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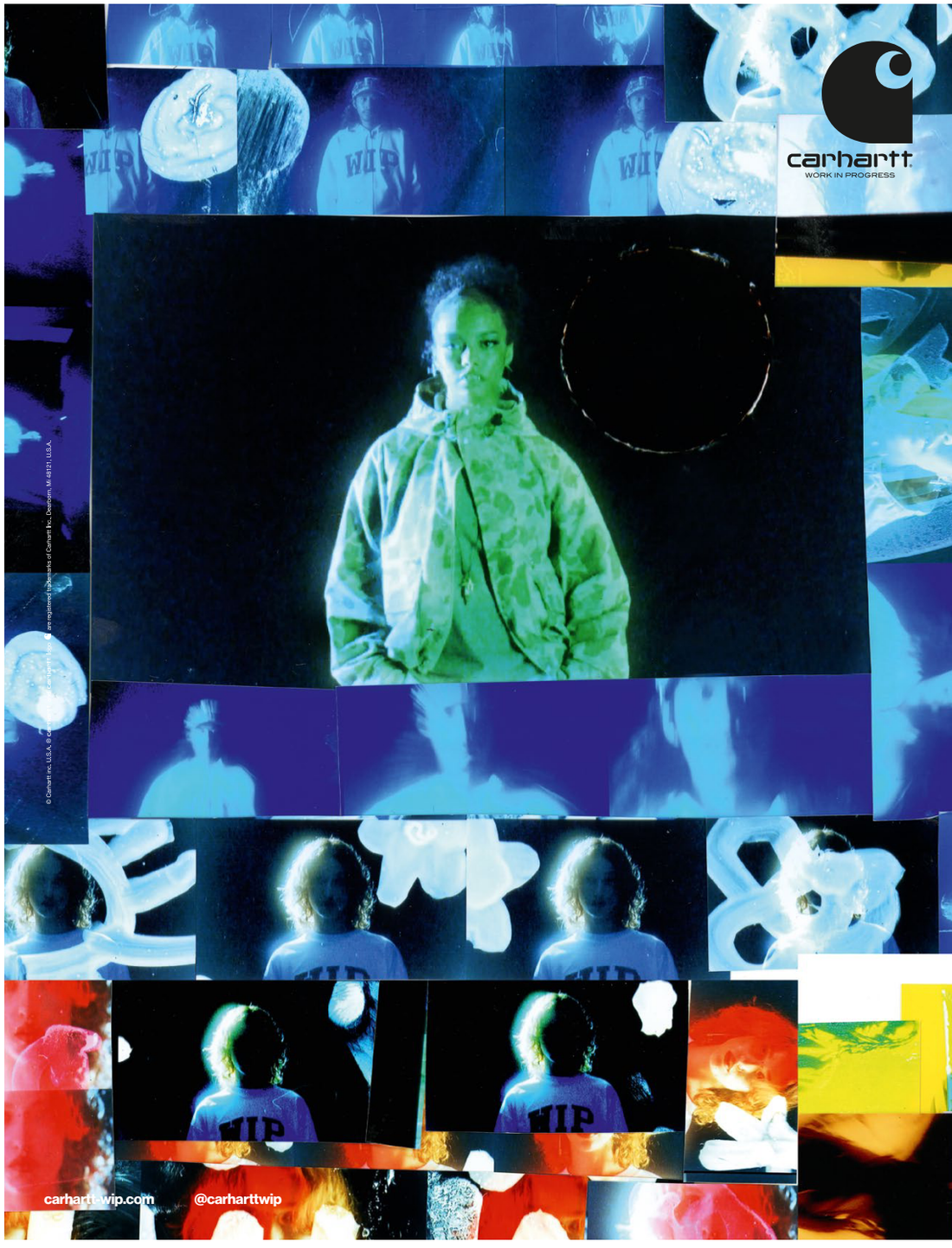





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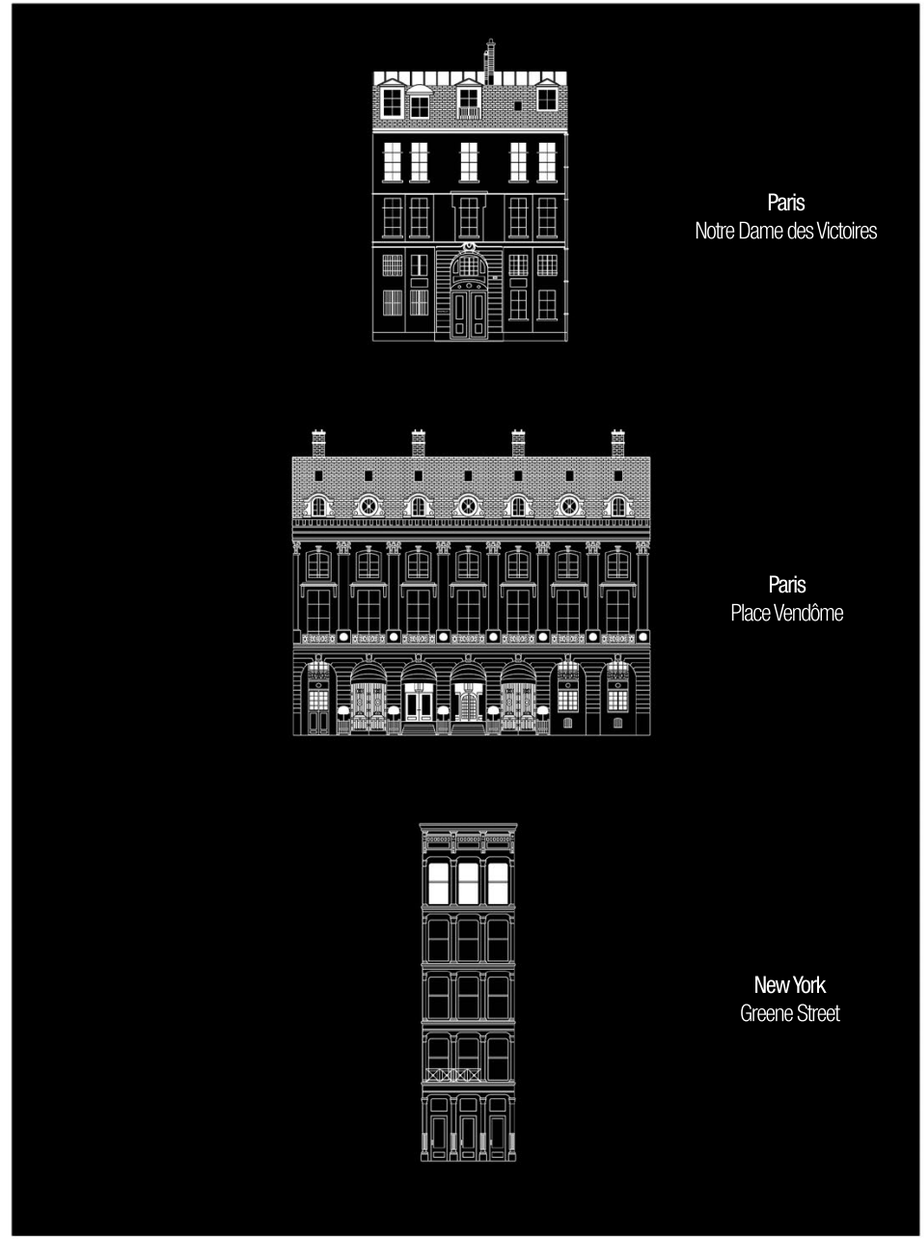

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Among Lotta Volkova's many idiosyncratic qualities is her ability to fuse the often-intangible powers of the stylist with the cold facts of the industry's bottom line. On one hand, the normally level-headed British newspaper the *Guardian* once labelled Lotta, 'The coolest woman in the world' ('That's psychotic,' she drolly retorts, during her conversation with writer Alexander Fury, p.38). On the other, the work she does for Miu Miu, in close collaboration with the brand's founder Miuccia Prada, has resulted in the kind of eye-watering financial growth that doesn't so much buck the current market slump as rip it up entirely (possibly into a frayed micro mini-skirt): as of Q3 2024, sales had increased a staggering 97% year on year.

***System* was simply keen to hear Lotta's own take on what it is she does, and why it's so successful, hyperbole and sales figures aside. In a career that continues to be (sometimes lazily) defined by her geographical and cultural backstory, we were also curious to understand how even today she remains largely unclassifiable, beyond pigeonholing, singular.**

As we put the final touches to Lotta's cover story, she – as well as Lauren Sherman, the brilliant fashion reporter at Puck, featured on p.232 – was among the many faced with the catastrophic scenes of fire sweeping across their hometown of Los Angeles. Our thoughts are with all those, in fashion and beyond, whose lives and livelihoods are affected.



loropiana.com

Loro Piana

‘I don’t look at it from a perspective of fashion.’

The rise and rise of Lotta Volkova.

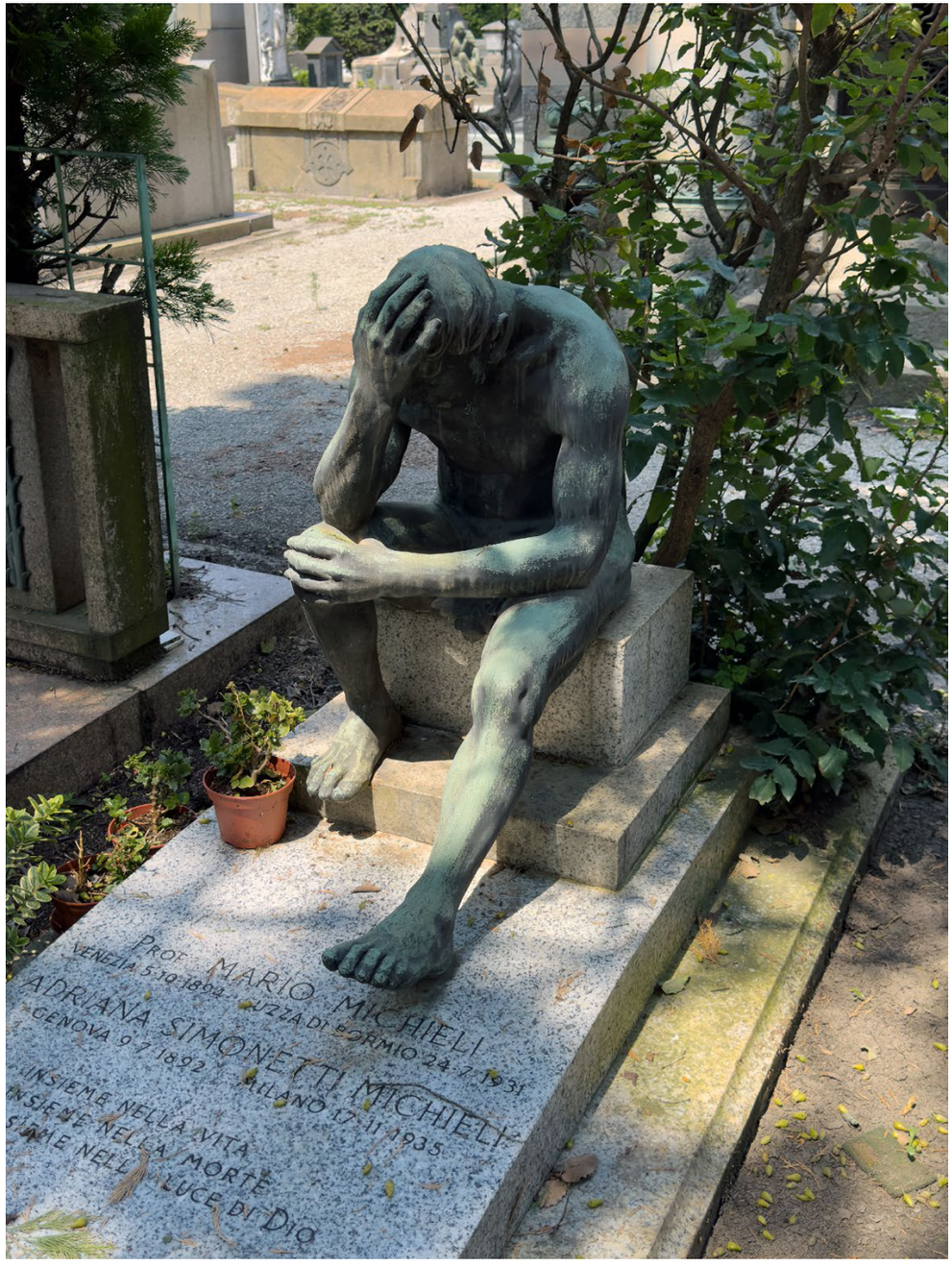
Text by Alexander Fury
Photographs by Juergen Teller; creative partner Dovile Drizyte



Tights, shoes and anklet by Miu Miu.



Dress, gloves, tights, shoes, anklet and sunglasses by Miu Miu.
Hair bands, bag and charms, Lotta's own.




MIU MIU




BIANCHI







Jacket, gloves, tights, shoes and anklet by Miu Miu.
Hair bands, Lotta's own.



Dress, gloves, tights, shoes and anklet by Miu Miu.
Hair bands, bag and charms, Lotta's own.




apple





Bra by Miu Miu, tights by Tyt.
Hair bands and ring, Lotta's own.







‘Lotta has a natural connection and understanding of fashion, and more importantly of contemporary culture. Another aspect that I admire is her curiosity and respect of individuals.’

Miuccia Prada

Hair stylist: Shiori Takahashi.
Make-up artist: Andrea Sailis.
Styling assistant: Toariki Dexter.
Photography assistant: Felipe Chaves.
Post-production: Louwre at Quickfix



It is understandably difficult to pin down Lotta Volkova. She works a lot, for many people, on many things: collaborating on fashion shows and advertising campaigns; consulting on collections, sometimes under her own name and sometimes those of others; and shooting editorial work that ends up in magazines and is occasionally bound into limited-edition books that become collectors-only art pieces. She is one of the most influential creatives working in fashion today.

'Freelance stylist' is the rather ironic 'snippet' (as it's known) that comes up under the Google search result for her website. A site that is actually just a blank black page, no email, no nothing. Call my agent! It's true, of course – she is indeed a freelance stylist – but it's written with a blunt, matter-of-fact-

campaign of glamorous kept women clad in furs in an over-furnished glamour pad. That shoot even had a poodle, but it's white. I assume she's living the (clichéd) dream.

Disappointingly, in real life, Volkova is in a plain white room in a West Hollywood apartment. 'It's a normal home,' she says. 'Well, kind of. It has a lot of art objects, I guess, so people say it looks a bit more like a gallery rather than a living space. I'm not so into very comfortable chairs.' More a Donald Judd vibe? Volkova cackles. 'Voila, you've got me. In the choice between looks and comfort, it's leaning towards looks, unfortunately – or fortunately. I like it.' Her Zoom room is sparsely decorated with a pinned-up spread from *0081*, her recently published book with photographer Moni Haworth, featuring imag-

Volkova has embedded herself with designers, consciously limiting herself to only working intensely with a handful. 'That's just my nature. I know I'm not necessarily also always expected to, but I feel like if I engage on a project with someone, if I make that decision to engage with something, I really engage fully and I give all of myself,' she says, cautiously. 'Which is not always a good thing.' This past season, she worked with Maximilian Davis at Ferragamo, with young designers Benjamin Barron and Bror August Vestbø, who design for a label named ALL–IN and show once a year, and Ellen Hodakova Larsson, winner of the 2024 LVMH Prize.

Volkova's first work with Miu Miu was on the Autumn/Winter 2021 show, presented on digital video due to Covid-19 restrictions in March 2021. In it,

'I remember my dad bringing back a Tina Turner tape, and Western fashions – denim and nylon stockings were a rarity in the Soviet Union.'

ness that makes her sound like a plumber. No job too big or too small. 'I'm not really interested in the grand titles,' Volkova says, when I ask her about it. 'I'm not really interested in stardom, let's say, and all of that attention. I'm actually interested in the work.'

We first meet in Milan, where she mostly works, then again in Paris, where three of the four shows she styled for the Spring/Summer 2025 season showed. Later, we speak on Zoom while she's in Los Angeles, where she has lived for a couple of years with her partner Artem, an artist, and her six-and-a-half-year-old black giant standard poodle, Dimitri. When I Zoom into that location, I half-seriously expect Volkova to be flanked by a swimming pool, like that Terry O'Neill shot of Faye Dunaway and her Oscar, or Steven Meisel's 2000 Versace

es of lavish, largely gelatinous Japanese desserts. She's wearing a white fine-cotton poplin dress by Miu Miu, the brand for which she has notably worked since 2020. Collaborating closely with Miuccia Prada, she consults across the collections, and styles all advertising imagery and fashion shows.

Yet styling feels like an understatement of what Volkova actually does, which includes practising what she preaches and wearing some of Miu Miu's most extreme looks. Like an underwear-as-outerwear ensemble of sequinned panties over sheer tights and under nothing, topped by a demure turtleneck sweater. Emma Corrin modelled a version in Miu Miu's Autumn/Winter 2023 show, and Volkova wore it to the brand's post-show dinner the next season. Indeed, throughout her career,

models wandered through snow in the Dolomites wearing brightly coloured puffer jackets and crochet. It was inspired, in part, by Miuccia Prada's recollections of skiing in a bikini as a young woman. At one point, Volkova tells me she has a passion for 'extremes – for example, black leather next to something very pink, baby girl or very fragile, feminine.' Or a bikini worn, up a mountain, in three feet of snow. I can see why they get along.

It was the next season, however, where Miuccia Prada and Volkova's work together on Miu Miu really hit pay dirt: that collection needs little introduction, other than saying it was the season of 'The Skirt'. A pair of chino trousers chopped down into a micro-mini, pocket-bags dangling past the hem, worn with similarly sliced-up,

midriff-baring sweater and shirt, the look proved meme virality in sartorial form, representative of a collection whose leitmotif was everyday garments reconfigured, spliced, diced, and reproportioned to seem brave and new. The outfit sold out, and then sold out again (I managed to buy one in Venice). It featured on magazine covers, was selected as 'Dress of the Year' at the Fashion Museum, Bath, and even spawned costume imitations at Halloween. The next season, Miu Miu explored a similar notion – because the idea of revisiting a radical idea itself seemed pretty radical in a world obsessed with the new and the next. Plus, if it ain't broke, don't fix it. And on and on.

Season after season, Miuccia Prada and Volkova have collaborated to ever-increasing critical and commercial suc-

'I'm not really interested in the grand titles. I'm not really interested in stardom, let's say, and all of that attention. I'm actually interested in the work.'

cess. As of the third quarter of 2024, Miu Miu sales were up 97% year on year. The work is working, and what's rewarding about that, for fashion people, is that Miu Miu clothes are great. It's not the case of sales spiking around anodyne, predictable product or savvy marketing; Miu Miu is embedded with the identity of Miuccia Prada, her intelligence, wit and personality. Which is also something Volkova has admired, forever. 'It's funny because I've always been the biggest fan of Prada and Miu Miu,' she says, earnestly. 'They were honestly, really, the only shows that I would watch live online, even if I was working with another client that day. Like, "Oh my god, what is this going to be this time?"' It's one of the most endearing things about Volkova – she's a true fan of fashion.

Like her, I'm actually interested in the work. Miuccia Prada once told me that the Miu Miu show essentially is designed in the 12 days between the Prada show in Milan and its unveiling in Paris. (Well, actually, I asked her if that was true, and she nodded.) I ask Volkova how that is, how it's possible, and how it feels to work that way.

Lotta Volkova: We have meetings throughout the season, but it definitely gets pretty heated in the last two weeks, and indeed after the Prada show. Of course, we do have a direction from the start; we do launch samples, we do talk about what we are doing. Everything always starts with a look, but it is during those last two weeks that we have really the defining crucial moments when it solidifies but a lot can still change. A lot is left to that freedom of questioning: 'Does this still feel relevant or do we do something else?' I do think it's important to be open to that question. OK, you suddenly have an unexpected great idea and you're like, 'Oh my god, this is going to put everything upside down on its head', but it's worth it. Being ready to go through with that – that's important, and that's when great things happen.

Alexander Fury: Is there anything in particular you can think of, like that?
Having said that, we haven't really changed ever our minds fully, never. It hasn't happened while I have been working with Miu Miu.

You've never ditched a collection?
No, we can still be discussing lengths and finalizing details, sometimes designing dresses, embroidery, and print. But the direction is pretty much set with the first idea, the first look, the first, I don't know, reference photograph. It always stays until the end somehow. It's more about making it precise, perfecting it. One thing I've definitely learned from Mrs Prada and working with Miu Miu is the notion that less is more. You can say that in many different ways, but I feel like I had never really seen it come to life so precisely before working with Mrs Prada. Being very precise, very focused, and analysing why you have that detail, analysing what it means to have that – I don't know – that cardigan, what it means to have this length of skirt. Why is it this length? It's never really random with her; it's always very, I could say intellectualized, but there's always a reason.

Considered.
It's also more than an instinct; it's a very studied, precise idea of a character, a personality. Why would this person wear that exact skirt with that particular jacket, what makes their hair messed up, why are there certain items in their bag, where are they going looking that way? Each collection is very precise to that look. It's almost like creating a movie scene. I feel like it's my job to help make it come through in the clearest manner.

Does Mrs Prada surprise you?
Yes, absolutely. It really is Mrs Prada's nature to suddenly say, 'What about that?' And you think, 'Oh my God, I never thought you would be into that. I never thought we would be working with that.' Also, we understand that

it's important to be open to changing our minds. We stick to a plan, but then Mrs Prada will always be open to changing if it suddenly feels right. Six months before or a week before, an idea might not be relevant at all, but suddenly it feels just right and makes sense. Like that you're almost tuned into the moment, and I feel like that's really important. It's something that she's very sensitive to and very in tune with. She feels that spirit of our times, and what is right in that exact moment. [She pauses.] Mrs Prada, she thinks. She has a point of view. Most designers don't try to say anything. They'd rather not say anything at all. For them, they're just making clothes that are nice, and it's enough. They're satisfied.'

Lotta Volkova is Russian, and even when speaking English has a directness that many have commented on as a characteristic of her native language. It's not rude, at all, but there's certainly no bullshit. It's refreshing. She is an Aquarius, if you hold truck with those things ('independent, free-spirited and eccentric'), and was born in 1984 in Vladivostok, on the far-flung, eastern reaches of the-then USSR. For context, Vladivostok is roughly 50 kilometres from the Chinese border and 130 kilometres from North Korea, but it's a 10-hour flight to Moscow. Volkova was isolated: 'If I had been a teenager in Moscow, I would have been way more exposed to the creative industries. I would have managed to sneak into a club, but there wasn't anything like that in Vladivostok.'

The city is at the far end of the Trans-Siberian Express, which sounds romantic and, stereotypically, makes you (or rather, me) think either of the babushkas and onion domes of old Russia or of the worn Brutalist concrete and thick snowdrifts of Soviet times. But she asserts it was actually pretty idyllic. 'I spent a lot of time on the beach,' Volkova says. 'We have surfing and windsurfing; we go hiking and up to the mountains, which have beautiful scenic views over the ocean.' She sounds like she works for the Vladivostok tourism board. 'While I was growing up in the middle of it, I used to hate it,' she continues, laughing. 'I used to really not enjoy nature; I was so bored. Painfully bored. I remember this boredom. I just couldn't wait to get out of it and go to London – an epicentre of culture I was obsessed with.' It was a toss-up between London and Los Angeles: 'I'd completely forgotten about it, but one of my best friends who I've known for a very, very long time reminded me that I've always wanted to live in LA. I was faced with a choice – either go to London or Los Angeles because I'm from Vladivostok, which is kind of the middle.'

The city is maritime. It is the home of the Russian Navy's Pacific Fleet and Volkova's father was a captain on cargo ships. Although he travelled incessantly, it meant her family had access to the otherwise inaccessible. 'My father used to sail frequently to Japan, Korea, Thailand, Germany, the US,' Volkova recalls. 'He actually managed to travel all over the world back in the time when we had the Iron Curtain and it was really difficult to travel outside of the Soviet Union. So in that sense we grew up in quite a privileged way. Being exposed to the "little treasures" from foreign cultures, like music tapes, VHS. I particularly remember him bringing back a Tina Turner tape, the latest Western fashions – denim and nylon stockings were a rarity in the Soviet Union – and Japanese sweets. I remember eating boxes of Choco Pie.' He also brought her Japanese fashion magazines, which Volkova couldn't read but whose imagery fascinated her.

On the maternal side: doctors. Volkova's mother taught physics at a medical school; her grandmother was a surgeon. Her aunt is a midwife and her uncle was a coroner. 'My family could take care of you from the beginning until the end, from birth to death – we had it all covered,' she says, smiling. 'My dad and me would drive to my mum's med school to pick her up from work and while we waited for her, we'd wander around the university grounds, getting lost in corridors filled with museum displays of various anatomical preparations, jarred examples of diseased tissues, bones, and anatomical sketches. I was always obsessed with them.'

Obsession is something Volkova experienced early. Her family got access to the internet when she was nine. 'The less there is around you, the more stimulated, the more obsessed you get searching for something that's impossible to find,' she says. 'So that has always been my driving force. I learned a lot about fashion, about art, about music. I would stay up nights listening to live shows on Internet radio stations like [hard-rock] KNAC.com or to an Ozzy Osbourne interview, or seeking out the freshest photos of the latest fashion shows on firstview.com. That's how I learned English.'

'It really is Mrs Prada's nature to suddenly say, 'What about that?' And you think, 'Oh my God, I never thought you would be into that."

Her mother gave up work in 1991, when Volkova was six, and it was through her that she was exposed to fashion. 'Back in the 1990s there were no brand stores in Vladivostok,' Volkova recalls, 'but a few risk-taking female entrepreneurs used to rent suites in big hotels in the city centre and sell a multibrand selection of items, which they'd purchased in stores abroad. Of course, these "shops" were pretty illegal, secret businesses, so you could only learn about them through contacts. My mother was lucky enough to discover a few. I still remember those trips.' Her mother also wore McQueen and Westwood and she remembers printed Prada suits and Versace vinyl skirts, marked up way past their retail price.

It was her mother, too, who spotted Volkova's creativity and encouraged it: rather than following the family into medicine, she suggested her daughter study art after she spotted Volkova's teenage drawings – portraits of her heroes, 'Iggy Pop or Blackie Lawless from W.A.S.P.' She moved to London aged 17: 'I graduated in June and the day after I was on a plane to London, alone.'

Volkova spent six and a half years in London, studying fine art and photography at Central Saint Martins, which, perhaps, in part explains her interest in image-making through clothes. She arrived in 2001, a period when London's nightlife was flourishing. She reinvented herself as Lotta Skeletrix, with hair and make-up influenced by the London punk scene; she was photographed by Wolfgang Tillmans with a glitter ball on her head at Kashpoint, a club she helped co-host. She began a fledgling fashion label at the encouragement of stylist Nicola Formichetti. Acting as a buyer, he purchased her clothes for the boutiques the Pineal Eye in London and Side by Side in Japan. 'I fell into designing by accident,' Volkova says. 'I wasn't really planning on becoming a fashion designer. It's something that happened to me in London, for a moment.' She staged a couple of shows, to acclaim. The clothes are very different to Volkova's look now: 'I was customizing garments to go out to clubs, but it was very basic in a way. I used to get vintage jeans and rip them up by hand using sandpaper, then add studs all over them. I was also customizing deadstock military T-shirts by studding them or sewing on leather straps. It was just me and my friends making everything, having a couple of beers after school… It was very DIY; it was not professional.'

It was, however, very much Volkova's personal style at that time, which is what people found compelling, and wanted to buy into. The whole reason she began styling, she readily admits, is because the photographer Ellen von Unwerth loved the way Volkova looked – as many people did, and still do – and asked her to style a shoot just like her. 'I've always loved Ellen's work,' Volkova says. 'I love its energy, spontaneity and femininity – the explosive femininity of her photographs.' She moved to Paris in 2008, and found it impossible to continue to design: 'It was very expensive to produce, to find ateliers to work with you. Because of course, Paris is the capital of fashion and every single person is aspiring to work for a big house or already working for a big house. So I didn't really find that much support or opportunity for myself.' She stops. 'I had to basically restart from zero and it took some time for me to really figure it out. It was a tricky time.' She decided to style, working on her first stories with von Unwerth. She never stopped.

Volkova's style, however, has never been static. I've known her for a little under a decade, during which time it has evolved, I think softened; her hair is long and bleached-blonde now, rather than dark and hacked short, as it was a decade ago. We meet at a *pasticceria* at the height of the Milan summer, and she has playful Sylvanian Family-sized donuts glued to her pink acrylic nails. 'I grew up obsessed by so many different designers for different reasons. I enjoyed the chic minimalism of Prada, the ultra-sexy Tom Ford-era Gucci, the eccentricity of Alexander McQueen, and the punk-rock attitude of Vivienne Westwood,' Volkova remembers. 'Now, I really enjoy working with designers who are very different to each other and represent different ideas and styles. For example, when I worked with Nicola Brognano for Blumarine, we established a really different look to the other brands I had worked with. So I guess it excites me to work in such varied ways, with a completely different aesthetic.'

This is something notable about Volkova's style: it's both distinct and instantly recognizable, yet transmutable, ever-changing and – importantly –

'Most designers don't try to say anything. They just want to make nice clothes and it's enough for them. Mrs Prada, she thinks. She has a point of view.'

keyed into the designers with whom she is working or into a fashion show. 'When I go into a house and work with a designer, my job is really to bring out what's the strongest in them, the best about a particular collection and how we can make it the strongest it can possibly be,' Volkova says. 'Make the message as clear as it can be – that's the angle I'm coming from. It's never really about my taste even. Of course, my taste does come through, because I'm doing it from my perspective, but I'm never trying to push my agenda through. It's always about collaboration with a designer and their point of view and how we can intensify that.'

That's different to many stylists who are recruited to bring a specific 'look' to a particular house – or, indeed, when a stylist has a particular stylistic obsession in any given season, and crops of models will appear across different fashion capitals with identikit haircuts, similar shoes, and maybe a weirdly tied bow to mark ownership. Volkova asserts she isn't into that kind of power play.

'For me, power is the wrong word,' Volkova says. 'It's something quite negative. It's not about power, it's about a process of working together in collaboration, rather than someone being more powerful than the other element. I know my place as a stylist; I know my job. If I wanted to design a collection by myself, I would do it, or I'd do a collaboration under my own name. I don't have that frustration; I'm not looking for that power or title.'

Editorial is something she approaches differently, though. With designers, she's working for them, but editorial is personal. 'It's more like creating a picture, an image, a mood, a story,' she says. 'Almost like a little movie of what happens from the first photo until the last photo.' Volkova says she likes America because it's 'cinematic', a word she also uses to describe the evolution of her work: 'My journey of shooting editorial has evolved in a more cinematic and more complicated way. It has turned into something more complex.' (I ask if she's ever consider costuming a film: 'People ask me about it; that could be an interesting development one day, but I don't know.') Back to editorial: 'I'm never really interested in what bag I'm going to put with what outfit…' She pauses. 'At least I don't look at it from a perspective of fashion. I'm not interested in shooting fashion, really.'

Are you going to say you're not excited by fashion?

I want to say I don't look that much at fashion, but that's not really true, because I do. I have to look at it, I have to look at it all the time when I'm pulling for editorials and I'm really happy looking at every single show. When I'm working on a shoot, my assistant does requests, but I do all the selections of the looks myself. I'll go and look at every show in the season. It's also very important that I don't outsource that to an assistant, but personally look at every single show and find what feels right. I do enjoy it; it's a part of the process. Sometimes it's a lot of information, but a really important part of my job is to be aware and to see and choose what's right politically, visually, conceptually.

That said, I've spoken with three different, very high-profile stylists, who all say, 'I'm not really buying clothes.'

Oh, I'm buying clothes.

What are you buying, besides Miu Miu? Although maybe you don't have to 'buy' Miu Miu?

I'm buying a lot – and I'm buying Miu Miu because I'm so over my allowance that I am actually buying it. I'll buy Prada, Phoebe, Saint Laurent, Loewe, Junya. Also, young designers: I wear ALL–IN a lot, also Hodakova. I got a pair of jeans with inserted swimming trunks from Duran Lantink that I love; there's also Jenny Fax, Ans Dotsloevner, Glumkimberly. That's about it, but I'm also open to the unexpected. If I really love something, I don't really care if it's considered cool or not.

That sounds like an odd assertion from someone whose stock in trade has been that difficult-to-translate notion of cool. 'How Lotta Volkova Became the Coolest Stylist in the Industry' read the hyperbolic headline that ran with a profile of Volkova in the May 2016 issue of *W*. 'In an industry that constantly seeks to label things "cool", Lotta Volkova has just been crowned as the coolest woman in the world,' was the choice sentence closing the first paragraph of a profile in the normally level-headed British newspaper the *Guardian* the same year. ('That one's psychotic,' Volkova says, laughing.)

Both of those profiles came about during Volkova's time working for Demna, when he still headed the brand Vetements – which he founded in 2014 and which Volkova styled from its second season and first show – and had just been appointed creative director of Balenciaga. In 2016, she was both right-hand woman and close friend to Demna. (Volkova ceased her collaboration with both labels in 2017.) She was also working with Russian designer Gosha Rubchinskiy to style his own-label shows (Rubchinskiy is now head of design of YZY, Kanye West's fashion brand). She was perceived, to a degree, to be an embodiment of the 'Vetemenciaga' woman, so much so that she modelled in shows for both brands. I interviewed Demna for *T*, the *New York Times*' style magazine, that same explosive year and he told me: 'When I work with Lotta – she knows what I know, what I want. We're very close, we really know each other, we're friends. It's not like I hired her.' 'We're very close – we're close in general – but in the way we think,' Volkova told me for *another* profile of her that ran in *W* in August 2016. 'We have the same references, we come from a similar background. We're on the same page, in what we want.' My profile ran with a portrait of Volkova by Juergen Teller, under the headline, 'How Did Lotta Volkova Become the Fashion Arbiter of Her Generation?'

Volkova views this part of her personal and professional past philosophically. 'What was really special about that time was that I had been styling, working in the industry for a while,' she reflects. 'I feel like my style hadn't really changed then, it had always been the same. I've always been inspired by more or less similar worlds. What really changed was that, finally, the designers I met at that time – like Demna – were coming from a similar culture. We shared the same references and interests, in music, art, visual culture. Suddenly we were in tune all together, talking and working. It was fun and it was exciting, and the creativity exploded in that way: all working together towards something we believed. We lived it as well, wore it, believed in it. So that's when the rest of the world tuned in and started to listen.'

That was important, because Volkova has always felt like an outsider in fashion. In a sense, she continues to be – decamping from Paris after 17 and a half years to Los Angeles, she is wilfully placing herself outside of the conventional fashion system. 'Living in LA I find very therapeutic, even though I do fly all the time and even though the jet lag is pretty physically exhausting,' she says. 'We do occasionally shoot campaigns in LA due to the proximity of Hollywood and I do love shooting editorials on locations around LA.' Still, she admits, 'Every time I land, it feels like I'm on holiday.'

It's December and I'm talking to Volkova, who is in LA, on Zoom. 'I think,' she says, 'coming back to where we left off last time, talking about being an outsider, is important.' I assume she means geographically, but, 'what I meant more was also in terms of upbringing and not being from a European background, not necessarily sharing the same codes, of social classes.'

How important do you think growing up in Russia was and has been?

I do think everyone's upbringing somehow influences patterns of thinking. Growing up in a place that was so far away from everywhere, that really literally felt like the end of the world, built certain character traits in me. This endless search, quest for something – I think that definitely formed because I grew up in Vladivostok. Also, not being a part of European society… I feel like an outsider, who is looking in, trying to learn and observe all these codes and rules, and sometimes I find it fun to fuck up those stereotypes. They don't mean that much to me because I come from such a different background.

Also, you grew up in a very different environment to the people around you now. You said, even after the fall of Communism, there was difficulty in getting everyday things – what I consider to be normal things – like fashion magazines.

Coca-Cola. We didn't have Coca-Cola. But having access to something doesn't mean that you have the culture of it. Because you didn't grow up with it, you don't necessarily grasp the true meaning. So for me, the 1990s were really quite an interesting, chaotic time, anarchy really, because it was about discovering everything for the first time. I was quite young, I was really a child, observing all of that, but for my brother's generation, 16 years older than me, for them it was a very different, sometimes tragic experience, suddenly embracing nightclubs, music, and drug culture. It's not just about growing up in Russia, it's also about growing up at that point of time in the middle of a very special political situation. So far away from Europe, so far away from everywhere, really. And being exposed to all of this, all at the

'I want to say I don't look that much at fashion, but that's not really true, because I do. I have to look at it, I'm really happy looking at every single show.'

'I feel like an outsider, who is looking in, trying to learn and observe all these codes and rules, and sometimes I find it fun to fuck up those stereotypes.'

same time. Suddenly the excitement of the first-time discovery, that for sure is definitely reflected on me.

What is interesting about Volkova is that she has created her reputation on her own terms. She has fans, although that's my terminology, not hers: 'I don't look at them as some kind of fans. It's more like we share the same interests and obsessions.' They follow her on Instagram – which she describes as being like her diary – and when she recently held two Tokyo book signings for her project with Moni Haworth, there was an hour-long to have copies signed.

Volkova doesn't like the word power, but she has it – her work resonates, especially with her own generation and younger. It's something she's always been able to do, it seems, and it's all the more remarkable because Volkova has largely avoided working with conventional mainstream titles, whose large circulations are still seen as an efficient means to convey your message to the widest audience. 'That's something I've never been interested in – the mainstream,' Volkova says. 'As soon as something is mainstream and everybody knows about it and likes it, it turns me off.' I wonder if she's interested in magazines at all; she is, but still. 'I don't really like to be stuck in this very rigid system,' she says. 'I want to do more surprising stories, and I feel like that is pretty much impossible when you work for more institutional, bigger-title magazines, because you have so many rules.' She frowns. 'I've always wanted to do a one-image or a one-look fashion story, for example. That hasn't quite happened yet because of, you can imagine, an extensive list of advertisers.' She smiles.

Volkova's editorial work is as varied as her fashion work. There is, however, a thread for her. 'I have always been attracted to the beauty of imperfections and gestures,' she says. 'Something that happened that wasn't meant to happen.' Many of Volkova's images seem captured from the wrong angle, models contorted unusually or models don't look like models wearing clothes that don't look like fashion. Yet they remain compelling, arresting – and also often singular. 'Once you've posted that image – these days, people aren't even really excited to see the rest of the shoot,' she says. 'Once they've seen one image, they know the gist; the rest of it doesn't really get that much attention, but that doesn't really bother me.' Maybe her one-image fashion story makes more sense than she thinks.

It would benefit us to listen, anyway, because the thing Volkova has become known for – valued for, paid for – is being able to sense a shift in the fashion pulse. It's difficult to write about without sounding naff, without using cringeworthy terms like 'zeitgeist' or 'disruption'. It's also difficult to pin down exactly what it is that Volkova can do, but, essentially, she knows what feels right, in any given moment, and can create images with meaning.

'Whenever I do personally get really excited about something, a lot of the time that resonates with the rest of the industry, other people, the audience,' Volkova says, carefully. 'These days, we are so overexposed to images, bombarded with references. The attention span is pretty short. Whenever we do get really excited about something, or encounter something that makes us look at it twice, that's when you know that moment is important or makes sense.' She pauses. 'I wouldn't say I know what's right or wrong. It's about trying to stay as free as you can within the limitations and rules that you have. To manage to push it and get inspired and excited yourself about what you're managing to achieve with a certain collection or a certain photograph, it's down to that.'

Which is a magical ability to have.

The Archives of Lotta Volkova 2015-2025

As selected and written by Lotta Volkova.





Harley Weir, *Re-Edition*, Issue 1, Spring 2015
Harley and I decided to shoot in Moscow. At the time I didn't have an assistant and embarked on the journey with multiple suitcases full of Vetements, Margiela, Bless, a couple of advertisers and of course, Prada. Location was the Sovetskiy Hotel. It would become one of those shoots that I feel I will always remember. Casting was very important. We wanted to reflect the young and free generation of the time. Our friends had a local casting agency Lumpen, and it was on this shoot that I met lots of amazing young personalities who would later become friends and collaborators, I'd say this shoot sort of marked that era for me. The cast was real, there was no hair and make-up. Boys and girls wore the same dresses, trousers were worn very high, there were tons of Vetements, folkloric patterns, flower prints and carpets. It felt like a breath of fresh and slightly provocative air. I loved those early shoots because they were very spontaneous: nothing was prepped, we got the clothes we could get and there was no production. That's why they felt like a mix of documentary and fashion.





Harley Weir, Balenciaga, Spring/Summer 2017
This is definitely one of my favorite campaigns I have ever done. It was so grand and majestic, perfect for the collection that I felt was very fetishistic.





Johnny Dufort, *Vogue Italia*, September 2018

This was another wild adventure back to Russia. This time literally in the middle of nowhere – Chikinskaya – the tiniest village in Arkhangelsk Oblast, which has only a few inhabitants left. I saw a photograph of the Tserkov Pokrova Presvyatoy Bogoroditsy online and felt mesmerized with the decaying beauty of this ancient church built between 1874 and 1889. I sent a friend on a scouting mission to find it.
The whole journey to get there became a tedious nightmare, cursed, I would even say. This time we were traveling with a whole team from Paris and London, including hair and make-up teams and production. Our flight was late and we managed to miss our connection to Arkhangelsk. It was the Football cup in Moscow, so all hotels were sold out and we had to sleep on the airport floor awaiting our early morning flight. A suitcase got retained in customs which became a nightmare and I didn't get the clothes back until months after the shoot. One misfortune came after the other and two more suitcases were delayed, arriving on the next flight. Eventually we got into a very old and dusty van taking us to the most quaint authentic Russian village I have ever seen, the closest place to stay to the church. The morning after we had to continue our journey, which consisted of: crossing the river on a tiny wooden old boat, loading rails full of the latest fashion and eventually making it to the other side - to the steps of the Tserkov Pokrova Presvyatoy Bogoroditsy. Upon arrival we realized the church had fallen apart even further and we were literally probably right in time to capture it before its full decay.
This story was a lot about the quest for spirituality. We painted the model's face green to symbolize a Buddha, Günce [Gözütok] was wearing a Gucci embellished outfit that echoed embellishment and colors of Orthodox priests, in another shot you see her wearing a fake moustache sitting inside a van that made us recall the free-spirited hippy-esque Frank Zappa. We were interested in mixing different cultures and embracing spirituality in its different forms. This story became quite a scandal back in Russia with discussions on TV, part of the audience believing it had a positive role in attracting attention to old architecture and its preservation.





Johnny Dufort, *System*, Autumn/Winter 2018

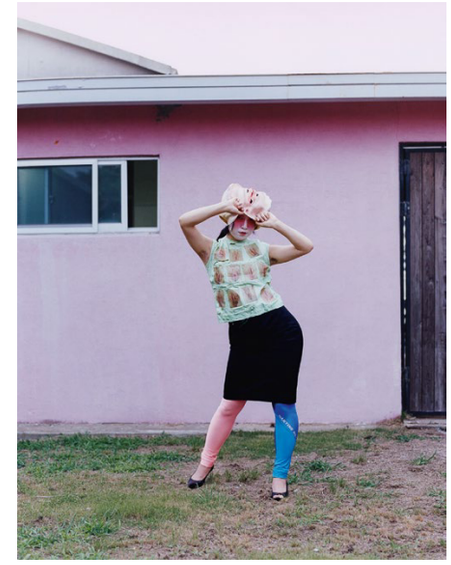
I have always been a fan of Italy and Milan in particular, so when System called and asked me to shoot a special on Italian fashion, I was very excited. Johnny and I were interested in interpreting various aspects of what Italian culture meant to us. I pulled all big Italian brands and archival designers such as Gianfranco Ferré, Romeo Gigli, Walter Albini and Krizia, shown in this photo. We shot at famous Milanese landmarks and featured Raphael inspired face painting, street chalk artists and local cast among models. We even got to do the last shot at the iconic Latteria, while tasting the infamous lemon pasta. On trips like this it's all about combining work and pleasure.





Harley Weir, *Re-Edition*, Issue 10, Autumn/Winter 2018
This was another one of those epic shoots with no production and an adventure. I saw an article about an erotic architecture park on Jeju Island, South Korea and was instantly persuaded that Harley was going to love to shoot there. We got a friend with K-pop connections to contact the park authorities, managed to get a permit and there it was – we were getting on the plane with my assistants, this time, carrying bags full of oversized structures, wearing extra heavy samples that didn't fit into the overweight suitcases, blagging our way onto the plane saying we were going to a wedding. The theme of the shoot for me was really sculpture. The erotic sculptures at the park were just an element to start me thinking about sculpture in general, and Living Sculpture performances by Gilbert and George in particular. That's when I thought it was interesting to turn our models into living sculptures – body-paint them gold or silver and use only matching gold or silver clothes and accessories. This was only one part of the shoot that we intended to photograph in nature, randomly stopping on the way to the park. It was an incredibly misty morning, we went into a field and something unexpected happened – a wild horse appeared in the background out of the mist. We couldn't believe how lucky we were to not only witness, but also capture this moment.





Harley Weir, *Re-Edition*, Issue 10, Autumn/Winter 2018
These images went further taking living sculpture into exploration of femininity and body. I was shopping for accessories and props for this shoot on all of my trips beforehand and I found this mask and a handmade top in a store in NYC.

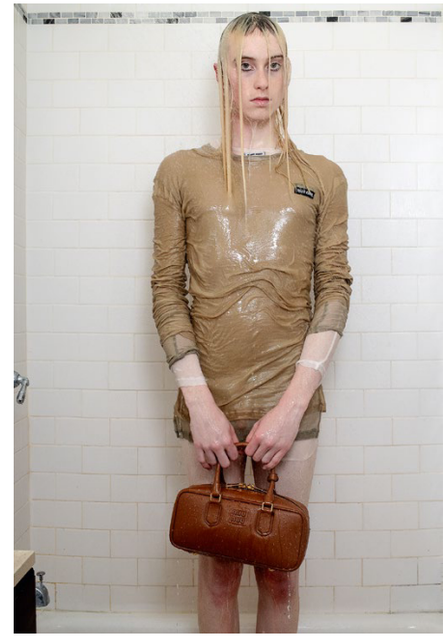




PHOTOGRAPHERHAL, *Double*, Autumn/Winter 2023

I encountered PHOTOGRAPHERHAL's body of work called Flesh Love a few years before this shoot actually happened. "Men and women are attracted to each other and try to become one. This fundamental desire carries an energy that affects all matter in the world. I wonder what is the reason we have to make such an effort to become one." PHOTOGRAPHERHAL started taking photos of vacuum-packed couples in 2004.

The extreme romanticism of these photos struck me and I wondered what it would be like to replicate them including fashion. My friends at Babylon casting found couples and family members willing to vacuum pack their love and affection for a maximum of 10 seconds, during which PHOTOGRAPHERHAL took one photo only. Each couple had one or two takes.





Richard Kern, *The Face*, June 2023

I always loved Richard's images of girls in showers. I thought it could be interesting to expand on that and see our cast of beloved NYC girls fully-dressed yet dripping wet. The Face called the story 'Drip'.





Julie Greve, *Self Service*, Spring/Summer 2020

I love photographers who have a universe, a world. It's interesting for me to see how fashion can fit into their picture without feeling forced or ridiculous unless that's obviously the point. Julie's work is exploring "coming of age" and the innocence and playfulness of that moment. Here we were inspired by Marie Antoinette – a modern quirky one of course – a model spotted wearing a fake embellished arm cast by Jenny Fax alongside another extravagant outfit by Comme des Garçons.





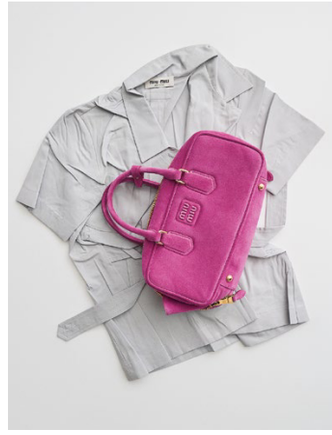




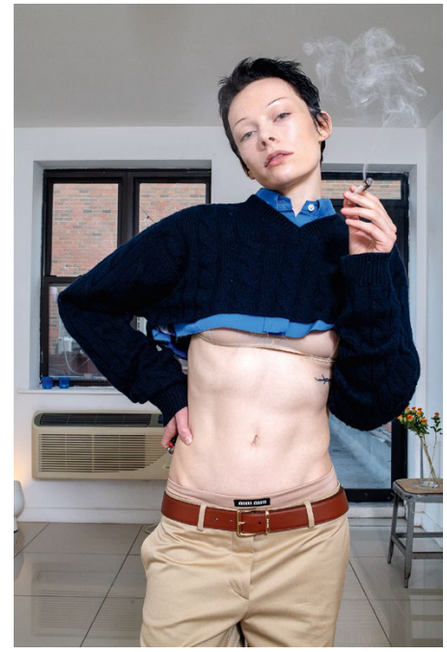
Marili Andre, *Double*, Spring/Summer 2023

When this shoot came out people couldn't quite understand if it was real or AI. There is a sense of nostalgia about these images, as well as something not quite definable and obscure, faces that seem familiar yet grotesque. There is a funny story: Marili originally started her AI project under a different name, but we had worked together already in the past. I encountered these images on Instagram pretty late one evening and was so astonished that I messaged that account instantly explaining that I was a stylist working in fashion and was interested to collaborate together. Marili replied to me with a photo of herself laughing at my message, saying how funny my introduction was.



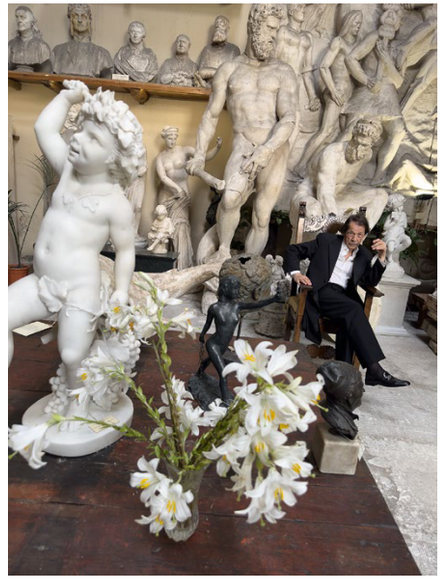



Alessio Bolzoni, Miu Miu, Spring/Summer 2025
The Miu Miu Spring/Summer 2025 collection had an element of deconstructed dresses creased, pressed and sewn, and basically transformed into bustier pieces. I thought that was an interesting technique to work with for Alessio's still lives. We folded and creased and pressed various items of clothing and used them as backgrounds for, again, pressed accessories.




Richard Kern, *Double*, Spring/Summer 2022
I came across the book "Deathtripping: the Cinema of Transgression" at the college library when I was studying fine art at Central Saint Martins. I got drawn to the post-punk underground movement and became a big fan of Richard Kern's films and photography. Many years later I messaged Richard on instagram asking to shoot this iconic Miu Miu Spring Summer 2022 collection special together. After some hesitation Richard agreed and Midland casted the girls, my assistant rented a car and we spent 2 days cruising around NYC taking pictures of models in their own environments with no hair and make up. I love how immediate and direct these portraits are.





Juergen Teller, Ferragamo, Autumn/Winter 2024
Capturing fashion in the most grand Florence locations with an iPhone is genuinely a punk rock attitude to me. I find these images incredibly beautiful, capturing an Italian heritage brand in the rawest way possible.





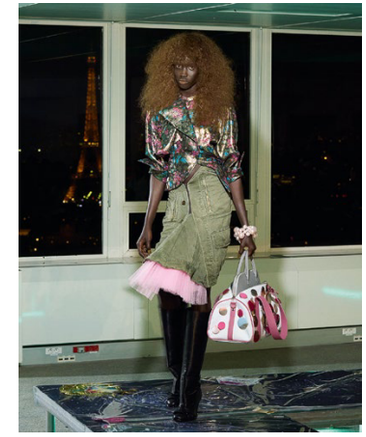
Johnny Dufort, *Double*, Spring/Summer 2022
This shot was originally a part of the shoot commissioned for a magazine but it got cut out of the edit for being too provocative and depicting nudity that wasn't "conventionally beautiful". It has been one of my favorite shots and we later on finally published it in the Double portfolio of my work in 2022. Here you can see a club of nudists playing musical chairs. This image was inspired by happenings and performances in the 1970s. We later on expanded on this concept and photographed more marginalized groups united by shared interests, with models wearing fashion among them.





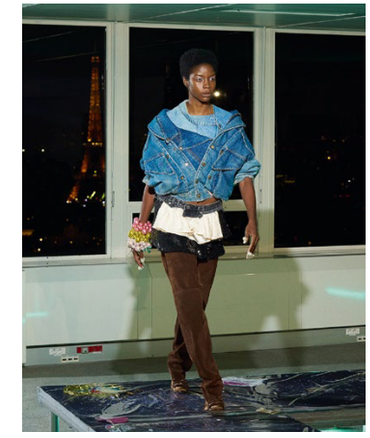
Michella Bredahl, ALL–IN special, *Interview*, December 2023

I started working with ALL–IN a couple of seasons ago, and I met Michella Bredahl through August (Bror) and Benjamin (Barron). She has been a part of the ALL–IN family since the beginning, walking in their shows, so it was really fun to be photographed by her at August and Benjamin's home for the Interview feature. I remember me and Dima being so jet-lagged, trying to stay awake and perform for the pictures. It was important the photos captured the energy of the young designers. We ended up dancing in their bedroom, trying clothes on and eventually jumping on their bed… which indeed got broken at the end of the shoot









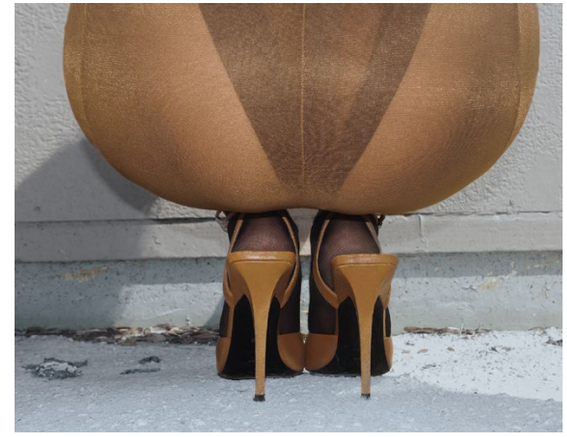
Pascal Gambarte, ALL–IN, Spring/Summer 2025





Moni Haworth, *Double*, Autumn/Winter 2024

Moni has been fascinated with Kristina (Nagel) and her work. She really wanted to photograph her, so when I met Kristina in Paris I mentioned it. Kristina said she wasn't into modeling, but she would do it with only one condition – she would photograph Moni in return. I thought it was a great idea for Double magazine – a true double story, two photographers shooting each other. Then of course I needed to persuade Moni to be photographed, which took a moment, but then here we were – happily ever after – in Daytona Beach, Florida, this summer, with a van full of leather and Saint Laurent's thinnest, most intricate stocking pieces – it was quite an adventure through swampy lakes, beaches, tropical woods, and the hard reality of biker bars and hangouts. Ultra-feminine see through stockings with ultra-masculine leather. The highlight of the trip was the infamous Last Resort bar, where Aileen Wuornos was arrested. Kristina said she "never left her comfort zone that far". We enjoyed imagining her as Sigourney Weaver and Charlize Theron stomping around the wild landscapes of Florida.





Kristina Nagel, *Double*, Autumn/Winter 2024





Zoë Ghertner, Miu Miu, Spring/Summer 2024
This show had a few highlights for me. The look was someone who had lost their sense of time, chilling on a beach and suddenly realized they had to run to work and had no time to change fully or wash their hair, battled feet covered in colorful Band-Aids, bags stuffed with the chaos of everyday life – full of shoes, sweaters, jackets, wallets, speedos and jewelry, just in case you needed to be ready urgently for any turn of a situation. This became a season that started the bag charm craze. Band-Aids were another funny unexpected addition, our fitting model Bibiana (Csengeri) had a blister on her foot during a fitting. I looked in my bag and found a newly purchased pack of sports colorful Band-Aids from the pharmacy and helped her with one. She stuck it on her foot, I think it was bright neon orange and it struck me as the most graphic accessory perfect for the season's open boat shoes.





Moni Haworth, *Re-Edition*, Autumn/Winter 2023
This shoot was basically our love letter to Japan. It was Moni's first time in Tokyo and she was very excited. Japanese horror movie and anime culture inspired us to embark on this journey starring Raiki Yamamoto – a young artist who I met through Tenko (Nakajima Glenewinkel) and her gallery. The shoot consisted of two parts. One was a live Anime character strolling through classically busy streets of Shibuya, Shinjuku and Harajuku dressed head to toe in candy colored mostly bonded leather outfits. The shapes so simple and naive they could easily be forged by a hand of an illustrator. The second part of the shoot was Raiki's what seemed a never ending quest - waking dream of nostalgic wild fantasy through our favorite Tokyo spots, including Koen-ji, Bar Nightingale, Golden Gai, Tenko's charming apartment etc. Funny fact: my assistant Toariki (Dexter) had a little acting debut, playing the monster chasing Raiki around Tokyo. A year later Moni and I came back to Japan and continued this project making it into a book, 0081, that came out last year published by SuperLabo.









Michella Bredahl, *everyth!ng* 001, 2025
I guess I really enjoy seeing fashion deconstructed. In this case it was interesting for me to see it upside down, falling apart, in constant movement and impossible to control.

Fashion can symbolize a search for perfection and beauty but to me this perfection is relative and I find it beautiful to see an outfit embracing the movement and having a life of its own. What happens to those carefully considered outfits that you see on the catwalk once on a gymnast or a pole dancer in motion? Documenting pole dancers is a part of Michella's practice, so I was invited as a sort of experiment. It was interesting how it was also very challenging to pole in clothes, fully dressed with shoes and gloves and layers. It was an unusual physical experience for the girls who were either pros or took pole dancing as their hobby.





Julie Greve, *Double*, Autumn/Winter 2022
I discovered Patrick Carroll's brand called Summon Elemental on Instagram. Patrick is an artist and writer who picked up knitting during Covid times and now makes every piece himself in Los Angeles. According to Patrick it is more of an art project, "It examines the fact that dress is immemorial and at the heart of social life, exploitation, and sensuality". I liked the idea of seeing those pieces within the frame of Julie's work.






Johnny Dufort, Hodakova, Spring/Summer 2025
I have been a fan of Ellen (Hodakova Larsson)'s brand Hodakova for a while at this point. The first time I ever discovered it was at a young designer section at Selfridges. I instantly became a customer. I like the repurposing nature of her work, looking for new ways to wear something familiar, something that already exists. We managed to work together on her September show, where my friend Lucca (Lutzky) collaborated with Ellen on a series of videos inspired by memories.




Moni Haworth, *Double*, Autumn/Winter 2022
We shot this story in very typical LA suburbs. We were interested in playing with the supernatural, the occult. I find Moni's approach to taking photos very fun, it can be extremely straightforward and DIY, reminiscent of B-movies that we both love so much - here you see Dosha (Deng) actually balancing on a stool, hidden by the dress. You don't always need expensive special effects or post production in order to make a cool image.



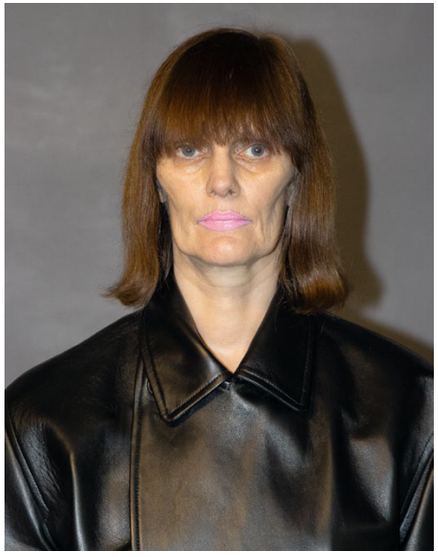


Kristina Nagel, *Re-Edition*, Autumn/Winter 2023
Kristina and I photographed our friend and artist Anna Uddenberg at the Boros Foundation in Berlin. The building of the foundation used to be a bunker, a fruit storage facility and a techno club before housing an impressive art collection as we know it today.



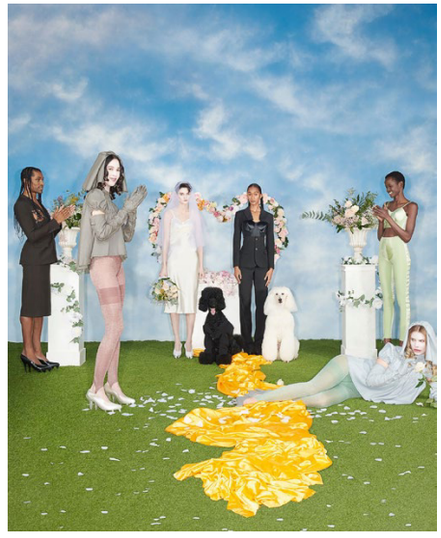


Moni Haworth, *Double*, Autumn/Winter 2022
Moni and I really enjoy going on trips together. It's the most fun to discover places and imagine scenarios and then come back to fulfill them in a photo shoot. Here we are – shooting right in the middle of Monument Valley. No permits, no production. Very guerrilla. We stayed in beautiful cottages at the footsteps of majestic mountains on the edge of the park, each morning driving in with our van to photograph Maty's (Drazek) journey and transformation through the valley. Impersonating partly a Hollywood old glamour actress, retired in the middle of the dramatic landscape with her chihuahua Atilla in her arms, eyelashes dripping gloss, courtesy of Yadim (who almost didn't make it to the valley due to a broken down car) partly a prince dressed all in white kidnapped by aliens and turned into a creature with steel wings and eventually dramatic full steel tutu ballerina, twirling through the storm. It was quite a surreal trip!





Kristina Nagel, *Double*, Spring/Summer 2024
This is a Phoebe Philo special shot by Kristina and I. We loved the idea of reinterpreting the ultra-chic masculine sharpness and juxtaposing it with pink lipstick and girly silhouettes. I guess I have always been attracted to extremes.





Johnny Dufort, Jean Paul Gaultier x Lotta Volkova, 2022
I have been a big fan of Jean Paul Gaultier for as long as I can remember. Watching his show Eurotrash, co-hosted with Antoine de Caunes, on pirate television in Russia in the 90s was one of my first memories of fashion. So when the opportunity came to collaborate on a capsule collection, I was extremely overwhelmed and smitten. I decided to jump straight into it and re-issue my favorite, most iconic Gaultier pieces. The satin cone bra worn by Madonna, the iconic 1984 dusty lilac cone velvet dress (the original was couture and never produced), the nude trompe l'oeil dress first designed by Jean Paul circa 1984 this time printed, crushed nappa baby doll dress and top with matching gloves, the Naked bikini – were all re-introduced to a young generation. I thought it was interesting to make those very iconic pieces available to purchase and wear.

What really struck me about Jean Paul was this extreme eccentricity, the uncompromising vision, and celebration of culture, art, and music. It's this awareness that forms the incredible, extravagant, and extraordinary world of Jean Paul Gaultier which we set out to express in our campaign featuring many of my friends and my beloved poodle Dimitri. The script was classic – the life and death of Dimitri. Atelier even custom made a couture eight cone satin bra to fit Dimitri, and a couture veil for his wife-to-be poodle.









Moni Haworth, *Re-Edition*, Spring/Summer 2023

This shoot was a kind of series of different episodes starring our friends, featuring artist Isabelle Albuquerque photographed laying among her sculptures in her studio. Each episode was a surreal scene set against a sunny background of Los Angeles. It reminded us of 1980s movies. The juxtaposition of darker and gothier multilayered looks photographed with plain sun and blue sky, whether in Moni's backyard, in front of palms or on a warehouse roof in the Fashion District with a menacing vision of Downtown reappearing along the story. The images you see here were shot in the valley at a hoarder's garage filled so full that, little to say, you could hardly get in there yourself, we managed to stuff in a giant blueberry!





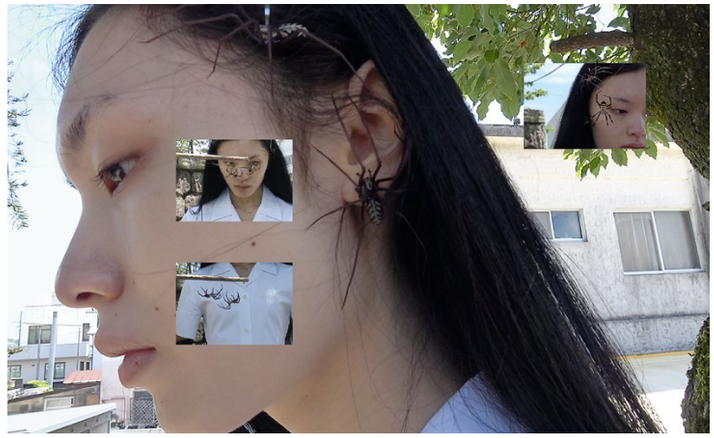

Michella Bredahl, Miu Miu, Spring/Summer 2025
I am a big fan of documentary photography, I love its spontaneity and energy – nothing can compare to that. These images, in my opinion, translate well the backstage chaos and yet stillness, waiting for the show to happen.

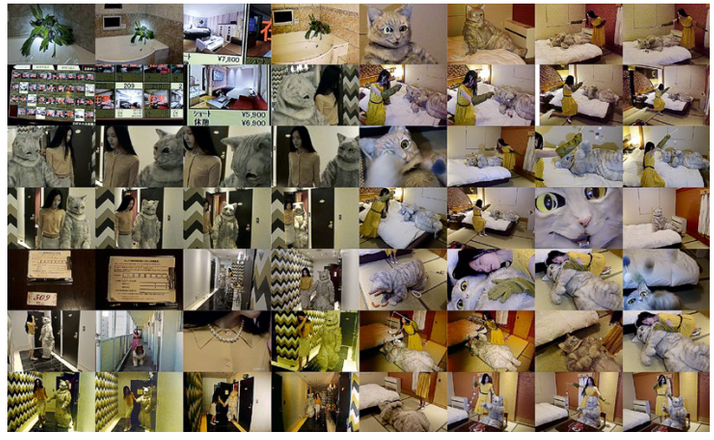



Alessandro Furchino Capria, New Balance x Miu Miu, 2024
I love the simplistic modernity and mesmerizing reality of Alessandro's images. I find them captivating, incredibly cinematic and pure. It was a priority for me to guard all these sentiments of his work for what could have been a quiet commercial launch shoot for the New Balance x Miu Miu sneaker campaign, but proved to be one of my favorites. So fun to be in bed in your sneakers!









Moni Haworth, *0081*, 2024

Moni and I wanted to go back to Japan and continue the adventures of Raiki. We researched local stories and places of interest with folkloric tone to them. We were interested in old tales and discovered the ancient tradition of 'Samurai Spiders' practiced from as early as 1598 in a tiny village Kajiki, tucked away in Japan's southern Kagoshima prefecture, as well as Nagoro, the Village of the dolls, hidden deep in the valley of Tokushima prefecture. Some might have seen a documentary about this strange place. "As the population of Nagoro declined precipitously, an elderly resident, Tsukimi Ayano, started to replace the people who left or died with life-sized replicas made of straw and old clothes. These dolls are placed naturalistically around the hamlet, in realistic poses. Their purpose is to combat loneliness."

Upon Raiki's return to Tokyo she encounters more creatures, this time, from modern folklore: human-size pets including a creature who identifies as a cat and a man who transformed himself into a collie dog saying he wanted to fulfill his childhood dream of becoming an animal and exploring outside as a dog.

The quest for Raiki's self ended in her birthplace, Kamakura, a quaint seaside town, south of Tokyo.



Lucid dreaming

Architect Shohei Shigematsu of OMA on translating brand identities into built realities. Image by OMA New York.

My default programming as an architect is to observe a specific context and then try to make something unexpected that reflects the shifts that I see taking place in it. While the fast, agile world of fashion might seem the antithesis of my world of architecture, brands are increasingly operating through physical spaces. In recent years, I have been asked to translate brand identities into built realities through designs for exhibition spaces, a process that has required much learning – and some unlearning. Creating environments not intended for a specific use or user but rather to communicate a brand has proved a refreshing challenge that has pushed me to feel more comfortable playing with architecture's intangible aspects. I have always loved building the permanent, partly from a desire to give ideas physical form and partly from an ambition to make a lasting contribution. Yet the more I work in fashion the less I feel preoccupied by these aspirations. It is an industry that effortlessly makes ripples in its surrounding cultural fabric and I enjoy trying to make physical spaces that can translate or enhance clothing's transformative potential. Through these fashion projects, I have discovered that image-building can become world-building.

In some ways fashion and world-building have always been synonymous. I lived in Japan as an architecture student in the 1990s, right after the economic bubble burst, when subcultures and the underground were emerging almost as an antidote to the glossy era of 1980s disco. I had a stint as a weeknight DJ at a club called Brickhouse in Fukuoka. I would show up in head-to-toe Vivienne Westwood, my Clint Eastwood bomber and John Bull hat sparking conversations with, say, an aspiring fashion designer wearing the Armour jacket from the *Time Machine* collection. I remember the shared excitement with an artist in a *Seditionaries* tank when Frankie Knuckles' 'The Whistle Song' came on. That club was like an informal salon for creative types and self-proclaimed connoisseurs, and what we wore was an expression of how we felt. References built relationships, which built the total experience. Participating in this world was perhaps my first foray into understanding fashion as a mode of culture, which is how I see architecture's connection to it now.

Today, the images, histories, and materials that make up a brand's identity are often derived from the place where it is based. They then move around the world in order to speak to local audiences. A collection might be designed in Paris, shown on the runway in Milan, displayed at a flagship in New York, exhibited at a museum in Tokyo, and offered at a pop-up in Hong Kong. This familiar network is always expanding. Cities like Bangkok, Xiamen, Seoul, and Riyadh are emerging as places where clothes are designed, exhibited and consumed intensely. Over the past 20 years leading OMA's New York office, I have travelled to and worked in many places. Everywhere I go, I try to find a balance between conveying a brand's image and slightly destabilizing it. In an exhibition for Louis Vuitton at the Gaysorn Amarin shopping centre in Bangkok, we used the immediately recognizable Courrier 90 as a key ingredient in the architecture by toppling a stack of these trunks and reconfiguring them into an arched tunnel. I wanted to suggest that a timeless object and symbol of Louis Vuitton's heritage could be adapted to a purpose that would have been impossible to imagine when the pieces were first designed.

When working on projects like this, I often feel I have to be true to my own aesthetic drive or let it go completely, neither of which is easy in architecture. So I try to learn from the specific context of a place, observing in order to draw out relatable threads, while providing a new experience. The Tiffany Landmark building on Fifth Avenue, which OMA transformed, was a chance to unlock stories, across time and geography, of this particularly American and quintessentially New York brand whose image has become inseparable from the city's history. For the scenography of a Miss Dior perfumes exhibition in Tokyo last summer, we explored ideas of femininity – romance, art and nature – embodied by the products, which have a different resonance in Japan than they do in France or the United States. I thought the feeling of a pleasant dream could be universal and created a dream sequence using familiar motifs and materials but with exaggerated scales, bright colours, and unexpected perspectives. I'm excited by the possibilities of constructing more surreal worlds in the future. They might be small, self-contained, and temporary, but they can still remove us from reality for as long as we explore them, like a dream.



Photograph by Olgaç Bolzap
for *Dazed* MENA, Issue 0

Hold the Future

The editor-in-chief of the newly launched *Dazed* MENA on his mission to secure the future of creative talent in the Arab world. By Ahmad Swaid.

It's been several weeks since *Dazed* MENA launched into the universe, and the excitement has not waned. In the six weeks leading up to our debut, we put together a 360-page monster of an issue that began in Kabul, spotlighting Afghan girls in the safety of their bedrooms, collaborated with Lea Colombo in Addis Ababa to document the biggest Ethiopian female skate collective, worked with Davit Giorgadze and Dogi in Berlin to photograph rapper Saint Levant, and paired Nell Kalonji and Bharat Sikka to document surfers in Sri Lanka. We captured singer Nemahsis in Toronto with Bottega Veneta, photographed Precious Trust designer and creative director Wathek in his family home, sent Olgaç Bozalp to Saudi Arabia to street cast and document the kingdom's youth for a Prada story, and told the story of a nine-year-old Syrian shepherd in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley. And for our cover, we turned our lens to Gaza, documenting parkourists moving against a backdrop of ongoing, indisputable violence.

The breadth of these stories, produced in just six weeks, speaks both to the sheer perseverance of our team and to the reality that there is an abundance of narratives waiting to be told across the MENA – Middle East and North Africa – region; stories that often go untold because our industry doesn't cater to youth and especially to youth from other backgrounds. A revolving door of PRs push the same pool of talent to global magazines, hindering the ability of young creatives to truly thrive.

At *Dazed* MENA, though, we're asking bigger questions: how do we create legacy? How can we contribute to our culture in the most unadulterated sense of the word? By empowering young talent and erasing the mentality that tells us we have to look outward for cultural value. For too long, there's been a tendency to adopt and amplify cultural products and practices from other regions at our own expense, holding them as a blueprint. This isn't about asking for a seat at someone else's table – because we're building our own. Our goal is to empower a generation of creatives across the region to experiment, collaborate, and showcase their work on their own terms.

The MENA region has the fastest-growing youth population in the world, not to mention its diaspora in cities like London, New York and Paris. As the new year begins, so does the work we intend to do. Looking back, I feel a sense of hope for the future, the same hope I felt during my youth in Aleppo, Beirut and Freetown, before I left those places to take up the opportunity of a career in London. Working with a number of publications – including *System* – gave me the experience and insight to do what I do now. Imagination cannot exist without industry and industry cannot innovate in absence.

Ultimately, *Dazed* MENA is not here to save us because we don't need saving – we need space. Space to connect, to build, and to celebrate the richness of who we are. We aim to be a vehicle for any kid, wherever they exist in the world, to create, and to provide the infrastructure and platform to support that creation. If they have the imagination and the perseverance, then we are providing the platform. We're shaping what's to come, and I can't think of anything more exciting than that!

‘We’re neither an art school nor a business school. We’re a fashion school.’

At Paris’s Institut Français de la Mode, the synergy between fashion design and management is helping shape the industry’s future.

Text and interviews by Marta Represa
Photographs by Antoine Seiter





The Institut Français de la Mode's distinctive, serpentine, chartreuse-green-and-transparent building alongside the River Seine has become a modern Paris landmark. Since 2021, it has been IFM's HQ, the latest chapter in the history of an institution that has mirrored France's fashion industry – and culture at large – for decades.

The school was founded in 1986 by then culture minister Jack Lang in collaboration with a group of fashion industry figures including YSL's Pierre Bergé. Its aim – to 'strengthen Paris's role as a global fashion capital' by focusing on business and management – immediately attracted a roster of brands eager to co-finance the project, as well as collaborate with (and recruit from) it. Research and fashion-design departments followed in the next decade, bridging the gap between the fashion industry's different sectors and professions, and completing Bergé's stated mission that, like he and Yves Saint Laurent, widely considered the defining partnership of business acumen and design genius, 'there should be no boundaries between each of our fields of expertise. We get to be better at ours by understanding those of others.'

Today, under the leadership of Xavier Romatet, the school attracts students from all over the world to its BA and MA programmes, in part thanks to the draw of its broad alumni network: creatives such as Nadège Vanhee-Cybulski, creative director of womenswear at Hermès, and Guillaume Henry, artistic director at Patou; fashion business leaders, including Bastien Daguzan, who has led Rabanne and Jacquemus; as well as countless heads of ateliers, directors, entrepreneurs and craftspeople. The result is an eclectic mix of students, all encouraged to learn from each other and explore creativity and innovation from all sides of the industry.

To understand how IFM's boundary-pushing mission works in practice, *System* brought together students from the design and management courses to reflect upon their experiences of working collaboratively, and spoke to the heads of their respective departments. The resulting discussions over the following pages offer not only an insight into the nature and importance of fusing the often-competing spheres of creativity and business, but also a possible blueprint for the future of the fashion industry itself.



Xavier Romatet Dean of IFM

It's not even 9am and the sky has that trademark Parisian moodiness to it, but Xavier Romatet is as upbeat as ever as he enters his office overlooking the Seine. Well known in the Paris fashion milieu for his unstoppable entrepreneurial spirit, Romatet began his career in marketing and communication as the co-founder of the Directing advertising agency before serving as CEO of Condé Nast France between 2006 and 2018. 'It was a remarkable era,' he says. 'We launched *Glamour*, *GQ* and *Vanity Fair*, expanded into the digital realm, created era-defining events like *Vogue*'s Fashion Night Out. For 12 years, the industry was full of possibility.' Until it wasn't. 'At some point in the mid-2010s, things started to contract and condense, and it didn't feel as stimulating any more,' he remembers. 'But then Bruno Pavlovsky [president of fashion at Chanel, as well as president of France's Fédération de la Haute Couture] reached out with a plan to reinvent IFM with more of an international focus than ever. It felt like a challenge, so I said yes.'

If, at first glance, Romatet might seem like an atypical choice for IFM's dean, it all makes perfect sense once he shares his broader vision of the fashion industry: 'It's all about culture, really: knowledge, cultural references, critical judgement. Things that have gone out of fashion as the world's emotionality has gotten more and more heightened. Ultimately, that's what we try to cultivate here.'

No matter which pathway they choose, candidates to the IFM must prove their creative sensibility. 'We get an average of 3,500 applicants for 600 places,' explains Romatet. 'We conduct around 1,500 very thorough personal interviews, lasting around 45 minutes each. That takes months, but good recruitment is essential for us. What makes us different from other schools is our multidisciplinary focus. We are not an art school or a business school, but a fashion school. And, ultimately, our mission is to nourish fashion's creative spirit.'

Marta Represa: There remains the kind of lazy notion that management in fashion is there to rein in, control or limit the creatives' ideas. How do you counter that?
Xavier Romatet: I've never believed that. Not for one minute. On the contrary, it's the creatives who should be at the helm of the industry. The essence of fashion lies in desire. We as consumers want a product for three reasons: it is original and new; it has an aspirational appeal, derived from the brand's philosophy and aesthetic universe; and it is well crafted. Those three things are creatively driven.

Those three things have also been the pillars of the luxury industry in France for the past 20 years.
Yes. In 1998, Dior's revenue was measured in millions; today, it's measured in billions. That evolution is the result of a business strategy built on the foundations of a creative strategy. Luxury groups rendered their heritage desirable through design, then developed – and rolled out globally – a powerful business strategy to support that. All this time, they've understood that, unlike pure marketing, the luxury industry is driven by supply, not demand. The client expects the unexpected. If all you do as a brand is respond to what people already like, and replicate the strategies that first led you to success, you're only going to thrive in the short term. Creativity is key. Of course, the bigger the brand, the harder it is to keep it at the forefront.

'We make our management students fluent in the language of creation, just as we familiarize design students with the business aspects of the industry.'

That's the challenge luxury groups are facing nowadays.
That and products going from being seen as aspirational to becoming downright inaccessible. Look at pricing, look at strategy. Luxury has to remain within the realm of possibility; it needs to feel attainable. Otherwise, you're just feeding a sense of frustration, and losing touch with the wants of society at large. That might be a conversation for another day; in any case, creativity is essential to the industry's survival.

How do you create a symbiotic relationship between the management and creative departments within a company?
At the end of the day, it's all about creating authentic relationships. I have always worked with creative people, people with remarkable talent and individuality, intelligence and sensitivity and I love managerial work with them, because I respect and admire what they can – and I can't – do. But mostly, I genuinely enjoy the company of creatives, and I actually find it easier managing them than I do other profiles.

Yet we continue to hear management say creatives don't always listen, and that in some cases, they're unmanageable.

Oh, but they do listen, and, in a world where creatives can easily find themselves surrounded by yes men, they very often want to hear the truth. They also want to be heard, and feel safe and free in their self-expression. As a manager, you need to respect that in order to have a fruitful dialogue with them. You can't just storm in with your business-school credentials and hope for the best. A creative sensibility is essential.

Is that what you look for in prospective students?
Absolutely. It's what we look for in all our candidates, and also what we nurture from the get-go. In our management BA, between 25 and 30 per cent of all courses are centred around design, art history, fashion culture, and image-making. We make them fluent in the language of creation, just as we familiarize design students with the business aspects of the industry.

So they follow business-centric courses?
They all learn basic management skills, production, merchandising, as well as crafting. It's a question of building a sense of fashion culture – and culture at large – as well as mutual respect and, of course, professional efficiency. I believe that's what makes the Institut Français de la Mode different from other – very excellent – schools: thinking of fashion as a fully rounded industry, knowing that everyone within the industry is ultimately working towards making brands better. We definitely want our students to understand that from the get-go.

Are there any core subjects all students share, regardless of their pathway?
We are currently working on setting up 15 different cross-disciplinary elective subjects, ranging from creative writing to technology to sustainability. The idea is to dedicate each Monday to them, on a project-by-project basis in groups of 10 to 25, so that throughout the academic year, students from all pathways will be working together on subjects such as fashion and cinema, or fashion and performance, in every sense of the word; just exploring the many ways in which performance nourishes creation and shapes brands and their creative expression nowadays. These are particularly relevant subjects in the industry and have proven to be very popular among students.

From what I have seen, management and design students already spend time together daily on campus.
We designed this campus with that very idea in mind. The walls are transparent, so anyone can see what goes on in the classrooms and ateliers. The idea was to create a series of spaces where everyone would meet every day, in an informal, spontaneous way. It's about the full experience rather than just a couple of workshopping hours. All year long, our main entrance hosts fashion exhibitions. Shows take place here during Paris Fashion Week, immersing students in their hectic atmosphere. So yes, it goes beyond just collaborating in class. We want all our students to get used to the creative process, to talk to one another, and to learn how to best use AI, a printing press or a sewing machine.

What active role do the city's fashion and luxury brands play in this school ecosystem?
IFM is here because of Parisian brands; they were the ones who first financed the school, and they in turn collaborate with us as they would in a creative laboratory. The school is a hub where all the professions and players of the industry meet. That has always been my goal: to create a cultural intersection. And I think brands have really understood and are responding to that, collaborating with us in an array of organic, authentic ways. Our projects with Hermès, Kenzo, Loewe or Coperni are designed to teach our students the realities of the industry, while bringing fresh points of view to the *maisons*. Also, of course, they are the perfect recruiting opportunities. After all, it would be a pity not to make the most out of the fact that we are based in Paris.

And then there is the incubator.
We have both an incubator, with around 20 start-ups and designers each year, and an accelerator, with five or six brands. Louis Gabriel Nouchi, EgonLab, Marine Serre and Jacquemus have all been part of it, but it was never as much about their undeniable creative talent as it was about their capacity and readiness to build a bridge between their creativity and their business strategy. Once again, it's about building bridges, because in this industry you can only succeed once you realize you can't go it alone and are part of something bigger than just you. That's the beauty of fashion.

'Managers need to respect creative expressions and sensibilities. You can't just storm in with your business-school credentials and hope for the best.'



Franck Delpal Director of MA
in Fashion and Luxury Management
Dr Leyla Neri Head of MA in Fashion Design
Thierry Rondenet Co-Director of BA
in Fashion Design
Hervé Yvrenogeau Co-Director of BA
in Fashion Design

Sat in a classroom, among several dozen Stockman mannequins, are key members of the IFM faculty: Franck Delpal, Leyla Neri, Thierry Rondenet and Hervé Yvrenogeau. Each has had a different professional path, yet all have first-hand industry experience. Delpal is deeply involved in the business of fashion through IFM's Incubator Program, which he founded in 2015. A fashion designer with a PhD in anthropology, Neri started her career at Gucci, and still collaborates with different brands. Rondenet and Yvrenogeau, a creative duo who graduated from La Cambre and won the Grand Prix at the Hyères Festival in 1994, have worked with Maison Martin Margiela, Jean Paul Gaultier and Balenciaga, while managing Own, their brand.

'The Row recently opened their Paris studio, and immediately picked three of our students to intern. We forget how lucky we are to be located in Paris.'

What attracts students to IFM and its programmes?
Leyla Neri: I think people who come here are attracted to two very different things at once: the specializations and how we bridge the gap between all the students in different programmes. In my case, I only have a few students who apply for the MA immediately after completing their BA. They tend to come to us after a period of work experience or even after a previous MA at a different school, like Central Saint Martins.
Franck Delpal: When it comes to the management side of things, we are competing with traditional business schools, so those who look for a different, more creatively oriented vision gravitate naturally towards us. Beyond industry specifics, they're looking for the intangible: learning about desirability, brand image, and so on, and that's our specific approach.

What kinds of student profiles do you look for?
Hervé Yvrenogeau: As many different profiles as possible. People from all walks of life, backgrounds and sensibilities. On the BA, we give the chance to young students, sometimes straight out of high school. Even if their approach can sometimes be naive, there is a freshness to them, and the kernel of something that can be nurtured and developed with time.
Thierry Rondenet: We had this student a few years ago who when he came to us had no previous experience within fashion, but was doing black-and-white photography. Not only did he complete his BA, he also went on to intern at Maison Margiela and is now back here for his MA on a scholarship.
Hervé: Our scholarship programme is fundamental to us; 25 to 30 per cent of our students are here on scholarships. Both Thierry and I studied at La Cambre in Brussels, a publicly funded school, so we feel very strongly about this. Fashion does not have to belong exclusively to the elites and the middle classes. On the contrary, it becomes richer the more diverse its points of view.
Leyla: But sometimes fashion remains unattainable even for the middle classes! Our fees are much lower than other schools, but for European MA students, it's still over €24,000 for the two years. For non-Europeans, the price rises to €38,000.
Thierry: That's why creating work opportunities is so important to us. Eighty-five per cent of our students go on to be employed within a year of completing their MA. Same for internships – the opportunities are unique. The Row recently opened their Paris studio, and immediately picked three of our students to intern. We tend to forget how lucky we are to be in Paris.

Can you describe your different programmes?
Franck: Our management MA is short, only 16 months long, but also quite intensive. It is often the last academic chapter for students who already have an MA. It is built on four different pillars. Firstly, learning about the transformations that are currently shaping the industry through things such as CSR, technology and international markets. Secondly, proficiency in everyday operations, no matter what field they later choose. This goes from production, pricing, and liaising with factories to merchandising, analytics, distribution, or even content production and image. Thirdly, a knowledge of creative culture and the creative process, not just so that they'll understand designers' points of view, but also so that they'll develop their own innovative solutions and ideas. Finally, traditional management skills: how to brief a team, giving feedback, using Excel, et cetera.



Left to right: Thierry Rondenet, Dr Leyla Neri, and Hervé Yvrenogeau.

Thierry: The BA is, of course, a whole other thing. Our work is very much angled in specifics. We create a framework and teach the basics of design, and of course, crafting. Little by little, the students start working on developing a silhouette and expressing themselves. Then, in our third and final year, our students create their collections, which are the perfect summary and expression of all they have learned.
Hervé: There are also some more unexpected disciplines we prioritize. For instance, research.
Thierry: Because they do tend to just want to do it online, which can quickly get very repetitive and limited.
Hervé: It's important to teach research methodology, while banning things like Pinterest. Library trips are mandatory, and that transition from online to physical can be difficult. For many students, spending two hours at the Bibliothèque Nationale seems like a waste of time. Hopefully, though, they come to understand this is how one builds culture.
Leyla: For the fashion design MA, it starts with choosing one of our four pathways: clothing, accessories, knitwear, or image. All students share about 20 per cent of their classes, on subjects including human science, sustainability, introduction to business, HR, and career preparation. Other than that, it's mostly a project-based curriculum. It's important to us to teach in a way that reflects both the current transformations in the industry and in society at large.
Thierry: We are in Paris, but count 77 different nationalities at the school, so not being Eurocentric in our teachings is essential, for example, with subjects like fashion history.

How do you go about integrating the work that students do with brands into the wider programme?
Leyla: Brand projects are at the heart of our MA. It's not simple, as we have to negotiate with the *maisons*, sometimes as much as two years in advance; establish a legal framework, for example, in case a student's idea is retained; and accommodate the rest of our daily schedule around it. But the wonderful formative opportunity they provide makes it all worthwhile.
Franck: The fact that we are working with real-life companies in real-life cases makes all the difference. We have brands come in to brief students like they would their own teams, about subjects including brand image, product development, communication, and client experience.

Leyla: After I graduated, I went to work at Gucci in Florence, during the late Tom Ford era. I cried throughout the first week – that's how clueless I was about working within a company. I've never forgotten how hard that transition was, and part of what motivates me in developing these brand projects is to help the new generations avoid experiencing that shock.

Who are some of the brands you work with?
Franck: Celine, Louis Vuitton, Farfetch, Galeries Lafayette, Jacquemus, Courrèges, Coperni...

Can you talk about a recent project example?
Leyla: We have just finished a four-month project with Loewe, where the theme was redefining masculinity in relation to men's accessories. Students had to research the gap between modern ideas around masculinity and gender and the realities of the men's leather-goods market, by doing things like going into a store to conduct a survey. Then, they designed a bag. With Hermès, it was all about visiting the house's archives to find *carré* scarves that could be transposed into knitwear. Then we did a project with Kenzo, centred around Kenzo Takada's first few collections, which he made on a shoestring budget but with the help of his community. Students had to reflect on that, and on Kenzo's sense of joy.
Leyla: In 2024, joy has been in short supply, and students were vocal about it. In the end, they all found ways to work within the concept, except for one student, who researched Kenzo's grief instead. Each student had to design a 30-look collection and produce a complete outfit, using a single material in two different ways.

What are the biggest challenges faced by today's students?
Franck: I don't even know where to start! The market is in a complex place at the moment, especially for luxury conglomerates. How do you make these huge structures, which are so well-established and sometimes resistant to risk and initiative, move with the times? Then of course, there is the evolution of trades, the rise of new professions, the challenges related to the transmission of crafts and savoir-faire, European manufacturing. The list is long and varied and, in many instances, potential solutions have to do with bridging the gaps between disciplines and knowledge fields.

'We have just finished a four-month project with Loewe, where the theme was redefining masculinity in the context of the men's leather-goods market.'



Franck Delpal



Gal Benyamin and Caroline Baratelli

Gal Benyamin MA in Fashion Design student
Caroline Baratelli MA in Fashion and Luxury Management student

Tell us about the work you've done together.
Caroline Baratelli: The school was approached by Sheltersuit Foundation, which helps people in need of shelter through a range of initiatives, including providing protective, functional, warm clothing to the homeless, refugees, and disaster and conflict victims. It was one of several options for a sustainability-centred project, and we were both instinctively drawn to it, even though Gal and I didn't know one another then.
Gal Benyamin: For me, it was a no-brainer, because it was the only project to address sustainability as direct social impact. It was the only place where we would get to help other humans directly, while the rest were start-ups, deadstock solutions, et cetera.
Caroline: I grew up here in Paris, and have noticed how, year after year, the homeless population has increased. This summer I started working with shelters, so this was the perfect opportunity to extend that work.

'We dress differently, think differently, but there is a lot that unites us. And it's those differences that have strengthened our working relationship.'

Gal: Same with me, I have done voluntary work outside the school, so having the chance to continue it here, with this project, has been great.

Were any other brands involved?
Caroline: Balenciaga gave us the deadstock to manufacture our product, and they also made a donation to the foundation.

How long has the process lasted?
Caroline: It's been long. We started in October 2023.
Gal: We're still working on it because we made the choice to continue, beyond just something to add to our resumé. In fact, we are expecting a fabric delivery from Isabel Marant this morning to make some more product!

How did you come up with the idea for your product?
Gal: At first, we didn't have a clear idea, so we spoke to refugees and homeless people about what they needed most, what they could use. In the process, it struck us how many children and pregnant women we were coming into contact with.
Caroline: There was one particular incident, where we were talking to a woman on a cold, rainy night and she was carrying her baby. She lost her grip, and he fell. We were horrified to realize that this woman lacked something as basic as a device to effortlessly carry her baby. That immediately sparked the idea.
Gal: I remembered how my mother used this wrap, which was 100-per-cent safe. No child would ever fall from it, and also it provided a warmth and closeness between baby and mother that I feel is precious – especially in vulnerable circumstances. So we designed a baby-carrying wrap.
Caroline: Gal's idea was genius from a business and production perspective, because it's so simple! All we required in order to manufacture the prototype was five metres of any slightly stretchy fabric. That's also easily scalable.
Gal: I have come to realize that, when working on a project as particular as this – indeed, anything regarding sustainability or social impact – the simpler the concept is, the easier it is to convince people to invest in it. It might seem banal, but it's really useful.
Caroline: We have produced and distributed 100 wraps to shelters so far, and are waiting for this Isabel Marant deadstock in order to produce a new, bigger batch. It's exciting.

What have you learned about each other and your respective work processes?
Gal: Honestly, the whole experience has been just so good. Putting aside the fact that Caroline is an amazing person, we've worked together really well because we completely trusted each other from the start, and we've known we had a common goal.
Caroline: We owe a lot of our success to the fact that our personal dynamic was so good, even though we are vastly different as people!
Gal: We dress differently, like different things, think differently, but there is a lot that unites us. And also the differences have strengthened our working relationship. When I'm doing creative work, I need to feel supported and also a bit pushed; I need someone to actually make things happen.
Caroline: It's about validation.
Gal: Not necessarily about me getting validation directly from you, but about you creating a sense of validation from the outside. Otherwise I get very unmotivated.



Paul Billot and Léa Lupone

Paul Billot MA in Fashion Design student
Léa Lupone MA in Fashion and Luxury Management student

Tell us about the work you've done together.
Paul Billot: The first thing is how much fun it was.
Léa Lupone: It was unexpected because unlike most of our projects, it was short. It was with Coperni and we only had five days to complete it, so it was an intensive week to say the least.
Paul: It's interesting to experience that kind of timeline, where you work under pressure and need to find quick and efficient ways to collaborate. It's draining, but enriching.
Léa: At the end of the week, we had to present our concept and our product in public. That added an extra layer of stress.

What was the brief?
Léa: Coperni came to us with a question regarding product expansion. They needed us to come up with new product ideas outside of pure fashion. Of course, being Coperni, we knew innovation and tech were an essential ingredient.
Paul: We quickly knew we wanted to create something beauty-related, because it makes a lot of sense for a lot of brands, but we also wanted to offer something different from what most brands offer, and feature some sort of cutting-edge technology. That's what inspired the idea of an LED mask. I've been seeing so many of them on social media recently, and the funny thing is people are not just wearing them in the privacy of their home, but making videos and selfies and TikTok dances while using them. So I thought we could give the masks different expressions: angry, laughing, happy. We called it 'LED-moji'. It's an innovative beauty device, but also an accessory.
Léa: When Paul first came to me with the beauty idea, it immediately set my wheels spinning. I started thinking of market opportunities, numbers, benchmarking. Then he told me about the mask, and I was bewildered for a minute. Then I realized I could make it work business-wise. For lack of a better word, I could 'justify' it.
Paul: Of course, you could! It was a good idea.
Léa: It was! I think our brains work differently, though. I don't think we ask ourselves the same questions at all. It's funny because I have never thought of myself as particularly numbers-oriented, but working alongside you I realized I actually might be! I was looking to justify every single decision in the context of the brand. I don't know how that works on your end, do you feel like you have to justify your choices?
Paul: Not in the slightest. For us, it's more about confronting the visual impact of what we design. How does it make us feel? How does our body react to it?

Often, the public doesn't really know what it wants until it has that visceral reaction to a new product.
Léa: Totally, and our work as managers is just to interpret and contextualize that new product. In this case, we did a photo shoot and then did the presentation wearing white lab coats, for a bit of a scientific veneer.
Paul: It highlighted the innovative aspect of the product, and it was also a little bit cheeky. I was into that.
Léa: We only had three minutes; we had to be as convincing in our pitch as we were in our prototype.
Paul: Our prototype was made in plasticized cardboard, printed using the Fablab, which is our technical laboratory, equipped with 3D printers, logo-makers, embroidery machines, and a team that coaches us in their use.

'Coperni needed us to come up with new product ideas beyond pure fashion. Being Coperni, we knew innovation and tech would be essential ingredients.'

Léa: I can't believe I had never before been to the Fablab. It was such a great discovery for me, and such a great opportunity to see this school in a different way to the one I'm used to.

What did you learn about each other during this project?
Paul: I realized we are incredibly different, personality-wise, but that we can work together fabulously well by sitting around a table and sharing ideas as equals. Around you, Léa, I felt free and safe to express an idea that could have been seen as stupid or too risky. You were really flexible in your views and the way you worked.
Léa: It was important for me to make you feel comfortable, and I think sitting around a table and just sharing ideas without judgement is a great way to boost creativity, yours as well as mine. Your input was invaluable for many reasons, one of them being that your vision is close to that of the client, because it is visceral, instinctive instead of analytical. I learned that by working with you.
Paul: And it's great to have your more analytical reactions, too, because among designers things can quickly get too… esoteric. We need grounding.



Ali Es-Kouri and Adrian Kammarti

Ali Es-Kouri MA in Fashion and Luxury Management student
Adrian Kammarti assistant professor, Fashion Theory and PhD student at Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne

What brought you together?
Adrian Kammarti: Ali was my student, but we had already met through aesthetic affinities. I finished my MA at IFM in 2017 and am currently an assistant fashion-theory professor here, alongside my PhD in the history of art and fashion.
Ali Es-Kouri: I started my MA last year after studying computer science, and I'm simultaneously interning at the men's merchandising department at Givenchy.
Adrian: It was another guest teacher who introduced us because she thought our views on fashion would click. We both discovered fashion through online forums.
Ali: We both have a preference for Hedi Slimane, so we immediately started discussing his Saint Laurent era after we met. I grew up in Morocco, so access to fashion was limited. Luckily, I was introduced to subcultures via the internet.
Adrian: For me, it was about Kanye West and what he wore.

'The goal is for my students to become more knowledgeable than most people in the industry. A lot of industry people aren't really fashion fans.'

That, and online forums, is how I discovered the work of Ann Demeulemeester, Rick Owens, Visvim, which ultimately led me to research the link between fashion and subcultures.

Does the IFM framework enable you to explore that vision?
Adrian: Absolutely, and in different ways, such as research and publications; I love the transversal quality of it.
Ali: There are many different student profiles here, we get to share a lot and learn from each other, but also to delve into the things that specifically make us tick. I still remember my application interview. I was nervous it would all be about the luxury industry, but the faculty encouraged me to talk about things like musical references – I'm a big fan of early-2000s indie rock – and how they inform my take on fashion.
Adrian: I love finding out about the things my students are passionate about, and I love to share my passions. The way I design my classes is the same: I start from a simple idea that I find intellectually stimulating or innovative, something that steers clear from the clichés of fashion history. I want to tell my students about the kinds of movements and designers that are often overlooked: Supreme, BAPE, Cottweiler. They were decisive in shaping a whole fashion era and what came afterwards, and they need to be more present. The goal is for my students to have better knowledge than even most people in the industry. Because, paradoxically, a lot of people in fashion are not really fashion fans.

Tell us about the project you worked on together.
Adrian: It was a part of my contemporary-fashion course, where I teach fashion movements since 2016, with the arrival of Demna at Balenciaga, Anthony Vaccarello at Saint Laurent, and Maria Grazia Chiuri at Dior. In it, we explore the ways in which the industry has been transformed. This year, to coincide with Paris Fashion Week, we concentrated on the evolution of fashion shows. Starting with an item related to a show – photo, video, soundtrack, prototypes – we asked our students to analyse and reflect on it, in the form of an art installation.
Ali: I got an Autumn/Winter 2022 Balenciaga invite, the one that came as an iPhone. That got me thinking about the concept of the front row, and its evolution these past few years. How did it go from the press, clients and aristocrats in Cristóbal's era to Kim Kardashian and influencers today? I researched the progressive changes through the Ghesquière, Wang and Demna eras and came to the conclusion that 2008 was in a way the 'big bang' year – because of the arrival of bloggers. That was when brands started thinking differently about the ways they wanted to be talked about.
Adrian: The great thing was that you presented your research by creating a front row yourself.
Ali: At our own, tiny scale. We created seating for the members of the jury and only sat one of them on the front row. We then explained the reasons for that choice.
Adrian: It was a perfect demonstration of the power dynamics at play, and a supremely creative mise-en-scène.
Ali: A scenographer guided us through the more technical aspects of it, and that was really helpful. We are students and of course, our means are limited, but that's what inspires us to think outside the box and come up with creative solutions and presentations. It's also really motivating to work around something you feel truly passionate about.
Adrian: At the end of the day, it's simple: the more passionate people there are in the industry, the better fashion becomes.



Paul Billot
MA creative collaboration with Paris-based fashion house



Christian Ye
BA graduate collection



Hyeonseo Yoo
BA graduate collection



Paul Billot
BA graduate collection



Paul Billot
MA creative collaboration with Kenzo



Victoria Yujin Kwon
BA graduate collection



Eliott Farny
MA creative collaboration with Kenzo



Sofia Castellon
MA creative collaboration with Paris-based fashion house



Filip Bejek
MA creative collaboration with Kenzo



Ricard Baldomà
MA creative collaboration with Kenzo



Ricard Baldomà
MA creative collaboration with Kenzo



Sofia Castellon
MA creative collaboration with Paris-based fashion house

‘I can’t change the world, but maybe I can change the idea of beauty.’

Yohji Yamamoto reflects on life and death, chance and destiny, Paris and Tokyo.

Text and interview by Tim Blanks
Photographs by Takashi Homma





System filmed my conversation with Yohji Yamamoto last summer for a planned series of online fashion profiles, a new venture for the magazine. Aside from the camera crew, there was also a full cohort of Yohji's team. An audience, in other words. That mutated the dynamic of a conventional interview setup: two talking heads and a taping device. We were, in a way, 'on'. The exchange became subtly performative.

Then something struck me as I was recently reading the unedited transcript. My conversations with Yohji over the years – the first one was in Tokyo in 1986, and there have been many more since in Paris, New York, and again, Tokyo – have always been like this, audience or not.

In 1986, he said the more he talked, the less he tended to be understood, or so he believed. Which suggested that how he talked clearly mattered to him. He always chose his words carefully, never using more or fewer than were necessary. He never hesitated in expressing himself – no ums or ahs – and, most compellingly, he spoke in a murmur that was paradoxically crystal clear. Sure, you concentrate on someone who's murmuring, but it's a curious sensation when they are actually completely audible even without the concentration. Oh, and he punctuated his words with a constant cigarette, pausing for a thoughtful inhale, while the ash lengthened suspensefully. A performer!

Yohji loves Bob Dylan. They're more or less the same age, but I get the feeling Dylan has been a huge influence on him. In an ideal world, Yohji would have been a musician. 'I feel designing is a young person's job,' he told me in 1986. 'You can't catch a young person's spirit as you get older.' (He was 43 at the time.) Just as Dylan, in his never-ending tour, still renews songs he wrote more than 60 years ago, iconoclast to the core, Yohji is drawn to revisionary blasts from his past. Perhaps that's why the fashion pendulum has swung his way once again. Bob and Yohji are elder statesmen, constantly cheating time by constantly cheeking their seniority.

They also share a mutual admiration for Picasso. 'He never aged in his spirit,' Yohji told me nearly 40 years ago. 'I feel he was a child when he was going to die, and I envy that.' (What a trove that interview was!) I guess there's always been a morbid tinge to our conversations. The power of fate certainly weighed heavy on our 2024 exchange. Yohji seems to have spent his entire life doing something that was, at the very best, third on his list of ambitions. Maybe he is what happens when resignation joins with pragmatism and an instinctive embrace of creation becomes an act of rebellion. The result has been a singularly personal art. Which means that some day I hope to see Yohji, Bob and Pablo fighting their corners round a table in Bar Paradise.

But for now, a fashion interview scripted by Samuel Beckett. I'll do me; you be Yohji.

'When I was a kid, I'd watch cowboy movies. In the beginning I liked the cowboys, but then I started to hate them because they killed too many Indians.'

Tim Blanks: We're in your Paris headquarters, so I was wondering what your relationship with Paris is these days?

Yohji Yamamoto: When I was at university, a famous Japanese university[1], my classmates started talking about and working for an exam run by a famous, large, and rich company. At that time, I didn't want to take the exam; I thought I didn't need to take the exam for a famous rich company, so I made a big trip by ship from Yokohama. I travelled to Russia first of all. My first trip to another country and the first one was Russia. Then the northern part of Europe, before I came down through Germany to Paris. I don't remember which station it was, Gare du Nord or Gare de l'Est, but the first moment I got off the train in this country, I smelled the Gitanes, the Gauloises, and I heard the very high-tone talking of people, like fighting each other. Anyway, it was noisy, noisy and smelly, and I felt, 'Oh, this is my town!' It was like fate, yeah. From the second I got out of the train, I started to love this city.

When you come here do you have a routine? Are there certain things you love to do, that you do to sort of settle yourself into Paris?
When I arrived 60 years ago, I started smoking.

Oh, that's not good.
Yes, it's good.

No, it's not.
But I'm still alive!

What do you smoke, not Gitanes?
No, the same thing I've always smoked[2]; they are very cheap.

So, Paris made you smoke.
In Paris, yes. In the United States, it is not allowed; it is like a joke – 'Welcome to Marlboro Country'!



Do you feel you work differently in Paris to the way you work in Tokyo?
I really don't know. My spirit or heart is always living in Paris and Tokyo, and it is always switching. Tokyo and Paris; Paris and Tokyo.

So, you're the same person in Tokyo and Paris?
Yes, I've kept myself the same.

You don't have a Paris personality.
No.

There are things you've said over the years that really stay with me. One thing you said seems more relevant than ever: you have to be angry to be a fashion designer. Do you still believe that?
Yeah... [long pause] Do you need me to give you a reason?

I clearly remember them, and gradually, like I was five or six years old, I started becoming angry about what the Japanese army had done to him. So, why I am telling this story? I still have anger left, and I don't know, I have no memory of my father actually. I just worked, only with my mother. She worked so hard every day. One strong memory I have was when my mother was in good shape, she told me, 'I have no memory of which food I gave you', and I answered to her, 'Same, I have no memory of which food you gave me.' We share the same memories because she worked so very hard.

Was remembering how hard that time was hugely important for you and for who you became?
I took it so hard; I took it as, 'This is my fate; this is my fate; this is my life.'

No. I didn't even want to become a fashion designer, a clothing maker. I really hate the look of fashion; I am not a fashion designer.

What are you?
A clothing maker – that's it. Otherwise, if I had chosen another method, right now, I would be dead or in prison because I was so angry. I was anti-men, anti-adults. They made so many wars, so many bombs. The women were pushed to the back, to be guards for men's lives.

Caretakers. So why choose fashion design then? You could have been a musician, a lot of angry young men become musicians.
You are right. I had only three choices: I wanted to be a musician; I wanted to be a painter; I wanted to be a clothing maker.

'I chose to become a clothing maker. But had I chosen another route, I'd be dead or in prison right now, because I was such an angry young man.'

Yes, I do.
When I was very young, very tiny, four or five years old, before primary school, I was at a – how do you say this? – a kindergarten, and in the kindergarten, I became very close to one girl, a tiny little girl. I always took care of her, helping her out, I don't know why. And it has continued until now. I helped that young girl, a tiny girl, and I have been on the women's side, the girl's side, ever since I was five years old. This is maybe because I don't know anything about my father. In 1945, the year of the end of the Second World War, he was conscripted to the war, and the final words he said to my mother were that because he had been given summer wear, the summer uniform, then maybe he would be sent south [to a warm country]. These were his final words,

So, you believe in destiny.
Yes, because I had no choice. So, I kept standing on the girls' side. I am a man, I like women, but I was always standing on the women's side.

Do you think looking after that five-year-old girl was the beginning of your destiny?
Yes, but at that moment I didn't know why. Then finally last October, I turned 80 and I looked back at myself and I was like, 'It was destiny. Who gave it to me?' I was really angry.

You don't know who gave you your destiny?
No, I don't know.

Well, you did. You make your own fate, don't you think?

Do you think you got trapped? What trapped you?
My fate.

I believe that. I'm glad you do, too. Yet fashion has been an incredible platform for you to express your ideas.
I don't think so. Fashion is one choice; I always think I had another choice.

And what would that be?
Maybe a killer.

Like a samurai?
I hate samurai.

You present so many ideas through your clothes, you talk about how you could have been a painter, but you paint with your clothes; how you could have been a musician, but you make



music with your clothes.
Yes, yes.

You have made clothes the vehicle for all these things you love in your life. That is a good thing, you must be happy about that.
It's nice to make it all together. Four times a year.

You turned 80 last year. How different is it doing that now?
I am always asking myself, should I stop or should I continue? Who can decide this? I am asking this to the heavens.

Do you still love it?
I love the vocabulary. Love is not right because I was pushed to be like that; it was my last choice: my mother was a clothes maker and I followed her, naturally.

you frustrated?
Always. But I cannot be somebody else other than a fashion designer. It is me.

So, why not? You could do anything. Is fashion what you have to do because it's your fate?
Yeah, I told you already, I don't like fashion.

Clothes making.
When I brought my first outfit to Paris, 80 per cent of the journalists hated it, they hated me. Twenty per cent, they approached me, and it was nice.

Because it is good to be a rebel? I feel that everyone you have respected in your life, Georges Braque and Charlie Parker…
It comes from a misunderstanding.

big mistake. I ended up naturally following my mother's job – and that is it.

Fate.
Fate, yes. But fate is very strong, as you know.

It's a killer.
Yeah, I wanted to be a killer.

I think of you as a romantic, I think of you as a lover, not a fighter, but you are saying that you are a fighter.
A lover can easily switch to a killer. Don't you think so?

Yeah. Love kills. Do you believe in wisdom, that you accumulate wisdom as you get older?
I do not believe in wisdom, but we need wisdom. As we get old, we need wisdom.

'From the very first time I got off the train in Paris, I really loved this noisy and smelly city. I just felt like, 'Oh, this is my town!' It was fate.'

So, what would young Yohji think of Yohji now.
Maybe no different; I am still young mentally.

Are you proud of what you have done?
No, I am not proud. It is very painful, it is painful. I chose my last choice, my mother's job.

But you make music now.
Not really, I have a friend, a professional musician, I tell them my idea, my feeling, and then they create music for me.

Does that make you feel free or freer?
The happiest moments in my life are when we make music together. Making clothing is suffering.

But this has been your whole life. Aren't

Most people misunderstand me. I am misunderstood by people, by journalists, by buyers.

They misunderstand you, but you are loved!
Am I?

You are loved and respected and revered.
I don't think I am. I am just misunderstood.

Do you relish that kind of difficulty? You don't seem to like things being easy for you? Have you always been like that?
Yes. Because I've known since I was two or three years old. I didn't dream of anything; I just wanted to choose my everyday job. It was a big, big question, and a

Don't you think so?

Yeah, it is how we survive, it's how we know what is good or bad.
Survival is given by chance; it's a gift.

Who gives that gift?
Maybe when I was young, sometimes when I was very lucky, I thought my father did. I was like, 'Oh, father gave it to me.' It was very strange.

That is like a fairy tale.
Yes, a fairy tale; I am living in a fairy tale.

That explains a lot. Given all of that, are you worried about the way the world is?
Can I ask permission to smoke a cigarette?



I've never smoked a cigarette in my life and I have a lung condition.
You know, I never stopped smoking all my life, and I have nothing.

Fate. I don't like my fate.
You don't?

No, I don't like the idea of having something in my lung that's going to kill me.
I cannot say whether I like fate or not; I am just riding my luck.

When you look at the world, how do you feel right now?
It's crazy, dangerous, people killing each other; human beings are naturally dangerous.

The world is also becoming so conservative.
Yes, exactly.

Why? After everything we have fought for…
You ask me why? Human beings are born to be like that, I think, they are very, how can I say…

Perverse.
Perverse, and people don't accept other cultures, other people. Living on this tiny earth. Nature is beautiful, but the situation on earth is terrible. Don't you think so?

Terrible, it's terrible, I could cry. It just gets worse and worse. But making clothes, how do you feel when the world is like it is? Do you think what is the point of making clothes?
I'm just doing it for somebody. I cannot change the world; I cannot change people's minds. If I can do something, change or do something, I can change a little bit the idea of what is beauty… something that is dirty or ugly, it might be beautiful for me, so looking at something, you have to be free to look at something.

True, you have to break people's cages.
Exactly.

And you can do that with fashion, you can challenge people's preconceptions with clothes. Have you done that? When you came to Paris and 80 per cent of people didn't understand what you were doing, but 20 per cent did…
That was nice.

You changed things for 20 per cent of people.
I didn't count in that way. I was thinking that if a small part of the population can understand me, then that is OK, that's nice, because I can eat, I can keep on eating, keep on feeding my family. That's it. So, thanks a lot.

So, you are like a father who wants to care for his family, you do a job to make sure that your family has food on the table. Very humble.
Humble, yes. Maybe I am humble, maybe. I don't know. Do you know yourself deeply? People don't know about themselves; you will always surprise yourself. Do you surprise yourself?

Sometimes.
How?

I tell myself I am lucky, just lucky.
You have to have luck and sensibility to catch something.

You have to be able to judge the moment.
It is terrible, it is terrible to judge something. There are many ways of understanding. For everything.

So why do you think we get trapped into only one way of understanding things?
I don't know. Some famous journalists or powerful politicians and leaders make us all understand things the way they see them.

Do you think of yourself as a leader?
No, never. I am a patient of society. Can you believe that the Japanese army at the beginning of the Second World War, they made a big war in China and used gas bombs.

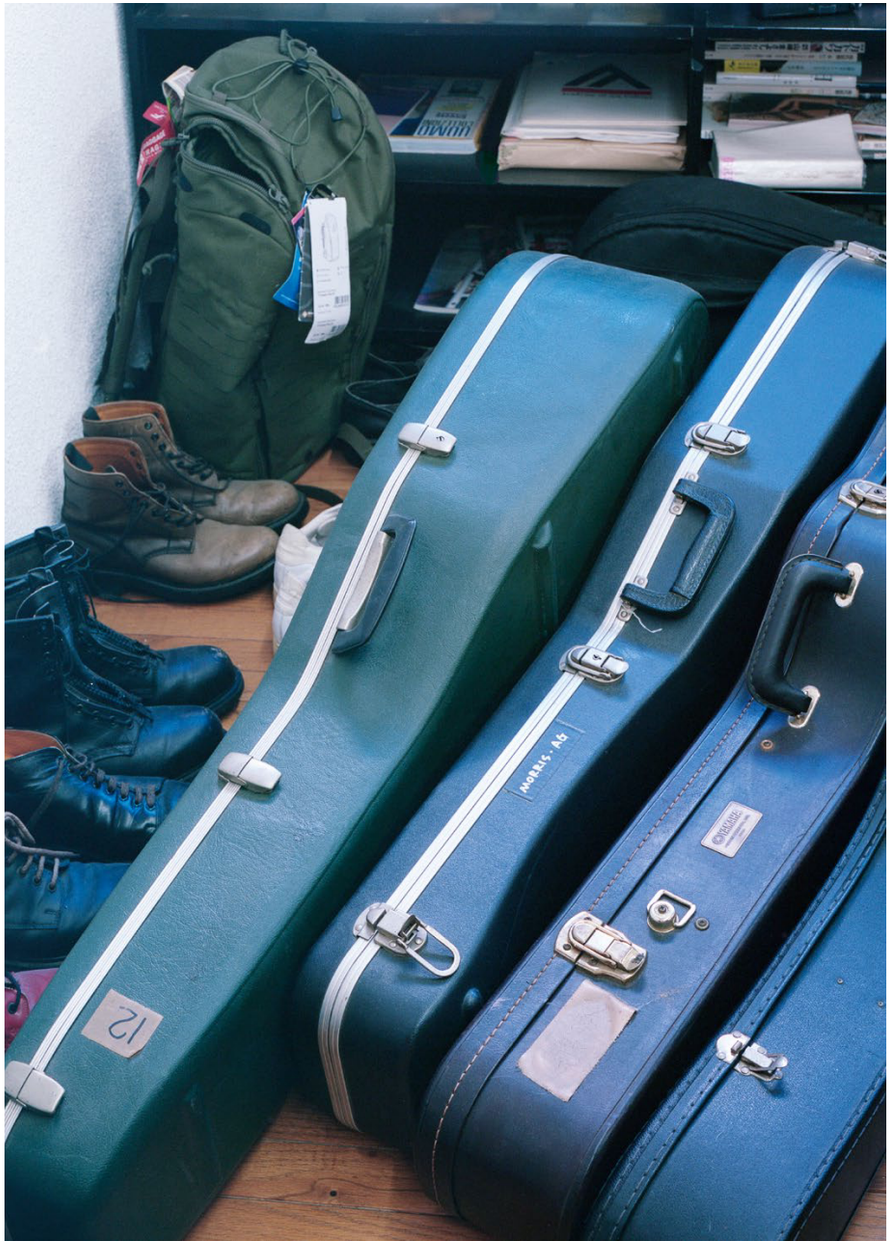
Nanking[3].
Can you believe that?

No.
Exactly. Then the Americans dropped the atom bomb on Japan, and that was the greatest act of terror in history[4]. People can do anything, but they have to know the limit. Limit is my favourite word. People have to know the limits.

Is that your motto?
Yes.

You have to know your limits. So, do you know your limits?
Yeah, yeah. Otherwise, I would be in prison already.

'Tim: Would you describe yourself as optimistic? Yohji: No. If I ever became too optimistic, I could no longer be a creator or a fashion designer.'



You would have killed someone. It is interesting, though – do you think fate defines your limits in a way? Fate saved you, otherwise you would be in prison or dead.
You say I was lucky?

Luck and fate, these are big questions. Do *you* think you were lucky?
Yes, but at the same time I made a big effort, probably it was enough; I don't know.

Do you think you were original? Did you do things first?
No, I am not like… I created something that people didn't like at the beginning…

Like Van Gogh, Braque or Picasso…
When I think of Van Gogh, my heart becomes painful, but this is life – no matter how much you try, people don't accept. It happens, very often.

The legend goes that he only sold one painting in his lifetime[5].
Yeah, yeah, but he was accepted after he died. It's nice…

Well, it didn't do him much good. But yes, I think it is good that the work was discovered. Do you think about a legacy for yourself? Do you imagine what your legacy will be?
It's luck. So, when I ask myself are you lucky or not, there is a chance I am lucky because I can eat. And I can travel.

Is there anything you haven't done that you still want to do?
I've done almost 80 per cent of my favourite things. I am ready to go, already, I am ready to go. I am ready to disappear.

You mean leave.
Yeah.

And where do you go, when you leave?
I don't know, probably my father's place or my mother's place. My mother went two years ago, she is waiting for me.

My mother went last year. How old was your mother?
She was 112.

No!
She was so strong, until she got sick around 110. She enjoyed so many things, she enjoyed buying all kinds of beautiful images, she enjoyed buying many things, and she enjoyed it because she could have money after my ready-to-wear company became successful. She became rich, so she spent money, and she spent it joyfully. I would watch her – she enjoyed everything. I was lucky.

My mother was 94 and she liked driving her car. But 112… Would you like to live to that age?
No, no, no way.

Do you like history?
It depends. It really depends… We cannot change history.

We can rewrite it.
Or we can think another way about history.

I'm just thinking about your mother and the things that she must have seen as a girl.
Oh, I cannot imagine! When she was a girl, don't ask me, it is terrible because she was such a strong woman. I don't want to imagine when she was young. Probably she became very, very strong, year by year.

Would you describe yourself as optimistic?
No, no. If I became too optimistic, I would not be able to be a creator or fashion designer.

When you did your wedding shows[6], were they not optimistic?
No, there was a time when I had no ideas for new outfits, so I jumped on the wedding dress. Only wedding dresses. Then, the American fashion press and journalists invited me to New York for a big party. I was surprised. I was cheered by American people, because the show was good. But actually, our company didn't sell a lot and we became poor. So, honour and wealth, they don't always go together.

I was curious about that collection because at the time, I always thought white was the colour of death in Japan.
It's not.

You said black was an arrogant colour, do you remember?
Did I say so? I am sorry.

You said it was humble and arrogant.
When I was young, I shouted things like that. People only wore black when somebody died; it is a funeral colour.

'Maybe my son or my eldest daughter could take my place, and continue my company. This is my dream, but maybe my company won't accept that...'

But black is your colour.
Yes.

So, you mean life is a constant funeral.
Yes! This is just a joke.

You said you were ready to leave. Are you spiritual?
Now I have my children and my grandchildren, I want them to be happy, for that I have to keep on working. Or my son or my eldest daughter, maybe they take my place, and they continue my company. This is my dream, but maybe my company won't accept that...

Like a dynasty.
A dynasty.

I like it, it's a medieval idea.
So, I am thinking about many things, for me the final answer for life is chance. It was made by chance.

Chance decides. I believe that. There's an interesting connection between the spirit and the flesh – they don't always understand each other – and sometimes the flesh likes to play tricks on the spirit and then the flesh decides. That's a lot to think about. Let's talk some more in Tokyo where I hope we'll do karaoke. What's your karaoke song?
I have so many types of favourite songs. I sing new songs, old songs, American songs, English songs, French songs, Japanese songs. I can't sing Chinese songs though, because of the language.

Do you sing Bob Dylan?
A lot! I love him.

Do you sing 'Desolation Row'[7]?
Yeah.

It's my favourite, even if I don't sing it; it's too long.
It depends on the karaoke shop.

Do you go to movies?
When I was about five or six years old, I was living with my mother in downtown Tokyo, and very close to my mother's shop, there were many movie theatres. So I would watch cowboy movies once a week. In the beginning, I really liked the cowboys, but later I started to hate them because they killed too many Indians.

You identified with the Indians.
Always.

I've always thought it was interesting how in your clothing you absorbed elements of American culture and combined them with elements of traditional Japanese culture. That hybrid was so important for people when experiencing your clothing. It was a new way of looking at things. That was your fate, to create a new way of looking at things.
I don't want to change my fate...

Thank you.
Thank you.

1. Yohji Yamamoto studied law at Keio University in Tokyo, graduating in 1966. He later studied fashion at Bunka Fashion College in Tokyo.

2. Yamamoto smokes Hi-Lite cigarettes, a domestic brand produced by Japan Tobacco. Each Hi-Lite contains 17mg of tar and 1.4mg of nicotine.

3. The Japanese Imperial Army invaded Manchuria, a region in northeast China, on 18 September 1931, and transformed it into a puppet state known as Manchukuo. In 1937, the Japanese military moved its forces more widely across China in what became known as the Second Sino-Japanese War and in mid-December, it took Nanking, the base of Nationalist Chinese troops. In the aftermath, approximately 300,000 Chinese civilians and captured troops were massacred, and tens of thousands of women systematically raped on the orders of Japanese commander Iwane Matsui. Between 1937 and 1945, the Japanese military is believed to have used chemical weapons on 2,000 occasions, mainly in China.

4. The US dropped two atom bombs on Japanese cities at the end of the Second World War. The first – known as Little Boy – exploded over Hiroshima on 6 August 1945 immediately killing approximately 70,000 people, and leaving another 70,000 dead from secondary effects by year's end. A second, more powerful bomb – Fat Man – was dropped on Nagasaki on 9 August 1945, leading to 40,000 immediate casualties and 30,000 more by year's end. The Japanese Imperial regime agreed to a full surrender on 10 August 1945.

5. 'We don't know exactly how many paintings Van Gogh sold during this lifetime,' says the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, 'but in any case, it was more than a couple.'

6. Yamamoto produced two wedding-themed shows in the late 1990s. The first was Spring/Summer 1998; the second was Spring/Summer 1999, a collection that reworked the tropes of traditional Western wedding wear in a series of looks that Tim Blanks has described as 'delightful and magical'.

7. 'Desolation Row' is the final track on Bob Dylan's 1965 album *Highway 61 Revisited* and clocks in at 11 minutes and 21 seconds. British poet Philip Larkin, reviewing the album in 1965, called the song, 'a marathon'.

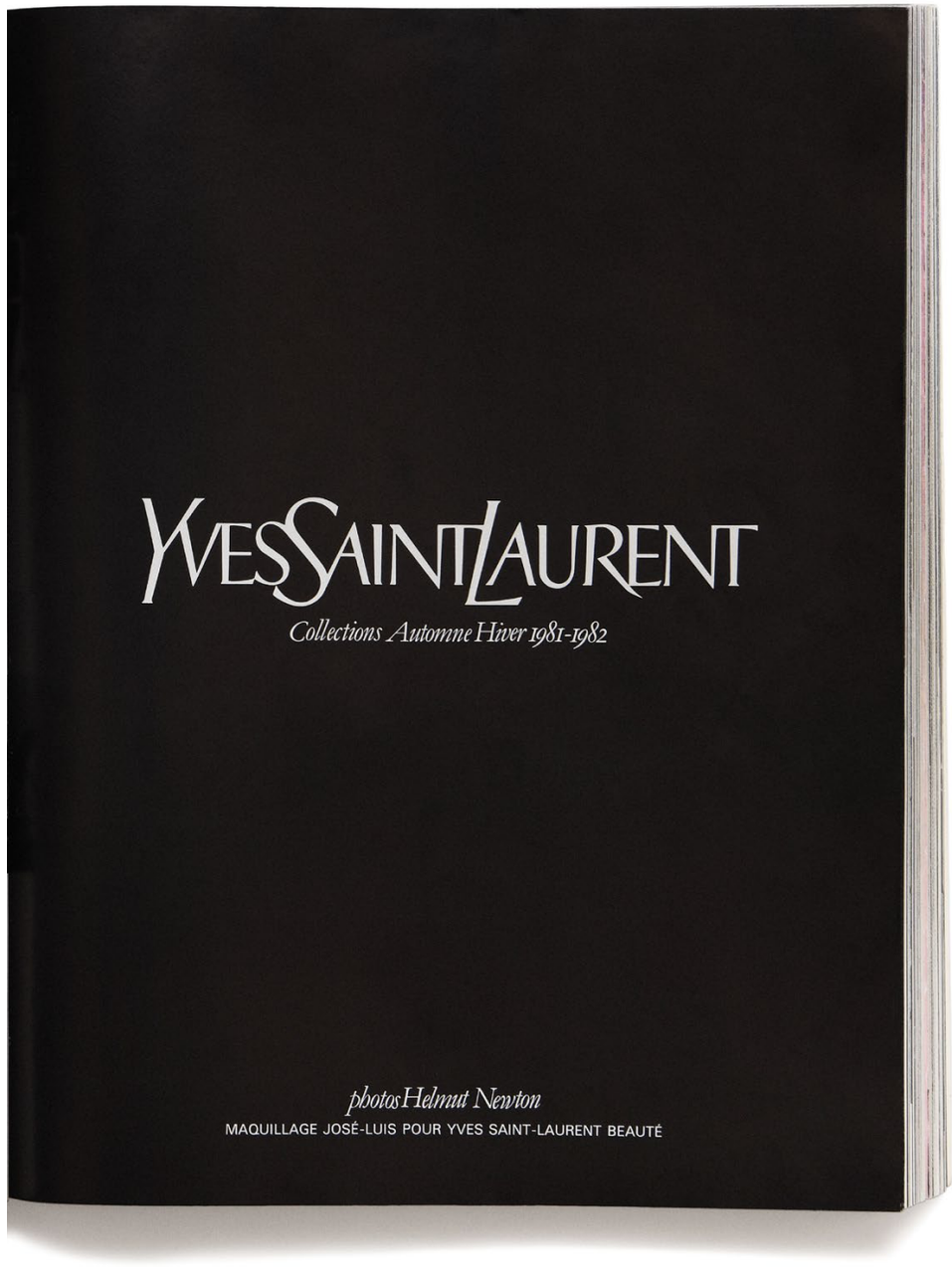
Photography assistant: Souta Kasahara



‘Newton was everything Saint Laurent loved.’

How a 1981 Yves Saint Laurent insert in *Vogue Paris* signalled a new era of fashion advertising.

Text by Jérôme Gautier



Images: *Cahier* originally published in *Vogue Paris*, September 1981, photographed by Morgan Le Gall.


YVES SAINT LAURENT
swakara
*ASTRAKAN DU SUD-OUEST AFRICAIN
tissus
SETARIUM
YVES SAINT LAURENT


CORISTA
pierre besson
YVES SAINT LAURENT


tissus
SETARIUM
YVES SAINT LAURENT


YVES SAINT LAURENT
TARONI
FRANCE
GANDINI TESSUTI ALTA MODA
Milano via Gesu 21 - Roma via Condotti 61/A
YVES SAINT LAURENT



YVES SAINT LAURENT

ABRAHAM



FORSTER WILLI ST-GALL
Les Broderies Suisses
CRÉATIONS
BROSSIN DE MÉRÉ

YVES SAINT LAURENT


RACINE
YVES SAINT LAURENT


YVES SAINT LAURENT
Marescot
TARONI
FRANCE
YVES SAINT LAURENT

On 1 August 1981, the shutters were pulled shut and Yves Saint Laurent's headquarters on Avenue Marceau became a *maison close*: a 'closed house' or brothel in French. But not like the one in Joseph Kessel's 1928 novel *Belle de Jour*, filmed by Luis Buñuel in 1967 with costumes by Yves Saint Laurent. In the movie, the heroine, Séverine – a jaded bourgeois housewife with masochistic leanings – looks chic in head-to-toe couture (except the white blouse she wears with customers) as she works in a bordello. The house of Saint Laurent, even when closed, was never one of ill-repute. Behind those closed shutters that day, an entirely different scenario (or several) was being played out.

The 'salon' girls, dressed in white blouses, black stockings, high heels, hats, and make-up, were ready to be photographed by Helmut Newton for a new 'Vogue Promotion' insert or *cahier* for *Vogue Paris*. Mounia, Edia, Maria, Dothi, Kirat and Nicole were YSL's in-house *cabine*, the designer's chrome-plated gang. Only Violeta Sanchez wasn't wearing white, as Newton had chosen her to interpret key looks from the Autumn/Winter 1981-1982 haute-couture collection. 'I liked to give an intention, a look, an attitude,' the actress and model recalls. 'I would make the garment my own and become a character.' Her femme fatale that day was – of course – the perfect fit for both Newton and Saint Laurent.

For this *cahier* of images, which was published for the first and only time in the September 1981 issue of *Vogue Paris*, Newton had once again been given carte blanche to capture and print the essence of Saint Laurent. He took the opportunity to book Jennifer Johnson, the only outsider in this little group. He had recently captured her one night at the Trocadéro in an image for the same issue of *Vogue Paris*, one that would become legendary: the dandy Philippe Morillon, kneeling, rolling down Johnson's stocking; she standing, tall and powerful in a Saint Laurent suit, watched by a few bystanders peering through the darkness. 'Saint Laurent inspired me to take some of my best fashion photos,' Newton wrote in his autobiography. 'I love the ambiguity of his fashion for the upper classes. There are so few people with whom I completely agree.'

Throughout his long career, Yves Saint Laurent's designs inspired some of the greatest photographers, from William Klein, Richard Avedon, Irving Penn and Jeanloup Sieff to Juergen Teller, Inez & Vinoodh, Mario Sorrenti and David Sims. But the relationship between Saint Laurent and Newton was something else, something rarer; the work produced was the symbol of a special bond born of a mutual admiration, which perhaps dates back to their respective beginnings. Newton had returned to Europe from Australia in 1961, ready to conquer the world of fashion magazines, starting with British and then French *Vogue*, the same year that Saint Laurent and Pierre Bergé founded the designer's couture house. It was a moment of upheaval, and both designer and photographer were perfectly placed to capture that change.

The first YSL advertisement was published in the March 1963 issue of *Vogue Paris*, a black-and-white studio shot by Tom Kublin. Like the promotional insert that Newton would later shoot, the page was paid for by one of the house's fabric suppliers – that was the rule. 'We'd call each manufacturer and say, "You can have look number three or five",' recalls Dominique Deroche, press officer at YSL for 40 years. 'As they were paying for the page, we'd ask them what they wanted to present – but if they didn't pay, they weren't selected.' Bianchini-Férier, a major silk manufacturer in Lyon, sponsored the first advertisement. On the page, however, its name was printed bigger than Yves Saint Laurent's. Cue drama. Pierre Bergé's solution was to create a series of advertising *cahiers*, each one created for a specific magazine and published only once. From then on, Yves Saint Laurent's name was never too small.

In 1964, Y became the house's first perfume and it came with a new advertisement. Then in 1966, Saint Laurent, who had made his name on Paris' Rive droite – Right Bank – caused a ruckus with Rive Gauche, his ready-to-wear line. The noise served as promotion. In 1973, Pierre Bergé established the Chambre Syndicale du Prêt-à-Porter des Couturiers et des Créateurs de Mode to recognize creative ready-to-wear by designers and couturiers and industrial manufacturers; it also allowed him to update the advertising *cahiers* using photographers including Alex Chatelain, Gian Paolo Barbieri, David Bailey, Horst P. Horst, François Lamy, and Helmut Newton. These *cahiers* opened a new chapter, fuelling YSL's communications in *Vogue Paris*.

'It was a revolution, in a world speeding up and with image becoming essential. Yet at the time, photography was not considered an art form.'

'It was a revolution back then,' remembers Patrick Hourcade, the man who dreamed up Vogue Promotion. 'A revolution in a world where everything was speeding up and image becoming essential. Yet at the time, photography was absolutely not considered an art form.' Despite that, Robert Caillé, *Vogue Paris*'s director from 1967 to 1981, and Francine Crescent, its legendary editor from 1969 to 1986, understood the power of the photographers they revered, from new names such as Newton and Guy Bourdin to veterans including Jacques Henri Lartigue, Cecil Beaton, and George Hurrell. 'She saw that images were in a state of flux,' says Hourcade. 'Francine understood that throughout her career. It meant the image took precedence over the product presented – which would end up changing many things.'

In 1971, Newton had a heart attack, an event that became a turning point in his life, work and style. Alongside a move towards masochistic erotica, he gained a new understanding of the 'Saint Laurent woman', symbolized by the image he later took of Vibeke Knudsen in a striped YSL suit that appeared in *Vogue Paris* in September 1975. In 1977, the designer asked Newton to shoot the campaign for his new perfume Opium. The photographer chose as his model the young Jerry Hall, who he had first met and photographed in 1974. Summoned to Saint Laurent's house on Rue de Babylone, she accepted the offer – at advertising rates – to pose for the new fragrance. The original French tagline for the resulting Opium campaign – 'Pour celles qui s'adonnent à Yves Saint Laurent' – with its notions of debauchery, was toned down in English to become 'For those to whom Saint Laurent is a habit'. Nevertheless, the perfume caused a scandal and incited protests in the US.

It was perhaps this Baudelarian vision of Opium that went to the models' heads on 1 August 1981. Saint Laurent was off celebrating his 45th birthday, but in YSL's headquarters on Avenue Marceau, Helmut Newton and the models were reviewing looks from the much-lauded haute-couture collection that had been selected by Saint Laurent and approved by the manufacturers sponsoring the *cahier*. Inspired by two artists close to his heart – Henri Matisse and Fernand Léger – the collection had been shown three days earlier in the Imperial Salon at the Hôtel InterContinental. No allusions, whether Fauvist or Cubist, for Newton, though. He was never prone to quotation; there was no need. 'Helmut was an artist who transformed the world,' Pierre Bergé once said. 'He made us see it differently. He changed our vision, to make us touch an unknown truth. He was a master.'

Helmut Newton also had the artistry to capture the world of Yves Saint Laurent, and that August 1981 shoot 'was everything Saint Laurent loved', remembers Dominique Deroche, 44 years after the event she witnessed first-hand. 'Models in white blouses, typical of the *cabine*. The world of couture, a thing of the past.' A world that had been dying since the 1960s, but which Yves Saint Laurent never stopped trying to preserve, as a reminder of the 1950s, a flamboyant time when he was able to be close to 'God' or Christian Dior. 'Dior was my master,' Saint Laurent said in his farewell speech, in 2002, 'and the first to introduce me to the secrets of couture.' Saint Laurent always had a strong relationship with his models. 'You can't imagine the personal, unspoken relationship between a couturier and a model,' he told Françoise Sagan in *Elle* in 1980. 'They sense when my imagination is at work, when their appearance provokes this intuitive creativity in me. They are proud and delighted by it; when I work, I have a direct relationship with them more than with anyone else. They are often exhausted, but in those moments will do anything to help me.'

They were all there (except Amalia) on 1 August 1981, at the centre of the images, dazzling and disturbing. 'There was this entire atmosphere that I still find so beautiful,' says Dominique Deroche. 'There are the girls reflected in all the mirrors. It's a little blurred, a little gloomy. There's ambiguity, there's that "louche" side, as Betty [Catroux] would say. We loved the louche at Yves Saint Laurent and Newton understood that atmosphere. Yet in spite of it all, there's still *elegance*.'

The result was Newton's third Vogue Promotion *cahier* for YSL, published here for the first time since 1981. He would go on to create ten more until their replacement by what we now call ad campaigns, in *Vogue Paris* and everywhere else. Newton shot nine of those between 1987 and 1997, and in doing so became not only the photographer who told the most Saint Laurent stories, but also the one who counted the most.

'We loved the the idea of 'louche' at Yves Saint Laurent, and Newton understood that atmosphere. Yet in spite of it all, there's still *elegance*.'

‘The concept of Dover Street Market is to make mistakes.’

DSM’s Adrian Joffe and Fashion East’s Lulu Kennedy on bridging the gap between emerging designers and global retail.

Text and interview by Rahim Attarzadeh

All images courtesy of Dover Street Market

Dover Street Market London. Comme des Garçons. Autumn/Winter 2017



Dover Street Market London, Simone Rocha, Spring/Summer 2020



Dover Street Market London, Craig Green x Fred Perry, Autumn/Winter 2024



Dover Street Market London, Olly Shinder, Spring/Summer 2023



Dover Street Market Ginza, Comme des Garçons, *Blood and Roses*, Spring/Summer 2015

Dover Street Market Ginza, Undercover, *But Beautiful III UTOPIE*, Autumn/Winter 2017





Dover Street Market Ginza, Louis Vuitton, *Elephant Space*, Autumn/Winter 2019, installation based upon Virgil Abloh's childhood bedroom



Dover Street Market London, JW Anderson, Spring/Summer 2014



Dover Street Market London, Comme des Garçons, *20A*, Autumn/Winter 2024



Dover Street Market London, Comme des Garçons Homme Plus, Spring/Summer 2019



Dover Street Market Paris, *Avalanche* by Tadashi Kawamata for Phileo x Adidas, October 2024

It was 10 September 2004. Tony Blair was the UK's prime minister, Google launched what we now know as Gmail, and at 17-18 Dover Street in London's Mayfair, Adrian Joffe and his wife, Comme des Garçons founder and designer Rei Kawakubo, opened Dover Street Market – and changed the face of fashion retail. Chaotic, contradictory and sensorial, the store – as much a sensibility as a space – immediately began creating, rather than simply capturing, the zeitgeist. In March 2016, DSM – having outgrown its original namesake site – relocated to the former Burberry HQ on Haymarket[1], more than doubled its size, and continued its enduring influence and uncompromising creative approach.

While Dover Street Market has opened its doors to established luxury brands throughout its 20-year history, it has always brought them together with young and emerging brands, curating luxury and leisurewear, rare books, perfume, coffee, watches, T-shirts, and art installations. It is an approach inspired by legendary London independent trader hub Kensington Market and its spirit reminiscent of the work of late stylist Ray Petri's 1980s Buffalo movement – a sprawling sartorial amalgamation of high and low that continues to influence fashion today. Over the years, DSM's presence has spread to Tokyo, Beijing, Singapore, Los Angeles, New York, and since May 2024, Paris. Within these collective spaces, Dover Street Market has honed its craft through two decades of industry feast and famine, yet the question remains: how did they consistently discover such burgeoning talent?

Like Joffe and Kawakubo, Lulu Kennedy, founder of London-based, non-profit talent incubator, Fashion East, has never taken the road most travelled. After years of organizing rave parties in Naples[2], she returned to London, began trading at Kensington Market and worked in an art gallery on Brick Lane, before finding her true calling after she met Ofer Zeloof, the owner of the Old Truman Brewery in East London. In 2000, Fashion East was born as a special project in the location to give show spaces to the designers Kennedy knew, loved and nurtured. Today, Fashion East has become key to nurturing the future of London fashion and a staple of the London Fashion Week schedule. Since its creation, the initiative has showcased designers including Simone Rocha, Craig Green, Jonathan Anderson, Kim Jones, Martine Rose, Grace Wales Bonner and Maximilian Davis, to name just a few. As the director of Fashion East, Kennedy was awarded an MBE in 2012 for her contribution to the fashion industry.

In essence, the Fashion East alumni have proved, if anything, the value of an international store like Dover Street Market. In today's retail landscape, what's needed beyond simply offering products is the intelligence, sensitivity and confidence to choose the right talent whose work can be supported, stocked and commercialized. In a world of always-on, instantaneously available apparel, Kennedy, Joffe and Kawakubo's keen eyes ensure that selection is differentiation, and that a shared experience becomes a communal moment. So, on a crisp winter's morning at Dover Street Market's Rose Bakery, *System* brought Kennedy and Joffe together to discuss the currency of independence, the bleeding of luxury, and what continues to make them anarchists at heart.

Let's start with a philosophical, if on-topic, question: what is your definition of independence?

Adrian Joffe: The freedom to do what I want, and in the context of Dover Street Market and Comme des Garçons, to do what we want. Freedom and independence – they've always been intertwined. It's an interesting question. Independence is as difficult to define as it is to earn.

Lulu Kennedy: Fashion East is a weird one because when we embark on different projects with all of these young designers, people really can't get their heads around the fact that everything we do is non-transactional. It's becoming an increasingly rare entity in the fashion industry nowadays, to do something that does not primarily benefit the proprietor. Of course, we have patrons who support us, but they've never tried to convert our vision into a business. That's how I would define independence: when you've built something that's been around long enough that it cannot be commodified.

'People can't get their heads around the fact that what we do is non-transactional. Doing something that doesn't primarily benefit the proprietor is rare.'

Lulu, would you say that this autonomy is based on the trust you've earned in the industry over the past 24 years of Fashion East?

Lulu: You can't have independence without autonomy. People often view this as suspicious, or nowadays as a marketing term to sell clothing. It's never been about business. True autonomy is when you are governed by instinct. If instinct happens to generate success, then that's an added benefit. Being in a position where you can afford to learn from your mistakes based on instinct is just as profitable as being successful.

Adrian, there is a debate surrounding the empowerment of creativity and freedom while running a business. There is the belief that the big brand is king, but there is another school of thought that sees independent brands and businesses as becoming more influential because they are more curatorial in how they operate, balancing equity and commercial strategy with authenticity. Where do you stand on all this and have those lines become more blurred in recent times?

Adrian: This adheres to a one-two punch combination. You have number one that forces designers to be as creative and independent as possible. Without that, you have no foundation for a business as it hasn't come from you. Very, very soon after that number one, you have number two, which in essence, is about survival. It's not worth putting yourself through the creative strain of number one if you don't have number two already at hand. If you really don't have both, then don't do it. You have to sell things to survive but those things have to be what you want to create.

'We're in a moment now where the more commercial the collection, the greater the artificial world around the brand, therefore the higher the revenue stream.'

Let's go back in time. What are your earliest fashion memories? Were there particular stores that stood out?

Lulu: Before London and Kensington Market, I was living in Naples and was part of a collective putting on raves. I was never really around fashion per se. My first exposure to this was actually through my dad who was an English and drama teacher at a school in Devon and at Dartington College of Arts. He always put on these big and dramatic plays and his version of *Jesus Christ Superstar* was totally psychedelic. The costumes were huge and from that I got this sense of the power and illusion that came from clothing, how it could be both concealing and revealing. Then it was watching *Top of the Pops*. My mum was the opposite; she wanted me to play a classical instrument and read a book, and I'd sit there going: 'No! I want to be like Blondie!'

You saw fashion as performance rather than specific brands or collections.

Lulu: Exactly. The 1980s really defined that relationship between fashion and style. There were these moments that I remember fondly. Neneh Cherry performing 'Buffalo Stance' while she was pregnant. She'd been styled by Judy [Blame][3], who I met shortly after I returned to London from Naples; I was in awe from the start. He was one of my absolute heroes. I remember coming back to London with about £50 to my name and meeting Kevin from Kensington Market. I bought a pair of studded boots with everything that I had – fashion was always about style for me.

Adrian, what about your early experiences of fashion?

Adrian: My parents had no idea about fashion. My mum would just take me to Marks & Spencer or Selfridges' food hall in London, but then I remember getting a little interested in fashion when I was about 14 or 15. There were a few Italian shops on the Fulham Road, and I remember going in this tiny multi-brand store and seeing these green corduroy trousers. When I actually went in and bought them, it was very exciting. I was attracted to the whole King's Road scene at that time, but it was my sister who got me into fashion; she was a knitwear designer at the time[4]. I helped her put on shows and sell her products. It was the early 1980s and there was this sense of expression through clothing when it came to independent brands and boutiques. There were fewer creative restraints compared to nowadays. It felt more curated and less formulaic.

Is curating today a question of expressing an opinion or an identity through the act of selecting and assembling choices? Many people consider what you do respectively at Fashion East and at DSM to be forms of curation, especially when it comes to working with independent fashion brands.

Adrian: We are all curating to some extent, whether we do it unconsciously or intentionally. It's the same when anyone decides what they want to wear on a daily basis. I would say that I've made a job out of it without knowing. I would like to think that Dover Street Market has been – whether intentionally or not – an architect in aiding people's ability to curate how they want to present themselves.

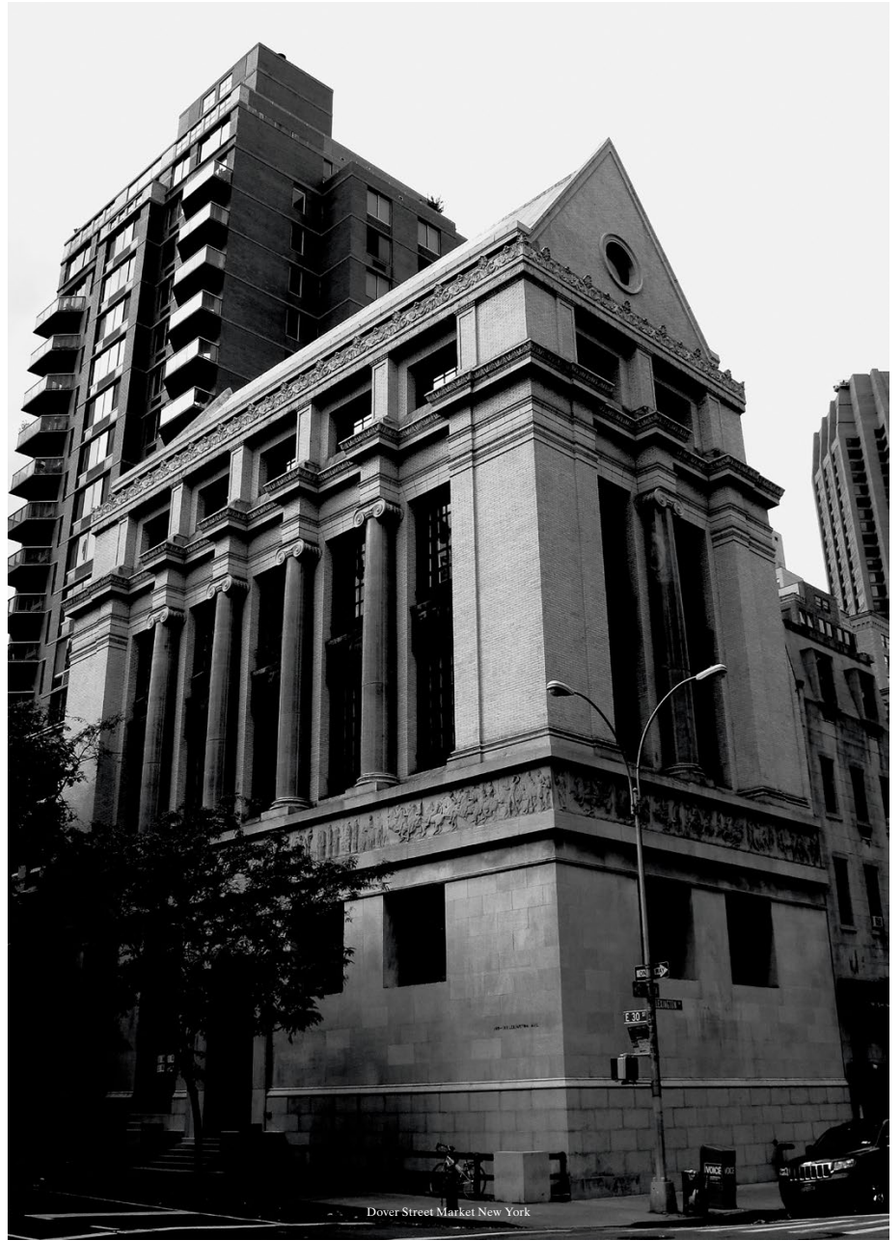
Lulu: Dover Street Market has always been about that for us. When one of the young designers that we've shown through Fashion East makes it to the store, we see that as a huge form of



Dover Street Market Beijing



Dover Street Market Los Angeles



Dover Street Market New York

validation. You guys have always been ahead of the curve. In terms of what I do at Fashion East, it's all about fostering their creative inhibitions into something that feels realistic and achievable amid the economic difficulties of today's fashion climate. There have been so many of them…

Adrian: So many… Simone Rocha, Craig Green, Maximilian Davis…

Lulu: Olly Shinder, Matty Bovan, Jonathan Anderson, Stefan Cooke, Grace Wales Bonner, Martine Rose…

Adrian: Am I allowed to ask Lulu a question?

That's encouraged.

Adrian: Is there some sort of rivalry between Fashion East and NewGen[5]?

Lulu: We are too different in purpose for there to be a rivalry. At Fashion East, we're very much about presenting three designers for two seasons in one show, whereas they are focused on solo shows. We're preparing them to hopefully get backing from NewGen. We don't see ourselves as challenging them. It's more about the show for Fashion East. We're talking to the designers about the new gender criteria and warning them of the pitfalls of having their own show too early on, rather than taking care of their team financially. We're helping them build their team and listen to the right people who are already used to doing shows, so when they get the backing they deserve, they know exactly what to do.

So you don't see it as essential for emerging designers to have their own show early on? Or for them to feel that they have to show in Paris in order to be recognized on a more global stage?

Lulu: If you have a good product that people want, it will sell. You could have a brand that's just a few T-shirts and it will never need to put on a show. I don't think designers should think that they absolutely have to show. It's a dangerous mindset for any designer as the pressure of putting on a big show can detract from the goals they set out to achieve within any collection. If you're a designer with a strong and distinctive visual language, like Mowalola, you could be selling stuff to ten countries around the world without putting on a show. Now she's decided to go back to doing shows because she feels it's the right time. It's not so much a case of if, more, when. If you already know how to be relevant today and you can make a desirable product, a fashion show won't help sell it.

How would you define your respective processes?

Lulu: Mine is less complicated as I'm not selling anything! For example, I could choose not to show somebody because I don't get on with them. That has happened before. Life's too short and I've made those mistakes before.

Adrian: We are similar. From a personal perspective, there has been loads of stuff I didn't like in my shops! [Laughs] I mean, we work with a team now, and there are seven big shops and one for the *parfums*, so I sometimes get defeated even if I don't want a particular brand there. I'll be like, 'There is no way I am having that shit!', and they all say, 'Yeah, but it's going to sell well, and it looks nice', and so I end up saying, 'Alright, if you insist.' Sometimes my team call me 'Joffelini' when I'm in that mood.

Adrian, do you feel that you've really had to consider the economics of the fashion industry, especially in more recent times? Has that ever hindered or influenced your decisions about who you want to support through Dover Street Market? Situations where it's become less centred around taste and more about revenue stream?

Adrian: Everything has become grossly commercialized. I'm not going to name names and I'm not going to name friends, but there are definitely some that immediately spring to mind – but that doesn't answer your question. We're in a moment now where the more commercial the collection, the greater the artificial world around the brand, therefore the higher the revenue stream. It's their job to make people buy what they think they need. Of course, we have to sell things. We have to have the hot sneaker. We have to have the bag that everyone's talking about, but I would prefer to go back to a time where people expressed themselves through clothing and not through trends.

Let's talk about fashion shows. How would you like to see the format change or develop, especially in London?

Lulu: I would like to see more presentations, so the collections originate from a place of discovery. People tend to remember events on the rota that weren't like all the others. That does not necessarily mean attention seeking through a presentation or something that feels forcefully abstract from a show. It's a balancing act and it's difficult especially as London Fashion Week is under constant financial scrutiny,

'When one of the young designers that we've shown through Fashion East makes it to the Dover Street store, we see that as a huge form of a validation.'

making everything feel sprawling and scattered. Why can't the audience come in and walk around freely, taking photos of the clothes on the models? Then the lights can go out and the models can start walking as if it's a show. That experience shouldn't be exclusive to backstage access. The frequency and format of fashion weeks feels too repetitive and too often. Each fashion show shouldn't feel like attending the Met Gala.

Adrian: You, as journalists, can change London Fashion Week, or fashion weeks in general, through the power of the pen. If you collectively write more about what's wrong with Fashion Week and how that is problematic for young designers, and then offer solutions, instead of primarily reviewing shows and talking about references and themes, things might change with that kind of solidarity.

something unique and personal?

Lulu: I think so. One of our aims is to make sure we have fun while doing it. When fashion isn't taken too seriously, great things can be accomplished. We encourage designers to lead by what they want to achieve, whether that's through a show or something else. Fashion East is not only about giving a space for these designers to show their work, it's also a place for recognition, for discovery, for team building, for creative development, and a way to show them that the fashion industry is not always an impenetrable fortress. It can be cracked – and I love playing a small role in helping them achieve this. It's also about having an open and honest conversation with each designer. In this industry, honesty is as expensive a currency as independence.

There's more than 20 years of shared history between Fashion East and Dover Street Market. With this in mind, would you say that the fashion industry is currently looking at independent brands for inspiration more than ever, and if so, why do you think that is? Most of the brands currently stocked in DSM Paris have shown through Fashion East.

Adrian: Definitely. That's why Paris is more alluring; it's become more creative. People coming in from Berlin, who used to live in London, are coming back to Paris. It's definitely having a moment again. At least that's what I think. While Paris is the obvious home of luxury fashion, it also leans towards the other end of the spectrum. We're stocking Olly Shinder who Lulu showed through Fashion East. His work is clearly inspired by Berlin, yet he's popular in Paris. There are also very independent people there doing things that no one wants. Then you've got everything in between. The DSM store in Paris is all about shifting that balance while respecting what fashion represents. It's refreshing to have a bricks-and-mortar store that's in that melee of shifting, where we really want people to see Paris how we see it.

Adrian, you've previously talked about the operational distinction between Dover Street Market and Comme des Garçons stores. Your latest DSM store in Paris consists predominantly of independent brands, so would you say that it is perhaps closest to the CDG philosophy in terms of its relationship with independence and autonomy?

'When the big brands come to DSM, we say, 'Don't spend £50,000 on your space, do something small, temporary, free yourselves up, you can change."

A lot of – but not all – journalists are afraid to say what they really think at the minute. The 'bigger' the journalist you are, the more brands are paying you for copywriting and storytelling. It's becoming increasingly problematic to consider anyone's point of view too significantly. That's why independent brands who either don't play that game or can't afford to play that game are seen from a point of authenticity – they are attended to and reviewed because the journalist genuinely recognizes that they are developing a framework of desirability. The revolution has to occur between all of us.

Lulu, is your role to offer a show space for brands or an opportunity to present their work to the fashion industry, regardless of their scale or resources, while also encouraging them to do

Adrian: Lulu, your role has been – and still is – far greater than you give yourself credit for.

What has been the best piece of advice you've given over the years?

Lulu: Take a season out when they're not in a good place. Don't be beholden to the system.

Adrian: It's also reaching a stage of self-awareness and having self-belief. Confidence can instigate independence. It's having that ability to know when to dip in and drop out of certain dynamics. Knowing when you're ready to present your work and not believing that by missing a season you're in some sort of self-imposed spiral. Whether you're an artist or a fashion designer, you have to know when you're ready long before the build-up to the show.



Dover Street Parfums Market Paris



Dover Street Market Singapore



Dover Street Market Paris



Dover Street Market London

Adrian: I see what you mean. The Paris store is similar to this mindset in terms of always wanting to offer new things and new juxtapositions of things. But we give freedom of expression to people who somehow share something, some value; they all have a vision and they all have something to say. For me, that is enough, even if I don't necessarily like what it is they're saying. The clash of expressions – 'the chaos' as we like to call it – is interesting. Comme des Garçons is always perfect because it is Rei's eye: every shop, every garment, everything that she does is perfect for her. But the concept of Dover Street is to make mistakes.

Why no concessions?
Adrian: Big multinational groups want to be in Dover Street because we give them a chance to express themselves differently. Every shop those big brands have might be identical, so when they come to us, we say, 'Don't spend £50,000 on your space, spend £10,000; do something small, something temporary, free yourselves up, you can change.' So they get all excited… and then they just end up doing exactly the same thing all over again! We have to politely suggest to them that maybe there's no point them being in Dover Street. I mean, if what they're proposing is really too boring, it's not good for anyone. It's no one particular person's fault; sometimes there are just too many suits in the way. Dover Street Paris offers something completely different where we don't have to worry about the separation of one space, it is free flowing and all-inclusive.

***System* often asks CEOs, 'When is big *too* big? When might you stop growing?' Adrian, would you say the model for Dover Street, particularly in Paris, and Lulu, the model for Fashion East, are extreme ways to resist the at-times needless push for constant expansion?**
Adrian: That's a great question. You don't need that big an amount of growth. What you need is stability and newness. Little by little, you can build a respected business, one that grows from a point of evolving creativity. Rei always says, 'Why don't people work harder? Why is this the same as last year? Why does the show look the same?' But when someone does something different she really acknowledges that. She is really inspired and excited by the idea of Dover Street somehow promoting new ideas. And you're right, I think we do resist growth if it's only about making money. Fashion people in general have been very protective of their own territory – you don't share things at all – and I think that has changed, partly thanks to Lulu and me, because we've opened up opportunities for so many emerging creatives. It's different for these luxury brands as they feel this constant need to grow, this pressure to grow the business year in and year out even if it means being less creative at times. Maybe through Dover Street and through the free-thinking spirit of Comme des Garçons, we've become anarchists for this type of growth over the years.
Lulu: We've been approached by investors who try and sell their dream of how they want to see Fashion East grow. In my experience, usually when things seem too good to be true, they are. There's a lot of bullshit about how to make money. The truth is that if you're not listening to your team and you don't genuinely care about the designers you're working with, then your business will fail, with or without investment. I'm always asked these questions about growing Fashion East more commercially and globally, and I will always shut the door as that's not for me. How can you go out and find these independent designers and really find talent if you only care about making money?

Adrian, you've often expressed the importance of Dover Street Market being about experimentation, curiosity and learning from mistakes. What would you consider one of the more significant mistakes that you've made over the past 20 years?

Adrian: That's a very difficult one. How is one mistake not greater than another? The mistake I often make is being too quick to decide on something without compromise. Then there's doing something for other reasons that may not be of the best interest to your wider team; you're maybe doing it because somebody knows about something, but you're not following your instinct. What about you, Lulu?
Lulu: A classic one for me is misreading my emails. I do everything in a hurry and I skim read. The other day I thought I had a Zoom meeting, so I tidied up my room and sat there while no one arrived. It was actually a physical meeting… things like that.

What's the common ground between Fashion East and Dover Street Market?
Adrian: The common ground is values. The values of independence, of encouraging people to pursue their art. There can be no creation without art.
Lulu: We want things to be as good as they can be. Yes, we are stubborn but that's because we've lived a lot and we've learned a lot.

What do you look for in an emerging designer and how important are instinct and personal taste in these decisions?
Adrian: When they have an aesthetic that doesn't scream, 'Oh, so predictable!'
Lulu: It isn't purely about my taste. It's about trying to give representation to people with real talent. I can sometimes stage a show for someone even if I don't wear their clothes. It's important to understand the message a designer is trying to send out instead of thinking whether or not you like the clothes – that can be a hindrance to progress. It's about having a holistic vision that transcends the so-called 'importance' or the ephemeral nature of a collection or a season.
Adrian: I would say it is more personal for Lulu than it is for me. At Dover Street, I have to consider what the buying team think and what's good for the shop – even if it's something that is not necessarily for me. Sometimes the staff love what's come in and they're into it, and that's good enough for me. I can share their curiosity. But sometimes you hate it more and more. I'm not a selfish person. I don't have that much confidence.

Lulu, you just used the word 'holistic'. How do you know when designers are at the level where their vision extends beyond a specific collection?
Lulu: It comes down to how the garments in real life translate from the portfolio they initially send me. If I can see a real connection between the clothes and how they draw or describe their work, then I know I've found someone. Then we can have a chat and figure out what's best for them.
Adrian: That's interesting. I didn't know that's how you looked at things, in terms of how the designers talk about their own work.
Lulu: That's as big a part of it as the actual clothes. You can get a designer who's so introverted that it may be difficult for them to present their clothes, so sometimes it's about having a chat and breaking down what's best for them.

Why do you think it doesn't work out sometimes?
Lulu: Finance. It's always that. Financial restriction. Lack of financial opportunity. Having to go too fast because they don't have enough time.
Adrian: I do sometimes say to designers, 'Are you sure you want your name out there in the world?' You don't always have to call a brand by your name. It immediately puts on a lot of pressure and there's quite a lot of psychological stuff that goes hand in hand with that. You can only be autonomous in how you articulate your brand if you are confident within yourself.

Do you think design freedom still exists for designers or do they have to adjust their visions to a market to be successful?
Lulu: They need to find their own way. I think we can fall into this trap of becoming a victim of our own success – we've taught people to expect different things all the time. Before, when we started we'd say to designers, 'Oh, that's different', but now it's more like, 'OK, so what's still different today?' It's the treadmill that you have to stay on these days; you've got to constantly find new ways of being creative with more restrictions.
Adrian: Young designers have to be guerrillas. Does being anarchic come at too high a cost nowadays? I don't think so. In fact, we need it.

'I sometimes say to designers, 'Are you sure you want to call the brand by your own name? It just puts a lot of psychological pressure on you.''

1. Dover Street Market originally opened in a building that was home to the Institute of Contemporary Arts from 1950 until 1968. The store's floorspace of 1,200m² was tripled when it moved to Haymarket.

2. In the 1990s, Lulu Kennedy lived in Naples and organized United Tribes events, which, she told *Elle*, were 'dodgy raves in warehouses'.

3. Judy Blame was a British fashion stylist, designer, and icon of the punk and post-punk movements. Known for his rebellious creativity and DIY ethos, Blame emerged as a key figure in the 1980s London club scene.

4. Adrian Joffe helped manage Ros Joffe, the knitwear brand created by his older sister Rose, and her husband, Jean-Charles Carrarini. The couple eventually closed the label and, changing direction, opened Rose Bakery in Paris. When the first DSM opened Joffe and Kawakubo asked them to open a café in the store; there is now a Rose Bakery in each DSM.

5. NewGen is a British Fashion Council initiative that supports emerging designers with funding, mentorship, and a platform to showcase their work at London Fashion Week.

‘You’re creating a utopia that is real.’

Michèle Lamy and Travis Scott occupy the terrain of those who dare to ask, ‘What might the world become?’

Text and interview by Josef O’Connor



Michèle Lamy & Travis Scott



Backstage, Travis Scott, *Circus Maximus* tour, Lisbon, August 2024.



The Glade, designed by Michèle Lamy.



The Glade (detail).

In August 2024, I found myself in Portugal, summoned by Michèle Lamy to moderate a conversation for *System* between her and Travis Scott. This was no ordinary exchange. Lamy, whose artistic vision is unbounded, had been commissioned by Scott to design and craft the Glade – a refuge of abstraction and intimacy for the musician that would nestle backstage during his *Circus Maximus* tour. More than a large-scale piece of furniture design, the Glade is a concept: a 'non-space' for collective reverie, a sanctuary for communion, and an ode to boundless creativity.

I had the privilege of witnessing two polymaths – each architects of their own worlds – converge in thought. Lamy, the ever-curious cultural alchemist, has long been a vessel for connections between disciplines, generations and subcultures. Now aged 80, she continues to disrupt and inspire. With his epoch-defining artistry, Travis Scott dismantles boundaries with each album, runway and spectacle, shaping the zeitgeist in ways that echo far beyond music. Together, they occupy the terrain of those who dare to ask, 'What might the world become?'

Their conversation unfolds like one of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's rhizomes – non-linear, multidimensional, infinite in its possibilities. Scott, whose song 'TELEKINESIS' (from the Greek words for 'at a distance' and 'motion') resounds with the lyric, 'I can see the future, it's lookin' like we levelled through the sky', speaks to the human longing for transcendence. While Lamy's reflections on collaboration remind us that no vision is singular, but rather that it is the interplay of minds and materials, people and places, that births the extraordinary.

Our conversation touched on the transformation of objects, spaces, and selves – from a Rick Owens Furniture bed to the ever-evolving nature of Scott's live shows, at which pyrotechnics, soundscapes, and visuals coalesce into worlds that audiences don't just witness but also inhabit. We explored their shared appreciation for multiplicity: how ideas, like Scott's music, stretch into 'different pieces of my brain', or how Lamy, with her nomadic spirit, moves between realms, gathering fragments and weaving them into cohesive wholes.

The Glade is as much a site for escape as for reinvention, because for Lamy and Scott, it's not about building utopias in isolation, but rather mapping new paths toward becoming. What, after all, is utopia if not a line in mutation, one that passes 'between things'? In the interplay of architecture, sound, and shared experience, the pair creates a blueprint for something new: not just a physical space but a psychological one, where boundaries dissolve and possibilities expand.

As we sat atop an empty stage within Lisbon's MEO Arena – a space born for Expo '98 as the Pavilion of Utopia – one couldn't help but feel the resonance of Ettore Sottsass, Oscar Wilde, and others who dreamed of worlds without limits. What emerged from our dialogue was a testament to the power of collaboration and an invitation to imagine a world not yet built but waiting.

Michèle Lamy: I am the eldest, so I get to talk first! I have to tell you – what I have seen at your shows is a revelation for me. I was talking about Deleuze, what I have been thinking about him, and you know, there is something about when a century starts. The first 20 years are still about the previous one, but then somebody will come along, a new artist, and change everything. And you know what? It's you.

Travis Scott: Are you recording this? Did you get everything she just said?

Michèle: When did you get those diamonds put in [your teeth]?

Travis: I got them three years ago.

Michèle: Mine are so small compared to yours.

Travis: Yeah, I got six, seven carats each, it's crazy. All platinum.

Michèle: Mine are all crystal.

Josef O'Connor: I love the story of how you met, how it started with a bed. I'd love to know more.

Michèle: I can already answer that, even if I don't want to be the only person speaking all the time. I saw this picture of you jumping on the [Rick Owens Furniture] bed.

Travis: Yeah, it was Spike Jonze who took that photo.

Michèle: It is two things: the bed is like a cocoon, but you are jumping all over it, so it was a good image. Then our connection continued when we were working on *Saturday Night Live*. How do you feel when you do your retreats in the Glade? Is it your comfort zone?

Travis: I had Spike in my crib; he was shooting some photos with my daughter. I had a couple of pieces that Michèle had made and then I did *SNL*, and I was like, 'Do you wanna tour, but can you just do my dressing room for me?' How my dressing room is set up is like how my room was during high school. Like I broke down my furniture, put my bed on the floor, my [recording] studio right next to my bed, so I could just roll over from bed into my studio. That was like an early design. I wanted just something else, everything all in one design, something minimal. I feel like the dressing room is just as important as the stage.

What is it about the design that unites you?

Michèle: It was just meant to be, I believe that. And then you called me about *Saturday Night Live* and said this is what you want. So, in fact that whole process is a continuation of an aesthetic and being comfortable. I don't know how to explain it, but you are so precise in a way.

Travis: It definitely married together amazingly; the stage, the Glade, it is all one to me. When it is all said and done, it is all just one big-ass world.

Is the Glade like a spaceship? The tour is about these exciting environments, but then you step into the Glade where you can be inspired?

Travis: Yeah, I've always got to keep my mind going. I got ADD or a form of that, but I got a persistence of wanting to feel like a certain way. You see some of the cement, some of the rawness of the building, it's kind of dope, and I like to sleep in the building and stay here; it's like one big home. If we could make all the trailer parks around the world like this, it would be another level.

Michèle: Yes, that is what I am thinking about, too, we could have also a goal one day when this genocide stops. We could think about this.

Travis: Yeah, exactly.

I'm intrigued by your architectural ambitions, Travis, but there is also another side to you that is about lifting people up. You talk about pushing things forward.

Travis: It is crazy. We went to Valerio Olgiati's[1] crib today, and it's good to hear his take on things because I think he's a genius: like, things shouldn't be design; everything should be a flow form of things. And you know, I thought like, 'Wow, that's crazy.' Even when I look at this, at my stage and shit, it's like cool, I might have a lot of design elements, but I am always learning. I appreciate things. I think surrounding yourself with different people, you learn, and you see things visually, and I try to adapt that everywhere, down to the toilet paper.

You almost create two worlds, one backstage and another for the audience. You're almost building a utopia here as a starting point…

Michèle: You were talking about American writers from the 19th and 20th centuries, and you said that they were so aware that the world was bigger than them. When you are an artist, you see the world in advance and it's the same for you. Your spirit is creating a world, you don't know exactly where it's going, but we feel this is in you and you are putting it into the music. Art is like creating a stage and this is a way to show life to people – this is very important. It is why you have all those kids out there, because the system is not working, but there is hope. There is a lot of hope with you.

Travis: That is exactly what I want, that is what I want to deliver. I have been a fanboy myself; I am still a fan now. I have been there, and I know the feeling, and I feel like it is important that I create something that they will like.

Do you see Michèle as a teacher you are learning from?

Travis: Yeah, and well before I met her, through design and art and photography, style. It is all lessons.

Michèle: But you are pushing it beyond, without knowing whether it is coming to the right place.

You've described your music as genreless, as different pieces of your brain. You're thinking about so many different things and constellations and keeping it all flowing, piecing things together… Can you explain that?

Travis: It's in everything, the trap influences, the folk, the country, the blues influences, which influences country; I like how certain things take you. It is interesting with rock, like Metallica or something, just looking at the images on the T-shirts you think it is just straight hard rock, but then you get to the chorus and you get these guitar melodies, straight *Twin Peaks*-type shit, that take you somewhere that is like ecstasy. Even with rap music, with trap, there is this aggressiveness that is hard as fuck. You know what I'm saying? It's raw. But I am a follower of it all; I'm someone who lived through it all, you know what I'm saying? I lived it in all different areas of life and

'When a new century starts, the first 20 years are still about the previous one. Then somebody comes and changes everything. That person is you, Travis.'

'I have been a fanboy myself; I'm still a fan now. I've been there, I know the feeling, and so I feel it's important that I create something people will like.'

my brain is travelling through so many different phases of what makes me me, and I think that is what makes a human: I can go through different trials and tribulations, and can adapt and be around different people, and I can understand it – and that is what utopia is right? Being able to understand. There are all these fans here – different races, different generations from different places – but they all got a kind of general understanding of common ground. With music it is the same thing, shit hit and at some point it can take you on an out-of-body experience and you have an ecstasy feeling, and then you come right back to some more raw shit. It's like emotions you know, you are like mad, sometimes you are happy, and then you might smoke and be like, 'Fuck all this shit', and then not care any more, then that shit wears off and then you get paranoid again. You know what I mean? But after all that you work it out, you figure it out and find a solution. And with music I try to do that a lot.

What is your idea of utopia?

Travis: I think what we are doing every night man, right now: it's these different nationalities, different ages, different sexes. Everybody is here – like fuck me, people are here for one thing, it's to let go.

Michèle: For my generation it was going to be Jimi Hendrix, but then he disappeared, so we were orphaned in a way. Now you are taking everybody to that next generation… even if I am the oldest fan here, I was dancing with them and dancing with you.

Travis: It's ageless. There is no age, it never ends.

There is something very beautiful about your relationship, it is cross-generational…

Michèle: It was the way that you jumped on what was an original bed that had travelled already, and then went to you and continued. You are pushing us into a story that was invented before, but for you, landing here. And then the contrast with the creation of that huge stage and you jumping high above it, it's amazing, but it is so important that it says something about your design and pushing us in this new direction.

Have you created any music in the Glade?

Travis: Yeah, like a whole album, coming out soon. I did a whole album while on tour.

I was reading about Hugh Hefner, how he didn't really leave his bed, how he worked from his bed and had a fridge just by his bed. There is something about the Glade that feels like the womb, like a safe space.

Michèle: Yeah, it is probably the smallest recording studio in the world. Because Travis said, 'I don't like those recording studios because they are too big and go too slow.' So, there you direct everything, it is your world, and at the same time, it's your home.

Travis: But it is not just a bed, it is like a community gathering, a meeting space.

It's like the restaurant that Michèle had in LA[2]; the importance of it being a community gathering space more than just a restaurant. There's that commonality between you.

Travis: Yeah, I meet there [in the Glade], I eat there, I sleep there, work there, fuck there… It's like all there. It is dope because of the energy and it puts everyone in straight focus, you know what I am saying? It is dope, yeah, I can't really explain, my brain… it's hard.

When you are building a show like this, where does your brain start, how does it manifest?

Michèle: I'd like to know that.

Travis: Shit, I am thinking about me last; I am always thinking about the person who is furthest away, in the seats that I hate… because it feels like that person is missing the experience, like I'm at the back but I want to get to the ground. So, I am like, OK, how can I create this for them? How can I make it so they can feel like they are close enough to feel this? I always think the biggest, fuck the stadium, like at the Colosseum with the gladiators, people were so far up, but it was straight rawness going down, but like, how did that energy get so high up back in the day? There was no phones, that was their only entertainment. So now, how do you defeat the 5G, how do you defeat the cell phones, the ADD of the fans, and captivate them? So I try to make them feel like they are a part of the show. I try to figure that out, how I can reach them, and also make sure the guys nearest to me are just having the greatest times of their lives.

Michèle: *Circus Maximus*, here we go.

Why do you think young people gravitate to you? I've never seen anything like it in my life. What is your perception of energy and what draws you into your audience?

Travis: I don't know. I just come out every day hoping I can push it and wake somebody up, get them… you know I have been to shows, and hopefully people will understand the pureness of what I am trying to put out on stage. I am really for every single fan who comes here. Hopefully, every day somebody come in here and be like, 'Oh, my goodness!' It's not even about being an artist but I understand what it takes to turn a switch on and off. Like alright, man… Because life can keep you in such a hub and you can go to a concert and, not be let down, but be finessed. It's like, 'Oh man, this is ill, but fuck that' – you only got 20 per cent of what you were supposed to get. You know what I'm saying?

Michèle: Yes, because sharing is like a communion. When he starts [the show each night], it is like a shot of adrenaline.

Travis: Yeah, it can give you that boost, like you know you can leave here and be like, 'I got it.' The next five years of your life, I know that sounds dramatic, but you understand where to go.

You said you want to spend the next four years of your life studying architecture…

Michèle: Are you? What do you want to learn that you don't know already?

Travis: I want to go to school for the engineering, because I feel like the design I know; I am drawing this shit up on a day-to-day basis. But people here are setting up and I want to know the technical side to it all. Because one thing I hate is working with designers who give you renders that are not doable. You know, a designer can create the illest thing, a computer can create the illest dreamable building, but if the engineering is behind and it's not physically buildable... then fuck. Every time, every step, you get closer to building it, but then you're stripping away two steps, three steps, you're stripping away the original design and you end up with nothing, so you might as well scrap it. I want to go to school to learn the technical side.

Michèle: You're interested in creating a utopia that is real.

Travis: I can start pushing the engineering and see what I can and can't do, do the engineering and the math. So, it's not to go to school to learn design, but more like the pure technical side.

Michèle: You go do the technical thing because you don't need to do the creating. What Rick [Owens] did with the clothing was he went to technical school.

There is a current thread to this polymath approach to music and to creating a universe beyond that, that is architecture, design and all these other elements. What is it that motivates you to push into these other areas?

Travis: I just want to see more on a day-to-day basis; I want to help create things for people on a day-to-day basis. And I think within design I can help people get through a lot of frustration and might take away anxiety, and all that shit. And help them to naturally pick up on what to do and what not to do, what's ill, what's fresh, what's not fresh. Shit like Ikea, man, with $20 furniture. I just want to be able to push that idea on a day-to-day basis.

I think your live shows motivate that and act as a form of design to change the world.

Michèle: It's like a rhizome: an agricultural thing where some roots go parallel to the world and then there are branches pushing upwards. You are an artist rhizome, and I think I have something that helps make the thing hold up and be part of it. And that is all we did. It is not about having a page and designing it, it is all part of the world. Here we can see it from within; that's why we are here. It was very surprising to see us create a new thing; we don't know what it is with all those people out there – as they are all different – but that should be our new society.

Are you feeling hopeful or nihilistic about the future?

Travis: I think there are a lot of great creatives around and, yeah, I think people are interested to see a better future, so I am hopeful.

Michèle: Even if most people say that my optimism is exhausting, and right now the world is so difficult, but that is why I'm following Travis, because this is the hope.

Travis: Yeah, the youth is hope.

I thought we could end with a word game. So, Travis, say the first word that comes into your head, and then Michèle, say the first word that comes into your head in response to Travis's word, and we'll see what happens…

Travis: Power.

Michèle: War.

'Even if I am the oldest fan at your *Circus Maximus* live shows, I am dancing along with the crowd, and I'm dancing along with you.'

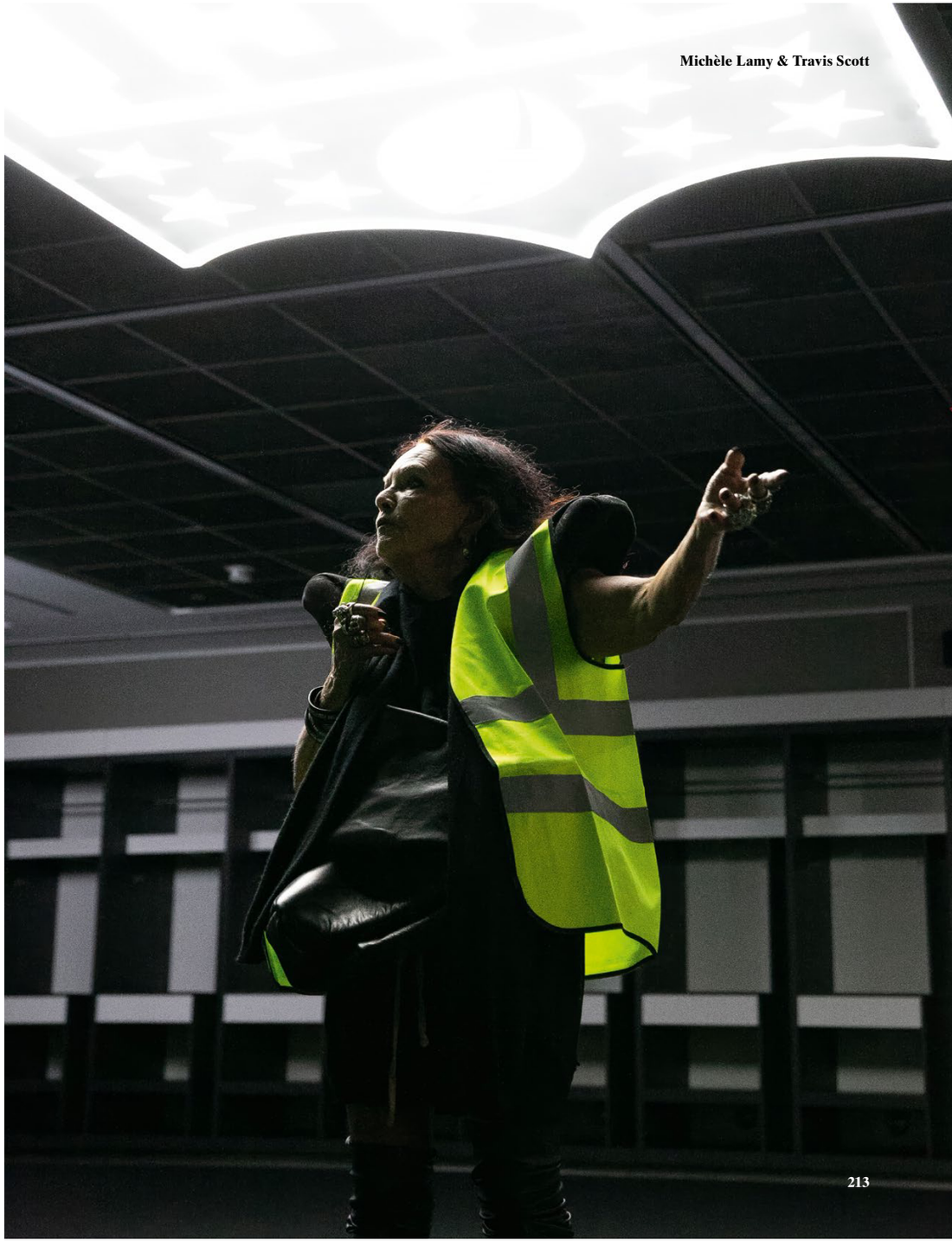
'Every night, it's different nationalities, different ages, different sexes. Everybody is here – like fuck me, people are here for one thing, it's to let go.'

Travis: Rage.
Michèle: Roses.
Travis: Bees.
Michèle: Orphans.
Travis: Horses.
Michèle: Sputnik.
Travis: Water.
Michèle: Fire.
Travis: Snowboarding.
Michèle: Skateboarding… surfing.
Travis: Javelin throwing… I don't know where my brain is.
Michèle: We are brained out!

1. Valerio Olgiati is a Swiss architect known for his manifesto, *Non-Referential Architecture*, co-written with Markus Breitschmid, which argues for a new architecture freed of rigid ideologies, pre-fixed symbols, and historial connotations. Among his many architectural projects was the 2018 design for the Celine flagship store in Miami.

2. Michèle Lamy opened two restaurants during her years in Los Angeles. The first, Café des Artistes, which opened in the late 1980s, was 'a romantic, verdant bistro with a ... monied boho clientele', according to *Los Angeles* magazine, where she served food and staged the shows for her knitwear label. In 1996, she opened Les Deux Cafés, which the same 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 finally closed 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.'

Photography: Opening image of Travis Scott and Michèle Lamy by Josef O'Connor; all other images by Moritz Tibes.



‘I love this one!’

Prada S/S 2025 accessories, selected by our favourite Prada fans.

Photographs by Charly Gosp

Karina

Leather shoulder bag

‘This bag perfectly captures the simple yet luxurious essence of Prada that I love. The colour is stunning, and it feels like a bag that I would carry most often in my everyday life.’



Gabriella Karefa-Johnson

Oversized sunglasses with scarf

‘There is a delicate balance between lawless eccentricity and curated quirk. It’s a line I tow in my own style, but a philosophy for Prada. There is always tension between the surface and the ideas simmering below. This accessory is truly weird. One part Marvin the Martian, one part Little Edie. Childlike and mature. Messy and refined. Deliberate and rendered haphazardly, but just so.’



Susannah Frankel

Studded leather Buckle bag

‘I love the belt bag. The metal studs on this one are about as close to decorative as I will ever go.’



Bryan Yambao

Leather brogues with espadrille platform sole

'How could anyone possibly resist the undeniable genius of Prada flatforms? First unveiled in the Spring/Summer 2011 fashion show, the shoe is a masterclass in innovation – if, of course, your idea of brilliance involves combining a formal leather brogue on top, a casual jute espadrille sole in the middle, and a rubber platform at the bottom. Ideal for those seeking height without sacrificing comfort, flatforms challenge conventional design by combining formal and casual elements into a cohesive, forward-thinking piece. The juxtaposition of materials and styles is a testament to Prada's ability to push boundaries.'





Ferdinando Verderi

Wicker and plexiglas visor

'A past's view of the future, handwoven artisanal mastery, a humble material, technologically rich lens, the memory of superheroes, Homer's Polyphemus, bucket-hat Prada culture, an eccentric sense of privacy, parallel realities, endless contradictions, a single individuality.'

Troye Sivan

Suede shoulder bag

'I love this brown suede cross-body bag because it allows me to carry all my daily essentials while on the go between tour stops. It also works with nearly any outfit I have on – no matter how casual or dressed up I choose to be that day.'



Susanna Lau

Leather shoulder bag

‘Prada past and future in a purse: I love that the shape nods to the utilitarian granny bags Miuccia did a lot in the 1980s and 1990s.’





Elizabeth von Guttman

Crested leather pumps

‘For me, the shoes in the collection were what defined it, and I could have picked any of them, yet these just edge it, literally. Sharp, angular, exaggerated, and with a touch of danger. Shoes for our times.’

@whatmiuccia

Leather loafers

‘A slightly weird shoe is what I love at Prada. This one is a totally presentable 1960s brown low heel save for the oversized white rectangular tongue affixed to the front. This stiff, delicate twirl on top of the shoes is reminiscent of a Prada white invoice (with little logo and all) that floats forever at the tip of your shoes. Lovely!’



Hunter Schafer

Leather handbag

‘I was the most excited by the bags this season! Particularly the lime-green handbag, I thought the oblong shape and slightly aged look of the leather and hardware made it look like such a loved and lively everyday object. This tint of green, which leans toward yellow, is one of my favorite colours as well.’



Suzanne Koller

Leather and plexiglas visor

'The Prada bucket hat with the iconic eyelets. Elegant, bold, and timeless – a statement of nonchalant elegance. Mrs Prada can turn anything into a modernist sculpture.'





Norbert Schoerner

Patent leather shoulder bag

'I'm still captivated by the totemic quality of the classic Prada logo – it's what first caught my eye back in the early 1990s.'



Lynsey Alexander

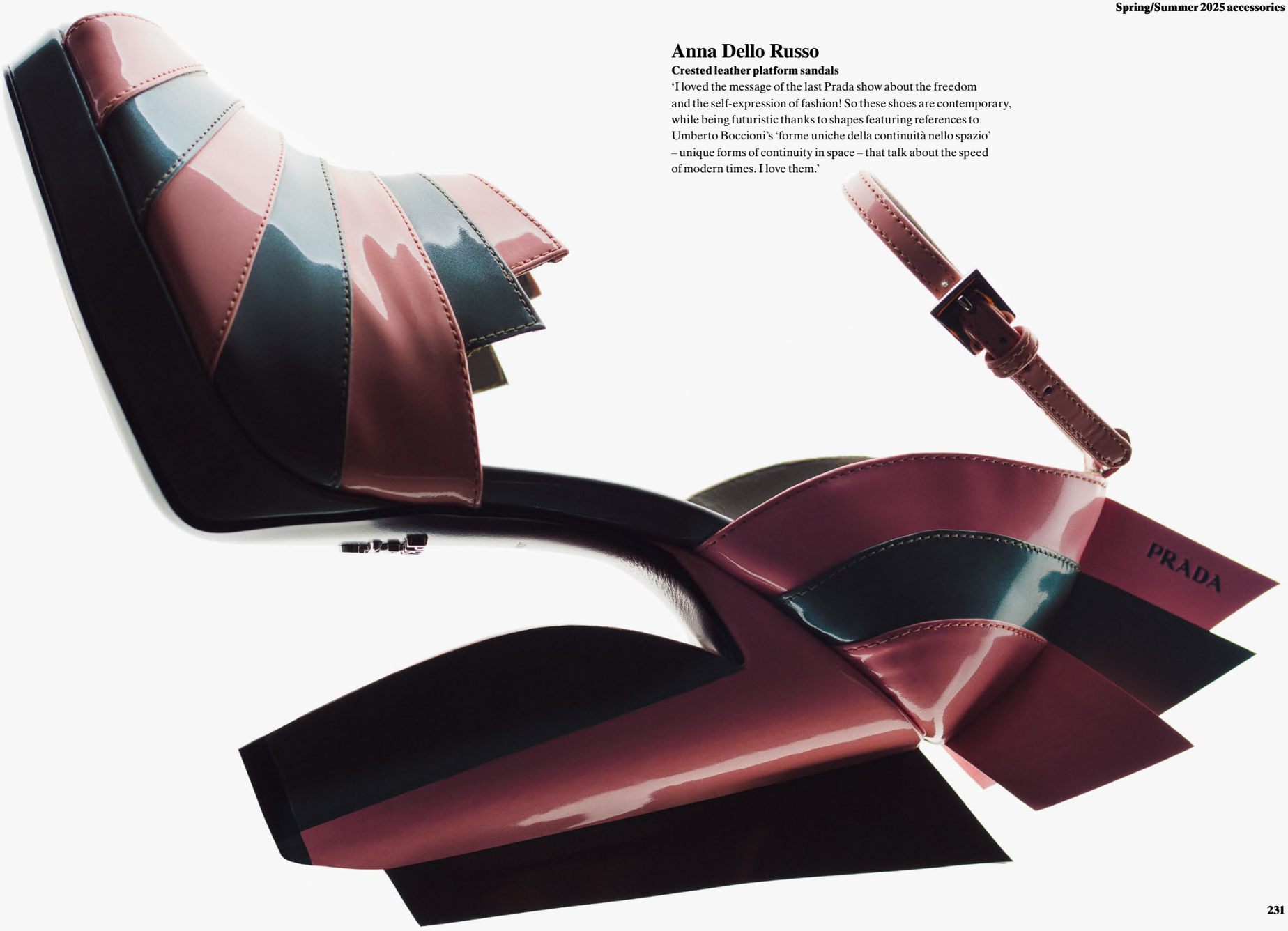
Buckle shoulder bag with studded belt

'I love the simplicity and ease of an accessory that I can wear across my shoulder and under my arm. I need my hands free as I'm always on the go. I don't like what I wear to define me too much, and this piece almost becomes a part of me and looks better the more it's worn. I can wear it all the time and forget it's there.'

Anna Dello Russo

Crested leather platform sandals

'I loved the message of the last Prada show about the freedom and the self-expression of fashion! So these shoes are contemporary, while being futuristic thanks to shapes featuring references to Umberto Boccioni's 'forme uniche della continuità nello spazio' – unique forms of continuity in space – that talk about the speed of modern times. I love them.'



‘They all love Puck, when it’s not about them.’

It’s Lauren Sherman’s business to know your business.



Text and interview by Jonathan Wingfield
Photographs by Daniel Jack Lyons

The digital revolution was no party for many fashion and lifestyle journalists. For those who had learned their trade in the 'Last Golden Age of Magazines' (the title that raffish ex-*Vanity Fair* editor Graydon Carter gave his memoir) the shifting demands of print media in the 2010s spelled trouble ahead. This typically began as a 'little extra (unpaid) content required for the website', before gradually morphing into an overstretched workload for reduced income, and the perpetual threat of publications either downscaling or shuttering altogether. For some writers, salvation came in the form of online e-tailers or luxury brands who poached them away from their editorial stasis with offers of handsomely paid promotional work. Other, more entrepreneurial types opted to cultivate their own personal 'brand' by mirroring social media's first wave of influencers and turning their allure and (genuine) skills to digital formats: the Substack newsletter, the podcast series, the regular selfies. In short, by the time Covid brought its killer blow, style writers as we had known them in pre-digital times had largely migrated, fizzled out, or left the building entirely.

Ex-Condé Nast staffer Jon Kelly, had more optimistic ideas about the future of journalism. Kelly – who in the mid-2000s was PA to the aforementioned Carter, followed by stints at *Bloomberg Businessweek* and the *New York Times Magazine*, before returning to *Vanity Fair* in 2015 to oversee the title's digital-news vertical, The Hive – saw the turbulent times as fertile opportunity. He figured that by incentivizing writers to join a leaner, new-media business centred around their reporting skills and profile, he'd be able to lure marquee names away from America's hallowed press institutions: the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Hollywood Reporter*, and his own former stomping ground, *Vanity Fair*.

Launched in 2021, Kelly's new enterprise, Puck, began to deliver unflinching dispatches from deep within America's 'four centres of power': Wall Street, Washington, Silicon Valley, and Hollywood. Weekly, industry-centric newsletters – delivered to subscribers via email – were written, and fronted, by Puck's freshly acquired, top-tier journalists whose editorial mission and tone of voice was now pitched firmly behind-the-scenes, 'beyond the press release', and, occasionally, just this side of libellous. Puck's business model was initially based on digital subscriptions: for $200 a year (it has since increased to $250), 'Inner Circle' members were offered the chance to 'break the 4th wall with direct access to Puck's elite writing talent'. This was up-close-and-personal, whites-of-the-eyes journalism that mixed the tantalizing promise of private-access experiences (à la OnlyFans) with the knowing and gossipy hubris of an old-boys' members club. Unsurprisingly, Puck's initial subscriber base was predominantly male and American. But with memories of *Vanity Fair* rarely far from his thoughts, Jon Kelly sensed that insider coverage of the fashion industry would broaden the audience demographic and appeal to luxury advertisers. Cue the arrival of Lauren Sherman.

Having spent a decade as one of the Business of Fashion's most prolific and respected reporters, Pittsburgh-raised, and now LA-based Sherman was ready for a new challenge when Jon Kelly came knocking in 2023. With 20 years' experience of covering the industry, and trusted contacts within pretty much every fashion brand, group, agency and media ('I cover everything from Target to Hermès'), Sherman was the perfect fit for Puck's savvy, no-holds-barred approach to insider reporting.

Today, she continues to comb both the upper echelons and underbelly of the global fashion industry for insider scoops, sound bites and titbits of news that she shares, analyses, and constantly updates in her Puck newsletter – entitled Line Sheet – each week day. Plenty of fashion's designer musical chairs have been first reported on Line Sheet, alongside pet subjects including Anna Wintour, the Arnault-LVMH succession plan, and the continuing fate of Condé Nast, while practically every move and shake, hire and fire, rise and fall, squabble and skirmish lands on Sherman's radar.

Of course, fashion-industry gossip has always served up rich pickings for online consumption – from the insidery (Lee Carter and Horacio Silva's much-loved circa 2000 'Chic Happens' column on hintmag.com) to the free-for-all (countless reddit threads; forums such as the Fashion Spot). Yet Puck's uniqueness – for better or worse – is its conscious blurring of the unmediated online Wild West with the more regulated role that quality reporting plays in contemporary society. In an era of fake news and gossip-passing-as-fact, Puck, and Sherman, manage to walk the line between absolute authority and endearing, warts-and-all transparency (in Line Sheet, Sherman readily admits when tip-offs go nowhere or when she gets things wrong).

Over the past six months, *System* has spent time interviewing Lauren Sherman about her increasingly public role as fashion's one-woman Woodward and Bernstein, the complex nature of reporting facts in an industry governed by spin, and how Puck has carved out a freewheeling new home for great American journalism. Given the slow-burn nature of *System*'s biannual publication, the backdrop to our initial conversation in June 2024 – Hedi Slimane still at Celine, John Galliano still at Margiela, a designer still to appoint at Chanel – felt light years away from our most recent exchanges, which were set against a new year clouded by Meta's decision to ditch fact-checking, and the tragic scenes unfolding in Sherman's adopted hometown of Los Angeles.

Jonathan Wingfield: Back in your high school years, were you considered a gossip?

Lauren Sherman: I actually wasn't! I was more focused on getting out of school and the South Hills of Pittsburgh, where I grew up. I didn't drink or smoke weed because I was too preoccupied with not messing up and navigating my exit. Thinking about it, I guess I was pretty gossipy. Everybody knew me but I wasn't super popular, though I wasn't uncool either.

Were you the storyteller among your friends?

I was the editor-in-chief of the college newspaper, but I wasn't what you'd call a storyteller who craves being the centre of attention. What I did want from a very young age was to be a journalist. My uncle had been in the US Naval Academy and was in the Gulf War, so I watched the news very closely growing up.

The Gulf War signalled the beginning of live TV rolling-news coverage[1].

Well, mine was a single-mom household with no television filter. I was allowed to watch whatever I wanted and became obsessed with TV news and the morning shows. I desperately wanted to be an anchor on *Good Morning America* until I realized I didn't actually like people looking at me, and I didn't want to have to get my teeth fixed. Luckily, I was always interested in writing from a young age, so I could hide behind a byline.

What about fashion in all this?

I always had an interest in fashion, just wanting to pick my clothes out and feeling a connection to how they made me feel. Then, when I was about ten, I asked my mom if I could buy a fashion magazine, and she said, 'You can buy *Sassy*; it's a feminist magazine.' That was right before [founding editor] Jane Pratt left – or got fired, or whatever she did – and I just remember seeing this pair of mustard-coloured Converse on one of the market pages and feeling a deep connection to what this magazine was saying. Prior to that, I'd watched *House of Style* on MTV, and the Tim Blanks show[2], but there was no language around fashion where I grew up. So, I quickly became obsessed with magazines, and by the time I was 14 I'd decided I wanted to live in New York, go to fashion shows, and become a fashion-news writer at *W*. So that was that!

Did you train as a journalist or just learn on the job?

I graduated from high school in 2000 and went to a college called Emerson, in Boston, which was focused on media and performing arts. They had this programme called 'Writing, Literature and Publishing', which was essentially a magazine-writing course. So, I did that. These days, people have to have those skills right out of the gate because everyone's looking at your stuff so closely [on social media]; there's no time or space to just find your voice and develop your skills.

Did you naturally have those skills?

I've always had an opinion and a pretty decent tone of voice, but things like sentence structure weren't my strong point. So, at college I was thinking, am I even capable of doing this? For a moment, I actually thought about going into costume design instead. I was working at the school bookstore and the sister of the woman who ran it was the costume designer on *Dawson's Creek*[3], which sounded like a really cool job. But I didn't have a driver's licence – I only got it a couple of years ago when we moved to LA – and I remember thinking, I can't go intern on a film set because the one thing I'll need to be doing is

'I really wanted to be an anchor on *Good Morning America* until I realized I didn't like people looking at me, and didn't want to have to get my teeth fixed.'

'By the time I was 14 I'd decided I wanted to live in New York, go to fashion shows, and become a fashion-news writer at *W*. So that was that!'

driving around. So instead I ended up interning at this company in London called Quintessentially[4].

The luxury concierge service for wealthy Russians in early 2000s London?
Yes. They had a magazine with an editorial director and an art director, but they needed an assistant. They liked me, and said, 'Why don't you move back full-time after you graduate from school?' So a week after I graduated from college, I moved to London to work at Quintessentially for two years.

Did it feel suitably luxe?
I was on 16 grand a year! I was also working weekends in a shop selling underwear, getting paid cash under the table. I was renting a room in what was essentially a boarding house in Finsbury Park, and living off canapés at work events. I was mainly writing 'listicles', like, 'The Five Best Places in London for Afternoon Tea' or 'Daylesford Organic Christmas Baskets'. It was actually really interesting and useful, because I got to see how people spend their money. As I've always loved consuming, I love thinking about the psychology of why people buy what they buy, and how that links to perceptions of status. After that I moved back to the States at the end of 2005, found a room in Washington Heights in New York, and got a job at *Forbes*, which is where I got my real training.

Whose career did you dream of having at that point?
Prior to moving to New York, it had been Anne Slowey at *Elle*[5]. I didn't know who people like Cathy Horyn were before then because we'd never had a newspaper subscription growing up. Once I got the job at *Forbes*, the managing editor there told me to read Teri Agins' book, *The End of Fashion*[6], which was the 'ching' moment in my life. I was like, this is way more interesting than the lifestyle stuff I'm writing. I just figured, Teri Agins is pretty much the only person writing about fashion in this analytical, business-minded way, and at the same time fashion businesses are becoming huge, so I might as well make that my thing.

This was the mid-2000s, pre-crash boom, right? With the Chinese market starting to explode.
Yes, by 2006 the consolidation was starting to happen. So, I just figured I might as well become an expert in this. By that point, I was reading the *Times* a lot; I loved Cathy – she's the best writer – and Eric Wilson, who is a really great reporter.

What do you think makes a great reporter?
For me, it's all about the insight that writers are able to share, the stuff that lies beyond the straight facts, and that requires a lot of background reporting. I don't think many people do that these days. Eric Wilson broke a lot of news, but I particularly remember a review he once wrote about liking Christian Siriano, this super-commercial designer in America who makes pretty dresses. He'd been on *Project Runway*, and I think Eric's piece really changed the opinion – or shifted the attitude – of a lot of other writers and editors. It wasn't that he was super serious about it, but he had so much knowledge, and was comfortable, honest and clear about his opinion, which was, 'Actually, I *like* this.' For many seasons after that I think more people attended Siriano's shows. Besides that, I was reading a lot of stuff by the classic *New York Times* fashion critics: Bernadine Morris, who was a real straight reporter, and Amy Spindler, who I think had a really good way of saying hard things without being cruel. But in terms of how I personally learned reporting skills, I have always just instinctively been interested in knowing the reality of what's going on. Like, I want to know what's actually happening. I don't like feeling deceived. Because that is why people gossip.

Would you say your bullshit detector is finely tuned to fashion-industry spin or smoke and mirrors?
I kind of accept that *everything* in fashion is bullshit – it's all a construct – so from that point I try to look within the bullshit and say, 'Well, are they doing it the right way?' One of the reasons I wanted to do this kind of analytical reporting is that it would drive me crazy being at the shows and everybody – in particular the British press, who I was sat among during my time at BoF – would just be like, 'Oh, this collection is so shit. It's disgusting.' Then five minutes later they'd be posting on Instagram, 'Fabulous show!' I was just like, these people are such assholes. I know they have jobs to do and advertisers to please, but part of me wanted to expose that hypocrisy a bit. But, to be honest, I don't get *that* upset about this stuff, not in the way that some reporters get profoundly angered by the overall state of the industry.

From a moral perspective?
They think there's too much product, too many consumers, too much greed… Like, 'When is it going to end? It needs to stop!'

Does it?
I do think the industry is at an impasse right now and that things are changing, like, after great consolidation comes decline. And I don't think we're as far away from that as we realize. But I'm also like, I don't want to change anything; I don't feel like an activist.

We've got ahead of ourselves. What did you learn from working at *Forbes*?
Forbes was quirky; they called themselves 'the theatre critics of business'. But the one thing they were hardline on was not allowing you to quote analysts. You could speak to them, but you weren't allowed to quote them because you were supposed to be the expert. So that forced me to develop opinions. The other thing I learned was the importance of picking up the phone and calling people. The *Forbes* newsroom was full of reporters who'd been doing it for a long time, and they'd be calling sources all day long. Which is what I now do at Puck.

When did you first hear about Puck? You'd been at the Business of Fashion for about a decade prior to joining?
Yes. I was full-time at BoF for seven years, and a contributor for ten. I moved to LA in 2020, had my baby in May 2021. I'm sitting there on maternity leave when someone forwards me this new newsletter called 'What I'm Hearing' by Matt Belloni, a big entertainment reporter who'd been at the *Hollywood Reporter*. That newsletter wasn't even called Puck at the time because they'd yet to properly launch Puck, but I really loved it. I felt like Matt was doing exactly what the trades needed, which was writing about things that everyone else would have been very careful about, and doing it in a super straightforward way. He's also an ex-entertainment lawyer, so he's comfortable knowing what he can and cannot say. I really liked the tone, and the idea of 'follow the power', which mirrored the business journalism approach of 'follow the money'. I remember thinking to myself, there are so few new publications in the past ten years that have a real point of view, personality and style of writing. Love it or hate it, Puck has all of those things.

So that was the origin of Puck?
Yes. At *Forbes* they'd always said to me, 'no inside baseball'[7], don't exclude readers with insider industry chat – but the whole world is now inside baseball. What Jon Kelly identified was that trade news would be interesting to people if you package it like a glossy-magazine story. What Jon's done is make B2B business journalism exciting. When I started in business journalism, it was not desirable at all. I didn't even want to work at *Forbes*; I wanted to work at *Jane* or *Teen Vogue* or *W*. Jon applies the same delight in working at one of those grand places to business journalism.

How was he able to entice big hitters from the *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, and the *Hollywood Reporter* to jump ship to what was essentially a start-up?
I think Jon's big thing was, '*Why* are people leaving careers in journalism?' Because they're not incentivized, it's not fun, and there are all these infrastructures in place to discourage you from wanting to do it. So, he essentially hired a lot of very senior people, with the idea of building Puck's business around journalism talent. The journalists or columnists – at Puck we're actually called 'partners' – are at the centre of each of Puck's verticals: entertainment, Wall Street, politics, tech, media, fashion, sport, art... It's funny because people ask me why I've only really worked at start-ups – Fashionista, BoF, Puck – because, you know, it feels so risky. But I'd say the riskiest place you can work at right now is one of those legacy newspapers or magazines where there are constant layoffs, where you don't make a lot of money, and where your role is diminished every single year.

Did Matt Belloni's Hollywood newsletter become the blueprint for how Puck, and you, now operate?
Definitely, because he was covering an industry that is probably the closest to fashion. It's not brands, but it's studios and agencies, yet they have a much easier relationship with journalists in that there's less gatekeeping. When I started at Puck it was mainly DC politics, Wall Street and entertainment. They'd hired Bill Cohen, a writer I really admire who used to write for *Vanity Fair*, and

'I accept that *everything* in fashion is bullshit – it's all a construct – so I try to look within that bullshit and say, 'Well, are they doing it the right way?''

'At the shows, the British press would be like, 'This collection is so disgusting.' Then five minutes later they'd be posting on Instagram, 'Fabulous show!''

who'd worked on Wall Street for years. I don't think fashion was the natural fit, especially in America, at a publication where the majority of the readership is men. It's becoming more female now, partially because of me, and Marion [Maneker's] art coverage, but it's still majority men…

But Jon Kelly saw fashion's potential.
He had worked at *Vanity Fair* so he knew the dynamic between LVMH, Kering, and fashion media; he understood its value. Whereas every other generalist business publication I'd written for had dismissed it. At *Forbes*, I wanted to write a profile on Tommy Hilfiger, the company. I'd met with Tommy Hilfiger, and his company was doing really well. I was like, this company is going to get bought – I don't know how I knew, I'd probably done some reporting – so I went to one of the managing editors to propose the idea. He dismissed it and jokingly talked down to me: 'Tommy Hilfiger hasn't been cool since the 1990s!' And I was like, 'This isn't about being cool.' Plus, this was 2009, and he was wearing dad jeans when they absolutely weren't cool, so I was also thinking, 'What the fuck do you know?' Six months later, Tommy got bought for $3 billion by PVH[8]. I'd already left *Forbes* by then, so I just emailed him with a news link in the subject line. The fact remains, a lot of these publications in America are still run by guys who don't take fashion at all seriously. In fairness, [*Wall Street Journal* editor] Emma Tucker has an incredible reporter in Paris covering this, and she has put fashion on A1 a lot, which I think reflects the fact she's from the UK. But if you look at the *New York Times*, they still don't have a business reporter exclusively covering the luxury industry.

Even though Bernard Arnault was listed as the wealthiest man alive in 2023.
Exactly. I also think those big publications are a little nervous about covering fashion and luxury in a serious way, because they rely on that advertising. But Jon just got it, and he really treats my coverage in the same way he treats everyone else's – how much attention it gets on the page, how much they spotlight it. There aren't a lot of people in his position who would be giving me the platform that I've been given.

What do you think makes a good story for Line Sheet?
I always say that I cover everything from Target to Hermès. I'm interested in brands that people care about, which could mean either loving them or hating them, but they care about reading about them. So I'm always asking myself, 'Is this a brand that I'm interested in and care about? Are the people around me talking about it? Is it eliciting some sort of emotion?' If it's ticking those boxes then I'll generally 'follow the money'. Sometimes it's about a brand *not* making any money, and sometimes it's about a brand making so much money that you're shocked. I've written about this brand Vuori, which has a massive amount of private-equity money behind it – I think it's hundreds of millions of dollars[9] – and has become ubiquitous in the US. Most of my readers are not wearing Vuori, but they are interested in it because it's become such a phenomenon.

Did you make a conscious decision to shift the way you wrote for Puck from the way you had done for BoF?
For sure. It's more conversational at Puck. Essentially the mission was to write Line Sheet like you're writing an email to a friend. Since I've been at Puck, it's also more about personality, but I'm more interested in the psychology of who these executives and creatives are, and less about what's going on behind the scenes in their personal lives. I just find the fashion industry so fascinating. It's a bigger and bigger industry. Every year, the players are getting richer, becoming more powerful, more influential in government, and I feel a responsibility to communicate that to the people who read Line Sheet but who don't work in the industry – because there are a lot of them. Alongside all the fashion insiders – CEOs, designers, basically everyone who I write about signs up – I also have Hollywood agents at CAA, teachers in North Carolina, and that's been the interesting thing about this job.

You mentioned before how *Forbes* had trained you to pick up the phone. Are you still regularly cold-calling people you don't know?
Sure. It's much more uncomfortable, and it's not like I enjoy confrontation, but I just think it's easier if people hear your voice, especially mine because I sound like a child. Though my basic rule is I won't badger people. I probably should more than I do, but if someone is uncomfortable talking to me, they may not give me a straight answer anyway. I want to trust the people I'm speaking to, especially when it comes to some of the gossip that I'm reporting on.

What's your rule on that? Some would say that your reporting on gossip gives too much credence to it.
I try to be really upfront and clear that I'm reporting on what people are talking about, not what is confirmed to be true. The transparency is really important because I've been doing this for a long time, and I've learned that there's so much that fashion journalists hide.

Why?
Because they don't really care, because of the benefits of their relationships with brands, or because it's just not how the industry is reported on. I was talking to a comms person from a big company the other day who's also worked outside of fashion, and they're like, people in our industry have no understanding that this is how tech and finance and all these other industries are covered.

Last week, Alex Fury was answering questions from his followers on Instagram Stories. And one of them asked him, 'Why do you think a publication like Puck is breaking the Chanel [new designer] news? Industry mainstays shy?' And Alex replied, 'Because nothing has been confirmed, it's all gossip, really, until it's confirmed, and then it becomes news. And I personally think all the conjecture around moves can be quite toxic, and is certainly destabilizing. I understand the urge to break news first, but I feel that it's having quite a negative effect on fashion.' Thoughts?
I would not say something so definitively if I didn't know for sure. So I did have it confirmed, just not in a press release. But do I think that all the rumour mongering online is negative? It has, in some instances, gone too far. I try to think of it like sports and player trading: you hear one player's going to one team, then you hear about another player wanting to leave and go to another team, that sort of thing. I do think there's a value in talking about it, whether or not something ultimately happens.

Can you give me an example?
A current one is Dario Vitale, the design director from Miu Miu, who is leaving at the end of January. There was a lot of conversation about him maybe going to Bottega; *WWD* reported he might be going to Gucci. I don't think he's going to either of those places, but I cannot say for sure – and that's what I wrote. On the other hand there was the John Galliano exiting Margiela situation. They had confirmed months before that his contract was up in October, but then waited months before confirming his actual departure, which just created lots of unnecessary speculation; it became the Wild West for everybody. I get it, sometimes you *want* the speculation, sometimes it's helpful; they want people to talk because it gets people excited about things, but it's not the way journalism works any more. And I think someone like Alex Fury, who has been a really great writer for magazines forever but who isn't a news reporter, maybe doesn't consider that a little more transparency from the brands would make this speculation go away. The Dries succession was handled perfectly: they didn't wait super long to tell anyone; they sent out a press release; they gave an interview to Tim [Blanks], who was the right person[10]. The way they handled that was great.

But there is a broad spectrum of legal scenarios involved in these things. For every internal solution, like at Dries, there are oftentimes complex contracts to extricate people from.
You're right. Sometimes these negotiations go up to the last minute, the contract doesn't work out, and the whole thing falls apart. So, of course, brands need to be careful, and they can't say it until they say it. Yet I still think in many of these cases, the brands are trying too hard to control the narrative, and they can't control it any more. Instead of engaging, which would actually help them more, they tend to pull out entirely, and that is not helpful.

Conversely, are there times when people call you – individuals, not just PRs – and you're thinking, 'You're planting something here for your own benefit.'
For sure. But that's not to say I wouldn't write about it, if it's interesting. That's sort of the point of Puck – I'm often reporting on the spin. I *want* people to call me and give me their spin.

You often describe what you do at Puck as 'reporting beyond the press release'. Does that ruffle feathers at luxury-fashion houses, who, as you say, for so long have been able to control the narrative of their communications?

'I learned that the more people care about the company they work at, the more they'll talk. Unless they've equity and it's going really well, they'll talk.'

'If you *only* know the good, 'press-release version' of events, it doesn't feel real and so no one gets emotionally connected to what it is you're doing.'

As a B2B reporter I'm very interested in the tension between fashion communications and how broader society is shifting the ways that it's seeking information. I mean, I have a friend who was messaging ChatGPT for love advice last night, so it's like, you're not going to need the press release to be regurgitated to you any more! Without naming the company, there was a big executive reshuffle last year, and I was talking to one of the executives the other night, who said to me, 'When they announced this reshuffle internally, they told us, "Don't worry, we're not going to announce anything publicly for about a year".' One of the other executives said, "There's no way that this is going to be contained, you've just told all of the senior management within the company that it's happening!"' But they are so used to having a relationship with the trades where they say, 'I'm going to give you this exclusive, so please hold off on writing about it for six months.' And the trades are OK with that because they're obsessed with exclusives, which I think makes no sense any more.

But every news media – Puck included – loves scoops, surely?

I love getting scoops and being the first person, but I know that that's not where my value lies. My value lies in being able to give a story context. A partner in a big PR agency said to me years ago, 'We just don't feel the urge to give exclusives any more', because, for example, when the *Wall Street Journal* broke the news that Pharrell was going to Louis Vuitton, they got the scoop, but it was clearly not given to them as an exclusive. I mean, Pharrell and Louis Vuitton no longer require any of the big publications to do that. They can just announce it on their own Instagram accounts.

You said your value lies in giving a story context. Tell me more about that.

Just sharing more insight on how things actually work, which I think will lift the industry up. Knowing the good *and* the bad often burnishes things. Whereas if you only know the good – the press-release version – it doesn't feel real and so no one gets emotionally connected to what it is you're doing. I often wonder, 'Are the brands actually afraid of what I'm doing?' But then I will see them, and they'll be like, 'I love what you're doing.' There's been no one saying, 'I can't have a relationship with you any more because of all this stuff you're exposing.' I honestly think that many people are just very surprised by it.

Surprised by what?

That someone would have the nerve to do what Puck does. I did a story on a big European designer, a behind-the-scenes of how their business is working, and a couple months later, Jon said to me, 'Do you think they'd agree to talk at a Puck live event?' And I was like, 'First of all, they wouldn't do it even if we were the *New York Times*, but also, no, because they don't like that I'm saying all this stuff about how their business is working.' Meanwhile, Bill Cohen has covered the trials and tribulations of Goldman Sachs for Puck, and yet the CEO of Goldman Sachs agreed to do a live event for us. It just speaks to the culture of fashion versus other industries.

Or is sleeping with the enemy just a more accepted occurrence in American business culture?

They understand that if you're not covered holistically it's not real. As I mentioned, if the whole thing is covered, from good and bad sides, it feels more believable. Think about LVMH's attempted acquisition of Hermès or the Arnault-Pinault rivalry; those things – regardless of which side you were on or however you saw it – made both sides seem more powerful, not weaker. But fashion is so much about being perfect, so showing any sort of wrinkle or imperfection scares people. That said, the brands that I think are doing a good job have generally been really supportive of me, even when I've written things that maybe they don't want everyone to know. I just think it's part of this wider re-education that is going to take a little time. I've received emails saying, 'You're doing a really good job' from industry people who probably aren't supposed to say that. Yet at the same time, I'm barely scratching the surface. There's lots of stuff that a great reporter would find in fashion, but there just aren't enough of them covering it.

What should be publicly known and what shouldn't? Is there anything off limits?

When a story starts to touch the hiring and firing of lower-level employees. I've been dealing with this recently because there's a lot of movement in the comms departments. I wouldn't report on lower than head of department, or VP, senior level, just because those other people don't make enough money to be written about. My general rule is, is this going to affect the business or the brand? Similarly, with personal-life stuff, sometimes that does affect the business, but that's not something I would gossip about. It would have to be like, there's an HR complaint against the CEO. Even then, I'd need to see the complaint. It's not because I don't want to get into trouble or I'm afraid, it's because these stories aren't just speculating about the future of a business conceptually. It's nothing like, is the designer maybe leaving or staying? Of course, there's a value in talking about designers moving because of what would happen conceptually to the brand, but I don't want to ruin someone's life. It's really about, does this give context to the greater story of what's happening in fashion right now? If so, then it's worth looking into.

In a post #MeToo world, do you think there needs to be more robust reporting on workplace culture in fashion?

Of course. These are things I've written about in the past and I'll continue if it's important, but it's much harder to be objective about personal 'he said, she said' things. I'm not going to write a story about 'This person is mean to someone', even though they probably are. If it's not systemic, it's not worth it. I think what happened during the #MeToo and Covid era – the peak of all those cancellation stories – was that a lot of the reporting was actually really sloppy. Some of it was just HR complaints about people being mean to someone else, yet that can destroy a company, even when the business is doing OK. Sometimes that stuff needs to come out in order to change things, #MeToo being the obvious example. It absolutely needed to happen so that people would start behaving better, but in fashion, the reality is a lot of that stuff hasn't changed because the cultural mores in Europe are different than the US.

Do you see a distinction between the way European and American companies treat Puck, and your work?

Absolutely. Most of the interesting luxury fashion and accessories brands are based in Europe. But I cover a lot of the department stores in the US, and I would say they are more comfortable with it, they understand it a bit more. At the same time, I have different experiences with the different European luxury groups. Kering's whole mantra is being open and transparent, and they are more open to having a dialogue. That being said, there are people within the individual LVMH companies who are really helpful and open to me. Do I feel like I get closer to more important things for Kering? Yes. Do I think they benefit because they engage with me more? Yes. Because the more you know, the better the story is. At the same time, LVMH is a really well-run company and the people who do engage with me there are really helpful. Also, they communicate a lot by *not* communicating. There's a lot that I can read into their annual reports just by certain language or words they use.

Give me an example.

If they say something's exceptional, that obviously means it's growing and doing well. Whereas with, for example, Tiffany, they will say, 'We had a great store opening', without actually saying anything about how the business is doing. I had a background interview years ago with one of the big LVMH CEOs, and he said, 'The reason we don't share our numbers every year is because a) we don't need to and b) it doesn't matter if we don't grow every year.' You also see this with Chanel and how they've changed their strategy. As a private company, they obviously don't need to share any financial information. But for many years Reuters, Bloomberg and all the wires were taking Chanel's reports from the Swiss registrar and publishing them. So, they decided to start publishing their own information. But when you look at what they write and then you talk to people internally, their definition of how something is performing can differ.

How much of your coverage is driven by reader feedback or tip-offs?

I get a lot of Instagram DMs. I get a lot of WhatsApp because I put my phone number in [the Line Sheet newsletter] all the time. I get anonymous messages on Proton, which I rarely reply to; right now, I have someone supposedly 'at LVMH' messaging me who is trying to be Deep Throat[11]. I'm like, dude – or lady – you need to tell me who you are because I'm happy to take your feedback, but I need to know who I'm talking to. With the Vuori coverage, for example, I mentioned they have raised all this money that I'm sceptical of and I got feedback from a company CEO who was like, 'I'm really bearish on it.' Then there's this activewear brand called Bandit Running that's based in Greenpoint, and an investor, was like,

'I don't get much negative feedback. Maybe people are afraid or don't care, or maybe I'm still in the honeymoon phase with readers, and it will switch.'

'I think a lot of the reporting during the #MeToo and Covid era – the peak of all those cancellation stories – was actually really sloppy.'

'Man, I wish I was in it. It's very real.' Then I get a lot of feedback pointing me in the direction of things I wouldn't have known. Like I did a piece on Bernard Arnault's courtroom trial, and someone in France sent me a follow-up piece from *Le Monde* about him joining this learned society in France, which no American outlet would ever think to write about. So I would say a good amount of my coverage is driven by people sending stuff. Sometimes it is just tips, but generally it's more of a dialogue.

What about negative feedback?
To be honest, I don't get a lot of negative. Maybe people are afraid or don't care, or maybe I'm still in the honeymoon phase with the readership, where they're like, 'Oh my God, you're doing all this great stuff', and maybe it will switch.

true, but a very senior person denied it, so I let it go, because I was like, 'You know what? I trust this person.'

You've mentioned doing what you call background interviews with executives. Do you consider these to be off the record?
I'll often do background interviews with executives, with CEOs, other sources. I'll tell them that I may use the information, but I won't attribute it to them. Sometimes they want it attributed to them, but they just don't want to be directly quoted.

Why do you think some sources feel the need to speak to you about their employers, owners, colleagues, or friends?
Well, I think a lot of people feel that the truth will out.

super well. A great example is Hermès. People have worked there for 30 years. It's an amazing business. Why would anyone bother? Chanel is more challenged, and there are executives who are frustrated there. There's obviously been a lot of change happening, things that have to happen. But as I said, these people really care. Because they see that a lot of fake stuff gets published, and people are sick of being lied to. It sounds so dramatic, but I think if you've been in the business for long enough, you don't want to read this any more. So I do like to poke a little bit and make people a little more uncomfortable than they would like.

Do you think that fashion PRs have a mild panic attack when your name appears on their phone?

'I get anonymous messages on Proton, which I rarely reply to; right now, someone supposedly 'at LVMH' is messaging me trying to be Deep Throat.'

There was one item I wrote – about a magazine – and someone got very upset about how I'd positioned it, and sent me an anonymous hate-mail kind of thing saying, 'You're an idiot and you sound stupid!' Which is fine. The best feedback is neither positive nor negative, but informative: I was talking to a senior-level person at Kering the other day, and they told me, 'I just don't want you to sound stupid. You won't sound stupid if you say these things, but you'll sound stupid if you say that.' And that's what I want. People always ask me, 'How do you get your sources?' And I'm like, 'I'm just like any other beat reporter, and sometimes the information I get isn't right.' Which is why I'm always trying to call people to ask, 'Did I get this right? Is this true?' The other day, I think some information I had was

From within?
Early on, I learned that the more people care about the company they work at, the more they will talk. Unless they have equity and it's going really well, they will talk. When I really learned this was when J.Crew sort of started going to shit in the US around 2015. When I later found out that they had fired [creative director and president] Jenna Lyons – or she exited or whatever – the floodgates suddenly opened, and I realized that these people cared so deeply about this business and that they'd talk to me forever. A great example of a company where people didn't talk for a long time was Glossier. Nobody wanted to talk because they all had a good amount of equity and so they all thought they were going to get super rich. It's more impenetrable when things are going

Sometimes, yes. I'm always like, 'Don't worry, it's not bad…'

But you're rarely the bearer of good news.
No.

Good news rarely makes a good Puck story.
I mean, it can be… Honestly, if it's an upbeat story and I'm not doing anything with this new information, I'm not giving them a heads-up. Whereas if I'm doing a story where there's no new information, but I'm saying something that is tricky, I do give them a heads-up as much as I can, because I do have a relationship with these people. I've known many of them for 20 years: some of them are my good friends. I just think… they all love Puck, when it's not

about them. Ultimately, publicists don't have to do anything with me, but I think that having a relationship with me benefits them. Like, if I call and I say, 'I'm hearing this thing…', they can be like, that part is true, but this isn't, and it's helpful to everyone. I don't take everything I hear from brands at face value either. Like a lot of times the publicist doesn't know, and I've talked to someone way more senior than them already.

It was reported online that Bernard Arnault had written an internal memo to chiefs at LVMH blacklisting certain media – including Puck, which presumably means you – because of stories that had been written about the speculation surrounding the LVMH succession plan. Did you have any sense that was going to happen?

laundry – and it's only going to get more intense for them. They're so used to controlling every little thing, and they've been used to *Bloomberg Businessweek* puff pieces, but I think the industry is now too big for publications like the *New York Times* to ignore, and it's just not going to be like that any more. I don't want them to feel like they can't come to me, but they are also not used to getting lobbed the questions I lob at them. We're in a different era of journalism, and I appreciate that culturally things are different between France and the US, where big corporations send internal emails like that all the time.

What does LVMH represent to you, as a reporter?
I could write about it every day, forever – which I basically do – because it's one

reporting? Is the story more important than maintaining good relationships?
Ruthless in terms of my reporting, I would say a seven, because a lot of times I'm like, this is not worth the stress. But a 12 in terms of prioritizing the story and making it good over maintaining the relationship. The thing I do not do is bully people, which I have found to be a popular tactic across trades in every industry. Like, 'If you don't get me an exclusive, we're going to…', but I don't feel that way. That said, does doing a story that I think is right come above all? Absolutely. As I said, I have relationships, I'm close with people, but a lot of the people that I'm close with are people who I've written about, like, broken stories about, who maybe didn't want that information out there.

'The one thing I do not do is bully people, which I have found to be a popular tactic across trade publications in almost every industry.'

That email actually went out in January 2024, but there's been no change in the way that I operate with anybody at LVMH since then, at least not on my side. No, I had not heard about it. It was only leaked in September, so at that point I reached out to people there who I really trust, and I obviously reached out to the official LVMH people, too, to talk about it, because I'm not going anywhere, and they know that. One person there said, 'I don't share anything with you about the family anyway, so nothing changes.'

Were you surprised by it happening?
I don't really have an opinion about the fact that they did it, but it didn't surprise me. It's a family business, and suddenly everybody is examining them and digging into their dirty laundry – which isn't even dirty, it's actually very clean

of the biggest companies in Europe. They own 75 different businesses, so I can write about Patou one day, and Celine the next day, and Dior the day after. A producer in Hollywood messaged me about one of my Arnault succession stories and said, 'Oh, *this* is the TV show. This is the movie.' And I was like, 'Do you know how many people have said that to me in the last year?' And do you know how many people are currently writing books about that? I've been approached, but I'm not doing it, even though it is juicy. There are five kids; they hang out with celebrities; their Dad is the third-richest man on a good day, fifth-richest man on most days. It's been a gift to me.

On a scale of 1 to 10, how ruthless would you say you are when you're

Can you report on fashion and be friends with those people?
I think you can, but not that many people. I'm very careful about it. It's not my real life, for sure, and it never has been. When I was about 27, I remember having lunch with a woman named Bonnie Morrison who has been a publicist, and worked at *Men's Vogue*, and who is a great writer and very New York. She said, 'Don't wake up when you're 35 and only be friends with fashion people.' I really took it to heart.

As well as its subscription revenue, Puck has advertising, too. When I looked this morning there were Van Cleef & Arpels banner ads on the site. So, hypothetically, what would happen if a big Van Cleef story broke?
A broader retraining needs to happen

with advertisers. It's a really good point. I've yet to experience issues myself, that's yet to happen. Maybe it will some day, maybe it won't. The idea of creating the business around the talent means that I have tons of Netflix and HBO Max advertising on Line Sheet, but I have fashion brands, like Tiffany, Hermès and Akris, too. Van Cleef is currently doing a big thing across the Puck website, but they also specifically chose to sponsor the art newsletter, whereas they didn't sponsor Line Sheet. And then MLB [Major League Baseball] might sponsor the media guy or the Wall Street guy, or a watch brand might do Wall Street. So there's all these different ways to come in. The thing that I'm trying to figure out is how can I get a heads-up on who those advertisers are going to be. I've honestly not had anything negative happen yet, but there have been occasions when I've written what I would say is neutrally about a brand, and there's an advertisement adjacent to that story. So, while advertising obviously represents part of Puck's revenue, it's a matter of doing it in a way that doesn't compromise the relationship with the reader.

It's interesting to hear you talk about not wanting to compromise the relationship with the reader. In fashion publications, it's often as much, if not more, about not compromising the relationship with the advertisers.
As the luxury brands pull back on advertising, it's going to change the dynamic between brands and publications again. For the past 15 years, especially the bigger publications in the US have been slaves to the luxury brands, but the dynamic is changing. Vogue World last year was sponsored by State Farm Insurance and Nike, not by, say, an LVMH brand. And so the question is, how much are the magazines and the more general news outlets willing to push? It's a little easier for a newspaper, because they can have a business section that covers the serious stuff that the brands don't like, and then they can have a separate lifestyle section that just has fun and doesn't dip into the serious stuff. I do think Puck overall is pushing that dynamic in every industry.

I'd say that BoF did a lot of the heavy lifting around the shifting of how the fashion industry is covered, prior to Puck launching.
Agreed. I think Imran [Amed, founder and CEO of BoF] has done an incredible job of building something that feels more credible in this era in terms of how to cover the fashion business. I should also say that he taught me a lot about how the industry works; there's no one else who knows more about how these companies work, and to have learned from an [ex-]management consultant was invaluable.

What distinguishes Puck from most of the trades is its conscious blurring of offline and online. You know, the unmediated online conversation merging with the more regulated role that traditional media reporting plays in contemporary society today, and certainly in fashion. That, to me, is what may become Puck's legacy in, say, five or ten years' time – for better or worse.
It is influencing the way the more traditional outlets cover stuff. I think that they're loosening up a little bit. You see it at *WWD* in particular. I think [*WWD*'s international editor] Miles Socha is the best fashion reporter working, and he probably knows eight million things more than everyone else. But he's hemmed in by the way that they operate, and I see him pushing a little bit more, which I think is really good.

Are you also seeing the more traditional gatekeepers – those who not long ago would have been pretty uncomfortable with what you represented – now starting to thaw?
Well, PR is definitely changing. Someone like Lucien Pagès doesn't call and yell at me. If something happens, he'll say, 'I can't share anything with you' or he shares the press release. He protects his brands, but he's never threatening me about some stupid little thing because I think that culture of fear is going away. Similarly, the corporations are hiring more strategic comms people who are used to dealing with traditional reporters, and that in turn creates an environment where important topics are being covered. The result of this is that you're now seeing someone like Sam Hine at *GQ* – I don't know if he's been inspired by me at all – writing about industry topics like designer changes or the state of men's fashion, in a way that feels genuine. And I think that's the word that audience wants – genuine. I'd say that's why *System* resonates with people: you're picking topics that you're interested in, you're doing it the way you want, with the right writers and photographers. Then you've got someone like @ideservecouture who's on Instagram right now saying, 'That *Vogue* digital cover with all the models looks like crap.' And he's right. I was just talking about it yesterday with two of my friends who are fashion editors. One of them said, 'Why did this happen? They just did this amazing issue with Marc Jacobs, which reminded us all how magazines like *Vogue* can still make us feel, and then they go and publish this terrible thing!' And @ideservecouture is able to go online and actually say it. I love that!

Do you have a Puck story that you're proudest of? One which required the best of your reporting and judgement?
When the [ex-Abercrombie & Fitch CEO] Mike Jeffries[12] thing came out, because I'd recently written a book about Victoria's Secret with one of my old colleagues from BoF, Chantal Fernandez, I was able to immediately call a bunch of sources who'd worked with Mike Jeffries and get a unique perspective that no one else had. I was proud of the way I handled that one. A more recent one is the piece I wrote about the Arnault trial in France, with the spy. People really responded to that. It didn't have a lot of additional reporting, but it did have a lot of context, and I don't think anyone else could have written about it the way I did.

What's the most outlandish fashion rumour you've heard in the past year?
Back in 2023, I heard that Obama was going to be in Pharrell's first Louis Vuitton campaign. I called people on the Obama side and it wasn't true. I don't think I even wrote there was a rumour.

Because it seemed too outlandish?
Well, it would be a big deal if the former president of the United States starred in a Louis Vuitton campaign.

The former leader of the Soviet Union starred in one[13].
That's true! But mentioning that I heard a rumour about Kendrick Lamar working with Chanel is not going to hurt anyone, whereas the implications for Obama being in a Louis Vuitton campaign are different.

Lastly, what's the biggest scoop you'd love to land?
Short term, I'm really waiting to see who's going to run the LVMH fashion group. I don't know how many people care about that other than me, but I'm very interested in how they manage that group. Because I think that group, which is all the smaller brands, is the key to their future. You put the newer designers and executives in that group, and then they might end up running Dior and Vuitton in a few years' time. Besides that, the other big story for me will be Anna Wintour's retirement. Although I'll probably never get the scoop as it'll be planned meticulously to be announced in the *New York Times*, and it's not going to leak. I love writing about Anna; I'm obsessed with her! One time, about halfway into my BoF tenure, I was with someone from *Vogue*, and they casually asked me, 'Would you ever want to work at *Vogue*?' And I was like, 'No, never! I love writing about Anna too much.' It's such fun! She's so amazing and horrible and interesting and boring all at once. When she steps down, she's going to leave a huge void. I just hope for everyone involved that she doesn't retire for another five years, because, like, who am I going to write about if she's no longer around?

'Someone from *Vogue* once asked me, 'Would you ever want to work at *Vogue*?' I was like, 'No, never! I love writing about Anna too much.''

1. The 1991 Gulf War, particularly Operation Desert Storm during which the US and its allies ejected Iraqi troops from Kuwait, made the reputation of 24-hour news channel CNN, which thanks to thorough preparations and political manoeuvring was able to continue broadcasting from the region when other networks were taken off air. The war was the first in which US-military-provided images, including those of cruise missiles hitting targets, were widely broadcast. Their video-game aesthetics were one reason why French thinker Jean Baudrillard famously wrote his essay, 'The Gulf War did not take place'. 'Since this war was won in advance,' he explained, 'we will never know what it would have been like had it existed … But this is not a war, any more than 10,000 tonnes of bombs per day is sufficient to make it a war. Any more than the direct transmission by CNN of real time information is sufficient to authenticate a war.'

2. Tim Blanks presented the show *Fashion File* on Canadian TV channel CBC between 1989 and 2006.

3. *Dawson's Creek* was a teen drama set in Capeside, a fictional town in Massachusetts (but actually filmed in North Carolina), which ran from 1998 to 2003. The series, which introduced James Van Der Beek, Michelle Williams and Katie Holmes to the public, was created by Kevin Williamson, the screenwriter of *Scream* and *I Know What You Did Last Summer*. He said that it 'was about me and my friends'.

4. Founded in 2000 by three friends, including Queen Camilla's nephew, Quintessentially says that it takes 'the concept of luxury concierge to an entirely new level'. In February 2024, the *Guardian* reported that the Quintessentially group of companies was warning of heavy debt and the possible need for more 'external funding' that 'may not be forthcoming': 'this creates material uncertainty that may ultimately cast doubt about the group and company's ability to continue as a going concern.'

5. Anne Slowey worked for *Vogue* and *W* before spending 18 years at *Elle* as fashion news director. In 2020, she co-launched Latitude, a 'weather and lifestyle' app whose primary goal, she told CFDA, was 'to liberate people from the burden of decision fatigue, while we help them align their personal values with their love of fashion'.

6. *Wall Street Journal* reporter Teri Agins' *The End of Fashion: How Marketing Changed the Clothing Business Forever* was published in 1999. In her review of the book for the *New York Times*, Penelope Green wrote that, 'It ought to be mandatory reading for people who think they might like to be clothing designers.'

7. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines 'inside baseball' as 'something known or understood only by a small group of people'. The phrase has been in use since the 1890s. 'The original meaning,' according to the dictionary, 'appears to have referred to a particular style of play which relied on bunts, stealing bases, and minor hits, rather than flashier tactics, such as home runs.' It was first used figuratively in the mid-1950s.

8. Philips-Van Heusen (PVH) paid $3 billion for Tommy Hilfiger in March 2010. 'Observers described the deal as industry-transforming,' wrote *WWD* at the time, 'even if it will saddle PVH with significant debt.'

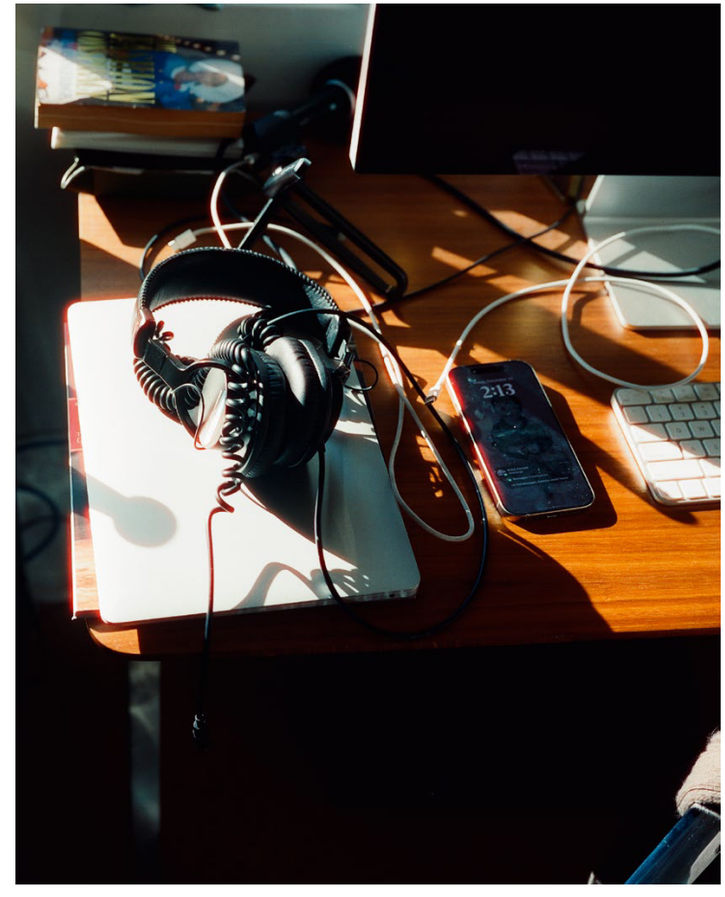
9. On 8 November 2024, investment funds General Atlantic and Stripes, and other investors, announced they were injecting $825 million into sports-apparel brand, Vuori. The investment raised the company's valuation to $5.5 billion.

10. Dries Van Noten retired after his runway show in June 2024, 38 years after his first. In early December 2024, his successor was announced as Julian Klausner, a 33-year-old Belgian designer, who has worked on the house's women's collections since 2018.

11. In 1972, reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein of the *Washington Post* were investigating whether a break-in at the Democratic National Committee in the Watergate Office Building in Washington D.C. was linked to the Republican president Richard Nixon. The pair was helped by a secret informant who the *Post*'s managing editor nicknamed Deep Throat after the title of a 1972 pornographic film and who regularly passed information to Woodward in an underground car park. Deep Throat's identity was finally revealed in 2015 as being Mark Felt, who in 1972 had been the FBI's associate director.

12. On 25 October 2024, CNN reported that Mike Jeffries, former CEO of Abercrombie & Fitch, had pleaded not guilty to '16 federal counts of sex trafficking and international prostitution'. On 24 December 2024, his lawyers filed a court document stating that Jeffries has dementia and late-onset Alzheimer's disease and, according to the BBC, 'requested a hearing to determine whether he is fit to stand trial'.

13. The final leader of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, was shot by Annie Leibovitz for a Louis Vuitton advertisement in 2007. It was not Gorbachev's first advertising job, however: in 1998, he starred in a television spot for Pizza Hut in which his fellow diners argue about his political legacy before saluting their ex-leader with slices of cheesy pizza.



‘I don’t do fashion; I give my friends elegant solutions.’

Loro Piana celebrates a century of sourcing the world’s finest fibres and its continuing quest for understated elegance.

Photographs by Juergen Teller
Creative partner Dovile Drizyte
Styling by Aleksandra Woroniecka
Text and interviews by Angelo Flaccavento

Long cherished by a coterie of ultra-discreet, globetrotting, and discerning clients, Loro Piana has in recent times been transformed into a widely sought-after synonym of ‘quiet luxury’. It is a label somehow both perfectly accurate and completely wrong. While the *maison* has indeed fostered an idea of elegance that is all pared-down sophistication, timelessness and almost-unattainably precious textiles, the Loro Piana aesthetic is definitely not based upon the usual quiet-luxury formula of muted neutrals and endless cashmere. At Loro Piana, there is no rulebook but instead an almost stubborn quest for excellence, built upon a distinct and profoundly Italian identity. A sense and an appreciation of daring and adventure, of a life immersed in nature and sports, and of the vastness of horizons are central to the house’s ethos.

Its story began 100 years ago, in 1924, with a textile mill in Piedmont, northern Italy, a mountainous region renowned for the production of superior wool fabrics. A family enterprise in the best Italian tradition, Loro Piana built a global reputation for its textiles before expanding its scope to include apparel in the 1990s, under the leadership of the late Sergio Loro Piana and his brother Pier Luigi ‘Pigi’ Loro Piana. While Sergio and his wife Luisa worked on style, Pier Luigi travelled to far-flung regions around the world in his quest for the rarest fibres. In 2013, LVMH stepped in as majority stakeholder and Loro Piana has since grown significantly. Today, under the focused guidance of CEO Damien Bertrand, Loro Piana has become a force to be reckoned with: a true embodiment of luxury, with a language all its own. To celebrate its centenary, the *maison* will stage its first ever exhibition, an immersive show about its storied history at the Museum of Art Pudong in Shanghai in March 2025. *System* decided to mark the occasion by asking photographer Juergen Teller to turn his singular gaze upon the composite identity of Loro Piana and its leaders, while paying homage to the *maison*’s exquisite fibres in its factories in the Piedmont towns of Roccapietra and Quarona.

Luisa Loro Piana

Luisa Loro Piana is the widow of the late Sergio Loro Piana, the impossibly stylish heir to the family enterprise who expanded Loro Piana's territory from fabrics to apparel.

'When I talk about Loro Piana I always get emotional. It is and has been such a big part of my life, like the memory of a dream, which in the end came true. Sergio, my late husband, was the driving force, along with his brother Pigi, of the shift that turned Loro Piana from a supplier of the best fabrics into a supplier of the best clothing. The experience bonded us deeply. We didn't do much market research; we just brought our beliefs and taste outside of our own environment. The materials used in the first stores, for example, were the same as those in my house, the colours too, and the André shirt – still a bestseller – was my father-in-law's shirt. I met Sergio in New York; he was struck by the way I was dressed, all in grey flannel with a battered cashmere sweater. I am Venetian, he was Piedmontese, and we really got along. Our shared love of nature and adventure was another strong bond, which we transferred into the *maison*'s values. Sergio was a scuba diver, a helicopter and aeroplane pilot, a golfer. For him, sport was discipline, concentration and personal improvement, which complemented his impeccable manners. Our love of sports and nature took us to beautiful places. Creating the Loro Piana world was very natural for us, because that's how we are; we've just tried to show others what we are. Friends told us, "You supply the best designers and fashion houses with beautiful fabrics and wonderful yarns. You should propose something of your own." When they met Sergio, they would comment, "You have a certain way of dressing and carrying yourself, which people admire – do something with it." At the end of the 1980s, this type of product was missing, and it was perfect timing. If one wanted to be elegant in a sporty kind of way, the offer was limited: Burberry, Barbour, or Husky. The first thing we did, in 1992, was the Horsey Jacket for the Italian equestrian team at the Barcelona Olympics. The rest originated from there, but we always kept in mind that it wasn't fashion. This was paramount for Sergio. He used to say, "I don't do fashion; I give my friends and clients elegant solutions." For him, the clients were the best ambassadors. Sergio brought the tradition of his Piedmontese roots – with a German-Dutch mother and a Venetian wife – to the world, finding a niche in the market. The elegance that everyone attributed to Sergio was for him like the right measure you find in Greek philosophy: moderation in all things, not doing anything loud. Sergio was an entrepreneur of great taste and an exceptional man. There was an innate elegance in his gestures, in his way of being, in the things he surrounded himself with. But he was also a good entrepreneur, with a really clear and precise vision of what he wanted, of where he wanted to position the *maison*, and he did not compromise in order to get there. The results we obtained are largely due to his tenacity. The balance that set him apart was also in the company: Pigi bought the raw materials and Sergio had the ideas about making a particular fabric or item. When it came to selling the company, among the various proposals we got, we chose the family that had the most respect for all our values. Today, Loro Piana continues to be a *maison* that customers can fundamentally trust, as they always have. This is really Sergio's dream come true.'



Pier Luigi Loro Piana

Pier Luigi 'Pigi' Loro Piana is currently the *maison*'s deputy chairman and charged with sourcing and discovering the finest fibres. He is a passionate sailor and a tireless researcher into all materials precious and rare.

'One of the reasons why I decided with Sergio, my late brother, to create sportswear in traditional fabrics, such as cashmere or wool flannel, is because we had noticed something amusing and curious. During the week we met bank managers and entrepreneurs in blue suits, looking really elegant in their white shirts and impeccable neckties. On the weekend, however, we met the same people on the ski slopes and they were all dressed in nylon, in bright colours, with stripes and bands, looking loud and garish and honestly, not very elegant. How was it even possible? We gave these clients something that at the time was not available, and succeeded. Loro Piana is an important part of my life; it's a visceral relationship. Of the 100 years we are celebrating in 2024, I have lived 50. My father's ambition, after the Second World War and in the economic recovery of the boom years, was to move the company towards the best quality products with the intent of making something beautiful, something of value in limited quantities, following French haute couture. He passed this philosophy on to us. Technological innovation has been a fundamental aspect for us, a true pillar. For instance, my father invented Tasmanian, a really light suiting fabric with a simple weave that revolutionized the world of formalwear and went on to become a staple. We, in turn, developed Storm System, a waterproof membrane applied to precious fabrics. This allowed us to use top-quality raw materials for different products with an added extra: lightness, softness – and waterproofness. These are characteristics of a modern and contemporary garment, but made with noble raw materials. Loro Piana is not just an artisanal company; it's also a laboratory and an industrial company. Over the years, we've reached production volumes that have allowed us to use the most advanced technology and so increase productivity. Being responsible for purchasing the raw materials, I was curious to go and see where they were produced, climbing up the supply chain as far as possible and coming in contact with suppliers that were totally different from those I had in Italy. That's where the creativity and inspiration for the finished product originated. My role is to look for other raw materials and try to develop them, coming up with new ideas. There is a lot of creativity in the world of production, more than you might imagine. This is what sets us apart. That quest for maximum quality and the transformation into a recognizable finished product are important, but if you don't make a product that satisfies clients' needs for elegance or self-esteem, you're missing the point. What matters is the combination of quality, shape, personality, image, and self-recognition. For high-quality products like Loro Piana's, the concept of disposable cannot exist. We joke that it's an insult when someone throws away a Loro Piana item from their wardrobe. If our clothes are seen as contemporary and beautiful, even if they are not fashionable or trendy, then I am not ashamed to say that they represent the right kind of fashion. Luxury is our goal, by which I mean quality without compromises. When you can afford to use the finest wool in the world produced in the best way, then it can be really considered a luxury product. That, ultimately, is Loro Piana.'



Damien Bertrand

Damien Bertrand has been CEO of Loro Piana since November 2021. Under his tenure, the House has seen remarkable and noticeable growth and become one of the luxury market's most desirable *maisons*.

'Loro Piana represents the pinnacle of luxury, a *maison* where excellence is a shared passion. With our timeless take on elegance and unique sense of touch, we blend rich tactile experiences with functionality and style. It's a very interesting moment for us, a pivotal point, as we celebrate the *maison*'s centenary. I see this turning point as symbolic of the tension between always remembering where we come from and always having in mind our North Star. It's about evolution, not revolution. The trajectory is set: our aim is to continue being the masters of fibres so we can always bring our clients the absolute best wool, the best cashmere, and best linen that we can source around the world. We are unique compared to other houses, because we start with the fibres, and then work these remarkable materials into the best products, taking time to create and make our collections. But we do not do fashion. Being the heralds of timeless style, that does not mean we always offer the same products. We take pride in the fact that our collections are relevant today, but probably will also be relevant in five years or more. It takes dedication to do what we do, and time is something we take. This is what luxury means: having the time and a different time frame. Over the past few years, we have redefined the Loro Piana silhouette to make it more modern, stylish and contemporary, but still timeless and extremely chic, so that people can always recognize the Loro Piana signature style. The *maison* has a very rich history: what the family has done over a century is remarkable. Heritage and an obsession with quality are very important. At the same time, we don't want to look into the rearview mirror; we want to look to the future – and one important component of this future, I would say, is innovation. The beautiful thing about textiles is that it is possible to innovate. We are not looking at making big, visible changes; we are not loud in what we do. It's a little like a painting to which we are constantly adding little brushstrokes. The subtlety of our values translates into a desirability for clients who want innovation, high quality, and something that they buy to treat themselves, out of personal fulfilment. We are growing and keep doing so, that's for sure, but I wouldn't say that growth is our obsession or our main goal. Rather, our growth is the consequence of that desirability, which is based on our heritage and our projection into the future. Family is also important. For Sergio Loro Piana and Pier Luigi Loro Piana, it was essential to welcome key clients into the *maison* Loro Piana. As the gatekeepers of the past 100 years, and the people preparing the next 100, we are committed to sustainability and social responsibility; they are essential values for us. We have created stable relationships with the communities in Peru, New Zealand, Australia, Mongolia and China that grow our fibres, and in a way they are part of the Loro Piana family, too. These durable, long-term relationships are essential to who we are and how we work. We want to improve this aspect even more and create the conditions to work together for the next 100 years. Since I joined, we have changed the *maison* a lot, but at the same time we've remained anchored by our values, heritage, and the family. Continuity is key.'







Weaving loom



Jacquard loom



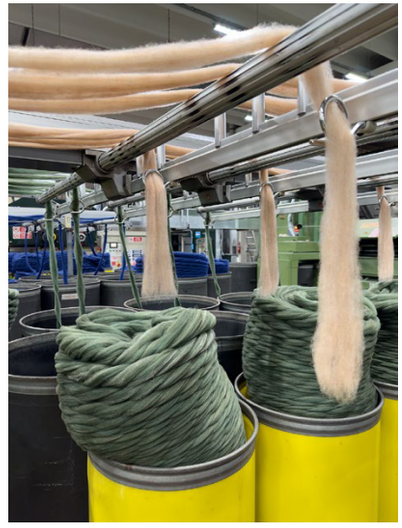


Blending machine





Carding machine







Jacquard loom





Weaving loom



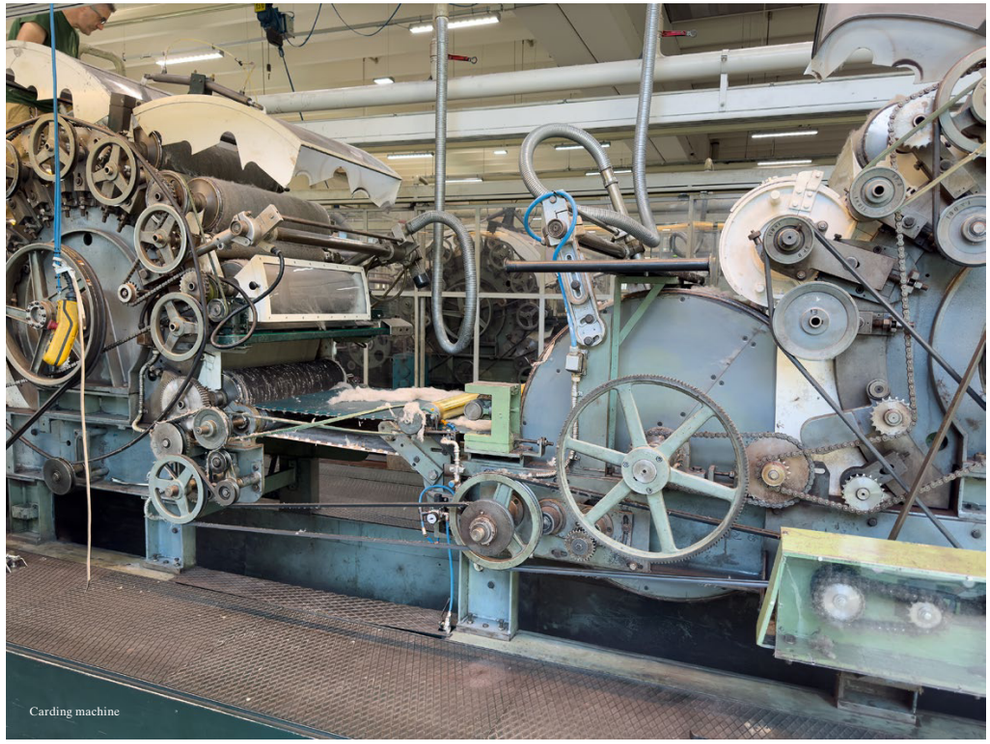



VICUÑA
Loro Piana
VICUÑA
UNCOMPR



Fabric finishing area





Carding machine





Carding machine



Carding machine





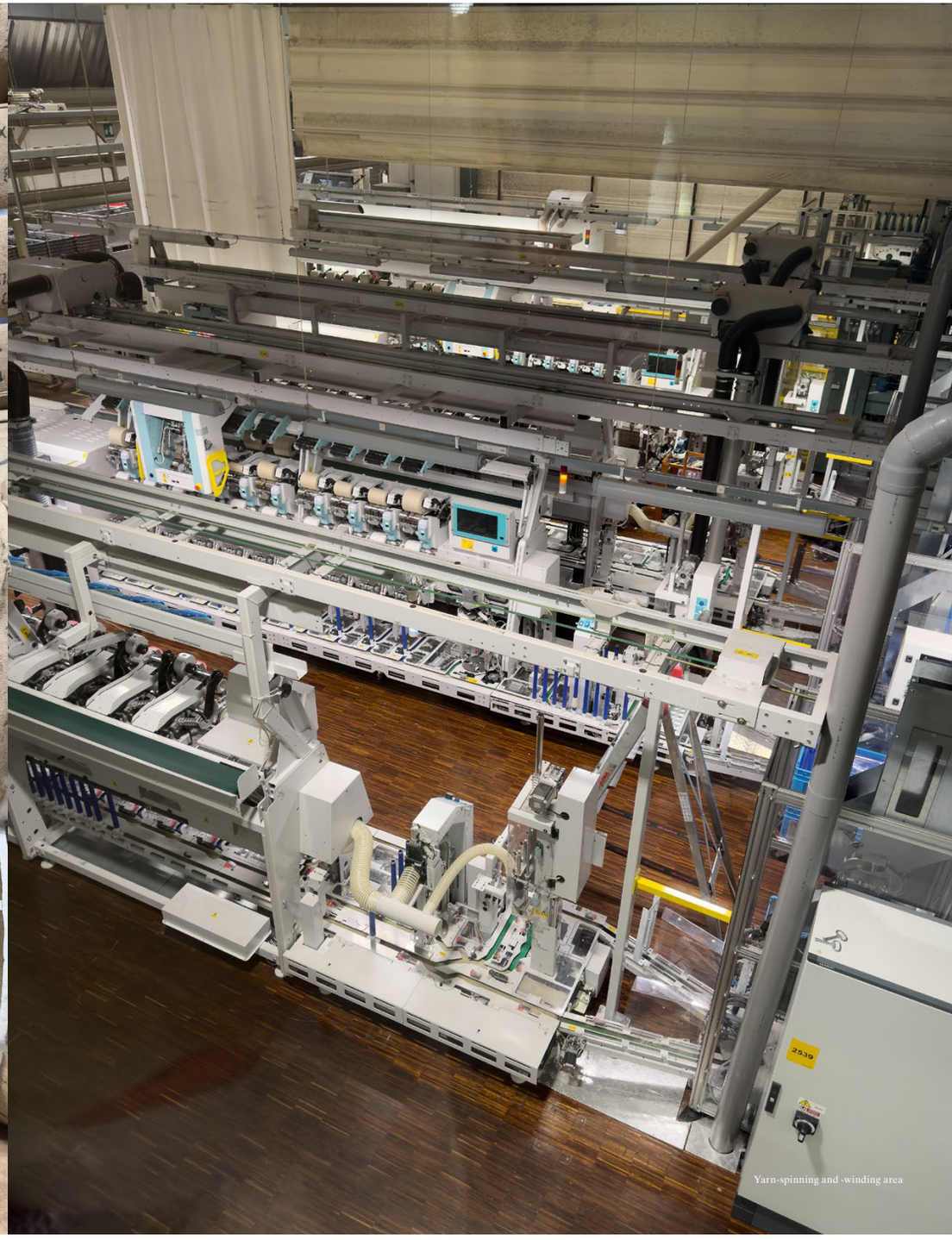
Carding machine




Loro Piana







Yarn-spinning and -winding area



Yarn-twisting area



Fibre quality control



All clothes by Loro Piana


In the background, fabric leftovers to be recycled

Models: Lina Zhang at Elite and Leon Dame at Viva.
Hair stylist: Pierpaolo Lai. Make-up artist: Michiko Ikeda. Manicurist: Giovanna Demarco.
Photography assistant: Felipe Chaves. Local production: Mr Wolf. Post-production: Louwre at Quickfix.





Photograph: Julien Da Costa



The Loïc Prigent Interviewing Questionnaire

By Loïc Prigent

The first fashion designer you ever interviewed?
Helmut Lang. First, the PR came round to inspect my apartment. Then I met Helmut at the Café de Flore, upstairs. Before anything, he asked my star sign. I answered. He liked the answer and sat down.

The most memorable designer interview you've ever done? What happened?
Yves Saint Laurent bitching about Tom Ford was nerve-racking.

The nicest thing a designer has ever said about you?
'Yes, you can come backstage during the show!'

The bitchiest thing a designer has ever said about you?
That I filmed better than I dressed. Pure Karlism.

Which deceased designer do you regret never having interviewed? What would you ask them?
Gabrielle Chanel. I would ask her to show me how she talks to her deceased lover Arthur Capel; it would be a totally meta experience. And can I also talk to Kenzo Takada to ask him about his early years in Paris? Oh, and Paul Poiret… and Patrick Kelly, too…

Which living designer have you never managed to interview? What do you want to ask them?
Bob Mackie. Tell me about your childhood?

The one question that always elicits a memorable answer?
'Why red?' I once saw CNN journalist Elsa Klensch ask it backstage after a show in Paris and I never forgot it. Rudimentary questions, technical questions are my favourites.

The one question you never dared ask Karl?
There was nothing off limits with him.

Has a designer ever cried during your interview? Who, and why?
Viktor or Rolf, but it was out of exhaustion, right after a fashion show in 2000.

Has a designer ever walked out of your interview? Who, and why?
Yes, Alexander McQueen did. Hysterical screams, a super violent bout. I'd expressed my strong disapproval of his debut Givenchy ready-to-wear collection. I wish it had been filmed, it would now be a ridiculous, cult video.

Which designer smells the best?
Yves Saint Laurent, Diane von Furstenberg, Kim Jones, Olivier Rousteing.

Which designer arrived the latest to an interview? How late?
Karl Lagerfeld. I got used to waiting for him. Meetings were typically scheduled for 2 pm at his 7L studio-bookstore. You'd get there, grab a magazine, and settle in. He'd usually roll in around 7 or 8 pm, but the latest I ever saw him was 11 pm. Eight hours waiting! But it was never a drag. There were always magazines, a great team, and countless stories to swap. And the interviews with Karl were always a masterclass in fashion and culture, not to mention pretty funny.

Which designer had the largest entourage in attendance when you were interviewing them?
I remember a Calvin Klein filmed interview where the make-up artist constantly re-powdered him during the questions, literally on air, and Calvin Klein just kept talking. It was pure genius, pure fa-shun. Of course, we broadcast the absurdity in full.

The best fashion rumour you've ever heard this year?
Fashion rumours are boring, and of course the best ones are unprintable!

The best fashion rumour you've heard about yourself?
There are no fashion rumours about me because everything is true.




SNOW GOOSE
BY / PAR CANADA GOOSE




SNOW GOOSE
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LOUIS VUITTON