# System


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Issue No. 10 – £10 / €14 / $22

## What is Virgil Abloh?

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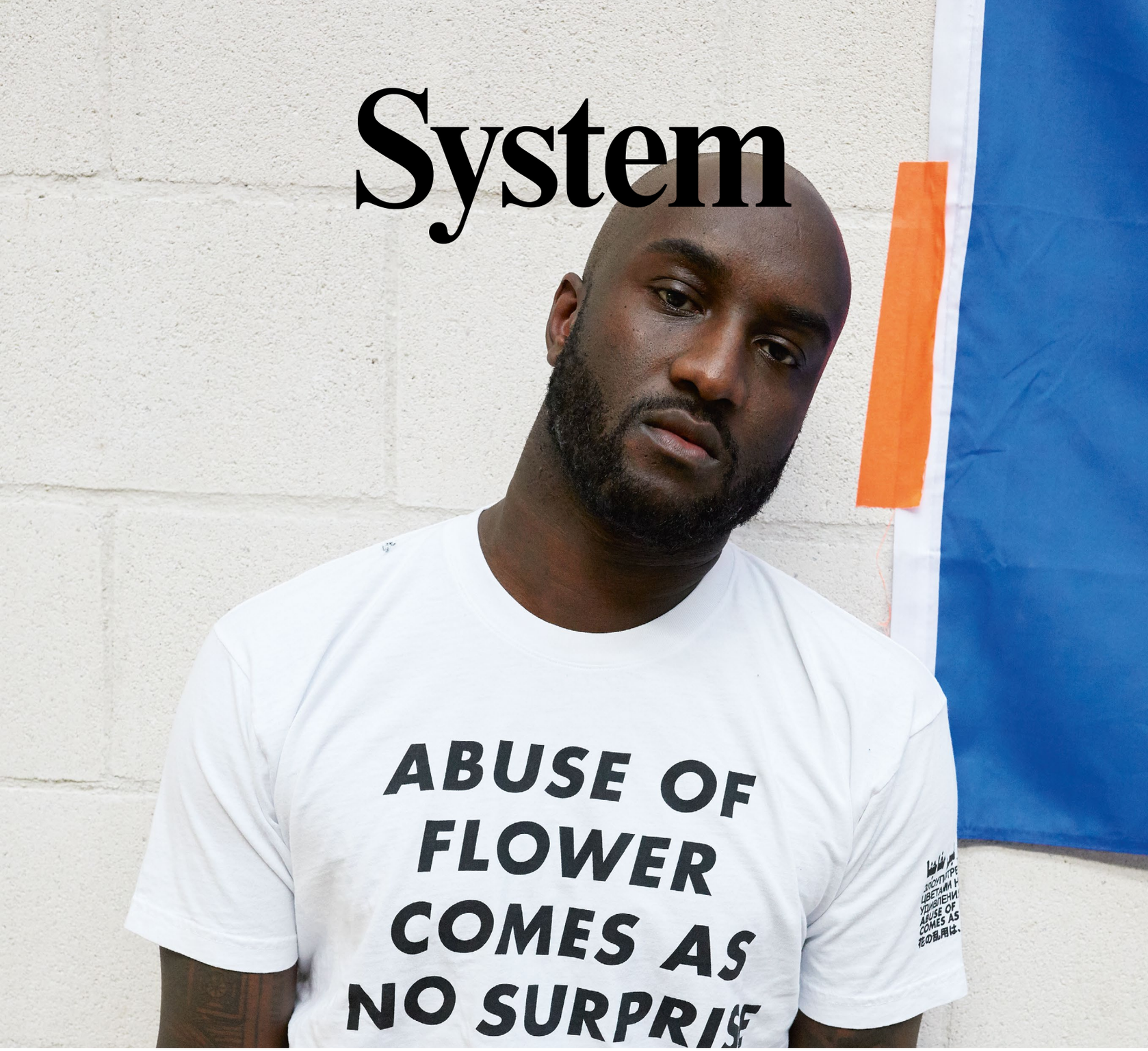


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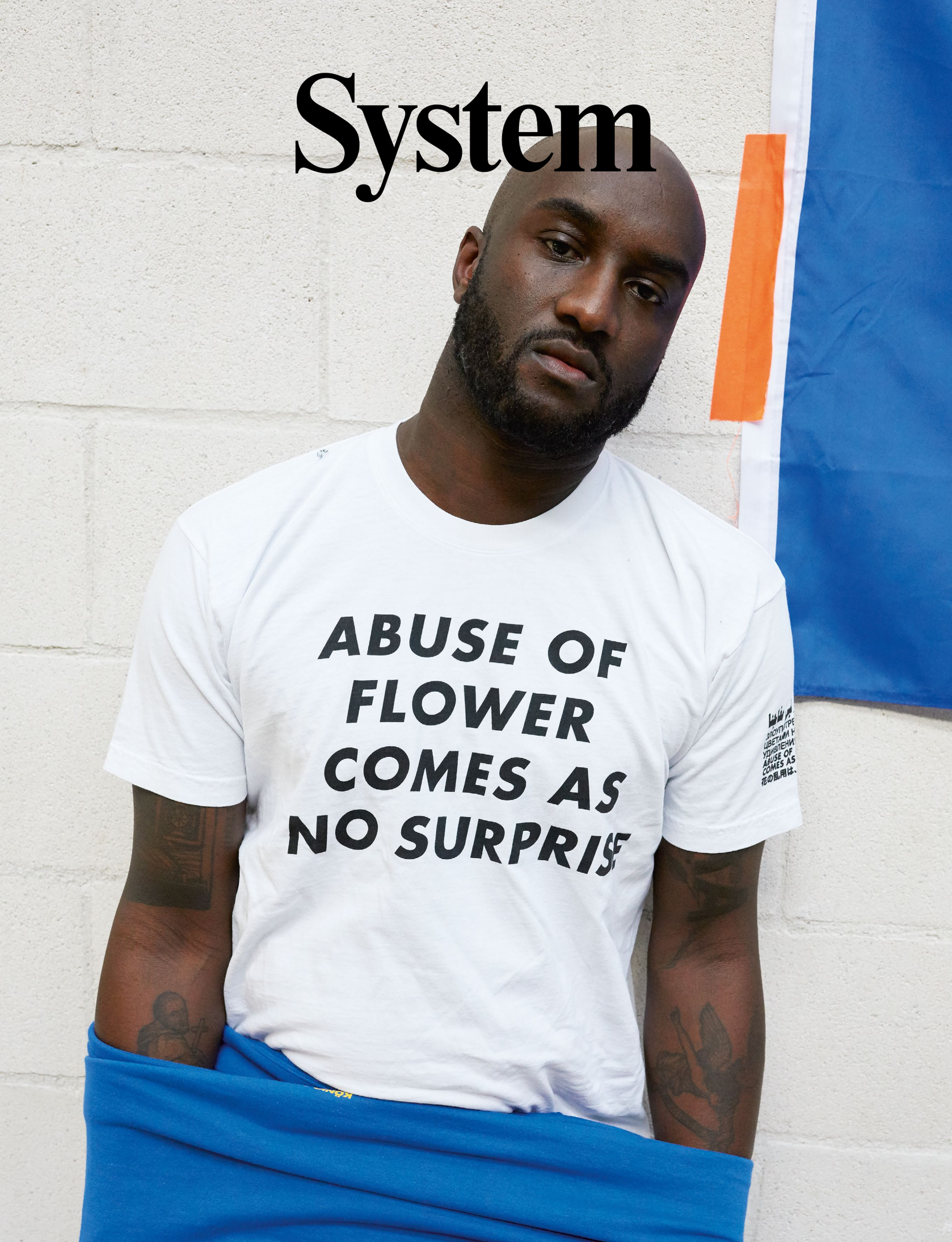

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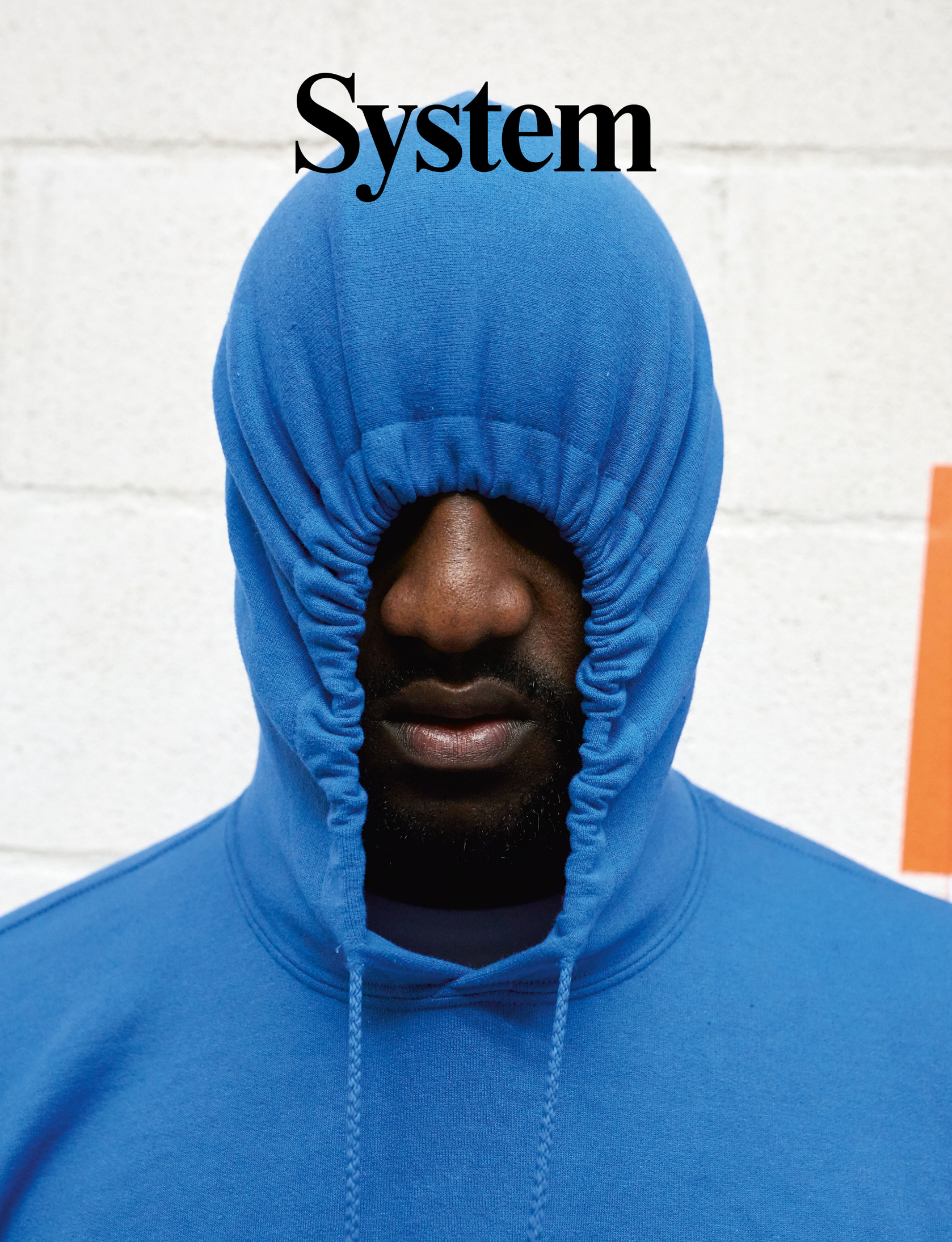

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ALL I WANTED WAS A CAR

MONTLHÉRY, FRANCE
JULY 3 2017
BY ALASDAIR McLELLAN

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ALL I WANTED WAS A CAR

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JULY 3 2017
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Billboard artwork: Andy Warhol, *Skull*, 1976 © The Andy Warhol Foundation / ARS, photographed at The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh
CALVIN KLEIN 205W39NYC Fall 2017: photographed May 2017, Mojave Desert, California

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# Sies Marjan

June 12th, New York
Photographed by Bruce Weber
siesmarjan.com


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Eva Stenram, *Drape I,* 2011

Eva Stenram, *Drape (Print I),* 2014

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**Virgil Abloh** is the founder of fashion label Off-White™. He also DJs. He'd recommend following wordless blogger @jjjjound on Instagram. If he could have dinner with one person, dead or alive, it would be architect Mies van der Rohe.

**Haider Ackermann** is the Colombian-born creative director of Berluti, and his own eponymous line. He would love to have dinner with Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, the king of Bhutan.

**Sarah Andelman** is the co-founder of colette in Paris. She recommends following @natgeo on Instagram; her dream dinner guest would be Andy Warhol.

**Camille Bidault-Waddington** is a Paris-based stylist. She would invite fellow *System* contributor Anders Edström around for dinner, 'and just stare at him'.

**Tim Blanks** is a fashion critic and editor-at-large of *The Business of Fashion*. His recommended Instagram account is storm-chaser @markokorosecnet. He'd invite Elizabeth Taylor to dinner: 'After we'd dined to excess, we'd talk about the men in her life. I have questions.'

**Alice Cavanagh** is a writer from Sydney, Australia, who now works in Paris. 'Follow @SimplicityCity on Instagram,' she says. 'It's how I want to dress, now and forever.' Her ideal dinner guests would be Nancy Mitford, Gloria Steinem, and her grandmother.

**Farid Chenoune** is a fashion historian, lecturer and writer. He recommends following Christine Martin on Instagram, and would have dinner with the first transhuman (a person with powers and abilities beyond those of standard humans).

**Colin Dodgson** is a Californian photographer now based in New York. He'd recommend following is @animalsdoingthings. If he could invite anyone to dinner, it would be Jerry Seinfeld.

**Anders Edström** is a photographer and filmmaker. He's as elusive as his long-term collaborator, Martin Margiela. The one person he'd invite to dinner, dead or alive, would be Cat Ball White.

**Alexander Fury** is a fashion critic and the editor of *AnOther* magazine. He recommends following illustrator @josayhef on Instagram. His ideal dinner guests include the Marchesa Casati, Marcel Proust and Yves Saint Laurent ('with Azzedine Alaïa to host, as he does it better than anyone').

**Ingeborg Harms** is a literature and fashion journalist, based in Hamburg, Germany. 'I recommend following the aroma-obsessed @killeenna.' Ideal dinner guest? Kiefer Sutherland.

**Ariane Koek** is a curator and producer, as well as a writer and consultant in arts, science, and technology. Her favourite Instagram account is @Wolfgang_Tillmans, and her ideal dinner guest would be Ada Lovelace.

**Sander Lak** is the creative director of New York-based brand Sies Marjan. He recommends four Instagram accounts: @shesvague, @kidforte, @fuckadvertisements, @_cindysherman_. He'd have dinner with Oprah.

**Joe McKenna** is a fashion stylist and creative consultant. He is from Kirkintilloch, near Glasgow. Joe isn't on Instagram, but if he could invite anyone to dinner, it would be Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor.

**Dexter Navy** is a London-born filmmaker and photographer. Dexter says follow @ifyouhigh on Instagram. 'I love how trippy it is.' Ideal dinner guest? 'My mother because no one is jigger than her!'

**Natacha Ramsay-Levi** is the new creative director of Chloé. She thinks you should follow @camillebwaddington on Instagram. She'd love to dine with artist Louise Bourgeois.

**Venetia Scott** is fashion director at British *Vogue*. She recommends following @thebluebed. Her ideal dinner guest would be American musician and actor Kris Kristofferson.

**Norbert Schoerner** is a German photographer and filmmaker, based in London. He recommends the Instagram account of @mauriziocattelan. He'd want to have dinner with Sigmund Freud.

**Matthew Schneier** writes for the *New York Times*. 'I love @_cindysherman_,'s Instagram – a newbie and already a master of the form.' His ideal dinner guest would be Frank O'Hara ('but I would take the young Richard Hell in a pinch').

**Carla Sozzani** is an Italian editor, gallerist and businesswoman. She is the founder of Galleria Carla Sozzani and 10 Corso Como in Milan. Sozzani recommends following @studioolafureliasson on Instagram. She'd love to have dinner with Paolo Roversi.

**Sølve Sundsbø** is a Norwegian-born photographer based in London. 'I don't really do Instagram, but if I could invite anyone to dinner, it would be Leonardo da Vinci, Eleanor of Aquitaine, Einstein, Dorothy Parker (for the conversation) and my mum.'

**Juergen Teller** is a German photographer. He is also a guest-lecturer at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Nürnberg. He recommends *not* looking at Instagram, and would invite his father to dinner. 'He killed himself in 1988, and I'd have a lot of questions for him.'

**Charlotte Wales** is a British photographer. She recommends following @HansUlrichObrist on Instagram. If she could have dinner with anyone, it would be writer Fran Lebowitz.

**Masthead**




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BURBERRY

## What is Virgil Abloh?

**Ask anyone who operates in fashion-or-art-or-music-or-street-or-design-related activities and you're likely to spark a debate. Perhaps everyone has something to say about Virgil Abloh's rise to ubiquity, influence and financial gain. As though he's the barometer by which to gauge one's own place in today's topsy-turvy world.**

***System*** **couldn't seem to make up its mind. So, we chose this issue's cover story to explore the Virgil Abloh phenomenon (or, to write it the Abloh way, "phenomenon"). We wanted to witness up-close how Virgil thinks, talks, works, communicates (answer: via every digital channel, often at the same time), travels, relaxes, takes selfies, does that thing with his fingers to indicate ironic quote marks, and goes about his day-to-day business.**

**We spent the past six months organising meetings in London, New York, São Paulo, Paris, Milan and Amsterdam between Virgil and other restless conversationalists, including arts curator Hans Ulrich Obrist and Virgil's student-years hero, architect Rem Koolhaas. We went deep behind the scenes of his collaboration-in-the-making with IKEA, a company with a current annual turnover of €35.1 billion. We asked dozens of industry figures to go on the record with their personal opinion. And, finally, we sent him off for a sauna at Juergen Teller's studio.**

**The result? We're exhausted. Overwhelmed. Spent.**

**Though Virgil Abloh, it seems, is only just getting warmed up.**

# ‘What is Virgil Abloh?’

**What everyone really thinks of the Off-White™ founder, the serial collaborator, the man who lives in ironic quote marks, and who has become fashion’s hottest property.**

**Photographs by Juergen Teller**

'I see Virgil Abloh and his Off-White™ concept as an encapsulation of this very particular moment in time, where luxury fashion and popular culture are colliding, fuelled by the power and influence of social media and the new "fashion establishment" it has created. He represents – in its purest form – the fashion populism that will certainly be remembered as a defining characteristic of this era in fashion. Given his serially creative mind, it will be interesting to see what comes next after Off-White™.'
**Marco Bizzarri, chief executive officer, Gucci**

'We stock Off-White™. Right now, there's a whole group of millennials who really respond to what he's doing and really engage with it. I think he's a really clever social anthropologist, and he's observing through images on Instagram, through music, and all kinds of different media, what that generation really wants. I first heard about Virgil through my children before hearing about him in the industry, but in the industry, he has a reputation as being a very, very nice guy. That's the consensus.

I think fashion is changing so much, and the industry and what Virgil's doing now is a different thing entirely. It might not be fashion in the traditional sense, but it's disruptive. His success is saying, "You might have the snobbery to say that I didn't go to fashion school, and I don't know how to cut a dress on the bias, but so what?" People want his things, and they're good and they're well made, and he has a following that proves that.'
**Ruth Chapman, co-founder, Matchesfashion**

'He tapped into a movement where our product is becoming more about the convergence of music, art, design and technology. He designs by experimenting.'
**Daniella Vitale, chief executive officer & president, Barneys New York**

'Virgil has been able to captivate, evolve and in turn, create his own unique movement that appeals and resonates so strongly with the youth audience today. This is made all the more powerful through the fact that he engages this audience in a humble, courteous and truly inclusive way.'
**Dickon Bowden, vice president, Dover Street Market**

'Anna and I have come to know and love Virgil – he has a respectful but enquiring mind that questions all boundaries and a spirit that ultimately transcends them. He is a force of nature, fast-tracking the evolution of mass culture.'
**Peter Saville, graphic designer, and Anna Blessmann, artist**

'According to all the retailers I speak with, Off-White™ is one of the top-selling brands. And according to our quarterly analysis with Lyst, it's now the third hottest fashion brand in the world, behind Balenciaga and Gucci. Not bad for a guy who many people dismissed at the start.'
**Imran Amed, editor and founder, *The Business of Fashion***

'Virgil Abloh has definitely worked to revolutionize high fashion through his fluid merge of streetwear and couture. His focus on detail and structure sets him apart unequivocally.'
**Selah Marley, model**

'Virgil is the perfect Renaissance man. He is stimulated by the world and the world is in turn stimulated by him.'
**Edward Enninful, editor-in-chief, *British Vogue***

## 'Virgil's the perfect Renaissance man. He's stimulated by the world and the world is stimulated by him.' Edward Enninful, editor-in-chief, *British Vogue*

'Mr. Abloh represents to me everything that is wrong about the fashion system right now: excess of communication, abundance of needless hype, lack of true innovation, paucity of design. He is the smartest of communicators, for sure. Abloh has convinced everybody that he is the pinnacle of cool and a new breed of conceptual designer, and everybody believes so. The fact is, though, that he communicates nothing: the clothing he designs is average, evolved streetwear with some styling trick to make it look conceptual. Everything seems to me just like a pose, and heavily derivative of what Comme, Yohji and the like have already done way better over the years. Abloh has suave manners, and appears to be a nice person, if a bit too keen on self-promotion. I'll be convinced of his talent when he truly delivers something original. He hasn't yet. For the moment, it's just blah-blah.'
**Angelo Flaccavento, fashion writer**

'He's definitely getting under the fashion industry's skin and that isn't necessarily comfortable for either party – but it suggests he's onto something. Even if you think all he does is take what's already out there, and slap a higher price tag on it, it's

hard to argue that his questioning of what fashion and luxury are, and whether or not they're relevant, isn't healthy. As for his Princess Di collection, I think a lot of people assumed it was tongue in cheek, but it was sincerely meant. To me, that was both intriguing and unexpected. He's an interesting voice to have around.'
**Lisa Armstrong, fashion director, *The Daily Telegraph***

'When I watch Virgil DJing, I'm struck by his messianic relationship with his fans. They follow his fashion with the same intensity. But I think it's much more about him than anything he actually makes. Like he was someone they were all waiting for. Cometh the hour, cometh the man. Colour me bemused.'
**Tim Blanks, editor at large, *The Business of Fashion***

'I've known Virgil since his very first T-shirt line, before Off-White™ or Pyrex 23. He has always remained the same throughout: so open to anything and everything that it can blow your mind! How many people have told me recently they're working on a collaboration with Virgil – it's amazing, inspiring, and hilarious! I think Virgil just says yes to any kind of project and he's absolutely right! They're all treated as a new experience.'
**Sarah Andelman, co-founder, colette**

'I think Virgil is good for fashion – he has paved a road for black garment makers, as well as an avenue for glamour to be seen in street-smart clothing. He draws and creates parallels between luxury to street – they can become one and can become even.'
**Matt Holmes, stylist**

'He combines all of the phenomena of the moment in a really smart way – social media, Instagram, street style. He's a real street stylist, but not in the fashion sense, with perfect images taken outside shows – the real street. His way is definitely the future, combining all those phenomena that we'll all sooner or later have to work with and identify. The designs are also great. I understand that he's criticised, but it's a very challenging platform for criticism when you're working from the street and social media. And showing in Paris, the most critical platform. He's collaborative though, and the way he collaborates is interesting because he works with the people who inspire him. The packaging, the graphics and designs are truly a successful mix.'
**Gaia Repossi, creative director, Repossi**

'Virgil Abloh is a true visionary. His understanding of the creative process and its value, juxtaposed with his understanding and appreciation for the business as it exists now and in the future, makes him a leader in design and more importantly in cultural progression.'
**Kyle Hagler, president, Next Models**

'From what I know of Virgil, he is someone who has been able to maintain his humanity while becoming larger than life. To me, he is a very kind man.'
**Melissa Collett, creative director, WORME**

'I met Virgil though Kanye West when he was starting Pyrex 23, before Off-White™, and I have been following his work ever since. I am a great supporter and huge fan of his. In my opinion, he is not only reinterpreting fashion but also culture, by making them both accessible and consumable by millennials. His success is built on his understanding of the Instagram era and his ability to take risks with his creativity and communications. The fact that world-renowned brands like IKEA and Nike, known as averse to collaborating in fashion, have asked him to design for them, shows the impact he has had on youth culture.'
**Alexandre Arnault, co-chief executive of Rimowa**

'I spoke with Virgil at the Barbican for a Nike workshop, and it came to the question of whether his work is "streetwear" or fashion. I come from a "streetwear" background, and what was true of it in the beginning is true of it now: it is about looking at culture and bringing it into product in a more obvious way, to a point. When people say Off-White™ is a streetwear label and it's not "fashion" in the traditional sense, I think it's strange. Look at the luxury brands showing today, they do streetwear collections. When it comes to being connected to culture and youth right now, I don't think there's anyone else who comes out on top, not in fashion. The big thing about Virgil is that everywhere he goes, he's talking to youth. He says I

## 'Mr. Abloh represents to me everything that is wrong about the fashion system right now.' Angelo Flaccavento, fashion writer




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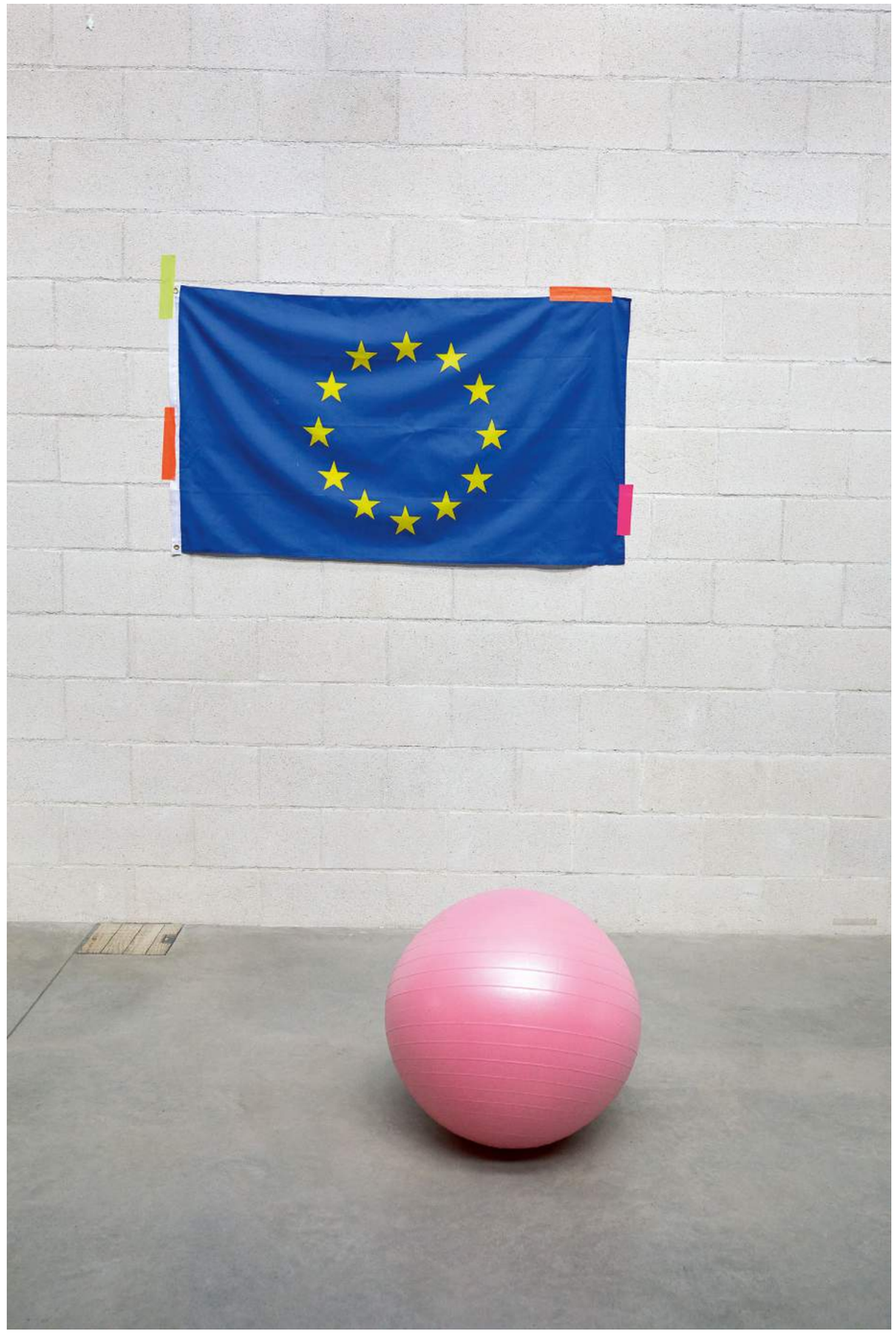


want to give you cheat codes; I want you to access my world; I want you to get into Nate's world, and I want you to ask the hard questions, so we can help you get into it. There's something extremely open and engaging about the way he communicates. Virgil is the type of person who would visit the Nike Campus and easily pick up a conversation with an intern and the next minute converse with CEO Mark Parker.'
**Nathan Jobe, senior creative director, Nike**

'Virgil Abloh catalyses and defines today's society. He is creative in a relevant manner and inclusive, and that's the reason for his continual success. His creative mind is much broader than fashion; he is a global creative leader.'
**Floriane de Saint Pierre, founder and president of headhunting agency Floriane de Saint Pierre et Associés**

'Simple: Virgil is a man of many talents. He's proved that by touching and engaging with so many areas inside and outside of the fashion world. Sure, the fashion design isn't challenging, but Virgil's mind for brand expansion, with furniture and shoe – and more – collaborations in such a short space of time

**'According to our quarterly analysis, Off-White™ is now the third hottest fashion brand in the world.' Imran Amed, founder, *The Business of Fashion***

is enough to say that Virgil is a creative to get to know. Join in or get left behind.'
**Rhea Dillon, AAMO Casting**

'Virgil is one of the few fashion stars to arrive in today's convergence of pop culture, music, fashion, street style and social media. His unique graphic vocabulary coupled with a fresh sensibility for a new generation makes him one of the most important people to watch.'
**John Demsey, executive group president, The Estée Lauder Companies Inc.**

'Virgil Abloh is today's equivalent of a Renaissance man: a designer, an architect, a DJ, a civil engineer. He is the champion of a social phenomenon, a generational shift, which I can identify in so many people around his age. For example, my eldest daughter is 23 and when she finished university, she opted out of a typical day job to be a designer/curator/model/blogger/marketer; and she accomplished all of them in her latest project. The point is that this is a generation uninterested in being "defined" by any one thing, or brand or idea.

The path now, especially for creative people, is not singular and linear; it's multiple and parallel. A photographer is a director is a platform is an art director. In fact, at Art Partner, we stopped trying to label talent several years ago, we simply call them "artists"; and they need to be able to express themselves in different platforms, different mediums. I find Abloh and his generation absolutely inspiring, a much-welcome change after years on end where things were so uniform and predictable.'
**Giovanni Testino, founder, Art Partner**

'To create something relevant, you need to look around you. You need to be open and curious – on a small scale, as well as a big one. I think that's Virgil. It makes sense that he studied architecture. He managed to translate his eye for architecture and art with dexterity and precision into fashion. I think he's super relevant.'
**Paul Hameline, model**

'Virgil has been a friend of The Webster since day one, way before launching his own line! We saw his vision evolve through the years, keeping a very strong DNA, while he has remained exactly the same: an extremely polite, nice and gentle man. I first met Virgil with Kanye in Miami; we became friends and next thing you know, I was in his first "showroom" in his small room at Hotel Americano in New York. Today, it's a full success story, and there is no age or style limit for his clients. Instagram is still an amazing strength for him and his ability to create "movements" and "things" – such as his "quotes" – is really impressive. We love him and everything he does!'
**Laure Hériard Dubreuil, founder and president, The Webster**

'I was a vocal Virgil Abloh/Off-White™ sceptic at the outset because of his penchant for copying others, namely Raf Simons. However, since then, I've become quite taken with Abloh's work and his approach. While so much of the fashion industry appears to be on a fixed path, Off-White™ feels as if it's working from a different vantage point, with a different roadmap. It doesn't hurt to be more egalitarian in 2017, and the fashion industry has very high barriers to entry. Abloh has functioned as proof that there are other ways to enter, giving young people hope. It's his brand-building ability, and his



Photography assistant: Karin Xiao. Clothing: Virgil Abloh's own.

ability to understand and resonate with youth (not because he is "tapped in" but because he is actually guiding it in ways) that I think will take him far, and likely land him at the helm of an established fashion house. It's just a matter of when and which house, rather than if.'
**Julie Zerbo, legal consultant and founder, The Fashion Law**

'I think Virgil is ahead of most of us. His talents spread wide and he somehow remains one of the most grounded, kindest people I know. He is in 300 places at once, and because of it he's able to experience time in such a different way. I am super proud of him, in all the years we've been friends he's deserved everything that's come his way. He's a visionary of our generation, and the craziest part is he's just beginning.'
**Bibi Cornejo Borthwick, photographer**

'I like the speed of it all and Virgil's is a rapid rise. Fashion is so quick now that much of it is about communication. That is why fashion and Instagram are so well-suited of course. Virgil makes clothes that are communication. Obviously, he writes on shirts and shoes, but it is not just that. The products say what he means and then, when worn, say what the wearer wants to say. Vetements and Palace are the same in their own way. Including Off-White™, all three have happened so fast because they communicate directly with their fans and customers. They are on a spin cycle, more frequent than fashion weeks and ahead of advertising.'
**David Owen, director, IDEA Books**

'I really like Virgil. I think he's trying to do something pertinent. Any effort, not least as pointed as his, deserves credit. *Chapeau*.'
**Marc Newson, industrial designer**

'I've never met Virgil, but my colleague says he has amazing taste in hand creams and that he's a good DJ. I think getting people to dance is a fantastic skill. To get a whole room to jump around by means of great music is what I dream of at night. As a fashion creator, Virgil clearly gives people the assets to stand out, to be extravagant to their liking, which I find a beautiful thing, too. Spotting a stranger on the street wearing something that is diagonally striped and/or bears the name Off-White™ in bold type always delights me. (I'm yet to come around to the quote marks thing, though.) Virgil appeared in the most recent issue of *Fantastic Man*. I like his honesty. Wherever and whenever he speaks, he's always delightfully open about his plans, ambitions and agenda. If only more people were like that. He's also a master of branding, not just for himself, but also in terms of a "project" such as his label. I'm sure he could be just that for the big company or "house" that he sees himself running at some point in time. Two geniuses he reminds me of are Jeremy Scott and Karl Lagerfeld; they're all incredible aggregators.'
**Gert Jonkers, editor-in-chief, *Fantastic Man***

'I met Virgil in Paris about four years ago. He comes across as slightly goofy, very innocent and the kind of person who is a genuine fan of fashion with a vision that sees the system differently. All of this coupled with the way that he presents himself to the world – boldly and exacting by way of his wares – indicated to me that he had something. Off-White™ is an interesting case study in how designers can see success amid the escalating and consistently tumultuous landscape that is inciting fear, not motivation, among many of today's most prolific labels. And what I find most refreshing is how simple he makes it seem.'
**Leandra Medine, founder and writer, Man Repeller**

'I stopped trying to work out if Virgil Abloh was a "good" designer a long time ago. I don't think it matters – the impactfulness of what he does is more relevant and interesting than how well-crafted or executed it is. His recent collaboration with Nike is one of the most intriguing collaborations of the past year. In the workshops he hosted in New York and London – at which aspiring young Hypebeasts could sit in on talks about DJing with Benji B, design their own sneakers with Michèle Lamy, or create graphic T-shirts with Heron Preston – you could see that Virgil is really pushing the envelope when it comes to populist design. He's integral to traditional hierarchies being dismantled; it's becoming increasingly hard to distinguish between "streetwear" and the work of many luxury houses.

But there are elements to Abloh's work that feel rushed. Often it feels as if he applies the immediacy of printing an idea onto a blank T-shirt to his "luxury" ready-to-wear. There's a sense that some of the references he has incorporated are things he's just learned of, or hasn't fully understood. Take his recent womenswear collection, inspired by Princess Diana, and *The Sun* bag in particular, for example. While I appreciate what he was trying to do – and the fact that he is not British, so probably unaware of what that newspaper stands for – it was indicative of the drawbacks of his process. In the past, he has spoken about "freedom" and "empowerment" in womenswear, but he then included the logo of one of the UK's most misogynistic newspapers, which persisted with some form of its "Page 3" feature – a hackneyed, outdated reduction of women to a pair of tits – until March this year. That was clumsy and ill-considered.'
**Calum Gordon, fashion writer and author of *Contemporary Menswear***

'To me, Virgil's success glows from his talent for being curious. Any time I've hung out with him, I've noted how intriguing and inspiring he finds the smallest idea – and just how quickly he's able to process it into a vision greater than the original or keep it true to where it began while adding the smallest amount of vision to renew it. From that I take a lesson that anything is possible if you really look at whatever you set your mind on. Everything I've seen him do since we became friends has been true to his DNA as an artist.'
**Dexter Navy, filmmaker & photographer**

'I like Virgil.'
**Tom Sachs, artist**

'What he's doing reminds me a little bit of what Andy Warhol did by commodifying art.'
**Emily Weiss, founder & CEO, Into The Gloss and Glossier**

'I think that Virgil is a wonderful thinker. He is a little bit of a Jeff Koons of the fashion world. I find his approach to fashion and clothes as objects interesting in the fact that their value is determined by their context. The idea of appropriation, and the acceptance of an object like a sweater being a sweater, but transformed by the other references you bring to it. There's an idea of bringing the discourse of appropriation into the fashion conversation. I think that's what has captured my interest. I find his theory interesting. It's not really about designing, but it's not about styling either – the two big schools of fashion design that we seem to have today. It's about neither. I think he approaches fashion as a series of projects; he's very active, collaborative and inclusive with his approach.'
**Stefano Tonchi, editor, *W***

'I think Virgil represents a phenomenon. The way he works is completely new; it's the future. Russian kids are crazy about him, too – 13-year-old kids go wild for his work here.'
**Alla Verbel, vice president, TSUM department store, Moscow**

'Virgil is for me the perfect expression of what contemporary designers have become, or should become in order to adapt to a system that has profoundly changed: he is a veritable multitasker and a communicator for whom clothes are just part of a wider job. Virgil travels easily, with a natural proclivity for invariably hitting the right spot, across disciplines and countries. He is an authentic globetrotter, spending an incredible amount of time en route to somewhere. By living like this, he gets to know things, and to experience them for real, which has an effect on his oeuvre. He knows people, knows what's cool everywhere and is able to translate it into a personal idea of fashion as communication. I think he is a master of the virtual, who does things for real. He has another quality that's instrumental to all of this: he can literally talk anyone into bringing a project to life.'
**Karla Otto, founder of Karla Otto PR**

'Virgil is smart and aware and calm. I'm glad I met him. I want to watch what he does. Can he be president now?'
**Jenny Holzer, artist**

'While everyone else is in the business of saying no and being extremely controlling about their brands, Virgil is having a good time and doing it all. Not only is he talented, but he's charming, unique and beloved by everyone. There hasn't been a vacant or soon-to-be-vacant opening that someone hasn't said, "I've heard that Virgil is up for that job", including Givenchy, Versace, and ones I can't name at the moment. In fact, someone even jokingly suggested him for the editor of *Vanity Fair*. I've certainly heard crazier ideas. Fashion folks tend to revel in misery and Virgil seems to be doing the opposite; we should all take note.'
**Michael Carl, fashion director, *Vanity Fair***

**'I really like Virgil. I think he's trying to do something pertinent. *Chapeau*.' Marc Newson, industrial designer**

**'I've never met Virgil, but my colleague says he has amazing taste in hand creams, and is a good DJ.' Gert Jonkers, editor-in-chief, *Fantastic Man***

# ‘People can swallow the pill because it’s on a T-shirt.’

## The Virgil Abloh story. In his own words.

**Interview by Hans Ulrich Obrist**





**Part One**
**Serpentine Gallery, London**
**June 30th, 2017**

**Hans Ulrich Obrist: How did you connect with architecture?**
**Virgil Abloh:** My parents are immigrants from Ghana in west Africa, and my dad had one vision: ‘If I make it to America, I want a son with a distinguishable career.’ What he didn’t predict was that my teenage years would be the 1990s in America.

**When were you born?**
In 1980. I was playing, living the American dream, growing up in an American suburb thinking life was great because I wasn’t in a Third World country. I have African roots, but they were sort of washed away by growing up in suburban America. I was into skateboarding, rock’n’roll and rap. Lifestyle things. School was easy. I had friends who were rebellious. When it came to college, though, my father said he wanted an engineer for a son and he was going to choose my major. I felt it was the least I could do to pay him back. I was nonchalant. But early on, I was into DJing to split things, to take the edge off, to have something cultural to add to something practical. I took humanities late, so I never had an art class. I didn’t know I was into it. Then I took an art-history class in my fifth year of engineering. I learned about the Italian Renaissance and Caravaggio, and it rewired my brain.

**It was with Caravaggio that it clicked.**
Completely. It was the idea that within art you could invent, just like you can invent a new way of distributing load in a tall building. That sent me into a tailspin. By then I’d spent five years doing engineering, so I Googled three institutions where you could do an architecture masters with a graduate engineering degree and there were only three at the time. One was the Illinois Institute of Technology. It was like my foundation course on the Mies van der Rohe[1] campus: I know nothing about architecture; I just have this book of Caravaggio paintings; and I walk into Crown Hall, and I lose my breath. From then on, I was learning about the foundations of Modernism and the International Style. Rem Koolhaas finished the students’ centre[2] the same year that I started. So I’m learning while Rem is giving lectures, Michael Rock[3] is giving lectures, in a student centre with a tunnel for a train to go through. I was born from that crash.

**‘My parents are immigrants from Ghana. My dad had one vision: ‘If I make it to America, I want a son with a distinguishable career.”**

**Had you met Rem at that time?**
No. But *Content*, where he writes about his work with Prada – the study of retail, the forward thinking, the non-conceptual design – was the launch pad for me to sit in classes and know what I wanted to take away from them. Michael Rock helped me learn how to think, too. Understanding the architecture in art and the theory with Prada showed me a path. At that point, I was mesmerised by Modernism. I felt there were pillars in that ideology that were going to apply when the Internet fully settled in.

**And then the next transition happens.**
Yes. I was working and then all of a sudden, I got a call from Kanye West. He said: ‘Hey, I heard about this kid in Chicago who can design and understands music and culture.’ So after two years of work practising architecture, building homes and working in various small firms, I went on to be his creative director for 14 years. It was a great experience to apply the things I knew. Kanye used to say that when you become that famous, you’re the janitor with the keys to the world.

**People told him there was this new kid?**
Yes, like, ‘Hey, there is somebody who thinks like you’. Chicago is a big small town. People you grew up with are always telling you what’s happening back home. I had one very young professor who taught me all the digital things, like Photoshop, Illustrator, AutoCAD, 3D rendering, 3D Studio Max. I just applied those skillsets to fashion. Kanye said, ‘Hey I need you to design this’, and I thought if I can design a building, I can think that through. And when he said, ‘Hey we’re going to build a pavilion for a film in Cannes’, I said, ‘Let’s call OMA; let’s call Rem’, and that was how we started.

**What exactly was your title?**
My title was creative director, but I called myself an assistant. He was the spearhead and I would follow through. Or I would do research to add an underpinning of art and architecture to his equation. I had 14 years of running around the world taking meetings.

**And you were creative director not only of him, but also of his brand?**

Exactly. Which I credit him as innovating because he's an artist. He used to make fun of me and call me Steve Jobs because I always had such a long, precise explanation for every small thing. And that added a lot of rigour to what he was doing. We are still close to this day. I'd still be studying architecture if I had not met him.

**It was a decisive encounter?**
Yes. I am four years younger than him. I am a part of this generation that's the tail end of the millennials and interested in a wide range of things. I chose to focus on my own project, which doesn't look at art, architecture, music and fashion as separate disciplines, but draws zigzag lines between them all. So I work with Rem, Miuccia Prada, Kanye West, Beyoncé, George Condo, Vanessa Beecroft, Jenny Holzer. And I started Off-White™.

**But you had your own fashion label before that, Pyrex 23…**
I had never done anything that was completely mine to the end for 10 years, so I decided to shoot a film in New York. It's called *A Team With No Sport*. I took kids from Harlem to downtown SoHo and made this brand with clothes that weren't mine. I took Ralph Lauren and screen-printed over it. Caravaggio on the front, 'Pyrex 23' on the back. 'Pyrex 23' is a two-line poem about being in the hood. The only way to make it out is to be great at basketball – and 23 is Michael Jordan's number – or through Pyrex, which is the cookware in which you make crack cocaine. I made it as an art piece, and on the wall is writing by my artist friend Jim Jones who's pixelated in the video. He is like a modern Basquiat. The music is 'Heart and Soul' by Joy Division. It's a juxtaposition. Being black, people would assume I'd use hip-hop, but I always use niche European music references that I crash together for a different result. It creates a wider audience. That six-minute video I shot with a friend went through-the-roof viral. Sold from colette. I didn't even produce the clothes, they were other people's brands. It turned out to be a seminal piece of work.

**When was this?**
This was 2012, it was 12.12.12, when the video came out. I was trying to communicate that this generation wants to play a part in fashion and they have to make it themselves. Then I decided that if I was going to do a clothing line, 'Pyrex' as a name wasn't to my taste. My career is about going back to the original – a black African kid growing up in suburban America. So I use my project to talk about race in the most non-literal terms. As soon as you talk in literal terms, people's brains shut off.

**When did you have your epiphany for the name Off-White™?**
I had spent 14 years with Kanye West and I was like, 'OK, let me remind myself of my favourite colour…' Pyrex was a sensation. I was selling it and I stopped it. It was only meant for a moment in time, it was never meant to be a long-standing thing. I came up with Off-White™ as a means to talk about race. Off-White™ is in-between black and white, but my version of in-between is tainted with my opinion. It's a blank canvas, a piece of off-white material that millions of artists can shape to give it value and meaning. Off-White™ is a modern version of a fashion brand. It's a Trojan Horse for me.

**Is it all designed by you?**
Yes. It's 200 pieces, men's and women's, four times a year. And I'm an architect! Building buildings was too slow and it wasn't communicating to kids in my social circle. There was no way to talk about it at the bar.

**And was there a manifesto?**
Yes there is. It exists online. It's about luxury, because my clothes are placed at a luxury price point. Off-White™ behaves like a luxury brand, but the spirit and everything underneath it relates to issues of race, youth culture, and globalization.

**Is it what David Adjaye would call 'new moral luxury'?**
In a way. I believe that there is a generation gap, a younger generation that the presiding generation is trying to understand. Certain fashion brands no longer speak to a younger generation.

**What's the average age of people who would buy your stuff?**
From 18 to Celine Dion's age, so around 50. I have invested in this group that the hierarchy is trying to relate to. I invested in the kids and their knowledge base. I have this tremendous base of information that I am very particular about, that I have absorbed. Off-White™ is me being a black artist in disguise as a fashion brand in disguise as a DJ, or however people choose to describe me. I chart my course by using my brand to do special projects.

**Can you describe a few examples of that to me?**
The diagonal lines of my brand's logo are very similar to the work of Peter Saville and Ben Kelly, the architect who did the Haçienda club in Manchester. I've commissioned him to do a mobile version of the Haçienda. It's an Off-White™-owned piece, but whenever it is activated with music, we do it together. We debuted it in Miami at the end of last year, it got commissioned at the Open Eye Gallery in Liverpool, and it is coming to Somerset House in London in November. Another example is Jenny Holzer, just two weeks ago.

**What's next?**
I got an email from Michael Darling, the curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. There's going to be an exhibition about my role in the cultural importance of young people. There are not many people who leave a trail of projects in different spheres, so between art, music, fashion, culture, I have 14 years of provocative work. That'll be in 2019 at the MCA.

**Like a retrospective exhibition?**
Not quite. There's new work. It's 14 years with Kanye West, leading projects, working on nuances with many artists, and my own projects that have never been shown. It's all one evolving idea and I use a train of projects to refine one idea. You know, I realized that an architect has no relation to the cultural kids who are musicians and actors, the people who are provocatively involved with culture. So I decided to start a fashion label and pour it all in. When I build stores, I'm actually building them in a certain postmodern way. I have this theory that no two stores should be alike – the opposite of Starbucks and McDonald's and Louis Vuitton where you walk in and everything is the same. The first part of the first store I designed in Hong Kong, on Causeway Bay, is natural, all green, and when you walk in, it rains. It's a symbol that clothes can be worn; they are not these precious items. And at the back is stone from a quarry. The architecture stuff just falls in like that. Same with music – I work with music acts and do clothes for them. All the way to Jenny Holzer two weeks ago. It all fits in with my halo of having a fashion brand.

**Fashion is acting as a gateway to everything else you do?**
Yes, which is how we get to my latest work with IKEA. IKEA works with a limited group of collaborators and now they are realizing that they are such a big business, they want to do special projects. Marcus [Engman] is the creative director of the whole thing and he approached me. He asked what I wanted to work on and I said I want to work on the millennial's first apartment. This is the post-Tumblr generation – we take multiple images and put them on a social-media platform and that exudes what our tastes are. So who is designing physical objects for the generation that has an aesthetic value, that understands what art is?

I am really fortunate to be able to travel to very wealthy people's places, people who live with a museum-quality art collection, but I also have friends whose first apartment purchases are chairs from IKEA. I was at the home of a friend's friend in Mexico City and they opened the doors and there was a Sterling Ruby, there was a Jeff Koons, and this is someone's house. I walk in and there's that feeling of being able to walk in your socks to go get a bowl of

## 'I got a call from Kanye West. He said, 'Hey, I heard about this kid in Chicago who can design and understands music and culture.''

## 'I can go to Japan and see a kid who looks like my friend from New York. They're fans of each other; they're sharing. That's the power of social media.'

cereal, while living with this art. And I thought: this is what this IKEA project is going to allow me to do, to transfer this sensibility to a generation that wants it. So that is what I am doing. I've written this 80-page book about the project. As you can imagine, I'm really long-winded about it. It's still only halfway done in my own head.

I had photos of a prototypical rich person's place and I made it like a catalogue, like how IKEA places the dollar amount next to items. There's this chair that's worth $60,000, but was originally designed for schools and wouldn't have cost anything before. I always start with a very true understanding of why something is important, like the cultural wash of that chair. And then I usually come up with something that's easy to follow with an interesting twist.

## 'Your parents' generation owned one jacket. This generation has 12 hoodies, 12 T-shirts; they're buying clothes like it's a sport and they're reselling them.'

**I've heard that not only artistically but also economically you revolutionized the fashion world.**
Luxury fashion worked in a certain way. Like, 'Here, we're going to sell you this dream'. Like the de Beers ad and aspirational clothing. You see it and you want to be that. Your parents' generation only owned one jacket, one outfit. This generation has 12 hoodies, 12 T-shirts; they're buying clothes like it's a sport and they're reselling them. Zara and H&M are making money by doing derivative fashion. So I wanted to make clothes for a luxury price point that have the spirit of young clothing, streetwear. And then I made a distribution model. I own the brand 100% myself, so I didn't have to give away anything to get what I want. And I said that I want to be in every store that Margiela, Prada, etc. are sold at. There are 260 men's stores, 250 women's stores, and so then the younger customer goes to the store. My economic growth is now at a level that proves my premise.

When I'm thinking about this IKEA project, it's so vast; it's more architecture than architecture to me. I've landed at a seminal project about designing objects in an era when millennials want a lower price, and IKEA's built its whole business on providing higher design and global accessibility.

One of the pillars of my work is releasing work in progress. I want these interviews that we're doing together to be a sort of published research, a manifesto. The design process is going to come after this conversation. In 30 years, you are going to be able to draw from this project. That is what motivated me to do this. Think about the readers of this content who want to understand their times, in retrospect.

**Part Two**
**Empty Gallery, New York**
**July 28th, 2017**

I am opening a retail store here in August. The first Off-White™ retail store, on Mercer Street. Art direction for me starts as a series of questions. As a new, young brand that's challenging luxury, I said, 'Is it cool to have a store?' The answer is no. Stores in 2017 for a brand are a little braggadocious. People can go online and buy things. Customers can choose digitally.

**So it is unnecessary to have a store?**
Yes. So I'm opening a gallery; it is called Empty Gallery.

**So it is not a store, it's a gallery?**
Branded LLC through and through, but it's not an Off-White™ store. I found this space on Mercer with a burned-out second floor, so it's double-height, and then I made the whole thing into a white-cube gallery. A garage door opens at the front. It is activated by curating an artist. First put the artwork in the space and then the retail comes in second, so there is a hierarchy. I did a street survey and was informed by the shopping culture, the walking nature of this area. You can walk by a retail store, but if it stays the same for 10 years, why would you ever go in? For me, my brand is digital; it came from Instagram. People know the brand through images, but they never see the clothes, so I am giving them some experience of the store. There is sound design, there is art direction, and I did the first installation myself.

**And what about the clothes?**
The clothes are there, but they are secondary. I have designed the fixtures in a certain way and the merchandising in a certain way. You are walking into a world that happens to have clothes in it.

**It's the first non-store store. It opens tomorrow? I'm in LA.**
I'm in Montauk. I'm not even here for the opening. I am here working on that and a few other projects and meetings of that nature. There is a lot of energy in this city at this moment.

**You feel there is a lot of energy here right now?**
Yes, there is. A lot of the creative young force that made New York City moved to LA, so this city is dealing with a creative drought, but there are creatives who have hunkered down and now it's the real ones left. After the hype that drew everyone to LA, there are interesting things happening here.

**You find it revived?**
It is sifted. You sift it away and find the core of creatives that is interested in the 2.0, the after-effect of youth culture. Everyone young is an artist, designer, creative director. What you have now is a generation like myself, age 37. I've been learning and working through my teenage years and 20s, and now I am in my 30s applying these ideas in new ways.

**You've maintained your base in Chicago. Is that a conscious decision?**

## 'People have too many clothes, so why make more clothes? My clothes are ironic. They are designed to make people question what else is in their closet.'

It is super conscious. When you live in a city like Chicago, you're 'out of the mix'. There is a natural cadence in New York or LA, so there is a reality check when you go home. Travel allows me to consciously compare and contrast. I can see the differences between a European train of thought of a 25-year-old to that of a 14-year-old in New York City. They are starting to analyse the world around them, and my creative process is super-reactive. Like when I went to the Serpentine and I saw Arthur Jafa, it immediately triggered a train of thought. That's where I find the value in great work; I just loved how he was able to articulate his ideas.

**You should do a T-shirt collaboration with Arthur Jafa.**
I would love that. I think there is a clear synergy between what is happening in respective spaces. These little remnants offered to the public are like entry points to that dialogue. I love how the Serpentine is embracing a particular genre of art, giving a voice to stories that are happening now. His work is ultra-relevant.

**Are the glasses another of your many collaborations?**
Yes, with Warby Parker. I work in a collaborative tornado every day. Warby Parker disrupted the market place and basically threatened Luxottica by offering prescription eyewear online for $95. I over-intellectualize and I design fashion in an architectural way, so when asked to do a collaboration, it was more me asking a client what they need and then offering my opinion. I often think democratically. In this case: 'How do you design one pair of glasses?' Not for one person but across the set. That is how you can influence mass change. There is a new trend in eyewear that's a bit more 1990s, glasses with really small lenses. But then there is also a presiding trend. So I designed one frame and then I shrank it by 50% and increased it by 150%. It is one frame in three sizes: large, small and medium. Everyone can find a shape that suits them, but it is only one frame. To me, it is all about ideas. The diagonal lines are the language of the brand, like my monogram, before Louis Vuitton or Gucci. It is derivative. It's a pattern.

**So diagonal lines are your monogram?**
Yes, exactly. Which is so generic, and I use punctuation a lot as well, as a branding tool. My idea is to embrace generic-ness. I have this theory on anonymity, too. Anonymous design, which you get in furniture a lot. The presiding thing with youth now is normcore.

**You know normcore was coined in a lecture at the Serpentine?[4]**
That is the presiding mood of young people, of my generation. This idea that generic is the new cool. Anonymous is fine. And I have drawn parallels with my work, my furniture. If it looks like design, then it must be design. In fashion, a trend becomes so ubiquitous that it is easy to duplicate and people do it more for that reason than for aesthetics. I like finding ideas under that camouflage of anonymity. I use fashion as a tool to communicate. We are now such a visual society. We consume images.

**Is your store already on Instagram?**
You know, that's funny. It is not. I have deliberately made the choice to let the organic process of discovery happen. So I DJed last night and I used my set like a sonar. I did an experiment and DJed for six hours straight in Brooklyn with a Funktion-One sound system, no cameras allowed. I did a marathon set just to get a litmus test of where music is at right now. It was a way of thinking.

**What kind of music do you play when you DJ?**
I play 80 percent contemporary music that they think I am going to play. The remaining 20 percent is songs that they forgot they loved, to awaken their minds. A rock'n'roll song that you might not know the name of, but you know the lyrics. You constantly have to reawaken

people. You play that one chord no one is expecting to hear and then everyone is engaged.

**What kind of music is it?**
I play techno, hip-hop, rock'n'roll, soul. It puts my brain on display. It is as eclectic as I feel, as I am, as I work with art or fashion. I've started working on a super-large-scale sculpture for my Museum of Contemporary Art show. It will be one of the first times that people see my artwork. I am doing a one-to-one scale sculpture of a Concorde airplane made of cardboard boxes. It's essentially a paper plane. I was at structural-engineering school when 9/11 happened. I saw a plane in a building in my brain, in a class that was studying how buildings fall down. This sculpture will travel the world, but will always be intercepted with buildings. It will be made out of ready-made boxes. And there's the idea that commercial people used to be able to break the sound barrier. Another project is for Nike, which has given me 10 shoes to redesign. It's a design project, not a fashion project. I'm reimagining 10 icons in Nike's portfolio across their different brands.

**They have given you famous shoes.**
Famous shoes that I have reworked. The oldest Nike technology, crashed together like a collage. I love showing the process. This is unstitched, this is raw edged… To show that there is human interaction, that these things don't come from a factory, that there's handwork, mixing arts and crafts with industrialism.

There is always an underlying voice in my work, with a little humour or irony. A human connection. I use texts on the inside of the shoes. The writing that you can see on the shoes is my handwriting attempting to be Helvetica. I like Helvetica. It's the most generic font there is. It keeps an even keel. It is of no import. I have adapted it so it is my own.

**What other sculptures have you done?**
Lots of furniture work, so you're not sure if it's a chair or a sculpture. That's in the IKEA work, too. I designed and made an armchair myself, building upon things to bring them to a new generation.

**Like with Superstudio.**
Yes. This is my DNA. Five years of practical work and no aesthetic training and then three years of architecture, which is all aesthetics based on the practical, so my brain is equally split. I can think of structure and have an aesthetic. I can slide the scale between them. Add in my theoretical analysis and I can propose new ideas that are provocative. One major thread that runs through my DNA is that I like using ready-made things. That is a tool to evoke instant emotion. Like with the music, when I play songs that are in the backs of people's heads. I use diagonal lines on the street as a pattern. But I am branding. On my Instagram, I often use quote marks or trademark symbols. I look at those as graphics.

**Do you have a definition of design?**
Do you know Bob Gill, the graphic artist? I just discovered him last week. He is like: 'Forget all the rules you learned about graphic design, including the ones in this book.' Very provocative, the idea of evoking emotion and taking people on a new journey. At the root of my definition of design is having an intention. There are enough things in the world. Remember when recycling began? That way of thinking triggered how we are today. This whole health thing, too. These parallels exist in my design. How much is too much? People have too many clothes, so why make more clothes? My clothes are ironic. They are designed to make people question what else is in their closet. You should only buy something new if it is different. But then they're my vehicle, too. When I looked at Arthur Jafa's work, the first piece with the black Confederate flag and the black American flag blew my mind. The medium is there to talk about race. Thinking of my T-shirts as works of art, I built a brand around a word related to race, and people can swallow the pill because it's on a T-shirt. The graphic says 'white', but the brain says something else. The colour white isn't opinionated. It's a colour, but it is layered. It's also generic. I look at clothing as a canvas before I look at it as fashion.

1. Chicago's Illinois Institute of Technology has the greatest concentration of Mies van der Rohe-designed buildings in the world. The 20 buildings include S.R. Crown Hall, a steel-and-glass testament to the architect's 'less is more' aesthetic.

2. The McCormick Tribune Campus Center (MTCC) was opened in 2003. It was the first building designed by Rem Koolhaas in the US. Built beneath an elevated public-transit line, it incorporates a 160m-long stainless-steel tube to enclose trains as they pass over.

3. In 2006, graphic designer Michael Rock was awarded the USA's prestigious National Design Award. He later caused a scandal when he refused to visit the White House to collect the prize.

4. The term 'normcore' was coined in *Youthmode: A Report on Freedom*, delivered by US trend forecaster K-HOLE and Brazilian research group Box 1824 at the 89plus Marathon, curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist, Simon Castets, Ben Vickers and Jochen Volz, at the Serpentine Gallery on October 18, 2013.

# ‘No one owns anything anymore.’

## Virgil Abloh and architect Rem Koolhaas on the future of living, working and selling.

**Photographs by Piotr Niepsuj**

Rem Koolhaas is one of the world's leading architects. His firm, OMA, has designed buildings around the world, including the Central Library in Seattle (2004) and Chinese state television's Beijing headquarters in (2012). He also leads AMO, a 'research and design studio' that 'applies architectural thinking to domains beyond'. Known for their voluminous research documents and studies, such as the now-classic, 1,300-page *S,M,L,XL* (1995), Koolhaas, OMA and AMO have long been inspirations for Virgil Abloh. We brought together the 73-year-old architect and theorist of society, urbanism, living spaces and consumerism with the 37-year-old polymath for a wide-ranging conversation, one that reveals two original thinkers currently shaping the landscape of the world we live in.

**Rem:** And that furniture is just for the store or can it also be bought?
**Virgil** Yes, it's a series you can buy. It was produced in Italy and I have an agent in Paris who represents it globally. My career is fashion four times a year and a new series of furniture maybe once every year and a half. IKEA approached me to do a survey of millennials' first apartments, so I am looking at doing 30 pieces of furniture that could be a tool kit for millennials. So I am understanding the different clientele – why they purchase furniture, what they want. Part of the study was understanding the Duchamp principles of art and objects. I looked at the IKEA nomenclature, a Kelly bag, and how the price of a Tom Sachs art piece evolves.

Looking at Tumblr images is how millennials assemble these images to represent themselves. No one owns anything anymore, but if you have knowledge of a certain chair, then it is part of your dinner conversation. That is the millennials' train of thought. I am interested in this new cultural world that we have been handed, that processes politics and art in a different and democratic way.

I am doing this survey because I am giving IKEA a design proposal. This is the very first book that I've done as a research project and I wanted to use it in a Duchamp spirit, to reapproach these iconic designs in a way that takes the energy of the historical side and replaces it with something that a young person can identify with. Ultimately, this drove me down the path of researching how the art-gallery world reclaims iconic design pieces.

**Rem:** Did IKEA agree to the prices in your design proposal?
**Virgil:** The prices might be lower! The proposal was to invite people to imagine a college dorm room, and imagine that it contained the equivalent of a $110,000 lamp, say, but because it is made with IKEA, the cost is much lower.

I got interested in plastic, tape and fire-proofing. The images show the disarray in being provocative and pushing IKEA. Now we're doing prototypes and it all has to be done in a certain way by hand. I find that intriguing because IKEA is a brand that forces the consumer to make the item. It comes with a little Allen wrench, and you have to realize the form through a series of steps. This final form forces people to artistically upholster, which is a process, a DIY, IKEA thing. I want to find out what it's like living with this new idea of preservation.

**Rem:** So, you say you work with other people, but that you are doing most of this on your own?
**Virgil:** I embed myself into a culture. It is not simply designing stores for a client, or saying, 'Here are some chairs for 10,000 student homes'. There is potential for a new way of thinking about introducing new ideas. Within architecture, it's always been a built form or a published book, those are the arms to seep into the common person. Now I've made this brand that speaks to millennials directly. When is our generation going to produce something that is of value to the generation coming afterwards?

**Rem:** How old are you?
**Virgil:** I'm 37, which has given me 15 years of practising.
**Rem:** Do you consider yourself a millennial? Or just before?
**Virgil:** Just before. I am a little bit too old, but I went to enough school to be able to understand it. I keep myself young – like a fountain of youth!
**Rem:** Actually, I did the same thing. I went to school again when I was 26 to study architecture.

**Virgil:** I think the Internet has created a sort of utopia. I look at it as potential. Do you feel that this is a Renaissance period or the worst Armageddon?
**Rem:** I'm not sure I can judge this. I never try to define it. It has elements of both, but I don't think it is a bad period. Do you? Maybe it just becomes more boring. Cities will become more boring. It will be offices and work. Cities will have no real use. There is no business anymore.
**Virgil:** I went to a store this morning and there was no one in there, literally no one. Imagine if all the vacant spaces invited contemporary architecture and it was like, 'Hey, let's go meet at this pavilion'. An area with Internet and basic things. Just a space that people go to. Space has always had value, but now it means something different. At this moment, once you take things that have traditionally lived in four sacred walls – the art world, the fashion world – this holy layer for purists, and you intersect it with tourists, with people who are authentic to themselves, then you could get change.

I think it could be super profound to come into a home embedded with a new ethos. I have only just scratched the surface. I want to go more in-depth. I want to be part of a think tank on new spaces and collaborate on new, non-traditional projects, finding some way to combine things. I want to create a fashion think tank and write a curriculum. The same way you have set up your infrastructure, I want to do the same thing. I want to do an inverse think tank about consumerism and objects. People invest in clothing but not in the rest of their living space.

At one of my shows, the chairs were called Free Cubes and people could take them. Here's the shift – people took an Off-White™ product that wasn't clothing. I never said that they were free and people could leave with them, but people were like, 'Hey, I can take these'. I broke the threshold. Is this part of the set? Is this going to the trash? Is this going to waste? And their value was raised because I put text on them. I put the word 'Off' on them. Kids took three of them, put them in their trunk, rode the subway, and they just ended up in the world. The knowledge of the brand made them take something that wouldn't be in their closet, but in their living room.

Gathering information from millennials and thinking in an architectural way about fashion, there is so much at play between six or seven layers. There is the purist and there is the tourist, who is mindfully following trends on social media.

**Rem:** You are basically the first person to have something good to say about tourism in 10 years. I'm serious.
**Virgil:** The young communities of these cities are looking for direction. I want to publish essays of people leaving New York for Los Angeles. That is a huge cultural thing that is happening. It's a small, influential story behind why New York has changed in the last five years. There was a storm that came and wiped out lower Manhattan, and they all decided to go where the weather is constant.

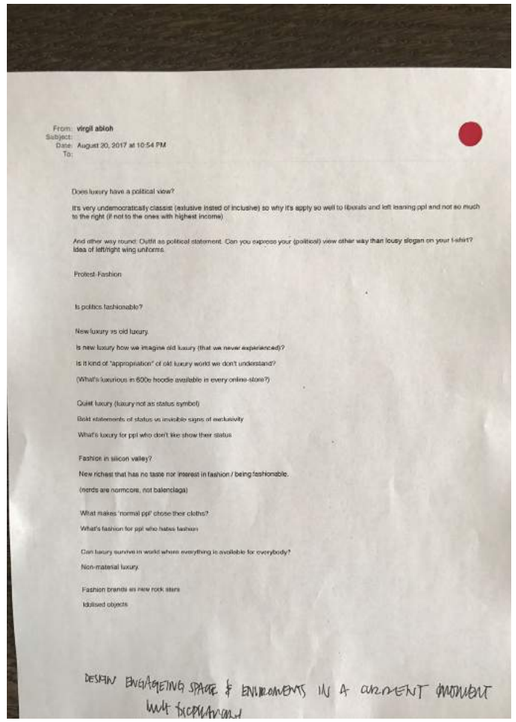
The important rationale about this new youth group is that it feels like they are seeing the world with fresh eyes, as if nothing came before them, trying to rationalize things to make the proper moves forward. Someone who lives with three people might have a living room empty to the point of there being no furniture, because there is no need for them to communally gather. My basis in this project is the bedroom as a unit and what's absolutely necessary.
**Rem:** So are you actually looking into conceptualizing a new bedroom or a new existence minimum for that age group? Do you know the expression 'existence minimum'?
**Virgil:** No.
**Rem:** It's the very minimum people need to exist. People find it very frightening because they are addicted to luxury, but I find it very sympathetic. It shows that there is no waste and that you are really focusing on the essential. Is that something you are looking at? Are you trying to do this metaphorically or literally?
**Virgil:** I am doing it metaphorically. I am interested in the information about this idea of modern living that I have

## 'I use my career in design to focus on a brand. I am creating a dialogue with culture that Louis Vuitton and Kering haven't been able to understand.'

**Virgil:** I do everything with an architectural way of thinking, using my career in design to focus on a brand. I am creating a dialogue with culture that Louis Vuitton and Kering haven't been able to understand. This is the next generation of consumers, with their own ways to buy, and ideas of what's important. In the years between 2009 and now, a new consumerism has emerged.

At my Shanghai store I designed the furniture, too. I was interested in the external structure being the main structure and this hollowed-out feeling. It's the very first furniture I have produced that is on sale in collectable design spheres. Whether it is taking something with a [Marcel] Duchamp-principle and adding value to an inanimate object, or something else, it's about making new work with a reference to the past.

## 'Existence minimum' refers to the minimum people need to exist. People find that frightening because they're addicted to luxury, but I find it sympathetic.'



From: virgil abloh
Subject:
Date: August 30, 2017 at 10:54 PM
To:

Does luxury have a political view?

It's very undemocratically classist (estutive instead of inclusive) so why it's apply so well to liberals and left leaning ppl and not so much to the right (if not to the ones with highest income)

And other way round: Outfit as political statement. Can you express your (political) view other way than lousy slogan on your t-shirt? Idea of left/right wing uniforms.

Protest Fashion

Is politics fashionable?

New luxury vs old luxury

Is new luxury how we imagine old luxury (that we never experienced)?

Is it kind of "appropriation" of old luxury world we don't understand?

(What's luxurious in 600e hoodie available in every online store?)

Quiet luxury (luxury not as status symbol)

Bold statements of status vs invisible signs of exclusivity

What's luxury for ppl who don't like show their status

Fashion in silicon valley?

New richest that has no taste nor interest in fashion / being fashionable.

(nerds are normcore, not balenciaga)

What makes 'normal ppl' chose their cloths?

What's fashion for ppl who hates fashion

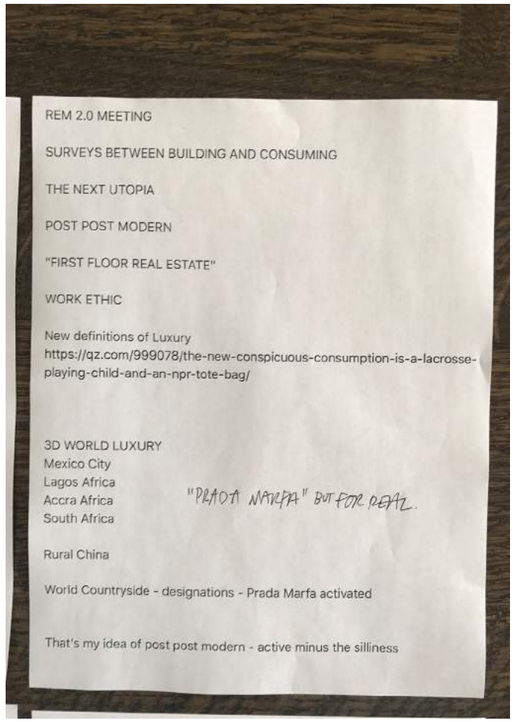
Can luxury survive in world where everything is available for everybody?

Non-material luxury

Fashion brands as new rock stars

Idolised objects

DESIGN ENCHANTING SPACE & ENVIRONMENTS IN A CURRENT CONTEXT WITH INSPIRATION



REM 2.0 MEETING

SURVEYS BETWEEN BUILDING AND CONSUMING

THE NEXT UTOPIA

POST POST MODERN

"FIRST FLOOR REAL ESTATE"

WORK ETHIC

New definitions of Luxury
https://qz.com/999078/the-new-conspicuous-consumption-is-a-lacrosse-playing-child-and-an-npr-tote-bag/

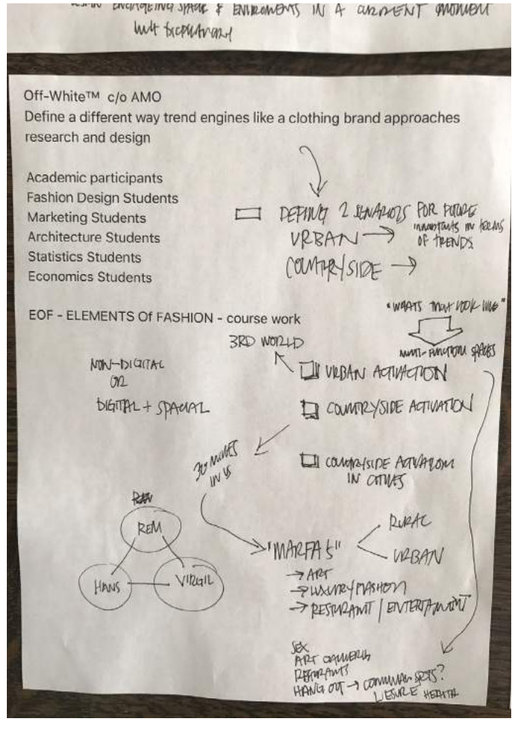
3D WORLD LUXURY
Mexico City
Lagos Africa
Accra Africa
South Africa

"PRADA MARFA" BUT FOR REAL.

Rural China

World Countryside - designations - Prada Marfa activated

That's my idea of post post modern - active minus the silliness



Off-White™ c/o AMO
Define a different way trend engines like a clothing brand approaches research and design

Academic participants
Fashion Design Students
Marketing Students
Architecture Students
Statistics Students
Economics Students

DEFINING 2 SCENARIOS FOR FUTURE URBAN → COUNTRYSIDE → MOVEMENTS IN TERMS OF TRENDS

EOF - ELEMENTS Of FASHION - course work

"WHAT'S THAT LOOK LIKE"

3RD WORLD

NON-DIGITAL OR DIGITAL + SPATIAL

URBAN ACTIVATION

COUNTRYSIDE ACTIVATION

COUNTRYSIDE ACTIVATION IN CITIES

30 MINUTES IN LA

REM

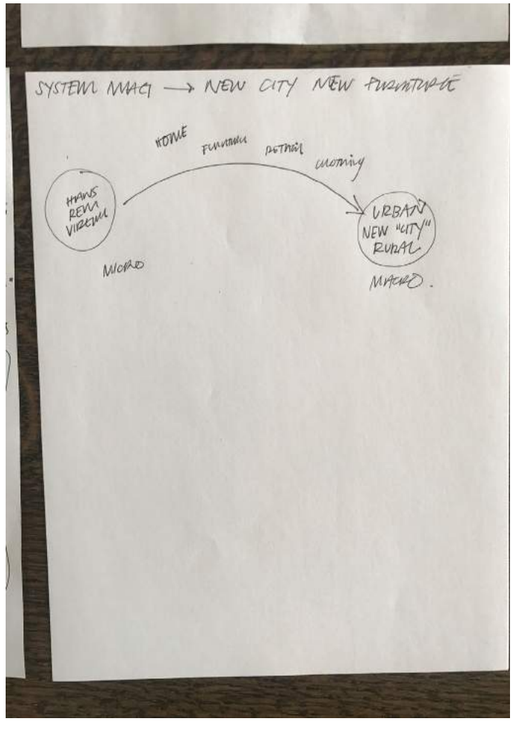
REM
HANS
VIRGIL

"MARFA 6"

RURAL
URBAN

→ ART
→ LUXURY FASHION
→ RESTAURANT / ENTERTAINMENT

SEX
ART GALLERIES
RESTAURANTS
HANG OUT → COMMUNAL SPOTS?
LEISURE HOSPITAL



SYSTEM MACH → NEW CITY NEW FURNITURE

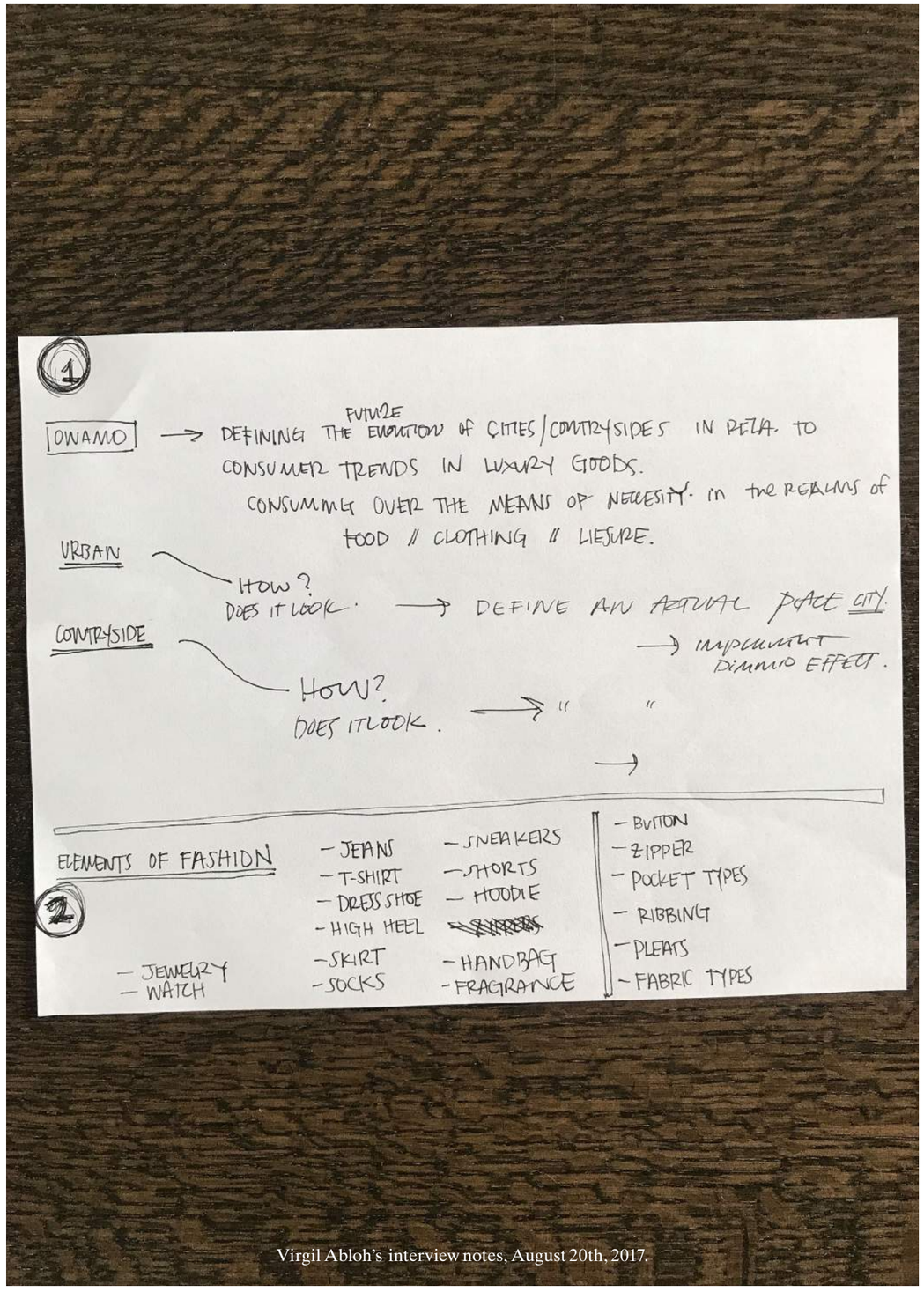
HOME
FURNITURE
OFFICE
CLOTHING

HANS REM VIRGIL

NOMAD

URBAN NEW "CITY" RURAL

NOMAD.



1

OWAMO → DEFINING THE FUTURE EVOLUTION OF CITIES/COUNTRYSIDES IN RELA. TO CONSUMER TRENDS IN LUXURY GOODS.
CONSUMING OVER THE MEANS OF NECESITY. IN THE REALMS OF FOOD // CLOTHING // LIESURE.

URBAN
HOW? DOES IT LOOK. → DEFINE AN ACTUAL PLACE CITY.
→ IMPLEMENT DIMMO EFFECT.

COUNTRYSIDE
HOW? DOES IT LOOK. → " "
→

2

ELEMENTS OF FASHION

- JEANS
- T-SHIRT
- DRESS SHOE
- HIGH HEEL
- SKIRT
- SOCKS
- SNEAKERS
- SHORTS
- HOODIE
- ~~SUNGLASSES~~
- HANDBAG
- FRAGRANCE
- JEWELRY
- WATCH
- BUTTON
- ZIPPER
- POCKET TYPES
- RIBBING
- PLEATS
- FABRIC TYPES

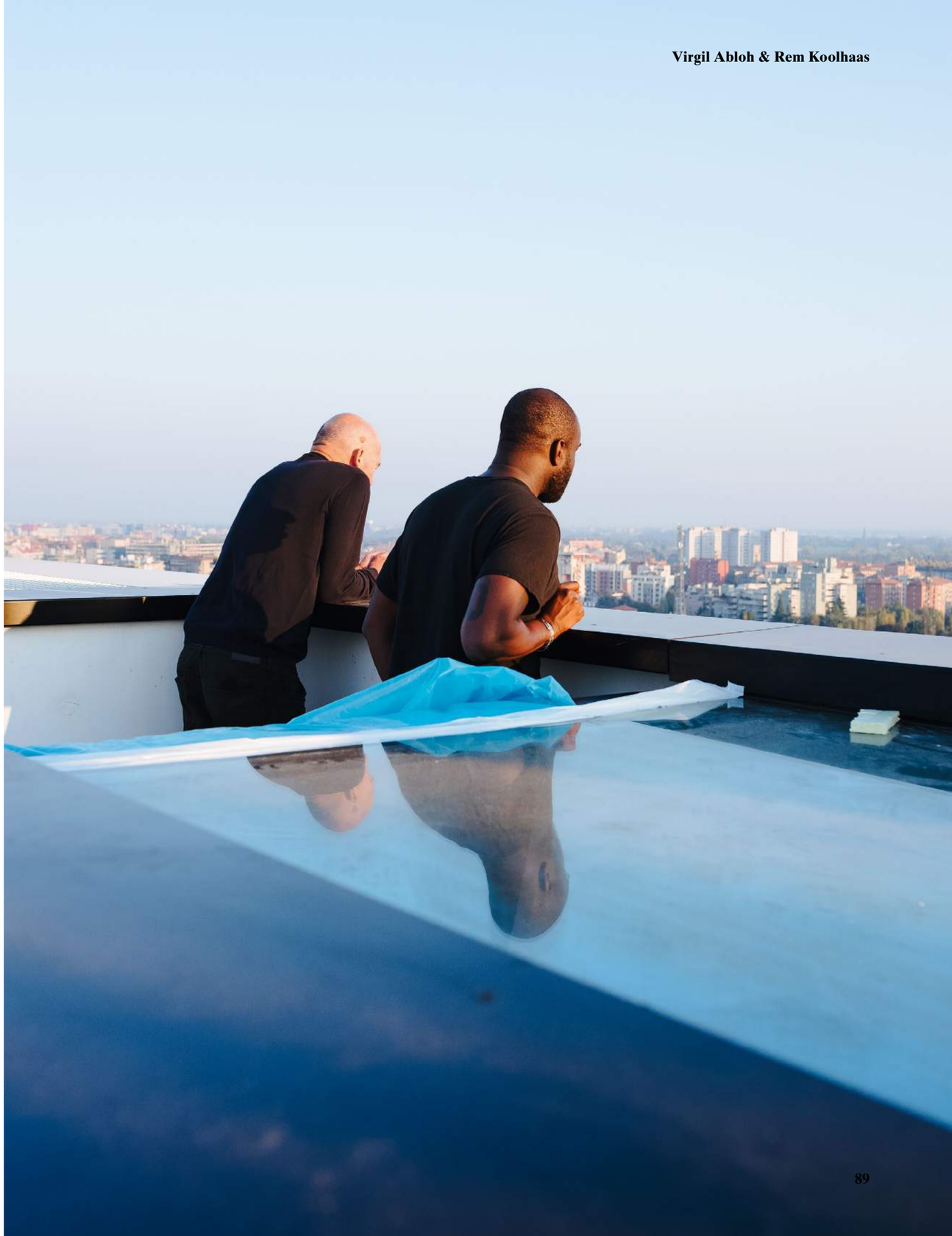
Virgil Abloh's interview notes, August 20th, 2017.

gathered and am discussing with networks. How we live digitally through avatars and Instagram, how we share and connect ideas, and how we're not really specific to a city. We are all travelling together, and through our shared decisions there is a trend effect, which dictates and then inspires a whole group of others to continue going down that path. Challenged with the project of designing a set of furniture, designing environments, I am placing importance through discussion on that sort of premise, like the Bauhaus premise. We need to know what is minimal.

**Rem:** But, eventually, do you want to construct something?
**Virgil:** Yes.
**Rem:** I am actually also working on a project to have a similar pre-fab environment for minimal existence, somewhere in Los Angeles. I didn't necessarily imagine you were doing this with a physical project, I thought it was stuff that you were developing.
**Virgil:** Yes, it started out as an aesthetic, but has become more of a survey. It's turned into travelling the world, interviewing millennials, and finding out how they understand the objects they live with. Where they place importance. How they live with roommates. Then I compare that to the aesthetic assumptions that I had in the beginning.
**Rem:** And you do that in order to refine them?
**Virgil:** Yes, exactly. To see if things meet, then refine and reduce.
**Rem:** To refine it, or to expand it?
**Virgil:** To refine it. I am interested in editing.

**Rem:** But you are editing your own furniture line.
**Virgil:** Exactly.
**Rem:** So you want to test this.
**Virgil:** Exactly, to see if my aesthetic ambitions serve a purpose. A large part of the process is understanding what is physically necessary to live as a person who is aged 18 to 26. And then see what adds value to their space from an aesthetic perspective, as well. Hence, the idea of understanding previous notions of furniture, like a Le Corbusier lamp. What I found interesting about the backdrop of IKEA is the role monetary value plays in the overall aesthetic. During my survey, I visited a multi-millionaire who had museum-quality art and I wondered what I could make at IKEA that would transcend the idea of monetary value, so that people would adopt it because it is tied to something else with value. It's research – that's my point of view and I am having conversations around it to be informed.
**Rem:** I am very impressed by the aesthetic and I recognize some of the moves, particularly with this material. A return to something that is not blatantly wasteful and almost tender to the touch. I can respond positively to almost all of this, but of course, I do not have the tastes of a millennial.
**Virgil:** My aggressive ambition is that this state of flux be perfectly ordered because I said, 'I am going to steer this in the right direction'. My work might alter the actual course that that dart was going to go. It's all shifting. Is a guy from Silicon Valley going to make the decisions, or me as a guy between architecture and design? I value the work of IKEA and my adding to their ecosystem is about being anti-anonymous design. When I look at all the chairs they offer, they are all designed, which raises this multiplicity of things that look designed, but are not actually provocative. That is where I started with the aesthetic, and then I stopped and began doing this survey to add these dual layers. But it started with me understanding what IKEA is in this world of brands and services.
**Rem:** You know that IKEA is now, for the first time, agreeing to dismantle their stores. They are basically stopping their exclusivity.
**Virgil:** So, yes, I could sell IKEA products at my store.
**Rem:** Which is a totally new thing.
**Virgil:** Does IKEA resonate with you, for any specific thing?
**Rem:** We consulted with them around 10 years ago, when their stores were in big boxes in the countryside, and they were worried that we were running out of countryside, so they were asking themselves what an urban IKEA would look like. We helped them with that. With many of these companies, you itch to take all their ingredients and take them further, or connect them, or curate them. I feel that this is something that you are doing, or that you want to do, Virgil.
**Virgil:** You always see IKEA on the way to the airport or into the city. Do you have a term for that? Like, not the full countryside, but that sort of, like, buffer airport zone?
**Rem:** I am not thinking about that. I think that has been thought about for some time and there is quite a lot of literature.

## 'Virgil, you are basically the first person in about 10 years to have something at all good to say about tourism. I'm serious.'



# colette: past, present and future

**After 20 years at 213 Rue Saint-Honoré, where next for Sarah? By Sarah Andelman. Illustration by Jean-Philippe Delhomme.**

Some people thought I would move to Woodstock after closing colette. After all there's still so much to discover in the region. Like Hobart, a town I just found out has seven bookshops for 600 inhabitants! I love our 'second home' in the Catskills, but I still can't imagine living here full-time. Would I appreciate the sky, the flowers, the river in the same way if they were part of my *quotidien*?

Nevertheless, it's always amazing what you can find when you have a curious and roaming eye – which is what my mother, Colette, has always taught me. And it is a desire to discover and share what's new that explains much of colette's 20-year history. But now it's time for me to turn the page on that past and seek out other expressions of 'new'. Why now? Simply because it just felt like the right thing to do. It could have been yesterday or next year or in 15 years, but the fact is, we're content to be announcing our closure at a time when the business is doing well, and the colette story remains pure and untarnished. Of course, we could have sold the name – and the business – on many previous occasions, but colette is tied to a place and to the person whose name it bears.

My mother has worked incredibly hard all her life; she's been profoundly inspiring to me and many others. Yet only a few people have witnessed first-hand quite how committed she's been over the past two decades, just how fundamental she has been to the spirit and history of colette. But now it's time for her to take a step back, to adjust to a different rhythm of life, even though her curiosity will always remain.

As for me, this past fashion week has been the first in over 20 years that I've not had to run around like crazy, placing orders. My first instinct, when discovering the work of a young designer or a new magazine or an original-looking skateboard, has always been to place an order and share those things in colette. Not having that outlet is a big change for me. But it won't stop me continuing to support creative talents, however I can.

In Paris, I recently went to an event honouring the late Pierre Bergé. Dominique Deroche – who spent much her life working with Monsieur Bergé and Yves Saint Laurent – took the time to speak to me, kindly commenting that everything we did at colette was *éblouissant*: 'dazzling' or 'magnificent'. Coming from a woman who collaborated so closely with Monsieur Saint Laurent, it was powerful and meant a lot. But then Dominique has always been wonderful to me. It was 1998 when I first went to her office – unbelievably! – to ask to stage an exhibition at colette of Saint Laurent's *La Vilaine Lulu* drawings. I know that in later years Monsieur Bergé (somewhat) distanced himself from the brand he'd given his life to, but I wish he was still around to witness the approaching transformation of colette into Saint Laurent.

The last day of colette will be December 20th. As much as I want it to be a regular working day, I know it'll be a combination of intense personal emotion and the madness of the crowded space. We've already witnessed incredible scenes just these past few weeks: people in tears telling us how much colette has meant to them; a gay couple who came in to tell us they'd named their child colette, after the store.

It is too early to tell what history will make of colette. It's not something I can control, and I have no desire at the moment to mythologize a project that's always been about the present and future, even though I'm as fascinated as anyone by the mythology of historical places such as Biba. As things stand, the legacy of colette – if there is one – is of a place where we brought people together and made things happen. It's always been about creating a place where everyone can come and where everything is possible.

And that's where I see my future: continuing to 'make things happen'. Staging exhibitions, projects and collaborations, but also working directly with brands or channels, perhaps. And as long as the work retains the same freedom and openness to which I've become accustomed at colette, it could be anyone – a young designer, a huge brand like Coca-Cola, a car manufacturer. Because as I've learned these past 20 years, with a curious eye, anything is possible.

# For whom the cow bells toll.

**A modest suggestion: look at fashion. Then head for the hills.**
**By Matthew Schneier. Illustration by Jean-Philippe Delhomme.**

On October 4th, after 30 or so days of looking – continuously, nearly unblinkingly – at fashion and fashion shows, I woke up early, groggy, sour, and went to see the cows. They were skinny, brindled things, more like dogs than heifers, and they had outfits, or at least, accessories: bells around their necks that clanged in warning when they walked. They sounded like church bells in miniature.

I had come to escape. I was by a field in an obscure canton of German-speaking Switzerland, where the locals talk in a dialect unintelligible even to Swiss German speakers, fry veal sausages and go about their business well insulated from what we euphemistically call the 'fashion world'. A multibillion dollar business that in recent years has mutated into something combining the best and worst parts of commerce, blockbusters and bullshit. I am (luckily, I might add) part of an odd, sizable caravan whose job it is to follow the circus and report what goes on there to those who are interested. It's a job I found my way into without intending to, but found myself enraptured by an industry that exists at the nexus of so many fascinating vectors, often working against one another. I love commerce. I love blockbusters. Properly delivered, I love bullshit.

As fashion has moved from the elite privilege of the cloistered few to mass entertainment on a Hollywood scale, more people are interested in it than ever, and accordingly, there is more need to interest them. So the shows have become richer, stranger, with musical acts and set pieces and sponsored starlets sitting front row. More than anything else, there just seems to be more of everything: more brands and more shows and more insistence on giving them your full attention. The scale and the scope have become dizzying, the language used to describe them more hyperventilated. We're obsessed and we need and we must have and we love. (I am guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty.)

Despite the alarming bounty, there is also a nagging feeling of alarming sameness, ideas ricocheting from one collection to the next, sequential tiles in an endless Instagram scroll. (If Instagram has made it easy for everyone to imbibe one another's lives, loves and ideas, it also makes it easy for upstarts like Diet Prada to call out serial offenders.) Every collection seems enslaved to the idea of a millennial shopper, so every collection now includes a high-end sneaker, a logo T-shirt, a flirty, whiplash mix of 'street', 'sport' and 'haute'.

What brought me to Switzerland was a creeping feeling that the fashion circuit has become alarmingly closed; that fashion people, such as we are, do fashion things, talk fashion talk, chew over the same small handful of references like cud, and retire home to do it all again. Half the people leaving Paris Fashion Week seemed to be headed to Frieze, and half seemed to be headed to a Supreme store opening in Brooklyn. I headed to a Swiss hotel with a more than passing resemblance to a sanatorium. I don't say this to brag; St Moritz this was not. I dined on health mush and hot cheese; I was the youngest guest by a decade at least. The Blue Room outside of which a strings-and-piano duo in formalwear played every night had not been redecorated since 1908. Every morning, print copies – imagine, print copies of a newspaper! – of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* waited, relaxing in a language I cannot read.

It was profoundly, restoratively un-fashion. Everyone wore unstylish skiwear and sipped thin red Swiss wine in the cold open air by the third-rate golf club. (The Swiss consume most of the wine they produce and export very little; you are not likely to see it on the wine list of any fashionable place any time soon.) Reprieved from the obligation to obsess, to notice every shoe (and the fact that no fewer than three of your international colleagues are wearing it at any one time), I relaxed. I didn't realize how sensitive my antennae had become, nor how tense I had gotten from holding them aloft at all times. I straightened up from my front-row defensive crouch. I rode a bike (terrifying). I petted a cow.

Maybe you knew this all already. Maybe you don't need to be reminded to unplug by someone recently converted to the lifestyle of a Swiss convalescent in the years preceding World War I. (Please prepare yourself for my forthcoming lifestyle brand.) But fashion will wait. I blame no one for sheltering in it as a distraction and a refuge, especially at a time when it seems as uncertain of its own future as at any time I can recall (retail is hobbling, magazines are shuttering, 'the system is broken', the lifers mutter as they head off for their town cars).

But to obsess without end won't save it, or us. What we may need – in my own, single, humble opinion – is to go farther from the trail, to be braver, stranger, less slavish in our devotion to our obsessions and less terrified of our deviations, and to return the better for it. So I did. I left in my overnight bag the high-end sneaker and the logo tee. I asked not for whom the cowbell tolls. It tolls for me, and thee.

# Fashion memory lane

**Taking a stand against Mao with a dress.**
**By Hung Huang. Illustration by Jean-Philippe Delhomme.**

I am Chinese – at least, I was born Chinese, in 1961. That year, wearing a dress was all the rage. Especially the *boo-la-gee*, which was how we pronounced платье, the Russian word for dress. This one in particular was a shirt-dress – with button fastenings on the top half, just like a shirt, and a gathered skirt from the waist. This is my first fashion memory. My grandparents used to take me to the parks around Tiananmen Square, and I remember all the girls in their *boo-la-gee* twirling around to see whose skirt could make a bigger shadow in the sun.

By the time I was in primary school in 1968, the Cultural Revolution was in full swing and no one was wearing a *boo-la-gee* anymore; it had become the wardrobe of the 'stinking Soviet revisionists'. The fashion became instead to get army-surplus clothes and pin as many Mao badges on them as possible. When I was in first grade, small Mao badges were in, but they grew bigger and bigger until eventually our baggy uniforms were weighed down with them. Those were crazy years, with midnight parades to celebrate a new speech from the Chairman, and loudspeakers blasting his latest quotes, with everyone marching in their Mao-badge-pinned uniforms. It was like North Korea is now.

By the time I was sent to boarding school in 1970, Mao badges were 'so last season', but army surplus was still all the rage. Particularly the real deal, which you could tell apart from replicas with the badges. The real ones had special badges. The cool kids in my class were army brats, with real uniform hand-me-downs from their fathers.

In 1973, I was sent to New York by the Chinese government to study English. To show my staunch patriotic stance, I was determined to wear my army greens over there. But I was told that Westerners already thought the Chinese were poor, so we should get extremely dressed up to show them how well-off China really was. Twenty-eight of us were sent to different countries, and we all received a huge clothing stipend. We made fancy suits for ourselves. I remember getting a dark-red pleated skirt and a light-blue woollen coat.

Unfortunately, the most awkward things on our first day at the Little Red School House were our crisp new suits and patent-leather shoes. I swear we would have fitted in better in our army surplus, so we quickly ditched the fancy clothes and ran to The Gap for our first pair of jeans. Mine weren't jeans, though. Instead, I got two pairs of corduroy bell-bottom pants – one in burgundy, one in sky blue.

While I was strutting around in bell-bottoms in Greenwich Village, fashion was changing at home. Jiang Qing, Mao's wife tweaked the Russian dress, giving it an empire waist and making it pleated instead of gathered, and swapping the button-front for a Chinese crossover fold. She was very proud of her design, apparently. My mother, the wife of the foreign minister in the 1970s, was called to visit Mao's wife at two in the morning. "I designed a dress!" Madame Mao ecstatically told her and three other sleepy ministers' wives.

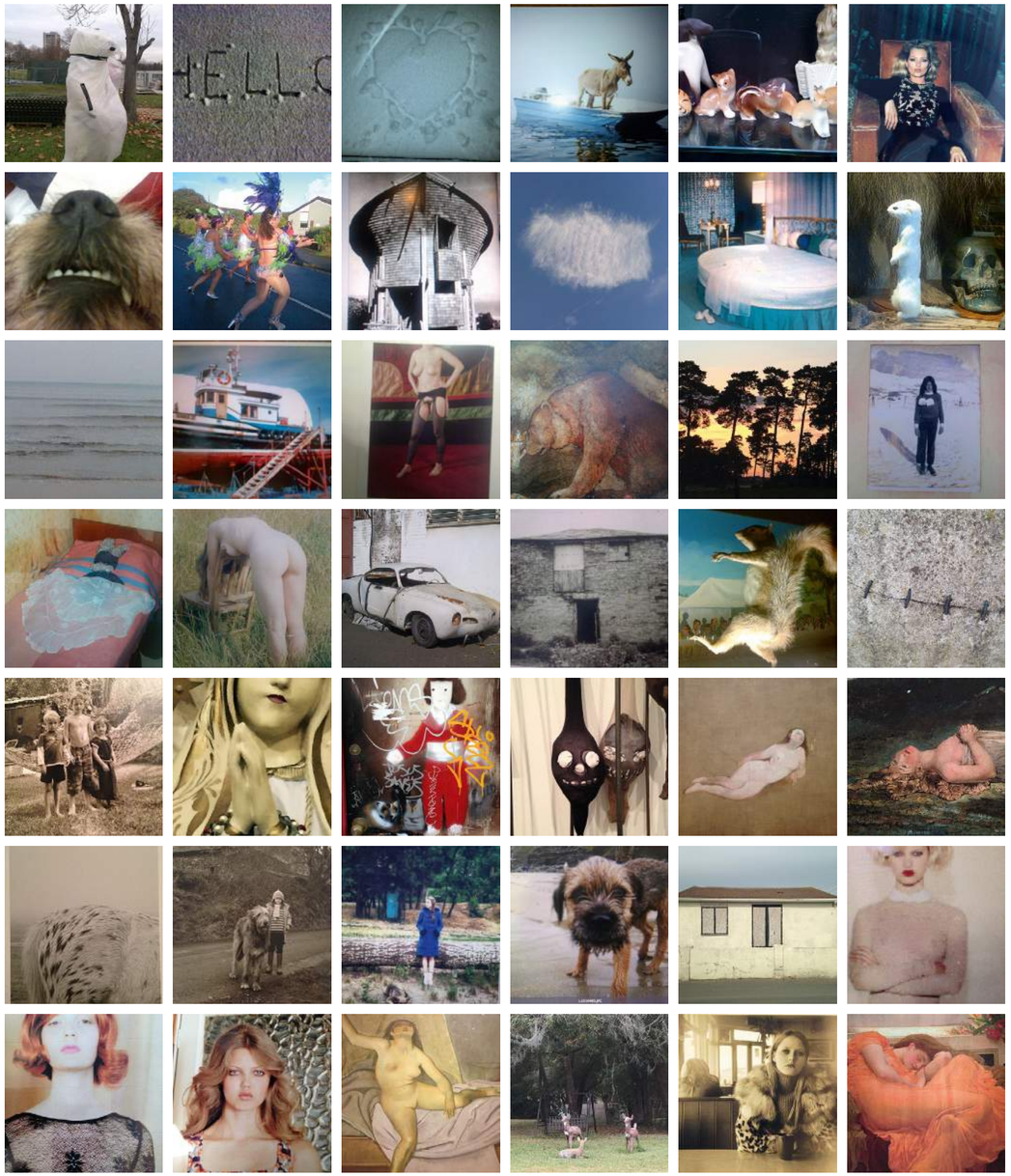
My mother recalled later that Jiang Qing wanted all foreign ministry personnel to wear the dress, and that my mother and the other wives had to wear it as an example for others. She said that even though it was the middle of the night, tailors were on standby to cut the dresses immediately. 'Did you wear it?' I asked her. 'No,' she said. I asked if it was dangerous not to wear Madame Mao's dress. 'Yes,' she replied, 'but you have to make a stand somewhere.'

And there it was, my mother's political rebellion – all tied up in a dress.

After going to America, my fashion memory merged with the mainstream, and it stopped being unique. In the 1980s, Pierre Cardin came to China and introduced Western fashion to the Chinese. In the 1990s, China became the garment factory of the world and Chinese cities were flooded with counterfeits of Western brands. And, with their arrival, Chinese fashion disappeared.

# Camera roll

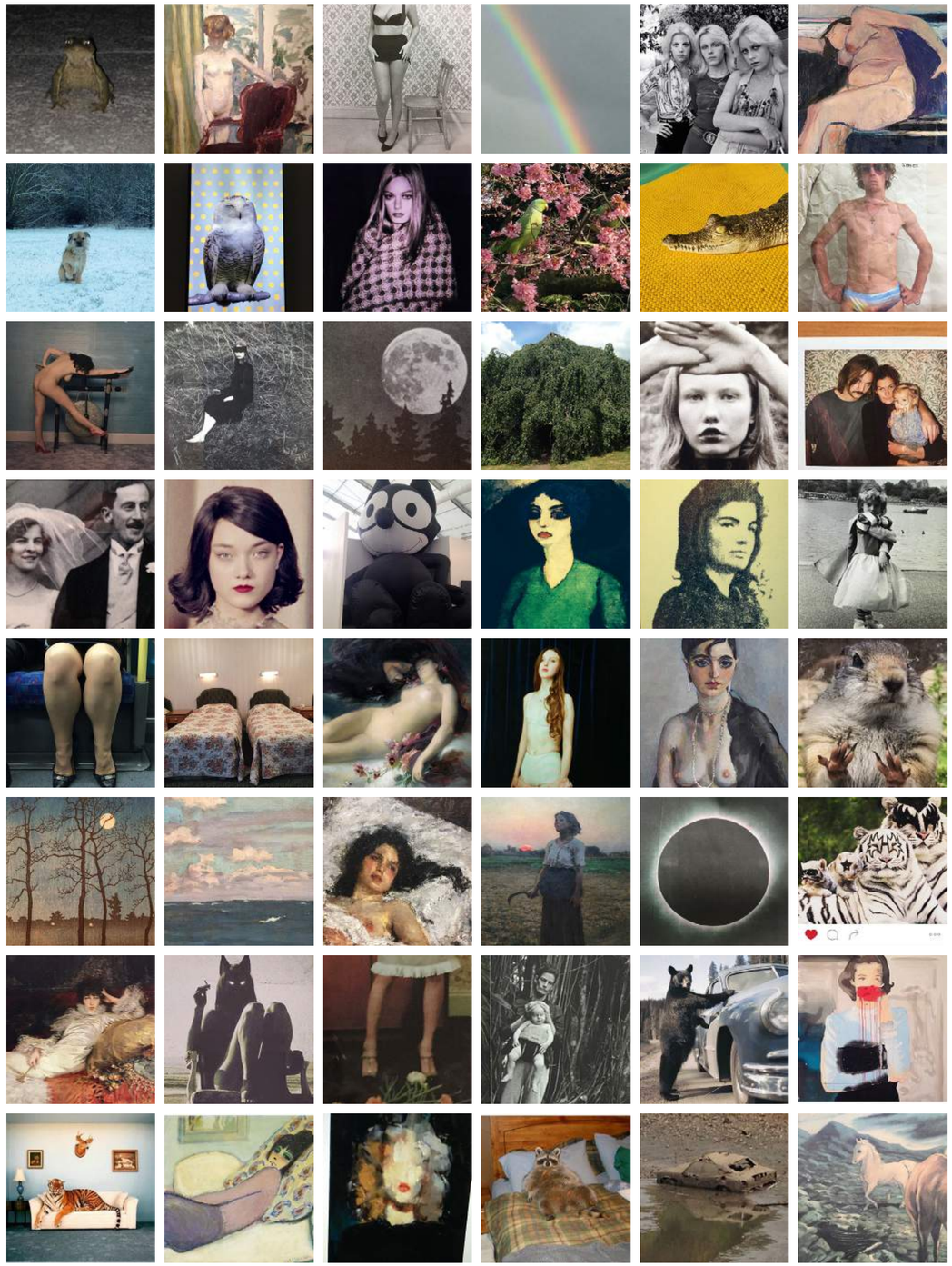
## By Venetia Scott



This page, from left to right, by row: 6. Photograph: Venetia Scott; styling: Bay Garnett; *Centrefold*, issue 8 / 11. Carrin Room, Madonna Inn, San Luis Obispo, CA / 16. John Bauer, *–Stacakars Lilla Basse!*, 1913 / 29. J.M.W. Turner, *Two Recumbent Nude Figures*, 1828. ©Tate / 39. Balthus (Balthasar Klossowski de Rola), *Le Lever* (detail), 1895 Opposite page, from left to right, by row: 2. Pierre Bonnard, *Interior with Nude Figure* (detail), 1905 ©ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2017 / 5. Brad Elterman / 6. Richard Diebenkorn, *Reclining Nude – Pink Stripe* (detail), 1962, © The Metropolitan Museum of Art / 8. Robert Wilson, *Kool*, Video Portrait, 2006, ©RW Work LTD. / 20. Yumi Lambert by Venetia Scott; *MUSE*, issue 39 / 22. Kees van Dongen, *Femme à la blouse verte*, 1906, © Richard Nagy Gallery / 23. Andy Warhol, *Jackie (Gold)* (detail), 1964, © The Sonnabend Collection / 27. Auguste Alexandre Hirsch, *Night*, 1875 / 29. Jan Sluijters, *Naakte meisje*, undated / 31. Kawase Hasui, *Toyama no hara (Toyama Plain)* (detail), 1920, Art Institute of Chicago / 32. James McNeill Whistler, *Violet and Silver – The Deep Sea* (detail), 1887, Art Institute of Chicago / 34. Jules Adolphe Breton, *The Song of the Lark* (detail), 1884, Art Institute of Chicago / 40. Juergen Teller. *Venetia Scott, Index Magazine*, supplement, Nov/Dec 2000 / 41. Emil Schulthess. *Yellowstone National Park*, 1953, Fotostiftung Schweiz / 42. Liz Markus, *Babe Paley 3* (detail), 2014 / 45. Fanny Nushka, *Fashion Week*, 2013 / Every effort has been made to trace and credit copyright holders of these images. Please contact *System* for further information.

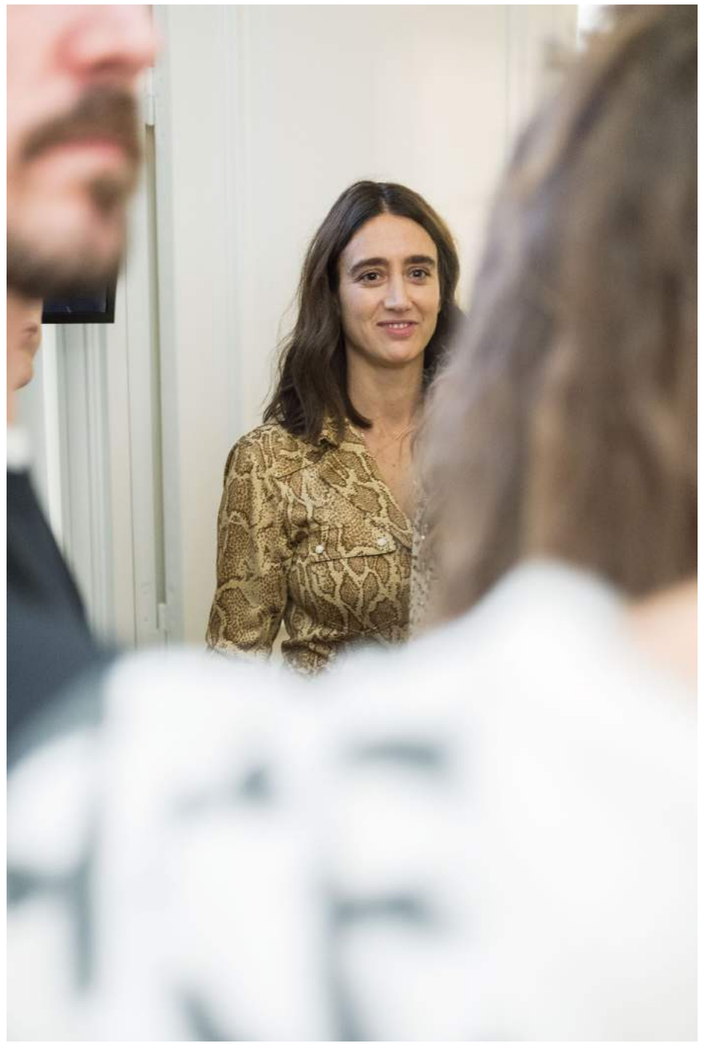






# ‘We added something a little punk.’

## Natacha Ramsay-Levi’s first season as the creative director of Chloé.



By Alice Cavanagh
Photographs by Anders Edström

‘The first look was developed early on, with the whole collection focused on the duality of something old and something current. For the first look, the linen of the dress’s bodice is mixed with the silk of the skirt, a kind of collage, and then we painted the linen white to give the impression of something being a bit “off”.

I started with a dress because Chloé is a house that has so many dresses; it’s recognized for that. It was important to start with white, or off-white, as well because I think Chloé is well known for its beiges and its nudes. [Chloé founder] Gaby Aghion said she saw “the colours of Egypt”, and I loved that idea. So I worked with mineral, organic colours: dusky pink, sand, and beige. White is the virgin form of this palette and was a good place to begin. White also felt right for a Victorian-inspired dress.

We started to do these classic English embroideries, which could be 19th century, and then thought about how we could rework them for today. So we added piercings and metalwork; we added something a little punk. The 1970s and the Victorian era were a key reference, because something about dresses at that time was so feminine. Aesthetically, I’m especially drawn to the 1970s, because it was an era when fashion worked with the body, and represented lifestyle and personality.

We found this silhouette quite early on. But we adjusted the dress when I met Sophie Koella, who opened the show. Sophie was one of the first girls we cast. I’d seen her in a magazine and thought she had such amazing natural beauty. I called Ashley [Brokaw], my casting director, and she said: “She’s beautiful, but she doesn’t do shows, because she doesn’t correspond with what people want for shows.” I liked that: as a designer you want to create your own identity with the casting.

I met with Sophie in July. She was as gorgeous as expected, but was a bit lost in the clothes because she doesn’t have a classic model’s build. It was a bit like taking a dress and adjusting it for an actress for the red carpet – this idea of clothes evolving with a woman. Sophie has an amazing neck, so we wanted to show it, and she has beautiful skin, so we wanted to show her arms. It was different, customizing the look to the girl, to change the way you usually think. But I like the idea of that.

Female designers design differently because we think about how to wear it, how it feels and fits – where the clothes fall on your body. At the moment, I like high-waisted pants that come in at the waist, because they give you a particular stance. But it’s more than just about being a woman and asking if I’d wear it or not; it’s also about the feeling you have when you wear a piece.

The way we dress is a way of expressing our personality. It’s a dialogue you start with someone else; it’s that first introduction. The thing about the boots in the first look, for example, is the determination and energy you can put into them. That can translate into movement – you can have that same determination in your walk. The boots give a strength that I think balanced the romanticism of the clothes.

The Venus totem on the necklace in the first look emerged as a theme quite early on. It’s from an ancient period, when femininity was something you cherished. These ideas, at Chloé, started with Gaby, who for me is an eternal inspiration. There is still so much to discover about her; each time I learn something about her, I feel that she was so avant-garde and her work is still so relevant. When I found the Venus totem, I thought, of course, Chloé as a house wants to explore the idea of femininity. There is this idea of embracing different kinds of women, of not imposing a “look”. This is very Chloé: the idea of gathering different typologies and ideas around femininity. I will keep trying to do that.’

# ‘...and none of us have changed.’

## Adwoa, Kesewa, Camilla and Charles. The Aboah family on keeping it real.

**Photographs and interview by Juergen Teller**

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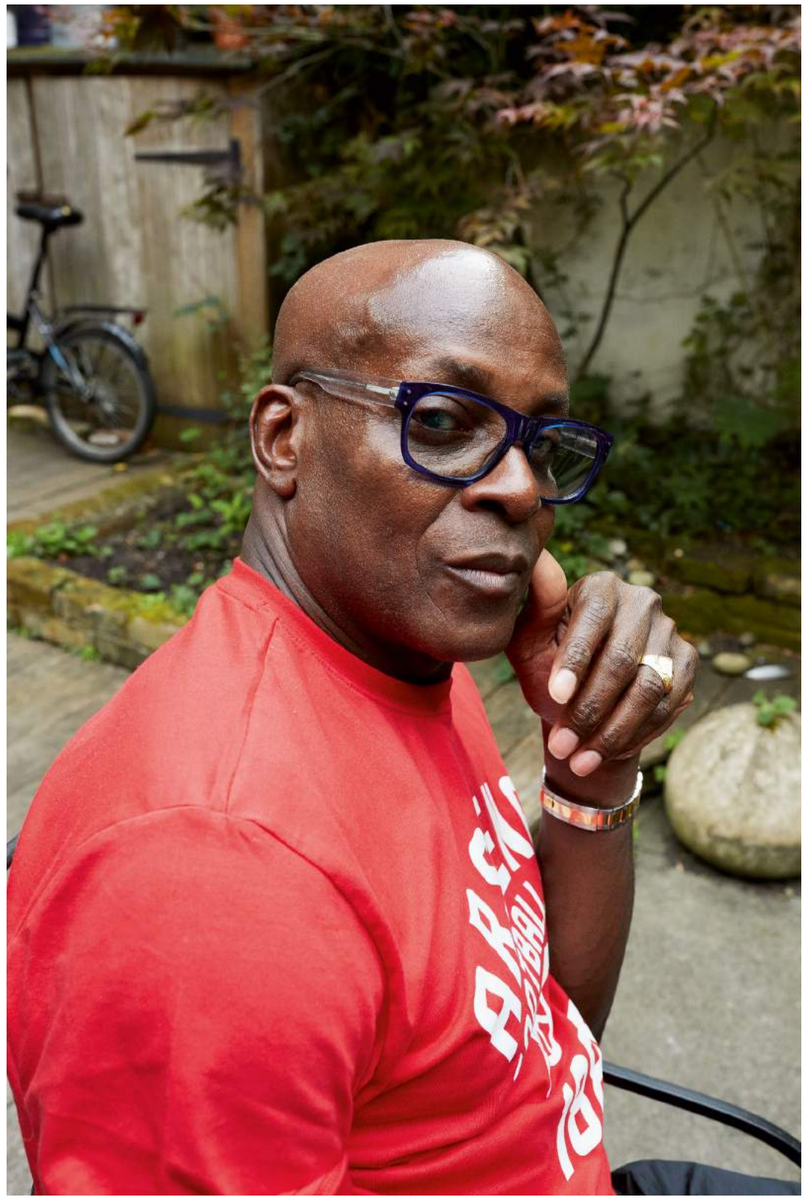


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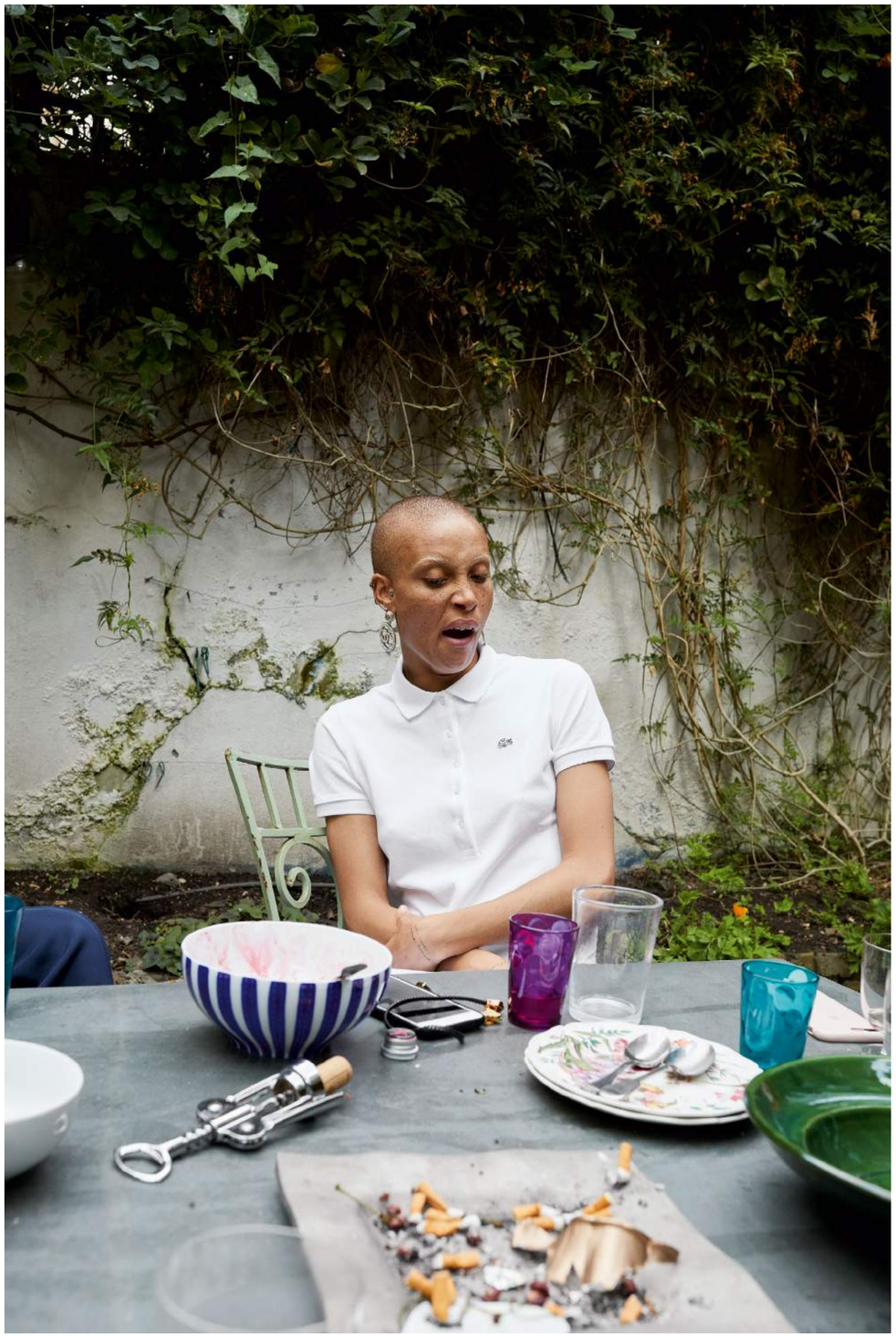


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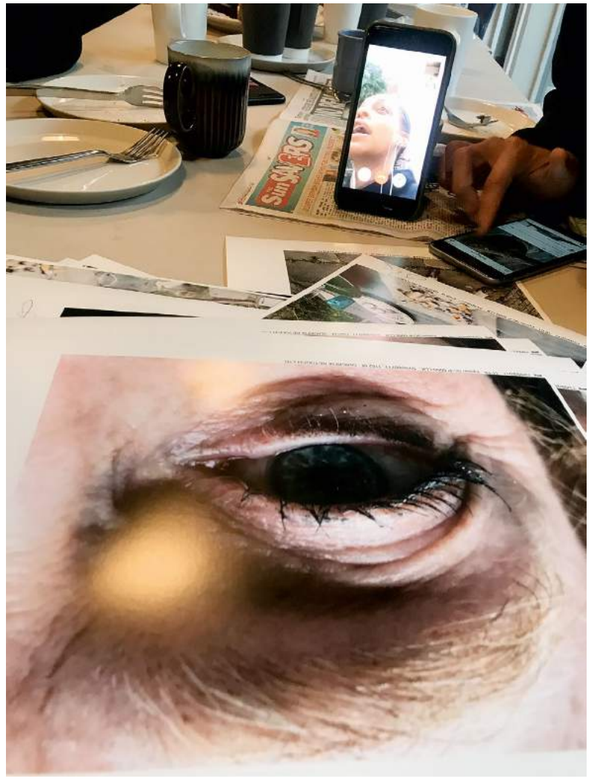






Adwoa Aboah is one of the most significant and visible faces in fashion today. She's walked in 15 shows during the Autumn/Winter 2018 season alone, has recently fronted campaigns from high-street to high-end (from GAP to Versus Versace), and appears on magazine covers worldwide. Perhaps because it's not just her face, but also her voice that resonates. With refreshing candour, she has talked openly about her struggles with depression, drugs and a 2015 suicide attempt, and channelled her experiences into her online community Gurls Talk to encourage young women to open up.

Adwoa grew up close to fashion. Her mother is photographic agent Camilla Lowther, whose creative agency CLM represents high-profile stylists and photographers such as Katie Grand and Juergen Teller. Her father Charles Aboah owns both a location-scouting company and CiMS, a technology company. While her artist sister Kesewa is now also a model, and one of the current faces of Miu Miu.

As well as being represented by CLM, Juergen Teller has been a family friend of the Aboah's for many years. Which made him the perfect person to capture an intimate and tender portrait — in both images and words — of this modern family. So *System* asked him to pay a visit to the Aboahs' home in West London, to take some family pictures and have a chat. The results are as candid as the participants, the kind of refreshing honesty that's engaging a new generation of fashion fans and the industry to talk about more than just clothes and catwalks.

**Camilla:** We were laughing in the car with Adwoa, because Adwoa's friend, who has a house on Golborne Road, rented his house out on Airbnb. The person who rented it was a foreigner who thought it would be a cool place to live in temporarily. The guy had a really fancy car and his wing mirror ended up getting smashed so many times that he eventually moved out. Everywhere around this part of town is so kind of 'bijoux' these days, that it's quite nice to know that it can still be a bit rough.

**Adwoa:** I love that.

**Camilla:** It actually makes me happy to hear that. Like, thank God. So Juergen, what are you shooting for the next Vivienne Westwood campaign?

**Juergen:** We're going to have these transgender people.

**Camilla:** Shooting in New York?

**Juergen:** Yes.

**Camilla:** And Burberry is the following week. Christopher Bailey won't tell *anybody* what the shoot is, except you, Juergen. He won't even tell his staff.

**Juergen:** What the hell is it that makes it so secretive? Is it the Queen wearing Burberry?

**Camilla:** Maybe he wants you to photograph him naked or something.

**Charles:** Maybe it's Donald Trump in Burberry!

**Adwoa:** What transgender people are you using for Westwood?

**Juergen:** You weren't there at my exhibition at the Vivienne Westwood showroom in New York, right, Adwoa?

**Adwoa:** No, I wasn't.

**Juergen:** There was my exhibition, and then they had all these transgender people walking on all these different floors in their Vivienne Westwood outfits.

**Camilla:** Were they completed trans-ed?

**Adwoa:** Somewhere in between, I don't know exactly.

**Charles:** You're not really allowed to say he or she.

**Adwoa:** No, you have to ask what they would like to be known as. In schools, they now ask you what pronoun you are – he, she, they…

**Camilla:** They've got a transgender person in school. And I said, 'Wow, that's amazing! We didn't even have a single Jewish person in our class, let alone anything else. It was so boringly white, Anglo-Saxon Catholic.

**Adwoa:** Isn't that cool though? Juergen, have you ever photographed Teddy Quinlivan?

**Juergen:** No, I haven't. I think she may-be came for a fitting once though.

**Adwoa:** She's lovely, you should use her, she just came out as transgender.

**Charles:** …and she did the Gurls Talk event, too.

**Adwoa:** No, that was Hanne Gabe. Hanne's not transgender, she's inter-sex.

**Juergen:** What's that?

**Charles:** She's what used to be referred to as hermaphrodite.

**Adwoa:** Teddy does the Louis Vuitton show; I'm sure you know her. She's transgender. She's just great.

**Juergen:** Well, at my exhibition in New York, I found all the transgender people extremely charming and cute and sweet. Really quite something. And I thought, 'Wow, we should use them for the campaign'.

**Adwoa:** That's a great idea.

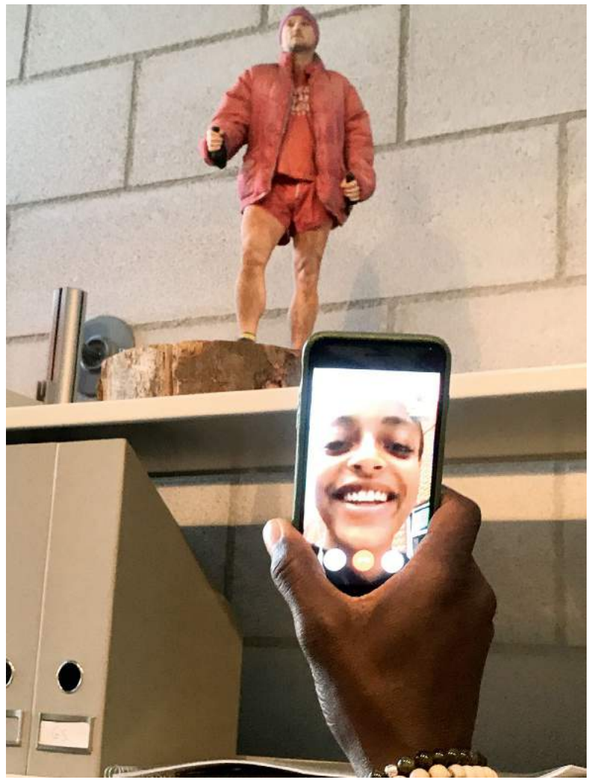
**'Everywhere around this part of West London is so kind of 'bijoux' these days, that it's quite nice to know that it can still be a bit rough.'**





**Juergen:** And they were gorgeous too, and intriguing, and really engaging.
**Adwoa:** Will Vivienne Westwood travel to New York for the campaign shoot?
**Juergen:** Yes. She is almost always on the shoot.
**Charles:** She's sweet, isn't she?
**Camilla:** She's opinionated. She's got lots to say.
**Charles:** Andreas is very nice, too.
**Adwoa:** He is so nice.
**Charles:** I didn't realize that he's the main designer at Westwood now.
**Juergen:** That's right. Andreas is brilliant. So listen, do you want to see the pictures we did together in the summer, the ones that will go with this interview?
**Adwoa:** Yeah, yeah.
**Juergen:** But there's no veto, OK?
**Charles:** [laughs] I love that, laying down the rules. We'll just have to take the rough with the smooth.
**Adwoa:** I only told you to do one thing, which was Photoshop that spot out of my face…
**Juergen:** That's fine.
**Adwoa:** That's all I ask. I don't want there to be a spot.
**Juergen:** [laughs] Or I'll just add another one in retouching!
**Adwoa:** Yes, you'll end up giving me acne on my face.
**Juergen:** So, it is in no particular order, OK? [Begins showing the pictures]
**Adwoa:** That's so nice!
**Charles:** It was a good day, wasn't it? We drank a lot of rosé. [Looking at pictures] This was obviously shot at the end of the day. You'd gone to bed by then, Adwoa.
**Adwoa:** [Looking at another picture] Oh, it's Kesewa babe!
**Juergen:** So sweet, right?
**Adwoa:** Love that. Ah, Mama, you look lovely in this one.
**Charles:** Yes, that is a very nice one of you, Camilla.
**Juergen:** Isn't it.
**Adwoa:** [Looking at another picture] I love this one of us all together.
**Camilla:** Juergen wanted that on the cover, but *System* wouldn't do it because you were smoking.
**Adwoa:** Why can't you put that on the cover? It's so funny. It'll make a nice Christmas card though! [Looking at another picture] My eyes are rolling back in this one.
**Charles:** Were you that tired?
**Camilla:** You'd been to a party the night before, hadn't you?
**Charles:** Wow! Look at Camilla's eyes in this one, that's really lovely.
**Adwoa:** You've captured all of us so well, Juergen. And that is *really* us… annoyingly.
**Camilla:** You know when you get those *Vanity Fair* or American *Vogue* shoots where the family is together in their lovely garden. Well, this is the real version of that.
**Juergen:** So, Adwoa, there have been so many articles about you recently. And you just did something with Tim Blanks, which came out today.
**Adwoa:** Yeah, yeah.
**Juergen:** So I thought, what do I ask you? I don't even know where to start or whether I can add anything to what you said already.
**Camilla:** Just ask us normal questions.
**Charles:** Tim's article was very good – very well written – did you read it?
**Juergen:** I just started reading it. I recently photographed Tim for *System*. [Shows the pictures]
**Adwoa:** That is hysterical. Whose dog is that?
**Juergen:** It's Tim's dog, licking his hairy legs.
**Charles:** I didn't realize he was so muscular.
**Adwoa:** I never knew he was so *hairy*.
**Juergen:** He is such a sweet guy.
**Camilla:** Juergen, for this interview you don't really have to add anything about Gurls Talk.
**Juergen:** Yes, I totally agree. Because it's already been written about so much. In a way, this piece is more about the pleasure for me of having known you for something like 28 years. And the fact that we all live in the same area, and it's such a lovely thing to see a family with two kids doing all this stuff…
**Camilla:** …and none of us have changed.
**Juergen:** So, what do you like doing as a family?
**Camilla:** We like watching television. We're all telly addicts.
**Adwoa:** *Gomorrah*.
**Charles:** Oh God, *Gomorrah* was amazing, I loved it. When we went to Positano, I said to the guy we were with, 'Tell me, you and your family run a boat business, you have all these restaurants and everything… is there an influence of the Mafia here, like in *Gomorrah*?' And he said: 'Basically, this whole area is their playground. So, nothing untoward goes on here, you know what I mean. They keep it very safe.'
**Juergen:** What else are you watching on television at the moment?
**Charles:** We're watching *Queen of the*

**'You know those *Vanity Fair* or American *Vogue* shoots where the family is all together in their lovely garden. Well, this is the real version of that.'**







*South*. It's on Netflix.
**Adwoa:** I started watching *Ozark*.
**Juergen:** *Ozark* is fucking brilliant!
**Adwoa:** Yeah, so good.
**Charles:** I finished *Ozark*.
**Juergen:** I watched it in Hydra. Three days, whole thing done.
**Camilla:** TV has always been the way that all of us relax.
**Juergen:** I grew up on TV in the German countryside.
**Camilla:** Yes, me too, over here. Especially in winter.
**Juergen:** And when I was a teenager, it was cinema.
**Camilla:** Me, too.
**Juergen:** I had no culture around me whatsoever. Just trees.
**Camilla:** Everything I learned was from films.
**Charles:** That's where Camilla learned her first swear word.
**Camilla:** No, I learned that from my parents!
**Juergen:** Charles, how did you and Camilla meet?
**Charles:** I used to work in London when I was a youth at this place in Knightsbridge called the Chicago Rib Shack. This one girl I worked with called Charlotte was, unbeknownst to me, a very good friend of Camilla's.
**Adwoa:** What were you doing there, Dadda?
**Charles:** I was a chef and Charlotte was a waitress. Her now-husband John used to work there, too. We called him John the Barman because he was the barman. John and Charlotte married and then Mummy and I got married. Anyway, one day Charlotte said to me, 'Oh, you've got to meet my friend Camilla; she's doing this Berkeley Square ball, but there aren't any men there. So, I said, 'OK. I'll go and meet her.' Well, I obviously never went, and each time Charlotte saw me she was like, 'Did you meet Camilla yet?' I finally went, and took a friend along with me. Camilla was standing there, with bright red hair, and a yellow jacket, remember?
**Camilla:** Mmm.
**Charles:** She was standing at the end of the kitchen, and she wouldn't look me in the eye! One thing led to another, we finished a conversation, and as we went out, my friend said to me, 'She's very weird, isn't she? Did you notice how she didn't look at us?'
**Juergen:** [laughs]
**Charles:** Anyway, off we went, and then we did the Berkeley Square ball together and we became friends and…
**Camilla:** He's such a liar! Basically, he missed the night bus.
**Charles:** No, I didn't!
**Camilla:** Yes, you did!
**Charles:** You *asked* me to stay, you keep telling that version of the story to please yourself.
**Camilla:** We did the Berkeley Square Ball; it was the night they sank the Belgrano during the Falklands War. Remember?
**Charles:** All the men that she knew at the time were basically junkies. And couldn't get it together.
**Camilla:** And white. I didn't have any black mates then.
**Charles:** We behaved really badly at the Berkeley Square Ball.
**Camilla:** *Really* badly.
**Charles:** Because the stupid idiots gave us two cases of Champagne.
**Camilla:** Vidal Sassoon was the compère, and he was wearing a shirt that had VS sewn into it. And my friend Charlotte asked him, 'What does that stand for?' and he replied, 'Very Sexy', and she went, 'Very Slimy more like'.
**Charles:** I remember Norman Parkinson was there that night.
**Camilla:** That was a long time ago.
**Charles:** A *long* time. How old were you?
**Camilla:** 21 or 22.
**Juergen:** Where did you grow up Charles?
**Charles:** I was born in Ghana. My father was a diplomat so part of my childhood was in Cairo. He was posted there and then we grew up here in London as well. My teenage years were here, and I've stayed ever since. I still go back to Ghana; I'm going back soon to see my mother.
**Juergen:** We should go one day.
**Charles:** You would have a ball! I mean it. It's like a photo set everywhere you go.
**Adwoa:** It's so nice in here, Juergen; you've got the best studio.
**Juergen:** I've got a sauna upstairs.
**Adwoa:** Do you?
**Camilla:** Do you guys all get in the sauna together?
**Charles:** That's very German. I prefer steam.
**Camilla:** I like walking. I wouldn't do running, I hate running.
**Juergen:** Walking is great.
**Camilla:** Ed [Juergen and Sadie Cole's son] is just so adorable: you can see that he is just at that tipping point of becoming a teenager. He's got a little moustache.
**Adwoa:** Does he?

## 'I said to my son, 'Oh my God, Ed! You've got a moustache growing!' And he goes, 'Yeah Dad, deal with it. You're losing your hair, and I'm arriving!'"





**Camilla:** It's tiny, like dust.
**Juergen:** I'd been away for a week and I was sitting with Ed having breakfast – he was wearing his hoodie up over his face, eating cornflakes – and I was looking at him, and suddenly said, 'Oh my God, Ed! Look, you've got a moustache growing!' And he just goes, 'Yeah Dad, deal with it. You're losing your hair, and I'm arriving!'
**Charles:** [laughs]
**Juergen:** I was speechless.
**Camilla:** Has he got a bit smelly?
**Juergen:** Yes, especially when he's done hours and hours of skateboarding.
**Camilla:** Young men stink, don't they?
**Juergen:** Yes, and they're totally oblivious to it. Just recently we were in Sadie's tiny car, and we picked Ed up from skateboarding. I was sitting in the front seat, and he came and hung all over me, and I was like, 'Eugh! Get off me!'
**Camilla:** I agree. You have to tell them they smell. They have to learn to wash. They don't wash enough. And they go monosyllabic on you as well, teenage boys do. They just kind of grunt.
**Juergen:** Not yet.
**Camilla:** Sadie said he switches from being cuddly to grunting.
**Juergen:** That and the toilet-seat action. It starts going everywhere.
**Adwoa:** I couldn't live with that. We had our cousins over and they are so stinky.
**Charles:** Shall we get Kesewa on FaceTime?
**Charles:** [On FaceTime to Kesewa] … so we're just looking at all the pictures Juergen took of us this summer. You want to have a look?
**Kesewa:** Yes! Hi Juergen!
**Juergen:** Hi, how are you?
**Kesewa:** Good thank you, how are you?
**Juergen:** Great. You in New York?
**Kesewa:** Yes, in New York. I'm walking to your house, Adwoa.
**Adwoa:** Cool, what else are you doing?
**Kesewa:** Just been to the gym.
**Camilla:** How are you?
**Kesewa:** I'm really good. I'm going to watch *It* tonight.
**Charles:** Oh, that is really scary.
**Camilla:** It is *really* scary. Have you read the book? I hate clowns.
**Juergen:** That's what Ed said. Look at these pictures Kesewa [show pictures via FaceTime]
**Kesewa:** They are so cool. Is that Adwoa sleeping?
**Adwoa:** Yeah.
**Kesewa:** Oh, let me see that one closer. Pull the phone closer. Oh, Mamma! That is so nice of you; you look so happy.
**Camilla:** I know. For once.
**Kesewa:** God, why am I pulling that weird face? You can definitely tell I was hungover in some of the photos.
**Charles:** Well, we did have about six bottles of rosé, remember?
**Kesewa:** Yes, but I'd also only been to bed for a few hours the night before.
**Camilla:** Where had you been? You and Adwoa had both been out.
**Adwoa:** Cherry's. Cherry's. Cherry's.
**Kesewa:** I'd been out clubbing in East London. They are so nice, Juergen. You're a bloody good photographer, aren't you!
[Everyone laughs]
**Kesewa:** You should do it for a living! They are so fucking cool. Oh, I love my family! Love you for taking all these photos, they are so sweet.
**Adwoa:** How's it going in New York, Kesewa?
**Kesewa:** It's good. I've been having these really lucid dreams recently and then later on being a bit more awake and realizing they're not actually real. Yesterday, I fell asleep on your sofa for two hours, and I had a dream that I found your iPhone inside the sofa, like you had ripped open the upholstery and put it inside. I woke up and I literally wrote the text to you saying, 'I've found your phone inside the upholstery on the sofa', then suddenly realized that the upholstery was still closed and that it had all been a dream. It was so fucking weird!
[Everyone laughs]
**Kesewa:** I've just come from the gym. The personal trainer woman is so annoying! She is so fucking happy all the time, it actually makes me angry.
**Charles:** Oh, I can't bear that.
**Kesewa:** When you're burning with pain and she's like, 'Oh my God, just push it girl, you're doing so well, I really believe in you!' And I'm like, 'God, I am so going to punch you in the face!'
**Juergen:** Kesewa, could you tell me a story about Adwoa?
**Kesewa:** About Adwoa? God yeah, I've got loads. Erm, OK, she once got us kicked out of this ping-pong club.
**Juergen:** A ping-pong club?
**Kesewa:** Yes, they play lots of music and then you play ping-pong. It was very fucking strange. And it was full of American hoorays in button-down shirts and like, what do you call those beige trousers?
**Adwoa:** Chinos.
**Kesewa:** Yeah, chinos. It was just very Hooray Henry. So, we were playing

## 'Daddy got kicked out of a nightclub because the line was too long for the bathroom and he started peeing in the garden. It was so humiliating!'

ping-pong and Adwoa got bored so she jumped on top of the table and started dancing and throwing her ping-pong bat in the air. The bouncer came, took her down off the table and chucked us out. Then suddenly, as I'm following her out, Adwoa suddenly dashed passed us and climbed back onto the table and started gyrating, and then gets kicked out again. That was fucking funny.

**Charles:** What about the time *I* got kicked out of a club.

**Kesewa:** Oh yes! Daddy got kicked out of a club because the line was too long for the bathroom so he started peeing in the garden. It was so humiliating! I took him out with all my friends, then saw him getting thrown out by the bouncers. I was like, 'What the fuck are you doing?'

**Adwoa:** You took Dadda to a club?

# 'Two cops took me and two took Adwoa. They were asking us, 'Why were you fighting?' And I was like, 'Because she's my bitch sister and I hate her!"

**Kesewa:** I took him to a club with about 15 girls! I have the funniest photo of him and my friend Indigo so drunk; Indigo on his back doing the lasso move. Then I've got a photo of him with all these girls on a table – he looks like Don Corleone.

**Camilla:** Talking of getting busted for peeing, do you remember when Georg, who used to work with Juergen, got a writ for peeing? He was in New York somewhere – it was the middle of the night and he was a bit pissed – and he was so desperate for the loo that he peed in a bush and got stopped by the police. He got a writ and a summons.

**Kesewa:** Really? Wow.

**Adwoa:** Doing this interview has reminded me that people always say Kesewa and I sound the same. Remember when I always used to get you to call people and pretend to be me.

**Kesewa:** I used to answer all Adwoa's calls, too, pretending to be her. But it got a bit weird the other day because I was like, 'Hello!' – and I did the whole Adwoa voice – but it was someone she was seeing, so it was actually a bit strange. Do you remember that night we walked back…

**Adwoa:** …from Brooklyn.

**Kesewa:** That was so nice! I was also thinking about that night when we danced the whole way home from New York.

**Charles:** Have you got a story about Mamma?

**Kesewa:** Yes. On Sundays, when we were younger, Mamma used to come in and check our sports bags and stuff to make sure we had everything for the next school week. As per usual, I'd probably lost half of my sports kit and my uniform, so that would always piss her off. Anyway, every single Sunday, like clockwork, she'd walk in and there was this chair that she'd stub her toe on…

**Charles:** [Laughs].

**Kesewa:** She would be in the worst fucking mood you have ever seen. But it was so funny.

**Charles:** Adwoa, have you got a story about Kesewa?

**Adwoa:** I can think of loads of things. It almost always entails lots of dancing, doesn't it?

**Kesewa:** Well, there is a better story, if I'm allowed to tell it?

**Adwoa:** Which one?

**Kesewa:** The one in New Mexico?

**Adwoa:** Oh my God, yeah, why not.

**Kesewa:** That is the best story we've got.

**Camilla:** Juergen will love that story.

**Adwoa:** Let me tell it. So, after I'd come out of rehab, we had gone on holiday to save our relationship.

**Juergen:** Whose relationship?

**Adwoa:** Me and Kesewa. It was a make-or-break holiday to save our relationship! [Laughs]

**Kesewa:** A family road trip to New Orleans.

**Charles:** Well, we started off in LA and went to Las Vegas, remember? We won loads of money.

**Kesewa:** We did gambling as a family in Las Vegas. Our first ever time and we each won over a grand!

**Adwoa:** Then we went to Sedona and I got into a fight with the woman who worked in the supermarket…

**Kesewa:** No wait, that was Santa Fe.

**Adwoa:** Oh yes. I got into a fight with the woman who ran the organic supermarket and Kesewa was humiliated by my behaviour. So then we were driving – in total silence! – to Carlsbad, in New Mexico, to see the caverns. I was trying to make up with her, but since there was unfinished business it was all pretty tense. Then we went to bed – still in silence – and woke up the following day.

**Kesewa:** That is bullshit! We had already made up by that point and I went to get pasta for us to eat, sorted out the hotel, the dog was with us…

**Adwoa:** No, it was still tense between us. We woke up the following morning…

**Kesewa:** I went downstairs and had a coffee. I'm quite grumpy in the mornings at the best of times, and after all the driving we'd been doing, I was *really* grumpy. Now this is probably the point where we differ on what happened, but you start…

Photography assistant: Karin Xiao. Production: Gabi Besevic-Simpson and Elise De Rudder. Special thanks: Thu Nguyen at CLM, Rozi Rexhepi, Tori at TESS Model Management, Natalie at Viva Model Management.



**Adwoa:** No, no, you carry on Kesewa.

**Kesewa:** When I went downstairs for a coffee, I felt as if Adwoa was trying to pick a fight with me. I just said to her, 'Leave me alone', and went outside to the car, where I started being a bit of single-tear crying on the bonnet of the car. Then Adwoa comes over and says, 'If you're going to fucking cry about it why don't you just go home?' So then I was like, 'Well, maybe I *will* go home'. And she said, 'Oh fucking hell you are so pathetic!' At that point, we were stood either side of the car, hurling abuse at each other. Then Adwoa starts walking around the car, towards me…

**Adwoa:** …slowly approaching each other.

**Kesewa:** And we just kind of collided! For about half a minute, we started punching each other in the face. Glasses got smashed, earrings got smashed.

**Juergen:** Really? Wow.

**Kesewa:** Adwoa dragged me around by my hair, it was all coming out! About half way through, while on the floor, I got a glimpse of the facade of the hotel; there is only one window at the bottom of it, and there were all these faces just staring out at us two, scrapping in the parking lot.

**Adwoa:** All these families that were on holiday, just looking over at us.

**Kesewa:** So we had our quick fight: a couple of punches, kicking, screaming, you know what it's like. Then, just as we're breaking apart, four policemen start running towards us. Two took me away and two took Adwoa away. They were asking us, 'Why were you fighting?' And I was like, 'Because she's my bitch sister and I hate her!'

**Adwoa:** And I was like, 'Yeah and I fucking hate *her*, too!'

**Kesewa:** They asked for our visas and all our ID and documentation; I had all my school ID with me. The police were like, 'Look, we're not going to take you in, but you *really* can't be fighting like that in the middle of a parking lot!' Then, as I get back into our car, and Adwoa's lighting up a cigarette, four police-cruisers suddenly rock up with two policemen in each of them!

**Adwoa:** They'd basically called for fucking back-up because they were so panicked about these two black girls having a fight in a parking lot in this tiny butt-fuck-of-nowhere town. [Laughs]

**Kesewa:** But we've got loads of nice stories, too, like in Mexico, where we literally danced the whole time.

**Adwoa:** We were *always* dancing.

**Juergen:** Kesewa, you are older than Adwoa, right?

**Kesewa:** No, Adwoa is older. There have been other moments when the two of us are just eating or in a cab, and being very chilled and relaxed in each other's company; we'll just be talking about mummy, daddy, the family, or our friends, and we'll get the giggles and cannot stop laughing.

**Juergen:** That's sounds wonderful.

**Kesewa:** Also, Adwoa has fantastic clothes. So, my favourite thing is, when I'm in a panic about getting dressed to go out for something, Adwoa will always take me into her room and will do the whole outfit for me so I look really nice. That's always really nice of her... She's the best!

**Camilla:** You are best friends now.

**Kesewa:** We've always been best friends; we just had a break.

**Juergen:** That's normal.

**Charles:** I love the four police cars. You're lucky you weren't Tasered.

**Adwoa:** I know!

**Kesewa:** But we were still best friends when we were having time apart.

**Juergen:** Thank you, Kesewa.

**Kesewa:** Love you all so much! Have a good day.

**Charles:** Love you, darling.

**Juergen:** I think that was brilliant.

**Charles:** Thanks, Juergen, that was really good fun.

**Adwoa:** Thanks, Juergen. Bye, babes.

# ‘I’d say my vision is pure.’

## The enduring influence of Jil Sander.

**Interviews by Ingeborg Harms**
**Photographs by Norbert Schoerner**


St. MICHAEL
POTAIN


S:CATHARINA



**Jil Sander has – perhaps for the first time in her life – been looking back. A major retrospective exhibition of her work, opening in November at the Museum Angewandte Kunst in Frankfurt, has provided her the context in which to re-examine an extraordinary 50-year career. One that has given the world a legendary fashion brand, but also a design philosophy combining rigour and natural elegance, which Jil Sander herself often refers to as 'pure'.**

**Her introspective mood ahead of the exhibition felt like a unique opportunity for *System* to ask Jil Sander to discuss her singular aesthetic approach, and to examine why its influence is now being felt more widely than ever.**

**So we brought Jil Sander together with Joe McKenna, master stylist and long-time collaborator, to discuss looking backwards and forwards, individuality and teamwork, and the realities of life, in and out of fashion. Sander then asked *System* to talk to sound artist Frédéric Sanchez, with whom she has worked since the 1980s, and Carla Sozzani, founder of 10 Corso Como and career-long supporter, about her enduring vision. Meanwhile, over the summer, photographer Norbert Schoerner captured Jil Sander's world: her studio, showroom and private residence, her hometown of Hamburg, and the sumptuous garden that so perfectly reflects her unwavering commitment to design, nature and purity.**

Jil Sander's life in fashion began in 1968 when, while working on German magazine *Petra*, she opened a boutique in her hometown, Hamburg. A year later, aged only 24 and working on her mother's sewing machine, she launched the Jil Sander label, quickly establishing her signature vision.

A harshly received first show in Paris in 1975 – journalists proving less prescient about the importance of her radical refinement than her customers – only briefly checked her progress, and by 1979, Jil Sander's expansion was such that the brand had launched its first perfume, Pure. This was still a relative rarity among fashion houses at the time, as was taking her company public a decade later. With that new injection of capital, the label rapidly expanded around the world and in 1993, Sander returned to Paris in triumph with the opening of her flagship store on Avenue Montaigne.

In 2000, a year after Prada had bought a 75 percent stake in her label, she left. She returned in 2003, only to resign again in 2005 and be replaced by Raf Simons. Her final return was in 2012, but she left for good with the Spring/Summer 2014 collection. Meanwhile, in 2009, Sander began an extremely popular partnership with Uniqlo with her +J line, which brought her increasingly relevant and meaningful aesthetic to a new generation of designers and fashion lovers.

Sander has had a wide-ranging, pioneering impact: her drive to create a complete design world – from fabrics to shows to flagship stores and shop-in-shops – changed the way that the wider industry approached branding and retail, photography and art direction, perfumes and beauty products. Yet through the ups and downs, the hard work and drive, Sander has never wavered from her vision: clothing should be pure, and flattering in its extremely worked simplicity. Indeed, it might be said that Jil Sander's vision will remain forever contemporary because it has always been timeless.

**Jil Sander & Joe McKenna**
**Hamburg, July 27th, 2017**

**Jil Sander:** I am living in the past right now.
**Joe McKenna:** Really? I am thinking about the future.
**Jil:** I usually am, too. But in preparing the retrospective I've had to look back for the first time.

## 'The shoes arrived two hours late; the audience was restless. Today, you might just say, 'Cool, let them go barefoot'. But my nerves were frayed.'

**Joe:** Do you think you are an obsessive person?
**Jil:** I am, for sure. That's something we could both be asking ourselves. We are both quite strong people. We were both ambitious. We wanted to do good work. We learned together how to handle a show, how to go for it. And when we got there, we were happy. Do you remember Masao Nihei,[1] our Japanese lighting specialist? He always asked how I felt: 'Do you feel emotional? Do you want to be literary, poetic or bright in a "light-up-my-day" kind of way?' I just saw Frédéric Sanchez who has been with Jil Sander from the beginning. I am so happy that he is taking care of the sound installation for Frankfurt. He remembered so many things. In our first Milan show venue – the Palazzo delle Stelline, a former monastery – he worked day and night on the sound, sitting in a little monk's cell among hundreds of tapes.

**Joe, how did you and Jil first meet? Were you formally introduced?**
**Joe:** The first time I met Jil was at a dinner Franca Sozzani gave in Florence. I was working in Milan for Prada and drove down that night to attend the dinner. I sat next to you. And when I drove back that night, I thought about our conversation and what a very nice lady you were. It was quite a big deal for me to be sitting next to Jil Sander, because I was such a fan of your work. Then, I think you contacted me the following season.
**Jil:** What I remember is that I saw you in New York; you were wearing a big sweater.
**Joe:** One thing I wanted to ask you about relates to teamwork. Tell me about Marc Ascoli and M/M (Paris) and how that collaboration came about? Since that also lasted...
**Jil:** ...a couple of years. You know, doing shows traumatized me. I started in Paris. We showed at the InterContinental Hotel, in the space, where Yves Saint Laurent used to do his couture shows. I did three shows there, but then stopped.
**Joe:** Why?
**Jil:** The shoes arrived too late; the audience was restless; we were two hours behind schedule. Today, you might just say, 'Cool, let them go barefoot'. But my nerves were frayed. So, I packed my suitcase and decided, if they want us, they must come to Hamburg.

**But then you decided to show in Milan.**
**Jil:** I became friends with Karla Otto.[2] She was also at the beginning of her PR-work. She always wanted me to do a show, and I'd always say: 'Yes, but next season.' I'd have nightmares about it, in which everybody was backstage, smoking; the coffee was cold, and someone suddenly would shout: 'Right, we have to start!' It was like being scolded at school. Still, I ended up showing in Milan, and I'd work with Marc Ascoli and M/M (Paris) for the campaign. We placed the clothes on the floor, added a little scarf. Frédéric Sanchez was also with us. And for our campaigns, we did the iconic Nick Knight photos of Christy Turlington and Linda Evangelista. It was the era of the supermodels, a completely different time.

**What were your shows like at the beginning of the 1990s?**

## 'In 1989, nobody went to the stock exchange to float a company. And if they had, they usually had a business partner. But Jil did that on her own.'

**Jil:** They were almost couture shows. Inès de la Fressange walked in my first show in Paris.
**Joe:** Today, everybody talks about luxury brands, but that wasn't a word, people used in the 1990s. But Jil Sander was really the ultimate 'luxury' brand, because so much time was spent researching fabric, time spent getting the fit right, and time seems to be the ultimate luxury.
**Jil:** We were together in this.
**Joe:** No, I think you give me too much credit.
**Jil:** We had four eyes; we learned together who to cast, how to have them walk. It was fantastic. We were so consistent, we really had a handwriting in our presentations. We were always open to going forward. I always went to the fabric fairs and then directly to the factories to develop new textiles. My fingers were sore because I touched and tested like crazy. I always hoped to find something that could interest me.

**You once mentioned that one of your first expressions as a child was 'selber machen' – do it myself.**
**Jil:** No, I could never have done it by myself. I was surrounded by people who loved to work with me and supported me everywhere. You can't do this kind of work on your own.
**Joe:** In 1989, nobody went to the stock exchange to float a company. Nobody had heard of that. And if they had, they usually had a business partner. But you did it on your own. And then, there are pre-collections, a much talked-about part of today's fashion business. You were doing them in the mid-1990s. Today, more and more shows are done to make a statement on the runway, creating a visual experience that the world can swipe through on their phones. Your shows weren't like that: they were great contemporary clothes, and they were backed by the kind of advertising campaigns that photographers dreamed of being a part of.

**Joe, did you always come to Hamburg before the shows?**
**Joe:** Jil invited me to come and look at what she was doing with the view of taking that forward to present something more press worthy.

**Was that during the pre-season?**
**Joe:** Yes, Jil invited international buyers in January and July. They came to this building, they spent three days. All the models from Paris or London would come. And Jil did proper shows, 60 to 70 looks with 20 girls. I didn't know anybody else who did this.

**Can you tell us how your label started and moved on to shows?**
**Jil:** Early on in my career, when I worked on photoshoots as a fashion editor, I'd ask the manufacturers to make changes to existing designs; that's how I became freelance for little collections myself. Then, when I started my own brand, my fabrics were quite particular, and often difficult to realize. I tried to find strong fabrics that were not so womanly, because I was always trying to do 3D-cuts. At the meetings with my franchise people or with clients, there was always a moment when they complained about the delivery times. So I asked my Parisian clients to help me out by coming to Hamburg during the couture-show season, because it would give me more time to produce. I was the first to ask them to do their orders that early, because in those days, they were placed in April and September.
**Joe:** When will the retrospective exhibition start?
**Jil:** In early November. We are editing the material at the moment; the presentation will be mostly digital. I just watched our first men's show again, the one when we came back to Jil Sander the last time. I noticed that, by then, the runway had become longer and longer, so the guests were almost pushed against the wall. And do you remember the tent in Milan where we always worked? Watching the video of the show was extraordinarily emotional





because you see all those people who we know again. There are distinct memories for each and every show.

**Joe:** I really hope that you will have a new portrait of yourself shot for this feature.

**Jil:** You know how much I hate that.

**Joe:** Are you photographing your garden for it?

**Jil:** Yes, and for the exhibition we're showing a film of the garden with a nice meditative mood. The total exhibition is 3,000 square metres, so the room showing the garden film is a way of relaxing from it. There is an anonymous painting from the early 15th century hanging on the opposite wall, called *Little Garden of Paradise*. It was done at the beginning of three-dimensional representation. The whole room will be very calm and spiritual.

**Jil:** I had a dream after visiting Sissinghurst.[3] At the beginning, we were advised by a friend, Moritz, Landgrave of Hesse,[4] who was a relative of the British royal family. We started with the gardener of Prince Charles. Later, I worked with Penelope Hobhouse.[5] So, it's what I'd call a 'studied garden'. I always wanted to meet Russell Page,[6] the famous garden designer. I had a strong affinity to his architectural thinking, but I missed him.

**Joe:** Why the love of an English garden?

**Jil:** You know, I am from Hamburg, and we are such Anglophiles. Hamburg has a long tradition as a traders' city; the men wore great tailored suits when I grew up here. But the affinity lies in the climate, too; we have a joke that we open our umbrellas when it rains in London. The light is important too, it's

## 'In those days, there was a lot of decoration and opulence around – but we had a more modern vision. I was never looking backwards.'

**Joe:** Do you garden yourself?

**Jil:** I try, but there are also professional gardeners who work on it. Everything you see in the film has grown over 30 years. It was quite a process. It's like a life's work.

**Joe:** Are you recreating a garden in the exhibition?

**Jil:** No, only aerial views on film and in photography. You see the structure, the architectural vision. It is created on a peninsula in a big lake. There is landscaping and a Sissinghurst-inspired area where you have three rose gardens – a pastel one, a white-green-grey one, and a deep-purple one. There is a cutting garden, one for berries, a beautiful vegetable garden, one for fruit trees. For the sake of openness, I left an empty square, which I call Jil Sander Pure.

**Joe:** Did you design the garden?

always different through the seasons, especially here in the north; with the clouds, the sky is always changing.

**Joe:** Almost Scottish.

**Jil:** Yes, and in winter you think things will never grow back, but then the trees explode, especially this year since we've had so much rain. As I always say, you can't beat nature. It's so beautiful in itself. Of course, you can always correct a little bit. It's very creative to do a garden, but it needs time and a love of nature – just think, there are maybe 2,000 rose varieties. A structured garden like mine is very work-intensive.

**Joe:** It's a full-time job, every season, every day.

**Jil mentioned her job as fashion editor before she turned designer, so the photographic dimension of the runway came naturally to her. That's something, you have in common. Joe, you had been working for magazines, too. You more or less invented the job of the stylist.**

**Joe:** Well, I wouldn't say that. When I started, there was Ray Petri, but not so many other British stylists. There were American stylists such as Kezia Keeble,[7] Paul Cavaco and Tonne Goodman. They were all there before me.

**Jil:** You started very early on working with Bruce Weber.

**Joe:** Yes. I was very lucky to meet Bruce at the very beginning of my career.

**Jil:** And then our long period with David Sims.

**Joe:** Do you have all the pictures in the exhibition? Is there a favourite?

**Jil:** I don't know. When I look at the campaigns we did, they fit very well with the shows. We were always very cool the way we presented ourselves. I was never looking backwards. But now, looking back at my runway films, I am amazed how feminine the design was, in a self-assured, slightly androgynous way. A lot of skin and transparency, sensitive, not sexy. Even in my cosmetics I can see this transparency now. In those days, there was a lot of decoration and opulence around. But we had a more modern vision.

**Joe:** That's not a word I hear a lot today – 'modern'. Sometimes it would be good to question that.

**For how long had you been in the business by then?**

**Joe:** Ten years. I had worked with Azzedine, that was the first thing. And

I guess that's where I learned that, if you want to do things well, you need time. Today there's little time to work as deeply as designers would like to. How would you deal with that, Jil? Even in the four years you've been gone, the industry has evolved so much.
**Jil:** I know, I know. I follow things, of course.
**Joe:** You look at fashion magazines?
**Jil:** Sure, as a designer you are always interested in everything. I just edited an issue of *ZEITMagazin*, and went through all the collections.
**Joe:** May I ask what you think when you are in the role of an editor again, and you look at clothes, touch them and trying them on?
**Jil:** In that instance, I couldn't touch them; I familiarized myself with them via the Internet. As always, I selected

## 'All my life, people wanted Jil Sander design, but the pricing was an issue. The Uniqlo partnership was a wonderful experience to say: for all.'

what I liked. But I found it quite difficult, let's say from my 'spoiledness', to find the right cut, the right proportion. Also, I am from a very luxurious time. In the future, what people show will be tremendously different, what tools they will use, what kind of coherence they will aspire to. Think of those cruise collection shows where people are invited to go to other countries. Or you move an iceberg into the Grand Palais.[8] But what I really try to avoid is being solely optical.
**Joe:** How do you think you would deal in today's fashion world?
**Jil:** You have to see that the brand building kept me fully engaged in many aspects from the beginning. That early cosmetics licence...
**Joe:** Do you know when that was?
**Jil:** Yes, in 1977.
**Joe:** Forty years ago!
**Jil:** Woman Pure[9] was practically the first designer scent that didn't come out of Paris.
**Joe:** How do you feel today when you go through an airport and see a Jil Sander fragrance stand?
**Jil:** I am used to it, because I started so early. I look at how it is presented.
**Joe:** Even now! Do you miss designing clothes?
**Jil:** Yes, of course. Like children, we always like to be creative. But I am very careful at the moment. I am also very happy with the experience of going back to the past, the first time in my life. Of course, you can also be creative as a gardener. You can work all day there. But my experience is fashion. I always tried to find innovation or modernity; I always wanted people to feel great, to feel strong in my clothes. You have to ask, what is the value of fashion today? The way people want to present themselves has changed a lot.

**The concentration you achieved in your shows stands in opposition to today's runway culture of big events with many triggers and sensations.**
**Jil:** The concentration saved me a lot – it kept me lighthearted – because you forget everything. Joe, too, is very good at concentrating.
**Joe:** That's something I learned from really great photographers and designers. You don't leave until the job is done.
**Jil:** You were so intensive. You did *not* give up.
**Joe:** I have a photo album that my assistant Claire Mosley did for me. It has lots of moments – two o'clock in the morning, two o'clock in the afternoon – and there's a page that shows I tried the same look on 14 different models. It was a white shirt with a skirt that looked like an onion skin.
**Jil:** Yes, we had onion skin.
**Joe:** The point is, when you make very pure clothes, as Jil did, all the little nuances have to be right.
**Jil:** As long as it's not just optical or decorative, that's the most difficult. As I always say, let's pretend it's completely effortless. And yet we know how difficult it is to get there: to this freshness, coolness, nonchalance, and sophistication.

**If you have such little decoration, the model becomes very important. It's almost as if you were casting for a film: character is central.**
**Jil:** We were very open to new personalities. We had a vision that included men and women. For me, it was always very important to see a personality; so when you look into their eyes – it's difficult to explain – there is somebody, there's some kind of class.
**Joe:** But it was easier, because there weren't so many people in the game. Maida Gregori Boina was one of the few casting directors working.

**Beauty was quite coded.**
**Joe:** Yes, there was a moment in the early 1990s. David Sims and Corinne Day were photographing much more real and natural-looking models. At the same time, you also had the power of the supermodels.
**Jil:** And then there was a change. I remember when another girl type came.



The way Kirsten Owen walked, even in 1989, felt like a cool woman, very modern.

**Wasn't that quite an important moment in fashion, too? It was no longer about the *créateur*, the genius designer who created the way every woman of the moment had to look? Wasn't it the dawn of street style and of fashion that catered to the individual? The fact that you fitted the same shirt on 14 models says a lot about the versatility of the Jil Sander vision.**

**Joe:** I don't think we felt that at the time. We looked for certain types of models: classy beauty but with a thought in her head; someone quirky, sometimes. There was a lot less focus on the body than there is today. Perhaps that's because there is less personality today.

**Joe:** We did. I would come every January and July to Hamburg for the collections, and then I would stay a couple of days afterwards and chat with Jil and the team. And then I'd come back five weeks later for a few days. There would be samples, things would have evolved. One really important thing, because you talk about looking at people, thinking, what can I give to them to make them feel better? When I mentioned to several friends that I was coming here, they all said, 'Oh, please ask her to go back to Uniqlo!' That was such a successful collaboration.[10] Will there be another one?

**Jil:** At the moment, no. When we left, there was really a big change in my life. Fortunately, I was very busy. In the beginning, I was travelling. And I was also kind of isolated, coming out of that turbulent world of fashion. There had been the stress, running the company...

**Joe:** Is that because you've been a very strong-minded woman who has done all of this on her own? Has that made it difficult to work with other people?

**Jil:** I think I'm a team player. I was also the one who took responsibility for everything in the end. When you and I worked together, I was very focused on your side. Although I liked, of course, to be the one who could decide in the end. When I first went to Tokyo, it was quite difficult for me to adapt, since I was obviously not the owner of Uniqlo. But it was also amazing. We said: 'The clothes are for all people; the future is here.' We did the shoots over there, too. But it was a big job: we had no studios; we had to teach and motivate the Uniqlo team. We did the sourcing for fabrics. We did the fitting, because the shape is already 60 percent of the quality. I was in Tokyo almost every six weeks. And the result was Jil Sander.

**Joe:** Very!

**Jil:** In the last three years, I've learned to have a life. To be with friends, but also things like using a cash machine or buying a trolley bag. It's completely different, completely new. And I hope the angels will tell me what to do.

**Joe:** I am glad you mention the angels. You would always say that when we were going through a rough moment at work: 'I hope the angels will look out for us.'

**Jil:** They do, they do.

**Joe, you mentioned Jil's strength and autonomy. Did that create any conflict?**

**Jil:** He's also strong.

## 'In the last three years, I've learned to have a life. To be with friends, but also things like using a cash machine or buying a trolley bag. It's all new.'

**But that was unusual, then?**

**Joe:** At Azzedine or Versace, there was a very different aesthetic to Jil's. Sexier, supermodels. Some of those models worked for Jil, too, but generally Jil's models were newer, which made it interesting.

**Was it about a more silent kind of beauty, for the clothes as well? You had to look twice.**

**Jil:** In my vision, I can tell you, a shirt and a shirt are not the same. Joe, you always buy Brooks Brothers, and you feel great in that.

**Joe:** Well, I feel comfortable in it.

**How did you go about communicating in those long hours, on the preparation of a show? If I remember correctly, you didn't really talk so much?**

**Joe:** I probably shared a similar aesthetic, being a fan of Jil's in terms of clothes and photography. It wasn't so difficult for me to make a connection. We had some crazy times and experiences together. But at the end of the day, a stylist is there to support the designer. It's the designer's vision; it's not the stylist's vision.

**But there was also the sparring-partner aspect.**

**Joe:** I ask a lot of questions. Maybe, that gives a bit more clarity. I do enjoy a good conversation! Jil, let me ask you something, because it is a bit strange to do a big story on you and not discuss Prada. What did you learn from that experience?

**Jil:** Since you find me in the middle of this exhibition preparation, I am so

deeply inside everything that 'was'. And there are a lot of memories. So when I think about Prada and that joint venture, it was a time when globalization in fashion started. Accessories became very important. We could also have been an accessories company. We did great handmade shoes and bags, very early. I always said, the wrong bag kills my coat. And I was also an entrepreneur, thinking forward. I thought it could be constructive for the company to grow accessories through a joint venture. When I went public with the company in 1989, we were in a prime situation with many Jil Sander flagship stores all over the world. We were on top of the world, important, we had good ways of working globally, with Asia and the US. We didn't have debts. And around 2000, it became the fashion thing to do joint ventures, like Mercedes and Chrysler. But do you remember when we were at that McDonald's?

**Joe:** We were in a McDonald's when you told me that you were going to resign from your company.

**Jil:** It was shocking.

**Joe:** I understood the decision. You wanted to partner with a group, and Prada seemed like the right choice. They had great expertise and really beautiful, fashionable accessories. It was the beginning of the mania for shoes and bags. It seemed like a good choice, but ultimately the personalities didn't fit. But it was time for you to step away from it. It was sad, but it was an important chapter in your history.

**Jil:** You know, sometimes, it's destiny. As I said, the angels watch. I returned twice to the Jil Sander company, and each time I felt like a divorced woman taking care of her children. I had built my company from the cradle. But then, because of my joint venture with Prada, it became very difficult. Not because I am difficult, but because of the situation. And I became free to do something else: this democratic vision of my line +J at Uniqlo. All my life, many people wanted Jil Sander design, but the price was an issue. It was a wonderful experience to say: for all.

**Were there moments of great risk-taking that you experienced together?**

**Joe:** No, but I would say that with every show you work on, you are never sure what the perception of that collection will be. And a lot of people worked really hard on each collection, so you want it to be well received.

**Joe, how do you, as a stylist, deal with the decisiveness coming at you from the designer's collection? Do you sometimes eliminate strong pieces?**

**Joe:** No. I like strong pieces! All we can do is edit, edit it down, put it together. And Jil was there every step of the way. It wasn't as if she was absent for a day.

**Jil:** The problem was always the time for personal, private relationships.

**Would you say the same for your life, Joe, that it's centred on work, with little time for the private side?**

**Joe:** No, I wouldn't say that, but like anybody who works in fashion, if you want to be good at what you do, it requires a lot of dedication. I was very lucky, you know, I started as a fashion stylist in London at a time when there were not many other stylists.

**I remember you taking a quick nap under the table late at night. And sometimes, when you came back in the morning, you'd change the previous night's work.**

**Joe:** It happens all the time. The intensity today maybe comes from how fast it all has to be done.

**You mentioned that the parameters of fashion have changed, they focus no longer on modernity.**

**Joe:** It's just something that you no longer hear people talking about. Maybe, because the word 'modern' is associated with the 1990s and the early 2000s.

**It feels like the notion of individuality is today's focus. It seems as if we no longer care for the gorgeous 1990s uniform of modernity.**

**Joe:** Fashion has to evolve. As we know, it's a global industry today, less niche, and that means more consumers, more choices. It's interesting how important imagery has become to the industry. With the incredible rise of social-media platforms like Instagram, designers realize the immediacy and importance of people talking about an image. But Jil was doing this with her ads for many years. The ad with the shadow on the wall, the ad of Angela Lindvall in make-up... Your ad campaigns still have a very strong visual impact.

**Jil:** People actually collect that imagery today. They pay a lot of money for Jil Sander catalogues. We are displaying some of them at the exhibition.

**Joe:** That was another nice part, the catalogues.

**Jil:** I was very open, never thinking

## 'Do you remember? We were in a McDonald's when you told me that you were going to resign from your company.'






along commercial lines. We always strived for beauty, creativity, innovation. But quality, that was the mission. There was maybe a handful of photographers who delivered that.

**As to the shows, they used to be almost half an hour long. How did you maintain the intensity?**
**Joe:** When I worked with Jil they weren't that long.
**Jil:** By that time, it was 15, 20 minutes. But before, it was 28! Never ending... And the people were so patient.

**How would you create the flow of a runway show? The turning points, the climax, the relaxing parts? Because a show is an artwork, like a play on stage.**
**Jil:** Many things come together. We didn't have a production company. We chose the best lighting technicians. Light was extremely important. But it was mainly walking, not an event or an environment. When we came back to Jil Sander, we created a diamond or glass constructions for the show space. I always wanted the people at the show to feel something happening, and not only through decoration. I needed authority to be able to show a certain effortlessness, clothes for which you didn't have to twist yourself.

**To get back to the choreography: Jil mentioned that new clothes often arrived on the morning of the show, and you had to exchange the models.**
**Joe:** It was a process.

**As to Jil's vision of cleanness...**
**Jil:** Was there really a cleanness? I'd say it was pure. People sometimes called it minimalistic. But I am no bluestocking – I can do less *or* more. It depends. Do you think we were so plain? So minimalistic? Even our make-up, our hair, our casting...?
**Joe:** It was a single vision: Jil's. I don't think that it was a case of 'Was it too clean?' It was a very consistent vision. And within that vision, you had to move with the times. Jil did more prints; there were clothes with ruffles. It wasn't always so 'pure'. And yet, the results still had the authority, so you knew this was Jil's handwriting.

**Jil, regarding cleanness in your vision: the fact that you were a child in the rubble of Hamburg, after the destruction of World War II, may place this notion in a different light. Clearing up must have held such a sense of promise.**
**Jil:** I was only born in the countryside because my mother was bombed out of Hamburg[11] when she was heavily pregnant. She stayed with my grandparents who lived in a little village by the North Sea. I was born in that village because there was a military hospital there. I was born at the end of 1943, and when I was maybe two years old, we returned to Hamburg. And I really think when I consider my life and my parents – and I had a second father, since my mother divorced and married again – we had quite a good time. My mother was a lovely person. When it was raining, my brother and I didn't have to go to school. It was almost the other way around – we insisted that we had to. My brother was in school 10 minutes before eight, always very serious. We were – and still are – very mindful of responsibilities. That maybe comes from the generation that had to rebuild their income, their work. My father built a little company, and my mother took care of her children. She was always light-hearted.

**You went to the United States as a young woman.**
**Jil:** I don't know why I wanted to go away, and so far. Because in those days that was not so common. My father got me a car when I was 18, a Volkswagen. But shortly afterwards I told him he could have it back. I wanted to go to California. So finally, he agreed. I remember when they took me to the airport, I expected him to say at the last minute, maybe, better not. But I went. He was always very careful with his children, who they were with at night. So I kept my pocket money for taxis to be home in time. In California, there was nothing like that, in 1963; it was so free. When I came back to Germany, it had really changed my vision.

**'My father got me a car when I was 18, a Volkswagen. But shortly afterwards I told him he could have it back. I wanted to go to California.'**

**What brought you back?**
**Jil:** I came back because my father died very young; he was only 54. Actually, I planned to return to the States after that. My brother was 15 then, and my mother said, 'You can't go now'. So I stayed and accepted the responsibility. But in quite an optimistic way. As I always say, you stumble and you get up again. It was a difficult time for everybody. Completely different from today.

**Considering Joe's reference to American stylists, you both received your early visions from the United States.**

**Joe:** Not exclusively American, for me.
**Jil:** You have an apartment in New York, right?
**Joe:** Yes, but I can't say that only America was a big inspiration. I like a lot of American photographers, but I equally like European photographers.
**Jil:** I also spent time in New York, before I flew back to Germany. Had I returned to the US when I'd wanted to, my life might have turned out completely differently. But who knows, it may have been written in destiny all along. I always had the drive to do things by myself. To dress the way I wanted. But Joe also, I think.

**How do you consider the notion of stylishness? Does it have to do with timelessness or with a very keen feeling for the tip of any given moment?**
**Jil:** We started in 1990, almost 30 years ago, in the Avenue Montaigne, and we opened big flagship stores in the US, in Asia. We had a huge collection; we had to feed 10,000 square-foot stores. Of course, within the limited time constraints of the runway we wanted to express a concept. But when you went to the Avenue Montaigne store, there were beautiful clothes. Every piece had a great level of quality, of workmanship. It was never a selling collection, and we never did clothes solely for the show.

**Weren't those big store spaces also part of your aesthetic? Not for reasons of maximalism or to show the power of the brand, but to allow the clothes to breathe and have space?**
**Jil:** I used to think that we were the ones who created the collections, and that there were others who presented them and brought them to the audience. Then, I understood that you had to work on the overall image as well, to make people understand. If I think about it today, to undertake such a project on the Avenue Montaigne was really courageous. It certainly had a great effect on our success. When I started aged 24, 25, I had to learn everything. I was not only designing, I was everywhere in my company, speaking to people a lot. I spent my life in the Italian factories. Then I built a factory in Ellerau, close to Hamburg.

**Joe spoke of pushing things a bit on the runway, and mentioned the quirky model. What other ways are there to give a collection an edge?**
**Joe:** It's a lot to do with casting. And a great shoe very often helps.
**Jil:** I just looked at photos from the Cristóbal Balenciaga exhibition in London.[12] How women looked in 1964! The hair, the clothes, Parisian... When I started in 1968, I went to London, you know, King's Road, punk, expressive personalities: so beautiful. I was stealing from the whole movement; I remember the maxi lengths, for example. I always had this androgynous feeling inside, but never at the expense of killing the feminine part of a woman. And when I started to do men's collections, I took a long time to develop the drops, to take the shoulder pads out for the sake of a natural shoulder, to develop all the different shapes, the German, the English, the American. I liked to be flexible, because everybody is different. I wanted a collection you can play with personally. And I studied with my eyes. When I see a photo, I see the cut. You can be modern, but stay sophisticated. Fashion is always a reflection of its times. I also always had the grey suit in my mind. But when I look at my shows today, I see more dresses than I ever imagined.
**Joe:** Would you want to come back to fashion?
**Jil:** I am very open to finding myself in a new way. I am interested in projects, but I also have a foundation that isn't specified in its aims yet. So I could use this house for other things besides fashion.
**Joe:** It's such a passion for everyone who is involved in the fashion industry. It's very difficult to step back and move on.
**Jil:** There is a big change, also in other industries, because of the tools, the Internet, artificial intelligence even.

# 'I always knew what I liked. When I am visiting somewhere, I automatically start to move things around. So be careful if you think of inviting me!'

**Jil:** My vision when I started was directly in opposition to the 'Madame' type. I always knew what I liked. When I am visiting somewhere, I automatically start to move things around. So be careful, if you think of inviting me! Even when I worked with photographers at an early age, this tendency was already strong. It took me three weeks to design my first women's trousers. In those days, they still had the side zip. Today, that can be great, if you know how to do it. But then, I tried to make it... not to be emancipated but to give the cut strength. I was a bit shy, so I thought, I needed power from the way I dressed. You know how it is, when you feel comfortable, like a million dollars?

**And then, Jil, you developed your own Jil Sander flagship stores.**

**Wouldn't you also say that quality is slowly disappearing from the material world?**
**Joe:** As I said, if you want quality, you need time to work on it. And that's not so available to most of us.
**Jil:** I believe that there will always be new possibilities. We just have to find them. And there are many positive tools, just think of virtual fitting. Maybe we won't want fashion shows any more. But we will always need clothes. There are still trends, especially among young people. I think there will always be a group of people with a certain taste level.
**Joe:** That group is shrinking.
**Jil:** But there will always be a need for special things. Take the down packaging at +J. We didn't invent it, but we were very early in making it something that could be stylish. Even in comfort or in casualness, there are certain levels.

**But most trends today are not as imperative as they used to be when Paris was the only capital of fashion.**
**Jil:** But wasn't it always like that? All I am saying: Is there still a dream?
**Joe:** There is a dream, but it's more attainable. What I think happened is a need for 'product' – owning a product that has a certain buzz attached to it.

**And it doesn't have to be well crafted?**
**Joe:** I think it does, but most things are well crafted today.
**Jil:** I am not so sure. Give me an artisan who knows his job.
**Joe:** I'm just saying that everything is very advanced. It's not so difficult to make a good product today.

**We crave products today that are predominantly media-driven. Products happen in the digital world.**
**Joe:** There's so much fashion content out there and it all needs to be constantly updated. So there's a lot of 'buzz' about things that don't really deserve it. But there is still a need for creators.
**Jil:** A lot of brands are trying hard to get it done.

**In any case, there was a moment in fashion associated with minimalism. And it came rather late, considering that in architecture and product design, the Bauhaus spirit had been around for 80 years.**
**Joe:** But I want to end by looking forward and knowing what Jil will do next.
**Jil:** What would you advise?
**Joe:** I wouldn't want to say, because you're a woman who knows exactly what she wants to do.

1. Masao Nihei is best known for his long-standing collaboration with Yohji Yamamoto, for whom he has designed lighting and scenography for both catwalk shows and exhibitions. Work with other designers and artists includes lighting concepts for *Scenario*, a 1997 dance piece with choreography by Merce Cunningham and costumes and stage design by Rei Kawakubo.

2. Karla Otto is a German PR expert whose agency, founded in 1982, works with over 70 fashion brands. Jil Sander was one of her original clients.

3. Sissinghurst Castle Gardens were laid out in the 1930s by diplomat, author and politician Harold Nicolson and author and journalist Vita Sackville-West. They were designed as a series of 'rooms', discrete spaces through which visitors experience different plants and degrees of formality. The gardens, which are today considered the very epitome of English garden design, were opened to the public in 1938; entrance at the time cost 1 shilling.

4. Moritz, Landgrave of Hesse (1926-2013) was the head of the House of Brabant, an art collector and cousin of the British royal family.

5. As well as Jil Sander, horticulturist and TV presenter Penelope Hobhouse's garden-design clients have included the late Queen Mother and Steve Jobs.

6. Russell Page (1906-1985) was prolific, influential, and the (self-described) 'most famous garden designer no one has ever heard of'. His clients included the Frick Collection, industrialist Gianni Agnelli, First Lady Ladybird Johnson, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, and the Marquis of Bath. In a 1983 interview with the *New York Times*, he was described as: 'One of the tallest men around, he has a way of sitting that suggests that his bones have been unpacked in a hurry and will never be put together again.'

7. When public-relations powerhouse Kezia Keeble died aged 48 in 1990, one obituary said she had 'helped reshape the image of American fashion'. In 1976, she had married Paul Cavaco and the couple created their PR company Keeble Cavaco. After their divorce in 1985, she married a journalist, John Duka, and they all joined forces to found Keeble, Cavaco & Duka. The company still exists under the name KCD.

8. For the Chanel Autumn/Winter 2010-2011 women's ready-to-wear show, Karl Lagerfeld imported 240 tonnes of ice from Sweden and made an iceberg in the Grand Palais. After the show, which featured Swiss band Grauzone's 1980s classic 'Eisbär', Lagerfeld told reporters who asked about global warming: 'Have you felt any warming this winter? Maybe that's all nonsense, who knows.'

9. First launched in 1979, Woman Pure was Sander's first perfume. Perfume blogger Barbara Newman describes it as having a base 'by turns strident and soft' with a 'bracing opulence' in the dry down.

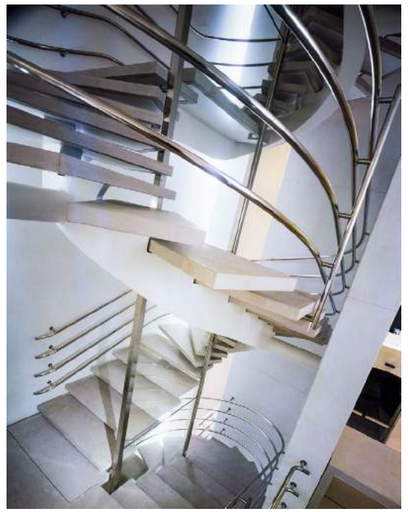
10. The +J collaboration with Uniqlo ran from 2009 to 2011.

11. In late July 1943, Operation Gomorrah, an eight-day series of bombing raids by the British Royal Air Force and the US Army Air Forces, saw over 8,000 tonnes of bombs dropped on Hamburg. The resulting firestorm destroyed almost the entire city, killed 40,000 people and forced nearly a million more to flee.

12. The exhibition *Balenciaga: Shaping Fashion* runs at the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, until February 18, 2018.

Jil Sander's private quarters (photographed on pages 168, 172 and 176) were designed by celebrated Hamburg architect Martin Haller (1835-1925). The architect was also responsible for the neo-Renaissance Hamburg Rathaus or city hall with its 112-metre tall tower (pages 152 and 160-161); the Laeiszhalle concert hall; and the imposing HAPAG office building.

The Brahms-Kontor building (page 157) was designed by architects Werner Lundt and Georg Kallmorgen in 1904, and expanded by Ferdinand Sckopp and Wilhelm Vortmann in the late 1920s. It was Hamburg's first high-rise building and long its tallest.



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1. Jil Sander, Paris flagship store, 1993
2. Jil Sander, portrait, 1975
3. Jil Sander cosmetics, Bath and Beauty, 1981, design by Peter Schmidt

4. Jil Sander cosmetics, Face Pure, 1984, design by Peter Schmidt
5. Jil Sander, Paris flagship store, 1993
6. Jil Sander, portrait, 1978

**Carla Sozzani**
**Paris, August 28th, 2017**

# ‘Jil’s style was not minimalism; it was maximalism in the care and execution. I don’t even know why it is called minimalism.’

**You were an early supporter of Jil Sander. In the show videos that are displayed at her exhibition in Frankfurt, you can always be seen sat in the front row.**
**Carla Sozzani:** Even when she started in Paris, I saw one of those first shows, for sure. Then, when she went to Milan, I decided to follow. In the beginning, I was curious about her decision to show in Milan, given that she’s from Hamburg. But there was so much purity about her work. As much as I am a fashion person, I like it when the shapes are pure. What really counts for me are the cuts, the fabrics, the shapes. I was never interested in gimmicks or too much decoration. Decoration is nice, but I never liked it when you just do it to impress...

**...or use it to make the look more valuable.**
It does not. When you really see a coat, without distraction, you realize if it’s good or not. Jil’s style was so precise. And it was not minimalism, actually; it was maximalism in the care and execution. You have to remember how much maximalism there is in a minimal dress, because it’s much easier to do it with lots of ribbons. But Jil’s look is sophisticated. I don’t even know why it is called minimalism.

**What did it mean from a Milanese perspective that a woman from Hamburg came to show her collections there? Even the fact that you came to see it...**
At the time I was a journalist, so I was happy to see beautiful work. The first person in our time who put this look together – pure, clean, perfect cut with no embellishment – was Jil.

**What was she like then?**
Always very elegant, beautiful, nice.

**In Germany, she was considered shy.**
Maybe in the sense of being reserved, well educated.

**You have curated more than a hundred shows at Corso Como. How would you present a Jil Sander exhibition?**
Well, she told me she doesn’t actually have many clothes to exhibit.

**Do you like the idea of not exhibiting clothes? Because, aside from not having them, Jil doesn’t want to show former collections physically. She is going to present them digitally.**
I think she is right. Everything she did belonged to a vision beyond the clothes. The vision to go public, to do fragrance, the advertising; the vision to be pure. Visuals were always important to her. All of that goes beyond the clothes. Though the clothes were beautiful… the coats! They were the best. And the fabrics, the research that went into them. All this is still inspirational to many brands today. I sometimes see what I’d consider ‘a Jil coat’, yet at the Jil Sander brand itself, they don’t seem to do it. It’s very strange.

**Jil mentioned that you were instrumental in her return to her brand when it still belonged to Prada.**
It was very easy. I thought the separation was a shame for both parties; it was obviously something that didn’t make any sense. I say that as a friend of both sides. They called me when they were back together as happy people. What happened after that, I don’t know.

**You are almost like a homeopathic doctor. You did something similar for Azzedine Alaïa and Prada.**
When you are lucky to be friends with people you love and respect, it’s like family, no? You see two cousins fighting and try to resolve it. It’s the same.

**Is the fashion world really a family?**
It is. We’re all friends, even when we fight. There’s a link that keeps us together.

**Fashion and everything that goes with it is a craft. But this expertise remains in the hands of the experts. It is not really taught to new generations.**
It is something we should all teach. In Japan, they call it ‘living treasures’.

**Bernard Arnault started to cultivate fashion craftsmanship with his Institut des Métiers d’Excellence programme.**[1]
It’s great that he is doing this, because LVMH has the financial resources, the power and the possibilities. In the Renaissance, there were schools for high craftsmanship. As a painter, you went to Giotto. Armani is doing a lot in this sense. On the subject of Armani, I love when a brand has the name of the creator, when he is alive. It is a shame that Jil is here – alive, in good health and full of creativity – yet not heading up her brand. If somebody is alive and that’s the case, it’s against nature.





# ‘Designers now put Instagram and the social aspects of fashion first. This desire to make the most of every moment has become an obsession.’

**When Jil was watching all her catwalk videos back, in preparation for the exhibition, she was surprised to see how feminine her collections had been. She had often been considered the master of the trouser suit.**
*Mais non*! I never thought of her work as solely androgynous. Even though there are the jackets, the coats, and the white shirt. But Yohji Yamamoto and Rei Kawakubo were also doing the white shirt at that time.

**How do you see the relationship between the Japanese designers and Jil Sander?**
There is something about strictness that they share. But the Japanese changed. Rei Kawakubo went in a totally different direction. It’s very difficult when somebody has such an individual voice. It’s impossible to say that you are similar to somebody else. They are never close. They are all individuals.

**Individuality is a Renaissance concept. But it is also a German idea. Like Italy, Germany has stayed decentralized for a long time. It was always regional, individual, if you want.**
That’s what makes the world interesting. How can you describe something as being American? It’s a huge country! After Martin Margiela, you find all kinds of connections, but before, they were generally all individual voices. How can you compare Vivienne Westwood and Rei Kawakubo, Jean Paul Gaultier and Azzedine Alaïa?

**You are making a beautiful argument for fashion designers being artists.**
And they all appeared in the same 10-year period!

**Did this have anything to do with the political climate?**
There wasn’t that much money in fashion at the time. It was not a global concern; there was no Internet. There was no Russia, no Africa, no India in fashion. People used to be in small apartments, because everybody was poor. Creativity takes time. You have to be in a room alone with a piece of paper, a piece of fabric. No magazines, no flea markets. Today, designers travel first class and have salaries of millions. There are press offices and huge marketing departments.

**Is individuality disappearing, too?**
I hope not! We are looking for it everywhere. I hope I can still recognize it when it happens.

**The Internet doesn’t exactly encourage individuality.**
The Internet is making a big noise about things that we’ve already seen. Take Barbara Kruger.[2] Today, she is everywhere. But she’s long been an individual voice, a real artist. Now her style is copied all over the world, and it seems that the people who are doing it, are creative people.

**Why all this appropriation?**
There is a problem. They honestly think they are creative. An artist today is much more social than reclusive. But a real artist doesn’t live a social life. Cézanne’s body of work was not made going to cocktail parties. Nor Picasso’s. But these days, designers put Instagram and the social aspects first. This desire to make the most of every moment has become an obsession. Andy Warhol was going about his business in a very quiet way compared to today’s hype. I used to know Warhol because he was always with us at fashion shows. But the hysteria is going to go away.

**Do you think so?**
To see Barbara Kruger ripped off like that upsets me, because she is still alive. People don’t think they’re copying; they just think they’re taking an idea. I am of a generation that thinks, ‘I shop therefore I am’… OK? We know. In my store, I sell Barbara Kruger cups and bags...

**Do you agree with Joseph Beuys that everybody can be an artist?**
Of course. There is an artist in each of us. The problem is to know how to express it.

**Isn’t it also a question of support? Yves Saint Laurent had Pierre Bergé.**
It’s very difficult to be absolutely alone. But if you build something with someone else, you become two lonely persons together. As for Jil, I think her friend Dicky Mommsen played a very important role. She was like me with Azzedine: ‘Pom, pom, go, you are the best!’ Do you know how much this means in life? Plus, Dickie wore Jil’s clothes beautifully.

**Let’s go back to the late 1960s. What was Italy like when you started?**
I started working as a fashion editor in 1968 – next year is my professional

50th anniversary. There was couture in Rome, where I used to go as a member of the press. Then, there was prêt-à-porter, which started in Florence. And that was amazing; to me, that was the best system. Everybody was showing 16 outfits, and if you look, 16 outfits are enough because it gives you the essence. And every journalist had six outfits for the whole week. So you could go to lunch, leave your things on the seats. Everything was so civilized.

**Was there a genuinely Italian elegance?**
It was Italian and French. Everything was happening between Paris and Rome. Couture was in Rome, Valentino was in Rome. Walter Albini[3] was a little bit separate from that. He was what I'd call pure perfection.

**‘Jil did everything before everybody else. Her advertising campaigns were revolutionary. Yet always with this elegance; subdued, never loud.’**

**Would you draw a line from him to Jil Sander in that respect? Did they have something in common?**
Well, obsession is probably their common link. Nothing is good enough or is ever going to be good enough.

**You were a protégé of Alexander Liberman.**
For a short time. I met him in the 1980s. He came to Milan many times, and when I wanted to leave *Vogue* magazine for *Elle*, he convinced me not to leave Condé Nast.

**He revolutionized graphic editing. His inspiration were radical Soviet artists like Malevich and Rodchenko.**
And what is more beautiful? I remember the Rodchenko exhibition at our gallery; Jil came and really liked it. There are so many things that link art and fashion. Photography, the point of view, and the way people relate to one another.

**Today, fashion is more recognized as an artistic discipline.**
It is a form of art. It all depends on how you are doing it. Rei Kawakubo is art. Azzedine is art. So is Jil Sander who devoted herself to purity. What I admire about her whole project is that she did everything before everybody else. She went public before anybody else; she did the fragrance license before anybody else. Her advertising campaigns were revolutionary for the time. Yet always with this elegance; subdued, never loud.

**You and Jil both started as magazine editors and later moved to a position that allowed for a more direct influence on fashion's course.**
I was fired from *Elle* after three-and-half issues. I could have gone back to Condé Nast, but at that point I decided that it was that for me. I first opened a publishing company, then the gallery, and then Corso Como.

**As a concept store, Corso Como brought back the idea of the arts working together, of a new kind of Bohemia.**
When I was fired from *Elle*, I took it as a sign. I was 41 and had already spent 19 years in magazines. I had made a mistake leaving *Vogue* and I knew it the moment I walked into the *Elle* office. Because they had agencies who sold them stories. You know, coming from *Vogue*, where even the glass and the flower bouquets are made specifically for Vogue, the concept of buying in stories was against every principle I grew up with. At *Vogue*, I had been working with Robert Mapplethorpe, Peter Lindbergh, Bruce Weber, Sarah Moon...

**Going back to the idea of a new bohemia: Azzedine and Jil may both be obsessive, as you say, but at the same time, they are great team players. Is this capability to orchestrate a team something modern?**
But the others are just as obsessive. It's a group of obsessive people. I am, too. I have this strange thing since I was very young. Before any trip away – no matter how long or short it is – I have to clean my office and leave everything perfect. So whatever happens to me, anybody should be able to come in and find what they're looking for. I can stay and clean until it's six o' clock in the morning until my office is accessible to everyone. Sometimes, I can't even start working if things are not organized my way.

**You left magazines for the 3D world...**
I went to three, four, five, six dimensions!

**But with the digital world, we are back in the two-dimensional.**
I like the digital world, but with Corso Como, the gallery, the restaurant and fashion... I don't understand how people can stop living. How can you stop having the pleasure of sitting at a table with friends?

**Like you, Jil left journalism almost by accident. At first, she just wanted to improve the clothes she had to shoot. But she ended up designing them full-time. It all began when she was hired by the textile producer Höchst to do a Trevira trend collection.**[4]
Jil was always very much about textiles.

**You, too, chose a hands-on approach to design.**
Yes, it's more interesting this way. It's what makes life worthwhile. We cannot live it in a passive way. Not everybody can do this, but it's much nicer to create than follow creators.

**Now, we are talking about the new and about living an original life.**
Yes, inspiration is one thing. You go to the Cézanne exhibition and might be inspired by seeing those colours – that is good – or you go to Pompeii. But going to the flea market, getting some clothes, sending them to the factory to be copied, and thinking you are creative, well, that's another matter. It's quite simply another job.

**Jil always emphasizes that her work is all about the three-dimensional.**
Of course. Vionnet was very much like her.[5] Actually, Jil's store on the Avenue Montaigne opened in the former Vionnet couture space.

**It's almost easy to explain why there are so few original voices in fashion today. There is not much space for artistic development when you have to do up to 10 collections a year and satisfy marketing requirements.**
There is too much money. Before, the big groups didn't exist. A designer could wake up in the morning and have nothing to do. But today, the pressure makes things very difficult.

**What Jil calls modern and forward-looking seems to be what you call classic. Is that right?**
Or radical.

**When Jil Sander collaborated with Uniqlo, her slogan was: ‘The future is here.’ Was she being too optimistic?**
But her brand still exists! I wish she could still be doing it.

**She sees herself as a missionary who wants to reform dressing styles for good. Jil always aimed at dressing everybody beautifully.**
Impossible!

1. According to the group's website: ‘In 2014, LVMH created in France the Institut des Métiers d'Excellence (IME) vocational training program to ensure the transmission of time-honored artisanal skills and to promote careers in traditional craftsmanship and creative métiers among young generations.’

2. Newark-born artist Barbara Kruger's most influential – and copied – work features black and white photographs covered with pithy sayings written in white Futura Bold Italic text in red boxes (‘I shop therefore I am’, ‘Your body is a battleground’). It has proved highly influential: in 2017, James Jebbia sued label Married To The Mob for parodying the Supreme logo, but in deposition for the case acknowledged that his logo ‘was based directly on Barbara Kruger's famous imagery’.

3. Before his death aged 42 in 1983, Walter Albini had been fêted by fellow designers, been called the Italian Yves Saint Laurent, become one of most important pioneers of ready-to-wear, and helped found Milan fashion week. A handsome dandy who understood the power of image, he began as a fashion illustrator in Milan and Paris, before designing collections for a number of labels, as well as his own ready-to-wear and couture label.

4. Trevira was a founded in 1956 as a division of German textile manufacturer Höchst to make polyester fibres and fabrics. It is now owned by Bangkok-based Indorama Ventures.
5. French designer Madeleine Vionnet (1876-1975) founded her own label in 1912, before closing it at the outbreak of war in 1939. An enormously successful presence in the 1920s, she opened a store on Avenue Montaigne that became known as the ‘temple of fashion’. She also invented – and then copyrighted – the bias cut.

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7. Jil Sander, portrait, 1978
8. Jil Sander cosmetics, Colour Pure, 1985, design by Peter Schmidt
9. Jil Sander campaign, Spring/Summer 1996, photograph by Craig McDean, model, Guinevere van Seenus







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10. Jil Sander campaign, Spring/Summer 1996, photograph by Craig McDean, model, Guinevere van Seenus
11. Jil Sander cosmetics, Sander for Men, 1999, design by Fabien Baron
12. Jil Sander, portrait, first show in Paris at the Hotel InterContinental, 1976

**Frédéric Sanchez**
**Paris, August 29th, 2017**

**How did you get into fashion?**
**Frédéric Sanchez:** Originally, I wanted to work in ballet.

**Did you dance yourself?**
No, but I adored ballet and theatre. My approach to music comes from the theatre and the opera, from the idea of a 'total spectacle'. This notion is important for me. I have been profoundly moved – both visually and aesthetically – by the performing arts, and feel very close to that world. I saw Pina Bausch when I was young, as well as the work of a German director called Hans Peter Cloos,[1] who did Brecht's *Threepenny Opera* in 1979 in a small theatre around the corner from where we are right now.

**The Bouffes du Nord?**[2]
Yes. It was marvellous.

**Peter Brook did *Ubu Roi*[3] there, very few props, fabulous energy...**
Yes, like that. The *Threepenny Opera* production was important, because it was done with musicians from the German scene, I think; they were from the group Ash Ra Tempel,[4] using electronic sounds. Before, there had been a play called *Susn* from Herbert Achternbusch. That really was my youth; these were the things that shaped me a lot.

**How did this lead to fashion?**
Through music, because we had something called the Théâtre Contemporain de la Danse here in Paris in the 1980s. There were these young companies like Régine Chopinot, Philippe Decouflé...

**Chopinot worked with Jean Paul Gaultier.**
Exactly. And in London, there was Michael Clarke. Besides contemporary dance, there was the whole Manchester music scene, and Factory Records; with all its beautiful album covers designed by Peter Saville. He later worked with Yohji Yamamoto on his fashion catalogues. That's how I discovered fashion.

**Did you get a formal education in music?**
I did French *lycée* but couldn't wait for it to end. Music was my passion since I was a little child. Not solely music, more sound in general. This aspect impressed me a lot. Then I got into fashion and met Martine Sitbon and Marc Ascoli by chance. I started to work a bit for Martine. Then a friend introduced me to Martin [Margiela], while he was still at Gaultier, and preparing what would become his own first collection. It came as a surprise to me quite how well Martin and I were a good combination. All of a sudden, we were doing something that resembled a manifesto.

**This idea has been a bit forgotten in fashion.**
Not just in fashion. But with Martin it was more personal. For me, it enabled me to find my voice.

**A personal manifesto.**
Yes. Also, with Martin, I turned to a style, which was more arts and crafts. I preferred working with reel-to-reel tape recorders, rather than computers. Anyway, when I started in fashion, it was important for me to do something with my hands, something akin to collage. I discovered cinematographic *montage*, and I quickly conceived of models walking the runway as images glued to one another, in order to create a story.

**And be deconstructed?**
Both de- and re-constructed, yes. That became the basis of my work. And that is still there today, even though I've since done things that are much more sophisticated. The style of work has remained the same. The starting point is always the image. One or two years after starting with Martin, I met Jil. That was in the beginning of the 1990s.

**Typically, were you in close contact with her in the days leading up to her shows?**
I set up a studio in the Palazzo delle Stelline in Milan with reel-to-reel machines. Jil was busy in the rooms below, preparing her collection. She would come up and listen to what I had to propose. I really participated in the development of the show and drew inspiration from the fittings. Jil spoke a lot about how the clothes were made, about quality, materials.

**How do you translate quality into music?**
Through the quality of sound. The purity. I don't know whether Jil remembers, but we always spoke about a sound that is very round, a bit like the sound you hear in a truly luxurious car, a sound that is extremely enveloping. It was about creating a sound environment of extreme quality which, furthermore, suggests an enormous sensibility. So, it was not about one sound, but of different music, almost moments of life.

**Did this music relate to the images you mentioned?**
Exactly, and they create a story. What I created for Jil in the first years was quite cinematographic. There was often a beginning and an end. You would hear the music from the beginning again at the end, like the credits in a film. And for Jil I often used leitmotifs.

**In the Wagnerian sense?**[5]
Yes, ideas which return and transport you back to certain forms. That inspired me a lot. My culture comes very much from German culture, that's why. Be it Wagner or the music that came after him at the start of the 20th century, like Schönberg and Alban Berg. Primarily Berg. His opera *Wozzeck*[6] is very important for me. The way he executed it is very cinematographic, with a beginning, middle and end. These are the things I adapted in my work for Jil Sander.

**Did your musical work take into consideration other elements of the show like lighting, stage architecture?**
There wasn't really any play with the light. It was mostly white, crude, quite minimal, an ambiance that lasted from beginning to end. As for the architecture, the sound often creates an architecture within the architecture, a specific space, which situates stories.

**And then there were the models.**
I think that the personalities of the models had quite an impact. But this impact came mostly from the clothes. And, of course, from make-up and hair.

**Did all these elements unfold side by side in the conception process?**
All this evolved in the discussions we had. With Jil, it was always like that. What I find interesting, too, with Jil Sander, is that you can see periods. In the beginning, there was this *mélange* of the idea of tradition and extreme modernity. There was a strong sense of the contemporary. In my first season with Jil, David Lynch had just done *Twin Peaks* and *Wild at Heart*. We mixed that with European culture. There was this link between Europe and America, more a porosity, a world in between, like that of Susan Sontag who was very influenced by the fact that she had come to Paris and became acquainted with the work of people like Hans-Jürgen Syberberg.[7] On the other hand, certain phenomena of American culture, like Philip Glass or Bob Wilson, were much more known in Europe than at home.

**You spoke of periods in Jil Sander's work.**
Then came a period, between 1992 and 1994, which was closer to grunge, even though I don't like the word. And it was not exactly that. My sound work related to the past, too, to the Velvet Underground, for example.

**Again, with Nico, a hybrid of European and American culture.**
Then, around 1996, came a period, where we used a lot of German electronic music like Neu! and other new groups like Kreidler and To Rococo Rot, this whole new German scene. To Rococo Rot was a 1990s group, but it related to currents within the German post-war tradition, that went back to Karlheinz Stockhausen or Kraftwerk.

**Jil Sander was an exchange student in California in her youth. She says that changed her a lot. And this seems to have to do with American pop culture and the idea of seriality.**
There is a certain minimalism of space with Jil, and you find that in American culture, too. But functionality has European roots. The work with sound became very important in a certain moment of Jil's history. There are a few female fashion designers who did not only create clothes but a world that went with them. In short, she created a house.

**So you both really had this affinity for the *Gesamtkunstwerk*?**
Let's say that I respect the fact that Jil knows where she wants to go. She has the sensibility to know what will work with her. When she came up to my office, she'd always says things like, 'This needs to be subtler; I don't feel anything...'

**Did you ever reuse what you did for Jil on other catwalks?**
No. It was very specific to her. What I did with Martin was completely different from what I did for Jil. In a formal sense, too. Calvin Klein and Helmut Lang, that also was very different. And there is the fact that Jil is a woman. That is very important. I have the impression that a woman creates a world around her. Jil was more in the present, her

**'We always spoke about a sound that is very round, a bit like the sound you hear in a truly luxurious car, a sound that is extremely enveloping.'**

**'There are a few female fashion designers who not only created clothes but the world that went with them. In short, Jil created a house.'**

aesthetic was very much based on reality. While for a man, things are more 'fantastical'. I think of Yves Saint Laurent who said that he used fashion to realize his fantasies.

**Do you mean that for a man, the work is more conceptual, while for a woman more existential?**
Yes, absolutely, something existential. And it is interesting that Jil moves easily from the way she creates and designs her clothes to the way they are sold.

**It's always the *maison* aspect.**
And somehow, I find this very strong. All of a sudden, architecture is important, too. Music is important...

**Jil's home in Hamburg was designed by Lorenzo Mongiardino,[8] in an almost Renaissance style.**
That doesn't surprise me. It can be the same thing. The runway music speaks of a moment in time. And yet, when you listen to the 25 years of recordings I made for Jil – either one after the other, or if you switch from 1992 to 2000 – you are always in the same story. There is always this duality of the ancient and the new, the classical and the avant-garde. What binds it together is quality.

**Karla Otto pointed out that there are very few catwalk specialists. Basically, there are only one or two for each discipline. And they don't really train new generations. Would you say that your work is too personal to be passed on?**
It is something personal and it comes from far away. The people I work with understand what I do, but they know that they couldn't reproduce it. My work goes with my life. It's like writing. My relation to sounds is very particular, because it comes from my family.

**How do you know if something works or not?**
I see it at once.

**And what about the audience? Do you stay for the show itself?**
I do, but you press play, that's it. What interests me is what happens before. Of course, if people come, it's all 'awesome, awesome, awesome!' In the 1990s, people started to either hate or to adore things, that didn't exist so much before.

**Did the collaboration with Jil run always smoothly?**
Yes, I considered her comments a challenge. My work was for her, and you need that humility, too. Today it may be more difficult. I don't know. It was a group of people, Jil, Joe, Maida Boina, Guido Palau, myself... Suddenly, there was a family. It was a bit like a troupe. Like with Fassbinder, who always worked with the same people.

**Nevertheless, there must have been more of a distance. Fassbinder actually lived with his people day and night.**
And yet, there is not that much of a difference. There is the idea of the troupe. After 25 years, Jil does an exhibition, and she calls me. To me, this is very beautiful.

**Is this kind of 'intensive fashion' dead today?**
When I started to work within fashion, I liked its ephemeral nature. But then the Internet arrived, and archive imagery returned. So, all of a sudden, fashion was no longer ephemeral. Fashion, itself, disappeared; it turned into something different. The same thing happened to music, to art. Today, there is nothing new. Which forces you to become even more personal. I look at nothing any more. I plunge deeply into myself. What inspires me is life itself. Images come, and I want to keep these moments.

1. Theatre director Hans Peter Cloos was born in Stuttgart, but has spent most of his professional life working in France. The 1979 production of *Threepenny Opera* at the Bouffes du Nord launched his career.

2. The Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord in northern Paris was the base for British director Peter Brook's multicultural Centre International de Créations Théâtrales between 1974 and 2010. Brook has now retired from actively running theatre, but it continues to stage experimental theatre.

3. *Ubu Roi* was written by French dramatist Alfred Jarry (1873-1907). A mixture of odd, slangy language, absurdist ideas and Shakespearean elements, it is often seen as a precursor to Dada and Surrealism. Its first (and for a time, last) performance was held in Paris on December 10, 1896. A riot ensued; the play was quickly banned.

4. Founded in the early 1970s, Ash Ra Tempel's mix of blues and jazz improvisation with psychedelia made it a key element of the early Krautrock movement. British musician Julian Cope says that the band's early records, 'pulled out, still wriggling, the cosmic conger eel of white light which so few artists ever capture in the Moment of Recording'.

5. According to the *International Cyclopedia of Music and Musicians* (1958), a Wagnerian leitmotif is: 'A word ... for a theme of easily recognizable melodic, rhythmic or harmonic identity, first used in connection with a certain character of incident, and which returns time and again, always with a reminiscence of the original association. These melodic fragments acquired symbolic meaning in the Wagnerian music-dramas.'

6. *Wozzeck* by Austrian composer and librettist Alban Berg was based upon Georg Büchner's unfinished play *Woyzeck* about a murder in a small German town. Its success after its 1925 Berlin premiere apparently disappointed Berg: he had hoped that his opera would be too modern and avant-garde for a popular audience to fully appreciate.

7. Hans-Jürgen Syberberg is a German film director whose oeuvre mixes fiction, documentary and theatre into what he considers a *Gesamtkunstwerk*. While his investigations of German history have long interested thinkers including Susan Sontag and Gilles Deleuze, his views about the Nazi regime have raised accusations of anti-Semitism.

8. Architect, and interior designer Lorenzo Mongiardino (1916-1998) was celebrated as a master of what he called 'decorative architecture'. His richly decorated interiors are characterized by their trompe l'oeil effects: painted marble, marquetry and architectural details that create a perfect illusion of reality.





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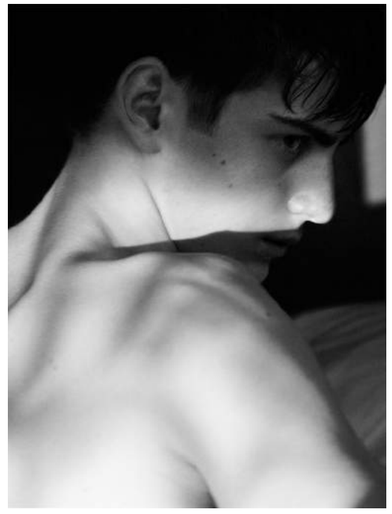

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13. Jil Sander campaign, Spring/Summer 1996, photography by Craig McDean, model, Guinevere van Seenus
14. Jil Sander, Milan showroom, 2000
15. Jil Sander campaign, Autumn/Winter 2013-14, photograph by David Sims, model, Ben Allen

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16. Jil Sander, backstage portrait, 1999
17. Jil Sander campaign, Autum/Winter 2013-14, photograph by David Sims, model, Edie Campbell
18. Jil Sander cosmetics, Man Pure, 2004







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19. Jil Sander, Paris flagship store, 1993
20 & 21. Jil Sander campaign, Autumn/Winter 2013-14, photograph by David Sims, model, Edie Campbell

# ‘To me, that Lacroix dress is priceless.’

## A personal peek inside the vintage fashion market.

**By Alexander Fury**
**Photograph by Jess Bonham**






Lighting: 123 Lighting.

A few weeks after the Autumn/Winter 2017 haute-couture shows in Paris, I'm in a taxi on the way to the Saint-Ouen flea market just to the north of the city, exchanging the search for fresh ideas to the pursuit of the old. I've heard a rumour, passed through different channels, that there is something worth seeing up there: an original bunch of Christian Lacroix dresses, from his final collection for Jean Patou 30 years ago.[1] After Lacroix was poached to establish his own haute-couture house, the clothes were never commercially produced. Any outfits now available for sale are rare, true one-offs. Hence the circuitous route, outside of fashion month, to the dusty outskirts of Paris, and the remembrance of clothing past.

Vintage has been fashionable for decades, but lately, our definition of the term 'vintage' has become more fluid. The concept of time has collapsed, so clothes from barely 20 years ago are now declared vintage and hence ripe for resurrection. We are no longer cribbing from the period stretching, roughly, between the 1940s (big shoulders, draped crepe dresses, platform shoes) and the 1970s (the first revival of the aforementioned styles, possibly the birth of vintage) for style notes. Today, vintage may describe a 1991 leopard-chenille Azzedine Alaïa catsuit, a 1996 Halston-alike Tom Ford for Gucci jersey evening gown, or even a logo-splattered saddle-shaped handbag by John Galliano for Dior from 2000. In quick succession, the unfashionable, unexpected and often unloved have suddenly become scarce, desirable, and often, unaffordable.

**'In quick succession, the unfashionable, unexpected and often unloved have suddenly become scarce, desirable, and often, unaffordable.'**

Many call this the 'new vintage' or 'future vintage' – the implication being that it isn't quite legitimately vintage, yet. That is perhaps because although designers tinker with styles season after season to generate relentless novelty of appearance, the nuts-and-bolts of silhouette change has actually slowed down over the past few decades. Meaning that a dress from 1997 doesn't seem anywhere near as alien in 2017 as a 1947 dress looked in 1967 (think of the respective styles). That's an extreme example – the New Look versus a Courrèges mini – but try it between 1967 and 1987, or 1927 and 1947. The theory stands.

'We were one of the first,' says Steven Philip, co-owner of Rellik, a west London vintage shop established in 1999, which specializes in clothing from roughly the 1970s through to today. On the racks of his store, in the shadow of the Brutalist Trellick Tower,[2] 1970s Bill Gibb and Zandra Rhodes may jostle with 1980s Romeo Gigli, Stefano Pilati's designs for Yves Saint Laurent from barely a decade ago, and a healthy swathe of Vivienne Westwood (Philip is an ardent fan and fanatic collector). For him, Rellik was about deflating the pretension of 'vintage': 'It doesn't have to be about 1890s Victoriana or 1930s sequins. That market is there, but our market is looking back as little at 10 years, 20 years, 30 years.'

His idea has proved both lucrative and influential, and has attracted new collectors who can rival noted private collectors of vintage couture, such as Hamish Bowles, Azzedine Alaïa and Louis Vuitton's men's style director Kim Jones. He has amassed entire painstakingly assembled outfits by Vivienne Westwood, and also esoteric creations by little-known London designers including Rachel Auburn and designer-cum-artist Leigh Bowery.[3] Generally, there is a preference for marquee names – Alaïa, Galliano and Ford-era Gucci are big, as are Alexander McQueen, Helmut Lang and Martin Margiela. The clothes of the last, in particular, can demand prices far higher than their original sale tags: in March, when Gill Linton of US vintage retailer Byronesque held a squat-style Margiela-exclusive sale in Paris, many pieces sold for five figures. One of the first items snapped up was a pair of gargantuan oversized jeans from Margiela's Autumn/Winter 2000 collection, in which garments were expanded or enlarged by varying degrees. Linton confessed to me that the owner of the jeans had bought several pairs years before in US discount-store chain T.J.Maxx, where unsold or 'dead stock' frequently winds up, for about $10.

The sourcing of vintage can be troublesome. Supply is limited, demand ever-increasing, meaning that it is not only collectors but also dealers scouring eBay and auction houses in search of finds, which can then be flipped for a fast profit. Margiela at T.J.Maxx is exceptional, although, occasionally, pieces can slip through for a song. A vintage dealer I know managed to snag not one but two of Mariano Fortuny's turn-of-the-century pleated silk 'Delphos' gowns[4] for a few hundred pounds at an auction (they generally sell for tens of thousands). They hadn't been correctly identified and, just as an expert may spot the brushstroke of an Old Master in an anonymous portrait, he realized the worth stitched into those intricate seams. I once found a John Galliano jacket from his first catwalk show, 'The Ludic Game',[5] for sale on eBay for £60.

Azzedine Alaïa remembers sales at Parisian auction house Drouot in the 1970s and 1980s at which a tiny cadre of couture enthusiasts would bid low for exceptional pieces that today would fetch many multiples of their selling prices. Alaïa now owns a collection to rival any museum; indeed, he has lent various institutions work by Madame Grès, Madeleine Vionnet, Yves Saint Laurent, Jacques Fath and Balenciaga, and has a number of pieces in the blockbuster Christian Dior show currently at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs. But as collectors and museums snap up pieces, the number on the open market dwindles.

The Lacroix dress I am searching for in Saint-Ouen was, I am told, bought directly from Jean de Moüy, Jean Patou's great-nephew, possibly at some point after the business was sold.[6] After Lacroix's departure, Patou ceased producing fashion to focus on perfumes (Joy, a fragrance first launched in 1930, still sells healthily). The house was acquired by P&G Prestige in 2001, and then by Designer Parfums in 2011. In 2010, Moüy auctioned Lacroix's final collection at Parisian auction house Chayette & Cheval; the 60 lots, including my dress, brought in over €160,000.[7]

The Patou sale was exceptional. Generally, vintage doesn't come straight from a designer archive, but rather via complex, meandering paths. Clothing dealer William Banks-Blaney, whose company WilliamVintage specializes in Metworthy, mid-century clothes, finds couture everywhere. He attends estate sales and auction houses, such as Kerry Taylor Auctions in London, specializing in fashion and textiles. He also approaches families directly, through networks of friends. One French family, who avidly collected haute couture through several generations, kept their archive in plastic containers in the basement of their Parisian home: from one, Banks-Blaney unearthed a pristine-condition Pierre Balmain gown, embroidered by François Lesage[8] and worn once. Kerry Taylor solicits for submissions to her sales through email and, again, through social introductions. She recalls pawing through suitcases of clothes from the attic of a Devon country house where many of the pieces were so moth-eaten they were tossed, immediately, onto an open fire. 'Luckily, it was the woollen things that the moths had gone for. Tailcoats, things like that,' recalls Taylor. 'It was a quite smart family, so it was sad, but thank God the moths hadn't gotten to the Schiaparellis.'

The Internet has certainly opened up the market. You can easily dredge eBay for hidden treasures, or pay through sites like Vestiaire Collective, a French resale website where vintage runs the gamut from a few mid-century couture pieces to last season's Gucci. And if you search hard enough, you can come up with gold. But the Internet has also changed the market for sellers – many are now far more aware of their pieces' potential value, meaning heirloom pieces are now coming to auction, where prices are also rising. 'We got £110,000 for a Schiaparelli jacket,' says Kerry Taylor. She takes a deep, sharp breath at the mention of the price. 'I think that made people really sit up and look.' Presumably, for their own Schiaparellis.

Kerry Taylor's sales aren't fixated on couture, though. I attended one, where lots included panniered 18th-century ballgowns and a 1999 Gucci-branded snorkel set, designed by Tom Ford. The highest bid for a garment was for a 1994 Versace slashed, silk-jersey dress with rhinestone buttons. The auction took place three days after Donatella Versace's archive-inspired Spring/Summer 2018 collection, a tribute to her brother Gianni. 'Versace's going to be big,' Steven Philip of Rellik told me at the same auction. He raised his eyebrows (but not his paddle) when the gavel sounded on that dress.

Vintage buying shifts and switches mood and temperament according to external cultural influences. Certain items will always hold value: major designer names; pieces prominently featured in editorial shoots or advertising campaigns, and so immediately recognizable; pieces with supporting catwalk images (rare for pieces before the 1980s, and difficult to source until around 2000); anything owned or worn by a celebrity, especially with provenance. 'A lot of it is about condition, and a piece's cut and look,' explains William Banks-Blaney, who like Philip predominantly sells to people wanting to wear the clothes, rather than to collectors. But exhibitions, label revivals, or even movies can throw interest and attention for both collecting and wear onto specific periods or designers. The recent flush of interest for Martin Margiela, both for

his own label and Hermès, for which he designed between 1997 and 2003, has been partly driven by an exhibition in Antwerp and much discussion in fashion magazines, and is set to accelerate with a 2018 retrospective of his work, curated with Olivier Saillard, in Paris.[9] The revival of the Helmut Lang label brought the already frenzied bidding around his vintage pieces to fever pitch. Versace is set to be next.

Collectible clothing generally passes through several hands before ending up with its final owner: from auction house to dealer, to a restorer or dry-cleaner, perhaps then uploaded online to a website like 1stdibs.com, which has an entire sub-section for vintage fashion alongside fine art and furniture. There are some people who have Steve Philip's hunter-gatherer instincts, and enjoy foraging through salesrooms; some prefer to pick clothing up in a boutique, and pay extra. The advantage of the latter, of course, being that the garment has been pressed, prepared, sanitized (ideologically, sometimes literally) and, possibly most important of all, curated.

The 1987 Lacroix I'm schlepping out of Paris to get is more unusual. I have a personal passion for the work of Lacroix; I have had it since I was a child, when the inflated, campy shapes and brilliant colours obviously appealed to someone enthralled with the fantasy of fashion, especially French couture. It was a colourful contrast to a childhood spent in the fairly bleak countryside of northern England. Abstracted from that, the piece is a prime example of the symbolic excesses of mid-1980s fashion, before the crash of October 1987 floored the economy and ended the party. A short, polka-dotted and petticoated example of Lacroix's signature 'pouf' skirt, the model was the 20th passage of the January 1987 show. Ironically given the intrigues then blustering about Lacroix leaving Patou and the discussions underway with Bernard Arnault, now the CEO of LVMH and the man who financed Lacroix's own-label couture house, this dress was titled 'Retenez-moi' – 'Hold me'. As a dress, it's coquettish, fun, interesting and a bit mad; the French term *ludique*, so expressive of the very best of Lacroix's work, springs to mind.

It's also a unique fragment of French fashion and cultural history, perfectly expressive of the fashion of its time; of the 1980s revival of haute couture for which Lacroix was chiefly responsible; of the styles with which the designer's name remains associated; and of a peculiar fashion-based expression of postmodern ideals and aesthetics. Technically, it's also an example of fashion at its very highest level – haute couture, entirely sewn by hand. As the original catwalk prototype, it is exactly how Lacroix wanted it to appear in his Patou show, without client alteration. It's also the only one ever made, and particularly collectible as it's from his final show. (Designers' first and last collections are often highly sought after; Marc Jacobs' final Spring/Summer 2014 collection for Louis Vuitton, for instance, was bought by customers to wear and collectors to treasure.) In my mind, it mimics the morbid spike in the price of photographer Robert Mapplethorpe's work after he was diagnosed with AIDS – collectors were buying against the artist's death, and the implied rise in price. 'The deader, the better', as the macabre mantra goes.

In any case, I want this dress.

I collect clothes, but generally they're part of my wardrobe, bought to be worn. I have rails of Prada and Balenciaga, and even Comme des Garçons, which I wear frequently. There are also pieces I bought because I wanted to own them – and not because of an avaricious impulse to buy and then sell them at a profit or as an investment. It's always been more about the thrill of the chase, the rush of discovery. Steven Philip shares the impulse: 'I'm the hunter and gatherer. It's hunting down the next piece, gathering pieces that excites me.' Philip not only buys stock for Rellik, but for his own personal archive. Gems are showcased on his Instagram account, generally thrown on the floor, because Philip refuses to be precious about his precious pieces (although he does have a number of storage units to house key items).

The pieces I hunt and gather are John Galliano (mostly 1990s); Azzedine Alaïa (anything exceptional, from the 1980s through until today); Antony Price; and Lacroix. Lacroix is, possibly, the most specific: only haute couture, preferably eveningwear. They come up for sale infrequently, especially Lacroix's work for Jean Patou (which was purely haute couture). I had seen a number of pieces from this collection for sale elsewhere, probably because of the Moüy auction. Back in 2014, Californian boutique Decades had a wonderful example, in taffeta and lace; it was priced at $30,000. Which is understandable, given its scarcity. And makes searching for another example out in the Puces more exciting and more extraordinary. Hunted and gathered – and hopefully cheaper.

**'Back in Saint-Ouen, in a small store tucked away in the Puces market, the Lacroix dress is sitting in a trove of other archive fashion pieces.'**

Because conversations about vintage clothing can often get tied up with costs and worth. The rule when buying a new car can sometimes apply: a designer dress depreciates in value the minute you hand over your credit card and slide it into a slippery paper bag. As soon as a couture dress is worn, it's worth a fraction of the astronomical sum paid for it. As an unconventional commodity, vintage fashion has long been considered an indulgence, rather than an investment. Yet as the scarcity has increased, so have the prices. 'But do you know what?' says Kerry Taylor. 'All of the people who have been buying from me over the years, not one of them has regretted anything they have bought. The value has gone up dramatically. Some Chanel couture bought from me for £2,000 in 1993 is now worth £30,000. If you bought a Georgian table back then, it would be worth absolutely nothing now.'

Back in Saint-Ouen, I have found it. Here, in a small store tucked away in the Puces, the Lacroix dress is sitting in a trove of other archive fashion pieces, both contemporary, and antique. There are 1920s flapper dresses and 1990s Chanel (the rap-inspired, gold-logo-and-chain-festooned stuff). The Lacroix pieces are hidden away, a little dusty, unloved, defiantly out of style, pretty much unwearable; the dress is alongside a hat from the same collection, a top-knot of taffeta and cabbage roses that seems from an entirely different age, an example of the telescoping of costume references and influences that Lacroix did so well. Its roses are flat, a little sad.

Please note the humanizing, the empathy that emerges when talking about vintage clothing. I'm never sure if it's my own personal taste coming through, but I like to think that, when it comes to clothing, the intimacy of a garment – an object that touches the skin of a human being – has something to do with our reaction to them. Vintage clothes bear the traces of other lives, the lives of their wearers, the lives of their creators. Haute couture, of course, is exceptional in that it has touched many hands and, therefore, is imbued with not one life, but many. 'Couture has a power that ready-to-wear can never have,' Lady Amanda Harlech – Karl Lagerfeld's right-hand woman, and couture aficionado – told me. 'Because the intention of *les petites mains* as they sew, all that love and belief goes into the cloth, and that's what you feel when you wear it.'

It's a romantic notion (in addition to her day job, Harlech is by nature an incurable romantic), but there *is* something romantic about vintage clothing, about this direct connection to the past, even a recent past. Who doesn't have a certain degree of nostalgia, whether for the 1890s or the 1990s? 'Find something you're obsessed with,' says Steve Philip. 'The Westwood thing, I was always obsessed with three collections. One was Pirates, one was Witches, and another one was Mini-Crini.[10] I adored all the crowns, all that. Because I was in London, skipping around and suddenly God, everybody could be a royal. The message was: we're as good as them.' Philip shrugs. 'It's not all about the value of it.'

The Lacroix dress I've found is worth something, to someone, and a museum may love to have it in its collection. But I'd argue it's worth more to me – it brings back all those memories of my childhood, and to the party I was never invited to, the one I was pressed against the window of, observing, turning the references over in my mind, hoping I would be allowed to attend, eventually. To me, that Lacroix dress is priceless. So I paid for it.[11] Then I took it home – to cherish, to love.

1. Christian Lacroix joined Patou in 1981 and presented his final collection for the house in late January 1987. A few weeks later, he announced the creation of his own couture house backed by Bernard Arnault's holding company Financière Agache. It was sold in 2005; the designer himself left the house after the Autumn/Winter 2009 haute-couture show.

2. Trellick Tower, a 98-metre, 31-storey residential block in west London, was designed by Hungarian-British architect Ernő Goldfinger in 1966 and completed in 1972.

3. Rachel Auburn met Leigh Bowery at Kensington Street Market, where she had opened a stall in 1982. The pair – key members of the Blitz Club scene – designed clothes together including an infamous collection launched in 1983 in New York, which featured clothing stitched together from fabric found on the street in London. Bowery died on New Year's Eve 1994, aged 33; Auburn is now a DJ and a yoga teacher.

4. First unveiled in 1907, Mariano Fortuny's flowing and innovative Delphos gowns were handmade in silk. The exact process Fortuny used to create the handmade pleats remains a secret to this day.

5. Held in February 1985, 'The Ludic Game' was John Galliano's first show at London Fashion Week. In a 2008 interview with *Wonderland*, Galliano says that they had to hold the show twice because so many people turned up. In the same interview, DJ Jeremy Healy remembers it as 'total mob scene… all the models came out swinging dead mackerels that they then threw into the audience'. If looking for early Galliano, check for the number 1 written on the label underneath the 'family crest'.

6. Guy and Jean de Moüy, third-generation owners of Maison Patou, managed the couture house during Lacroix's tenure.

7. The sale was held at Drouot-Richelieu in Paris on March 28, 2010. The dress, which was on the cover of the sale's catalogue, was lot 122 and had an estimate of €1,300-1,500. It sold that day for €1,800, but how it ended up in the shop in Saint-Ouen is a mystery.

8. François Lesage (1929-2011), one of couture's most celebrated embroiderers, worked with, among others, Yves Saint Laurent and Christian Lacroix.

9. The Saillard-curated Margiela exhibition will open at the Palais Galliera in Paris in March 2018.

10. 'Pirates' (Autumn/Winter 1981-1982) was Westwood's first catwalk show and put together with her then creative partner Malcolm McLaren. The designer's own website says it was inspired by 'plundering history and the Third World'. 'Witches' (Autumn/Winter 1983-1984) came together after Westwood met Keith Haring and was inspired by his 'magic signs and hieroglyphs'. Spring/Summer 1985's 'Mini-Crini' was a '[c]ardinal change' featuring 'Princess line coats inspired by the Queen as a child'. The collection's eponymous and influential skirt was short and stiffened with whalebone hoops.

11. The dress cost £2,000; Azzedine Alaïa himself said that it was a great deal and that any museum would have snapped it up.

# ‘Colour, fabric, fit. In that order.’

**At Sies Marjan, it’s not just the clothes that are bright and breezy.**


**By Jonathan Wingfield**
**Photographs by Colin Dodgson**

June, 2017. Flatiron District, New York City.

There are saggy balloons and half-eaten cake in Sander Lak's office at Sies Marjan, the New York-based fashion house, named after his parents' respective first names, where he is creative director. It's Monday morning and the remnants of the previous Friday's festivities – Sander's 34th-birthday party – are still on full display. As are the more buoyant work-in-progress layouts for the brand's Bruce Weber-lensed campaign (which has since been released); it's all colour and smiles and American family trees, both literally and metaphorically. Equally vibrant fabric swatches and image-reference boards for the forthcoming Sies Marjan collection are also on show. (Rather than release pre-collections, the company delivers its bright-and-breezy seasonal collections in two separate drops, a couple of months apart: part one is 'the sellers'; part two, the 'more extreme show pieces', as Gabbie – aka, Gabrielle Bennett, Sies Marjan's product development coordinator – describes them). Everything in Sander's working world, it seems, is on show. There's nothing to hide.

Nowhere more so than the design atelier, the first thing you notice upon entering the Sies Marjan HQ. With only a floor-to-ceiling glass wall dividing it from the rest of the second-floor space, visitors freely observe the goings-on in this creative goldfish bowl. The predominantly female team of seamstresses, patternmakers, designers, and producers goes about the business of turning Sander's ideas into fully formed collections. It's awash with buzzy activity set against the myriad rolls of kaleidoscopic fabrics that have become the Sies Marjan signature since its launch during New York Fashion Week in February 2016.

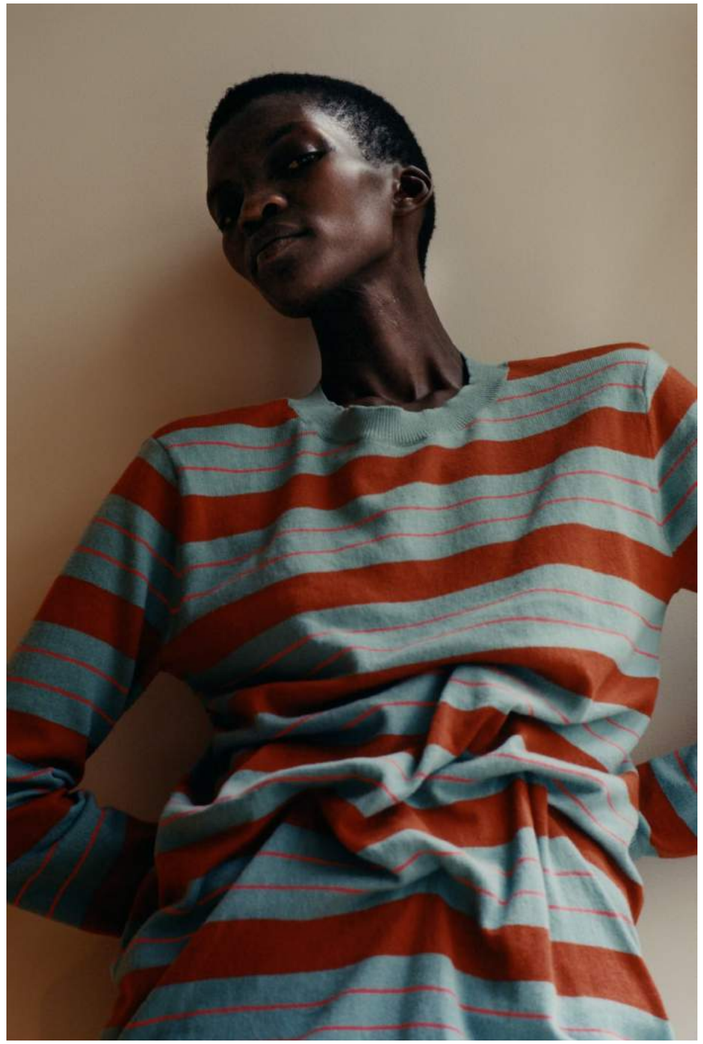
This season, the notion of share-it-all transparency extends to the Spring/Summer 2018 collection being presented in the atelier itself. Reviewers, buyers, bigwigs and VIPs get to see and smell the environment in which the collection has been created. It's both a confident (and economical) move and fitting metaphor for a brand that has been quick to garner praise, curiosity and, now, expectation.

For all its joyful momentum and verve, however, Sies Marjan was born out of the ashes of the Ralph Rucci label, which unceremoniously imploded three years ago. Rucci had long been feted for his talent as a painter, his masterly haute-couture skills, and his fervent following of private clients. One of the devoted was Nancy Marks, wife of billionaire investor Howard Marks, who became Rucci's business partner and backer in 2012. In doing so, she offered more tangible possibilities for the commercial success that had always eluded the designer. But that all ground to an ugly halt, when in late 2014, Rucci announced his immediate departure from his own company 'to pursue other creative endeavours'. Not only did this leave a palpable void among American society's ladies-that-lunch, it also left an atelier of highly skilled couture hands out of work. Some of Rucci's team of patternmakers, sewers, cutters and hand-finishers had been with him for well over a decade, and Nancy Marks and Joey Laurenti, the CEO she'd brought in to steer the Ralph Rucci business, were left facing a challenging new reality.

Fast-forward three months and Laurenti had hired Sander Lak, a Dutch designer who had worked under Christophe Decarnin at Balmain before becoming Dries Van Noten's right-hand for five years. Laurenti and Lak decided – from a strategic, conceptual and emotional standpoint – to retain many of the atelier workers to work at their new, American luxury fashion house, Sies Marjan. By taking their considerable 'American couture' skills and fusing them with Sander's more European-fashion-forward outlook and design staff, Sies Marjan had a chance to create a modern proposition of beautifully crafted and relevant garments.

It's a decision that has so far paid off. Sander's undeniable talent as a colourist and fabric aficionado has been well received by customers and industry alike, his upbeat and unpretentious dresses and outerwear considered a welcome antidote to the doom and gloom of modern-day America. Add to that the openness and generally positive vibes that the brand exudes, and Sies Marjan seems to be chiming with the desires of the times.

With this in mind, *System* spent the past season observing Sander Lak and his Sies Marjan team during the creation of the collection they presented in their atelier in September as part of New York Fashion Week. This also provided us with the chance to hear from the Sies Marjan team members themselves; the eclectic, yet strangely harmonious mix of women in the large glass cube, whose collective skills and refreshing attitude have helped Lak and Laurenti turn this upstart brand into a potential New York contender. Of course, this isn't a social experiment, it's a business, but its sense of family and honesty prevails. As Louise du Toit, the company's vice president of sales says, only half-jokingly: 'The thing about Sies Marjan is that we know when to have fun and when to work our fucking asses off.'



Model: Sasha Pivovarova. Special thanks: Anita Bitton at Establishment Casting. Sara Helmig.



**Sander Lak**
**Creative Director**

**People sometimes refer to Sies Marjan as a new luxury womenswear proposition. Do you feel that is accurate?**
**Sander Lak:** That surprises me. I don't think there is such a thing as a new fashion label. Fashion is an old craft, an old thing to do. I don't really see the value of the word 'new' so much. There are many other words that are better. 'Surprising', maybe. 'New' is very empty somehow. I don't think we are doing anything revolutionary; we just do things the way we want to do them. For *us*, it is new because we've never made products like this before, but I don't think that we are a new fashion thing. It would be great if we were! And it's great that people think that, but it is not different and new, was the superficial observation of us using colour, whereas in an old way of thinking, New York is all about sportswear, and black and white. That is not something that we calculated, but an observation that is being made again and again.

**Was it thought of as a calculated thing?**
No. Most of time I do things by gut feeling; I don't calculate, I just do what I feel is right. And I just felt that this was the opportunity, these were the kind of clothes that I wanted to make and this was the group of people with whom we could make them. It just happened to be the right thing at the right time in the right place, because no one was really doing colour in that way. We didn't sit around the table and say, 'No one is doing colour – so we should do colour!'

**Was it a given that you would inherit some of the existing structure and staff from the Ralph Rucci era?**

**'For the younger generation, something from the 1990s is as old as something from the 1890s. Everything that is old is old.'**

what we strive for. We are not seeking out newness. I think the time of new is over. Now is a time of collaging things together. For the younger generation, something from the 1990s is as old as something from the 1890s. Everything that is old is old.

**Sies Marjan certainly comes across as something new in the context of New York fashion. Is what you are doing steeped in any kind of New York fashion lineage?**
We are a New York-based company. We have American backing, an American location. In the traditional sense, we are an American company. But outside of that, I think we are very much an international company. Within the context of New York, what people were immediately drawn to, what made it

**You've obviously worked for a number of houses before as second-in-command. Was it always your ambition to be at the head of a label?**
Yes. I did my BA in Holland in Haarlem and when I went to do my Master's at Saint Martins in 2005, it was with the idea of starting my own label. I was determined. At Saint Martins, Louise Wilson kind of slapped that idea out of me. She said everyone comes to Saint Martins thinking they will start their own label, but she preferred people to get jobs and do something that really benefits them. She said there are really only one or two people each year who start their own label. She really pushed me into this idea of working, saying I wasn't ready for it, that I was very young and that I didn't have any experience. I didn't even know how a sewing machine worked until two years into fashion school. I really took that onboard. I started working, went from one place to the next, and kind of forgot about that idea. I was totally happy and totally convinced that it was what I should be doing, and I forgot about my own label. Then, eight or nine years in, it started bubbling again. I started thinking that maybe I wanted more. And somehow, lots of things became available, including this kind of leftfield opportunity in New York that was so strange and not according to any rules. Taking over a house is one thing and working for someone else is another. I understood both, but this was a complete unknown.

No. When Joey [Laurenti, Sies Maerjan CEO] and I were really sitting together and before I actually said yes, we were really just trying to see what was possible. What does the old company have? What can we take over and what not? As soon as we had discussed all these things in theory and I had said, let's do it, we just had to see and build from there. From the beginning, I had to get to know everyone and I had to see what skills were there – what could I use and not use? And then we had a year to put the company together, to go through that process, hire new people and see how they worked together. We made some mistakes along the way and we made some good choices. You know, you really grow into your thing. After that first year and those first collections, I really felt that we had the right

combination of the old and the new. You couldn't tell who was there from the start from who came later. Everyone here from the old company naturally morphed themselves into becoming part of Sies Marjan.

**What were your first thoughts about taking this offer rather than going to another existing design house?**
What Joey and I really discussed in the beginning was the landscape of an American-based luxury brand. There is only a handful of them.

**Why is that do you think?**
I think it's probably a cultural thing. Everything is very product-driven and very money-driven, too. That's a great thing, but it takes away some magic and fantasy. It is very hard for high-

## 'We didn't sit around a table saying, 'No one is doing colour – so we should do colour!' It just happened to be right thing, right time, right place.'

end American fashion brands to conquer European and Asian markets. I think Europeans don't look at American brands in the same way. In a way, they are seen as second rate. In France, it's like, 'We own this territory of high-end'. With Sies Marjan being a nomad thing – as I am, too – we thought there would be a hole in the market for an America-based luxury brand. In a way, we were right, and now we have a lot of stores in Europe embracing us in a way that they don't normally do with American brands. We are American, but our name isn't American. The product we make isn't typically American, but it isn't typically European either. I think we can build a bridge to conquer both those territories. The money is here, but the prestige is there. We really found a way to hit both at the same time. Joey, especially, is really good at that. This was 2015. We worked that whole year and had our first show in 2016. And 2015 was a very different time in the industry. The way we approached it back then was different. We have already had to adjust our pricing structure. People always ask me, 'Why did you start a brand?' This is the perfect time to start a brand because we can adapt so quickly to rapid changes. We don't have a history of how we used to do things.

**What are your desires for the brand?**
They have also changed. When we started, I had this idea that this should be the alternative Ralph Lauren. I really had this idea of a brand, clothes and furniture, like a whole world. That has somewhat disappeared. My ambitions haven't become smaller, but my desire to be that big has changed. All of a sudden, this idea of being niche has become attractive. The desire for that kind of grandness is a little bit suicidal at the moment. Becoming as big as we can, in a niche way, and trying to hit all of our market placements and grow organically into product groups – that's really what the future should be, not necessarily turning this into a huge machine.

**Was that a hard realization?**
No, not at all. It got shattered because I realized that that is not what I really want. Maybe I will change my mind again in a few years, but for now I don't want to be that big machine.

**What do you think is the defining mood in fashion right now? How do you think that Sies Marjan conveys that mood?**
As with everything, I think there is good and bad. The bad side is this disconnect with what it is that we actually do, and people perceiving fashion as entertainment to fill magazines and dress celebrities. In the end, what we do is make a product and sell that product. For a while, if you put the right things into a product, it would just move. Sometimes it would even sell itself. That has now completely changed and the product doesn't move as smoothly anymore. All of a sudden, there is panic. A lot of figuring out where and how customers are spending their money and how you can get them to spend their money on you. Do we have to put everything on Instagram? Do we have to be purely online or in a physical space? Do we do events? All of these questions are becoming bigger and more time-consuming than ever. Because we have manoeuvred ourselves very quickly into a high-end space and the right stores, we are able to move really quickly with those changes. I think that has really helped us, but it is not very rosy out there. It is weird, because I am a very positive person, but I don't know how long fashion is going to survive in its current form. At some point there will be a sort of implosion. Like in 2008, when Lehman Brothers folded and then there was a trickle-down effect. I hope this won't happen and I love this industry, but I do feel that there is going to be something similar. The industry became so much about money and profit and margins. That is why it became an entertainment, as opposed to a very high-end, niche thing that trickled down to the masses. It used to be separate, but now there





is too much stuff for everyone and not enough money to go round. Too many things. At some point, something has to happen. That is very scary and people are worried. They are getting aggressive in how they reach their clients.

**Do your products stand out in among all the others?**
I do think that when you go into the store and there is our rail of colour, it does give you something. It is all about colour and texture – that is the first thing that you encounter when you walk into a store. In certain stores where it is very dark and there is lots of navy, and you see our rail with all that colour, it just pops out. It is nice to be able to do that with the product, rather than with big merchandising banners. That is a very conscious thing. We sell clothes.

## 'In stores where there is lots of navy, our rail with colour just pops out. It's nice to do that with clothes, rather than with big merchandising banners.'

That is how we make our money. It is the clothes that need to speak.

**You've said that even as a child, colour played a big role. Looking back, how did that express itself?**
I was always really sensitive to colour, so I would always have very specific needs as a kid, like what colour my shoes had to be. Not so much what kind of clothes I would wear, but what colours they would be, without knowing that this was out of the ordinary. For me, it was super normal. I just had to choose the colour. I started realizing that while we were living in Gabon, and my mum would dress us all in very bright colours because we were living in a rainforest and were surrounded by all of this green. She would dress us in bright blue or bright pink, so she could look out of the window and see us, because if we were in earthy tones we would disappear. That was the first time that I really became aware that colours could give you a dimension. They are more than just a thing that covers everything; they actually do something. As a teenager, I started understanding that these things could really have an emotional effect, too. When I was younger, I remember very clearly starting to understand that if I was wearing dark clothes or black clothes, then I would feel a certain way and become a certain person. Then when I would go really bright, I would feel very differently. Originally, I thought it was because I was a teenager and full of hormones, but then I realized it was the colours of the clothes. That is something I always take with me. I am very sensitive to it, but everyone has something of that in them – that certain colours make them feel a certain way. Colour is so instinctive and emotional. If someone asks you your favourite colour, you pick one instinctively.

**How do you feel about colour quickly becoming one of the brand's defining elements?**
It will always play a part. For the coming years, I feel very much that everything we do has to have a consistency, because if you change too much people don't know how to define you. So, yes, I do think we have to keep that part of the collection very clear now, then after a while I am sure I will get bored and try and do something else. But I have absolutely no problem with being known as the colour brand – it could be worse!

**Having met some of your seamstresses and team today, I'm struck by how their personal stories work their way into the overall DNA of Sies Marjan. Larissa and Irina, for example, grew up in former Soviet Union countries, learning dressmaking skills because that's just what every girl did. And then, as young women, they came to America and both became steeped in a basic tradition of American luxury by their experience of working for Ralph Rucci. Now that that house has been transformed into Sies Marjan, they have a mix of a European fashion sensibility with this hybrid American luxury, while your design sensibility forces their skills into new areas…**
…and they force me, too! It really goes both ways. I'm learning just as much from them as they are from me.

**To what extent do you think all of this is tangible within the clothes or the brand?**
I think a lot of it is very technically hidden. There are ways that we treat our fabrics, make certain things and engineer our twists, folds and drapings that are very couture-based. We try to make a product that is easy to wear and does not have a couture price point. But that can make it very hard to read just how high-end it really is. We make it into something that just hangs off you. Something that doesn't scream. I didn't want to say, 'Now we are American couture'. That didn't feel authentic, because I don't have a couture background. I don't know shit about couture. I have never worked that way. For me, it is more about being able to have a crazy or complicated idea and have a pattern

maker who is skilled enough to bring it all the way to the highest level and then back to a ready-to-wear product that sits on the floor next to Céline. A lot of people who really understand how clothes are made say that our fabrications are beautiful and the way they are finished is really well done. I don't want to scream about it – it should be a given, if it's a luxury product. Then again, we don't always succeed, and sometimes we do have to make compromises. But it is about having that option, about being able to move.

**You've said that you are almost able to sense from clothes on a rail the kind of environments in which they were created. What did you take from your different experiences, good or bad, that helped create the culture you have here?**
It is really about the experiences on the factory floor, sales floor, and so on. Being able to sit around a table and listen to people who are very honest and raw about those experiences and what they like is really where it started.

**What was the common take from that?**
We don't want any attitudes. No fashion bitches, no harsh treatment. Nobody should be treated in a bad way or a way that is completely disconnected from what we actually do. We make clothes; we are not saving lives. We are not changing the world. We do something that is very precious and important, and it's a luxury to do what we do, a joy, so we have to treat it accordingly and treat each other the same way we treat our product. We found this very important. We all had experiences of being

**'We don't accept any attitude at Sies Marjan. No fashion bitches, no harsh treatment. We make clothes; we are not saving lives.'**

A certain torture happens in the industry with certain brands and companies that you can see in the products. I have worked in very nice and very harsh environments, and I think what you learn from both sides is equally important. What I have really taken from it is that I needed to find a way that works for me and Joey. We really put everything on a table and said: 'This is what I have experienced, and this I what felt was the right thing, and this is really the wrong thing.' Really going into detail about everything. Then we started dissecting it and selecting what we liked. My experience is from a designer's point of view, whereas Joey has a very different background and Louise [du Toit, vice president of sales] has a different background. In the end, it is not just about a designer's experience, it is enslaved to a product. That approach makes no sense to me. It does not come from respect or love, which is what it should do, in this industry. That is something that I was really clear about. Of course, we end up arguing or having bad moods, but the overall thing is that no one here feels that they are being exploited or forced to do something. I really felt lucky in that I have had mostly good experiences. While I was listening to these people, I was thinking that the last thing I want would be for anyone to come from this place and to sound like that.

**What were the character traits that you found recurring?**
I think that people are very honest and direct. They help out if someone doesn't know how to do something. Every single person in this company would help them to figure something out. It is rare in a studio that people help each other out. They tend to focus on what is needed from them only and just want to please the creative director. We all know that exists, and I didn't want that. I don't want anyone to think just about themselves. Everyone has a life outside of Sies Marjan. They have a partner, kids, a home. I think the person with the least healthy life here is me! But, you know, I take one for the team. I find it very important. People need to have a life outside of this, otherwise they won't give me what I need as well.

**How much importance do you place on women playing a part in a process that makes clothes for women?**
That is one of the most important parts. I am not saying that men cannot design for women, or that women cannot design for men. That is all bullshit. But for the way that I work, and for the product I want to make, I find it very important that women in the team can contribute beyond an aesthetic point of view – which is what I can contribute as a man. I know this because I was always a menswear designer. I know what it is like to design for your own sex. I would design a piece of clothing and then put it on and feel it. I just physically cannot do that with women's clothes, so it is very important to have women in the team who can really respond to that. It is just logical. It makes total sense. Why would a team of only men design for women? It is like the White House – all these white middle-aged men deciding women's rights. That just makes no sense.





**How do you see Sies Marjan evolving? Do your conversations with Joey about the three-year or five-year plan make you feel excited or slightly terrified?**
They don't terrify me. I am really excited to have put something out there in such a short space of time, which means we can already start thinking about what a piece of Sies Marjan furniture might look like, or a shoe, menswear, children's wear. It is quite defined already. For me, quite soon the womenswear won't be enough. I already want more. We started shoes, which had not originally been in the plan. They will be in stores from August, when we are also starting our online store, in the USA to begin with. Then we have our menswear capsule collection, which we are working on now. But we are taking things as they come; they are like Post-its, and we just take them off the wall as we get to them. We were going to do bags first, but then no one cared for bags and suddenly everyone was screaming for shoes, so we did shoes. Then the buyers were saying: 'We love what you wear, Sander. We want men to dress like you.' We said fine, let's do a menswear collection! We go with the flow, with the end goal of becoming a brand where you can get your clothes and your pillows, shoes, bags, and then furniture. That would be a dream. Maybe not at the scale of Ralph Lauren. But the idea of creating a world with the identity of Sies Marjan makes me really excited. That's what I think we should be doing.

**More than scale?**
Yes, more than scale. We need to make sure we make money and are profitable, but it is not so much about scale, more about your footprint in the market. From there on, you just grow in the way that you grow. Five years ago, it was very different. You could have projected your growth, then, and it was an easy calculation. Now that is off the table and it might take a few years before you get to a certain point, which before it would have taken a year to reach. Then again, it can happen that you are an overnight sensation. Look at Vetements, look at Off-White. I mean, look at us. All of a sudden, out of nowhere, we are like 'boom'. That can also go the other way around. Some of the things we did will probably not work at all, but what is nice with our set up is that we are able to experiment. Also, I trust my team. If someone says, 'I really think we should do this, we keep hearing from this market and this is what they want', then it is up to me to listen and react.

**It does feel like this company is being well brought up, based on the collective team here. It feels like a solid base on which you can build.**
Yes, totally. Starting a brand when you come out of college has always been a hard thing to do, but even more so now. There is virtually no space for that anymore. That is why I was really clear when Joey and I were speaking, that if we do this, we have to sit next to those brands in the department stores, the Célines and the Alaïas, and not become 'the young brand'. We wanted to establish ourselves. We can't be like that kid who just graduated. With the elements we have and the people we hired and the amount of experience people have – not too much, not too little – we can both see what is possible and avoid making stupid beginner's mistakes. I'm not talking about the pattern cutters, but me and Joey and Louise and the design team. I think that that amount of experience is really perfect. Five to 10 years is enough for you to understand what it is all about, but not be ruined by it yet.

**Autie Carlisle**
**Assistant Designer**

I've wanted to work in fashion ever since I was 11 years old, growing up in northern California. My entire professional life has been spent in New York, working in the industry – both in design and production – at archetypal New York companies such as Proenza Schouler, KCD, and Alexander Wang.

When I met Sander, I was drawn to his low-key and easy-going personality. I asked him who the Sies Marjan woman is, and he just said: 'God, isn't that term – "the so-and-so woman" – so fucking boring and clichéd.' I admire his honesty, too. He recently said: 'Guys, we showed at the Hilton last season, which, for us as a young company, is expensive. So now let's economise by doing the show here, in our own atelier.'

I wouldn't say Sies Marjan feels like an American brand. I'm more accustomed to a working culture where the designers are upstairs drinking fresh-pressed juice while downstairs none of the seamstresses speak English. That doesn't exist here. And we're encouraged to go home at 6pm and have a life outside the studio environment.

The Sies Marjan design philosophy is straightforward: colour, fabric, fit. In that order. Everything starts with colour because Sander has great instinct for it. But it's always anchored in reality; he's not the type to suggest something ridiculous, like 'space-age renaissance'. That sense of the tangible, the real, sets the tone for everything we do. We design, we develop and we sell real garments. We don't sketch, we drape. We don't do paperwork, we chat. It just makes sense.

**Irina Atanasov**
**Senior Pattern-maker**

I grew up in the former Soviet Union, so it was normal for a little girl to learn skills such as sewing. At school, I had good knowledge in maths and geometry, but also art and colour. I was always taught by my family that having knowledge will help you progress in life. We all need to be prepared for change, but, you know, you might lose your job, but you'll never lose your knowledge.

I started working with Ralph Rucci in 2001. The company was based on the idea of American couture. Now that things have changed, we've moved on from that. Sure, it may still exist in Europe, but in America, I feel that is an uncommon practice for people to want to spend so much on clothes. Who honestly wants to spend $30,000 on a dress these days? People want something of real quality, but at a more realistic cost. That is my responsibility. It's not about compromising elegance because women will always seek that. Simplicity is the new era of clothes and fashion, I feel. That doesn't mean easy. As a specialist, I can tell you that we have very, complex constructions in our dresses. To help Sies Marjan make that a reality for people – it's a beautiful challenge, I feel.

**Larissa Ryzhova**
**Senior Pattern-maker**

I was born in Kazakhstan. As a girl learning to sew and make her own clothes, I always knew I wanted to work in fashion. I moved to New York 20 years ago and Ralph Rucci was my first proper job. I worked with him for 18 years. In the early days, when he had just seven employees, I started by sewing, then moved onto creating artistic developments for embroidery, patternmaking. Everything by hand, in the atelier. That's my culture. No different from when I was a girl.

The change of company and boss was tough for me emotionally. I was deeply attached to each dress I made at that time, but I also had to adapt to a new life, and the realities of paying rent. Adapting was like opening Pandora's box. Sander's taught me to understand a new style of fashion. Ralph was steeped in classics, and Sander is braver, more challenging when it comes to proposing what is tomorrow's fashion. New fabrics means new construction and new behaviour. The construction is often trickier than anything I've had to do in the past. For the Sies Marjan customer, wearable clothes reign supreme, but there is always space for beautiful handcraft to be appreciated. Maybe more now than ever before.

**Alyssa Paparatto**
**Production Manager**

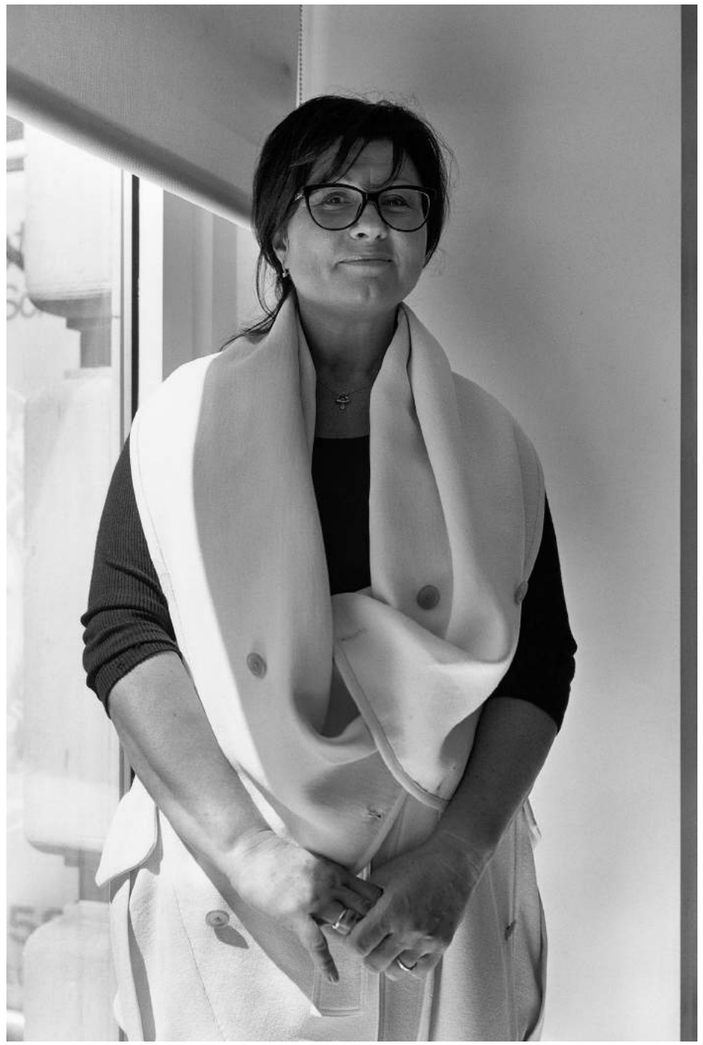
**Gabrielle Bennett**
**Product Development Coordinator**

**Louise du Toit**
**Vice President of Sales**

I was raised a Mormon in Utah, and after university moved to New York with hopes of fashion school and a job in the industry. I got an assistant position at Acne 11 years ago and ended up becoming the brand's wholesale manager for North America.

When I met Sander and Joey [Laurenti, CEO], my first impression was, 'What a bad time to launch a new brand'. But it felt legit, and fresh, and a cool place to be. There was an amazing naivety about the project that felt infectious. Optimism has been key to my life, and as ridiculous as it sounds, when I saw the huge fluffy couch in the showroom, I just thought to myself, 'That's me. I see myself here'.

On a brand and press level, people seem to respond to the notion of Sies Marjan as a brand full of colour. But then colour is the hardest thing to sell to a commercial partner. Why? Because people rely on the darkest colours in their closets. We're challenging that. I start by challenging the buyers: 'Try and only wear colour for an entire week.' They'll start to understand what I consider to be colour therapy; the way you see yourself, and the way that others see you, too. Just recently, I was walking down the street in a peach coat and slip dress, and some guy looked over, and I'm like [rolling her eyes], 'Eurgh, here we go', but he said, in a really cheerful manner, 'Hey, miss! Nice colours!'



**Oksana Butsenko**
**Production Patternmaker**

I was born in the former Soviet Union, in Ukraine. In 1986, when I graduated from high school, my dream was to follow patternmaking studies in Kiev, but my mother wouldn't let me go due to its proximity to Chernobyl, which had just had the nuclear explosion that same year. I ended up becoming an art teacher locally, before taking the leap and emigrating to the United States in 1996.

When I started working with Ralph Rucci in 2006, I was a hand-finisher, applying my artwork skills to garments, and operating in a context that was very intricate and couture. I then moved on to sewing-machine work, before taking a course in patternmaking and draping at FIT [Fashion Institue of Technology] – over the road from the studio here.

I was obviously sad and scared when the Ralph Rucci company suddenly ceased to exist, but the birth of Sies Marjan from that has offered a new start. The clothes that Sander designs feel both relevant and exciting. Plus, he and his design team have forced me to re-evaluate my own skills and experience. To create something that is new but still beautifully made, with complex constructions. Sander basically asked himself: 'How can we combine Oksana's skills and this new fashion vision?' And I answer that question through my work.

**Jennifer Levy**
**Logistics Manager**

**Nirva Derbekyan**
**Executive Assistant to Creative Director**

# ‘What I do is evocation, not evaluation.’

## Fashion’s master storyteller, Tim Blanks, spins a yarn or two.

**By Jonathan Wingfield**
**Photographs by Juergen Teller**

# ‘Growing up in New Zealand, you were so painfully aware that everything was happening somewhere else. You were just so geographically outside the loop.’

# ‘I had a total crush on Valda Kerrison, this beautiful redhead hippie-maiden type who was always barefoot, in a shawl, and on acid.’

Tim Blanks’ presence in fashion is as bright and colourful as the shirts he often wears on the front row. A long-standing fixture at the seasonal shows – he’s been covering the New-York-London-Milan-Paris circuit since 1987; initially as a TV presenter and since 2006 as a reviewer – it’s Blanks’ infectious mix of curiosity, authority and cultural erudition that forms the basis of his critical eye. Astute and influential (few openly voice an opinion before they’ve read the Tim Blanks review), his show critiques are crafted with the same passion and *savoir-faire* as the couture gowns he observes on the catwalk.

As editor-at-large at today’s fashion-media sensation, *The Business of Fashion*, Blanks delivers written reviews, features and interviews, as well as live-event Q&As and online punditry, to a digital audience of CEOs and students alike; his expanding array of ‘content channels’ mirroring the ever-increasing global interest in the fashion industry itself. Blanks was previously editor-at-large at Condé Nast’s much-cherished-now-discontinued online catwalk resource, Style.com and its menswear counterpart Mens.Style. And prior to that, between 1989 and 2006, he wrote and presented *Fashion File*, a globally syndicated TV show out of Toronto that offered up a lively snapshot of supermodels and star designers to the MTV generation.

But perhaps more than any professional entry on his CV, it is Tim Blanks’ own rich and meandering life story that today makes his voice in fashion so unique and original. By his own admission, Tim grew up a “a fat, queenie, super-unpopular kid” in late 1960s Auckland, New Zealand. A prodigious student yet an “outsider’s outsider”, he lost himself in a world of music, art and glamour, delivered to him via the pages of, first, his grandmother’s *Life* and *Time* magazines, and then the era’s influential British music ‘inkies’, *Melody Maker* and *NME*.

For young Tim Blanks, this was an age defined by David Bowie and Lou Reed, Andy Warhol and the Factory, Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton, the Vietnam War and Watergate. And by joining the dots of what he was reading about – culture and image, escapism and political unrest, social climbers and downtown drag queens – he unwittingly created the blueprint for his ensuing journalistic career.

Today, a Tim Blanks show review is as likely to reference a John Cale viola drone solo as it is the *bouleversé* braiding on a Dior bar jacket. This isn’t cultural showboating or one-upmanship, it’s symptomatic of Blanks’ schoolboy enthusiasm for sharing his treasure chest of references. It harks back to when young Tim would seek out kabuki theatre and Kansai Yamamoto’s body suits because he’d read Bowie mention them in *Record Mirror*. And ultimately, ‘Tim’s Take’ makes the fashion-media landscape a more nourishing and culturally enriching place for us all.

In a series of conversations with Tim over the summer months in London, *System* discovered tales of a life that started on the sidelines and now resides firmly in the thick of the action – while along the way recalling lively jaunts in London squats and Bel Air mansions (with housemates Bryan Ferry and Jerry Hall), naked backstage mania with Claudia Schiffer (Claudia, not Tim), feuding (briefly) with Gaultier, and having something refreshing to say about pretty much anyone and everything. So pull up a seat, and read Tim Blanks.

## Part One
## The outsiders’ outsider

**Music seems to have been the portal to everything in your life and career, so let’s begin with that.**

**Tim Blanks:** The first music I was drawn to was *Mary Poppins*, *West Side Story*, and *The Sound of Music*, which made my mother despair because she loved the Beatles, and wanted me to love them, too. My kidneys failed when I was 11 and I clearly recall her visiting me in hospital, clutching a copy of Ella Fitzgerald’s version of the Beatles’ ‘Can’t Buy Me Love’ as a get-well gift. But the first Beatles album I voluntarily got into was the *White Album*, which, believe it or not, was Rei Kawakubo’s inspiration for starting Comme des Garçons.

**Is that something you’ve discussed with Rei Kawakubo?**

When I asked her about it, she just shook her head! But I think Comme des Garçons sometimes uses that hand-sketched apple emblem[1] because of the *White Album* record sleeve; it’s a subliminal recognition of the importance of the Beatles in the history of Comme. I think when Rei Kawakubo heard the liberation in that music, it inspired her to be a free spirit, above and beyond whatever she was doing at that point.

**Was teenage Tim Blanks experiencing a similar moment of liberation in Auckland?**

I couldn’t have cared less about freedom! I was too busy soaking in the bath every Thursday night for hours, listening to the local radio station playing the John Peel show[2] via the BBC. That’s how I discovered Sandy Denny[3] – a total epiphany – and then promptly made my mother drive me downtown to Wiseman’s Records, where I bought *What We Did on Our Holidays* by Fairport Convention.[4] Sandy Denny really struck a chord with me – maybe because I was coming out of this Julie Andrews musicals vibe – and I still consider her the greatest female voice of all time.

**What was everyone else at your school listening to at the time?**

I went to an all-boys school: everyone was into Jimi Hendrix and the Doors, which just didn’t register with me at all. Well, Jimi Hendrix did, just much later on. I still love Hendrix.

**What were you like at school?**

Archetypal nerdy. A fat, super-unpopular ostracized kid; everyone thought I was queenie. School was basically awful, so I gravitated towards a mid-city record store called Taste, where the staff were all older and clued-up about what was hip and happening. That’s how I discovered bands like Tyrannosaurus Rex. If you played that stuff to people who liked Jim Morrison, they thought you were from another planet.

**Did the record-store crowd immediately accept you as one of them?**

There was this fabulous woman working there called Candy Alderton, who I bonded with. She also happened to be a stripper. How a fat, queenie 14-year-old schoolboy bonds with this extraordinary creature I’ll never know. During one summer heatwave, she was on the front cover of the *New Zealand Herald*. You know when newspapers do that headline, ‘Phew, what a scorcher!’? Well, they used it on a photo of Candy wearing a string bikini, and romping with her dog. The caption said: ‘Candy Alderton, 24, and her dog.’ I remember seeing that and squealing ‘Wow! I know her!’ and my mother being, like, *horrified*!

**Would you say you were particularly smart or academic as a kid?**

I was top of the class. A prodigious student. My mother’s mother raised me: she had a telescope and would teach me about the sky and the planets, and got me reading when I was three years old. Teachers gave me the newspaper to read at the back of class, while the others were struggling with Janet and John.[5] My younger brothers would be given scooters for their birthdays and I’d get books about the movies. I was just always way advanced in reading and thinking.

**Did you see that as your escape route?**

Very young, I made a deal with my parents: if I passed the exam and got a scholarship, they’d let me go to university at 15. Which I did. I was wide-eyed and quite untutored in the ways of the world, suddenly surrounded by people who most definitely weren’t. I had a total crush on Valda Kerrison, this beautiful redhead hippie-maiden type who was always barefoot, in a shawl, and on acid. I was this googly-eyed boy who didn’t even drink, hanging around with these extremely seasoned ‘heads’ – that’s how they were referred to back then – so it was quite an eye-opening education for me.

**Had the hippy scene hit Auckland in a big way?**

It was *very* localized. Growing up in New Zealand, you were always so painfully aware that everything was happening somewhere else. You were just so geographically outside the loop. But I was drawn to people who, in their interpretation of what was happening elsewhere, looked incredibly gorgeous. And it was exhilarating to be hanging out with these real-life versions of what had previously only existed in my grandmother’s copies of *Life* and *Time* magazine. It’s funny, I just did Anna Sui’s book with her, and while I was growing up in New Zealand, she was growing up in Michigan, but we were both reacting to exactly the same stuff. Anna remembers that Andy Warhol Factory story in *Life* magazine that I was obsessed with; or those colour photos of people skinny-dipping at Woodstock; and the pictures in *Vogue* of Edie Sedgewick standing on a leather rhinoceros.[6]

**That says a lot about the mass-marketing of magazines at that time.**

They were a *huge* deal: that mix of war and glamour and music and art. Vietnam, Warhol, Elizabeth Taylor

marrying Richard Burton in Montreal, the Rauschenberg *Bonnie and Clyde* cover,[7] the Lichtenstein gun cover[8]… I swear, *Life* magazine must have shaped the minds of so many kids in the 1960s because it was your window on a world you simply weren't living. It reminds me of what Lou Reed said: 'If I'd been reading about the Factory and not been able to get to New York, I would have killed myself.'

**Is that how you felt?**
No, because I was still so young. But imagine how those things touched the sensibilities of kids who felt like outsiders. Or in my case, an outsider's outsider. I remember when the movie *Woodstock* came out in Auckland, and seeing these incredible long-haired hippies walking into the local cinema in their what anybody looked like. There were no videos; there simply wasn't the scale of widely distributed imagery we're now so accustomed to. You'd see pictures in *Melody Maker* – my copy of which would arrive in Auckland six months late – but everyone just looked like fat old, bearded hippies. There was never anyone who looked fabulous, except the Velvet Underground and Nico. Sunglasses at night seemed like 'a thing'.

**So, it really was just about the music.**
Well, glam rock did change that. There might have been six people I knew in Auckland, strutting around in looks we'd fashioned for ourselves. I'd be riding my Honda 19 in these ridiculous glam-rock outfits, and we'd show up in the front row when Roxy Music came to play in Auckland. Ironically, it was all that he made for me – red, amber and green – which got me into trouble with the police. Traffic-light acid was the big acid at that time, and because I had these trousers on, they thought I was a drug dealer.

**Had designer fashion hit your radar at this stage?**
There was no such thing as fashion; there weren't stores *per se*. The first designer fashion that came to Auckland was Yves Saint Laurent ties for men. You didn't shop, it didn't exist; you didn't even go to restaurants, there weren't any.

**I presume live gigs were a rarity in New Zealand, too.**
Totally. Led Zeppelin were the first international act to play in Auckland.

## 'I wasn't on drugs, but when Jimmy Page played guitar on 'Dazed and Confused' I idiot-danced so furiously, my entire body chemistry altered!'

full Technicolor-dreamcoat business. One of them had 'FUCK' written across his forehead, and I remember thinking, 'Wow, I *love* these people!'

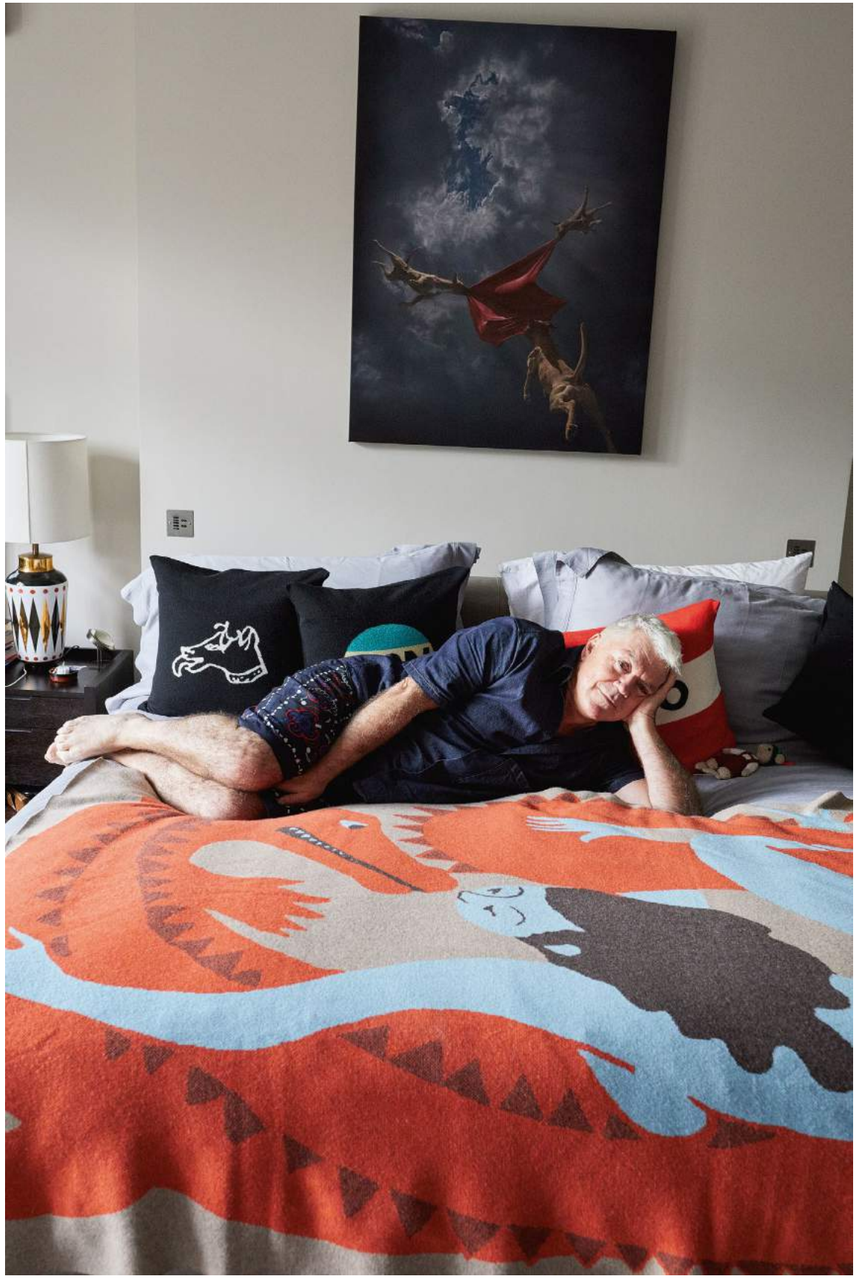
**Did you become a fully signed-up hippy?**
Funnily enough, there was this fabulous transitional moment when I started sharing the music that I'd discovered by myself with these older, groovier people. I'd play them Ziggy Stardust or Roxy Music's first album and they were like, 'Eurgh!' Didn't get it *at all*. All of a sudden, they seemed a little less cool, so I moved on, and created my own little glam-rock micro-clique.

**Did glam rock feed a parallel appetite in you for clothes and fashion, or at least a fascination with image?**
Not initially. You couldn't really *see* the hippies at the back who'd be screaming, 'Sit down!' at us. The baton had truly been passed. And in our efforts to re-enact what we thought was happening everywhere else, I realize now that we didn't do such a bad job.

**Were you making your own clothes? Or shopping in thrift stores?**
When the Stones came to play Auckland, I remember putting a look together for it. I found an old jacket with a gold lining, turned it inside out and had my friend Eve sew gold dice – as in [the Stones track] 'Tumbling Dice' – down the lapel. I was friendly with a guy called Colin McLaren from Elam Art School in Auckland who used to paint white canvas trousers with different-coloured stripes around the hem. So, I wore these traffic-light trousers By then, I loved Led Zeppelin, loved cock rock, loved a meaty guitar solo. I went to that gig with people who were much older, and who'd all taken acid. I didn't take drugs, but when Jimmy Page played his guitar on 'Dazed and Confused'[9] with a cello bow, I *completely* freaked out. You know that footage of those people at Woodstock or at the Stones concert in Hyde Park[10] doing what I call 'idiot dancing'?

**Wigging out.**
Yep. Well, I idiot-danced so furiously, my entire body chemistry altered! [Laughs] There were a couple of things that had a massive impact on my home life and that Led Zeppelin concert was one of them.

**And what was the other thing?**



My father dying in 1972. His death was the canvas against which everything else played out. It'd be too convenient to say that music was my refuge, but there was certainly a tension.

**How strong was the urge to get out of Auckland?**
You have no idea! As I said, everything was happening somewhere else. These days, of course, New Zealand is where everyone *wants* to be…

**Thanks, *Lord of the Rings*.**
And it *is* the most beautiful country in the world, but that means shit-to-a-tree to a 16-year-old speed-freak.

**I thought you said you were wide-eyed and innocent.**
That changed. Speed was the first drug I ever started taking with any conviction. Why? Well, you know, I loved the idea of the Velvet Underground and that whole sleazy New York scene. But the funny thing is I ended up escaping to London, instead of New York.

**What took you to London?**
Officially, a post-grad thesis. But honestly, Bowie. This was 1974.

**Was London your first experience outside of New Zealand?**
First ever time on a plane! Just after take-off, we flew through a hurricane above Auckland. There was a priest on-board giving last rites, and cabin announcements to say that children should go and sit with their parents up in first class. I just figured that's what flying was like all the time.

**Did you know anyone in London?**
Only one connection: friends of my mother's friends, so my friend-slash-boyfriend Jude and I got off the plane and went to stay with them. On the journey from Heathrow into London we passed the Hammersmith Odeon, where Bowie hadn't long done his Ziggy Stardust farewell concert.[11] When you're a fan, all that stuff really resonates. That first day in London was a Thursday, and I remember watching Sparks play 'This Town Ain't Big Enough for the Both of Us' on *Top of the Pops*.[12] I instantly knew I was where I should be.

**Did you have any fixed plans to work? To write?**
Within about two weeks, I'd got completely distracted from the thesis, fell in with some pretty ghastly company, and started writing about music. I'd already been writing for a little music magazine back in Auckland called *Hot Licks*, so I began writing stuff for them, as the 'correspondent from London'. You cannot imagine how easy it was just to call up a publicist and say, 'Hi, I write for a magazine from New Zealand, and I'd love to interview…' so and so. I called up all the people I loved: Peter Hammill, for example, because I was obsessed with Van der Graaf Generator;[13] Kevin Ayers from Soft Machine, Brian Eno…

**What about Bowie himself?**
Bowie was unavailable at that point, but [his management company] MainMan packed me off to the Château [14] [studio] to interview [Bowie guitarist] Mick Ronson who was recording his *Slaughter on 10th Avenue* album.

**Can you paint a picture of what London was like at the time?**
Grim. A black-and-white city in which every house had a 'For Sale' sign outside. Every day and night was accompanied by a panoply of IRA bombings. You'd be at a gig, boom! A party, boom! Horrible, but fabulous, too.

**Which part of town were you living in?**
Initially, Islington. I found a place to live off the notice board at New Zealand House, then I moved into a squat inhabited by the most extraordinary people. And the parties we had there were amazing. Look at any magazine from that time and all the best people were at those parties. Too many drugs, of course. Not me, but everybody else got completely fucked up, and an alarming number of people wound up dead.

**How acute was the *décalage* between the glam-rock fantasy and the realities of that scene?**
This is something that really interests me. If I think objectively about it now, how on earth could you survive the horrors of the daily existence of doing *nothing*, being surrounded by such dubious people? I mean, in your own squat, people would rip you off the whole time. My beautiful T. Rex T-shirt… vanished!

**Who were your closest friends?**
Among others, there was Ritva Saarikko, a photographer I'd been introduced to in New Zealand who showed up one day in London. I was interviewing Brian Eno that afternoon, so she tagged along and met him. Or rather, Brian met her. He called me up straight after and said, 'Would I be stepping on anybody's toes if I asked Ritva out?' They ended up becoming an item for four years; she also did the record covers for his albums *Taking Tiger Mountain* and *Before and After Science*.

**It seems incredible to think that one of Auckland's only totally obsessive Roxy Music fans ended up in Brian Eno's social circle.**
It seems surreal now but you could go anywhere then and see anyone. Ritva and I were living at Vale Court[15] and I remember this fabulous moment when we were sitting in the window, watching John Wayne shoot the movie *Brannigan* right over the road from us. You could go to El Sombrero and Angie Bowie would be dancing with Dana Gillespie.[16] Or you'd go to the Casserole restaurant on the Kings Road and see people. Although because I was a speed freak I only ever ate desserts there. I'd have a small portion of the trifle[17] as my main course.

**What about the presence of fashion in London at that time? People like Brian Eno and Mick Ronson had a pronounced sense of style.**
Yes, but their girlfriends or friends made their clothes. Brian Eno's clothes for Roxy were made by his then-girlfriend Carol McNicoll,[18] and Mick Ronson's clothes were made by Freddie Burretti,[19] who also made Bowie's clothes. For shopping, there was Swanky Modes in Camden, and Laurence Corner near Euston Station where people used to get their Bryan Ferry army-surplus-y look. Then there was the McLaren and Westwood shop Too Fast to Live Too Young to Die, which then became Sex. But South Molton Street certainly didn't exist as a fashion street, other than Browns, which probably stocked Armani in 1977.

**Were you deliriously happy to be in London at that time, finally in the thick of the action?**
Yes. But I was also really ill. I was vomiting blood because of the speed habit. There were days when I would take so much that I thought the blood vessels in my eyes had burst because I could only see purple. I'd buy my speed down in the Piccadilly loos.[20] One night I was in there and Pasolini was casting for *The Canterbury Tales*;[21] checking out the male hookers because he would cast guys with huge penises. It was fabulous and awful. Like London.

**And spiralling out of control.**
It was clearly going to go horribly wrong at some point! And it did. I got an ulcer and, after less than a year, had to return to New Zealand to regroup. Luckily, I was still young.

**Having escaped Auckland and landed in London, didn't it feel hugely underwhelming to be returning home?**
Sure. But I knew I had to get myself better. Did that, then moved to Sydney, which ended in a cloud of mega Mandrax[22] abuse, and so I drifted back to London once again. I called Ritva and ended up living with her and Brian. He was recording *"Heroes"* with David Bowie at the time, which was kind of exciting. Every weekend he'd come back with an acetate of the song they'd just completed and I'd force myself to be super casual about it. Anyway, they were breaking up and one day in 1977 or 1978, Ritva just announced: 'I have to leave London because I don't want to be with him anymore. Let's move to America.' So, we did. I had nothing to lose.

**To New York?**
No, I ended up in Los Angeles. Working for Bryan Ferry. Living with him and Jerry Hall in Leslie Caron's[23] huge house at 474 Cuesta Way, in Bel Air.

**How does a glam-rock-obsessed teenager in Auckland end up working for Bryan Ferry in LA?**
I forgot to say, but while I was back in New Zealand, licking my wounds, Roxy Music showed up on tour. I knew them through Brian [Eno]. I happened to be doing my full Bryan Ferry look at that time, too: black hair, tweed jacket and corduroy pants. When I met him, he looked me up and down and said, 'Oh God, if I ever do a movie of my life, you can be my understudy.'

**Why emulate Bryan Ferry's look, as opposed to, say, Bowie's?**
You couldn't really dress like Bowie; you couldn't really do a Kansai Yamamoto[24] body suit on a stocky New Zealander, but you could do a tweed jacket and khakis. Anyway, I rounded up a whole bunch of really gorgeous girls for the Roxy gig in Auckland, which, of course, made the band very happy, and then later on Bryan got in touch, wanting to know if I'd work for him back in London. That didn't work out, but a couple of years later I ended up being shipped out to LA to work for him.

**'Within two weeks of arriving in London, I'd got distracted from my thesis, fell in with some pretty ghastly company, and started writing about music.'**

**'I'd buy speed down in the Piccadilly loos. One night Pasolini was casting male hookers for *The Canterbury Tales*. Fabulous yet awful. Like London.'**

Tim Blanks (top) with his friend Jude,
Auckland, circa 1972.

**What was your official job title?**
They called it Personal Manager on my visa form.

**Describe a working day with him.**
Bryan would say, 'So, what are we going to do today? Let's go to every house that Raymond Chandler lived in'. So we'd climb in the car and just drive around town. The thing is, nobody really knew Bryan in LA, until he'd walk into somewhere like Amoeba Records. *Everyone* there knew who he was, so he'd have his moment of 'fabulosity'.

**Wasn't he writing or recording music?**
He was supposed to be making the cover-versions album that became *The Bride Stripped Bare*, but it wasn't such a fruitful period for him. I remember he'd be asking, 'What songs do you think I could cover?' I'm pretty sure I suggested 'What Goes On' by the Velvet Underground. Had that whole experience happened to me a couple of years earlier – when Bryan had first asked me to go work with him – it would have been so amazing. But by this point I was so into punk that I felt completely disconnected from Bryan and Bel Air. And, as you can imagine, Bryan wasn't remotely curious about punk. Once again, the tide was shifting. For me, at least.

**Part Two**
**Discussing Sonic Youth with Shalom Harlow**

**When were you first aware that there was an industry in fashion, that there was a community of people working and making money out of it?**
If *Life* was my visual record of the 1960s, then French *Vogue* was my visual record of the 1970s. I was a huge fan of Guy Bourdin's photography in French *Vogue* and for those Charles Jourdan shoe ads – those pictures are staggering – and since I'm quite anally retentive, I'd make a point of seeking out his work, and that of people like Helmut Newton, of course. That in turn took me to finding out the models' names, and joining the dots with music. So, when I saw Josephine Florent in *Vogue*, I made the connection that she was Robert Palmer's girlfriend, and the girl on the cover of his *Sneakin' Sally Through the Alley* album.[25]

**When did your writing start to become more focused on image and style rather than predominantly music?**
I'd always been writing music pieces that brought in other elements: H.P. Lovecraft, James Dean, teens, nihilistic stuff. In Sydney, I was writing weird, off-the-radar think pieces for a big music magazine called *Rock Australia Magazine*, very influenced by people like Lester Bangs[26] and Ian MacDonald.[27] They were never style pieces *per se*, but there was always an angle. Then, I moved to Toronto in 1978 and started writing about all sorts of things: couples in the art world who worked together; interviews with Warren Beatty or Jack Nicholson for more conventional 'style' pieces for a magazine called *Close-up*; I even wrote about Orlando golfing holidays. I mean, *me* golfing? [Laughs]

**Can you remember the first fashion designer interview you did?**
Zandra Rhodes for *Close-up*, but she fell asleep two minutes into the interview. She had narcolepsy. I eventually excused myself from the room an hour later. The auspicious debut! [Laughs]

**Were you actively pursuing a job on a fashion title?**
All I wanted was a full-time job, and *Toronto Life Fashion* were the only ones prepared to offer me one. I became the features editor, which was great because I'd go on trips to Japan or Italy. But then the editor left and I replaced him, which meant the creative aspect of work promptly shunted to a halt because I was too busy massaging the advertisers. Honestly, I would never want to be a magazine editor ever again.

**How was Toronto in the 1980s?**

## 'Then I ended up in Los Angeles, working as Bryan Ferry's personal manager. Living with him and Jerry Hall in Leslie Caron's huge Bel Air mansion.'

Such an incredible city; so much money there, too. It was the axis of Europe and North America, so everybody who wanted to test-run their product – whether that 'product' was a new Armani fragrance or a Simple Minds world tour – would launch in Toronto before heading over to Midwest America.

**Was it for *Toronto Life Fashion* that you started covering the shows?**
Yes. We'd done collections coverage before, but I was the first person to actually go to the shows. That would have been 1987.

**What was the first international fashion show that you attended?**
The first I remember was a Yves Saint Laurent couture show; the collection with the Braque guitar and the Picasso





doves.[28] As an introduction to the shows in Europe, it was pretty extravagant. Shows like Saint Laurent and Ungaro were staged in hotel ballrooms, would last for at least an hour, and there would be 150 looks. Besides Bill Cunningham,[29] there was no pizzazz outside; they were quite sedate. All the important people sat at the end of the catwalk, while the photographers were sat up and down it, making sitting in the front row tedious. Which didn't trouble me, since I was always in standing. I didn't care, I was just glad to be there. As Helena Rubenstein said: 'Even if you're by the toilet door at Le Cirque,[30] you're still eating the same food as Jackie Onassis.'

**Weren't Gaultier's shows the antidote to sedate couture?**
Totally! Ready-to-wear was obviously a different experience, especially in Paris. Gaultier, Mugler, and Martine Sitbon became the hottest tickets. There would be an absolute party at those shows, with busloads of drag queens coming in from Eastern Europe. When Vivienne Westwood showed at Azzedine [Alaïa]'s studio,[31] which I think was 1991, that show was an hour long, and the interplay between the audience of freaks and the models was incredible; models were laughing and running and joking.

**That's so rarely the case today.**
If you could pinpoint when models were told to stop smiling, stop being human and stop interacting, that was about three or four years later.

**When did you start getting accepted as a regular fixture at the shows?**
I did a little research and found out that it was good to send Denise Dubois at the Chambre Syndicale[32] a big bunch of flowers from Moulié-Savart, her favourite florist. She was probably surprised to get a big bunch of flowers from Tim Blanks, but it worked and I started getting seats. It's funny to think about that because I wasn't ambitious at all. Never in my life have I been driven! The secret to my so-called success is no secret: I've just been doing what I do, early, patiently, for a *long* time. I proposed the TV show that became *Fashion File* to the CBC [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation], and that started in 1989. And in the whole time I did *Fashion File*, so many people came and went trying to do something similar. And my point was always the same: it was never about me; it was always about them.

## 'I've always felt that you should take designers a little seriously, show them some respect. Don't just march up and say, 'So, tell me, are you a natural blonde?''

**'Them' being the people you were interviewing?**
I knew that people wanted to look at Claude Montana or Thierry Mugler or Jean Paul Gaultier or Karl Lagerfeld. That was who I wanted to look at! Not look at me – I didn't want to be a star.

**Were you surprised that fashion on television remained such an untapped medium?**
I'd already worked a bit in music and in film, and I'd already been going to fashion shows, so it seemed obvious to me that television would be such a refreshing arena to present all these amazing people and places in fashion.

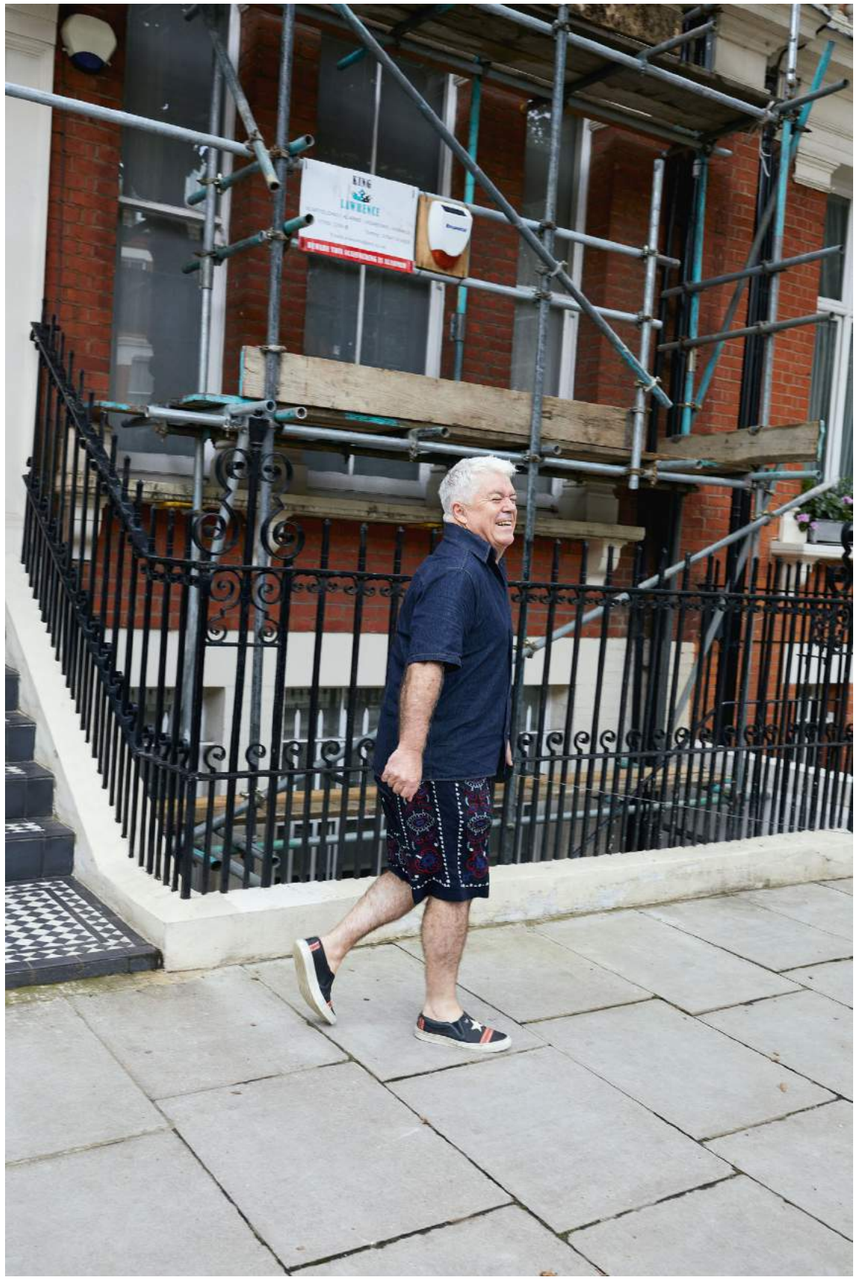
**Why was that so refreshing at the time?**
Because there wasn't anyone doing it. Elsa Klensch's show on CNN[33] was like *Tales from the Crypt*. Jeanne Beker for Fashion Television in Toronto was doing it in such a populist way. Then there was Marie-Christiane Marek at Paris Première, but she didn't speak English. And then there was me. In 1989, there was literally the four of us backstage. Then the supermodel thing happened and it went from 4 to 400.

**Overnight?**
In a flash. And of those 400, 370 of them were absolute fakes. Claudia Schiffer would be stark naked in a *cabine*, and there'd be somebody pointing a camera at her. It was just crazy. I'd say to the security people: 'You should check how many people in this room actually have film in their cameras.' You know, how many of these people aren't just busy leching at all the models?

**In what ways did your approach to documenting fashion differ from everyone else's?**
I've always felt that you should take people a little seriously, just show them a little respect. Don't just march up to a designer and say, 'So, tell me, are you a natural blonde?' I'd ask models if doing their job was changing the way they saw themselves in the mirror. Or I'd just end up sitting with Christy Turlington and talking about the books we liked. Or discussing Sonic Youth with Shalom Harlow.

**It seems so innocent.**
It was! Designers would say to me, 'I didn't know what I'd put on the runway until I talked to you', because I'd have said something like, 'The show reminded me of this Visconti scene', or, 'I loved

Tim Blanks (centre) with his best friends Yvonne and Jude,
drinking vermouth in Yvonne's back garden,
Auckland, circa 1972.



it when you used the music from *Vertigo*'. I just think you will never ever lose by giving people credit for intelligence. Elsa Klensch was the goddess of fashion on television and her questions were like, 'Tell me about the length of the clothes'. I just couldn't do that. But my shortcomings as a traditional fashion journalist helped me carve an original path.

**Sonic Youth and dress lines are absolutely worlds apart.**
I was thinking the other day about how Christian Lacroix's backstage food buffets were just works of pristine art. People don't do it anymore – it's too expensive – but it was another world that was so worthy of celebration, above and beyond, 'Here's another hoop skirt, here's a puff skirt'. Ultimately, I'd say that my curiosity humanized the fashion industry. Besides, you can't really imagine Elsa Klensch getting down on her haunches and asking a model about Sonic Youth.

**Watching *Fashion File* archives on YouTube, that sense of total access is palpable, and everyone was so unguarded in front of the TV camera.**
What can I say? It was new. You'd see it all: models melting down in rages when they didn't get the outfits they wanted. People backstage crying when the designer had been horrible to them. Someone like Claude Montana would be shepherded in front of the camera, quivering like a baby and blinking into the lights, because his people had told him to do it 'because everyone else is'. I remember Pierre Bergé literally pushing Saint Laurent out in front of the camera for me to interview him, and Loulou de la Falaise translating. It's agonizing to watch, because never in a million years did Saint Laurent imagine that a condition of his job would be to perform for TV.

**Others must have relished it though.**
People like Lacroix, who had a natural curiosity, saw it as an opportunity. He used to call me his therapist because he was so honest. Gaultier was amazing, too – just hilarious – and so familiar with the TV format because he hosted *Eurotrash*.[34] The early McQueen stuff was really good: we showed him in darkened silhouette – like he was a terrorist or a drugs smuggler – because he said he was on the dole and his face couldn't be on screen. Most of the European designers were fantastic because they believed they had to answer any question they were asked, whereas even back then the Americans would spout a paragraph of press release. Paris was so much more tantalizing.

**Sounds like a golden age of fashion from a media perspective.**
It was. Everybody talks about the 1970s being the golden age of film – with *The Godfather* and *Apocalypse Now* and so on – well, the 1990s were the last golden age of fashion. Thinking about it, there's a lot of fashion history in what we were doing for *Fashion File*, because quite a few of those designers have since died or, like Issey Miyake, are simply no longer available.

**What's the modern-day equivalent of all that *Fashion File* style of footage?**
It doesn't exist anymore. These days, everything's an officially staged 'set-up', with five officially allocated minutes, and so on. None of the wrong 'uns slip through the net.

**Who or what triggered that change?**
When Tom Ford did his breakthrough Gucci show for Fall 1995. He really understood the game, so he ushered in the new rules: you have to wait until after the show to interview Tom; Tom has to be stood here; there has to be this kind of light on Tom, and at this angle; and you can have three questions for Tom. Which he obviously answered brilliantly. He was made for TV. But KCD[35] then took the three-questions rule and applied it to every other designer they had, even if they were incapable of speech. At that point, things became much more formalized. Until then, it was open house: you could just turn up and start interviewing Kate Moss backstage. Besides Tom Ford, there were then people like McQueen and Galliano who started playing the game *their* way.

**Which was how?**
Galliano was Garbo-esque and made everyone wait for an hour or so before he'd finally appear backstage to talk to the media. McQueen simply stopped doing backstage interviews altogether. He'd disappear into a waiting car.

**It seems ironic that around the same time that Tom Ford was rewriting the rulebook for how to present yourself as a media personality, someone like Martin Margiela was becoming increasingly aware of the mythology surrounding his total absence.**
Sure. Margiela, Yohji Yamamoto, Helmut Lang and Rei Kawakubo never did anything at that time. But although we couldn't film interviews with designer, we could still do pre-scripted chatty stuff to camera. I remember filming something – *anything*! – about Comme des Garçons outside their show venue in Paris and Marion Greenberg [Rei Kawakubo's then-New York PR] came bounding up to me, screaming, 'Tim, I'm *so* shocked! I'd told you *no*!' And I said [adopting incredulous tone]: 'Marion, we're in the *street*! It's actually public property.'

**Were you making *Fashion File* on a tight budget?**
I can't even tell you how cheap that show was to make, and they [CBC] leeched every bean. It was selling internationally and they took every penny it made and poured it into fancy talk shows with audiences of 40,000. They never took it seriously the whole time. And even when it stopped – after 17 years – I'm sure there were people who said, 'I told you it wouldn't work'.

**Why did it stop?**
One of the first deals we made was with E! in America. E! was looking for the same thing as CBC: cheap programming to fill the hours. So they bought *Fashion File* from CBC and pretty soon, there was a moment when we outdid Howard Stern on E!'s ratings. But then they decided they needed a 'personality' to host it, so they proposed bringing in Tyra Banks.

**So, she was going to replace you?**
Her fee for one episode was the same as mine for an entire year, *allegedly*! And in that year, we'd produce four content pieces a week, 52 weeks of the year; all original programming, no re-runs. So even E! backed down on that.[36]

**What impact did *Fashion File* have at the time? Were you aware of the audience or industry reaction to it?**
The weird thing for me is [Tim's partner] Jeff and I moved to London at the beginning of the 1990s, so we never actually saw *Fashion File*. They'd send tapes, but I couldn't be bothered to watch them. But if I went anywhere else in the world – like Mexico or Brazil, where it was shown on four different networks – it was a huge deal. Someone told me that at one point in America we were the number-one top-rated show on E! It used to go out on Saturday mornings, so Americans often tell me today, 'Oh, I used to watch you with my mum when I was little'. Just the other week, Jack McCollough from Proenza Schouler said to me: 'You presenting *Fashion File* is the reason I'm in fashion.'

### Part Three
### Being a critic in an age when criticism is fiercely criticized

**What is so apparent from your past is that you've always been a fan.**
Fandom defined me. Still does.

**Are there fashion designers who come anywhere near to the level of fandom that you have for pop stars?**
Oh, totally! Claude Montana, ardent fan. Miuccia Prada, total rock star. Raf Simons, too.

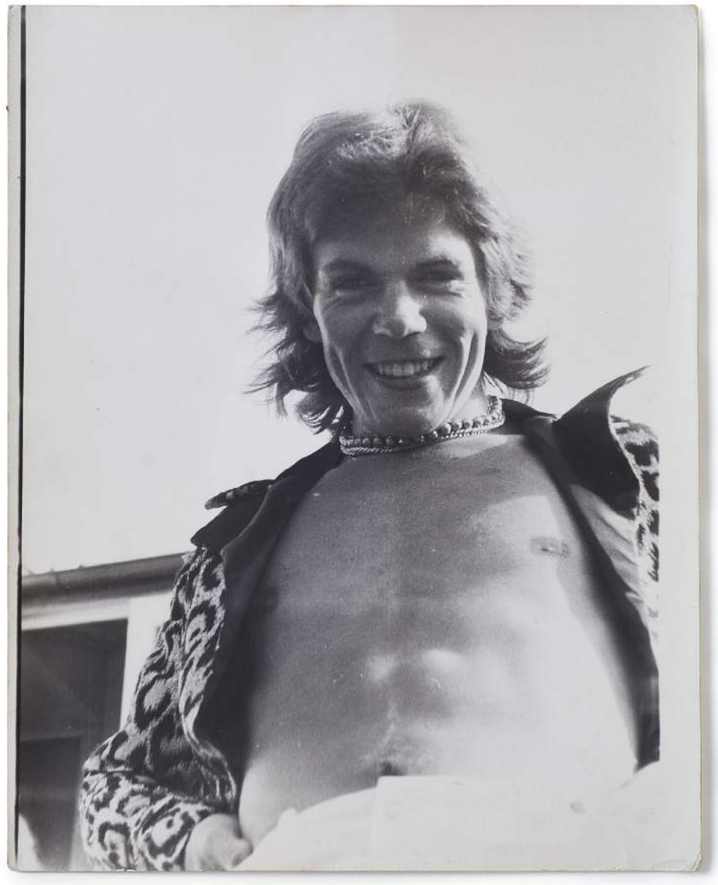
**What is it that distinguishes them from the rest of the pack?**
Just their total and utter idiosyncrasy. Every collection is like a new album. If you look at Bowie from the 1970s and 1980s as being the consummate musical statement of human civilization – an album a year, and a clear evolution – so there are designers who've mirrored that. Quite a few actually. Every season in fashion gives you three dozen points of view and it's very easy to pin down those that stand out.

**How would you define what it is you're conveying in a show review?**
I think what I do is evocation, not evaluation. In a way, fashion is a narrative, and I'm just retelling the story. So regardless of what I am writing about, what I'm doing is trying to put the reader there. But since everyone now has such incredible access to everything, people say that destroys the role of the critic. That's probably true, because the minute anything is online there are thousands of opinions about it. And criticism has been replaced by opinion.

**And polarized opinion, at that. It's all '#perfection' or 'that fucking sucks!!!'**
Either way, criticism has always had weird, snarky connotations. When I was reviewing records I'd think, 'Even if the record *stinks*, these people have spent six months of their lives making it, so who am I to gut it like a fish?' That's me being falsely noble now – total revisionism [laughs] – because obviously,

'Claude Montana would be shepherded in front of the camera, quivering like a baby and blinking into the lights, because his people had told him to do it.'

'I'm as much a fan of fashion designers as I am of pop stars. Claude Montana, ardent fan. Miuccia Prada, total rock star. Raf Simons, too.'

Tim Blanks
Auckland, circa 1972.

I'd be furiously gutting records most of the time.

**Are your reviews based on an accumulation of facts and knowledge, or on instinct?**
Well, I don't report; I'm not a journalist. I suppose the cop-out answer would be facts and knowledge illuminated by intuition! There is, of course, authority in knowledge, if you can make a valid point by referencing something historical in a convincing way. But you don't want to sound pedantic in a fashion-show review.

**You said you're not a journalist. What do you consider yourself?**
Good question. What am I? A writer? An eyeball on a scene? It's that whole thing about evocation, and this notion of trying to create the scene for people who aren't there. Obviously, that doesn't always work. But if I mention the soundtrack, then you've got the song in your head, and if I then add a detail about the models' hair, well, then maybe that evocation starts to come through.

**How important is it for your writing to be accompanied by visual aids?**
People often tell me: 'I read your review and got excited, then I looked at the clothes and they were boring.' People talk about fashion shows dying, but they never will because nothing – *nothing* – can replace that experience. Sure, you can see a video or a live stream, but that's like a photo of an event; you can't smell the blood in the bullring. Nothing can replace the immediacy of communicating a moment to 500 people who will go out into the world as your ambassadors and say, 'Oh my God, there was this moment when the music kicked in, and the smell of incense in the room was overpowering, and…'

**So you critique shows rather than collections?**
Definitely. A show is what the designer wants me to see, to understand their collection. I don't do re-sees. I'm not going to go to a showroom and write about looks that aren't on the catwalk.

**So the show review exists as its own moment of entertainment, rather than a prompt?**
To me, it's total entertainment. Fashion is quite unique from that perspective. If you read a book review that you like, you'll go buy the book; if you read a film review you like, you'll go to the movies; but if you read a Walter van Beirendonck fashion-show review you like, you're not going to rush out and buy Walter van Beirendonck. Fashion criticism is the one vehicle of opinion that holds no sway over the way that people respond to the product.

**Do you think that fashion publicists and marketeers will cry into their Walter van Beirendonck collections on hearing you say that?**
No, because buying a book or downloading a movie, or going to the ballet or the theatre or whatever, is much less of an investment than buying a fabulous Dior dress.

**It's like writing about art.**
It is. If you read someone's lyrical piece about Klimt, it might enthral you, but you can't just go out and buy yourself a Klimt. It might thrill you to read about that Dior dress, but you can't buy it. That's why fashion reportage is so different from all other cultural coverage.

**In what other ways would you consider it different?**
Well, it's fascinating that there is a long-standing canon for every other genre of criticism – in art, you've got Clement Greenberg,[37] Vasari[38] going all the way back – and yet that just doesn't exist for fashion. Everything about fashion just seems much more transitory; you're not going to see an anthology of Cathy Horyn's or my reviews, yet Pauline Kael's[39] collected film reviews are published in books, as are Anthony Lane's – his book [*Nobody's Perfect: Writings from The New Yorker*] is fabulous, by the way. I strongly recommend it.

**Your archive of Style.com reviews is now housed in a constantly mutating online *Vogue* archive. How does that make you feel?**
I just hope that it doesn't get brushed away into a closet and vanish forever. I'm not sure what the final word was when Style.com moved over to Vogue Runway. I don't know if there were decisions made about what designers would be archived. Considering we reviewed people who were only in business for one or two seasons, they probably wouldn't have been kept. There are designers whose entire careers are not recorded in any way whatsoever. But then I think about all the shows that I filed for *Fashion File*, that were taped over at CBC. Lost forever. Then again,

**'You wouldn't get Le Corbusier parading his maquettes for 15 minutes in front of an audience. He'd just build a building that everyone would see.'**





the same thing happened to entire Charlie Chaplin movies, too.

**Do you think the broader world of publishing and media will ever associate fashion coverage with anything other than 'flicking through *Vogue*'?**
When I started editing *Toronto Life Fashion*, I was a lone man on the totem pole of fashion in Toronto. Besides me, there was this hideous film journalist who wrote for *Now* magazine – the local freebie – who kept writing about fashion for some reason. He was this big, fat, bearded man who wasn't even a good film critic, but his hatred and venomous attitude towards fashion was startling. Yet it reaffirmed for me the power of fashion. You just wanted to say, 'If you're so uptight about it, all you are doing is proving the power of this medium that you cannot comprehend, and you fear your ignorance of this power'.

**Has that general attitude towards fashion shifted?**
Yes, somewhat. I've always said that fashion has this extraordinary power to both reflect and to project.

**What is it reflecting right now?**
You certainly see a lust for security in the couture collections we saw this summer. Everything was quite rigorous, stringent, monochrome, play-it-down, adopt a uniform, husband your resources – which seems like a response to the mood of the times. For all that *power* associated with couture, people haven't really written about it in any consequential way.
**Why do you think that is?**
Because throughout history, it's been about the 15-minute show. There's no record, it's gone. Think about Balenciaga couture shows – which I would imagine as being the apogee of design – and their equivalent in other fields. You wouldn't get Le Corbusier parading his maquettes for 15 minutes in front of an audience. He'd just build a building that everyone would see forever more. Balenciaga would do his thing, and then it was gone; no photos, maybe just Bill Cunningham's drawings or something.

**That's the transience of fashion.**
That transience has interfered with fashion's ability to be seen for what it really is: an extraordinary industry of creativity, and a testament to the human ability to transmute the basest things into things of searing beauty. It's alchemy. But through its documentation in magazines like *Vogue*, it remains fashion. It's not been documented in art magazines; there isn't a fashion *Cahiers du Cinema*[40] with mega-analyses of what we're looking at.

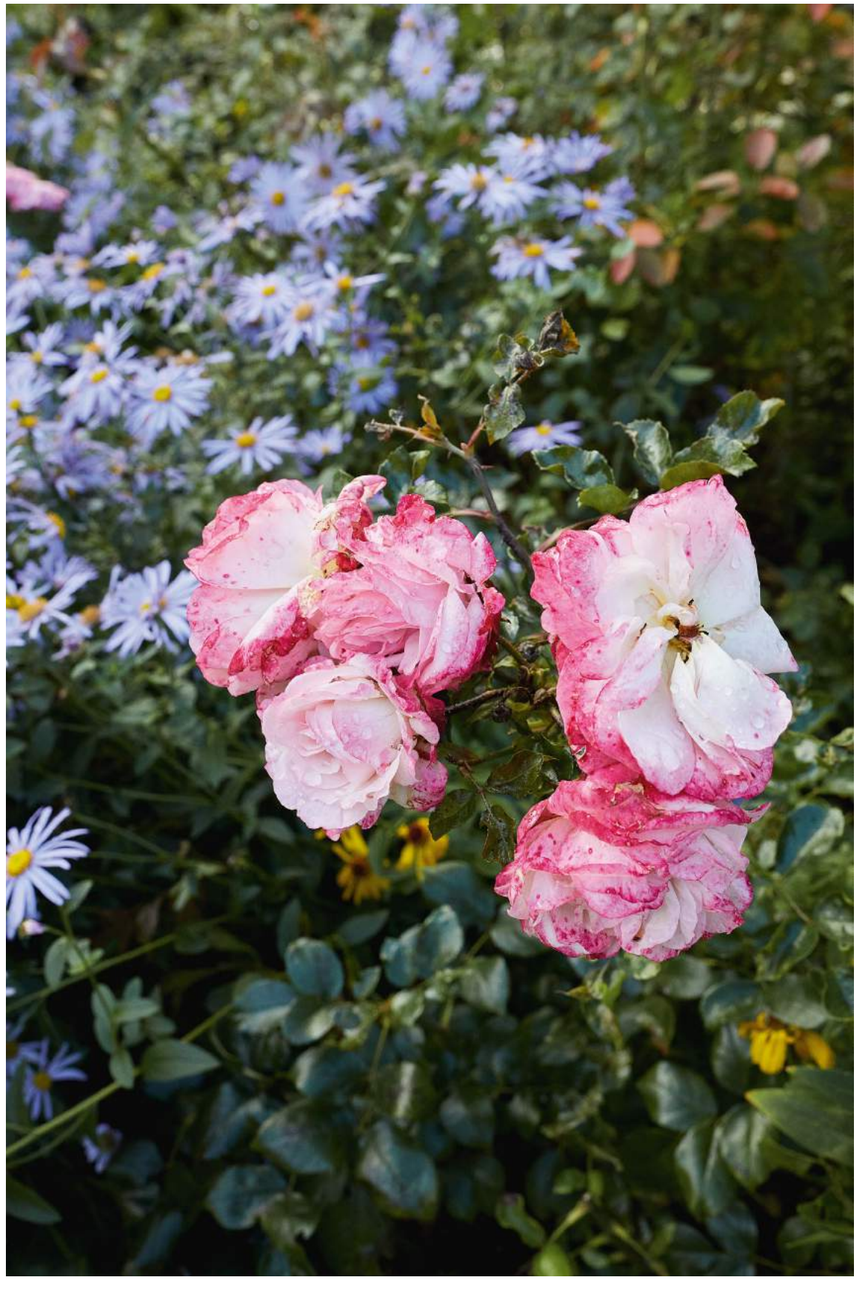
**Has fashion always merited that kind of treatment?**
Yes, always. From the beginning. But I guess clothes have always been a part of everybody's lives, so it's harder to sit back in wonder and say, 'Oh my God, that's an incredible feat'. Movies came late into the cultural mix – they were already considered an incredible technological feat – and the thing about the ephemerality of music is that you could recreate it; you could take sheet music and play the same thing in New York as people were hearing in Paris. But fashion shows never travelled.

**Why not?**
I've always said, 'Take those McQueen or Galliano shows on the road!' Let people witness them first-hand. It's funny talking to Dries Van Noten, because the whole transience of fashion is exactly what enthrals him; he says the memory is what's important. We're not living in an age of memory; it's an age of truncated attention spans.

**Would you say we're living in a particularly fashion-conscious era?**
Clothing has always been about tribal identification. And identity has never been a bigger issue than now, because if you look at what people wear in the street, clothes have never been more boring. I remember on Fifth Avenue when people were wearing Claude Montana leather jackets, and now it's all sweats and denim and marl grey. There has never been a time when placing yourself in a group through clothing is more lifesaving: people don't want to stand out as looking like a Muslim or a homosexual in the street. Yet, conversely, there has never been a time when drag is more amazing.

**Why is that?**
Because it's defiant. Its political point is honed every single day that Donald Trump is in the White House and Theresa May is in 10 Downing Street. The kind of fuck-you-ist vibe of drag is so mainstream now. What those kids do to themselves is staggering; it defies, it's so beautiful. I just love it.
**Where do you see that now?**

**'Placing yourself in a group through clothing today is lifesaving: people don't want to stand out as looking like a Muslim or a homosexual in the street.'**



Timothy Blanks' scrapbook,
circa 1964/5

I follow them all on Instagram; it's utterly magical. Just as it was seeing images of Candy Darling[41] in that other intensely troubled era of Vietnam and societal collapse. It had the same furiousness, even though we're obviously post-50 years of gay activism.

**What are your thoughts on fashion's widespread embrace of social activism as a means to communicate?**
This was an interesting season for that. Walter van Beirendonck is a designer who has always incorporated a lot of social comment into his collections, and he said that he didn't feel good about designers suddenly finding their voices when they've always previously kept shtum. He feels that when activism becomes a marketing tool, it's the time for wise old owls like him to shut up. That's why he called his show *Owls Whisper*. Rick Owens said the same thing, and those two designers are more acutely aware of their environment than anyone.

**What do *you* think?**
If you are a caring and conscientious human being, how can you *not* express your opinions through what you do? And if it takes the incredibly dramatic events that have been endured over the last 12 months for you to find your voice, then at least you found it.

**Do you think today's consumers need to feel that fashion brands stand for something other than financial gain?**
There is something I've read about – perish the word – millennials: that they are committed to the commitment of the people they make investments with. To me, this doesn't seem new because I worked with Anita Roddick at The Body Shop for 10 years, and that was *always* the line – provoking people to ask questions. And, you know, big banks are investing in arms and then supporting Gay Pride.

**How easy is it to get distracted by all the massive branding tools that fashion houses now have at their disposal? The advertising budgets, the brand ambassadors and celebrities, the social media, PR and marketing… Sometimes it feels like the collections are made into a success before they've even been presented.**
I'm not distracted. Chanel is the perfect example of that whole D.W. Griffith[42] approach to fashion.
**How would you define that?**
Just massive overwhelming spectacle that you feel pathetically grateful to be a part of. There have been Chanel shows that have been massive that I absolutely loved, and others that were equally massive that I didn't really care for.

**Spectacle for spectacle's sake seems like an ever-increasing trend.**
I think that fashion is generally quite good at adding some emotional clout to gigantism. It calls on things like desire and beauty; ideas that are distracting in themselves. This new thing of flying people off to remote corners of the globe for two days [to attend Cruise collections] is certainly an odd wrinkle. And it's strange hearing people half-moaning, saying 'Oh God, I've got to go to Kyoto next week'.
**Do you think that fashion critics are unique in the world of criticism, because, for economic reasons, they cannot be genuinely critical?**
You mean because they don't want to bite the hand that feeds them freebies and trips to far-off lands? I'm not so sure the same situation hasn't prevailed in other arenas with the wining and dining of opinion-makers. But it ultimately all comes back to the issue of what has constituted fashion criticism in the spotty history of fashion coverage. What has always been different with fashion is that 'fashion criticism' wasn't the sort of thing that your average reader would curl up with, like a movie or a music critic in the daily paper. I felt it was more *inside*, more for the benefit of the industry. There was a lot of *reporting*, and then there were a few fearsome opinions that everyone looked to, and those writers were largely bound by traditional codes of journalistic integrity, which they still seem to be. No freebies. No junkets. No compromises. But that doesn't mean there isn't editorial partisanship. It's human nature to play favourites, and it's not hard to think of fashion examples. Getting back to your point about uncritical fashion critics, I'd say the 'be-nice' school of fashion coverage is something completely different. It's an aside.

**How easy is it for you to go to a show and remove any preconceptions of a designer or a house, and what they represent? Is the history of the house part of the criticism, or do you go there with a clean slate?**
I try and make sure every moment has its own value, that there is a reason why I'm here. I will have all that historical stuff in my head – not in a wildly consequential way, but just because it's all there. It's hard for me to look at a John Galliano show and not remember the first one I ever saw. It would be wilful of me to block out the Lagerfeld or Gaultier or Prada shows that I've seen.

**It's hugely beneficial to have that knowledge stored away though.**
It's the texture for a review, and I guess I like to tell people about something that struck me maybe 20 or 30 years ago, without wanting to sound like a pontificating old bore. At the same time, all of that doesn't make a bad thing good.

**No, but it probably allows you to identify threads in a designer's work.**
You often find that there is a cyclical thing in their careers. Working on that Dries book [*Dries Van Noten 1-100*], it was funny to see what his tropes were over a hundred shows. You're not so aware of the recurring Salvador Dalí references at the time, but if you go back, these quirky little themes do pop up incongruously over the years.

**Fashion generally dismisses nostalgia. Someone like Karl Lagerfeld makes a thing of always saying, 'Never look back, on to the next show'. Do you think that looking back is at odds with the very essence of fashion?**
Fashion is surprisingly reflective and slow moving, for all its fresh-flesh syndrome. And it's surprisingly 'same old, same old' a lot of the time. Considering the tsunami of blanket coverage that comes at you during the collections – Instagram, Snapchat and so on – I don't think it's nostalgic to say that a lot of the really important things that happened in fashion took place before all that existed.

**Is that a shame?**
Imagine if Instagram had existed for Galliano's Dior show at the Opera Garnier at the end of the 1990s![43] Looking at that now in Alex Fury's Dior book [*Dior: The Collections, 1947-2017*], I can barely believe those shows even happened. The clothes are incredible! The staging was Diaghilev-ien.[44]

**To Dries Van Noten's point, don't you think that one of the principal reasons those shows remain so incredible in your mind is because they weren't documented so exponentially at the time?**
That is what the designers would say. The transience is the allure. As Dries said, 'It lives on in the imperfection of memory'. But how could you step back and change your mind about those things? I mean, they were utterly extraordinary!

**What other big moments from that time come to mind?**
Walking into the McQueen show where there were these big metal drums filled with fire, and a terrible smell of burning and genuine sense of danger. Or that Gaultier show where this weird chemical shit was blasted at everyone to make it appear like a snowstorm. A whole bunch of people had to go to hospital afterwards because it got in their mouths. Thinking about those moments, I imagine it was like working in the silent movies before the movie industry went boom.

**Why is there the general perception that fashion is so fast paced?**
Because it's seasonal. If you see something you like in a shop, then go back later to buy it, it's already gone. A winter coat is hanging there instead of a bikini.

**Was that an industry construct?**
Yes. I think the industry created this demand that it now says it is satisfying with things like 'see-now-buy-now'. If you look at Dior Couture or Balenciaga from the 1940s, it wasn't presto changeo every season; it evolved gradually. If you wanted something from Spring 1943 in Fall 1945, I'm sure it was possible. I just think fashion got ahead of itself; I mean, there are clever people now, like Neil Barrett, who reintroduce things when the world is ready for them. Miuccia Prada does that very well, too.

**You've written before that if you've bought something and you think it's a little too much, put it away and bring it out again four seasons later. Based on today's heightened sense of immediacy, does four seasons constitute vintage?**
Well, what's vintage? Is it the second something's hung up with all the other old clothes? Designers like Gaultier never had archives, amazingly. Galliano paid his models in the clothes; there *was* no archive. And that was only 20 years ago. It's like fashion never really took itself seriously.
**Last time we spoke, you were**

'The Body Shop *always* provoked people to ask questions. Whereas these days, big banks are supporting Gay Pride while they also invest in arms.'

'I don't think it's nostalgic to say that a lot of the really important things that happened in fashion took place before Instagram and Snapchat existed.'

**‘In Paris, I’d get a call at four in the morning from Style.com saying, ‘We’re all in New York waiting for your copy...’ And I’d be like, ‘Oops, I fell asleep!’”**

**describing how at shows in the 1980s the front row was where the photographers were placed. Which seems ironic today, given that every single person on the front row is now taking pictures.**
They take pictures of the opposite front row. The big change is technology. People are looking at shows in a very different way.

**Like live gigs, people aren’t watching fashion shows; they’re too busy documenting them.**
Yes, and for what? I guess it’s an existential thing. ‘I exist. I am here.’ People can now prove that they exist, they can validate their existence through the phones.

**Is that something you do?**
I decided to take photos of the walk-outs because I thought it was useful, but it isn’t. I did one for Galliano and posted it. I haven’t posted anything on Instagram for a week; I haven’t even looked at it.

**On the subject of immediacy, do you trust your immediate judgement when evaluating a show?**
No, because sometimes you miss the thing that struck you the most. I take notes during the show, but, inevitably, when I send the review and I reread my notes, I will have forgotten the thing I most wanted to say. I remember talking to Cathy Horyn about this. Like, ‘Do you always have to start by writing the first paragraph?’ I’m much more likely to write the section that I feel gets to the essence of what I want to say, and then build the review around that. Especially if it’s late and I’m tired.

**Given that you’re responding to a show very much in the moment, aren’t you keen to immediately assemble your notes into a review, and write it in the car on the way to the next show?**
I know I *should* do that, but I’ve always managed to find excuses as to why I won’t: motion sickness, too dark to see my notes... I resisted writing on the iPhone for forever, but the Pages app is quite easy to use and I’ve got used to doing that a bit.

**Are there habits, conditions, or rituals that precede writing?**
What, like Truman Capote sharpening his pencils? [Jokingly] I *have* to clip my nails very short before I write. When I started doing reviewing properly for Men.Style, I was doing 12 shows a day, and writing all night. One thing that made the experience pleasurable was having a nice bottle of wine; it was like a treat, that would generally – but not always – keep me awake. Occasionally in Paris, I’d get a call at four in the morning from Tyler [Thoreson, the then-editor of Men.Style], saying, ‘We’re all here [in New York], waiting for your copy…’ And I’d be like, ‘Oops, I fell asleep!’

**Isn’t that anxiety-inducing?**
Oh, I thrive off guilt and anxiety. That’s why I always let deadlines run away with me. I have discipline issues, and I don’t do anything about it; that’s part of the issue, obviously. I’m not disciplined enough to do anything about discipline issues. It’s like a Russian doll.

**Do you get writer’s block?**
Of course. Sometimes I can get it for days. I just try and write something that isn’t the piece I’m supposed to be working on.

**Would you say that with writing, the more you do the easier it gets?**
When I was doing Men.Style and then Style.com – both of them in a season – yes, the more I wrote, the more I wrote. Admittedly the reviews were much shorter a lot of the time, but there were days when I literally worked two days around the clock.

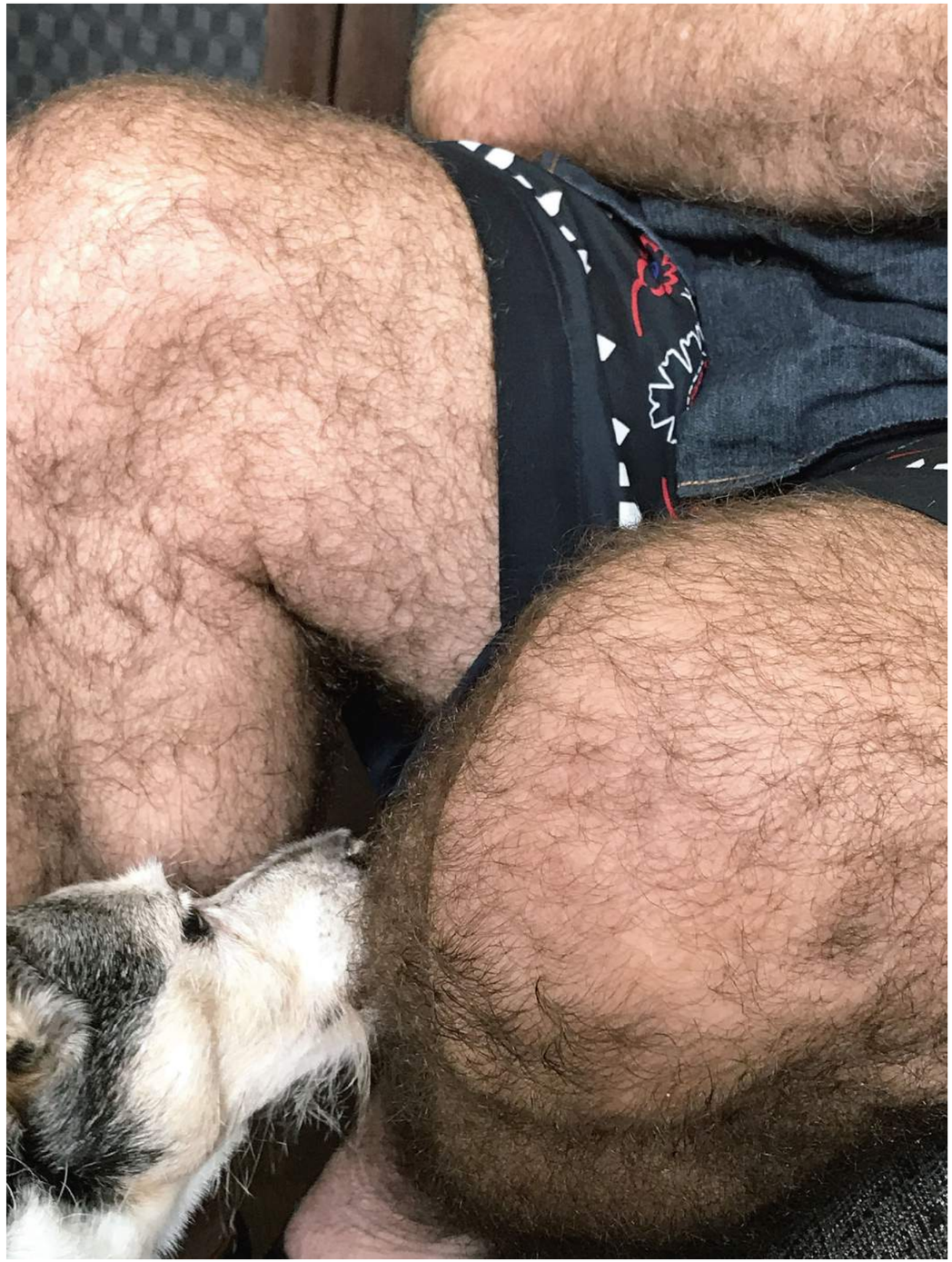
**Has the squeeze of the deadline led you to write about a show in a way that you’ve later regretted?**
Occasionally. There are times when I’ve said something glib for effect, and I get pissed off with myself because it’s such a cheap shot.

**Is it easier to be amusingly nasty about a show rather than positive?**
Without a doubt.

**Can you be funny and positive?**
Yes, but when you are being funny and positive you sometimes come across as just as much of an arsehole. Because it sounds like your positivity is a put-on.

**Do you feel a responsibility to seek out at least one glimmer of positivity in any show?**
I could sit through *Zombie Biker Chicks in Lederhosen*, or whatever it is that I watch at four in the morning, and think, ‘Somebody learned their lines and acted in this; somebody sat in an editing suite and actually crafted it’, and it seems like such a cheap shot to just dismissively give it an ‘F’.

**Are there many fashion designer**



**equivalents to z-movies?**
There are some designers who just never evolved, never got better. In the end, I'd be thinking, 'What can I even write about them?' Maybe something that acknowledges their achievement with a nice description of what we saw.

**Do critics consider being banned from a designer's show as a badge of honour?**
The problem is that it's always the same people banning journalists. It's never people who don't ban them who suddenly start banning. Which would make more sense. It's got to the point where enough people have been banned from one particular brand that they could all get together and, you know, have a big lunch while the show's on. Like an alternative Miss World competition!
**What about yourself?**
I've not been banned; I've only ever been politely asked not to review. Unless I get banned from Dolce & Gabanna for the last review I wrote, because Stefano [Gabanna] got quite upset about it. Besides that, I had my Gaultier moment.

**What was that?**
It went on for quite a long time. He wrote a letter to me, saying that he was hurt about something I'd written, and that he thought we were friends. I wrote back, explaining why I thought what I'd written was valid. Cathy Horyn then called me from Charles de Gaulle and said, 'Have you seen *Women's Wear Daily*?' He'd posted the letter online: an open letter to me, and made it meaner. The whole thing just went on and on for ages. I felt terrible because he is one of the greatest fashion designers who has ever worked. I don't even want to dredge that whole episode up again.

**What kind of things do you typically write about in your harsher reviews?**
When people get stuck in a rut. Or, the gap between the ideal and the execution. You either temper your expectations of yourself, or not.

**Is it a question of hypersensitivity, or defending one's business?**
That depends. I remember one time when a designer called me to say that all the buyers had cancelled their appointments.

**As a direct consequence of the harsh review you'd written?**
It wasn't even me who'd written it. But I was nonetheless told: 'You need to know this is what happens when journalists say the things they say.'

**And what was your reaction to that?**
What *can* you say? I'm really sorry to hear that.

**Do you take into consideration people's livelihoods when you're writing reviews?**
Would you ever say anything ever again, if that was in your mind when you were writing?

**Well, you're just telling them in a harsh way to improve.**
Unless they feel there is no need for them to get better. We're living in the post-truth era and all that's left is opinion. There is so much opinion in fashion and I'm not sure there are the voices left with the authority to make the power of opinion in fashion a life or death situation for a business. I think that words can wound savagely, but less so in the context of a fashion review than a takedown in the business pages.

**Which brings us to your current employer. One very apparent thing about your show reviews is that you are responding to creative endeavours. Now that you're writing these for *The Business of Fashion*, they exist within an editorial culture of business; the reporting of brands' financial performances and so on. Do you think this affects the reading of them?**
That's a good point. For example, the site covers the recent business vicissitudes of Prada, and then there is my review that says, 'Prada's creative return to form'. But it's possible for the site to have a variety of entry levels and points of view. I think Imran [Amed, *The Business of Fashion* founder] is very partial to opinion, and things clearly stated, and he and *The Business of Fashion* take positions on things.

**It is almost unique in that respect.**
Well, *Business of Fashion* has its own cross to bear because it has investors, so there is always that disclaimer about LVMH having invested in it. I don't know why people automatically equate that with us being soft on LVMH because it's obviously not the case.

**One testament to the success and influence of *The Business of Fashion* is that I often find myself reading the early-morning newsletter – with its headlines like 'The continuing downturn in sales'… 'The end of American Retail' – before I've even had breakfast. I imagine half the fashion industry clambers out of bed thinking, 'We're doomed'.**
Don't you find though that there are incredible stories about China and India that you wouldn't have read before? I find myself reading those before anything else. *The Business of Fashion* has moved on from just who is up or down on the markets today, to embrace fashion as a human industry. It includes stories about workers agitating for their rights in Bangladesh, millions and millions of people trying to get by.

**Are you part of the broader editorial decisions at *The Business of Fashion*?**
No, I am a reporter. I suggest one or two things, but I'm not in the office, even though I live in London. I've always been 'at large'… and getting larger.

**Do you not crave human interaction?**
No, I like isolation and solitude.

**What about the audience?**
It's nice to be part of something that people are enthusiastic about. I get compliments for things that haven't even been written by me. No one looks at the bylines. Considering my vintage and my lack of digital savvy, I've been extraordinarily lucky to be associated with Style.com, which was considered 2.0, and now *The Business of Fashion*, which is 3.0.

**Since joining *The Business of Fashion*, do you take more into consideration the scale of business and the resources available when reviewing a brand's show? Armani and, say, Grace Wales Bonner feel like they're operating in two completely different industries?**
Because one has deep pockets? Limited resources have always produced interesting results. The Velvet Underground recorded their first album in less than 24 hours. Raf Simons has wrung tears out of people with almost nothing. I don't think there is an equation between limited resources and a great show. Obviously at the back end – or the bottom line – if resources are limited then yes, it's tougher. But I think that Grace is an interesting case of someone who puts an enormous amount of thought into her shows, almost more than anyone. I mean, she gives you a reading list on your show seat! It's fantastic. So, if someone with limitless resources does a mediocre show, I'd probably feel more critical.

**How do you make the distinction between a good show and an exceptional one?**
It's not a rational process.

**Do you leave shows thinking, 'I've just seen something extraordinary'?**
Maybe once or twice a season. I thought that last Craig Green show was exceptional – the best he's done – and he's a designer I've followed from the start. When he did that Children's Crusade show[45] – that's what I called it anyway – people were in tears.

**Do you see that happening very often?**
No. I remember going to Geoffrey Beene shows at The Pierre [hotel] in New York and seeing Diana Vreeland and her gang weeping. And then actually going to shows where I could understand that response. Then my worry for a while was that Beene was a one-chord wonder, that what he was doing was fabulous but I could not see how it would evolve. And then it did.

**Like what you said before: some designers evolve, and other don't.**
I'm sure there are people who have an extremely good business *without* evolving. But with Green, it was initially so new looking, you thought if he gives it a few seasons people will catch up. I began to worry that was it, but then it just jumped. There are instances – in my mind at least – where a designer makes that jump to the next level.

**Could you give me an example of that?**
That David Bowie *Station to Station* show that Dries van Noten did,[46] or the Prada show with fur on bags, like big pelts.

**Quite specific moments within shows.**
Oh, I've been sitting in shows when halfway through there's a chord change in the soundtrack, and – boom – the switch goes on and I'm like, 'Whoa!' Like when Jimmy Page played his guitar with a violin bow when I saw Led Zeppelin.

**You referred to the Craig Green show as the 'Children's Crusade' show. Do you care that your interpretation might be completely different to what the designer originally intended?**
Not at all. I just think what I think. But

**'It's got to the point where enough people have been banned from one particular brand that they could all get together and have lunch while the show's on.'**

**'Limited resources have always produced interesting results. Raf Simons has wrung tears out of people with almost nothing.'**

I'm like that with the movies. I have a list of movies that no one else knows – and that are absolute schlock – but I could watch them 24 hours a day.

**Do you get told by designers or PRs, 'Tim, you know that thing you wrote, well it's actually completely the opposite of our intention…'**
No, they're more likely to say: 'Can we use your interpretation? We're not going to write the press release until we've spoken to you.'

**You could have such a malign influence!**
I remember seeing one of Tom Ford's Gucci shows and being struck by how it reminded me of those photos of Verushka in the desert,[47] slightly tigress-y and wild. I think it was extremely flattering for a lot of designers to hear those kinds of associations. It was the first time most of them had been taken seriously.

**You were placing them within the canon of culture that you responded to.**
It was *their* culture, too. Like, I see *Blade Runner* a lot in shows. It's funny because Raf made it so literal with that last show of his.

**You must see a lot of Bowie, then.**
I can see Bowie in a blade of grass! Although when I started out, there were far more old people around. If I was talking to Hubert de Givenchy, for example, he'd be too busy correcting my French pronunciation to even consider any of my references.

**Who do you wish you'd have had a chance to interview before they died?**
Cristóbal Balenciaga. But at dinner, because Cecil Beaton always said Balenciaga was very gossipy over dinner. He probably would have been gossiping about all those old society broads, who don't actually interest me that much. I would like to have interviewed Richard Avedon, too.

**Have you interviewed many other photographers?**
I remember once interviewing Horst [P. Horst]. We had such a good time. He must have been in his 80s and he was very funny. He lived with his minder in Toronto, and at one point the minder guy went to the toilet and Horst quickly smoked a cigarette and was like, [whispering] 'Don't tell him!' He then said, 'I would love you to come and stay at Oyster Bay', and in my head, I was thinking, 'I bet you say that to all the boys'. I mentioned it to someone later, saying, 'It was so sweet because Horst asked me to go stay with him', and they said, 'I hope you did, because he never ever asks people over to stay, so if he did ask you, he would have been so insulted that you didn't go'. And I was like, [groans] 'Oh, great!'

**Who would you like to interview who is still living? Someone who you haven't had a chance to properly speak to?**
I have never interviewed Azzedine, and I love what he does. I would really love the opportunity to go deep with him, because a 300-word review written an hour after the show just isn't that. Well, some of my reviews go really long. Maybe the longest one I write might be 600 words. I have to save myself from getting stuck at 150 words and thinking, 'Oh God, I have to go back and add a load of words.'

**This piece is probably going to end up over 10,000-words long.**[48]
Wow. Really?

**Can you think of a piece of fashion journalism that you've read in the last, say, 12 months that's impressed you?**
Matthew Schneier's piece in the *New York Times* about Ben Cho – the New York designer who killed himself – was amazing.

**Which designer, who for whatever reason, disappeared from fashion, is due some kind of revival or renaissance? Who do you miss the most?**
Christian Lacroix. I don't know if you could bring him back, but he is an absolute genius and a wonderful man.

**Have you ever done an interview when you've accidentally forgotten to press record?**
Yes, loads.

**Who?**
Rei Kawakubo.

**Part Four**
**Quantity has bred an appreciation of quality**

**What is the most significant change in fashion that you have observed over your time of working in it?**
The rise of digital coverage. When video first came along, people started to 'do' fashion shows instead of just having

**'Horst P. Horst then said to me, 'I would love you to come and stay at Oyster Bay', and in my head, I was thinking, 'I bet you say that to all the boys."**





Photography assistant: Karin Xiao. Production: Melinda Akerbrant Gray and Elise De Rudder. Special thanks: Thu Nguyen at CLM, Rozi Rexhepi, Stella and Annie the Jack Russells.

the girls walk back and forth. My producers at *Fashion File* loved things like Betsey Johnson – it was great for TV – whereas Helmut Lang looked a bit sterile on the screen for anyone who didn't know about fashion. The biggest change brought about by the digital rise is the popularizing of fashion. How it's gone from the time I started – you know, the very first couture show I went to, which was skinny-ankled ladies on tiny gold chairs at Saint Laurent – to this sort of frenzy of spectacular shows and social-media coverage, and the star systems that have evolved with that.

**Is it going to continue getting bigger and bolder and more spectacular?**
I think everything is escalating like that. I mean, when a *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie costs $250 million and is, in my opinion, total dreck, what's the point? Then you thank God for things like *Moonlight*. I do feel it is like a hothouse effect and we are heading towards a cliff.

**The level of choice we now have as consumers of fashion is remarkable, too. To the discerning eye, are the hundreds of different fashion brands available on Net-A-Porter simply too many?**
Of course. You can't see the forest for the trees. But what's interesting is that it puts the onus back on the customer, and credits them with the ability to edit. Obviously, no one in the world – except perhaps [mentions a celebrity] – is going to order from every single one of those brands. So, what do you do? You scan down the list until you see a name that you recognize.

**Is this era defined by a sense of quantity over quality?**
No. The quantity has bred an appreciation of quality, in everything. People are reading beautifully designed and crafted books again. Quantity drives people back to things that make them feel good. *The Business of Fashion* did that funny little story about florists and fashion, and Cathy Horyn did one too, about small, artisanal practices. Someone recently posted the cover of Schumacher's *Small Is Beautiful*[49] on Instagram, and I remember when people were reading that 25 years ago in the face of what they thought was corporate overwhelming-ness then.

**It seems that today's winners are those that marry the facade of the artisanal with the multinational corporate structure and resources, like Apple.**
Gucci is an extraordinary example of a business that places a macrocosmic scale on a microcosmic vision.

**Micro- because its sheer nicheness shouldn't appeal to the masses?**
Just the crazy idiosyncrasy! It is so nuts. If it is aspirational, then it's a redefinition of aspirational. Jared Leto on stage, in the clothes he is wearing, like crazy wizard coats and stuff – it's like wow! Gucci is the nutty hippy sitting on the beach embroidering jeans for his friends, but done on a huge scale. It's completely rewritten the rule books.

**Are you surprised by the success?**
I'm thrilled, because the fashion industry didn't do itself many favours by not giving people much credit. Buyers would go and buy 20 collections and they would buy a navy suit from each one. And when the customers were given the choice – when Net-A-Porter came along and basically shared every brand's look book – they would choose the craziest stuff. Stuff that the buyers would never have even looked at, systematically, without fail. And the navy suits became, all of a sudden, very navy. When you give people the choice, they will completely fuck you up: they'll vote for Trump; they'll vote for Brexit; and they'll buy a crazy Gucci jacket! I'm not even sure that the fashion industry has absorbed the impact of having given the consumer the choice.

**Do you think these days the best designers are those who are able to cope with the work flow?**
No, because that implies that the best designers are those who are prepared to accept the situation that they are radically overworked. I think there are also designers who are totally downscaling. I would say that is where the future is. But then someone like Jonathan Anderson loves the challenge of the work flow; he is extremely perverse like that. I think of him as someone who doesn't consider limits; when he's designing, I think he has a million other things in his head. There are so many references and surreal echoes of Elizabethan England or *The Jetsons*[50] or Salvador Dalí, it's all so *off*.

**Why do you say it's 'off'?**
It's like a some kind of exquisite corpse: the hat is this; the jacket is this; the trousers are this; the shoes are this. It all has an incredible charm. All the activities that he arranges around his work as a fashion designer – the 12"-record party in Ibiza, the exhibition he did at Wakefield – are just fabulous. It's not flying people out to Kyoto for two days, it's doing these things that kind of relate.

**Finally, how would you explain the dynamic of fashion to someone who has no real comprehension of it?**
What, like how to explain fashion to a novice? Well, my brother is the perfect example of that. He's like, 'Armani is perfume, Versace was murdered, never heard of Tom Ford…' I watch some of those fashion reality shows, and something like *Project Runway* actually requires people to be good to succeed, and I think that is quite a good paradigm for the fashion industry – you have to be good at what you do.

**'When you give people the choice, they'll completely fuck you up: they'll vote for Trump; they'll vote for Brexit; and they'll buy a crazy Gucci jacket!'**

1. The 'apple emblem' is actually a red heart with a set of eyes designed by New York-based Polish artist Filip Pagowski. It was originally created for Comme des Garçons' PLAY line in 1999.

2. Even before his sudden death in 2004 in Cusco, Peru, John Peel was considered a legend. One of the original DJs on BBC radio station Radio 1 when it first aired in 1967, Peel spent nearly 40 years discovering and championing new bands and music, from T. Rex to the Ramones to PJ Harvey. Before joining the BBC, Peel was briefly a DJ in Texas and was present in Dallas the day US president John F. Kennedy was assassinated. Passing himself off as a reporter for the *Liverpool Echo* newspaper, he managed to attend the press conference at which prime suspect Lee Harvey Oswald was paraded in front of journalists. The story was seen as an urban myth until 1996, when news footage was found that showed him present and he confirmed the story.

3. Sandy Denny was the lead singer for British folk band Fairport Convention on three albums released between May 1968 and December 1969. She then formed her own band Fotheringay and later became a solo artist. She died, aged 31, of a brain haemorrhage suffered after a fall.

4. *What We Did on Our Holidays* was released in January 1969 and was the first Fairport Convention album to feature Sandy Denny on vocals.

5. With their simple vocabulary ('See Janet, Mother. See Janet play' from *Off to Play*, 1949) and colourful illustrations, the *Janet and John* books helped several generations of English-speaking children learn to read during the 1950s and 1960s.

6. The photograph of Edie Sedgewick balancing on one leg on the back of a small leather rhinoceros was taken by Enzo Sellerio and published in the August 1965 issue of *Vogue*.

7. The December 8, 1967, issue of *Time* magazine featured a strap line that read 'The New Cinema: Violence…Sex…Art…' and a Robert Rauschenberg illustration that used stills from the film *Bonnie and Clyde*, which had been released in September that year. The film, which starred Faye Dunaway and Warren Beatty, was directed by Arthur Penn (1922-2010), the younger brother of photographer Irving Penn.

8. Roy Lichtenstein's pop-art cover for the June 21, 1968, issue of *Time* featured a still-smoking revolver pointing out at readers and the title 'The Gun in America'. It was published two weeks after Sirhan Sirhan had used a revolver to assassinate Senator Robert F. Kennedy at close range.

9. 'Dazed and Confused', which opens with Jimmy Page using a bow on his guitar, was the last track on Side A of Led Zeppelin's eponymous 1969 debut. The song was originally composed by singer-songwriter Jake Holmes in 1967 and later rewritten and reworked by Jimmy Page for his band, The Yardbirds. Page has said that he was inspired to use a bow on a guitar – which because of its flat bridge is not ideally suited to the technique – when working as a session musician.

10. Attended by an estimated 400,000 people on July 5, 1969, the Rolling Stones' free concert in Hyde Park, London, was the band's first full live show in two years and saw the debut of a number of songs, including an epic, 18-minute version of 'Sympathy for the Devil'. It began, however, with Mick Jagger reading out two verses of Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem 'Adonaïs' in honour of Brian Jones, the group's ex-guitarist, who had died two days before. After he finished his reading, hundreds of cabbage white butterflies were released. Drummer Charlie Watts later described this particular event to the *Sun* newspaper as: 'a bit sad, really. They looked good from the audience, but actually if you were near them there were an awful lot of casualties… It was like the Somme before they even got off the ground.'

11. David Bowie played the Hammersmith Odeon on July 3, 1973, the final date of the *Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* tour. At the end of the concert, Bowie told the audience: 'This particular show will remain with us the longest because not only is it ... not only is it the last show of the tour, but it's the last show that we'll ever do. Thank you.' Many took this to mean that Bowie himself was retiring, including most of his band, who had not been warned of the announcement. Only later did Bowie explain that he had simply decided to kill off the Ziggy Stardust character.

12. *Top of the Pops* was a music show that ran on the BBC between 1964 and 2006. The format remained much the same throughout that time: bands would appear in the studio and lip-sync their current hit in front of a crowd of awkwardly dancing young people. The presenter, most often a well-known DJ, would introduce the acts and also run down that week's music chart.

13. Progressive-rock band Van der Graaf Generator first formed in Manchester in 1967, split up in 1972, reformed in 1975, re-split in 1978, and got back together again in 2005. Side A of the band's best-known album, *Pawn Hearts*, which was a commercial failure in the UK, but a huge hit in Italy, was written by the Beatles' producer George Martin.

14. Le Château d'Hérouville, was a recording studio in a 17th-century mansion about 30kms north of Paris, owned by Michel Magne, a composer. Starting in the early 1970s, it was a favourite studio of a series of big-name artists including the Grateful Dead, David Bowie, Pink Floyd, and Cat Stevens. Elton John recorded three albums there, including his classic double album *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road* and *Honky Château*, which became the studio's nickname. The Château closed in 1985 and lay abandoned until 2016. The new owners plan to reopen the studios.

15. In 1973, according to a 2016 article in *Ham & High* newspaper, David Bowie, his then wife Angie, and their son, then known as Zowie, also lived in a flat at Vale Court, a residential block in Maida Vale, London. The family stayed for six months until they were evicted for 'excessive noise' by the flat's owner, actress Diana Rigg.

16. Dana Gillespie is a British singer and actress. She was also 1962 British junior waterskiing champion and Mary Magdalene in the original West End production of Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical *Jesus Christ Superstar* in 1972.

17. The Oxford English Dictionary's definition of trifle – 'A cold dessert of sponge cake and fruit covered with layers of custard, jelly, and cream' – does little justice to the delicious blend of textures, sweetness and slightly odd ingredients contained in each one.

18. Carol McNicoll worked as a seamstress for Zandra Rhodes, before designing clothes for Brian Eno and Roxy Music, and overseeing the cover design of Eno's album, *Here Come the Warm Jets*. She is now better known as an influential potter, one of a group of female artists who revolutionized British ceramics in the late 1970s.

19. Freddie Burretti was a 19-year-old apprentice tailor when he met David Bowie at El Sombrero club in London. The two became friends and Burretti went on to design Bowie's Ziggy Stardust stage costumes. Burretti disappeared in the late 1970s, possibly to Israel. After his death from cancer in Paris in 2001, Bowie said: 'Freddie and I changed our world, small as it was, to what we thought it could be. He lives on for me in his creative genius.'

20. In *The Dilly: A Secret History of Piccadilly Rent Boys*, Jeremy Reed writes that amphetamines and Valium sold at Piccadilly Circus station in central London were known as 'ups and downs' by dealers, while marijuana joints smoked before sex were called 'vice-boy cigarettes'. The toilets in the station today have a 50-pence entrance fee.

21. Pier Paolo Pasolini's film, *The Canterbury Tales*, which won the Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival, was based upon eight of the bawdiest tales originally written by late-14th-century English poet Geoffrey Chaucer. On film website IMDb, the film's top five Plot Keywords are 'pubic hair', 'male pubic hair', 'male rear nudity', 'male full-frontal nudity', and 'erotica'.

22. Mandrax was the brand name in the UK for methaqualone, perhaps better known by its US name: Quaaludes. The drug was originally sold as a sleeping pill and anti-anxiety drug; it proved both popular and dangerous. After clear proof of it being both physically and psychologically addictive was produced, it was banned for sale in the US in 1984, and most countries followed suit. An illegal form of Mandrax is still a widely abused drug in South Africa.

23. Leslie Caron was born in Parisian suburb Boulogne-Billancourt in 1931 to a French father and an American mother. Aged 16, she was part of the troupe at the Ballet des Champs-Élysées, where Gene Kelly spotted her, and had her cast in Vincente Minnelli's *An American in Paris* (1951). She went on to play the eponymous role in Minnelli's *Gigi*, starred in François Truffaut's *L'homme qui aimait les femmes* (1977), and appeared in three episodes of US soap *Falcon's Crest* (1987).

24. In 1972, pioneering Japanese designer Kansai Yamamoto heard that David Bowie had been wearing clothes from his womenswear collection. Yamamoto went to New York and met the musician backstage after a show at Radio City Music Hall, and, as Yamamoto told *Elle* in 2013, 'we immediately bonded'. The resulting friendship and collaboration produced some of Bowie's most iconic outfits, such as the 'Samurai Spacesuit' and the outrageously sized striped bodysuit ('originally designed with a lady in mind') worn on the *Aladdin Sane* tour. Yamamoto's continuing influence is visible in Alessandro Michele's reboot at Gucci, Ricardo Tisci's recent work at Givenchy, and, most explicitly in Louis Vuitton's 2018 resort collection, presented in Kyoto in Yamamoto's presence.

25. *Sneakin' Sally Through the Alley* was Robert Palmer's debut solo album. Released in 1974, it is said to have been the most expensive record produced by Chris Blackwell's Island Records label at the time. The distinctive cover photograph, in which model Josephine Florent's eyes are blacked out, was shot at 3am in an approach tunnel to London's Heathrow Airport.

26. 'Lester Bangs was a wreck of a man, right up until his death in April of 1982, at the age of thirty-three,' journalist Maria Bustillos wrote in the *New Yorker* in 2012. 'He was fat, sweaty, unkempt – an out-of-control alcoholic in torn jeans and a too-small black leather jacket; crocked to the gills on the Romilar cough syrup he swigged down by the bottle. He also had the most advanced and exquisite taste of any American writer of his generation, uneven and erratic as it was.'

27. Ian MacDonald is best known for his 1994 *Revolution in the Head: The Beatles' Records and the Sixties*, a sociological and musical analysis of the Beatles' entire back catalogue. MacDonald committed suicide in 2003 after a long period of depression; he was 54.

28. Yves Saint Laurent paid homage to Pablo Picasso in two haute-couture collections: Autumn/Winter 1979/80 and Spring/Summer 1988. For the latter, known as *Libération*, he also used the work of Georges Braque, Picasso's accomplice in the invention of Cubism.

29. Bill Cunningham was perhaps the original street-style photographer. For more than 40 years he worked for the *New York Times*, riding his bike the length of Manhattan, snapping fashionable unknowns and celebrities. (He would also travel to shows further afield.) Always a free spirit, he refused to join the staff at the *Times* until he was knocked off his bike by a truck in 1994, later explaining his decision to the newspaper as 'a matter of health insurance'. He was such a well-known presence on Manhattan's streets that in 2009, the New York Landmark Conservancy declared him a 'living landmark'. Bill Cunningham died, aged 87, in 2016.

30. Legendarily snobby and expensive, Le Cirque restaurant in New York first opened in 1974 on East 65th Street. It has since moved to East 51st Street. In a 2012 review of the restaurant, Pete Wells wrote in the *New York Times* that he 'could never square what I'd eaten with what I'd been asked to pay for it. It may be the restaurant's last remaining way of telling diners where they stand'.

31. Vivienne Westwood told *Le Figaro* in 2016 that when she stopped showing in London (due to 'some financial issues'), Azzedine Alaïa heard about it and 'came by the store on Kings Road and said to the manager: "Tell Vivienne to come to Paris next season and I will give her all the space she needs in the rue de la Verrerie." Since that day, every season, we show our collections in Paris. Azzedine doesn't help out anymore, but I know that I would always have a seat at his table'.

32. In June 2017, the Chambre Syndicale du Prêt-à-Porter des Couturiers et des Créateurs de Mode, the Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture, and the Chambre Syndicale de la Mode Masculine joined forces to create the Fédération de la Haute Couture et la Mode. The Fédération organizes the various Paris Fashion Weeks in which the 100 members participate; acts as a chamber of commerce for the Parisian fashion industry, including promoting and developing emerging labels; and runs renowned fashion school, École de la Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture.

33. *Style with Elsa Klensch* ran for 21 years on CNN until Klensch resigned from the cable network in 2001. The *New York Observer* described the show as the 'fashion world's must-see equivalent of Monday Night Football', and said Klensch, 'known for her airy Sydney accent, firm shoulders and that memorable, upside-down wok of thick auburn hair', gave 'viewers a close-up of the temperamental world inhabited by eccentric designers, hard-to-please editors and breadstick-thin models'. But Klensch was also always a true believer in the power of fashion; in her 1995 book *Style*, she wrote: 'The more stylish you are, the happier and more successful you'll be.'

34. Introducing the first ever episode of *Eurotrash*, broadcast on British network Channel 4 on September 23, 1993, co-host Antoine de Caunes explained that the show was 'an exciting new look at a boring old place, and it might give you British the chance to laugh at us just as we have laughed at you for so many, many years'. In reality, this meant shows full of reportages chronicling the weirdest, wonderfulest and trashiest on the continent, as well as the presence in the studio of Pipi and Popo, two giraffes made out of toilet-paper tubes. The show eventually ran for 160 episodes until 2007, but connoisseurs prefer the early years (1993-1997), when it was co-presented by a kilt-wearing Jean Paul Gaultier.

35. KCD is a leading fashion marketing and production company. Based in New York, London and Paris, the agency was founded by Kezia Keeble, Paul Cavaco and John Duca in 1985.

36. Tim Blanks left *Fashion File* in late 2006. In 2007, CBC broadcast *Fashion File Host Hunt*, a reality show to choose a new host for the show; journalist Adrian Mainella was chosen. CBC cancelled the show in March 2009 citing budgetary reasons.

37. Clement Greenberg (1909-1994) was perhaps the most prominent English-language art critic of the 20th century. An early supporter of Abstract Expressionism – he first wrote about Jackson Pollock in 1943 – he thought that art should head ever further towards pure abstraction, and be unconcerned with 'content'. Or as he put it in a 1945 review of artist Hans Hofmann: 'His painting is all painting.'

38. Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574) was an architect and painter (his fresco cycles can be seen in the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence), but his reputation today rests upon his epic 1550 book *Le Vite de' più eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori italiani…* (*Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*). In the work, which was dedicated to Cosimo de' Medici, Vasari presents the history of art as being in three stages: antiquity and the lost period of the Dark Ages; the early Renaissance in 14-century Tuscany with Cimabue and Giotto; and a later period that culminated with Michelangelo.

39. From 1968 to 1991, Pauline Kael was the *New Yorker*'s film critic, a pulpit from which she championed her vision of cinema to the joy of her favourites and the annoyance of her 'enemies'. One of the latter was George Lucas. Kael had consistently criticized him, writing in the *New Yorker* of *Star Wars*: 'It's enjoyable on its own terms, but it's exhausting, too: like taking a pack of kids to the circus.' He retaliated in 1988 when he named the skull-faced villain General Kael in *Willow* after her.

40. *Cahiers du Cinéma* was co-founded by André Bazin in 1951. Most of the directors later associated with the Nouvelle Vague were critics at the magazine, including Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut, Éric Rohmer, Jacques Rivette, and Claude Chabrol. The magazine was key to the development the influential *auteur* theory.

41. Candy Darling was a transgender drag artist and actor who was part of Andy Warhol's Factory and appeared in a number of his films, including *Flesh* (1968). Born James L. Slattery in 1944 in Queens, New York, she died of lymphoma aged 29 in 1974.

42. D.W. Griffith (1875-1948) was a film director who made some of early Hollywood's most ambitious and spectacular movies. His innovative approach to cinema is now overshadowed by the overt racism – including the glorification of the Ku Klux Klan – in his films *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) and *Intolerance* (1916).

43. John Galliano's Christian Dior couture show for Spring/Summer 1998 was held in the Second Empire splendour of the Opera Garnier in Paris. On the building's main staircase, he presented a lavish collection inspired by the Marchesa Casati; the show ended with butterfly-shaped confetti dropped onto the audience. Tim Blanks himself has said that it was among his favourite shows of all time: 'It was like every single drug experience that everyone's ever had in their whole life concentrated into 10 minutes.'

44. Sergei Diaghilev (1872-1929) was a Russian-born dance impresario whose company Ballets Russes revolutionized ballet in the early 20th century. He is particularly remembered for his versions of the Igor Stravinsky works *The Firebird* (1910), *Petrushka* (1911), and *The Rite of Spring* (1913). The third was choreographed by Vaslav Nijinsky and created an immediate scandal.

45. The Craig Green show Blanks dubbed the 'Children's Crusade' was Spring 2015 menswear. The Children's Crusade was a religious movement that rose up in 1212 and was 'arguably the first European youth movement' according to the Encylopedia Britannica, and the reason why 'thousands of young people took Crusading vows and set out to recover Jerusalem from the Muslims'.

46. Dries Van Noten's 'Bowie' show was Autumn/Winter 2011 menswear. For the show, Bowie not only gave Van Noten permission to use his song '"Heroes"', but even allowed it to be specially remixed by Soulwax.

47. The images of Verushka in the desert were taken by Franco Rubartelli and published in the April 1967 issue of *Vogue*.

48. With footnotes included, it is actually over 16,000.

49. E.F. Schumacher's *Small Is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered* was first published in 1973, but its ideas of 'gigantism' and a modern economic system concerned only with pure profitability remain pertinent. Or as he wrote in the book's second chapter: 'The modern economy is propelled by a frenzy of greed and indulges in an orgy of envy, and these are not accidental features but the very causes of its expansionist success. The question is whether such causes can be effective for long or whether they carry within themselves the seeds of destruction.'

50. *The Jetsons* was animation company Hanna-Barbera's space-age equivalent to its prehistoric hit *The Flintstones*. Its 24 originally episodes ran on US TV between September 1962 and March 1963.

# Wet

**Photographs by Charlotte Wales**
**Styling by Camille Bidault-Waddington**

Previous pages:
left, Top by Louis Vuitton
Earrings by Vanessa Schindler;
right, Top by Stella McCartney
Trousers by Lemaire
Underwear by Christian Dior
Earrings by Vanessa Schindler

This page:
Bodysuit by Falke
Knitted trousers by Acne Studios
Knitted skirt by Véronique Leroy
Single earring by Vanessa Schindler

Dress by J.W.Anderson
Scarf and cardigan by Loewe
Single earring by Matty Bovan

Top by Ralph Lauren
Swimwear by Eres
Knitted sleeves by Andreas Kronthaler for Vivienne Westwood
Top styled as skirt by Sankuanz
Earrings by Vanessa Schindler

Top by Balenciaga
Skirt and earring by Matty Bovan
Trousers by Miu Miu
Boots by Toga

Knit by Prada
Skirt by Faustine Steinmetz
Shoes by Balenciaga
Earrings by Vanessa Schindler

Dress by Y/Project

Knit by Calvin Klein

Earring by Vanessa Schindler

Dress and belt by Vanessa Schindler
Leggings by Falke
Boots by Toga

Jumpsuit by Gucci
Top by Berluti
Single earring by Matty Bovan

Top and boots by Toga
Skirt by Christian Dior
Trousers by Alice Rabot
Earrings and belt by Vanessa Schindler

Knit by Moncler
Leggings by Acne Studios

Photography assistants: Arturo Astorino and Félix Dol Maillot. Digital operator: Kelsey Hale. Styling assistants: Pia Abbar and Bérenger Pelc. Hair: Christian Eberhard. Make-up: Nami Yoshida. Nails: Julie Villanova. Set design: Alexander Boek. Model: Elise Crombez. Production: Tobias Brahmst. Set assistant: Julien Cavallina.

Top by Sonia Rykiel
Underwear by Christian Dior
Single earring by Vanessa Schindler


BALENCIAGA

# ‘I realized I had ideas I couldn’t produce by hand.’

## Iris van Herpen on 10 years of pushing the boundaries by fusing fashion and technology.

Interview by Ariane Koek
Photographs by Sølve Sundsbø
Creative direction and styling by Jerry Stafford





Since launching her label in 2007, Iris van Herpen has earned a reputation as an avant-garde technologist, pushing the boundaries of form and couture technique. Experimenting with previously unexplored methods, van Herpen has challenged the conventions of haute couture, marrying its time-honoured traditions – the meticulous handwork of the *petites mains* – with modern machinery, such as 3-D printing.

Admitted as a guest member of the Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture in 2011, van Herpen has since presented a number of collections made in collaborations with scientists, artists and architects. She has played on perspective with 3-D printed *paillettes* made with abstract artist Esther Stocker; shown injection-moulded silicone that ripples across the skin to a soundtrack played by underwater musicians; and used iron filings manipulated by a magnetic field for a collection inspired by a visit to CERN, or the European Organization for Nuclear Research.

It was there in 2014 that van Herpen first met Ariane Koek. An expert in arts, science and technology, Koek founded the laboratory's Collide Artist Residency Awards to make seemingly impossible links between the arts and scientific practice. Koek and CERN's work continues to inspire van Herpen's designs, both technically and aesthetically. Alongside pieces constructed using magnetic processes, quantum foam – the idea that the fabric of the universe is a foam-like mass of time-space bubbles – inspired a collection made of thousands of hand-blown glass bubbles that form a foam-like exoskeleton around the wearer's body.

This is van Herpen's sui generis approach to integrating science and technology in her work, unlike anything previously presented in a haute-couture context. The seemingly immiscible elements of printing, metalwork, synthetic fabrics, and nature references come together with a poetry that does little to give away the complexity of her research and construction process. It is why her work has been collected by cultural institutions such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, as well as academic institutions such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

*System* brought together Ariane Koek and Iris van Herpen to discuss the designer's idiosyncratic, multi-disciplinary approach, her of 10 years of haute couture, and the practicalities of sustaining her innovative work.

**‘I saw architects in Amsterdam working with 3D printers and was taken by how precise they were, and how much potential there was to produce clothes.’**

**Ariane Koek: So, here we are in your studio, surrounded by 10 years of work. I suppose we ought to start at the very beginning. How did you choose to go into fashion?**

**Iris van Herpen:** I come from a really small village, so fashion wasn't something I was that aware of. There was nothing on television; there were no magazines. But I moved to a high school in a small city, where I got to experience more about clothes and identity – style, rather than fashion. I didn't really know how to do it, but started making clothes at that time, around the age of 12 or 13. I didn't have a sewing machine, so I'd sew everything myself, and time really starts to slow when you're sewing by hand. It felt like mediation, my own time and space. I hadn't experienced it with anything like that before, so I'd take every moment I could to make something. I knew I wanted to go to the art school; I just didn't know if I wanted to go into fashion, sculpture or painting, because they were all quite tactile. But I realized that with fashion I could sculpt and paint, too. It was the perfect way for me to focus on the body, and work with my hands, and bring together everything I enjoyed.

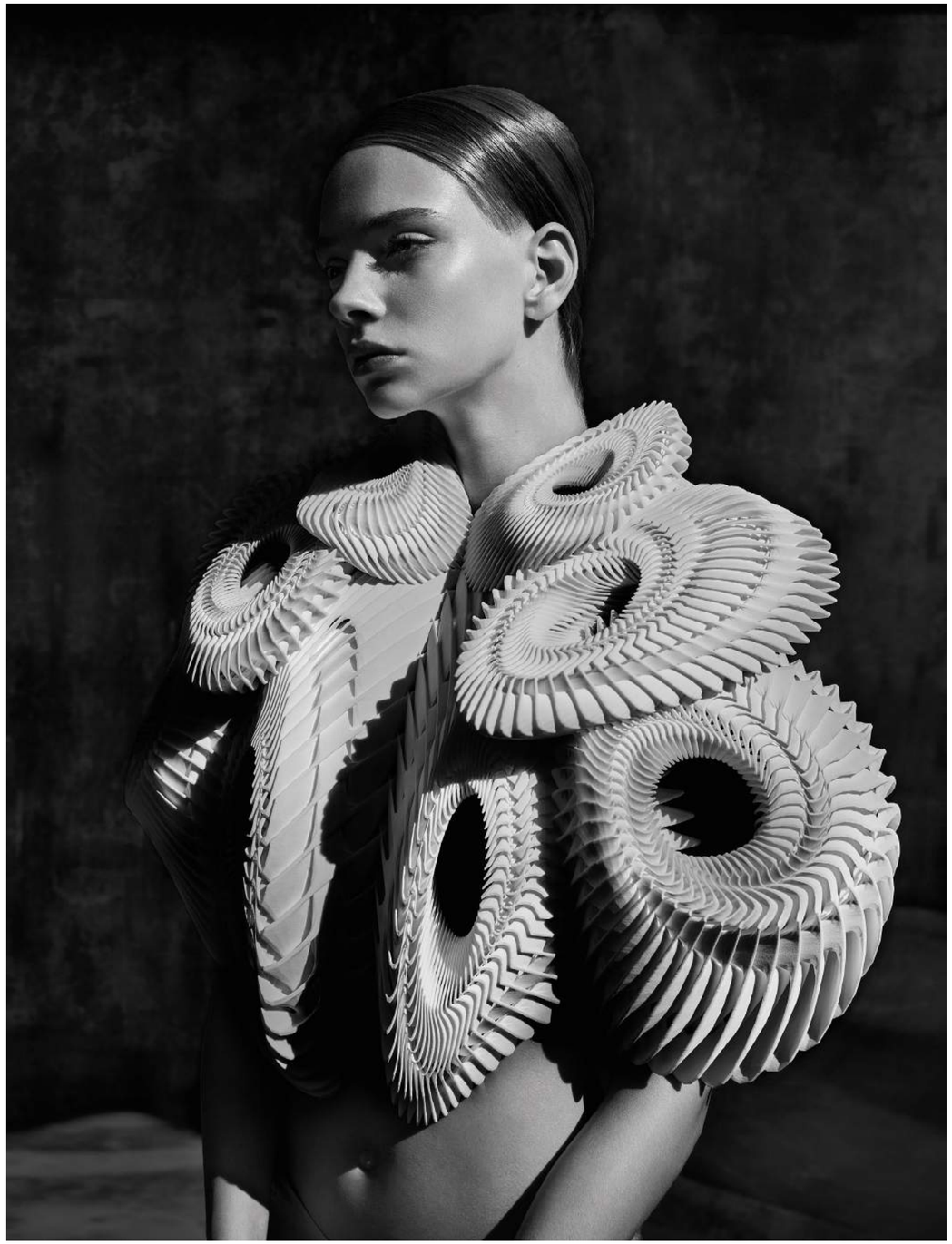
**I expect that while you were studying at ArtEZ University of the Arts [in Arnhem, the Netherlands], there wasn't much access to the tools and techniques you're known for using today. How did you discover those?**

At art school, I actually preferred handwork to the sewing machine – which was a disaster at the time because they told us we weren't allowed to do handwork in final year. I could barely use a sewing machine! I think the reason for that is probably because craftsmanship and handwork is not an industry. I don't think they thought it was a good plan to have people so focused on craft…

**When did you first look to technology as a tool for the creative process?**

I realized I had ideas that I couldn't really produce by hand, and I saw that architects in Amsterdam and the Netherlands were working with 3D printers. I was really taken by how precise they were, and how much potential there was to produce clothes. So I started working with an architect because I didn't have the experience, and had no idea

*Lucid*, haute couture, Autumn/Winter 2016



*Capriole*, haute couture, Autumn/Winter 2011

*Crystallisation*, made in collaboration with Nick Knight's SHOWstudio, 2013

how to create files for the printers to work from. That was definitely when I realized the potential of combining that kind of technology with fashion.

**Can you remember the first collection you did using 3D printing?**
It was a collection called *Crystallisation* in 2010. I started working with Daniel Widrig, a London-based architect, but at the time it was more like a side-project, an experiment. But before that, I was working with two architects who had designed a museum in Amsterdam and then asked me to make a dress inspired by their museum. It looks like a big bath, so I decided to make the water element that was missing in the architecture, and that was the turning point. You absolutely cannot create water with a needle. So that's how I started thinking about 3D printing. But actually, at the time, water was impossible to make with a 3D printer, too! So, I did end up doing that by hand, but the project made me aware of the limits of handwork, and I realized I wanted to find more ways to create. That's why I became so open to collaborations with architects: I was learning about the difficulties and the possibilities of the technique. I think almost half of my collection shown in Paris was 3D printed after that.

**How have your experiences working within fashion informed that creative process? You went from studying to working with Alexander McQueen, didn't you?**
Yes, it was my first internship. He really inspired me. I mostly did handwork, and pattern-cutting there, but I learned a lot about working with fragile and difficult materials, and of course, McQueen's pattern cutting was famously precise. I learned a lot about the process of working towards a collection and a show, and the research that goes into that, creatively as well as practically. I think I just learned a lot about fashion: what it takes to create a collection, how one collection relates to the next. Little bits of everything.

Straight after that though, I worked with Claudy Jongstra, who isn't connected to fashion at all, but to art and architecture. I got to be much more involved in working on the concept and experimenting with process with her, and when she had new things to develop for buildings, I'd start testing materials. So I think with both experiences, getting to work across fashion and art, I had all the elements: development and craft. I enjoyed both.

**You must experience a lot of failures though, just in the sense that your work with material is so experimental.**
It's a big part of my work, especially in the material development. That's all trial and error. But sometimes a material seems to have failed, but actually turns out to be fine in the end. Draping, however, is another challenge. After material development, the draping starts. I don't draw. The little drawings you get at the show, they're done by someone else…

**I think some people would be surprised about draping, as the word implies working with fluid fabrics, not metal or 3D-printed materials.**
We never finish a piece before it's been seen on a real, moving body, and we understand the interaction between both. So we can get a sense of how the piece moves, sometimes I'll drape it on myself. The draping and re-draping is something that really connects to my early interaction with clothes though, connected to handcraft. That's the part that really inspires me creatively. It is a long process; it can take anything between a few hours and several weeks, but I think it's the part of the whole process that I enjoy most.

**What made you decide to go it alone and start your own label?**
The freedom of fashion, and fashion feeling like self-expression for me. That's crucial. But also, during my early internships, I definitely realized that parts of me weren't in use. I just get really restless when I can't express ideas, or find an outlet for things I have in my mind. I just need to get them out. So it wasn't a business-driven decision, like, 'Oh, I'm going to start my own company with a 10-year business plan'. It was very intuitive and more about, 'Let's see where it goes'. But I like that – I'm happy with risks. It's difficult to imagine having a job where I would be able to look 15 years ahead though; I think that would frighten me more. I prefer not knowing what happens next month. That sounds strange, maybe. But even in the process of making a collection, if I started on a collection with ideas, knowing how it would all turn out in the end, why would I make it? I don't see the purpose of that. I need the unknown; I think the unknown is my energy in that sense.

**'It's frightening to imagine having a job where I would be able to look 15 years ahead. I prefer not knowing what happens next month.'**

*Between the Lines*, haute couture, Spring/Summer 2017

**But practically, Iris van Herpen is still a company with a workspace and staff you have to pay for, and of course, you need to earn a living. When you launched ready-to-wear in 2014, was that a business-driven decision?**
It was stimulated by expanding in that sense. I think it was a good step in that we did communicate to a wider audience, which was definitely the goal – as well as create pieces for them. At that time, after winning the ANDAM Award, launching ready-to-wear, it felt that there was no other way than to go with the system.

**Why did you then make the decision to spend less time on ready-to-wear?**
For me, fashion – clothes – is about quality and not quantity. There is so much speed, so many imitations in that system, so I had to reduce the quality. I could produce ready-to-wear for the rest of my life, but it's not what is going to make me happy, and it's not what I want to say in fashion. There's way too much of everything already, and I don't really need to make another T-shirt and add to that. Of course, as a business decision, it's obvious, but it's just not for me. I feel like we can do more interesting things, and maybe that's the harder, but different way. It's what makes me happiest, and it's where I feel I can add something to the system. Couture is more sustainable in that sense. I still believe in developing my work as a form of art, and it's important for me to focus on couture because couture is the part of fashion where we can push things.

**… and fashion moves so fast now.**
I like the speed of fashion; it's not something that I'm against. For me, that pace is a good stimulant to keep moving forward. The rhythm is tough, but it's good. I think I've found what feels like a happy balance, being able to spend six months on maybe 18 pieces. If I had to make four collections a year, I'm sure the development and innovation, and the quality would be different. I think it's a case of thinking how much you want to make while working within the system and its established model. Having two collections a year, loosely working within that schedule, deciding how much we can make, that works for me.

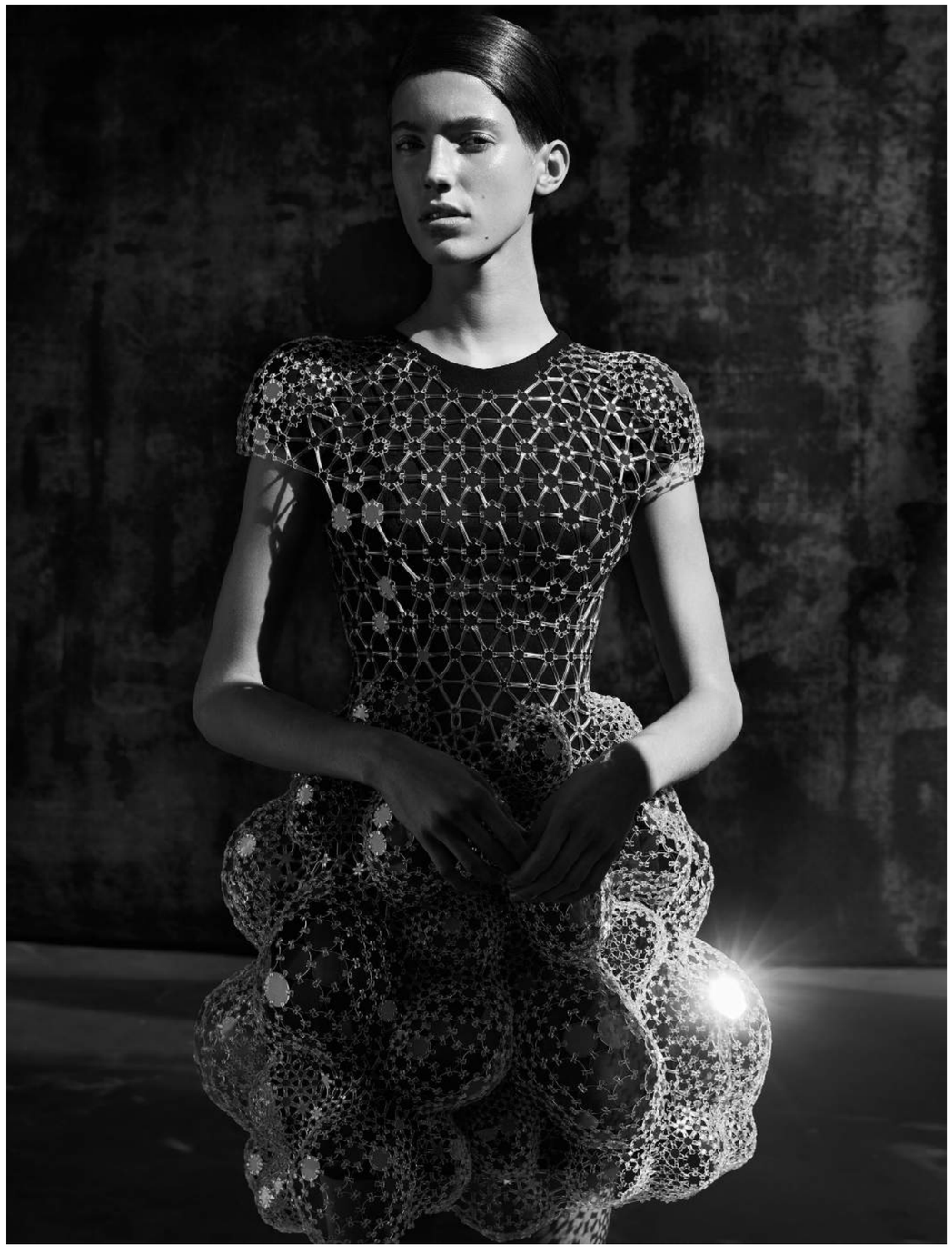
**So what about other elements of that system? What role do press and marketing play within your business?**
I think it plays a big role. There's definitely a lot to explain considering there's so much technology involved, but I've felt that change over time. The press seem to understand my work more now, and also I think generally the press are less focused on fashion now. Any interviews I do – and read – seem quite broad now, which I enjoy more.

**You have a collaboration coming up with Sasha Waltz, and you've also collaborated with Benjamin Millepied. So you've been moving very much toward dance. Are there any other art forms or disciplines that you want to engage with?**
I am working on a project in architecture. Of course, I've worked with architects before for my own work, but now it's the other way round: I'm now helping architects with the design of a building. That's a very big, very new step. It's nice to turn inspiration into creation in that way. Architecture has always been a huge source of inspiration for me, so being able to create as part of that world is challenging, but exciting.

**How about technologies that you haven't yet worked with, but would like to explore?**
I'm doing quite a lot of research into 4D printing. At the moment, the technology isn't quite there for me to use yet; it's still too new, but I am very excited about the idea of working with it. With 4D printing you can sort of design a different movement to what the material would naturally do. So it is almost like designing evolution. You're changing the shape, structure, colour, whatever you can think about.

**And are there any technologies you're looking at beyond printing? Are you interested in the technological development of fabric and materiality?**
The space between materiality and immateriality is very interesting. But I am more interested in the space between, thinking about what isn't there but could be, rather than immateriality itself as something like virtual reality does. Those disciplines, I think they're great PR, but I don't feel inspired by or excited by them. I think materials will change a lot in years to come, and I am very curious to know where it will go, because so much of our lives are immaterial at the moment. To me, that makes materiality so much more important. Maybe that is a counter-reaction. You see something online that you can't touch, so maybe that's an

## 'Ready-to-wear is not what I want to say in fashion. There's too much of everything already, and I don't need to make another T-shirt and add to that.'



*Lucid*, haute couture, Autumn/Winter 2016

*Wilderness Embodied*, haute couture, Autumn/Winter 2013

*Aeriform*, haute couture, Autumn/Winter 2017

interesting thing to explore. I wonder how technology will develop to communicate a more complete experience of materiality. It is definitely trying to. I mean, the experience of seeing someone sitting next to you is such a different experience to seeing that person on Skype. Also, I don't know if this is going to be sooner or later, but I do think materials will be grown in the future – for everything, everyday use, architecture and fashion. It addresses the whole concept of waste, so a lot of companies are starting to develop materials that can be grown, and I'm curious to see where that will go.

**You're obviously very into science. You came to visit us at CERN, for example, and talked about the notion of genetics in your work.**
I am fascinated and perhaps even a little scared by the possibilities of where technology and biology come together and fuse. It's an interest – and a fear I suppose – that I don't directly translate into my work, but it does fascinate me. I have no idea where it will go, and maybe the unknown keeps me interested. It's also connected to philosophy, because it's not about what we can think of, but what we can do with the things we create. I'm curious about the decisions we'll make, bearing in mind the possibilities of what we are creating. Art and science are the most powerful media of transformation, and I think that's why they both stay in my mind. I'm driven by the thought of where both will take us.

**So if you were to look way ahead into the future, the 22nd century, and imagine how they might describe you, what do you think they'd say?**
That's a big question! I think, or I hope, that my work can be seen in a number of ways. When I look back at my work over the years, I think that most of the things I learned in the early years, I've let go of now. So, in that sense, I'd love to be thought of as always moving, maybe always looking for disruption to go further. I'm very much looking at the possibilities within fashion, and that's something I'd like to be recognized for – but I've never thought about that before!

**So would you say you're a fashion designer?**
You want one word or one title? Oh yes, then a fashion designer. But that shows the scope in what fashion is to me. I also think, that people are much more collaborative today. If we think about a fashion designer today, we have a very specific idea of what that is, and that's a person who is designing with fabric, making garments. I think, and hope, that disciplines will become much less fixed in terms of what we understand them to be, and interact much more.

**How do you get people from other different disciplines on board? Is fashion a hard-sell to those in other industries?**
In general, those people aren't so interested in fashion, so I think they come on board because they see I'm already collaborating with other disciplines. They maybe see a new possibility, and that might trigger them to think about fashion in a different way, to see new possibilities. That's the impression I get when I start working with someone from a completely different background. I'm happy that those seemingly impossible links are made.

**You've dressed some pretty extraordinary people, too – Björk, Tilda Swinton, Beyoncé.**
Björk did a DJ set at our 10th anniversary celebration. That was a moment. Meeting her for the first time was special. As a high-school kid, I grew up with her music, so being able to make my work, which feels so personal, for her, that was special. It's a strange feeling, like a moment that makes you pause and think about the point you're at.

**… and what point do you feel you're at, 10 years in?**
I feel that I've touched base with a lot of things, but I feel that it is very much touching bases, rather than diving into all those subjects. So, perhaps that's next: a deeper exploration of the things I've touched upon.

**Do you feel a part of the wider fashion industry?**
Yes and no. I've created my own family within the system, but the fashion system is so big. I feel really connected to the people I know within it, and that's how I feel as if my work is alive. But I don't feel part of the general system as a whole, because it's too big. So I've created my own niche within it.

Photography assistants: Peter Carter, Kai Cem Narin, Simon McGuigan. Models: Elza at IMG, Nadine at Elite, Kyona at Elite. Casting director: Madeleine Østlie. Hair: Martin Cullen at Streeters. Hair assistant: Reuben Wood. Make-up: Sam Bryant at Bryant Artists. Make-up assistant: Elise Priestley. Nails by Chisato Yamamoto at David Artists. Set-design: Robbie Doig at Dragonfly Scenery. Digital tech: Lucie Byatt. Film assistant: Samuel Stephenson. Production: Sally Dawson, Elise De Rudder, Paula Ekenger. Special thanks: Annemiek at Art + Commerce, Pauline Bianchi, Emma van de Merwe.

*Aeriform*, haute couture, Autumn/Winter 2017

# ‘We made it the Hermès of our dreams.’

## Reinventing Hermès, by the trio behind the pivotal campaigns photographed by Bill King.

Interview by Thomas Lenthal






Tailleur en fil à fil sac body en fil d'Ecosse et sous imper en soie caoutchoutée. Chaussures "Juliette". Sac "Kelly" en autruche. Sac "Trim" en box. Accessoires, montres et bijoux Hermès.
1837 H 1987
HERMÈS. SHOCKING ELEGANCE.
HERMES
PARIS


Sur le thème "Champignons".
Veste matelassée twill fond blanc.
sweat shirt col roulé fond vigogne.
jupe droite matelassée et carré.
Ceinture "Collier de chien".
Sac mallette crocodile gold.
Sac "Trim" box marron.
Bijoux, gants et montres Hermès.
Bruxelles. Hermès.
50 bd de Waterloo. Tél. (02) 512.55.38.
Gent. Langerock.
66 Brabantdam. Tél. (091) 25.45.99.
Hasselt. Moray.
29 Grote Markt. Tél. (011) 22.42.62.
Hasselt. Moray.
25 Demerstraat. Tél. (011) 22.32.69.
Knokke Le Zoute. Beman.
303 Kustlaan. Tél. (050) 60.23.24.
Kortrijk. Henry.
Korte Steenstraat 2 B. Tél. (056) 22.28.49.
Liège. "Ancienne Maison Deman".
21 rue Vinave d'Ile. Tél. (041) 23.53.29.
Luxembourg. Epsom.
1 rue Philippe II. Tél. 209.81.
Tongeren. Couture Agnès.
56 St Truidenstraat.
Tél. (012) 23.18.87.
Verviers. Boutique Valentin.
14 rue de l'Harmonie.
Tél. (087) 33.07.94.
HERMÈS.
L'ÉLÉGANCE DANS TOUS SES ÉTATS.
HERMÈS
PARIS


*En twill façonné "Abeille":*
*pantalon, chemisier portefeuille,*
*chemises-manteau superposées, écharpes.*
*Bracelet "Collier de chien".*
*Gants "Breloque". Carré "Grand uniforme".*
*Semainier autruche rouge.*
*Sac "Roissy" autruche blanc.*
*Ceinture "Mac" fjord noir.*
*Ceinture "Collier de chien" veau grainé blanc.*
*Montres et bijoux Hermès.*


HERMÈS.
L'ÉLÉGANCE QUI FAIT CRAQUER LES HOMMES.
HERMÈS
PARIS
1837 H 1987
Blouson poil de chameau col castor.
Pull et jupe cachemire gris.
Chaussures "Herodix" en box.
Sac "Plume" 54 cm en autruche.
Carré twill de soie "Feu d'Artifice".
Accessoires, montres et bijoux Hermès.


Featherweight suède blouson.
Fringed suède shawl.
White suède gloves "Hawaii".
"Mini-Kelly" handbag.
Silk twill scarf.
"Clipper" watch in steel.
Calf sandal "Tina".
Jewelry and accessories by Hermès.
Please note: The watches shown in this advertising page is, as such, available on the British market. However, and strictly for legal reasons concerning brand registration matters, this article cannot bear in this country the Hermès brand name.
Hermes Shops :
155 New Bond Street.
London W 1Y 9PA 01-499 8856.
3 Royal Exchange.
London EC3V 3LL 01-626 7794.
Harvey Nichols : Knigtsbridge.
London SW 1 01-235 5000.
1837 H 1987
THE SPARKLING CELEBRATION HERMÈS
HERMÈS. SHOCKING ELEGANCE.
HERMÈS
PARIS


*"Mini Kelly" handbag in lizard. $2,595.*
*"Jige PM" clutch in crocodile. $6,300.*
*"Bugatti GM" zippered travel bag in ostrich. $5,895.*
*"Collier de Chien" bracelet in crocodile. $745.*
*"Chaine d'Ancre Tressee PM" bracelet in 18K. gold. $6,650.*
*"Pullman H" watch. $875.*
*"H" jacquard wool throw. $675.*
*"Armes de Paris" silk twill scarf. $175.*
*Silk twill ties. $85.*
*"Toucans" porcelain.*
*"Eau de Cologne Hermès" fragrance for men and women.*

*All other products by Hermès.*

*Available exclusively at Hermès Stores:*
*New York, 11 East 57th Street.*
*Palm Beach, Worth Avenue.*
*Dallas, Highland Park Village.*
*Beverly Hills, Rodeo Drive.*
*Chicago, The Hermès Boutique at Bonwit Teller.*
*San Francisco, One Union Square.*
*Boston, The Heritage on the Garden. Opening this Fall.*
*Houston, The Pavilion on Post Oak. Opening this Fall.*

*Boutiques du Monde d'Hermès:*
*Baltimore, Nan Duskin.*
*Denver, Printemps.*
*Manhasset, The Americana.*
*New York, Barneys.*
*Philadelphia, Nan Duskin.*
*San Antonio, Frost Bros.*
*Toronto, Hazelton Lanes.*

*Visit the Hermès Boutique closest to you or call (800) 441-4488, ext 200.*


*Gürtel "Étrier". Plaid doppelseitig, uni und kariert. "Calèche", Eau de Toilette. Krawatte Tasche "Market". Teller, Service "Chasse". Wochenkalender. Tasche "Duffle". Goldkette "Éloïse".*

*"Zèbres". Kaschmir-Plaid. Umhängetasche. Tasche "Taxi" der Kollektion "Sacs à Malice". Notizbuch mit Minenhalter. Goldarmband "Chaîne d'Ancre Tressée". Seidentuch "Brazil".*

**DEUTSCHLAND.**
**Aachen** bei Renata Krieger.
**Baden-Baden** bei E. Braun & C°Nachf.
**Berlin** bei E. Braun & C°Nachf.
**Bielefeld** bei Nolte.
**Bremen** bei Stiesing.
**Dortmund** bei Modehaus Deters.
**Düsseldorf** bei Hermès.
**Frankfurt/Flughafen** bei Hermès.
**Frankfurt** bei Davidoff-Hermès.
**Freiburg** bei Marie-Luise Edinger.
**Hamburg** bei Annette Boutique.
**Hamburg** bei Jäger und Koch.
**Hannover** bei Hellborn.
**Köln** bei Hermès.
**Mannheim** bei Juwelier Braun.
**München** bei Hermès.
**München** bei E. Braun & C°Nach.
**Stuttgart** bei Koelble und Brunotte.
**Wiesbaden** bei Kurowsky.
**SCHWEIZ. Basel** bei Andre.
**Bern** bei Au Panache.
**Crans-sur-Sierre** bei Bouby Sports.
**Genève** bei Hermès.
**Gstaad** bei Hermès.
**Lausanne** bei Hermès.
**Locarno** bei Fumagalli.
**Lugano** bei Fumagalli.
**Neuchâtel** bei Robert Tissot.
**Saint-Moritz** bei Casagrande.
**Saint-Moritz** bei Casagrande-Hermès.
**Zermatt** bei Hôtel Mont-Cervin.
**Zürich** bei Au Panache.
**ÖSTERREICH.**
**Badgastein** bei Wally's Moden.
**Graz** bei Prokop.
**Klagenfurt** bei Grüner.
**Linz** bei Resmann.
**Salzburg** bei Resmann, exclusivités Hermès.
**Wien** bei Adlmüller.


*Cravate "Zèbres". Bel Ami d'Hermès, eau de toilette. Sac "Constance" en crocodile. Chaussure "Cindy". Assiette plate "Pivoines" camaïeu de bleus. Sac "Kelly Sport" en crocodile, cadenas "Éléphant". Sac "Palm Tree", collection "Sacs à Malices" en box et lézard vert. Agendas différents modèles en lézard. Ceinture "Étrier" en crocodile. Bracelet or "Ascot". Sac "Trim" en doblis. Agenda "Adaptable" en box. Carré "Brazil". Sac "Mini-Constance" en box. Sac "Mini-Market" en doblis. Montre dame "Clipper". Montre dame "Kelly" plaqué or, Bracelet or "Chaîne d'Ancre Tressée".*

Few brands operate at a scale like Hermès, yet still manage to retain such a sense of discreet luxury. Despite over 300 stores worldwide, the 180-year-old house continues to whisper, rather than shout, with an understated approach to both design and marketing. Its choices of designers since the late 1990s have only reinforced that, with the famously reticent Martin Margiela designing womenswear, followed by the equally reserved Christophe Lemaire and Nadège Vanhee-Cybulski since then. (Jean Paul Gaultier's reign being the exception that proves the rule.)

This discretion is almost paradoxically accompanied by the house's instantly recognizable design signifiers: the bold orange packaging, the collier de chien buckle fastening (a feature of the handbag carried and named after the late Grace Kelly), horse-bit prints and silk carré scarves. If these motifs are now seen as indissociable from the brand's core identity, it is thanks to the campaigns created for the house by ad agency Eldorado, now known as Publicis EtNous, since the 1970s.

Founded by Françoise Aron, Pacha Bensimon and Bruno Suter in 1976, Eldorado took a bold approach to its work with Hermès, helped by the free hand they were given by the house's chairman Jean-Louis Dumas[1]. Working in tandem, he set about transforming the family-run house's commercial and financial strategy, while the trio's communications work successfully reinvigorated its fusty image with a new sense of dynamism.

Much of this exuberance was supplied by photographer Bill King, whose high-energy images of the supermodel era were regular features of *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue* in the mid-1980s, until his death from AIDS in 1987. Aron, Bensimon and Suter were among the first to commission King in Europe, and the work they did together – showcased on the following pages – brought they all brought new joie de vivre to Hermès, while introducing it to a new, younger audience. *System* met the Eldorado three, to discuss the importance of being trusted by your boss and having confidence in your photographers, and the changes in marketing luxury brands since the 1970s.

**Tell me how you all met.**

**Françoise Aron:** We met at Publicis, where I was working as an account manager, and Pacha was the creative on all the campaigns. Bruno joined us two or three years later.

**Bruno Suter:** After two years, we worked a lot together, then Françoise and I decided to set up our own agency, so we did. Then we said to ourselves we need someone else, and that was when Pacha joined us. That's a quick version of the story.

**Pacha Bensimon:** That was in… 1976. It was kind of exceptional because we felt this strength together, and we knew it was the beginning of an agency: Eldorado… in the depths of Neuilly-sur-Seine!

**And you didn't have the Hermès account at this stage?**

**Françoise:** No, not then. We didn't have anything with Hermès. Jean-Louis Dumas had been aware of what Eldorado was doing, and we knew each other as we were former schoolmates. So when his father died, and he became chairman at Hermès, he called and said, 'I'd like you do something for us. We don't have much money, but would that interest you?' We weren't going to say no! Jean-Louis had total confidence in us, and with that confidence came a freedom to do exactly what we wanted.

**Pacha:** There were no briefs, just, 'OK, so we'll do an image with Hermès shoes…'

**Françoise:** When shoes were zero percent of the turnover. But we all agreed that with an image of shoes… well, you can say everything about Hermès with shoes: the shoes with the squared-off toe, the shoes in green ostrich skin, the two-tone shoes. We took all of those and worked with them.

**Was that the first campaign?**

**Françoise:** No, the first campaign was the girl in denim. It's very important. That one, we did in 1978.

**Pacha:** What started our way of thinking, and how we worked was when someone at Hermès said to us, 'Just don't talk about the scarf; it's the least fashionable thing on earth!' So that's exactly what we did. Which of course boosted the scarves like nothing before. We knew we wouldn't change the products, they were then what they are today: the scarves, the Birkins[3], the Kelly bags, the gold chains. What we wanted to do was change the impression people had of this institution, so, we said, 'Right, what we have to do is change the way people view Hermès'.

**Françoise:** This was the first time that advertising clashed, or I suppose, was considered, with everything else. No luxury brands were really considering advertising and marketing at this time.

**That's what I thought – luxury brands weren't actually advertising then. Not in the way they do now. It was considered vulgar.**

**Françoise:** Even Jean-Louis was reticent, but he had this incredible instinct for his house. That was why he had complete confidence in us. So we worked beyond the standard codes, and we started with objects; we showed luxury products in a way no one had thought of doing before.

**Where did the idea of wrapping up come from?**

**Bruno:** That was me. When I saw those things, the boxes… all so wrapped up, with the ribbons. I had that in mind. That was my guide, that being the signature and all that. They even did a Hermès scarf with the ribbon after that. It was orange with the ribbon above it, over a box. Sorry for showing off a little bit, but that was my idea. I was quite obsessed with it. It was funny.

**Françoise:** Bruno was amazing with his Swiss, mountain-minded instinct, because he completely grasped that the wrapping and boxes were vehicles for fabulous advertising.

**And so that was a huge success.**

**Pacha:** Huge, with the sales figures, too. Sales of the scarves skyrocketed the following Christmas. The demand for those silk carrés was enormous. At one point, we did have to bring in the clothes. No one chose for us though.

**Françoise:** The brief was like, 'What about the clothes?' The denim had just been an accompaniment to the scarf. But then – and this seems amazing today – as Bruno said with the ribbon design, we had some influence on the products. Jean-Louis said one day, 'We're launching a new bag. It would be good if you could do something for it'. It was in burgundy though, so I said to Jean-Louis: 'Sure, no problem, but not in burgundy! We want something amazing, real colours.'

**Pacha:** So, he made it in green, and then that led to a whole load of other small leather goods. We then said, 'OK, you should do it in crocodile'. After one advert, they sold 17 bags.

**At €50,000 a time just for one handbag... Who was the stylist working on those campaigns?**

**Pacha:** There wasn't one. It was just us and [photographer] Daniel Aron[2]. We chose the scarves we wanted to work with. I remember doing the styling for an image we did in Venice. Our girl didn't have any clothes, so we used the dressing gown from the hotel. People wouldn't believe it – these days you do a shoot with an entourage of 30 people. There was so much fog, we were worried about getting lost. There wasn't a make-up artist either – nothing, and no retouching!

**Françoise:** We always chose the emblematic garments, clothes inspired by the scarves, for the campaigns. To change the point of view we used girls who became top models: Estelle Lefébure[4], Cindy Crawford, Paulina Porizkova… it was uplifting.

**Who chose Bill King to photograph them?**

**Bruno:** I found him. I thought he was interesting because he brought something new; there was a freshness and gaiety in his pictures. I wanted him to do Bill King; we had to let him do his thing. When we started working in fashion it was important to escape a little bit, and at the same time there were new designers at Hermès, so it was pretty new back then.

**Pacha:** Bill liked the idea of the brand, and he came to Paris to do the campaigns for a now defunct brand, Harriet Hubbard Ayer[5]. Then, when we started doing the ads for clothes at Hermès, we thought of Bill again. The first campaign we did with him was in New York. So, we stuffed our suitcases full of Hermès, because our idea was to do a sort of over-representation. We decided to play with the idea of accumulation – outrageousness – so belts, boots… This was obviously the 1980s.

**…a time of excess. How many of you went to New York?**

**Bruno:** Oh là là, only two! We went on our own; sometimes it was only me who went. Just me and a suitcase. Bill would organize the stylists and all that. But for big things I would go with a stylist who was often Melka Tréanton[6], sometimes Carlyne Cerf de Dudzeele[7] – I can't really recall who worked on what when. The make-up and hair were all there.

**Was it Bill who did the casting?**

**Françoise:** Yes, it was Bill. He found Estelle, Cindy, and all the others. We didn't even see their comp cards. He'd

## 'Someone at Hermès said to us, 'Just don't talk about the scarf; it's the least fashionable thing on earth!' So that's exactly what we did.'

## 'No luxury brands were really considering advertising at this time. We showed luxury products in a way no one had thought of doing before.'

just say we've got so and so.
**Bruno:** Cindy was already well-known. But she was paid normally then; she wasn't a star.

**How did Bill make the girls move? Was there music?**
**Bruno:** Oh no, there was nothing at all. It was calm, and when you went in, there was a large panel, and everything was so clean.

**So how did he transmit that dynamism to the models?**
**Bruno:** I think it's because he was the quickest guy I knew; the flashes were continuous; he just shot photo after photo. He got them moving with very little, but the models knew exactly what he wanted. There were never any static photos. Everyone got moving, even

**'It was like a photo factory, Bill King shot non-stop like a crazy person. I think he was the quickest guy I knew; the flashes were continuous.'**

the assistants, and it was like everything was on wheels, like a photo factory, it was crazy. He shot non-stop, like a crazy person.

**When you look at the images you get the impression that the people are just about to fall, it's pretty amazing.**
**Bruno:** Yes exactly, he always caught the perfect moment, and I think he knew when that right moment was. Well, the proof is there with everything he did; it's sublime. I don't know who this was for, maybe *Harper's Bazaar*, but there was a shoot with a baby who was maybe six months old, and the expression on the baby's face is quite exceptional. And that's what made him one of the greatest photographers. Also, what was also exceptional for the time was the selection process. The photos still had to be developed back then, so Bill would take the photos, then they'd be taken by a courier to be developed. The edit was made with him while I was there – we all worked so closely together. I have to tell you about the way Bill chose the photos. All the photos would be spread out over a table and within one minute he would have made his choice with a cross on what he wanted. It was concrete in an instant. It was so professional; it was incredible.

**Did Bill King have much of a reputation in Europe at the time? It's funny that there are no books on him, no exhibitions, nothing.**
**Bruno:** That's amazing because he was working for the biggest magazines in the world at the time, *Harper's Bazaar* and so on. He was known for that; that was how I discovered him. At the time, it really was him and Avedon, they were the two who really counted. Bill was doing his thing with white backgrounds.

**He's probably the biggest photographer who used white backgrounds.**
**Bruno:** Of course, and using so little, there was absolutely nothing else. Some photographers take hours to set-up, but with Bill, once the people were made up, we'd start shooting. Working with him was incredibly simple. He was absolutely incredible in terms of speed. When we were preparing the photos, between the models and all that, it was so easy. There were never any problems.
**Françoise:** He had a formula; the same way of working each time. With him, people really let go, and became joyous and free. He had an incredible joie de vivre. He was very elegant too, always in jeans with a polo shirt and loafers, and a crocodile-skin belt.

**And Jean-Louis in all this, when you told him you were going to shoot with Bill King because he's upbeat and fun, what did he think?**
**Françoise:** He trusted us, so we had meetings with him, but they weren't briefs. He had a way of talking to us that wasn't like a brief at all. We'd talk about so many things, so many digressions, talking about people we'd met, etc.
**Bruno:** We could never have done it, the agency, without Jean-Louis Dumas. There was no one contradicting us, and when Jean-Louis said yes, it was good. It was so simple. I just can't tell you how simple it was.
**Pacha:** We started working with Hermès just as it was being reborn with Jean-Louis, and we saw things as he did. He was fresh, innocent, clever and kind. That whimsical aspect of Hermès, that was what we knew him for. That cheeky side, that was him and that was what we translated – that sort of innocent joyousness and daring. One day they launched an orange-coloured leather and we said, 'Great, let's do an advert'. So we did. Spontaneously, just like that.
**Françoise:** We never struggled; never showed any mock-ups or sketches. We retained the spontaneity with a serious dose of improvisation. We didn't get anything validated.

**When the photos were done and you made your choice, one image per advert with the text, Jean Louis would just look at it and say, 'Yes, great thank you'.**





**Pacha:** Yes, that's exactly how it was.

**When you think about the last 40 years, how much has changed? I'm not talking about the project briefs or conditions, but how has your take on the house evolved? When you think of Hermès, do you still think of Jean-Louis?**
**Pacha:** We think about Jean-Louis. He is very present in our minds, and we still say, 'Oh yes, he'd like that' or perhaps wouldn't. We're both very critical of our own work though. We get called the 'Tatas Flingueuses' – Axel [Dumas, Jean-Louis Dumas's nephew, who took over as chief executive in 2011] calls us that. I think it's quite chic.

**It's untranslatable in English.**
**Pacha:** It's because we say what we think. Well, we say what we think, but we're a bit more delicate now. We wear gloves more often – fur-lined gloves from Hermès!

**Unlike most luxury brands, Hermès works with this idea of the committee, with always at least 15 people around the table. Does there have to be consensus?**
**Pacha:** When we did all those campaigns, Hermès was a company of 7,000 people. Today, there are 12,000… Before, we used to choose things from the catwalk shows, and we'd say that's nice or that could be a good theme. To be honest, now, if we want to change a product it's certainly not as easy as before.
**Françoise:** The girls in denim, which everyone still talks about, we probably couldn't do that today. Now, when you take an item of clothing, you're almost obliged to take the whole look number 15 from the show, and with that look comes the shoes, the bracelets. What we always did was mix up the pieces. That's where the girl in denim comes from.

**Has your perception of the luxury market changed?**
**Pacha:** Luxury used to be little artisanal companies just like Hermès, and now they are all multinationals backed by huge financial groups. That is what's changed. When we did those early campaigns, there was the house of Chanel, which hadn't taken off really, and Dior – they were little French houses, and now they are vast multinationals. That's what upset everything.

**Was choosing to work with an American photographer ever an issue? Because there were some good photographers in France in the early days, and it was a French fashion house… but you chose Bill King.**
**Françoise:** We did a campaign with Avedon, too, six months before he died. He was amazing. I remember, he was so excited about a shot. He was so young, nothing was fast enough. He was so overexcited with the girls; I couldn't believe my eyes. But, no, going back to working with American photographers, that wasn't an issue. Jean-Louis had exceptional taste, and geography didn't have anything to do with that.
**Françoise:** …and Bill's work was so optimistic, so fresh.

1. Jean-Louis Dumas-Hermès was the great-great-grandson of Hermès' founder Thierry Hermès. Born in 1938, he began working at the house in 1964, becoming chairman in 1978 after his father's death. He immediately began moulding Hermès to his vision: less old-fashioned, more globally minded. From 1993, when he took the company public and his retirement in 2006, revenue quadrupled and net profit rose tenfold. Yet, when once asked what exactly his financial strategy was, he replied: 'That my grandchildren are proud of me'. Dumas-Hermès died on May 1, 2010, in Paris.

2. Daniel Aron is a French photographer living in Tangiers and Paris.

3. One day in 1983, Jean-Louis Dumas-Hermès was sat next to Jane Birkin on a flight between Paris and London. Birkin dropped the contents of her bag and began to complain that no bag had enough pockets for her stuff. Dumas-Hermès helped her collect the contents, introduced himself, and promised to help her create the bag of her dreams. The result was the oversized and ever-popular Birkin handbag.

4. Estelle Lefébure is a French model, perhaps better known as Estelle Hallyday after her marriage to David, the son of French singing legend Johnny Hallyday. Estelle was the face of Thierry Mugler's first perfume, Angel.

5. Harriet Hubbard Ayer founded the Récamier Manufacturing Company in 1886 to market her Récamier Cream for the Complexion. The business was a success, but Hubbard Ayer's taste in men wasn't. Her business partner tried to steal Récamier by arranging to have her killed while she was travelling in Europe. When she returned unharmed to New York, she was forced to sue him to wrest back control. She won the case, but then he, with the help of her children and ex-husband, managed to have her committed to an insane asylum after she was 'diagnosed' with melancholia and an addiction to prescription opium. Upon her release 14 months later, she began a successful tour lecturing about the terrible conditions in asylums. In 1897, she became a highly paid beauty columnist at the *New York World* newspaper. Hubbard Ayer died in 1903 from flu, but the company bearing her name continued (her daughter had sold the rights). By the 1920s, Harriet Hubbard Ayer had expanded its product range to include beauty creams and make-up, and began opening abroad (for example, with a shop at 33 Boulevard Haussmann in Paris). In 1947, the company was bought by the US branch of Unilever. During the 1960s and 1970s, the French part of the company grew, while US operations tailed off. After being bought and sold a number of times, Harriet Hubbard Ayer ceased operations sometime in the 1990s. The French subsidiary was finally struck off the national registry of companies in 2013.

6. Melka Tréanton was a powerful stylist and magazine editor at *Elle* and *Depeche Mode*, who is credited with 'discovering' Thierry Mugler and Jean Paul Gaultier.

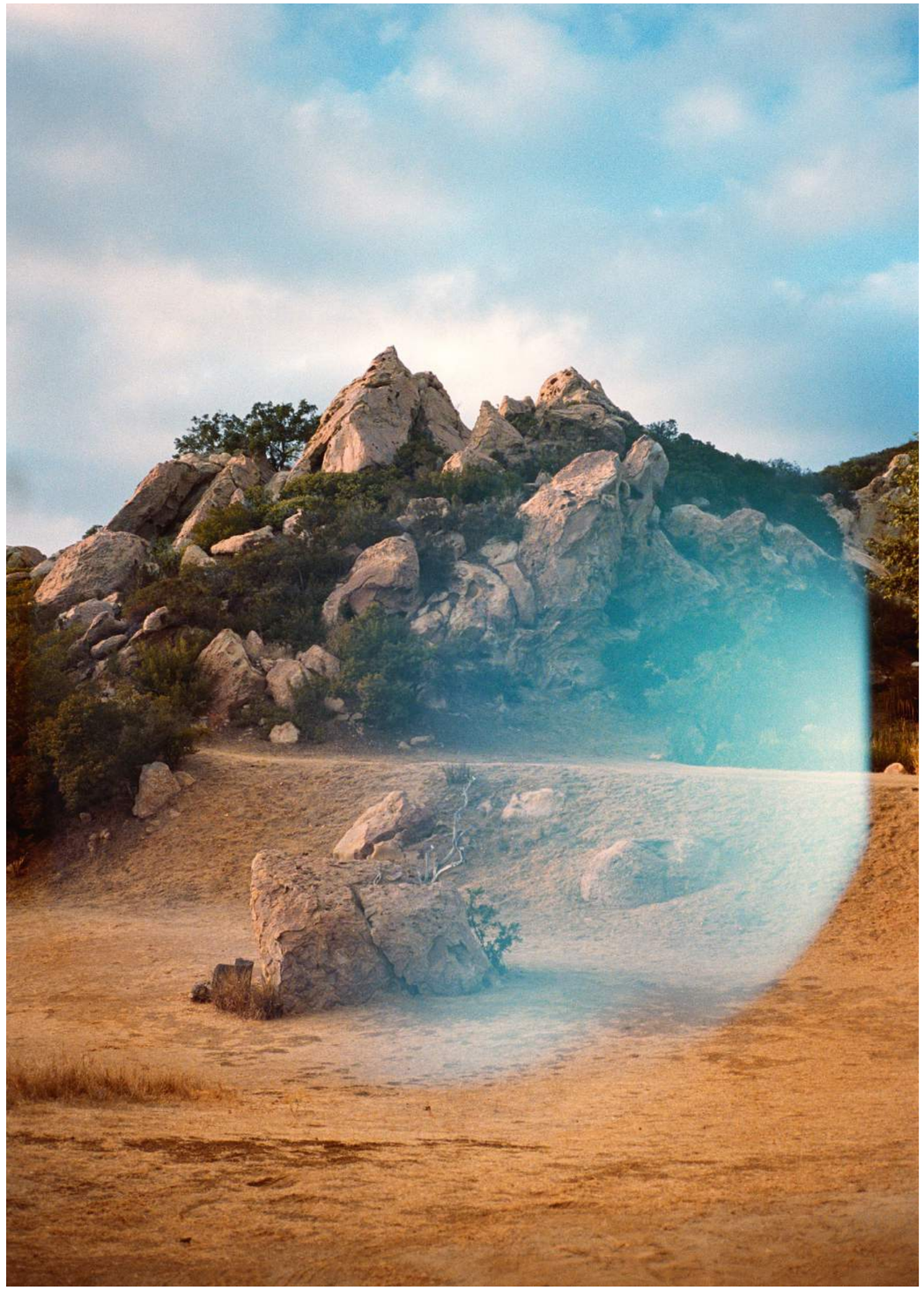
7. Powerhouse French stylist Carlyne Cerf de Dudzeele styled the cover of Anna Wintour's first issue of *Vogue* in 1988. She has frequently worked with the biggest names in fashion photography, particularly Steven Meisel, and collaborated closely with Gianni Versace. In 2013, when asked by the *New York Times* about her starry reputation, she replied, simply: 'I am a legend.'

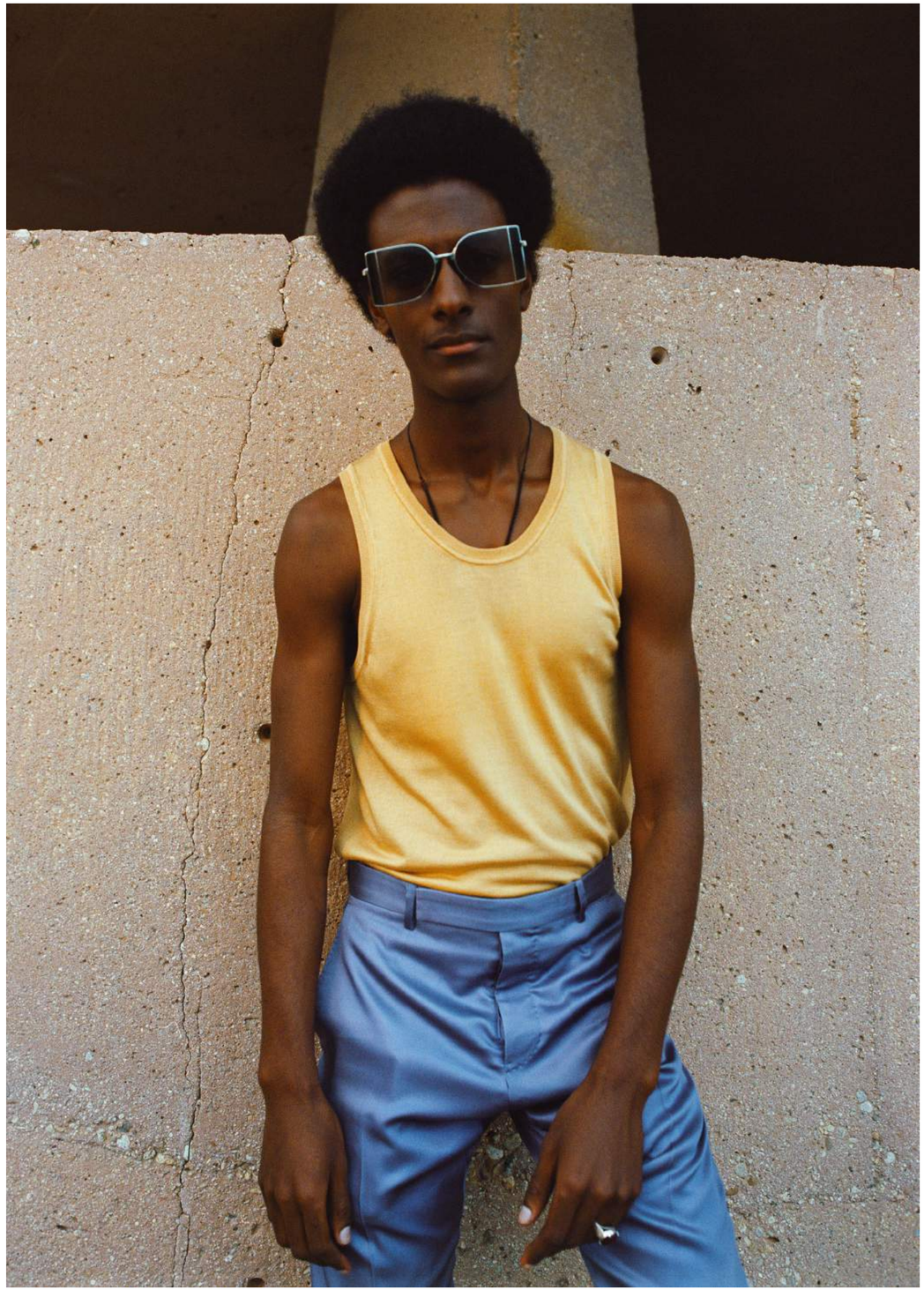
# ‘It’s something other than a perfectly ironed suit.’

## Haider Ackermann and the nonchalant transformation of the house of Berluti.

Interview by Farid Chenoune
Photographs by Dexter Navy
Styling by Haider Ackermann







All clothes: Berluti Spring/Summer 2018.

Photography assistants: Jonathan Folds and Thomas Pat. Film assistant: Diego Andrade. Models: Kalib Tarik at Wilhelmina, Getty, Hanoak, Meron Amahayes, Nate Bekele, Nate Selassie, Sesen Debesai, Rebecca Amahayes. Hair: Johnnie Sapong at The Wall Group using Leonor Greyl. Hair assistant: Drew Howard. Make-up: John McKay at Frank Reps using CHANEL Travel Diary and CHANEL Le Lift Skin-Recovery Sleep Mask. Make-up assistant: Heather Polaski. Set design: Victor Capoccia. Fashion assistant: Chanel Gibbons. Tailor: Susie Kourinian. Production: Edward Brachfeld, Margot Fodor, Mark Hobson, Eric Wilcox at Brachfeld. Catering: Lee Seligman at Kitchen Mouse. Lighting: Vividkid.

Since 2016, Haider Ackermann has been in charge of Berluti's steady transformation. As the French luxury house's creative director, he has been bringing his eye – trained as much by the landscapes, deserts and foreign cities of his nomadic childhood as the rigour of his training at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp – to the move from single-product specialist (beautiful, handmade men's footwear) to complete fashion brand (men's ready-to-wear, leather goods and eyewear).

Born in 1971, Ackermann set up his own label in 2004, and since then has steadily built a unique vision of contemporary womenswear: luxuriously colourful, beautiful fabrics transformed by sensual draping, wrapping and gentle, yet precise tailoring. (It's been called an underground vision of new

# 'There was never a eureka moment – because I didn't know about fashion. I didn't know what it was because we were in these faraway countries.'

female dandyism.) Yet, it wasn't until Spring-Summer 2014 that the designer first attempted menswear. The discreet collection was spotted by Antoine Arnault, Berluti's CEO, and two years later, he asked Ackermann to replace Alessandro Sartori.

At Berluti's studios on Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré in Paris, Ackermann took time out from preparing his third season to talk to *System* about growing up barefoot, the art of shoemaking, and the real Berluti man.

**Farid Chenoune: I'm going to put my raincoat, bag, phone, and Dictaphone on the table here. I hope you don't mind the clutter. How do you feel about disorder in general?**

**Haider Ackermann:** I like organized chaos. With me, there's always something organized in the chaos. It's controlled, so it doesn't bother me.

**There has to be logic in the disorder?**
Do you find that strange?

**No, I don't think it's strange, it's always interesting when you're a designer or an artist. When you say you like organized chaos, is it only you who can find yourself within it or is chaos…**
It's chaos that is only understandable to me, apparently. In my office, however, all the books have to be perfect. That's my Germanic side, from my childhood, my father. I come from Nordic countries.

**You come from lots of countries! Your father was a mapmaker?**
He worked in photogrammetry.

**And what does that mean?**
Cartography, it's about land maps. Everything is linked, for my father everything was very rigid. Everything was very calculated.

**That opens lots of doors for us… I like the idea of what we owe our fathers; I like the idea that your father was in photogrammetry, and that it was about recognizing territories and I like this idea because the Earth is a surface, with its reliefs, undulating rhythms and a surface of inspiration for artists, materials…**
Necessary undulations.

**Yes, and it's interesting to have this very Germanic background, this working on lines, a geometric logic, angles, and his work was to map all those undulations. Did you know all of that when you were young?**
No, not really, because my father was always about to leave for somewhere; I wasn't very aware of that.

**So he was always on missions?**
He worked long days and then he worked late at home as well.

**A traveller and a worker. It's a question you cannot help but ask when you look at what you've been doing since…**
It was 2004, everyone gets the date wrong.

**Because you are clearly drawn to enveloping and enrobing, draping, and then on the other hand, perhaps this is the masculine side or something else altogether, you are calculating space, clothing space. This idea of geometry is stricter than your previous work, which was more velvety…**
Maybe before there was an idea of protection. Why were people from my youth enrobed in metres of fabric? It was to protect them from the wind, from the sun, the violence of the elements, and I think I was very used to that. And I was quite anxious and not very confident, and there was this sort of protection in enveloping women. Perhaps now I am more at ease within my profession; I've let things go and now there's a certain generosity through being stricter.

**I'd like to go back to your childhood, and your experience of the clothing that you wore or that the people around you wore…**
It was what I saw other people wearing.

# 'When I was 17, I'd left my parents' house to go and live in Amsterdam, and was part of a certain sort of life there. I lost myself in the night.'

When you live in Ethiopia, the women are enveloped in metres of fabric, in *boubou* dresses, kaftans. Then we were in Algeria and Iran, and there it was the chador, women were hidden. We could debate that forever, but it is a form of protection.

**Where were you in Algeria?**
Oran. Yes, and then also my parents would wrap us up in metres of fabric when we were walking in the streets and in the dunes. So, in fact, fabric and the movement of fabric was always there, always as a sort of protection. But there was always this movement, this draping, this enveloping.

**After you learned to sew, when did you first realize you wanted to do fashion?**
There wasn't ever that moment; it wasn't like a sudden click. It just became obvious; it was just a continuity of what I'd seen, what surrounded me. There was never a eureka moment, because I didn't know fashion, I didn't know what fashion was because we were in these faraway countries. I didn't know who Monsieur Saint Laurent was, who Madame Grès was or Vionnet. All those people…

**Your parents had no interest?**
Absolutely none at all. We were so far away from all of that, Ethiopia, Chad, Algeria…

**Your parents were like nomads?**
Oh yes, my father was nomadic and my mother followed him. They were very drawn to all those countries, and fashion was simply nothing to do with us. The only thing that drew me to it as a child was all those metres of fabrics rippling in the wind. And even then, it was the beauty of what I saw – my brother and sister have no memories of that at all.

**It's already not bad going, having one Haider in a family!**
Yes, well, fashion wasn't really something that I knew at all, but I did know fabrics.

**How old were you when you arrived in Europe?**
I was 12 when we arrived in the Netherlands. Later, when I studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp, it was so violent because I was from a world where the aesthetic was so colourful and rich. Antwerp was just the complete opposite of everything I'd known. I admired what Monsieur Lacroix did, and felt close to him and it most resembled my world, but the Belgian aesthetic was violent. Yet it really helped set me up, too.

**So that was a vocabulary that you learned slowly…**
I learned it slowly, but it made me question myself instantly. It was something in relation to Belgium that was very down to earth…

**Not the same earth, but the same relationship?**
It was the same relationship and this attraction to extremes, to everything I knew, really touched me. And then I really got into Arte Povera, all the things that were so far from what I knew, but at the same time close to the countries where we had lived in a house made of stone, and so on. When I met the Belgians, and got into Arte Povera, it was all about purity, nobility, the materials.

**How old were you when you started studying in Antwerp?**
I think I was 19.

**Did you do the whole course?**
No, they kicked me out. I was there for three years.

**It took them three years to kick you out?**
Yes.

**That's a long time.**
Yes, but they were right. I was always rather untamed. And I was only disciplined when I thought it was the right time to show things. I wasn't a very disciplined student.

**You weren't in tune with the school's agenda?**
Exactly.

**How did you get expelled?**
Every year I passed by a miracle because I didn't always finish the work, but there was enough work that they found beautiful to pass me. There was nothing lazy about it; it was just that I wasn't ready to show my work. I had my own idea of when it would be ready. I was a bit untamed.

**So when you left school, that was when you started working with designers?**

No, no, I lost myself in the night. When I was 17, I'd left my parents' house to go and live in Amsterdam, and was part of a certain sort of life there. I observed a lot and had come from a background that was so far from everything I saw happening in Amsterdam, which I found pretty shocking.

**What was shocking?**
I lived in a neighbourhood where there were prostitutes, and drugs, so it was pretty hardcore for me. I'd come from the depths of Holland where I'd been very protected and in quite a bourgeois situation. So I was confronted and intrigued by all of that. When I left the academy in Belgium, I wanted to explore the nightlife there and go off in every direction. Maybe I needed that to find myself again.

**When you say you lost yourself in the night, do you mean literally, like you became a night owl? Were you drifting?**
And also debauched, everything. After the academy in Antwerp, maybe I needed that to understand and to discover, because my childhood had been so far away from all of that. I didn't see any of that in childhood, so I think perhaps there was a curiosity.

**How did you earn a living at that time?**
I worked; I had four jobs. I worked in nightclubs, in restaurants, I did everything. I wanted to be autonomous from the age of 17. Being supported by my parents was out of the question; my ego would never have allowed it. I was very responsible even aged 17, very autonomous. I don't like being told off for anything, so this way if I made a mistake it was my responsibility. I wanted to pay all my own studies. I wanted to go to that academy, when my parents wanted me to stay and go to an academy in our home town. I chose elsewhere, so I assumed my choice and I paid my way.

**Are you still in touch with your parents?**
Very much so. For them, I was a little boy who dreamed a lot, who was quite absent. So it was hard for them to follow what was going on. I have a very introspective side; I'm very much in my own world. Having travelled to all those other countries where I didn't always speak the language, you end up isolating yourself a bit – you create your own world. So there is something quite inward-looking about me. I was in my dreams and for my parents it wasn't always easy to keep up. I knew that was how I was, so it was up to me to assume it.

**You were doing lots of little jobs for a couple of years, did you also work in fashion at all then?**
I was drawing every day.

**You drew clothes.**
Yes. I couldn't see a film, read a book, listen to music without drawing. In sketch books, but it was pretty organized.

**So, there was no breaking away or abandoning of fashion, it was always there.**
Always. When I was younger I drew all the time. Now it happens more through words. Now things have to be explained; I didn't need to explain anything before. My drawings and my books could be carried in my dreams.

**You draw less now.**
Much, much less. It happens sometimes, but much, much less.

**When did that change?**
Maybe five or six years ago.

**When you start a collection, do you still start with drawings?**
No. I start with music. Perhaps it's a sort of egocentricity, but often the collections reflect what I was feeling at the time, they all reflect something that I have felt. Music is the best expression for me to get into that mood. Often lyrics or melodies carry me away and express where I want to go. A reflection of my personal life, which has calmed down a lot. For the collections, I like telling stories, which probably comes from my childhood. In the villages in Ethiopia and Chad, there was always a storyteller, men who would tell stories. So when I think about a runway show, it always comes from telling a story, the clothes all come out of that story. And my mother read a lot. So, we would read in turn to her in the kitchen while she cooked. As we were always abroad, so as not to forget French, she'd wanted us to keep that link. It was very important to her.

**And your father spoke to you in German?**
No, in French.

**Of course, your father is Alsatian, and your mother as well?**
No, she comes from Toulon.

## 'In villages in Ethiopia and Chad, there was always a traditional storyteller. Today, the clothes in my runway shows always come out of a story.'





**You had a wonderful childhood, I think…**
Well, it was certainly rich. When you're a child and you move every two years, change countries and lose your references each time, perhaps it isn't so easy at the time. But after my teenage years, I realized it was extraordinarily rich. I have amazing memories; I've seen things that no one else has seen. I'm very aware now of how wonderful it is.

**Especially with a job like your father's where it was all outside.**
It was all outside.

**Not in an administration office.**
We were always outside. Always outside.

**As a child in Africa, were you walking barefoot, which was obviously quite common?**
Of course, we ran around a lot with bare feet.

**That's interesting, given that you now work at Berluti. Luckily, they didn't ask for the CV of your feet!**
Luckily, yes. But that said, shoes were always foreign to me; they were something I didn't really pay much attention to. What's strange is that things that are foreign, you can actually appropriate quite easily.

**Because you have no experience of it, either negative or positive.**
You can appropriate the unknown more easily. It's very beautiful.

**Can we talk about Berluti now? You're working on the third collection. Could you explain to me a little about the project? How do you use this vocabulary to create something? Have you been surprised?**
Yes, of course, I come from womenswear. It was completely new, like the other side of a coin. Even if I had done some menswear, it was still very new to me. I was surprised and astonished, but that evokes even more curiosity, there was something incomprehensible for me. And maybe people thought I would take a different path, but the thing that upsets or destabilises me actually draws me towards it.

**What did LVMH see in you to offer you this job?**
I don't think I am the right person to answer that.

**OK. Why you then?**
Why me? I have often asked the question, but at the same time I don't really want to know. I don't like analysing things too deeply; I get worried I might get lost. There is a sort of freedom in the not knowing – and I am keen to maintain that freedom. If I analyse things too much or understand them too much, I might end up in a certain category where I didn't want to be. What I can tell you is that I was very surprised and at the same time incredibly proud to take this job, because there's a big challenge with this house and I don't think I was the most obvious choice. I think there were other, more legitimate options. But the fact that this house dared to make this choice and that we're looking at the same path, well, I find that very courageous. And I want to make them proud and prove them right for having made that choice.

**You have already done masculine collections, but how are you learning and what is Berluti teaching you?**
I am learning everything that was completely unknown to me in the sense of the artisanal. Like the way the house works with shoes. Doing shoes is a very different architecture to being a fashion designer. It's another profession, one I'm not trained in. I had done shoes, but to have really beautiful shoes, it is a whole other job, another architecture that was completely incomprehensible to me. Now, thanks to the team I have here, I am slowly learning how it functions.

**Are you also creative director for the Berluti shoes division?**
Yes, and I have an amazing person who works alongside me, who is instructing me. And that is what I love about being here, you feel really alive, in spite of the fatigue, it's a lot of work. But there is something that's very renewing, because you're always in a state of apprenticeship. And I think that is what makes us happiest, the most alive.

**Menswear is very much about tailoring, but have you worked much on what we call 'sleeved articles'?**
No, no, that's the whole point, all this architecture is new to me. And within this architecture, I try and find a sort of comfort. I imagine the Berluti man as another sort of nomad to the nomadic nature of my childhood. It's true that men today are always in airplanes, taxis, moving all over the place. So I want

## 'I was surprised, yet incredibly proud to take this job. The Berluti house is a huge challenge and I don't think I was the obvious choice for it.'

to have a clear sense of comfort, in the suit as well. In the work I am doing right now, which is interesting, I'm bringing that back to my life, keeping it easy.

**What about the draping that you did before?**
It's true that it is more rigid now and that is something new to me. We talk about centimetres and not millimetres with menswear. With me, it's about finding a certain attitude, it's not about embellishing men. There is nothing interesting in embellishing a man. What is interesting is the idea of giving him a certain style and attitude. So, it's more concentrated. It's good though.

**It's true that menswear moves very little compared to womenswear where traditionally, there's movement.**
certain designers who have that talent and I admire that wholeheartedly. But that's not me. It's more like I am writing a book and each season is a new chapter of that same book. My story carries on.

**So from collection to collection, it's a continuing portrait of a contemporary man, the Berluti man.**
A contemporary man.

**And is this very different to what you did for your own label?**
Mine is much more vagabond, more of a daydreamer, while the Berluti man is very anchored in life, he speeds through life. I think my man is what I am and the Berluti man is who I would like to be.

**Do you have a personal pantheon of people, real or otherwise, who are like**
and sophistication. Perhaps I interpret it differently. I don't know – I don't really like to compare myself to what was going on before.

**Yesterday I was looking at the tuxedos from your latest Haider Ackermann brand collection, I think, and they had these lighting details, like cracks…**
There's a Leonard Cohen song that I like a lot that says, 'There is a crack in everything / That's how the light gets in…' I always found that very beautiful. Have you ever been to a Leonard Cohen concert?

**No, I've never been, but I like his work a lot. The way the suit has been almost hit by lightning or by an earthquake, I found that very beautiful.**
There was something more tortured

**'The Haider Ackermann man is a vagabond and daydreamer — he is what I am. The Berluti man speeds through life, and is what I would like to be.'**

I like to talk to my team about a man, where he comes from. The first collection for Berluti was about a man who I wanted to have a sort of, not complete nonchalance, but for whom a cashmere jacket isn't his most precious possession. He gets up at 5am and we don't know where he spent the night. In the morning, he puts on his sweatpants and his cashmere sweater and he leaves. I like the fact he is almost unknown, indescribable and mysterious. There is this mix of materials to give him something other a perfectly ironed suit.

**So, no masculine codification. How does it change from one season to the next?**
Nothing changes. It is a continuity. There are designers who renew everything season after season. There are

**your ghosts? Your muses?**
None, that doesn't interest me at all. I am drawn to so many different things; it could be a man I see at a concert with a velvet jacket, the baker on the corner of the street who wears his apron. It is a mix of all that.

**There has never been an embodiment of all that?**
No, never. I can be attracted to a gesture as much as by the guy on the street corner. It comes from everywhere, the way someone wears their shoes or bag…

**From a fabric point of view, have you introduced new materials? Do you work differently from how it was before?**
Berluti was very much about beautiful fabrics; there is a huge amount of taste
about it, but I was in the middle of a breakup at the time.

**Is there also that at Berluti?**
No, it would be too...

**It's really signature Haider Ackermann.**
The Berluti man is much more timeless than mine. There's no reason why the Berluti man should be about trends and fashion, that would make him uninteresting. The beautiful materials and the savoir-faire we have here, I wouldn't want that man to stop wearing his blazer after two seasons; it would be silly.

**Your Berluti man is not about running after fashion or gimmicks and ending up a fashion victim, chasing an image?**
No, that's not interesting. With Berluti,
I want this man to strive for the essential. I want this man to have a wardrobe of basics made from beautiful fabrics. A cashmere gilet. I want them to be simple pieces that can carry over from one season to the next. So everyone can find their niche. I have tried to establish a team here with people who are all very different from each other. One is a punk covered in tattoos, another is a skateboarder, another is very classic. When I first entered this house, Antoine Arnault was surrounded by women and women were designing here, and I wanted the team to be more masculine. I want everyone to find their niche here; I want it to appeal to all sorts of men. And if we succeed with that, then we will have succeeded. It is harder to make beautiful simple clothes, without any ornamentation, to just focus on that simplicity.

**Is there a made-to-measure atelier?**
Yes, and we have made-to-measure shoes as well.

**Could the made-to-measure take inspiration from the collection?**
Over time maybe, but for now, I'm concentrating on the creation, what goes straight into the shops, the runway show, the image of the house.

**So as you were saying there's no incarnation, a Berluti gallery...**
No, but the house of Berluti has dressed some of the most interesting men in the world, whether it's Winston Churchill and Jean Cocteau or Monsieur Saint Laurent and the Duke of Windsor. Men who all had a slightly eccentric edge, and I would like to rediscover those men. In luxury, there has to be a bit of madness. I want to find that slight craziness again. In the past with menswear there was an incredible freedom, now everything is so much more codified. It's all managed and codified. When you look at what Cocteau wore, what David Bowie wore, there was no calculation; it was all an accident. Their style belonged to them. These days there's no room for accidents.

**What you're referring to is the difference between elegance and codes.**
Yes, when you travel in other countries, when you go to Bhutan and see that clash of fabrics they put together, there is nothing calculated about it, all those accidents result in the ultimate elegance. It's also an absolute freedom.

**Getting over this notion of codes that is so ingrained in contemporary fashion — you're setting yourself a titan's job!**
Not just in fashion, but the world in general. Everything that is politically correct.

**Does Berluti have brand codes?**
Yes, of course, it has codes. Patent leather is very much part of the house, and the colours, but that wasn't very foreign to me. The thing that lots of people talked to me about after the first collection was the colours that I brought to the house of Berluti, but it wasn't true. They were already there, I just brought them out again and played with the codes.

**In terms of your own brand, do you think you have codes and signatures that are instantly recognizable?**
It's very hard to analyse my own work. I don't want to lose the spontaneity, the lightness – no, not lightness because there is nothing light about what we do – but the freedom.

**You talked about accidents.**
Yes, that's what is most beautiful. There aren't any more today. No faults are allowed any more. Before, people had the time for accidents to happen. [Colleague comes in to end interview]

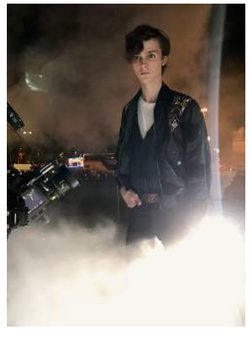
**OK, we can stop there, it's perfectly imperfect. Thank you.**

# Saint Laurent by Anthony Vaccarello Spring/ Summer 2018 September 26th, 2017

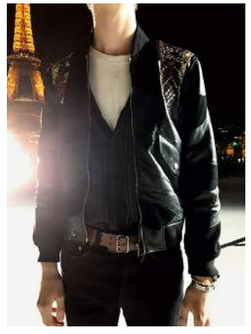
By Juergen Teller



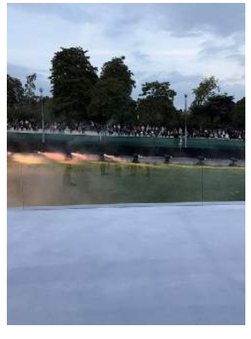


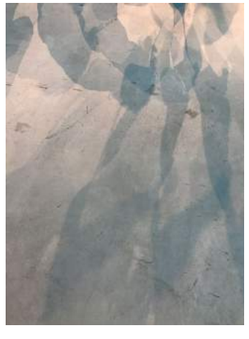








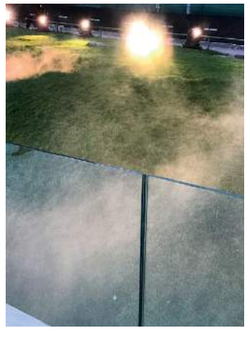
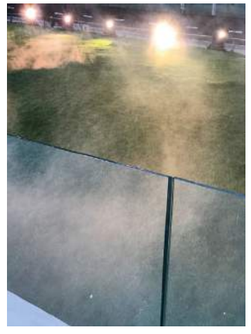


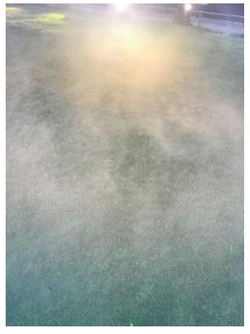
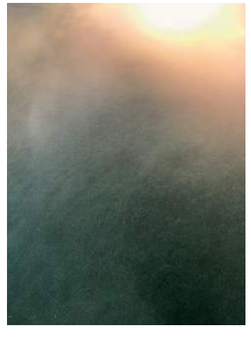


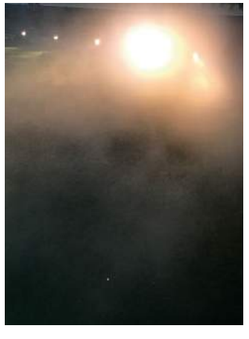
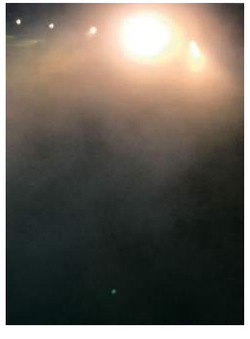




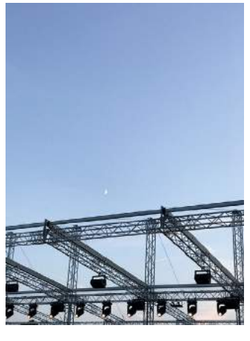






















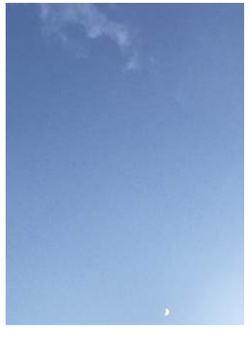
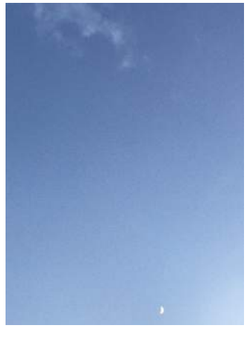


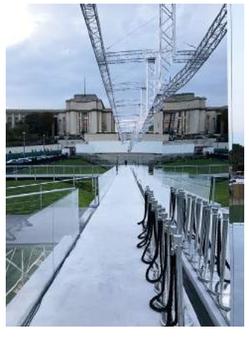


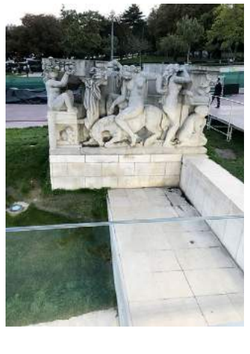






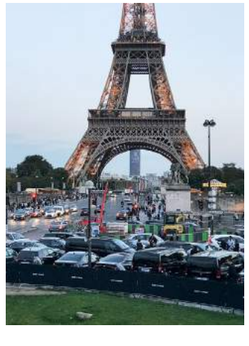
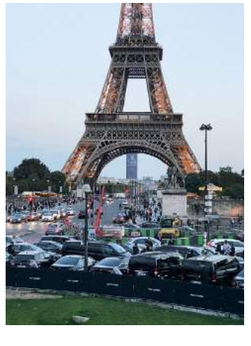












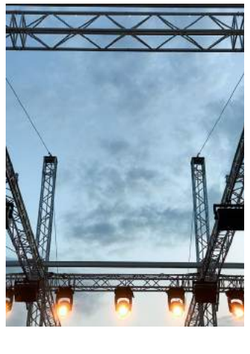





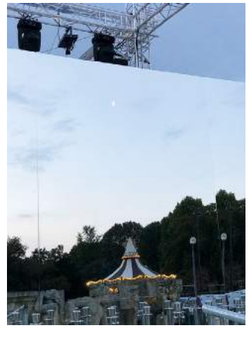






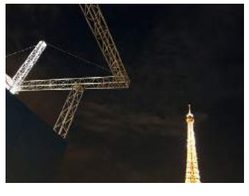
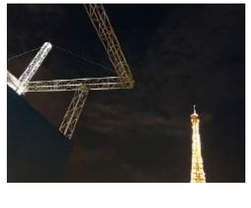
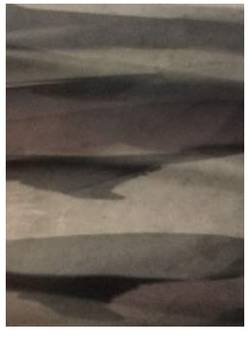


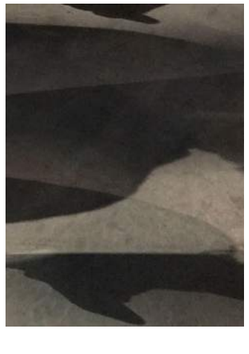
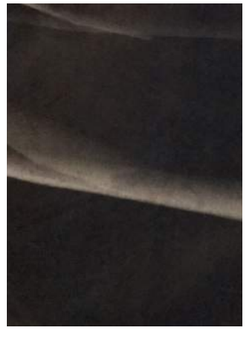


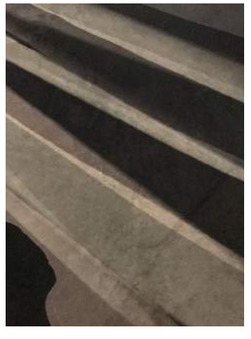







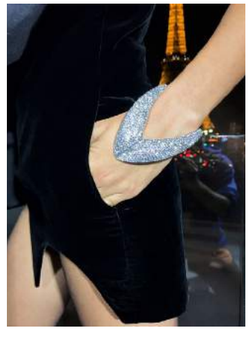




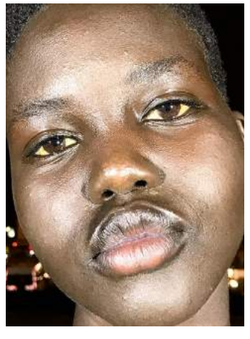


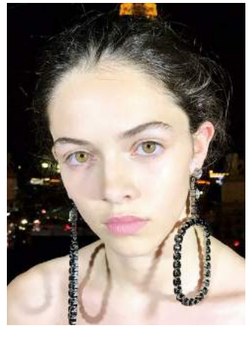


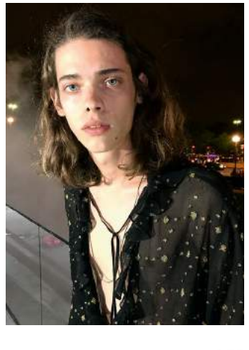




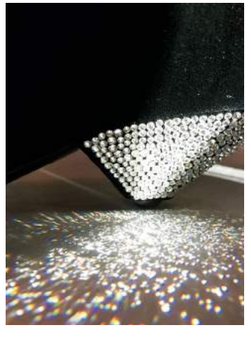
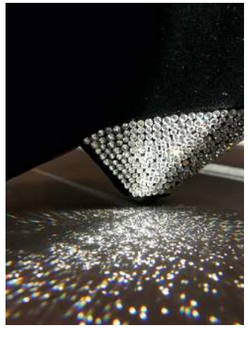


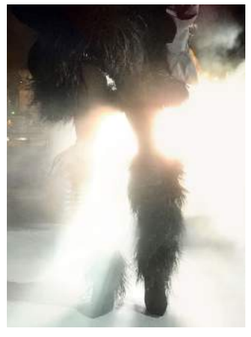



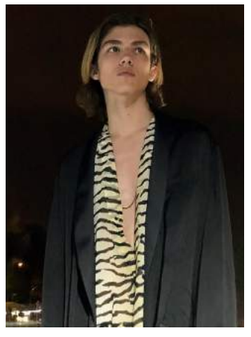




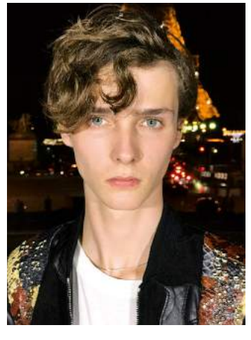
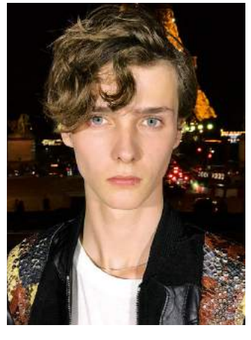


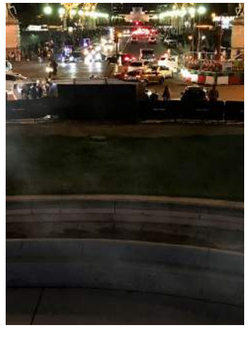
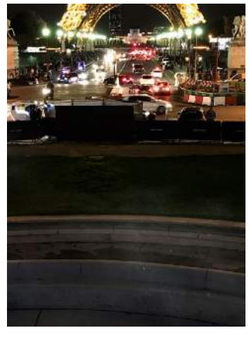















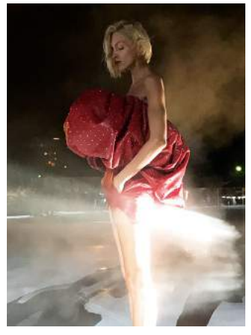






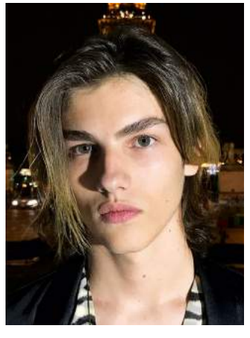






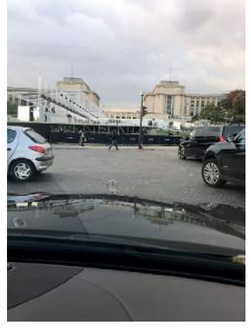


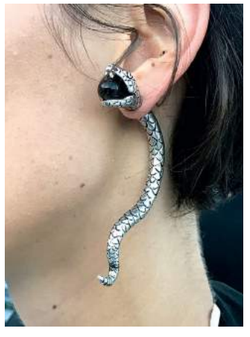



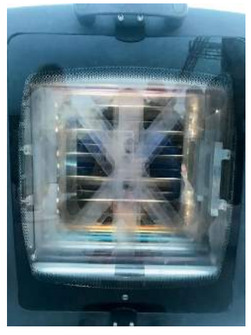








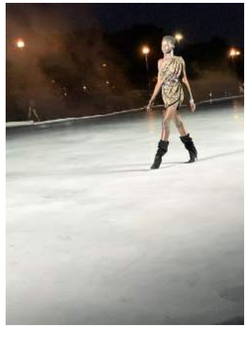


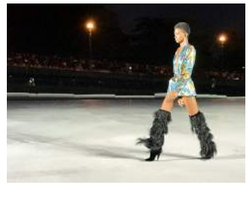
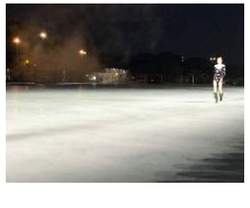
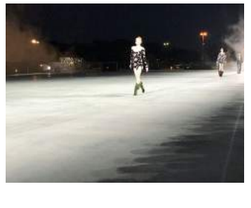
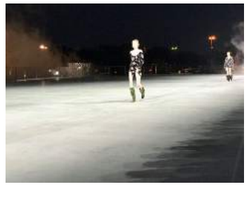
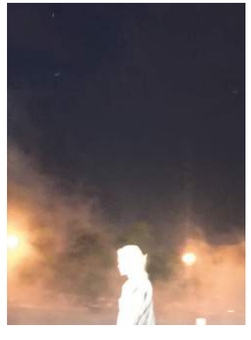
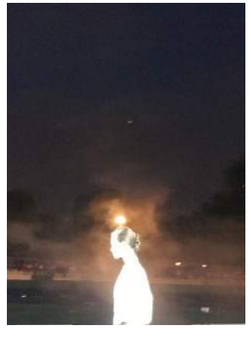
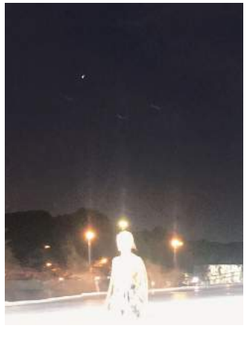




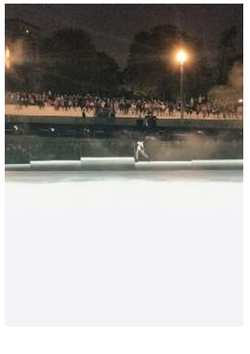


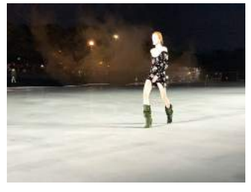


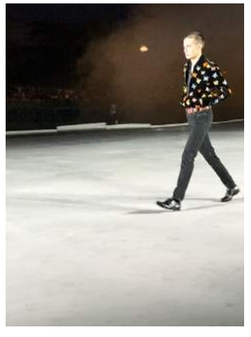



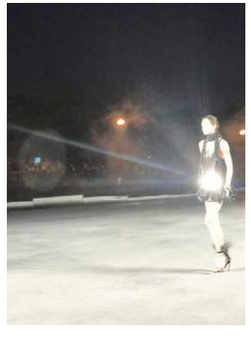








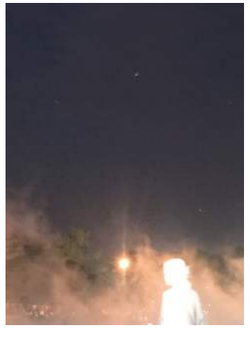
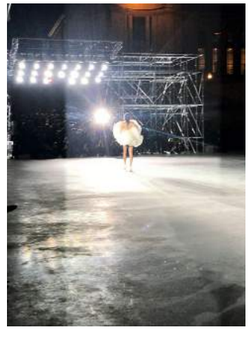
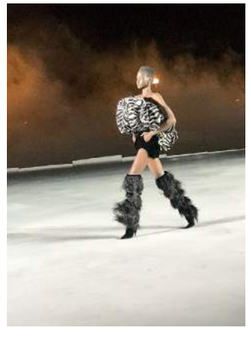
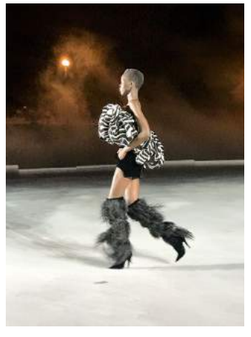




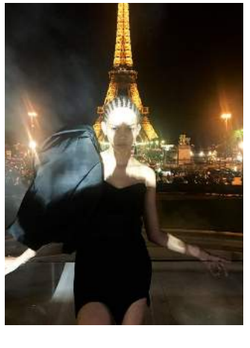
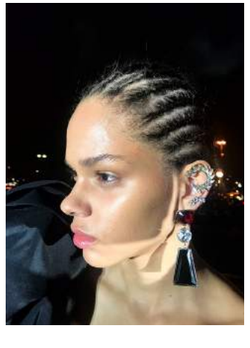






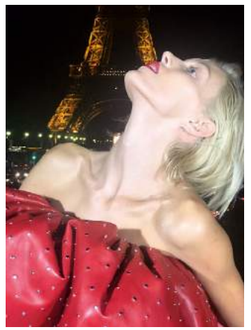
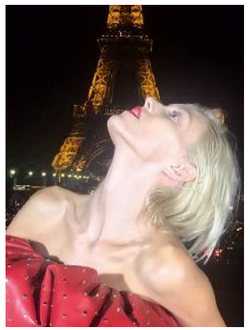






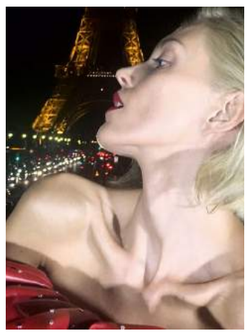
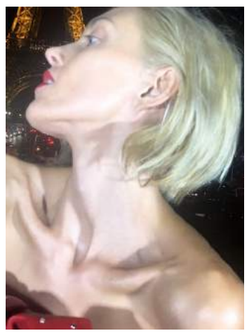
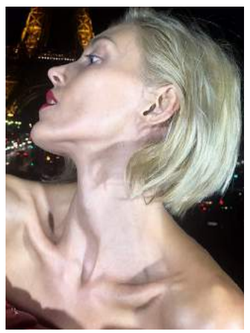


**Saint Laurent by Anthony Vaccarello**







Production: Joy Hart at JN Production. Post-production: Catalin Plesa at Quickfix Retouch. Special thanks: Philippe Contini, Anthony Vaccarello.

# The Scotsman in New York questionnaire: Jonathan Saunders

## By Loïc Prigent

**Which Scottish stereotype do you hear most often?**
We're alcoholics who don't spend money... not all wrong.

**Where do you live?**
South Williamsburg, Brooklyn, in a converted shoe-polish factory.

**Is the rent more extortionate in London or New York?**
Much more expensive in New York. The spaces in Brooklyn are incredible though, and the light is much better. We have an incredible view of the skyline.

**What polite New Yorker thing have you stolen from their etiquette?**
They always keep everyone informed. There is a lot of email correspondence, that's for sure. And people seem to love to share. I know everything about our neighbours and we have only been in this apartment for a few months. You wouldn't get that in London.

**What polite thing you usually do would you teach New Yorkers?**
No one puts a kiss at the end of a message. I think it's sweet. x

**What did Diane von Furstenberg first teach you about New York fashion?**
The customer comes first.

**What are three differences between the fashion industry in London and New York?**
1. There is a personal closeness that I find with London designers that I haven't seen (yet) in New York.
2. Marketing plays a much bigger role in New York than in London, probably due to the scale of the businesses.
3. The creative process feels similar. I research in the same way, sketch, drape. But time is more limited, although this could be more to do with my role here. There is no shortage of sources of inspiration though, which is great.

**How do you hail taxis?**
Not very well. I must have one of those faces. It's always a struggle to get one.

**Are you a 'taxi talker' or an 'eyes-down-and-on-Instagram' kind of guy?**
I send emails until I get car sick. Sometimes it's nice to look out of the window. Other times, I forget I live in New York, look up and am surprised all over again.

**Downtown or upstate?**
The Hudson Valley is nice. Peaceful.

**What's your favourite piece of art at MoMA?**
My dear and late friend, fashion designer Richard Nicoll has one of his dresses in the current exhibition, *Items: Is Fashion Modern?* It has to be that.

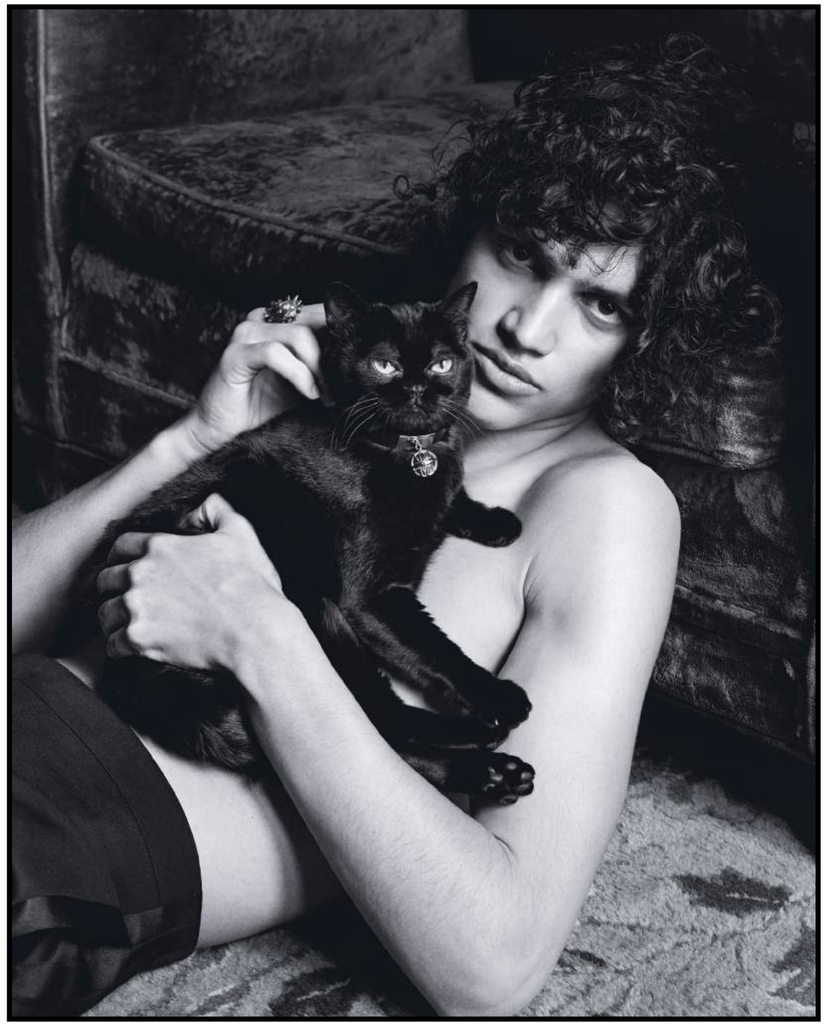
**What's your favourite piece of art in the Met?**
Has to be *Autumn Rhythm (Number 30)* by Jackson Pollock. So familiar, but so exciting every time I see it. I can imagine him painting on the floor with all that energy and movement.

**What's your favourite piece of art at the Frick?**
*Portrait of a Bearded Man* by Léonard Limousin (or Limosin). The colours and composition feel so modern. And he has a good nose.

**And finally, three questions that I decided to steal from the ever-vague, quintessential New Yorker, Carrie Bradshaw:**
**1. In a city of great expectations, is it time to settle for what you can get?**
Never. Being satisfied would be the death of me.
**2. Are New Yorkers really giving up on love and filling up on power?**
It depends on what stage you're at in your life. I think it's hard for many.
**3. Do we need drama to make a (fashion!) relationship work?**
Relationship: no. Fashion: definitely, yes!



Portrait by Christian MacDonald



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LOUIS VUITTON