



ANN-SOFIE

BACK

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photography LUCA KHOURI, styling ANDREW SAUCEDA, models INDRA, DITTE, ANGELINA, LYDIA, ELIAS, casting JULIA LANGE, LISA MARLEEN, AND ANNA PKHAKADZE FOR JLC, hair JOE BURWIN, makeup JEANETTE TORNQVIST, DANIELLA ERICSON, set design ARON HEINEMANN, production HELLO PRODUCTION, photography assistant FREDDY PERSSON, text MATTHEW LINDE.









































































ANN-SOFIE BACK

Ann-Sofie Back received her BA at Beckmans College of Design in Sweden in 1996 then two years later an MA at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design. Her graduate collection was bought by the iconic London retailer The Pineal Eye. In this period Back was working with upcycled projects, often exhibiting in galleries such as London's ICA. Her first ready-to-wear was Spring 2002 in Paris. In 2005 the BACK diffusion line was established and in 2010 the artisanal Ateljé line. She has also consulted for a number of larger companies.

I discovered her work during my own fashion design studies in the early 2010s, compelled by its strange mundanity. Betraying high fashion's rote binary in austere minimalism or gawdy opulence, Back pointed to a growing niche of third-way designers who obsessed over "the rituals of everyday dressing," as Ulrich Lehmann put it. The reenactment of mass market clothing codes at a remove. In a 2006 interview with Francesca Granata, Back explains, "My de-

signs are always about the same thing: referencing fashion that is about fashion." A sensibility shared by contemporaries like Maison Martin Margiela, Anke Loh and Lutz Huelle.

MATTHEW LINDE: I remember your early collaborations with Anders Edström, whose obsession with mundanity seemed so harmonious. Am I right you also met in '98? What was it like meeting and working together?

ANN-SOFIE BACK: Yes we met in '98 after I graduated from an MA at Saint Martin's. I went to Paris to try and get a designer job and also booked a meeting with *Self Service*. I had dabbled with styling in Sweden before moving to London and I never really separated designing from styling. I think this was before *Self Service* had become "big" and they had time to meet with me. They suggested I work with Anders as he was in London and Swedish as well. We are both a bit shy and awkward so our meeting was a real pain. I always worked with shame, humour, embarrassment and awk-

wardness even though I at the time didn't understand that. And that is where Anders and I meet. I always felt that styling is lighter work than designing, you can do spur-of-the-moment decisions and who cares if it's irrelevant one week after publishing. You can experiment more.

ML: In a fantastic Ulrich Lehmann review of your work in Phaidon's *Sample: 100 Fashion Designers - 010 Curators* he writes, "[Ann-Sofie Back] explores the conceptual contretemps of the oddly shaped and cheap looking garment in order to visualise the 'Other' of fashion's underbelly. That she manages to incorporate this concept into clothes of surprising elegance indicates the imprint that everyday garments have left on the collective sartorial memory, where the mundane forms the necessary basis of all efforts to improve one's appearance." I love the whole review. I'm curious though to hear from you, what were what were your influences in the early years? And did you look at other designers' work, historical or contemporary?

ASB: Yes that description is very accurate. I need to go find that book again! I was very influenced by Margiela (of course), Chanel (introducing bijouteries), Alexander McQueen (1996-2000), Leigh Bowery and Anna Cockburn (the stylist, who I now believe has left fashion). Especially a story she styled with David Sims in *The Face* in 1997 (I think) called "Mr Potato Man". There was this bland-ish looking girl in Anna's customized designs (basically a piece of curtain with a stitch in), standing in a muddy field. The most beautiful shoot I have ever seen.

ML: A personal favorite was your Autumn/Winter 2004 collection featuring PVC trench coats, faux-fur and belted scarves. Throughout a sort of mutated corporate wear. Could you discuss the making of this collection?

ASB: From the design research that I did for that collection I could have designed eight collections. There were so many ideas and it is one of my favourites too. I am currently working on recreating some of the accessories and garments that have been lost or destroyed

from this season. I have an upcoming retrospective opening in November 2024.

ML: Speaking of which, what collection was your favorite? Can you choose?

ASB: At the moment it's Autumn/Winter 2005. It was inspired by the '80-90s dress for success books. What to wear when you are invited to go hunting in the country or when having coffee with friends in Sloane Square. Also inspired by shop displays, how to fold garments and style with accessories. It included earrings attached to the little plastic shop display and a wedding ring in it's box as a necklace.

ML: Ann-Sofie Back Ateljé was the more 'artisanal' line. How did this emerge?

ASB: Haha yeah that was fun but not exactly a success. It was an attempt to diversify BACK from Ann-Sofie Back. I wanted a more creative outlet.

ML: You chose to do a massive sale of your archive in 2018. How did it feel letting go? I also read you've most likely designed 10,000 pieces cumulatively over the years!

Had you maintained them all in your personal archive?

ASB: It wasn't massive by any means! It was maybe 5% of my archive, pieces I had doubles of. Yes I have kept everything, it is now stored at "Centrum för Näringslivshistoria" for the next 100 years.

ML: What are you doing since this farewell sale?

ASB: The sale was not a farewell sale, I just didn't need to keep all three colourways of every item in the archive! The last collection I designed was for Spring/Summer 2018.

I now design interior accessories or objects under the name Gnilyd Kcab (our surnames Dymling and Back reversed). The objects are connected to fashion, for example a cushion with a long silk train, or a fur coat in the form of a rug, mirrors with metal studs or lampshades made out of wigs. It is very liberating to move away from the body when you design and the pace, output and life length of the objects are much longer than fashion.