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L'Homme Dior

System



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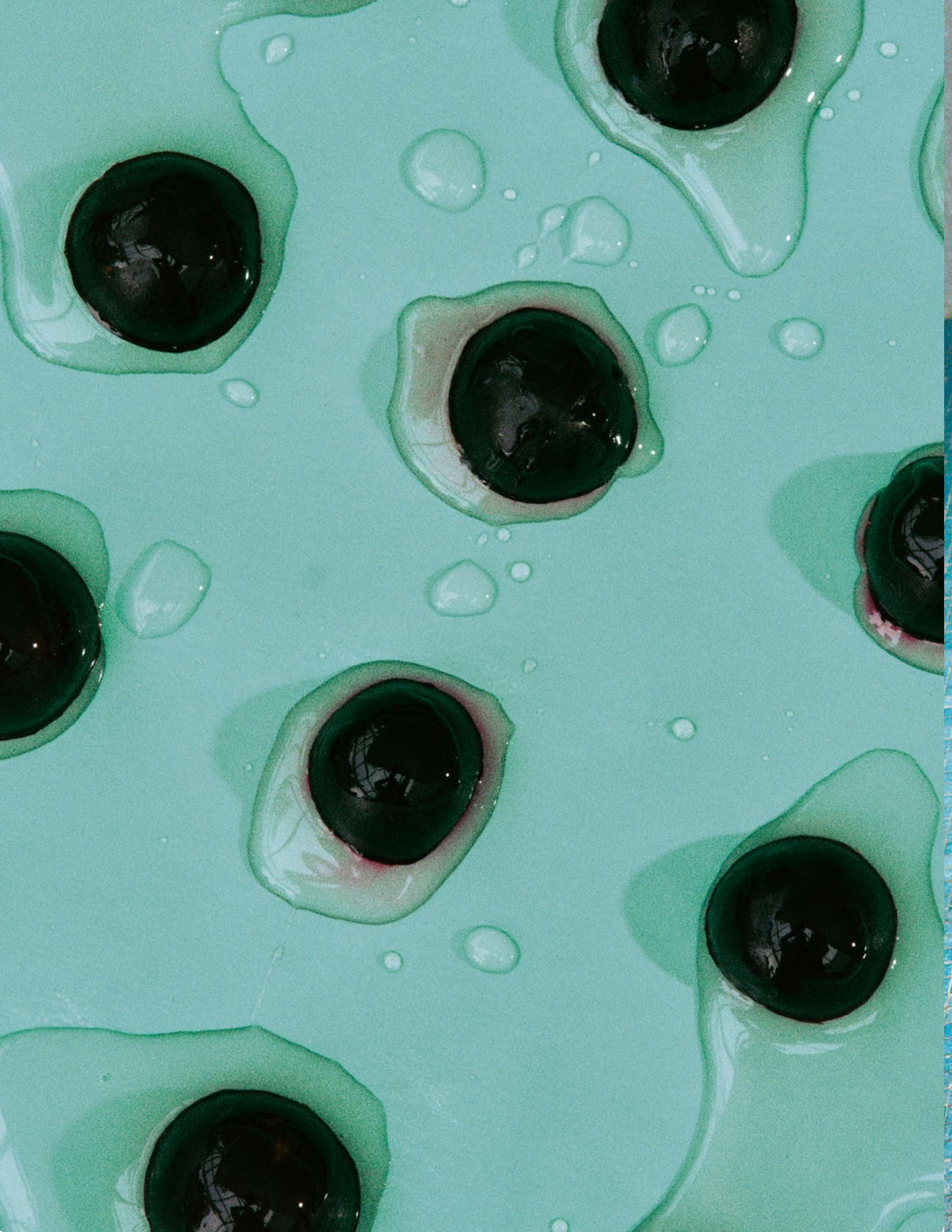
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Tems - Ashley Graham

my little secret



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Cartier

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Photographic retouchée

loropiana.com

Loro Piana

One of the most compelling aspects of Jonathan Anderson's first year at Dior has been the way he distorts and collapses notions of time. Since his arrival, the pendulum has swung between 18th-century Chardin paintings, late-20th-century Warhol portraits of Lee Radziwill and Jean-Michel Basquiat, and the new campaign imagery he creates for the house with David Sims, already forming the visual imprint of his tenure. His collections, too, revisit and playfully subvert design codes from Dior's almost 80-year history, from Monsieur Dior's Bar jacket onwards. For Anderson, the past is there to be mined, referenced across decades and centuries, and reassembled into something sharply of the present.

This was one of many themes we explored with Jonathan during the hours of interviews he graciously accorded us for this issue's cover story. Time's elasticity surfaced repeatedly: in conversation with Yorn Michaelsen, Christian Dior's design assistant in the 1950s, Jonathan reflected on the house's origins; with Tim Blanks, Jennifer Lawrence, Magdalene Odundo and Sims, he spoke of the realities of implementing his five-year vision for Dior that binds heritage and modernity into one continuous proposition.

Elsewhere, time assumes different guises. Amanda Harlech reflects on a career spanning John Galliano's early ferocity and her years with Karl Lagerfeld at Chanel. In a portfolio shot by Juergen Teller at Glyn Cywarch, the 17th-century seat of the Harlech family in north Wales, she wears this season's collections mixed with her own archive pieces, styled by her daughter Tallulah – generations in dialogue, her enigmatic style undimmed by time.

Miguel Castro Freitas, Mugler's new creative director, recalls sketching his first collection at the tender age of six, and discovering Thierry Mugler's futurist work as a teenager in Portugal through his local TV guide – a glimpse that foreshadowed his path to the house. In our interview and accompanying scrapbook of personal archive imagery, he reflects on how those early influences shape his balancing of Mugler's theatrical heritage with a modern sensibility attuned to our times.

And from ARCHIVISM's reframing of vintage luxury for a new Chinese audience to Will Welch's reinvention of *GQ* towards a timely 'New Masculinity', this 25th issue of *System* considers time not as something that passes, but as something we shape, and are shaped by in return.

Publicité Et Nous

HERMÈS
PARIS

stones and mist

Hermès, crossing horizons



Photographie retouchée

‘You have to trust the process of change.’

Jonathan Anderson on his first year of becoming ‘L’Homme Dior’.

Interview by Tim Blanks
Photographs and layout by Juergen Teller
Creative partner Dovile Drizyte



The news of Jonathan Anderson’s appointment as creative director of Dior Men’s in April last year was met with fanfare and high expectations. By June, his remit had expanded to include the house’s women’s collections and couture – an unprecedented consolidation of power and influence that sent anticipation soaring.

Anderson, arguably the defining designer of his generation, has never concealed his ambition. His creative direction rests on the three essential ‘C’s: collections, collaborations, and celebrity. At Loewe, he struck a rare balance: playful yet rigorous, avant-garde yet commercially astute.

But this is Dior: a French institution operating at a global scale, with a designer lineage stretching from Monsieur Dior to Saint Laurent to Galliano et al. And, crucially, a house generating north of €10 billion annually.

Anderson’s first year has been marked by Big Ideas, fashion-as-entertainment, sculptural silhouettes and an abundant arty curation befitting of the time. Reactions have ranged from elation to confusion; whether it is the universal triumph many predicted remains uncertain. Still, early sales forecasts seem encouraging, and his debut couture collection suggested a turning point – a designer deeply attuned to craft embracing the prowess of a world-class atelier. He speaks resolutely of his five-year masterplan for Dior’s redevelopment, underscoring the enormity of reshaping such a behemoth in his own image – ‘For me, at Dior,’ as he puts it.

Soon after his arrival, *System* requested an audience to observe this transformation up close. Given Anderson’s appetite for curatorial challenges, we proposed a selection of conversations from which to choose one, possibly two to record: a dialogue with longtime interlocutor Tim Blanks; a meeting with 90-year-old Yorn Michaelsen, former assistant to Christian Dior; a red-carpet reflection with Jennifer Lawrence; a discussion about form and cultural intent with ceramicist Magdalene Odundo; and a three-way exchange with photographer David Sims and stylist Benjamin Bruno.

Anderson’s response was unequivocal: let’s do them all. And let’s invite Juergen Teller for a visit to his Île Saint-Louis apartment mid-renovation (yes, the visual metaphor was lost on no one) and then ask Sims and Bruno to create an audacious interpretation of his debut couture collection.

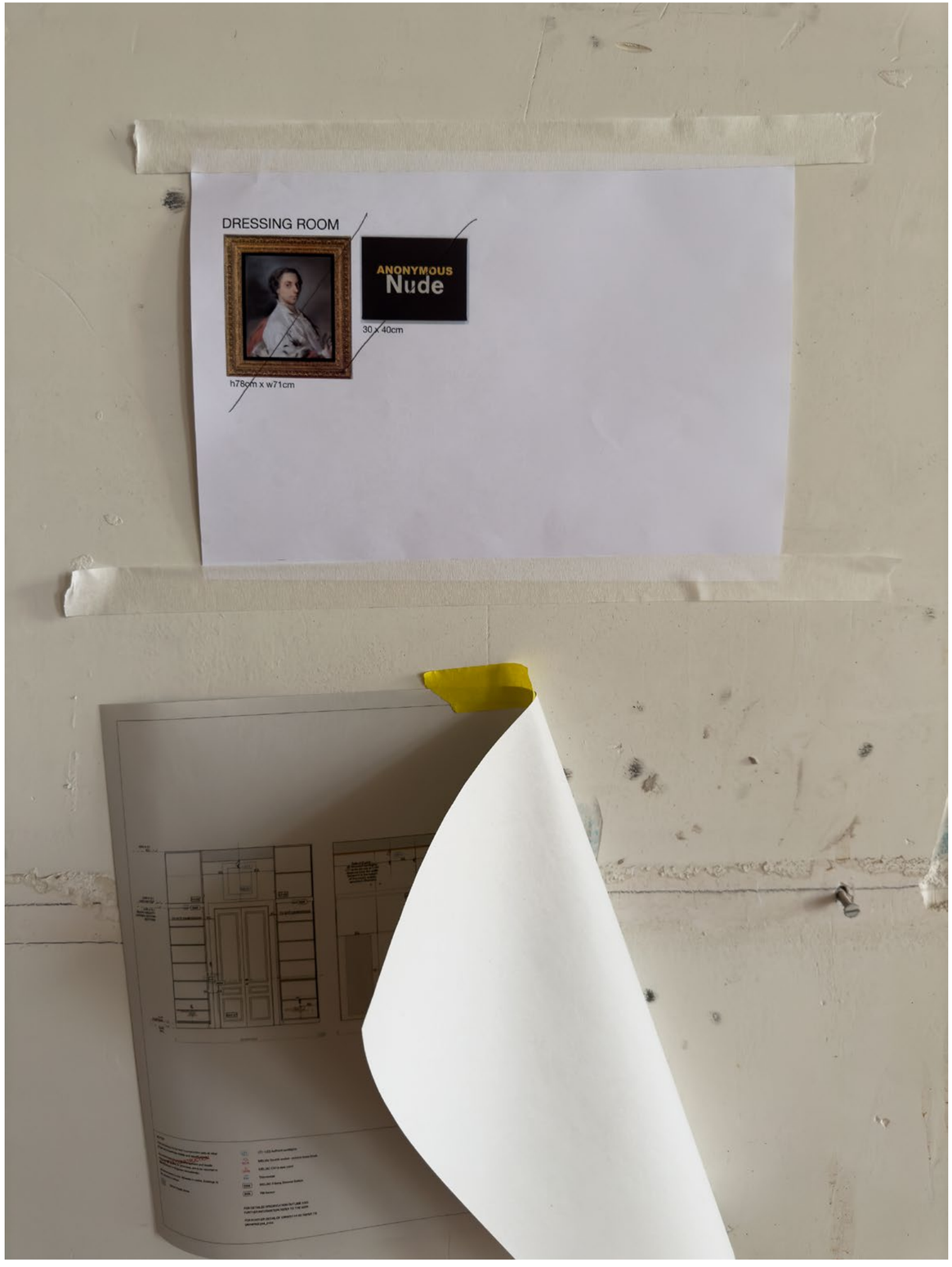
And so, across the following pages: Jonathan Anderson’s first year of becoming ‘L’Homme Dior’.










DRESSING ROOM
ANONYMOUS
Nude
30 x 40cm
h78cm x w71cm











Photography assistant: Felipe Chaves. Production: Cinq Étoiles Productions. Post-production: Louwre Erasmus at Quickfix.

Jonathan Anderson's office is a catalogue of obsessions. A huge bare-backed Wolfgang Tillmans monochrome rules the room. One of the same artist's colourful vernacular still lifes fills another wall. A small but splashy Howard Hodgkin anchors a third wall.[1] The Hermes 3000 manual typewriter that dominates Anderson's desk is a 1960s design classic. He uses it to write thank you letters when the muse takes him.

On the fourth wall is another small, but ravishing, painting by Giangiacomo Rossetti,[2] a young Italian artist Anderson found to memorialise his first collection for Dior. That men's show last June already, curiously, feels like an aeon ago. Much more of the moment is a reminder of Anderson's most recent first, the couture collection he showed at the end of January. Japanese artist Hiroshi Sugimoto photographed the opening look, a black silk dress sculpted after the monumental ceramics of Magdalene Odundo. His image is propped on the sofa alongside textile artist Sheila Hicks' multi-tasselled re-imaginings of the Lady Dior bag from Anderson's womenswear debut in October.

Odundo sat in the front row of the couture show with that bag in her lap. Hicks, seated opposite, clicked away on her phone with unrestrained glee. The presence of the two women represented everything that has made Jonathan Anderson irresistible to fashion. His ardent love of craft, his boundless appetite for quirk, his unhinged curatorial vision and fearless idiosyncrasy fired up leathery old Spanish brand Loewe to the dulcet tune of billions, which greased the wheels of his ascension to what is probably the biggest job in fashion: creative director of Dior, lock, stock and barrel. Men's, women's and haute couture. No single designer has ever had that particular purview, so make that another first.

Quite what that might mean for Dior will become more obvious in the years to come. But what emerged in the hours and days after the couture show was a clear intent to communicate a new spirit. The fact that it emerged during haute couture, the rarefied pinnacle of Dior's fashion pyramid, made it even more intriguing. Anderson conceptualised his couture debut in three chapters. The first was the show itself, a spectacle that anyone could visit via social media. The second was an installation he called Villa Dior where, immediately following the show, couture clients were invited to re-experience the collection they had just seen, and then some, with the addition of shoes, bags and jewels that weren't shown on the catwalk. Baldly stated, it was a selling show, and hearsay says it sold out.

The third chapter was a week-long public exhibition in the show space at the Musée Rodin.[3] It highlighted vintage Dior couture, alongside looks from the new collection and Magdalene Odundo's sculpted pieces. *Le tout Paris* queued in the rain, many thousands more than anticipated. Social media highlighted enraptured children, sketching away as they scrutinised Dior, Anderson and Odundo.

So that's a start. And now we talk, in that office with all the threads of Anderson's own fascinations slowly being drawn into the Dior centrifuge.

Tim Blanks: A little while ago, you told me that the world could throw anything at you. Twenty collections a season, whatever, you could do it all. You're in a situation now where you are kind of in that place. How do you feel right now?

Jonathan Anderson: Acclimatising. I think you probably got me on a very good day when I said that. It's taking a bit of time. When you go into a new business, you're trying to understand the people, trying to understand what the flow is. This year I feel way more at one with it.

What's changed?

I think I am now coming to the end of the cycle of doing everything for the first time. So now going forward will be the second time. It's easier, you start to get products in stores. It's quite frustrating when you spend time and there's no product in store because you don't know what to argue against. I mean, there's nothing to see on the street, no way to hear what customers are saying. Now, since the beginning of the year, I can see what works, what doesn't work, what we need to do, what is resonating, what's not. It feels more rewarding because it's actually a real thing. It's not like doing a hypothesis on it.

Do you check the numbers every day?

No, I don't, but if I'm anywhere near a store, I always pop in just to see what the vibe is. You know, in the end, I always find it really fascinating watching people shop.

With couture, you get an instant response, don't you? You don't have to wait months and months. The feedback comes right away from the clients, not just the press. Tell me about that experience, because that is the pinnacle of the Dior pyramid. It's where it all comes from.

This was very daunting, I must admit, because I had never done it. The client is this mystical thing, and you have to sell the looks that are in the show. And you can only sell three of each look. It's a completely different genre of people. They have way more opinions. But I found it really exciting because I had redone the showroom as this sort of *wunderkammer* where you could go in and buy different things that were made for the salon as well as the show collection. I liked this idea of what it would be like if you were going to meet Monsieur Dior, and what would be the feeling of buying I've been looking at it, trying to understand it. I think couture is the purest form of fashion. It's about craft, it's about making. There is no sewing machine. It's all by hand. There's something truly romantic in the idea. And in a weird way, it's very nostalgic, sort of like going into a bygone era of making these looks, these art forms, and there is a fantasy to it. I think it can engage with a larger audience because ultimately you don't have to be the person who's buying it, you can just see it as a kind of spectacle. I think people like the narrative behind it.

It also puts you in dialogue with Monsieur Dior himself. How did you find that? That's a very different kind of relationship for you, having someone looking over your shoulder like that.

Loewe was more like a manufacturing company, more about the craftsmen. Whereas with Dior you're up against multiple legacies, some that are forgotten, others that are tremendously well known. So, you're dealing with all these odd voices which are the brand itself. You have the legacy of Dior, you have Yves Saint Laurent for this brief moment, you've got Marc Bohan, who's quieter. Then John Galliano… All these voices, plus the public imagination of what Dior is. Each generation has a certain vision of what it is. They're not all the same. For some, it might just be perfume. Or throwing jewellery on the ground. Or running through Versailles. Then you have people who know Dior because of movies and the story of the war and all of that.[5] And then there's my generation, which is all about Galliano mania. So, you're dealing with a brand that ultimately means so much to people, and you're trying to find a doorway into it all.

Is it a clamour?

Yes.

Who did you feel the most affinity with while working on that collection?

I think the very beginning part for me was very much looking at the psychology of Christian Dior. He was obsessed with construction. How do you build the inner architecture of a dress? What is underneath it, to maintain that volume? When you look at those dresses in museums or in the archive, they're quite industrial. There's a lot of very heavy crin, lots of boning, lots of corsetry there. A lot of stuff to maintain the fantasy that we know. So I was thinking, how do we keep that volume but make it incredibly light? Like those opening dresses, if you have not felt them, you would think they're hard structures, but they're actually soft. So for me it was finding new ways of doing structure today. You have Dior, who was the nucleus, and then you have a period where it was very well looked after. Marc Bohan was there the longest. Ferré becomes bows and frills and suddenly you have this moment where John Galliano arrives and *Bam!*, it's about complete excess, amazing theatre, on a level that had Paris on its knees at one point. For me, it was like, 'How do you bridge all of that? How do you say this is actually part of the historical DNA of the brand?' That's why when I did the first ready-to-wear show, it wasn't really about the show, it was about what I did with Adam Curtis: creating a white space, but knowing that all of this pre-exists, and it will

'Loewe was more like a manufacturing company. With Dior you're up against multiple legacies, some forgotten, others tremendously well known.'

'There is a history of fashion language here. Everyone is like, 'Well, that's not Dior.' The best comment was, 'Coats are not Dior'. Well… coats *are* Dior!'

this one singular thing? It's really like the film *Mrs Harris Goes to Paris* with Lesley Manville.[4] I love that film because it plays into the quintessential dream of having this one thing. I was thinking when I was building the salon, 'What is that feeling like?' The near-Disney feeling of putting on the dress. And it was amazing. It was such a wild week, to do all of it at once and then finish with the exhibition. It made me realise why couture exists, this endangered craft that you sit and make all by hand. There was something that made me enjoy fashion more.

Fashion itself is notoriously struggling with relevance, but some very strange alchemy happened during the couture shows. It suddenly felt like couture was the most relevant kind of fashion that there is right now.

never disappear. So, it is better to be confronted by it than pretending that bias cut dresses don't exist anymore.

Do you think your attitude changed from the first show, or was it your sense of what was possible? That film you made with Adam Curtis was quite confrontational, but the couture was an embrace of beauty like I haven't seen you do before. Maybe it wasn't a quantum leap, but it was a definite shift.
It was definitely a shift. For me, it was more about how long I've been there. I know it sounds like a really basic thing to say, but the women's collection was done in 27 days, whereas with couture, I had the time to get into the company, understand it, and meet people. So instead of just being like, 'I need a jacket! Who's going to make it?', now I know there is this person who will do the jacket. You work out what you want from them and how you collaborate.

Was that hard for you?
Yes, in the beginning it was very hard because you're trying to juggle multiple plates. You're trying to understand. You're dealing with the outside world, the real world. You're trying to know what you are doing. What I've realised since the beginning of this year is that the key to the job is you have to always know where you're going. No one else does, but you know where you're going. No matter how many things are going to be thrown into it, you have to keep going because you subconsciously do what is right. That's what I reminded myself, I subconsciously know when I go to work in the morning, five days a week – or seven days sometimes – I know exactly what I need, where it's going. It's just always trying to remember that and not get thrown.

When you say what is right, you mean for Dior? Or for you?
For me at Dior.

And what's that dynamic?
Now, I'm at one with that. I think I was in a big conflict with it last year because I was trying to work out how to break this cycle. Like, 'How do I break the brand?' It was like running after a horse and you're trying to grab it, and it's going faster than you. This year I feel I'm walking beside it and it's fine. The first show, as much as people may have been confused by it, was the right show to do at that moment. Sometimes you go into a brand that everyone in the world knows so everyone has an opinion on it. So, you're listening to Jane-from-Inverurie [writer's note: *let's assume this mythical creature wields the power that the Secret Shopper once had in a long-gone world of retail*] to see what she thinks about it. Then you wake up in the morning and you're like, well, maybe Jane's right.

And how the hell do you hear what Jane-from-Inverurie thinks?
Because you just see *everything*. Then I started to realise that you have to trust the process of change. And change ultimately means conflict. But you cannot get into that conflict because ultimately you have to say to people: this is the line. We're not going behind that line anymore. We're going this way now. It takes time for people to acclimatise to it.

So, you have to assert yourself. The thing about Dior is it's not just a fashion house, it's a cultural totem. One of the pillars of France. So, I would imagine asserting yourself requires you to be forceful in situations where people resist you. You must have to fight.
It's not about fighting. You have to become quite stealthy because the thing is, you're trying to remember what the end goal is, and not change midway. But once I'd had Christmas and I'd come out of the whole I'm-in-a-tumble-dryer at the beginning of January, the minute we had the windows installed and we had the product in and people were buying it, then I got this big [mimics a sigh of relief]. It is real. It is not me in a cupboard trying to design stuff in this imaginary world. Yes, there are shows, but it becomes a real thing the minute it goes in store.

The French-ness of Dior is another thing. How's your French?
I'm really bad at French. But I quite like French-ness. I think it's the historical things. What I like in Christian Dior is his obsession with the 18th century. I'm obsessed by English 18th century, which is actually very similar. One is a bit more flamboyant, the other is tougher. You know, like French furniture in the 18th century is a lot more gilded, way more over the top. Whereas in Britain we were trying to copy it in a cruder way. It's a bit bigger. There's something which I like in the meeting of the two, because that's something Dior was very into. He was an Anglophile as well. He was very into English art, English furniture, English houses, English aristocrats. I like that there is a romance in that part of him.

'I'm really bad at French. But I quite like French-ness, the historical things. What I like in Christian Dior is his obsession with the 18th century.'

Are you finding a surprising compatibility aside from that? When you're actually in Paris and you're working here, in this hub of French culture. Or are you conscious of a performance element for yourself? Like there's a role you're playing.
I don't go in as the couturier in the morning. As much as people probably would love it if it was like that. It's not like that. As my dad would say, it's very rag trade. The difference ultimately from where I was before is that when you go to a restaurant or you walk down the street, you deal with more recognition. Paris is smaller than London as a city. If you're being quite loud or animated on the phone, you start to realise you can't be loud or animated on the phone. That takes a bit of time to get used to. And it happened quite quickly. it's going to be survival of the fittest and which one's going to win? You would go on Instagram, and it'd be like, 'Oh my God, this is a nightmare'. It was intensified because ultimately it became like a TV show. Everyone was like, 'Who's going to be at the next house? Which show is going to be better?' The first show, the men's show, was very calm. It was very much those two Chardin paintings in a room.[6] You either liked the collection or didn't like the collection. And I was, like, 'This is OK, this is going to be fine.' But it was not until I did the women's show, when you could feel the anticipation in Paris, which was quite exciting, and this guy Yorn [Michaelsen] came backstage beforehand – he'd been Christian Dior's assistant – to wish me good luck… That was the moment where I was like, 'Oh, this is a nightmare because you're in France and there's this *reverence*.' I didn't have this reverence. So then I was trying to work out, 'OK, this is important but *is* it important?' And it was not until the show was done, and there was a relief, an emotional *thank-God-this-is-over*, no more *what-is-it-going-to-be*? When we looked back on it, it was a big change in fashion. Two of the biggest houses were suddenly changing at the same time.

How do you cope with that, then? It's almost like you're in a sort of ambassadorial role.
My father was a rugby player, and I remember going to rugby matches, and people would ask for his autograph and I always found it so embarrassing. Whenever I went to see my dad play rugby, it would take forever to get out of the place. My dad would talk to people *forever*. But you know, it's part of how fashion has changed since I started. There's the thing that we all love, which is designing and making clothing, but fashion has become part of the entertainment business. And that's where I struggled last year a bit, because in my head it was just like, 'Oh, I'm going to take this job and it'll be just like going to Loewe.' I wasn't thinking like, every single designer is moving, the industry is in turmoil,

And with two designers who were very easy to position opposite each other to create this kind of irresistible heated rivalry…
Yes. So you end up in this thing where you're just trying to do the collection, not dealing with the global picture, which everyone else was. You could feel it. It was a very strange year.

How sensitive are you to that sort of outside stuff?
I'm human.

I always thought you were kind of thick-skinned about it all.
Sometimes I am, but I'm ultimately human. It can be tough some days because you're like, Why? *Why*? Why do you not understand? Why can you not just give it time? But then you become immune. Which is scary as well. I was in a situation at Loewe where I grew with the brand. We started and people just got used to it. People didn't have any expectation of it. I was so used to working in a landscape which had a leather goods language, but no fashion language.[7] You could do anything there. Here, you have to grow into it. There is a history of fashion language. When you come, everyone is like, 'Well, *that's* not Dior.' The best comment was, 'coats are not Dior'. Well, coats *are* Dior! You realise that you have to just silo yourself in the end, because there is the brand, there's you, and then there's you *and* the brand. I've never been to a psychiatrist – maybe one day I should – but I was talking to a friend about this idea that there are three Jonathans, or three Tims. Three different personas. There's work Jonathan, then the outside thing, and then there's *you*. You have to put these different hats on. Some days you have to be more personal, some days you have to be more like Jonathan, the designer of the brand, which is a different mindset.

And sometimes you just have to smile.
And sometimes you have to smile and, and as cliché and as boring as it will

'I don't go in as 'the couturier' each morning. As much as people probably would love it if it was that. It's not. As my dad would say, it's very rag trade.'

sound, I can only do my best. I get up every morning and I love what I do. You have to kick me out of the office because I really, really enjoy it. Is it difficult? Of course it's difficult, but I love a challenge. I love, 'How am I going to work all this out to get a solution?' Even if I go mad in the process, I enjoy that process.

I sat next to Sheila Hicks at the show, opposite Magdalene Odundo, who inspired the dresses. And I was in Jonathan World there. Then I look at the online coverage and you're in Bezos Land backstage. The strange bedfellows that this whole situation creates for you are slightly schizophrenic.
But fashion is schizophrenic. My whole thing is you have Jeff Bezos and Magdalene Odundo in the same room, because I think they can learn from one another.

But I enjoy that process because it's to me because, in a weird way, it is very difficult to quantify creativity in fashion. We've blurred it. We ended up with some designers who did amazing collections, but weren't financially successful. We are now living in this era where we judge a designer on the financial success of the brand. It's not about the creative output. For me, you have to juggle these two. I have to produce something to take a brand that was *here*, and I have to bring that customer with me. No one wants to know that. Everyone just thinks that you just click your fingers, and you go from one customer to another. But Delphine and I have to work together on this very complex thing where you're taking a customer that was used to buying one sort of silhouette…

'I'd done these shows and people seemed confused by what I was doing. No one was gravitating to it and I was like, "What the hell is going on?"'

You actually love doing the business bit, don't you? The level that you're at gives you the resources to be as creative as you could dream of being, and yet at the same time there's this massive machine you can involve yourself in. Best of both worlds.
The thing that drives me is creativity. I always believe that creativity will make good business if it's done right. So, you need a partner in crime. I have Delphine [Arnault]. We work together on how we are going to take the business from *here* to *here*. For me, the success really comes from that meeting. You cannot silo creativity and business. In the history of fashion, that never worked.

We are going to use creative solutions to create money. If we create money, we create jobs. So that we can re-invest in something. That's exciting like a riddle. You're trying to work out what the business model is going to be, because I think the business models are always changing.

The fashion prototype is the creator and the businessman working in tandem: Saint Laurent and Bergé, Valentino and Giammetti, Ford and De Sole. Are you looking at yourself as a fusion of those two things?
I need someone to work with who enjoys that fusion. That's why I enjoy working with Delphine. She is very creative on bags, for example, and is very good at business. I think we can have a debate. She's a good partner in that way because you're trying to work out a solution without arguing. I love that. I could sit for days, because for me, it's very like, 'OK, we've got €1, but we want to get to myself. There will be no one harder on me than myself. I'll be like, 'It could have been better. It could have been this, it could have been that. Why is that person doing this? Why is this dress like that? Why is this happening?' Every day is a correction on what we can do better. So, if I'm here to grow the business, that will come out of a compulsion to succeed. It's not to win, it's to succeed. Which means I have to take all these people – people who don't know me, people who I brought with me – and we have to go *this* way. That's the hardest part to get to. Once you get to it, then it grows. But you have to get everyone to go with you.

Do you feel you were made for a job like this?
Yes, if I didn't enjoy it, I wouldn't do it… When I'm bored, that's the problem.

Famously, everybody knows what LVMH expects of you with Dior, how you're supposed to take it from X billion dollars to Y billion dollars. And you have a game plan for that?
I've been in LVMH for 11 years and I don't feel any pressure regarding that. The most pressure that I get is from €5.' And we just need to do this, this, this and this. But then I need to make sure that the product is this, this, this and this. And then you go, 'OK, there's the goal so we're going that way'. So, no matter what people think of the show, no matter what other people are doing, you know that you are going to make sure that you are ticking those boxes so that you don't have people saying it's not working because it's not a financial success. Because that's how it works.

Out of the three Jonathans, which one is the bored one?
I think sometimes it can be me, myself. If I'm at home and I feel bored, then my brain starts, 'Why is this not going right?' For me, I need to be fuelled.

You're not good with downtime.
No. But if I go on holiday, I'm good at it. I will pack it out. I will be, like, 'We're going to go to the beach and we're going to a restaurant.' I need to feel that I am continually propelling forward. That is what I enjoy. I like being around people. That is what turns me on. I like sitting around and trying to work something out because I know it will always work. I know it sounds crazy, but I know, no matter what, I will do everything I can in myself to make it work, and I will take it all on because I feel like if I don't take it on, I don't have anything to fight for. So, in a weird way, I sometimes have to create an invisible enemy just to feel like I have something to make it more competitive.

'The minute we had the windows installed and we had the product in and people were buying it, then I got this big [mimics a sigh of relief].'

Who is the invisible enemy?
It could be anything. It can change, you know? But usually for me, it's very much a target thing.

I will be like, 'OK, where is the gap in this whole thing?' For me, fashion can only be new by finding the gaps in what people are not focusing on. It's not that I've never done anything with art before in my previous job or for my own brand, but I was thinking 'OK, if I'm at Dior and we do art, that is different.' It can't be an insular, romantic world. People know Dior, so we can actually introduce them to someone like Magdalene Odundo, who they will have never heard of. If I can introduce 80 people to Magdalene Odundo's work after the show, then I have won on why this brand can be amazing. It should be about access, you know? For me, that is the most rewarding thing. My end vision for couture was that I wanted to have school groups in the couture venue drawing. Because I went to see Magdalene Odundo's show and there were all these kids drawing her vases – and drawing the vase and drawing the dress is the same thing. It's about volume. If we can get people in, then I feel like that is going to make up for everything. And it did. I really do believe that was like a singular moment: having the bar jacket, and Magdalene's vases and the new dresses in the exhibition and young people with naive eyes looking at it all and drawing. For me, that was the newest thing that happened in couture. Forget the collection.

It was quite radical. The sense of mission did feel like something new, but it was in the collection too. The craft, the quirkiness of all the stuff you've done your whole career, insinuated into Dior. Were you surprised that you were able to do that so successfully?
I didn't know how the show was going to turn out. I knew exactly what the exhibition was going to be, because I'd worked on it for six months. We had requested the works, we had gone to the archive, and we had got the exact dresses. We had the right mannequin, the right platform, the kids' book. Everything was already done. But the collection I was a bit worried about before. I had done all these shows and people seemed confused by what I was doing. No one was gravitating to it and I was like, 'What the hell is going on?' But then I realised that this is a creative process. If I was to do the perfect show on day one, then you would switch off because there would be no progress, and it has to progress. This is what I really believed. I thought it was going to take a year for me to put the work out, and then with the couture, I let myself go into the process of this being part of where this brand is going to go in the next five years. Instead of worrying about Jane-from-Inverurie, all that kind of stuff, I was, like, 'I'm going to start and I'm going to keep putting the work out, and it may not make sense to me right now but at some point it will.' That's what I quite enjoyed after the show. There were some looks that looked way better in the show than they did in the fittings because they were moving. Suddenly a tuxedo was moving in a way that when it was captured in motion, it looked 10 times better.

You've talked about wanting couture to be the foundation of the whole business. A crucible of ideas. That's always been an haute cliché, that couture is a kind of laboratory, but it never really translates like that in real life.
Dior has couture as some sort of reality-fantasy lab creating ideas and community. For me, it's the backbone of the entire brand, because it is ultimately the top of the tree. If it doesn't sit like this, then you can't build from it. Which is the goal. I believe that couture should be radical. A journalist recently asked me what exactly is there to wear, which

I found to be quite reductive, because you're already forcing it towards commerce rather than asking what the idea or the emotion is. That's why we love fashion. That's why we all turn up to shows, or we like watching people wear the clothes. We want to feel the emotion of it. How I always worked on menswear is close to how I work with couture. When I do men's, I'm always like, 'What would I love to be able to wear? Could I wear it?' I want to be able to walk down the street and be able to pull it off. I want to have that. In a weird way, the couture was like that. I wanted it to be these things that were about 'The Idea'. I think this is why couture felt quite interesting this season, aside from the tension around 'first shows'. It was like, let's forget about what we're wearing – because ultimately we're all dogged by the idea of commerce – what is the *fantasy* of it? Sometimes they can be old fantasies, you know, but they'll always be new in the moment. Everyone will have a projection. Is it Raf? Is it Dior? It doesn't matter. It is about putting out what you think is fascinating to you. If you believe it, then there will be at least 10 other people who might believe it too.

When you're the third Jonathan, at home, can you stop thinking about this?
I can. When I get home, I go into things that are my own. Am I going to paint this wall, am I going to hang this picture, where am I going to go for dinner? Shall we cook, order Deliveroo, or see friends? I have to get into that because if I don't, I feel that I'm stuck in *this* person.

Which person?
The me-as-designer. I have to perform that during the day. So, when I go home, it's not about performance, it's reality.

I like cleaning the house. I like to be able to do that bit, because I think it is very easy in this job to lose a feeling of groundedness. I'm very, very much on the ground. I know exactly who I am and I'm very happy with who I am. But the minute I'm getting off the ground, I know it and I can feel it. But then I have people like Ben [Bruno] who will turn around and say, 'Get back'.

How important is somebody like Ben? He's been with you through all your incarnations.
I trust Ben implicitly on everything I do because I think Ben is very good at foresight. He's very good at seeing something that's coming before it does. I need someone to argue with or to keep me in place, I like the tension of it.

How many people like that do you have in your life?
Creatively I have that one person. You can't have multiple people like that. You can only really count one person like that, because it keeps consistency.

What are you most proud of at this moment?
What am I most proud of? [Long pause] That's a very difficult question.

Well, it's nice to know that you haven't reached that point yet.
I'm proud I was able to get here in one piece with the people that I wanted to come with me on this journey. I'm proud of the people that excelled more than I thought they were going to, because it means I made the right decision. I think that is the biggest thing, because sometimes when you convince people to go on a journey with you, there's always the thing in the back of your head saying, 'Have I dragged them the wrong way?' So that makes me really happy. On the personal side, there's probably more room for improvement, I think I need to spend more time with family. There's certain things that I need to be better at. But, you know, it's like a seesaw.

Are you afraid of anything?
At the moment? No. Ultimately I'm always afraid that there would be no work. There would be nothing to do. Boredom is probably my biggest fear. That there's nothing new that I discovered. As a compulsive person, I feel like every day I need to learn something. That's why I've loved the couture atelier. I'm a designer but I never knew how to do tailoring. Then you work with someone who only does tailoring, this guy who works with us called Rocco. You look at this garment and you say, 'I want it like this,' and he will do this and this and this, and you're watching this person manipulate this thing, and you realise you know nothing. It's the most amazing feeling because when I see him in the fitting, I'm looking at him to try to learn what he is doing. I don't need to do it, but I want to understand it because then with the next collection, I will be like, 'OK, we did this, and maybe if we push it, we can do that.' Then you have this dialogue with someone. That's why I think if I retired, I would have to be a gardener because there would always be a problem in the garden. There are always four seasons. There's always going to be leaves to mop up, grass to cut. There are always things to be planted or watered. There will always be something that needs doing.

'Boredom is my biggest fear. If I retired, I'd have to become a gardener because there'll always be leaves to mop up, grass to cut, new things to be planted.'

Solutions are so satisfying when you're gardening.
That would be the only other option after doing a job like this. Because you would need something that would be from morning to evening. Dior is like a garden. Every day you have to make sure everything is working. You have to give everyone airtime because if not, they start to wilt and then they feel like they're not supported. After that, it would have to be something like gardening. I've always wondered to myself how you would stop yourself from going mad.

Dior is the ultimate distraction from boredom.
Yes, it doesn't stop.

1. Howard Hodgkin (1932-2017) was a British painter known for his colour-saturated abstractions rooted in memory and emotion. As he once explained, 'I paint representational pictures of emotional situations.'

2. Giangiacomo Rossetti is a London-based painter whose evocative figurative work was commissioned by Jonathan Anderson to mark his first collection for Dior. Rossetti created a portrait 'that would encapsulate the spirit and sensibility' of the debut. The work featured Christian Dior 'easter eggs', including the carnation from his inaugural show and his beloved medallion chair.

3. Following Jonathan Anderson's debut Dior haute couture show, a public exhibition *Grammaire des Formes* was held at Musée Rodin, a museum the house has a historical relationship with. Dior has staged multiple couture shows in the museum's gardens, a setting Christian Dior himself was said to love strolling through.

4. *Mrs Harris Goes to Paris* (2022), directed by Anthony Fabian, stars Lesley Manville as a London cleaning lady who travels to Paris to buy a Christian Dior gown. The film was praised for Jenny Beavan's costumes, earning Academy Award and BAFTA nominations.

5. Christian Dior's younger sister, Catherine Dior, was a French Resistance operative arrested by the Gestapo in 1944, tortured, and deported to Ravensbrück and other camps before surviving the war. Her story later inspired Dior's first perfume, Miss Dior.

6. At the Dior Spring/Summer 2026 men's show, two paintings by the French artist Jean Siméon Chardin (1699-1779) were hung in the showspace.

7. Founded in Madrid in 1846, Loewe began as a cooperative of master leatherworkers focused on expert tanning, cutting, stitching and finishing. Enrique Loewe Roessberg helped unify local artisans into a workshop celebrated for its exceptionally supple and enduring leathers.

In conversation
Yorn Michaelsen and Jonathan Anderson moderated by Olivier Flaviano

In 1956, when a 21-year-old Yorn Michaelsen knocked on the door of Christian Dior’s headquarters on 30 Avenue Montaigne, in search of an apprenticeship, it seemed the stars had aligned. An avid reader of *Harper’s Bazaar* and *Vogue*, Michaelsen arrived from his hometown of Bremen in Germany with a folder of garment sketches, but no experience of couture. Nonetheless, he arrived just as one of Monsieur Dior’s design assistants was being summoned for National Service and so found himself promptly summoned to replace him, working alongside a young Yves Saint Laurent.

Within the studio, couture revealed itself to Yorn not as myth or image, but as an intricate method: sketches, materials, techniques and bodies animated by a coterie of formidable women. Figures such as head of studio Raymonde Zehnacker, technical director Marguerite Carré, and Dior muse Mizza Bricard formed the creative backbone that underpinned Dior’s vision. This was a time when Dior’s name was already known the world over, and his company was expanding exponentially, turning it into the first truly modern couture house of its age.

Seventy years have passed since Michaelsen first entered the *maison*, but his reverence for Christian Dior, the man and the couturier, has not faded. Shortly before Jonathan Anderson’s debut couture show in January, *System* invited Michaelsen and Anderson to meet to record a cross-generational conversation, moderated by the affable and errudite director of La Galerie Dior, Olivier Flaviano. Together, they reflect on their unique connections to the House of Dior, each linked to defining moments in its storied history.



Olivier Flaviano: So Yorn, when you arrived in Paris you were only 21 years old and you joined Christian Dior's studio. What did the House of Dior represent to you at that time?
Yorn Michaelsen: I had just finished school in Hamburg, and it was my first time in Paris. Even though I had never been there, I knew I loved France. I was very interested in fashion and I was drawing the whole time, but I didn't know for whom I was drawing. My only rapport with Parisian haute couture was through magazines, and the only name we really knew in Germany was Christian Dior because of his New Look.

What about you, Jonathan? What did the house of Dior represent to you before you joined as creative director?
Jonathan Anderson: When I was a student, Dior was synonymous with the amazing John Galliano. The New Look is something you learn about straight away when you go to fashion school. It was a radical brand, so for me it was a creative Mecca. One of the pinnacles in terms of the fashion industry. It was the top, you know. But now I'm here, it's surreal.

Yorn, you arrived in November 1956, and hired as an assistant at the studio, when Christian Dior was about to start work on the Spring/Summer 1957 collection. What was Christian Dior's first step when creating a collection?
Yorn: The first things were the materials. Two months before the presentation of the collection, Dior chose the materials – out of thousands of swatches proposed by the fabric suppliers – before he left to La Colle Noire,[1] his country home in the South of France where he used to do his drawings. A Christian Dior collection started with 600 to 800 sketches, done within a few days, which constituted the first physical shape of his idea. Then he would come back with his drawings, and everybody was waiting for this great moment. The whole collection in a little box! He opened the case with all the sketches inside, and there was such excitement in the studio. It was incredible. There was Mizza [Bricard, a Christian Dior muse], there was Raymonde [Zehnacker, his right-hand woman]… For me, it was like a dream. The excitement was incredible. 220 sketches which best represented the ideas and themes of the collection were selected by Christian Dior. These would become a reference point for the ateliers as they created the toile, their three-dimensional transposition of the sketches before the choice of fabric. It was throughout this key step that the main silhouettes for each season took shape to embody the new line.

So what about you, Jonathan? How do you start your creative process?
Jonathan: I approach it very holistically, starting with the body – it's really about the raw material first, and then how it's applied. It often begins with a single dress, which then evolves as the story develops. There's never one moment where it's like, *Bam!* – here are 600 sketches. Instead, it starts with an overarching idea, then moves into fabric direction. Once the fabrics arrive, we work directly on the body, and from there the shape or the attitude begins to emerge. From that point, it becomes an editing process – refining and distilling each look through repeated fittings. Some dresses are now on their ninth toile. It's about finding the right balance between material, form, and structure. Couture allows for a great deal of freedom, but at the same time, because everything takes so long to make, you have to reach a moment where you can say, 'Enough – this is it,' and let go.

You mentioned the importance of the body. And in Monsieur Dior's sketches you can feel that the body is alive. He used to say 'for a dress to be successful, you need to know how it will move in the movement of life'. Yorn, what was the importance of the house models during the process of creation?
Yorn: They were very important to him because they were representing different kinds of women, and different femininities. He devised his collections for several types of women. He knew exactly for whom he was doing a collection.

Jonathan, do you also have a specific kind of woman in mind when you're working?
Jonathan: For me, it's about asking: 'What is the vibe you want to communicate?' What's the energy around it? What's the attitude, and how are they going to carry themselves in it? When I start a collection, I like to find a new face – someone who hasn't done anything before. From there, I build the entire collection around that one person. It creates a sense of neutrality, so that when we come to the final casting, you can find a feeling of newness through the process.

Is that 'face' in your mind, is it an abstract woman, a celebrity?
Jonathan: When I first started at Dior, I was very into the severity of someone like Lee Radziwill.[2] Something quite done up, quite smart but, at the same time, could be at Studio 54. The couture starts with this idea of going to the opera and coming out of it, getting into a car. Then this merges with the work of the artist Magdalene Odundo, who's a very dear friend of mine, who is a completely different type of woman. Her work [and influence on the collection] is more about form, and informing the shape.
Yorn: I think it's fabulous.

Yorn, tell us a little bit about the studio. There were three important women around Christian Dior, can you tell us who they were?
Yorn: There was Raymonde Zehnacker, head of the studio. Raymonde was the shadow of Christian Dior. They met when he was working at Lucien Lelong. She was *everywhere*. And he didn't make *any* decision in his life without the 'OK' of Raymonde Zehnacker. She was very important in the life of Christian Dior; in his social life, his private life, the life in the studio, she organised *everything* and she knew *everybody*.

Then you had Marguerite Carré, *directrice technique*. Christian Dior used to call her 'Dame Fashion'. She was incredible, his 'dressmaking self'. She was like a dream-maker: Christian Dior had his dream, his sketches, and Madame Marguerite would explain what she thought Christian Dior wanted to express with his sketch to the *premieres d'ateliers*. They would then do the toile under her supervision. She was very, very important. And she was there from the beginning. The New Look really was her technical work, too.

Then you had Mizza Bricard. Elegance was her *raison d'être* said Christian Dior. I think she was the first trend-setter we had in couture. She created the panther look for Christian Dior.[3] She dared when Christian Dior couldn't.

Do you have someone like this, Jonathan?
Jonathan: I work with a stylist called Benjamin Bruno who is my ears and eyes. And we have a very transparent and rigorous relationship. You always need to have someone who is going to say no. Someone who is free to disagree with you, who you can argue with. You need someone to work *against*. I have Ben for that. Conflict can be quite important in creativity so that you're pushing yourself to do better. It's about how you create tension in the pursuit of newness. You're trying to find balance and newness when you put the look together. So you need someone to have a conversation with that you trust, and who is going to make you take risks that you may not be comfortable with.

Let me just quote Christian Dior from the 1956 *Dior by Dior* book. He recalls the New Look, and he says, 'In order to satisfy my love of architecture, and clear-cut design, I wanted to employ quite a different technique in fashioning my clothes from the methods then in use – I wanted them to be constructed like buildings. Thus I moulded my dresses to the curves of the female body, so that they called attention to its shape. I emphasised the width of the hips and gave the bust its true prominence; and in order to give my models more 'presence' I lined nearly all of them with cambric or taffeta, thus reverting to an old tradition.' Yorn, would you say it was easy, at the time, to recognise a Dior dress by its technique, by this architecture?
Yorn: Yes and no. Dior dresses had such a distinctive shape they were easily recognisable, but the technique which creates the shape is something that you can't see. If you see a dress, you can't see the technique inside. For example, the famous corset he did inside of the dress.[4] You couldn't see it, but the clothes of Christian Dior, you could leave them on the floor and they'd stand up like architecture. That was incredible. You could feel it, but you couldn't see it. You could see the flamboyance, the luxury, but if you see all the work under the clothes, the dream is over.

Jonathan, does this Dior technique have an influence on your work?
Jonathan: Well, I had never worked in couture. It is slower, but at the same time the detail becomes more impactful. For example, hand-done *double face* is insane because they're pulling the fabric apart and then re-stitching it together. So, it's like looking at the skeleton of a garment differently. What I find interesting, which is something we're so used to in today's world of fashion, is that everything has become very flat. When you do couture, everything's a bit more rounded. Because the stitch is by hand, it doesn't get the same tension in it. You

'My only rapport with haute couture was through magazines, and the only name we knew in Germany was Christian Dior because of his New Look.'

'When I was a student, Dior was synonymous with John Galliano, who turned it into characterisation, and who added another layer for the 21st century.'

get more roundedness to a jacket. The underpinnings of a Dior dress, are like the inside of a watch. There are so many ways in which they build up structure.

That structure has evolved over time, over 50, 60 years. Each generation passes on information and then they adapt and then they change it and they find other ways in which you can deal with structure, how to do it without too much weight. That is very, very different from ready-to-wear. It's an entirely different world. It's deeply romantic. Even if you were to make a T-shirt in couture or a jean in couture, it is a *completely* different thing. It has a *really* different energy to it. It makes you love fashion.

Yorn, one of your roles was to complete the 'collection boards'. Can you describe them to us?

Yorn: Every collection had a storyboard consisting of several pages, which provided Christian Dior with a holistic vision of his collection. This allowed him to balance the looks by category: morning, cocktail, evening dresses. On each of them was the name of the look, the little sketch, a little piece of material, the name of the mannequin, the name of the *premières* and *premiers* who supervised their creation. Then he could see if there were too many morning dresses, not enough evening ones.

One collection was 180 or 200 looks, and they were divided by day dresses, cocktail dresses, and evening dresses, because a woman would change her garment several times a day. Jonathan, would you say that fashion today still reflects our way of living?

Jonathan: Well, I think we're really boring now because we don't have that sense of occasion. We don't have occasion-wear, apart from weddings, funerals… There is no etiquette. What I love about Dior is that the house comes from this moment when everything has been destroyed [after World War II]. You have the birth of America as a global superpower. Speed, modernity, cars. The 1950s is a decade in which you have the decline of the British aristocracy. You have the birth of a new social elite in America. They bring a sort of British etiquette to America, repackaged with speed. I think what was interesting about Dior's period is that when we look at occasions, people were coming to it with a different viewpoint. They were like, 'Can I project myself into this for *this* moment?' There wouldn't be two moments per year, there could be 24 moments! I think if Dior was alive today he would be like, 'What the hell is going on?' Fashion has gone from being something which had an inner nucleus, to something which has become a popular global phenomenon. It's really fashionable to be into fashion. It's part of the public imagination.

Let's talk a little bit about the fashion shows. Yorn, can you tell us about the shows when you were working at Dior?

Yorn: There's a big difference between being a guest at a fashion show and working at one. When I first arrived in Paris. I saw this magic world in front of me. Madame Luling[5] would direct the shows like it was a ballet. Then you had this marvellous fashion show, set in the beautiful couture *salons* which could accommodate 250 guests. The 180 looks of the collection were presented, in complete silence, one after the other to the press, buyers and, the following weeks, private clients.

Jonathan, how do you design the fashion show? Particularly now it is no longer just a presentation of garments.

Jonathan: I would love to go back to the days of 250 people. This would make my life a lot easier! The show has now become a huge marketing tool. So, it's less insular and you end up having to become a director in the end. The job has become so big that there's no longer this idea of being a designer. But I think the most important thing about a show is its ending point. That is why the show, as much as we can question the show as a creative medium, is a full stop. There is a before and after. Then you move on to new ideas.

It used to be that no photographers were allowed into shows, and the first photographs were seen only a month and a half after in the magazines. So, what was at stake? Were they scared of people copying the clothes?

Yorn: Oh, Christian Dior was so afraid of the copy. When the clothes were coming from the ateliers and going to the *salon* to be presented they were always covered with paper or white cotton so no one would see what he was going to present. Now, though, you show your show and half an hour later, you have it on your phone.

There's an interesting quote by Christian Dior from *Dior by Dior,* where he says the weeks which followed the first show had a decisive influence on the collection, which is yet to be born. Jonathan, how do you react to the immediacy of images, and do they change how you think about a collection, too?

Jonathan: Christian Dior was lucky. Like all designers today, I live in a world where there can be millions of comments on a single collection. You end up in a quagmire of information. The day I finish the collection, I can barely look at it because I've seen it from every possible angle. I have looked at thousands of viewpoints. By the time you've shown it, you've already consumed it. Christian Dior was very lucky to work in a moment where there was a much narrower window of criticism. There was the reviewer, the newspaper – it was all very tight. Today it is a free-for-all, and it's difficult to even sense what is happening. One of the reasons I wanted to work in fashion was that I have always been obsessed with the future – with the idea of what comes next. A fashion show used to exist six months ahead of its moment. Now, people don't have the patience to digest it, or to allow it to be relevant in six months' time – which was the whole point.

The joy of fashion lies in that distance: it gives you time to distil an idea, because the reality of a runway is very different from the reality in-store, or from the reality of a garment as a three-dimensional object rather than a two-dimensional image. Everything has become so fast that you're now dealing with people's recreational outrage. You have to find patience within yourself and resist being pulled into the noise.

Yorn, when you joined in 1956, Dior was already a global brand. Christian Dior New York opened in 1948, Christian Dior London in 1952. Dior was also the couturier who used communication the most. When he passed away, Carmel Snow said: how can couture survive Christian Dior's death? It was such an important brand in the world of fashion. So, did you feel that this was a global brand, working in a studio that was a little family?

Yorn: I think it was Christian Dior who really made the house feel like a family. He chose everybody working in his house more or less by himself. I think he was very talented at knowing exactly who or which person can work at what. He started with the idea of doing a very small haute couture house. Very important for a small clientele, you know. Suddenly, after his first successes, he realised, 'My God, we must evolve, we can't stay still.' But as house got bigger – from 85 people and 3 workshops when it started, to 1,000 people and 28 workshops in 1953 – he also felt a greater responsibility.

He had this marvellous idea to create a perfume, Miss Dior. I think it's the most important accessory you can have, and the most marvellous marketing support for a couture house. He was the first one who had the idea to go out of Paris, past the frontier, at such scale developing a worldwide organisation of fashion. He predicted the future and adapted fashion to a changing world after World War II. That was the most important talent he had, to do exactly what he wanted to do next, and he prepared all of it. So, when he died, everything was more or less in place to continue.

At that point, the Dior name was all around the world. Jonathan, is the branding of Dior something you looked into when you joined the house? How important was it for you to define your own vision of Dior?

Jonathan: I love the Dior logo. I think the Dior logo is a design classic. It gives you a sense of exactly where you are. When I first joined, I had an entire biopsy done on the logo because I wanted to know the history of it. What is so fascinating is that he chose a French font. When you look at historical fonts, there are not a lot of French fonts from that period. For me, the logo as a branding tool is one of the most important things because the final act of finishing a garment is when you put in the label. And when you look at the history of Dior, by looking at all the labels, you can tell the period that you're in. This is important, that there is another layer that is added. Sometimes you can use the branding for nostalgia, or you can use it as an idea of modernity. For example, for ready-to-wear we have a new label. But then in couture we have gone back to the idea of the original couture label, where it is numbered, because that is the nucleus of the brand. When you see it on an archival dress, it still has so much value. I think sometimes we associate heritage with leather goods companies. We forget that Dior is a heritage brand. It has transcended multiple different creative directors. Everyone has added to it. But ultimately the nucleus of the brand will always be there, you know? That's why Dior has survived this long. Because the idea was good at the beginning. So, it just means that you have to keep fuelling it.

'A Christian Dior collection started with 600 to 800 sketches, done within a few days, which constituted the first physical shape of his idea.'

'For me, it often begins with a single dress. Once the fabrics arrive, we work directly on the body, and from there the attitude begins to emerge.'

Christian Dior used to say that the most profound purpose of couture is not only to make, but to *create* clothes, to invent new forms, new techniques of cutting, and using of material. A couture house is first and foremost a research laboratory. Yorn, was Monsieur Dior researching new shapes, new lines, new techniques as he created a collection?

Yorn: You are not a couturier if you don't think like that. If you are a couturier, you have a talent to detect the future. It's not only to create something beautiful, it's more intellectual. You must know exactly where you are going, to do something today that is for tomorrow. Like Cocteau said, 'One must do today what everyone else will do tomorrow.'

You've approached couture the same way, Jonathan?

designers – someone like John Galliano, who comes in and turns it into this other characterisation. He adds another layer into it for the 21st century.

Dior was about fashion. It was not about the everyday. It was about fantasy. It was about dressing up. It was about the new. Dior has an immense historical strength in that it is able to embrace the idea of 'Fashion' with a big 'F'. It is there to be radical. We look at Christian Dior now as a historical figure. But if we are to think about his work in that period, it was *radical*. The things he was doing were quite a lot for people to digest. As a couture house, it is unique in that way. Ultimately, couture is an elitist practice, it exists for the very, very wealthy. It is incredibly expensive, because the amount of time that goes into each garment is extraordinary. That said, I think there are different responsibilities embedded within it.

For me, one of them is the protection of couture as an endangered craft. That feels like a real responsibility. Another is the emotional connection we have to clothing – the idea of searching for something new, and of translating fantasy and desirability into something that is entirely handmade. Every day on my way to work, I pass people queuing to enter La Galerie Dior, and it reminds me that Dior also has a responsibility to the public: to tell its story. That's what I want couture to engage with. With each collection, we'll take elements from Dior's history and confront them – whether through an artist or in dialogue with another brand and share that narrative with a younger audience.

When you go to a museum, you experience something to fuel creativity. So, for me, there's this part of couture which is about *why* we make. Why do we look at form? Why is Christian Dior important? What is couture today? And I think it's about the exploration of fantasy. The museum is as powerful a part of the brand as the New Look, because it is experiential, it is emotional. Even if you don't buy couture, there is always curiosity to see the making of craft. For me, that's what is exciting in couture at the moment in that it can be multiple layers in and of itself, but at the same time it's also the spine of the brand. Without the couture, what is Dior?

Lesley Manville, who is a dear friend, played in a 2022 film which is called, *Mrs Harris Goes to Paris*. It shows you the power of Dior as a brand. Because ultimately, movies are made about it. It is about a turning point in modern history, and I feel like as a designer I have a responsibility to that. Not to the owners of Dior, but to the idea of Dior, the essence of it, which is part of the public domain. If you get into a taxi, a taxi driver will know Dior, and they have their own fantasy of it. That's why I love that film, it's so touching because it shows you the idea of the fantasy. When I go to the couture atelier, it's like being in a Disney film. You're very much like… Can I touch this? Fashion needs that, as much as we want to radicalise everything, sometimes you need a bit of austerity and a bit of the magic behind the clothing.

Talking to you, Yorn, I'm reminded of how the brand is bigger than me. It's bigger even than Monsieur Dior himself. In a strange way, I think a lot of people

'When I go to the couture atelier, it's like being in a Disney film. Fashion needs that magic, as much as we want to radicalise everything.'

Jonathan: For me, couture is a remarkable exercise. It is completely void of any form of logic. That's what I love about it. It is illogical because it is ultimately about freedom. You don't have to think, 'Oh well, how is this going to work?' Or, 'How can we afford to do that?' It's more about, 'We are going to make this fantasy into a reality.' That's why the lab is the most important part of it because it's the ideas machine, it's where you are trying to birth out new ideas, which then can go on to the outskirts of the brand. It is a freedom machine. There is no wrong or right in it. It is about exploring, experimenting, and if someone wants it, they can have it. Is it for everyone? No. But it's imagination that is needed at a brand like this. Dior, in terms of couture, is very, very, very unique. You have Dior himself, and a series of other

associate Dior with something quite narrow – the idea of a dress. A pretty little dress, often imagined as pink. But when you really look at Dior's work, the range of colour and texture is remarkable. It was deeply textural, and the way he combined colour was entirely unique. I think Christian Dior has been typecast, probably through marketing, but the Dior language is far more complex than it appears. He made some of the greatest coats in fashion history, yet somehow we don't associate Dior with coats at all.

Because of the Bar suit. And the black and white.

Jonathan: As much as designers don't want to look back, it *is* nice to look at someone else's history because you don't own it. You feel less precious with it.

And besides Christian Dior's history, there's a Christian Dior character. He was extremely superstitious. Yorn, can you tell us more about this side of his personality?

Yorn: Christian Dior was superstitious. He was consulting a fortune teller from time to time. And he always had in his pocket a little string with a series of charms attached – a star, a piece of wood, a lily of the valley, a gold coin. But he never showed this side of his personality in the studio. He was concentrating only on the work.

I have one final question for you both. When Christian Dior passed away, Jacques Rouët, who was the administrative and financial head of Dior, made a statement. He said that Christian Dior not only created a house, a silhouette and an empire, but he also created a school of taste and style. So I wanted to ask you both: what is the most important thing that Christian Dior taught you?

Yorn: He truly changed my life. I came here with nothing and I'm here 70 years after, so lucky to be in Paris. He was an example for me, but more as a man than a couturier. His qualities were so evident, so rare. He was really an example of kindness. He left this impression on the whole house.

Jonathan: I think if you work at Dior, you're working in service of the Dior legacy – because you believe in it. Of course, there's the commercial side and everything that comes with it, but ultimately you do it because you believe in the idea. Dior has influenced so many designers. I was looking recently at collections by Yohji Yamamoto and realised how deeply he was inspired by Dior – something I'd never fully recognised before. You begin to understand just how far Dior's work has permeated fashion globally. People aren't only investing in the idea of Dior itself, but in the idea of putting ideas into fashion. Ultimately, he is the fashion designer's designer.

A good way to end.

Jonathan: There we go. And thank you so much for doing this.

Yorn: Thank you, Jonathan. For me, it's marvellous to have been there in 1956 and to still be here now with you.

1. Christian Dior described his work as 'ephemeral architecture, glorifying the proportions of the female body,' a philosophy embodied in La Colle Noire, the Provençal château he restored from 1950 until his death.

2. Lee Radziwill, sister of Jackie Kennedy, was an American socialite, interior designer and public relations executive. A central figure among Truman Capote's circle of New York socialites known as the 'Swans', she was a cultural and fashion muse of the 1950s and 1960s, frequently dressed by leading couture houses including Dior. Capote praised women like Radziwill as 'beautiful, well-born, and intelligent – with an instinctive understanding of style.'

3. The 'panther look' at Christian Dior refers to the leopard motif introduced in 1947, inspired by his muse and collaborator Mizza Bricard. 'Madame Bricard emerges from her hatboxes, sails in magnificently, gives one definitely adverse comment, condemns an unfortunate fabric with a look or suddenly plumps for a daring colour,' Dior wrote in his 1956 autobiography, *Dior & I*.

4. Christian Dior's 'New Look', introduced in 1947, popularised extremely narrow waists. To achieve this sculpted silhouette, he relied on firm underpinnings such as girdles, underwired bustiers and layered tulle or horsehair petticoats. Notable Dior corsets include the 'waspie' (or *guêpière*) and the 'Colette' corset, both designed to create the signature waistline.

5. Suzanne Luling, Christian Dior's childhood friend, was appointed in 1946 to direct sales and public relations. She was regarded as a steadying influence on the couture house and was instrumental in managing press, buyers and clients as the brand grew internationally.

In conversation
Jennifer Lawrence and Jonathan Anderson moderated by Sara Moonves

Jonathan Anderson is the third creative director Jennifer Lawrence has worked with during *her* time at Dior. At just 22 years old – shortly after the release of *The Hunger Games*, widely considered her commercial breakout role – she became a brand ambassador and the face of Miss Dior in October 2012, just months after Raf Simons took the helm of the House. And following Simons’ departure, she continued in the role for nine years under Maria Grazia Chiuri. As Lawrence notes in her conversation for *System* with Jonathan Anderson, it’s been a minute: ‘I can’t remember my career *without* Dior. It’s been such a long and beautiful relationship. I wore a Dior wedding dress’. Since Anderson ushered in a new era in the summer of 2025, she’s graced his Dior designs to all the events that matter: from film premieres to award shows, film festivals to front rows.

Jonathan Anderson’s work has often been regarded as cinematic, so it felt like a natural progression when he began collaborating with Luca Guadagnino in 2024 – as costume designer on the director’s films *Challengers* and *Queer*. That partnership continues with *Artificial*, expected later this year, based on the curious episode at OpenAI in 2023, when Sam Altman was fired and rehired. Naturally, the conversation between Anderson and Lawrence – moderated by *W* magazine editor-in-chief Sara Moonves, who, coincidentally, received the Media Award at the CFDA Fashion Awards in November 2025 from Lawrence, a close friend – oscillates between fashion and film. They discuss the new Dior vision, the process of designing for characters, the importance of capturing quirky details on screen, and *that* dress at the Governor’s Awards (‘One of the first I was completely happy with,’ admits Anderson).



Sara Moonves: Let's talk about when you first met each other, which I believe was in September.
Jennifer Lawrence: We met at my fitting for the show. And it was abundantly clear that I was going to love the clothes. Jonathan was so just free spirited with everything. He actually cared if I was comfortable and what I would have wanted and was really hands-on with styling.

And Jonathan, what was your first impression of Jen?
Jonathan Anderson: I was kind of jealous that I had never met you and that I had to join Dior to do so. And you're way too much fun. Plus, you're a great interviewer. I was looking at one that you had done with Leo [Variety x CNN 'Actors on Actors' video series, with Leonardo DiCaprio], and it was fantastic.

something I just learned about Jonathan, even though we've been friends for 20 years, was that you went to acting school.
Jonathan: I wanted to do Shakespeare, and I was in the National Youth Music Theatre,[2] and I then got a scholarship to go to the Washington Shakespeare Theatre Company to study Shakespeare. I went there for two years and realised that I was really bad at it. I spent most of my time in the costume department because I was completely obsessed with this big, burly Black guy who was the queen of the costume department. And that's where I fell in love with the idea of making characters, this idea that you could use all this fabric and come up with something. Sometimes you have to find out what you're really bad at to know what you're really good at.

Jennifer: That happens every time. The costume really helps me figure out who the character is because it's how they present themselves. It's how they want to be perceived. But I guess one costume that jumps out would be the Mockingjay costume from *The Hunger Games*, because you put on this battle armour and obviously hold yourself differently. There had been all this lead up to her becoming the Mockingjay, and so having the Mockingjay outfit was kind of a big deal.

Jen as the actor, Jonathan as the costume designer: what are those conversations like in the beginning, to make a character with the clothes?
Jennifer: It starts out really broad and then it gets narrowed down just to each day. And it's a creative conversation about who this person is and how they'll present themselves.
Jonathan: For me, it depends on the film. I remember when I did *Challengers*, Zendaya would work in a certain type of way; she knew exactly what 1990s reference she wanted. So you would be working around the archetypes that she had in her head of the character, and then encouraging ways in which that can flow as an arc. Or you have someone like Daniel [Craig] who wants to be completely immersed in the entire process of what the clothing is like: 'What is the underwear? What is the shoe? Can the shoe be worn in this way? I want it worn in this way, so it might help me walk differently.' When you're doing a film, it's quite liberating because it's stuff that you've never designed before. You're referencing things that you've never designed, but you're reinterpreting them in terms of what the actor and director want. Luca [Guadagnino], for example, knows exactly what he wants from a scene.

'I got a scholarship to go to the Washington Shakespeare Theatre Company. I went there for two years and realised that I was really bad at it.'

I wanted to ask both of you what was the first time that you saw a costume on screen that really stayed with you?
Jennifer: The first one that comes to mind is Gwyneth Paltrow's green outfit in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*. Maybe that one's too boring and obvious.
Jonathan: That's a good one. Mine would be Roller Girl in *Boogie Nights*. I remember when it first came out, I was at university in D.C.,[1] sitting in a cinema when you could still smoke in them. I remember leaving Ireland, going to D.C. having never been to America, getting a pack of Marlboro Reds and smoking the entire box while watching *Boogie Nights*. I came out, like, high!

A amazing. I was Roller Girl for Halloween, just so you guys know. Three years in a row, with my roller skates on. So,

And Jen, what was your early experience of acting?
Jennifer: I didn't go to acting school, I just started auditioning for commercials. I moved to New York and then eventually got on a sitcom. So, I guess the sitcom would have been my first kind of regular training.

What was the sitcom?
Jennifer: It was called *The Bill Engvall Show*.[3] Nobody saw it. Which worked out great because I got to audition for movies while I was doing it, and then I got *Winter's Bone* [in 2010] on one of the hiatuses of the show.

What was an early moment in your career where a costume or an accessory transformed your character and you felt like the clothes were helping you?

What is the process like of being a costume designer when you are fully immersed in being a fashion designer at the same time?
Jonathan: The first time I did it was *Challengers*. It was shot in Boston, so it was nice to get out of Paris. I was petrified about doing it in the first place because Luca, instead of doing just individual costumes, he wanted the entire thing – background, everything. This is a bit daunting when you've never done it. Now I have done a few more, for me it's like a refuge. It's a kind of escapism from my reality.

Speaking of *Die My Love*, the clothes were so simple and real but they help you understand the character right away.
Jennifer: Catherine George was our costume designer and she's a genius. She did something that was so helpful to me as a performer, and I think the audience. Our characters in the movie were new to town, so our costumes made us stick out like sore thumbs. We looked like city people coming into a small town. As the time passed in the movie and we had been there longer, my clothes start to blend in more with my surroundings. So for me, playing somebody who is getting further and further and further away from their sanity, being able to clock what wardrobe I had that day helped me place myself and where I was in the world of the movie, and where I was in her mindscape.

***Without a Cause* while wearing his clothes. How does your personal style influence how you design clothes, whether costume or fashion?**
Jonathan: When I was younger – like, when I was non-gay, and realising that by looking at James Dean I actually was gay – I became completely obsessed with him. I had to have Lee jeans. There was something about him, this idea of the archetype. I think, weirdly, in my personal style, I've always compared it to cooking. If you ever cook a meal for people, it is difficult to eat it. I find that with clothing. I like a uniform. I went to a school that had a school uniform. So, in the morning, I need to not have to think about my own clothes, because all day I will have to think about clothing. So, in the end it's a navy sweater and a pair of jeans.

'When I wrap from shooting I keep a lot of the costumes. I literally have *Hunger Games* boots in my closet with my other boots.'

Jen, are there any costumes that you've worn in films that you kept, like your wardrobe in *American Hustle*?
Jennifer: You know, I always end up dressing like my character when I'm working. So when I wrap I keep a lot of the costumes. I'm like: 'Oh, my God, I'm totally going to wear this shirt and these pants. And these are my new shoes. This is the new me.' And then I bring them home. Obviously it just doesn't work out that way. It's a totally different style. And then I can't get rid of them because they're memorabilia. I don't even have a trunk for this kind of stuff. So, I literally have *Hunger Games* boots in my closet with my other boots. You'll pull something out of my closet and be like, 'Eugh, what is this?' And I'm like, 'Well, it's from *Die My Love*, so we can't get rid of it.'

I loved every time you put on the shoes. When you were walking, when you were pushing the baby stroller over to your mother-in-law's house, it is exactly the right footwear for those moments. It was just brilliant. Jonathan, now being at Dior – and Christian Dior was nominated for an Oscar in the 1950s[4] – do you want to continue your work in costume design?
Jonathan: I just finished wrapping a film at the end of last year, *Artificial*, which is about Sam Altman. I never knew Christian Dior was nominated for an Oscar. Wow! There we go. fact-finding.

I think both of you have a very distinct personal style. Jonathan, you were quoted about James Dean and his style, that you would watch *Rebel*

The way you put a show together, over your entire career, it's always felt like a movie. I think specifically your Spring/Summer 2026 show for Dior, which started with the short film that Adam Curtis made.[5] Do you think of it in that way sometimes? And how did the Adam Curtis collaboration come about as the first moment anyone would see womenswear under Jonathan's Dior?
Jonathan: One of my favourite documentaries is *HyperNormalisation* by Adam Curtis. I think he's got a very good way of taking a long period of history and condensing it into a collage of imagery that tells you a story. I thought, in a weird way, for Dior, I needed to somehow create a white space that you either hated or loved, because it could not be just like, 'Oh, Dior is nice.' It had to be a confrontation, to split the crowd.

Adam had taken all these amazing designers who have added to this brand, and you're kind of saying: 'Well, this is the legacy of the house and therefore it has to break itself down and rebuild itself.' By working on that process with him, I realised that, like with any creative field – for example, if an actor wins an Oscar for the very first performance they ever do, where do you go from there? You don't have the before, you don't have the after, you don't have the in-between. You have to have an arc. So, in a weird way, I had to work out a way to do a show that was going to be able to say, 'These are things that we will tackle over a five-year period.' It cannot resolve itself straight away.

Completely. Just going back to personal style, Jen, I think yours is probably the most talked about on *W*. You're always in our top 10 every week! There are also so many Instagram fan feeds dedicated to every single piece of clothing you wear. How do you get dressed knowing that is all out there?

Jennifer: As hard as it is to believe, I try very hard not to think about it too much because otherwise I would be paralysed and never be able to get dressed. It's just been a part of my life that I've accepted. They take pictures and then leave me alone for the rest of the day. So, when I'm looking for clothes, I'm really just thinking about where I'm going. I like things to be simple and comfortable. There are things that I get excited about doing, but I try not to think about it.

What is an outfit that you feel the most 'you' in? What are you most comfortable in? Is it jeans and a T-shirt? Is it a dress?

Jennifer: Well, jeans are not comfortable. I would say a Colby pant and a cashmere sweater. Or a Freecity.

Freecity sweatpants! Jonathan, do you know about Freecity? It's a very LA thing. There was a store in LA called Ron Herman when I was growing up, and there was this brand there called Freecity that made the most comfy sweatpants ever. It still exists. Jen and I are going to bring you a pair to Paris. Very unchic. You'll hate them! But, Jen, you've been an ambassador of Dior for over a decade now and I'm thinking back to when you won the Oscar wearing Dior couture. What has Dior meant to your life as an actress? Because, you know, you're going to have a new era. Jonathan's about to do his new couture show. What have those dresses meant to you?

Jennifer: I can't even remember my career without Dior. It's been such a long and beautiful relationship. I wore a Dior wedding dress. Every huge landmark in my life, I have Dior on my body. I was a huge fan of Jonathan before he started working at Dior, and so this is a really, really special experience.

Jonathan, I know how excited you were to work with Jen when you got to Dior.

Jonathan: Thank God that she was a brand ambassador when I joined. I find you super inspiring. You know what I love about you, Jen, is that you are real. When we had dinner that evening after the show, it was such a relief to me. When you step into a brand and inherit the legacy of the designers who came before you, it's nerve-wracking, because you're joining a cast that's already in motion – if you know what I mean?

Jennifer: Yeah.

Jonathan: I love so many films that you've done. Really, truly. I've watched them several times – and there are not many films I can watch several times. I think you're really inspiring for people in general because there's not some sort of weird calculated system around your persona. It's just you being you.

Jennifer: Oh my God, thank you.

Jonathan: I think today, there are so many actresses where it's like a whole machine…

Jennifer: Name them.

Jonathan: [Laughs] You know I can't – though I'd love to. There's a preconceived idea that, to become an award-winning actor, you have to be a certain 'thing'. It's very cookie-cutter. When we had that dinner, I remember thinking, 'Oh my God, you're so much more than I ever dreamed.' I've always felt that the relationship between a designer and a brand ambassador is complicated. You're asking someone to wear the brand, and that comes with a whole set of expectations. I never want it to stop being fun. I respect people's free time and how they choose to spend it. At the same time, I have a responsibility to the brand – and the reality is that it's a business. You're constantly trying to strike a balance, but that process can strip emotion out of relationships, because everything becomes transactional. That's the part I've always struggled with. You want to go to dinner and simply have dinner, not feel obliged to say, 'Right, we're here, now we need to take the picture. Let's stand next to someone.' There's nothing worse for me. If there's one thing I wish I could change about this job, it's the post-show photocall. I don't feel like people genuinely want to take a picture with me – it's the strangest protocol fashion has ever invented.

Jennifer: I know, I hate it too. I feel so bad. Everybody is swarming you, and then I have to join them and attack you. It's the worst.

Jonathan: Like my best friend Ben [Bruno], who is the stylist of the show, when the show finishes Ben is running out the door, he's just like, 'Bye bye'. All I want to do is run out the door with him. You just want a sofa and a television afterwards. But I'm very glad that you were there, because you're real. And if I was a woman, I would want to look like you.

That's a good line! I think the moment that stands out in terms of Jen wearing your clothes thus far, is that incredible white dress that I believe was for the Governors Awards.[6] Jonathan and I were texting saying, 'This is unreal, she looked so amazing.' How was the process of designing that dress? And Jen, how did it feel to wear it?

Jonathan: When I joined Dior, I was building everything at once. You have to bring your own hand, while also putting together a couture team, a womenswear team, a menswear team, a VIP team, and several others. It was an incredibly chaotic moment. That dress was one of the first I was completely happy with. I micromanaged it, because I kept thinking, 'We have to get this fucking right.' And I thought you looked fantastic in it.

Jennifer: I loved it. It was my favourite dress I've ever worn.

Jonathan: You looked hot. It just sat perfectly on you. It's a complicated shape to get right, but it looked brilliant.

Jennifer: It's happened a couple times when I've put your stuff on where it seems like it's going to either be hard to wear or not going to be flattering – having that ruching on your waist is famously unflattering! Somehow, though, it's like magic, the way it moves. You really know your way around clothes.

Jonathan: I'm learning here. The thing about Dior is that it's known for a certain type of structure. You're trying to work out what the new language of the structure is. Dior created this idea of building clothing like architecture. So, you would build an under structure, then another layer of structure. You're trying to work out a way to bring Dior's hand and my hand into a super talented atelier. At the time of us doing this interview, we haven't done a couture show yet, so I'm losing all my hair over trying to do that. When you've had someone like John Galliano at a brand, the bar is very, very high. But, it'll slowly evolve. I'm trying to be patient. My new mantra this year is to be patient.

Can you give us a sneak peek of what you're thinking about with couture?

Jonathan: I'm looking at the history of the house and it is going to go back to the theatrics. There's a lot of major coats in it for daywear as well. It's going to be a bit more like day-to-crazy-nighttime. It's all based on this idea of Lee Radziwill coming out of an opera. She's layering a skirt, and there's fur and all the accessories are insane. All the rings are mounted meteorites. It's going to go from fantasy right through to a 100 per cent cashmere floor-length coat with a big belt and a pair of tuxedo pants with no bra. It's going to be a bit of a smorgasbord of different things. It's going to look to Dior, it's going to draw on the theatrics of John [Galliano], the essence of Marc Bohan, it's going to take all this in, get thrown into a blender, and then I will probably be executed in the press.

Jen, when you're getting ready for the red carpet are there style icons you have in mind, or reference pictures of people you're pulling up?

Jennifer: It's different for every look, but if I had to generalise, I stay pretty much in the supermodel 1990s.

Jonathan, I love that you've been referencing American style icons like Lee Radziwill and Basquiat. And I feel like Jen's just the perfect ambassador for your Dior.

Jonathan: When Dior started after the war, the only people that had money were the Americans. In Europe there was no money left. So, it was over to the Americans. They were our aristocrats. It's playing on this idea that there's nothing better than an aristocrat who's lost all their money. They still have all the clothing, and they still look major.

Jennifer: Well, money can't buy you class.

Jonathan: Exactly.

'With the post-show photocall, I don't feel like people genuinely want to take a picture with me – it's the strangest protocol fashion has ever invented.'

1. At age 18, Jonathan Anderson moved to Washington DC to study drama.

2. The National Youth Music Theatre is an arts organisation in the UK providing pre-professional training in musical theatre.

3. *The Bill Engvall Show* was an American sitcom that ran on TBS from 2007 to 2009, in which Engvall plays Bill Pearson, a Colorado-based family counsellor whose family could also have benefited from some counselling. Jennifer Lawrence played the show's eldest daughter, Lauren.

4. Christian Dior was nominated for an Academy Award (Oscar) in 1955 for Best Costume Design, Black-and-White for his work on the film *Terminal Station* (also known as *Stazione Termini* or *Indiscretion of an American Wife*), released in 1953.

5. Adam Curtis's film, titled *Do You Dare Enter the House of Dior?*, served as a psychological 'exorcism' of the brand's history before Jonathan Anderson's new creative direction. The film utilised Curtis's collage and montage technique, intercutting archival Dior footage with clips from horror movies released every year since 1947 and was projected onto a large inverted pyramid with a soundtrack by Lana Del Rey.

6. The Governors Awards is an annual ceremony in November, hosted by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, awarded for lifetime achievements in film.

In conversation
Magdalene Odundo and Jonathan Anderson moderated by Andrew Bonacina

In January, Jonathan Anderson presented his first haute couture collection for Dior in the sculpture garden of the Musée Rodin in Paris. Immediately following the runway presentation, the museum opened *Grammaire des Formes*, an installation that placed 15 of Anderson’s new couture silhouettes in direct conversation with seven ceramic works by Magdalene Odundo, alongside nine historic designs by Christian Dior, weaving fashion, sculpture, craft and history into a single spatial encounter. The week-long exhibition was conceived not as a straightforward archive or backdrop, but as an active dialogue between disciplines, offering visitors a rare opportunity to see Anderson’s couture alongside the forms that inspired it.

We recorded this conversation in the days that followed the couture show, in that brief, charged window when the work had just entered the world. Jonathan was already looking ahead to his next deadline; Magdalene was ready to retreat back to the studio. The adrenaline of the show hadn’t fully cleared, but the intimacy of the process was still present.

The seed of this collaboration was planted more than a decade ago, during my time as the chief curator at The Hepworth Wakefield, when I invited Jonathan Anderson to curate the 2017 exhibition *Disobedient Bodies* that included Magdalene Odundo’s sculptural forms. The show was something of a blunt proposition: what happens when labels, hierarchies and the boundaries that keep disciplines in their lanes are set aside, and fashion, art, craft and design are allowed to share the same space. It was a group show, but within that wider constellation, questions of status, value and categorisation felt heightened for Magdalene and Jonathan.

For Magdalene, the art world still had a habit of tripping over that tired ‘craft versus art’ binary, as if ceramics needed to justify its seriousness. For Jonathan, fashion was powerful, yet still treated as adjacent to visual culture, rarely granted the same kind of cultural weight as art. The aim was to suspend those value systems long enough for people to look differently.

The recent project for Dior is the most public manifestation of a dialogue that has been unfolding in the background for years. Friendship has been the constant, punctuated by intermittent collaborations, sometimes visible, often private. What links the work is a shared set of preoccupations: the body, the intelligence of craft, the refusal of tidy categories, and the idea that the new only becomes meaningful when it’s in conversation with what came before.

Andrew Bonacina



Magdalene Odundo: How do you feel, Jonathan? Do you have any thoughts of what you're going to do next?
Jonathan Anderson: I feel great after the couture show. What am I going to do *next*? I have a show to do in three weeks today!
Magdalene: I thought the [couture] show and exhibition were beautiful. I just couldn't believe the glass pieces.
Jonathan: The dresses based on your glass?
Magdalene: Yes, I just keep thinking about them. I know you explained how they were made, how each flower is stitched, but I still can't believe that they feel so close to the glass.
Jonathan: It is amazing what you can do with knit. And when you see them just as pieces in an exhibition, they become so conceptual, objects in their own right.

turn to Magdalene for this important moment?
Jonathan: I needed to start with something personal. I came across Magdalene's work when we were curating *Disobedient Bodies*. Then after that show, I purchased a piece from her that I've lived with ever since. It's hard to say why the piece has been so important for me, but I think it has something to do with not being able to place the work in any one time period. You can't say, 'Oh, this was made last week – or even a thousand years ago.' There is an iconography in it that I find miraculous. I get bored of things quite quickly; I'm sure Magdalene is the same. I live with art. There are many things I fall out of love with, but I've always been in love with that piece. There's something human about it. When I joined Dior I knew the biggest challenge was going to be haute couture, and it's the thing I've been most excited about because it taps into my love of craft, my love of people, my love of making. It was always going to be my way of getting into the mindset of Dior, because it's ultimately about form.

made while I was surrounded by a whole lot of people in Philadelphia, and I don't really work much with people, but I do take information, in one way or another, from bodies around me. I think this is why I've always made vessels, so I can gather these ideas within a container.

I think it goes back to those qualities in your work that Jonathan was talking about – they feel so timeless because they are built on this vast archive of research and looking that you have undertaken throughout your lifetime.
Magdalene: Research for me was never about being academic; it was about finding myself through looking. I looked at histories because I needed to understand how form carries memory, and then you distil it until it belongs to you. The research is a kind of nourishment, but the work only begins when you stop quoting and start making. I'm interested in universals: the body, containment, gesture. So research feeds the language, but the object must become independent. Otherwise you're decorating history rather than building form.

'When I'm making a vessel, it's not an object in isolation; I'm making a container to hold something human inside it, even if that human is imagined.'

Magdalene: I think once they got onto the body, they became alive.
Jonathan: I was quite surprised how well they turned out because as much as they're conceptual, they still feel relatable. There's something in them that worked better than I thought they were going to as structures.
Magdalene: I left with the feeling that it didn't really matter to get accolades. It meant a lot more that something was accomplished between the two of us.

Andrew Bonacina: This collaboration comes out of a long arc of friendship, and many other collaborative projects, but it's hard not to feel like the momentum has been building up to this. Jonathan, this first haute couture show was always going to be the big one in your first year at Dior – what made you

In fashion, couture is the pinnacle of craftsmanship. It's about deep time and knowledge. I think there is an obvious kinship with your work, Magdalene, which draws on so many histories and languages that you have synthesised into these charged objects.
Magdalene: The influences can go both ways, but the central part of our interest is the body. That wonderful word 'disobedience' is the fact that we're both very strong-minded in what we do. That piece that you're talking about is one that I

Jonathan, this is the first time that you have a truly great fashion archive to think about and use. How does the idea of research function for you in the service of creating something new?
Jonathan: With an archive, even if it's an incredible one like Dior, the danger is you become too polite. You end up doing a 'Dior' thing. I'm more interested in the archive as a provocation: why something worked, what the construction logic was, what the attitude was. Then you can argue with it. Research is also about removing awe. Once you strip away the mythology, you can use it. Otherwise you're just worshipping it. And in a weird way couture needs you to be practical, it needs to ask: 'What's the point of this technique now, who is it for, what does it do on a body?'

Magdalene, you've reflected on the fact that you are both thinking about bodies in one way or another. Was there a moment over the past 10 years when you realised you had more in common between the way in which you work? What do you recognise and relate to in Jonathan's process, even if the materials are worlds apart?
Magdalene: I think the recognition came through the body. I'm not dressing bodies, but I am always thinking about a body being present. When I'm making a vessel, I'm not making an object in isolation; I'm making a container that has to hold something human inside it, even if that human is imagined. With Jonathan, the materials are different, but there is a similar negotiation between structure and movement. You build something with rigour, give it form, but then it has to have another life. That's very close to what happens for me between the raw clay and the fired form: you are trying to hold energy without killing it. Over the years, I realised the overlap isn't just that we both like form. Actually, I think it's often about the process of taking away – the edit. The idea that you remove until the work becomes definitive. I see that in Jonathan's way of looking. That's when it clicked for me: we're both trying to distil the world into something you can feel without being told what to think.

As well as looking at the history of ceramics and sculpture, you've talked about looking to fashion in the past, and how it's fed into your own language. How did it feel for the table to be turned and for your work to be inspiring a collection?
Magdalene: Obviously I was intrigued. I trusted and I wanted that magic to happen. I wanted to be surprised, but I didn't know to what extent. And when I was looking at the models coming through during the show, I was seeing not only my work but also lots of the things that inspired me early on, like Elizabethan dress, court headwear and those beautiful narrow-toed silk shoes that courtiers would have worn. I saw echoes of my interest in Zulu costume and beaded work which I know Galliano also referenced in his collections.

'With ceramics, you're constantly aware of balance: where something wants to sit, or tip, how it holds itself. It's like what a garment has to do on a body.'

Jonathan: Yes, John made some amazing pieces for Dior [for Spring/Summer 1997], which were based on the Maasai.
Magdalene: I just thought, 'Well, it's all come round again.' Maybe it's because I know other things you're interested in, but I could see so many other references in this collection.

Jonathan, you've been an avid scholar and collector of ceramics for many years. Has it shifted how you think about designing? Not necessarily as inspiration, but really in the process of creating something bodily and three-dimensional?
Jonathan: I think it's changed the way I think about that relationship between volume and line. With ceramics, you're constantly aware of balance, not just visually, but physically. Where something wants to sit, where it wants to tip, how it holds itself. That's very close to what a garment has to do on a body. Also, when you live with objects, you stop treating them like images. You start seeing the logic. And that's useful for couture, because couture can't just be a look. It's engineering. It's structure, it's restraint, it's obsession with where something lands on the body. So yes, it changes the thinking. Not because I'm copying a pot, but because the pot teaches you to be precise about form. It teaches you that a small change in curve changes the whole feeling, and it teaches you to respect the time it takes to make something that looks inevitable.
Magdalene: This respect that you have for craftsmanship extends beyond just one medium though. I love the fact that behind the scenes we could see the sketches and the drawings of each costume. The other thing that I respect so much about you is that you extend your thoughts and creativity to sharing in the dialogue of making. Physically and intellectually. It allows those that are working with us to also stretch their imagination, and to be happy that they've collaborated. It's very rare because most artists want to have all the glory.

You've carved out a very particular way of collaborating with artists, Jonathan. What's the deeper intent for you beyond simply referencing? Indeed, what is collaboration doing for you, and for the house of Dior, and ultimately for the audience?
Jonathan: Collaboration stops the house from becoming a closed system. It interrupts the autopilot. If you're not

careful, you end up producing an image of yourself over and over, and the brand becomes self-referential. An artist gives you a different conversation and asks different questions.

Artists bring with them a certain kind of license, they are given permission to do things that you often can't do within your own industry. I always think that's why artist-curated exhibitions are often the most popular, because they break the rules, they don't have to respect the way things are usually done. Couture is such a protected space, do you think you were looking to bring in something of that when you turned to Magdalene?

Jonathan: With couture specifically, I wanted a lens that wasn't fashion. Couture can become theatre, or it can become pure technique. An artist helps you get to something more human. It also makes you accountable, because you can't hide behind a trend, you're forced to ask what you actually believe in. I like that it opens a door: you're not telling people what to think, you're giving them a way to look. It's about adjacency, letting people make connections without turning it into a slogan.

Magdalene: For me collaboration can be a way of testing the boundaries of my language without abandoning it. It's not an antidote in the sense of escape, but it's a different kind of energy. Other people bring different questions and skills that can refresh the imagination, and it can also challenge you to articulate what you normally do intuitively. If I collaborate, it must be with someone who respects the work of making and the people who make. Then it becomes a shared question rather than a compromise.

Jonathan: I think what has been really interesting about the process of making this collection and then showing it in an exhibition, was having children come and see the show. We are in such a complex time in the creative world. As much as we all try to break out of different ways of how to deal with hierarchy, it's all still very siloed, or it becomes very politically led. Is craft art, or not? Are ceramics contemporary art or not? People get so precious about things. What I love when we work together is that I think we get above all that. It's about: 'How do you feel? What is new?' Collaborating and trying to get people to look at similarities, or look at adjacencies without boiling it down to one thing. I think we achieved what we did over that week because it's really nice for me to introduce more people to your work, and it's a nice way for people to understand my relationship to Dior through your work. But also because there is no hierarchy in it.

The exhibition *Disobedient Bodies* that we all worked on together was almost 10 years ago. Do you think the questions that we were asking then are the same now? Have things moved on?

Jonathan: It has, and it hasn't.

Magdalene: What we are all trying to do – and what I think that exhibition was trying to do – is to encourage people to look at the world through a different prism. We're trying to open up creativity in all its forms.

I'm asked about that exhibition constantly because it changed the terms of permission. And the questions weren't abstract, they were embodied in all work included in the show because it's how most creatives think and work.

Magdalene: I agree. I think that exhibition, the exhibition now, and the work in between has been saying: 'You're allowed to dream, you're allowed to use your imagination to make things.' What I want to stress is the fact that both of us are really respectful of craftsmanship. To be radical and to make art, you don't have to trash it, it doesn't have to be ugly. It can be simple. It can be reductive. Chaos can be distilled into something that is peaceful and thoughtful but says a lot more than is made explicit. You don't have to feed people with ideas. You allow them that privilege of being able to think and reflect.

I think both of these exhibitions, 10 years apart, were made in a way to allow that open sense of thinking and making. I know, Jonathan, you have something of a hatred for fashion exhibitions, so have you been trying to find a new way to bring fashion into the museum context?

Jonathan: Yes. When I started at Loewe and I started the craft prize, I was trying to look at fashion as craft. That was 10 years ago, a long time ago. In a way, there's been so much progress. But I think people still have this idea that craft is a provincial thing. It was not until this morning that I realised that, in a weird way, I hate the idea of conceptual art. I hate the idea of contemporary art because I think it siloes it into this idea of being something which is untouchable. It's a veneer.

'Collaboration stops the house from becoming a closed system. It interrupts the autopilot. Artists give you a different dialogue and ask different questions.'

If you think of Michelangelo or you think of Rembrandt, these people were craftsmen. If you think of Holbein, for me, one of the greatest painters in history, he was a craftsperson. Holbein, a court painter who has a workshop, is technically a craftsman. He is hired as a craftsman to paint the court and is a genius in his field. But then within the period that we're in now, we still want to say, the potter is here, the filmmaker is here, the contemporary artist is here. I think today we're too excited about trendiness. I work for Dior. It's one of the biggest brands in the world, but at the same time I want it to have a sense of humility. To be curious about people and to be able to strip away all this pomp. To just say: here is a dress. Here is a vase. Here is my outcome. I think Christian Dior was humble too. It was not until this morning that I realised something: that 'contemporary' is a bit like the word 'luxury', which I have a problem with, too. It's a word used to contextualise something that has to sit in a certain place.

We're talking about haute couture here, which is one of the most rarefied manifestations of craft. It's not something most people can own, but they want to engage with it. 35,000 people visited the exhibition after the show in just six days, that's quite amazing. I think most people are drawn to things that are made with such skill and care.

Jonathan: Newness, I think, can be found in how to get couture to open up to people. If not, how do you celebrate it? The person who has spent thousands of hours and tens of years training to make these things. It is something that should be experienced. You have to get up close to these things. It's something of pride, and it is a part of French history. It needs the viewer to be able to engage with it, to understand why this thing exists and why it is important. If we remove the pomp and ceremony from it, why is it important to keep this? If there is no reason, it will just die.

The magic was in seeing those garments almost as soon as they left the atelier – before the media had recycled it or before we've seen it worn. That doesn't often happen with couture, and I think that is what has excited people.

Magdalene: I think that potential to astonish and amaze is the most powerful thing here. If the audience takes away those feelings from the exhibition and from the show, then I think we've achieved something, because with that, you leave the audience with a hunger to want to get close to these crafts and that will keep them alive.

Jonathan: The ultimate goal is to preserve couture, because it could so easily be lost.

By the time this conversation is published in early March – just after the next womenswear collection – the couture show will already be 'old news' in fashion terms. Jonathan you've talked about wanting to approach your collections in a different way, where ideas accumulate and build rather than each being a completely new proposition. Can you say something about that?

Jonathan: I don't want to work to feed that fashion calendar. I'm more interested in continuity and building a story, letting ideas grow so the audience can feel the logic over time. Accumulation is also how craft works: you learn through cycles. Especially with couture, you need to live through it to understand what you're doing – the first time is always a lot because you're learning the system while trying to make the work. So I'm trying to make the pace serve the idea, not the other way round. If the conversation is real, it should be able to continue and deepen, instead of restarting every season.

Magdalene, has this experience made you think any differently about your own work?

Magdalene: It reminded me that the work can travel without losing itself, if the conversation is honest. I'm protective of my language, but I'm not precious about context, I'm interested in what happens when my work meets a new public. It also made me think about education, not in a didactic way, but in the sense of opening the imagination. If this kind of collaboration invites people to look harder, to value making, then that's meaningful.

Of Mice and Men

Christian Dior
Haute Couture Spring/Summer 2026

Cameo bracelet, feather sandal, mini minaudière and portraiture brooch, all by Christian Dior Haute Couture.
Throughout: Rex wears a bodice from the National Theatre of London. Goran wears a bralet from the National Theatre of London. Slips and tights by Falke.

Photographs by David Sims
Styling by Benjamin Bruno









Goran wears a ‘Cyclamen’ bouquet headpiece, an ‘Orchid’ bracelet and a mini minaudière, all by Christian Dior Haute Couture.
Rex wears an ‘Orchid’ bracelet and a mesh chainmail bag, both by Christian Dior Haute Couture.



Cameo bracelet, feather sandal, mini minaudière and portraiture brooch, all by Christian Dior Haute Couture.

This page: Mini minaudière by Christian Dior Haute Couture, as seen on the dressing table.
Opposite page: Goran wears the 'Féline' dress by Christian Dior Haute Couture. Bracelet, chainmail bag, minaudière and sandals, all by Christian Dior Haute Couture.



Rex holds a feather sandal by Christian Dior Haute Couture. Minaudière and bracelets by Christian Dior Haute Couture, as seen on the dressing table.

Goran wears the ‘Cyclamen’ dress and a mesh chainmail bag, both by Christian Dior Haute Couture. Sandals by Christian Dior Haute Couture, as seen on the dressing table.

Goran wears the 'Cyclamen' dress and a mesh chainmail bag, both by Christian Dior Haute Couture. Sandals by Christian Dior Haute Couture, as seen on the dressing table.

Goran wears the 'Féline' dress by Christian Dior Haute Couture. Bracelet, chainmail bag, minaudière and sandals, all by Christian Dior Haute Couture, as seen on the dressing table.

Rex wears an alpaca stole, adorned with a cameo brooch and velvet skirt, all by Christian Dior Haute Couture.
Minaudière, bracelet and sandals on the dressing table, all by Christian Dior haute Couture,

Goran wears the 'Cloche' dress by Christian Dior Haute Couture.

Goran wears the 'Cloche' dress by Christian Dior Haute Couture, and gloves from the National Theatre of London.
Opposite page: Rex wears the 'Pompadour' dress by Christian Dior Haute Couture, and a feather boa from the National Theatre of London.

Ulrikke holds the 'Cyclamen' sandals by Christian Dior Haute Couture.



Goran wears the 'Immaculée' wedding gown by Christian Dior Haute Couture.

Rex wears the 'Bois' dress by Christian Dior Haute Couture. 'Petit Diner' clutch and 'Orchid' bracelet, as seen on the dressing table, both by Christian Dior Haute Couture.

Goran wears the 'Bolero' dress by Christian Dior Haute Couture, with earring and gloves from the National Theatre of London.



Rex wears the ‘Voyage’ dress by Christian Dior Haute Couture.

Rex wears an ‘Orchid’ bracelet and a mesh chainmail bag on the lap, both by Christian Dior Haute Couture. Minaudière as seen on Goran by Christian Dior Haute Couture.

Minaudière as seen on Goran by Christian Dior Haute Couture.

Models: Goran Duchesne at Run Model Management, Rex Hobson at Supa. Ulrikke Skotte-Lund at Scoop Models. Casting: Erin Fee.
Hair: Lukas Tralmer at Streeters. Make-up: Lucy Bridge at Streeters. Manicure: Alexandra Janowski at Bryant Artists. Set Design: Poppy Bartlett.
Production: Erin Fee Productions. Photography assistants: Mark Lincoln, Federico Fossati, Jed Barnes, Paul Jedwab, Ahmad Smith. Digital operator: Luca Trevisani.
Styling assistants: Shaun Kong, Marine Boisset, Winnie Rielly, Arthur Callegari, Natasha Arnold. Dior Ateliers on-set team: Liam Leclercq, Jennifer Beteille Zanardo.
Hair assistants: Sevil Tai, Ruth Jay, Clement Billon. Make-up assistants: Jana Reininger, Jay Kwan. Post-production: SKN Lab.

'Creativity is a very, very complex thing.'

In conversation. Benjamin Bruno, David Sims and Jonathan Anderson. Moderated by Jonathan Wingfield.

Jonathan Anderson began working with Benjamin Bruno almost 15 years ago. Having met the stylist in a showroom shortly after Anderson had graduated and launched his own business, the duo quickly formed a deep and intuitive creative bond that has since become the foundation of much of the designer's prolific output: at his brand JW Anderson; during his 11 years at Loewe, transforming the Spanish leather-goods house into one of the most exciting and zeitgeisty brands around; and, just shy of a year, now at Dior. Theirs is a dialogue propelled by a rigorous and mutual challenge: to conjure newness through image, and to tap into, as they put it, 'the psychology of the house'. The resulting work – mainly catwalk shows and campaign imagery – has been cultural, coded, sometimes obscure, and occasionally full of contradiction. It is widely regarded as some of the most memorable of recent times.

Renowned photographer David Sims became a recurring part of their image-making team later in Anderson's Loewe tenure, in 2022, and has been fundamental in shaping Dior's new aesthetic. Having emerged as a photographer in the late 1980s, Sims quickly established himself as one of the industry's leading creatives, with a style of imagery that was often stark, full of street-y attitude, and a precursor to the grunge aesthetic that soon characterised the early-1990s era of fashion, style, music, culture and youth. As such, brands and magazines came calling, eager for him to elevate their image by showcasing his work. Sims' style, attitude and output have evolved and shifted in the decades since (he's now widely acclaimed for his technical prowess and the sheer breadth of his photographic repertoire) and he's arguably more in demand today than ever before.

For the final chapter of *System*'s series of conversations with Jonathan Anderson, we invited Bruno and Sims to speak with the Dior creative director about their close collaboration and the intense pace and volume of image creation that's now required of them.

'When we got started with Dior, it was a discussion more around values than it was any particular photographic style or visual direction.'

Jonathan Wingfield: Jonathan, when you first arrived at Dior, how did you begin considering the role that image and photography would play?

Jonathan Anderson: You're trying to strike a balance between putting out imagery that is precise about where you think Dior can go, and at the same time not closing yourself in. That's why, at the beginning, we put out the Warhol imagery of Basquiat and Lee Radziwill, because they express a mood and a psychology around what we're doing. From there, it allows us to build on things.

Benjamin Bruno: The first task we had in mind was to reset the brand, to rewire the psychology of the house. Dior should be about a youthful, French aristocratic sense of style. But image-wise, as an aesthetic embryo, we used those specific Warhol Polaroids as a first scent of what the brand could build upon. The logo made sense on these people, no matter what era, time, age, or background. It was too early to pretend to know what the Dior image should be, and this gesture just felt right, fresh, and relevant. It's as if you were taking off the parquet of a house and laying another reclaimed and gorgeous one that establishes new foundations.

David Sims: Jonathan was really clear. He said what would be needed was a different language, something very distinct from what we'd been creating in the past [for Loewe or JW Anderson]. What Jonathan does is create a universe, and without sounding falsely modest, I just add to that in part. I want to be able to interpret things which aren't necessarily verbalised, things that we discover by just getting stuck in and doing it. That's how it felt when we got started with Dior – it was a discussion more around values than it was any photographic style or visual direction.

Jonathan: When you have a brand like Dior, you have to try to carve out the values that you want to bring to it. Is it about relationships between women? Is it about a relationship between the Dior man and the Dior woman? Where is Christian Dior today? It was very important that we brought something more empathetic, so, while speaking with David and Ben, you're trying to work out how to tell that through the characters that you're using: the casting, the image-making, the interconnection between the photographic lens and the character. So that the customer looks at it and, even though they don't have the word in front of them, they just *feel* it.

David: By and large, campaign imagery takes up real space. If you go anywhere in Paris, you see that, right? But it can also be a liminal space, one that can be transformative, but which ostensibly draws people towards an idea. And that language comes primarily between Jonathan and Ben. I'm trying to sit in front of those ideas and create them through the mechanism of photography, but I've got to be able to feel it spiritually as well. And Jonathan is particularly good at expressing that sort of spiritual value, which I know could sound absurd to some people, but for us, that's a very real thing.

The work the three of you have produced together obviously predates Dior. Was there a conscious decision to establish a distinct photographic language for the house?

Dior woman is, who the new Dior man is, and what the house of Christian Dior is today, we just create intuitively. We have a mission to create desire, to weave pragmatic daydreams, and to sell, but the storytelling, the characters, and the world the brand lives in, is an absolute playground for blossoming freshness. It's like growing new burgeons of freedom from a plant that has been sitting in a beautiful antique flower pot.

Do you recall seeing David's work for the first time?

Jonathan: I knew David's work incredibly well before I began working with him. A lot of his imagery really spoke to me because I thought it was very 'purist'; the sort of images that get exactly what you want from fashion without it being about fashion. For example, the images for Guido [Palau]'s hair book [*Heads: Hair by Guido*] really stuck with me.

Benjamin: I'd probably say his pictures of Kurt Cobain in a Liberty floral dress or a tiger costume; his portrait of Kate Moss against a baby blue backdrop, with deconstructed short hair by Guido; or his *Heads* hair book images with Guido. You don't forget a picture by David: they get embedded in your mind and in the collective unconscious because they are so graphic, uncompromising, rebellious, empathetic, forward-thinking and simply larger-than-life.

And now that you're close collaborators?

Jonathan: Well, what I love is that David is a master at setting up an image – which is really about craft. He knows about every lighting and technical aspect of picture-making, which I think has largely disappeared [from fashion photography] today. So there's a mutual trust in the collaborative freedom, and that's very difficult today because I think a lot of people just turn up with an image of an image and are trying to recreate it. What's really nice about working with David and Ben on this whole thing is you're carving out something new because it's about an instinctive feeling, it is not about a marketing decision.

Benjamin: I like how atomised David's mind is, how curious his eye is, and how big his heart is. I can go anywhere with him – every aesthetic route, every picture is worth the journey. I like the quality in him of being fragile, of being vulnerable; it means you are real, you don't act life, you live it.

How do you respond to that, David?

'I like how quick we have to be now. Because it stops the ponderous, self-involved nonsense that used to go on around images, people taking it too seriously.'

Benjamin: When it came to choosing the creative voice, the lens, the storyteller with an infinite ability for characterisation, David was the one. Simply because we go back a long way together, and essentially because of his creative agility, lighting genius, relentless quest for 'accidental' perfection, and his rare humanity. There is an almost orgasmic, unfulfilled quality in his working process; he never gives up searching and questioning, as if each picture were the last one he would take. Because my editorials are only shot with him, and because we created that big body of work for Loewe together, we just knew that the visual vocabulary for Dior would have to be unique and drastically disconnected from our previous adventures. And then, by figuring out and endlessly finessing who the new

David: I can't help but be deeply flattered. I think that the connective for us is that there's a very specific type of 'intelligence' – call it craft, call it experience – which can be developed through different approaches. When we're together, the flexibility comes from the assurance that we can rely on that 'image intelligence' to either move back to a place that is familiar and that offers a foundational outcome to what we're trying to achieve, or to be free to surprise ourselves. It's a clunky phrase, 'image intelligence', but it is apt.

Jonathan, tell me about the very specific role that Benjamin plays. It feels like such a key relationship and dynamic.

Jonathan: Ben is someone I trust implicitly. Ever since I have really worked in fashion, I have worked with Ben, and I

like that he's going to tell me the truth. He is the person who could destroy me in two minutes. And I quite like that. Ben, ultimately, is about image-making; that's where he is very good. No matter if it's building a look for a catwalk or building a look for a group of people in an image, Ben has this incredible ability to forge out a tension within what the character is. And so, on a shoot, I kind of vanish.

Because you're no longer needed?

Jonathan: I have a weird emotional process because I've just done the show, and then we have to silmultaneously shoot the campaign and launch another show. So, it's a moment where I'm letting go, and letting Ben *enjoy* it; where there's an element of surprise, where you're like, 'Oh, this character has now evolved into something else.' That is Ben's magic.

'He can boil at me with his eyes full of anger, and I can scream at him and slam the door, but at the end of the day, we're here to make things a success.'

You have previously said, 'I need someone to work against. I have Ben for that.' Tell me more about this tension.

Jonathan: Honestly, it's like being in a relationship with someone. Creativity is a very, very complex thing. And when you're doing something on the scale of Dior, the amount of creative output is huge. So you have to have a partner in crime who is able to keep a feeling of curiosity in order to find newness within every new collection that you're kicking off. There are days when you are not aligned. There are moments when you're *completely* aligned. There are moments where I'll be like, 'I'm not so sure,' but then cut to a year later and we're doing it. And that's because Ben is a very good future thinker; he is able to push me outside my comfort zone. That's really important, because if you didn't have that, you could get completely lost in yourself and become quite repetitive.

Benjamin: Jonathan and I are like two parts of the same brain, or brothers. We are definitely in a relationship, in life and in creativity. We don't need to talk much to understand each other, our brains and intuitions move at the same pace, and almost always to the same places. Where there is passion, there is conflict. If you care, you care. So yes, there can be friction between us, but because we have this common thirst for excellence, and because we love each other, it doesn't really matter. He can boil at me with his eyes full of anger, and I can scream at him and slam the door, but at the end of the day, we are here to make things beautiful and a success, to make the people who trust us proud and happy, and we are here for each other too.

Does that resonate with you, David?

David: Deeply. I mean, neither Ben nor I are shouldering anything like the kind of pressure that Jonathan must be under, and I think he handles it superlatively. There's obviously a lot of trust between Jonathan and Ben, and I hope that Ben trusts me enough to be able to bring these ideas forward, because they're precious to him. But what I read in Ben is a kinship: I feel a definite desire to support him in his exploration of this inner creative self. Being creative, and going through a process in your head, can be isolating, and Ben probably knows that that exists in me too. But as a photographer I can help to manifest it, which I think is a worthwhile exercise.

Jonathan often references and considers different notions of time and history; like the campaign shot in the Comtesse du Barry's Pavillon de Musique. What role does source material or the broader idea of history play in your work?

Benjamin: I respect history, but I don't like dust. So I can admire a magnificent dress or a coat, but then it needs to be dismantled to give birth to newness. I like and admire the codes of a fashion house in small doses, but I love extracting relevant details from a piece of clothing and then transfiguring, bending, reinterpreting, mocking, and morphing them into a contemporary, fresh version that smartly winks at the past.

Jonathan: For me, the historical context is just about the psyche of something. Shooting at the Comtesse du Barry's house brings up many possibilities. It's a building of sheer modernity – probably one of the greatest pieces of French architecture – and I think some people would struggle today with trying to create modernity of that power. It's kind of like facing up to Goliath. You may not get that from the pictures, but it's all those layers that are important in brand-building. It's saying, here are the adjacencies that I want in French culture, with a French institution. But by the time you go to shoot there, and get inspiration from it, and throw a lens on it… It morphs into something else. That's where newness can be found, because it's not becoming overly prescriptive.

Photography plays such a powerful role in creating legacy for a designer's work. Yet the pace and volume of image creation is more intense than ever. How are you affected by this tension?

Jonathan: We have to produce a lot of imagery because fashion is a bigger business than it was in 1956. And I think there is both a reality and a *non*-reality of what image is today, and of why we do it. That's what I find exciting in fashion because we look at it sometimes through jaded eyes. We all see more imagery than ever before, everyone's an expert; but at the same time, there is always newness to be found when you put three or four people around a table and then you shoot something, because it will always be a different time and moment.

David, how does this intense pace and volume affect your working methods?

David: It's incalculable, so I try not to think about it. Although part of what I'm commissioned to create is volume, so you have to deal with this amplification because without it, you don't exist to the majority of people. It's about trying to reach that scale while retaining some degree of the DNA of your creativity from its origin point. And that's proven to be really difficult. We've had to develop totally different approaches. Digital has become a huge part of that, but people still want to see photography that, in some cases, is almost aping a very analogue approach — trying to do as much within the camera as possible, not relying on software to add or smooth over certain aspects of the work. So we try to keep it as organic as possible, knowing full well that we have to come away with a huge number of images in a very short space of time. But I'm not going to deny it, I think I've become slightly attached to that pressure. I like how quick we have to be. Because it stops the sort of ponderous, self-involved nonsense that used to go on around images, people taking it far too seriously. Of course, we take it seriously, but sometimes we can get trapped in a fantasy of our own brilliance. And when you're challenged in the way that we are now, you've got to just roll your sleeves up and get down and dirty with it. And I quite enjoy that.

Has the aspiration of each single image changed now that it exists as one image among so many others?

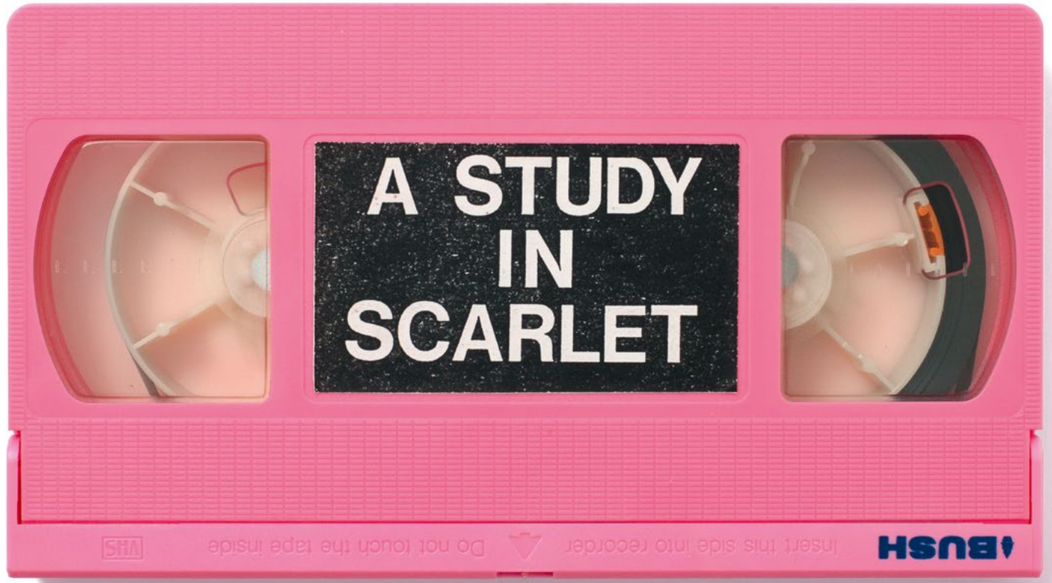
David: I've played with pluralism because I increasingly felt that there was too much energy and too much focus on creating 'definitives'. And I had this nagging sense of 'all that is being lost'. So I think I am aiming at this person who is not kind of standing back and admiring just a single picture. What I want them to do is walk away with some feelings from a collection of images. This is why I'm such a fan of Wolfgang [Tillmans], because there are so many images talking to each other so wonderfully in those shows he creates. You still walk away with a feeling. Let me be clear, I don't think I moved in any direction as an outcome of seeing Wolfgang's work, but I think I've evolved in a certain direction because I'm such a fan of photography and the vibrant culture[s] around photography.

'The power of the logo is what qualifies a lot of images in people's minds. I don't think the imagery without the logo would be nearly as impactful.'

On one hand, you've got a carousel post of 20 images existing within the deluge of Instagram, and on the other there are entire building façades that have become billboards for one single image.

David: I think that covering buildings is quite an interesting situation. The scale of it, how huge they are, is really impressive. And I think you mustn't forget the power of the logo, it's what qualifies a lot of images in people's minds. I don't think sometimes the imagery without the logo would be nearly as impactful. Maybe that's why a single image printed that large and occupying a whole building front – the monumental scale – is really important. If you're affected by that it's quite something to see.

Benjamin: I like pictures that can solidly exist on a billboard, at a bus stop, in a book, in a magazine, and in a gallery. So I don't really draw any distinction between advertising photography and editorial photography. Of course, one speaks globally at a massive scale and the other is more an intimate playground for exploration and characterisation, yet both are about telling stories and hand-making dreams. But while I acknowledge that advertising pictures serve a different purpose from editorial or art pictures, I can't compromise on their quality or rarity. I have to confess that I'm extremely demanding in terms of image-making, mostly with myself and, by extension, with other collaborators. No matter the pace and demands of the industry, I cannot possibly live with delivering a mediocre picture; it is simply not an option. Because for me, photography ultimately remains the most noble and chic medium to record reality, at a certain time, in a certain place. To paraphrase Nan Goldin: 'I thought by taking pictures of my friends, I would keep them alive forever,' and also, 'My camera partially functions as my memory.' I think that's the most romantic and moving description of photography.



Cosey Fanni Tutti, *A Study in Scarlet*, VHS tape, 1987.

Pink as confrontation

How a Cosey Fanni Tutti VHS tape inspired Climax.
By Isabella Burley

I still remember the way it arrived.

A Study in Scarlet came wrapped in a black bin bag, taped shut, the address written carefully in biro. Inside was a VHS tape from 1987 – hot pink, confrontational, hand-numbered. One of only 160 made. The seller messaged me afterwards to say it had belonged to her late husband. At the time, I didn't know why I needed it. I just knew that I did.

I found the tape on eBay a few years before Climax existed, when I was still working in magazines, collecting books and objects without any particular sense of where they might end up. It sat on my shelf for years, unplayed but never invisible. The colour alone refused neutrality, making it impossible to ignore.

Ironically, Cosey Fanni Tutti was the first person I ever interviewed. I was 19 and totally terrified. The interview took place around *Cosey Complex*, her one-day event at the ICA [Institute of Contemporary Arts, London], conceived with writer Maria Fusco. It was the same institution where, in 1976, she staged *Prostitution*, the now-infamous exhibition by COUM Transmissions. The show was shut down after just four days and described by MPs as a 'sickening outrage'. It included imagery of Fanni Tutti appropriated from pornographic magazines, opening-night performances by her band Throbbing Gristle, and later a stripper, Cherry, writhing naked on the floor covered in fake blood – work that was often flattened into provocation, when it was in fact concerned with authorship, agency, and control.

Looking back now, I can see how Cosey Fanni Tutti, and a cultural artifact like *A Study in Scarlet*, became such a strong early reference point for Climax. Not in any literal sense, but in its instincts. The tape was raw but deliberate, erotic but precise. It was self-authored.

When Climax began, it wasn't with a business plan. I genuinely didn't think anyone would buy a single thing. It began with a feeling: that the things I'd been collecting obsessively for years mattered. Overlooked artists, countercultural figures, ephemera that might otherwise have been discarded but deserved to be shared.

The pink that has since become synonymous with Climax – the shopping bags, address labels, vinyl doors, and the faint tint you pass through when you enter our stores – can be traced back to that VHS tape. It's not the same pink, but it occupies a similar thinking. Pink as confrontation rather than sweetness. Pink as something that signals refusal as much as invitation. A colour that doesn't apologise for being seen. Strangely, it feels timeless; six years on, I still love it.

Over time, Climax has grown (we now have stores in New York and London) but the practice has remained largely the same. I still choose slowly. I still trust my eye. I'm more interested in how something makes me feel than how easily it explains itself. I believe cultural objects carry weight: of intention, of importance, of risk. That instinct still shows up on our shelves today, whether it's a book by the late Pippa Garner, with her warped humour and radical approach to authorship and the body, or a rare Hiromix CD-ROM from 1996, the photographer pictured on the cover holding a shiny silver gun.

Running a space like Climax means constantly negotiating between preservation and exposure. How to make something accessible and welcoming without flattening it. How to allow growth without diluting it. Some things are meant to remain rare, awkward, or unresolved, though if John Waters or Sofia Coppola comes into the store, we're going to take their picture.

That VHS tape is still with me. It now lives in my kitchen cupboard, because my home is too minimalist for my books to be on display (one day I'll have proper shelves). I still love it, and show it proudly when people come round. It hasn't changed much. Neither, really, has the way I look at things. I've just got more people to show them to.



Gabriella Karefa-Johnson's grandmother, Rena Karefa-Smart, on a state visit to Taiwan in the 1960s.

I got it from my grandmother

How consciously do we choose to speak through what we wear?
By Gabriella Karefa-Johnson

I was raised by people who believed visibility could be a form of action. When it comes to the intersection of style and politics, there are two photographs of my grandmother that shaped the way I understand the relationship between the two.

In one, she's a 20-something theologian – a Black American woman in the late 1940s – addressing a spellbound crowd of thousands of white convention-goers at the *Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchentag* [German Evangelical Church Assembly], a massive gathering devoted to connecting faith with social responsibility. Her speech is part-sermon, part-political lecture. She delivers it wearing traditional West African dress and gara headwear among a sea of Western suits and sensible shoes.

In the other, she's on a state visit to Taiwan in a glamorous tailored two-piece with a leopard collar, matching clutch, and headpiece. She knows it will turn heads, but she also knows that they are staring anyway. So she makes no apologies. Behind her, a local onlooker is caught mid-reaction, mouth open, tongue out, completely disarmed by her presence and presentation.

In both images, before she says a word, she has already spoken.

My grandmother understood that stylistic difference, when borne with intention, carries meaning. Whether she was at a pulpit, in a classroom, or simply walking into a room, she moved with the same conviction: presence can challenge power. Watching her, I learned that occupying space fully and unapologetically could shift the terms of the conversation. She knew then, as I know now, that fashion communicates. Before I understood hemlines or house codes or hierarchies of design, I understood that.

That early education is what I carry with me when I talk about fashion as a tool to challenge the systems that contain us. For better or worse, style signals who we are and what we believe. So the idea that fashion can opt out of politics is one I fundamentally reject. Now more than ever, we cannot subscribe to the false privilege of neutrality or pretend our industry is exempt from responsibility.

To do so ignores how fashion actually functions: it's made by people, shaped by history, moved through to global supply chains and tied to traditions of craft that hold cultural memory, to status and to ceremony. It isn't abstract. It can offer protection, physically and psychologically. It gives shape to identity in public space. Getting dressed is one of the ways we make meaning visible.

So in every fitting and on every set, I think about who is being seen and who is missing, because those choices determine whose stories get told and whose remain invisible. I think about the long life of an image and the stories it will tell after the moment has passed. And I recognise that for public figures, especially in politics, a single look can calcify into narrative that defines entire eras.

As a stylist, I have felt the weight of that.

When I worked with Kamala Harris for the cover of *Vogue*, she wore American designers and Converse. A deliberate choice to present her as grounded and approachable at a historic moment – warm, human, relatable after four years of cruelty in American political life. The response made clear that many people read the image differently. Some saw it as too casual and lacking the gravity they associated with the office. Others felt it was safe, unglamorous and overly deferential to American fashion nationalism.

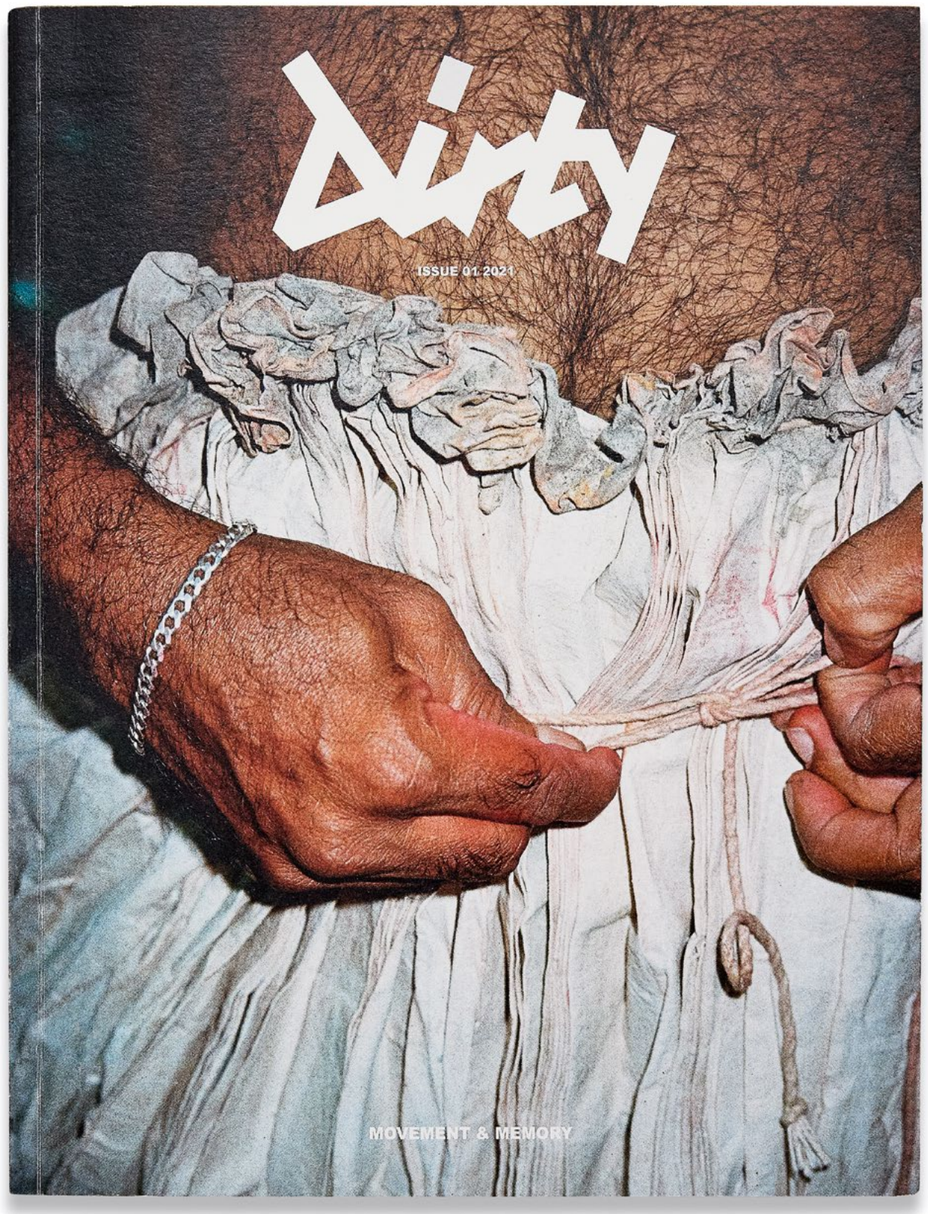
Looking back, I see how much of our thinking was shaped by a desire to make her legible and palatable within existing expectations of power. That grasp for relatability flattened the message. It was a lesson I will never forget.

A different energy guided my work styling Rama Duwaji for Zohran Mamdani's mayoral inauguration. Our starting point was honesty rather than acceptability. Propriety politics were not part of the conversation. This moment could speak to global connection and solidarity while authentically expressing Rama's taste and sensibilities.

Rama's choice to wear a coat designed by Cynthia Merhej, a Palestinian-Lebanese designer, reflected a real connection to cultural identity and political reality. Nothing about the look was permission-seeking. It asserted itself on the steps of City Hall while protestors tried their hardest to make the new mayor and his partner feel unwelcome. They, and their respective looks, claimed their place in history anyway. The public responded to that clarity. They recognised it as genuine and felt inspired by it.

These experiences have only reinforced what my grandmother showed me decades ago: clothing is never just decoration. Fashion can obscure meaning or make it unmistakable – prop up harmful hierarchies or help dismantle them. The idea that fashion should sit outside politics ignores the truth that we have always dressed our beliefs.

The only real question is how consciously we choose to speak through what we wear.



Repro photograph by Ole Wei-Yang Ripper

The launch issue of *Dirty* magazine, 2021.

A fine mess

Why *Dirty* magazine eschews India's usual editorial systems. By Kshitij Kankaria

At some point, fashion as we know it stopped being a reflection of its time and a modality of self-expression for those who create and wear it. The Indian fashion industry in its current form is relatively new, and has emerged from age-old traditions of craft and textiles. To this day, in India, the much overused buzzword 'tradition' is the key element which churns commerce. The industry never had to look outside of its almost two billion consumers until very recently.

When fashion magazines entered the Indian fashion system in the late 2000s, designers still had craft and brands still had money, but style as an independent way of thinking became rare. What began as commentary and curiosity slowly morphed into a system designed primarily to sell. This shift was accelerated by paid promotions and Bollywood, which has conveniently collapsed fashion, cinema and commerce into a cyclic promotional loop. By the time I started thinking about making *Dirty*, magazines had already fallen down in the ranks of 'content' hierarchy. The original purpose of the form had lost its original meaning.

Yet, culturally, India was at a crucial moment: the country was changing rapidly. A younger generation was directly plugged into global conversations around fashion, art, luxury and identity. Young designers were starting to show, and we saw art weeks, literature festivals and music festivals sprout across the country. It was clear that investment and attention were flowing into culture across disciplines.

But there were very few platforms where young people could see themselves represented beyond their purchasing power. The media largely spoke *at* them. International fashion titles like *Elle*, *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar* that entered India arrived with iconic global legacies, yet they also came burdened with rigid templates: systems built in the West. The results were polished and professional, but often disconnected from the local creative communities they were meant to represent.

My relationship with magazines had started much earlier, and much less formally. I first encountered magazines on a bus, travelling to school from the very small town of Thandla in central rural India where I grew up, to a slightly bigger one to take my biology exams. I was meant to be memorising diagrams, but in an attempt to brush up my drawing skills, I was sketching faces from the pages of a magazine I had just discovered. My biology exams felt optional. Drawing did not.

In 2019, while working on a book with a photographer friend in Paris, he suggested I start my own magazine. I laughed. Print felt irresponsible at best, nostalgic at worst – especially in India. Then the Covid lockdown happened, and boredom took over. I decided to give it a shot, and *Dirty* launched during the peak of the pandemic. With very little else competing for attention, it travelled quickly and unexpectedly, both within India and internationally. What began as an experiment became something more specific: a platform that treated Indian creative communities with seriousness.

Ever since our debut issue in 2021, we've covered newly-sprouting drag scenes in coastal communities around Mumbai, where we found stylists like Deepen (who goes by her drag name Deedeepls), who's gone on to style some of our covers. Designers we discovered on Instagram – Naseeb Sihag, Ashish Karmali and Pramod Bhange – create incredible looks through the most unusual processes. Photographer Yash Sheth, whose humorous images capture the infectious joy of Mumbai's underbelly, became one of our regular contributors, despite having no experience within the traditional media system. Together, they have given us a distinct editorial edge. We've now merged into each other's lives, and formed an ecosystem that thrives across our magazine, in bedroom ateliers, and in the nightclubs of the city.

From the beginning, *Dirty* has refused the usual systems. We don't offer photo approvals. We don't allow brands to choose teams. We don't dilute artists through committees. This is unusual in India, where access is often exchanged for compliance. It is equally uncomfortable for European luxury brands to encounter this level of control from a young, independent publication operating out of Mumbai. But it's worked.

As well as discovering and championing homegrown talent, we've worked with some of the most iconic photographers from the West, including Sarah Moon and Tim Walker. With a relatively small following, the magazine has now built up a level of engagement that has exposed a larger truth: scale without meaning is hollow. *Dirty* has been welcomed in India because it slowed things down when everything was accelerating. Because it insists on centering people in an industry which feels as though it is based only on transaction. Because it treats fashion not as a product category, but as a cultural language worth interrogating, and because boredom, when taken seriously, can still be a radical place to begin.

‘Expertise in vintage, through the act of consumption.’

ARCHIVISM, a ‘creative agency based on things from the past’, is setting the tone for China’s burgeoning vintage market.

Text by Gemma A. Williams
Portrait by Kin Chan Coedel











Photographs © ARCHIVISM

Installation views of the *Collector's Room vol. 01: CÉLINE by Phoebe Philo* shoppable exhibition at Suhe Haus, Shanghai, November 12, 2025 – February 14, 2026.









Photographs © ARCHIVISM

Installation views of the *Margiela in Hermès: Legacy of Luxe* shoppable exhibition
at the ARCHIVISM Showroom at XC273, Shanghai, December 20, 2024 – January 27, 2025.

Brain La is a rising name in Chinese fashion. He's not a designer, or a stylist, or even a photographer, but a collector of vintage fashion – something of a rarity in China until relatively recently. In 2023 he founded ARCHIVISM, a 'creative agency based on things from the past', the focal point of which is his collection. Built up over a decade, it clocks in at an eye-watering 8,000 pieces, many of which would make even the most established museum curators envious.

Since 2024, Shanghai-based La has been showing off select parts of this archive at highly curated pop-up events, the first of which was an exhibition of Martin Margiela's ultra-revered collections for Hermès (1997-2003) which opened at the now-defunct concept store XC273. Prices ranged from €400 for a skirt or vest, to €12,000 for key, collectible pieces such as a long, black draped lambsleather coat – part of an ensemble that made up Look 14 of the Hermès Autumn/Winter 1999 collection. This curatorial project, which La calls 'The Collector's Room (TCR)', presents meticulously researched and assembled exhibitions of if-you-know-you-know fashion history, but with a major twist: it's entirely shoppable.

The ARCHIVISM collection features significant pieces from the most pivotal periods in the careers of numerous seminal designers. There's an Alexander McQueen coat depicting the 1845 daguerreotype *Drei Mädchen* ('Three Little Girls') by Carl Gustav Oehme from the designer's Autumn/Winter 1998 collection 'Joan'; a Martin Margiela *trompe l'oeil* Tattoo Torso Ensemble from the designer's Spring/Summer 1989 debut runway show; and a grey check dress from Comme des Garçons' Spring/Summer 1997 collection, 'Body Meets Dress, Dress Meets Body', more commonly referred to as the 'Lumps and Bumps' collection, one of the holy grails for 1990s fashion collectors.

Throughout his decade of collecting, Brain La has zoned in on particular areas of interest: Hedi Slimane's Dior Homme; Nicolas Ghesquière's Balenciaga; Tom Ford for Gucci (the subject of the next TCR event opening in November); and Helmut Lang from 1989-2005. These brands and eras are not dissimilar from the interests of Western vintage collectors, but what sets this archive apart is its business model. Rather than hide it behind closed doors, ARCHIVISM has developed a retail experience that breaks the conventions of Chinese secondhand luxury shopping.

The most recent shoppable pop-up exhibition was a survey of Phoebe Philo-era Céline that ran from November 2025 to February 2026 at the art and design centre Suhe Haus in Shanghai's vibrant Jing'an District. Featuring 800 archival pieces from the designer's tenure at the label between 2010 and 2018, it included covetable classics such as the Yves Klein 'Anthropometries' dress from Spring/Summer 2017, and the woven checkered laundry bag ensemble from Autumn/Winter 2013, both priced at €12,000. The exhibition's physical display also paid homage to spatial elements from Philo's Céline world: the straw wall developed for the 2016 Pre-Fall campaign and store window displays; the floral installations seen in the Céline Paris headquarters circa 2015. Equally impressive is the depth of research that goes into assembling ARCHIVISM's shoppable events. Instead of price tags, each piece is labelled museum-style with an image of the runway look, as well as information on the collection, look, and materials, which are deliciously paratextual.

Displayed alongside the clothing is a constellation of books, art and other ephemera that, taken together, paints a picture of Philo's revered world: a comprehensive set of official Céline catalogues; VIP-exclusive printed campaign portfolios photographed by Juergen Teller, rarely seen publicly; and a collection of magazines featuring interviews with the designer. Out-of-print books by the artists and photographers central to Philo's work also feature, such as Yves Klein, Brassaï, Dan Graham and Sarah Lucas. Clearly, Brain La is, as his name suggests, a *brain*. An obsessive and passionate one at that.

'Big storehouses in Shenzhen ask customers to don white gloves as they enter their premises to look through pre-owned Dior and Chanel handbags.'

Typical of contemporary China's new breed of fashion founders, he's friends with all the right people: fashion PR Bohan Qiu; Zhang Yaning, design director of Chinese group JNBY's label Less; and media veteran Tim Lim are all in his circle. La looks the part, too (he's wearing full black Comme des Garçons when we talk). Just 30 years of age, he grew up in Xi'an in Shaanxi, an island province in North China, and studied biology in Canada's University of Alberta. Alongside this, he had a deep appreciation for fashion, often posting little videos and reselling items here and there.

Like many before him, his entry point into collecting fashion was a love for sneakers, but it was a jacket from the Spring/Summer 2005 'Beautiful But' collection from Undercover by Jun Takahashi that really changed his life. It was 2014 when he saw photographs of the collection on his friend's WeChat. He'd never seen anything like it before and, like any self-respecting fashion obsessive, promptly got to work buying up all the pieces he could. 'I wanted to soak up all the information I could find about Undercover,' he explains, 'and I wanted to understand what I bought.'

Aside from the role of discerning collector, La can add archivist, curator, stylist and tastemaker to his CV. He researches and lectures in fashion history at East China Normal University, but also engages a more general public – during our conversation, he mentions he's just returned from Hangzhou where he hosted a series of talks to support the recently opened exhibition *Martin Margiela 1989 – 2009: The Women's Collections* organised with the Palais Galliera. All of this experience feeds into his work for ARCHIVISM, but he still enjoys being on the shop floor. 'I'm the best at sales,' he says, half-jokingly, but something tells me it's true.

'Most Chinese people entered the world of fashion relatively late,' La explains, 'yet the industry here has developed with incredible speed and sophistication over the past decade, and customers have accumulated their fashion expertise through the act of consumption.' Like La himself, this consumption includes, more recently than perhaps in Europe and the US, fashion's own material history. Socially and culturally, Chinese shoppers have traditionally been highly resistant to the idea of purchasing and wearing secondhand clothing.

Japan, of course, has long made a name for itself selling covetable preloved pieces – both American vintage that was hard to come by even in the US, as well as from its most revered homegrown designers. The Western market, too, has spurred on the rise of what is known to younger consumers as 'archive' fashion – largely 1980s to 2000s avant-garde and luxury designer wear. Today, internationally, the popularity of secondhand clothing is rising exponentially. In consulting firm Bain's Luxury Study for 2025, it was revealed that secondhand luxury goods sales had grown to an estimated €50 billion, outpacing sales of new luxury goods. Chinese consumers had eschewed the idea of buying pre-owned clothes due to long-held negative superstitions, but in the 12 years since I have been travelling there, the rise of interest in the resale market has evolved from an aversion to an explosion, exemplified by ARCHIVISM's success.

Data from the marketing agency Daxue Consulting shows this to be true. The overall secondhand market in China was valued at RMB 1.68 trillion ($225 billion) in 2024, while the luxury resale market in China is currently estimated to be at $28 billion according to consulting firm McKinsey & Company's 'State of Fashion 2026' report. Over 60 per cent of consumers in China have shopped more from resale platforms today compared with two to three years ago; and over 70 per cent report plans to shop resale in 2026.

This shift in attitude has been assisted by two major factors. The first is China's economic downturn. Due to low consumer confidence, real estate pressures and rising youth unemployment, people are generally spending less. Put simply, shoppers want more bang for their buck. The second is the tech platforms with built-in tools for listing secondhand clothing, such as the AI interface on *Xianyu*, *Zhuan Zhuan* and *Dewu* (similar to eBay's AI listing tools) and the popularity of flexing shopping hauls on *Xiaohongshu* (RedNote)[1]. These factors, and a new demand for secondhand luxury in particular, has led to new, physical spaces selling vintage in Tier 1 and 2 cities – something unheard of less than a decade ago. Big storehouses in places like Shenzhen ask customers to don white gloves as they enter their premises to look through pre-owned handbags from Gucci, Dior and Chanel.

Brain La's collection, though, is different. It's for those with, perhaps, more niche fashion interests than your average Chinese secondhand consumer. ARCHIVISM's clients are usually older than the 18-to-25 age bracket shopping secondhand on *Xiaohongshu*. ARCHIVISM's paying customers by contrast are much older, in the 40s-to-50s age bracket which La says is 'the generation more interested in luxury experiences and slow retail.' They are, he says, more educated about the history of fashion and, La admits, 'easier to sell to.'

While ARCHIVISM is building up a reputable name as a key destination for niche vintage fashion, he and his contemporaries still face several issues in China's resale market. For one, there are complex import taxes that must be taken into account. Plus, competition is high and an influx of luxury goods sellers might bring down the price of certain garments, ultimately lowering the margins for all traders. La said prices in Paris and London are, from his experience, currently higher than in China despite the added tax. While this may be true in some cases, prices can vary widely. Internationally, the Philo-era Yves Klein dress La has priced at €12,000 can be priced from around €2,300 on international sales platform 1stdibs, to €12,000 on Vestiaire Collective.

While it's still early days, La is redefining what it means to shop for luxury vintage in China. So, what's next – the ARCHIVISM Fashion Museum? 'It's not easy to build such a thing and it would require a lot of work and government support,' La explains. For now, he's consulting for a number of luxury brands and doubling down on the retail side of things. This Spring, ARCHIVISM opens its first permanent store (ARCHIVISM Gallery Store, AGS) in Shanghai's Suhe Haus, and, in June, will bring the shoppable 'Collector's Room vol. 01: CÉLINE by Phoebe Philo' exhibition to Paris. While the venue is still under wraps, Philophiles should still their beating hearts and start queuing up now. A fashion museum might not yet be on the cards, but La is certainly building the foundations for China's first vintage fashion empire.

‘LA is Hollywood, Paris is fashion, and New York is everything.’

_W_ magazine editor-in-chief Sara Moonves is delivering her best performance.

Interview by Jonathan Wingfield
Portrait by David Sims



Have you seen *W* magazine recently? The New York title oozes a heady mix of confidence, character, and creative zeal. It's the place where high fashion wraps itself around popular culture, and where the industry's most creative creatives often deliver their strongest work. Crucially, Hollywood's A-list all show up for a *W* cover shoot, a bit of playfully irreverent social content, and its hottest-ticket-in-town parties.

While previously considered *Vogue*'s younger, artier sibling, today's *W* has a spunky independence about it and no longer resides in the shadows of Condé Nast's leading lady. The publishing behemoth had owned *W* for 20 years but sold it for a song in 2019 as part of its restructuring effort to pare down (or was that tear down?) its portfolio. Unstable times ensued – until, deep in Covid lockdown, freshly promoted editor-in-chief Sara Moonves drummed up investment from the likes of Karlie Kloss, Kaia Gerber, and Lewis Hamilton, and saved *W* from the brink.

Since then, she has ushered in a 'print-digital-events' strategy with an annual calendar of highly marketable themed issues that reflect fashion and entertainment's ever-deepening love affair. There's the 'Best Performances' issue, a Hollywood-vehicle co-assembled with Tinseltown veteran journalist Lynn Hirschberg, to coincide with awards season; then 'Directors' (featuring contributions from heavyweights such as Spielberg and Tarantino); 'Fashion', which straddles the international runway show weeks; and 'Art', which lands on the eve of Art Basel Miami.

Much of this resurgence has been down to Moonves' own brand of deft, behind-the-scenes manoeuvring – juggling luxury fashion brands, digital media experts, the aforementioned Hollywood talent, and marquee contributors such as Steven Meisel, David Sims, Juergen Teller, and, most recently, Tyrone Lebon, whom she successfully coaxed out of a decade-long abstinence from shooting editorial.

Born into the upper echelons of the entertainment industry, Moonves grew up in Los Angeles surrounded by Hollywood executives, Oscar nominees in the making, and a bedroom wallpapered with fashion magazine spreads. As a teenager, she snagged bi-coastal internships at *Vogue* (with Lisa Love, Sally Singer, and Phyllis Posnick) before establishing herself as one of a new wave of New York fashion editors. And when *W* hit the skids mid-pandemic, it was her verve, vision, contacts, and Herculean work ethic that came to the rescue.

System recently sat down with Sara Moonves in New York to discuss her journey: from a charmed LA childhood to the editor's office on the 37th floor of One World Trade Center, *W*'s eerily serene headquarters. It makes for an upbeat ride, because she's so affable, exuberant, and well-connected: 48 hours previously she'd been partying with Charli XCX at Bar Marmont, and at one point during our conversation, she excused herself to take a call from 'PTA' – the multi-award-winning movie director, not the local Parent Teacher Association.

Jonathan Wingfield: Tell me about growing up in Los Angeles, immersed in the upper echelons of the entertainment industry. The only reference point I can conjure up is… *Beverly Hills 90210*?

Sara Moonves: It actually wasn't too different from that. I went to Harvard-Westlake school, which had a big grassy lawn, in that clichéd LA high school kind of way. And the families of most of the kids that I was friends with worked in the entertainment industry. Everyone had their hand in the Hollywood pot: which could mean running a studio or working as an actor or being a film editor or doing voiceover work. It was just what was normal. And as a kid I loved movies and TV obsessively. I watched *everything*.

What was your go-to show?

Sex and the City, which I was very much *not* allowed to watch because I was too young, but I'd sneak in to watch it anyway. I loved being immersed in those TV worlds, and I also loved knowing the people involved in making them. I also had friends who were becoming actors as we were growing up, which was really fun to watch.

Did any of them hit the big time?

My best friend growing up was Jonah Hill. I remember when he started working, he had a teeny part in *I Heart Huckabees* by David O. Russell. That was his first foot in the door. Then he did *Superbad*, which ended up being massive, and all of sudden my friend was *really* famous. Later, as he got into directing – when he did *Moneyball,* which got nominated for an Oscar – I was just like, 'Holy shit!' These days, it's great to watch other childhood friends achieve the things they set out to do, like the film producer Eli Bush, who actually produced Jonah's film *Mid90s*. He's been working with the Safdie brothers and now he's nominated for an Oscar for Josh Safdie's *Marty Supreme*.

You mentioned in your CFDA speech[1] that as a young child you'd appeared in four episodes of *Full House* alongside the Olsens twins. Were you keen to pursue acting as a career yourself?

I never wanted to be an actor, and never wanted to work in television. I remember going on TV sets and saying, 'This is amazing,' but as crazy as it sounds, it felt boring to me because you're playing the same character for six months, or you're working on the same film for an entire year. What I dreamed of was a job where it was different every single day.

So who was your favourite celebrity? Drew Barrymore?

All my friends were obsessed with her, but I wanted to be Cate Blanchett. I remember her wearing this gold Balenciaga dress to the Met Ball, and then Nicole Kidman wearing Balenciaga to her wedding. I loved John Galliano, too. I was obsessed with that whole Dior moment. And when *Boogie Nights* came out, I became obsessed with Julianne Moore, and the way that the movie and the fashion were all connected.

Did you have a favourite supermodel?

I was never so obsessed with the supermodels. Don't get me wrong, I was following all of them as well, but I preferred clothes on celebrities more than, say, Gisele or Kate Moss.

Who was your favourite designer at the time?

Nicolas Ghesquière at Balenciaga. Anytime anything was written about him or there were photographs of him, it would be on my bedroom wall. I remember this particular image of Nicolas, with Marie-Amélie [Sauvé] and Charlotte Gainsbourg, shot by Annie Leibovitz.[2] That was probably the first time I saw what he looked like. You know, 'Oh my God, he's a real person!'

What about *W*?

W came a little later. I remember the Brad and Angelina story,[3] and then the David Sims shoots. It was pushing boundaries and offering commentary on culture. If you look at that Brad and Angelina story now, it's *unbelievable*, just the fact that it was so close to the bone in terms of art imitating life… Anyway, then I had the opportunity to intern at *Vogue* in LA, and my life changed forever.

That was in the *Vogue* office in LA?

Yes, which doesn't exist anymore. There was a Condé Nast floor in a very office-looking building around West Hollywood. It wasn't glamorous. It almost looked like a bank.

What a comedown.

I was Lisa Love's intern every summer of high school. She was the West Coast editor. She had this corner office and one assistant, and that was basically *Vogue* LA. Down the hall was *Vanity Fair* and down a little further was *GQ*. I remember walking to her office and having this feeling that my life was going to change. We connected really quickly, me and Lisa, she's still family to me now. The job at the time was walking to Whole Foods to pick up her lunch, writing names on seating cards, that kind of thing. But I studied *every* last detail, so when Lisa was having a dinner I'd be figuring out who each guest was. When I wasn't doing that I'd be sitting and reading all the old *Vogues* she had in her office, because there was no other access to the archive.

Given that *Vogue* was so centralised in New York, what was Lisa Love's role?

She was the centre of LA fashion in a lot of ways. So, if Anna [Wintour] was

Enter the role of the magazine editor…

Well, I'd been reading fashion magazines as far back as I can remember, becoming obsessed with *Vogue* and Italian *Vogue* and this whole world of fashion. But fashion in LA is not nearly as present as it is in New York or Paris or London. So, fashion magazines were an escape, which is ironic when you consider that movies and TV offer escapism for most people. As I said, *Beverly Hills 90210* wasn't an escape for me, it wasn't so different from real life. Whereas when I'd look at Italian *Vogue* and see these fantasy stories that Steven Meisel was shooting, I was like, 'I want to be a part of *this*.'

How old were you at this stage?

Fourteen. My friends all thought it was odd how obsessed I was with magazines. No one else was buying them, whereas my entire bedroom was covered in magazine pages, like crazy wallpaper.

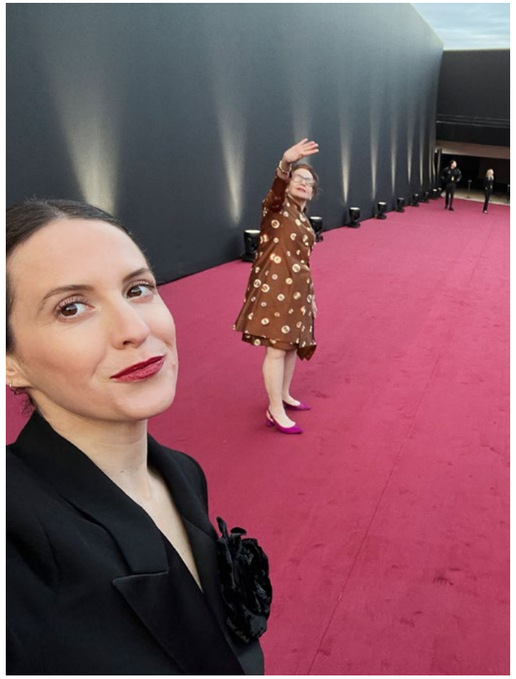
'The families of the kids I was friends with worked in the entertainment industry. Everyone had their hand in the Hollywood pot. It's just what was normal.'

'Fashion magazines were an escape for me in the way movies offer escapism for most people. *Beverly Hills 90210* wasn't so different from real life.'













Top left. Stellan Skarsgård and Lisa Love, *W* and Louis Vuitton pre-Golden Globes dinner, Los Angeles, 2026.
Top right. Bottega Veneta Show, Milan, 2024.
Bottom left. Adam Sandler, fitting photo from 'Best Performances', Los Angeles, 2020.
Bottom right. Nicolas Cage, fitting photo from 'Best Performances', Los Angeles, 2024.





Top left. Luca Guadagnino, *W Fifty Years, Fifty Stories* book signing, London, 2022.
Top right. Sara Moonves and Lynn Hirschberg, Versace show, Los Angeles, 2023.
Bottom left. Sara Moonves and her daughter meeting Chappell Roan, New York, 2025.
Bottom right. Brad Pitt, fitting photo from 'Best Performances', Los Angeles, 2023.

coming to LA, she took care of that. If a designer was coming to LA, she'd throw a dinner for them. And at that time, it was the start of a fashion movement in LA that hadn't existed before: Rodarte was beginning, Scott Sternberg was doing Band of Outsiders, there was a big denim scene happening, Rick Owens was still in LA, and Michèle Lamy was doing Les Deux Cafés,[4] which is where me and my friends would hang out. Lisa was really the person pushing *all* that along. We're talking really early 2000s.

Peak Juicy Couture era.
Oh my God! Juicy Couture was *everything*, such a big deal. But LA was far from everything, so when anyone was coming into town or a shoot was taking place, it was a big deal. Clothes would get sent to the office, so Tonne Goodman or Phyllis Posnick or Grace [Coddington] could come and prep their stories. I'd steam all the clothes before they'd do a fitting with a celebrity in this little closet we had, and then I'd take a Polaroid. It was such an education to watch these incredibly talented women, but the most influential relationship that I built while I was there was with Sally Singer, who would come to LA for two weeks every summer. At the time, she was the fashion news and features director at American *Vogue*, and it was my job to organise her schedule. So she'd meet all the LA designers, all the denim designers… I would make her dinner reservations, find a babysitter for her kids. By this point, I had read every word Sally had ever written in *Vogue*. She was the one who made me think, 'Oh, that's what I want to do.' I wanted to be Sally.

Why? Because she was writing rather than styling?
Yes. That was a pivot for me, where I was like, 'Oh, I want to write about fashion.' So I begged her: 'I'm going to New York next year to study at NYU. I'm going to email you at some point to be your intern.' And she said, 'I've never had an intern, but OK.'

So then you left LA for New York.
I went to Gallatin, which is a School of Individualized Study at NYU. So, you got to make your own major. I combined journalism and photography, and took a class called 'How to Make a Magazine'. I became *obsessed* with captions, heds and deks – things that I'd never heard of before. I understood how powerful Sally's words were; I'd seen that her writing could change the course of a designer's career. There was a story that I got to write as an intern about Scott Sternberg, when Band of Outsiders started doing women's, it was my first *Vogue* byline. That was a big moment, for him *and* for me. I remember Scott telling me how important that was for his business, and I couldn't believe it.

Tell me about New York.
As a kid, I'd sometimes come with my family, and so I'd make a map of all the fashion stores I wanted to go to.

How did you even know about them?
At the back of *Vogue* there was a directory of all the clothes and bags and everything that had been shot for the issue, and it would say where you could buy them. Like, 'Page 19, Balenciaga bag, Barneys New York.'

We're talking SoHo, right?
Oh my God, going to SoHo was the dream. LA had Barneys, which was mega, and obviously Rodeo Drive, but I wanted to go to those New York stores so badly. Prince Street, the downtown Prada store, Balenciaga over on 22nd Street, which was a big one for me – it looked like outer space.

By the time you were studying at NYU, you were interning for Sally Singer. Was the plan to wrangle a job with her?
During my senior year at NYU, Sally told me, 'I can't hire you. I don't have a job for you.' I desperately didn't want to leave *Vogue*, but I needed a real job; I couldn't be an intern anymore. However, there was a position open working for Phyllis Posnick, so I became Phyllis's assistant two weeks after I graduated. Assisting a fashion editor was something else entirely to interning in LA.

Would you go on shoots?
My first time ever being on a real set as an assistant was with Irving Penn. Which is insane. It was in his studio on Fifth Avenue. I can't remember exactly what the first picture we did with him was, I just remember all the stages it took to make it.

Was it a fashion image or still life?
It was fashion. So, we would go to his studio and have a whole day of meeting and looking at pictures. Next would be a day of casting, where Gisele, Kate Moss and Caroline Trentini would come in to see Mr. Penn. He loved Caroline Trentini at the time, so we were mostly working with her. Then there was a hair and make-up test day with Julien d'Ys and Stéphane Marais. And then it was the shoot day. The whole process was so different to how shoots are now. But watching the masters at work was life changing. Phyllis taught me so much about making a picture: the clothes made the picture; it was never about, 'Ooh, I love this dress!' It was always, 'How will this dress make an image that Irving Penn is going to shoot, which could one day end up in a museum?' I'd studied his photography in college, so I knew the importance of what that meant. Part of my job was to keep Mr Penn occupied while they were doing hair and make-up, which took forever, so we'd sit and talk about one of his favourite things – television.

What TV did he like?
He loved all those half-hour sitcoms, so we'd just sit and talk about them. He loved baseball, too. The other thing I noticed about him was that he always wore these amazing high-waisted jeans.

And what were *you* wearing at the time?
Balenciaga motorcycle boots by Nicolas Ghesquière. Mr Penn hated how loud they were. I mean, he thought they *looked* amazing, and he understood Nicolas was an incredible designer, but those boots were far too loud and clunky for his studio, which was always so quiet and peaceful. Looking back, I'm so lucky and grateful that we had that year working with Mr Penn. He was 90 years old at the time, and it was the last year he shot pictures. It was so special. He loved Mary's Fish Camp, so I'd pick up lobster rolls for everyone on set.

Were you there when he was shooting Nicolas Ghesquière's Balenciaga?
Yes, we did a Balenciaga story because I remember Phyllis had this amazing lace jacket, from Nicolas' iconic lace collection [Spring/Summer 2006].[5] But there was a rip in it after the shoot, so Balenciaga let us keep it, and Phyllis gave it to me. I got it fixed, and I still have it. And in a full circle moment, Nicolas later designed my wedding dress based on that lace collection.

What about Paris? Had you already spent time there?
We'd gone to Paris on holiday as a family, in that very touristy way. But when I discovered there was an option at NYU to go study abroad I said yes to Paris right away. So, my junior year was spent studying in Paris.

Because NYU had an outpost there?
Exactly. I have such vivid memories: the NYU school in Paris was in the 16th, this cute little building where we had our classes. We had incredible French teachers, drinking wine during class, and I had a Eurail pass so I'd head off to a different city each weekend. My other memory is of going into the school computer lab and desperately trying to log on to style.com to look at the shows, but it would be like *de, de, de, de, de* [mimicking the Internet dial-up sound], the images would slowly appear, and I'd just be mesmerised. I'd figure out where the show venues were during fashion week and just sit outside waiting to see the people walking in. I was a total fan. Just being in the same city as Balenciaga and all those other fashion houses was so inspiring. Then, because of Lisa and Sally, I was able to start an internship at American *Vogue* in Paris.

In the Condé Nast office, next to Rick Owens' place?
Exactly. I worked with Fiona [DaRin], who's still the European editor and, you know, did all the intern-y jobs. As the sort of goodbye present when I was leaving, they got me a ticket to a Karl Lagerfeld Chanel couture show. I was in row 92 or wherever, and I remember calling my mom in LA despite the time difference and saying, 'I'm at a Karl Lagerfeld Chanel show!' I was sat there thinking, 'I can't believe that people do this for their jobs.' And still today, whenever I'm exhausted at the end of Paris Fashion Week, I remember, 'I get to go to fashion shows as part of my job. Suck it up, you'll get through it.'

What did that year in Paris teach you about fashion?
I realised that Paris was the epicentre of fashion, and that showing there meant a lot. I quickly understood the big picture: LA is Hollywood, Paris is fashion, and New York is kind of all of it. So I came back to New York to graduate, and then it all happened from there. I was living in the dorms on Washington Square Park – literally, the best real estate in the city! – and downtown was the centre of the world. Narciso Rodriguez was totally major, you had the Helmut Lang store on Greene Street, and The Strokes were at their peak. They used to hang out at this bar called Black & White on 10th Street between Third and Fourth, so we'd sit there waiting for Julian Casablancas to walk in and just be like, 'Ahh… what a dream!'

'Anything written about Nicolas Ghesquière I'd stick on my bedroom wall. When I first saw a photo of him, it was like, 'Oh my God, he's a real person!''

'Part of my job was to keep Irving Penn occupied while they were doing hair and make-up. We'd sit and talk about one of his favourite things – television.'

















Top left. Malcom Edwards and Tim Walker, England, 2019. Top right. ‘Best Performances’ party, 2025.
Bottom left. Frank Ocean by Tim Walker, 2019. Bottom right. Guido and Pat McGrath, New York, 2025.

Top left. Wolfgang Tillmans and Jennifer Lawrence, London, 2025.
Top right. Jacob Elordi, *W* and Cartier dinner, Paris, 2025.
Bottom left. Charles Levai and Kevin Tekinel with Nicole Kidman, ‘Best Performances’, Los Angeles, 2025.
Bottom right. Tilda Swinton and Malcolm Edwards, Scotland, 2023.

Besides bumping into The Strokes, did you have a clear ambition once you'd moved back to New York?
I *really* wanted to be the editor-in-chief of a magazine.

Was Anna Wintour your lodestar?
Yes, obviously, Anna. But also Franca [Sozzani], Sally, Grace Coddington, Edward Enninful. But Anna was always my North Star. She was always it for me because I think she changed what American *Vogue* meant and also changed what it meant to be a celebrity in a magazine.

I'd argue that she went further than that: she changed the perception of what fashion meant to the world.
Exactly. I remember watching *The Devil Wears Prada* with my mom right before I started at *Vogue*, and her being like, 'Are you absolutely sure you want to do this?' But I never had an ounce of fear. I was just like, 'I don't care about any torture. If it gets me to get where I want to get, I will happily do it.'

Did you bond with the other interns and assistants from that era?
Yes, I was in a good class of assistants. It was me, Chloe Malle, Mark Guiducci, Rickie De Sole, Selby Drummond. We were all super ambitious, all wanted to do different things in the same space, and were all really supportive of each other. We still are. They were my fashion family in so many ways, and so watching everyone grow up is surreal. It's so exciting to see Chloe at *Vogue*. It's amazing seeing the people who've worked really hard: one of the best examples of that is Mary-Kate and Ashley [Olsen], who I've known since we were kids in LA. I mean, The Row was a T-shirt and a lookbook, that's literally how they started the brand. And to watch their success, based on talent, not fame, has been unbelievable. They deserve every ounce of it because they are the hardest working people I know.

Post-*Vogue*, tell me about going freelance and trying to define a sense of authorship on your work as a stylist.
After I left *Vogue*, I thought I'd be totally on my own doing stories, but then Marie-Amélie [Sauvé] called and asked if I would be her assistant in New York. Whenever she came here, I would work on jobs with her, which was such an opportunity, and I never saw it as slowing down my own freelance career.

It must have been a trip to work with Marie-Amélie, who you'd had postered on your bedroom wall as a kid?
It was amazing. We were doing shoots here [in New York], and in LA. She was working for American *Vogue,* Italian *Vogue,* Balenciaga, Narciso… And then the reason I actually left Marie-Amélie was because [in 2010] Sally got the job as editor-in-chief at *T* magazine. She called me to ask if I wanted to be a fashion editor. She wanted to work with a new wave of people: Cass Bird, Alasdair McLellan, Jamie Hawkesworth, Colin Dodgson, Angelo Pennetta…

Let's skip to the *W* years. You arrived there in 2017, when it was still owned by Condé Nast.
I started out as style director. Edward had just left to go to British *Vogue*, and me and Katie Grand both got hired. The first cover I did was with Daniel Day-Lewis and shot by Tim Walker, for *Phantom Thread*, which I'm still so proud of. I'd prepared a studio full of clothes, but he ended up wearing a sweater that he'd brought with him; he'd picked it up in Scotland and it was based on one of his grandfather's sweaters. He put it on, and I was like, 'That is it!' I was really figuring out who I was at *W.* I had been at American *Vogue* for a long time, and they're different things.

How would you describe the difference between *Vogue* and *W*?
Vogue was so big, and has so many people. It's this incredible institution. But *W* felt exciting because it was smaller and therefore could be quicker, and you could push the envelope more.

Would you say that a degree of risk-taking is written into *W*'s DNA?
Absolutely. That was its appeal for me. I was like, look at this history – all those incredible issues with Dennis Freedman as creative director.[6] How can I add to it? The 'Best Performances' issue, which had become 'a thing', was a huge part of the draw for me here. I was ready to take my work in a different direction, and I thought *W* was a great home for it.

Let's talk about that whole period between 2019 and 2020. Condé Nast sold off *W*, you became the new editor-in-chief, the magazine hit the skids during the pandemic, and then you lined up investors and successfully bid to acquire *W* back, for a new start-up company called W Media. It's exhausting just thinking about it.

'I remember watching *The Devil Wears Prada* with my mom right before I started at *Vogue*, and her being like, "Are you absolutely sure you want to do this?"'

Crazy year! I became editor-in-chief six months before the pandemic. Initially, it was incredible. Everything I'd dreamed of. And I was super proud of the work we were putting out: the Frank Ocean cover, my first 'Best Performances' issue, shot by Juergen.

The one with Brad Pitt standing by the big black SUV?
Yes! I've got a good story about that shoot, but we'll get to it later. So, we were on a roll, and it was working. And then the pandemic hit. I was absolutely in fight-or-flight mode because I loved this title, not just for myself, but because it's an important title, and I was going to do everything I could to make it work. I was thinking about the archive, the history and, above all, the team here that I absolutely love. To let all that go was going to break my heart. I felt like I was the only person that could really fight for this thing. I can joke about it now, but during the pandemic I basically did online business school to figure out how to sell *W* [to a group of investors].

Looking back at those initial Zoom calls to assemble your investor group, what was the primary sales pitch that you used to convince people like Karlie Kloss, Jason Blum and Lewis Hamilton that *W* was a viable asset?
For anyone to give me money, I had to explain what it meant to *me*. This wasn't a tech startup in AI, it was a magazine; our investors weren't putting money in to make a billion on return. But the deck that I built with the help of many others was about the history of this brand. I felt that people needed to be reminded of all the incredible things that *W* had done over the years.

Not to shower you with praise, but its selling point was not only its history – you'd quickly transformed *W* into a title that had a real creative energy.
I think it was a combo of, 'Look at this rich history, look what I've done in six months, and look at what we can do moving forward.' It wasn't ambitious to a point of being unrealistic.

What about regaining the trust and support of the industry and all your contributors?
When I first got offered the editor-in-chief role, I had the invaluable support of some key people. The first person I told was Tim Walker, who immediately said, 'I'm with you'. There was a lot of support from some of my favourite industry creatives like Katie Grand and Juergen. And I had Lynn Hirschberg,[7] who was the most important person to stay. Lynn doesn't have email, she's old school that way, so I said to everybody before I got announced as editor-in-chief, 'I have to call Lynn. It's very important that I know she's on board.' So, I called her from the corner of the conference room as we were about to announce it. I just said, 'Are you staying? I need you.' She said 'Yes, of course.'

What about all the brands, all the advertisers?
It took time, and a lot of meetings. I think people were asking themselves the question, 'What exactly can they do with *W* now that it's out of Condé Nast?' Like, what *is* this company, W Media? No one knew me, I was a fashion editor. I'd never been in these [brand advertising] meetings before. But if you look at the ad pages from my first issue compared to now, it's a very different magazine. I think that I'm very lucky that in the past year, so many people from my generation – people that I know and love and respect – have become the creative directors at the big houses.

So, it's a generational shift as well.
Definitely. Just take Jonathan Anderson's appointment at Dior. He and I have been friends for 20 years. I was at his first ever JW Anderson show. Jonathan used to stay in my apartment when he'd come to New York, before he could stay in a hotel. I actually have a coat from his very first collection which he gave me as 'rent' for staying with me. When Dior announced him becoming the new creative director, I knew in that moment that everything was going to change.

A reshuffling of the cards.
And Jack [McCollough] and Lazaro [Hernandez] going to Loewe, and obviously Matthieu [Blazy] going to Chanel. I was like, 'This is crazy, these are my people, my generation.' I'm 41 years old, Jonathan's 41 years old, this is going to change the industry in profound ways.

Another generational shift at *W* is your hiring of Charles Levai and Kevin Tekinel as the magazine's 'creative directors at large'.
Charles and Kevin are a huge part of *W.* They bring such a high calibre of taste and a European sensibility to the

'I was in a good class of *Vogue* assistants. It was me, Chloe Malle, Mark Guiducci, Rickie De Sole, Selby Drummond. We were all super ambitious.'

















Top left. Sarah Snook, Sarah Paulson and Sara Moonves at the dinner party for Jack McCollough and Lazaro Hernandez's debut show for Loewe, Paris, 2025.
Top right. 'Best Performances' party, Los Angeles, 2026.
Bottom left. Elle Fanning, fitting photo from 'Best Performances', Los Angeles, 2026.
Bottom right. Frank Lebon, behind the scenes of 'Best Performances', Los Angeles, 2026.

Top left. Tyrone Lebon video installation at 'Best Performances' party, Los Angeles, 2026.
Top right. Jeff Henrikson photographing A$AP Rocky, New York, 2024.
Bottom left. Josh Safdie on set, Brighton Beach, New York, 2026.
Bottom right. Kendall Jenner, Harris Dickinson and Sara Moonves, Academy Museum Gala, Los Angeles, 2024.

magazine. They were on our call with Paul Thomas Anderson just now, and I can't think of a better compliment than them laying out text on his imagery and him saying, 'Great, no changes.'

Your investors included Karlie Kloss, Kaia Gerber and Lewis Hamilton – some glam in the boardroom.
Karlie was the first person to say yes. She and I met when she was probably about 15 or 16 on a *Vogue* shoot. I called her to tell her what was happening, and she said yes right away. She understands the value of legacy media. It was how her career started. Not only did she say yes, but she said, 'I'm going to help you'. Lewis Hamilton and Mellody Hobson[8] are people I met through Karlie. I wanted people who understood what we were doing. I didn't want someone who was going to be calling every day, asking why we weren't a billion-dollar business yet, because that's not what our goal was.

What do the metrics of success look like for that kind of cap table?
Well, we're profitable now, so on a financial level it's exciting. But I think the reason why you're here interviewing me is because of some of what we've achieved. We've made a dent in culture, we are able to move the needle. I think that success to our investors looks like our Grammys party last night. Not only was it financially successful but it was an amazing night. People are talking about it. It's fun. And, you know, the recent 'Best Performances' issue clogged everyone's feeds for 48 hours. It's also the ability to work with the biggest film directors in the world, to get them to say yes, and to collaborate with them to create great work. We set out to be a relevant magazine in a bigger world than just fashion, and I think we did that.

But in this past year, things has gone up a level, no?
Things have happened that I'd been dreaming about for a really long time. Whether that was my friends becoming creative directors of these houses, or me winning the CFDA Award – which, I should add, I thought was a prank call when they told me – or getting Tyrone Lebon to shoot our latest 'Best Performances' issue. I'd been working on that since my first day as editor.

That's a real coup. How do you persuade the photographer who has steadfastly refused to shoot editorial to shoot your entire issue?
Tyrone and I have been good friends for a long time. My first editorial when I was at *T* was with him. We've always stayed in touch, and talked about him doing things for *W*; we've gotten very close, but it just never worked out. Then he had this brilliant idea for 'Best Performances'.

What was the elevator pitch? Did that come from you, or from Tyrone?
All from him. It was more than an elevator pitch, he put together the most detailed PDF. It was an homage to Hollywood and to movie making. So we made a movie trailer, which is as important as the photos are. In fact, the photos are really the behind-the-scenes and the making-of for the trailer. It was important for Tyrone to have his brother Frank there as his co-director. It was important that we could have fun with it but also make images that we thought would stand the test of time. The layout, the casting videos, how things were printed – everything had so much time and care go into it.

How far in advance do you start thinking about and planning the 'Best Performances' issue?
We're already thinking about next year. But 'Best Performances' really is Lynn Hirschberg's baby. It is something that she lives, eats, breathes, and we're so lucky to have her brain. I mean, if you look at who she cast in this year's issue, and who the Oscar nominees are. But beyond that, it's the relevancy of the people she puts in there. It's unbelievable. She just *knows*. She's a brilliant editor that way. And the process begins during Cannes, when we start hearing about the new movies.

Do you go to Cannes?
I don't, but I'm paying close attention. Lynn will either go or she'll start seeing the movies. So once a movie has been at Cannes, they'll usually screen it for us, around June. I remember that Brad Pitt year [2019], Lynn was at Cannes for that. She called me after the *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* premiere and was like, 'Brad Pitt, that's it! Brad Pitt cover! It's happening!' I think Lynn saw *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* 20 times. For this year, I think it might have been *Bugonia*, which I think was at Cannes, that put things in motion, and *Frankenstein* too. We didn't see *One Battle After Another* until September. But yes, the conception starts in June.

Tell me more about Lynn Hirschberg.
The amazing thing about Lynn is that she knows everybody by now, so she knows their personalities. Having that advantage is amazing because she can say 'So-and-so is up for all of it,' and then she'll say, 'This person's quite serious, they're going to want to be in simple clothes and don't go crazy with them.' Having that insight is invaluable. More than actors though, I think she's taught me the most about directors. We both have a deep love for film directors, and I've read *everything* Lynn's ever written about them all. I think the directors also know what she is able to bring out of their actors – there's a deep respect for her. I've seen the way Quentin Tarantino, Paul Thomas Anderson, Steven Spielberg or Pedro Almodóvar interact with Lynn. It's total trust.

'Success is the ability to work with the biggest film directors in the world, to get them to say yes, and to collaborate with them to create great work for *W*.'

'My favourite question to ask a designer I'm co-hosting a party with is, "Who's your dream guest? Who can I bring along that you *really* want to meet?"'

Let's talk about the rapport between fashion and entertainment. *W* embodies that relationship, as do you. And even though she wouldn't necessarily say it, someone like [powerhouse publicist] Amanda Silverman now plays such a central, albeit behind-the-scenes, role in the industry.
I said to Amanda at the Grammys party on Sunday that she was the most famous person in the room, and I absolutely stand by that. The world of film is paying so much more attention to fashion, and vice versa.

Can you think of any specific landmark moments in, say, the past decade, which you felt shifted things?
Just look at the way the collaborations between talent and brands have become so much bigger: Emma Stone with Vuitton, Jennifer Lawrence with Dior… It's about being in the advertising campaign, being at the show. It's about really working together, not just about red carpet dressing.

Well, the red carpet seems to be more intense than ever.
It's always been a big thing, but it's on another level now, especially if you're a newer talent; it's how you're going to be perceived by the world. When you think about someone like Amanda [Silverman], she puts so much thought into the way that she works with her talent: what imagery they do, what interviews they do, what they're wearing, who they're working with. It's a whole machine that is not just a one-off. It reflects the way the industry is going. Think about someone like Margot Robbie on the current *Wuthering Heights* promo tour: the involvement of designers dressing talent is on a bigger scale than it ever was before.

The heightened intensity comes from both sides. Talent, brands and designers all want more.
This touches upon the conversation that I recorded with Jen Lawrence and Jonathan [Anderson] for this issue of *System*. You've now got the creative director at Dior doing costume for films; not simply dressing talent, but as the movie's actual costume designer. Things are so intertwined now, that's fundamentally changed things, and it's having a ripple effect.

Fashion has an ability to wrap itself around anything: movies and music and art, and now sport, which is the latest opportunity everyone's going after right now. Where do you see all that heading?
There's no way it's going to slow down. The way that celebrity and fashion work together is only going to get bigger and bigger. At Jonathan's debut couture show last week, which was one of the most beautiful fashion shows I've attended, I'm sitting there and watching it and dreaming about it, but I'm also thinking, 'This is going to look so amazing on so-and-so on the red carpet.' Our brains just think that way now. In the same way that designers now choose their brand ambassadors, and the way they work with talent – it defines who they are as a brand. I'm so excited for Jack and Lazaro's new brand ambassadors at Loewe. Those decisions are going to help define their time at the brand. Similarly, what new talent is Matthieu going to bring back into the Chanel world? The fact that he already brought Nicole Kidman back was amazing. Ironically, it makes me think about the Chanel No 5 commercials she did with Baz Luhrmann.[9] At the time, big film directors shooting fashion commercials still felt a little bit behind-the-scenes, whereas now everything's so much more of an event.

Let's discuss the Grammys party that you did this weekend that was co-hosted and underwritten by Saint Laurent. What do you think they as a brand are getting out of that? Is it eyeballs? Is it cultural relevance?
I think it's all those things. It's about bringing other people into the mix who are not necessarily part of that brand's

core world. For us, nothing is more exciting than getting to introduce someone to a creative director of a brand that they maybe hadn't met before. I love being able to bring unexpected people into a brand who maybe weren't there before. My favourite question to ask someone I'm co-hosting a party with is, 'Who's your dream guest? Who could I bring here that you really want to meet? That maybe you haven't before?' Making that happen is exciting.

Was Charli XCX being at the party just a natural evolution of the fact that she was in town for the Grammys?
She was our co-host. It was Anthony [Vaccarello], Charli and me. But it was actually Charli's idea to do the party with us. I mean, no one better to throw a party with than Charli XCX, right?

It's interesting what you said about introducing someone new and unexpected to a brand's creative director. Does it work the other way, too?
That Brad Pitt cover that Juergen shot, he was wearing Hedi Slimane's first men's collection for Celine in that picture. I remember Brad asked me on set, 'What's Celine?' Which was incredible. But if you think about it, Celine had only been womenswear. Phoebe didn't do menswear. It was Hedi who introduced it. We introduced it to Brad Pitt, and that image blew up.

Wait, didn't you say you had a story about that shoot?
So, Brad really wanted to wear the Celine pant, but the sample we had was quite small. I suddenly got bad anxiety, thinking, 'Oh God, I don't want to insult Brad Pitt,' because he may not fit into it. But he really wanted to wear that pant, so, I was like, 'Hey, let me tailor it for you. It'll only take a minute.' And he was like, '*Nah*, I'll just try it on, it'll be fine.' So he pulls it on, and it *rips* in the back. And I'm just *mortified*. But he obviously didn't care. He was so cool, so hot, so easy. Anyway, the pant was totally fine in the front, so he was just like, 'It's all good. You're only shooting it for the front, right? I'll wear it anyway.' So as we were walking back on set, I said to him, 'Do you want a robe or something?' and he was just, 'No, it's fine!' He knows exactly what he's doing, as he walks through the entire set, past *all* the fashion assistants, past *all* the jewellery guards, with his ass hanging out. And obviously everyone was like, 'This is the best day of my life!' So the next time you happen to see that picture…

…perfect in the front, ripped in the back.
But you're right, it's amazing to make those connections between talent and brands where it's possible. And I always try to do the same thing when I meet a designer. I'll just ask them, 'Who would you love to dress?' Because, you know, I don't want to put someone in clothes that, A: they don't feel comfortable in, and B: the designer isn't so interested in. Those personal connections really are everything. A designer will say, 'Oh, I'm obsessed with X, Y or Z person…' And so then I do all I can to make it happen.

Lastly, you received the Media Award at the CFDAs in November 2025. Tell me about that evening.
My mom was sobbing hysterically, losing her mind. I was wearing The Row and sat with Mary-Kate and Ashley, who've known my mom since we were growing up; and then of course my husband, and Jen Lawrence and her husband, who I know so well. The whole evening was just surreal because I couldn't believe the industry that I love so much was recognising me. Looking out into the room and getting to thank Anna and Phyllis and Sally and Lisa in my speech, was pretty awesome. It was the full, full circle.

1. At the 2025 CFDA Fashion Awards, hosted annually by the Council of Fashion Designers of America, Sara Moonves received the Media Award in Honor of Eugenia Sheppard, where she described serving as editor of *W* magazine as her 'dream job'.

2. For the 2009 April issue of American *Vogue*, Annie Leibovitz photographed Nicolas Ghesquière during his tenure at Balenciaga, alongside his muse Charlotte Gainsbourg and close collaborator Marie-Amélie Sauvé.

3. 'Domestic Bliss: Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt at Home' was a 60-page 2005 *W* magazine editorial shoot photographed by Steven Klein, portraying Jolie and Pitt in highly stylised domestic scenes before their relationship in real life was publicly confirmed.

4. In 1996, Michèle Lamy opened Les Deux Cafés in Hollywood, which *Los Angeles* magazine described as the 'world's most successful boîte situated in a parking lot' until it closed after, in Lamy's words, 'the front part of the building collapsed, and everything stop'. After reopening in 1997, it closed for good in 2003. 'The service was abysmal (infamously, and intentionally so),' wrote ex-employee and journalist Chris Wallace in *The Paris Review* in 2012, 'the food was okay, but the scene... the scene was the thing.'

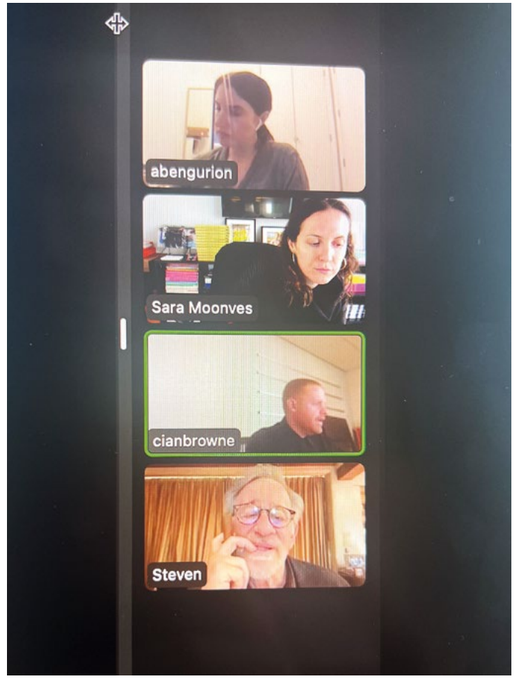
5. Consisting of what Nicolas Ghesquière himself described as 'baroque rock star' pantsuits and jacquard patterns accented with lace and frill insertions, the Balenciaga Spring/Summer 2006 show was described by *Vogue*'s Sarah Mower as both an attempt and a triumph to 'fuse two apparently contradictory ideas together to create a synthesis that has never occurred to anyone before.'

6. Dennis Freedman served as the founding creative director of *W* magazine from its early days in the mid-1990s until he left the role in 2011. He tenure was characterised by the audacious and artistic fashion stories he commissioned, shot by photographers and artists including Bruce Weber, Juergen Teller, Steven Klein and Philip-Lorca diCorcia.

7. Lynn Hirschberg is an American journalist and editor-at-large best known for her long career interviewing and profiling cultural figures, including creating the 'Screen Tests' video series and later 'Birthday Stories' and '5 Things with Lynn Hirschberg' for *W* magazine.

8. Mellody Hobson is an American business executive and president of Ariel Investments, one of the largest Black-owned money management firms in the US. She made history as the first Black woman to chair the board of an S&P 500 company at Starbucks and has served on multiple major corporate boards.

9. The Australian, Academy-Award-winning film director Baz Luhrmann directed *Le Film*, a 2005 TV commercial for Chanel No 5 starring Nicole Kidman. The two-minute long film had a reported $33 million budget, making it the most expensive television commercial of all time.





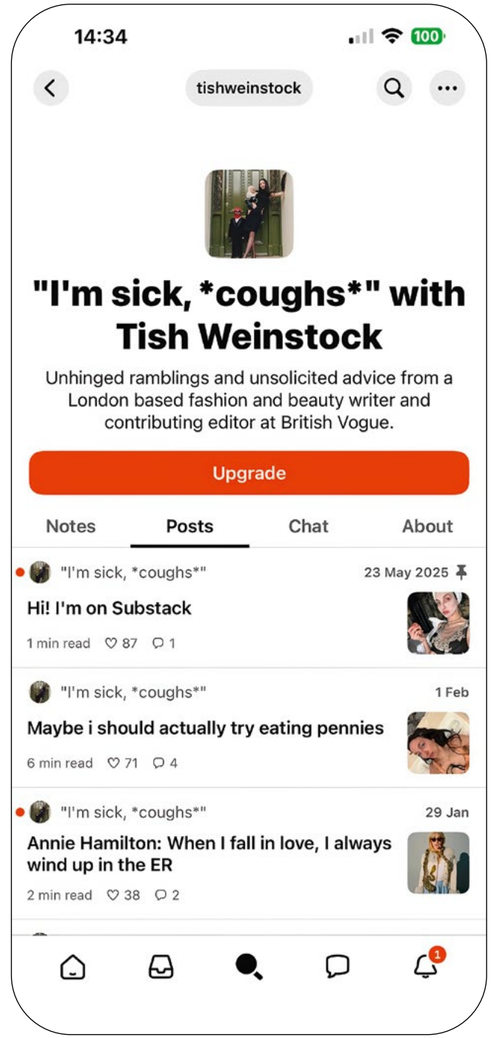




Top left. Zoom Call with Steven Spielberg and the *W* Team, 2023.
Top right. Dovile Drizyte and Juergen Teller on set, Los Angeles, 2024.
Bottom left. Zora, Lynn Hirschberg and Sara Moonves' daughter Georgia on set, 2023.
Bottom right. A dinner hosted by Nicolas Ghesquière and Sara Moonves in Los Angeles, 2026.

‘Instagram makes me feel bad. Substack doesn’t.’

Why exactly is Substack having a fashion moment?



Text by Tish Weinstock

By the end of 2023, I was cooked. I'd spent the last 15 years working for magazines in both full-time and freelance capacities. I'd done the whole digital desk thing, where you are basically a slave to traffic nazis, SEO bots and the clinically depressed affiliates team, where your only job is write about Hailey Bieber's arse crack or manipulate readers into buying a handbag that absolutely will not change their lives, despite you writing the contrary.

I'd also done my time in print and dealt with an array of cuckolded editors who refused to wean themselves from their advertisers' teats. I was done with having to sanitise my work for the sake of sucking up to brands. I'd also just written a book, which, for someone with the unique combination of an attention span that rivals a goldfish's and a particularly acute obsession with deadlines, almost killed me.

So, what now? Maybe it was time to sell my soul and finally go full-on influencer. Leave my journalistic credentials and Oxford degree at the door and embrace my inner basic bitch? Gone were the days of the workhorse; herein, the life of a show pony. Or so I thought. After a year of attending absolutely everything and learning how to craft vaguely engaging, potentially quite edgy pictures of my face, feet and 'fits, I'd reached peak Instagram fatigue. Engorged on images of perfection to the point where I'd lost touch with my own sense of self, opinions and taste; exhausted by the relentless spon con and performance of it all; and brain-dead from the deluge of AI slop that had been clogging up my feed (not to mention a slave to the hamster wheel of engagement), I realised the life of a show pony wasn't so sweet. While Instagram had freed me from the corporate monotony of working at a magazine, it was dragging me into a different kind of hell, one that didn't make me hate my job but, rather, hate myself.

I needed a new fix, something less curated. A platform where I didn't have to pretend my life was perfect, and that I wasn't totally dependent on SSRIs. Too old for TikTok (I tried, and it was embarrassing) and too prudish for OnlyFans (maybe I'll come back to it?), I needed something buzzy and new, that wouldn't rot my brain or deplete my self esteem. Enter: Substack.

Substack was founded in 2017 by two tech guys, Chris Best and Jairaj Sethi, and a journalist, Hamish McKenzie. It started out as a newsletter platform that gave writers the option to put some, if not all, content behind a paywall, the minimum being $5 a month. It has since evolved into an app where your newsletter will show up as a 'Post' (whatever is paywalled on the newsletter is paywalled on the app), and there's a free Twitter-coded discussion thread called 'Notes', which acts as a kind of never-ending home feed. Additionally, there's a group messaging channel called 'Chat' which gives writers a direct line to their audience that is mainly but not always for those with paid subscriptions. On top of all this, you can now host live or recorded video podcasts.

Disillusioned with the bloated state of Big Media and the increasing fragility of the attention economy, the idea was to create a world in which writers were paid by their readers, thereby incentivising the writer to create content of substance and rigour (worthy of being paid for) that wasn't dependent on ads or clicks. This wasn't just another rage-bait circle jerk that relied on virality or the obligatory advertiser titwank, rather it was going to be a platform that allowed writers to create authentic content they couldn't publish anywhere else and, ultimately, build long-term, intimate relationships with their readers, something that's made even more prescient given the impending onslaught of AI.

I first came across the newsletter platform towards the end of 2024 while planning the American leg of my book tour. I'd been lucky enough to get press in most major publications, but I wanted to do something that felt a little more countercultural. This was a book about goths, after all. This is when I came across newsletters like 'Perfectly Imperfect' and the 'Love/Hate' lists by Dream Baby Press, who invite guests to curate a list of their recommendations, and things that they actually(!) love and hate. Recalling the DIY zines of the 1980s, which were not yet tied to the umbilical cord of brands or traffic targets and were based around people's genuine tastes and interests, something about them felt fresh, rebellious – even punk. It was after doing a 'Love/Hate' list that its founder Matt Starr, who incidentally worked on the Substack events team, suggested I start an account of my own. And with that: 'I'm Sick, *coughs*' was born.

Despite being categorised as a fashion and beauty newsletter, my Substack has become a space where I whinge about my aching back, leaky gut, dodgy parenting skills, and questionable mental health, with the odd vintage purchase, fashion week disaster, and beauty tweakment thrown into the mix. While Instagram is about how great my life is, 'I'm Sick, *coughs*' is about how much it *sucks*. It's almost like a diary in which I am free to be authentically, *scarily* myself, without an editor there to prune or pilfer it. Which is exactly how Starr sold it to me; an editorial Elysium where creative freedom can finally be yours.

Over a year on, I asked Starr if that's still what he thinks about Substack.

How would you describe Substack's ethos?

Matt Starr: You can basically do and say anything you want. You own your audience, your work, and have direct relationships with your subscribers. It's very freeing. It's what the Internet was supposed to be.

How does it compare to Instagram?

To put it bluntly, Instagram makes me feel bad and crazy. Substack does not. And that's not just because I work here. People on Substack really engage with the work.

Why is Substack having such a moment?

I think people are suffering on the other apps and platforms, and realising it's not making their lives any better or fun and looking for an antidote.

'Substack isn't a video network, or a writing network, or an audio network,' stacked McKenzie back in March 2025. 'It's a network of people who care about culture. When I subscribe to your Substack, I'm not subscribing to content. I am subscribing to you.' Around the same time, Substack announced that there are now more than five million paid subscriptions to writers and creators on Substack, double what it was in 2023, and in June more than 50 people were making $1 million a year. In particular, fashion and beauty content is drawing in big numbers. Since 2022, this category has more than doubled year-on-year, with fashion and beauty publishers collectively earning over $10 million annually in paid subscriptions.

From the outset, fashion and Substack seem like unlikely bedfellows. Fashion is a visual medium (which is why it lends itself so well to Instagram) and is propped up by (if not wholly dependent on) brands. Substack, however, prioritises the written word (with its 2004 Blogspot-era font, page configuration and slightly janky automated visuals, I wouldn't exactly call aesthetics its strong point) and is marketed as an escape from the shackles of the corporate world. But it's precisely this tension that makes the fashion and Substack union so exciting.

That's how Farrah Storr, head of international at Substack and former editor-in-chief of *ELLE* UK sees it. 'As someone who used to edit fashion magazines in my life before Substack, I saw firsthand the burnout experienced by fashion creators who were constantly performing for platforms where algorithms were mercurial and inconsistent, and everything felt filtered through ad deals or beholden to brand guidelines. What's more, long-form fashion storytelling has more or less vanished from traditional outlets, meaning fashion writers and thinkers, as well as consumers, are left craving a space to indulge in thoughtful fashion storytelling.'

There's the anonymous fashion vigilante and free-speech absolutist Lewis's Mag, who uses Substack to actually critique(!) a collection, something you don't really see anywhere else – at least not so blatantly. And in her newsletter, influencer Brenda Hashtag interrogates the very framework she is a part of, debunking various myths about how to make it as an influencer (PR lunches don't work, apparently; instead, she says, you should just focus on nurturing your audience). Likewise, the stylist Gabriella Karefa-Johnson uses her Substack to dismantle the aspects of fashion she sees as contributing to a broken system. In one post, she critiques the notion of full-look styling and the fact that American *Vogue* dedicated an entire cover story to massaging its relationship with its golden goose, Louis Vuitton.

What brought you to Substack?

Gabriella Karefa-Johnson: I started 'Brain Matter' nine months ago. It was my second or so season back on the fashion week circuit, unattached to a magazine formally. I wanted to create my own place to parse out my ideas.

How does it differ from fashion content elsewhere?

Well, let's be clear, my Substack is a blog. It's one long op-ed comprising all of my chaotic and meandering thoughts. There is no pitching for approval; there isn't always a peg in the mainstream or zeitgeist. I aim for criticality, but sometimes I'm also shitposting.

'You own your audience, your work, and have direct relationships with your subscribers. It's very freeing. It's what the Internet was supposed to be.'

'It's a network of people who care about culture. When I subscribe to your Substack, I'm not subscribing to content. I am subscribing to you.'

16:17

Emily Sundberg
@emilysundberg

can do things with my phone that you can't ven imagine.

Feed Me +2

Voir les abonnés

Abonné

tivité Posts Chat Likes Lectures (230)

Latest post

Emily Sundberg substack
22h



16:24

FEED ME

Not everyone wants to work at Vogue.

"Was approached for it, they want 4 days in office. Respectfully no."

EMILY SUNDBERG
25 NOV. 2025 À 19:12

Feed Me Abonnement cadeau

Good afternoon everyone. Halfway through today's letter you will see a paywall. If you want a paid subscription to Feed Me for 25% off, you should use this link, not that one.

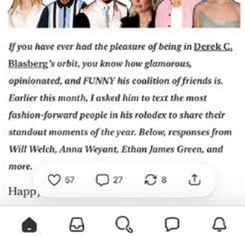
Today's letter includes: Why beauty writers don't want the beauty writer job at *Vogue*, Tucker Carlson told me why he's running ads on *Red Scare*, an SC103 store is coming to Chinatown, and the new not-yet-named food media company from *Puck* and *Vanity Fair* alum

81 36 8

16:22

The good stuff usually happens below the paywall.

✓ Abonné



If you have ever had the pleasure of being in Derek C. Blasberg's orbit, you know how glamorous, opinionated, and FUNNY his coalition of friends is. Earlier this month, I asked him to text the most fashion-forward people in his rolodex to share their standout moments of the year. Below, responses from Will Welch, Anna Weyant, Ethan James Green, and more.

Happ

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16:59



Rachel Seville Tashjian
@rstrstrst

fashion critic, writer and reporter at CNN. Previously: The Washington Post

Rachel Seville Tashjian +1

3.5K+ abonnés

Abonné

Activité Posts Likes Lectures (93)

Rachel Seville Tashjian substack
5j

In fashion, there are brainy brands and body brands. And I fear Pieter Mulier going to Versace is a body brand hiring a brainy brand designer! Allow me to explain cnn.com/2026/02/05/style/versace-prada-g...

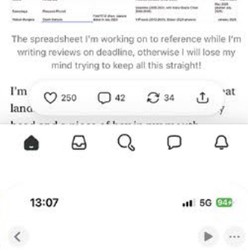


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Rachel Seville Tashjian substack
28 janv.

17:03

Can someone invent a new language of clothing or a new way of getting dressed that's as impactful as Christian Dior's post-World War II nationalist-nostalgia, or Giorgio Armani's slouchy cool (which my former colleague, the GOAT Robin Givhan, says trickled all the way down to Everlane and Cos), or Coco Chanel de-corseting all of Western womankind?



The spreadsheet I'm working on to reference while I'm writing reviews on deadline, otherwise I will lose my mind trying to keep all this straight!

I'm lanc at

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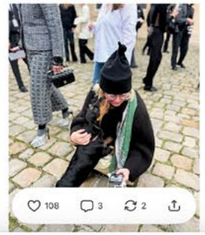
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POST RUNWAY

The best-dressed people at Fashion Week

Plus: The only way to start a Great American Novel is while eating raw meat.

RACHEL SEVILLE TASHJIAN ET THE WASHINGTON POST
10 OCT. 2025 À 15:10



108 3 2

17:08

5thingsyoushouldbuy

5 Things You Should Buy

Suggestions of what to wear for when you don't want to look anymore. I scroll so you don't have to.

101,000+ subscribers

Abonné

Posts Chat À propos

Becky Malinsky 8 févr.
How To Wear Two Pair Of Pants
6 min lu 133 15

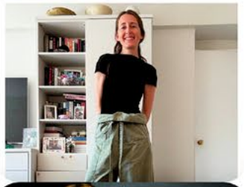
Becky Malinsky 2 févr.
Brain Freeze
Payant 3 min lu 99 9

Becky Malinsky 25 janv.
Do You Have To Choose A Uniform?
10 min lu 260 28

17:09



ZEE BACK! Low but not "must go braless" low.



15:45



I usually abstain from sunnies in the winter bc I hate the cold acetate on my face. But for you all, I will do it! Here are my Thistles Jack sunglasses which look perfect with literally any and everything. But the Al looks adventurous and worth a trv. And the Malone appr ght. Look 173 25 who only sells in drops. Wishing when I got the email that

14:50



brenda
@brendahashtag

i have a podcast it's called brendawareness. THERE WILL BE TYPOS <3

brendstack +7

10K+ abonnés

Abonné

Activité Posts Chat Likes Lectur

Latest post

brenda substack
6j



14:50

o stop me from buying hehe. but i am nosey nd always want to see what other people re eyeing right now, so here you go. these re not affiliate links but straight from my ikes.

lso i just uploaded a new podcast episode n- here



https:// 14 2 tian-
vomen
lior-leather-shoulder-bag-rbtr3

14:53

my look for hermes! they loaned be this coat and bag and i styled it with my peter do boots that i have worn to so many shows (you'll see a lot more of them in these series, they are F/W 2021)



love! posing versus my mood IRL! alaia sunnies paired with an alaia wrap top paired with my peter do panda and brendidas and chane

72 1

14:55

BRENDSTACK

how i got my dream job(s)

truths and myths about being an influencer

18 DÉC. 2025 À 18:23

this marks another year of being my "most successful yet".

but this is not a glamorous self boasting piece of writing (i hope), i want to break this "success" into bite sized pieces by examples. I did not grow up wanting to be an influencer, that didn't exist, so everything was learning by doing. but there are a few rules of thumb that everyone seems to agree on.

on self promotion

I think there is a big difference between putting yourself out there vs pitching yourse se I am tl 70 11 8 because someone likes my work. most

17:40



Dream Baby Press
@dreambabypress

The Dream Baby Press Substack is here to make literature a little more exciting. Come join us for Curated Fanfic, A Poetry Club in a Burger King, Wri... Voir plus

The Dream Baby Press Substack +5

Voir les abonnés

Abonné

Activité Posts Chat Likes Lectures (26)

Dernier post

Dream Baby Press substack
2j



13:07

THE DREAM BABY PRESS SUBSTACK

OTTESSA MOSHFEGH'S XL LOVE/HATE LIST

40 Things Ottessa Moshfegh Loves and Hates

DREAM BABY PRESS
10 DÉC. 2024 À 16:00



Améliorer

Dream for a 107 2 15 ngs she have

13:08



Améliorer

Dream Baby Press asked **John Cale** for a list of 10 things he loves and 10 things he hates.

John Cale is a musician, composer, record producer and one of the founding members of The Velvet Underground. He's always been a musician of the times, helping to usher in titanic shifts in sound and culture. The bleeding edge drones of his *Sun Blindness Music* opened the path to The Velvet Underground. The frantic rock of *Fear* and *Slow Dazzle*, not to mention his production with Patti Smith and the Stooges, framed a half century of punk, post-punk, and art-rock to come. And his curiosity about the way electronics could be more than a gimmick in rock music served as an

13:09

THINGS KARLEY SCIORTINO HATES:

1. Alternative milks
2. That all movies are three hours now
3. Weed Culture
4. Waking up/being awake in general
5. People who monologue at you and never ask questions
6. Peeing (it's so boring!)
7. Having to say "seggs" and "corn" on Instagram
8. People who text during a meal (or movie, etc)
9. Extended periods of standing up
10. My (lack of) attention span
11. When people make true crime their pers
12. Textin

11

15:12

Karen Elson
@misskarenelson

The Lipstick Letters.

Karen Elson

1.1K+ abonnés

Abonné

Activité Posts Chat Likes Lectures (7)

Latest post

Karen Elson substack
2 févr.



15:24

Have you seen the amazing new Doja Cat video? I was so happy to be asked to be a part of such an iconic lineup and of course Doja Cat is so inspiring. She really gets all the fashion references and has an incredible team of creatives around her who really get fashion and beauty. Also, what a catchy tune!

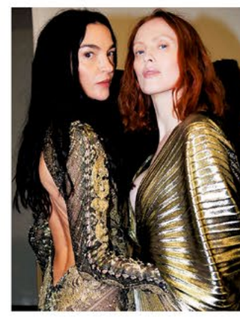
I love that it was camp, and high glamour. I wore a wig and a lot of face tape to give me the snatched look!



I've just had a whirlwind trip to Milan that

15:24

Back to Milan...



I love this new generation of models. My favorites right now are Alex Consani and Lulu Te ble act. F 70 6 2 c energy that Kate and Naomi had back in the

17:40

lewissmag

LEWIS'S

Formerly known as Garmento.

2,000+ subscribers

Abonné

Notes Posts Chat À propos

LEWIS'S 26 déc. 2025
nd The Winner Is...
oyant: 0min restantes 9

LEWIS'S 1 oct. 2025
S 2026 in Review
oyant: 42 min lu 4

LEWIS'S 10 oct. 2025
est & Worst of S/S 2026
oyant: 17 min lu 12 3

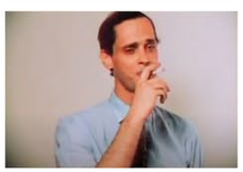
14:44

LEWIS'S

Secret Runway Bangers

The good stuff isn't on Spotify.

LEWIS'S
19 AOÛT 2025 À 05:15



For your ears only.

4 a liké

4

14:46

LEWIS'S

The Crack in the Mirror

A critique of fashion industry and a warning of the impending collapse of a 250 billion dollar bubble.

LEWIS'S
4 FÉVR. 2025 À 13:43



45 2 2

17:22

Lyas
@lyas933005

Lyas

354 abonnés

Abonné

Activité Posts Likes Lectures (7)

Lyas substack
3G déc.

oNE year ago, I was starting 2025 in New York with a iPhone 4 and no lipstick. I was fearful of the newest year (I kinda tried to dance the fear away). Cause 2024 was such a rewarding year for me that one thou... Voir plus



17:23

Note

Lyas substack
14 déc. · Se désabonner

I was crying when I woke up.

There were tears on my pillow this morning. A break from the usual other body fluids that stain my sheets. And it brought me back to when I was 17 and in love for the first time.

I was dating this guy and after a 4 months relationship we found ourselves in my hometown normandy that he came to visit as my « exchange student friend » (that's what I told my parents so they'd let me sleep with this English boy).

The last minutes of that trip will stay with me forever. He told me he loved me as the train left me but the way he said it could only mean goodbye. I cried on that platform up until I got into bed and then until the next morning. I learned that night that you could indeed shed tears while sleeping. i thought it was poetic but not easy to hide the red eyes from everyone the newt morning. I wish I could have worn my saint Laurent sunglasses at all times back then.

But when this morning I woke up crying it felt good. Well not really, I hate crying im a man from my family. Those specific tears had exhaustion, loneliness and hangover all over them. I knew where they came from which I think makes things a tiny bit better. But crying reassured me about something.

Laissez une réponse...

15:04

Natasha Stagg
@natashastagg

Natasha Stagg is the author of four books—Surveys, Sleeveless, Artless, and Grand Rapids—and the New York-based newsletter Selling Out. She works in brand strategy and writes for multiple publications regularly.

Selling Out +4

Voir les abonnés

Abonné

Activité Posts Chat Likes Lectures

Natasha Stagg 1 févr.
Consumer report
Payant Terminé 16

Natasha Stagg 31 janv.
Both things cannot be true
Payant 6 min lu 17

Natasha Stagg 27 janv.
Manifesto-ing

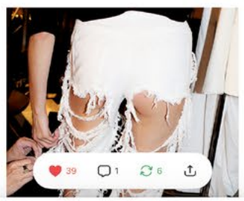
15:05

SYSTEM MAGAZINE

Natasha Stagg writes a letter about... Backstage, Maison Martin Margiela by Marina Faust.

Natasha Stagg reflects on an image taken at Margiela's Spring/Summer 2008 show.

SYSTEM MAGAZINE ET NATASHA STAGG
21 NOV. 2025 À 20:35



39 1 6

17:28

Tina Brown
@tinabrown

Author, journalist, editor

FRESH HELL Tina Brown's Diary +5

82K+ abonnés · #4 En hausse dans Culture

Abonné

Activité Posts Chat Likes Lectures (3)

Tina Brown 10 févr.
Bafflement with Bezos
6 min lu 1,1 k 76

Tina Brown 6 févr.
My Video Chat with Gabe Sherman about Media's Great White Shark Rupert Murdoch
1 min lu 59 6

Tina Brown 2 févr.
Sex, Lies, and the Epstein Files
6 min lu 2,3 k 49

17:28

FRESH HELL TINA BROWN'S DIARY

Give the Gift of Fresh Hell

TINA BROWN
20 DÉC. 2025 À 21:35



Give a gift subscription

"Deeply enjoyable and dishy... no sharper observer of politics and culture." NYT's Lulu Garcia-Navarro

Forget 's. This h Hell's sharp, illuminate take on politics (Why

17:29

FRESH HELL TINA BROWN'S DIARY

The Queen of the Power Scene Leaves the Party

TINA BROWN
1 OCT. 2025 À 15:30



431 52 28

Lally

What can Substack bring to fashion?
More rigorous criticism of the harmful systems that fashion upholds. I want tougher conversations about the social and political mechanics of this industry. I want to know where people stand.

Indeed, it is this lifting the lid on the cogs of our industry, exposing its machinations, and calling out that which is broken, in a much more thought-out and contextualised way than the ragebait we're seeing on Instagram or X, which I find so intriguing about the kind of fashion content that I'm seeing on Substack. Raging against the machine feels fresh and rebellious. Especially after the more sanitised content we've been force-fed for so long via legacy media.

That said, some fashion people aren't writing about fashion on there at all. Instead, they're using Substack as a dumping ground for thoughts, feelings and emotions. When emailing the other day, Natasha Stagg – who started her brilliant 'Selling Out' newsletter back in 2020, after deleting both X and Instagram in protest – said something I can't get out of my mind. 'Doesn't it feel, now, as though most of our time is spent trying to see through something, that nothing is totally honest and easy anymore?'

Like Stagg, I'm at a point in my life where I'm increasingly allergic to the artifice that we're constantly seeing being pedalled online (which I obviously, hypocritically participate in). Unlike Stagg, however, I'd rather eat wasps than delete my Instagram. But for me, the two cancel each other out, with Substack functioning as a kind of antidote to the performative perfection we see (and I enforce) on Instagram. It gives readers insight into people that they might not find anywhere else. For example, the other day I read an intimate stream of consciousness from fashion disruptor Lyas, in which he questioned whether the guy he was seeing was into him. 'It allowed me to be vulnerable,' admits Lyas. 'I believe there's a spontaneous thing to sharing your writing on Substack… it doesn't have to be perfect; it's just gotta be true.'

This quest for truth is what brought the model Karen Elson to Substack, where she has written about everything from being on the brink of a miscarriage to the personal politics of ageing in a society that fetishises youth.

What was it about Instagram's current that brought you to Substack?

Karen Elson: Like many on Instagram, I started to feel like the magic was waning. The thing that made those platforms special, the authenticity or sharing the weird things we were into, morphed into 'content'. For me, 'content' is a terrible word; it's devoid of anything unique and interesting.

What do you get from writing on Substack?
Some days I wonder if I share too much. It's a balance: people know my face, or a curated version of me via an interview where I'm usually peddling something. On Substack, I can be myself.

What are you looking to read on Substack that you can't find anywhere else?
Unfiltered realness, the quirks, the mistakes. The beauty of Substack is that a lot of us hit send on our posts when an editor may have told us to change something. There is something a little unhinged about Substack that I appreciate.

Leaning into the diaristic aspect of the platform, veteran journalist Tina Brown joined Substack in 2024. Fusing the personal and the political in 'Fresh Hell', Brown is just as likely to interview an exiled leader of the opposition in Venezuela as she is to share intimate details about her 30-something-year-old son. After nearly 50 years of filing perfectly formulated copy, she finds the notebookish informality that lends itself so well to Substack a much-needed relief.

What is it about Substack that appeals to you, as you enter your – as you described it – 'third trimester' of life?

Tina Brown: I'm able to have the freedom to be myself, say what I think, without anybody questioning why I will be saying it, or for what reason. For me, it's a perfect time to be liberated… It felt like a more intimate process and a hassle-free one. I certainly don't want anybody telling me to be careful. And in this world of terror and timidity about, sort of, Trump and lawyers and all the rest of it, I don't want to be told that something is 'appropriate' or not.

Has it changed your style of writing?
It's allowed me to be my private writing self. When you're writing for a publication, you are always sort of slightly dressing for dinner, whereas I think that it allows me to just simply write as I write, like in my diary or to friends. It gives you the sense that you are writing for yourself. Of course, that's a myth, because you're actually writing for the world. But it does promote more of a feeling of colloquial release.

Do you find that you're sharing more about yourself in your writing?
Yes, in the sense that I can express some of the process of it at the same time. In my last column, I wrote, 'I have no idea how that person got into the news flow and I don't care'. I might not have done that for a piece that was for a magazine. It's a way of being able to be true to the thought as it falls to the page. Sometimes I write about my family, so in terms of the topic, there's no constraint; I write what I feel like writing.

That's not to say that Substack is this totally worthy, altruistic space where people come and share their feelings and fight the good fight against corruption. People are also there to make money in a landscape where jobs in traditional media are drying up and commissioning budgets are being slashed.

My Substack is free, which is partly due to my raging imposter syndrome and the fear that nobody would pay for any of my dribble, and partly because I feel weird crowdsourcing money from strangers. For me, the reward isn't financial, it's reputational. It's gratifying to have people come up to me and compliment me on my Substack. No one's ever complimented me on my Instagram, and it would be kind of weird if they did – it's basically just spon con and pictures of my kids. As a friend of mine with a successful (free!) Substack said, 'I do it more to remind people I'm funny and important.'

Last year, *i-D* editor-in-chief Thom Bettridge launched a personal Substack in which he dissects the mechanics of 'content', unpacking what works and what doesn't – basically giving us the secret sauce to his editorial wizardry. He has 6,500 subscribers, and puts all his content behind a paywall. £60 a year gets you access to his newsletters, reports, expert interviews and 'Attention Economics' series, whereas £375 per year gets you an hour-long one-to-one per year with the man himself.

A lot of those subscribers will be students to whom Bettridge generously gives free subscriptions, and some people will be there for the free intros, before the paywall kicks in. But let's pretend for a minute that all 6,500 subscribers are paying customers, that would mean Bettridge was making just under £500k per year, which is 10 times more than a senior editorial salary at most UK-based titles. 'I have horrendous executive function skills, so I knew that I would need to pay someone to help me produce CONTENT if I were going to actually do it consistently,' he says. 'So having paid subscribers offsets that cost. I offer paid subscriber status gratis to students and people who are new to the industry. If you're a marketing fat cat, you have to fork up.'

Writer Liana Satenstein, who has over 15,000 subscribers, only paywalls some of her content. For £55 a year, she gives readers access to a monthly deep dive exploring some kind of archival fashion treasure. For Satenstein, what started as a fun experiment has since evolved into a more considered editorial pursuit.

Why put some posts behind a paywall?
Liana Satenstein: I started to charge for the posts that I heavily research. For those sorts of pieces, I talk to primary sources. Then I transcribe. Then I hire an editor whom I trust. They are enjoyable, but it can be a lot of work. I started to charge for posts that include vintage picks, too. I just did this with a post about Long Lady Wallets. This isn't, like, a diluted market post though… I go in!

How does the kind of content you create on Substack differ from what you were doing at American *Vogue*?
I quit my job at *Vogue* after working there for over eight years. There were things I wanted to write about, but just didn't… Like breaking down Madonna's 'Bad Girl' music video, which was my first post. I can write when I want. I don't have to wait for editors or publications to get back to me.

Why are fashion people moving to Substack?
I think people want autonomy, both financially and creatively, and you don't necessarily get that at a legacy publication anymore. Everything you write or do will always go to build the publication, and not the individual. There is also a direct connection with the audience that I think is important.

And there's so much potential. Forget writing as an individual; with a bit of elbow grease and vision, you can create your own alternative media company. Just look at what Emily Sundberg has done with 'Feed Me', in which she manages to make dry financial news

'I think people want autonomy, both financially and creatively, and you don't necessarily get that at a legacy publication anymore.'

'The reward isn't financial, it's reputational. It's gratifying to have people compliment me on my Substack. No one compliments me on my Instagram.'

17:35

neverworns



NEVERWORNS

m a former Senior Fashion Writer at Vogue. You can read about only-here archival deep dives, froth-at-the-mouth obsessions, inside closet cleanses, and...

16,000+ subscribers

Abonné

Posts Chat À propos

Liana Satenstein 28 janv.
he '90s Vogue Illustrator Who Created y Logo and Captured My Nose
min lu 66 17

Liana Satenstein 8 juil. 2025
intage Sportswear Will Crush Your Alo oga Sets
oyant Terminé 331 16

Liana Satenstein 28 avr. 2024
he '90s Shoe That Changed Everything

17:37

NEVERWORNS

Should We Be Reissuing Bags?

It can be a hit but it's usually a miss.

LIANA SATENSTEIN
7 JANV. 2026 À 17:35



The current Mombasa on Saint Laurent's site

Yesterday, Saint Laurent reissued the Mombasa bag. The campaign is a solo Bella Hadid holding the bag in a padded elevator. The still images show the bag in three smoo[illegible]m, and i[illegible] product shots, you'll see a minuscule

17:41



218 19 34

17:35

neverworns

Posts Chat À propos

Neverworns



Illustration by Maurice Vellekoop.

I'm a writer who has ended up in the schmatta industry as much as I tried to escape my roots. I'll explain: I was at *Vogue* for over eight years during an incredible heyday of Wild West online fashion media. I was covering *and* starting vintage booms, and perhaps you remember some hits like the Mombasa bag and the Balenciaga City

17:38

natashastagg



Selling Out

Mostly New York-based missives from the author of Surveys, Sleeveless, Artless, and Grand Rapids.

Abonné

Posts Chat À propos

Selling Out by Natasha Stagg

To support my preferred lifestyle (Manhattan), I have been writing strategy, identity, press, social, internal, and ads, making my CV resemble a text-only version of some glossy's front pages. As you can see, I've already Sold Out, but there's always further to go.

Become a paid subscriber ($5, or $4.17/ month when you buy a year) for more gossip and vulnerable thoughts—basically,

15:04

SELLING OUT

Both things cannot be true

I'm working, but my job is in France

31 JANV. 2026 À 01:13

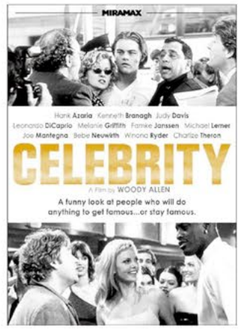
Selling Out Abonnement cadeau

Last night, I had dinner with friends at Chez Napoléon, a small French restaurant in Times Square that will hold its last dinner service tomorrow. Reservations are closed; "Au Revoir!" says every menu. None of us had been. Erin had put it on a mental list after walking past its tinny speakers playing old cabaret music outside, and then read the Hell's Kitchen blog W42St's reporting on its imminent closure. This was one of Midtown's remaining holdouts, it said, founded in 1960 and full of *house rules.*

Marguerite Bruno took over in 1982. W42St calls h[illegible] chef, and, at [illegible]

17 1 [illegible]

15:06



I saw Stephen Gurewitz's ***Honky Kong*** (2021) in the t[illegible] recomm[illegible]

6 5 [illegible]

13:09

CONTENT

Thom Bettridge

@thomthomclub

Editor-in-Chief at i-D

CONTENT i-D

6.8K+ abonnés

Abonné

Activité Posts Chat Likes Lectures (89)

Thom Bettridge restacked

i-D substack
2j

From our cover to the Super Bowl. Bad Bunny <3 i-d.co/article/bad-bunny-puerto-rico-res...



13:10

Thom Bettridge

Activité Posts Chat Likes Lectures (89)

Auteurs multiples 17 déc. 2025
Wanna crash our pitch meeting?
46 min regarder 82 7

Thom Bettridge 11 déc. 2025
I messed up
8 min lu 42 5

Auteurs multiples 9 déc. 2025
CONTENT CONVO: Dot Dot Dot
51 min regarder 43

Thom Bettridge 3 déc. 2025
Be Dumb. Seriously.
Aperçu 7 min lu 27

Thom Bettridge 23 nov. 2025
Juergen Teller's photo dump
8 min lu 58 3

Thom Bettridge 18 nov. 2025
"You wanted to make it a little nasty"

18:13

i-D

@id

Chic and based since 1980

i-D +3

Voir les abonnés

Abonné

Activité Posts Chat Likes Lectur

Douglas Greenwood 9 fév
Wuthering Heights is not what you think
4 min lu 51 11

Nicolaia Rips 5 fév
What's the deal with Trad Nouveau?
3 min lu 88 8

Auteurs multiples 4 fév
Grammy's Red Carpet Reviews
41 min regarder 16

Thom Bettridge 3 fév
"You wanted to make it a little nasty"

13:13

i-D

Activité Posts Chat Likes Lectures

Nicolaia Rips 15 janv.
ow to avoid excess.
min lu 72 3

Douglas Greenwood 9 janv.
o It's Your First Awards Season
min lu 30 1

Nicolaia Rips 8 janv.
ur Taste Should be Private
min lu 1,1 k 25

Adrian Tiu 6 janv.
Doomer Guide to 2026
min lu 63 8

harmony tividad 3 janv.
eace, Love, and Harmony
min lu 32 1

steff yotka 31 déc. 2025
he Internet is Over

13:14

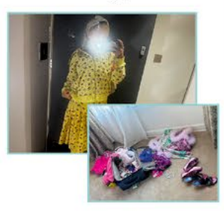
the digital revolution that was promised to liberate us. So, until we are rescued by this decentralized utopia, it seems we have no choice but to hunker down in caves with all of our silver, similar to how we did in medieval times. Which brings me to—



1. **Don't be in denial of new hardware.** One needs the aptitude to embrace new things like new cameras and new laptops because these new things usually function better than their old counterparts. Mostly, this just means prioritizing utility, which means using AirPods or other bluetooth headphones instead of wired headphones. It means abandoning all forms of style that are dependent on nostalgia or reference. I think, in order to crawl out of our dark, silver-ridden caves, it's a good exercise to not be tempted by retro-ness, which is a shiny gem that will just lead you further into the depths of

13:14

6. **I want to only wear clothes that feel like they are continuing my path to my highest good (clothes aren't purely superficial - we look in the mirror to see ourselves throughout our days and I feel like it becomes part of our reinforced self-image)**



7. I [illegible] fit of the

32 1 4

17:25

BRAIN MATTER

What to Wear at Midnight and the Morning After (If You're the First Lady of New York)

A Swearing-In, Styled: Rama Duwaji, Zohran Mamdani, and What They Wore When Power Changed Hands

GABRIELLA KAREFA-JOHNSON
2 JANV. 2026 À 00:21

Brain Matter S'ABONNER



1,4 k 99 186

17:24

Activité Posts Chat Likes Lectures (47)

Auteurs multiples 14:00
Group Chat with a Genius: Pierpaolo Piccioli
2 min regarder 24 3

Gabriella Karefa-Johnson 30 janv.
GEN-C: A Social Media Syllabus for Couture
6 min lu 132 6

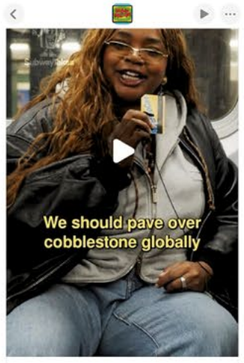
Gabriella Karefa-Johnson 26 janv.
The Impossible Style of Jennifer Lawrence
Payant 8 min lu 77 6

Gabriella Karefa-Johnson 8 janv.
Nothing Tastes As Good As Skinny Feels
5 min lu 262 41

Gabriella Karefa-Johnson 2 janv.
What to Wear at Midnight and the Morning After (If You're the First Lady of New York)
6 min lu 1,4 k 99

Gabriella Karefa-Johnson 26 déc. 2025

17:29



SubwayTakes with Kareem Rahma on Instagram: "Episode 596: We sh...

Prov[illegible] Inn[illegible]

262 41 21

17:46

THE CEREAL AISLE

Leandra Medine Cohen

@leandramedinecohen

"Professional dresser" according to The New York Post.

The Cereal Aisle by Leandra Medine Cohen

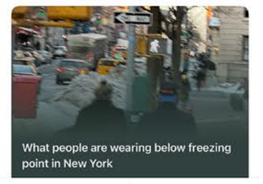
169K+ abonnés #4 sur Fashion & Beauty

Abonné

Activité Posts Chat Likes Lectures (33)

Latest post

Leandra Medine Cohen substack
3j



17:47



Aflalo jacket, Giulva Heritage pants



From the front, with a Roxanne Assoulin gold chain belt and Skall Studios' 'Amy' turtleneck; will include earrings like these (or these? No! These) next time. A jacket more cropped like this from Aritzia looks great styled with low rise trousers.

So I've been playing around with what I'm calling the 3-piece solution. It is exactly what

17:48

THE CEREAL AISLE BY LEANDRA MEDINE COHEN

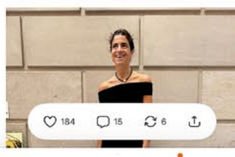
It's the best and worst time of year to get dressed

Mini identity crisis season is here

LEANDRA MEDINE COHEN
22 SEPT. 2025 À 13:14

It's the best time of year to get dressed because it's great outfit weather so the pairings have an opportunity to be more idiosyncratic than during other seasons —

SEE WHAT'S NEW AT CAFE LEANDRA



184 15 6

17:48



Aflalo shirt and bra, here's an alt belt, Tory Burch skirt, Khaite boots (navy satin sock boots here)

But it takes mental space and physical energy, a thorough dance of off, then on, off, then on, off, t to his[illegible]

184 15 6

17:51

tishweinstock



"I'm sick, *coughs*" with Tish Weinstock

Unhinged ramblings and unsolicited advice from a London based fashion and beauty writer and contributing editor at British Vogue.

6,000+ subscribers

Abonné

Notes Posts Chat À propos

About me sections give me anxiety, so here are some random facts and a lie...



17:16

tishweinstock

Notes Posts Chat À propos

"I'm sick, *coughs*" 24 janv.
The world is broken and all we deserve is ass
Terminé 98 10

"I'm sick, *coughs*" 17 janv.
I am bitch wife mother, hear me roar
Terminé 80 10

"I'm sick, *coughs*" 9 janv.
Same bitch, same problems
Terminé 117 13

"I'm sick, *coughs*" 7 janv.
Ivy Wolk: I am just someone animals sense bad energy within
3 min lu 84 2

"I'm sick, *coughs*" 2 janv.
I woke up on New Year's Day with trench foot
3 min lu 91 1

"I'm sick, *coughs*" 31 déc. 2025
Lola Kirke: Destruction breeds

17:16



What I bought

On Monday, I went to a slinky little vintage emporium in the depths of east /north (unclear) London, owned by a very sweet guy with [illegible] danger[illegible]

74 18 2

17:18

"I'M SICK, *COUGHS*" WITH TISH WEINSTOCK

She's a naughty girl with a bad habit

Kunty karl, embarrassing mums, and Marie Antoinette's tweakments,

28 NOV. 2025 À 12:08

Every parent thinks their child is a star. But watching Reuben in his school nativity on Monday morning (before Thanksgiving, really?) made me realise two things: 1. Reuben really is a star and 2. Every other parent is delusional.

Wearing a cropped white wife beater (which always makes me think of Stanley in A Streetcar Named Desire, which is kind of weird and inappropriate when it's in relation to your son) with black track pants, a faux (don't panic!) ermine fur-lined cape and crown, the only king among queens in this fem[illegible] oldes[illegible]

117 18 10

17:17

it's the kind of quote that would do wonders on Substack. But also, *am* i too ugly for Only Fans?



What I did

On Tuesday, I was in Paris for a shoot where I had to crawl on the floor with an iPhone in my mouth, which was all very Allen Jones x Bianca Censori. It actually felt good to be degraded; it got me out of my head for a bit. But now im pranging out about what a mou[illegible] my gu[illegible]

74 18 2

17:52



What Should I Wear?

TORY BURCH

@whatshouldiwear

A newsletter about style, fashion, culture and women entrepreneurs, from the editors at Tory Burch. Named after the 1956 Claire McCardell book 'What Shall I Wear?,' reissued in 2022 with a foreword from Tory.

What Should I Wear? +4

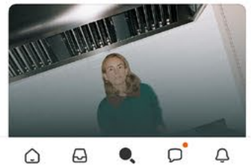
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Latest post

What Should I Wear? substack
2 févr.



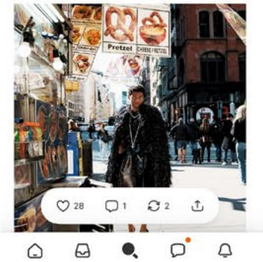
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WHAT SHOULD I WEAR?

Asking "Why not?" with Jalil Johnson

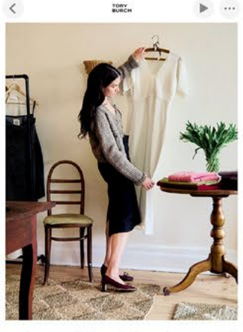
The "Consider Yourself Cultured" writer puts his inimitable spin on some Fall '24 favorites.

WHAT SHOULD I WEAR? ET JALIL JOHNSON
27 OCT. 2024 À 14:01



28 1 2

17:54



Melissa wears Old Stone Trade's cashmere cropped cardigan and bralette with a Tory Burch quilted cotton skirt and Celine pumps. On the wall: Old Stone Trade's Alba dress.

24 3 2

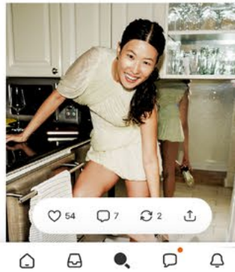
17:53

WHAT SHOULD I WEAR?

Playing dress-up with Anny Choi

The Vogue editor-turned-bridal stylist invites us over for a tutorial on what to wear for late summer and early fall events.

WHAT SHOULD I WEAR?
17 AOÛT 2024 À 15:02



54 7 2

funny(!) and hot(!) and cool(!). Since launching her Substack in 2022, while she was still working in marketing at Meta (a job she was later made redundant from during a series of layoffs), she has turned her humble newsletter into a lucrative media empire.

Sundberg has her own employees, hosts her own events and even makes her own sell-out merch. Where other business titles might prioritise traffic and revenue over things like quality and integrity, by focusing on nurturing her relationship with her 150,000-plus readers, all of whom have come to demand a certain level of honesty in her work, 'Feed Me' feels like a return to some original intention. Imagine a magazine creating content based on what its editors and their readers were actually into, and getting paid for it too, without having to go cap in hand to a brand for some money to do a random advertorial on something nobody cares about. Isn't that what fashion is crying out for?

Before I started writing this article, I had this really romantic idea about fashion's migration to Substack, that it was the result of some zeitgeisty pursuit of truth; a revolt against the tyranny of Instagram and legacy media. But then I spoke to senior style reporter at CNN, Rachel Tashjian, and she ever so slightly burst my bubble by pointing out that Substack has been actively courting fashion people, trying to get them to join (I mean, wasn't I also technically groomed?) and that, conversely, fashion people are also starting to invest in the company, with Jens Grede, co-founder and CEO of Skims, investing an undisclosed amount in the company's $100 million Series C fundraising round. In short: fashion's move to Substack has been carefully orchestrated.

But even so, at least for now (there is talk of implementing native ads, but in such a way that it maintains the platform's founding ethos), Substack only makes money (a 10% commission on every paid post) if the creators do, and creators only make money if their readers are into whatever it is they're writing, which means a certain quality and integrity must be adhered to. If your content suddenly devolves into clickbait and spon con, people are just going to unsubscribe. Just like they would if we all started putting our Instagram behind a paywall. Imagine!

Then there's the whole gift guide and marketplace of it all, which, on the surface, just feels like Instagram and legacy media 2.0. 'A lot of people who are moving into the space for fashion are people who are prioritising shopping and affiliate revenue, and that's where they're making their money,' says Tashjian. 'Fashion on Substack really started with Becky Malinsky and Leandra [Medine] Cohen. And the two of them were very much writing about shopping, and that hasn't changed much to this day. Now, when you go on Substack and you look at fashion content, it primarily looks like what the market pages of magazines did 20 years ago.' This, however, doesn't really bother me, because there's something about it being on Substack, this (for the moment) alternative media engine, that feels elevated.

I'd rather read a piece on skiwear essentials that Becky Malinsky has researched and written in her signature conversational, humorous style than scroll through a carousel of pictures of her wearing whatever fits she's cobbled together on her morning coffee run. Even though they're basically doing the same thing, the former feels more intentional and rigorous, and less of the blatant blend of commerce and self-promotion that is so intrinsic to Instagram. And at least I know that my money is going straight to Malinsky as opposed to whatever title she was previously working under. That's got to count for something, right? Also, crucially, if I don't want to see it, I don't need to subscribe.

Another potential cause for concern for the Substack heads is the fact that brands and traditional media publications are starting to move in, with the idea being that they're crowding out independent thinkers and tainting this editorial arcadia with the threat of institutionalised commerce. In the last year, we've seen the arrival of Balenciaga, The Real Real, Tory Burch, *The New Yorker*, *The Paris Review* and *i-D*. For them, it's a no-brainer. 'So many brands crave deeper storytelling beyond campaigns and product drops,' says Substack's Farrah Storr. 'They also want to foster meaningful relationships with a self-selecting, deeply engaged audience. The brands succeeding here treat their Substack as a long-term relationship-building tool, not just another content channel.' This is something Tory Burch has been able to nail with their Substack, 'What Should I Wear?' (a nod to American designer Claire McCardell's seminal book of the same name). Nestled in between the more obvious gift guides and shoppable trend pieces are engaging features that aim to spread a message of female empowerment, like an interview with *All The Cool Girls Get Fired* authors Laura Brown and Kristina O'Neill.

How has Substack allowed you to engage with your audience differently?
Tory Burch: Substack is where we go deeper on storytelling, engage directly with readers around the world, and highlight women who inspire us – other designers, editors and entrepreneurs.

What is it about Substack that appealed to you in comparison to other platforms?
We started 'What Should I Wear?' in 2023 as the next-gen iteration of 'Tory Daily', the blog we launched in 2009. Storytelling has always been incredibly important to me, and the way people consume this content has changed. We were drawn to Substack for its creativity and strong sense of community.

What is the ethos behind it?
'What Should I Wear?' is purely editorial and retains the lo-fi spirit of our original blog. It is run by our creative team, which includes former magazine editors and art directors.

I don't know about you, but I'd rather be bought a drink before someone tries to get their leg over me, and that's what's happening here with these brands on Substack. Instead of ramming their products down their audience's throats, they're attempting to woo them first with charm, intellect and wit, creating culturally relevant content in the process. It reminds me of the early days of SSENSE, which was about community and culture first, shopping second.

It's the same with publications. I love what *i-D* is doing on Substack. The other day, they staged a livestreamed pitching meeting, in which they peeled back the curtain on their editorial operations, which felt fresh and new.

Why was it important for *i-D* to be on Substack?
Thom Bettridge: Substack is the nucleus of DIY publishing today, and *i-D* is an institution that is rooted in DIY publishing. It is a platform that very much feeds off parasocial behaviour, so we wanted to make content for it that's unfiltered and directly from our editors, so that you feel like you really know us.

Why are we seeing such a migration of fashion people to Substack?
It's funny because a lot of the OG Substackers who are dominant on the platform now – at least the ones I know personally – were people who quit their legacy media jobs and went their own way. Not only did they find that they could get paid a shitload more, but they also found that the unfiltered, down-the-rabbit-hole version of what they were into, that no editor would let fly at a real magazine, was actually what people really wanted. That vibe is contagious and I think any smart brand or media player trying to enter that space needs to get on that wavelength, or they will fail miserably.

How does fashion coverage differ there?
I actually think a lot of the fashion coverage on Substack is pretty mid. A lot of it is sharing affiliate links and making gift guides, or sharing a tired mood image of Hermès by Martin Margiela that someone found on Pinterest. That's why it's been nice to see veteran editors like Rachel Tashjian and Gabriella Karefa-Johnson come on board. I think that shift will bring more critique and ideas into the mix, versus fan behaviour.

How will Substack evolve?
A lot of people on Substack worry out loud that the platform is going to get gentrified by newcomers and brands. But I actually think it has a lot of room to grow without changing. The reality is that the pie of people who care about fashion is growing constantly, so fashion on Substack is primed to grow with that.

Indeed, as long as you're creating authentic, boundary-pushing content that you can't find anywhere else, it shouldn't matter which brands or publications are moving to Substack. It's not a threat, it's a challenge to do better. With the promise of creative freedom and financial autonomy, unsullied (at least for now) by traffic targets and advertisers' demands, and an invitation to be as raw and unhinged as you like, we are living in a golden era of Substack. Because of the unique financial model, the quality and integrity of content will always come first, ensuring writers, brands, and publications uphold certain editorial standards, which in turn, I truly believe, will contribute positively to the culture. Yes, things might change. And they probably will. But if you're not into it, you can just unsubscribe, or better yet, call it out on your own Substack. Isn't that what it's there for?

'Rachel Tashjian ever so slightly burst my bubble by pointing out that Substack has been actively courting fashion people, trying to get them to join.'

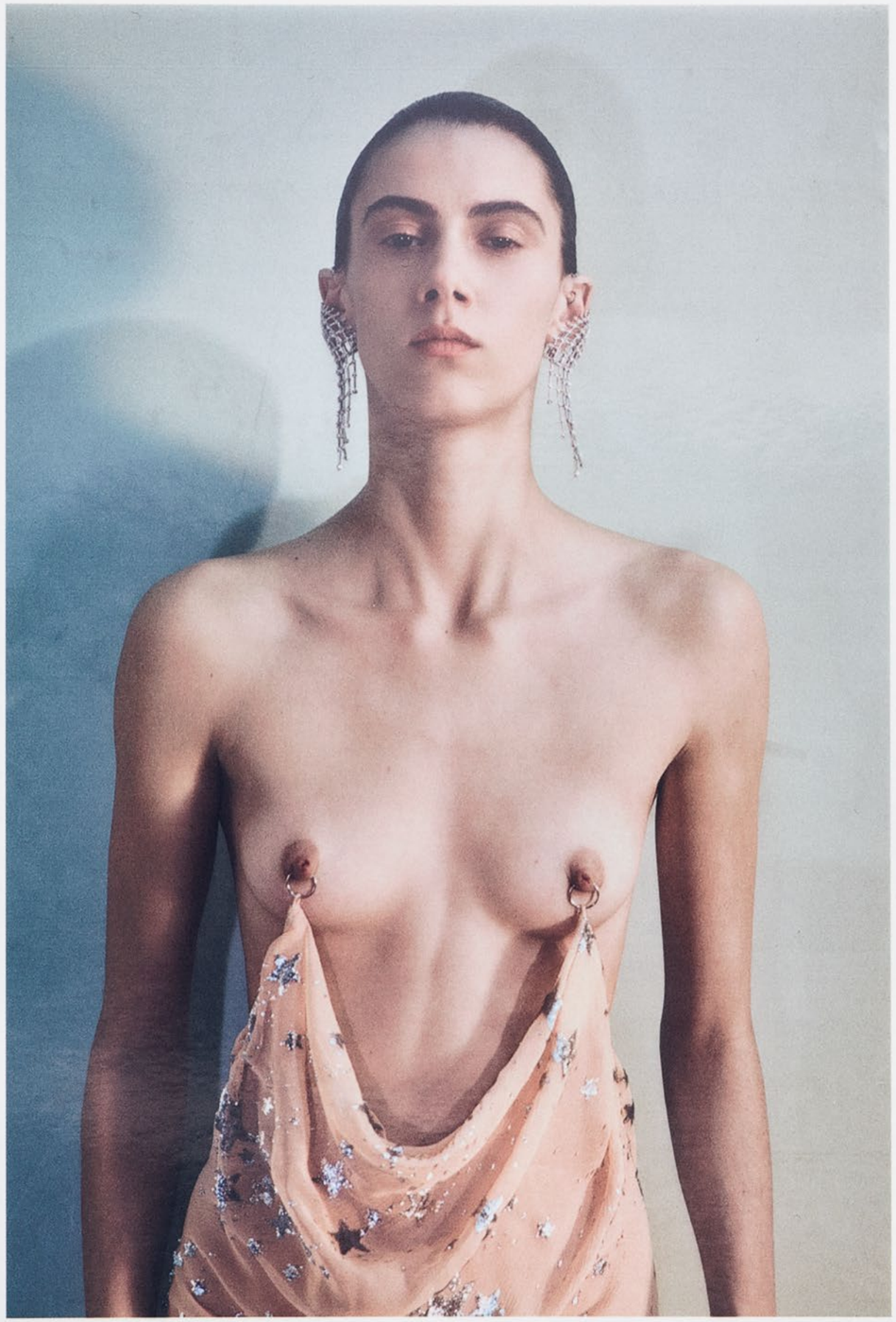
'Jens Grede, co-founder and CEO of Skims, has invested an undisclosed amount in Substack's $100 million Series C fundraising round.'

‘It’s fashion as a way of conveying fantasy.’

Miguel Castro Freitas on his lifelong journey through fashion, from Portugal to Mugler.

Interview by Olivia Singer
Photographs by Casper Sejersen

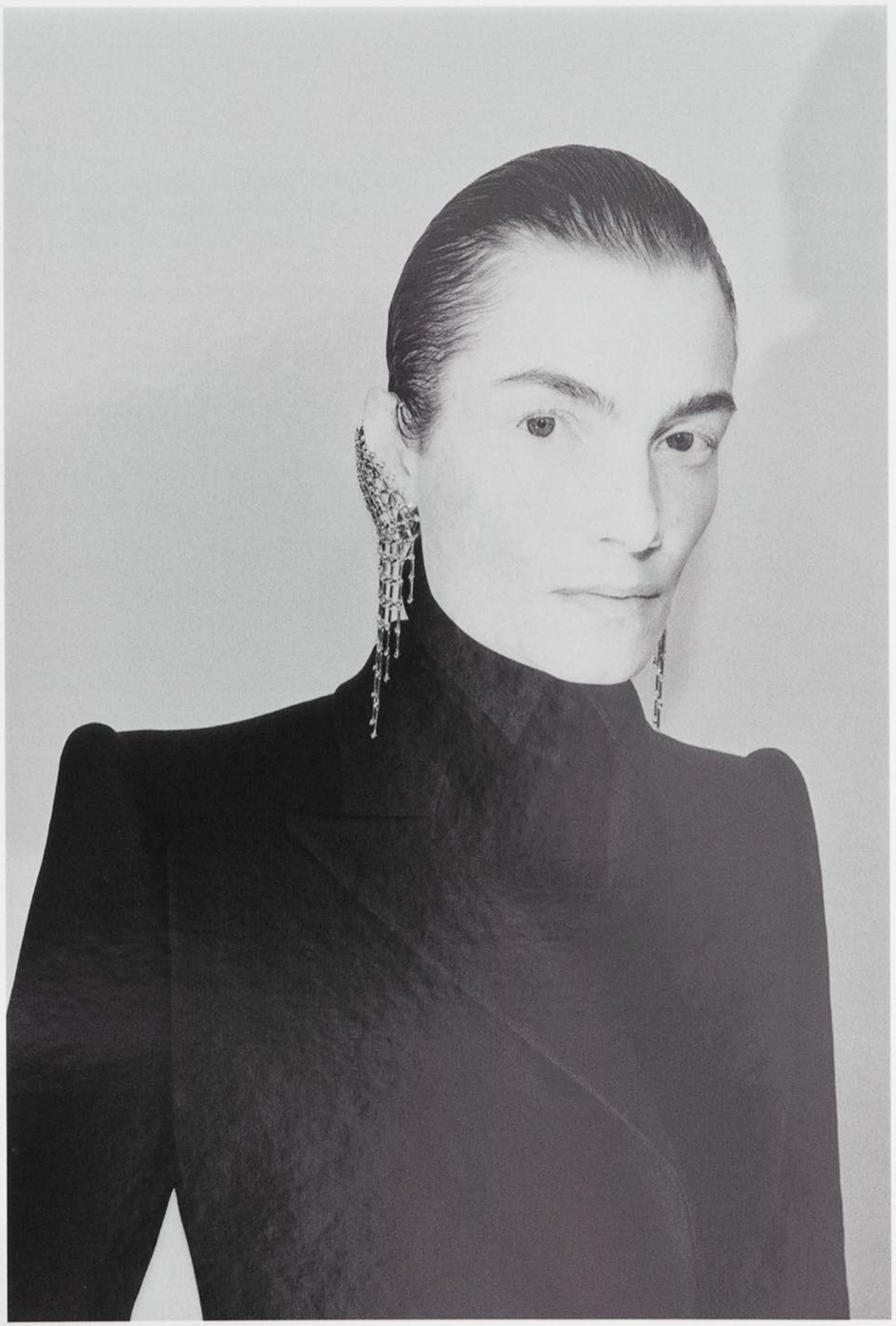




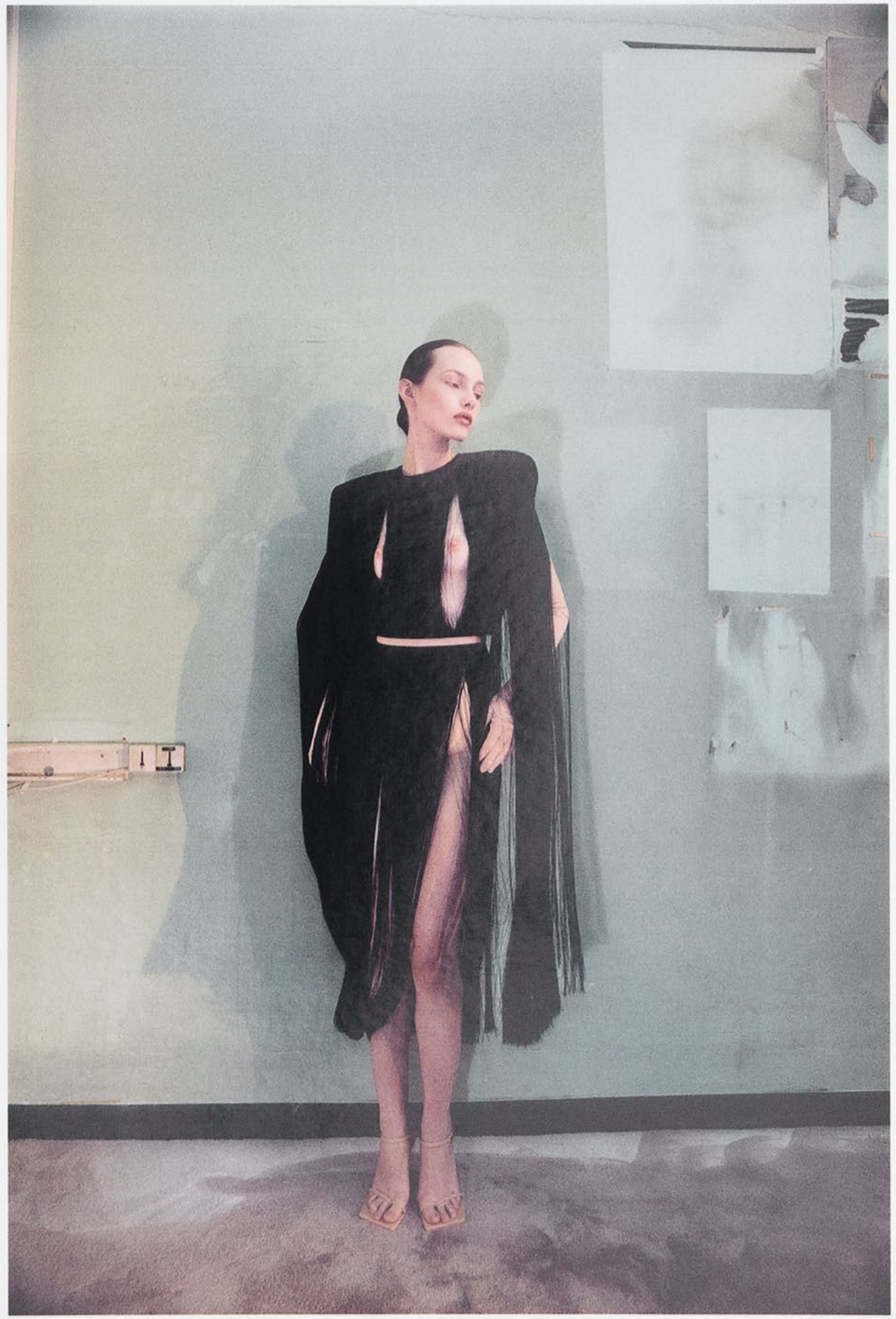


Backstage imagery from Mugler's Spring/Summer 2026 collection, 'Stardust Aphrodite'.
Part 1 of 'A Trilogy of Glorified Clichés.'















When interrogating the biographies of fashion's foremost creatives, there's an anecdote that arises with uncanny regularity. That of an adolescent happening across a magazine, being overcome with awe, and tearing it apart to plaster its pages across their bedroom walls. There are few, however, whose childhood fixations translate to reality as directly as that of Miguel Castro Freitas.

Aged six, living in the Portuguese town of Santarém, he would flick through the only printed matter that came into his family's home – the TV guide – and pore over its back pages, which were filled with full-colour highlights from Paris fashion shows. It was the mid-1980s, the original heyday of Thierry Mugler, whose runways defined the high-octane glamour of the era, and who first transformed the fashion show into a fully-immersive spectacle. In a small town an hour outside of Lisbon, a young Miguel became besotted with the world Mugler created, and assembled his clippings accordingly.

Around the same time, Miguel began drawing his own collections, featuring women with triangular dresses covered in stars, balanced atop sky-high heels. Nearly 40 years later and, after a career spent working behind the scenes with some of contemporary fashion's foremost designers, last September Miguel staged his runway debut as the creative director of Mugler. 'Stardust Aphrodite', a deconstruction and recontextualisation of the showgirl fantasy, traced one of his and Manfred Thierry Mugler's common obsessions: female archetypes of desirability as seen through the lens of cinema, rendered in a way that appears to draw on some of Miguel's formative fashion memories.

On his runway, the hyper-feminine silhouettes of Golden Age starlets were refigured with exaggerated proportions rendered in glossy leathers, slick latex, austere wools and skin-tight jersey. Their sculpted silhouettes paid homage to the theatrical fetishwear of Mugler's making, but refracted that sensibility through stark minimalism. Initial reactions from the industry and audience have largely remained on the fence – give or take a more heated response to certain looks, one of which (a re-appraisal of a 1998 archival style, the fabric of its form suspended from a woman's nipples) was customised and worn by Chappell Roan on the Grammys red carpet. 'Giggling because I don't even think this is THAT outrageous of an outfit,' she wrote on Instagram. 'The look's actually so awesome and weird. I recommend just exercising your free will it's really fun and silly :D.'

The only decorative element that remained in the collection was the occasional, galactical scatterings of stars. The same type that illustrated Miguel's adolescent 2D drawings, and, over those same years, became what Thierry Mugler described as his totemic 'fetish symbol'. So, in more ways than one, what appeared on the runway was something of a Freudian fantasy. In order to get a more rounded look at Miguel's debut at Mugler, *System* asked him to assemble a scrapbook which illuminates this particular designer's unconscious.

'I wanted my first collection for Mugler to focus on the principle of glamour. To ask: what is glamour and what can it represent in this day and age?'

Olivia Singer: Were you always interested in fashion? Were the women in your early life interested in clothes?
Miguel Castro Freitas: No, nobody at home had any interest in fashion – not even my mother. The only magazines in the corners of the house would be TV guides and, in the back, they had sections that, periodically, were dedicated to fashion shows. Every time I saw something I really liked – Mugler, Vivienne Westwood, Jean Paul Gaultier, Versace – I had this compulsion to rip the page out. And then, when my mother would go to the hairdresser or the medical clinic, I would be thrilled to go with her because I knew I would find more magazines there. Recently, I was going through boxes at my mother's house, and I found them all. She'd kept them…

I've interviewed quite a few designers whose introduction to fashion came through tearing pages out of magazines. It's sort of a proof of their power. It's quite reassuring to realise we all come from the same place. When you're a kid, you don't realise that the things you're attracted to can eventually become a job. It took me a while to realise it could become a path. I was very interested in the arts, in film, all of those things. So as much as I would flirt with the idea of fashion, I had other aspirations in parallel.

And your grandfather was a tailor, so did you grow up making clothes?
When it was the holidays, I would spend three months in the mountains with my grandparents. I would wake up at six in the morning and go feed the chickens,

see if there were any eggs – that was the highlight of the day – and become a Tom Sawyer kind of boy. When I was about 10 years old, I asked my grandfather to teach me how to make a jacket. I spent an entire afternoon with him, at this very modest wooden table under the house. There were two cubicles: a tiny one where he had created his own atelier for sewing, and the one next to it where we kept the farm animals, because he was also a farmer. So cows, pigs, sheep, chickens…

What sort of clothes would he make? Men's suits?
Yes, for the men around town. When he was 13, he became an apprentice for the most prestigious tailor in the north of Portugal, in the town where my family comes from, and he became a master tailor. But then he was fed up with all of this, and decided to go back to nature. Apparently, he had wanted to escape the destiny that everyone in his family had of being a farmer, so he became an apprentice, but he ended up falling in love with nature on his own terms. I learned how to make a suit with him. I still have the paper patterns for it.

Were you interested in the clothes worn by people around you? Was the way that people dressed something you paid attention to?
Quite frankly, no. The only person in town I can think of, who I thought was the most stylish woman I'd ever seen in my life, was the local prostitute. I spent a lot of time at my grand-aunt's home. On her street was a brothel. I remember one day I saw this woman in the street. It's ingrained in my memory: I had never seen anyone look as exotic as her. She was tiny and she would change her haircut and hair colour quite frequently, which was unusual for a small town like mine. She'd wear extensions, or shave her head, and she was wearing *leather*. Leather suits with 12 centimeters stilettoes, sometimes in varnished red. I was about seven, and I would force my cousin to sit by the window with me, waiting for her to come out so I could comment on her looks. This woman was incredible. She took a liking to me because I was so mesmerised by her. She would – at least once a week – ring my aunt's doorbell to give me chocolate cigarettes and coins. I'd never been very drawn to fashion besides what I'd see on the runways in the magazines, but she became my first style icon. I thought everyone else dressed boring.

'When I was 10, I asked my grandfather to teach me how to make a jacket. He was an apprentice for the most prestigious tailor in the north of Portugal.'

What about film? There's something cinematic about what you've started to present at Mugler.
One night, I came across David Lynch's *Lost Highway* on TV. That is what really opened my mind to cinema. Then on Channel 2 in Portugal, when I was about 15 years old, they ran a cycle of different directors – one on David Lynch, one on David Cronenberg – and that completely rewired my mind in terms of what film could be.

What was it about their work that interested you? Lynch, Cronenberg, their films are different to what normally comes on TV, they're like windows into another world.
That's precisely the point. It opened up different worlds and showed me reality in a way that you don't necessarily experience in real life. The idea that you can reconstruct the world in different ways and tell stories that come from an abstract place. That things don't have to reflect how you live life, or how you see life, but rather how you feel it.

So how did you end up moving to London in the early 2000s to go to Central Saint Martins?
The epiphany came when I found a copy of *i-D* for the first time in my hometown. February 1996, with Kate Moss on the cover. I was like, 'What the fuck?' It wasn't an average fashion magazine. It wasn't glossy, and I read the last page which was a short Q&A with Alexander McQueen. I was completely obsessed with his work and in the interview he said he went to Central Saint Martins. So I was like, 'OK, if that guy went there, that's where I'm gonna go.' Then I found out that John Galliano went there, too – the designers who really represented everything I aspired to.

What was it about them that interested you so much?
It was the disruptive nature of their work and how it transcended fashion. I discovered clothes were not just clothes, that you could say so much with fashion and that it could be a platform on which you could project so many other things. The same way that cinema is called the 'seventh art', I think fashion should be called the 'eighth art'.[1] There's something so complete about how we can convey so many different expressions through fashion: it's a multimedia realm. We don't work just with fabric, there's photography, film, the



'My grandfather working at the sewing machine in his modest atelier, after arriving from the farm.'



'My grandfather's farmland in Portugal.'



‘My first communion.’



‘My first fashion drawing of a runway collection,
at six years old – taken from my first school book.’

engineering of a garment, the understanding of space and movement.

The world-building?
Exactly. So, when I got to Saint Martins, I felt like I was finally in my place, and among people who had the same aspirations and the same kind of interests as I did. I was living in Shoreditch, which back then looked very, very different to how it is now, and I was sharing a flat with four or five friends. There were always people coming and going at our place. We would help each other out – for example, one of my flatmates worked at the George and Dragon,[2] so we could drink there for free. It became like a temple for us.

I miss the George and Dragon.
It’s so sad that it closed. It was like a meeting place for all these people coming from different areas – from fashion, from the art world, from the music scene. Everyone would gather there. And we’d go to Trade a lot,[3] which was our home on the weekends, and with the rise of electroclash we’d go to Nag Nag Nag.[4] People would really dress up.

I remember that period so well, and I am deeply grateful that there aren’t as many photos of it as there would be now.
The outfits! And all the make-up.

So, what was your graduate collection like?
I was interested in the idea of playing with codes of class. I had this image of a family of aristocrats who had lost everything. They had been dropped into the middle of a forest with no access to the rest of the world, and no idea how to exist. It was sort of historical, sort of anachronistic, sort of a time that didn’t really exist. But at its core it was about playing with what you associate with propriety. That idea was shaped by necessity, of course. By the fact that I didn’t have a big budget, and I was making do with what I had. Using poor materials but with elaborate craft techniques, constructing these symbols of class. I do believe that some of the best inspiration comes from necessity. The power of navigating certain limitations to find the best way to express something. It’s so formative, like a blessing in disguise.

Who were the designers you were inspired by around that time? It sounds a bit Margiela, a bit Galliano…

‘The only stylish person in my childhood town was the local prostitute in her leather suits and varnished red 12cm stilettos. I’d never seen anyone so exotic.’

They were both extremely inspiring. I graduated at the end of 2004 and it was the period of Hussein Chalayan, one of the greats who defined that era and the arrival of conceptual design. Martin Margiela has always been a hero of mine, for the fact that he stripped down certain codes of dressing, together with designers like Rei Kawakubo. I’m interested in designers who rip the codes of tradition apart. There is something very poetically disruptive about the work of someone like Margiela or Kawakubo. They understood tradition and therefore are able to deconstruct it.

Like Picasso. They know how to make something in the ‘proper’ way and then choose to do something different.
Exactly. You first need to master something in order to corrupt it. Then, after I had graduated, my first job was for John Galliano at Dior, which was a dream come true.

What a remarkable introduction to the industry. What period was that?
It really was the dream. The first collection I worked on was for the 100th anniversary of the birth of Christian Dior [Autumn/Winter 2005-2006 couture]. The show with all the horses and carriages, everything in tulle. It was a moment of transition between what fashion used to be, and what it would become; when it became much more driven by the corporate system and marketing dominance. For me, especially in retrospect, it was such a privilege to have been a part of that. When we wouldn’t use words like ‘budget’, or even refer to the brand as a ‘brand’. It was the house, the *maison*. There were no constraints, no creative limitations. To be a part of that, to initiate my career with someone like him and to learn about the grand gesture of fashion was something that informed me for life.

How long were you there?
I stayed for two and a half years, and then I went to Yves Saint Laurent with Stefano Pilati. Very different! But equally amazing.

Wow, a complete 180. What was it that drove you to go and work with Stefano?
I was very, very fascinated by his world and his proposition for Yves Saint Laurent. I felt like I needed to see different tastes, to work with someone who could introduce me to another way of thinking about and seeing fashion. Moving from

Dior to Yves Saint Laurent was almost like black and white, yin and yang. It was so extremely opposite. I felt like I needed that challenge to train myself, and it was very in tune with the zeitgeist. I stayed with him for three years.

I do think you have the most remarkable CV…
Then I went to Lanvin, with Alber Elbaz. That was another incredible experience. I was there for Alber's 10-year anniversary and we all worked very, very intimately with him – both because the team was small and because he had a very unique way of working. He didn't make any distinction between senior and junior designers, and it was very important to him that we were close to the materials. It was important to him to see things formed with our hands. It was incredible training because, after years mostly sitting at a desk sketching, working with Alber was more about pulling out rolls of fabric and slashing or draping on the Stockman.

And then?
Back to Dior, 10 years after I had started there, but now with Raf Simons. Which was incredible. One of my favourite experiences. I really identified with his ethos, with his way of thinking, with his approach to fashion. I think the fact that he didn't come from fashion, that he studied industrial design, meant he had a very different way of responding to an image, to a silhouette, to colour, to texture. It was almost less fashion-driven and more artistic. For me that was very inspiring, to communicate in a way that felt different to what I was used to. It really resonated with me and I stayed until a year after he left.

Then you went to Dries [van Noten]? Sorry, I feel like I'm doing a job interview with you but it's fascinating to hear about these different approaches that must have influenced you.
Yes, and I moved to Antwerp! I was commuting, spending the weekdays there and the weekend here in Paris.

So Raf sold you on Belgium?
Precisely. Not that I wasn't sold on it before – I was already such a fan of the Belgian school of thought, of that cerebral approach to fashion, that it somehow felt like home. And Dries is a true master. One of the things that always fascinated me about him, and I think was pretty much a mystery to all of us, is how great a colourist he is as well as his sensibility for prints. There's something quite painterly in the way he approaches fashion which, at the time, felt like a code to be cracked. I am not someone who is very close to the world of prints, and that was all the more reason for me to want to work with him.

When the opportunity for Mugler came up, did you incorporate into your vision what you'd learned elsewhere? What was it about the job that was exciting?
Well, I was flattered, of course. It was like going back to where it had all started for me as a child, to the very beginning of how and why I had taken an interest in fashion. Generally speaking, what I feel is missing at this moment in time is seeing fashion as a way of conveying fantasy. This is something the house of Mugler has always been synonymous with. It felt like there was also a desire on their part to return to what was perceived as its essence.

What do you see as the essence of Mugler?
Mugler is about so many things. I think that's what I find so fascinating about it. I'm someone who is very interested in paradoxes and it's a complex world. On the one side, it represents glamour; and on the other, power-dressing. Mugler really ventured into exploring different worlds but – whatever themes he explored, whatever fantasies – he was always empowering women.

It's interesting that you say that, right now, fashion needs to convey fantasy. What do you mean by that?
It has become pretty beige; driven by a corporate hunger for commerciality. I mean, I have nothing against commerciality. We are an industry, first and foremost, and we shouldn't pretend to be artists, but nevertheless I think we have an obligation to create something that has depth. Fashion is a great platform to inspire people and I think we have the obligation to propose something that can move people on a deeper level, that has a cultural value beyond just consumption. There is so much that can be conveyed, so much to express in order for a product to carry some soul. I know that's why I first wanted to be a designer. At some point I started to feel as though, with the changes that were happening, the industry was not what I signed up for; it was no longer what had made me want to do it in the first place. So when Mugler

'Designing for Mugler is like going back to where it all started for me as a child, to the very beginning of how and why I'd taken an interest in fashion.'



'My very first archive image: a page ripped out of the TV guide from 1993.'



'An example of my early image collection archive, featuring one of my favourite artists, Hans Bellmer.'



‘Ready for Trade night at Turnmills, with my friends Nuno and Miriam.’ London, 1999.



‘My friend Ricardo and I after a night out.’ London, 2000.



‘Me getting ready for clubbing at Trade.’ Turnmills, London, 1999.

approached me, I felt, ‘OK, maybe there is hope; the opportunity to return to the things I always believed in.’

You mentioned female empowerment. I wonder, because Mugler addressed so much around identity politics – and politics more broadly – and was remarkably progressive in so many ways, is that something that interests you today in your work for the house?
Yes, that’s another reason. Mugler represents everything I believe in, in terms of my values. It’s not just to do with the aesthetics or the creative expression of the brand, but also its humanism.

Do you think fashion has a responsibility to engage with those issues? Do you think it can spark actual change?
I don’t like to think that we have an obligation as designers to be politically engaged, but I do think that if it’s something that is part of our nature, as human beings, then it’s something that bleeds into the work. I don’t know how it transpires in mine, but there are things that matter to me and that inform my work in one way or another.

That leads me into your debut Mugler collection. You went through the archive to excavate commonalities between you and Thierry Mugler, and I know that you came across film as a common point of reference. Can you tell me a little about that, about the idea of the showgirl that informed what you presented?
Of course. It is well known that Mugler was fascinated by old Hollywood and the idea of the *femme fatale*, the showgirl. There was this glamorous aspect of his work that was close to kitsch and that’s where I wanted to start because I thought it was the most difficult subject to tap into at this very moment. I wanted to make the first collection part one of a trilogy deconstructing the essence of Mugler, and I wanted the first to focus on the principle of glamour. To ask: what is glamour and what can it represent in this day and age? I feel like people are always running away from clichés, but they’re something I really love. They are clichés for a reason, because they are universal statements. There’s a familiarity to them, they carry certain signifiers. I was trying to deconstruct those codes through my own lens.

How do you make this *femme fatale* feel relevant in a contemporary landscape of womanhood?
It’s difficult to articulate because it’s not just about what inspires you, but about the context of the now, of the zeitgeist. I exist in this time, but it’s hard to pinpoint because it’s something visceral. You look at things that come directly from the archives because you want to investigate and pay tribute to them. But, at the same time, you also have personal obsessions that are with you throughout your life, together with the things that you are currently interested in. Then, there are questions you ask about the world of today, or about the people around you. All of these things, I think, end up informing what you do. I don’t spend so much time trying to understand why I do what I do, but whenever I feel the compulsion to dive into something I will do it uncompromisingly, knowing that there must be something within that’s informing the work. You have to trust the process, trust that something will happen, almost alchemically.

There was some controversy online around one of the looks you showed – the gown suspended from nipple rings that was reappropriated from the archive. Do you think it’s more complicated today, in the digital age, to have certain conversations with nuance?
Oh my God, yes. It is something that scares me a great deal because it can be very dangerous. People nowadays can look at things in a very first degree way, and are ready to attack at first glance. This dress, more than anything, is a message, a question. It is a symbol and it has a context that lies within its place in the rest of the collection. In isolation, however, it changes the meaning. Like everything in life, it is important to look at things in context. For me, there was something really poetic about it. For some people, it was perceived as misogynistic. For others, it was perceived as sexually empowering. And, of course, the latter was the intention.

What about the cinematic idea of the *femme fatale* feels empowering to you? I find it interesting in light of what you said about discovering one of your first interests in fashion through a sex worker, a sort of archetypal *femme fatale*. Can you tell me about the women, or the characters, who inspired you?
There were countless. Mildred Pierce [of Michael Curtiz’s 1941 film of the same name] and three different Lolas: Fassbinder’s *Lola* [of his 1981 film], Jacques Demy’s [1961] *Lola*, and Max

‘Mugler ventured into exploring different worlds but – whatever themes he explored, whatever fantasies – he was always empowering women.’

Ophüls' [1955] *Lola Montès*. There was [1929 musical comedy] *Glorifying the American Girl*, which is the film that Pamela Anderson's character was obsessively watching in Gia Coppola's [2024 film] *The Last Showgirl*, which also inspired me.

I love that Pamela was at the show because she's the ultimate example of reclaiming agency over that image. Speaking of, I think it's been interesting over the past decade to see the resurgence of Mugler's archive through celebrities on red carpets, on women like Kim Kardashian and Cardi B, and now Chappell Roan who wore a custom dress from you for the Grammy Awards. Is that something that interests you, or resonates with what you're doing?
I think that right now, the industry functions in a certain way. Of course, there's always been a connection between fashion and celebrity, but it's not the first thing on my mind.

That feels, to me, quite interesting for Mugler. I mean, Thierry Mugler was really the first person to initiate the bombast of the fashion show, to figure it as pop culture in such a way that even a six-year-old kid is getting excited looking at it. But to me it felt like this show stripped back that side of things.
Stripping back is exactly the expression I would use. It was precisely the intention of this first show, and even informed the chromatic scheme, these neutral tones. I wanted to purify things, to put the focus on the totemic element of the collection, which is silhouette, and to focus on the woman behind the clothes. For me the idea of revisiting clichés is also to find ways to disrupt the perception of them. Mugler's name is associated with theatricality, but right now a lot of people are engaged with a nostalgic idea of things. Even if we need the past to inform the future, fashion is supposed to be looking forward, not backwards. It feels as though we're in a miasmic time where fashion has become a vacuous proposition which makes people dream of things from the past rather than being excited about what's coming next. People are very cynical right now.

There's also such a broad audience for the bombast of fashion now, for commentary from all angles, even people who perhaps don't understand the context. Does it feel like a complicated time to be doing what it is you do?
I try not to think too much about it, otherwise I will be overwhelmed.

I'm sorry!
I mean, I don't have any point of comparison because I'm pretty much a *debutante*. But I try to see things now as a continuation of everything that I've done before. I can only do what I know best and try to follow my deepest instincts despite how the work might be received. I don't know how to do it any other way, so I try to quiet the noise – because there's a lot of noise right now – and focus on the everyday conquests in our intimate cocoon with all the beautiful, talented people that I work with, who are really committed to the vision and dialogue that we have. I can wake up every morning thrilled to know that I'm going to go into a room and be surrounded by all these creative people, and that we are all in unison to propose something that is meaningful to us and hope that eventually it will resonate with others. I don't think there's anything that matters more to me than that.

1. Traditionally, the 'six arts' refer to architecture, sculpture, painting, music, poetry, and dance; cinema was later theorised as the 'seventh art' in the early 20th century for its synthesis of these forms.

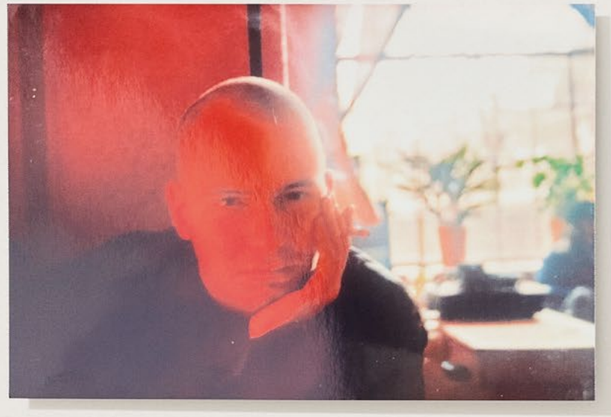
2. The George and Dragon was a gay pub in Shoreditch, London, that became a well-known drinking hole for those in the creative industries in the 2000s and early 2010s. It was closed in 2015 due to a dramatic rent hike.

3. A renowned queer club night in the 2000s, Trade was held at Turnmills in Clerkenwell. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, Trade's organisers would travel across the world, from Ibiza to New York, with the party. It ceased to exist after 2008, citing its popularity and unrealistic audience expectations as a key factor in its demise.

4. Nag Nag Nag was an influential London club night at the seminal gay club Ghetto in Soho. It ran for six years, from 2002 to 2008.



'Me in London.' 2000.



'My portrait taken by my friend Miriam.'

‘The wildest thing on the tube anywhere.’

Reappraising Anton Perich, the original point-and-shoot filmmaker, public access TV pioneer, and proto-YouTuber.



Text by Tim Blanks


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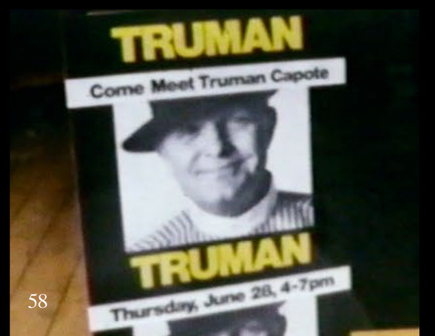

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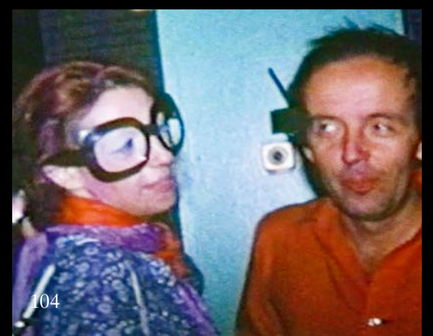

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1: ‘Charles Jourdan’, fashion show at Studio 54, 1977.
2: ‘Amanda Lear’, 33 Union Square West, 1975.
3, 32: ‘Andrea Feldman’, the LoGiudice SoHo loft, 1970.
4, 54, 81: ‘Scott Barrie’, 1975.
5, 23, 41, 79: ‘Kenzo at Studio 54’, fashion show
at Studio 54 with Grace Jones, Jerry Hall and Valentino, 1977.
6, 35: ‘Lambs Club’, 1970s.
7, 28, 91: ‘Issey Miyake at FIT’, fashion show at FIT, 1975.
8: ‘Chamberlain Couch’ with John Chamberlain, The Dakota, 1976.
9, 73, 93: ‘April in Paris’ with R. Couri Hay,
the charity ball at the Waldorf Astoria, ca. 1975.
10: ‘Grace Jones, Haircut’, Cinandre Hair Salon on E 57th St., 1978.
11, 53, 59: ‘Candy & Daddy’, 1972.
12, 74: ‘Edwige, Maripol, Robert’, Anton Perich’s 210 5th Ave. loft, 1978.
13, 39, 52, 58, 77, 100: ‘Andy Warhol and Truman Capote’, Fiorucci, 1979.
14, 69, 72, 76: ‘Yves Saint Laurent Show’, the 79th St. Boat Basin, 1976.
15, 60, 65, 67: ‘Diana Ross at Le Jardin’, Le Jardin, 1975.
16, 31: ‘Andy Warhol’, 1970s.
17: ‘Night at Hurrah’, Hurrah Disco, 1977.
18, 43, 50, 68, 83, 87, 96: ‘The Rae Spencer Fashion Show’, Fiorucci, ca. 1978.
19: ‘Andrea Feldman at Max’s’, Max’s Kansas City, 1971.
20, 46: ‘Jerry Hall in Huntington Hartford’s Tie Closet’, 1977.
21, 63: ‘Artist’s Rights Day’ with Jackie Curtis, West Broadway, 1976.
22, 36, 40, 55, 86: ‘Rainbow Room Halloween’, the Rainbow Room, ca. 1974.
24, 29, 51, 71, 82, 97, 101, 105: ‘The Most Glamorous Women’, Halston show, 1975.
25: ‘Victor Hugo Working in Halston Window’, Madison Ave., ca. 1977.
26: ‘Dave Street, Angry Punks’, Anton Perich’s 210 5th Ave. loft, 1978.
27: ‘The Hughes Affair’, Hotel Chelsea, 1972.
30, 42, 44: ‘Frankenstino’ with Taylor Mead,
John Chamberlain’s SoHo studio, ca. 1972.
33, 92: ‘Hair Life’ with Tinkerbelle,
Nancy North and Andre Martheleur, Cinandre Hair Salon, 1977.
34, 49, 66, 99: ‘Hot Dice’ with John Cage, Patti Smith and friends,
unidentified West Village gallery, ca. 1974.
37: ‘The Great American Silent Movie’ with Taylor Mead,
Candy Darling and Tiger Morse, Max’s Kansas City, 1971.
38, 47: ‘Bebe Buell’, the LoGuidice SoHo loft, ca. 1973.
45: ‘Charles James #19’, Hotel Chelsea, 1978.
48: ‘Susan Blond and Danny Fields’, the Music Party, 1974.
56: ‘Punk Store’, 1978.
57, 78, 89: ‘Mickey Ruskin’, 1974-1975.
61: ‘Ara Gallant’, Ara Gallant’s, 1974.
62, 85: ‘Saks Fifth Ave.’, Saks Fifth Avenue and
Rockefeller Center, ca. 1973.
64: ‘Ray Johnson and Laurel’, 1975.
70: ‘Betsey Johnson’, 1977.
75: ‘Matuschka and Michael’, Anton Perich’s 210 5th Ave. loft, ca. 1976.
80, 84: ‘The Night Porter Movie Opening’ with Charlotte Rampling,
Lynn Redgrave, Andy Warhol, Taylor Mead, Dustin Hoffman,
Mick Jagger and Bianca Jagger, the Four Seasons Restaurant, 1974.
88: ‘Lance Loud and The Mumps’, Anton Perich’s 210 5th Ave. loft, 1978.
90, 103: ‘Bobby Scott’, the Rainbow Room, 1976.
94, 98, 102, 104: ‘Max’s Kansas City’ for Steven Kasher Gallery, 1971.
95: ‘Pink Party’, The Fabulous, 1975.

The book I'd rescue in a fire is the catalogue of Andy Warhol's first exhibition in Europe, at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm in February 1968. It's the greatest fanzine ever made, a 600-page mix of bad art repros and monochrome candids by Billy Name and a teenage Stephen Shore, who were commissioned by a visionary Swedish curator to document every single scintilla of life and work at The Factory, Warhol's studio at 231 East 47th Street.

Even then, The Factory was fabled, no detail too big or too small to exert a powerful allure. The soon-to-be-iconic silkscreens propped against walls sprayed silver by Billy Name. The grubby couch that was as much of a character in Warhol's movies as Edie and Viva and the other superstars. The Velvet Underground as house band for impromptu dance parties. Amphetamine as a food group. *The payphone*! My teen self couldn't get enough of the book's vicarious kicks. It was my Bible. (I paid $4.95 for it in 1971 – spiritual succour came cheap in those days.) It has travelled the world with me. And soon, yellowing with age, it will join me in my tomb.

Bible aside, The Factory itself remains my enduring fascination. Like I said, no detail too big or small. So the news that a MoMA curator had discovered several dozen rolls of undeveloped Factory film from the 1960s in a storage facility in Pennsylvania stirred my loins. Even more when their contents were found to include tantalising footage of a party at The Factory and the Velvet Underground on a road trip, eight more of Warhol's famous Screen Tests, and an extraordinary handful of sexually explicit reels (the couch features strongly) that attest to the artist's hearty interest in porn. It's possible the film was never developed because he was sensitive to the legal issues attached to such interests at the time.

For decades, Warhol's films and the cherished Modern Museet 'zine and the endless stream of behind-the-scenes biographies and diaries, including the artist's own, have functioned as an archive for me of a kind of personal dreamland. And it's not just me. As more and more archive footage is winkled out of whatever cupboard or cardboard box it's been stuffed in for decades, you get a sense of how huge and hungry an audience there is for the kind of you-are-there footage that drops you into A Moment, especially as it relates to any kind of public figure. Two documentary series spring to mind: *1971: The Year that Music Changed Everything*[1] and *Kingdom of Dreams*. Music and fashion – two arenas with ardent fans ravenous for revelation. I sat through both shows gasping at the footage. Who filmed it? Where had it been hidden these many years? How much more was there? What did that mean for any other subject I was interested in?

We're living in the age of the archive, when the past is called upon to inform the present and distract us from the diminishing possibilities of the future. It creates a curious intimacy, getting to see how people got to be who they were. It also seems like there is no longer any such thing as 'banal' when archive footage comes into play because absolutely everything is shadowed by something dark – natural catastrophe, war, genocide, plague, financial collapse, or some other species of untimely end – which weights it. Highs and lows are cojoined by Death, literal and metaphorical.

This point was strikingly made while I was watching an episode of *Anton Perich Presents*, an early adopter of the New York mini-phenomenon called public access TV. In 1972, the Federal Communications Commission mandated that cable companies in the US had to provide public access channels as an open platform for anyone with a camera. A kind of pro-to-YouTube, in other words. You don't have to imagine the lunatic banality that ensued. The clips are all over Instagram. But in New York, a nascent underground art and film scene found public access TV as the perfect post-Warholian venue for challenging countercultural experimentation. Perich, a Croatian photographer and filmmaker who'd chosen New York over Paris, was one of the first people to take advantage of the new legislation. He felt it instantly opened up a whole captive audience. From 1973 to 1979, he roamed Manhattan with his Sony Portapak, filming parties, fashion shows, club nights, and his own odd little soap operas with the same blank, all-seeing eye. In this particular episode I mentioned, he's filming the aftermath of an Yves Saint Laurent show in 1976 at the 79th Street Boat Basin. People are disco-ing furiously in what looks like office attire (more on this later) when one woman collapses. A couple of men and women attempt to revive her. Mouth to mouth. A little light CPR. The Portapak stares fixedly. Eventually, one man hitches her up in his arms and carts her off. 'I Got the Music in Me' rages on, oblivious.

And this is what *Anton Perich Presents*' audience was watching. Along with Grace Jones getting her hair cut for 14 minutes

'From '73 to '79, Perich roamed Manhattan with his Sony Portapak, filming parties, fashion shows and club nights, with his blank, all-seeing eye.'



NEW YORK POST, THURSDAY, JANUARY 3, 1974 B5

Public Access Television: Is Anybody Watching?

By JOYCE WADLER

In theory it sounds like a terrific idea — particularly given the tendency of New Yorkers to be more than willing to offer their opinions to anyone willing to listen:

Start with a new-born communications industry — in this case cable television. Set aside free air time for anyone who wants it. Insure freedom of expression by ruling that the cable company can in no way regulate what is said or done on that time.

Then you've got public access television.

Seems like it should be doing beautifully in this town?

It's not.

Public access TV, operational in New York in its two-channel glory since July, '71, has an audience that's been put, by three separate surveys, as between five and 10 per cent of the city's 114,000 cable subscribers — at most. Despite the aim of public access to give television back to the people there are almost no facilities in New York for a person to go to learn how to use or borrow video equipment. Even public access' most devoted supporters will admit that a lot of the programming is awful. And if you ask your average New Yorker if he has any idea of what public access is, chances are he'll tell you he doesn't.

What Does It Mean?

Does that mean that the famous New York drive to speak out has disappeared and that no one is participating in the public access experiment?

Not at all.

Sterling Manhattan and Teleprompter, the two cable TV companies having the New York City cable franchise for lower and upper

in to public access and you might see "Let's Get High with Frank and Guy", a marijuana-reform show, or "Street Meat," a show on verbal abuse of women produced by the Women's Video Projects, or a yoga class, or a community meeting.

If you were particularly lucky, you might have seen the 1972 New York City Street Olympics broadcast, which opened with an aerial shot of sweat-shirted, pot-bellied New Yorkers racing through the city streets as a voice announced that the show was coming "from a fire escape high atop Thompson Street," then cut to a shot of the athletes lighting the Olympic torch: two bear-cans filled with Sterno.

Maybe you've even been able to catch the regularly broadcast Sunday evening of Yugoslav filmmaker Anton Perich, shown over both Teleprompter and Sterling the companies often broadcast the same show simultaneously. Perich has given public access its biggest publicity boost with his "satiric soap operas" which include a lot of Warhol stars, a lot of nudity, and a lot of talking dirty. (One of the most famous Perich shows featured a nude man with a paint brush in his behind who painted "I love you" on a sheet of glass.) Perich's other work includes interviews with rock stars, celebrities — one as yet unscreened interview with Muhammed Ali at his training camp. ("What makes me different from other men is I got imagination," says Ali, who talks in the interview about inter-racial marriage, American politics, poetry, "A man with imagination can fly.")

Post Photo by Terence McCarten

Anton Perich, the bad boy of public access television, in front of monitors showing one of controversial programs.

can reach each other," says Maxie Cohen, the director of the Video Access Center, which had served as a viewing and training center for Sterling Manhattan before it closed two months ago. "The point is not complete with "Bonanza." Public access isn't for entertainment. It's to promote community interaction and exchange."

Even Cohen admits, however, that the quality of most of the shows is terrible, and almost everyone in the industry agrees.

"Most of the stuff on public access is awful," says Sandy Schulberg, the 25-year-old assistant director at Open Channel, a privately

they felt that the limited number of viewers of public access did not merit the space that public television did. (A representative of the Daily News, the only paper to have carried public access, said that the paper had carried limited public access listings prior to expanding their TV-film listings six months ago, and that they were seeking space to resume the listings.

Beside the problem of knowing what's on public access TV, the person who wants to produced his own program, or be on public access himself, has almost nowhere to go.

Program Dropped

Prior to its closing, two

would lend equipment for which there would be a wait of "a few weeks." He referred the caller to a small, independent access center which might be able to provide training, and to Teleprompter for use of a studio.

Asked whether the Video Access Center, or its equivalent, would be opening up, Lawrence said "probably not."

Viewers who want to shoot a show outside a studio—who either want to borrow equipment or learn how to use it—essentially have no place to go.

There are a number of small, community video access groups around town,

equipment and facilities necessary for the production of programming," there are no specific requirements as to what those "minimal" facilities might be, and no guidelines as to what the cable companies are expected to spend on public access.

Morris Tarshis, the director of the city's Bureau of Franchises, which is in charge of the franchise agreements, says that as far as the city is concerned, the cable companies are "more than living up to their part of the agreement."

"According to the agreement, they could have charged the public for the time, instead they offered it free," says Tarshis.

Anton Perich, as featured in the *New York Post*, January, 1974.

(the true triumph of nothingness, given that the hairdresser had literally *nothing* to work with). Or Jerry Hall rootling round socialite Huntington Hartford's tie closet, looking exceptionally gorgeous and sounding exceptionally stupid singing filthy bar songs. Or the Met Ball in 1974, long before it was 'The Met Ball', and even longer before media-savviness was a perquisite for Manhattan socialites. Or the Coty Awards, which is what the CFDA Awards used to be, and which is where my inclination to draw parallels between what things were and what they later became hits a brick wall of discretion.

But when people viewed the world as captured by Anton Perich what were they actually *seeing*? Imagine your average home movies – with requisite sound drop-outs, lighting issues, errant camera moves and anomic moments of inarticulacy. And then reimagine them cast with people you grew up reading about in magazines. I call that the power of the archive. And the power resides entirely in how you feel about the characters in the films.

Sure, he photographed them all, but I find it slightly infuriating that Perich was so resolutely 'point and shoot' when it came to filming the scenes I've only read about in books by Warhol or heard about on albums by the Velvets. The backroom at Max's Kansas City is as hallowed a space as Warhol's Factory. Perich films its denizens rabbiting on in much the same way as any stoned person does when they're captured on film *sans* awareness. In his defence, I'm sure that's exactly the way it was, but it's also proof that the power of the archive can't always elevate the crushingly prosaic everyday.

At the exact other end of the spectrum is an irresistibly energetic film he made of an Issey Miyake show at New York fashion college FIT in 1975. The highest and mightiest of international designers apparently loved Perich's pipeline to a local audience. Issey's clothes need no big-up but the models are amazing too, supermodels before such an idea existed – Sara Kapp, Billie Blair, Toukie Smith, Janice Dickinson, Pat Cleveland prancing, twirling to a soundtrack that blends Pink Floyd with serious funk. The show runs 28 minutes, afterwards Issey is introduced to Diana Vreeland, and Halston's nemesis Victor Hugo co-opts him for a long, stoned diatribe about who knows what. I mean, I am *dying*.

If Perich hadn't been there, this would have been lost to time. And that makes me think of all the other moments which weren't captured. It took an obsessive with a new technology who was happy to point and shoot at *anything* to capture these ephemeral moments. I love David Bowie more than life itself. Halfway through his 'Diamond Dogs' tour of America, he had a massive brainstorm and switched to soul music. Do you think there was anyone there with a camera to capture this epochal shift? Apparently not. Same with Bowie's 'Thin White Duke' tour. If anyone has a consequential visual record of that (aside from the Vancouver rehearsals, which I have seen), please forward. Compare and contrast that to now, when your local singer-songwriter is all over social media.

Of course, it now seems prescient that *everything* Anton Perich filmed and photographed, however good or bad or ugly, was cast to the winds of public access TV. He was a true child of Warhol in his refusal to pass judgement on any of the creatures who drifted through his orbit. Those office workers disco-ing while their colleague collapsed? 'Blurring the line between fiction and documentary,' was one journalist's description of what he was doing. Someone else called him 'the Cecil Beaton of Max's Kansas City'. He obviously excited extremes of opinion. And, in hindsight, his work does elevate, celebrate and memorialise a world whose end was presaged on July 3rd,1981 when page 20 of the *New York Times* ran an article titled 'Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals'.

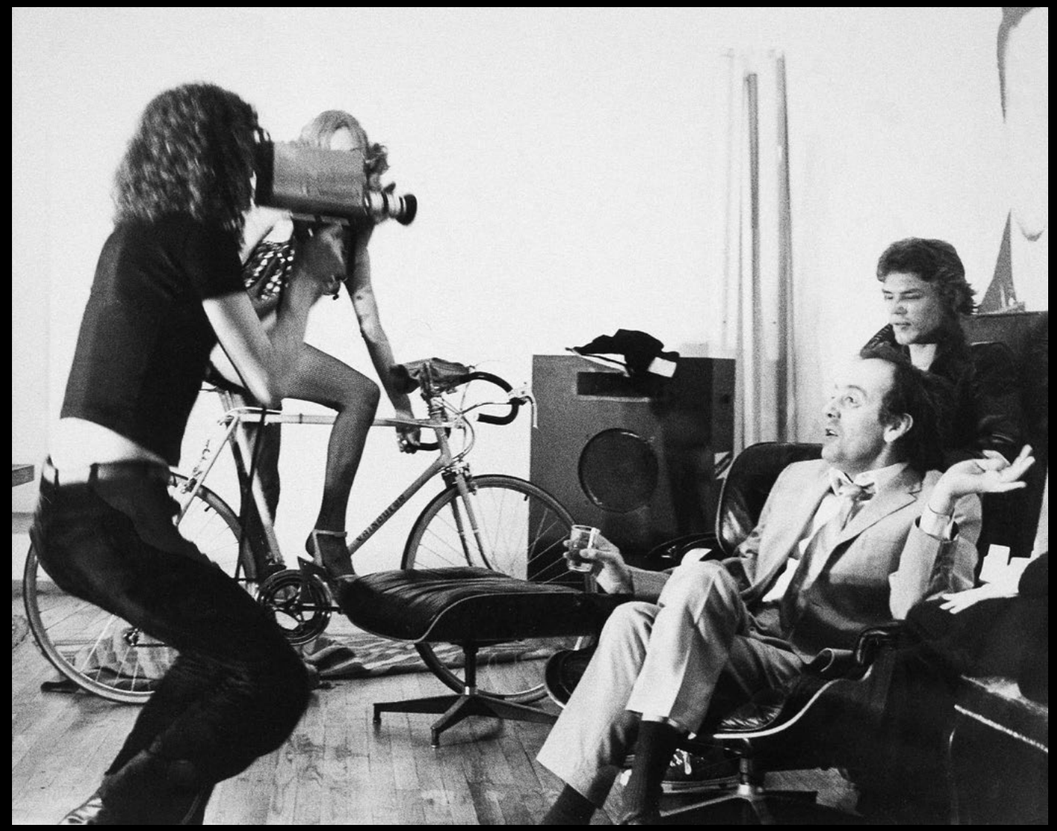
Ask me a month ago and I would have thought Perich's point of access for posterity would probably be Studio 54, not only because that venue has so thoroughly captured the imagination of a contemporary audience, but because it felt like his happy place as it translated in his work. He did, after all, make *NIGHT*, an oversize magazine that celebrated nocturnal New York in the late 1970s. It is distinctly free of the ambiguity that ruffles the surface of images by other documentarians of the time like Tod Papageorge.

But since a documentary called *Public Access* premiered at Sundance,[2] I'm wondering if this is Anton Perich's time to shine. The savant Glenn O'Brien, who succeeded him with the more culturally resonant *TV Party*,[3] always insisted Perich was 'the wildest thing on the tube anywhere.' For better or worse, he was undoubtedly a pioneer of public access TV which, in Trump's America, is being pitched as a rule-shattering, censor-defying bastion of free speech. In that context, Perich's work is, according to Kara Elizabeth Carmack, who wrote her thesis on the subject, 'a vital historical and cultural document that will largely transform our understanding of the era.' You know what? Grace Jones getting a haircut? I can live with that.

1. *1971: The Year That Music Changed Everything* is a documentary series released in 2021, directed by Asif Kapadia and Dan Lindsay. Blending archival footage with cultural commentary, the film explores how artists such as Marvin Gaye, Aretha Franklin and John Lennon responded to political upheaval and social movements, making 1971 one of the most influential years in modern music history.

2. *Public Access* is a 2026 documentary film directed by David Shadrack Smith that premiered at the Sundance Film Festival; it chronicles the influential history of public-access television in New York City, offering, in its own words, 'an unprecedented look inside one of the greatest media experiments to hijack American screens… a free-speech battleground where anyone could be a star.'

3. Glenn O'Brien's *TV Party* was a public-access television programme he created and hosted in New York City from 1978 to 1982.



Anton Perich filming with his Sony Portapak video camera, New York, 1973.



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JANUARY 2026



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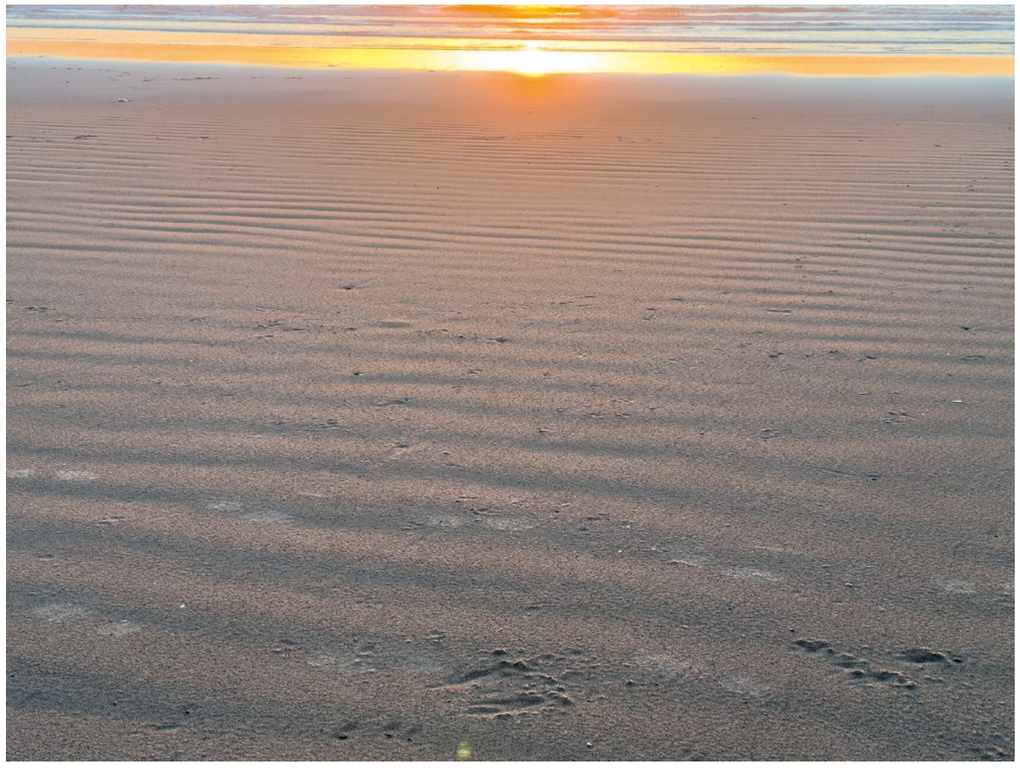
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JANUARY 2026

‘From a story into an image.’

Amanda Harlech on shaping fashion’s imagination – from the rue Cambon to rural Shropshire.



Interview and text by Jerry Stafford
Photographs and layout by Juergen Teller
Creative partner Dovile Drizyte
Styling by Tallulah Harlech

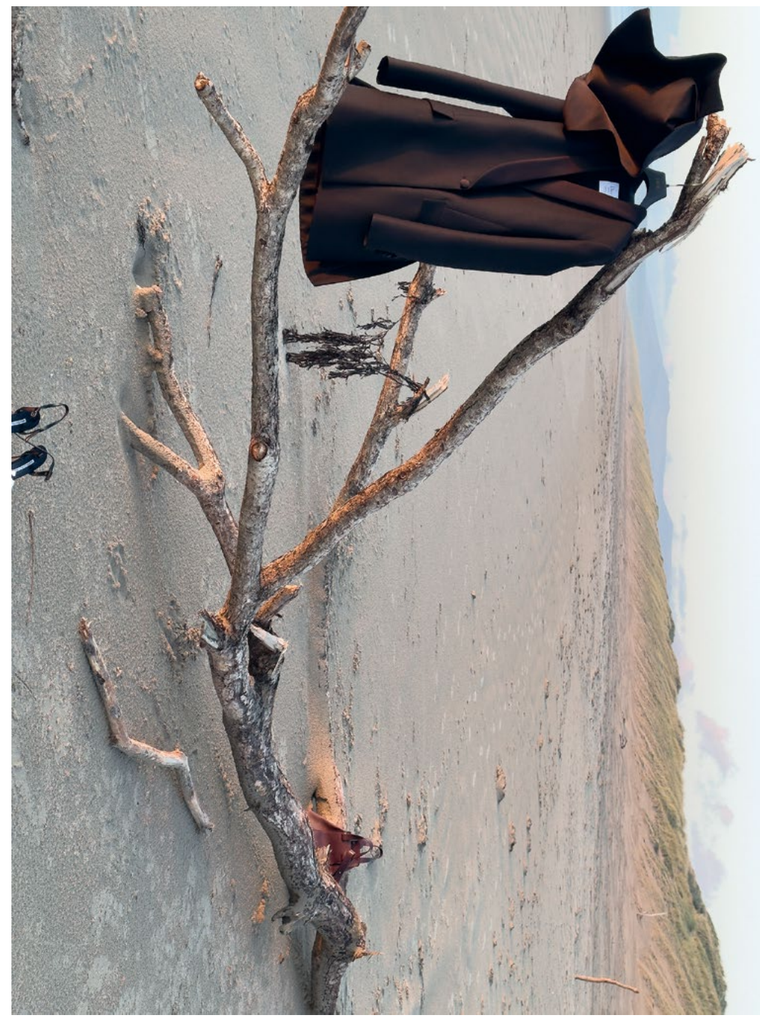




This page and previous page: Amanda wears a coat by JW Anderson (Autumn/Winter 2026), her own roll neck by Phoebe Philo, and trainers by ON.



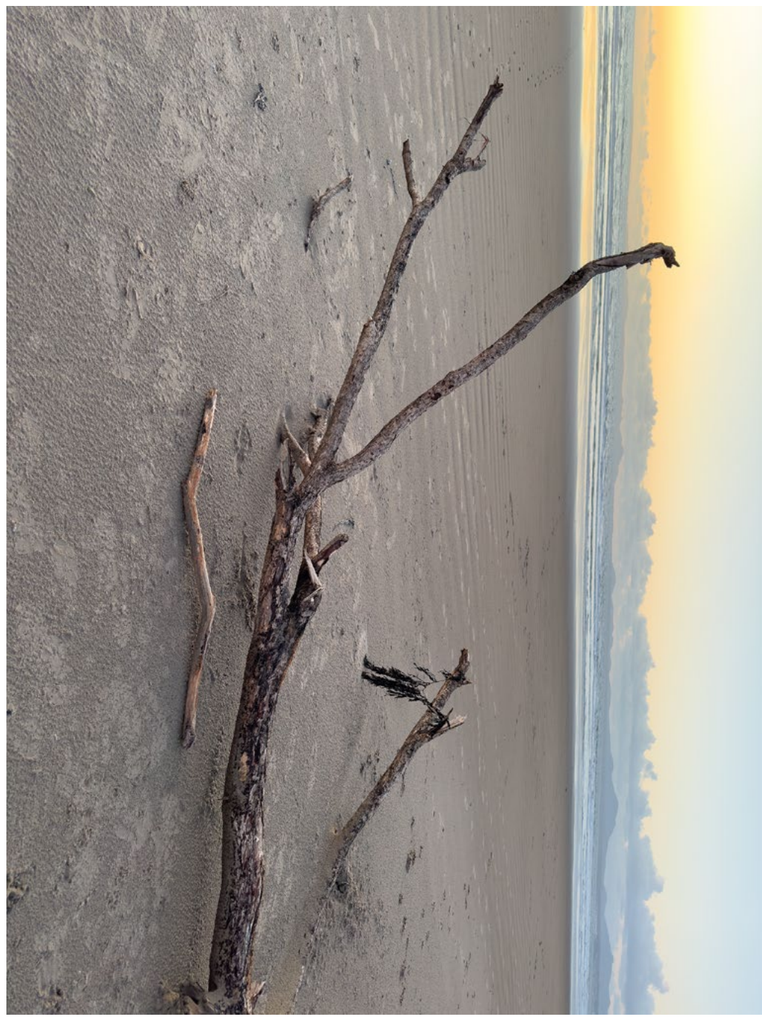
Jacket and hat by Dior (Spring/Summer 2026), Manolo Blahnik pumps.





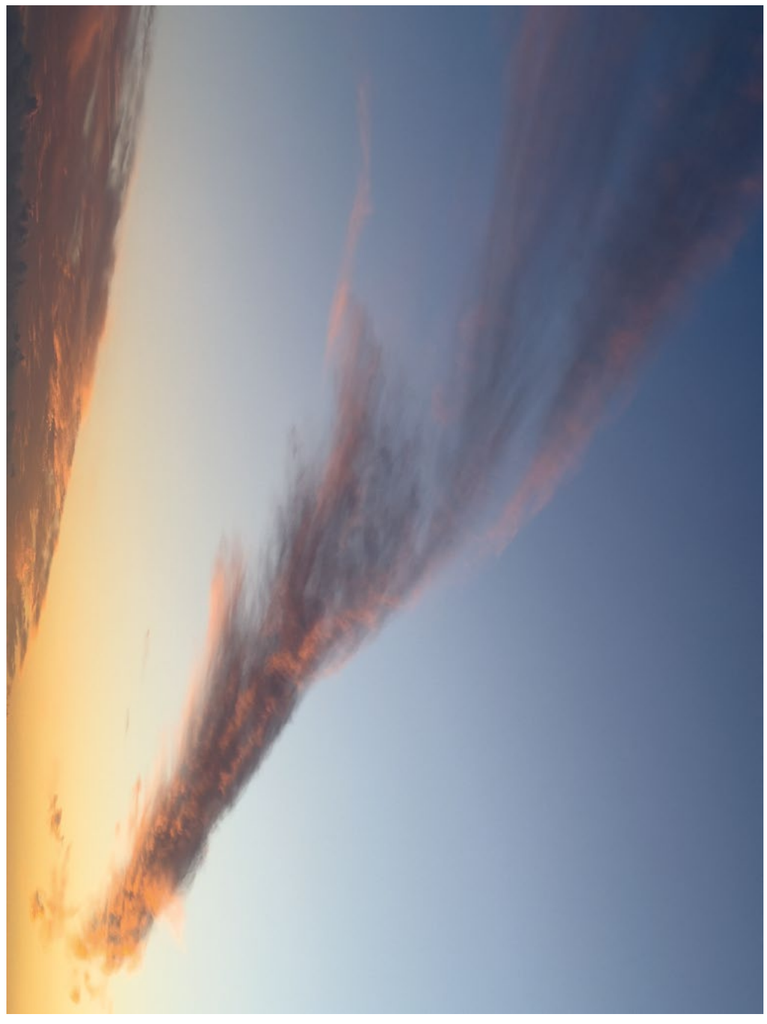


Amanda wears a jacket and hat by Dior (Spring/Summer 2026), leggings by SYLVA, and pumps by Manolo Blahnik.



Amanda wears a jacket and hat by Dior (Spring/Summer 2026).

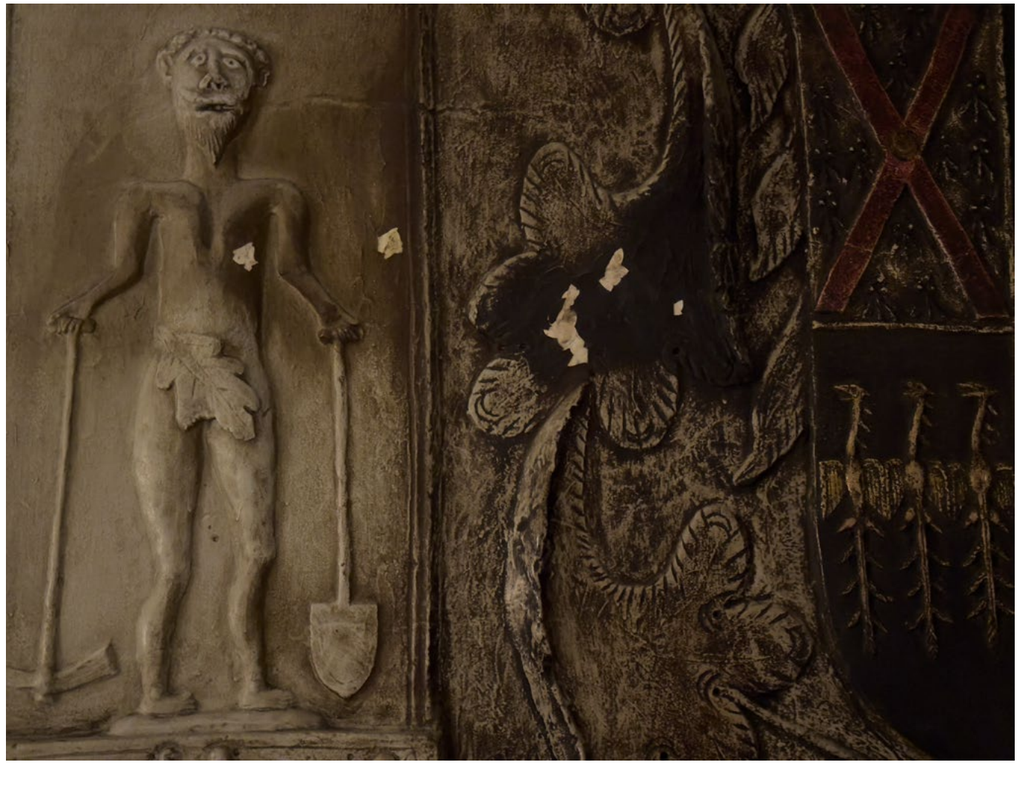








Amanda wears a jacket and hat by Dior (Spring/Summer 2026), leggings by SYLVA, and pumps by Manolo Blahnik.

























Amanda wears a tweed jacket and trousers by Phoebe Philo (Collection D), tights by Wolford, and her own boots by Phoebe Philo.









Amanda wears a patent zip up jacket and skirt by Tom Ford (Spring/Summer 2026), tights by Wolford, pumps by Manolo Blahnik, and her own sunglasses by Balenciaga.

Amanda wears a tweed jacket and trousers by Phoebe Philo (Collection D), tights by Wolford, and her own boots by Phoebe Philo.









Amanda wears a full length goose down puffer coat by AREAL, Bosideng x Kim Jones, tweed trousers by Phoebe Philo (Collection D), and boots by Arc'teryx.









Amanda wears an Alaïa dress (Spring/Summer 2026), her own tulle gloves and veiling.















Amanda wears a jacket and trousers by Chanel (Spring/Summer 2026), tights by Wolford, and boots by Arc'teryx.













Amanda wears a jacket and trousers by Chanel (Spring/Summer 2026), tights by Wolford, and boots by Arc'teryx.





Top: Amanda wears a shearling jacket by Phoebe Philo (Collection D), her own leggings, and trainers by ON. Bottom: Amanda wears a shearling jacket and split leg trousers by Phoebe Philo (Collection D).









Amanda wears her own jacket by Comme des Garçons, her own leggings and socks, and her own boots by Phoebe Philo.









Photography assistant: Felipe Chaves. Styling assistant: Peter Aluuan. Post-production: Louvre Erasmus at Quickfix.





A woman sits on the ground, leaning against a pine. Its bark presses hard against her back, as hard as life. Its needles scent the air and a force hums in the heart of the wood. Her ears tune down to the lowest frequencies. The tree is saying things, in words before words.
Richard Powers, *The Overstory*

A dawn mist lifts over the gentle curves of the surrounding landscape and a single standing oak reveals itself to one's gaze. The wide bay windows of the 18th-century farmhouse look out upon the generously spreading branches, its red brick walls nestled in the medieval hamlet of Shrawardine in Shropshire where Amanda, Lady Harlech has made her home for over two decades.

Each morning in all seasons and in all weathers Harlech takes a photograph of her tree from the window, describing its presence as 'a constant which will outlive me, a connection with the past and the future – it is my lodestar and the first thing I see when I wake up.'

Like the mighty oak, which she embraces each day on her first brisk walk with her greying black whippet, Albertine Harlech is a delicate yet demonstrative presence, a force of nature whose roots and rings reach down through time and verse and across myriad boundaries and disciplines.

Whether she is dressed in a battered Barbour and old riding breeches to muck out the stables and hack her dark bay gelding Ed, or making breakfast by the Aga stove draped in Phoebe Philo cashmere and shrink-wrapped in Comme des Garçons, or descending a staircase in Galliano's Boldini brushstroke of bias-cut *vieux rose* organza or spike-heeled and *décoiffé* in black-feather and pearl-embroidered Chanel couture, she is, like the infamous Countess of Greffulhe, the essence of insouciant elegance and intractable flair. And as Proust once said of his muse: 'It is difficult to judge her, because to judge her is to compare.'

She has been described as a fashion historian, a memorialist, a creative consultant and curator, both stylist and sibyl, and an eccentric Casati-like muse. But she is above all an artist, whose navigation of the fashion globe has been the stuff of operatic drama and silk-spun dreams. She is one of the industry's most enigmatic and influential figures, a woman whose celebrated style, poetic sensibility and storytelling have discreetly informed and delighted designers, photographers and social commentators alike since her early days in 1980s London as a fashion editor, through her mythical collaborations with master couturier John Galliano, and almost quarter of a century of intense and intimate collusion with the imperious Karl Lagerfeld at Chanel in Paris.

Also a painter, writer and pianist, she now divides her time between Shrawardine House and her elder son Jasset Ormsby-Gore the present Lord Harlech's ancestral home Glyn Cywarch in North Wales. She herself spent many years at Glyn with her late husband Francis Ormsby-Gore, the previous Lord Harlech, and she brought up Jasset and her daughter Tallulah between this rambling Jacobean house and estate and their family home, The Mount in nearby Oswestry.

Born Amanda Grieve in 1958, she was raised with her brothers Charlie and Ivan in a 1960s London milieu still peppered with an eclectic mix of burlesque and baroque characters, enjoying a rather disjointed and disparate childhood of divorced parents and drafty dormitories. Harlech's memory of this time is threaded with the precious fantasy, the radiant simile and romance, the gilded layers of memory, words and images which have been the opalescent touchstone for all her work with the more celebrated names she has so often inspired and influenced.

Harlech, both an astute observer and a curious mind, has left an indelible imprint on the rich tapestry of fashion not only through her unparalleled work with John Galliano but also at the house of Chanel where she continues to work closely on brand heritage, while mentoring students and young creatives through their sponsorship programme. It's that excitement which, as she explains, 'connects me with someone like John again, it's the explorative curiosity and hunger of the student, encouraging them to dare to go on.'

Innate eloquence, boundless fantasy and whiplash intelligence guide her eye and her hand. Her spontaneity and unconscious desire, her vulnerability and fragility coordinate her map to the stars. In her precisely chosen words, 'Fashion is very personal, we're potentially losing the human connection with a creative endeavour where teams and departments, usually from the commercial side of a business, move in and take over the creative studio.' Yet in an industry which increasingly chooses political strategy over poetic creativity, and the conveyor belt of commodity and control over craftsmanship and conversation, Harlech still stands tall, sylvan and proud, her back braced against the ill winds of commerce, and continues to forge her own inimitable illuminated flower-strewn and ivy-clad path towards a shimmering aqueous light.

'Bringing in the logs, mucking out a stable… I find that when you're doing something physical and repetitive, that's when you have quite good ideas.'

'I remember Izzy [Blow] saying to me, 'I honestly don't know how you can live in the country. I would turn into a boiled egg."'

Jerry Stafford: We're at the kitchen table in your house in rural Shropshire. Can you describe the landscape and the countryside around here, and what attracts you to this part of England?
Amanda Harlech: It's the Welsh Marches. The natural frontier between Wales, mid-north Wales and England is the River Severn, and I live literally on the river, with a 180-degree view of the Welsh hills. When I was looking for somewhere I wanted that long view because it's something that always feeds me. Why did I come to Shropshire? I fell in love and got married.

How would you describe your life here?
Very manual labour. I tend to tell myself that it's a sort of monkish or nunnish way of living, with a lot of meditative routine – bringing in the logs, mucking out a stable. I find when you're doing something physical and repetitive is when you have quite good ideas. So that's what my life here is: a dance that, like with all quarters of my life, is rather too full of things to do. Horses, the garden, piano, reading, painting, immersion in the River Severn. I don't know quite how I manage to pack it all in, but I definitely do.

Let's zap back in time. How were your parents influential regarding your early interests? Did they influence your taste in literature, poetry, clothes?
I think parents are influential whether you perceive that to be a good thing or a bad thing. My mother had an extraordinary sense of colour and texture but she wore clothes that sometimes made me wrinkle my nose.

Because you thought they were slightly bad taste?
Not bad taste. I think children naturally have quite bad taste. I mean, my penchant for all the things I wasn't allowed to wear, like a pale blue organdie party dress with pointy shoes and lace ankle socks, was forbidden to me. I had to wear burnt orange corduroy culottes, black patent pumps and black tights. And my hair was very severely cut in a bob to go on the TV show *Crackerjack* – I was mortified.[1] My mother was definitely cool, ahead of her time. She didn't really care. She had this sort of strange, Balenciaga-ish kind of thing and refused to be, I think, the trophy wife my dad wanted her to be. I remember them having a huge argument because she'd chopped all her hair off. Mum was great.

And how was dad?
Dad was the suave silver ghost: he had silver hair; used to drive a vintage Rolls-Royce to pick us up from fucking Brownies.[2] I lived on Regent's Park Terrace, adjacent to Gloucester Crescent, and there was a whole gang of kids outside playing and everything, in the way that I wish children did now. Anyway, you know the way fathers are very conditional, it was like: 'No talking in the car except to answer my general knowledge questions,' with my friends in the car – to my mortification. But dad was wonderful. Very stylish: the flannel suit with the good shirt, always. And a lovely dark brown, 'oily' fishing sweater that he'd sail his boat *Southerly* in.

And was little Amanda Grieve a well-behaved child?
No. My mother said I was too independent. Sometimes she was like, 'I just don't know what to do with you.' I remember writing 'I HATE MUM' in capital letters in spit down the stairs. That didn't go down very well. Often it was because she couldn't protect my brothers from my father's wrath. I didn't escape the punishment, but I didn't get the beating.

Were you aware of the way you presented yourself from an early age? Did you have a certain discernment?
I think it's so wonderful that children aren't self-conscious when they're very young. I wasn't. And then suddenly I was. So, I can remember being five, and getting into my Sunday C of E [Church of England] best, which was a very Chanel-esque pink-and-white checked pleated skirt and sort of Chanel jacket. A little girl's thing. I knew that I had to dress up to meet a very young Jasper Conran, who lived two doors down the Terrace, to play in the muddy gutter, picking up taillights and headlights from which we made tiaras.

Oh, that sounds fun. Did you understand the power of clothes from an early age? In what sense?

That it was the key you needed to go through the magic basement – to be accepted by other people.

Can you remember a particular piece of clothing which empowered you at that time?
We had a dressing-up box with all my great aunts' stuff; they were artists and suffragettes and spent part of their life in Buenos Aires because their father – my great, great grandfather – was a painter. He was Scottish, Kay Robertson. I had their clothes because everybody else was killed in the Blitz, in Hampstead. It was so upsetting for everyone. I remember Mum posting me through a little doorway in the attic and seeing all these boxes of clothes – my great aunt Helen's beautiful, embroidered shawls. And my great aunt Anne, who was a miniaturist. I obviously have this idea that she was an opium addict and lived in the dark and only wore black velvet and a black velvet hairband because it was so beautiful against her white skin. So, all these boxes of those clothes and my grandmother's clothes and my mother's clothes, like the black Dior cocktail dress that I cut up into little bits to be a witch for Halloween.

Do any of those clothes still remain?
No. Mum chucked everything out when we left home. She was quite a clearer-outer and she'd already moved, got divorced. So, that all went – my dolls house, my Cindy dolls, wardrobe, boxes of shoes, all gone. It was sad.

As a young horse rider, the riding uniform became closely linked to you as a person and influenced your own personal style. Was that very empowering?
Not when I was very little. By this time, my father had moved to Chalk Farm with his wife, my stepmother, and they lived in Chalcot Square. I remember him telling me, 'OK, you're going to get the scholarship for your senior school, South Hampstead Girls Public Day School Trust. For you to get this scholarship, you're going to have to give up all sports. And if you get a scholarship, I'll get you a pony.' Because all I wanted to do was ride. I'd be sent off to a riding establishment in the middle of the New Forest, where my brothers did things like shooting and sailing. I couldn't wash the horse smell off me, and I would do that whole thing of working myself up into a fever when I came back, which actually involved putting the thermometer between the bars of the electric heater so that my mother would send me back, but she never did. She'd just say, 'If this is your temperature, you would be dead.'

School uniform is one of the first vestimentary codes we try to subvert. When you were at school, did you customise your uniform?
Totally. You weren't allowed to cut it, so you rolled the waistband up so that your skirt – which is meant to be just two inches above the knee – became sort of a pelmet skirt. And you'd bend the rules. Desert boots; socks rolled, half falling down, not all pulled up. I wasn't that rebellious though. I think uniforms are quite a good thing, actually, because within a uniform, you can still have your own identity.

What was growing up in Camden like at the time?
It was fantastic. In the 1960s and 1970s Gloucester Crescent was full of characters, like Alan Bennett or George Melly. My best friend Melanie Taylor's mother was a prima ballerina at the Rambert and taught us ballet. Elizabeth Robbins, my friend Lucy's mum, had been in the theatre. And Mrs. Peacock, *her* mother, was definitely in the theatre, like something out of the 1920s. So we'd do productions and dress up; there was lots going on. My mother took us all to the V&A costume gallery and Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood. It was the most amazing time.

Were you a grade A student, or a bit of a slacker?
I was always trying too hard. I was a grade A. But I never felt that I was good enough. I remember being teased for taking things like poetry too seriously. I mean, there were *very* clever girls in my class and we had very good teachers too. But it was hard. I remember I was sat next to somebody called Elizabeth Dione who would pinch my thigh really hard if I didn't tell her the answer. Junior school was wonderful though. There was complete freedom to paint and make *papier mâché*. And we had fantastic dance productions, where you're a water nymph or a fire bird or whatever. And we loved the sports: there was rounders on Hampstead Heath, hockey in Regent's Park, and netball. I was captain of all of them until my dad put the kibosh on that. Probably didn't want to have to ship me to the matches or something, I don't actually know.

'I was not a well-behaved child. I remember writing 'I HATE MUM' in capital letters in spit down the stairs. That didn't go down very well.'



London, 1963. 'Perfecting a look on my least favourite doll, Jean. My brother Charlie and Jasper [Conran] had daubed my dream doll Daisy with navy blue gloss paint, so she was out of action.'

Was home life happy or tough?
It was great but it was also really tough. I loved where we lived and I think it was very sad that my brothers were sent away to a prep school when they were *tiny* seven-year-olds. And as the marriage fell apart, you could feel the fracture lines running through Mum. I mean, Dad at this point had left. One of my brothers ran away and there was a sort of anxiety… Then I was by myself. My mum went to work, and I would come back from school. You had to let yourself in and make your own supper, which was something out of the freezer – boeuf bourguignon, chicken something-or-other, or sweet and sour pork, none of which I really liked. But I was very happy at my desk doing my drawings, making magazines, or whatever was going on in my head at the time.

‘In the attic were all these boxes of my mother’s clothes, like the black Dior cocktail dress that I cut up into little bits to be a witch for Halloween.’

Were you yearning for something else?
No, I think I made it better in my head. In this imaginative space, I had complete freedom, and I think I probably retreated there because I got quite bullied at school. I was called ‘No Nose’ or ‘Miss Perfect’.

Well anyway, ‘No Nose’ or ‘Miss Perfect’ went up to Oxford…
First my parents both moved out of London. I had just done my O-levels and Mum said, ‘Right, I’m moving with your stepfather, we’re getting married, and we’re going to move to Kent.’ And my father and my stepmother were moving to Berkshire, which meant I couldn’t go on living in the [London] home. I think home for me is such a soul, and that was deeply upsetting. I was sent to the sixth form at Marlborough [school] where you were allowed to wear your own clothes, and I wore only black and was known as the Whipper!

So, boarding?
Yes. I was a day girl who’d never set foot in a dorm, among all these very experienced girl boarders.

How old are you at that point?
15 or 16 maybe. But Marlborough had the most extraordinary art school. I was very lucky to be taught by Robin Child and Simon Brett. I always had great music teachers and the most brilliant English beak called Andrew Davis. I was just really lucky. But I was also unlucky because neither set of parents would come and see me. You’d have reverse charge calls. I can remember calling my father to ask if he could take me out for the weekend, and I’d hear the operator saying to him, ‘Will you accept this call?’ And I’d hear him say, ‘no’. It was really, really hard.

You did eventually get through your education.
I did. Got into Oxford with a scholarship, where I read English Literature. Initially, I rocked up in Laura Ashley – and exited wearing Boy. Definitely during my time at Oxford, I discovered how I could reinvent myself through what I wore. I had this favourite dress, which In my mind was like a 1920s flapper dress, but was just some sort of nylon-mix shiny green thing. But I really loved it. I would talk to myself and say, *this* is who I am. Again, it’s that imaginative world that was my security because the rest of it was quite frightening.

In what way?
You know, when a boy who’s invited you out to dinner then presses himself against you a bit; I can only describe it as a bit like one of those plunger things for unblocking a sink. And I’m saying something like, ‘No, no, no, that’s not what I meant at all.’ And then the white-hot fury of that rejection, which involved, in that instance, a funeral wreath being sent to me! I remember it being in the porter’s lodge with my name on it, and the card read, ‘I pray that I will be able to forgive you.’ While also being aware that all his friends were that gang – Alan Hollinghurst, Stephen Pickles and everybody – all those King’s Head people…

The King’s Head pub, being a sort of set…[3]
Yes. And so I retreated into my tower blocks of books and my essay crises and my endless romantic love affairs that inevitably went wrong. Somerville was a funny college, it was all girls at the time, but it had this funny rule: you could have more than one person in your room until 11pm, but then you could only have one person after that. So, it’s like, you’d have one person in the room and then the other guy would be sleeping outside my room to make sure nobody else came in.

Were you already going down to London at this point?
Yes, in the final year we did, because somebody could drive. By that time there was quite a gang; it was also a set that went and stayed in wonderful country houses. It’s very old fashioned, it was

a time where those places still existed and a whole gang of 20-year-olds would stay for the weekend. It meant dressing up, although I didn’t have a gown from Bellville Sassoon or whatever those girls who could dress up, had. So I wore my great Aunt Helen’s bias-cut thing, which when you’re doing a Scottish reel [traditional folk dance] is really inappropriate.

When was this final year at Oxford?
1979, 1980.

So, were you aware of what was going on in London at that time? For example, punk…
I was definitely aware of Seditionaries. I’m not quite sure how I was aware of that, except we did things in London and my friend the screenwriter Pierre Hodgson was very ‘film noir’ so he would dictate what we wore. I think Tom Bell was making dresses then.[4] We’d go to pubs that were open all through the night, and then on to the Connaught hotel which was the cheapest place for breakfast. It was sort of like you were in a movie.

‘I went and got a job as a receptionist in Vidal Sassoon. I’d always had long hair, and they immediately cut it in a shaved-up-the-back haircut.’

Were you going to nightclubs, had you started exploring, say, subcultures?
I hadn’t got there yet. I think I was going to Monkberry’s![5] There were some strange places. I remember a bunch of us gatecrashed a lot of parties too.

Who was your first crush, platonic or otherwise?
My first crush. He was the son of Mrs Harris at the riding establishment in Sway, Hampshire. He was called Drew. God, he was like Robert Redford. I can remember, we’d all be swooning, these teenage 13-year-old girls. Then, aged 17, I fell madly in love with my first boyfriend, Marcus, who was a very brilliant historian, a very brilliant pianist, and we’d play piano concertos together. We did serious tours of Italy and the Byzantine and things like that.

Was he seduced by your style or your elegance?
No, no, I didn’t really use that. Dressing was not a weapon of seduction. Definitely not. I think the weapon for seduction is nakedness, it’s certainly not clothes.

Can you remember the first photograph, a fashion photograph or otherwise, that captured your attention?
Grace Coddington’s shoot in China with Esme [Marshall]. She was wearing a red Fiorucci boilersuit, so I went to Fiorucci and spent more buying that than I’d ever spent on anything. By then, I was going out with a painter named Johnny Dewe Mathews who was much, much older than me, and was also a friend of Ossie [Clark]. He said, you should really buy Antony Price. So I bought a purple silk boilersuit, then went to Zapata, which was Manolo [Blahnik]’s first shop, and bought red strappy sandals.

Did you buy the Antony Price boilersuit from Plaza on the King’s Road?
I can’t remember. But it was proper amethyst purple.

Obviously fashion had become an interest by this point.
Yes. I realised that it had. That sense of aspiration.

Let’s not call it fashion, let’s say clothes.
That feeling you get with a still image. It would drive me to want to be her, to be right in that world. Your clothes were the way to get there.

Which magazine was that Grace Coddington image in?
[British] *Vogue*. I was also looking at *Harpers & Queen*, where I ended up working. I came down from Oxford and walked straight into a job there. I was the first person in my family to embark on a career in fashion. My father did *not* consider it a career. He wanted me to work as a journalist, or if not, do my PhD. He couldn’t even talk to me. Travelling to London, I couldn’t be in the same carriage as him because of what I was wearing. The Seditionaries long-sleeve T-shirt was hanging on the line…

So was that when you became aware of a more progressive kind of fashion?
I'm wondering… I mean, there was a time in London, during the holidays, when I went and got a job as a receptionist at Vidal Sassoon. I’d always had long hair, and they cut it in a shaved-up-the-back haircut. I don’t know that I knew about subculture or anything, but there were movements and currents and sounds, and the way people were dressing and talking that was so alive.

Were you aware that that kind of movement was also about undermining a certain class system, and shaking up the status quo?
All I knew was that the status quo was really boring. I’m not a confrontationalist at all. So, being able to beat them down wasn’t part of it, but I had nothing

to do with it and continue to have nothing to do with it. I mean, throughout the 1980s and then 1990s, all my choices have been against what I would call power dressing or brand dressing or bling dressing or whatever.

Status dressing.
Status dressing. Exactly. I always think you might as well wear a paper bag with the label on it, the name of it with the price tag, done!

You said you joined *Harpers & Queen* after Oxford. How did you get that job?
One of my friends, Sophie Hicks, was a fashion editor there.

Was she your contemporary at Oxford?
She wasn't actually at Oxford, as far as I can remember, but she was around. It was quite a gang. I remember, I think I'd worn something outrageous to the Piers Gaveston Ball or whatever it's called.[6] So outrageous that I remember getting a lift from a police car, which I thought was great, especially when they put the siren on. Anyway, I'd had my picture taken by Costantino Ruspoli for *Harpers*, I think, so I'd been in a photo studio. Sophie and I must have been talking about it and she said 'If you're that interested, why don't you come and assist me on a shoot in London?' So I went and I watched and I packed and unpacked and ironed and made tea. But mostly, I was just fascinated that in the course of the day you could actually transmit your ideas and feelings – from a story into an image. That was so exciting because, actually, to write a novel takes a lot longer.

So, from the beginning it was all about storytelling?
Yes, it was the story of that woman or that being or those people. Then Sophie left to go to *Vogue* and the brilliant Willie Landels – the editor-in-chief of *Harpers & Queen* at that time – asked me if I would take over Sophie's four pages of 'Shopping Bazaar'. To be given four pages was extraordinary. It wasn't really clear what the brief was. Nobody really said. But I charged off with my ideas for doing shoots like, 'I'm going to do fake jewellery', stuff like that. And because I was a junior fashion editor, I worked with emerging photographers.

Who were you shooting with at that time? People like Mario Testino, Kim Knott, Andrew Macpherson?
And Perry Ogden too. Everybody who was beginning to be published. They'd been assistants of photographers and they were beginning to strike out. I'd work with them and then I'd be told by the fashion editor, 'No, you can't shoot [the model] Nikki Shulman surrounded by camellias in a black dress with pearls. You're doing still lives in a studio against a white background.' But I persisted, and I did quite good stories.

Do you have an example of one memorable story?
I remember doing a whole story about shadows, which involved practicing with Andrew Macpherson in the studio beforehand and then doing this shadow dressing. A bit like Peter Pan and his shadows, which involved me leaping around and Andrew working out the lights.

Can we put a date on this? It must have been the early 1980s? Was it during that new wave of young British fashion designers?
Yes. There was BodyMap, PX, John Richmond and Maria Cornejo. You know, we'd go to Lynne Franks [fashion PR] in Covent Garden, and everything would be down there.

And your childhood friend Jasper [Conran]?
Jasper was already very established. He came straight from Parsons to do a very chic pair of shorts and stripy T-shirt show. It was for the fashion editors, not junior fashion editors like me!

Did you go to Paris? Did you go to the shows at this point?
The magazine begrudgingly agreed to take me. I just *had* to go to see Mugler, to see Gaultier. I was staying on the floor of the photographer Javier Vallhonrat. The first show I saw was Chloé.

Chloé by Karl Lagerfeld?
Yes. I remember watching that show and going, '*That's* how you do it.' You have a beginning, middle and end. And by the time you come to the end, you understand what the first outfit was. It was that coherence that I took forward. It has to mean something. Things can be much more random now, and collaged in a way where, actually, the reasons why they go together don't have to add up. But where I came from, things had to mean something. I remember Sally Brampton, bless her, saying, 'Fashion can't be intellectual. It's got nothing to do with it having a meaning.' And I remember arguing my case.

'Status dressing? I always think you might as well wear a paper bag with the label on it. Just put the name of it with the price tag, done!'



Modelling session, London, 1969. 'I had instructed my brother Charlie to photograph me with the shadows of me and my bike on Regent's Park Terrace. I made my own 'fashion' magazines, writing all the editorials and drawing the covers.'

So you began attending the shows while at *Harpers*?
Yes. And I would sketch them. This was before you had so many photographers at the shows. I remember watching Grace Coddington, because she also sketched, and as each passage came out that's when she made her selection – she'd sketch it. So that's how I did it.

Why did you leave *Harpers & Queen*?
The main reason was because I fell in love with Francis, my husband-to-be. And it was a long commute from London to Shropshire [where he lived]. Sometimes he'd forget to pick me up from Wolverhampton and I'd have to do things like hitch a ride with only a penknife for protection. But also, I'd reached a point where I remember saying, 'I don't see why I should photograph just the advertisers in my shoots. They should want to be part of the creative vision, but not the *entire* focus of it!'

Did you feel that whole construct with advertisers just compromised your creative input?
Yes, because you'd have to photograph *this*, and you'd have to photograph *that*. And inevitably it was very dull.

So, you took the decision to move on, for personal and creative reasons.
I went freelance for *The Times* with Andrew Neil. And I remember reporting in Paris and things like that. That was crazy. And then I also did things for *The Face* and *i-D*.

I think the first time I was aware of your work, and possibly crossed paths with you in a nightclub or at a party, was when you styled the cover of punk svengali, Malcolm McLaren's album *Fans* – with a then-unknown fashion designer called John Galliano – featuring the models of the moment Eugénie Vincent and Dovanna Pagowski. Was that part of that period of freelancing?
Yes. I think that was in 1984. I'd met John and totally fallen in love with him. I knew that I couldn't do anything without him, and he worked on that with me. We made that fan together for the cover of the opera-inspired album which included a version of 'Un bel di vedremo' from Madame Butterfly. We went to Gerrard Street to get Japanese newspapers to make it.

At the time in London, did you buy fashion brands or were you more inclined towards vintage or homemade clothes?
I couldn't afford to buy much. And anyway, what was happening in the mainstream was not what I wanted to wear. I wanted to wear a pair of velvet knickerbockers from the boutique PX, which I would mix with a lot of vintage to do an Artful Dodger look with a top hat and a lot of ivy. You just made the looks up. That was part of the joy. But also, I had a Norma Kamali moment.

Didn't we all?! At that time in the 1980s, London's subcultural network of clubs and underground scenes was a hotbed of creative action. This is where everything was coming up from. Who did you meet over those years and who would become lifelong friends and collaborators?
Aside from John and of course Sibylle de Saint Phalle, there was the milliner Stephen Jones whom I met at PX.

And Tom Bell, of course, was in your life at that time.
Very much. I lived with Tom Bell in Nicky Haslam's house off the New Kings Road. That time was all about dressing up, and Tom would make these dresses. I remember going to a friend's wedding and I went in a fingered leather Velasquez dress. I remember I was madly in love with the photographer Johnny Pilkington around that time, and when he discovered that I'd fallen in love with Francis, he was so incensed, he threw all my clothes out of the window onto the Fulham Road. And Tom Bell came to my rescue.

You forged relationships around that time with three other significant, influential and stylish women – Lucy Ferry, Isabella Blow and Daphne Guinness. Can you describe them both collectively and individually?
Well, Lucy I met probably a little bit before Izzy. Daphne I didn't meet until later. But Lucy was so beautiful, so glamorous, and she had this outrageous fashion sense and a really incredible sense of colour. That's why she liked Christian Lacroix and all of that. I was in bits of vintage and rags, but Lucy was something else. Being with Lucy, there was never a sort of compare-and-contrast with what you were wearing. Our friendship went beyond that. I can remember her mother, Mrs Helmore, saying, 'Yeah, my daughter's going out with Bryan *Fairy*.'

Isabella Blow, was that around the same time?
Izzy was then mentoring Philip Treacy. He came in and was involved with hats for John for one collection, and Izzy was always very conspiratorial, whispering in your ear like, 'We've got to do this.'

And then Daphne.
Daphne was much later. I remember, one just fell in love with Daphne, seeing her in her wrecked, embroidered McQueen, with a completely shredded hem, and blood-stained Manolos. She was flawless. When I was working with John, I would also see Izzy more and Lucy less. I was also rattling back and forth on a regular basis to Shropshire, where I had my two children, Jasset and Tallulah. I remember Izzy saying to me, 'I don't know how you can live in the country. I would turn into a boiled egg.'

You've mentioned John Galliano now a couple of times. This was obviously a pivotal moment in your life. Where did you meet him for the first time?
I had a friend called Caroline Kellett,[7] who was extraordinary and very beautiful. I think we'd been at Oxford together, we were definitely running in the same crew. I remember walking with her near PX, past Zanzibar the cocktail bar[8] and saying, 'I really want to do this shoot with these 17th-century creatures with jewellery and hats, but I just can't find the clothes.' And she said, 'Oh, you need to go and see John Galliano's degree collection.'

Was that the 1984 Saint Martin's show?
Yes. I saw that collection and, I can't remember how, but I got his number. I said, 'Would you come to tea?' And at that point, I was living in Old Church Street opposite Manolo in this beautiful house that was owned by Max Reed. I remember John bringing his book of sketches and I mean, they were unparalleled, *exquisite*; tremulous lines approaching a fragile perfection. I had left *Harpers*, it was Christmas 1984, and in the New Year he said, 'I'd like you to come and work for me. I can't pay you any money.' And that was for 'Afghanistan Repudiates Western Ideals'.[9] There was no turning back after that.

What do you think he taught you? And what do you think you taught him?
I don't know what I taught him but he taught me about the inside of clothes, about construction. He taught me about texture, about colour, but also about that courage to splice something with something else off the street – something really urban. To take something completely out of context. I mean, there was also music, but what I could bring to him was a narrative. If he was talking about shrunken suits, I would say, 'Well, if she was in the bar and she rubbed up against the wall, actually the brick dust would have come off onto the pinstripe.' And that became a weave. It was those things that I could bring. The patina, the mark of a man or woman. It was the flaws, I suppose, that made it unique. We always agreed that fragile beauty held perfection; that something that was perfect, wasn't.

Like the hairline crack in the Ming vase.
Yes, exactly. And that electrified both of us. John was like somebody I'd known all my life. The long-lost brother standing at the little bar in the Spain of my childhood, at the end of the track with the black and white telly with the bullfight and the pinball machines. We literally finished each other's sentences. We had this complete openness together. It was never ever a case of, 'Well, that's a stupid thing to say.' And I think that is the most creative thing.

Did your new family embrace him?
Yes, he came to stay several times at The Mount in Oswestry in Shropshire and at Glyn in North Wales. We did a lot of shoots there because of my love of the countryside and the land. He understood all of what that meant for me, and that's where I could really tell a story. I remember him coming once to The Mount and there was a whole gang of us. We'd actually *live* it. It wasn't just dressing up a model and being detached. You were all part of it. Like, at John's first show in the Pillar Hall, I got dressed in the clothes, and I remember John looking at me and asking, 'Why are you wearing that?' And I was like, 'I have to go down the runway because I can't *not*. It's so important.' Not as a model, my excuse was, 'I've got to pick the things up that have fallen off the models' hats.' I just needed to be part of it, to be on the runway.

You were swept up in the moment. I remember the show in London, one of the first of John's shows I went to with a 12- or 13-year-old, Lucie de La Falaise opening the show, it was magical…
I call it the 'little wild child' show. Kate [Moss] was in that show. I think my niece Zita Lloyd too. I remember they had sugar in their hair. That's when they had bare feet and a black bias-cut dress.

'I rocked up to Oxford University wearing Laura Ashley and exited wearing Boy. I discovered how I could reinvent myself through what I wore.'

'I wanted to wear velvet knickerbockers from the boutique PX, which I'd mix with vintage to do an Artful Dodger look with a top hat and a lot of ivy.'

Backstage at those shows must have been amazing.
'Fallen Angels' in a tent at Chelsea Barracks was a beautiful show. They were in Dorothea Lange-style dungarees. I got lots of baling twine from home and I'd done the straps. We had lots of fuller's earth, it was so poetic. The ending of that show was when they came out in those white Empire-line dresses, and they had water thrown over them by the hairdresser Julien d'Ys and the black stamp of the John Galliano label trickled down their faces. It was amazing. Patrick Cox, who'd made the shoes, had given us all something which I think was ecstasy. It put you in a state of high anxiety, so I could not undo the knots for the girls to get into their next outfits. It was fucking scary. That was a lesson for me; not touching that again! John, him saying, 'I'm just a city girl, I can't cope with this.' The fashion industry was much smaller back then. There were two shows a year, and I lived in the countryside and came to London to put the show together. In the meantime, we communicated constantly on the landline, and he would send me parcels of sketches with fabric swatches. Then he'd come and stay and we'd go through it all.

Your relationship was extraordinarily personal, poetic, intuitive and mutually stimulating. There was an end point though, when John was offered the position at Dior.
Well, I was thrilled for him and I knew that was his dream and I couldn't think of anybody more perfect. [After working with John on four collections for Givenchy] I wasn't reckoning on the toughness of LVMH to cut me out of a living wage and expect me to sign the contract [for Dior] that they sent me. I had to be in Paris for six months, and I had two children.

So you were actually in the contract to begin with?
Yes, I'd started work on that first couture collection. As you know, I had that weekend where my life fell apart, where I discovered that the love of my life, my husband, was having an affair and had been for the last two years. That I would have to get divorced because the children were being affected and, then, if you married a peer of a realm, you weren't entitled to anything. I was going to stay with Izzy that weekend. I remember talking to Steven Robinson[10] and he was saying, 'You're going to carry on being paid what you get for Galliano for now.' And I was like, 'It's going to be a lot more work!', as I had been asked to do the accessories for Dior. But there was no wage increase. Just 25% off in the boutique.

How did you experience the finality of that rupture with your dear, dear friend?
I couldn't get to speak to him. He was obviously very protected. But then what I did was speak to my friend the designer Patrick Kinmonth about his lawyer, who was an opera lawyer, who drew up a proper contract and we sent it. At this point, Karl [Lagerfeld], through André Leon Talley, knew that I was in real dire straits and didn't know what to do. Karl said, 'I would love you to work for Chanel, but I respect your relationship with John. This is the contract we would give you at Chanel. Send that to LVMH.' I did. And then there were explosions!

All hell broke loose.
He [John] probably didn't understand about the divorce. And the fact that I'd have to employ a nanny…

He didn't understand the personal implications of it for you?
I think that's often true. I mean, creative people, they're under a huge amount of pressure. What happened to Izzy with Lee later [when McQueen took over Givenchy after Galliano left] was the same. It's heartbreaking and will remain heartbreaking. There's always a version in my mind where that didn't happen, where actually there was a considerate contract.

'You start working with a creative director and the relationship is potentially so intimate. It's like going to bed with a stranger. You just don't know.'



Harlech, North Wales, 1988. 'Andrew Macpherson took this portrait of me on the estuary at Glyn Cywarch.'

A page was turned though, and then Karl Lagerfeld became a part of the next chapter of your life.
I didn't get to know Karl properly for a long time. Well into the 2010s. He was a very private man, very guarded and very vulnerable. They all are. Karl was somebody with wit and he was very seductive. He was like a king or an emperor, it was extraordinary to be in his presence, sitting at his table in his *hôtel particulier* at 51 rue de l'Université, which was charged with the 18th century. But actually working at Chanel, I was left all alone. It was very much sink or swim. Karl didn't lay anything out for me, and I didn't know what I was supposed to do. I just thought that I was supposed to do what I did for John: you worked on the set, you worked on the clothes, you listened to the music, you did the soundscapes. You were part of everything. So I started to do that… only to look at the faces in the studio, absolutely *frozen* in horror that I'd dared touching the clothes, that I'd put on a jacket and wore it in my own way to demonstrate how you could change the shape. I had broken every single rule.

And were you aware of what your presence provoked in other members of the Chanel team?
Yes, very quickly. It was a very different studio initially. There was Gilles [Dufour], who was Karl's right-hand man, and there was Victoire [de Castellane]. But you also had the whole Chanel team who would come in their *tailleurs* and pearls and brooches, and sit during fittings like an audience. Karl at one point was feeling really frustrated and stuck, because sometimes when you want to try something new you don't want to be observed by 25 people. He left the room and beckoned me to follow him. So, I went out through the door, marked 'Mademoiselle' – that one.[11] He turned to me, and he said, 'I want you to go back in there and tell them that I'm not coming back in unless they all leave.' And I remember thinking, 'OK, well, I'm going to get fired.' So, I went in and in my best French told them that, and they got up and left.

So a definite feeling of discomfort.
I was very alienated. Karl was very friendly to me, but more often privately.

You did forge a relationship with him, through your shared love of books, paintings, poetry, music, photography, history – particularly the history of fashion. How did that evolve?
It evolved slowly. I remember thinking, 'I've just got to be myself.' André would be giving me lectures, like, 'You cannot turn up to work without make-up on.' Initially it was very scary. In the end, I just thought, 'No, I've just got to be myself.' So back came the vintage bias dresses and the bits of this and that, and I thought, 'Look, all I can do is give 110%. If it's not right, then it's not right. But I can't do it any other way.' So that's what I did. One of the most wonderful things was the fax machine splurging out faxes all through the night with all his sketches, and then we would talk about them the next day.

Just you and Karl.
On the phone. Or the famous *dossier de presse* when he photographed the dress rehearsal with hair and make-up to see where the whole thing landed. That car journey at three or four in the morning, back to his place, and then I'd be dropped off later. Or sometimes I'd walk back at dawn. That car journey was very important because he would turn to me and say, 'Well, what do you think?' That was the moment that I could explain to him what I felt the collection meant. Its emotional impact in the context of the time we occupy.

That was obviously something that you probably felt inhibited to express outside of that intimate conversation?
He would ask, but there was a chorus that surrounded anything that he did… I think there's a danger in any creative studio where everybody will say, '*Oh, c'est sublime, c'est magnifique!*' But the thing I learned from Karl is you can't just be negative. You've got to explain the positive. As he said, there's no such thing as a problem, there is only a solution.

From the outside it looked like this extraordinary fantasy you were living out, taking on the mantle of Coco Chanel; a gilded life. But the reality of the situation was very different. How did you feel when you started to realise things were not as you had hoped?
Karl was a very different designer to John. He's not so much inclusive as exclusive. All ideas come from him. I had to understand that. With a designer, it's their name at the end of the day, it's their collection. And sometimes a suggestion might reappear as something they did, of course. It was a strange double life because then there would be crazy things happening, like when I turned up and Karl was shooting a *Gone With the Wind* editorial for *Vanity Fair* with André![12] John Galliano was in that shoot and I was a soldier. Gianfranco Ferré was also in that, it was a very potent, high-octane time, all at great speed, which I hadn't experienced before. Rather like when Karl was choosing fabrics, it was done so fast!

Did you feel that there was a shift in the attention that Karl gave you or that your position wasn't as performative as you'd hoped it to be?
Definitely. I felt like I was the secret weapon that was being disarmed. I wasn't meant to do anything except to 'be'. Which was difficult because I'm a do-er, and a team player.

How did he feel about John?
He probably felt very competitive.

Threatened?
I don't know that Karl felt threatened. I think that he felt challenged. That was how he liked things to be because it drove him on. It made him work harder.

How did he maintain that? How exactly did he manage his court, so to speak?
Divide and rule.

How did that manifest itself?
Well, nobody was allowed to be friends with anybody in the studio.

Did that affect you?
Well, they were friends, but I was the English woman. At one point we were all given a studio outside the creative studio. This is when he brought in his loyal team from Chloé. We were all put in this building. I remember coming into the office, my little room, and there were pictures of roast beef all over the wall… In all my time at Chanel, not one person from the studio invited me back to their place for a cup of tea or a glass of wine. Only Karl, who I spent a lot of time with, and Sébastien [Jondeau].

Was the figure of Coco Chanel always very present?
Very. Gabrielle Chanel is very present in the house of Chanel. There is an indelible spirit of that woman. And she was personified, whether it was by Inès [de la Fressange] or Stella [Tennant].

Do you think there was a facet of yourself that was Coco?
I rode horses over the same country that Coco Chanel did when she was going out with the Duke of Westminster. There were a lot of parallels, that practical logic of the countryside and the tweed jacket.

Were you following John's progress at Dior while you were there?
I was looking at the shows. You have this whole connection to something because you can read the language, and yet you're not part of it. I remember Karl was giving me a lift after the Ibsen-inspired couture show, the Norwegian one – a very Karl collection. Anyway, in the car I was thinking about John, and Karl, who was very sensitive – he could read anybody's emotions at a hundred yards – was so upset that he told André he felt like a second husband. He didn't want me to feel anything for John.

Do you think that you kind of channelled her spirit?
We all do. Even as a teenager, I had an idea of who Gabrielle Chanel was. That's why it's so interesting, there is a grace and elegance that is very quiet and therefore very strong.

What would be your lasting memories of being at Chanel?
Karl, working on these sets, having these ideas and being so infectiously excited. Months before a set was being built – literally as the last model would be going out onto the catwalk – he'd turn to me and say, 'I know what the next one should be.' It was this never-ending story, a constantly evolving and refining line. That was Karl.

Can you remember what your last conversation with Karl was?
My last conversation with Karl was on the phone. I was very sick. Not *very* sick, obviously, relative to what Karl was going through, I wasn't. But I had a really heavy cold and there was a Fendi fitting. I rang him to say that I wasn't going to come. He said, 'That's OK. I'm sick too.' That was a very lovely, gentle moment, and that was the last time we spoke. I remember him saying, 'Bye bye, bye, love, bye.' And it was that voice fading away. He'd done his last couture, which I think was all his favourite things – you could see every house code in that show. After the fitting, the final accessorisation, we left, and he was visibly wrenched. I mean, he was exhausted, coming apart in the lift. He said to me, 'What music would you have for the show?' And I said, 'Oh, the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto.' And he went 'No, that's too romantic. It should

'These heifers came bounding towards us, and John was like, 'Oh, no!' And I said, 'Where's your Spanish blood? You're meant to be a bullfighter."

'One just fell in love with Daphne [Guinness], seeing her in her wrecked, embroidered McQueen, with a shredded hem, and blood-stained Manolos.'

be Mahler's, *Das Lieder, von der Erde*.' I didn't know the piece, and when I got home, I listened to it and rang him to tell him I'd got the [Kathleen] Ferrier version. He just said, 'It is so beautiful.' And that, to me, was Karl telling me what he was feeling. He was dying, but he will go on and on.

Paris was obviously central to your relationship with Karl as well.
He threatened to come here [to Shropshire], but never did, thank goodness.

What was your relationship with Paris? Where would you stay?
Initially, I was at the Ritz in a room. I didn't live there, but I'd have the same room. 252. It was great. The Ritz then was a sort of place of pyjama parties and madness and André.

Let's talk about your relationship with Silvia Fendi and the Fendi sisters. When did you first meet Silvia and the family? Was it with Karl?
Yes, Karl took me to Fendi. I wasn't actually working there yet, but he would bring his court, his friends. He also wanted to have a good time. I never met Jacques [de Bascher], but I think Jacques brought arabesques of gaiety and absurdity and great style.[13] It was like, keep it moving, keep it alive. The one thing Karl hated was meetings. He didn't want anything formal, it was all electrifying, it was like, 'Let's go!' Anyway, Fendi was always that place of ideas. Working with the five sisters, it was all about them bringing him workmanship that he could never even have dreamt of – he loved it. By the time I went there, there had been a lot of changes.

'I don't know that Karl felt threatened by John. I think that he felt challenged. That's how he liked things to be because it made him work harder.'

Can you tell me something unexpected about Karl, something that people might be surprised by.
I think we were all surprised by how much he loved Choupette [Karl's cat]. That was something that came out of nowhere. Up to that point, although he denied it, he *hated* cats. I mean, Ingrid [Sischy] and Sandy [Brant] had their beloved cat Cassidy who'd come with them. But the cat escaped one time, and Karl was like, 'Oh, why are they making such a fuss about a cat?' Well, you know, fast-forward to Choupette. That was one hell of a high-maintenance princess. I remember once in Saint-Tropez she escaped! I had to go down the embankment towards the road and scoop Choupette up. I remember thinking 'I've only got one chance to do this. Do *not* get it wrong.'

There was Gilles, initially, and then Eric [Wright] came in, and Vincent Darré. I think Eric did a great job. I think Silvia did a great job. I think Vincent did a great job, but it lacked direction and a creative director and designer like Karl who just goes, 'No, this is what it needs.'

Describe Silvia a little bit.
Mystery. Elegant. Roman. Authoritative. Sphinx-like, wise, hilariously funny. Twisted, like her daughter Delfina, in the most superb Roman bourgeois way, and so wise-crackingly modern. She's really out there, that one. She's also very strong.

How was her relationship with Karl in those days?
Up and down. I mean, Karl was not great with her or Delfina or any of them – or me. I remember him telling me I was the cloud that passed across the sun of the perfect summer, and he didn't recognise my voice.

You continued to work with Silvia, though, after Karl passed.
We had a really good team: Charlotte Stockdale and Katie Lyall. And me. And Silvia obviously didn't want to break that. She did some very good shows. The Colosseum couture, that workmanship is extraordinary.

When Kim Jones came on board at Fendi, you continued to work with Silvia *and* Kim for several years.
That was, again, another nerve-wracking time. I had met Kim, thanks to you, and I sensed this febrile, intuitive, brilliant man. But I didn't know him. You start off with a creative director and the relationship is potentially so intimate. It's like going to bed with a stranger. You just don't know. I remember he invited me to his extraordinary house in Notting Hill Gate, and I was terrified, looking at the sketches with Alister Mackie and immediately trying to join the dots. It's like, what's this about? What is that? How does this work? We had some great times. Like Karl, he's extraordinarily generous. Not brutal as Karl could be. Silvia came back and said, 'I want to put the team back together.' So, we were back again.

Let's shift the emphasis. You've been photographed by Mario Testino, Bruce Weber, Tim Walker… How do you experience this process in contrast to creating an image from *behind* the camera?



Paris, 1997. 'Karl Lagerfeld took this photo of me at 51 rue de l'Université, when he first invited me to dinner. Wearing John [Galliano]'s ephemeral ghost dress and Odile Gilbert's wig from the last Galliano show, I felt protected. It was overwhelming and frightening to be in such 18th-century finery with the Emperor of fashion.'

Agonising. The fashion industry is a tough industry. If you want to be aware of your faults, you are going to be. If there's any Achilles heel that you don't feel fits whatever the template of perfection is at any given time, you feel terrible – and I am not particularly confident. It was hard doing the documentary [entitled *Karl*] with you and Nick [Hooker] and William [Middleton]![14] I was constantly aware of my imperfections under the scrutiny of the lens. I mean, maybe a documentary film is harder than a still…

You were photographed on multiple occasions by Karl. Was that a particularly collaborative process?
No, it was a command. He was obviously extremely visual and also could sketch. So he had the idea of what he wanted you to look like. And *you* had to get there.

'One day I know that John and I will sit down together again. There's a lot to talk about and a lot to laugh about.'

Which was the case for most of the subjects of his photographs. Were they all very studied in that sense?
Yes, you wouldn't get a sort of Corinne Day feel happening with Karl. He had a thing in his head and that was that. Although we'd try to bend it.

One of the most recent shoots that you've worked on [as a stylist] was for American *Vogue* with Rafael Pavarotti – for the first Chanel *prêt-à-porter* collection designed by Matthieu Blazy. It just seems like a wonderful beginning to a new era. I'm sure it must have been very exciting for you.
It was very emotional and very exciting. It was amazing to be asked to do it and amazing to shoot with Rafael. We'd already shot that big story for the Met, for the Karl Lagerfeld exhibition and got to know each other. You follow that dance, and you give what you can. He's enlightened and humble and so generous. He gives with love and abandon. I love that. That's what we felt in the shoot.

It felt like the energy that we had all been waiting for.
We were all loving it and hugging each other. It was very, very special. I think Matthieu has that loving embrace and humility in the inclusiveness of his design. You have the emotion of the workmanship, and you have the line that's so lyrical.

You were very closely involved in the Met show that surveyed Karl Lagerfeld's career in 2023.
With Andrew Bolton, who was just a joy to work with. The best thing about Andrew, I often say, is that it's a bit like playing tennis with somebody who's much better than you. It constantly ups your game. So, brainstorming with Andrew was revelatory. There was a point where Andrew was describing the process of storytelling the exhibition, 'Well it could be like this, and Karl's brain is like a computer. And then it short circuits,' and that was how it was working with John.

Did it remind you of working with him?
Yes, it really did. Where you travel to somewhere you would never have got to by yourself.

What do you think is Karl's legacy?
Karl's legacy to me personally? To get on with it. Stop being so lazy. Commit. Don't hang around. Write. Paint. Get on with it. That's his legacy to me, personally. His legacy in terms of fashion…

Fashion history. The industry.
I think it's his design discipline and his understanding of structure. Which I miss because now we are in a time where things are, in a sense, softer and more voluminous. Not everywhere, because some stuff is tighter. But the way Karl would construct a shoulder, it was very rigorous.

The rigour of the architecture.
I think his other legacy would be his intelligence and ability to absorb not only fashion history or the history of the world, but also to understand the history or iconography of the house. So, he could absolutely riff on that *ad infinitum*. That's how creative directors do that now, when they move into a house they're taking a leaf out of Karl's book. They don't start off with something completely new. They take, if you like, the legible signs and then they reconfigure them.

Talking of which, you were an early supporter of Jonathan Anderson. What did you see in his work?
I remember wearing a divided, heavy felted wool skirt and a top to a Chanel couture backstage. Karl looked at me and was like, 'What's that?' He was always quick off the mark. He could tell when something's good. Karl had clocked that I wasn't wearing couture Chanel. I was wearing JW Anderson. I continue to wear it – his Loewe as well.

How did your personal relationship with him come about?

We shot a film about collaboration. Artist Johnnie Shand Kydd made it here with Albi [Amanda's dog] under the tree. That is when Jonathan and I sat at this table for hours and hours and hours and became friends. We had that openness, about the fears and the joys and how you can orient yourself through this really difficult terrain which is the fashion industry. Jonathan is a strategist. I mean, so is Kim and so was Karl.

Who do you still admire and do you feel has maintained a consistency and dignity and singularity in their work over the years in the fashion industry?
Well, apart from Rei Kawakubo? I am a disciple who made the pilgrimage to every show without fail. Phoebe Philo, who, if anybody, is like Gabrielle Chanel. She herself is the spirit that imbues the clothes, that makes them so desirable that you want to be her without even knowing her. She pushes the dial, as does Jonathan. If something feels uncomfortable or wrong, within 36 hours it's suddenly the *only* thing. That is his genius. It has a rightness. Even though I can't necessarily always feel it myself.

He breaks rules?
It can be something like a colour. A combination of colours, that's like, 'I can't relate to that.' And then in its difference, you do. I think that's really exciting as we are all naturally drawn to what we understand and have experienced, the shapes that make sense in our memory. Also I respect Haider Ackermann whom Karl admired and whose clothes are majestic and emotional, and I'm a devotee of Michael Stewart's incredible Standing Ground work, he is a masterful and poetic craftsman.

How did you feel when you saw the final Galliano show at Margiela?
Well, I didn't know it was his final one and I'd broken my foot so I couldn't go. To my cost, because I've had the world telling me that it was the show that has changed the landscape of fashion forever. I have to say that I recognised everything in it. I'm not saying that in a complacent way at all. It's just that it was a language I know, the way everything had been resolved. It was extraordinary.

Have you been able to reestablish a relationship with John since your parting of ways?

'Karl's legacy to me personally? To get on with it. Stop being so lazy. Commit. Don't hang around. Write. Paint. Just get on with it.'

We sat next to each other at a dinner in Anna Wintour's honour when she became a companion of honour to the King. That was glorious. I was talking about how much I love ruffs. And John was telling me how you could have a swan's down ruff. We started talking again and I was like, 'I missed this,' and was threatening to go and stay with him. We nearly saw each other in October, when I was in Paris, but then we didn't. He has his life and his friends, and he's probably working on some new thing, I hope so. One day I know that we will sit down together. There's a lot to talk about and a lot to laugh about.

We began by talking about this beautiful home of yours here in Shropshire. Let's end by talking about your son Jasset's historical house and estate, Glyn. You and both your children, Jasset and Tallulah, have dedicated the last few years to its restoration and renovation. Can you just describe Glyn, the house, the history, the landscape, its meaning to you. And how do you feel when you're there?
It's like an ancient magic, wound up with legend and myth and all the wood sprites and Rhiannon the sorceress, with its standing stones and lakes and the moon up the top. The house itself is such a warm place. It's a place of gathering and people and exchange of ideas. It's a really special place that has belonged to one family for hundreds of years, sitting in the palm of Snowdonia, where the actual steps and the land have been carved by those generations. And that investment, that *emotional* investment, is palpable.

What single word immediately comes to mind?
Jacobean. It's where I imagine myself riding a horse up the hillside wearing a veil. Something I have done and plan to do again. It carries that deep time. It's really less about the house than the outside. Sometimes when I'm sleeping there I feel that the house has no walls, because all the windows are open, and you can hear the owls and see the foxes and the stars. It's so uniquely placed and so far away from any mark of man.

And the accompanying photoshoot that you've just done with Juergen took place at Glyn. Talk a little bit about that. And how was it to collaborate with your daughter on it?
Tallulah is brilliant, turbocharged. She's just unstoppable. Incredible creative

energy. We know each other so well, and yet she pushed me forward. I never thought I would wear an Alaïa dress like that. Ever.

How was it working with Juergen?
Really incredible. I've obviously met him and Dovile a few times, but I've never worked with Juergen before. There was an openness, a tale-telling and understanding of the wild, which is very important for Glyn. It's not about a showy interior or anything. It is about what is sacred, which is the wild.

There's no hair and make-up in the shoot. There's no artifice.
That just felt right. I think it was really about me. They allowed me to be me. They didn't actually change what I was doing, I would just decide to go up to a tree and lean against it. It just all happened like that. There was never a moment when I felt like I was in freefall thinking, 'Oh God, I don't know what to do.' It was like we were on a journey going somewhere together. And the weather was just so benign. It was extraordinary. It didn't rain, and it normally does.

1. *Crackerjack!* was a popular BBC children's television program running between 1955 and 1984.

2. Brownies is a UK youth group for girls, organising residential camps featuring outdoor activities.

3. The King's Head is an historical inn formerly frequented by English diarist Samuel Pepys which became a frequent meeting place for members of Homerton College, Cambridge. A secret society and discussion club at the college is now named after the pub.

4. Tom Bell was a multidisciplinary artist and designer born in Melbourne. After working in fashion, Bell became known for his interior design, notably for Mayfair private members' clubs, his large-scale paintings and sculptural works exhibited in London, New York and Istanbul.

5. Monkberry's was an exclusive private members nightclub, situated off Jermyn Street in London. It was active in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and often frequented by celebrities including Freddie Mercury and members of The Rolling Stones.

6. The Piers Gaveston Society is an exclusive Oxford University dining club founded in 1977. Traditionally limited to a small group of students, its annual Piers Gaveston Ball is a highly secretive, themed event that has gained a reputation for flamboyant dress and extravagant behaviour.

7. Caroline Kellett, known professionally as simply Kellett, was a British fashion journalist and former fashion editor of *Tatler*, with a career spanning multiple prominent roles in British fashion media.

8. Zanzibar was a fashionable Covent Garden bar in 1970s London, central to the city's art-bohemian and emerging punk scenes, frequented by figures such as Iggy Pop and Johnny Thunders. Recalling its atmosphere, collector and gallerist Jonathan Ross said: 'My mother once introduced me to Lucian Freud, I had drinks with George Melly and Felix Dennis tried to pick up my girlfriend. If the cocktails hadn't been so darn good I could probably remember more.'

9. John Galliano's Spring/Summer 1985 ready-to-wear collection 'Afghanistan Repudiates Western Ideals' was the designer's first major commercial collection following his graduation. The collection is named after a 1920s Punch cartoon of an Afghan figure stomping on a Western bowler hat. Galliano's designs combined historical Western tailoring and stylised Eastern influences, reflecting the diverse cultural milieu of his East London studio.

10. Steven Robinson was John Galliano's longstanding right-hand and studio manager, until Robinson's tragic and untimely death in 2007.

11. The white door marked '*Mademoiselle Privé*' is located at the iconic entrance to Gabrielle Chanel's studio on rue Cambon in Paris.

12. 'Scarlett 'n the Hood' was a 10-page fashion editorial in the May 1996 issue of *Vanity Fair*, conceived by editor André Leon Talley and photographed by Karl Lagerfeld. The editorial subverted *Gone With the Wind* by casting Naomi Campbell as Scarlett O'Hara, with designers John Galliano, Manolo Blahnik and Gianfranco Ferré depicted as her attendants.

13. Jacques de Bascher was a French aristocrat and notorious Parisian dandy best known as the longtime companion and muse of Karl Lagerfeld, whom he met in 1971. De Bascher also had ties to the broader fashion world, including association with Yves Saint Laurent and involvement in early creative projects around Karl Lagerfeld's *prêt-à-porter* work for Fendi in the 1970s.

14. Amanda Harlech features in the 2025 documentary, *Karl*, directed by Nick Hooker, based on Lagerfeld's biography *Paradise Now* written by William Middleton. Both Harlech and Jerry Stafford were involved behind-the-scenes, as a producer and creative consultant respectively.



Photograph by Diego Uchitel

London, 2002. 'Me, Izzy and Daphne for Philip [Treacy].'

‘I love this one!’

Chloé Spring/Summer 2026 accessories, as selected by the friends of the house.

Photographs by Roberto Greco

Song Ah Woo

Chloé ‘Paddington’ small shoulder bag in grained buffalo leather

‘I’m usually a big bag girl, but this Chloé totally changed the game. It’s small, but somehow fits everything: lipstick, phone charger, passport… all of it. And the design? Obsessed.’





Pat Cleveland

Chloé ‘Bracelet’ bag in grained calfskin

‘My favourite accessory of the Spring/Summer 2026 collection is the Bracelet bag! It is my travel companion day and night. Love it!’



Alexa Chung

Chloé ‘Jelly’ mules in TPU

‘A Cinderella glass slipper but make it jelly. I can’t wait to be a grown up in my childhood dream heel.’



Iris Law

Chloé ‘Spin’ large tote bag in grained calfskin

‘I love the balance between boyish and chic, it has that almost boxing-bag silhouette, which is a shape that I always love. It feels effortless yet intentional, like something you could throw on with anything but still have it quietly make a statement.’



Dree Hemingway

Chloé ‘Tropicus’ swan minaudière in printed leather

‘I pick the Swan bag. It’s romantic and fantasy; you can create a whole world around that bag.’

Awar Odhiang

Chloé 'Lixi' pumps
in transparent TPU with metalised lambskin
'Chloé has always mastered that tension between strength and softness, and this pump captures it beautifully. There's a quiet confidence in the silhouette, something both grounded and fluid at once'.





Claudia Schiffer

Chloé 'Tropicus' lemon minaudière
in metal radiant
'I'm instantly drawn to Chloé's lemon bag as it conjures up that carefree spirit of summer, one of my favourite times of year. It reminds me of warm evenings chatting with friends over delicious food – the perfect companion for a holiday dinner.'



Tish Weinstock

Chloé ‘Paddington’ shoulder bag
in grained buffalo leather
‘It’s giving Y2K boho girlie but with an edge.
I actually had a bootleg one when I was a teen so
it would be a full circle moment to carry the real thing.’

Elodie David-Touboul

Chloé ‘Maxime’ sandals
in vegetable tanned calfskin
‘I love the Maxime wedges because
they’re an iconic Chloé shoe that
Chemena revisited, engraving
words and significant years from
the house’s history;
a love letter to Chloé.’





Pirrie Wright

Chloé ‘Tropicus’ papaya minaudière in brass

‘I would pick the papaya bag. It feels like the perfect amount of whimsy to add to a classic outfit. And a conversation starter, no less!’

Set designer: Lune Kuipers. Photography assistant: Valentin Le Marc’h. Digital operator: Thomas Jezequel. Production: Caroline Benaouda for We Are The Agent.

Julia Stegner

Chloé ‘Plissé’ shoulder bag in pleated leather

‘I adore the shoulder bag. It’s such a timeless statement piece and it comes in my favorite kind of blue. A staple that will never go out of style and is so quintessentially Chloé. Très chic and beautifully bohemian at the same time.’



‘I doubt Pharrell will be asking me to help him program beats.’

He’s leaving *GQ* for Pharrell, media for brands, and New York for Paris. Is Will Welch’s new move symbolic of where the industry is heading?

Interview by Jonathan Wingfield
Photographs by Ilya Lipkin



In the spring of 2013 (when, incidentally, *System* magazine was launching), American *GQ*'s latest issue to grace newsstands featured a Terry Richardson image of Beyoncé on its cover. The future Cowboy Carter was captured in red and black leopard-print knickers and an ultra-cropped sports T-shirt, flanked by the straplines: 'The 100 Sexiest Women of the 21st Century', 'Gentlemen, Put Your Pants Back On', and 'Dads Gone Wild!'. Viewed today, it's something of a relic, a cultural nadir for a magazine founded in 1931 under the original title *Apparel Arts*. Yet it remains a *GQ* landmark nonetheless: one of the most commercially and culturally successful issues of its era. Teasing a sneak peek of the cover, *The Hollywood Reporter* announced at the time, 'We aren't even bothering with a poll to ask you if you like this photo. We know you do. It's a slam dunk, a hole-in-one, a touchdown.'

Six years on, and with a new editor-in-chief, Will Welch, at the helm, *GQ* delivered its November 2019 issue featuring Pharrell, not so much wearing as engulfed in a mustard-yellow, floor-length Moncler 'puffer-gown', accompanied by the words: 'The New Masculinity'. An altogether different *GQ* landmark, the issue signalled the start of a major editorial shift, away from traditional 'lad mag' tropes and towards a more inclusive, progressive and (crucially) fashion-forward exploration of modern manhood. The overarching ambition was to interrogate what masculinity means today in a post-#MeToo world. Welch's editor's letter specifically framed empathy as the 'antidote to toxicity', and *GQ* partnered with a polling group to survey 1,005 Americans (men, women and non-binary individuals) to gauge how gender norms were shifting across the country. Other topics addressed in the issue included isolation, anxiety and male suicide – each linked to the pressures men face within a society of restrictive norms and stigmas surrounding mental health.

With the title's ethos undergoing a paradigm shift, Welch began lavishing particular attention on #NewGQ's website, social media accounts and video content, using a high-fashion-meets-entertainment lens to capture digital audiences and advertisers alike. Where once Pulitzer Prize-winning longform investigative journalism cohabited with cigar reviews, columns titled 'Why a Gentleman Packs Whisky', and Brooks Brothers editorials, Welch was presenting a new *GQ* for a new generation: the Virgil Abloh era of streetwear-meets-post-preppy fashion, FOMO-inducing parties at the Chateau Marmont and Paris Fashion Week, and an eclectic roll call of cover stars and kindred spirits, from Pharrell and André 3000 to Grace Wales Bonner, Law Roach, and Anok Yai; Sydney Sweeney and SZA to Lil Nas X, Lewis Hamilton, Paul Mescal, Willy Chavarria, Travis Kelce, Hailey Bieber…

American *GQ* welcomed digital relevancy, a new hyper-engaged community, and year-on-year growth despite a challenging media landscape. In December 2020, as part of the Anna Wintour-led strategy to make Condé Nast both more streamlined and more global, Welch was promoted to global editorial director of *GQ*. His digital-first outlook, likeable manner, and relatable appearance – bespectacled, preppy without being stuck-up, tattoos – made him a hit not just in the Condé Nast boardroom, but also in the fashion, entertainment and media industries.

Then, in January of this year, he announced via Instagram that he was leaving *GQ* after 19 years; upping sticks to Paris and taking on a new role in partnership with Pharrell and Penni Thow, the founder and CEO of Copper, a talent investment and advisory firm. Welch's shock move – from *GQ* to Pharrell, from media to brand-side, and from New York to Paris (with a be-brogued foot in Hollywood) – feels symbolic of where much of the industry is now heading.

With all this in mind, *System* caught up with Welch in Los Angeles: a week after he'd attended the men's fashion shows in Paris, the morning after his appearance at the Grammys after-party, and just days before he was co-hosting Thom Browne's Super Bowl fashion show in San Francisco. We discussed early 2000s downtown New York, his tenure at *GQ*, time spent with Kanye, Anna, and Pharrell, and what his new chapter in Paris is going to look like.

‘As a intern at *The Fader* I was keeping track of budgets, while writing pieces on spec with no expectation that they were going to get published.’

Tell me about the magazines that you loved as a kid.

I really loved *Sports Illustrated*, specifically Rick Reilly's column. He was writing about sports from a very emotional perspective, and as a 12-year-old kid who desperately wanted to be a professional basketball player – which is hilarious when I think about it now – I found his writing deeply inspiring.

Growing up in Atlanta, Georgia, I was also obsessed with OutKast. Their debut album came out in 1994, when I was 13, and I came to think of them as ambassadors for Atlanta. I'd go to the local newsstand each month, praying that the music magazines had written about OutKast and Atlanta.

Was there a turning point, when you began considering journalism as a potential career?

From 11th grade on, I excelled as a writer, and moved to New York in 1999 to go to college at Columbia as an English major. I loved writing but, you know, there was no way I was going to get a book deal any time soon…

Why not?

Because I didn't even have any book ideas. Magazines seemed like an easier way to make money; I figured there was a magazine industry, which would mean there'd be entry-level jobs. I'd go to Kim's, the indie record store,[1] which had a rack of magazines, and started looking at mastheads. Through a fluke, I got the email address of this guy named Knox Robinson, who was one of the editors of *The Fader*.[2] We met at a bar, and he ended up offering me an internship, which I started two weeks before graduating from college.

The dream…

Well, it was unpaid so I'd work at *The Fader* during the day and then barback for money at night.

Were your colleagues at *The Fader* kindred spirits?

Yes, it was a tiny team but we were all deeply ingrained in New York's downtown music scene. We're talking 2003, just after Strokes mania… *Vice*, Ryan McGinley, Dash Snow. I used to hang out pretty much every night at Max Fish, a bar full of musicians, skaters, artists, photographers.[3] It was a really electric time in downtown New York City.

Were you immediately given a lot of responsibility at *The Fader*?

Totally. I learned about photography by going on assignments with photographers. I learned about graphic design by sitting with Eddie Brannan, who was an editor but also laid out the magazine. By virtue of it being so tiny, we were each other's fact checkers and copy editors. You learned about all the constituent parts of putting a magazine together. As an intern I was keeping track of budgets, while pitching ideas and writing pieces on spec with no expectation that they were going to get published.

‘I'd hang out pretty much every night at Max Fish bar. We're talking 2003, just after Strokes mania. So it was all *Vice*, Ryan McGinley, Dash Snow…’

People mainly praise your editing skills but the longform pieces that you've written for *GQ* – that big Kanye cover story in 2020, the Tom Ford exit interview – are really well-constructed. Whose magazine writing influenced you?

By the time I got to *GQ*, I was beginning to know *real* writers, the legends of magazine writing: Chris Heath, Mike Paterniti, John Jeremiah Sullivan… Tellingly, none of them were bound up in the office proofing pages. Mike Paterniti didn't even live in New York, he lived in Portland, Maine, and John Jeremiah Sullivan lived in North Carolina. They were free to be deep in their research. I was just like, 'I got into this industry because I wanted to be a writer, but maybe I'm better at this editing game where it's more about the totality.' Discussing story ideas with great writers, taking text and design and photography, writing headlines, putting all the pieces together, making it all make sense… I realised that was my actual calling. But since I became editor-in-chief, about once a year, I'll dust off the tape recorder and write a piece myself.

Your proximity to your subjects means you've been able to negotiate great conditions for writing about them…

With Kanye, for instance, I ended up flying all over the world with him for the story: Mexico, Paris, Wyoming...

Was all of that negotiated upfront or did he just hijack you?

Well, we've known each other for a pretty long time.

You wrote his first ever cover story?

Yes. Knox and I co-wrote it, for *The Fader* [December 2003]. It happened to be my first ever cover story, too. I interviewed him at the Boston Market restaurant on 23rd Street, a couple of months before [debut album] *The College Dropout* came out. So, the start of my career paralleled the start of his career. I'd be in and out of touch with him over the years. Kanye can be 'all or nothing', so once you're in his world, and writing about it, he just wants to show you more and more and more of it. For that *GQ* story, we took his jet from his ranch in Wyoming straight to LA, got into his Lamborghini and headed over to Beverly Hills for Kid Cudi's birthday party. I remember

still being covered in ranch dust. Then we went to Paris because four days previously he'd suddenly decided he was going to put on a Yeezy show during fashion week. He was like, 'You gotta be there,' so I just booked a flight. That was the fashion week when Covid was beginning to spread and people were getting sick, so the whole experience had this really eerie mood. By the time we got to Mexico I was like, 'I can't keep following you, I've got to go home and write this up.'

I've recently reread that 2020 story, and was struck by the fact that Kanye spoke with conviction and clarity about transforming his Wyoming ranch into a Yeezy campus. Did you have an inkling that it was all going to unravel for him?
I was certainly taken aback by the *way* it did. But throughout my time knowing Kanye, there has been this tension between what he said he was going to do and what everybody else thought he was capable of. Everybody was like, 'You make amazing beats, but nobody needs you to rap.' And then he proved everybody wrong. Then he was like, 'I'm not just a rapper, I'm not just a musician. I'm this multi-talented, multifaceted, genius creative.' And everybody was like, 'Dude, it's perfectly fine to be one of the greatest musicians of *all* time – chill out.' But then he proceeded to do a version of what he said he was going to do: become incredibly influential as an apparel and sneaker designer, a wild centre of gravity and innovation in the fashion industry. He's always made proclamations that seemed farfetched and unhinged and then delivered on some version of what everybody said he couldn't do.

So what I tried to do with that piece was avoid the usual, 'Listen to all the ridiculous shit this guy thinks he's going to do.' I was just trying to keep it neutral – neither credulous nor incredulous – because I thought he had never had that before. But the big X variable in the equation was his mental health. We've seen that become a bigger and bigger struggle. I have been, broadly speaking, disappointed with the discourse around his various offences and meltdowns and proclamations. I think we've proven that as a culture, we don't have a very sophisticated understanding of mental health disorders and how that can interact with something like social media; where somebody who's in a particular mental state happens to have millions and millions of followers and can mainline thoughts directly to a global audience. We've seen how harmful that can be. Not just for the person whose thoughts are being projected out to the world, but to the audience receiving those, especially when some very dangerous things are being said.

We've become sidetracked by Kanye, let's go back to your move to *GQ*.
I got a call on a Friday in April of 2007 from an editor at *GQ* asking me to come interview for a job there. At first I was like, 'I don't know anything about *GQ*, I'm this downtown music guy, why would I go work for this mainstream men's fashion magazine?' I didn't get it. Then, over the weekend, I realised that firstly, I had to let go of this narrow identity that I was holding on to for myself, and secondly, that I was in the minor leagues and the big leagues were calling, so I can't be thinking I'm too cool for that call. I thought, 'Just slap yourself in the face, put on a fucking tie, and go interview for the *GQ* job.' Which I did, and I got it.

Were you thrown in at the *GQ* deep end: what I lazily imagine to be cigar reviews, whisky columns and Brooks Brothers showrooms?
I was doing front-of-book lifestyle service content, like, what are the fundamental differences between the Italian, the American and the English suit? Or, you know, what are the best restaurants in South Carolina?

What did you learn about the mechanics of making a magazine?
At the time, Condé Nast magazines were well-funded and full of incredibly experienced editors who really knew what they were doing. It was an awesome environment to enter into because I was working with the best of the best in terms of packaging, storytelling, headline writing, captioning; making it all make sense and dynamic and exciting and informative and sexy and all the things you want from a good magazine. I also brought that same fearlessness that I had shown as an unpaid intern. I remember going to an editorial ideas meeting in my first week, pitching a story, and getting it approved. My predecessor as editor-in-chief, Jim Nelson, rightfully gets a lot of credit for having created this open environment of 'Best Idea Wins'. It was never like, 'Will, you're new here, shut the fuck up.' So it was a huge priority for me to preserve that spirit when I became editor.

At first I was like, 'I don't know anything about *GQ*, I'm this downtown music guy, why would I go work for a mainstream men's fashion magazine?'"



What *did* you change when you took over as editor-in-chief?
It was the era of *GQ* as a broad, general-interest title. At the time, our salespeople could go into meetings with clients and say, 'We're *GQ* – we speak to American men.' And it was true. Men would read the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Esquire* and us.

Give me some idea of the audience size at that point.
The circulation was about a million. But it was a way less fractured environment. You know, nobody was Tweeting or Instagramming. Only certain platforms had a megaphone and *GQ* was one of them. By the time I became editor-in-chief at the end of 2018, *everything* had changed, and the basic thesis of my era was: we're going from this big, broad open door where you're trying to welcome all American men, to becoming the flagship of men's fashion. We're going to be declarative and niche, and the way to grow in the Internet era is to pick a very tight niche and grow deep within it, instead of trying to be shallow and wide.

Were there specific elements of digital media you knew you had to engage with to stay relevant?
I was just paying attention and had the humility to recognise the evolving power dynamics and strengths and weaknesses of the *GQ* brand. One way to think about it, is the first time *GQ* did a LeBron James cover [in February 2009], LeBron needed *GQ* more than *GQ* needed LeBron. You know, if LeBron wanted to be knighted as a superstar and part of the highest cultural tier, he needed *GQ*. Cut to the most recent time we covered LeBron, he probably has, I don't know, like eight or ten times as many Instagram followers as *GQ* does. If he wants to shift a narrative, it's right at his fingertips. I was just paying attention to those changes and recognising that *GQ* still had an incredibly important role to play, but the exact nature of that role had changed. If you try to hold on to the role that you played when you were in a position of power, it's just a matter of time before you're tumbling downwards. So you have to be realistic about, for example, how you negotiate with the talent that you cover. If you call them up and you're like, 'You need us more than we need you, and we're going to tell you what to do,' which is how it was in 2007, you're not going to get anywhere.

Did that shift extend to the rapport *GQ* had with fashion houses and its advertisers?
When I started at *GQ*, fashion houses communicated through runway shows, campaigns and occasional events. Editorial occupied this middle position: you're not the consumer, but you're not the brand; you're a place where a consumer can come and see the messages of the brand, but they've been re-spun and represented in a new way. They'd show another vision for how to wear the clothes that's different from the runway or the brand's own campaign. Fashion houses are now essentially in the media business, they are daily publishing houses via social media, via e-commerce. I still think that editorial continues to play that important second position. It can show the reader a way to think about fashion that is different to the way the brands themselves present it. This is why I've held firm against total-look policies. When luxury and fashion were super-performing and media was disrupted, I think the brands started taking advantage of their leverage over fashion media to start demanding that editorial become less editorial and more like advertising. I have resisted that because I don't think it's good for anyone, even the brands. You need that second voice, that second storytelling. It's a lot more powerful.

I just want to go back a bit. Prior to you becoming editor-in-chief of *GQ*, you oversaw the introduction of *GQ Style*, which presumably acted as the precursor to you shifting main *GQ*'s focus towards fashion.
In 2016, Anna Wintour asked me to meet her and do a small project – somehow she'd heard my name. Out of that came the opportunity of a baby editor-in-chief job for a spin-off magazine called *GQ Style*. The idea was that *GQ* was this huge mainstream men's magazine that was really speaking to American men – some of whom had an interest in clothing and style and grooming – but it wasn't a fashion readership. The company leadership at the time felt there was an opportunity to do a high fashion version of *GQ* for the American market. I got asked to be the editor and put together a tiny team. I basically got the opportunity to test my ideas in this smaller space that wasn't under the level of scrutiny and commercial pressure that *GQ* had. It was intense because I had originally been brought in [to *GQ*] and taught, 'This is how you do things, and this is the *only* way to do things.' And then I got this opportunity to leave that aside and do things my way. It started working right away, and was quickly picking up steam. Readers liked it. The fashion industry liked it. I also got to hone my leadership skills, and out of that came the opportunity to be the editor of *GQ* proper.

That whole period was being played out against the backdrop of a major shift in society, politics and identity – nothing short of a revolution. But what changed within *GQ* itself?
I began to realise there was also a generational component. This isn't so much a comment on the culture at *GQ* specifically, but in the fashion and fashion media industries at the time, I thought there was a lot of ghastly behaviour. People being wicked to each other as a matter of course; as though in order to have a great fashion shoot, you needed to be horrible to people. Stuff like that. Me and my little crew didn't believe that was what it takes to be great. We actually believe you can lead with kindness. As you say, the broader cultural context was shifting as well, and would culminate in the #MeToo movement. The idea of this boorish editorial way of speaking about and photographing women was ending. Magazines like *Maxim* had really stolen readership from *GQ* and *Esquire* by doing the bikini girl thing, so, *GQ* and *Esquire* took in some of that and made it part of their mix. It was time to flush all that crap back out.

Was that a conscious thing? And was it a gradual process?
It was like, 'We're doing *GQ Style*, and it's really important because community should be inclusive, not exclusive; self-selecting, not pushing people out.' And of course, if you're doing a community-based approach, you can't *not* photograph women.

You've just got to do it in a different way.
There should be women in every issue of *GQ*, but they don't have to be half-naked. Once I became the editor there was an opportunity to scrutinise some of the habits and mores of the machine. To take the best, get rid of the rest, and bring in a new energy.

Was there resistance to any the change?
Well, I had the total backing of Anna Wintour to rip things up and do it my way. And because of that short period where I was doing *GQ Style*, I had established a clear blueprint for my point of view and my aesthetic. So there was a lot of buy-in for what I was going to do.

If you had to define what it was you were doing in one sentence, what would it be?
A community-based approach to fun, sophisticated, expressive fashion. I remember doing an interview with BoF's Chantal Fernandez which was like, 'Let's talk to the new editor of *GQ* and figure out what the hell he's going to do.'[4] And I basically said, 'If you're not interested in fashion and style, you're not going to like this new *GQ*.' And that did scare some people.

Were readers jumping ship?
I had total conviction that this new approach was the way forward. And that was really empowering. I was clear that I didn't care that a lot of the regular *GQ* guys might feel alienated… By that point, I actually thought they were imaginary, these 'regular guys' who read *GQ*; I thought we had already lost them because this is the era of the Internet. There was nothing to lose.

How did you define what fashion meant for *GQ*?
It was defined through the *GQ Style* team. Mobolaji Dawodu, who was the fashion director, is Nigerian but grew up in the Maryland, Virginia area; he's a man of the world. He specialises in street casting and street styling and has a really global point of view on fashion. He doesn't hold European runway fashion in higher regard than the traditional dress that his grandmother wears in Lagos, or a particular store in New York City that makes Indian garments. He'd mix Italian tailoring with clothes from all over the world; fashion with traditional dress. That was really exciting. Then there was Noah Johnson, who grew up in Troy, New York as a skater, so he really understands – among many other things – skateboarding and American street culture. In particular, things like the very specific fit of your pants – he's really into the details. Then, there was a very young Sam Hine, who I hired for *GQ Style* as my assistant and to be the editorial assistant. He brought the perspective of a new generation, who didn't need the difference between American, Italian and British tailoring explained to them. Sam's generation already knew all that.

'It was the era of *GQ* as a broad, general-interest title. Our salespeople could go into client meetings and say, "We're *GQ* – we speak to American men."'

'There should be women in every issue of *GQ*, but they don't have to be half-naked. Once I became the editor it was time to flush all that crap back out.'

A generation that had outgrown the previous one's style bible.
The old approach to *GQ* had basically been: we are going to create a cookie-cutter mould of a man, and if you can just shove yourself into it, you'll be successful at work, you'll get laid, and your friends will think you're cool. When I became editor of *GQ* in 2019, we'd reached a time where, if you did fit into the *GQ* cookie cutter, you were considered wack. It had become this incredibly expressive moment in men's fashion. Virgil had just become the menswear designer of Louis Vuitton. It was a very new thing for people like me who grew up with sports – and not so much fashion – to be able to tell you who the designer was of each European menswear house. That was the new world that we were entering.

Within months of taking over as editor-in-chief, you put out *GQ's* 'The New Masculinity' issue.
'The New Masculinity' – those exact words – was an idea that I actually brought up in our first editorial meeting with me as editor. I said, 'This is where we're going, we're going to do this.' My intention was to do it in April 2019 – my third issue – but my team helped calm me down and say, 'This is going to take a second to get right, and if we're going to do this, we have to get it *exactly* right.' I became the editor of *GQ* right in the middle of the #MeToo movement, and although we began tagging everything #NewGQ on social media, it was still going to be recognisably *GQ*, and I really wanted to broadcast that there was something new going on here. I thought it was important to mark the shift in values that we were making with this new idea of a very historic brand. I wanted to do that right away, but then I calmed down a little bit, and instead of doing it in April, we did it in November.

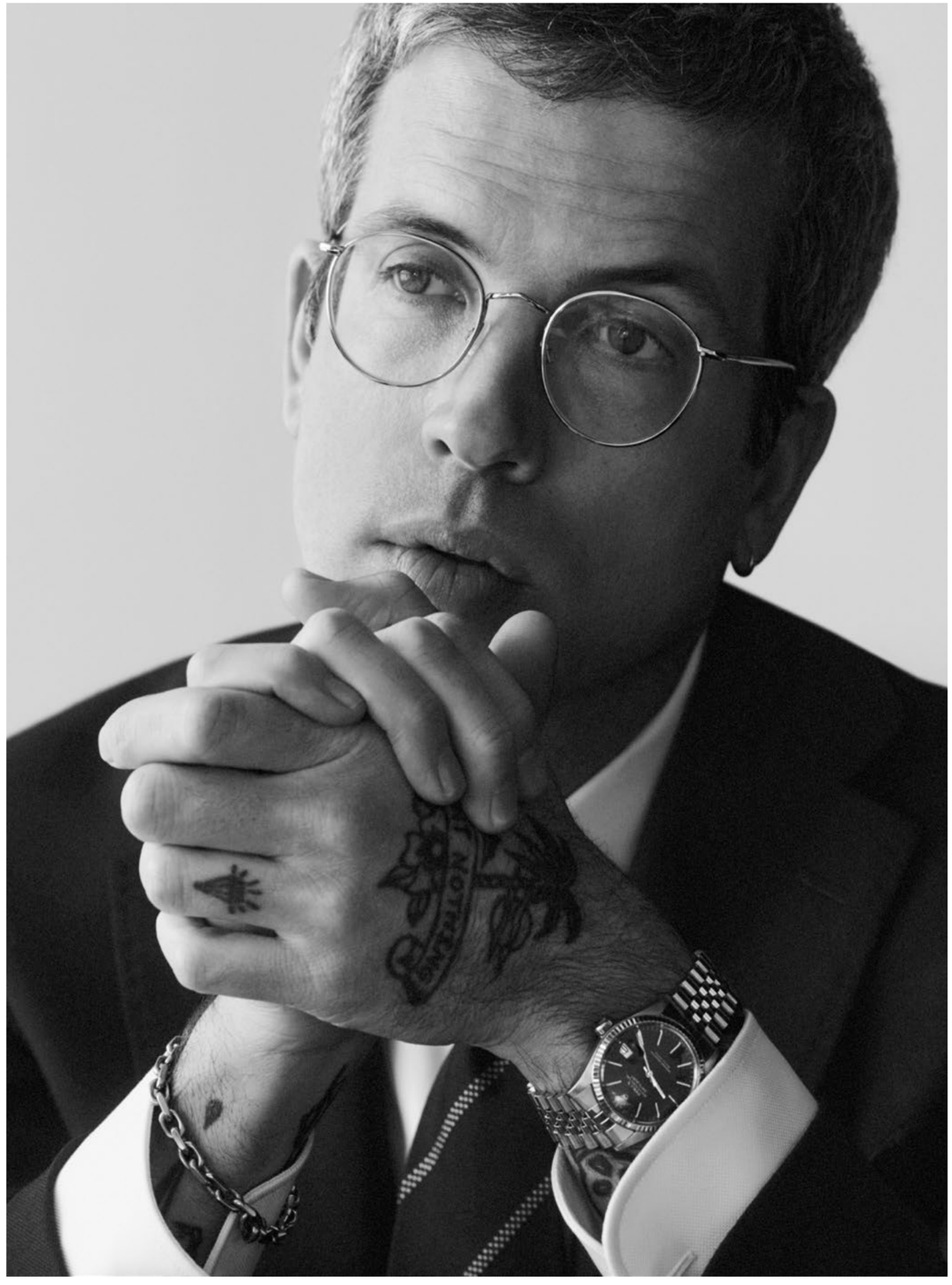
What did you learn from that issue?
If you make a really grand, ambitious statement and execute it at a high level, it can have a profound impact. I do believe there was a cultural understanding that masculinity was in crisis. We as *GQ* stepped out and said, 'We have something to say.' And people said, 'Oh, *GQ*, this is actually your topic of authority, we care what you have to say about it.' It made a lot of noise and kickstarted a cultural conversation. It's the issue I've done the most press for to this day. I did all the morning TV shows – people just wanted to hear about it from us.

What impact do you think that had on *GQ* as this American men's brand?
It had a big enough impact that a lot of people came to work at *GQ because* of that issue. I'd be interviewing people for an open position, and they'd be like, 'I want to work here because of the 'New Masculinity' issue, I really believe in that kind of cultural statement, I want to be a part of the team that made it.' I was blown away.

Last year, in October 2025, you revisited the same theme with the 'State of the American Male' issue. Why repeat the editorial premise, and what's changed in those six years?
You do have to be really disciplined, because if you get high on the reaction to something like that, you want to do it all the time – and that doesn't work. There was a lot of pressure from the team, and from outside the team, like, 'Hey, that really worked, do it again.' But we waited. And then last year we found that, especially in America, masculinity had reached a new crisis point. That was an opportunity for us to revisit the themes of the 'New Masculinity' issue, and ask a big group of American men some of the same questions we'd asked in 2019. What we found is that there definitely has been some degree of backlash to the elements of #MeToo that made men feel rebuked and chastised. But I really resist this idea that the old toxic masculinity has 'come back' in some way. Masculinity is not a pendulum that swings from toxic to woke and back again. We are in a new third space. Is there cause for concern, especially among young men who are chronically online? Yes. Is there reason for hope, especially as young men exhibit a new sensitivity and emotional intelligence that their grandfathers never could've dreamed of? Also yes.

The MAGA movement has been partly synonymous with young white American men, which also happens to be *GQ*'s traditional readership. When you refer to American masculinity being at a crisis point, has *GQ* engaged with the MAGA demographic to gauge their perspective?
I really hope that we are not just a voice of the progressive left speaking only to the progressive left. I have tried to construct *GQ* very carefully to avoid that. One of the first things I did with our daily web coverage was to get out of the business of soaking up traffic by talking about what an idiot Donald

'I resist this idea that the old toxic masculinity has 'come back'. Masculinity is not a pendulum that swings from toxic to woke and back again.'



Trump is every day – although I'm talking about the first administration here, not the current one; it's a different dynamic now – but there were a lot of rage clicks to be had by simply making fun of 'The Orange Man' every day. To me, all that was doing was further exacerbating the fundamental problem of stratification in American politics. We don't want to preach to the choir. If you want to read rage-baiting politics headlines you can go to every media outlet on Earth. Why do you need a men's fashion magazine to do that? It didn't make any sense. All of which is to say I've tried to make a point of having *GQ*'s position be niche, declarative, really clear. I believe that effective criticism needs to be constructive, and as we moved through the #MeToo movement it felt like very little of the criticism was constructive. It said what *not* to do, but there was very little information available, especially to young men, about how to move forward. That's what we were trying to do with the 'New Masculinity' issue. To say 'Yes, masculinity must change, but we're not just going to stop there. We're going to talk about *how* to actually move culture forward.'

What happened was there were all these men, especially young men who were like, 'Nobody is telling us *how* to understand this.' So a wild crew, primarily podcasters, stepped in to fill that void with some pretty gnarly points of view. They were able to attract very large audiences, despite the fact that most of them are engagement-baiting edgelords.[5] They were able to amass followings that almost made them mainstream. I do think that has brought us back to this crisis point in masculinity, and I do think *GQ* has been a more positive voice and outlet for some of those young men to engage with. At the same time, I don't think I did a good enough job of engaging some of the potential audience. We don't have a massive podcast, for instance, which we should do, so there are some things that my successor can come in and hopefully clean up.

What would your broader advice be to your successor?

I think there's an opportunity to look at a bunch of stuff that I've been doing and be like, 'That is tired.' I love that expression, 'Kill your darlings'. My successor needs to kill some of my darlings to be successful. I had the opportunity at a critical time to come in and make some changes that were, honestly, pretty self-evident. It's not because of my brilliance. It was quite obvious that the energy needed to shift, and now we're at a moment where *GQ* has the opportunity to shift again.

You mentioned before that you had Anna Wintour's backing to rip things up and do them your way. What has she taught you about being an editor?

For sure, Anna's been by far my biggest champion, and the most important person in the development of my career. And even though I've had a front row seat from which to observe her, there's still so much magic to what she does. How she's able to keep all of her plates spinning, for example. That mystery is kind of exciting and part of what makes her an icon. I'm just very proud that she didn't say, 'Go faster, Will' a single time in 2025, because every year prior, she has had to say that to me a lot.

Go faster in what respect?

I appreciate that it could come across as being pushy, but actually what she's saying is, 'You already know the answer. Quit dallying and execute on your instincts.' The way that she values gut editorial instincts and immediate execution without worrying has been a huge influence on me. One of the hallmarks of my era of *GQ* has been risk-taking. We've tried a lot of things, did some wild shit, and Anna was always pushing me for more of that, not less. Any time there's been controversy around the stories that we've made, she's the one that's always come to me and is like, 'This is great, everybody is talking about your cover.' Honestly, the job that I'm leaving is one in which I had total creative freedom and the full backing of the one person who has approval over what I'm doing and how I'm doing it. I recognise how rare an opportunity that is.

Still, your move away from *GQ* to working with Pharrell, from traditional media to brand side, and from New York to Paris, feels symbolic of where so much of the industry is heading.

I didn't go out seeking this. I've learned over the years that if you're just being yourself, sometimes a door opens in front of you, and as long as you're paying attention, it becomes clear that you're supposed to walk through that door. That's what happened. Me and Pharrell first met about 20 years ago, towards the end of my time at *The Fader*. I always had an enormous amount of respect for him, not only as a genuine fan of the music that he makes. Although I do remember the first time I ever heard a Pharrell beat: I was in my driveway in Atlanta, sitting in my 1989 Acura, with my brain feeling like it was coming out of my ears while Mystikal's song 'Shake Ya Ass' played on the radio. I was like, 'Holy shit, what is this? This is like the new James Brown.' The beat just had this swing.

How do you reconcile being a huge fan of Pharrell, and then becoming his professional partner?

I've always felt a connection to him as a person, and it's a relationship that's developed over time. We had a mutual friend, Sara Newkirk Simon, who used to be the co-head of music at WME. She represented Pharrell. Before that, she was a music manager who shared an office with *The Fader*. She just always had this intuition, and anytime the three of us were together she'd say, 'You two are going to work together in a different capacity one day.' Because of her stirring the pot a little bit, when he and I worked together on *GQ* stuff, he would just say, 'Whatever you want, I'll do it, I'm trusting you completely.' That led to the 'New Masculinity' cover, and then later, when Pharrell got the Louis Vuitton appointment, we did a global cover across all 20 editions of *GQ*. So it was an organic conversation that didn't start as like, 'Oh, I'm going to leave *GQ* to come work in partnership with you full-time.' But that's where we landed.

Tell me something about Pharrell that might be surprising to people.

A big part of what my role is going to be about is linked to the fact that he's so multidisciplinary. I had an a-ha moment when we photographed him for the 2024 *GQ* 'Men of the Year' issue. He was already living in Paris by then but we photographed him in LA. He wanted us to set up a photo studio in one of the recording studios he likes to make music at. My impression was that he'd come there specifically for our shoot. But whenever Pharrell moves anywhere, certainly when he's there, he puts all this other stuff around it. And so, it was only over the course of the day that I realised that this recording facility had all these other studios on the property. We were set up in one of them, but he had four different artists making music in four of the other studios on the property, and he'd just move around them, check in, and then go on to the next one. And so, the nature of his creativity is that it really kicks in when he's multitasking.

Our crew that day felt that we had total presence and commitment from Pharrell on our shoot. But, unbeknownst to us, he was actually doing all this other stuff at the same time. In fact, the only time when we were ready for him to start the next shot, but I couldn't find him, I found Amanda Silverman, his publicist, and I was like, 'We're ready for Pharrell, where is he?' And she was like, 'Oh, he's actually in the bathroom doing a *New York Times* interview. He just needs like six more minutes.' [Laughs] That was the only moment during the day where the fact that he was doing 17 other things slowed us down, and it slowed us down for six minutes. Besides that moment, it was almost imperceptible. So I think for a lot of us, creativity requires focus and concentration, but what I've learned about Pharrell is that he's at his most creative when he has seven different things happening at once. That's when he can elevate to a different place.

Broadly speaking, what can you tell me about the role?

The role, which will become more explicitly defined publicly in time, is to be across the creative output of all of Pharrell's activities, and to help lead those teams. To be a part of it, to help elevate things, and to lead.

When you say all his activities, you mean the music, Louis Vuitton menswear, all of these different things? What are the boundaries?

We're just going to figure it out by doing it together. I mean, I doubt he'll be asking me to help him program beats or to sew anything at Louis Vuitton [laughs], but it will touch music, fashion, everything.

Let's just get some sense of the actual breadth of his current activity…

He's obviously the men's creative director at Louis Vuitton. He is one of the greatest music producers of the last 30 years, if not *the* greatest, and he's got very interesting projects ahead on the music side. He has a decade-long Adidas partnership. He has film and TV projects. He has the wellness brand Humanrace and the auction and collectibles platform Joopiter. Plus a bunch of investments and portfolio companies across consumer and real estate.[6] I mean, really, the list goes on and on.

'Any time there's been controversy around the stories we've made, Anna's been the one saying, "This is great, everybody's talking about your cover."

'For a lot of us, creativity requires focus and concentration. Pharrell is at his most creative when he has seven different things happening at once.'

I'm still learning about some of the ventures. While he doesn't need any help with his creativity or his vision, one person can't run all of that at once. My understanding from our discussions is that one of the reasons he believes I can contribute is because over my 19 years at *GQ*, I was doing creative work that he thinks is good, while also running a large global team at a large global company, and being able to navigate all the corporate components of that. Pharrell, coming from music, has historically not, in the strictest definition, had a job – although I'm guessing this changed with the Louis Vuitton appointment. Whereas I very much *have* had a job. So to bring a little bit of that ability to be creative while being part of a company, hopefully I can contribute through that.

What new skills or experiences are you excited to be facing in this new role?
One of the most attractive things is that it's really the other side of the table from where I currently sit at *GQ*. As an editor, I'm looking at the creative output of artists, musicians, filmmakers, fashion brands, and thinking, 'Oh, that's interesting, there's a great story to tell here.' In this new role, I'm going to the other side. I've got to now help *make* the best stuff. So, rather than seeing those industries from the outside, I'm going to be part of them. That is an exciting challenge for me.

What will the metrics of success be in this new role?
From my conversations with Pharrell and his business partner, Penni, I think it's going to be three things that I care about very deeply. Number one is creative excellence, which includes innovation and sophistication. Number two is cultural impact. And then number three is bottom-line profit. In a lot of ways, those were the three standards that I've held myself to when I was in a media role. Editorial excellence, first, then truly having a cultural impact, you're not just reflecting culture, you're also shaping it. Number three, this is a business. At the end of the day, if you want to continue to do great journalism, you have to do it profitably

Lastly, where do you see the world of media going in the next, say, five years?
I'm actually quite bullish about the fate of media in the medium to long term. What I've observed over the years at *GQ* and at Condé Nast is that the audience still really values what media offers. That hasn't gone away. It's just gotten incredibly complex in terms of how to monetise it. But we were all participants in this shift. We were like, 'Well, we want engagement more than we want money so we are going to give everything we do away for free online.' In a way, it was the only choice because of the way the web and social media unfolded. That choice has had serious ramifications. The audience has proven that it still wants really good, sophisticated journalism, fashion media, et cetera and I think between that and what's coming with AI – what is *already* here with AI – is the value we place on the good stuff. Good, trustworthy, elevated, curated content. It hasn't gone away. But there hasn't been a new business model to bring it all forward… yet. To give an example, the music business was disrupted in exactly the same way. Napster came in about 25 years ago and suddenly the history of recorded music was free and available to download online. In a way, the media industry hasn't been able to do what the music industry was able to do, which was to find a technological solution to reconstitute music as a business after it had been disrupted by technology – like how Spotify and Universal Music Group have. I have no doubt that something similar is coming to the world of media. It's just a question of exactly when and exactly how.

1. Kim's Video and Music was a landmark video and music retail store in Manhattan, widely known as the 'go-to place for rare selections' of experimental and esoteric film and music. At its peak, there were six locations around Manhattan.

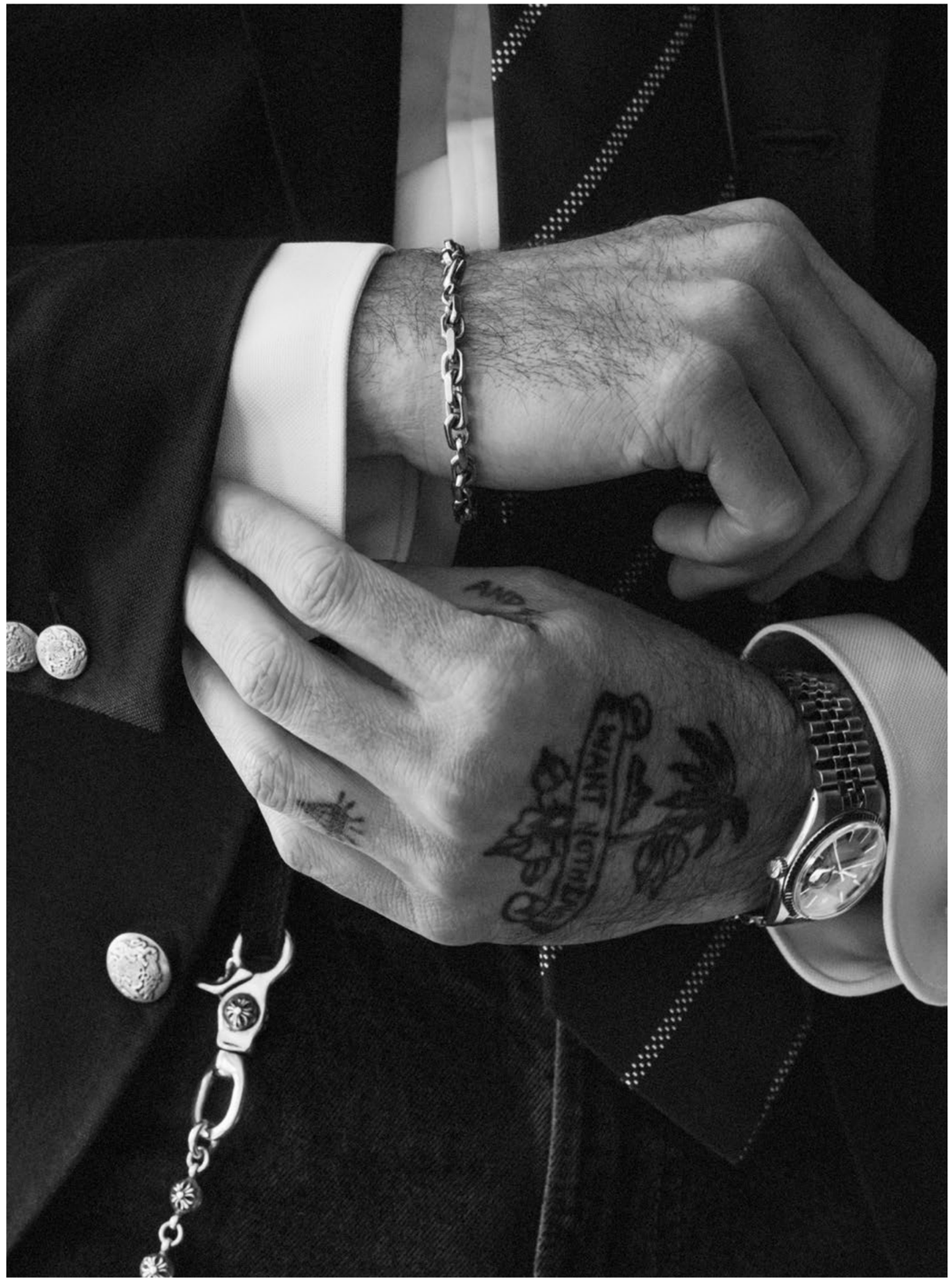
2. *The Fader* is a US-based music, culture and lifestyle magazine founded in 1999 by Rob Stone and Jon Cohen, known for spotlighting emerging artists, hip-hop, and indie culture, often before mainstream recognition.

3. Max Fish was a beloved Lower East Side bar and cultural hangout, originally opened on Ludlow Street in 1989 and later relocated to 120 Orchard Street. It was known for its cheap drinks, relaxed vibe and eclectic mix of patrons, doubling at times as an art gallery and music space that attracted locals, artists and celebrities. According to *The New York Times*, 'those who were there from Day 1 recalled a shoot for an opening sequence of *Saturday Night Live* being interrupted by a bomb threat, Iggy Pop visiting, and Bob Dylan parking a limousine out front.'

4. A story in The Business of Fashion entitled '*GQ* Says Goodbye to the Suit', published in January 2019.

5. An edgelord is someone, typically online, who tries to impress or shock by posting exaggerated opinions such as nihilism or extremist views. According to the Merriam-Webster.com online dictionary, the first known usage with this meaning was in 2013.

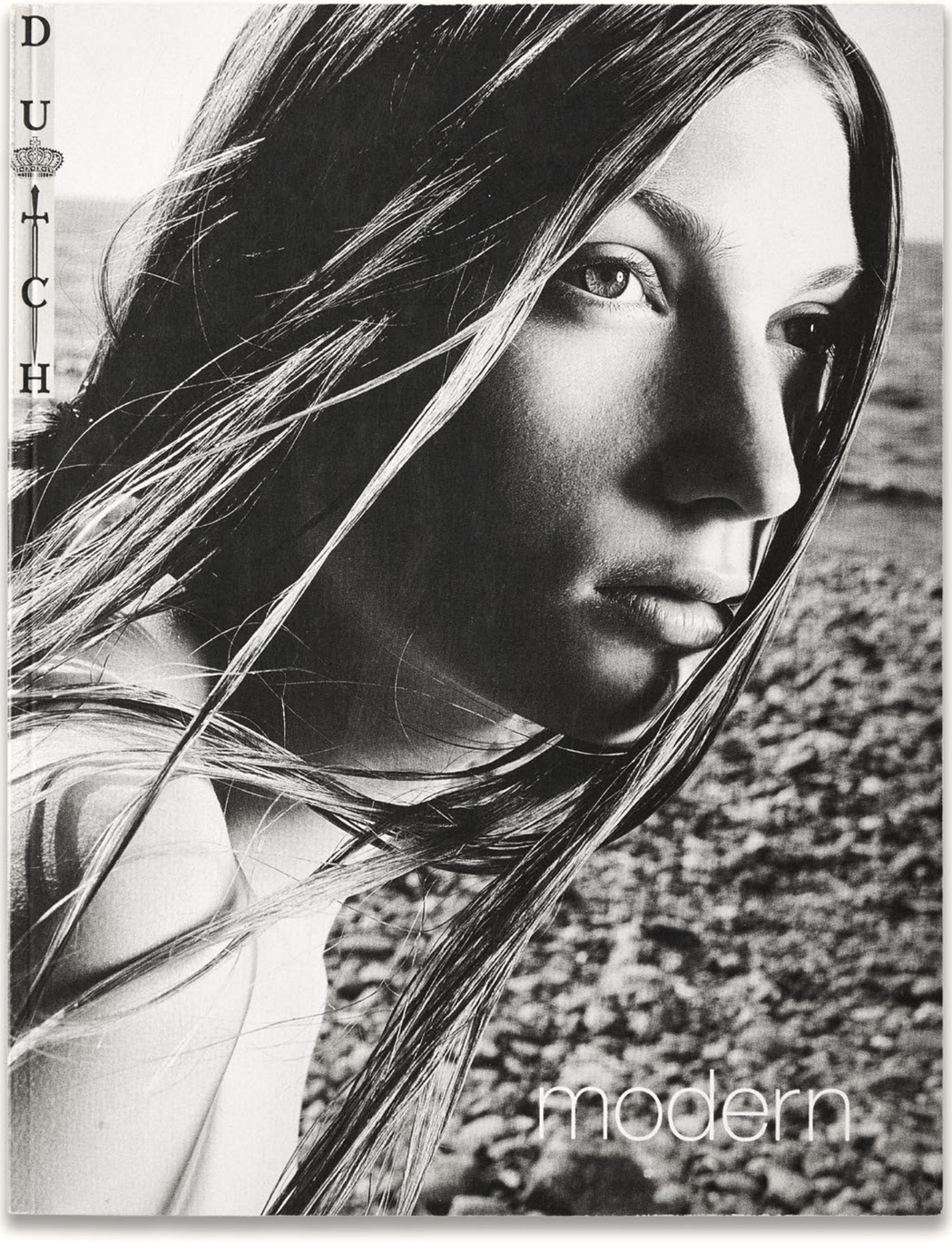
6. In recent years, Pharrell Williams has expanded his portfolio of operations to include hospitality and real estate, partnering with Miami nightlife expert David Grutman in 2021 to open The Goodtime Hotel, a 266-room destination in Miami Beach. In October 2024, Williams partnered with Mohari Hospitality and Omnam Investment Group to acquire the historic Hôtel Saint-James & Albany, a 17th-century five-star property in Paris's 1st *arrondissement* overlooking the Tuileries Gardens.



Groomer: Daniel LaRiviere. Post-production: Catalin at Gentle Touch Retouch.

‘The DNA of the magazine was freedom.’

That time when 1990s cult magazine *Dutch* shot an 82-page fashion story, with no fashion.



Interview by Thomas Lenthal

homosapiensmodernus

Some time ago, a fashion editor from another publication commented on the tremendous freedom we have here at Dutch. How lucky we were, she said, to have the choice to do whatever we liked editorially. True, it is an autonomy we created by ourselves, but it is one born out of the need for survival. Too much of everything – clothes, magazines, photographers, stylists, etc. – already existed in the global marketplace, therefore Dutch had to create its own niche, its own identity, if it was going to succeed. And, we have indeed been fortunate, because our advertisers have not only been supportive, but have encouraged this magazine to push the boundaries beyond the conventional.

For this issue, we are pushing the limits quite a bit further than usual, as our fashion pages do not feature any clothes on them at all.

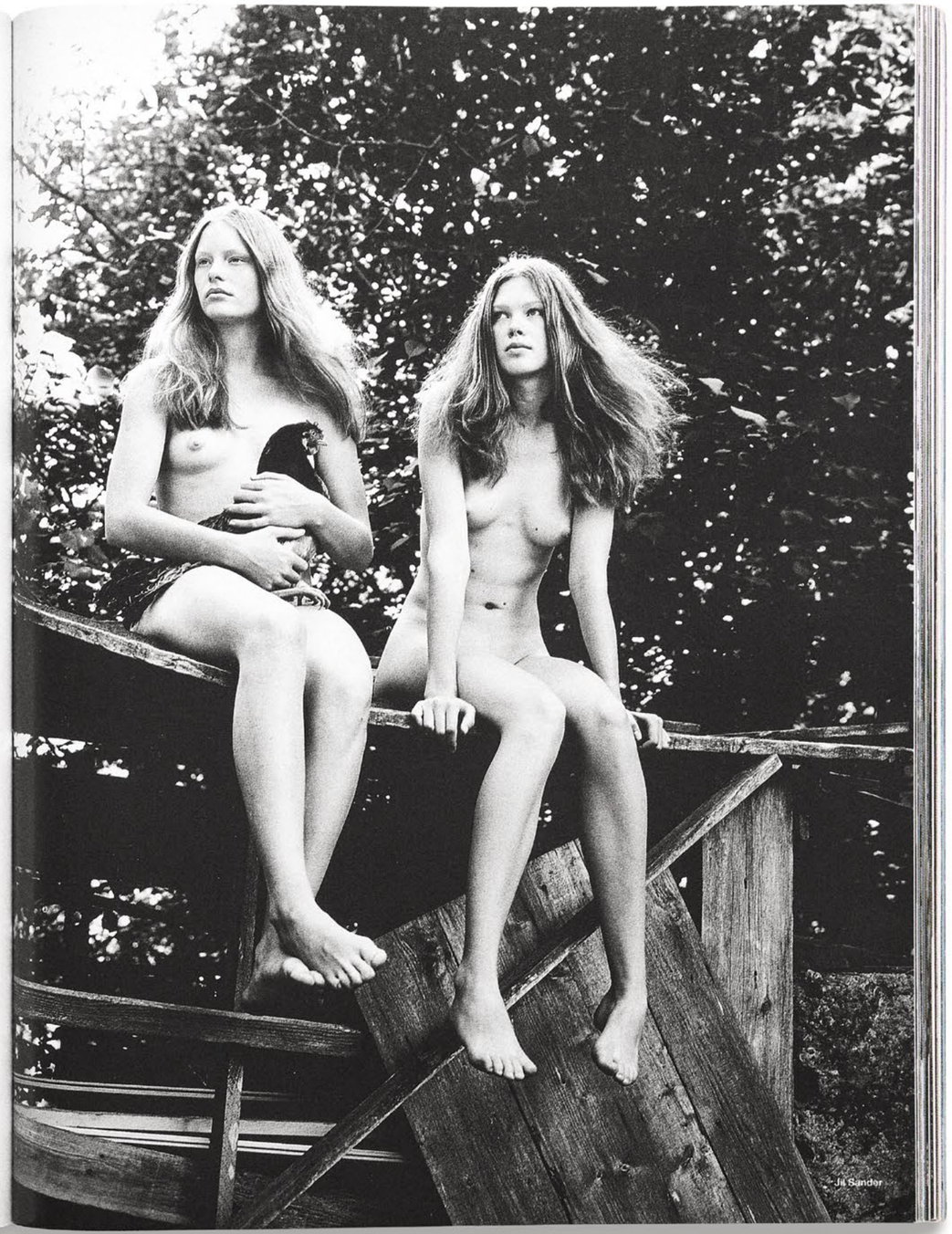
When I first asked Mikael Jansson to photograph 80 pages of fashion without clothes, I advised him to sit down, think about it and not respond right away. He immediately said yes, and then sat down. Jansson has created a story with a group of models that shed their clothes to show themselves in their purest, naked form. A story of such simplicity and beauty that it needs no explanation.

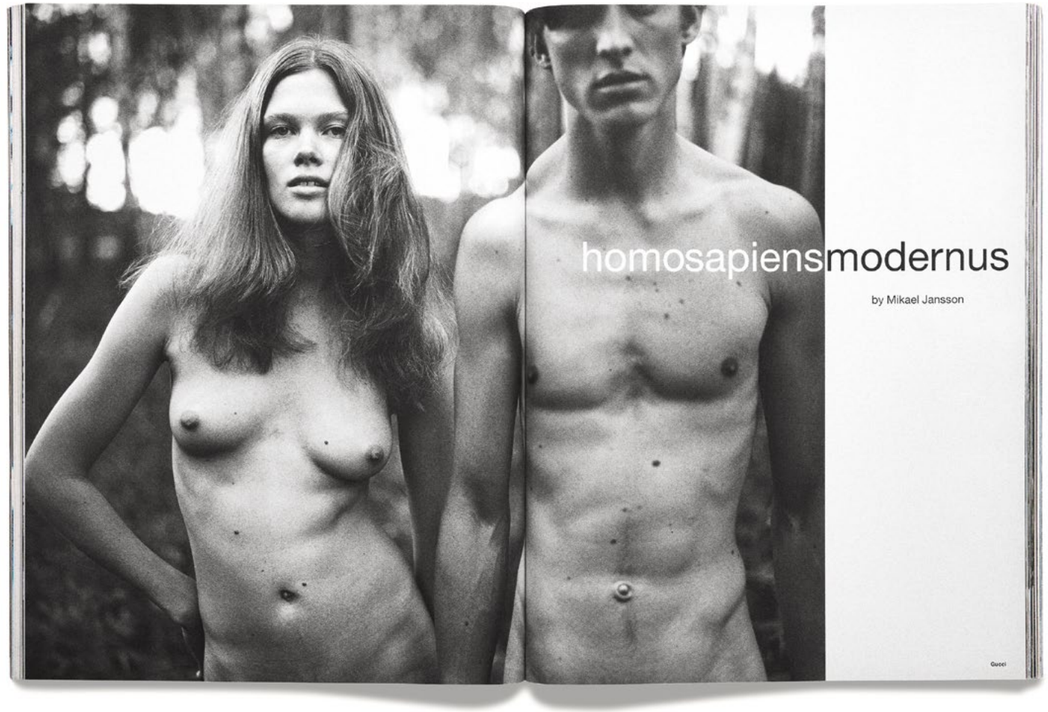
Dressed and covered in our daily clothes, we provide a shell, in which we can function and feel comfortable. Clothes can also make us feel confident, seductive and powerful, and depending on what outfits we choose, we can also create our own image. It is a game we play with others and ourselves.

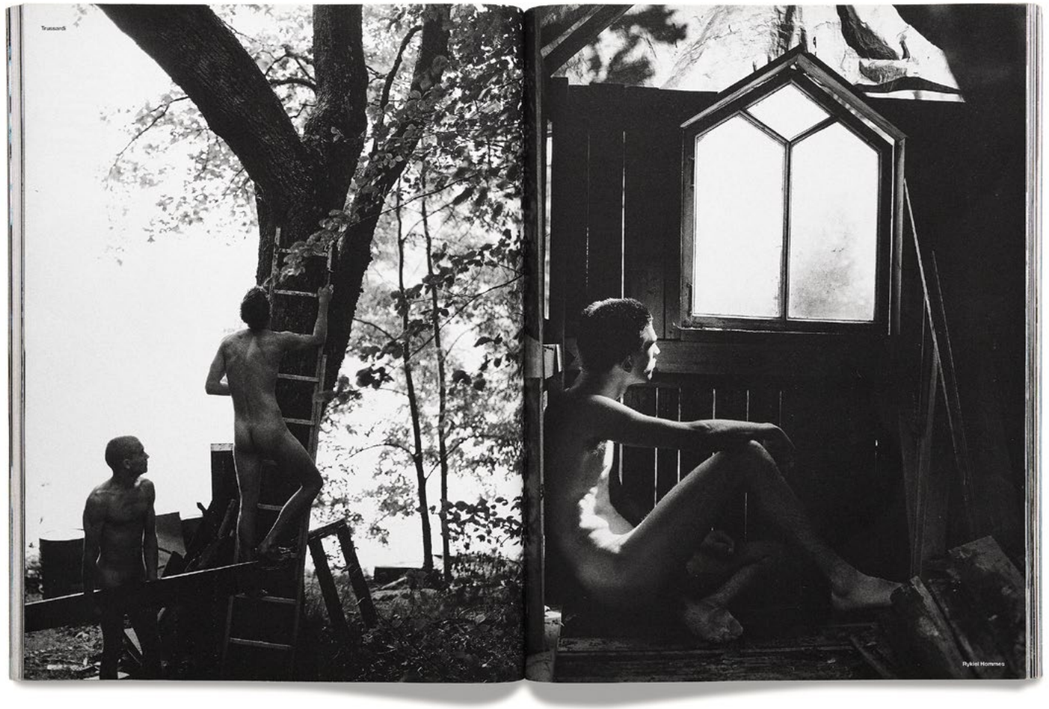
Take away the garments, accessories, etc. and what you have left is you. Vulnerable and transparent you. Being this fragile can be liberating in its own way, if you are honest and can accept who you are. To be ashamed of our bodies is sad, and to censor it in this day and age is even more of a mystery. Unfortunately, hypocrisy and pretence surround us. In some parts of the United States, for example, it is considered common to carry a gun, but to show a woman's nipple through a transparent blouse in a magazine brings a wave of protest from disgusted readers.

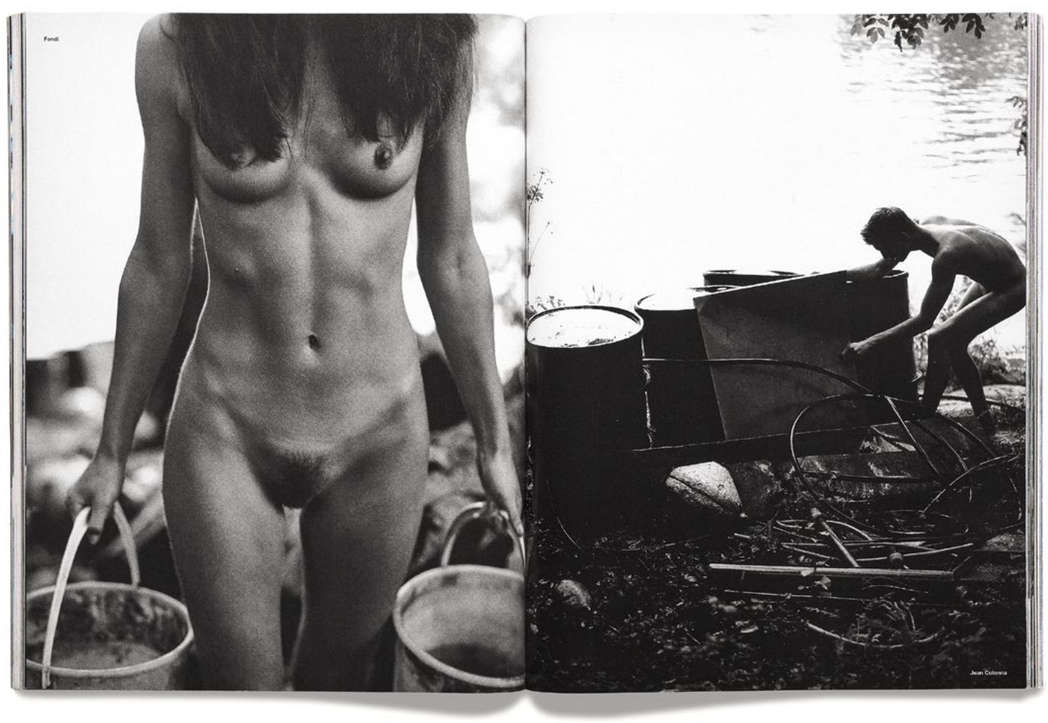
On the pages that follow, you will see a story that requires a certain imagination, since we have left the clothes to be filled in by you. We have merely provided the brands. The ultimate message, however, is one of freedom from censure, from fashion and from fear. It is a story which will hopefully make you realise that we as human beings are equal, but at the same time unique. Individuals with the potential to break free and make a difference. That is what homo sapiens modernus means to me.

Matthias Vriens
Editor in Chief



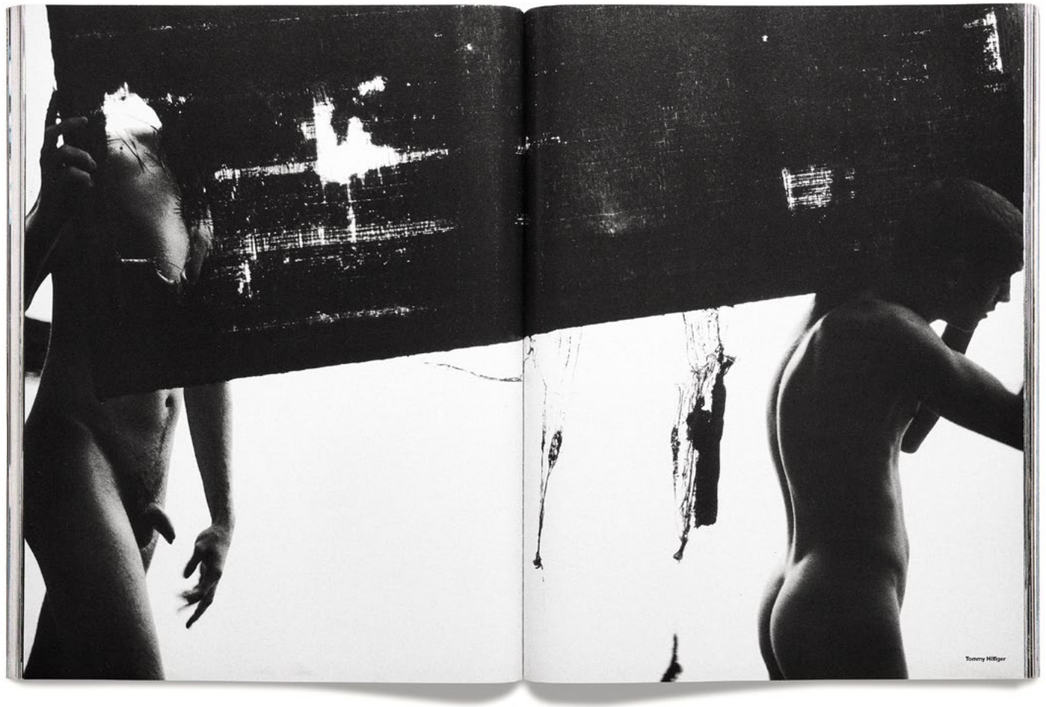

homosapiensmodernus
by Mikael Jansson
Gucci

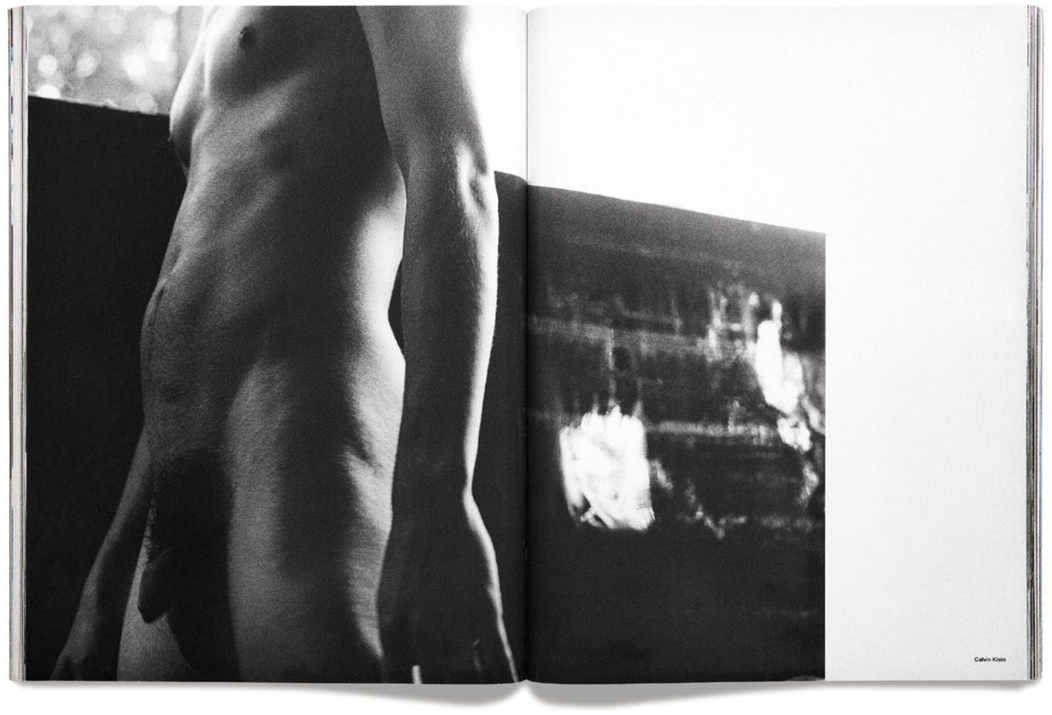

Transworld
Rykiel Homme

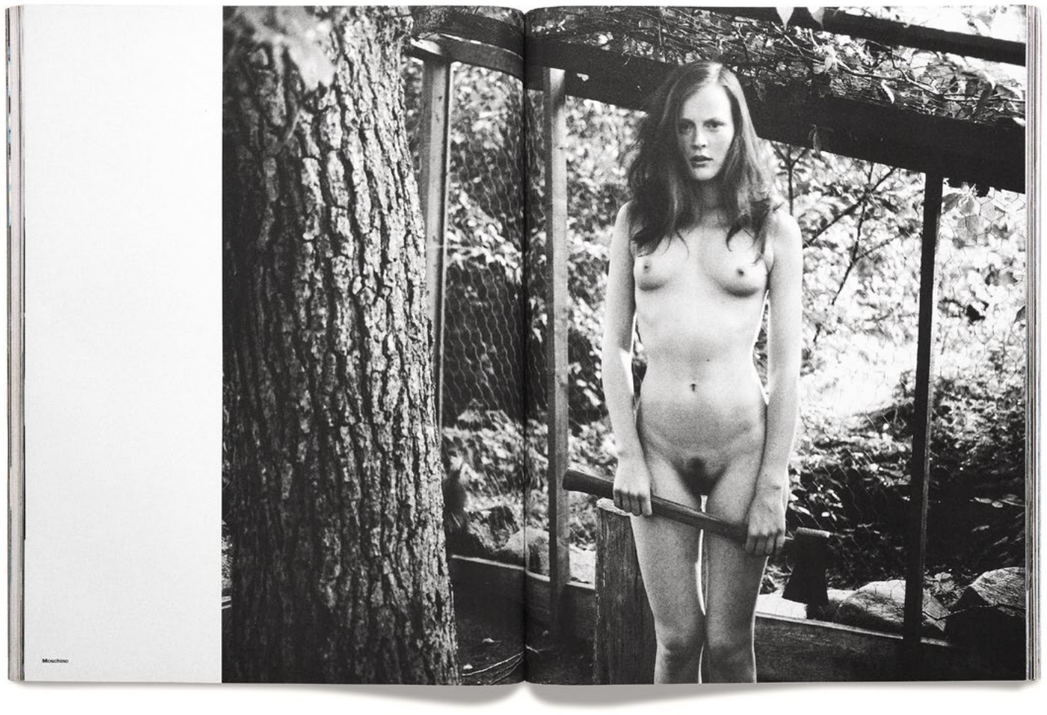

Fendi
Jean Colonna


Dries van Noten
Celine


Dolce & Gabanna


Tommy Hilfiger


Calvin Klein


Moschino



Exté



Plein Sud



Diesel



Diesel



Sportmax



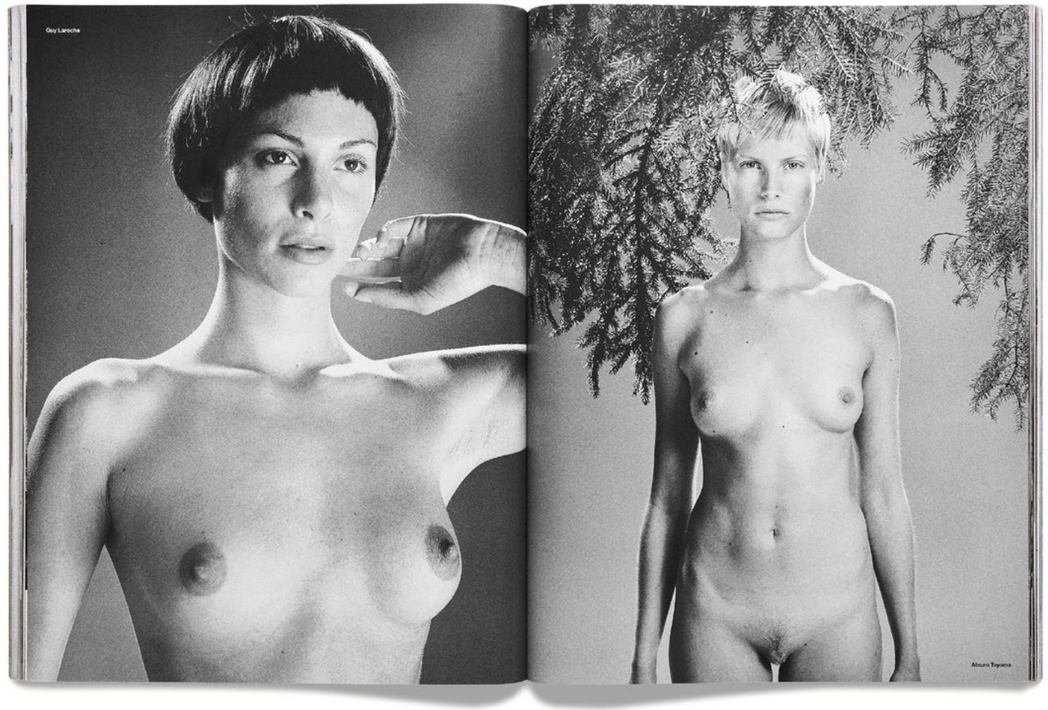
Cartier

Chanel



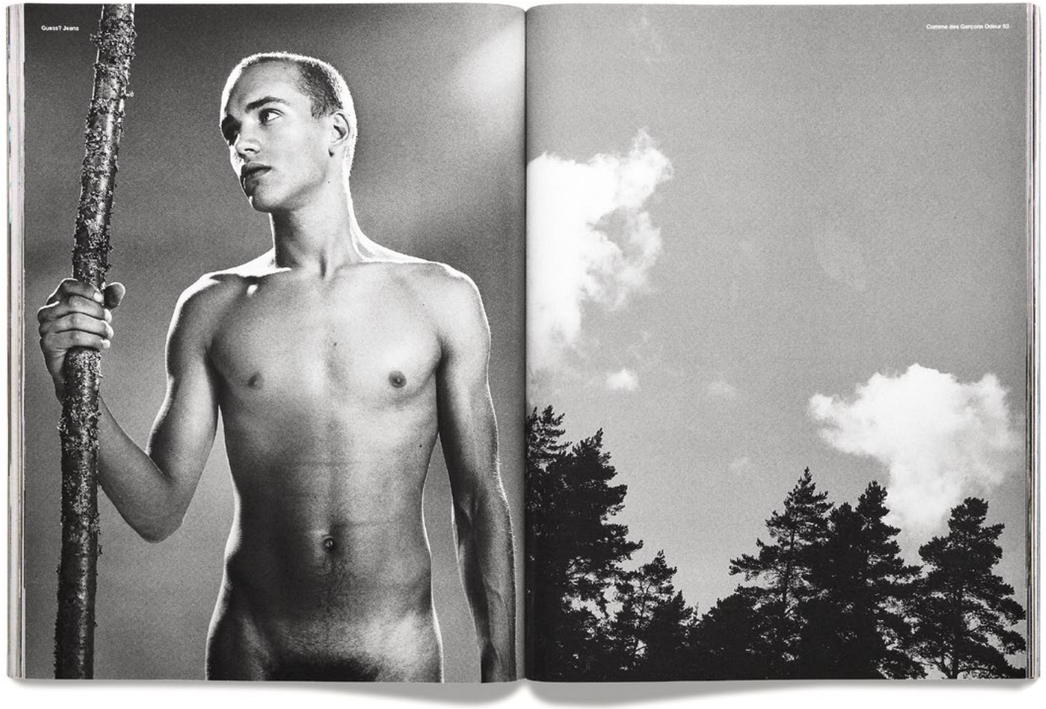
Marithé et Francois Girbaud

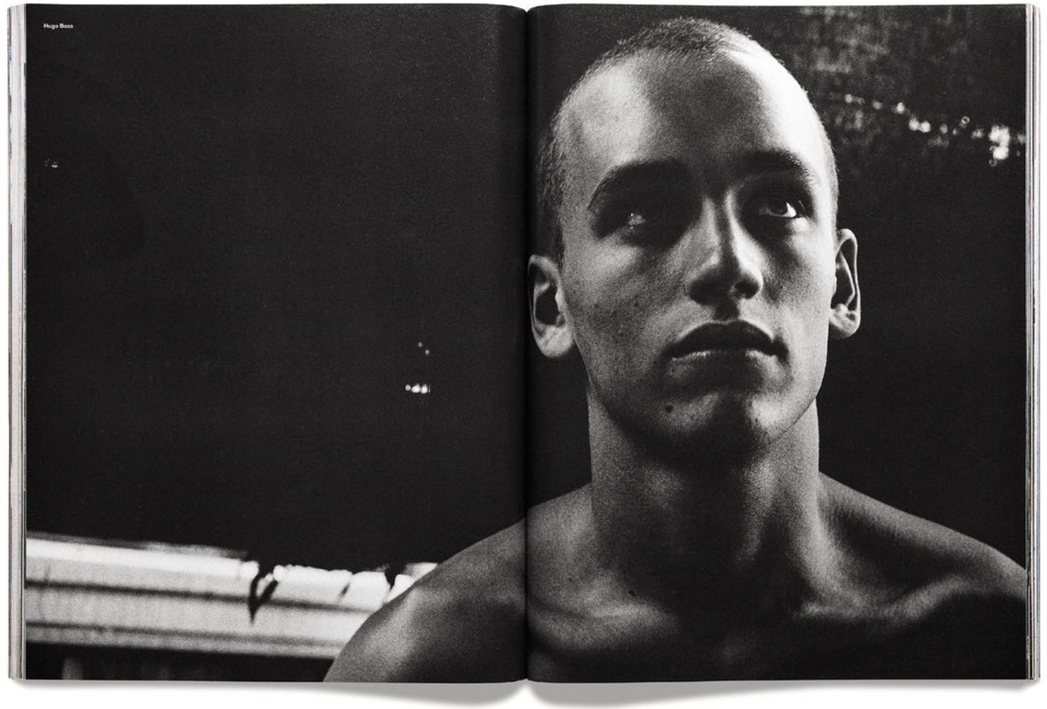
Chanel

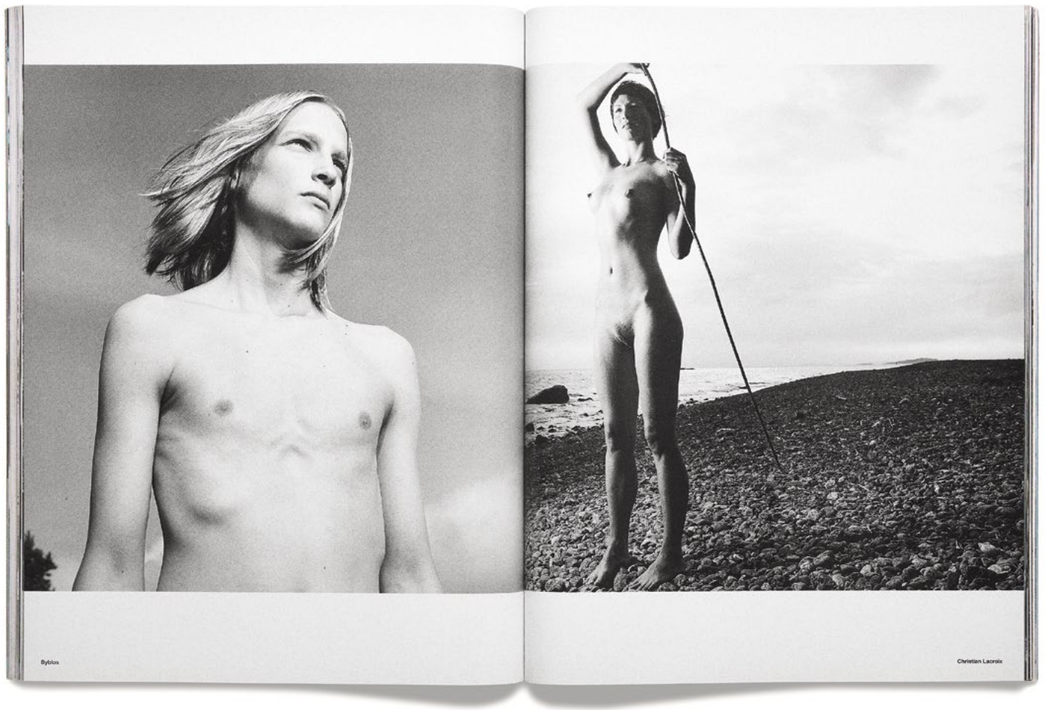


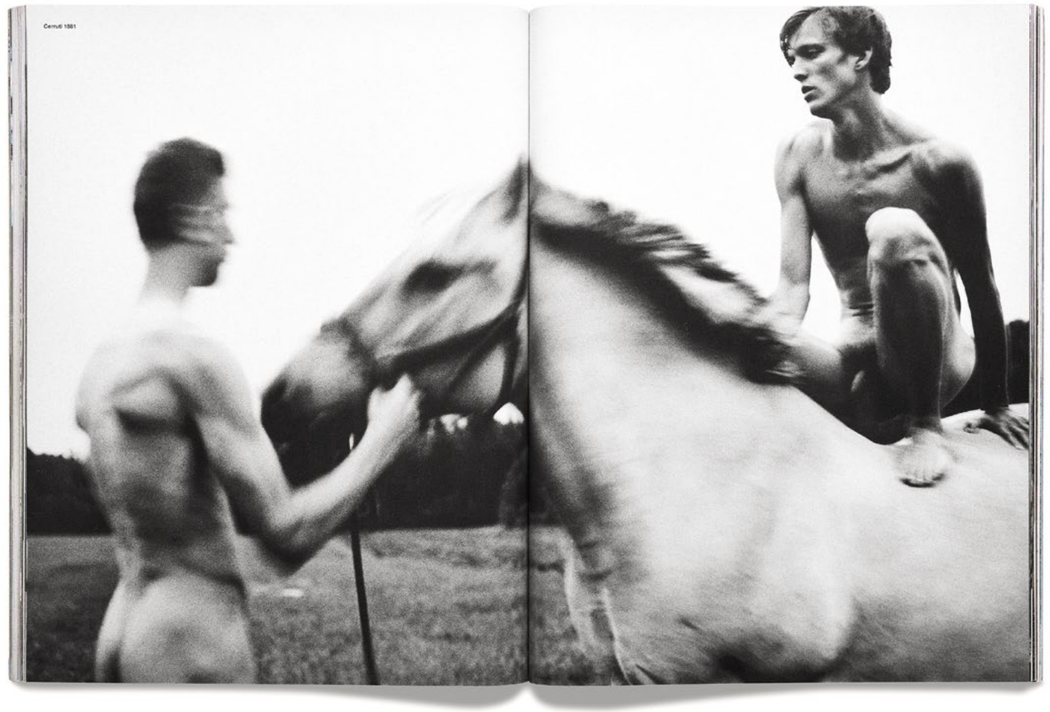
Guy Laroche

Atsuro Tayama

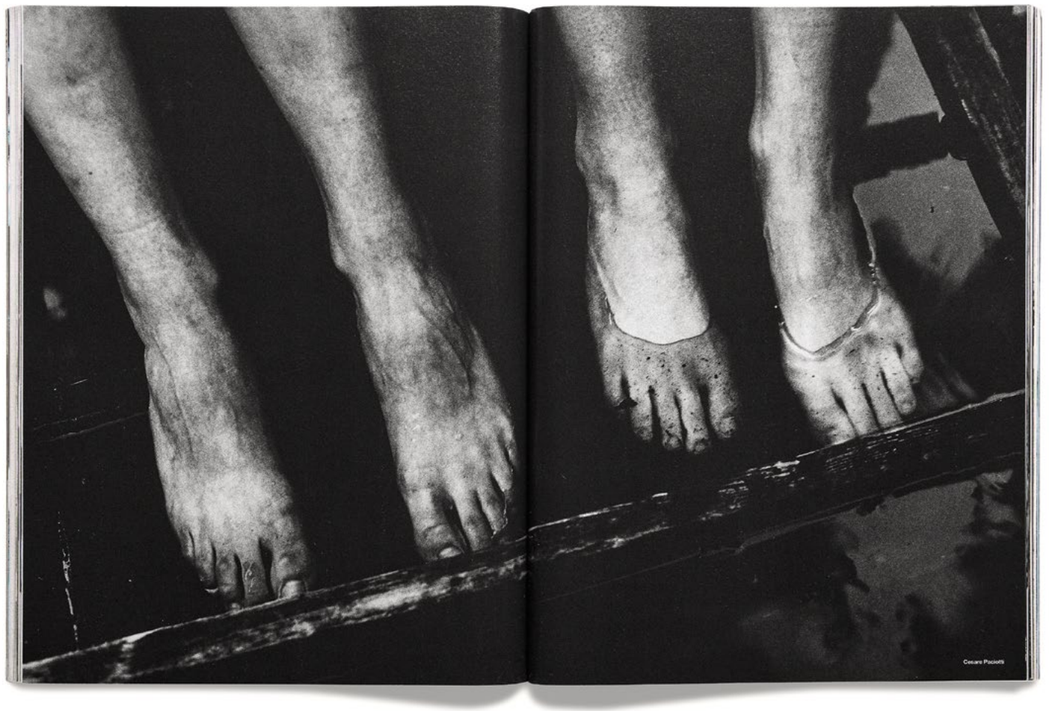

GuessT Jeans
Comme des Garçons Odeur 53

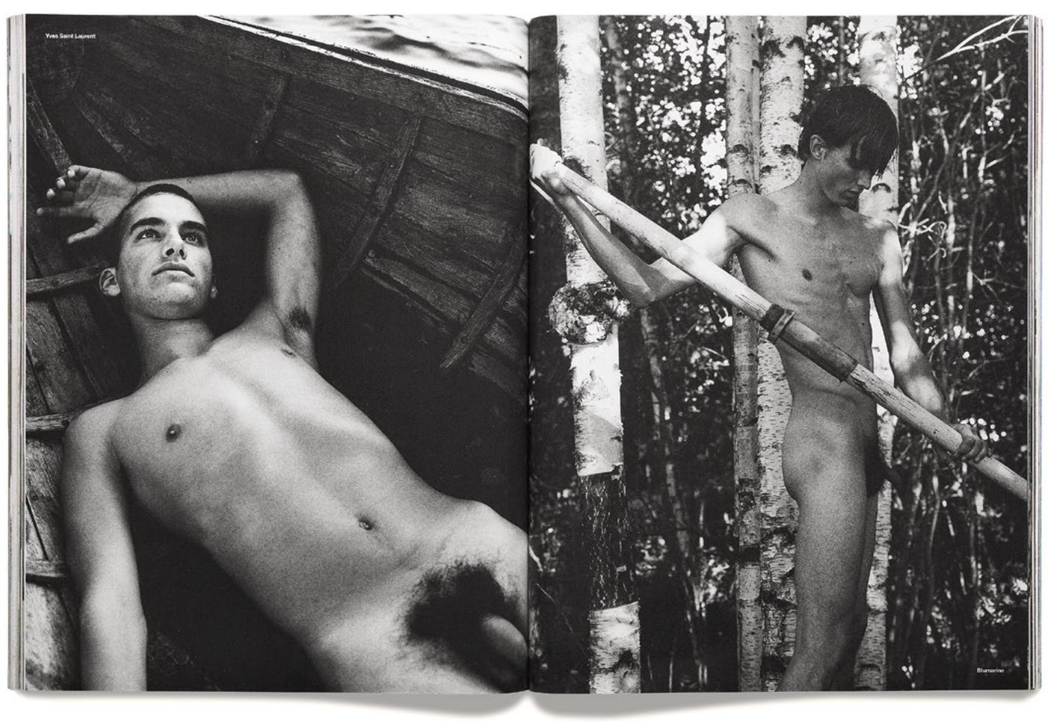

Hugo Boss


Byblos
Christian Lacroix


Cerruti 1881

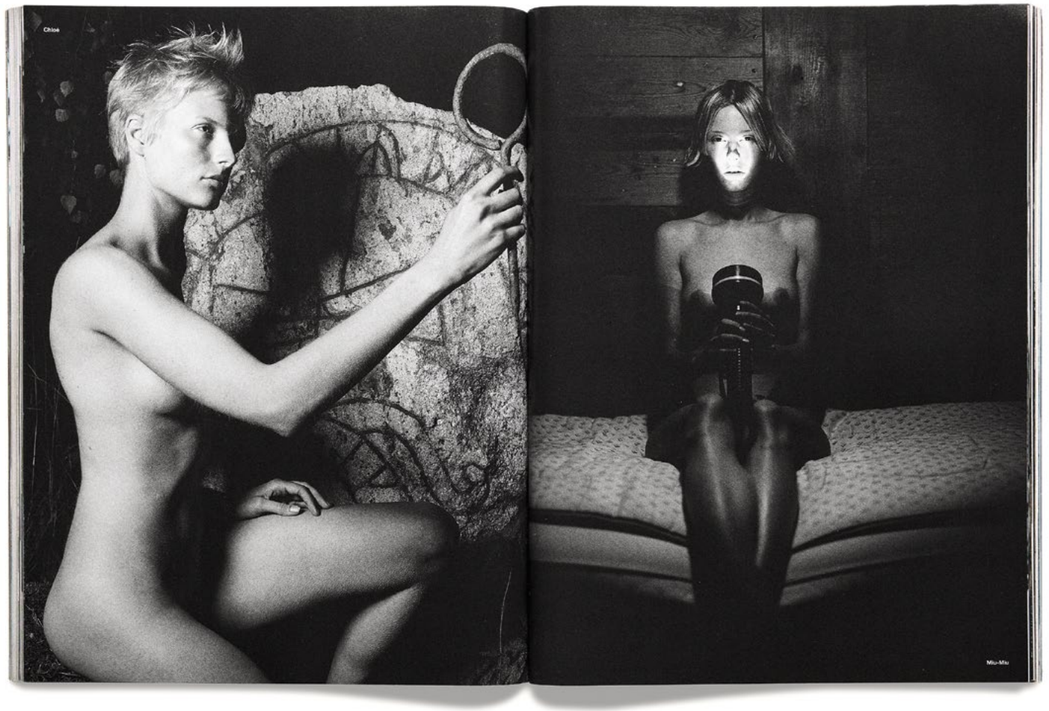

Missoni


Cesare Pacioti


Yves Saint Laurent
Blumarine

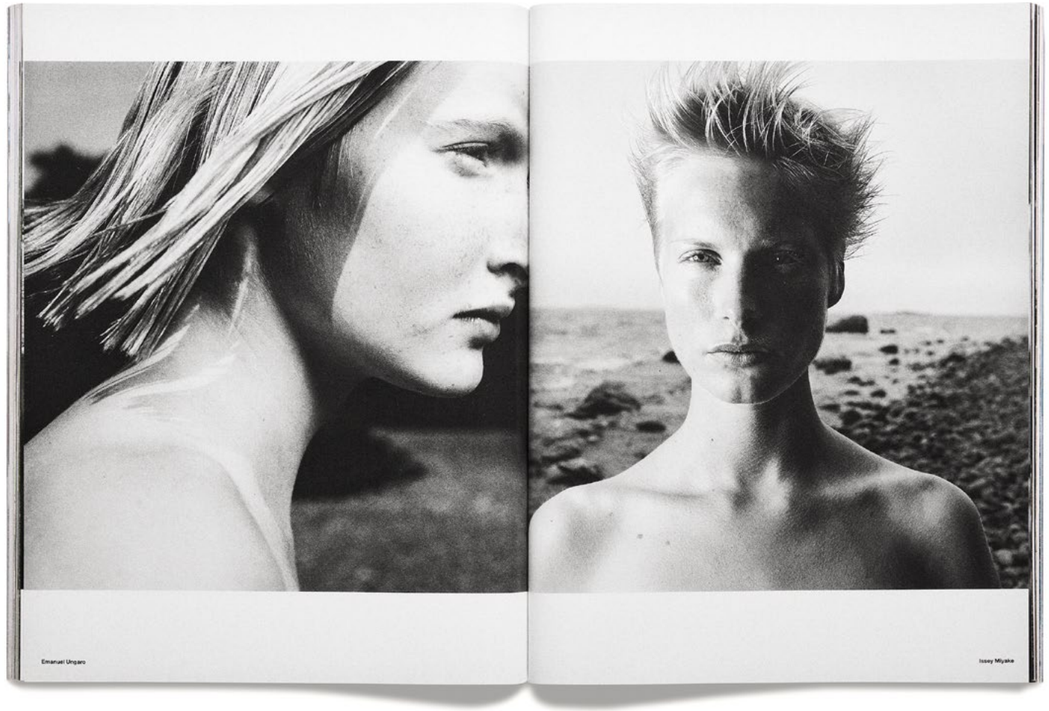

Extreme Polo Sport Ralph Lauren
Polo Jeans Ralph Lauren


Jean Paul Gaultier
Helmut Lang

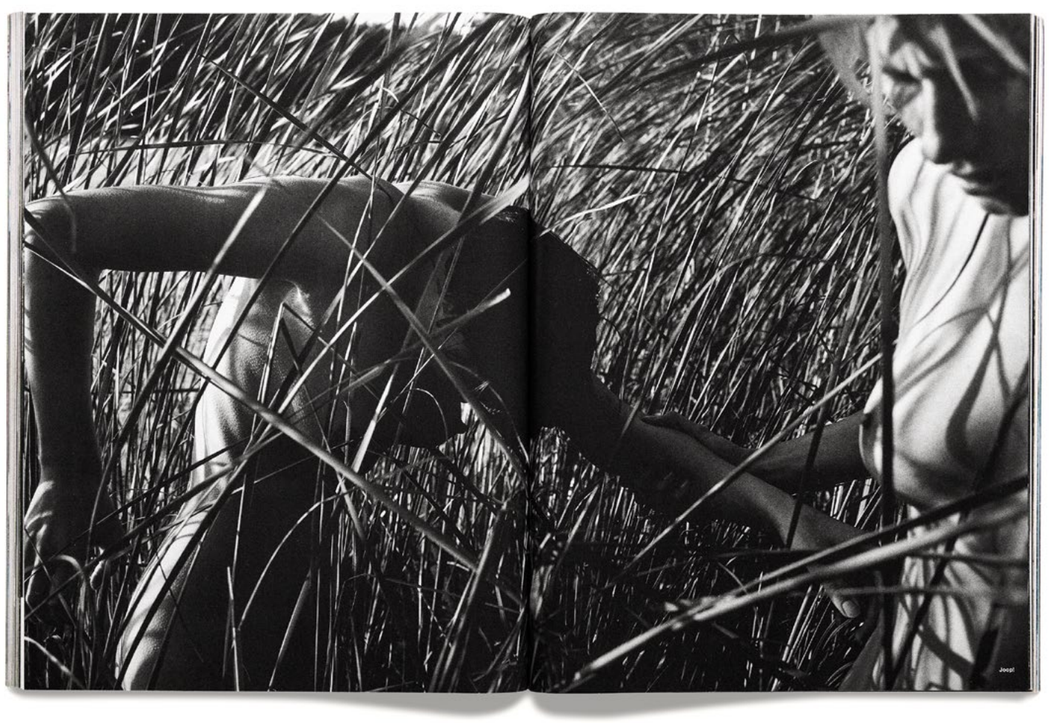

Chloé
Miu-Miu

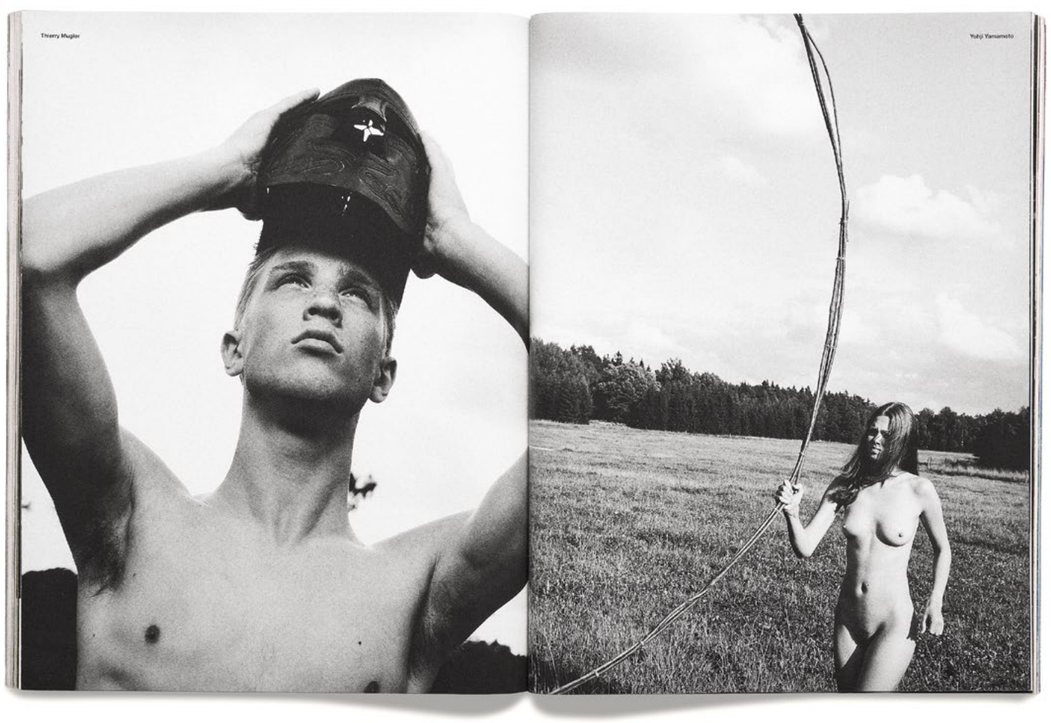

Dirk Bikkembergs
Hermès


Mako
Lanvin


Emanuel Ungaro
Issey Miyake

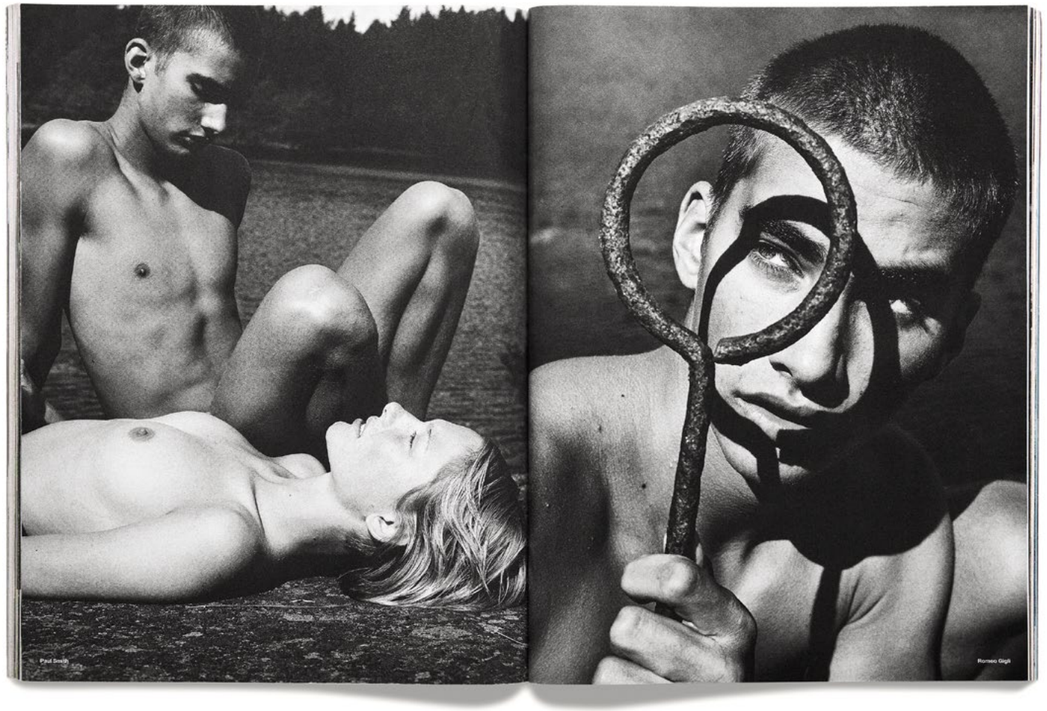

Joop!

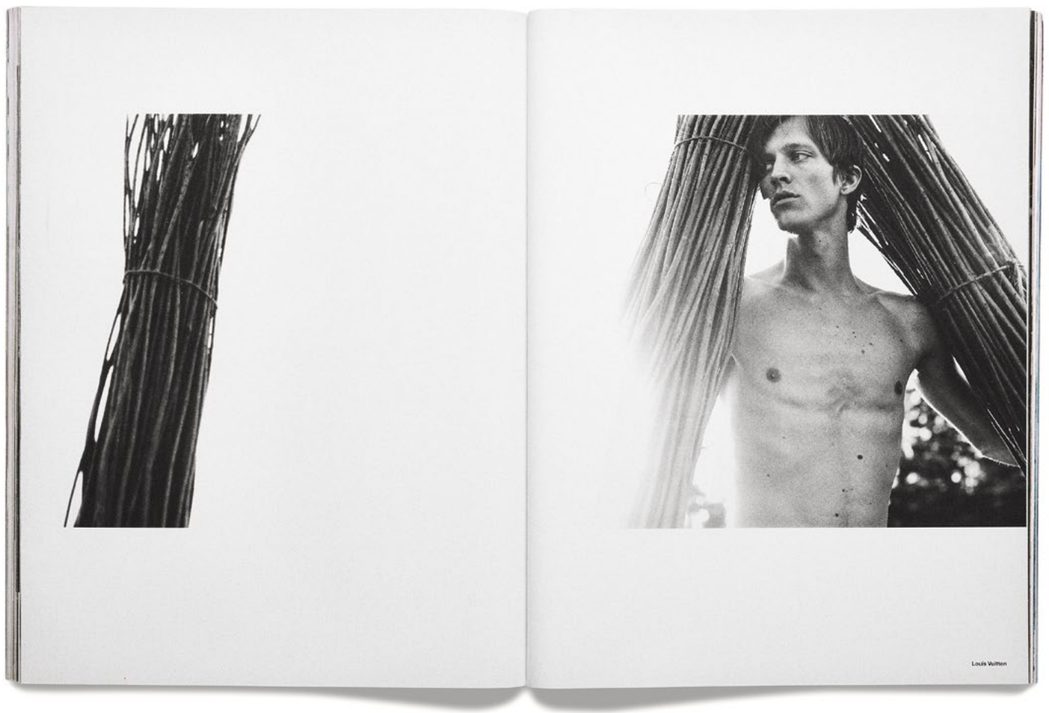

Joop!


Thierry Mugler
Yohji Yamamoto

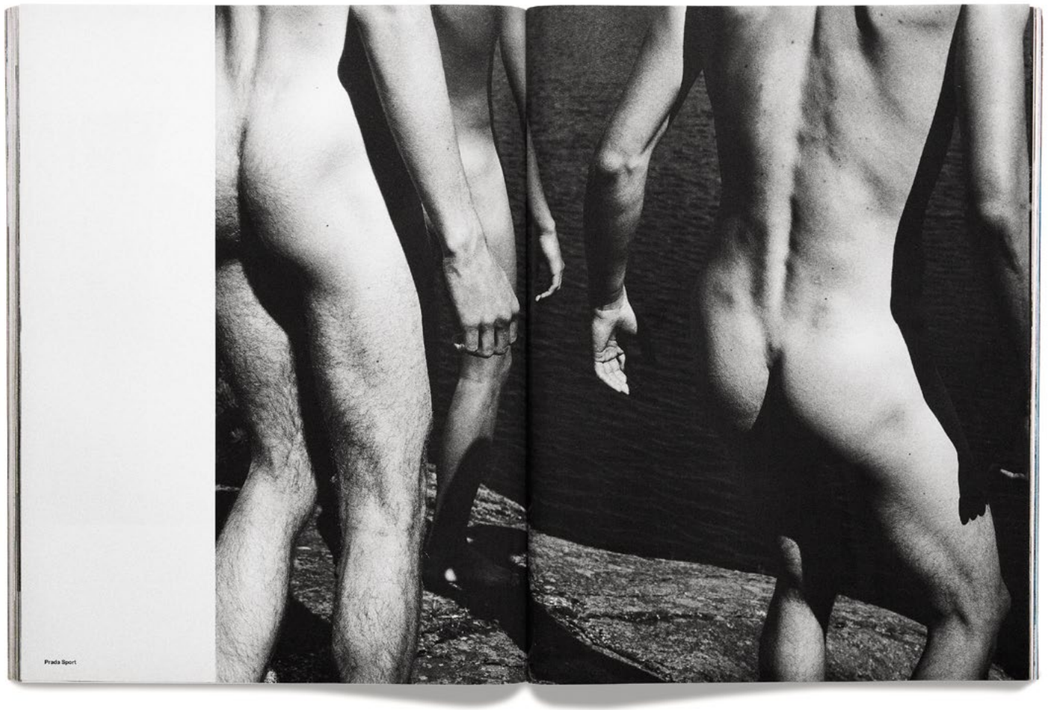

Iceberg Jeans
Iceberg Uomo


Zucca
Zucca

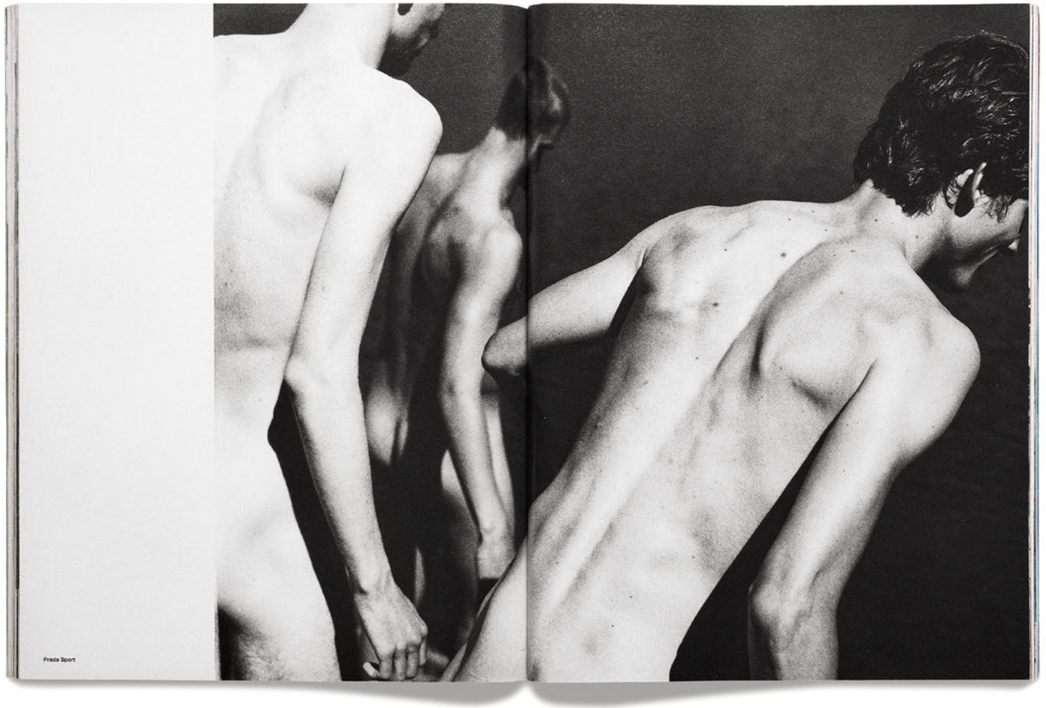

Paul Smith
Romeo Gigli


Louis Vuitton





Repro photographs by Ole Wei-Yang Ripper





In 1998, *Dutch* magazine published an issue that has since acquired the status of fashion world legend, shorthand for a particular kind of editorial audacity that feels harder to locate today. Instigated by the *Dutch* (and Dutch) editor and creative director Matthias Vriens, and titled simply 'Modern', the issue contained 82 pages of black-and-white photographs by Mikael Jansson: nude men and women photographed across the Stockholm archipelago. What made the portfolio so disruptive and indeed memorable, however, was not nudity alone, but the deadpan conceptual gesture attached to it. In the corner of every image sat a single fashion credit – Prada, Gucci, Helmut Lang, Chloé, Louis Vuitton… – despite the conspicuous absence of clothes.

The story behind the issue is, by

'With hardly any clothes available to shoot – everything was at *Vogue* – I came up with the idea to scrap all the fashion and shoot nudes with credits.'

now, well-rehearsed. Four years into *Dutch*'s run, Vriens found himself facing a familiar problem for independent magazines operating on the margins of the late-1990s fashion system (that has seen little change today): limited access to collections to shoot and budget. Rather than compromise, he removed the clothes altogether. What emerged was not an anti-fashion statement so much as a reframing of fashion's conditions – a recognition that image, desire and brand symbolism circulate even when garments do not. As the legendary curator and writer Vince Aletti later observed, the joke was subtle but insistent: even liberation, it seemed to suggest, required sponsorship.[1]

Seen in hindsight, the issue also reads as a precursor. Its matter-of-fact approach to nudity arrived many years before Mario Testino's Spring/Summer 2003 Gucci by Tom Ford campaign featuring a model with her pubic hair shaved into an angular Gucci 'G'. Yet unlike much of what followed, *Dutch*'s 'Modern' issue resisted spectacle. Nearly 30 years on, the issue continues to circulate as a reference point. To understand why it still resonates, *System* spoke with both Vriens and Jansson about the context and conditions that made it possible, the reactions it provoked at the time, and what it represented – and perhaps still represents – as a moment when fashion editorial briefly allowed itself a different relationship to freedom, humour and risk.

Thomas Lenthal: Let's go right back to the beginning. How did *Dutch*'s nude issue come about?

Matthias Vriens: The theme of the magazine was 'modern', so I started talking with the team about what is modern and what is not. We started making contradictions, for example having Barbara Cartland[2] give a quote about modernism, which seemed really quite farfetched, and then run that opposite an artist like Tracey Emin, who wrote an amazing email about modernism. When it came to the fashion story, I had something quite different in mind, looking at the clothes of, for example, Helmut Lang. However, even though *Dutch* was pretty popular we didn't have the dominance of *Harper's Bazaar* or *Vogue Paris* or American *Vogue*. I recall being in the Michèle Montagne [PR agency] showroom, and there being hardly anything available to shoot. Everything was at *Vogue Paris*, the entire fashion content. That already opened up a few doors because what photographer *doesn't* like that idea? I knew at the time Mikael was working with a stylist that I quite liked as well, Kari Hirvonen, and that he created magical work with him. So, I said, 'I want you and Kari to create something that goes beyond fashion. Because, as a matter of fact, there will be no fashion.'

I had a call with Mikael, and he wasn't quite sure. Then I went to Stockholm, and I explained it in person much better than I did over the phone. He was very enthusiastic and said yes. Then we started contemplating. Because you can say: 'We solved the problem, we have a bunch of nude kids, and there we go.' And even though I love to provoke – maybe that's a very Dutch thing – provocation for provocation's sake is too who'd hold on to it for three months, or American *Vogue* who'd keep it for six months. So, for me, there were some scraps left. Then it came to budget, availability, and so on. It became pretty stressful and impossible to actually get five or six shoots together, which, as you know, takes time and organisation. Our budget was also upside down. I had a couple of sleepless nights and then, again, pondered upon the question: 'What is modern?' I came up with the idea to scrap all the fashion and shoot nudes with credits. The ideal person that immediately came to mind was Mikael Jansson.

What did you tell Mikael exactly? How did you pitch it to him?

Matthias: I remember I had a very specific idea in mind, that he would shoot

'I love to provoke – maybe that's a Dutch thing – but provocation for provocation's sake is too easy. Having a reason to provoke in an elegant way is smarter.'

easy. Having a reason to provoke in an elegant way is much smarter.

Mikael Jansson: I thought it was very inspiring, I didn't recall it as being a provocation! I thought it was just a really fun idea.

Matthias: It was provocative because there's male and female nudity. When it comes to female nudity, it's not that shocking. But when it comes to male nudity, I think that still, even today, it's very much a taboo, because we are used to seeing nudes of girls. Mikael played around with these kids for a couple of weeks on the archipelago islands,[3] and I had seen some Polaroids, but then the prints arrived. Keep in mind that he is a fantastic photographer, and Mikael's also from the school of Richard Avedon, he used to be his assistant.[4] So I'd sit in my office, and these gigantic boxes would come wrapped in plastic, foil and tissue paper, and you would get these huge, beautiful prints. It was an absolute joy. It was better than my birthday and Christmas at the same time, like a visual orgasm. Working with Mikael is one of the best things that I've done as an art director, as an editor. The result was groundbreaking, tremendous beauty.

What Mikael managed to achieve is a feeling that it really doesn't matter if there is a naked girl or boy in front of you. I think the essence of beauty and poetry within the structure of these pictures is so full and so radiant that I think we really managed to bring something extraordinary. That said, I felt a little sketchy about bringing this magazine around to some people. One in particular was Karl Lagerfeld, because around the time there'd been a couple of lawsuits for misuse of the Chanel logo. Karl saw the issue, sent me back a couple of signed prints and books and said it was the best issue he'd seen in a long, long time. And we became pretty thick friends after that.

Mikael, what was the working dynamic like on set? How did you or Kari interact with the models?

Mikael: Kari was very involved. He came up with all these funny props, and we had all this junk; almost like they were building something. We had this little treehouse, and they were climbing up the treehouse, up the ladder. That was his thing, that the models had things to do and to carry.

When it comes to the tactfulness of Mikael's approach, do you think that comes from Scandinavian culture and its rapport with the bare body? Let's put it this way: you wouldn't have got that from an Italian photographer. It would have been quite different.

Matthias: Yes, it would have been different. If you look at the 1960s, the way Nordic countries had an openness towards sexuality, and even pornography – it was pretty significant. I remember my father's drawers full of Scandinavian porn. I think there is this Scandinavian beauty within the structure of the pictures, this being one with nature that really spreads out through the story.

Mikael: Growing up, nudity was a natural thing. When you were at summer camp or on public beaches, it was not a big deal to be nude. In films by Bergman or others coming out in the 1950s and 1960s, they had that same thing.

Out of interest, was there anybody other than Mikael that you had in mind? Mario [Testino], for instance.

Matthias: I'm a big fan of Mario's photography, but he would not have worked because it would have been almost Italian in the sense that it would have been far more erotic. Even though I am a big fan of anything erotic, I thought that would have been too easy. What Mikael created was this ethereal beauty that went beyond nudity. I think in that way we won big time. If I look at the story now, 27, 28 years later, it's still very modern, it's still valid.

Mikael, had you shot nudes before?

Mikael: Definitely. This was 1998 and I started on my own in 1987. I shot a lot of nudes when I started, and it was a completely natural thing to do.

Did you have any references or was it a natural continuation of those nudes?

Mikael: When I started to think about how to do it, I wanted to work with people that I knew would be comfortable. I worked quite closely with a modelling agency at the time, so I was transparent; even if the times were very different from now, it was still important for me that they felt comfortable. Many of the models that I photographed I had met before. I thought [being in] nature was important as well. I shot everything around my summer house in the archipelago. The whole thing felt very personal, how I was setting it up.

Like inviting a bunch of people to your house to spend a couple of days.

Mikael: Yes. We were around my house. The chickens [in the pictures] were my

chickens, but then we were also in the surrounding neighbourhood and on a friend's island where she had a house. We didn't know how many pictures we'd shoot, Matthias didn't give me a page count or anything. We ended up with 82 pages and he published all of them.

How many models were there on set?
Mikael: About 15 altogether, I think.

I remember seeing it for the first time. Beyond the fact that I thought it was just so clever and beautiful, it had an extra layer of intelligence because every picture carried the perfect credit. You'd be like, 'Yes, of course, this is very Ralph Lauren, this one is obviously Calvin Klein, and this is Chanel.'
Matthias: Exactly. I really played with them for a couple of days. Two girls braiding each other's hair – so it looked like knitwear, and that was Missoni. A girl with a hairy pussy carrying two buckets was Fendi. The guy splashing his face with water was Polo Ralph Lauren, and so on. I'm glad it came across. It was a bit like a puzzle, you know?

That's where it became as much a Matthias story as a Mikael story.
Matthias: That's kind of you to say. I think it's 100% Mikael Jansson. But had he not gotten the opportunity to shoot this, I don't think he would have shot that for any other magazine because, again, the freedom that we created within editorial is what we thrived on. That became the one reason we could still exist and get money from advertisers. The DNA of the magazine was freedom. If we would have done what *Numéro* or any other magazine was doing, we would have been a B choice and we would not have done a good job. Just like today, the market was very saturated. So that was our survival mode.

Was the issue commercially successful?
Matthias: Very. I don't think I ever made such a flattering editorial with all the advertisers in there, you know? Every advertiser that we were working with, or were hoping to tempt into working with us, was in there. That's a bit of a contradiction because there was literally nothing available. But I think everybody that had a credit in the magazine was incredibly happy, and everybody that didn't was pissed off, believe me.
Mikael: I didn't really think it was going to be a big thing. I thought about this afterwards, if the fashion houses or the brands would be offended by it, but I didn't think about it at the time.

Did you get a lot of people calling you saying: 'This is really great'?
Mikael: Even today, people always still refer to that shoot. Every time I meet Marie-Amélie [Sauvé], for example, she's like, 'Oh, that story you did!' It was positive, but it's been growing over time.

Matthias, did this issue trigger an interest for your work beyond the roster of people you were already working with?
Matthias: I'm a strange one. I like what I do, but I don't necessarily hunt down results or connections through that. I'm a very private person, even though that seems like quite a bit of a contradiction, because my own work as a photographer is very outgoing – talking about sexuality and nudity most of the time, and very strongly so. But like Karl, he would work on something, do it and then drop it. And as you very well know yourself, you work so hard on an issue and then it's out. For me it's always a bit of an anticlimax. You move on and then you're already in the production of the next issue. I never really had this moment of, like: 'Let's sit down and enjoy this one.' I did enjoy it, but I don't know if this issue opened up doors that weren't already open.

What do you remember about the fashion magazine landscape in the mid-to-late 1990s? How did *Dutch* sit within or stand apart from that environment?
Matthias: It was part of that great lot: *i-D*, *The Face, Self Service*, and *Purple*. *Dutch* fit in there nicely and was an equal even though it was different. I think *Dutch* was perceived as one of the leading alternative magazines because we were *really* alternative. We didn't have a dime. I'm proud that we managed to make something that was equal to those other magazines.

Do you think there's a legacy to the 'Modern' issue within fashion and image-making today? Being the first of its kind, opening certain doors or making certain things more acceptable? This was six years before the Gucci pubic hair campaign.[5]
Matthias: I'm sure that you've experienced it in your life as well, where you have an idea for your magazine, and then you see somebody else did it before you. And then everybody else seems to do it. I always see that within the stretch of collections, all of a sudden everybody has a red glove or fur or whatever. I think it was a moment in time that collectively was on this platform and co-existed within that stretch. I don't think I invented anything. Did it change anything? I think we have not progressed. We have regressed. I don't want to sound like a Debbie Downer and be too negative, but there isn't a single fashion campaign today that I'm really blown away by. It's all very, very, very safe. We've gone backwards, and I don't think the 'Modern' issue would really be possible today.

'Every advertiser that had a credit in the magazine was incredibly happy with what we did, and everybody that didn't was pissed off.'

Good point, probably not.
Matthias: I think it's actually the perfect time to do it again. I once made an artwork with my ex-boyfriend Francesco Vezzoli. We did a remake of a trailer for *Caligula*. I worked with a bunch of really incredible people, including Gore Vidal.[6] He said something along the lines of: 'People say there are horrible times right now. The world has always been a horrible time.' And that is indeed the case. Right now there are horrible times for sure, and we're also aware of it immediately. That is the big difference. It's an absolute moment of anarchy. And I don't mean anarchy in the sense of me running around the rue du Cherche-Midi naked with a black flag burning. No, it's a moment of extreme artistry and saying what is important and beautiful. Maybe in my case that is to a very niche audience. But that was also the case with *Dutch*. It wasn't for everybody. I remember that Tom Ford had said *Dutch* was his favourite magazine, and he would give a couple of issues to André Leon Talley, who in turn would sneak them into Anna [Wintour]'s office, and then Anna would later complain to Hamish [Bowles]: 'I don't know why he's giving me this gay magazine.' *Dutch* was not a gay magazine. It had male nudity. It portrayed men in different ways than you would see in *GQ* or *Esquire*. That was already groundbreaking then.

Did you see the current Versace campaign made up of nudes?
Matthias: Yes. If anybody has a vocabulary within the stretch of the brand of sexuality, it is Versace. It's Italian and it's colourful and it's about sex and seduction and luxury and all of it.

You started working with Armani right after *Dutch*. Why did you stop *Dutch*, or did *Dutch* itself stop?
Matthias: I left at the very height of it. To be honest, I wasn't making any money. Through Robert Triefus[7] I was offered the title of worldwide creative director of Armani. It was kind of like a hallucination. It was the first time I was offered a really great salary. So, I jumped. The reason that I jumped is that I really didn't see much of a future for *Dutch,* unfortunately. The founder [Sandor Lubbe] had sold the majority of shares to a Dutch publishing company [Audax]. We already had a very small budget, and it became smaller and smaller. So, I was like, 'OK, it feels a bit like the Titanic.'

I started looking for other stuff. I even spoke to Gardner Bellanger at one point, when she was still head of Condé Nast in France. She was interested and said something that upset me at the time, but in retrospect, I really understand. She said, 'Matthias we're very interested in buying *Dutch*, but we can't buy *Dutch* because we can't buy you. And *you* are the magazine.' After I left, little by little the advertisers left. It's not that it was a bad magazine. There were some really great issues, but it became more of a regular fashion magazine. Issues like the 'Nude' issue or the 'Fur' issue or even a 'Sports' issue, those weren't happening anymore. As we've already mentioned, the market for magazines is and has always been very, very saturated. If you don't have a couple of million dollars behind you, you are an alternative magazine, and you've got to really turn things around a couple of times before you manage to keep your head above the water.

1. In his 2019 book *Issues: A History of Photography in Fashion Magazines*, in an entry on this seminal shoot, Vince Aletti wrote, 'Simple, subtle, insistent: even liberation needs sponsorship. *Dutch* prided itself on its unconventional approach to fashion, but it couldn't afford to alienate advertisers. Still, satire is always a risk. In this case, it spurred an unexpected coup.'

2. Dame Barbara Cartland, who almost exclusively wore vibrant coral pink outfits, was born in 1901 and wrote 723 books in her lifetime, of which 644 were romance novels, many of them historical. Her first novel, *Jigsaw*, was published when Cartland was 22, and she never seemed to run out of steam afterwards, writing about 6,000 words per afternoon and delivering a novel at an almost monthly pace.

3. The Stockholm archipelago is the second-largest in the Baltic Sea, after Finland, and consists of over 24,000 islands, islets and skerries (a reef or rocky island). Björn Ulvaeus and Benny Andersson reportedly wrote most of their songs for ABBA in an archipelago cabin.

4. Mikael Jansson worked as Richard Avedon's assistant for roughly two years, starting in 1984, during Avedon's work on the American West.

5. For a 2003 Tom Ford-era Gucci ad, photographer Mario Testino shot a picture of Carmen Kass exposing the letter 'G' shaven into her pubic hair. Mediawatch UK tried and failed to get the ad banned, and in February that year, *The Guardian* reported: 'The advert sparked a rush of tabloid condemnation, with the *Daily Mail* columnist Bel Mooney condemning its creators as 'no better than pimps and those who advertise sexual services in phone boxes.'

6. Gore Vidal is often regarded as one of the premier American essayists of the 20th century. He was a frequent contributor to *The New York Review of Books* and won the National Book Award for Nonfiction in 1993 for *United States: Essays 1952–1992*.

7. Robert Triefus is currently the president and CEO of Stone Island. Before that, he spent almost 18 years at Gucci after having led the marketing and communications department at Giorgio Armani from 1999-2008.

‘The best fashion show is the one you see every day in the streets of Paris.’

Alexandre Mattiussi on the city that made AMI.

Interview by Marta Represa
Photographs by Jack Day
Styling by Elodie David-Touboul



All clothing and accessories by AMI Paris
Autumn/Winter 2026-2027.














DON'T
FORGET
TO LOVE


THANK YOU
FOR BEING
A FRIEND


THANK YOU
FOR BEING
A FRIEND







Models: Gertrud Rose at Noah MGMT, Rosalieke Fuchs at Elite, Raf Pineus at Viva, Lucien Le Nevé at Premium. Casting director: Piergiorgio Del Moro – DM Casting.
Hair: Benjamin Muller at MA Talent. Make-up: Adrien Pinault at Bryant Artists. Manicurist: Alexandra Janowski at Bryant Artists. Production: AP Studio. Executive producer: Marie Godeau. Production manager: Nora Moutawahid.
Production coordinator: Marine Becker. Photography assistants: Joseph Reddy, Quentin Farriol. Digital operators: Adrien Brianchon, Yann Gauthier. Styling assistants: Pauline Charriere, Mathias Tichadou.
Hair assistant: Mills Mouchopeda. Make-up assistant: Fay Bio-Toura. Manicurist assistant: Cecilia Hameir. Production assistants: Alphonse Emery, Foucauld De Kergorlay, Paul Gourragne.

Alexandre Mattiussi opens the door to his Parisian office, Dyson vacuum in hand. 'We were just selecting fabrics; you can't imagine the mess that makes,' he explains. The room is a luminous, lived-in space overlooking the Place des Victoires. In it, there are racks of clothes, stacks of books and vases with fresh flowers sent by Mona Tougaard and other models right after his Ami Paris Autumn/Winter 2026-2027 show. A large, egg-shaped sculpture balances precariously at the edge of a chair. 'It's an allegory of what our business used to be like,' he says. 'Now it's more like that other piece,' pointing to a vase teetering over a large metal spring next to his desk. Over the past 15 years, the Ami Paris founder has seen his company grow from an up-and-coming independent label to an international powerhouse. While here to 'kill it',' he says. 'I'm here to offer something that feels soft, warm and welcoming.' In the following conversation, Mattiussi sits down with *System* to discuss the inextricable bond between Ami and Paris, and between Paris and Ami.

Marta Represa: What was your creative vision when you first started Ami Paris?
Alexandre Mattiussi: The brand was born in October 2010, with the first collection released in January 2011. Back then, I had just finished a 10-year stint working for Dior, Givenchy and Marc Jacobs.[1] All of them luxury houses, creating wonderful things, but living in a reality very different to my own. So my vision was a very simple one: I wanted to make the kind of clothes I would wear. I mean, I love clothes, who doesn't? I love thrifting, I love vintage, I love wearing something simple like a fleece with jeans and sneakers. Most of all, I love the intimacy that develops in one's relationships with one's clothes. That's what I wanted to make: something real and pragmatic.

How did that vision evolve over time?
It pretty much changed as my personal experiences changed, the kind of life stuff that nurtures creativity. At times I have been more disconnected from that initial vision, inspired by the industry, the fashion system and commerciality, to get out of my comfort zone. I've been tempted by a more couture-like approach, for instance. I've done embroidery and transparent [designs]. Would I do it again? Probably not, but it was cool to try. I don't regret any of it. At the end of the day, I always find myself going back to my roots, especially over the last three years. Even when, like today, I choose fabrics from a big box of samples, I tend to go for the ones I've chosen before. I work with them differently, finding new ways of draping, cutting and styling them. That's why this season's show invite was a Rubik's Cube, to symbolise the many possible combinations.[2]

Is it a matter of longevity versus trends?
Well, I received an Instagram comment the other day about our last show, which said: 'Nothing new under the sun, this already exists.' And yes, this already exists, and that's OK! Ami is about style rather than fashion, and I'm perfectly content with that. Because we all know how fashion works nowadays: it's too fast, we have no time to adapt, to understand and to savour a particular trend before a new one takes over. As a designer, the more you are of the moment, the faster the moment passes you by. We have seen the most extraordinary talents being sidelined after a while, as if their aesthetic is no longer the *dernier cri* and so they had nothing of value to offer, no interesting stories to tell. I'd rather stay clear of all that and do my own thing.

You launched womenswear in 2018. How did it find its way into the heart of the brand?
I always worked as a menswear designer and launched Ami as a menswear brand, but we realised women were shopping the collections too. Not that that's groundbreaking, because women have always worn men's clothing. But an emotional bond was forming, which is why we created *l'homme pour*

'That whole hipster vibe, tartan shirts, beanies, artisanal coffee shops… There was an opportunity to explore that, giving it a uniquely French spin.'

the company was officially launched in 2010, the trademark for the name goes back to 2002. 'You could say the brand has existed, in a way, since my childhood. *Ami*, meaning 'friend' in French, is simply a contraction of the first, middle and last letters of my name, and it's how I've always signed my name – and I knew I'd do something with it one day.'

The latest collection is a perfect encapsulation of Ami's ethos, featuring an ensemble of wide-proportioned suits worn with generous coats and comfortable sneakers, Canadian tuxedoes with argyle cardigans and embroidered caps, and sweatpants audaciously mixed with crisp cotton poplin shirts and Mongolian-hair coats. The French designer is well aware of his place in an industry often consumed by trends, speed and the meme-ification of clothes. 'I'm not

la femme: men's clothes that were lightly altered in terms of detail, proportions and sizing. Caroline de Maigret was the first woman to wear Ami on the catwalk, back in 2014, and since the concept worked we decided to launch womenswear. So it all happened organically.

Let's talk about Paris.
What can I say? Ami is inspired by and designed in Paris. I have been a Parisian for the last 28 years. My God, my interns are younger than that!

Parisian style has changed quite a lot since 2010. Do you remember how things were back then?
I remember Ami was born at the height of the hipster years. For most men, that was their fashion awakening. Not that there weren't interesting propositions that were inherently Parisian: there was that very rock and roll look that Hedi Slimane had created for Dior Homme; there was Riccardo [Tisci] at Givenchy. But most menswear felt very classic and the landscape was nowhere near what it is today. But that whole hipster vibe, with the tartan shirts, the beanies, the artisanal coffee shops… We saw there was an opportunity to explore that, giving it a uniquely French spin.

In what ways has Parisian style changed since then?
It's more relaxed. Remember what heels used to be like? Now, I don't see women wearing over eight centimetres. In many ways, though, there's been a sense of continuity. This season, one of our show looks consisted of a *marinière* jumper with a camel coat and light trousers, worn by a long-haired model. The minute I glanced at the photo on the moodboard, I realised I had seen that before. Guess what: a Google search revealed that our very first look in our very first 2011 show consisted of a *marinière* jumper, a camel coat and light trousers, worn by a long-haired model! The changes have happened in terms of proportions, fabric feel and comfort more than the look itself. In French, we say *c'est dans les vieux pots qu'on fait la meilleure confiture*: 'old jars contain the best jam'.

Do you feel like Ami is a reflection of the ways in which Parisian style is evolving, or is it more of an anticipation?
That's not for me to say! What I can say is that when I was about to launch the brand in 2010, I made a booklet; a sort of manifesto for what I wanted Ami to be. There were photos of Daniel Buren's columns at Palais Royal,[3] of Saint-Germain-des-Prés. In it, I wrote that I wished to one day dress Louis Garrel, Vincent Cassel, Romain Duris, Étienne Daho… And they have all become clients! Whether that's anticipation or reflection I don't know.

How do you reconcile the Parisianness you sell to Parisians with the the Parisianness you sell to, say, Asian markets?
Honestly, I think sometimes I overplay my hand. I can exaggerate. But Paris makes such an extraordinary postcard! It's cinematic, it's historical, and – above all – it's dreamy. You wake up in the morning and think *quand même*! Every day I come here to the Place des Victoires and realise how lucky I am. I'm inspired by everything: the Louis XIV statue, the roofs. After all, Paris is an amusement park, just like Disneyland. You go to Montmartre, it's an attraction. The Eiffel Tower – which, by the way, I only visited for the first time two years ago – an attraction. The 20th *arrondissement*, where I'm moving to shortly, it's *le vieux Paris*; you feel like Edith Piaf could make an appearance at any point. It's what we call in French *un joyeux bordel* [joyful mess]. It's cosmopolitan, bourgeois, rich. And at the same time it's lively and popular, with its markets, the Metro…

Does that 'Disneyfication' of Paris ever worry you? The *Emily in Paris* aspect of it all?
I have absolutely no problem with *Emily in Paris*. Actually, we were in *Emily in Paris*, and it was great![4] It's true that my friends were telling me I was going over the top. Well, so what? We live in a complex, polarised, unnuanced world – fashion should be fun and lighthearted. Which of course doesn't mean we shouldn't take our craft seriously, but we should take *ourselves* less seriously.

Paris is also the inspiration behind all of your runway shows.
It is! We have held a show in the Metro, at the Palais de Tokyo, the Grand Palais – with Chanel's permission, of course.[5] It's very *Ami in Paris*. Last season we were here, at the Place des Victoires, blasting Ravel's 'Boléro'. Very dramatic. In contrast, this season I wanted something that felt very pure, very conceptual. So we went to 22 Avenue des Champs-Élysées, to this bare space that we filled with white benches. People

'Parisian style is more relaxed these days. Remember what heels used to be like? Now, I don't see women wearing over eight centimetres.'

were sitting very close to the models, so that they could appreciate every detail of the collection. But even that was inspired by Paris, because the idea was to mimic the sensations one has while doing the most Parisian of activities: sitting on a café terrace. Is there a better fashion show than the one you see every day in the streets of Paris? You're having coffee peacefully, watching people go by: an old lady wearing a coat she's owned for the past 50 years, a boy on his bike, a band of teenage kids, a guy fresh out of the gym… I'm always inspired by that. If I put a girl in blue tights on the runway, it's because the evening before I saw a girl in blue tights in the street.

What's your first memory of Paris?
I have very early memories of the city. My parents met here. My dad had grown up here, the son of Italian immigrants. My mum had just arrived from her provincial town. They decided to bring my brother and me up in Normandy. But we came back here very often, so I grew up knowing a reality other than the cows and pastures I saw from my bedroom window. Back then, I was a dancer. In the summer, I would come to the city for courses at the Salle Pleyel. I think my most vivid memory is of the Opéra Garnier. Just stepping into the hall and seeing those chandeliers was so incredible. It made me think of [dancers] Patrick Dupond and [Mikhail] Baryshnikov… Of course I have other memories, like living in a nine square metre *chambre de bonne* in Montmartre. In my years here, I've seen everything.

Do you remember where you first fell in love?
Of course! It was at the Duperré school near République, where I was studying, that I fell in love for the first time – with Thomas, who remains one of my dearest friends to this day. There are other memories too: countless hours spent at the Buttes-Chaumont park with my friends; the Marais, the neighborhood where I explored my queerness and found a sense of community. Paris has given me so much.

What film best encapsulates Paris?
Oh, I bet you don't know this one. Claude Lelouch[6] made his very first short film, *C'était un rendez-vous*, in 1976. It has no special effects of any kind and is shot from the point of view of a guy getting in his car early in the morning at the Place de L'Étoile, and driving all over Paris without stopping one single time: he goes through the Arc de Triomphe, Concorde, the Quais, the Tuileries, across the 9th *arrondissement* up to Montmartre and through Place du Tertre, finally arriving to the Sacré-Cœur, where a girl is waiting for him. Then you realise it was all for a date. It gives me chills every time. When we did the show at the Basilica, I wanted to do a teaser inspired by the film, but try crossing Paris nowadays in eight minutes with all the one-way streets. It was a different world.

The company experienced exponential growth right after the Covid pandemic.
To this day, we don't understand why, but we went from a €30 million turnover to a €300 million turnover between 2021 and 2025. It was crazy! I don't think we will experience hypergrowth like that again any time soon.

Does it ever scare you?
No, because our different markets – Europe, America and Asia – are very balanced, which gives us stability. From here, we can grow at a steady rate. This season, we had to add one more commercial showroom day to cater to all our 800 clients. By the way, I just learned this morning what the most in-demand piece was: a camel cashmere and wool trucker jumper. To me, that's reassuring, knowing it's a piece like that instead of a plain white Ami de Coeur T-shirt… Which is in second position, anyway.

What's the season's silhouette?
Relaxed! Everything is supple, light, easy! As we were preparing the show, I remember I had a long conversation with our stylist, Elodie David-Touboul, while we were 'playing doll'. I mean, our job is pretty much an intellectualised version of playing doll, isn't it? We both came to the conclusion that we wanted to keep it real, you know, with the accessories, the wired headphones… We even told our models to walk just like they would in the street, and we styled the pieces in as realistic a way as possible. At one point, we asked ourselves, 'Is there such a thing as keeping it *too* real?' We looked at each other and we knew: maybe there is, but that's exactly what makes the collection so covetable.

1. Alexandre's LinkedIn page states that he worked at Dior as an assistant menswear designer from 2001-2002, then for himself for two years, followed by roles as menswear designer at Givenchy from 2004-2008 and at Marc Jacobs from 2008-2009.

2. The Rubik's Cube was created by Ernő Rubik, a Hungarian architecture professor, to teach his students about three-dimensional spaces. One Cube has more than 43 quintillion possibilities (that's written as 43,000,000,000,000,000,000 in arabic numerals).

3. *Les Deux Plateaux*, more commonly known as the 'Colonnes de Buren', is an art installation created by the French artist Daniel Buren in 1985-1986. The work is made of 260 black and white striped columns, which cover an area of 3,000 metres squared.

4. Ami featured as one of Emily Cooper's clients at Agence Grateau in the Netflix show *Emily in Paris*.

5. Since 2005, Chanel has held its haute couture and ready-to-wear shows at the Grand Palais. Today, the Palais is theoretically synonymous with Chanel.

6. Born in 1937, as a young child in France, Claude Lelouch's mother hid him in movie theatres so as not to be found by the Nazis. In an interview with the Director's Guild of America, he said that his first paid directing experience came when he won $10,000 from a Canadian company for filming the bodies of Vladimir Lenin and Josef Stalin (in secret) at Lenin's mausoleum.



Alexandre Mattiussi in his office overlooking the Place des Victoires.

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PH: MATTHIEU LAVANCHY

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celebrating the culture of design today



The Sacai Questionnaire: Chitose Abe

By Loïc Prigent

Photograph: Craig McDean.

What was your first ever fashion obsession?
As a child, I absolutely hated wearing the same clothes as everyone else. I had my mother alter ready-made garments in all sorts of ways, like turning the sleeves into puff sleeves. Perhaps I was already obsessed with my own 'designs' even back then.

I'm moving to Tokyo from Paris, what should I bring?
Honestly, Japan has pretty much everything you need, especially Tokyo. While prices vary, you can easily find great food. Maybe just bring some good French books with you.

What is the Parisian attitude I should leave behind before moving to Tokyo?
I sometimes notice cultural differences in our Paris office, but what I notice the most when I'm in the city is how impatient the drivers are! The streets in Japan are not as crowded, and trains run on time. So rather than leaving any attitude behind, it's better to prepare yourself for Japanese diligence.

You're starting a new brand but the name Sacai is already taken, what do you do?
I can't even imagine. I'd just try to think of a way to get the Sacai name back!

Who is the best dressed person in the world?
Anyone with a confident attitude looks good in everything.

Which film have you seen more than 10 times?
Good Will Hunting.

What did you learn from your mother?
She gave me confidence as a child and taught me that free thinking leads to self-assurance.

Do you work on Sundays?
I normally try to take time off, except when I have to prepare for the collections or during business trips.

What is worse: to arrive late or to stink?
I don't like to arrive late or for someone to be late unless they have a reason.

Who is the funniest person in the world?
My mother. She is very free-spirited and assertive, but incredibly interesting. I can see where I came from.

Who is the best karaoke singer you know?
We had a karaoke party in our showroom last year, and were all stunned by [art director] Jean-Baptiste Talbourdet-Napoleone's Elvis Presley.

Who is the one fashion designer you'd spend a year of holidays with?
Karl Lagerfeld. I still remember being deeply moved years ago when I received a very big, beautiful flower and a message from him after the show. I'm very curious about what kind of holiday he spent at his hideaway.

Which historical figure dressed the best?
Coco Chanel.

What is the best thing about Japanese culture?
The beauty of Japanese culture stems from its graceful movements and elegant bearing.

A new law has passed and you can only use one fabric and one colour per season. What do you choose?
White wool. If it's white, you can colour freely.

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