



THE FAIRY TALE UNIVERSE OF SWASH

by Silvia Bombardini

"Swash" could be one of the most charming, eloquent and suggestive words in modern English. Oxford Dictionary defines it as the rush of seawater up the beach after the breaking of a wave. It's also an extended flourish on a printed character, or even the act of flamboyantly swaggering about or wielding a sword. The swash motion in itself, perseverant and sleek as only geology matters can be, would still follow a waxing moon like a sleepless poet, eating away at the foreshore with salty love bites.

Sarah Swash couldn't have hoped for a more suitable surname to showcase her and her partner Toshio Yamanaka's matched multiple talents: patience and meticulousness, courtly images and dreams, fluid and oversized watercolor silks with unique motifs and endless love. Swash and Yamanaka both come from seaside towns, in Cornwall and Japan respectively. Perched on different oceans at the farthest corners of the world, the pair met in 2000 at Central Saint Martins in London, where they are currently based.

"I spent my teenage years dreaming of the city through the glossy pages of fashion magazines and Toshio, too, left his seaside town for London aged only 15," says Swash. "So perhaps what we have in common is a love of home and our respective seashores but an understanding that for us the city is where it all happens."

And a lot has happened since they started their own brand in 2004, when they were awarded the Fashion Grand Prix at the prestigious Festival d'Hyères. Swash and Yamanaka have designed special-edition anniversary scarves for Barneys and Le Bon Marché, adorned Liberty of London with their dainty, handmade balloons, and wrapped up five floors of Isetan in Tokyo with Swash wallpaper. Their minutely detailed, light-hearted illustrations could grace

gallery walls just as brilliantly as their signature silk scarves and ready-to-wear clothes. In fact, in Hyères, Swash also exhibited 100 framed drawings for their five-year retrospective.

Even so, their focus on fashion never falters. "The lines may well very often blur, but we certainly create with fashion and design in mind as opposed to art," they explain. "We do love the idea of creating a Swash universe with printed walls, objects and people but we thrive on the immediacy that fashion brings and the fact that you are always working on something new."

Recently, Swash proudly showed off a capsule collection of printed pumps and wedges in collaboration with Camper - on the sides of London's iconic Routemaster buses.

And now, a new, lush and magical winter collection, 'Phantastes,' (named after George MacDonald's 19th century romantic novel) leads us through a precious and tempting dreamland of secret gardens and opulent palaces, mirrors and deceptive clocks. "We wanted to create something as playful as ever, but also romantic and even slightly sinister in places like all good fairy tales should be," they say.

Swash and Yamanaka's beloved whippet Candy, who often agrees to model for the label, plays the part of the Marble Lady, who embodies the elusive ideal of Beauty in the book. "It was unquestionably love at first sight," says Swash, recalling the first time she saw Candy. "When she walked into the room, we were both struck by her beauty and her elegance. I can wholeheartedly say that I truly believe there is no more beautiful dog alive."

www.swash.co.uk