

## New Zines & Nodels

by Silvia Bombardini



Jenny Cheng, Esther Gauntlett, and David Moses in Moses Gauntlett Cheng

For a number of years they had given ground to the perceived unfiltered-ness of blogs, but in the mid-twenty-tens, perhaps since Yahoo!'s acquisition of Tumblr in June 2013, zine culture is on a roll once more. Sassy, messy and homegrown, new zines arise: pointedly lo-res in unglamorous fonts, they brim with satire, colouring-in pages, crass quizzes and centrefolds or comically narrow-themed studies – see Chloë Sevigny's *No Time For Love*, all exes and stickers, or the X-rated illustrations of *Solo*, a post-One Direction Zayn Malik fanzine. They're uncensored, sleazy and romantic, with the immediacy of nary an afterthought. Typically self-published whenever they please and prone to vanish, past issues are cherished one-off finds. Zine culture both thrives on a dedicated community and gives voice to it: authentic and sincere enough that regular clean, glossy mags are starting to borrow their lingo. Free from advertisers or commercial worries, pro-thrifting fashion zines like *Mushpit* feature counterfeit clothes. They aim to pick holes in the unrealistic portrayal of women organised media got us used to, but their kind of feminism, the so-called fourth-wave, is gentler than zines past, and sworn to reclaim its clichés.

A similar sentiment and aesthetic easily fuelled by local zines inform the creative process of a tight, often self-taught group of very young designers, some still in their late teens, who for a couple of seasons now have revamped the New York fashion scene. Working from the margins on the wake of HBA, labels like Vejas, Moses Gauntlett Cheng, Shan Huq and Vaquera set to tenderize rather than shatter them. If Shayne Oliver can be rightfully credited with disrupting the long-lingering reputation of NYFW as predictable and mercantile, with stumpy walks and a fiercely visionary approach, these new brands are building on the momentum by promoting the same ideals of diversity and inclusivity – albeit in kinder, softer, heartwarming ways that successfully bring them to the forefront, along with the clothes and often before them. Lou Dallas takes pride in her sloppy approach, Gogo Graham in using cheap materials. If polished skills can only be acquired via the expensive education of the elite, their DIY method recalls the ‘availabism’ theory of Kembra Pfahler, that photographer Sarah Piantadosi quotes as inspiration for her new zine Milk Jagger but could truly apply to the medium as a whole. Like the one between zine and reader, their inexperience translates as intimacy, the kind established brands that stand by the quality of their product still aspire to. Take Rick Owens’ SS16 womenswear sensation: true to form provocative, yet the press notes tell us that those straps that could have been elsewhere, and certainly have been about restraint in seasons past, are now *“loving ribbons”*, of support and cradling. A markedly feminist vision, the show is all about *“sisterhood/motherhood and regeneration; women raising women, women becoming women, and women supporting women”*.

Most of all among youth, feminism becomes more and more popular, and many have worried if fashion won’t cheapen it. But good things too can come from widespread awareness and transmedia commitment. This side of the pond, young designer Clio Peppiatt and *Polyester* zine co-curated *Female Matters*, a group exhibition to explore sexual liberation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century while raising funds for FGM survivors. Another newcomer, Richard Malone soundtracks his Fashion East debut with Sylvia Plath readings, and his garments, pocketed and washable, aim to *“challenge the confines of patriarchy”* that permeates the working-class Irish culture of his childhood. The models, who drink champagne and pay us no mind, are the girlfriends who inspired him. One wonders if the time was not yet ripe, or the means still too aggressive, when in the SS15 show that was to be their last, Meadham Kirchhoff put tampons on display and gifted their guest with a raucous riso-printed zine. Titled *Reject Everything*, it came with candid lists of their Loves, like Oprah, and Hates, like Terry Richardson, and fearless statements such as *“fuk LVMH corporate fashion”*.

Other London-based labels have come to publish zines to complement their work. Claire Barrow, whose trademark hand-painted characters spontaneously align with the format, made an illustrated zine with Ditto Press for FW15, while her SS16 *Broken Machines* collection, imagined in a darkling post-tech age, echoes the anti-social media, scissors-and-glue ethos many zines still print by. Now in its 2<sup>nd</sup> issue, also by Ditto Press, Grace Wales Bonner’s *Everythings for Real* channels blaxploitation cinema and the poetry of diaspora, sells for £25 with a bonus CD soundscape and calls itself a *“luxury zine”*. Few would argue if it’s

still right of this beautiful pamphlet to use the term zine, or how far it stretches. Maybe because zines are easier to print than to define, but most likely because there are no rules. Zines are disobedient by nature, inclusive, and against all snobbery. A zine exists when it's named a zine. That doesn't mean it won't raise a few eyebrows if used too freely as a marketing tool. The Yeezy Season One lookbook, for instance, claimed to be a zine for no defensible reason.



Claire Barrow's *High Flyers* zine

But it's not just in name, language and means that the influence or similarities with zine culture end. Rather, with the earnest, defiant and worthy purpose of recoding beauty. An unprecedented wave of amateur or non-models have took to the catwalk in recent seasons – baptised as *nodels* by New York-based Eckhaus Latta, they stand, and walk, as if to remind the audience that a person is really what makes the clothing. A message that's all the more clear when the clothing itself is a uniquely imperfect production of love. Most brands mentioned above dress up their friends, who are also their muses, and the community aspect is strong too: Zoe Latta's godfather walks in their SS16 show, and David Moses of Moses Gauntlett Cheng turns up both in Eckhaus Latta's [campaign film](#) for winter and Vaquera's presentation for spring. In turn, the Moses Gauntlett Cheng SS16 VFiles show features Esther Gauntlett's mother and her brother's girlfriend. Young designers would usually forgo professionals for budget reasons as well, but the never photoshopped result also hits their target more soundly. Hyped labels like Vetements or MM6 already pursue a similar goal with street-casted models. Quixotic as it seemed, the promotion of more realistic beauties championed firstly by zines appears well on its way to conquer the system.

