

## Zowie Broach

by Silvia Bombardini



If 2016 was a year best be forgotten by popular consent, in 2017 we've learnt to be grateful for the little things – and looking back over the past 12 months, there were plenty of those to be grateful for. Take the pink pussyhats of the women's marches, for a start. Zowie Broach, co-founder since 1997 of the avant-garde British label Boudicca and Head of Fashion at the Royal College of Art, weighs up the year that was, books and bots. And most importantly, riding the wave of history, she shares some of her precious insight into the years that will be.

**S.B.: As 2017 draws to a close we take stock of its highs and lows, but in tune to the Christmas spirit let us keep to the former for now. In fashion and the world at large, what would you say is great about living in the present?**

Z.B.: Only the times we are stood within can give us all. We're witnessing a continual shifting of ideas, and new freedoms about what one dreams of being... we are led now more and more by the unique opinion, within a

history that ferments, absorbs and plays to the extreme wild and sensitive cool. This is the power of the virtual network in the most positive sense that we need to embrace, giving us all the ability to decide and create our own identities.

**S.B: So many styles come and go over the course of one year, since fashion's seasons began to multiply, that no good idea ever sticks for long anymore. Still, one has to be grateful for the short life of some fads – the springtime male romper, say – and embrace others, like rappers' clout googles or the shoulder-pad comeback. How do you imagine that 2017 will go down in the fashion history books, what should we remember it by?**

Z.B.: The first thing that comes to mind are the women's marches that were prompted by American society and politics but gathered a world wide vision and sense of community – and realised for many women their first protest march while staking ground and debate for the present and future, for a global turn in history that is essential. The pink pussyhat is a wonderful example of realising that what seems an impossible world issue can be answered, and listened to, from the small gentle ambition of a few, and reach outwards and be inclusive of so many.

We now look forward to the Alaïa exhibition at London's Design Museum in May, after his untimely passing. The world of fashion has lost a great legendary designer.

**S.B.: Thinking of major themes, it's hard to miss that ever since the pussyhats it's been a year traced with variously commodified feminist sentiment. With *Wonder Woman* in her shimmery bodysuit and *The Handmaid's Tale's* Offred in a bloody cape and bonnet as perhaps two polar extremes of the same cause. Were you a fan of either? Do you expect the rekindled fire of feminism to continue to warm pop culture and fashion in the year ahead?**

Z.B.: *The Handmaid's Tale* took us aesthetically somewhere powerfully new and yet deeply past, and then pushed upon us to re-examine, look up and see once more. The young men and women of today are certainly sharp with their personal debate and with the ownership of their sexuality, with their position in their tribe and in society... and it is key that we listen and see how they can inform us for the future. As we interweave what we know with the new, the stories we're told can be important. History is no longer linear... it absorbs, it weaves back and forth, oscillating about us almost like the air we breathe. This new way of understanding the self is one to watch for.

**S.B.: As we try to divine the future, and for all that it's anachronistically and ana-climatically still carried forth by calendar seasons, fashion is maybe for this very reason best suited to offer predictions, from its advantage position of working always one year ahead. We hear plenty about the ambiguous promise of new**

**technologies, which if not yet in 2018 then certainly soon, are due to revolutionise the industry. What do you imagine will be some of the challenges fashion will have to face, and what benefits may come from it?**

Z.B.: The Fashion industry will need to be on its toes as algorithms seen to be the powerful way forward will also distort data. With the talk of bots on bots, algos on algos, the maths can get out of control and we need to be aware of how this could damage and disrupt what right now seems very solid.

For new designers the hope is that new technologies will enable them to find new business models away from the old wholesale system, and create new visions of values and fashion as design once more. And equally to build a business that protects them as designers. Looking at systems like LOT 2046 as a subscription model, could this be a way forward to build upon?

**S.B.: Of course this kind of questions and concerns will affect young designers most directly, and I guess that when you're working with your students at the Royal College of Art, you're spending time in close quarters with the future already. In your experience and from observation, what are the thesis and themes that most preoccupy and absorb your pupils – the creative talents we'll get to know in the seasons to come?**

Z.B.: Firstly they wish to collaborate much more, and the sole authorship of the designer is being questioned. Secondly, they wish to understand more before they just add products to the market, the landscape, the world. So these are the crucial and complex dynamics and issues to handle as they wash away the old ways of thinking about fashion and how it is studied. I am deeply proud of the students at the RCA and their radicality and fresh bravery, and I hope to run alongside their new beginnings to support and learn with them.

**S.B.: Finally, since we were just talking about movies and heroes, are there some films or books you've particularly liked this year, that you'd wish to recommend our readers as we all prepare to pen our Christmas wish lists? What about your own list, what are you wishing for this time?**

Z.B.: Here's a couple of books to read for history, beauty, and conversation: *Age of Anger* by Pankaj Mishra, and *The Agony and the Ecstasy: Jack Webb* by Glen Luchford. I would also suggest a subscription to Luncheon Magazine. As for my list of dreams, I'd like a Peter Zumthor studio for Boudicca, an electric Jaguar sports car, and a sabbatical to write a book about our future identities.