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# ENCYCLOPEDIA OF COLLECTIONS

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KATE BETHUNE

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Alexander McQueen designed 36 collections for his London label, including his MA graduate collection; 35 of these were presented on the catwalk. Between October 1996 and March 2001 McQueen also produced two haute couture and two ready-to-wear womenswear collections a year – in addition to his London label collections – as chief designer for Givenchy womenswear. McQueen absorbed references as wide ranging as underground films and Gothic literature, Northern Renaissance art and war photography, and Victorian London and the Far East. Nature and autobiography also informed McQueen's approach to design, his collections reflecting his interest in the animal kingdom and the natural world as well as his East End roots, his Scottish heritage and distant ancestors in colonial Massachusetts. McQueen once said, 'Clothes don't come with a notepad ... it's eclectic. It comes from Degas and Monet and my sister-in-law in Dagenham' (*The Pink Paper*, April 1994). But perhaps the greatest repository of inspiration for McQueen was his own imagination. In his curious and complex mind he wove together myriad – and often divergent – themes, translating them into a coherent vision for each of his collections.

Cutting across taboos and conventions, McQueen was an iconoclast who consistently pushed the boundaries of fashion, both through the innovative cut, construction and material qualities of the garments he crafted and the often provocative, always spectacular, catwalk shows through which he presented them to the world. For McQueen, everything began with a concept for the catwalk presentation. As many of his colleagues have observed, he envisaged the collections as both garments and mise-en-scène. A tight-knit, trusted circle of art director, production designer, show producer, stylist, and music and lighting directors made this possible and enabled McQueen to turn his visions into a reality. McQueen's creative vision also extended to the ephemera and invitations that accompanied each show. Reproduced here, their diversity and graphic qualities reflect McQueen's breadth of vision for his collections and illuminate his creative collaborations.

All quotations are taken from publicity material and show notes issued by Alexander McQueen, unless otherwise stated.

# JACK THE RIPPER STALKS HIS VICTIMS

MA GRADUATE COLLECTION 1992  
DUKE OF YORK'S HEADQUARTERS, LONDON; 16 MARCH 1992

McQueen's graduate collection – which he showed the day before his 23rd birthday under his given name Lee A. McQueen – marked the completion of his Master's degree in Fashion Design at Central Saint Martins. It was presented during London Fashion Week in the British Fashion Council tent at the Duke of York's Headquarters on the King's Road in Chelsea.

The collection was principally inspired by the East End felon Jack the Ripper and the prostitutes whom he savagely murdered in Whitechapel in 1888. Having grown up in London's East End, and with an ancestor who had supposedly owned an inn where one of the Ripper's victims lodged, McQueen was drawn to the darker aspects of the area's past.

The collection had a strong emphasis on tailoring. Victorian silhouettes were achieved by skilful cutting and were rendered in a sombre palette of predominantly black and maroon but with red and lilac silk linings. A deep-pink silk frock coat with barbed hawthorn print (by fellow student Simon Ungless), cut tight to the body and arms, showcased McQueen's skills, honed as an apprentice on Savile Row. Skirts echoing the Victorian crinoline were cut short, distressed with burn marks and overlaid with a bricolage of portraits from magazines, including that of a young Johnny Depp from the cult 1980s TV series *21 Jump Street*. A tight-fitting black jacket, with

peplum at the rear and dagger-shaped lapels, was lined with red silk. Strands of human hair were visible beneath the translucent linings of some of the garments, inspired by the Victorian prostitutes who sold their hair as love tokens. McQueen borrowed pieces from jewellery designer Simon Costin, including his 'Memento Mori' necklace (1986), which incorporated two bird's claws and three jewel-encrusted rabbit skulls.

Fashion editor Isabella Blow, who would become instrumental to McQueen's career, purchased the entire collection piece by piece.



# TAXI DRIVER

AUTUMN/WINTER 1993  
THE RITZ, LONDON; MARCH 1993

McQueen was one of six new talents sponsored by the British Fashion Council via the newly launched NEWGEN initiative, which gave him the opportunity to present this, his first collection after leaving college, in a suite at The Ritz, London. The garments consisted of 13 new designs – made at a house in Tooting that McQueen shared with Simon Ungless. These were supplemented with others reworked from McQueen's graduate collection as well as some experimental pieces made in between. An enhanced collection of 26 pieces was subsequently presented under the name Alexander McQueen to buyers and journalists at the Covent Garden showroom of newly established fashion recruitment agents Alice Smith and Cressida Pye.

The collection demonstrated McQueen's early interest in accentuating parts of the female anatomy to create a new shape and marked the debut of one of his most important contributions to fashion, the 'bumster' trousers. These are described on a price list of the designs shown at Smith & Pye as 'French cut trousers (bumsters)'. The waistband was cut 5 cm below that of hipsters, so that they grazed the hipbone, elongated the torso and exposed the lower spine.

McQueen's interest in historical reinterpretation found expression in tailored angora Palazzo pants, trousers cut just above the ankle in 1950s style, and 'Korean-line' frock coats with Chesterfield collars. The traditional was suffused with modernity not only via innovative cutting, but also through the use of experimental materials and processes: tank tops with French partridge feathers encased in vinyl, and fabric edges dipped in latex as a substitute for seamed hems.

While the title perhaps referred to McQueen's father, who was a London cabbie, the explicit influence behind the collection was Martin Scorsese's film *Taxi Driver* (1976), which told the violent story of vigilante Travis Bickle (played by Robert De Niro). It manifested itself as a long line waistcoat, printed by Ungless with the image of De Niro's character.

McQueen's interest in the Victorian era was articulated in garments such as a corseted woollen riding jacket and a skirt printed with images of August Sander photographs (his notebooks for the collection also contained examples of photography from the era). Yet a couture coat made from silk suiting, with pleated and jewelled collar, shared the same name as Baroness Orczy's novel *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1905) and hinted at McQueen's interest in Revolutionary France.



# NIHILISM

SPRING/SUMMER 1994  
BLUEBIRD GARAGE, LONDON; 18 OCTOBER 1993

McQueen's first professional catwalk show was presented at the Bluebird Garage on the King's Road, Chelsea, to the beat of American hip hop artist Cypress Hill's 'I Wanna Get High'. The building, formerly an Art Deco masterpiece, had acquired a reputation for drugs and violence. It was a fitting venue for McQueen's pioneering collection, presented by skinny, punkish models who were full of attitude.

Tailoring was technically precise and featured sharp lapels, hardened shoulders and frock coats that were cut away at the back. Lack of funding forced McQueen to be creative with his materials. An Edwardian jacket in corroded gilt and a frock coat with matching trousers made from cheap gold fabric, tarnished by chemicals that burned through the fibres, suggested defaced luxury. Many of the textiles McQueen utilized in his designs at this time, including a fabric screen-printed with a rusty resin paste of oxidized iron filings, were made with Fleet Bigwood, McQueen's former tutor at Central Saint Martins.

A strong ethnic undercurrent also prevailed. Pickled locusts sealed in liquid latex were embroidered onto a dress made from cling film, smeared in dirt. It was another co-project with Simon Ungless and served as a comment on famine in Africa. Other garments incorporated William Morris prints and hinted at McQueen's interest in the Arts and Crafts Movement. Although the collection was not intended as a commercial enterprise, McQueen was mindful to build his brand, his name appearing as a logo across the bust of a white shift dress.

McQueen's debut show aroused the attention of the fashion press. Critics identified perversity in models dressed in cling-film knickers and muslin tops smeared with a blood-like residue. Although Marion Hume of *The Independent* branded the show 'a catalogue of horrors', she conceded that McQueen's 'shocking' innovation was instrumental for safeguarding London's creative supremacy.

McQueen created the show invitations with pages torn from an encyclopedia that were hand-stamped with the date and venue.



# BANSHEE

AUTUMN/WINTER 1994  
CAFÉ DE PARIS, LONDON; 26 FEBRUARY 1994

Staged at the Café de Paris, a historic nightclub in the heart of London's West End, *Banshee* unfolded to a soundtrack of Celtic pipe music, which gave way to hard club beats and a female rapper swearing.

The prevailing mood of the collection, named after the spirit from Gaelic mythology (Bheansidhe) who wailed whilst washing the blood-stained clothes of men approaching a violent death, was one of romance undercut with tragedy. McQueen resurrected the image of a post-shipwreck seascape through dresses of tattered tulle and jackets with gold piping on collars and cuffs in reference to a drowned captain's uniform.

However, as the collection notes stated, McQueen's models were 'no banshees of the deep', rather 'survivors, women who [were] proud to wear their beauty'. He presented his strong women, among them Isabella Blow, via controversial designs and irreverent styling. Over-sized sleeves resembled those on a straitjacket; a sheer black dress with an Elizabethan neckline was modelled by a pregnant young woman, her shaven head stencilled with the word 'McQueen'. The designer instructed her to pose like the bride in one of his favourite paintings, Jan van Eyck's *The Arnolfini Portrait* (1434).

While a painterly theme found expression in gauzy black dresses dripping with metallic prints that evoked molten silver and suggested dark romance, McQueen honed in on the erogenous zones with necklines cut to reveal the nipples and knitwear made by Julien MacDonald that exposed the breasts.

McQueen's interpretation of contemporary Britishness also shone through in his combinations of heavy pea-jacket melton mixes with spider-web silver lace, thick flannels paired with glossy latexes and sequinned tops. Drawstring 'leg-ups' and a jacket held in place by 3 cm of silver thread emphasized McQueen's inventiveness with cut and cloth, alongside a continuing interest in unlikely materials and silhouettes. Here he first experimented with moulded designs that emphasized the form of the body beneath – in this instance a breastplate crafted from plaster of Paris.



## THE BIRDS

SPRING/SUMMER 1995

BAGLEY'S WAREHOUSE, LONDON; 10 SEPTEMBER 1994

McQueen's Spring/Summer 1995 collection was presented at Bagley's warehouse, a rundown party venue in an insalubrious part of King's Cross, London. The collection was made with the assistance of Andrew Groves and David Kappo. Jewellery designer Simon Costin, who worked on McQueen's set for the first time, provided accessories. *The Birds* was the first show styled by Katy England, who was assisted by Alister Mackie. Fashion journalist Plum Sykes, then assistant at British *Vogue* and 'It Girl', modelled.

This collection initiated McQueen's love of birds as expressed through his designs, their gracefulness and profile in flight consistently informing his silhouettes from this point. Dramatic prints of swallows – produced by Simon Ungless – flew across burnt-orange tailored suits and tight-fitting red skirts. The graphics had been reworked on the computer by Groves to create the impression of a sinister flock that surrounded and engulfed the wearer. The image, informed by Hitchcock's 1963 suspense thriller, *The Birds*, after which the collection was named, connected McQueen's fascination with ornithology with his passion for film.

Road kill provided another inspiration for the collection and its staging. The show invitation featured an image of a small bird squashed on a road. Costin, who had trained in theatre design as well as jewellery, painted the catwalk to look like a road, with models entering via a long, dark tunnel. Tyre-tread prints – again a direct reference to *The Birds* – violated crisp white suits and cellophane tops, and were echoed in the models' body and face make-up, generating fresh criticisms of the

designer's representation of women. McQueen subverted his catwalk collection in new ways by inviting corsetier Mr Pearl to model a tight-fitting jacket and skirt, which drew attention to his cinched waist; the svelte silhouette was inspired by Tippi Hedren's wardrobe for the film.



## HIGHLAND RAPE

AUTUMN/WINTER 1995

NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM, LONDON; 13 MARCH 1995

Considered McQueen's breakthrough collection, *Highland Rape* was presented on a catwalk scattered with heather in the British Fashion Council tent outside the Natural History Museum in South Kensington, London.

The controversial collection, which was delivered to dance music overlaid in places with the knell of a church bell, made reference to McQueen's Scottish ancestry. Garments fashioned from the MacQueen clan tartan of red and black shot through with yellow invested the designs – and designer – with a sense of heritage, while the inclusion of plumes from wild birds acknowledged the Scottish game-keeping tradition. But there was nothing romantic or idealistic about this collection. It was precisely McQueen's intention to subvert any sense of nostalgia with designs that shocked and cut against romanticized notions of Scotland's past.

The contentious use of 'rape' in the title unsurprisingly aroused criticism and accusations of misogyny from the press. McQueen, however, insisted that the collection was a commentary on the Highland Clearances levied against Scottish communities in the nineteenth century and the 'rape' of a culture by English aggressors. Still critics identified violence in the savage cutting of the clothes, which were ripped and torn to expose flesh and breasts, and vulgarity in the watch chains hanging from the pubic region of skirts. Aside from the uncomfortable title, the designer provoked his audience further with a graphic invitation that depicted a surgical wound with scabs left by the suturing needle.

The clothes complemented the political atrocity that served as the base inspiration for the collection. Any sense of romantic fragility inherent in garments crafted from chiffons and laminated laces was transformed by the aggressive way in which they were presented. But this was not intended to debase the women who wore them. McQueen's models, some styled with dark make-up and black and mirrored contact lenses, were not vulnerable victims but fearless women whom he had galvanized through the strength of his designs.

## THE HUNGER

SPRING/SUMMER 1996

NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM, LONDON; 23 OCTOBER 1995

Presented as the finale to London Fashion Week in the East Lawn tent outside London's Natural History Museum, *The Hunger* was the first McQueen catwalk show produced by creative consultant Sam Gainsbury; Gainsbury had commenced her working relationship with McQueen as casting director for *The Birds*. It would result in a longstanding collaboration, with Gainsbury producing every subsequent show (from 1997 together with business partner Anna Whiting). *The Hunger* also initiated McQueen's collaboration with jewellery designer Shaun Leane, who produced the single 'Tusk' earring for the collection. Other collaborators included the Icelandic musician Björk, who produced the soundtrack. McQueen dedicated the collection to his friend – by now his creative director – Katy England.

The collection was inspired by Tony Scott's dark, sexualized horror film of the same name (1983), which starred Catherine Deneuve, David Bowie and Susan Sarandon and told the story of a love triangle involving a doctor and a vampire couple. The spectre of the insatiable vampire was translated via tailoring that featured aggressive cut-outs, sharp collars developed from his graduate collection, and flesh-like designs, including a top that incorporated strands of red yarn that echoed human veins. McQueen harnessed sexual undertones with themes of mortality and decay in a visceral, moulded corset – constructed from worms sandwiched between sheets of transparent plastic – which emphasized the breasts and hinted at decomposing flesh. Other designs included thorn and feather prints which were applied to slim silhouettes.

The ensemble comprising red bumsters and a floral brocaded top with hanging sleeves was selected by fashion editor Tamsin Blanchard as 'Dress of the Year' for 1996; an annual award conferred since 1963 by the Fashion Museum, Bath.

In his early collections, McQueen sometimes included a small number of male models. However, *The Hunger* featured 28 menswear designs out of a total of 95.



## DANTE

AUTUMN/WINTER 1996

CHRIST CHURCH, LONDON; 1 MARCH 1996

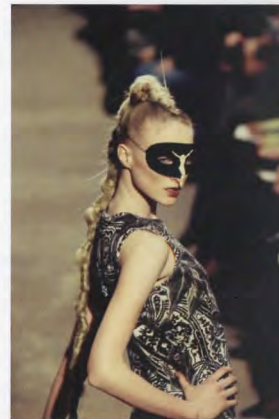
McQueen's Autumn/Winter 1996 collection – dedicated to Isabella Blow – was presented in the dramatic setting of Nicholas Hawksmoor's Christ Church in Spitalfields, east London. The Baroque edifice was a pertinent choice of venue, for McQueen had learned from his mother that his family had descended from the Huguenot immigrants who had moved to the area in the 1680s. The fashion press were anxious to see what McQueen would present in a place of worship. They were not disappointed. Guests, among whom a skeleton was seated, overlooked a runway in the shape of a cross; the sound of a missile gave way to club beats mixed with organ music and salvos of gunfire. The first McQueen show to feature Kate Moss as a model, it set a new theatrical precedent for the designer.

Ostensibly named after Dante, the fourteenth-century Florentine poet, who presented in his *Divine Comedy* an allegorical vision of the afterlife, the collection was a commentary on religion, war and innocence. Religious iconography and brutal images of conflict abounded. Black and white photographs of social pariahs, including a nineteenth-century colony for the blind, and Don McCullin images of the Vietnam War were printed on jackets and coats, creating a poignant contrast to the luxurious fabrics beneath. McQueen also borrowed from his favourite photographic artist Joel-Peter Witkin, in particular the mask with the figure of Christ crucified, which he took from Witkin's *Portrait of Joel, New Mexico* (1984). Fourteenth-century Flemish paintings – a genre McQueen greatly admired – also found expression in

the slashed sleeves, erect collars and layered clothes that he assimilated from figures in paintings by Jan van Eyck and Hans Memling.

Statuesque models draped in black lace veils, and a corset of black lace and jet beading laid over a ground of soft purple (the colour of Victorian 'half' mourning), signified McQueen's ability to find beauty in death as the soundtrack gave way to Samuel Barber's 'Adagio for Strings'. McQueen, however, harnessed the melancholic with the energy of British street culture by pairing his creations with frayed and bleached denims.

Accessories were integral. A Philip Treacy headpiece of stag's skull and antlers and a lace cap with withered hand by Simon Costin invoked memento mori, while a crown of thorns by Shaun Leane connected with the collection's religious undercurrent. Whereas some models appeared as innocents with nails seemingly driven through their hands, others looked fierce with spikes projecting through scraped back hair and metal thorns that appeared to burst through the skin. *Dante* was presented twice, the second show staged in a disused synagogue on New York's Lower East Side on 30 March.



## BELLMER LA POUPÉE

SPRING/SUMMER 1997

ROYAL HORTICULTURAL HALL, LONDON; 27 SEPTEMBER 1996

McQueen provoked more controversy with his Spring/Summer 1997 show at London's Royal Horticultural Hall, in which models descended from a staircase onto a catwalk flooded with water. Out walked model Debra Shaw, shackled at the elbows and knees to a square metal frame. The uncomfortable vision of a black model in shackles led to accusations of McQueen glamorising slavery, but he insisted he had chosen the piece for the manner in which it restricted the model's movement, making her appear puppet-like.

The marionette reference was connected to the show's primary inspiration, the work of German Surrealist artist Hans Bellmer. Bellmer's 1934 photographic series *Poupée*, *variations sur le montage d'une mineure articulée* ('The Doll, Variations on the Assemblage of an Articulated Minor') presented dissected and reconstructed dolls, offering a response to Nazi theories of eugenics and Aryan ideals.

The collection – the first on which Sarah Burton worked – fused the 'purity of Far Eastern culture with the sharp punk elements of the West'. Revealing zips on tops and trousers were paired with 'sculpted jackets' sprayed with graffiti in 'bright and icy tones'. The effect was mimicked in the glistening make-up on the models' faces, which appeared to have been sprayed through a stencil. A Surrealist theme was manifested in a pink silk brocade cheongsam with a funnel neck that concealed the lower part of the wearer's face. Branch-like headpieces by designer Dai Rees, fashioned from porcupine quills, also featured.

McQueen was again praised for innovative tailoring. While a jacket was cut away at the rear to form a soft cowl back, a coat took on a trapezoidal form suggestive of origami. In another jacket, an inner metal frame held the arms outstretched, suggesting entrapment in the stocks, while the fantail at the back hinted at the possibility of escape through flight.



## IT'S A JUNGLE OUT THERE

AUTUMN/WINTER 1997

BOROUGH MARKET, LONDON; 27 FEBRUARY 1997

For his next collection, Autumn/Winter 1997, McQueen drew the fashion press to Borough Market in south London. The backdrop was a set constructed from wrecked cars and a screen of corrugated iron, littered with holes to look like bullet marks. Simon Costin, who designed the set, identified a scene from the Irvin Kershner thriller *The Eyes of Laura Mars* (1978) as a primary reference. Set to an eclectic soundtrack, which featured howling sirens and excerpts from The Prodigy's 'Breathe', an anarchic scene ensued as one of the cars accidentally caught fire. Jodie Kidd modelled.

In this collection McQueen paid tribute to the animal kingdom, citing the African mammal, Thomson's Gazelle, as his primary inspiration. McQueen considered the gazelle to be the food chain of Africa and he drew comparisons between it and human life. It was also a metaphor for urban life, and especially the fashion industry, in which only the strongest survive.

McQueen's theme was conveyed in the gazelle's beautiful markings that were mirrored on the models' faces and in the black contact lenses that emulated mammals' eyes. Several garments were fashioned from skin and horn. For example, a pair of curved, impala horns sprouted from wooden blocks concealed in the shoulders of a ponyskin jacket. Elsewhere McQueen's touch was softer, as seen in dresses punctured with cut-outs of delicate flowers, or pastel embroidery applied to a Prince of Wales check silk jacket and gauze sheaths. Some models, however, appeared more predator than prey.

in harnesses and skin-tight black leather dresses, face pieces crafted from metal and chains, and with long, silver talons that protruded from the hands.

McQueen's engagement with Old Master paintings offered an unexpected contrast in a jacket with sharp, wide shoulders, printed with a detail from Robert Campin's painting depicting the *The Thief to the Left of Christ* from the Flémalle panels (c.1430), which appeared centrefold on the rear. The exaggerated shoulders were inspired by the work of McQueen's assistant designer, Catherine Brickhill.

McQueen collaborated with Nick Knight on the invitation which featured a digitally altered image of the model Debra Shaw.



## UNTITLED

SPRING/SUMMER 1998

GATLIFF ROAD WAREHOUSE, LONDON; 28 SEPTEMBER 1997

McQueen's Spring/Summer 1998 collection was the first to be presented at the Gatliff Road warehouse, a rundown former bus depot in London's Victoria neighbourhood. A Central Saint Martins fashion graduate, Sebastian Pons, had joined the design team as McQueen's assistant. It was the first show for which McQueen received financial support from American Express, which was about to launch a new gold credit card. The collection was presented as *Untitled* because the sponsors were uncomfortable with the implicit sexual connotations of the original title, 'The Golden Shower'.

The set, in which a runway had been positioned above clear Perspex tanks lit from below, engaged with McQueen's interest in the transformative qualities of water. Thunder and lightning flashes created drama and anxiety, indicating that change was imminent. Halfway through the show the tanks beneath the catwalk filled with pools of black ink as Ann Peebles' 'I Can't Stand the Rain', overlaid with the John Williams' soundtrack to *Jaws* (1975), filled the air. Sinister undertones, however, gave way to lightness for a finale of designs in white. As rain poured from the ceiling, drenching the models and causing black mascara tears to run down their faces, gauzy cottons became transparent.

Tailoring was simple, precisely cut and featured diagonal and flag panelling. While pinstripes and Prince of Wales checks were shot through with accents of gold and yellow, gold and silver glitter shone through latticed leathers.

McQueen's love of nature and metamorphosis was identifiable in amphibious designs such as a tight python-skin dress, which formed a second skin over the model to merge human with animal. Hybridization was further reflected in Shaun Leane's 'Spine' corset, which was cast from a human skeleton and extended into a tail-like structure, worn over a sparkling black dress. The uncomfortable fusion of human and animal was inspired by Richard Donner's horror film *The Omen* (1976), in which a jackal gives birth to a child. A sense of brutality was also carried through in Leane's 'Jaw Bone' mouthpieces, which were worn by male models and were suggestive of the reconstructive surgery that was pioneered on Second World War soldiers. A silver headpiece by Sarah Harmarnee offered commentary on the impact of weapons on the body; the metal blade that ran down the nose sitting threateningly close to the delicate skin of the face.



## JOAN

AUTUMN/WINTER 1998

GATLIFF ROAD WAREHOUSE, LONDON; 25 FEBRUARY 1998

*Joan* was the second of McQueen's catwalk shows to be presented at the Gatliff Road warehouse. Guido Palau styled the female models' hair for the first time, the white blonde hair and severe fringe of some echoing that of the school children in Wolf Rilla's sci-fi horror film *The Village of the Damned* (1960). Mira Chai Hyde styled the male models' hair and Val Garland was the make-up artist. The show was dedicated to McQueen's friend and muse, Annabelle Neilson.

The stark, industrial feel of the venue provided a foil to catwalk sets that were growing in complexity and intensity. Whereas McQueen toyed with water in his previous show, this time he invoked fire. McQueen had been struck by a Richard Avedon photograph that appeared in an editorial in the *The New Yorker* in November 1995 called 'In Memory of the Late Mr and Mrs Comfort'. It inspired his most dramatic finale to date, in which a satanic ring of flames encircled a lone masked model in a red ensemble, which echoed flayed flesh, while the bugle bead skirt suggested dripping blood.

Themes of martyrdom and persecution prevailed in a collection saturated with blood and violence. Glossy red snake skins and leathers hinted at bloodshed; tartans referenced the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots; haunting prints of the murdered Romanov children flickered over sequins on coats and dresses. Medieval references were present in chainmail garments and tailoring with features incorporated from ecclesiastical dress and double-fronted clerical coats with *trompe l'oeil* effect capes. The martyrdom

of Joan of Arc was manifested in an articulated armoured creation by Sarah Harmarnee that suggested portraits of the French heroine in her battle dress; it also recalled a Thierry Mugler armoured suit from 1995 titled 'Robot Couture'.

The collection was presented by models that appeared aggressive and untouchable in dark, powerful silhouettes. Red contact lenses lent an air of menace, as did the hooded tops, which bore a resemblance to bondage masks. The presence of such strong, fearless, sexualized women served as a counterpoint to the murder of innocents.

The invitation featured a detail from Jean Fouquet's *Melun Diptych*, c.1452, which had been tinted red.



## NO.13

SPRING/SUMMER 1999

GATLIFF ROAD WAREHOUSE, LONDON; 27 SEPTEMBER 1998

McQueen's thirteenth collection, simply titled *No.13*, was presented on a pared down, unvarnished wooden runway conceived by Joseph Bennett, who had joined the team as production designer. Underpinning the collection was a concern with the handcrafted, inspired by the late Victorian Arts and Crafts Movement, with designs constructed from wood, leather, lace and raffia. Balsa-wood skirts, in natural tones, played out to mimic the spines of a fan, while winged bodices of the same wood connected the use of organic materials with the celestial and the sublime. The emphasis on the natural and the traditional stood in stark contrast to a soundtrack by American hip hop artists the Beastie Boys.

Paralympic athlete Aimee Mullins entered wearing a pair of wooden prosthetic legs, hand-carved in elm, which were reminiscent of the filigree qualities of Baroque carver Grinling Gibbons. Once again, McQueen experimented with the manipulation of bodily forms. Hard, leather bodices with high necks formed restrictive carapaces that forced models to adopt an erect posture. One model, wearing a mesh dress, appeared as though suspended in a spiral of wire, recalling 'Models in a Surreal Landscape', a feature photographed by André Durst for British *Vogue* (15 January 1936). Surgical undertones were implicit in lacing that appeared as crude stitches, and in moulded bodices and pants with leather buckles that evoked medical corsetry. These designs were inspired by the workshops at Queen Mary's Hospital, Roehampton, which were instrumental in pioneering prostheses for casualties of the First World War. Yet this hardness was tempered by soft, tiered lace skirts and

trousers – suggestive of the ruffles on a flamenco dancer's skirt – that harmonized the aesthetic into images of romance and beauty. Recognition of this achievement was marked by the award of 'Dress of the Year' (for the second time), *The Independent's* fashion editor Susannah Frankel selecting McQueen's lace dress with moulded brown leather collar.

In spite of the understated backdrop, there was no shortage of spectacle. Models rotated on plinths like fragile music-box dolls. The finale was the most arresting of any McQueen show yet. Former ballerina Shalom Harlow stood centre stage between two industrial robots, which appeared to interact with her in a gentle dance before turning predator and firing sprays of black and acid-yellow paint at her pure white trapeze dress. The sequence, inspired by a Rebecca Horn installation *High Moon* (1991), was perhaps intended as a counterpoint to William Morris's anti-industrial ethic, thereby provoking comment on the interaction between man and machine at the turn of the twenty-first century.



## THE OVERLOOK

AUTUMN/WINTER 1999

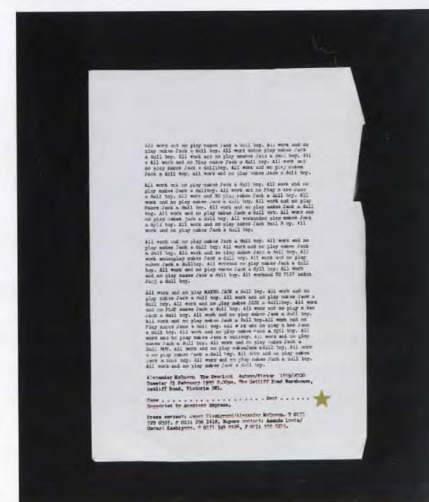
GATLIFF ROAD WAREHOUSE, LONDON; 23 FEBRUARY 1999

McQueen's Autumn/Winter 1999 collection was again presented at the Gatliff Road warehouse, this time transformed into a frozen landscape set within a giant Plexiglas cube. Midway through the show, skaters wearing white ballerina skirts, some made of lace and feathers, glided across the ice around frosted silver birch trees set in banks of snow, under ultraviolet lights. Al Bowlly's 'Midnight, The Stars and You' played softly in the background. It was a vision of pure romance.

The audience – who had been warned to dress warmly – were no doubt expecting a rupture to the charming frozen scene; the collection having been named after the ill-fated hotel in Stanley Kubrick's psychological horror film *The Shining* (1980). McQueen had intimated that the show would have a darker side: the invitation repeated the film's chilling refrain 'All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy'; the soundtrack – borrowed from the film – was overlaid with baying wolves and howling wind; the presence of two young red-headed models recalled the haunting ghosts of the murdered sisters in the film; and the final looks were presented in a blizzard that recalled the film's final scene.

However, McQueen drew not on the violent plot of the film but on the isolated, snowbound setting. Beauty and elegance intensified in glistening stiff lace dresses evocative of spun cobwebs, an aluminium skirt with cut-out Gothic script and curlicues, and an exquisite quartz bodice by Kees van der Graaf. Luxurious furs, chunky knits and Icelandic parkas

in soft pinks offered a vision of modern luxury. As usual, McQueen intrigued with his tailoring, this time manifested in a frock coat with a fantail silhouette, which attested to his interest in asymmetry and birds. The collection also engaged with native and tribal cultures. While the models' plaited hair, and frosted white stripes painted across the eyes, served as reference to the Native-American burial site underneath The Overlook hotel in the film, Shaun Leane's spectacular coiled corset, made from individual rings of aluminium that fitted precisely to the curves of the wearer, found its inspiration in the Ndebele women of South Africa.



## EYE

SPRING/SUMMER 2000

PIER 94, NEW YORK; 17 SEPTEMBER 1999

McQueen presented his Spring/Summer 2000 collection in New York to the American press and buyers who often would not attend London Fashion Week. It was a controversial decision but was seen as a shrewd financial move. The show, which was almost cancelled on account of Hurricane Floyd, was held at Pier 94 on Manhattan's West Side. Models walked through water over a black catwalk, the liquid symbolizing Middle Eastern oil. For the finale, McQueen aimed high, with models suspended from ropes over a spiked catwalk that recalled a bed of nails.

McQueen stated that the initial inspiration for the collection came from Turkish music that he had heard on a taxi radio. Islamic overtures were strong, and McQueen developed the theme in a design that suggested the burka. It was cut short at the front and worn with a pair of embellished knickers, creating a provocative statement. A yashmak by Shaun Leane, consisting of jewelled metal plates linked by chains, fused the Islamic with the medieval in a piece that spoke of the clashing of Western and Middle Eastern cultures during the Crusades. McQueen brought this up to date with examples of American sportswear printed with Arabic and crescent moon motifs and overlaid with Middle Eastern jewellery.

New shapes emerged in long scarf sleeves and trousers with high, scooped hems. Fabrics included brocades and embroidered leather, decorated with gold bells. Islamic coins and ruffled ribbon. While traditional embroidered tunic tops with bell-shaped sleeves were cut high to expose the midriff – serving as comment on the concealment of the Middle Eastern

female body – fetishistic studded leather harnesses, which exposed the breasts, attested to Western liberalization.

The collection received mixed reviews. McQueen, who never intended to show in New York in the long term, returned to London the following season.



## ESHU

AUTUMN/WINTER 2000

GAINSBOROUGH FILM STUDIOS, LONDON; 15 FEBRUARY 2000

McQueen returned to his East End roots and presented his collection for Autumn/Winter 2000 in a building in Shoreditch that formerly had been home to a power station and the old Gainsborough Film Studios. A runway covered in broken slate provided an apposite backdrop for a collection centred on primitivism, while tribal drums invoked the voodoo diaspora of sub-Saharan Africa.

Inspired by the story of a Victorian lady who settled in Africa, *Eshu*, named after an earth deity worshipped by the Yoruba peoples, brimmed with references to tribal customs. The full-face mask of a spirit-god replete with bushy mane, animal skins and fake monkey furs, wooden beads and hooped jewellery stacked high on the neck, all reinforced a vision of Africa prior to colonial intervention. Transformative designs, including a distressed denim dress with Edwardian high neck and leg-of-mutton sleeves, its skirt smeared with terracotta, hinted at the impact of turn-of-the-century missionaries on the African topography.

Once again, McQueen experimented with materials and developed new silhouettes. Felted, bleached roses formed a soft skirt beneath a raffia-moulded bodice, while a synthetic horsehair dress was beaded and corseted to create a fitted silhouette. A one-shouldered earth-coloured leather dress, its skirt punctured with a feathered design, sat asymmetrically over an exposed metal crinoline.

*Eshu* also told a story of survival through aggressive jewellery that pulled back the lips to expose the teeth. Whereas the visceral qualities of previous collections had focused on blood and flesh, here they were channelled through the material properties of skin, fur and hair. A detail of hair, streaked with colour, featured on the invitation.



## VOSS

SPRING/SUMMER 2001

GATLIFF ROAD WAREHOUSE, LONDON; 26 SEPTEMBER 2000

McQueen had always declared that he wanted his shows to elicit a strong audience reaction. Voss, one of his most celebrated, achieved that result. An enormous clinical glass box formed the centrepiece, constructed to resemble a padded cell in a psychiatric hospital with white tiled floors and walls formed from surveillance mirrors. From the outset the mood was tense; the audience forced to endure an hour-long wait, staring at their own reflections whilst listening to the unnerving pulse of a heartbeat. Eventually, the light levels in the glass box rose to reveal models trapped in the cube, who were unable to see the audience.

Depictions of madness and incarceration were the principal inspirations behind the collection's presentation. While the psychiatric hospital was most readily identifiable, Frank Darabont's film *The Green Mile* (1999), which told the stories of inmates on death row, provided an alternative notion of confinement.

Voss, like so many of McQueen's collections, harnessed multiple, disparate themes which coalesced into the designer's unique vision of beauty. The title – the name of a Norwegian town renowned as a wildlife habitat – suggested the collection would celebrate nature. Bodices, skirts and dresses constructed from razor-clam, mussel and oyster shells astonished the audience with their elegance and ingenuity. McQueen's love of birds found expression in feather skirts, and in a headdress composed of taxidermied hawks, which hovered perilously above a model and appeared to claw her hair through the bandages that swathed her head.

The notion of medical scrutiny was starkly conveyed in a vermilion ensemble, modelled by Erin O'Connor, which comprised a skirt of dyed ostrich feathers and bodice of microscope slides hand-painted red to hint at the blood beneath the skin. The sharp glass of the slides hanging delicately from the bodice also mimicked the soft feathers on a bird's chest.

McQueen's fascination with the Orient was explicit in designs featuring appliquéd chrysanthemum roundels; an embroidered grey silk ensemble with real amaranthus dangling from the rectangular headpiece; and a dress that incorporated the panels of an antique Japanese silk screen atop a skirt constructed from 80 polished black oyster shells. The look was completed by a neckpiece of silver branches, adorned with clusters of Tahitian pearls.

The finale was the most transgressive of any of McQueen's catwalk shows: a recreation of Joel-Peter Witkin's *Sanitarium* (1983). As the models dispersed and the soundtrack of a pulsing heartbeat gave way to a flat-line monotone, the glass box shattered to reveal the voluptuous, naked figure of fetish writer Michelle Olley, reclining on a horned chaise longue in the graceful pose of a Botticelli painting, her masked head bowed and attached to a breathing tube. Moths fluttered about her before the lights dimmed and left the audience to ponder the meaning of beauty.



## WHAT A MERRY GO ROUND

AUTUMN/WINTER 2001

GATLIFF ROAD WAREHOUSE, LONDON; 21 FEBRUARY 2001

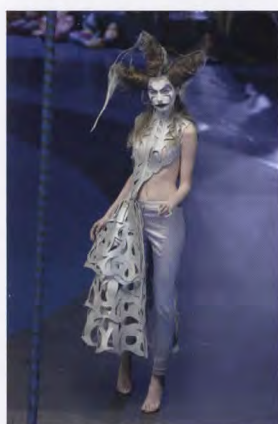
McQueen's final presentation at the Gatliff Road warehouse was the stuff of childhood nightmares. A macabre circus emerged on a set constructed to resemble a carousel. The lighting rig recalled that in the marble hall of the Berlin zoological gardens, where German Expressionist vampire film *Nosferatu* (1922) had premiered. Gothic, dark and disturbing, the theme was not the nostalgia of youth, but childhood fear and vulnerability. McQueen cited the character of the sinister Child Catcher from the family classic *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* (1968) as a primary inspiration. In addition to informing a number of designs, the character's idiosyncratic voice was incorporated into the soundtrack.

Any traces of sentimentality, discernible in the set and the sounds of children playing, were violated by the latex-clad carousel horses and models that pole-danced around the carousel to a conflicting recording of metal and hard rock. Inspired by Bob Fosse's *Cabaret* (1972), and styled to resemble German dancers of the 1930s, with dark lips and hair in waves set tight to the head, some models wore black leather great coats and Kaiser Wilhelm caps.

A tableau of automated toys and dummies, dusty through neglect, and dotted about with skeletons, provided a backdrop for models caked in clowns' make-up; the delicate, 1920s flapper style and embroidered dresses worn by some were in stark contrast to their grotesque features. This juxtaposition of the beautiful and the vulgar was also channelled through accessories, which combined pearls and

pheasant claws. In spite of the sinister undertones, *What a Merry Go Round* was a consolidating collection that revisited a number of designs from previous collections including *Joan*, *Eshu* and *Voss*. It was also a commercial collection. While bias-cut jersey dresses appealed for their wearability, the skull that appeared with crossbones on a black chunky knit would soon be transformed into a signature brand motif.

French undertones were also present; overtly in the characters of Harlequin and Pierrot, which informed the make-up, and more subtly in designs that echoed French Revolutionary uniforms. McQueen also invoked Eugène Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* (1830) in a gauzy, silver bias-cut dress that exposed one breast. The engagement with French culture and pointed references to liberty were hardly incidental, for McQueen had recently parted from French fashion conglomerate LVMH to broker a deal with the Gucci Group (Kering). He would show in Paris for the rest of his career.



## THE DANCE OF THE TWISTED BULL

SPRING/SUMMER 2002

STADE FRANÇAIS, PARIS; 6 SEPTEMBER 2001

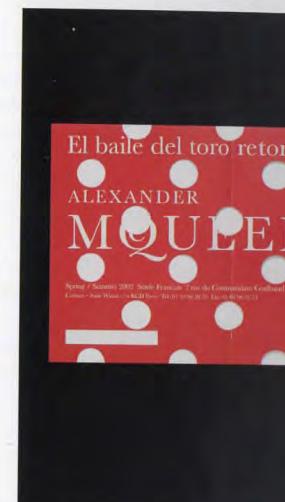
McQueen's Spring/Summer 2002 show was the first of his own-label collections to be presented in Paris. In contrast to many of his preceding shows, which had steadily increased in intensity and complexity, this was a calm, even casual presentation for the designer. Models walked through a smokescreen behind which a video of a bullfight played to an eclectic soundtrack of electronic music, acoustic Spanish guitar and the haunting vocals of Björk.

There was not the usual harmonizing of myriad divergent themes, rather a unified aesthetic that coalesced around Spanish dance. This was manifested both in the figure of the flamenco dancer and in the matador. Other elements of Spanish culture were incorporated via architectural cut-outs on a white top that recalled the work of Antoni Gaudí, and through colours that attested both to the Mediterranean and the dark Romanticism of the painter Francisco de Goya.

Flamenco and matador tropes – and their associated connotations of sex and death – were harmonized in dramatic polka dot gowns that captured the passion inherent in bullfighting and dancing. One ensemble incorporated long banderillas (decorative spears used in bullfighting), which appeared to lance the body and catch the edge of the ruffled skirt that hung from the spears to form a train. The models were portrayed as strong, sexualized women with exposed breasts and seductive smoky-eyed make-up. Sombre black

suits with flared trousers, and heavily embellished short jackets with padded shoulders, served as a complement to the seductive flamenco dancers, conveying the sex appeal of the matador rather than his masculinity and bravery, qualities for which he is lauded in Spanish culture.

Historicism was again invested in the designs. While eighteenth-century features were incorporated into modern all-in-one ensembles via integrated corsets and a corset used as outerwear, black silk and woollen breeches suggested that McQueen had turned to Juan de Alcega's *The Tailor's Pattern Book* (1589) for inspiration.



## SUPERCALIFRAGILISTIC-EXPIALIDOCIOUS

AUTUMN/WINTER 2002

LA CONCIERGERIE, PARIS; 9 MARCH 2002

McQueen's collection for Autumn/Winter 2002 heralded a return to the theatrical. The venue, the vaults of La Conciergerie, the medieval palace where Marie Antoinette was incarcerated prior to her execution in 1793, provided a suitably dramatic backdrop.

Among McQueen's inspirations was Tim Burton, director of dark, Gothic fantasy films such as *Beetlejuice* (1988) and *Edward Scissorhands* (1990). McQueen wanted the collection to have a 'Sleepy Hollow-esque feel'; the film *Sleepy Hollow* (1999) being Burton's reinterpretation of Washington Irving's tale of the headless horseman, set in 1790s rural New York. The drama inherent in the literary tale was translated by McQueen into the figure of an eighteenth-century highwayman replete with mask, tricorn hat and billowing cape.

Burton designed the lighting for the show and also the invitation: an ink-blotted school exercise book filled with his signature, quirky illustrations of children with scrawny necks and bulging eyes. The classroom motif extended into the collection with tight, pencil skirts that signified sex and seduction. Models, who appeared as schoolgirls-gone-bad with untamed hair and make-up that echoed American rock band Kiss, wore bowler hats of the type worn in Stanley Kubrick's 1971 adaptation of Anthony Burgess's disturbing novel, *Clockwork Orange*. In the

same vein as *What a Merry Go Round*, this catwalk show subverted adolescent norms with its sexual overtones and implied sadomasochism.

McQueen returned to several of the themes elaborated in his Autumn/Winter show from the year before, such as children's literature and cinematography; the title was borrowed from Walt Disney's *Mary Poppins* (1964). Unlike the film, McQueen's show was far from saccharine and instead bore closer approximation to a Grimm's fairy tale. An alternative vision of the figure of Little Red Riding Hood was presented by a model wearing an eighteenth-century-inspired hooded cape of lilac leather with wolferine dogs at her sides. Teutonic references also persisted, this time through an engagement with Germanic Puritanism that was articulated in neutral suits bound in fetishistic brown leather harnesses.

McQueen also referenced the ill-fated Marie Antoinette in high-waisted dresses with sheer tops, reminiscent of portraits by the French queen's favourite portraitist Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, and in deep red leather creations that hinted at the blood shed at the guillotine. These were complemented by empire-line ensembles that evoked the classically inspired dress of the *Merveilleuses* and epitomized the liberties associated with the infant republic.



# IRERE

SPRING/SUMMER 2003

LA GRANDE HALLE DE LA VILLETTE, PARIS; 5 OCTOBER 2002

For his Spring/Summer 2003 collection, McQueen once again looked to water for inspiration. The show opened with an underwater film directed by John Maybury that showed a girl in a torn chiffon dress plunge into the sea and appear to drown. But this was not a poignant film of a lost innocent, for *Irere*, meaning 'transformation' in one of the indigenous Amazonian languages, was to tell the story of the girl's metamorphosis from shipwreck survivor to Amazonian princess, a tale of redemption and survival.

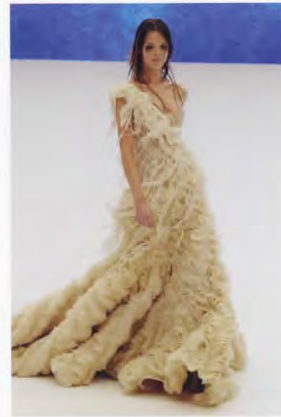
The collection was inspired by the Roland Joffé film *The Mission* (1986), in which a Jesuit missionary in eighteenth-century South America attempts to protect a native tribe from Portuguese forces. McQueen referenced the periods of European discovery and the great explorers – Christopher Columbus and Captain Cook – with modern renderings of historic dress. A gold Elizabethan-style doublet with lacings down the back and ruffles at the cuffs was brought up to date with sharp cut-outs that exposed the white ground underneath.

*Irere* was presented in three sequences. The first models walked out as pirates who had survived the shipwreck, their hair wet and make-up smudged. Micro-mini chestnut leather skirts, worn with tattered organdie shirts and knee-high brown leather boots with curved Portuguese heels, referenced the pirate aesthetic. Fragile femininity was conveyed in McQueen's 'Oyster' gown, constructed from a bodice of boned tulle and shredded chiffon, its skirt consisting of hundreds of circles of chiffon arranged on the bias to replicate

the folds on an oyster shell. This was followed by the torn chiffon dress seen on the drowning girl in the film, hinting that she had survived and was to be transformed.

Then came a sequence of designs in black – leather shirts above chiffon skirts, laser-cut harness dresses and bodysuits. One model wore an embellished cape and cone-shaped hat with buckle that evoked the seventeenth-century period of exploration. Styled with untamed hair that lent a punkish attitude, black eyes that suggested a masquerade mask, and walking to a cover version of 'Son of a Preacher Man' and David Bowie's 'Jean Genie', these models embodied the mischievous black sprites that the drowning damsel encountered in the forests on the island. The giant screen at the rear projected images in night vision, the sprites glowing an eerie shade of green.

Darkness gave way to a riot of colour for the final section, as models emerged as birds of paradise in chiffon gowns, some with bold feathered prints by Jonathan Saunders. Here McQueen pushed technological boundaries, projecting onto the screen thermal images of the models that were saturated with the vibrant colours of the tropical rainforest.



# SCANNERS

AUTUMN/WINTER 2003

LA GRANDE HALLE DE LA VILLETTE, PARIS; 8 MARCH 2003

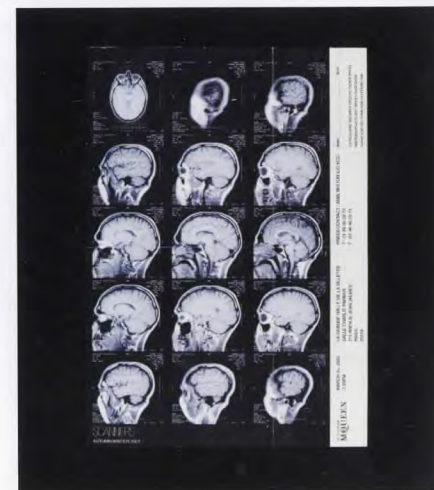
McQueen replaced tropical climes with the frozen Arctic tundra in his Autumn/Winter 2003 presentation. At ground level, a rubble-strewn wasteland set against an icy mountain was covered with rocks and a dusting of snow, while an enclosed wind tunnel supported by industrial scaffolding focused attention above. The invitations for the presentation were illustrated with scans of McQueen's brain, hence the title.

The collection engaged with McQueen's interest in Eurasian culture and was presented as a journey of displaced travellers, from West to East, from dark to light, across the harsh plains of Siberia through Tibet and on to Japan, the land of the Rising Sun. Strong, opulent designs stood in stark contrast to the barren set. Voluminous silhouettes conveyed modern luxury: over-sized, hooded, fur-trimmed jackets were belted tightly at the waist and paired with full skirts. Russian influences were strong. Embroidered panels and hems, and padded skirts trimmed with fur, suggested folk dress. The traditional was brought up to date, however, with khaki waistcoats and A-line skirts constructed from neoprene.

McQueen's fascination for Japanese culture also shone through in designs that incorporated familiar kimono shapes and the reds and whites of the Japanese flag. In *Scanners*, he pursued this interest further. While some designs were inspired by manga cartoons, he experimented in others with the forms of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century samurai armour: a dress constructed from panels of embroidered leather atop a delicate, silk petticoat stood out for its hardened beauty.

A different aesthetic emerged in models sporting punkish designs. Black and white checkerboard patterns were mixed with embellished black leathers that hinted at Ridley Scott's dystopian sci-fi classic *Blade Runner* (1982). Police sirens wailed in the background as Tiffany's 1980s pop hit 'I Think We're Alone Now' played out, perhaps a parody of tense international relations between East and West during the third phase of the Cold War (1985–91).

Attention shifted from ground level to the tunnel above the catwalk as a model wearing a black and white bodysuit struggled against the wind, a parachute of printed pink silk billowing out behind her. A final sequence of Japanese inspired outfits in reds and whites appeared on the ground to the sound of The Sparks' 'This Town Ain't Big Enough for the Both of Us' – a further comment on East-West relations – before wind howled through the tunnel once more and a model wearing an enormous kimono, embroidered with kabuki motifs, battled against the gales.



# DELIVERANCE

SPRING/SUMMER 2004

SALLE WAGRAM, PARIS; 10 OCTOBER 2003

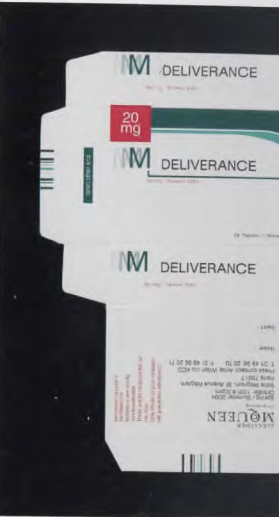
McQueen set a new precedent for performativity in the staging of his Spring/Summer 2004 catwalk show. This time he collaborated with dancer Michael Clark, who choreographed a routine that paid homage to one of McQueen's favourite films, Sydney Pollack's *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* (1969), which was based on the dance marathons held in America during the Depression. The concept was a 'dance to the death', the gruelling nature of which rooted the narrative to the unforgiving contemporary fashion industry. McQueen's choice of invitation, a cardboard medication packet, provided further comment on the exhausting pace of the fashion sector, and the pressures and expectations it places on contemporary designers.

The venue, the Salle Wagram, was a nineteenth-century Parisian dance hall replete with red velvet curtains, crystal chandeliers, wood panelling and frescoes; a McQueen touch was the addition of a mirrored disco ball. It was a pertinent choice for a show that incorporated professional dancers alongside McQueen's familiar catwalk models.

The show unfolded in three sequences. In the first, couples danced under spotlights to big band sounds in 1930s bias-cut dresses that evoked Hollywood glamour, an antidote to the Depression era. As a disco track by Chic cut in, the intensity amplified with dancers executing high kicks that thrust the feathered and sequinned skirts high into the air. Glamorous eveningwear designs in satins, lamés and sequins gave way to a second sequence with a sportswear aesthetic. Skin-tight bodysuits, sequinned hot pants, racing stripes and trainers all

reinforced the quickening speed of an elimination dance, as contestants raced around the room to a beating soundtrack with undertones of Nirvana's 'Smells Like Teen Spirit' before slumping to the floor.

In the final sequence, the now exhausted dancers staggered across the room to the distorted sounds of Billie Holiday. One model, in a floating chiffon gown printed to look like a delicate watercolour painting, was caught by her partner as she fell, before being carried off. Karen Elson, modelling the same design as that from the opening sequence except that its sparkling sequins were now tarnished, appeared to expire on stage. As Portishead's 'Strangers' played out, the dishevelled dancers expended any residual energy in attempting kicks that sent them to the ground. In this final sequence McQueen replaced the luxurious gowns that glistened with energy at the show's beginning with utilitarian denims, jerseys and patchworks (fabrics rooted to the 1930s) that served as a sartorial signifier of exhaustion and despair.



# PANTHEON AD LUCEM

AUTUMN/WINTER 2004

LA GRANDE HALLE DE LA VILLETTE, PARIS; 5 MARCH 2004

McQueen took a pause from spectacle for the presentation of his Autumn/Winter 2004 collection. Although he stated that he wanted to focus attention on purity of design rather than showmanship, *Pantheon Ad Lucem* ('Towards the Light') was not completely devoid of theatre. As scenes from space were played out in the background, models styled to look like androgynous inhabitants from another planet – with pale skin, elongated eyes and hair pulled into short, tight curls – emerged from what appeared to be the door of a spacecraft onto a circular, illuminated runway.

Like most McQueen collections, *Pantheon ad Lucem* fused multiple, disparate elements. The show centred on a futuristic narrative inspired by sci-fi films such as Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) and Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) – the soundtrack sampled Richard Strauss's theme tune 'Zarathustra'. Yet the title and pared down presentation connected the collection to Ancient Greek dress, which had inspired a number of ethereal, draped jersey gowns that skimmed the body in the manner of 1930s designer Madeleine Vionnet. Some appeared to suggest Princess Leia's costumes in George Lucas's *Star Wars* films of the 1970s, thus further harmonizing the futuristic with the classical past. These delicate creations were offset by thick tweed suits, shearling coats, and a gold and bronze boxy jacket decorated with a pattern reminiscent of crop circles.

Other cultures and historical eras were referenced, too. While black gowns with long sleeves and embellished yokes hinted at Plantagenet queens, high-necked, feathered shoulder capes with glass beads pointed to Native American culture. The final looks – presented in darkness and lit by LED lighting – re-focused attention on the future and McQueen's development of new silhouettes. A gold dress overlaid with a geometric pattern extended upwards from the bodice to form a funnel covering the model's chin and outwards at the hips to shift attention from the waist. The final showpiece was a staggering frothy gown of lengths of pleated silver tulle arranged on the diagonal. An ornate silver shoulder piece by Shaun Leane, with neck collar and orchid detailing, rose out of the funnelled bodice, which offset the cinched waist and balanced the A-line skirt that flowed out into a voluminous, scalloped train.



## IT'S ONLY A GAME

SPRING/SUMMER 2005

PALAIS OMNISPORTS DE PARIS-BERCY, PARIS; 8 OCTOBER 2004



Initially McQueen's Spring/Summer 2005 show appeared the most conventional yet. The first models walked to the sounds of Frankie Goes To Hollywood's 'Relax' on a white catwalk with white walls at the rear. Absent were the theatrics of water, Plexiglas cubes and giant projections. Yet as the first wave of models failed to leave the catwalk, and instead formed a line down the centre, it emerged that McQueen was experimenting with theatre of a new kind.

The initial group of six blonde models wore tailored, Edwardian designs inspired by the schoolgirls in Peter Weir's period thriller *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975). The second tranche to form a line on the catwalk were Asian models wearing neutral tones that were lifted with colourful prints and embroidery. Next came a group of redheads in pale green and white designs, ahead of Latin American models in sunny shades of yellow. Ostensibly McQueen was curating his models into types, while once again drawing a distinction between East and West. Contemporary Western culture was referenced in sportswear designs. Whereas one ensemble incorporated the helmet and shoulder pads of an American footballer, another bore an approximation to a motocross jumpsuit. These were matched by designs inspired by the East. A lilac embroidered silk dress with high collar twisted from the bodice into a puffball skirt and was pulled in at the waist by an obi sash that trailed to the ground. Another Japanese robe fused Western and Eastern cultures via a camouflage print in tones of lilac and soft green.

Once again McQueen experimented with body shapes and moulded designs. A dress with an appliquéd carousel motif extended at the rear into a bustle-like form, which sat beneath a brown, moulded leather bodice with high neck and stitching down the back that echoed designs from *No.13*. McQueen advanced this idea further in moulded leather ensembles that rose upwards from the neck into helmets from which ponytails sprouted, and downwards over exaggerated hips to end in horsehair skirts. The restriction imposed on the models by the hard carapace was reinforced by a metal bar across the mouth that evoked both sports helmets and braces used in corrective dentistry.

Whilst McQueen had thus far chosen to draw attention to the designs, next came the spectacle. As the final models lined up, the soundtrack changed to Frankie Goes To Hollywood's 'Two Tribes', suggesting that a confrontation was to come. As the lights came back up, a giant checkerboard appeared. It was now apparent that McQueen had delivered his models as chess pieces, which turned to face each other, ready to engage in a game. The set was inspired by contemporary artist Vanessa Beecroft's performance photographs and the chess scene at the end of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (2001). Choreographed by Les Child, the models responded to instructions from a robotic voice and started to eliminate their opponents from the game as the overture from the film played in background.

## THE MAN WHO KNEW TOO MUCH

AUTUMN/WINTER 2005

LYCÉE CARNOT, PARIS; 4 MARCH 2005

McQueen's collection for Autumn/Winter 2005, staged in a school hall, was a tribute to one of his favourite film directors: Alfred Hitchcock. Although McQueen had already alluded to Hitchcock in *The Birds* (Spring/Summer 1995) and *Voss* (Spring/Summer 2001), *The Man Who Knew Too Much* was saturated with overt references. While the title shared its name with Hitchcock's classic thriller (1934 and 1956) – a film McQueen had loved as a child – and the show's invitation was based on the advertising poster for *Vertigo* (1958), the film set backdrop – with the hall windows illuminated in purple at the end of an orange-lit runway – hinted at the voyeurism of *Rear Window* (1954). A Hitchcock aesthetic was also referenced in the collection, with designs inspired by Edith Head's costumes for Hitchcock heroines, such as Tippi Hedren, and McQueen's first handbag named after another of the director's leading actresses, Kim Novak.

The collection was conventional – both in terms of the designs and their presentation – and hugely successful commercially. It was also extremely nostalgic. Brimming with vintage silhouettes from the late 1950s and early '60s, models walked as modern-day Hitchcock heroines to upbeat tracks from the era by artists including Johnny Kidd and the Pirates, Alan Vega, Dusty Springfield, Elvis Presley, and Martha Reeves and the Vandellas.

McQueen was particularly fascinated by the precise manner in which Hitchcock heroines were dressed. He referenced the figures of Hedren and Novak – with their neat suits and

debonair styling – via pencil skirts and jackets with three-quarter length sleeves that were perfectly coordinated with leather gloves, seamed stockings, crocodile sling-backs and large, round sunglasses. Bouffant hair and bright red lips injected sex into an image of prim sophistication. While a model evoking screen icon Marilyn Monroe wore a sexy, lace top and tight-fitting skirt, a second wearing a mohair jumper and leopard-print skirt sported the tousled hair of Brigitte Bardot, another of the decade's sirens.

When McQueen ventured into eveningwear he looked to Anglo-American couturier Charles James. A pillar-box red satin gown with sweeping fishtail demonstrated an architectural quality reminiscent of the couturier. A glamorous nude cocktail dress encrusted with crystals that shimmered under the lights echoed the infamous dress designed by Jean Louis and worn by Marilyn Monroe when she sang 'Happy Birthday' to President John F. Kennedy in 1962. Ironically, whereas McQueen had previously been criticized for being too edgy and overshadowing his designs with theatrics, on this occasion he was rebuked by fashion editors for playing it too safe.

## NEPTUNE

SPRING/SUMMER 2006

IMPRIMERIE NATIONALE, PARIS; 7 OCTOBER 2005



The trend of pared down catwalk shows continued with *Neptune*, which was presented at an industrial warehouse in the Paris suburbs. The title – the name of the Roman god of the sea – teased the audience, which anticipated a return to McQueen spectacle. Instead, a plain, 30 ft runway with a narrow, bright strip of light evoked the sparse feel of early shows like *Nihilism* when McQueen was without the funds to invest in elaborate shows.

*Neptune* was a collection of glamorous, body-conscious silhouettes designed for the confident, metropolitan woman. 1980s power dressing provided a strong influence. The work of controversial French fashion photographer Guy Bourdin, and that of graphic designer and film director Jean-Paul Goude, responsible for the hard, androgynous look of 1980s icon Grace Jones, were cited by McQueen as inspirations. Further references to 1980s dress were evidenced in body-conscious designs reminiscent of Azzedine Alaïa and Gianni Versace, and in shiny, pleated skirts that echoed signature Issey Miyake creations.

Tailoring was predominantly in black and featured very short skirts, shorts, culottes and jackets with hard shoulders. Sheer panels, chiffon shirts and visible underwear invested the looks with sex appeal. Leather shorts were toughened up with embellished wrestling belts; short, figure-hugging dresses were given harness tops and paired with gladiator-style sandals; and a skin-tight pair of leather trousers was worn with a short leather jacket that exposed the midriff, all consolidating the hardened, sexy look. The occasional design

in silver, or a Grecian robe in white – one with a gold chain belt – brought glamour to the predominantly monochrome palette. Short chiffon dresses encrusted with jewels, as well as revealing swimwear in tones of gold and silver, channelled sex appeal. This was complemented by a show invitation that featured an image of a woman in a bath, partially covered by bubbles which distorted the figure.

The hard-edged collection was complemented by a rock soundtrack that incorporated Siouxsie Sioux and the Banshees, Suzi Quatro, and Ike and Tina Turner's hit 'Nutbush City Limits'.



## THE WIDOWS OF CULLODEN

AUTUMN/WINTER 2006

PALAIS OMNISPORTS DE PARIS-BERCY, PARIS; 3 MARCH 2006



McQueen's audiences had waited several seasons for a return to a theatrical show. They were not disappointed with *The Widows of Culloden*. The show – once again dedicated to Isabella Blow – was loaded with emotion. While the title appeared in Gaelic on the invitation – Bantraich de cuil Iodair – as memoir to a diminishing culture, the emotive soundtrack incorporated an eclectic mix of tracks from Michael Nyman's score for *The Piano* (1993), bagpipes overlaid with drums from a Scottish pipe band, punk rock and the howling winds of the Highlands. Models walked the rough wooden boards of a square catwalk in romantic designs that stood out for their exquisite craftsmanship.

McQueen revisited his interest in his Scottish ancestry and the historic subjugation of Scotland at the hands of its English neighbours. This time the inspiration was the Jacobite Risings that culminated in the Battle of Culloden (1745), the collection a memorial to the widows who had lost their husbands in the bloody conflict.

Despite the emotive subject matter, *The Widows of Culloden* was a more composed and less aggressive rendering of Scotland's past than McQueen's *Highland Rape* collection. It was filled with the now familiar MacQueen tartan, although this time its application was more refined. A tartan dress was draped over one shoulder and around the neck in traditional Scottish style but accompanied by a tulle underskirt and a top of flesh-coloured net appliquéd with black lace. A black belt with Celtic buckle cinched the waist to emphasize the female

form. Once again, McQueen celebrated the Scottish game-keeping tradition, this time with neat tweed suits paired with plumes from grouse and partridge. An exquisite headdress by Philip Treacy and Shaun Leane comprised a bird's nest filled with seven soft blue, speckled eggs encrusted with Swarovski crystals and flanked by mallard wings.

The collection was striking for the level of craftsmanship inherent in each of the designs. An evening gown constructed from tiers of pheasant feathers demonstrated a lightness of touch and an ingenuity of construction. McQueen, who was interested in the concept of heirlooms, wanted to invest every piece with emotional content. His intention was poignantly conveyed in a majestic grey lace dress with ruffled skirt, modelled by Raquel Zimmermann, and worn with resin antlers draped with an antique lace veil.

The collection captured a sense of melancholy that was not only transmitted in the fragility of the designs but also consolidated in its memorable finale. As the lights dimmed, Kate Moss emerged as an ethereal apparition from within a glass pyramid, slowly dancing in the air in a delicate chiffon dress to John Williams' haunting soundtrack from *Schindler's List* (1993). The sequence, produced by Baillie Walsh and art directed by McQueen, was inspired by the Lumière brothers' film *Danse Serpentine* (1896), based on the dance made famous by Loie Fuller in 1891. It was another technological feat for McQueen, this time with roots extending to the nineteenth-century stage mechanics of 'Pepper's Ghost'.





# SARABANDE

SPRING/SUMMER 2007  
CIRQUE D'HIVER, PARIS; 6 OCTOBER 2006

*Sarabande* was another collection that epitomized fragile beauty undercut with a sense of decaying grandeur. The set, designed to look like a deserted theatre, was dominated by a magnificent chandelier that evoked a scene from Stanley Kubrick's eighteenth-century drama *Barry Lyndon* (1975). Presented in the round, models walked the bare wooden boards of a nineteenth-century theatre to a live chamber orchestra that played 'Sarabande', the fourth movement of the harpsichord suite in D minor by George Frederick Handel, which also featured in the Kubrick film.

Darkly romantic and quintessentially feminine, the collection notes cited the portraits of Francisco de Goya, indigenous Mexican dress, and English country garden flowers as key inspirations. The influence of the eccentric patron and socialite Marchesa Luisa Casati – famed for wearing live snakes as bracelets and for declaring her desire to be a living work of art – was also apparent in a white dress with a floor-length grey mantilla that recalled Ignacio Zuloaga's 1922 portrait, and in a showpiece constructed from frozen flowers. As the model walked, blooms fell to the floor, exposing the transience of living things. While the image of French actress Sarah Bernhardt in her coffin, her body strewn with flowers, is discernible in the gown, McQueen cited the photographic compositions of decaying fruit by his friend Sam Taylor-Johnson and Marc Quinn's frozen flower installation *Garden* (2000) as further inspirations.

Once again, McQueen translated for his audience the beauty inherent in death and decay. The collection was an elegy to

nature, with delicate birds recalling Audubon prints hand-painted onto a moulded leather dress, florals embroidered on soft tulle gowns, and petals trapped inside layers of chiffon that alluded to designs by his one-time mentor Koji Tatsuno. A sense of melancholy pervaded the collection, with models draped with mourning veils, their skin ghostly pale, some with silvered wispy hair in suggestion of faded beauty, others with plaits that suggested Henri Cartier-Bresson's poignant portrait of a mother and child, *Mexico City* (1934). The prevailing colour palette – the dusky pink and mauve tones of lavender and heather – lent an antique quality and recalled the hand-coloured sepia prints of Pre-Raphaelite photographer Julia Margaret Cameron.

The collection was also dark in places. While McQueen's interest in Flemish Gothic was discernible in a Philip Treacy black silk hat that recalled the hood in Jan van Eyck's self-portrait (1433), the opening look – a high-waisted black redingote with a black silk hat in the form of a giant rose – was suggestive of the costumes worn by Silvana Mangano in Luchino Visconti's Edwardian-era film *Death in Venice* (1971). The Rolling Stones' 'Paint it Black' reinforced the theme.



# IN MEMORY OF ELIZABETH HOW, SALEM 1692

AUTUMN/WINTER 2007  
LE ZENITH ARENA, PARIS; 2 MARCH 2007

McQueen revisited dark drama in the presentation of his Autumn/Winter 2007 collection, the last show styled by Katy England. A 45 ft inverted black pyramid suspended over a blood red pentagram, traced in black sand, set the stage for a collection that combined the religious persecution meted out by seventeenth-century Puritans with ancient Egyptian paganism. A giant screen showing a film directed by McQueen of locusts, naked bodies suspended in limbo, an owl's face, and skulls engulfed in flames provided a dramatic backdrop to a show that starkly contrasted with the softer, romantic qualities of his two preceding catwalk presentations.

Once again, McQueen drew on his family history. He had learned from his mother, an amateur genealogist, that a distant relative – Elizabeth How – had been hanged during the notorious Salem Witchcraft Trials of 1692, falsely accused of practising witchcraft. Warrior-like moulded bustiers in brown leather suggested a defiance against persecution, while an advancement of the moulded bodice – this time extending downwards over the hips into a flat skirt panel and upwards from the neck to conceal the mouth, nose and brow – hinted at the suppression of religious freedoms.

Symbols of pagan worship were referenced by headpieces in the form of a crescent moon and star, encrusted with Swarovski crystals. Joseph L. Mankiewicz's film *Cleopatra* (1962), which starred Elizabeth Taylor as the ill-fated Egyptian

queen, was another discernible influence. The film provided the inspiration for the make-up – dramatic cobalt blue eyes framed with heavy eyeliner – which brought a touch of Hollywood glamour to an otherwise dark collection.

The palette for a collection centred on the dark arts and folk culture of the puritanical New British World was understandably sombre. There was also a Gothic undertone, identifiable in a green and black taffeta evening gown with a cross of embroidered crystals on the bodice. Blacks, dark browns and maroons were, however, offset by origami-style cocktail dresses in iridescent blues and golds that recalled the precious lapis lazuli and gold of Egyptian sarcophagi. A bold contrast was provided by a bodysuit of gold paillettes, inset with a moulded golden bodice with drooping breasts. A further touch of glamour was injected by a black gown dripping with silver beading that recalled flowing hair, evoking Jean Cocteau's linear designs for Elsa Schiaparelli.

McQueen also intrigued with cocoon-like designs that deviated from the Victorian silhouette to create new womanly shapes, this time suggesting the contours of the ovum. Praised for his characteristic juxtaposition of hard and soft in designs that connoted fertility and protection, the collection was criticized by some for its macabre theatrics.



# LA DAME BLEUE

SPRING/SUMMER 2008  
PALAIS OMNISPORTS DE PARIS-BERCY, PARIS; 5 OCTOBER 2007

Following the death in May 2007 of Isabella Blow, McQueen joined forces with long-time collaborator Philip Treacy to deliver a collection in tribute to the stylist who had been instrumental in the early stages of both designers' careers. At the end of a reflective catwalk appeared a huge pair of flapping, outstretched wings, their shape traced by neon tubes of light. The invitation, an illustration by Richard Gray, showed a winged Blow ascending to heaven in a chariot, wearing a dusty pink, feathered trapezoidal gown and a Philip Treacy headdress comprising a halo of black spears.

According to the collection notes, Spring/Summer 2008 was inspired by 'extreme glamour'. The collection was delicate in places, theatrical in others. Moreover, an engagement with nature and its transformative qualities was conveyed in designs that echoed Blow's passion for reinventing herself through her wardrobe.

The show opened with tailored designs that invoked McQueen's characteristic Savile Row sensibility. Strong hip and shoulder lines created structured silhouettes rendered in traditional menswear fabrics including plaid mohair and Prince of Wales check. McQueen distilled his inveterate fascination with Japan and the East; this time into silk designs with kimono sleeves and obi belts that reflected the Japanese-themed couture collection he designed for Givenchy (Autumn/Winter 1997), and shoes that drew inspiration from geta. Japanese symbolism also was evident in a striking Philip Treacy headdress comprising a flutter of red butterflies made from

hand-painted turkey feathers; the butterfly was revered in Japan as the personification of the soul.

As with many of McQueen's collections, there was a strong avian presence. Whereas a padded leather jacket with wings formed from reworked trainer moulds referenced McQueen's collaboration with Puma, feathers applied to gowns charted a shift towards opulence. Some models appeared as bird-woman hybrids with feathers applied to the face. While the final looks included vibrant printed chiffon gowns that summoned up the birds of paradise creations in *Irere*, a pair of unfurled wings were placed – inverted – over the bodice of a parachute dress made from soft blue silk, creating a statement unique to the show.

In this collection McQueen presented two alternative visions of femininity. Whereas ethereal chiffon gowns in soft colour palettes hinted at goddesses and conveyed the image of a fragile, delicate woman, black and neon designs incorporated fencing masks and shoulder pads, projecting fierceness and strength. The two aesthetics were tempered by creations that incorporated metallic paillettes in dusty tones and suggested soft armour, and in a geometric pink python-skin dress attached to a silver body grid by Shaun Leane – another close friend of Blow – which formed a protective cage around the face.



# THE GIRL WHO LIVED IN THE TREE

AUTUMN/WINTER 2008  
PALAIS OMNISPORTS DE PARIS-BERCY, PARIS; 29 FEBRUARY 2008

McQueen's Autumn/Winter 2008 collection centred on a fairy-tale narrative devised by McQueen about a girl who descends from a tree to marry a prince and then become a queen. It was inspired by a 600-year-old elm tree in the garden of the designer's Sussex home. At the centre of the set stood a giant tree swathed in fabric, inspired by Bulgarian artist Christo, who is renowned for wrapping buildings with material.

The collection notes listed the inspirations to be 'The British Empire, Queens of England, the Duke of Wellington. Toy soldiers and punk princesses.' These themes found expression in two distinct sequences. The first featured romantic designs with a predominantly slender silhouette that was emphasized by jackets with nipped-in waists and S-bend corseted tops above ballerina skirts. Here emerged McQueen's punk princess to the orchestral soundtrack of American grunge band Nirvana's 'Come As You Are', styled with unruly back-combed hair and dressed in rags, hand-knitted mohair and washed tweeds. The dark palette was lifted in places with striking decorative touches. While some designs were scattered with intricate snowflakes, another was lifted by a yoke of glistening jewels. A third was decorated with a silver print of the elm tree, which appeared embossed in cream on the gold show invitation. The sequence closed with a white tulle dress embroidered with two black peacocks in profile, a reference to the national bird of India.

What followed was beautiful and majestic. Opening to a suite of regal music by Haydn and Mozart, the second sequence continued the story of the princess as she leaves the darkness of the tree, meets her prince, and is greeted by the riches of the world. McQueen, who had spent a month in India with friend and collaborator Shaun Leane, looked to the twilight years of the British Raj. Offset against regimental-style jackets trimmed with gold frogging, gowns of feathers, tulle encrusted with Swarovski crystals, rich satins and crimson velvets were given tight-fitting bodices and exaggerated ballerina-style skirts. With their New Look silhouettes, they hinted at the haute couture creations of designers such as Hardy Amies and Norman Hartnell for the young Queen Elizabeth II. Columnar dresses crafted from sumptuous, patterned sari silks referenced the grandeur of Maharajas, while a regal cape of red silk with high ruffled neck was paired with an 'Empire' bag.

Styling for these designs was delicate, with a light touch to make-up, jewelled diadems, and individual hand-crafted slippers adorned with embroidery and jewels that recalled Roger Vivier's creations for Dior. Yet a sense of anarchy prevailed in a silk ballerina-style dress with a 'bastardized' Union Jack print.



# NATURAL DIS-TINCTION, UN-NATURAL SELECTION

SPRING/SUMMER 2009

LE 104, 5 RUE CURIAL, PARIS; 3 OCTOBER 2008

McQueen's Spring/Summer 2009 collection was presented on a catwalk filled with antique taxidermy – including an elephant, giraffe, tiger, zebra and polar bear – in an art space that was formerly a Paris morgue. It was a fitting venue for a collection that was to interrogate the impact of humanity on the environment. Mounted on a plinth at the back of the sloping concrete catwalk stood a metal globe onto which images of a glowing sun, silver moon and the earth rotating on its axis were projected. The show invitation featured a lenticular by Gary James McQueen, the designer's nephew, in which the image of McQueen's face morphed into a human skull, hinting at the vulnerability of life.

The primary inspirations behind the collection coalesced around Charles Darwin, the Industrial Revolution and, in particular, the impact of the destructive nature of man. McQueen divided the collection into two sequences to convey his message. The first featured organic shapes, soft colours and natural fibres digitally printed with images of the earth's natural materials – wood grains and meadow flowers – that were engineered for each garment. These designs placed the natural and the technological in provocative juxtaposition. While dresses cut from a single piece of fabric connoted historical simplicity, silk flowers trapped in tulle referenced Victorian specimen jars. Although decorative touches were predominantly soft – whitework embroidery and beetle-wing sequins – metallic buttercups on mini dresses dripped with acid-yellow enamels and provided a point of contrast.

The second sequence continued to draw inspiration from natural forms – flowers, crystals and minerals – but here they were engineered with a hard edge and enhanced to convey the synthetic qualities associated with modernity and the human touch. Prints were angular and invoked crushed crystal, metallic structures such as the Eiffel Tower and a granite mountain that was borrowed from a Dan Holdsworth triptych. In one design a diamond print morphed into a human skeleton. Dresses shaped like bell-jars and bodysuits encrusted with jet, gold and silver Swarovski crystals conveyed harsh lines in material form. Sharper silhouettes were complemented by a colour palette that incorporated black and white as well as vivid pinks and sapphires, and synthetic materials that included Lycra and bonded leather.

Whilst McQueen stated in the collection notes that he was 'not aiming to preach', his belief that 'we're in danger of killing the planet through greed' was fundamental.



# THE HORN OF PLENTY

AUTUMN/WINTER 2009

PALAIS OMNISPORTS DE PARIS-BERCY, PARIS; 10 MARCH 2009

McQueen returned to drama with his Autumn/Winter 2009 collection and a set that was both theatrical and exuberant. *The Horn of Plenty* (dedicated to his mother) revisited McQueen signature collections as well as referencing and subverting iconic designs in fashion history. Far from a nostalgic retrospective, the concept of re-invention was instead explored through irony and parody. At the centre of the set stood a giant rubbish tip sprayed black, composed of props from past shows: a broken merry-go-round horse, crushed car parts and the chandelier from *Sarabande*. Added to these were broken televisions and chairs, a washing-machine pipe and even a kitchen sink, echoing the show's subtitle, 'Everything and the kitchen sink'. This collection was a powerful comment on the excesses of fashion in a modern consumer age. Sharing its name with the pub in which Jack the Ripper's final victim Mary Kelly was reputedly last sighted, *The Horn of Plenty* – with its connotations of excess – also suggested impending disaster.

Political undertones were implicit in the collection. A catwalk formed of shattered glass alluded to the nation's collapsed economy following the crisis of 2008. McQueen's use of exaggerated forms – oversized M.C. Escher prints of magpies and ubiquitous houndstooth checks – hinted at the pressure placed on contemporary designers to produce bigger and better collections to sell to mass markets and cement commercial success. Where McQueen invoked the haute couture classics of Chanel, Dior and Givenchy, he subverted them by developing the references and motifs

to the point of hyperbole, at once paying respect to and lampooning the revered designers. McQueen also inverted his own signature creations, with trousers that were transformed into jackets and gowns that were reworked into coats. In characteristic McQueen style, luxury was mixed up with baser elements, most notably in a paper nylon 'rubbish sack' gown with lacquered silk 'bubble wrap' opera coat. Shaun Leane accessories from past collections, including neck coils and claw earrings, also were recycled in the collection; the silver yashmak from *Eye* reinvented as the hooded bodice of a silk ballgown, printed with the image of a red milk snake.

A strong Gothic vein also ran through the collection. This was most starkly manifested in a darkly romantic 'black swan' gown, the duck feathers enveloping the wearer in a bow-like form. A Gothic aesthetic carried through into the styling, which was aggressive and teetered on the precipice between the grotesque and the farcical. Models with faces whitened by Peter Philips and dark, oversized, clown-like lips appeared at once drag queen caricatures and homages to Leigh Bowery and Marilyn Manson, as they walked out to the American rock star's 'Beautiful People' and a compilation of tracks from former McQueen shows. While the hair and make-up was inspired by the consumer-driven world of Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* (1985), Philip Treacy hats transformed mundane household goods, including refuse sacks, tyres and sprayed hub caps, into objects of beauty whilst hinting at the disposability of fashion in the twenty-first century.



# PLATO'S ATLANTIS

SPRING/SUMMER 2010

PALAIS OMNISPORTS DE PARIS-BERCY, PARIS; 6 OCTOBER 2009

McQueen's final runway presentation was widely acclaimed as his finest collection. Fittingly, he returned to what inspired him most: nature. This time McQueen merged Darwin's nineteenth-century theories of evolution with twenty-first-century concerns over global warming. *Plato's Atlantis* – a reference to the legendary island described by the Greek philosopher, which sank into the sea – prophesied a future world in which ice caps would melt, seas would rise, and humanity would need to evolve in order to survive. It was pure fantasy.

McQueen delivered his models as an androgynous army of other-worldly beings – human-animal-alien hybrids. Two cameras on giant robotic arms moved along the catwalk, scrutinizing these specimens and projecting their images onto a white-tiled backdrop that resembled a clinical laboratory. Model Raquel Zimmermann appeared on an LED screen, writhing in sand and covered by vibrantly coloured snakes.

As evolution advanced and each model charted the progression from life on land to life under the sea, their features changed. Hair was either plaited tight to the head in mounds or sculpted into fin-like peaks, while the contours of models' faces were distorted with prosthetic enhancements, both features connoting biological adaptation. Colours and textures shifted with the transition from species to species. Camouflage prints of roses, and jacquards depicting moths in green and brown tones, referenced life above the sea; amphibious snake prints suggested a transition to water; and designs in blues and purples incorporated images of ocean creatures, such as stingrays and jellyfish. Here McQueen

perfected the use of digital printing techniques with each design engineered specifically for individual garments.

McQueen developed a host of new shapes, tailored to mimic marine features: pronounced hips and shoulders gave way to amorphous forms; a fluted miniskirt resembled the folds of a jellyfish; puffed sleeves were folded and pleated to connote gills.

Cinematic references to sci-fi and fantasy films including Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979), James Cameron's *The Abyss* (1989) and John McTiernan's *Predator* (1987) found expression not only in aspects such as the show invitation and colour palette but also shoe designs. The models stalked the catwalk in 25 cm heels, the 3D printed 'Alien' design inspired by the artwork of H.R. Giger (a member of the special effects team for *Alien*). The 'Armadillo' boot created a form entirely without apparent reference to the natural anatomy of the foot, the scaly surface of designs rendered in python skin invoking the armoured shell of the animal after which the shoe was named.

As the show came to a close Zimmermann re-appeared on screen, slowly disappearing beneath the waves, and the cameras now focused on the audience. McQueen broke new ground not only with his superlative collection but also through its multi-media presentation. In collaboration with photographer and web publisher Nick Knight, the show was the first to be streamed live over the Internet, enabling an interactive dialogue between fashion and technology.



# AUTUMN/WINTER 2010

HÔTEL DE CLERMONT-TONNERRE, PARIS; 10 MARCH 2010

The collection that followed McQueen's death in February 2010 – unofficially and posthumously titled 'Angels and Demons' – was presented in an appropriately sombre manner. It was shown in private to seven select groups in the parqueted salon of an ornate eighteenth-century Parisian mansion.

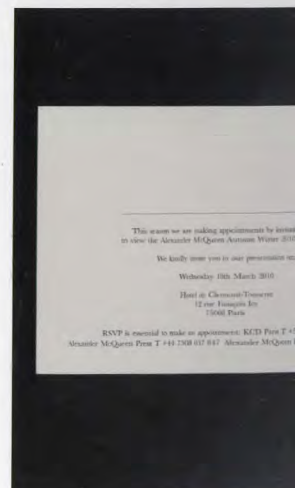
Sixteen designs had been cut on the stand by McQueen and were nearing completion at the time of his death. These were selected for the collection and finished by Sarah Burton – then McQueen's head of womenswear design – and her team. The final collection under McQueen's hand drew inspiration from Byzantine art and Old Master paintings. In particular, McQueen honed in on religious iconography, borrowing from paintings and altarpieces by artists such as Hans Memling, Hieronymus Bosch, Sandro Botticelli, Jean Fouquet, Hugo van der Goes, Jean Hay and Stephan Lochner. Entire artworks and specific details were captured digitally and then woven into jacquards, or once again printed and engineered to fit individual garments. Renaissance statuary also provided an influence and was expressed in a pale chiffon gown printed with images of grisaille angels from the *Portinari Altarpiece* by Hugo van der Goes, c.1475. The fluted skirt recalled curved alabaster.

McQueen harnessed the historical with the modern through his innovative techniques. Despite many designs being digitally rendered, there was a strong emphasis on handcraft that contrasted with the ultra-technological outlook of the

preceding collection. There was also an overriding simplicity; some designs were cut from a single bolt of fabric and many involved minimal seams. Yet the collection was ornate in places. Shoes crafted from crocodile skin, with gilded, hand-carved wooden soles, featured ivy adorned with acorns and evoked the work of Baroque carver Grinling Gibbons. While a silver pair embroidered with wings featured a heel sculpted into the shape of an angel, the signature McQueen skull found expression on an ankle boot.

The styling of the collection was also classic McQueen. This time each model wore a burnished metallic skullcap, in some cases bisected with a Mohican of golden feathers. They walked like birds to a suite of classical music by Haydn and Beethoven.

The poignancy of a collection that engaged with the themes of religion and the afterlife, and which was crafted from the most luxurious of materials and techniques, rich silks, duchesse jacquards, satin organzas, gold-painted goose feathers matelassé and *fil coupé*, was self-evident. As the collection notes that were handed to the audience read, 'Each piece is unique, as was he'.



# ENCYCLOPEDIA OF COLLECTIONS

## CREDITS

### **Jack the Ripper Stalks his Victims, Autumn/Winter 1992**

Catwalk image: Photograph by Niall McInerney  
Show invitation: Courtesy of Central Saint Martins Museum Study Collection

### **Taxi Driver, Autumn/Winter 1993**

Above: 'The Real McQueen', *Observer Magazine*, March 1993  
Below: 'With a Little Help from my Friends', Hilary Alexander, *Sunday Telegraph*, 7 March 1993  
Modelled by Alice Smith  
Photograph by Sean Knox

### **Nihilism, Spring/Summer 1994**

Catwalk image: Photograph by Brendan Beirne  
Show invitation: Courtesy of Chris Bird

### **Banshee, Autumn/Winter 1994**

Catwalk image: Photograph by Niall McInerney  
Show invitation: Courtesy of Fleet Bigwood  
Photograph by Rankin

### **The Birds, Spring/Summer, 1995**

Catwalk image: Photograph by Chris Moore  
Model: Jade Parfitt  
Show invitation: Courtesy of Fleet Bigwood  
Design by Silvia Gaspardo Moro

### **Highland Rape, Autumn/Winter 1995**

Catwalk image: Photograph by Robert Fairer  
Show invitation: Courtesy of Fleet Bigwood  
Photograph by Nicola Schwartz,  
Design by Silvia Gaspardo Moro

### **The Hunger, Spring/Summer 1996**

Catwalk image: Photograph by Robert Fairer  
Show invitation: Courtesy of Alexander McQueen  
Photograph by Gerhard Klocker

### **Dante, Autumn/Winter 1996**

Catwalk image: Photograph by Robert Fairer  
Show invitation: Courtesy of Alexander McQueen  
Photograph by Nicola Schwartz

### **Bellmer La Poupée, Spring/Summer 1997**

Catwalk image: Photograph by Chris Moore  
Show invitation: Courtesy of Fleet Bigwood

### **It's a Jungle Out There, Autumn/Winter 1997**

Catwalk image: Photograph by Niall McInerney  
Modelled by Jodie Kidd  
Show invitation: Courtesy of Mark C. O'Flaherty  
Modelled by Debra Shaw  
Photograph by Nick Knight with art direction by Alexander McQueen

### **Untitled, Spring/Summer 1998**

Catwalk image: Photograph by Anthea Simms  
Modelled by Gisele Bündchen  
Show invitation: Courtesy of Alexander McQueen

### **Joan, Autumn/Winter 1998**

Catwalk image: Photograph by Anthea Simms  
Modelled by Debra Shaw  
Show invitation: Courtesy of Alexander McQueen  
Photograph by Phil Poynter

### **No.13, Spring/Summer 1999**

Catwalk image: Photograph by Anthea Simms  
Show invitation: Courtesy of Alice Smith and Cressida Pye  
Photograph by Richard Green

### **The Overlook, Autumn/Winter 1999**

Catwalk image: Photograph by Anthea Simms  
Show invitation: Courtesy of Alice Smith and Cressida Pye

### **Eye, Spring/Summer 2000**

Catwalk image: Photograph by Chris Moore  
Backstage pass: Courtesy of Anne Deniau

### **Eshu, Autumn/Winter 2000**

Catwalk image: Photograph by Anthea Simms  
Show invitation: Courtesy of Tracy Chapman

### **Voss, Spring/Summer 2001**

Catwalk image: Photograph by Anthea Simms  
Modelled by Jade Parfitt  
Show invitation: Courtesy of Alexander McQueen

### **What a Merry Go Round, Autumn/Winter 2001**

Catwalk image: Photograph by Chris Moore  
Show invitation: Courtesy of Alexander McQueen  
Photograph by Ferdinando Scianna

### **The Dance of the Twisted Bull, Spring/Summer 2002**

Catwalk image: Photograph by Chris Moore  
Modelled by Laura Morgan  
Show invitation: Courtesy of Alexander McQueen  
Design by Michael Nash Associates

### **Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious, Autumn/Winter 2002**

Catwalk image: Photograph by Anthea Simms  
Modelled by Carmen Kass  
Show invitation: Courtesy of Alexander McQueen  
Illustration by Tim Burton  
Design by Michael Nash Associates

### **Irere, Spring/Summer 2003**

Catwalk image: firstVIEW  
Modelled by Letticia Birkheuer  
Show invitation: Courtesy of Alexander McQueen  
Photograph by Steven Klein  
Design by Michael Nash Associates

### **Scanners, Autumn/Winter 2003**

Catwalk image: Photograph by Chris Moore  
Modelled by Eugenia Volodina  
Show invitation: Courtesy of Alexander McQueen  
Artwork by Michael Nash in collaboration with Spencer Wallace at Nirvana CPH

### **Deliverance, Spring/Summer 2004**

Catwalk image: Photograph by Anthea Simms  
Modelled by Erin Wasson  
Show invitation: Courtesy of Alexander McQueen  
Design by Michael Nash Associates

### **Pantheon ad Lucem, Autumn/Winter 2004**

Catwalk image: Photograph by Anthea Simms  
Modelled by Tiiu Kuik  
Show invitation: Courtesy of Alexander McQueen

### **It's Only a Game, Spring/Summer 2005**

Catwalk image: Photograph by Chris Moore  
Modelled by Ajuma Nasanyana  
Show invitation: Courtesy of Alexander McQueen  
Design by Michael Nash Associates

### **The Man Who Knew Too Much, Autumn/Winter 2005**

Catwalk image: Photograph by Chris Moore  
Modelled by Shannan Click  
Show invitation: Courtesy of Alexander McQueen  
Design by Michael Nash Associates

### **Neptune, Spring/Summer 2006**

Catwalk image: Photograph by Chris Moore  
Modelled by Valentina Zelyaeva  
Show invitation: Courtesy of Alexander McQueen  
Photograph by Gerhard Klocker  
Design by Michael Nash Associates

### **The Widows of Culloden, Autumn/Winter 2006**

Catwalk image: Courtesy of Swarovski Archive  
Model: Snejana Onopka  
Show invitation: Courtesy of Alexander McQueen  
Photograph by Julia Margaret Cameron (Royal Photographic Society)  
Design by Michael Nash Associates

### **Sarabande, Spring/Summer 2007**

Catwalk image: Photograph by Chris Moore  
Modelled by Elise Crombez  
Show invitation: Courtesy of Alexander McQueen  
Photograph by Nick Knight  
Design by Michael Nash Associates

### **In Memory of Elizabeth How, Salem 1692, Autumn/Winter 2007**

Catwalk image: Photograph by Chris Moore  
Modelled by Magdalena Frackowiak  
Show invitation: Courtesy of Alexander McQueen  
Photograph by Joel-Peter Witkin

### **La Dame Bleue, Spring/Summer 2008**

Catwalk image: Photograph by Chris Moore  
Modelled by Raquel Zimmermann  
Show invitation: Courtesy of Alexander McQueen  
Illustration by Richard Gray

### **The Girl Who Lived in the Tree, Autumn/Winter 2008**

Catwalk image: Photograph by Anthea Simms  
Modelled by Alyona Osmanova  
Show invitation: Courtesy of Alexander McQueen

### **Natural Dis-tinction Un-Natural Selection, Spring/Summer 2009**

Catwalk image: Photograph by Anthea Simms  
Modelled by Jourdan Dunn  
Show invitation: Courtesy of Alexander McQueen  
Artwork and photograph by Gary James McQueen

### **The Horn of Plenty, Autumn/Winter 2009**

Catwalk image: Photograph by Chris Moore  
Modelled by Alla Kostromichova  
Show invitation: Courtesy of Janet McQueen  
Photograph by Hendrik Kerstens

### **Plato's Atlantis, Spring/Summer 2010**

Catwalk image: Photograph by Chris Moore  
Modelled by Magdalena Frackowiak  
Show invitation: Courtesy of Alexander McQueen  
Artwork by Gary James McQueen

### **Autumn/Winter 2010**

Catwalk image: firstVIEW  
Modelled by Polina Kasina  
Show invitation: Courtesy of Alexander McQueen