



## HOWDY, COWBOY!

by Silvia Bombardini

"It's the times. They are a-changin'. Something's blowing in the wind." The Wild West rodeo is back in town, and everybody is smitten. Charisma, testosterone, and swagger — cowboys traditionally stand just this side of flamboyant, and informed European youth have rarely dared to try anything more than the occasional pair of boots. But if recent catwalks — from Katie Eary to Saint Laurent — are anything to go by, the golden days of gutsy Western looks are soon due to return, and someone is finally starting to notice just how much we missed them. The times, it seems, are changing indeed, and Edna Turnblad's 1988 gem of wisdom couldn't sound more appropriate, especially when you can ask Alex Mullins, upcoming London-based designer and a big fan himself of both John Waters and the cowboy style, to reenact the whole of *Hairspray* for you.

Since his MA collection at the Royal College of Art, which, admittedly, wasn't all that long ago, Alex has brought his muse, a modern-day cowboy with the genes of Desperate Dan and the Marlboro man, season after season to the attention of the public. "Confidence, stature, and charisma is what cowboys are all about," he tells me. "You can wear anything if your attitude is right." For Winter 2014, Alex's official debut as part of the British Fashion Council's NEWGEN Ones to Watch initiative, this means dusty denims and melton wools, velvets and silks, and large-scale paintings spliced and reworked into breezy menswear essentials, a bit like Matisse with his cutouts. "The original artworks were large ink paintings of London postcards, but reworked in my style," he explains. "This technique brings a different kind of spontaneity to the pieces, unlike an all-over repeat print it allows the lines to flow around the body, being abstracted from the original canvas." He imagined it was his cowboy who had moved to the Big Smoke, and lived there as a narcissist, reclusive artist in 1974. "I love building a narrative and characters within it," he muses, "as it connects me to the reality of these sexy guys and helps me to be really thorough with each collection." And the British capital is, in fact, another major theme and magnetic pole for Alex Mullins and his work. Born and bred in West London, the son of a fashion lecturer, he now has his own studio in the heart of the East, so East in fact it's almost West again: it's where London's multiculturalism is palpable enough to echo that very American salad bowl that fascinates him so. "I do really like Shoreditch, I find it hilarious!" he admits. "It's getting so swanky around here." Just you wait a couple of months while this cowboy trend takes off: swanky won't even begin to cover it.