

Alexander McQueen

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Lee Alexander McQueen, (17 March 1969 – 11 February 2010) was a British fashion designer best known for his tendency to display female strength and sensuality with fragility in his collections, as well as the emotional power and raw energy of his provocative fashion shows. He is also known for having worked as chief designer at the French Haute Couture House Givenchy and for founding his own label under the name Alexander McQueen. His achievements in fashion earned him four British Designer of the Year awards (1996, 1997, 2001 and 2003), as well as the CFDA's International Designer of the Year award in 2003.

McQueen was the youngest of six children. He grew up in a council flat in a tower block in Stratford. He started making dresses for his three sisters at a young age and announced his intention to become a fashion designer. McQueen left school aged 16 in 1985 then went on to serve an apprenticeship with Savile Row tailors Anderson & Sheppard, before joining Gieves & Hawkes and, later, the theatrical costumiers Angels and Bermans. The skills he learned as an apprentice on Savile Row helped earn him a reputation in the fashion world as an expert in creating an impeccably tailored look.



Alexander McQueen's 1995 show entitled the 'Highland Rape' was the show that set him on the road to stardom. The collection featured dishevelled and battered-looking models in torn tartan clothing. It was McQueen said his comment on the "rape" of Scotland by the British (McQueen was of Scottish descent,) though critics of his work saw in it a perverse and misogynistic celebration of the sexual violation of women. For the show McQueen transformed an industrial loft space into a chaotic battleground symbolizing 1746's Battle of Culloden, in which the Jacobite Highland-Scots, were defeated and subsequently ousted by the British troops under the Duke of Cumberland, "the Butcher." The show also acted a modern, day conscientious objection against Cumberland's 1746 Dress Act clause in the Act of Proscription which made it illegal to wear Highland dress, in particular the kilt

In less than 10 years McQueen became one of the most respected fashion designers in the world. In October 1996 he was appointed Chief Designer at the French Haute Couture House Givenchy where he worked until March of 2001.

The following awards have recognized Alexander McQueen's achievement in fashion: British Designer of the year 1996, 1997, 2001, and 2003, International Designer of the Year by The Council of Fashion Designer's of America (CFDA) in 2003, A Most Excellent Commander of The British Empire (CBE) by her Majesty the Queen in 2003, GQ Menswear Designer of the Year in 2007.

For spring 1999, there was Shalom Harlow's graceful performance as the dying swan, while she was sprayed with paint by a pair of robotic arms. Then there was the snowstorm peopled by models ice-skating in fur-trimmed brocades and, in spring 2004, the darkly glamorous dance marathon. No one who saw the larger-than-life-size holographic image of Kate Moss floating above their heads in 2006 would forget it.

McQueen is not only cherished as a visionary within the industry, but he is also the designer of choice for discerning stars. Gwyneth Paltrow, Cameron Diaz, Beyoncé and Lady Gaga have worn his dresses on the red carpet. McQueen said: "I'm interested in designing for posterity. People who buy McQueen are going to hand the clothes down to their children, and that's very rare today."



His spring/summer 1997 collection, La Poupée, featured a black model whose movements were restrained by a metal cage attached to her limbs, hit the headlines again. Inspired by the German puppet-master Hans Beller, the rusty contraption was designed to evoke a marionette; inevitably, again, some of the press saw bondage, slavery and the subordination of women.

His weird and whimsical catwalk narratives have included models encircled in flames, drenched in rainstorms or spun like music-box dolls on revolving circles in the floor. The shows are inspired by cult films by Stanley Kubrick, Pier Paolo Pasolini and Alfred Hitchcock, or by the dark photographs of Joel-Peter Witkin. It was Witkin's work which inspired McQueen's spring/summer 2001 show. Models staggered around, trapped in a mirrored box that obscured their view of the audience. Their bandaged heads and confused expressions evoked disease both physical and psychological. The spectacle ended as the walls of the glass box shattered to the floor to reveal an obese model wearing nothing but a gas mask, surrounded by hundreds of moths.

From Alexander McQueen's 2001 runway show. Colorful lights, a merry-go-round, the sound of children Alexander McQueen's show brought to mind family trips along with fun and games. But once the lights went down and the blaring soundtrack began, it became perfectly clear that there was nothing even remotely candy-coated about his carnival crashers. Cavorling around poles, a posse of hard-as-nails girls took over the stage wearing shiny leather jackets and jeans, scalloped coats and skirts, skintight leather pants and military jackets. When the frantic pace finally slowed down, it was to reveal an eerie backdrop of gigantic stuffed animals, discarded dolls, puppets, balloons and ragged circus, out of which several characters emerged, wearing massive ruffles, centuries-old suits and beat-up lace. The perfect accessory? One of McQueen's otherworldly creatures dragged around a golden skeleton with her foot.

