a shit that she's related to the King of... Transylvania, or wherever it is.

#### Although you did say you loved all those socialites in your mother's copies of W.

Yeah, but we were all gullible back then; it was a remote world – it is no longer remote.

'The economics of fashion has affected everything

in the industry. It's no longer about aesthetics or

pleasure; it's certainly not about charming people.'

I remember Suzy Menkes writing about this in the [International] Herald Tribune about five years ago. She was going on about branding this and branding that; of course, she was absolutely right, that did happen, and the importance of branding has become key. But then it started becoming a part of her writing, there was just too much of an embrace of that language and the methodology that those companies were using. And I thought, 'Wait a minute, Suzy, why are you working for these people? You work for a newspaper and you're a critic, please try and stay somewhat independent of that thinking.' Suzy won't like me saying that, she'll say that I'm a... well, she will say what she will say. I mean, people could say that I'm being a Pollyanna about this, but it's had a terrible influence, I find it polluting.

# 'When I left the *New York Times*, a lot of the designers were like, 'You said things that were terrible, that really hurt me... but you were right!"

about it', and she'd just say, 'Make more newsworthy clothes and I'll come.'

#### What do you think gives authority to the critic?

A couple of things: longevity and being free of influence. You've always got something influencing you, but you should work at keeping some distance from that. You just have to say what you think.

#### Is that the hardest thing?

No. One of my toughest reviews was for an Oscar show and it was the one he loved the most. Same with Tom Ford. Tom got so upset with me about something... but when I left the *Times*, a lot of these guys were like, 'You said things that were *terrible*, that really hurt me, but you were right!'

could be a movie critic, or a book critic. Critics are *drawn* to their medium: art critics obviously have some fascination for the creation of new art and the personalities in art. I find fashion people more appealing than most artists. Maybe because of the business side, which I really like, maybe because I love the phoniness of fashion. These days, the phoniness is not so much fun as it was in the '90s. Bill was a big phoney, Oscar was a *huge* phoney. They came and they charmed and they swaggered, they flirted with the customers, and yet they were great people behind that façade.

#### Whose doing that now?

I guess Karl [Lagerfeld]. I mean, he doesn't necessarily spend so much time with the customers but he gets on the stage and he performs. Tom Ford does critical way about Armani because there's very little to say. He's a made guy, he's not going to change how he does things, there's not going to be any particular newness.

#### Surely Armani's sense of history the company is 40 years old this year – makes it newsworthy?

Well, I think about what his shows were like back in the late '80s and they were so beautifully done, as well as being great-looking clothes. I mean, you would kill to have some of those jackets and pants today. And the quality was insane. His presentations were just heaven, but now they're in this new space. I asked Armani about all this when I did an interview with him last year, and the great thing about Armani is, if you tell him straight what you

#### you think you instinctively make the has become distracted by the brandright choices?

For sure, you might miss something. But the bigger fear is that you might not perceive the stuff that you are seeing correctly, that you might not have the right set of eyes or the right amount of information, or you're just not up to date.

#### How do you keep up to date?

By reading a lot. By taking the time. By accepting the things that you're not so good at and concentrating on what you do well. This season I'm just trying to see as many new designers as possible. I'm not that hopeful, but I want to go. I'm going to see someone tomorrow, Ms [Mafalda] Von Hessen: she's a woman who is about my age, a costume designer from Rome who's started doing her own line. She is doing all those things

ing machines behind some of the big designers? Do the huge company structures, the big advertising spends, the brand ambassadors, the celebrities, and all the PR and marketing actually eclipse any objective analysis of a collection? It sometimes feels like the collections are made into a success before they've even been presented.

Yeah, completely.

#### Do you find yourself guilty of becoming distracted by all that?

I try not to be, because I have a particular bug in my ass about exactly what you're describing – about the *branding*. I don't even *like* that word.

So you consider all the branding fanfare as a negative distraction?

#### 'It' clearly works, though.

People have been totally bowled over and influenced by it. But then you get a younger generation that isn't as confident at expressing an opinion, or in some cases doesn't even know they can have an opinion about these things. That leads to an entire generation thinking it has to go with what the brand says, with its indoctrination.

#### Is this something you take into consideration when reviewing a big brand designer as opposed to a designer that has none of that branding support?

It depends. You'd mentioned Thomas Tait just before, as the polar opposite to Armani. Well, I love going to see Thomas, he's a little uneven but he's very hands-on. He obviously doesn't have the facilities of Raf at Dior, or the





incredible atelier of Azzedine, but I just expect him to be able to deliver at the level that he's able to deliver. If it's Chanel or Dior I expect them to deliver according to their histories. Ultimately, that is what you're buying. God, sometimes I think I should become one of these *brand* people; I'd love to say the things that they *should* do.

#### Do brands ever ask you to consult?

No, I couldn't. When I was at the *Times*, you had to be very careful. Even when I was in a showroom and people would ask me, 'So, what do you think of my business?' And I would tell them, just because it's easier to do that, but you weren't supposed to.

# How do you distinguish between a good collection and an exceptional one?

I think he was tired of hearing it; I think he liked it but I think he'd moved on. That show was around 2004 and I think he hated people saying in 2007 that they loved that show. Anyway, to go back to your question, great shows need that emotional or intellectual button. We've lost that within fashion, there used to be a lot of wit, too. You still see exceptional Rei Kawakubo shows, and then she can *really* hit it out of the park. But, you know, she has duds too.

#### As a fashion critic, how important is it to experience a show first hand in order to write about it?

Well, I wrote this piece for T magazine last summer without going to the shows. Joe McKenna had mentioned, 'I want to know why everything is so commercial looking.' So the deputy editor at T

to go into the *Times* archive to look at what Gloria Emerson<sup>8</sup> had written about YSL back in the day. I could tell that Hedi was getting everything from these two or three particular seasons in the '60s, but I wanted to be sure. Next thing I know, four hours have passed and I'm still reading about a T-shirt on the Left Bank in 1968. But that gave me the impetus to think about what Hedi was doing and to have some fun with writing about it.

### So the time available to you influenced what you wrote.

It was a completely different writing experience: I didn't go to any shows, I only looked at seven collections online, and I was really happy with how it turned out. I never had that time to think when I was on the paper.

# 'Sometimes the critic has to say, 'I love what you do and I'd love to come to your show, but it just isn't for me anymore – I don't want to disappoint you.'

I'd say the fundamental thing between good and exceptional is: can it hit an emotional button? Secondly, can it hit a mental button? Like John Galliano did a great collection for Galliano, which was one of my favourite shows that he did, with the twins, the tall people and the fat people; it was brilliant and he came out with the marionette on a puppet, and I just thought that was fun and gutsy. A lot of people were very upset about that show, saying these people are all monsters, and I was like, 'Look at us; we're the freaks! Are you kidding me?' Some of McOueen's shows have been very emotional, too, like the dancehall show. That was one of the all time great shows. Lee [McQueen] used to get very upset if people said that to him.

#### What was so upsetting about that?

asked me to write about it. You know, it was Nicolas [Ghesquière]'s first Vuitton show, and of course there was Hedi [Slimane], and then we thought of a few other people who showed really straightforward looking clothes – that's really what we meant by commercial. So they gave me that assignment at the beginning of June and I had three weeks to work on it, which gave me the time to really think about it, and to think about Hedi.

#### Why him in particular?

I think he *is* talented at what he does, he's great at branding – ha, that word again, [sings] *branding*! – even though I think the whole story with the teenagers and the music is so kind of poppy... Anyway, I enjoyed thinking about that piece, and I actually had the time

#### Does the squeeze of the deadline lead you to write things you later regret or that were off the mark?

Yeah, I've written follow-up pieces on collections because I missed things the first time around. I did it with Stefano Pilati and his first YSL show.

### What did you say in the first piece that you later revised?

I came back and said it was actually interesting. The first time around I'd dismissed it right out, saying it was all puff-sleeved and tulip-shaped skirts and very girly; I just didn't get it. But then I got it and wrote about it. I kind of liked him at YSL and I liked some of his ideas but I just sensed that he was a bit all over the place.

#### Have you found yourself reappraising

#### a collection by experiencing it in different contexts, like seeing it shot in editorials or worn on the street?

Yes. Not on the street or in editorials, but in the showrooms. Céline is a good example of that. Phoebe [Philo] does things in the show that can be good and interesting, or they can be things I don't quite get. I think she's talented and when I go to the showroom I tend to see a far more human connection to the clothes. But I'm still very much on the fence about Phoebe, too.

Let's talk about the *On The Runway* blog you wrote for several years at the *Times*. The interaction between yourself and the online community that formed around the blog was quite unique at the time. Was that the goal you set out to achieve?

our super SWAT team and all that.

# What did the blog offer that the print newspaper couldn't?

If I didn't quite get the show the first time round, I could revisit it on the blog and develop what I wanted to say. Later on, I did it in reverse: I would put things on the blog quickly and then I'd think about it and write a more complete piece for the paper. I always thought the paper should have the final word.

# The dialogue between you and the readers took on this whole new world.

The first five years were great because we had the same people who would come on to the blog and make comments. I could go from collection to collection and they always had a great opinion, and some great arguments developed.

feminism versus less aggressive feminism... Miuccia was obviously unaware it was going on, but when I told her about it I was like, 'You should have joined the conversation!'

### Wasn't Marc Jacobs actually posting at one point?

Yeah, sometimes Marc would weigh in, usually because he was annoyed...

#### How did you know it was actually him?

We had to get it confirmed. He was actually complaining about somebody's comment. Me or somebody else. I don't remember...

How did you feel about all these anonymous but sometimes really informed and knowledgeable people challenging you?

# 'Who could have imagined that guys and girls sharing pictures of themselves on Instagram would be enough to shift fashion product?'

It was totally organic. I remember talking with Tim Blanks [Editor-at-Large for *Style.com*] one night in 2007 at the Castiglione café in Paris. I mentioned I was starting a blog – they were still new at this point – and he said, 'If you're doing a blog you should...' and I said, 'Tim, stop! Don't tell me what a blog should be, *nobody* knows what a blog should be, and I don't want to know. I just want to see what comes from it.'

# Did you immediately feel a sense of freedom, a looser format?

In the early years, the *Times* allowed me to post onto the blog directly, because there was no one in the New York office when I was writing from Europe. I didn't have to go through an editor. Can you *imagine*? Then somebody found out and it all changed, and we then had

# You developed quite a rapport with some of those anonymous people posting.

Well there was Marko. His original handle was 'Autre'; then he went by his real name. He was very reactionary and funny and knowledgeable about clothes; turns out he lives somewhere in former Yugoslavia and has an Art History PhD. I met him in Paris actually, he is a really nice guy but very intense. He was so multilingual that he could just break things down in almost any language, and in slang.

# What was the most memorable exchange you had with him on the blog?

It was about that very curvaceous, zaftig-looking Prada show, maybe five years ago; Lara Stone and Doutzen [Kroes] were in it. We had all this post-Berlin-Wall feminism, post-socialism, militant

Some of it was really intimidating!

# Did you find yourself getting swayed by their opinions?

No, I made a point not to look at what Marko and other people were saying before I'd had a chance to post. Later on, I would get into the habit of coming back from something like a Jil Sander show, and quickly writing something on the blog – only four sentences – just to give them the platform so they could start writing. They needed that launching pad. But then *that* would bug me because, you know, I'd just want to sit in my room, eat my pasta bolognese and actually think about the show for a few minutes before writing.

# On that subject, do you find yourself swayed by the opinions of other critics?





No, I usually read them afterwards. I used to read Suzy because the *Herald Trib* came to my room in the morning and I could read it at breakfast. There are times when I read her and am like, 'What is she talking about? I don't believe that at all!' Other times I'll sit there laughing out loud because she's just so funny and right on target.

Did you ever have problems coming to terms with all the access that so many new people were now getting? Whether that was bloggers on the front row or people weighing in on the *Times'* blog? No, I didn't mind that part of it; I thought it was fun. Also, I have a big enough ego to think that what I had at the *Times* – my access, my place – was

great, and a reader with great opinions

didn't come close to that. But I loved the

the last couple of years has become a harder road. There are so many different types of fashion coverage – online fashion, red carpet fashion, celebrity fashion – and they take up a lot of the audience's time, or, worse still, they constitute the reason why some people have turned off from fashion. So here you are, the fashion critic writing your piece about the guys and the girls who are really good at fashion – the actual designers themselves – and yet the audience has turned its attention elsewhere.

#### What are your thoughts on the ubiquitous image-led blogs and the extraordinary rise of Instagram?

They have served an amazing purpose, those guys and girls with Instagram accounts just being able to say 'I like something'.

shows me his great work, or someone who is funny, or that girl who runs *Man Repeller*. But just to see some girl with her 20,000 likes? I don't know...

### Does it make the role of the critic more challenging?

The environment is more interesting today, but it's far harder to understand. There are just so many new designers out there, they're like gnats. Some of them are quite good and many of them have been able to survive through creating businesses on the internet. So I think all of that makes it interesting, but it's a constantly moving target. Just as soon as you grasp it, it changes again. And I think you're foolish to try and grasp it in its entirety. It just doesn't work like that anymore. As a journalist you have to focus on the things you believe in.

# 'I write about the people who really know fashion – the actual designers – but the audience has turned its attention to red carpets and celebrity.'

fact we had a community on the blog, and I loved being the forum master.

#### I guess it underlined the pecking order. The readers were not exactly your disciples, but they...

...no, please, they'd *better* be my disciples! It was like, 'This is *my* fucking show here.'

#### How has writing on a blog affected the way you review the shows? Generally speaking, descriptions of clothes now seem redundant, whereas analysis has become more important than ever before.

Well, slide shows have made people very lazy. They kind of do the work for you. In a way, even though I just said there are all these smart people out there, I think that fashion criticism in What purpose has that served to you? None to me, but it certainly helps the designers.

#### In massaging their egos?

No, in moving their products. It's free advertising. Well, I don't know if it's free anymore; they're probably getting sent clothes and products and being paid. But just by going on Instagram and saying I'm wearing this today, they're getting a gazillion likes and that shifts product. Who could have imagined that someone sharing a picture of themselves in an outfit would be enough?

#### Does that fascinate you?

Slightly, but after you look at it once, it's not so fascinating. I'd rather see [illustrator] David Downton's blog that

# Before we started the interview, you mentioned you were currently writing a history of fashion coverage at the *New York Times*, starting back in the 19th century. Have you found that critics were more or less opinionated in the past?

It depends on the individual, and I can only talk about the woman I'm researching right now; she was the first fashion editor at the *Times* – her pen name was Anne Rittenhouse – and she was quite critical. But she's not criticising designers *per se*, because she comes at an age when that whole designer thing was just beginning with Poiret<sup>8</sup>, so she's on the cusp. In an article I found about Anne Rittenhouse's first trip to Paris, she definitely whacks Poiret in that column. She knows she's in a modern space, she knows that Poiret is the

guy, but that doesn't stop her. She's also very good about telling readers when something is just silly, when hats are the worst they've ever been.

# How much of her archive have you been through? Did you relate to her in any way?

I've looked at some of her later stuff, when she becomes a syndicated writer, and she gets really croaky and is kind of past her due date. In those early years of 1908 to 1914 though, just before the war starts, she's amazing, and she's tough. But I know that I'm going to find fashion critics at the *Times* in the '30s and '40s who were not critics but who would kind of just give a slap on the wrist.

What have you read in the past 12 months that you think stands out as a

of formats, some of which have more elbow room than others.

#### Part Three Hypersensitivity in a Bitchy World

# Who are you writing for? The designers themselves? Bored housewives in the Midwest? Fashion students online? Bernard Arnault?

I think it's a little bit of all those people. But I hardly ever think about the fashion world, even though I know they are reading because I see them on Twitter and on blogs. It's essentially for a smart reader, in New York or across the States.

Do you care if your interpretation of a show or collection is faithful to what the designer had in mind? You know, there was a guy at the *Times* called Mike Berger who died in the late 1950s. He could write 1000 words in about 40 minutes.

#### Was it good?

God yeah, he won the Pulitzer Prize for a 4000-word piece he wrote about a war veteran who in 1949 went on a shooting spree in his neighbourhood. Mike Berger went over there and interviewed 50 people in the neighbourhood – the parents, everybody. Then he went straight back to the office and in three hours wrote 4000 words and won the Pulitzer Prize. It's an amazing piece; it's worth reading.

Do you agree that it's easier to write a damning review than something that's smart and positive?

# 'I grew up surrounded by White House reporters and sports reporters, so I think that everyone should just be cool and objective and less senstive.'

#### great piece of quality fashion criticism?

... [ponders] Oh gosh...

# You can say 'nothing' if you want. I can't think of *anything*.

# How telling is that in the history of fashion criticism? Do you feel we're in a low point?

What's frustrating is that there are some really good writers out there. They're smart, they're funny. But the formats available right now are not great, that's part of the problem. I look at Tim Blanks and he's very perceptive about a lot of things and he can be very funny, but he's writing in a format that has now defined him. He might be very happy with it – I haven't talked to him about it. I would just say that Tim has a long history of working in many kinds

No, that's why it's sometimes deadly to go backstage and get the designer's explanation, because then you don't interpret. I think the designers tend to like it too if you bring something totally different – McQueen used to love that.

# Do they ever tell you if they think you've got it wrong?

Yeah, sometimes they do. Generally they'll tell you if they don't like what you've said.

#### Do you get writer's block?

Sure, I don't call it that, but sure. You can sit down at six o' clock and by eight you suddenly get really tired and you don't feel like writing, but you have to write to the deadline – even though the words are coming out like glue. Other nights it's just coming out all good.

It depends.

### You've written your share of vicious

Doing that in the past was easier, because it was fun; there was a kind of breathlessness about it, a kind of daring. Contentiousness is a wonderful quality, but just being snarky - bitchy - is not the same thing. With the shows, you're coming back from 15 minutes of explosion and your mind is racing and when you see something really hideous – like Tom Ford's show with the weird broad caps and Kate Moss in it – you have fun writing about it. 'Hideous and freaky' I think I called it. I wouldn't change a word to this day, but they're not as rewarding to write. People generally remember a tart or snarky line, but for me as a journalist I would rather write





about something more thoughtful.

### Do critics hold being banned from shows as a badge of honour?

I think they used to. I never thought it was a badge of honour, and I was glad that the *Times* always stood up for me. Most of the time I didn't even know there was a problem until I found out I wasn't invited to the show. Even though I would hear later on – sometimes months later – that Art Sulzberger, the publisher or Jill Abramson, the executive editor, had been contacted. I think they may have been involved with Saint Laurent, I don't remember now. Armani; I'm sure. But they would never tell me that there's a problem, which I'm glad about, that way I just carry on.

So you never got your wrist slapped by

#### Almost everywhere.

I know I live in a slight bubble but it's the only thing I've ever known in newspaper writing as a critic. I think that younger journalists are sometimes nervous for no reason, or overly concerned about being critical, and I think that's too bad. Maybe they've never worked in my kind of environment where you have absolute freedom, where no publisher nor editor has ever called me and said, 'You pissed them off, Cathy, they've pulled their advertising. Can you just cool it now.'

#### Do you ever stop to consider how a harsh review might impact people's lives, whether it's the designer or the lesser-known individuals involved?

Not so much, but as time's gone on I have done. I remember getting a very

for your copy, if you believe that. The other side of that is if I don't like something someone has shown on the runway then I have to be able to say it to their face.

#### And not hide behind words?

Never. For example, Narciso [Rodriguez] and I are very friendly, Raf and I are very friendly, but I've called them before and said, 'I got to tell you this is not my favourite show.'

### What have you learned most from the designers with whom you are close?

People say to me, 'Oh, you're just friends with Raf,' and I'm like, 'I have spent a lot of time interviewing Raf, I've spent a lot of time *learning* about Raf and how he has put together his company and the thinking behind those

# 'No publisher nor editor has ever called me and said, 'You pissed them off, Cathy, they've pulled their advertising. Can you just cool it now.'

#### the powers that be at the *Times*?

Never in 16 years. I heard about advertising being pulled but I never heard anybody say, 'This is your fault'. The attitude was always, 'They might take it away now, but it will come back.'

# Your experience is singularly unique, I believe. You must be aware of that. Yep.

# How does that make you feel about the broader fashion media landscape?

The only place I would ever worry about it is at the *Times*; if their stance changed, it'd be a worry. Ultimately, I don't want to see any kind of influence: I don't want to see writers having to mention everybody who's an advertiser, I don't want to see anything repugnant like that. But it obviously happens.

irate phone call from Carolina Herrera when I said that the collection she'd done had absolutely no relevance. And she was saying, 'I have all these people who work for me and they spend time and effort,' you know, and I thought, 'Yes, she's right.' That was a cheap comment; there were other ways of saying it without being so dismissive. And I think that is when you have to at least consider the amount of effort and time that goes into creating something.

# Can you genuinely be friends with a designer who is going to be the subject of your reviews?

I think you can hang out and have an affinity for certain designers, but I think that if you believe you are truly friends then you are in for trouble. And it's not good for your professionalism nor good

collections.' Again, I think about Bill Blass: I learnt a lot about who he was as a guy, who he was as a creator, who he was as a businessman. I think that's been worth it. But it's not really important that they *care* about me; I mean, if they do then that's lovely, but I'm not expecting anything and I think it would be a mistake to do so. People were really kind to me when I left the *Times* and my boyfriend died; there was a huge outpouring of people calling, writing, emailing, it was fantastic. But, you know, it's still just my job.

#### Do you find yourself drawing a line between industry friends and your personal friends? Is there such a line?

Kind of, more or less. There's my own family and then one or two people, and that's about it.

# Have things that you've written caused personal relationships to fall apart?

No, because they probably weren't relationships. The people who got mad at me are still friendly with me, but we don't go on vacation together. We don't go to dinner together. I can still walk into their studio, even though they yelled at me five years ago, I mean *really* yelled. It's fine.

# Do you think that the paradox of your job is that you deal with issues of hypersensitivity within a world that is notoriously bitchy?

Sometimes, yes. I come at it from a news side; I grew up surrounded by White House reporters, sports reporters and all that, so I think that everyone should just be cool and objective. But then you find out that in fashion there are peo-

#### Do you find that you've become defined by the negative things that you've written or spats that you've had?

Kind of

# Does that upset you? When I googled your name this morning, the first thing that comes up is the spat you had with Hedi Slimane. It just seems reductive, especially since you've been writing for a long time and he's been designing for a long time...

...and we haven't talked in ten years. But yeah, I think it does come up a little bit; more so a few years ago when I'd go to Milan and all the Italian press were calling me 'La Horyn'– I loved that. They were more astonished that you could write certain things in the paper, and I was like, 'Are you joking? Do you read the *New York Times*; we

### and war; 'what I'm writing about is frivolous'?

No. I never felt that way, strangely. I don't think Anne Rittenhouse felt that way either. I always felt that what we were doing was important, that in its own space and context it was ultimately going to become social history. If we're lucky it is social history now, but it generally needs to marinate. The reality is that I know the *Times* is the paper of influence because of so much of its content, and fashion will not be in the Top Ten. It will be in the Top Ten for generating revenue, for sure... probably Number One.

#### So does that fast-track its importance?

To be perfectly blunt, the reason fashion is important at the *Times* is because of the writers who made it important. It

# 'I think that younger journalists are sometimes nervous for no reason, or overly concerned about being critical, and I think that's too bad.'

ple who are far more sensitive. I understand that creative people are going to be like that, but then across the board in fashion there are lots of sensitive people, and I think it almost becomes an excuse. That's why I love talking to the CEOs almost more than the designers. I sometimes have a much better rapport with them. I had a better rapport with Domenico De Sole than with Tom Ford. I like Tom, but I loved talking to Domenico, and if I wanted to know something about the company I would get it from him.

#### Why do you think that is?

Because we were rational, calm people, with the same sensitivities. Tom would often do a dance with me. [Adopts dramatic voice] 'Oh Cathy', all jokey and flirty. I'm like, 'Oh, *please*, just stop!'

are not like *La Repubblica*. We actually are good.' I was always surprised more than anything, that they didn't know enough about the *Times*. Why would this be a novelty? We have strong theatre and book critics, they've been banned, they've had trouble, they've had theatre owners take out full-page ads against them. It is not unusual.

# Do you consider the *New York Times* to be the best newspaper in the world?

Absolutely. Bar none. And absolutely the best website in the world, too. They're incredibly good at updating and staying on top of things and being aggressive right across the board.

Have there been times when you've thought to yourself, 'The *New York Times* covers world economics, politics

is just as simple as that. I think that Amy had a big influence on bringing respect to fashion at the Times. There are others too: Charlotte Curtis and her amazing society coverage in the 60s, Carrie Donovan<sup>9</sup>, too. But it's a step-by-step process, decade by decade. In the last 20 years nobody would dispute that fashion has a very key place at the Times. The guys in the '60s who said that fashion didn't belong there, who thought it was frivolous and were contemptuous of it, would never say that now. But I think it's the writers who have made it interesting and important and more relevant. But then I think we have a culture surrounding us that is interested in it.

#### It's a perfect storm.

It's very much that. And then let's face it; fashion pays for the foreign coverage.





#### When someone once asked you the question, 'What should an aspiring fashion journalist be doing now?' I remember you suggested they launch a Bob Woodward-esque<sup>10</sup> blog. Can you explain that a bit more?

I basically said: learn how to report. Learn to speak French fluently. Go to France. Make LVMH and Kering the objects of your reporting. Do a blog or a website in which you're not necessarily identified. I think it would be amazing and everybody would read it.

#### Do you really see someone doing that though?

All I'm saying is that if you know how to report properly, the fashion industry is such an amazing opportunity. People have said to me, 'But how will I get invited to the shows?' and I'm like, 'You

#### Can you answer your own question?

The romance and seduction of fashion. People would rather be sitting in the front row: it's a narcotic to them. I mean. these companies now pay for them to go to all these shows. They're happy; they don't want the conflict. They don't see the companies as, you know, the evil empire. I don't either! But I think there are great stories, great dramas and great intrigues in fashion, and it's worrisome that no one's really telling them.

#### But that begs the question, how can one be a fashion critic in a context that depends economically on the very thing you are supposed to critique?

As I say, it's worrisome. Fashion companies start behaving like governments. I've seen it just in the last couple of years. Journalists, as I've already

to create as slowly as they used to. I These days, the designers have to be more things to more people; it goes way beyond that traditional role of attending trunk shows, dinners and lunches – just getting to know the clients. If you go back to the 1940s and '50s, an era when the designers occupied an amazing kind of spotlight, in many ways they were free. They didn't have to do the things that Karl has to do – loves to do, but has to do. They were kind of the lionesses of the scene.

Well, they are under so much pressure, so they have assistants and machines getting the stuff out. It has good benefits but it becomes a business more

think that's definitely had an impact

#### Today's designers have far greater resources at their disposal though.

# 'Where is the Kawakubo of today? Or the Margiela? Or the Helmut Lang? Where are those people who can really make a statement about their times?'

don't go to the shows! That's not the point.' It's all about developing sources inside these companies to find out what is going on. I would love to know about the times when Bernard Arnault wants to absolutely spank Anna Wintour. I'm sure it happens, I'm sure there are times when he just wants to go to war with her. Similarly, why is it that whenever I talk to designers who work in groups, they always tell me the most amazing stuff and I'm like, 'Why can't that get reported?' I would have a hard time doing it because the places where I write generally require everything to be sourced. But you could run a good anonymous blog, and do what Nikki Finke11 did when she was running Dateline Hollywood and she had everybody scared. I often think like, 'Why can't you do that in fashion?'

mentioned, get very worried about saying anything that's out of line and then so many of these companies pay for the bloggers to go on a plane... And the voices that are raised against that are so small, so few and far between. They might be on a blog that's really good, but it doesn't have any impact and won't change anything. We were talking about Marko earlier; well I haven't had an email from him in about a year, and then I think to myself, 'Well, he's probably bored to death of this stuff by now.'

#### Part Four **Luxury Quantity**

#### Let's talk about how the designer's role has evolved over the past few years?

Perhaps the most significant change is that designers no longer have the time than anything else. That can be okay for some people – it's efficient, you get the job done – I mean, that's the story of Michael Kors. It fits with today's world.

#### To what extent are certain designers now fetishised by the fashion media? It's a case of the cult of personality...

I think that has always existed in one form or another.

#### But don't you think that social media has amplified it?

Not necessarily. Go back to the heyday of W: if those guvs weren't fetishized I don't know who was? It's true there wasn't so much competition, but Bill and Oscar and Calvin and Ralph and all the socialites - whoever John Fairchild felt like writing about – dominated those pages. I bet those same guys don't get that kind of publicity today, because they have to share it with all these other designers. And the media adjusts accordingly: all those smaller magazines and websites and blogs that have come out are creating endlessly multiplying microcosms. I mean, this is not Oprah or Johnny Carson level mass media; it's a new form of mass media.

#### Kind of mass-niche.

Mass-niche, yeah. You're in speciality magazines and blogs where it is really focused on someone's particular aesthetic or a specific type of person.

Would you agree that the most significant aspect of fashion right now is how immeasurably bigger it is, compared to 20 years ago? More brands, more CEOs, more media coverage, more thousand and teens, or whatever we call this era. Where is the Kawakubo of today? Or the Martin Margiela or the Helmut Lang; those people who really made a statement about their times? I don't think anyone is going to dispute what I am saying; we just don't see those kind of people emerging now.

#### Is that an irreversible shift? Is it likely to come back?

I think it will come back at some point, I just don't know when or how. That's not to say we're not living in interesting times: consider what the internet and globalisation have done, and how we've created these 'super-consumers' around the world. You could say the great story of our recent times is Netà-Porter, and how they've managed to deliver fashion product to your door.

to adapt to change. I mean, sometimes I don't like the shows but I get why he does it - the big scale thing - because he is selling Chanel to consumers around the world. It still means something, just on a huge scale.

#### Chanel is a pretty good example of a big-scale luxury brand that's evolving with the times.

I remember being in the gym at the Ritz one day – I used to sneak in there to use the exercise bikes -and Maureen Chiquet, the CEO of Chanel, was on the bike next to me. She's really smart, and I asked her if she thought there would still be couture after Karl retires? Her answer was interesting: she said, 'It will evolve into something else.' And I think that's a good answer. The fashion business just evolves into something else.

# 'The great fashion story of our times is probably how Net-à-Porter has used the internet and globalisation to deliver product to our doorsteps.'

#### product, more consumers, more everything. Is that a good or a bad thing? Or do you feel indifferent to it?

I don't feel indifferent, and I don't think it is a good or a bad thing. I just tend not to look at it. I mean, there are definitely negatives about it, in that it's harder for people to focus on things. Momentum is created by these niches but it seems strange to have all these brands yet with very little innovation going on.

#### Is this era defined by a sense of quantity over quality?

If you look at it from a strictly fashion historian point of view – and you think of the contributions and the design changes that happened in the '60s and '70s, and in the '80s you look at designers like Kawakubo - then I think we are going to be missing that in the two

# deduce about this era?

Probably the fact that the reader of fashion is more involved than ever before, thanks to social media. Then you'd have to consider how big fashion entertainment and red-carpet culture have become.

#### Is creativity notable by its absence?

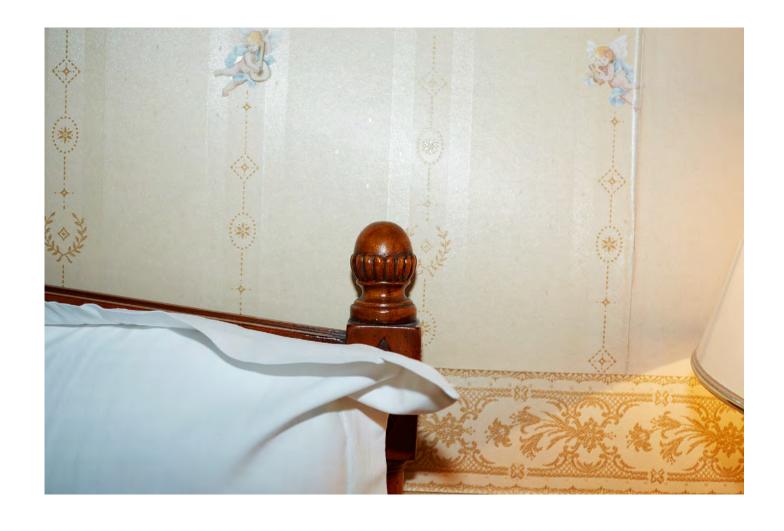
Well, if you have a foot in both eras then you can't help but think, 'I want to see the kind of things that McQueen was doing a few years ago.' From the designers' perspective, it's interesting to watch those who can adapt: I think Nicolas adapts and I think that Raf adapts; they are at the age when they can. Karl does his best to adapt. I think he does an amazing job, especially when you consider how tough Chanel must be

What else would the fashion historian Look at how Raf is installing dual studios at Dior: I haven't talked to him about it yet, but if it's working - and I would assume it is – then that's a really smart way of coping with the turnover required of him.

#### These days, are the best designers those who manage to cope with the workflow?

From what I can sense, not very many of them do cope with it; well, they cope, but it does get to them. I think it got to Nicolas at some point, I think it definitely got to Marc. Galliano said in his court appearance that it got to him.

Pressure... turnover required... ways of coping... You're not painting a very upbeat picture of what it's like to be a fashion designer today.





You have to look at the individual circumstances, because there are also character issues. If you're at Dior, you do have a huge infrastructure of people at your disposal, and I think if you ask a CEO like Sidney [Toledano, Dior CEO], he would probably say that the sense of chaos is blown out of proportion a little bit. I'm not being insensitive to the creative process – I think it's really hard and there are so many issues to deal with – but I would never think that McQueen killed himself simply because he wasn't satisfied with his business.

But when wildly creative individuals – McQueen being the obvious example – wake up one day and realise that a global company is dependent on their every move, then that must get to them.

loved talking to McQueen: I loved his thought process and the way he was able to execute ideas – from when he was working on a shoestring right up to when he had substantial resources around him. I remember being in the studio with him right before that Atlantis show, he was talking about finding a way to take hard shapes into soft shapes, you know, not just sewing them on, but to do it all in one piece of fabric or one form. It reminded me of Rudi Gernreich towards the end of his life talking to me about how to make a molded dress that didn't require a sewing machine.

#### Do you think the relentless rhythm and the lifestyle make it difficult for designers to take a step back?

Not always. Look at Margiela: he was smart to say, 'Okay, I'm 50, I'm done.

up with something conceptually really fresh. People ask me about this all the time and I'm always optimistic.

In a recent piece about artist/brand collaborations, an art critic recently wrote on *Artnet*, 'This stuff is so desperate not to make enemies, it's going to have trouble making any friends.' It struck me as a very telling quote because it could be applied to so many other fields or industries today.

Yeah, I know. I remember Raf saying to me not very long ago, 'I would like to see some stuff that really offends me, stuff that's hard to accept.' That's what I liked about Thomas Tait's show. You know, he had just won the LVMH prize, which is very establishment in a way, and then he goes off and does this bonkers collection, but I kind of liked it.

# 'In spring 2004, I said to Tom Ford: 'You should go behind a wall, never give another interview again and become the Howard Hughes of fashion...'

It's too convenient to say that the pressure gets to these people. I think McQueen was smart enough and shrewd enough to know there was the other side of the business that just demands a good handbag. Yet he probably thought as close to the way an artist thinks as anyone could in this business. Lee basically wanted to pursue things that he found stimulating and innovative; his last few collections were all about that, especially the Atlantis one. I guess, ultimately, there was a lot of sadness in McQueen's life; he was just an unhappy person.

# Were you shocked when you heard the news about his passing away, or did you sense it was inevitable?

It really shocked me. I'd seen him in London only a few months before. I

I've given everything, I'm happy to do something else with my life.' He started young and he built an amazing business... God knows what Renzo [Rosso] or what John [Galliano] do with it, but that doesn't matter – Margiela left his mark and it will go on.

# Do you think this sense of acceleration within the industry, and the workflow required to sustain it, will continue?

I don't think so; it will stay where it is. I think more designers will probably come into it. But the thing is that the big brands just dominate so much. It's really hard to imagine a young designer coming along unless they have a real concept, like Margiela in the avant-garde, or someone like Tory Burch with a lifestyle concept coming out of New York. Perhaps someone from China will come

# How easy is it today to break with the status quo?

I think that over time as a critic you get worn down, so as a creator you definitely get worn down. Everyone is talking about that. I mean, look at this girl Von Hessen that I was talking about: I like what she did because you just don't see that anymore. It's not world-shaking, it's not offensive, but I like people who put their taste out there... And the strange thing is, I fear that she won't even make it. There should be a big enough market for it, but I'm not so sure. Everything has been a little bit flattened by so much of what's going on in the industry, with the big groups dominating.

Do you think that the culture of luxury groups is here to stay? Do you think that other groups may form?

#### As a designer, are your two principal options: either attach yourself to a group, or become a small independent voice?

I hope a few more groups get formed, I think that would be great. Somebody else with some vision.

# Groups obviously bring great things with them, such as resources and infrastructure.

The big groups help with large-scale manufacturing for one thing; you can centralise a lot of that stuff, like in Navarro in Italy, where all the Kering brands get their stuff produced. I just saw Joseph Altuzarra's clothes and he's really benefitted from that. He talks all the time about how much better his manufacturing has become since Kering came on board.

went to see him in LA after he left Gucci in the spring of 2004, and he was very shaken and upset by what had happened, naturally. He was talking about making movies and I said to him, 'Why don't you do an online company? Why don't you create mini-movies for cell phones and for the web, that are pornographic. You should create these little instalment films with a 15-minute storyline and you embed all your products into it, and people subscribe to it, and its soft-core porn.' And he was like, 'Will women want to watch porn?' I was like, 'Make it more about the narrative, get great writers to do the content for you, make it is as funny as Billy Wilder, with these great storylines that you can go online and watch.'

#### I love the idea of you trying to persuade Tom Ford to become a digital version

Victoria Beckham told me that what she loves about social media is that it enables her to communicate directly with her however-many-million followers. The message doesn't get distorted by the press – and it costs nothing, unlike traditional advertising. It makes complete sense, from her perspective. But it begs the question, have the traditional fashion media still got any power?

Well, there's clearly a more general waning of the establishment in which critics have had the power – the traditional news outlets. That's happening in all fields of press: in politics, for example, look at how *Politico* has given all the newspapers a run for their money. Things like *BuzzFeed* are no longer alternative news channels; they *are* the news channels.

# 'I remember Raf saying to me not very long ago, 'I would love to see some stuff that really offends me, you know, stuff that's hard to accept.'

# We've only really touched on celebrity culture, but there was something that Tom Ford said recently that's maybe worth discussing. He said, 'These days, Rihanna's Instagram feed is more relevant than reviews or hard copies of magazines...

He's probably being a little inflammatory but there's also some truth in it. If you are a smart brand like Tom Ford – I'm using that word 'brand' again, I've thrown in the towel! – you know, they want it all. He wants to be in *Vogue* and [Harper's]Bazaar, he wants to be reviewed in the Times and The Cut, he wants to be in the Wall Street Journal and he wants to be with Rihanna.

#### To be everything for everyone.

I think so. But, you know, Tom is one to talk; he was one of the last to go online. I

#### of Burt Reynolds in Boogie Nights...

But I think that someone like Tom Ford could do that. He *should* do that. I said to him, 'You should go behind a wall and never give another interview again; become the Howard Hughes of fashion and just create these amazing things.'

# But then he went and made a traditional Oscar-winning film...

I was just trying to think of ways that Tom could combine his visual sense with what was happening in the world. At that point, there was maybe a Tom Ford website but they didn't do anything with it. I just don't think Tom is particularly comfortable in that world, so Rihanna doing her thing has fallen into his lap, which is great. But he doesn't strike me as really being particularly in control of it.

#### Do you think this direct-to-consumer communication that Victoria Beckham champions has the credibility of traditional media channels?

Probably not, but as I was saying about Tom Ford, I think the smart designer now wants to be spread across all platforms: social media, traditional press, Vogue. When Armani banned me from his show, I found it irritating and oldfashioned how journalists were making such a big fuss. I knew that at some point I would be invited back, and I could always look at it online. Plus, Armani could simply live-stream his shows, if he wanted – as Ms Beckham says – to talk directly to his consumers. But he is old school enough to probably want to have the journalists there; he wants to have the endorsements and the reviews, he wants that press coverage.

# As the fashion industry has basically become a brand itself, a lot of its 'players' have bigger media profiles – yourself included.

I don't even think about it, and I don't want to. Look at [New York Times street fashion photographer] Bill Cunningham: Bill works by himself and he doesn't want to be bothered by people, but after that movie came out about him [Bill Cunningham New York], people would come up to him and interfere with what he was doing. I understand that: during the shows, people will want to talk to me – thank God they don't want to take my picture. You know, Anna and all the others are so out there in the public eye that I just find it weird.

But you must be aware that over the years you've reached this inner sanc-

In the year after you left the *Times*, have there been instances, such as John Galliano's return at Margiela, or the changes at Gucci, when you felt frustrated not to have a platform to voice your thoughts?

It was more a question of, 'Phew, I don't have to think about that.' They banned me from Gucci because I wrote that she wasn't strong enough for them. And I don't think people were as critical of John's collection as they should have been. I think they gave him a bit of a pass on that one. I always allow for first collections to be a work-in-progress, but that was a little bit too much of a work-in-progress, and people didn't say it.

Let's talk about your move to *The Cut*. By the time people read this, you'll have done your first season reviewing

when I'd be slamming his show: I'd go from 'conical bra-cups' to 'Mr Ford said' in the same sentence. I tried to avoid saying it, and just write 'he'. But now if I want to say 'Tom', and it's appropriate in the context, then I can.

We talked earlier about your blanket protection from the *Times'* publishers. Will that change now you're at *New York*, a magazine that like any other relies on advertising revenue?

I don't know yet, we haven't talked about it; we'll just have to cross that bridge when we get to it. I mean, no one has said to me, 'You have to be careful what you say'. I just know I don't want anything that's snarky, but that's my own personal choice. I am in no mood to write anything snarky, I don't think that's interesting anymore.

# 'I never think about my 'media profile', and I don't want to. You know, Anna and the others are so out there in the public eye that I just find it weird.'

#### tum of the fashion world?

I think that where I am is a direct function of the *New York Times* – and I'm happy to say that it was the *Times*. I think I did what you're supposed to do as a *Times* reporter: cover your beat.

# So much of this conversation has come across as a love letter to the *Times*; are there moments when you miss it?

I just wish I'd left earlier so my boyfriend and I could have spent more time together, in a calmer environment – without me working, frankly. Right now, I really want to write this fashion at the *Times* book, and if I were still at the paper, it would be really hard to do, because of the daily demands of the shows and everything. Anyway, Vanessa [Friedman, Horyn's replacement] does a really good job writing the show reviews.

#### shows with New York magazine.

I'm really happy to be doing the shows again, and I think that *The Cut* is a good thing because it is a different platform to the *Times*. I was over there today and I was saying, 'So, I don't have any language restrictions like at the *Times*, right? And they were like, 'Shit', 'fuck', 'write whatever you like.' I mean, you don't want to go overboard but you want to have fresh, crisp interesting language. You can't use the word 'pissed' at the *Times*. Or 'junkie'. And I won't have to refer to people as 'Mr Smith' again.

These days, that feels almost like an affectation, verging on kitsch. It makes me wince to read about 'Mr Ford' in the *New York Times*. In my eyes, he's Tom Ford, or Ford. Who are we kidding?

It was strange to write all that, especially

# e. Do you ever feel disillusioned with e shows writing about fashion?

Sometimes, usually at the end of the fashion weeks. You're overwhelmed, and there's a lot of bullshit in fashion so you end up feeling like a tool in the business. But then you go back to your life making gingerbread. But then, as Suzy always says, you see another great show and you get recharged.

# Do you have a piece that you feel most proud of having written?

Probably, but I can't think of it, [laughs] there have been so many! The moments I am proudest of are when I've really spent time with a designer I didn't know, and I've learnt about them – their way of working, their way of thinking, what they bring to fashion. The big piece I did on Raf was one of my favourite stories.

He totally intimidated me before I'd met him. I thought he was so brilliant at being able to say on a runway what would take me forever to say. His control over his self-expression was amazing and I was convinced that I would go backstage and just say something stupid like, 'I love the colours!' So going to Belgium and talking to him, as anyone who's talked to him knows, was a really great experience. He is a very emotional person and a romantic designer, and I

will always think about him in that way. Other than Raf, I feel privileged to have got to know Bill Blass, and I've loved the conversations I've had with Karl. I will always remember sitting out on his patio in Biarritz at midnight – Karl in his sweater and high collar – talking about his father in post-war Germany when the Mark was devalued, and him coming home and having no money. Other than that, there are people I wish I'd gone out of my way to meet before

they died - Coco Chanel, for one.

### Have you ever been tempted to take on a magazine editorship?

No, I'd be terrible. Not me. I like writing, I like being out there.

# Last question, what do you know now about fashion that you didn't when you started writing at the *Detroit News*?

Hmmm, [whispers] how much money is made in it! Never underestimate that.

- 1. Diana Trilling (1905-1996) was an American literary critic and author. A member of a left-wing circle of writers, thinkers and polemicists from the 1930s to '50s known as the 'New York Intellectuals' which included her husband Lionel Trilling alongside Saul Bellow, Hannah Arendt and Susan Sontag Trilling's writing and literary criticism was published in titles such as the *New Yorker*, the *Atlantic* and the *Nation*. Martin Amis described meeting her akin to stepping into the "den of a literary lioness."
- 2. Praised by William Faulkner as the "best writer of his generation", the American novelist Thomas Wolfe (1900-1938) is known for mixing poetic and impressionistic prose with the autobiographic in novels such as *Look Homeward*, *Angel* and *The October Fair*. His writing analysed America during the period in which he wrote, and went on to influence the likes of Jack Kerouac and Philip Roth.
- 3. Over the course of her 30-year career, the Washington Post's Fashion Editor, Nina Hyde (1933-1990) was respected for her earnest reportage of the sociological significance of trends, and her notorious "Ins and Outs" column, which appeared in the paper

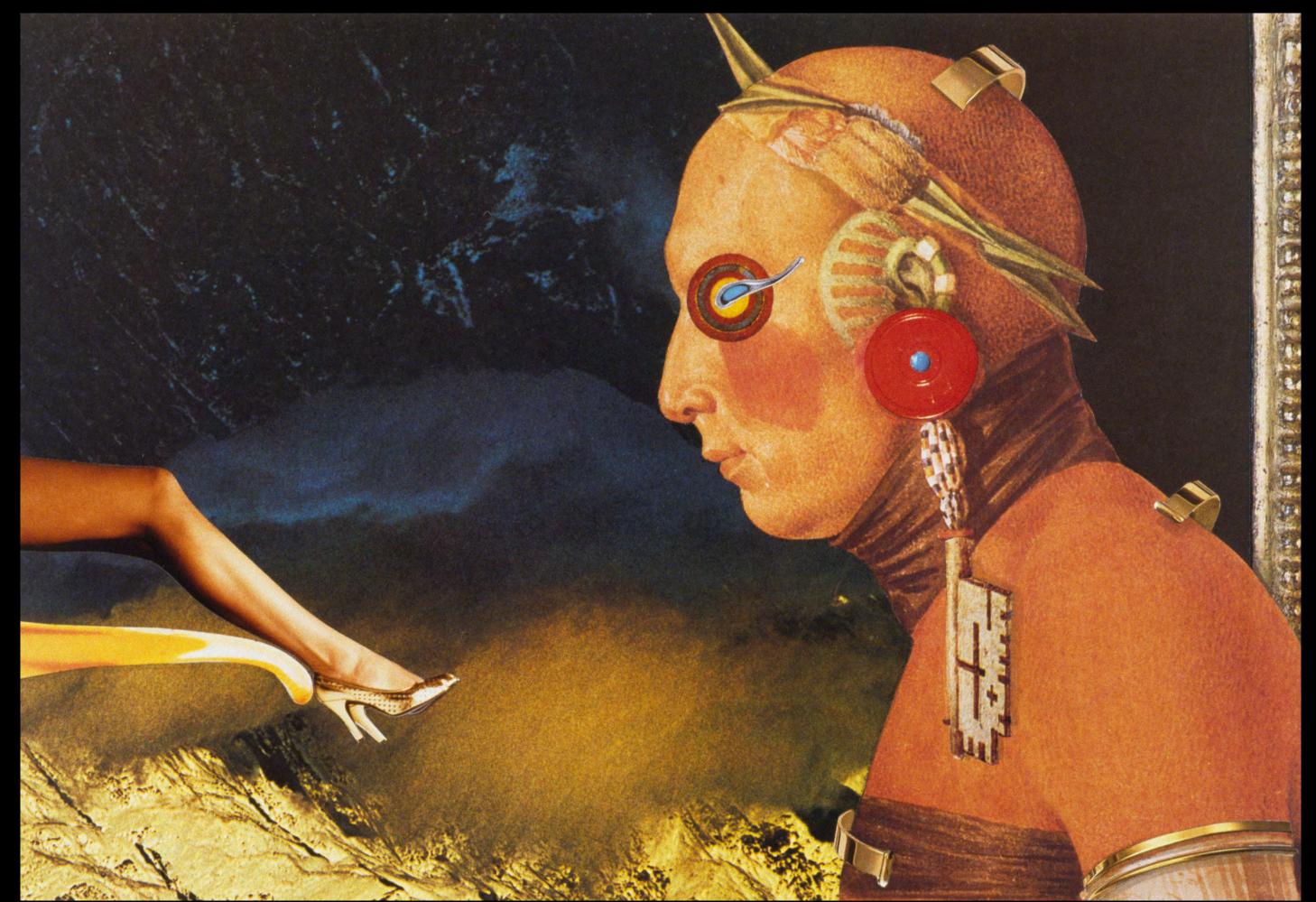
- every New Year's Day, covering politics and society in addition to fashion.
- 4. Arnold Scaasi is a Canadian fashion designer and couturier that has dressed First Ladies such as Mamie Eisenhower, Barbara Bush, Jacqueline Kennedy, and actresses like Elizabeth Taylor and Sophia Loren. After studying at the Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture in Paris, Scaasi moved to New York in the 1950s to set up his own label specialising in glamorous eveningwear. Scaasi was presented with a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Council of the Fashion Designers of America in 1996.
- 5. Founded in 1962, La Grenouille is a storied French restaurant in New York's Upper East Side, that after its launch became a hotspot for film stars and singers such as Frank Sinatra, Richard Burton, John Wayne, David Bowie and Woody Allen, and members of fashion's elite like Diana Vreeland and Yves Saint Laurent.
- 6. Ben Bradlee (1921-2014) was the Executive Editor of the *Washington Post* from 1968 to 1991. He became a national figure during Richard Nixon's presidency as he oversaw the publication of Bob Woodward and Carl Bern-

- stein's stories documenting the Watergate scandal.
- 7. Gloria Emerson (1929-2004) was an American author, journalist and New York Times war correspondent, originally hired in 1957 to work on the women's pages of the newspaper. Over her career, Emerson wrote for publications including Vogue, Playboy and Rolling Stone, and her book Winners and Losers, an account of her experiences covering the Vietnam War, won a National Book Award in 1978.
- 8. Paul Poiret (1879-1944) was a legendary French couturier who pioneered draping at a time when women were still expected to wear corsets. He is credited as the designer of the hobble skirt and the harem pant, and having commissioned Edward Steichen to photograph his designs in 1911, is also held responsible for what can be considered the first modern fashion photography shoot. As such, Poiret was known during his lifetime as 'The King of Fashion' in America, and simply as 'Le Magnifique' in France.
- 9. Style Editor for Vogue, Harper's Bazaar and the New York Times Magazine, Carrie Donovan (1928-2001) was known as much for her on-point fash-

- ion reporting as for her oversized glasses and for dressing entirely in black. After her retirement, she became widely recognised for her appearances in Old Navy commercials, where she wore her trademark glasses and declared the merchandise "Fabulous!"
- 10. As a young investigative journalist for the Washington Post, Bob Woodward did much of the original news reporting on the Watergate scandal the revelation of numerous clandestine and illegal activities of the Nixon administration, such as bugging the offices of political rivals and the harassment of activist groups by the CIA and FBI. Today, Woodward remains at the Washington Post, as Associate Editor, and has authored 16 books on American politics.
- 11. As the founder and Editor-in-Chief of the Hollywood gossip and entertainment website *Deadline* a daily, online rendition of *LA Weekly*'s 'Deadline Hollywood' column Nikki Finke is regarded as Hollywood's most powerful and uncompromising journalist. Finke has also written for the *New York Times, Vanity Fair* and the *Washington Post*, and in 2013, left *Deadline* with the view of launching her own eponymous site.

Retrospective Roman Cieslewicz





Previous page: Play-boy de la Sixtine

This page: Grand Gourou



Lapasse



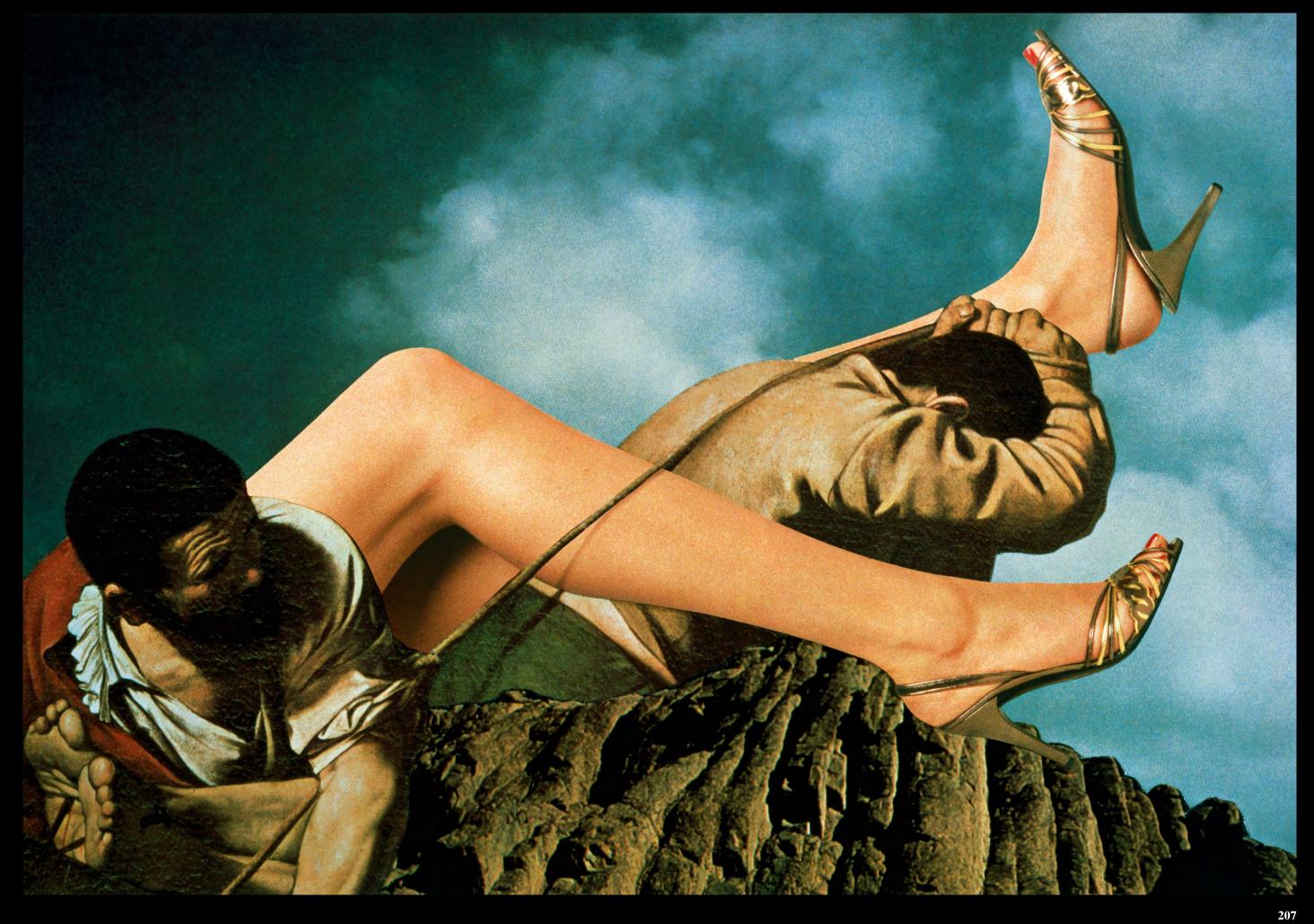
Les moines



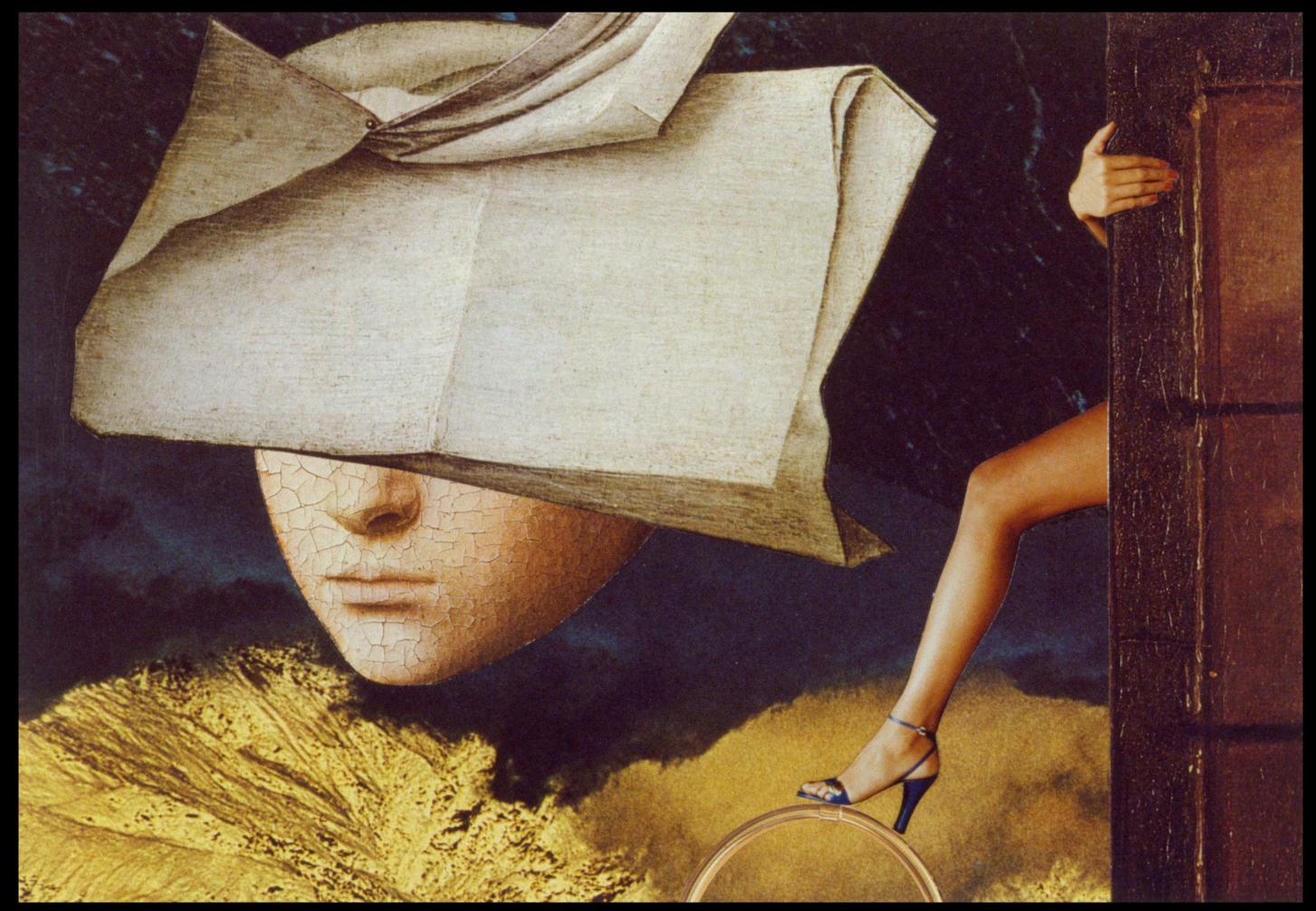




La Gulliver



Forts des halles



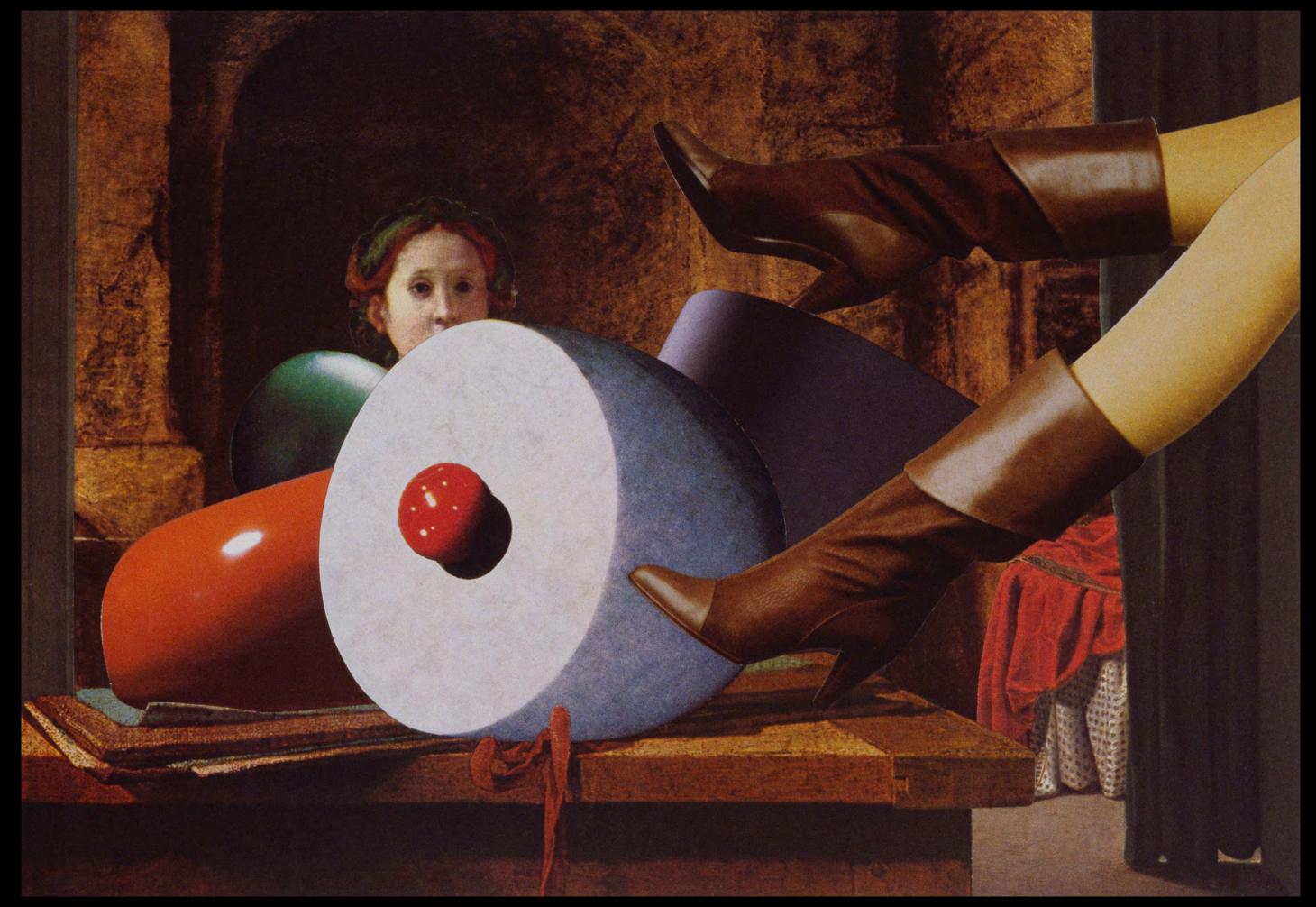
Lanonne



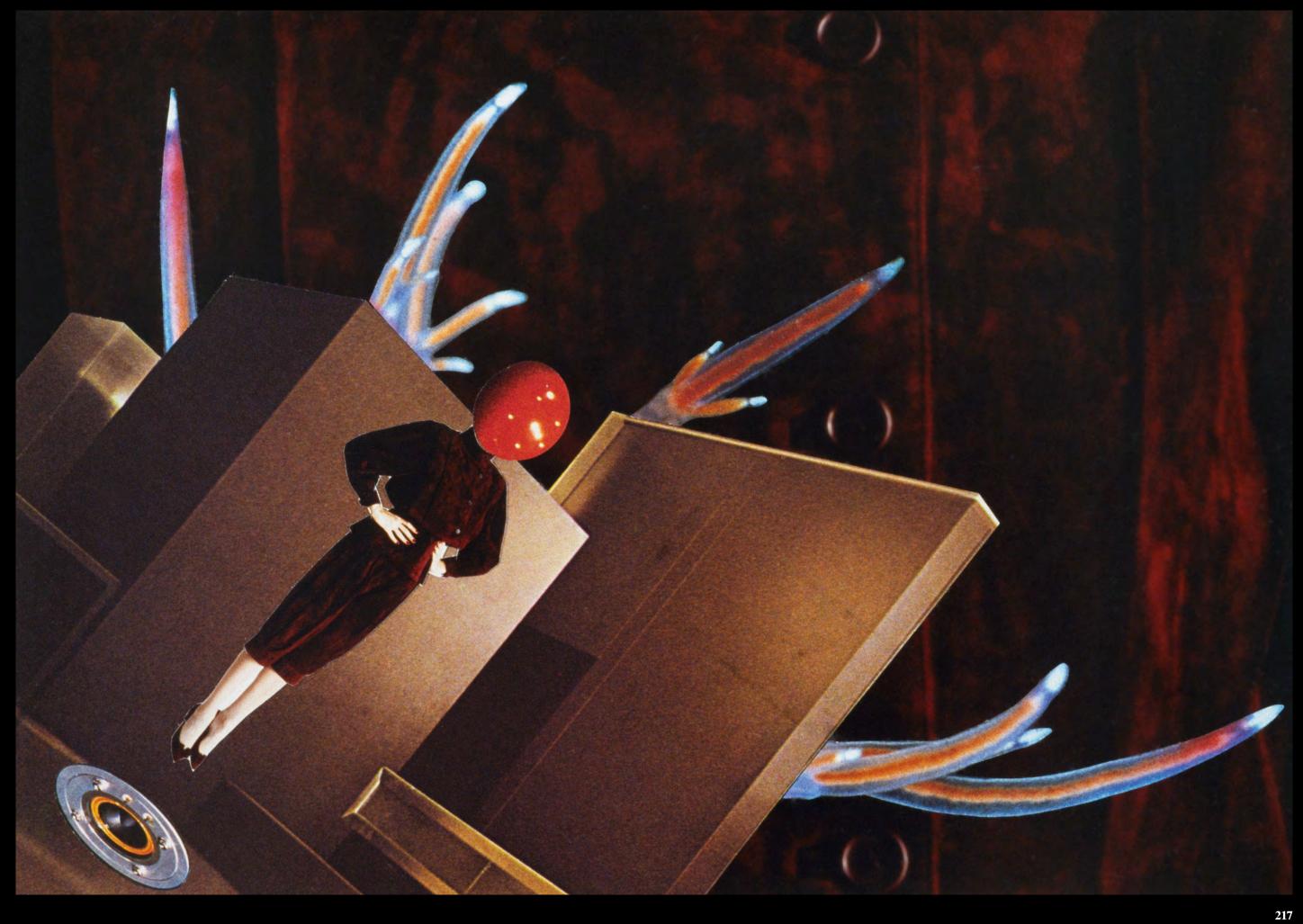
La chute



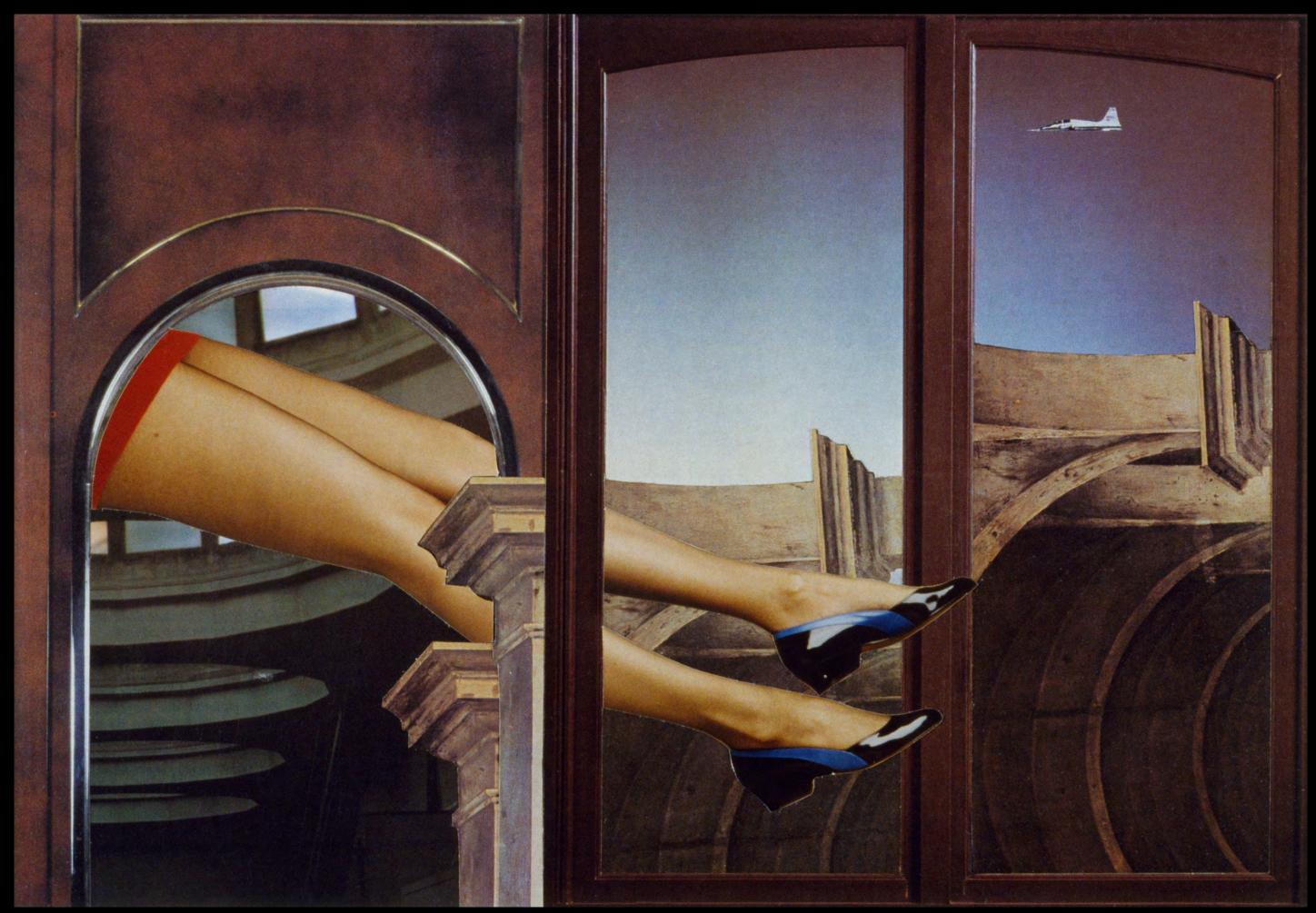
Lesocle



Nature morte



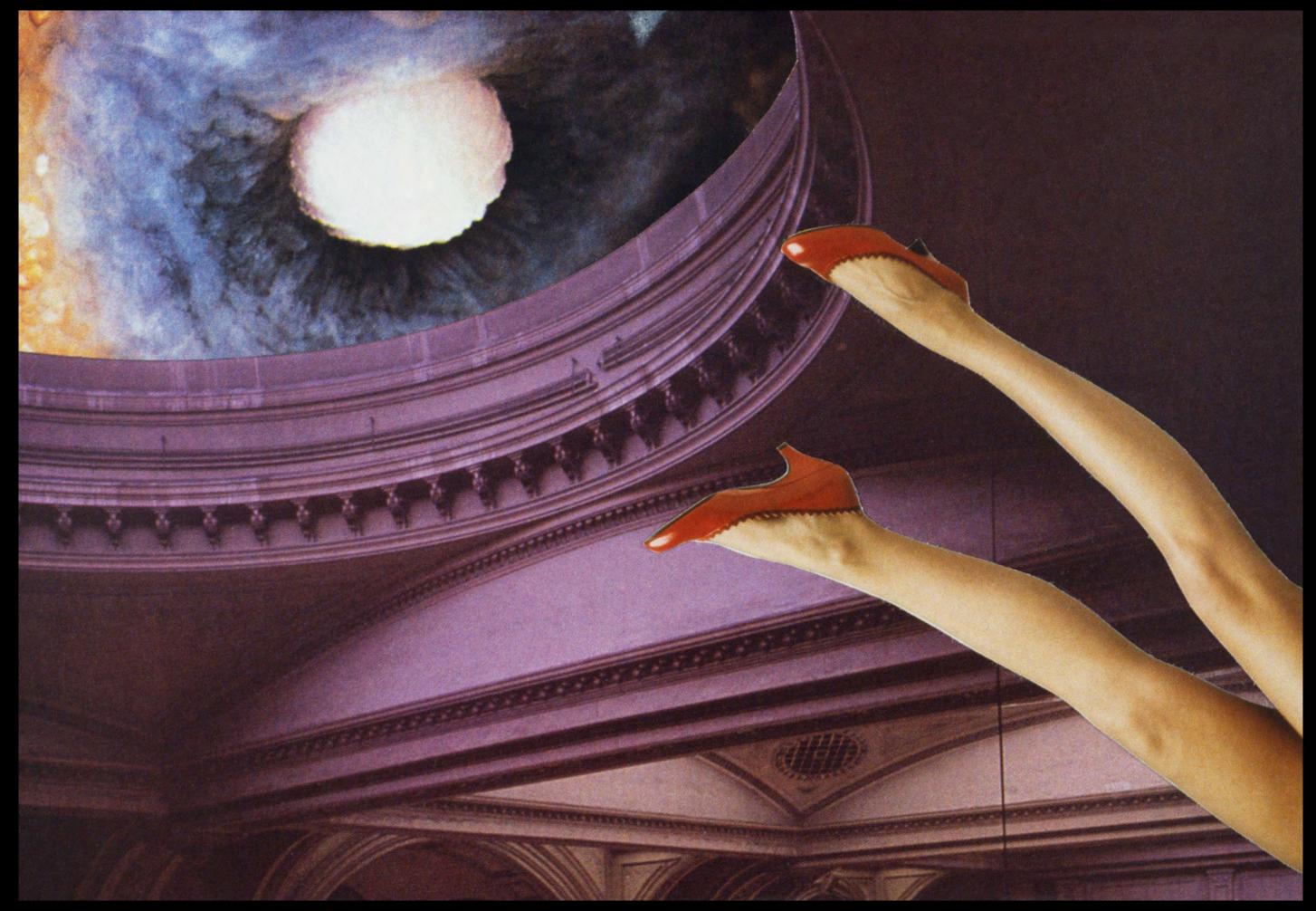
Départ



Triple fenêtre



Sol-Air



Retrospective Roman Cieslewicz

Born in 1930 in Lwòw, after studying at the then Polish city's School of Artistic Industry, Roman Cieslewicz moved to Krakòw at the tail end of the 1940s to enrol at its Academy of Fine Arts. There, under the tutelage of George Karolak, a graphic artist who shunned the state sanction aesthetic of socialist realism, Cieslewicz was encouraged to create completely new modes of expression unencumbered by the aesthetic mores of the Iron Curtain. Inspired by the Blok Group, a revolutionary association of poets, typographers and montagists, and avant-garde artists such as Mieczyslaw Berman, Tadeusz Kantor and Ludwik Gardowski – at a time he has likened to living in a "cultural desert" - Cieslewicz developed a visual language that employed the collage techniques of Alexander Rodchenko

who initially commissioned him to design photomontages to illustrate their features

Such was his acute eye for typography, photography and the nuances of composition, Cieslewicz went on to succeed Knapp as *Elle*'s art director in 1965 – a key moment in a career that saw the Polish *affichiste* [poster-artist] also design catalogues and posters for the Pompidou Center in the same decade. Having become a naturalised French citizen in 1971, Cieslewicz began teaching at the city's Ecole Superieure d'Arts Graphiques Penninghen a couple of years later, where he left an indelible impression upon his alumni – to the extent that one of them commissioned his master to create the advertising campaigns for Charles Jourdan in one of his early jobs after graduating.

south of Paris, and passed away in 1996 following a career that was as prolific as it was diverse; one which garnered a huge number of awards, and inspired countless others. Here his widow, Chantal Petit-Cieslewicz, is joined by Frank Salier – the Penninghen student who commissioned Cieslewicz to create the Charles Jourdan campaigns – and *System*'s Thomas Lenthal, a fellow Penninghen graduate, to discuss the dynamic between Cieslewicz's avantgarde aesthetic and the constrains of commerce.

Thomas Lenthal: Frank, before we discuss your work with Roman for Charles Jourdan, I have some questions about what the brand meant at that time to put everything into context. Something that is extraordinary in the his-

# 'We needed something suitably crazy to break away from Guy Bourdin's work. So pretty quickly we thought, 'Well, what about Roman?''

and John Heartfield to personal fixations of circles, hands, eyes, legs and lips. It was a graphic style that imbued elements of the Soviet constructivists with the free associations of the Surrealists, one open to accidents and semiotic happenstance.

Having worked at a Polish propaganda agency and art directed *Ti y Ja*, a fashion magazine which he formatted along the lines of its Western equivalents like *Elle* – in 1963 Cieslewicz moved to Europe, eager to see how his work would stand up against its "neon lights." Working from a studio in suburban Paris, he began refining his aesthetic, with its uncanny compositional imbalances and dialogue between the hand-made and the mechanical. He soon caught the attention of Peter Knapp, the then art director of *Elle*,

As the first shoe designer to advertise in fashion magazines back in the 1930s, Charles Jourdan more than recognised the importance of imagery to marketing their signature stilettos – over the course of 15 years, the brand's collaborations with Guy Bourdin led to some of the most iconic fashion photography ever made. As such, to immediately follow in Bourdin's footsteps could have been an especially intimidating brief. Yet Cieslewicz proved to be an inspired choice, as the Polish artist's appropriation of paintings by the Old Masters, and playful use of composition and scale, resulted in some of the most uniquely arresting – and certainly leftfield-imagery to ever be commissioned by a fashion brand.

Cieslewicz worked his magic from a small atelier in Malakoff, a suburb

#### tory of Jourdan was their collaboration with Guy Bourdin. How did you begin working with Jourdan? You were one of Roman's students, right?

Frank Salier: Yes, I was one of Roman's pupils. I graduated from Penninghen, top of my class; I can't remember what year. I got very good marks with Roman. But I was into typography – I'd chosen Paul Gabor¹ to be my thesis lecturer, and Roman was already very much in demand by so many others. Then I started at M.A.F.I.A.²

# TL: Did they still have [the supermarket chain] Prisunic as a client then at M.A.F.I.A.?

FS: No, they had Yves Saint Laurent and Absorba; they were the big ones at the time. They also had Les 3 Suisses<sup>3</sup>. At that time – this was the funny

thing at M.A.F.I.A.—to test a new photographer they would give them Les 3 Suisses press pack, which was systematically photographed against a white background in black and white. So, the first time I worked with Paolo Roversi, who had just arrived from Italy, he too had to do the press pack for Les 3 Suisses! It was funny—everyone had to start like that. It's a good learning process; I stayed there for three and a half years and then I wanted a change. I looked for work and lots of different contracts with various agencies. I chose the one that did the most different things.

#### TL: And what was it called?

FS: Ketchum. And when I arrived, the guy had started prospecting like crazy and he was only looking for fashion contracts. And we got Charles Jourdan...

# TL: Did you have to pitch to get Jourdan? Whose client were they?

FS: No I don't think so; the guy came and asked the agency boss if he could do it. We knew we had to do something really good in the wake of Bourdin's work. What could we do to break from Bourdin's imagery? I'd met him at M.A.F.I.A. in 1980, but I didn't know why Bourdin was no longer doing Jourdan... It was strange.

#### TL: So you ended up questioning yourself, saying, 'Okay, how am I going to follow Bourdin?'

FS: Exactly. We needed something suitably crazy to break away from Bourdin, whose work was marvellous of course—but something photographic wasn't really an option. So pretty quickly we thought, well, 'What about Roman?'

# TL: So just to elaborate here, Roman went off and did his own thing – were you in contact with him then to develop the concept?

FS: No, I simply told him I thought it should be done with old works of art.

#### TL: And why did you think that?

FS: It was ideal for collage, but also I liked the discrepancy. I had to photograph all the legs and everything here. So I did the photos with a leg photographer and then I gave them to him. We did different leg movements so he had enough materials to play around with in the collages. We decided to start mainly with Old Masters, to go with the Renaissance, with Michelangelo etc... and then later we did something more modern – that was for a second campaign. We did two seasons together.

# 'We decided to keep the space for the shoe inside the image, so the shoe would be a detail within. It was quite modest in the world of advertising.'

# TL: And at the time were you interested in Charles Jourdan?

FS: Yes, of course, because of Guy Bourdin.

#### TL: Was it a luxury brand or a mainstream brand then? Expensive or cheap?

FS: It had always been a pretty luxurious brand. Charles Jourdan's speciality had always been the heel – that was their strength and their trademark. The Jourdan heeled pump was a classic – it was the Louboutin of its day. Of course, that was before the '80s, when things started changing and they lost their direction... they did a design for a shoe that was more mainstream and it totally ruined the brand. They launched a ready-to-wear line which was in a way nonsense; it wasn't their craft.

Because he did images, they were pictorial but with a craziness that was ultra-interesting and coupled with such modernity. So I called him and asked if he wanted to do the Jourdan campaign, and he said yes straight away, and I think he was very happy to do it. He proposed two images – the Indian and the Michelangelo – which we showed as mock-ups to Jourdan.

# TL: And they understood the work straight away?

FS: Yes. With Roman we'd decided to keep the space for the shoe inside the image in relation to the Bourdin campaign. It's very interesting keeping the scale of the shoe – and it's quite modest in the world of advertising. We wanted to maintain that relationship; so the shoe would be a detail within.

#### TL: Why did it end?

FS: Because they didn't want to get stuck with just one artist, they wanted to keep evolving. I did other things afterwards. I did something with a Belgian guy who did things with Polaroids, collages, which was kind of at the same time as when Hockney was doing his Polaroids.

# TL: The two campaigns generated a large variety of images though. When Roman presented his first season to Jourdan, were they happy?

FS: Yes, it was very successful. We won lots of awards. It was wonderful.

# TL: I think it's one of the most beautiful ad campaigns of its time. Did Roman meet with Jourdan?

FS: No not all, it was me who took the

Retrospective Roman Cieslewicz

mock-ups to them. I went to Malakoff [a suburb south of Paris] to see Roman.

**TL: Did he have** *carte blanche?* FS: Yes of course.

# TL: So for two seasons you saw Roman, but only for the project?

FS: Yes, only for that. I was quite intimidated to be in front of my former teacher. I was young. I was just starting out then—I was 27 years old. I'd spent three years at M.A.F.I.A. where I'd been more of an assistant. He was very kind but he was still my teacher and I was very respectful of him and his work.

#### TL: This is a question for both of you, Frank and Chantal. We know that Roman had worked at *Elle* with Peter Knapp – what was his relationship

a magazine that was called *Ty i Ja* [You and Me]. He really liked that.

# TL: Did you have to present Roman's work before you started work on the Jourdan campaign?

FS: Yes, of course. He'd done lots of things, but we still had to present his work—that's normal though. I mean he wasn't super well known in that milieu. CPC: He was starting to become well known. It was a time that was very prolific for him. I remember at the time he didn't stop, his posters, catalogues, books, expositions of his own work and so on...

# TL: Did Roman know who Charles Jourdan was?

FS: Yes. It was a big brand and a good one. And he knew Bourdin's work.

things out and then there was no question of throwing anything away. He just amassed everything; I could never throw anything away.

# TL: Was he methodical in his organisation of everything?

CPC: Oh yes, very much so. He was like a computer. I gave his archives to the IMEC [Institut Mémoire de l'édition Contemporaine] where everything is visible. There's going to be a big exhibition at the Musée des Arts Décorifs in Paris, in 2016 using his archives. They are truly incredible – I also donated some of it to the modern art museum in Grenoble.

# TL: Do you know, for example with a subject like this, how he would work on it? Was he instantly inspired?

# 'Sometimes he would sign his work if it appeared in the press. For him that was the oeuvre. He was more interested in the work that was shared.'

# with fashion and photography of that nature? Because 80 percent of his work is more cultural than commercial...

Chantal Petit-Cieslewicz: For him it was the same. He could do both at once without any problem. He worked for quite a long time at *Elle* – he was artistic director at one point – and then at M.A.F.I.A. he did work for Galeries Lafayette. He also worked for *Vogue*. At *Elle* he worked with Peter Knapp for a while, and at *Vogue* with Antoine Kieffer, the artistic director. But it was at *Elle* he really made a mark.

#### TL: So he liked fashion then?

CPC: He didn't make any particular hierarchical distinction in the things he did. He started in that domain when he arrived in Paris, and even back in Poland where he'd worked on

#### TL: Did he admire it?

CPC: Yes. I'm pretty sure that he worked with Bourdin at *Elle* or *Vogue* too.

# TL: Were the Jourdan images used outside of women's magazines, on posters?

FS: No. They were in all the fashion magazines though.

# TL: So, Chantal, how did he amass his iconography, these cutout images?

CPC: He had incredible archives. He had files with themes and he had entire walls for these archives.

# TL: Did they come from magazines, books...?

CPC: Everywhere, there were piles of magazines everywhere – his studio was invaded by magazines. He cut

FS: I think he did the project quickly. Roman was into photomontages because they were part of his personal work too, so then he re-used the idea for Jourdan. It came from a similar series that he was doing at the time...

# TL: The images are so complex – they draw us into a rarefied culture that few people refer to. At the time you get the impression that it would have been done without asking too many questions.

FS: Well it was only Jourdan who did it. I'm talking about adverts. For editorials there were totally crazy things. There were also daring advertisements done at M.A.F.I.A. for Saint Laurent.

# TL: When you say he worked quickly, what is quickly for a collage like that? FS: I don't know, a day?

#### TL: And the size?

CPC: They came in different sizes.

# TL: Did he ever change the size of the elements he'd cut out? Did he ever enlarge them?

CPC: No, not when they were photomontages – they were almost always practically the original elements. When he worked in black and white, for his montages or for his poster maquettes, he used to play around with them more – transform the elements and change the size.

FS: Just looking at the photos I'd taken with the photographer, when you look at the light it's completely integrated, it's super well done. So even in his research he had to find just the right light according to the leg he'd chosen.

# TL: And when he delivered it to you was there a story to go with it? He gave it a title, so I guess maybe there was – Roman spoke a lot didn't he...

FS: Yes, but he didn't sell his thing. TL: No that's not what I meant... FS: He'd make a joke...

CPC: He collected quotes, lots of them and would invent titles – he loved doing that, even before he had started working on a piece. He often made a montage because of a title he already had.

# TL: That corresponds with the surrealist school, with the cadavre exquise<sup>4</sup> and so on... Do you have any anecdotes

#### you could share with us?

CPC: What I can tell you is that at that time he was working very hard; he was very prolific. And he worked alone. For example the Beaubourg [The Pompidou Centre] catalogue, he did on his own. He worked all night. I would sometimes help him. The texts would come on rolls of paper and we had to stick them onto cardboard. He did everything himself. He had an assistant occasionally.

#### TL: Did he cut using scissors?

CPC: Yes always scissors and Kleer Tak, which damaged the original copies terribly. But he wasn't interested in the originals; it was the final print that interested him. Roman would put the originals to the side but if they appeared in the press sometimes he would cut them out, put them in a frame and sign them. He'd sign the prints. For him that was the oeuvre. He was more interested by the work that was shared.

# TL: Frank, after Jourdan did you ever work with Roman again?

FS: No. But it's hard to use the same style for another brand.

# TL: And did he have any other fashion clients after that?

CPC: He did something for Vuitton. Not a campaign, but he did a catalogue which had images, photomontages. He also did a campaign for Galeries Lafayette for which he he took a small hand-drawn sketch and blew it up—that was fun. No other fashion people after that though. He worked a lot in every possible direction. He was prolific. But at the same time you didn't really notice that he partied too. He wasn't obsessed. He enjoyed it.

FS: [To Chantal] How old was he when he died?

CPC: Sixty-six. He was young. It was in 1996, nearly 20 years ago. [To Frank] He was very vibrant, very fun – I don't know if you found him funny – but he was very funny.

FS: Yes. I was intimidated by him but he always had something kind to say. He was super sophisticated which went perfectly with his image and his work.

CPC: I've never met anyone like him since, he was extremely joyous but at the same time very nostalgic. He went from one emotion to the other; it's a very Slavic characteristic.

#### TL: Were you one of his pupils?

CPC: No, not at all. I met him at a party in 1979. And I lived with him from 1980 onwards. For me, his work doesn't age. Every time I see it in an exhibition, it remains so fresh and alive, very modern and current. He was so natural in his work – he had just the right balance. Towards the end it became more radical and political. During his lifetime, he set in motion a whole school of design. Today, I still see images which are directly influenced by his work.

- 1. Paul Gabor (1913–1992) was a Hungarian graphic designer known for his typographic approach and poster compositions often informed by Bauhaus architecture.
- 2. M.A.F.I.A. is a well-regarded Parisian advertising agency founded in 1968. In the early 1970s, M.A.F.I.A. created a series of groundbreaking ad-

vertisements for the French supermarket Prisunic, and in addition to Cieslewicz, their collaborators included the likes Helmut Newton, Sarah Moon and the interior designer Andrée Putman. Best known for the 1977 advertising campaigns for Yves Saint Laurent's Opium and Rive Gauche fragrances, the agency was sold to BD-DP in 1986.

- 3. Les 3 Suisses is a French mail order company founded in 1932 that specializes in the sale of make-up, clothes, homeware and electronics.
- 4. Cadavre exquise refers to a Surrealist technique of assembling a collection of words or images. The method involves collaborators making contributions (concealed from previous of-

ferings) to compose a sequence or image. The name itself was coined from the phrase, "Le cadavre exquis boira le vin nouveau" – the first sentence created when the Surrealists employed the technique at André Breton's Paris home.

# We literally cook up the colours in a big pot.

Bali Barret takes us inside the Hermès colour kitchen.

By Thomas Lenthal Photographs by Antoine Seiter



Hermès launched its first carré [silk scarf] in 1937, following a century of making leather harnesses and bridles for European nobility. Featuring a group of woman playing a board game around a table, the Jeu des Omnibus et Dames Blanches scarf marked the beginning of a new adventure for Hermès: colour. This was a proposition that would require its own factory, established near Lyon the same year, and a product offering that would become as emblematic of Hermès as its iconic orange boxes.

Besides the iconic orange of the boxes, Hermès' approach to colour is far from straightforward. Over 75,000 colours are held in their records, each of which came into being through a process as complex as it is kaleidoscopic; relying as much on the subjective interlabel in 1999). Inviting *System* into her office and studio, high above Hermès legendary flagship store on Paris' rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, she discusses the complexities and contradictions of an industrial process determined by intuition, why certain colours are popular in certain countries, and how we are now entering a cycle of non-colour.

As the Artistic Director of the Women's Universe at Hermès, you are responsible for the *carrés* – the iconic silk scarves - which are celebrated not only for their inimitable designs but also for their arresting use of colour. Please could you explain the process – how do these colours come into being?

Seventy-five thousand colours have been created since we started printing Hermès scarves in 1937. 75,000! With at so many things without even really knowing why – I guess I'm searching for an emotional reaction.

#### And these references could be photographs, paintings or fabrics, right?

Exactly. Even architecture – anything visual. I question everything that has caught my attention. For the silks, we have to work with a very wide spectrum of colours because we produce 12 different colour ways per design, and there are around 30 artworks.

#### So that's 360 colourways per season?

Yes. Sometimes there are up to forty printing frames on a scarf, 40 shades of colour, so you really do need an enormous wealth of colours. Given that the spectrum is so vast — there are always blues, greens, yellows and reds – the

# '75,000 colours have been created since we started printing Hermès scarves in 1937. With every season the spectrum broadens; it's verging on infinity.'

pretations of the human eye as they do on the science of colour theory indeed, you'd be hard pressed to find a Pantone colour card in this most Borgesian of archives.

Eighty years on, Hermès carrés now account for 15 percent of the company's €945 million revenue. Such is the house's consummate use of colour, it is estimated that one of their silk scarves are sold somewhere in the world every 25 seconds. Overseeing this product division which releases four collections of 30 designs every season - and reissue classics such as the Brides de Gala in multiple colourways – is Bali Barret, the house's wonderfully titled Artistic Director of the Women's Universe at Hermès (Barret had previously been a design assistant at several Parisian fashion houses before launching her own

every season and every new colour, the spectrum broadens. It's almost something verging on infinity, it's crazy. The colourists will look to find whether the colours in the scales we propose to them already exist, but it's rare that a colour is ever exactly the same - we're obviously working with subtlety here, in nuances of millimetres. If we need a slightly redder red, we'll make it. We work on the creation of new colours and colour scales around a year and half before a collection comes out, to the rhythm of two collections per year. In the beginning, the process of colour creation is very intuitive; I give myself a few days to do nothing but research images and colour ambiances. It's a process that's anything but cerebral. I look through all of my book archives, I visit other bookshops, and I just go for walks. I look question is, which specific ones? Eventually it becomes a question of how to put the colours together. What harmonies am I drawn to? I attempt to understand why a certain combination interests or pleases me. Afterwards, I start to group things together by family.

#### What do you mean by 'families'?

Chromatic¹ families. I put things together, stop, take a look at them, think again and reassemble them. This happens several times. There are things that remain monochrome and others that are very multi-coloured, and progressively the options are reduced and I start to analyse what I've created. Is it modern, flat, synthetic, handcrafted? Is it bright, faded, greyish, nightish... what's it all about? It's not just about the colours, but the mood; the atmosphere. It's a





work I share with my right-hand man within the house's silk *métier* [artisanal department]. Generally, we do four or five colour cards. Sometimes they will take us nowhere but we'll still allow ourselves the opportunity to explore things –nothing is forbidden. Then, we'll make a fairly strict decision based on the spirit and how the colours are going to be used, and pass it onto the attention and expertise of the colourists.

# At this point is it a colour scale or a mood-board?

It's much more precise than a moodboard. It's like a chest of drawers containing manuals for each of the colours or images that explain why I like a certain image, composition, or interaction of colours. At this point, we've started to establish a colour scale; we've drawings and colours for the season. I should also probably talk about the 'Comité de Couleur'; it's a very serious affair here.

#### Yes, what's that?

At the time of Jean-Louis Dumas<sup>2</sup>, a committee for colour was created which worked under his supervision in collaboration with the Lyon colourist team. For many years, Jean-Louis was the artistic director of the *carrés* and he oversaw the draughtsmen, artists and colourists in Lyon. To work on the colours, he established a committee which included Leïla Menchari<sup>3</sup>, the house's 'high priestess of colour', and Tan Giudicelli, a former ready-to-wear designer at Hermès in the 1980s. When Pierre-Alexis Dumas took over from his father to become Artistic Director

and he follows up with his own expertise. Just like his father and grandfather before him, Pierre-Alexis has a particular affection and great eye for scarves and colours. He is what I'd call a colour addict too.

So there is still an informal committee of sorts, with no absolute guardian over the chromatic field. You'd almost expect there to be – many houses have house colour scales which are not infinitely adaptable.

It's an in-house joke to say 'Hermès Red', because we don't even agree on what the Hermès Red is! It's amusing, but it's also quite revealing. Everyone here has their own personal vision of what that red would be. Even the Hermès orange box undoubtedly has 12 different oranges – it's always much more



selected images for each story and given names to every harmony.

# How does your work with colour influence the rest of the house?

There's no obligation for anyone to take from our work, but if someone asks for our colours, we share them, *voilà*!

# So there is no real formal presentation of colours that you share with all the departments, right?

No. Each internal *métier* has its own voice, even if we do happen to share our inspirations. Creation at Hermès is about freedom.

#### So how do they find out?

I invite them to view our work. We ask the silk colourists, who are based in Lyon, to come up to Paris and share the of Hermès, he handed Leïla the baton and she still presides over this 'Comité de Couleur'. Leïla has an extraordinary eye and a huge knowledge of colour, and she was initially quite patronising towards me, saying things like; 'Who is this young whippersnapper trying to tell me about colour?' I eventually got her blessing, and we get on well together, even though my way of working with colour isn't the same as hers everyone has their own methods. These days, she still has an open invitation for our Tuesday morning colour meetings, and occasionally comes by; she still has that impressive 'perspective', it's in her blood. When she's here we'll smoke a cigarette, drink some coffee and look at the *carrés* together. Pierre-Alexis also comes by all the time: I share the colour scale with him every season,

defined on paper than on silk. There are really no limits here. In the whole process there's a crazy level of precision.

# What do you think made you the ideal candidate for this position?

No idea. I'd never thought about it. The idea of entrusting me with the *carrés* was a strange one as I never used print in my own fashion collections apart from Liberty prints and stripes. The only thing I can say is that I've always had this obsession with colour and harmony, and I would show my collections chromatically. I would have all my fabrics dyed too. When Pierre-Alexis Dumas first proposed the role to me, I thought it was a great idea and was filled with desire. He was very smart to see something in me that I hadn't even realised was there myself. At that time,





if I'd been asked to do anything else at Hermès – shoes, belts, clothes – I don't think it would have come to me as naturally. Before I started working here, I really liked the classical, chromatic scale at Hermès, but I wanted to resolve the gaping divide between the extreme modernism and extreme classicism of the house – to find a chromatic realism, which became my vision. Coming from fashion design, I was conscious and concerned with how a season needed to tell a cohesive story. I leant towards the use of colour as a tool for structure and storytelling. I also watched how the colourists worked in very intuitive ways. I think one of the principal reasons for the success over the past ten years is the creation of a vocabulary of colour that is both systematic and visceral. Colour is a fatal weapon. It's all about visual reac-

before we develop the colour scales, as the engraving process takes such a long time. The designs often have a link with the theme of the year.

# These designs are selected from the drawings produced by the Hermès draughtsmen, illustrators, or artists. How many draughtsmen do you currently work with?

About 50 working regularly with us.

# And how many drawings does each draughtsman propose?

Some propose only one, others can propose five to 10, but it's not only propositions from their side. It is all about a long creative process achieved through constant dialogue with the draughtsmen about their designs; the drawing, composition and storytelling are devel-

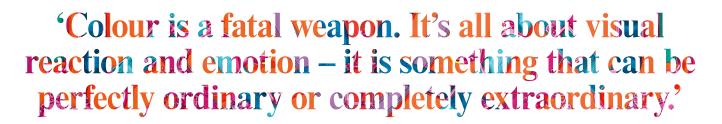
circumventing the occasional absence of colour comprehension.

# Meaning that there are good draughtsmen who are no good at colour?

Yes. I actually try to be completely oblivious to the colours of the drawings we receive. I used to find it hard to engage with a drawing without colour. Now, 15 years later, I can detach myself from colours.

# Wouldn't it be easier for you if the draughtsmen just worked in grey scale?

There are some designers who have actually become *carré* draughtsmen – they have a sublime hand and have never worked in colour. I would buy their drawings in black and white, and then add in the colour. Most of the time we want the draughtsmen to colour them



tion and emotion – it is something that can be perfectly ordinary or completely extraordinary. An Hermès *carré* is a signature which evolves. What makes it so special is the combination between colours, design and silk.

#### Do you use Pantones?

No. It's either swatches of paper, silk, thread or leather.

# You mentioned before that there were 30 new designs created each season.

Yes, although it's actually more like 40 as we also have several re-editions per season. Altogether it's around 800 new references per year, if you include the different range of colours.

#### How do you select the designs?

We choose the designs almost two years

oped together. This process — which can take anywhere between a month and a year — takes place in a kind of spaceship we call 'Studio Dessin', which is the heart of creation for silk design. Of course, we only buy the drawings we like! We reject a lot as well.

# Do the draughtsmen give you all their drawings in colour?

Yes, but they are not involved in any of the next steps; they entrust us with their drawings. Colour is unassociable from the design. Colour is the enlightener of the drawing; the passage from paper to silk is the real birth of a design.

# So, they will have worked on a colour scale that might have nothing to do with what you end up using?

Yes. In truthpart of my job is about

in though – some of them do a beautiful job. Ironically, sometimes when a draughtsmen is a good colourist, their drawing can almost be a bit ugly when first placed onto silk. It's really disappointing. However, once you rework the colours, it can be explosive! Sometimes I need to see something ugly to understand that it can become something beautiful. It's weird but true.

# I understand. It allows you to have an objective viewpoint.

I was pretty minimalist before joining Hermès. But I've since become the queen of multicolour: working on other people's compositions really opened up my colour spectrum. I like appropriating something that isn't mine to begin with and getting my head around the logic of it. That's what I find really





fun and exciting. To have real talent for colour, you need to have a photographic eye, to be able to foresee how something on paper will look once printed. Our colourists don't use computers: they do things manually, photographically, with abstract visual formulas. That is how our colourists still work, even the youngest ones. Of course, now we have tools that allow us to check those abstract visions on computers.

# Is everything prototyped? Are there not tests with watercolours on paper?

No, we don't use watercolours. We evaluate all colour combinations directly on silk. The colourists work with their colour scales to create formulas for every colour. Then, if they need complimentary colours, they'll get them from the colour charts in the archive. Our

what can really influence me is light. Under electric lights, there are reflections which affect your colour vision – I hate it and it makes me lose confidence in my perspective.

The paradox is that in a shop when you chose your *carré* it's under a very yellow spotlight. And it is all very subjective work – do you feel your subjectivity becomes stabilised with time so that something which bothered you on Tuesday would still bother you the following Friday? Or, would you say that your subjectivity or feeling toward something might change direction, even after you've spent hours on reaching a conclusion?

Because I do so many things, I may forget that I had said something a week before and repeat it – it's great when

the job. The actual colouring process is enchanting and after a while you start finding everything beautiful. At Hermès, you mustn't ever forget that you have to surprise, to do the opposite of what is expected as a form of freedom.

# So you have to be constantly questioning your vision...

The difference between now and when I first started is that back then, I never really asked myself, 'Do I really like it?' Now I ask myself this question all the time. If there is even a shadow of a doubt, we'll drop it.

#### You can get drunk on colour...

...and on the satisfaction gleaned from a beautiful object. I don't want to fall into that. It's not enough for it to be beautiful; it has to have something extra which



Tuesday morning meetings allow us to work on the colour combinations on each scarf and fine-tune the printing. It can be very challenging from a technical point of view. It's very subtle work. It would be strange to record those work sessions, because even though we understand each other 100 percent, to an outsider it would seem a crazy, abstract dialogue with lots of unknown words. It's a true connoisseur's conversation. I love that work, even though it's actually rather exhausting and can last up to four or five hours. It's a rejuvenating bath of colour every week!

#### What kind of light do you work in?

I try and work mainly with daylight, but in winter it's hard so we have to use electric lights which I hate. In fact, when you asked about the stability of my opinion, that happens and usually I've got a pretty stable vision. But other times, like today, for example, I saw a drawing called À La Plume that's by a young draughtswoman called Florence Manlik. The mock-up is amazing, but it's turning out to be unbelievably complicated to colour. It took a long time to find the right combination of colours. At first, I thought the colourist hadn't been able to create a colour scheme that corresponded to the original spirit of the drawing. Later, I realised I was the one who'd become too attached to the original spirit of the drawing, it's colouring and principles – I'm very Cartesian4 about my loyalty to a draughtsperson – and that in fact the colourist had been able to liberate something. I'm still going around in circles about it though! My real fear is falling asleep on

makes you want to grab it and run away. That's the feeling that I want to provoke.

#### An instant, powerful desire.

Yes, it can't just be beautiful – it has to be intense, it has to be extreme. My biggest challenge right now though, is figuring out how to do colour and non-colour at the same time.

#### Can you elaborate?

There are cycles in colour. Right now, we're actually coming out of a very colourful cycle – where the brighter a print, the more applause it got – to a place where there is a desire for less colour.

#### How long has this cycle lasted?

About ten years. There are moments of greater or lesser desire for colour in general – at least in terms of the *use* of





colour. Right now I want to use colour a bit differently. I've realised I'm wearing less colourful scarves these days and looking for something with a little more sobriety. But we are talking about Hermès scarves, and as we have to produce colour, how do we resolve this question? It's something I'm working on...

# Ok. So, how many colourists do you have working for you?

Ten.

# Are they trained exclusively in-house at Hermès or have they been trained at schools prior to arriving?

They are dedicated to the house. Some of them have been to art school or studied graphic design. Others learnt about colour in-house in the factories, much like artisans; the old-school way.

## So they'll find it in the files and also in their minds!

Yes, in what we refer to as the 'colour kitchen' – they literally cook up the colours in big pots using the colour formulas – it's complete alchemy.

#### Is this system richer than Pantones?

I hate Pantones; our work is about hues.

# Tell about the history of the *carrés* and colour composition at Hermès.

The very first scarf — the Jeu des Omnibus et Dames Blanches — was created by Robert Dumas in 1937. Dumas was fascinated by the self-imposed rigor of printing on silk.

# How many combinations were there of that first scarf? Do we know?

Very few. There have been nine colours.

Yes. We re-edited Jeu des Omnibus et Dames Blanches in 2007 for our 70th anniversary in a 70cm x 70cm format.

#### How do you select the re-editions?

I refer to our archives to see what exists in terms of colour. If something catches my eye, then we select it for a re-edit and recreate it. Sometimes if we're struggling with a colour, well look at the archives. I re-read the archives every season and observe, I look at all of our Brides de Gala. It's very instinctive.

## How many colourways exist for Brides de Gala?

Forty to 50.

# Is the Brides de Gala something that you re-edit every season?

No, not at all.

# 'To have real talent for colour, you need to have a photographic eye; to be able to foresee how something on paper will look once printed on silk.'

#### Where are they based?

The work is divided between two sites in the Lyon area. Every week, two or three colourists come up to Paris. We also go down to Lyon two or three times a season to work there.

#### Just a little technical question: what is the first thing they do when they receive your colour schemes? Do they try to locate the colours, or do they reconstitute them?

They create formulas for the colours of the season.

# Does it take a long time to find the specific colour?

Yes, but the colour charts are organised by families of colour. The colourists also have internal libraries and reference points.

#### When did it become so exponential?

After the war, in the 1950s, was when it became a real and continuous production. Robert Dumas adored drawing and had a friend with a printing factory whom he asked to print his scarves. If he liked a drawing, then he would have it made into a scarf and put it in the shop. When he saw that they were successful, he just started doing more. It was very empirical. Although designing was his real passion, he could not realistically do everything, so he called on talented specialists, among them Hugo Grygkar, who went on to sketch the famous Brides de Gala<sup>5</sup> in 1957. He also commissioned Cassandre<sup>6</sup> for the designs known as Perspective and Littérature.

# Would you ever re-edit a 1937 model in its original chromatic scale?

#### It comes out when it comes out?

There are no rules or restrictions in our choices. Having these archives is a treasure. We've brought out the Brides de Gala for this summer in a giant pink and green version – it's sublime. But before that I've also played with the Brides de Gala in many other ways: it has been dip-dyed, embroidered, indigo printed, used on bigger or smaller formats also, for bandanas...

# How many other iconic designs like Brides de Gala exist at Hermès?

There are many other super powerful designs. You can see how there is enormous potential here for colour creation. Yet, the art of colour lies in how you use it. Where the Hermès scarf stands out is with the quality and depth of its colours and compositions. They are unique.





# Do countries buy scarves in very specific colours? Could you predict what colours a certain market would take?

Yes. I like to know who bought what. Colour sensitivity is deeply cultural. Generally speaking, bright colours are the most popular. However, the Japanese like to buy paler colours because it looks pretty with their skin tone. Americans prefer classic combinations, with lots of orange, gold and black. *Everyone* adores a scarf with lots of blues; those are big classics. The crazy thing about Hermès is this almost megalomaniacal use of all those colours, it's absurd!

# The most is 40 colours for one scarf? 48 or 49, I think. We beat a record.

\_\_\_\_

#### What was it for?

For a scarf called Waconi by Antoine Tzapoff – it has a portrait of a Native American woman with all the nuances of her skin and the landscape on it.

# After so many years at Hermès, how do you avoid repeating yourself?

I keep files on every season. There are things that I don't use one season that I may save for the next. Usually, I don't like what I've put aside. I need novelty.

# Often in fashion, you find that over the years a designer will establish a rather restricted palette. Even for Yves Saint Laurent, it remained a box of paints.

Clothes and scarves are very different. As a designer, I did have a restricted palette, which was vital. Here we're working with an abundance of colours. There's nothing like it.

# Even though there is an infinite spectrum, there has also been a sensitivity to certain colours over the last ten to 12 years.

It's inevitable that some colours are habitual, which is both good and bad. I'm constantly searching for new techniques or combinations. I never want to be blasé about what I create, and that's hard. I think what inspires me most are all the great colour obsessives, the great artists like Josef Albers<sup>7</sup> – I can look at his colour scales forever.

# Albers' approach was less emotional, almost scientific... yet it certainly provokes emotions.

I find Albers' work very emotional: he worked on the principle that colour interactions create emotion, almost like a doctor who gives out a prescription.

#### Which other artists stand out?

Recently we worked with an Irish abstract artist called Richard Gorman. I came across a picture by him quite by chance on the Internet, and the harmony really pleased me. He's a pretty unknown artist who lives in Milan and is about 60 years old. He has a gallery in Dublin, so I asked them to send me any books they had about him. I started tripping out about his work when I realised that he was totally obsessed with colour. There was something special about his harmonies, so I asked him if we could collaborate on a scarf together. He designed the Squeeze carré for Spring/Summer.

#### Did it have multiple colourways?

Yes, we did seven. They're beautiful. What other artists can I give you...? Jean-Michel Alberola, Claude Viallat, Peter Doig, David Hockney are all extraordinary colourists, who frequently inspire me. When I work with artists like Hiroshi Sugimoto for Hermès Editeur<sup>8</sup> I try to put myself in their minds and imagine how they treated the colours and composition. Ultimately, I like experiences where I go into the body or mind of someone else.

- 1. The term chromatic derives from the Greek word for colour, *chroma*. Chromatic colours are those in which one particular hue, or wavelength, of light dominates. For example, red and blue are chromatic colours, while white, black and grey are achromatic.
- 2. Jean-Louis Dumas (1938-2010) was the chairman of the Hermès Group, and Artistic Director of the house from 1976-2006. The great-grandson of Thierry Hermès, the founder of the company, Jean-Louis Dumas is credited with reviving the house in the late 20th century through diversifying its offerings in travel and leather goods he was also responsible for launching the iconic 'Birkin' handbag and for the audacious signing of design talent such as Martin Margiela and
- Jean-Paul Gaultier. Under Jean-Louis' stewardship, Hermès' annual turnover grew from \$50m in the 1970s, to \$2.5bn in 2010.
- 3. Leïla Menchari is Director of Décor for Hermès' flagship store on rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré. Since 1978 she has overseen the store's four seasonal window displays, often considered the most sophisticated and theatrical in luxury retail.
- 4. Cartesian is a reference to the French philosopher and mathematician Rene Descartes (1596-1650), often credited as the father of modern Western philosophy, and the man who gave the world the maxim "cogito ergo sum" ["I think, therefore I am"].
- In Passions of the Soul, Descartes espoused the dualistic nature of life and consciousness, and his belief that the mind and soul are separate to the body. In the context of Bali Barret's answer, "Cartesian" refers to a dualistic loyalty: she is either steadfastly loyal to a draughtsperson, or not at all.
- 5. Released in 1957, the Brides de Gala is Hermès' best-selling *carré* of all time. Designed by Hugo Grygkar, the scarf features two symmetrical leather bridles a reference to Hermès' origins as high-end saddlemakers and requires 13 screens to print.
- 6. Adolphe Jean-Marie Mouron (1901-1968) was a Ukranian-French painter, affichiste [poster artist] and graphic designer who worked under the pseu-

- donym Cassandre. In 1961, Cassandre designed the iconic Yves Saint Laurent logo and monogram which broke conventions by blending letterforms and mixing incompatible typeface features.
- 7. Josef Albers (1888-1976) was a German artist who worked at the Bauhaus and emigrated to America in 1933 after the institute closed under Nazi pressure. He is best known for his series of prints and paintings, 'Homage to the Square', a rigorous study of chromatic interactions informed by the theories published in his influential treatise *Interaction of Color* (1963).
- 8. Hermès' online gallery presenting editions of works of art on silk.





# Tye always talked about male vanity; and now men shave their eyebrows.

Stefano Pilati on suits versus sportswear, and the shifting male psyche.

By Jonathan Wingfield Photographs by Pieter Hugo Sittings Editor: Jerry Stafford Matt rubberised technical single-breasted mac.
Single-pleat cavalry trousers in Harris Tweed.
Merino wool jumper.
Chelsea boot with French calf, rubber sole and leather strap.
All from Ermenegildo Zegna Fall/Winter 2015/2016.

Menswear is booming! So we're constantly told. On one hand, the sector is generating some of the fashion industry's most significant financial results, thanks, in part, to a sizeable demographic of Asian men embracing 'metrosexuality'. On the other, menswear designers are currently experiencing a period of creative liberation, redefining notions of masculine style and identity, with a notable shift towards more casual, sports-influenced garments. Thus, we find ourselves with historically 'classic' brands proposing skate skeakers, printed t-shirts and performance outerwear where only a few seasons ago, they were continuing to champion a more traditional menswear aesthetic and lifestyle.

This begs the question: are menswear brands aiming to capture younger con-

perfect ambassador for YSL's modern menswear, but he soon became the poster boy for a new era of, as he calls it, "male vanity". Bearded, never flashy, yet self-assured, Pilati looked as memorable in three-piece tailored suits as he did Comme des Garçons track pants.

The YSL era was nevertheless a turbulent time for Pilati, with his forward-thinking and conceptual take on the hallowed Parisian house ruffling the feathers of sceptics and traditionalists. When, in 2013, it was announced he was joining Italian house Ermenegil-do Zegna – the biggest menswear business in the world – as Head of Design of Ermenegildo Zegna Couture, and Creative Director of the house's newly revitalised womenswear label Agnona, it immediately felt like a neat fit. A major manufacturer of luxury textiles

System travelled to Berlin to question Pilati on the changing face of menswear and how he's helping Zegna navigate these changes. And always one to enjoy the visceral nature of dressing up, he agreed to model the latest Zegna collection for South African fine art photographer, Pieter Hugo.

You've often said you design menswear with yourself in mind. So when you're designing for Zegna, the world's biggest menswear business, does that put a lot of pressure on your own personal taste and wardrobe needs?

I'm obviously aware that whatever I might experiment with on myself isn't necessarily going to be valid for everybody else. You know, I am a 50-year-old man, sat here wearing floral pants and, frankly, not many other 50 year olds can

# 'I've supported sportswear for a long time but it doesn't give men status. The rise of casual wear shows we are suffering a paradox around luxury.'

sumers? Or are they proposing that older men – those generally with more financial muscle – dress in more youthful ways? In turn, is this shift towards more casual menswear attire affecting the sales and status of classic men's tailoring? And what is all of this doing to the male psyche?

We turned to Stefano Pilati to answer these questions. A pure product of 1980s Italian fashion, Pilati scaled the industry via a deep-rooted appreciation of cloth and fabric. Rising through the ranks of Cerruti, Armani, Prada and Miu Miu, it was his eight years in Paris at Yves Saint Laurent (initially under Tom Ford, then as overall Creative Director for women's and menswear) that brought him wider fashion recognition. Here was a designer whose personal style not only made him the

and suiting for brands like Gucci and Tom Ford, the company's own Ermenegildo Zegna label provides classic tailoring for men the world over.

Pilati's appointment answered Zegna's need to align itself with the creative renaissance at the heart of contemporary menswear, and presumably the designer's long-standing passion for fabric, Made in Italy, made him the obvious candidate. Installing himself and a core design team in Berlin, Pilati retreated from the public eye and let his work for Ermenegildo Zegna Couture speak for itself. Universally well received, his collections have pushed the brand into new territories via high concepts, exquisite and experimental fabrics, and a deconstruction of formal menswear into something more challenging and representative of the times.

get away with that. This is where I have to take a step back and realise that when I'm designing for Zegna, my own evolving tastes need to be grounded in some level of objectivity.

# But the influence of your personal style has certainly been felt over the years.

Well, I've been sporting a beard for 20 years and now everyone seems to have one; I've been wearing short-legged pants for 20 years and now everyone wears them; and I've been talking about male vanity for 15 years and these days, men shave their eyebrows. So with time you can see how my personal instincts might get filtered down to a wider public. But it never starts with that ambition.

When you first arrived at Zegna, did you take the conscious decision of



Single-breasted mac in Harris Tweed with recycled plastic finishing
Single-pleat cavalry trousers in archive wool check.

Khaki scarf in merino wool.

Chelsea boot with French calf, rubber sole and leather strap.

All from Ermenegildo Zegna Fall/Winter 2015/2016.

# translating your personal style towards a global menswear proposition?

As I said, for almost 20 years people have seemed to relate – or at least react - to the way I dress. And they want to wear what I wear. So at some point I had to take this into account and say to myself, 'Okay, so maybe let's go for it: this is what I want to wear, this is what I like and now you can have it too.' This seems to me more honest and natural than engineering a self-imposed personality in order to market fashion, or even market myself, which I'm not good at doing. I can bring myself to the collection but I can't really see myself trying to create an entourage of acolytes that will dress like me.

#### So who's the man you design for?

I've always designed for grown-up men.

# To what extent does a menswear designer have to understand the male psyche?

It's essential. Nowadays I find that men's rapport with fashion is underlined by paradox. Men want to feel as though they are acting individually in the way they dress, yet at the same time they don't want to be noticed too much. They want a fresh look but they want to follow vestimentary protocols.

#### You mentioned before that men now shave their eyebrows. What have you learnt about evolving male identity: how men now see themselves, how clothes can bring about these shifts?

I grew up in the 1980s: middle-class men were working in banks and were very respectable; there were individuals with basic options to dress in certain code of those who were dealing with the *real* money and *real* power. This was the upper class basically saying, 'We're almost blissfully unaware of what's happening to the middle classes.'

# Besides strict tailoring, what other ways did upper class men distinguish themselves?

Alternatively, they just went totally nuts and started wearing silk shirts and gold buckle sandals [laughs], almost celebrating the fact that they could work from their mansions.

# What about your own rapport with wearing suits these days?

It is funny because when I started working at Saint Laurent I was wearing three-piece suits every day, and I loved it. Then it slowly dawned on me that I

# 'Sure, fashion is frivolous – we're not saving lives – but I feel that at Zegna, exploring eco-sustainability is more relevant than creating a rock star look.'

I've never been interested in addressing youth culture through fashion. As far as I see it, young people need to create fashion for themselves, by themselves. You can't be an older designer telling kids what to wear, that's just an ego trip beyond belief.

# Yet isn't that exactly what designers seem to be turning to these days — menswear has never looked so sporty and youthful.

I'd rather put myself out there – as the vehicle, the opinion leader, the designer, a 50-year-old man – to express my values and Zegna's values and hope that men might connect with them. That is where the tailoring, the quality of the fabrics, the manufacturing, the newness, even the romanticism, all play a part in expressing this.

ways, but they had to wear a tie every day. I remember that at one point, in the second half of the eighties, these same men started going to work wearing a polo neck, losing the tie – and that was already considered revolutionary. This evolved into chinos and a jacket, which pushed things even further. This shift from pure tailoring to more relaxed dressing triggered the shift towards sportswear and outerwear and leisurewear.

## So it was predominantly a middle-class shift.

Yes, and because this shift was so synonymous with the middle classes, then the very upper class had to distinguish themselves in different ways: for example, you could confine yourself to the strict protocol of tailoring, the dress

didn't quite feel myself anymore. I started to feel that I was looking older than perhaps I should, and I kind of fell out of love with the ritual of dressing in three-piece suits.

# How did this shift affect your own sense of status, if at all?

To tell you the truth, I didn't like the idea that people were taking me more seriously simply because I was wearing a suit. I felt I needed to acquire that authority through what I was doing rather than the suit I was wearing. I know that sounds crazy coming from a Zegna perspective, but as I mentioned before, my own evolving tastes have been informed by many years of experimentation in clothing. Anyway, I decided to abandon the suit... and it seems that everyone else did the same.



Single-breasted jacket in high-density pink cotton velvet.

Single-pleat cavalry trousers with elastic stirrup detail.

V-neck jumper in worsted merino wool.

Chelsea boot with French calf, rubber sole and leather strap.

All from Ermenegildo Zegna Fall/Winter 2015/2016.

Grey cashmere scarf from Comme des Garçons.

#### In favour of more casual wear?

Right now, I don't exactly know where male identity is going. I have been a supporter of sportswear for a long, long time, but this doesn't give men status – and rich men want to show that they have options and possibilities. Once again, it illustrates how we are now suffering a complete paradox around luxury fashion.

# Luxury just seems to be a word that gets used in association with fashion – any fashion – in an arbitrary manner.

Yes. They are *all* apparently luxury brands and I cannot stand that anymore. There is a side of me that rejects all that, yet another side of me actually embraces it, in the sense that all this research at Zegna that I spend on the culture of tailoring absolutely *should* 

that means we can keep this level of luxury understanding high, but it is very complicated now.

# But what are you questioning here: the meaning of luxury or the *need* for luxury?

I keep asking myself this question on a daily basis. And to tell you the truth I don't always end the day with answers. So my comfort zone is simply about staying true to myself and true to Zegna. I feel I'm doing the right thing, and that it corresponds well to the brand I work for.

# What role do you think the suit plays in contemporary life?

I think a suit still has the role it's always had; it has the role of being formal. It is serious attire; a man in a suit always

#### So why are we all wearing them?

Because we want comfort.

# Has comfort taken over from formality, authority, even elegance?

It clearly has.

And do you think that is an irreversible shift? Every man wore a hat in the 1950s, but since the 1960s revolution that ritual has simply disappeared. Do you think that the current 'casual revolution' in menswear – if we can call it that – is an irreversible shift?

I would say so. I'd be surprised if it wasn't

### And what does that do to male identity on a broader level?

The suit remains a statement of fashion authority and it can be projected as

# 'I've never been interested in addressing youth culture through fashion. Young people need to create fashion for themselves, by themselves.'

count for something; it *should* be considered as a status symbol. But, you know, the moment that you do something like that, then people want to sell it in 500 stores and be successful and influential; they want to introduce it to a segment of the market that might *comprehend* the word luxury but doesn't really care to embrace it.

#### You mean, the middle classes?

Right. The middle classes don't give a fuck about luxury. They want a good quality/price rapport, they want to be comfortable, they don't necessarily want to be seen, they don't look for a statement or great status in what they wear – and they represent a big slice of spending power. The reality is that because we are addressing other countries with lots of money, notably China,

has authority, he *still* has it. You can be an employee at the post office or a bus driver, or you can be an auction bidder, wearing a suit shows authority, and that is why I will always respect it, no matter what my personal fashion sensibility is at the moment.

# How do you feel about the migration of so many classic – often Italian – brands now presenting collections that are either designed for a more youthful consumer, or proposing that elder men dress more youthfully, more casually, more informed by streetwear?

Everyone talks about sportswear, but what does that actually mean? It basically means we are all wearing duvet jackets, god knows how many of them I have. But I'm not convinced there's any real elegance in those garments.

something very sexy. But that doesn't mean that if you wear a duvet jacket or a leather jacket you cannot be sexy. So even the sex appeal projected through men's clothes is now far more eclectic—it is quite random, as life is today, and therefore more challenging.

# How does this shift in formality affect you as a designer?

Principally, it gives me freedom. I mean, what is the point of being a fashion designer and only proposing suits, shirts and ties? So this freedom leads you to explore new possibilities: new cuts and new fabrics; knitwear and sportswear become very important, overcoats, shoes and extra accessories take a new role. So from a designing point of view it is not frustrating at all. It is actually the opposite.



Single-breasted mac in translucent tweed-printed polyurethane with tweed binding Wide-leg military trousers with reversed waist in Harris Tweed.

Single-breasted jacket with darted volume pockets in wool archive check.

Chelsea boot with French calf, rubber sole and leather strap.

All from Ermenegildo Zegna Fall/Winter 2015/2016.

Part of Zegna's allure, and certainly a significant part of its global business, is the company's prowess when it comes to developing and manufacturing fabrics. Just to go back in time for a moment, how did cloth and fabric play a specific part in your understanding and appreciation of fashion as you were growing up?

When I was 17 I quit school and decided to do an internship at Cerruti. While the main design office – what I probably considered to be the sexy part – was based in Paris, the manufacturing and diffusion departments were in Milan. The diffusion division was driven by tailoring and fabric, and my internship started by assisting the director of the specific department that selected fabrics. The suppliers would come in to show us all the new fabrics and, part-

#### That's quite an Italian thing, right?

Well, the same school of thinking is at Armani, too; Giorgio Armani worked at Cerruti before setting up his own company. So even if a pure design studio – like the Cerruti one in Paris – was probably more appealing to me, the reality is that I had been immersed straight away in a very handson approach to fashion, based on a real understanding of fabric; which in turn led me to understand how choices of fabric could shape a fashion brand's identity. Over the following years, this took me first to work at Armani and then to Prada, as my ambition turned to becoming a full designer.

Were you hired as a designer at Prada? I started as a fabric researcher, but all the fabrics that I was selecting to show months, or eight months?' That tactile relationship with fabric still exists, but it's become far more subliminal. These days, I force myself *not* to fall in love with fabric research, because then you find yourself placing too much importance on something that people don't really care about. You know, as long as it is a nice colourful dress that you can buy in Miami... But, you know, that's fine, too. I can accept that. And to be honest, in menswear there still is that research element that men value, particularly when you start to think about performance outerwear garments.

It strikes me that the themes you're exploring in your Zegna collections – science, industry, urbanism, power, the ecology – seem like the themes that men should all be exploring in our

# 'Even the sex appeal projected through men's clothes is now far more eclectic – it could be a suit or a duvet jacket. It's quite random, as is life today.'

ly to teach me and partly to test me, my boss gave the task of putting dots on the fabrics that I liked the most. Quite naturally, I happened to choose the ones that were perfect for the following season's collection. Straight away, both my boss and the suppliers found it remarkable that someone so young had such a developed eye and a tactile sensibility for this.

#### What do you think informed that skill?

I honestly don't know. I think just pure instinct, as I have no background in my family for fashion whatsoever. Fashion and clothes obviously intrigued me but I had no formal training at all. So it my boss at Cerruti who really taught me the importance of how the choice of fabric could completely inform the type of fashion you want to create.

Miuccia [Prada] or Mr Bertelli were very much in line with how I understood their research for the collection. I was already considering design as well as fabric research. So everything came quite organically.

# Presumably the rapport between fabric and pure design is key to your role at Zegna.

These days, the visual aspect of the clothes and the approach to designing a collection has changed. I used to say that clothes talk – when you choose a nice fabric, the behaviour and aplomb of it inspires you with the designing. Now it is more a question of, 'Is it light enough for the Middle East, or for the humid countries? Is it inter-seasonal because the collection needs to stay on the boutique floor for four months, six

lives. Yet these themes seem almost at odds with the realities of what most menswear brands – and perhaps men in general – seem preoccupied by. Do you feel that what you are proposing is actually quite marginal even though it presents basic realities? And is that marginalisation a luxury now?

That was what I was about to say; maybe in the luxury market these themes *are* marginalised. But to be luxurious we need to be sensitive to a different level—ethically, intellectually, even sentimentally. I still suffer from this sense of shallowness that we give to fashion, so I am always looking to elevate both myself as a fashion designer, and fashion itself, to something that is more relevant to our lives and surroundings. You know, this is fashion—I'm not saving lives here—but I feel strongly about attaching what



Matt rubberized single-breasted mac with quilted lining in nylon tweed jacquard.

V-neck cardigan with integrated neck tie detail in worsted merino wool.

Single-pleat cavalry trousers with elastic stirrup detail at hem in Harris Tweed.

Chelsea boot with French calf, rubber sole with leather strap.

All from Ermenegildo Zegna Fall/Winter 2015/2016.

I design to contemporary life and social themes. Sure, fashion is frivolous, but I just feel that for Zegna, exploring ecosustainability is more relevant than making a rock star look.

# Again, this seems at odds with contemporary fashion's increasing reliance on archive source material.

Well, everything has been done in fashion, so we're dealing with refinement more than giant new steps. But I feel strongly - ethically, as a designer - that you shouldn't simply repackage what has been done before and sell it as something brand new. That whole approach to fashion reminds me of that MTV show, Pimp My Ride, when they get a vintage car and do a makeover of it. Of course, I understand why that makes commercial sense - human beings naturally find it easier to comprehend and recognise what we've experienced before – but I want to take a risk doing something new.

# Have you found yourself challenging the values of Zegna?

In a positive way, yes. I don't want to be the first of the class here. But I don't want to be the punk of the company either. I just think it's my role to shake things up a bit, within a reasonable frame of intelligence. I think I've given the company another audience, and with that comes another level of criticism, another level of investment, another level of the unknown. And for a company like Zegna – where everything is calculated to precision – anything unknown can be really destabilising.

# People seem intrigued by the fact that you're based in Berlin. What advantages does this have for you?

It keeps me out of the corporate daily life of the company, which is how I think it should be. And it takes away a lot of the pressure. You know, by my nature, I am a very isolated person. Not only do I isolate myself in this non-fashion city, but I live and work in the same building, and I spend weeks when I don't go out. All this gives me a great detachment; it reminds me of something Mr Bertelli said to me when I started at Prada: 'The best research takes place in your mind, not on 'inspiration' trips.' Of course, you can get inspired by all sorts of things, but that sometimes shifts the focus away from newness. We now live constantly immersed in our memories -especially as we get older - so it is nice not to stimulate them too much.

# Do you think the way that fashion is still presented seasonally is out-dated?

It is not relevant. I am very much against it, but frankly it is bigger than me. Why do we even continue to label the collections Autumn/Winter? I would rather think about occasions: you know, 'This is the look I would wear to talk to the teachers of my kids,' or 'this is the outfit

I would wear for a ceremony', specific to time and place. Being someone who has a lot of clothes, the real fun comes from exploring all those situations; elegance comes from choosing the right tie for the right occasion and feeling comfortable in it.

# Do you see yourself working in fashion for a long time?

I would like to think so, but I don't know. You cannot be a fashion designer unless you are giving literally all of yourself, every day. It is a very particular job because your taste, your reputation, your life, can be reflected – and judged – in the choice of a button. But you *can* change people's lives, so I take it very seriously.

# How do you personally quantify the success of your collections?

Taste. People can criticise my collections from different perspectives, but something that cannot be criticised is taste. If you work in fashion, you need to have good taste otherwise what is the point? I refine my style through refining my taste on a daily basis, and this isn't something that necessarily comes from research or development. You can find taste in an abstract painting, in car design, in a novel, or in a documentary. So when I quantify the success of my work, it is through the level of taste I have managed to bring into it. And that, I think, is... unquestionable [Laughs].





Dark green rubberized matt single breasted mac.

Single-breasted jacket in Harris Tweed.

Single-pleat cavalry trousers with elastic stirrup detail at hem.

Green V-neck cardigan with integrated neck tie detail in worsted merino wool.

All from Ermenegildo Zegna Fall/Winter 2015/2016.

Camouflage boots from Muck Boots.



# The colour questionnaire: Haider Ackermann

By Loïc Prigen

What colour would you want to bar

Could you define the rich purple you often use?

Layers of black blood

Who is fashion's best colourist?

Monsieur Saint Laurent

Who is painting's best colourist?

Who is photography's best colourist Steve McCurry.

Could you define the deep green you often use?

Colombian rock

What is your favorite colour name (I think Emerald is rather nice.)

Blood

<mark>What is the colour name you don't like</mark>' Mustard. y clashing them.

What colour should a car be?

Only black... or white in the case of 1910 Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost.

What is worst: very noisy neighbours o black lipstick?

Black lips – who would want to kiss them?

What is your favorite colour to be pair ed with black?

Black.

What is the new black?

Off-black.

**In what colour do you wish to be buried**' Nude

When is black vulgar?

Never.

When is white slutty?

When is red virginal

A good colour for a wedding dress that

Ask Monsiour Truffout

Ask Monsieur Truffaut

What is the right colour for men's underwear?

Leopard print

What is the right colour for a diamond? Black.

What is the right colour for a bouque of flowers?

hampêtre.

**What colours are your walls?** Raw.

What is worst: furry clogs or a yellow kitchen?

Furry clogs in a yellow kitchen







Eva Stenram, Drape (Print I), 2014



The spirit of travel.

 ${\sf Sold\ exclusively\ in\ Louis\ Vuitton\ stores.\ louisvuitton.com}$ 



LOUIS VUITTON