

# The Spirit of SoHo

Sharing Creativity and  
Community through LifeWear

## ISSUE: 01

Yukie Ohta

Futura

Tabatha McGurr

Jeffrey Deitch

Ryan McGinley

Carlo McCormick

Tristan Hughes-Freeland

Nicola Vassell

Jeff Koons

Jil Sander



LifeWear



On the cover: Nicola Vassell stands in front of “Malaria Tripping,” a painting by Uman, on view at Nicola Vassell Gallery.



Vered Lieb in her studio on Greene Street c. 1978. Painting on opposite wall titled, “No Illusions” was included in the Barbara Rose exhibition “American Painting in the Eighties.” Now in the collection of The Cincinnati Art Museum, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Photo by Thornton Willis



WATCH THE CAMPAIGN

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“Downtown taught me everything that I know about New York. It implicates everything I have done since. I suppose one could put it as always looking for the edge, always looking for the visionary aspect...” says Nicola Vassell in her interview on page fifty. That pursuit of vision, creativity and curiosity is part of what defines SoHo’s spirit and the style of its most famous residents. Fashion is one thing. Style is everything else. Style is a way of being, a way of living, a way of doing. In the early days, everything about SoHo was pure, bonafide style. Unfiltered creative edge. Raw, loose, free. Cheap rent meant everyone was welcome. If you were an artist, you belonged. Fast forward six decades and SoHo has changed the world. Its spirit defines the global cultural power that is downtown and has gone far beyond New York to influence art, music and fashion across the world. Legends like Keith Haring, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Andy Warhol, David Bowie and Laurie Anderson were made here, and continue to be made here. Its spirit lives on past its geographical boundaries and mythical era that looms large in the public imagination. Its creative legacy lives on. What is the spirit of SoHo? Hard to pin down, but not impossible.

Here’s an idea.





# YUKIE OHTA:

## THE SPIRIT OF PRESERVATION

PHOTOGRAPHED BY RYAN MCGINLEY AT THE SOHO MEMORY PROJECT



Extra fine merino ribbed  
turtleneck sweater  
\$39.90

All items are subject to availability.



The spirit of SoHo is hard to define. For some, it can be summed up in the summers that sparked new movements in art and culture, the freewheeling creative energy that rippled through the streets, spurred on by wildly low rents, and the first gallery shows of legends-to-be, like Basquiat, Warhol and Haring. But it's also much bigger than that. It's the spirit of a tight-knit community of artists, families, and small businesses that began calling SoHo home in the 1950s, that helped make it what it is today.

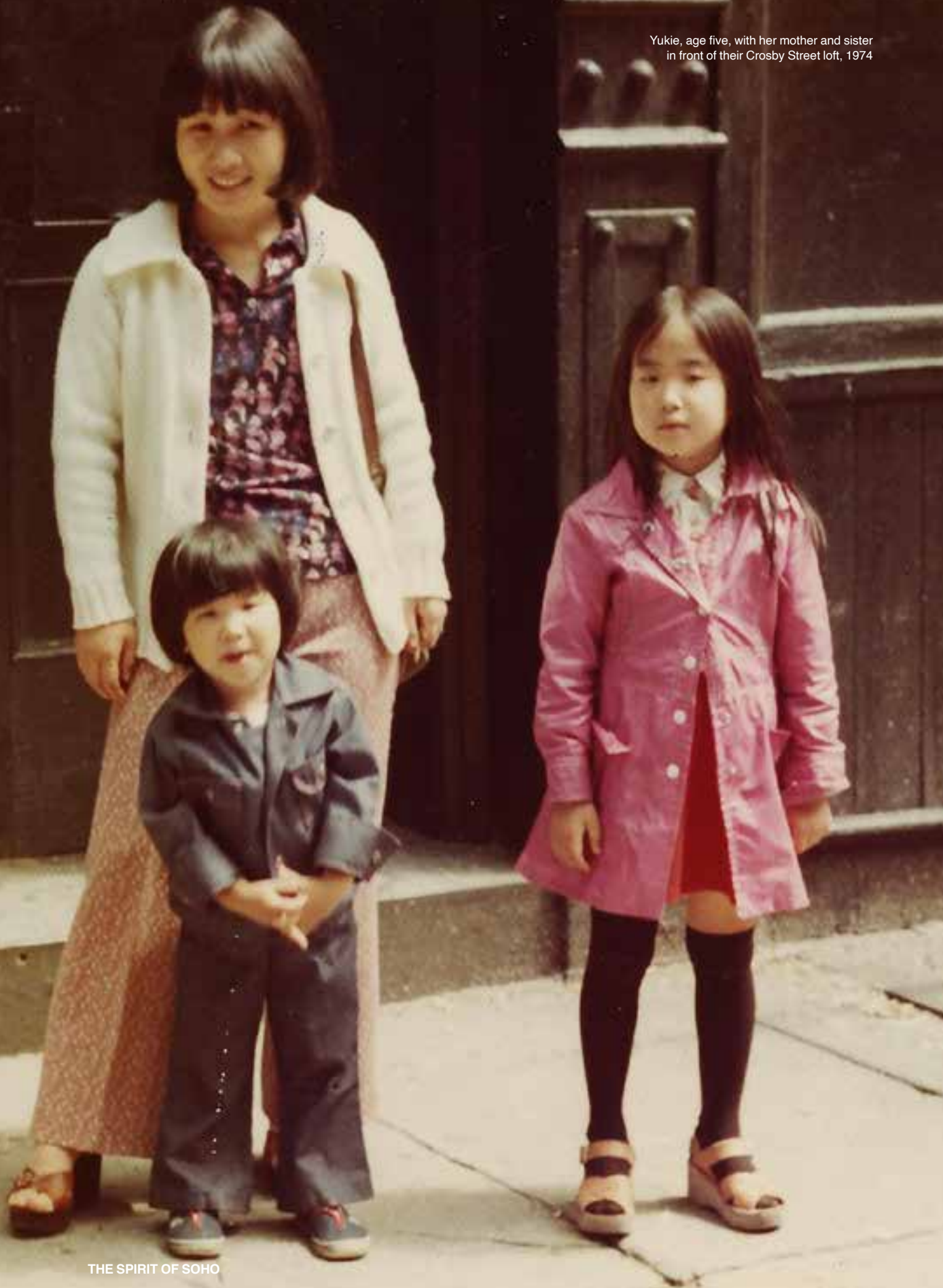
SoHo's rich past is massively influential. It's a blueprint for the future—and it doesn't stay alive on its own. No one knows this better than Yukie Ohta, a SoHo native and archivist who has dedicated her life to preserving the neighborhood's history through her nonprofit organization, the SoHo Memory Project.

She sat down with Carlo McCormick to talk about what makes SoHo so extraordinary, and why preserving its legacy is vital for securing its future.



SoHo Memory Project showcase

Yukie, age five, with her mother and sister  
in front of their Crosby Street loft, 1974



**Carlo McCormick:** When you're dealing with a memory project, you're trying to get people to know something about SoHo. What are you trying to get people to understand about what this neighborhood was and what it means?

**Yukie Ohta:** The SoHo Memory Project preserves the ethos as well as history of artists' SoHo. Its aura is part of what makes it unique and what makes people want to be here today. Moving forward, if we lose that ghost of SoHo past, SoHo will lose what makes it special. I don't want people to forget.

**Yeah. I always liked Jane Jacobs, who fought for SoHo. This was one of her big things, to get Robert Moses to not destroy SoHo with a superhighway and stuff. But she always talked about how you need the old ladies who sat on the stoop and told that story, because that's the identity of a neighborhood. Basically, we're a narrative. That's what it means to be a New Yorker, to know the stories.**

SoHo was once a small community. It was like a small town. We did have those old ladies watching. When I was a child in the 1970s I always felt safe because I knew that people had eyes on the street. I knew that if anything happened to me, people would catch me. Even though it was considered a bad neighborhood where cab drivers didn't want to take you, and your friends didn't want to come over to your house because it was such a seedy area.

**I mean, the same thing with raising my kid in New York was, your neighbors were looking out. And then this neighborhood got whiter. Those people don't pay attention in some ways. Like, when the rich people move in, they're all scared. But when it was a Puerto Rican and Dominican neighborhood, it was actually much better that way.**

**With old SoHo, we also think of painters, work pants and paint splatters. We had all these great young designers like Betsey Johnson coming out of here. Now it's a lot of really high-end shopping. But what's the nature of SoHo fashion? What do you think is consistent, and what's changed?**

SoHo definitely had its own style. It wasn't just about what you wore, but how you moved through the world, your gestures and how you spoke. There were definitely paint splatters. But there were also dancers and musicians, even though, when you think of SoHo, you usually think of painting. There was movement everywhere in the streets.

When the first fashion brands started opening up here, they were cutting-edge brands like Comme des Garçons, where the clothing was art, and art was clothing. I think those brands came here because there was so much creativity in SoHo. They, in turn, started attracting the larger brands. And then around 2000, luxury brands arrived. And suddenly, there were all these stores that I couldn't afford to shop in. I thought things must have plateaued. And yet the bar continued to be set higher and higher, until the pandemic. Now, I think we might be at a point of reset.



It is really interesting. I think about how the great opportunity of SoHo now is basically coming from abandonment. The light industry—this warehouse district—had basically ceased to function in a commercially viable way, and then development was supposed to happen, which didn't, thankfully. So there's this incredible opportunity. The rents are different now, of course, but do you feel there's potential now because of the abandonment, of the neglect of the fact that the stores got looted and all that stuff?

I definitely think that SoHo is at a turning point where it's going to have to reinvent itself yet again. Artists came and made it something post-industrial, then the fashion brands came and made it something else. I see all this talk of upzoning, the empty storefronts and the demographic changing.

Who knows what's going to happen? I feel like whoever makes those decisions, if they remember where SoHo comes from, it can be a very special place. It'll be something different. And that's fine. New York is always changing. But if they forget and just make it any old place, that'll be to the detriment of our neighborhood.

**Yeah. I think there's something in the DNA, which you think would survive, but it needs to be preserved.**

It does. There're these majestic buildings, but there are also the spirits that live in them. If you get rid of those ghosts, then it'll become very sterile. I don't want that to happen. I think cities need to change all the time, otherwise, they stagnate and die. But I think change should be planned responsibly and with respect to what was here before and to what makes our neighborhood special. I'm excited to see what's going to happen, I just hope it's not a wholesale erasure of what came before, but rather a building upon.

**You just reminded me about all the dancers who were here. Who was that woman who would do great dances on the roof in SoHo?**

Trisha Brown.

**Yeah. That stuff is so radical. It was about the space. Now they buy, like, a little corner of a building and it's called a loft. But these were floor-through places. That sense of space was ginormous.**

Space was everything. People came here from all over to be urban pioneers. Back then, it was like camping. There was no heat, there were no amenities—but there was lots of space, and that's all they needed to express themselves.

There was a magical moment here when people, if they had an idea, they gave it mass. They gave it weight. They gave it movement. They gave it sound. And they didn't care if you liked it, or if you wanted to buy it or even thought it was good. They just made it for the sake of making it.

**Back then, no one made any money off art. But there was a sense of, Oh, I'm going to get rich, exactly like Basquiat.**

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THAT'S REALLY WHAT THE  
MAGICAL SPIRIT WAS.  
—YUKIE OHTA**

The SoHo Memory Project,  
Mercer Street

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# SOHO MEMORY PROJECT

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When galleries arrived I suppose, things did change. But there was still that magical spirit. It's what draws people here. If we lose that spirit, I think SoHo will become unrecognizable.

**One of the great gifts you're catching, because things are disappearing, is that you're able to talk to a lot of old residents here—people who've been here for more than fifty years. What are a few things you think people need to know about SoHo, beyond the creativity?**

Well, being a child of SoHo was different from being an adult who came here from somewhere else. Growing up here, SoHo was all I knew. From birth, I was taught that anything is possible, and that if you wanted to create beauty or community, you were welcome here.

My peers and I have an optimism that allows us do whatever comes into our minds. We don't see restrictions that perhaps other people do. What I want people to see is that it's a wonderful way to bring someone up in the world.

**Are you able to convey this with the same ease and honesty to your kids as you think was a reality for you growing up, or is it more complex now?**

It's a little more complex. My daughter asked me if we're living in a dystopia. I was as honest as I could be. But I also told her that it's people who change the world. That if she puts her mind to it, she can make it something other than what she sees today. That it doesn't have to stay the same. I was able to tell her that and she believed me because it came from experience and from the heart. ■

*sohomemory.org*  
*@sohomemory*



# FUTURA AND TABATHA MCGURR:

## THE SPIRIT OF EVOLUTION

PHOTOGRAPHED BY RYAN MCGINLEY ON MERCER STREET



Windproof fluffy  
yarn fleece hoodie  
\$49.90

Ultra light down  
relaxed jacket  
\$69.90

All items are subject to availability.

Pioneering graffiti artist Futura's work has been just about everywhere. From canvases and walls, to clothing, Noguchi lamps and collaborations with brands like Comme des Garçons, Nike, Off-White, and, most recently, designing an activewear collection for UNIQLO, his iconic space-age-inspired art has graced a universe of culture. In conversation with his daughter, Tabatha McGurr, and cultural critic Carlo McCormick, the three discuss how SoHo's early days played a formative role in developing their style and how those styles have morphed over the years.

**Carlo McCormick:** Let's talk a bit about style, Lenny. You've had so many styles since I've known you. I remember that messenger kind of thing you were busting out. And then camo. All sorts of different obsessions.

Lenny McGurr: I have.

**And Tabatha, you've always had such incredible style. It's a little of your mom CC, a little Lenny.**

Tabatha McGurr: Yeah, the perfect merging of those two.

**Can you both talk about how you came up with your styles, how they changed and how downtown's been a part of that?**

L: Growing up in New York when I did, the only thing you really had were the clothes on your back and the shoes or sneakers on your feet. So, we did try very hard to look good. I used to get dressed up a lot and then I morphed in the '80s into a kind of b-boy character-slash-messenger. But I was always aware of New York as a kind of mecca of style.

T: Style-wise, between Lenny and my mother, it's kind of like a merging of the French mom and the New York thing. And then you have the Parisian high-fashion influence. I don't think I have a particular style. Some of the stuff I wear are hand-me-downs from when I was a kid that were his. I still wear the old classics and then drop a few luxury items into the mix to round it out.

**I'm curious, how did SoHo and downtown culture enter into your mindset, and how did it change your sense of style?**

T: Well, as a kid from Brooklyn, SoHo was always the city, so it was a very aspirational place to hang out for a young kid. I would tag along with my folks when they would come here to go shopping. And it was always seeing that there was almost like a catwalk here, just so many different varieties of style and different kinds of cultural looks. And so [it was] seeing people with avant-garde style and wanting to incorporate those things into my own young wardrobe. I dabbled with some experimental stuff. And that's why I say I kind of go back to the classics now.

L: You had transformative teenage years.

T: Yeah. And I would kick it down here a lot. From thirteen to my early twenties, I was definitely in SoHo and Nolita. Just being a little street rat. I did the SoHo thing for a minute.

**I'm sure you have so many memories of this neighborhood. I can't help but think that because you showed just up the street at Tony Shafrazi [gallery]. That was kind of like this moment in SoHo, like a busting open of a whole new youth culture in a very kind of old-school, conservative art world.**



- L: Tabatha mentioned how growing up in Brooklyn, SoHo was this aspirational spot. I grew up in Manhattan. I didn't know very much about the history of SoHo when I was growing up in the early '80s. We'd come down here, and we discovered what is the gold standard of the art world here in the city.

And yeah, having a show at Tony with Kenny Scharf was great for me at the time. And looking back, I remember some old photographs. I think I had the *Taxi Driver* look. I had the mohawk. I just ran through a lot of different looks, but I think I always tried to be almost borderline kooky. I can remember wearing hockey pants as shorts. There was some very eccentric stuff in uniforms.

**You had an interest in different types of uniforms?**

- L: I served in the Navy, so I was exposed to the actual military and all of the camouflages that come, not just with our own country, but globally, I saw what other countries offer. I was a collector of that. I still am. I have a really nice global camouflage assortment.

I've become someone that's less about overt branding and selling something—a name, a logo—and more just being comfortable with something pretty basic. So, after everything I've tried, I think I've regressed to a pretty simple style now.

**What I like about you working with UNIQLO, is that coming out of streetwear and then working a lot with some other brands, you've always been kind of like the trophy of the limited-edition world. And UNIQLO is so much more populist.**

- L: So much more.

**It's not limited-runs. With this, people just grab it and anyone can get it.**

- L: Yes. It's not just the fact that it's calm, basic, almost non-commercial in the sense of the look. But yeah, very much democratic, very much obviously affordable and available. And the fact that they're such a global brand, I think, is really amazing. It's really the thing I love about it. They can open doors to places you couldn't have access to. ■

@futuradosmil



Stills from The Spirit of SoHo campaign.  
Directed by Joe Bressler

**GROWING UP IN NEW  
YORK, WHEN I DID,  
THE ONLY THING YOU  
REALLY HAD WERE  
THE CLOTHES ON  
YOUR BACK AND THE  
SHOES OR SNEAKERS  
ON YOUR FEET. SO,  
WE DID TRY VERY  
HARD TO LOOK GOOD.  
—LENNY MCGURR**

THE SPIRIT OF EVOLUTION



Futura on his opening night at Fun  
Gallery in 1983, with Keith Haring.  
© Sophie Bramly



# JEFFREY DEITCH:

## THE SPIRIT OF THE SHOW

PHOTOGRAPHED BY RYAN MCGINLEY AT JEFFREY DEITCH, LOS ANGELES



Comfort jacket  
\$59.90

All items are subject to availability.

In the summer of 1974, Jeffrey Deitch arrived in SoHo. Fresh out of college and having serendipitously landed a job at the coveted John Weber Gallery, he built a name, or many names, for himself over the next several decades, in the midst of SoHo's creative golden age. Artist, art dealer, gallerist, curator, writer, advisor. Five years after he moved to SoHo, he received an MBA from Harvard, and then returned to the city to develop Citibank's Art Advisory Service, the first of its kind. He currently owns Jeffrey Deitch gallery in NY and LA.

Deitch is one of the most influential figures in the art world, largely responsible for creating the contemporary art market as it is today, and is known for his preternatural ability to sniff out superstar talent (he's helped propel the careers of Jean-Michel Basquiat, Keith Haring, Jeff Koons and Kehinde Wiley).

So, if anyone has stories, it's Jeffrey Deitch. Having not so much dipped a toe in SoHo's golden age as he dove headfirst into it, he has been witness to the creativity and chaos that ensued—and the careers that made history around the world. He sat down with Carlo McCormick to discuss how the spirit of SoHo extends far beyond the geographical boundaries of downtown New York.

**Carlo McCormick:** In 1974, you were working for John Weber. You've told me that you were hanging out with the artists around the loading dock then. It was a much more intimate scene. Can you describe the mid-'70s SoHo that you first experienced?

**Jeffrey Deitch:** Well, first, Carlo, it's so great to be here with you. We're old friends. We have a continuing conversation that's gone on for thirty years or so. We just pick up right where we left off. And so, it's a conversation that never ends. It remains very interesting, I hope, for other people as well.

So, yes, I arrived in SoHo in June of 1974, and it was a creative paradise. I wasn't aware that we were in almost a depression, that New York City was nearly bankrupt. It all seemed fine to me. What was so special is that it seemed like virtually every creative person in the entire country was right here within a ten, twenty block area in SoHo, a little bit extending to the Lower East Side down to Tribeca, a little bit into the [West] Village.

This is where everybody was. All you needed to do was go down to the street, hang out on the street corner, and you would meet, not only other people your age who had just come to New York City full of ambition to accomplish something, but you'd meet Andy Warhol. You'd meet Gordon Matta-Clark. The great artists and poets. I remember on our Rolodex at the John Weber Gallery, where I was a gallery assistant, under "Plumber" it listed Philip Glass. So if there was some leak in the bathroom in the gallery, you would call Philip Glass.

**He knew the sound of that [laughs]. And did you go to Fanelli's and stuff like that?**

Of course. There were only a few restaurants in SoHo at the time, beyond the factory workers' luncheonettes. There was the Spring Street Bar, the Broome Street Bar, Fanelli's, and of course, the famous FOOD started by Gordon Matta-Clark and a group of artist friends.

FOOD was remarkably influential, even though it had a short run. SoHo was not just about this geographic area of ten square blocks. It was a real state of mind. It was a set of cultural innovations that largely began here. In the decades afterwards, a storefront that was renovated down to the raw brick with hanging plants and a buffet with salads and cool people serving you, well, that's in cities all over the world now.

**And loft culture.**

I never saw a restaurant like that before FOOD. I think they invented it. They invented a whole menu, a whole set of decorations. That's an example of how this extended. So, in terms of gallery spaces, of how art is shown, of the clean white box, the loft space...that started here in SoHo. It's all over the world now, and we can just go on and on.



"Clay Pop" on view at Jeffrey Deitch New York, curated by Alia Williams. The exhibition documents the reinvention of ceramic sculpture by a new generation of artists.

Photo by Emily Chang







**I NEVER LOOK FOR JUST INDIVIDUAL, ISOLATED ARTISTIC TALENT, I LOOK FOR EXCITING CREATIVE COMMUNITIES. AND SOHO WAS ONE OF THE GREATEST CREATIVE COMMUNITIES EVER.  
—JEFFREY DEITCH**

A new approach to music came out of The Kitchen with Philip Glass and Steven Reich. These brilliant, innovative musicians. It's in literature as well. There's a whole downtown culture that became international downtown culture. And now, most of the young creative people don't live in SoHo anymore, but there's still some old timers here in rent-controlled lofts.

Of course, it's a luxury neighborhood now. And younger artists live in Bushwick, Brooklyn, or now, upstate in the Hudson Valley or neighborhoods in East Los Angeles. But it's all an extension of this downtown culture that began in SoHo.

**Yeah. And I mean, FOOD's almost the beginning of social practice when you think about restaurants.**

Absolutely. It can be viewed as a beginning of what is, academically termed, relational aesthetics. But now I think it's better to say social practice, where it's a restaurant as an art form, as an installation, that's so influential.

**Having experienced that, it kind of gives you a special radar for that energy. I think about when you did this show with all these young Japanese pop artists, or what you're uncovering all the time in LA.**

I love the way you use the term "radar." I think we both tune into that frequency. I refer to it as somehow having a compass. I don't know how I got it, but I have a compass that's set right to where the vanguard energy is happening. Even now that I'm nearly seventy. I'm lucky I still have it.

When I think of when I graduated from college, the first day I got out of school, I drove down to SoHo, parked here, and was able to get a job at the John Weber Gallery. But think of all the dozens of bad galleries I could have worked at. Somehow my compass brought me to the right place. And if you're in the right place, particularly in those days in SoHo, within six months, you meet everybody from Andy Warhol to all the other young artists your own age. I'm still friendly with many of those people I met in the first six months in SoHo.

**SoHo was everyone's North Star. What was it about the climate that, on one side, supported work that collectors might find problematic, and on the other hand, ignited some of the greatest phenomena?**

SoHo was a classic creative community. You can compare it to Montmartre in the first decade of the twentieth century or Montparnasse in the 1920s. Actually, going back to the Batignolles, the time of Manet at the beginning of the Impressionist movement. I never look for just individual, isolated artistic talent, I look for exciting creative communities. And SoHo was one of the greatest creative communities ever.

What was so special? Well, on a typical Saturday afternoon, there was Andy Warhol on the corner of Prince and West Broadway, giving out free copies of *Interview*. There'd be a bunch of young artists sitting on the loading docks across from the 420 West Broadway Gallery building. There'd be famous collectors and artists from Europe converging on the sidewalk. And I was amazed by its kind of European style because we didn't have that then. Both men, women and different generations. Basically, everyone was in a T-shirt, jeans and boots with cropped hair.

**Black pants, paint splatter.**

That's right.

**SoHo style really rapidly evolved from there, with the emergence of designers like Anna Sui and Betsey Johnson.**

That's right. And as we turned toward the '80s, there were the Japanese designers, like Issey Miyake, that a lot of the vanguard leaders wore, and you mentioned homegrown designers like Betsey Johnson. They were a very big presence. And Ingrid Sischy at *Artforum* helped unify the fashion avant-garde and the art avant-garde.

They really became a unified community. That was something that characterized the 1980s, not the '70s. In the '70s, it was a very small community. I wouldn't even say there was an art market around vanguard art. We had so few collectors at the John Weber Gallery. We basically had one major collector account, Panza, who would come once a year. And if, during his October trip, he didn't make a big purchase of around \$100,000, we were finished for the year.

We supplemented that with some sales at the Basel Art Fair and the Cologne Art Fair. But that was basically it. And the Vogels, the famous librarian postal worker couple, they would come in every Saturday and write me a check for fifty dollars on account.



**Yeah, they liked things pretty cheap also [laughs].**

It was a very, very different situation. There weren't very many people who were there to buy art. But everybody survived. The cost of living was very low. I remember I would almost never go to FOOD. It was too expensive. So I would go to the workers' luncheonette, where you could get the full blue plate special for ninety-nine cents. You didn't need to spend any more than that.

New York, then and now, has a lot of stimulating things to do that are free. Our circle, not only were we not taking taxis, we almost never took the subway, because you could walk everywhere. The only reason to go out of SoHo was to occasionally see a movie on 42nd Street or to go to the Museum of Modern Art.

**Right, or you were heading out of town.**

I very rarely headed out of town. There was something to do every single evening. The Kitchen had an incredible program. It was so dynamic in the mid-'70s. Rhys Chatham was music director. Robert Longo was program director for video. And I remember seeing all the great avant-garde artists there. Nam June Paik, the great musicians, Robert Ashley.

**I remember that video lounge. You could go in there, sit for four hours, and get an education.**

It was a phenomenal place.

**You were really good friends with Tony Goldman, who, I guess you could call him a real estate developer, but he was primarily a preservationist. And he had a real holistic sense about you developing in SoHo.**

Yes. There were some visionary people who helped SoHo become SoHo. One was Tony Goldman. He had a slogan: instead of "There goes the neighborhood," his slogan was, "Here comes the neighborhood." He was a specialist in neighborhoods where things had deteriorated and making them come back in an organic way.

And then there was George Maciunas with his Fluxhouses. He was one of the great Fluxus artists. A cantankerous, crazy character who created a number of Flux buildings. He would, in various means, get control of SoHo buildings and then sell floors to artists for very, very minimal amounts of

money. These Flux buildings still exist. And then there was Leslie and Lohman, who did the same early co-op-ing, and they would keep the ground floors. And the ground floor they kept in the building, right here at the corner of Grand and Wooster, is now the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay Art.

It's special individuals who helped make SoHo what it is. And these things never happen on their own. There have to be key people with a vision.

**When you talk about people with a vision, I can't help but think about the Art Parade you did through SoHo. It was such chaotic, carnivalesque energy, and so much fun. There was so much spirit of SoHo in that.**

The Art Parade is one of the great things that we did. We ended it when I had to close the gallery, when I became director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. But I'd say more than anything else, the question that's asked of me is: When are we going to have the Art Parade again? So, it's something we need to work on together to bring back. What I loved is that it was so democratic. One of the reasons we did it is, I would get so many inquiries from artists with great proposals, but we could only show fifteen projects a year in the gallery, if that. The Art Parade allowed us to say yes to everybody. Sure, you can participate. You just have to be able to carry it somehow. And at the last Art Parade, we had 1,000 participants.

**If I remember your entire first year of programming at Deitch Projects correctly, it was like, no white men. It was all people of color, really diverse and really rich, and that's long before the reckoning and the corrections that were facing the art world. So can you talk about your thinking with that and how this narrative is getting much richer and much more interesting as time goes on?**

Well, that was not done with any strategy. We just showed what we thought was strong and interesting. And I wasn't even fully aware of this until we had been operating for more than a year-and-a-half. Roberta Smith wrote a story about our program, and she had said that Jeffrey Deitch, after a year-and-a-half of operating the gallery, has yet to show a white male.

Isn't that interesting? And then we actually went on, some months after that, where we still hadn't shown a white male. But it wasn't like a strategic project. That's just who we liked. And when we



Dash Snow: A Community Memorial, Deitch Projects, 76 Grand Street, New York, July 23–August 15, 2009. Photo by Adam Reich, courtesy of Jeffrey Deitch







did start showing white men, they were pretty radical. Dash Snow. Barry McGee.

**That was some really radical energy in New York.**

We were very lucky to connect with this community with Dash Snow, Dan Colen and Ryan McGinley, who's involved with our project now. We did a big group exhibition connected with a book that we produced called "Live Through This," an homage to Courtney Love. There was an after-party that I didn't attend when we showed it in Miami, where I heard that Dash and Dan and friends created this hamster nest in a hotel room. They had shredded every phone book they could find. And then they just rolled around, went crazy. And there was a video of it. It's amazing.

So I then went to Dash and Dan, and I said, "Would you consider doing a version of this for our gallery?" They said, "Oh, no, no. Impossible. No, we can't do that." But I didn't give up and we kept talking. Finally, I got Dash to say yes. Dan was more difficult. He's more careerist—is this the right thing? He finally said yes, but it was a very specific set of rules. We could only shred the phone books by hand and only Whitepages.

We gathered a whole group of Pratt students, like twenty of them, and they sat all night shredding Whitepages. After about a week of this, and the show was going to open soon, we only had like three inches on the floor. I said to Dan, "We can't do this. Is it OK if we get another order of phone books and get one of those big mobile shredding trucks?" He said, "Oh, no, no, I don't want that."

It had to be a particular kind of shred. I said, "Dan, we don't have a choice. Would you let us try it?" So we brought the shredding truck. And of course, in one hour they shred enough and it's up to knee height. It looks amazing. Dan comes in, and of course, he loves it, because it's all uniform and perfect.

**Yeah, I like that in the chaos, there's something there.**

There are a lot of stories connected with that exhibition, which we called "Nest," which is the most radical project I ever did. Probably the most radical project that any SoHo gallery ever did.

**That makes you a little bit Disney-esque.**

So many people were comparing this to the Walter de Maria New York Earth Room, which is all perfectly manicured. They rake it every day, you know, make sure they weed it. This was just chaotic. We referred to it as, instead of the New York Earth Room, the New York Dirt Room [laughs].

**There was a lot of really strange energy in New York at that time, especially with that generation. We were dealing with 9/11.**

Right. 9/11 really affected people.

**Especially the young artist.**

It was right here. It looked like a war zone. It was a war zone. You know, walking around here looked like the historic photographs we see of the bombing of Dresden or London during the Blitz.

**Speaking of SoHo traumas, I was actually just sharing with John Jay, this book I picked up last night. I met these kids, a lot of them were out in LA doing the Kelly Clarkson show at that point, but it's something you'd love. It's called "SoHo Renaissance Factory." And it's fifty-three of these kids, and they're the ones who painted over all the boarded-up windows.**

Oh, that was really amazing.

**Yeah. And I remember talking to you during the pandemic and you were talking about how you were walking all the way from your place downtown every day and just looking at all this stuff. And that you were really inspired by this.**

Oh, it was incredible. Particularly walking down Wooster Street, basically every single storefront was boarded up or painted. And it really activated people. In front of every one of these murals, you had people posing, photographing. It was like an outdoor art exhibition. Very, very meaningful.

**It was very much in the spirit of SoHo. It was democratic. It was DIY, and it was very much also about Black Lives Matter. It was a real social awakening.**

Not so many of the creative people live in SoHo anymore, but SoHo is very, very central. All the train lines come here. And so whether you live in Brooklyn, Queens or New Jersey, SoHo is where people can converge. And they still do. ■

*deitch.com*  
*@jeffreydeitchgallery*

**THERE WERE SOME  
VISIONARY PEOPLE WHO  
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GOLDMAN. HE HAD A  
SLOGAN: INSTEAD OF 'THERE  
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HE WAS A SPECIALIST IN  
NEIGHBORHOODS WHERE  
THINGS HAD DETERIORATED  
AND MAKING THEM COME  
BACK IN AN ORGANIC WAY.  
—JEFFREY DEITCH**



# RYAN MCGIN- LEY:

## THE SPIRIT OF A GENERATION

SELF-PORTRAIT BY RYAN MCGINLEY ON THE ROOFTOP OF 100GRAND DANCE



Extra fine merino  
crew neck sweater  
\$39.90

All items are subject to availability.



Ryan McGinley is a photographer whose coming-of-age in SoHo in the late '90s and resulting iconic work captured the spirit of a generation. At 25-years-old, he was the youngest artist ever to have a solo show at the Whitney Museum, titled “The Kids Are Alright.” Now, decades into a career documenting everything from hedonistic youth culture and road trips across the American landscape to celebrity portraits and celebrations of queer culture, he spoke to Carlo McCormick about the spirit of his generation growing up together in downtown Manhattan, how it informed his sense of style, and what he learned along the way.



Photo by Josh Garcia

**Carlo McCormick:** Ryan, you’ve photographed a slew of people, with probably more than a forty-year age difference between all of the downtown people. What sense of SoHo style do you get collectively from the people you’ve worked with?

**Ryan McGinley:** SoHo style is a little bit street, a little bit sophisticated. It’s a little rough around the edges. There’s a chicness to SoHo, but you know, it’s not too fancy. I think it also has an attitude from people who live in the neighborhood who, I would hope, know its history and how it’s developed over the years, especially within the arts. That’s important to me.

When I was photographing Futura this morning, I said, “what was your first show here?” And he said, “me and Kenny Scharf had a show at Tony Shafrazi in 1979.” And I already knew that, you know. Part of my job as an artist is to know about the history of New York art, especially the street art that developed here. I think about people like Jean-Michel Basquiat showing at Annina Nosei, I think about Willem Dafoe and the Wooster Group. I think about amazing films like *After Hours* by Scorsese that were filmed down here. All the things that make a neighborhood beautiful.

**That just reminded me. When I first met you, you were just a kid out of art school. And you knew all this stuff. You knew things I’d written—obscure things that were long out of print. And as a student, you worked in the school library. Was that part of what coming to New York was about? To figure out this history and lineage that you see? You know way more than most people did.**

Being a kid from New Jersey, you get a bad rep. If you come to the city, there’s a chip on your shoulder for being bridge-and-tunnel. You have to prove yourself. I think it was important for me to know the history of New York, the people who came before me, and how they developed their art careers.

And really, just as a person, I really wanted to succeed as an artist. I wanted to see the blueprint for how other artists made their careers. So I did a lot of research. When I was at Parsons, I worked in the library and was able to research people whose art I just love and study their path and see how they made it, how they were able to support themselves as artists.

**When I met you, you were such a cute young kid and it was a whole group of people. It was a new generation arriving in New York. You all had a sense of style, but you weren’t overblowing it like a lot of kids. You were a little more buttoned down, but definitely had a real youthful kind of complexion, the way you were all presenting yourselves. You’re very fashion conscious but not overly fashion-forward. Can you describe how that identity was formed and how you guys were thinking about your presentation of style?**

It was always important for me to mix the subcultures I was involved in, like graffiti, skating and queer subculture. To bring in a little pizzazz from the queer side, some street from skating and graffiti, and to mix those and wear them proudly and sort of develop within the crew I rolled with. We weren’t scared to take fashion risks.

IT WAS ALWAYS IMPORTANT FOR ME TO MIX THE SUBCULTURES I WAS INVOLVED IN, LIKE GRAFFITI, SKATING AND QUEER SUBCULTURE. TO BRING IN A LITTLE PIZZAZZ FROM THE QUEER SIDE, SOME STREET FROM SKATING AND GRAFFITI AND TO MIX THOSE AND WEAR THEM PROUDLY AND SORT OF DEVELOP WITHIN THE CREW THAT I ROLLED WITH. WE WEREN'T SCARED TO TAKE FASHION RISKS.  
—RYAN MCGINLEY

So we were just talking about Kunle [Martins]. I always loved him when he was full-on [his persona] Earsnot. He was in a really homophobic world of graffiti, and he'd be like, "Yeah, I'm a fag. You got a problem with that?"

I always thought that was an interesting evolution of queer culture, which kind of came out of downtown. To me, queer culture came about when a generation of people came of age having experienced punk. It wasn't like fern bars and lip syncing to some old Judy Garland track, it was a much more aggressive thing. So how did you inherit this history of New York? How is that different from the '90s?

When I came out in the late '90s, there weren't a lot of subcultures that I identified with as a queer person. But then someone told me that one of my friends that I skated with, who was a graffiti writer named Earsnot, was queer. And I almost didn't believe them because he presented so masc.

So I went over to Astor Place and said, "Hey, someone told me that you're gay." And he was like, "Who's asking?" And I said, "I am, because I am also." He was like, "Oh my God." And we formed a friendship. Twenty-five years later, we're still so bonded. But it was amazing. He was interested in all the subcultures I was interested in, like graffiti and skateboarding. And this was before the internet, so I didn't have that much information about the groups that came before me.

All the Kenny Scharfs and the Basquiats and Keith Harings...at the time, I knew about their art, but I didn't know about their lives. To discover that later, yeah, they really laid down the blueprint for the history of New York and places like CBGB or the Mudd Club. Queerness was basically born out of punk. But I think that we were the next generation to evolve it.

Now that there's so much information out there, I really think the first queer generation in New York was the Beats. Maybe it was Ginsberg and John Giorno, and it all happened at the Cedar Tavern or something like that. And then it evolved to CBs and the Mudd Club, and then, you know, we landed in the '90s. I always think, it only took twenty years for it to get to where we're at—where sort of everyone's queer. ■

As an artist, you've been really engaged in the soundtrack to the zeitgeist. You always paid a lot of attention to bands and music from New York. How would you describe the soundtrack to SoHo, downtown, to what's come out of New York specifically?

You know, a lot of times I walk down Lafayette Street where David Bowie lived and where he passed. When I walk by the Puck Building, I always say a little prayer for him. I just think about Bowie making music in SoHo and something beautiful happening in that building. One of the best musicians of our lifetime, and his presence is still there. ■

@ryanmcginleystudios



Photo by Josh Garcia



# CARLO MCCORMICK AND TRISTAN HUGHES-FREELAND:

## THE SPIRIT OF DOWNTOWN STYLE

PHOTOGRAPHED BY RYAN MCGINLEY AT CAFE GITANE



On Carlo, left:  
Stretch selvedge slim fit jeans  
\$49.90

Over shirt jacket  
\$59.90

On Tristan, right:  
Ultra stretch skinny fit jeans  
\$49.90

Low gauge ribbed crew  
neck sweater  
\$39.90

All items are subject to availability.



Carlo McCormick is a cultural critic and curator who's lived in SoHo for decades and is the author of numerous books and art monographs. His writing has appeared in *Aperture*, *Artforum*, *Vice* and more. He sat down with his son, Tristan Hughes-Freeland, a rhetorical artist and recent graduate of The Cooper Union, to discuss how the mashup of downtown style has all but been rid of dichotomy, how SoHo has evolved from one generation to the next, and the impact of gallery spaces that still carry the freewheeling, visceral creative spirit of the neighborhood.



**Carlo McCormick:** I thought this would be a nice opportunity to talk about style and how you developed your own look over the years. I've seen you rock the thrift stores, a bit of limited-edition culture, and the street stuff. And you've modeled, so you have fashion in there. How do you build your look and form of identity and self-expression through the clothes you wear?

**Tristan Hughes-Freeland:** Considering the thrift and limited-editions and stuff like that, it all seems rather limited to some degree when it wears throughout time. Or taking something really nice and totally beating it to the bone, it becomes something of its own. And then creating an assemblage of those items together. It's rather performative in a weird way as well, dressing for one's self, but also to be perceived on the outside, especially in SoHo.

**Right. It's a personal expression, but it's very much a public one as well.**

Yeah, the most public.

**Is it kind of a mash up where it's a little bit of high culture, a little bit of vernacular stuff in there, as well? I mean, you mix it a bit. You'll throw something in where it'll be like, that's really top and designer. And it could almost be something from a department store.**

I think the dichotomy in the city has been thrown out the window for the most part. It's mashed together. Things are seemingly as low as they are seemingly high. In a lot of instances, there's a huge blend, and I think people are matching each other in that way. Everyone's also standing out in some way. But because everyone's standing out so much, everyone blends together at the same time.

**What does it mean to be a New York kid, but at the same time, be a downtown kid? Is it a different vibe than growing up in Queens or uptown?**

It's certainly a different vibe. I think it's more noticeable in the way people carry themselves or how they dress. I think those things are diminishing, but still what's underlying is how people take care of their clothes. The uptown shoe is the clean white sneaker. But coming downtown, it gets beat up because the trash is sprawled out over the sidewalks. And, of course, not upkeeping the quality of it is a statement in and of itself.

Growing up downtown, there's certainly been a huge shift over the past couple of years. What is uptown compared to downtown? It's kind of a sandwich of notions of class and so many other things. But how people dress removes that entirely.

**I always thought downtown had a better sense of fun and playfulness about clothing. This is kind of the spirit of SoHo. But let's think about that, because we lump all of downtown together. I mean, people call Chelsea downtown, people call Tribeca downtown. How did growing up in SoHo function for you?**

SoHo always felt like a no man's land. At night, it would become our playground, because it'd be so empty. Nobody would walk the streets. We could run around the sidewalks, run around the streets, and do whatever. It was completely devoid of the same performativity that we would find ourselves in during the daytime, in the same outfits.

**I've always loved that about SoHo, even back in the old days. It definitely never really had nightclubs. For all the things SoHo had, it was never a party spot. Desertion and emptiness has always been a nice thing about it. Late at night, it's just you and the rats out, basically.**

**Did you ever look at the stores? Because SoHo runs from Prada and some really high-end stuff to more youthful clothes, like what UNIQLO can do.**

Yeah. I would peruse, I would window shop and note what's on trend or what people are looking at. I'm a huge fan of the gray man theory, where one attempts to blend in to avoid sticking out. That's something about SoHo that's turned on its head, because everyone is matching each other to some degree, or outdoing each other.

**When I was young, it was really cool that Canal Jeans was there. It was almost thrift. It was really cheap. They had a lot of Army surplus and all of Broadway and all of Canal was filled with Army surplus stuff and camo. But by the '80s, because we weren't in wartime anymore, it was just a strange, empty nostalgia.**

**But Canal Jeans took T-shirts, jeans, everything, and just threw them in big vats of black dye, because we all wanted to wear black clothes. That was kind of the artist's downtown or punk scene. Everyone wore black so we could go there. And it was not easy to find black clothes.**



**You couldn't go to a department store because no one wore black. They had maybe one black suit for a funeral.**

And now, we're in such a vibrant neighborhood where there are murals on almost every corner and people are posing in front of them. Underpinning all of those moments is sort of a posed generation where our clothes highlight ourselves and are then flattened. And then we reinsert ourselves into the environment and SoHo is the backdrop, which gets re-flattened again through social media.

It's an infinite collaging of these items onto ourselves, then ourselves onto the backdrop of the city and whatever else exists in the city, just to collage back onto itself.

**Before there were restaurants, before there were stores, there were artists living here creating art spaces. There's a great history in the '60s. And in the '70s, much more radical, rigorous and formal work was done here.**

**But for me and my youth, I love the '80s, when all of a sudden, all those orthodoxies just fell apart. You had people like Keith Haring and Jean-Michel and Futura and Kenny Scharf doing shows. And I was like, whoa, a new generation arrived. These were the kids who were told, "Don't watch so much TV, it'll rot your mind." And then they were just exploding their rotten minds upon our culture with this really young and energetic thing. And I don't know if you feel traces of that history here?**

Definitely. Traces relating to the whole distinction between artist-run galleries and these commercial galleries.

**What I loved about SoHo as an art district versus what happened in Chelsea, for example, is that it's really important when galleries are at street level, because of the energy and the dynamics of the street, even if they're not coming into the gallery. The art needs to be right near the street, because it keeps the art honest, you know? You've got people walking through because they want to grab a bit of air conditioning on the way or something.**

You need people to pour in and feel something when they're walking into a space they have no idea about. But you also need the familiar faces to pour out the doors of such a space. When it reaches out to the sidewalk during a show, that feels much more like an event and a happening than just going up for an appointed moment.

Oh, yeah. And then the thing is, when you've got an art district and all these galleries, there's a whole lot of the art world that can't get into that space. SoHo always had this crazy kind of theatre artist who would come here to get attention. You know, they would do weird murals back before there was muralism. They would do performances on the street.

**There's one dealer, Gracie Mansion, who later became an East Village dealer, who couldn't have a gallery in SoHo. So she would do these limo shows where she'd rent a stretch limo and sell art out of the trunk. I don't think it's a coincidence that, when Jean-Michel Basquiat was coming up, he was doing the same graffiti in SoHo as he was in the South Bronx. He was selling postcards on the street in SoHo. He knew who he wanted to see it.**

So, even if you were shut out of that world, eventually, by the early '80s, we all got to take over SoHo for a minute. There was always some kind of crazy thing. I loved when David Wojnarowicz went to the legendary 420 building on Broadway. The superstructures of art market power, Leo Castelli and Mary Boone, were in there. And he went into the stairwells and stenciled burning houses, empty plates with forks—social issues—and then poured like 50 gallons of cow's blood down the stairs and ran. There were a lot of things that happened in SoHo which weren't really official SoHo events.

So many of the gimmicks of the past that we look up to have sort of been neglected, if not reduced to a status of being just that—a gimmick. But there's such a power to gimmicks. ■

**WHAT IS UPTOWN COMPARED TO DOWNTOWN? IT'S KIND OF A SANDWICH OF NOTIONS OF CLASS AND SO MANY OTHER THINGS. BUT HOW PEOPLE DRESS REMOVES THAT ENTIRELY. —TRISTAN HUGHES-FREELAND**

# NICOLA VASSELL:

## THE SPIRIT OF CREATION

PHOTOGRAPHED BY RYAN MCGINLEY AT NICOLA VASSELL GALLERY



Extra fine merino  
crew neck sweater  
\$39.90

Wide pleated skirt  
\$39.90

All items are subject to availability.



Gallerist and art advisor Nicola Vassell moved from Jamaica to SoHo when she was sixteen—and the rest is history. From working closely with Jeffrey Deitch for a number of years to becoming director at Deitch Projects and Pace Gallery, she's now at the helm of her eponymous gallery in Chelsea. Vassell has built a career off constant innovation and pushing the future of the art world forward. And her magnetic presence extends beyond the gallery world—in 2014, she founded an art consultancy and curatorial agency called Concept NV, through which she manages Alicia Keys and Swizz Beatz' Dean Collection.

She spoke to Carlo McCormick about the transformation of downtown style—including her own—and how downtown New York's worldview is now being reflected in the evolution of the world at large.



With Kathy Grayson, Whitney Biennial, 2006



With Dash Snow, Miami, 2007

**Carlo McCormick:** Let's start with yourself. You have these SoHo roots because you worked for Jeffrey for a number of years and you had your own apartment-slash-gallery, then you worked at Pace for a number of years. And now, you have your own gallery. I want to ask you about the sensibility that you get from SoHo and if it's particular to that place, or if that's something that's more pervasive throughout our cultural world.

**Nicola Vassell:** My life downtown informed everything. I mean, I came straight from the island of Jamaica when I was sixteen, about to turn seventeen, and moved straight to downtown New York. So it was very much the convergence of becoming an adult and bringing on board all those lessons.

Downtown taught me everything that I know about New York. It implicates everything I have done since. The gallery there on Greene Street, my time at Pace, and of course, now. I suppose one could put it as always looking for the edge, always looking for the visionary aspect, which was solidified by my relationship with Jeffrey. It's that downtown spirit of always pushing the rough and rugged.

**I do also think your Jamaican roots play such a large part in your personality and style. I'm curious, how does that merge with the sophistication of SoHo and edgy downtown?**

The transformation of downtown is as much a neighborhood tale as it kind of also characterizes my own journey. In the early '90s, it still had very much a village vibe. I would see the same people walking down the street and the same, very specific shops. It was very clearly bohemian and laidback, from the skater boys at Supreme on Lafayette to all the life down there. And then the transformation started to happen. The swankier shops moved in, a different kind of neighbor moved into the loft, and so on. It was a metamorphosis in a sense. As much as downtown changed, so did I.



With Jeffrey Deitch, Art Basel Miami, 2006



With Kehinde Wiley, Studio Museum in Harlem, 2008.  
Photo by Alex Quesada for *The New York Times*



With Jeffrey Deitch, Miami, 2008.  
Photo by Alex Quesada for *The New York Times*



Soho exhibition loft, Greene St, 2009

IT DIDN'T REALLY MATTER  
WHO YOU WERE AS LONG AS  
YOU WERE DELIVERING THE  
GOODS, AS LONG AS YOU  
COULD HOLD YOUR OWN  
WITH THE OTHER CREATIVE  
FORCES ON THE SCENE.  
—NICOLA VASSELL

**Can you talk about how that happened in terms of your own personal style?**

With downtown, you always had to come with something interesting. It's something to watch now, to see how people prefer a very subdued presence out in the world of the streets of New York. When I came, the whole effort was to stand out, so you were supposed to wear something with an edge—some interesting element. Always, in a sense, wearing your creativity on your chest, on your sleeve. That was a marker. That was what one was expected to do if one was part of that community. And nowadays, I think life itself has leveled everything out. I want ease. I want simplicity. But now, you know, I look for the edge in that.

**One of the things I've always loved about New York in general, and some neighborhoods more than others, is that it's a bit of a polyglot where people from all over, all sorts of different cultures, collide. And at the same time, we have to admit that there was a bit of hegemony in the art world because it was sort of a white flight. Can you talk about the transformation and challenges associated with this evolution?**

You know, if we use downtown as the fulcrum—and the people who populated the scene back then will understand exactly what I'm saying—race wasn't even an issue. It didn't really matter who you were as long as you were delivering the goods, as long as you could hold your own with the other creative forces on the scene. Therefore, what you found was that you just had the best of the best, and they were from everywhere. You had Black, white, Asian.

I think, because of the way society has transformed and the pressures that have been inflicted upon us, stress and density on the planet and, consequently, our communities, people now have to tribalize to survive. It's one of the consequences, but it's a transformation. Is it for good or bad? Who knows? I mean, we just always have to strive to be better.

**I agree with all that. It's good to hear you say it. When we start thinking of a broader program of diversity and inclusivity, it's interesting because it's all about the stories we tell. I think we're telling a richer story now. I don't know how you feel about that now, as a dealer in art, but how do we tell these other stories? And are they still the same stories?**

The body politic now really needs some clear affirmations, in terms of what the future will look like and what history really means. For too long, our little downtown petri dish was a thing unto its own. But in the wider world, there was definitely a sense that things were too monolithic and therefore societies are being called upon now to address that and kind of recontextualize things. It's quite profound and certainly a challenge on what one calls history itself. ■

*nicolavassell.com*  
*@nicolavassellgallery*



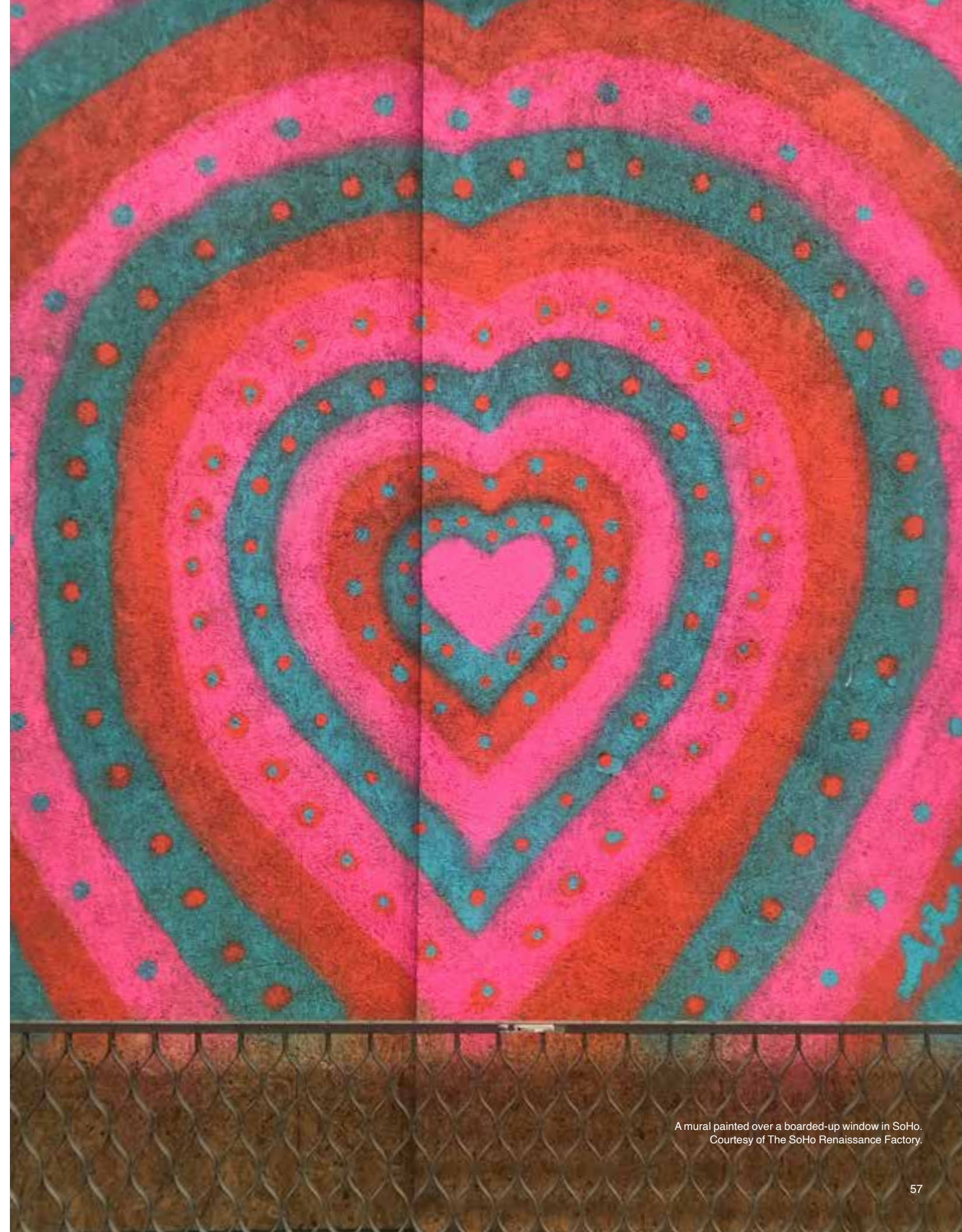


# RADICAL JOY

ESSAY BY CARLO MCCORMICK  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY KURT BOONE

We have, all of us everywhere, been through heartbreaking hard times, and have reason to fear that they will still go on. The narrative of our unfolding history is punctuated and dramatically changed by all manner of plagues and pestilence, floods, fires, wars, disasters, injustices and atrocities. We are never alone in the trauma of our suffering, fear, outrage, isolation and grief, but we are perhaps even more together in the love, hope and empathy that is borne of these troubles. Having spent my entire adult life, and much of my youth, among the artists of SoHo, downtown New York and far beyond, I have learned to heed and appreciate their uncanny skills as alchemists, able to somehow transform horrors into joys, or to transmogrify the unfathomable into another kind of nonlinear and abstract logic. This is what the spirit of SoHo means to me—an impossible grace in the abject lows and outrageous indulgences alike, and the kind of perseverance of personal vision and collective legacy it takes to transcend, or simply survive, these ever-changing times.

In this age of uncertainty and anxiety, facing at once the long-overdue issues of social justice, the existential dilemma of climate change and the ongoing assault of the COVID virus, the mental and physical health of the body politic is quite simply unwell. There is no telling yet how this will be registered by the creative receptors among us and, ultimately, change the arts. There is no one cure for what ails us, but there will be many. Certainly there are some very heavy problems to deal with, and we trust the arts to always be a voice for the voiceless and the conscience of many. If everything is now political, our well-being and survival—art too—must play an active role in our culture and politics. However, when we come to this need for change and the pain it involves, let us never neglect the curative power of play.



A mural painted over a boarded-up window in SoHo.  
Courtesy of The SoHo Renaissance Factory.





**Top**  
"The Colorful Eyes" by Daniel Aron

**Bottom Left**  
Art by Irena Kenny

**Bottom Right**  
Art by Garon

The rituals of grieving and those of an intoxicating, ecstatic and overflowing joy are not easy bedfellows but together they constitute the kind of carnivalesque inversions fundamental to real change—a way of celebrating and savoring life in the mortal darkness.

Some thirty-five years ago a friend of mine, Tom Solomon, the son of art patron Horace Solomon and art dealer Holly Solomon, a true child of SoHo, asked me to curate a show for the downtown artists of our generation with him. He called the show "Brave New World," which didn't really make total sense to me until he told me how, walking down the streets of SoHo as a little kid with the great anarchist and founding figure of SoHo, Gordon Matta-Clark, a rat ran across their path and Gordon told him: "It's a brave new world, Tom." The Spirit of SoHo lies in the heart of that rat (they live here after all, most of us are just renting) and the wisdom that an artist can find in such unexpected encounters. I suppose I've been following that rat, like all the children following that great rat-catcher, The Pied Piper of Hamelin, ever since the artist Christy Rupp wheat-pasted long rows of rats along the walls of downtown Manhattan during the garbage strike of 1979 to make us aware of the behavioral and migratory patterns of our perpetual neighbors. I never lost sight of that rodent, be it in the inflatable rats that workers erect to protest their unfair employers or the rat's constant visage in the more recent global phenomena of street art with artists like Blek Le Rat in France and Banksy in England.

To navigate the myriad unpredictable array of obstacles the city streets throw at us is a particular kind of urban choreography, as the urban visionary, activist and protector of SoHo Jane Jacobs described: "The ballet of the good city sidewalk never repeats itself from place to place, and in any one place is replete with new improvisations." It is the

ballet we all perform here, whether jumping from a rat, looking into the windows of a storefront gallery or store, or running into a friend. It is the dance that the great, radical anarchist Emma Goldman would have meant when she reportedly said: "If I can't dance, I don't want to be a part of your revolution." It is ancient and contemporary, from the Dance of Death in which people took to dancing in the streets during the Black Death, to Keith Haring's Party of Life (staged annually from 1984-86, during the AIDS epidemic), a step and a twirl in the very best of times, as in the very worst of times.

SoHo, whatever or wherever it may be—or is yet to become—is still a magical stage for us to trip the light fantastic. Here, the irreverent mischief of Fluxus once cavorted, Trisha Brown staged her landmark "Roof Piece" in 1971 with dancers scattered along various SoHo rooftops and a generation of artists like Keith Haring, Jean-Michel Basquiat and Kenny Scharf, who were far more comfortable on the dance floor than in the art world web, transformed the promise of SoHo into a new landscape of youth. It's where Jeffrey Deitch ran the uproarious Art Parade for three consecutive years, from 2005 to 2007, where young urban skaters continue to reimagine the architecture of the city, and where, last year, a spontaneous and organic movement of social consciousness, positivity and healing, rooted in street art and activism, blossomed as a new generation took to the boarded-up stores of SoHo following the mass looting, transforming plywood canvases into something I can only call the spirit of SoHo. ■

*Photos by @kurtboonephotography  
kurtboonebooks.com*





Jeff Koons, Balloon Dog (Orange), 1994-2000 © Jeff Koons, Photo: Tom Powel Imaging, Courtesy of Mnuchin Gallery.

# JEFF KOONS:



## THE SPIRIT OF CONNECTION

PHOTOGRAPHED BY OMI TANAKA AT JEFF KOONS'S STUDIO

This fall, UNIQLO is releasing a collection of UT T-shirts designed by Jeff Koons, one of the most famous artists in the world today. From elevating everyday objects to groundbreaking larger-than-life sculptures dripping with high-octane color to vibrant paintings and memorable installations, Koons’s career spans decades of exploring commodity, spectacle and the metaphysical.

He spoke to Sarah Hoover, art historian, writer and former director at Gagosian, where she built her career for almost fifteen years. Together, Sarah and Jeff discussed the transformative power of art, Koons’s personal ideologies, and his next endeavor to be even more global, on the heels of his upcoming exhibition in Doha, Qatar.

**Sarah Hoover:** The myth of Jeff Koons is so highly developed. When I started in the gallery world, there were these legendary stories told about you: front desk assistant at MoMA and Wall Street broker selling art about commodity culture to the really rich guys you used to work with.

**I don’t know how much of it is made up and how much of it is true, but how much of that myth is intentional? Do you care about your own perception? In my mind, everything about you is meticulous and perfect and planned but, maybe, you’re actually completely insouciant and don’t care at all. That’s what I’m curious about.**

**Jeff Koons:** I would have to say I’m aware of some of the mythology that, over the years, has surrounded myself and my work. I can understand how some of it came about. I was involved in sales at the Museum of Modern Art. Then, I became a broker. My work deals with the readymades. I work with everyday objects. But in many ways, I feel as though I’ve been a circular object forced into a triangular-type hole. It’s not a perfect fit. I think people were interested in commodity culture and writing about it and would try to tie my work to, maybe, certain perceptions of that culture.

I’ve only ever been interested in “becoming,” and communicating people’s sensations and feelings, and really, the power of art. How art can help us transcend and better our lives.

**Something that has been really powerful about the art world, actually, is the community that it’s brought, I’m sure, to your life, and to mine. It’s made up of some of the most eclectic and disruptive and brilliant thinkers. Of course, there are so many barriers to entry for so many people like money, skin color and education being just a few.**

**When you were getting started in your career as part of the artist scene in SoHo and with so many legends, what was it like to be emerging? Do you think it’s the way that it is to be an emerging artist today, or did it feel very special?**

I come from a rural background. I grew up in Pennsylvania. When I went to art school, I really didn’t know anything about art. I had my first art history lesson in art school and my life changed. I realized that art so easily would connect us to all the different human disciplines: philosophy, psychology, theology.

I continued studying art. I moved to Chicago and studied with the Chicago Imagists, and eventually, I moved to New York. The only thing I ever had an interest in—and my generation, the people that I was surrounded with—was the continuation of the idea of the avant-garde.

That we can transform who we are and who we can become. Not only that, but you can also change the world around you. This idea of experiencing life and feeling the power of what we can become—that’s what I picked up from the generation before us, like Rauschenberg, Warhol, and Lichtenstein, and the generation before them, Duchamp and Picabia—even as far back as Leonardo.

Everybody is interested in the same thing. It’s about giving it up to something other than the self, really finding interest and curiosity in life. Then, contributing to the best of your abilities with your own generation. I really enjoyed being a part of mine.

**That’s very positive. I suffer from imposter syndrome that is really deeply ingrained. Have you ever had moments where you’ve lacked that confidence in yourself? Are there practices you have to stay in that strong, positive, creative head-space so that you can keep creating your art?**

My first day of art school, we went to the Baltimore Museum of Art. When I walked around the museum, I realized I didn’t know anybody. I didn’t know who Bracques was. I didn’t know Matisse’s work. I didn’t know Cézanne. I would have known Picasso, maybe Dalí, but that really would have been it.

Then, we went back to school and we had our first art history lesson. They were telling us, “Look around, because only a third of you are still going to be here two years from now.” I realized that I survived that moment. A lot of people don’t survive that moment. They become very, very intimidated by art. They think that you must bring something to the table. This is life in general. They feel like you have to be prepared for something, have more knowledge about something, to participate in a dialogue other than your own past.

That’s not the case. You have your own history. It can’t be anything other than what it is. If we can only learn to accept ourselves, what our past is, and that we are perfect for where we are at this moment, it can’t be any different than what it is. It’s about this moment forward.



I accepted my limitations. I learned how to accept myself but continue to try to become the best artist I can be, the best human being I can be. It's that desire to participate, to be a part of the whole, that is really what has guided me. I just want to be part of the dialogue, and to be as generous as I can be. You can't do anything more than that.

**I think something people assume about you from the scale of your work—we touched on this briefly a second ago—is that it's about consumerism or the meaning of money, and maybe a critique of business and how the art world commodifies something, even as pure as sculpture. But your work is strikingly not elitist. I mean, what is more appealing than something like a balloon dog to practically everyone in the world, right? How do you reconcile the elitism of the art world that we all participate in with your personal ethics that focus on the universal?**

I think there are misconceptions that happen about people's work. John Dewey explains life in this way. Life is as simple as just a single-cell organism interacting with its environment and the effect that environment has on that organism. Then in return, the effect the organism has on the environment. That's communication. That's the life experience. That's what I'm involved with.

I'm involved with trying to have a dialogue about our internal life, our internal being, and the external world. I work with very plasticized-type objects, very three-dimensional, external objects. Art is not in these objects. Where art is found is within our own being.

The objects that we interact with, the things we come across in life, they can stimulate us. They can excite us, but that's not the art. The art is when we have an essence of our own potential. That's the art. If you're in a museum, that walks out of the room with you. If you're at a concert, it leaves with you when you leave that concert. Art is the essence of your own potential.

**Money is a taboo topic and I'm sorry that I keep touching on it, but you are undoubtedly one of the most successful artists of all time. I'm sure that your approach to making things shifted as you had more affluence in your own life.**

**I know you've been willing to spend it all for your art and do anything it took to make your projects become reality, which is really incredible and singular. I wonder if money and your access to it has impacted your interest in making things that are more accessible to more people, like something that could be bought at a museum gift shop?**

I have to say that money never came into the equation. I always wanted to be able to support myself, have experiences in life, be able to take care of myself and make my work. The idea, the pursuit of money, that wasn't what you found joy in. You find joy in making something powerful that you'd look at it and say, "Wow."

That's always been my interest. I ended up making things that would deal with the sense of perfection to a certain degree—and of quality. It's because I came to realize that one of the ways I could communicate trust to the viewer was to use craft and detail.

In dealing with the details, similarly, maybe you'll hear about Steve Jobs and about how the inside of the computer and the inside of the phone, everything is designed with this sense of perfection. I always had the same interests. It was that if anybody ever looked at one of my pieces, looked at the bottom of a work, or looked at something from a different angle, they would never be let down. They would realize that I cared about that experience. That's the way that you can communicate to the viewer that you care about them.

In the end, we don't care about objects. They're inanimate. They have nothing to do with us. What is relevant is that we are biological beings and that we're able to continue to be, in some manner, supportive of each other—that we can continue to adapt and to flourish.

**I think what you're saying is so particularly UNIQLO in a way, because I know that their purpose is to create the highest quality of experience for the greatest number of people on Earth. That's direct language from them.**

**I know that a real goal for them is to improve people's lives, from their products to their stores, to the way they entrench themselves within local communities. I believe that philosophy is called LifeWear.**

**What you were just describing feels very much at home within that philosophy to me. Your work with these nearly universal icons as monumental sculptures, ballerinas, balloon dogs, and all that, also feels rooted within that philosophy. Did you have a sense of that when you decided to work with UNIQLO?**

I enjoy very much how UNIQLO is in contact with my generation but also a younger generation. It really communicates across cultures and every-

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body enjoys their clothing. I love that sense of unity and the way they embrace cultural issues. I think that's wonderful.

At the end of the day, we're just people who are seeking to be connected with each other. Any way we can do that, by working with UNIQLO, making a T-shirt that can be connected and communicate to somebody else that I care about them, or that we're interested in issues that are global, and that we're one. I embrace that opportunity.

**This is the Qatar-USA Year of Culture and your 60-work retrospective titled, "Lost in America," is opening in Doha this fall, so congratulations! I know that a portion of the proceeds from this T-shirt is being donated to the museum, which is such a lovely way to give back. Was that important to you?**

**Also, the title of the exhibition is striking. It's a time in which I think a lot of people are questioning the real identity of America, with a lot of cultural shifts happening. Is the title about that? I mean, do you even consider yourself an American artist? Is that an important classification? You've shown your work internationally for many years—I wonder if you feel it is distinctly American in any way.**

Yes. I've had a wonderful relationship with Qatar over the years. I started going to the country back in 2000. I've seen the growth taking place in Doha and within the country. I visited many of the different institutions.

It's exciting to be able to work with the community to generate interest in art and try to have, again, this global dialogue of what art can be across cultures and how we all can realize that art isn't a defined thing, other than what I believe, coming into contact with the essence of our own potential.

And I love to be involved with working with children. It's really fantastic to have the opportunity to work with Qatar, in Doha, with the Children's Museum. Everybody, a new generation, is going to find their own way within art. They're going to experiment and see how meaning can be found to help the needs of new generations to come, to see how art can be a vehicle to better our lives. What could be more joyful and more rewarding than to participate in this program?

It's also very meaningful for me to represent America in this moment of A Year of Culture, this cultural exchange. It's a tremendous honor. The title of the exhibition...I think that it gives a sense of the different

directions one can feel in America, from the time that I was born, back in the mid-1950s, up to the present moment.

This exhibition was put together with Massimiliano Gioni, who I've worked with many times over the years. We've created different exhibitions together but Massimiliano came up with the title and I think it's a fantastic title.

**UNIQLO is based in Tokyo. While they entrench themselves very purposefully in local communities through tremendous support of the arts, the sleek design and emphasis on quality feels particularly Japanese. Have you traveled a lot in Japan?**

I love Japan. My first trip to Japan was for an exhibition around 1990. I've been to Japan several times since then, and the most wonderful thing is the people. Just the generosity of the people and how supportive they are to you. They really want to be kind to each other. I love that aspect. I love the aesthetics of the Japanese people, and I love the poetry.

If I think about the ideas in my own work, and I speak about transcendence and the whole spiritual base of my work, there's a very Eastern Asian aspect to it, a Japanese aspect, to the heart of, really, what's relevant in life? What is really meaningful in life? How can we transcend our situation?

Over the years, I've continued to think about, what can you do? What do I do as an artist to connect? I came to realize that there's only one thing that we can do—all of us, no matter what area of life we're involved with. And that's first, to have self-acceptance. Once you have self-acceptance, then you can stop looking inward but you can look outward.

The other thing is to follow your interests because what else do you have other than your interests? What could be more joyful than that? Every person, if you trust in yourself and you follow your interests, and you focus on them, it takes you to a metaphysical place where time and space bend and you connect to a universal vocabulary. This is what I practice every day. ■

*Interview by @sarahhoov @jeffkoons*



**Jeff Koons long-sleeve sweat pullover hoodie**  
\$29.90

All items are subject to availability.





# SOHO: A LEGACY OF CREATIVITY

ESSAY BY YUKIE OHTA

Painter Vered Lieb's SoHo studio, 1976 (©Thornton Willis)



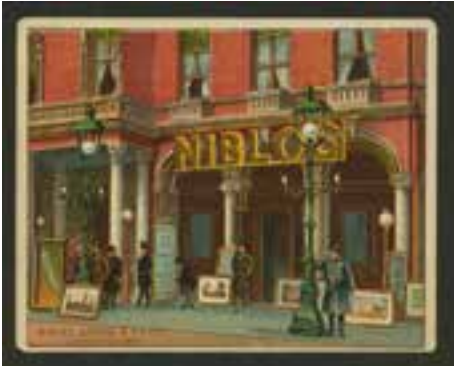
Detail of the E.V. Haughwout Building on Broadway at Broome Street  
(Landmarks Preservation Commission)

Look up at the majestic cast iron facades that line SoHo's streets and you see optimism in their ornate cornices that reach toward the sky and beyond. SoHo's legacy of creativity, born in this built environment, is infused with that same far-reaching optimism. Without it, SoHo as we know it today would not exist. It is what draws people here, compels many to return, and has led others to stay and put down roots. As time passes, few can still trace this magic to its source, but a look back at SoHo's storied past provides clues.



Temporary sign for the Paula Cooper Gallery at  
155 Wooster Street, 1973 (©Jaime Davidovich)





Niblo's Garden, a dining and entertainment complex on Broadway at Prince Street, c. 1890

When the City began paving Broadway north of Canal Street in 1775, it jumpstarted development in the area that is now called SoHo and, by the 1820s, it became an opulent shopping and entertainment district for well-to-do New Yorkers. Stores such as Tiffany & Co. and Lord & Taylor shared the neighborhood with grand hotels such as the St. Nicholas, which, in its heyday, was New York's preeminent hotel. By mid-century, bordellos began popping up on side streets, and SoHo was at once a fashionable shopping district and a red light district. After the Civil War, New York's commercial and entertainment centers began moving further uptown, and by the late-1800s, the private homes, shops, hotels and brothels would be replaced by factories and showrooms housed in the cast iron buildings that have come to define SoHo's architectural landscape.

commercial and entertainment centers began moving further uptown, and by the late-1800s, the private homes, shops, hotels and brothels would be replaced by factories and showrooms housed in the cast iron buildings that have come to define SoHo's architectural landscape.

SoHo is also known as the Cast-Iron Historic District, so designated by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. An American invention, cast iron facades were not only less expensive to produce than stone or brick, but also much faster, as they were made in molds rather than carved by hand, and affixed to the face of buildings. Because iron is pliable, ornate window frames could be designed, while the strength of the iron also allowed for enlarged windows that let floods of light into buildings as well as high ceilings in vast spaces with only columns necessary for support.

Natural light and open spaces were essential for the manufacturing that defined SoHo for the next fifty years, until advances in mass-production rendered the verticality of SoHo's buildings inefficient and outdated, and factories began leaving the cramped confines of New York City. It was also these same elements of SoHo's built environment that compelled artists looking for studio space, beginning in the 1950s, to inhabit these emptied industrial spaces that had fallen into disrepair, foregoing basic amenities such as heat, hot water, or even a lease. Artists slept on mattresses on the floor that were easy to stash and put blackout curtains over their windows so that, after dark, building inspectors would not suspect that anyone was living in these buildings without certificates of occupancy.

A fear of eviction at a moment's notice pervaded the existence of SoHo's resident artists until a confluence of events transformed this desolate area into a vibrant artist community whose mythical image still looms large in the public imagination. In the early 1960s, City Planning Commissioner Robert Moses was poised to build the Lower Manhattan Expressway (LOMEX) through SoHo to connect the Hudson and East Rivers. Property owners, unsure of the fate of their buildings, were hesitant to renovate their properties and instead rented spaces under-the-table at prices artists could afford. Once they had established their live-work spaces, artists fought for their right to remain, and in the end, due largely to citizen



The St. Nicholas Hotel on Broadway and Spring Street was at one time New York City's most opulent hotel, c. 1860



**Right**  
Cella's Chocolate Covered Cherries factory in SoHo, 1974 (©Allan Tannenbaum)

**Left**  
A craftsman restores a piano in a SoHo workshop, 1974 (©Allan Tannenbaum)







Artists renovating a Broome Street loft,  
1963 (©Louis Dienes)

**SOHO BECAME A TIGHT-KNIT COMMUNITY WHERE EVERYONE KNEW ONE ANOTHER AND WAS UNITED BEHIND A COMMON PURPOSE: TO MAKE ART.  
—YUKIE OHTA**

activism that included many SoHo artists, the LOMEX plan was defeated and the expressway was never built. Around the same time, a group of developers recommended a large part of what is now SoHo be cleared for development, but a report sponsored by the New York City Planning Commission titled “The South Houston Industrial Area,” found that SoHo was still an important industrial incubator and provided essential jobs to low-income workers and workers of color. Due to this report, the buildings of South Houston (later shortened to SoHo) remained intact.

For a short while, no one seemed to notice that artists had taken over this once-derelict area. But when non-artists looking for investment opportunities began noticing the profit potential of lofts, artists, who until then had chosen to remain anonymous and hidden, came together to form the SoHo Artists Association (SAA), an advocacy group that, in 1971, secured the legalization of loft dwellings for artists by demonstrating that art and artists are an invaluable asset to the city’s cultural and economic life. Then, in 1973, at the end of a years-long battle, the SAA, along with allies in the City government, secured historic district designation for the area, ensuring the architecture of SoHo would never be jeopardized again.

After a decade of uncertainty and artist activism that began with illegal living and ended with legalized live-work lofts for artists and historic district status, there was a brief moment in time in the early 1970s when SoHo became a tight-knit community where everyone knew one another and was united behind a common purpose: to make art. Many of SoHo’s pioneering artists look back at this time as a magical moment when artists no longer had to hide behind blackout curtains, but were not yet faced with rising rents and housing insecurity.

Once artists began moving to SoHo in numbers, art galleries followed. In 1968, Paula Cooper opened the first SoHo art gallery on Prince Street. At first, this was viewed as a misguided move, but soon after, SoHo, and especially West Broadway, became the art hub of New York as galleries began popping up all over the neighborhood. Gallerists came down from 57th Street, long the stronghold of elite New York art galleries, to be close to their artists and to rent the expansive and inexpensive industrial spaces they pioneered. For the first time ever, a large portion of the New York artist and gallery communities occupied the same neighborhood.

The building at 420 West Broadway, called the Gallery Building, or simply “420,” was considered the epicenter of the flourishing downtown art scene. Some of the now-world-famous artists who showed their work in this building include Sol LeWitt, Dan Flavin, and Robert Rauschenberg. By 1985, when the Tony Shafrazi Gallery mounted its legendary Warhol-Basquiat show, SoHo entered a new phase in its history, where superstar artists and gallerists hobnobbed with their wealthy clientele.





**Top**  
Frank Owen's SoHo studio,  
1975 (©Thornton Willis)

**Bottom**  
Douglas Dunn's dance studio  
on Broadway, 1982  
(©Peter Moore)



Thornton Willis in the SoHo studio of  
John Seer, 1975 (©Thornton Willis)



# SOHO IS STILL HOME TO MANY ARTISTS TODAY AND THERE IS STILL PLENTY OF ART TO BE FOUND THROUGHOUT THE NEIGHBORHOOD.

As the 1980s morphed into the 1990s, New York City emerged as the fashion capital of the world, and SoHo transformed once again. Many artists began leaving SoHo for Brooklyn and Queens as early as the mid-1970s due to rising rents, but it wasn't until the 1990s that galleries moved northward to West Chelsea and were replaced by fashion brands. Avant-garde designers whose work blurred the line between art and clothing, were the pioneers of the new SoHo fashion scene. Younger, edgier designers who felt shut out of Seventh Avenue, long the stronghold of New York's elite fashion brands, also came to SoHo to establish more artisanal, less corporate spaces for themselves to create and sell their designs. By the 2000s, SoHo had become a retail destination where the most coveted fashion brands inhabited the airy ground floors of the cast iron buildings that once housed art galleries and, before that, manufacturing showrooms.

SoHo is still home to many artists today and there is still plenty of art to be found throughout the neighborhood. While most of SoHo's famed art galleries relocated decades ago, some remain, such as Jeffrey Deitch and Louis K. Meisel, as well as several arts venues such as the Judd Foundation, The Drawing Center, and the Dia Foundation. More visible are the fashion brands from around the world that have planted their flags within the 26 blocks that comprise this neighborhood.

What was a shopping district in the mid-1800s is a shopping district once again, but in the interim, the community of artists who lived and worked in SoHo left a permanent impression. It is their optimism, activism, and creativity that, against all odds, gave birth to a magical place whose legacy drapes itself over all who come here today to visit, to work, and to live. It is this magic, present in its people as well as its built environment, that sets SoHo apart. ■

The Drawing Center at 35 Wooster Street was founded in SoHo, 1977 (©Ajay Suresh)





Lauren Martin  
\$24.90/ea.



Jason Naylor  
\$24.90/ea.



Rich Tu  
\$24.90/ea.



In store, we're featuring UTMe! designs from three New York-based artists. Scan to learn more about UTMe! and create your own design.

All items are subject to availability.

# THE 15-MINUTE T-SHIRT

The Spirit of SoHo is the spirit of creativity and creation. UTMe!, the newest fixture at the UNIQLO flagship store in SoHo, lets you design and make your own UNIQLO T-shirt—in under fifteen minutes. Tap the iPad screen to design, draw, or upload a photo straight from your phone.



DOWNLOAD THE UNIQLO APP TO SHOP AND  
RECEIVE EXCLUSIVE PRICES AND FEATURES



# The Spirit of LifeWear

LifeWear is the philosophy behind everything we do. It begins with respect. A spirit that we first brought to SoHo, where we opened our first store in America, 15 years ago.

We create clothing designed to make everyone's life better. It is simple, high-quality, everyday clothing with a practical sense of beauty. Ingenious in detail, thought-through with life's needs in mind and always evolving.

**Our clothes are crafted from our customer's perspective.** To make everyday life more comfortable, convenient, beautiful and positive.

**Reflecting the values of Japanese craftsmanship, every detail is thoughtful:** fabric, design, function, sewing finish, silhouette, and choice of color. It's an experience you can see and feel.

**Our clothes do not make a statement on their own.** Rather, they can be a beautiful part of any wardrobe, complementing and augmenting any mood or personality.

**We adapt and respond to the rapid changes in lifestyle, society and culture.** Making full use of technological innovations to always set the new standard for what clothing can be.

**We challenge the conflict between quality and price.** Establishing a benchmark for value while offering high-quality clothing to everyone around the world, regardless of race, status, gender or religion.

This isn't fast fashion. This isn't just about clothes or trends. The spirit of LifeWear is the mission to create the highest quality experiences for the greatest number of people.



+J

# “TODAY” AS PERCEIVED BY DESIGNER JIL SANDER

PHOTOGRAPHED BY DAVID SIMS

As our world prepares for a new beginning, the energy in the air is sober, yet hopeful. The 2021 +J Fall/Winter collection further develops its signature understatement, quiet distinction and innate confidence with pieces that move with us and into the future.

Generous volumes. Swaddling fabrics. Sculpted into new silhouettes with character, attractive proportions and iconic shapes, +J's signature idea of the global modern uniform inspires personal dignity and an energized, confident performance. Visual whites and variations of red are energy pools in a subdued palette of black, graphite, khaki and caramel. Formed from techno-satin, superfine cashmere, superfine merino, tactile leather and habutai silk, every millimeter of the collection elevates with intention.









**UNIQLO:** You avoid ostentatious fashion statements and prefer to speak about evolving your vision of +J. What do you mean by that?

Jil Sander: I like to attract interest in clothes in a more subtle way, concentrating on sculpted forms and attractive silhouettes which are very visible, even from afar. I avoid superfluous decorations which distract from the wearer’s charisma. +J wants to underline a person’s value with truly modern cuts—a good fit is equally important for sophistication.

**At the basis of +J is the idea of creating “modern uniforms.” In your view, what kind of uniforms do you think are essential for living in the modern world?**

By the smartness of their cut, uniforms signal an awareness of self-worth. Their overall understatement leaves more room for the wearer’s personality.

**From duffle coats and pea coats to pilot jackets, the Fall/Winter collection features several coats with military origins. What goes through your mind when updating these classic items for +J?**

In the military, functionality is paramount. To this purpose, civilian clothes have been modified and perfected in the interest of resilience, comfort and a wide array of climatic needs. In the military tradition, clothes are both iconic and indispensable—real personalities in our wardrobe. I like the creative challenge of interpreting those classics for our moment in time, our precise needs and our contemporary sensibility.

**How does your signature as a designer come into play?**

I like to think of my signature as invisible. I prefer to reduce and only add what’s necessary. Avoiding styles of the past which drag us down, or useless embellishments. An invisible signature may also be felt as a result of refusing to accept easier, less satisfying solutions, be it in the choice of materials, in cuts, colors or sartorial details. The collection as a whole, its overall message and the fact that individual pieces communicate with each other can also be seen as a subtle signature. I want all +J designs of one season to speak the same language.

**We see more varieties of outer items such as downs and cashmere-blended coats. The cashmere blend wrap long coat has an especially fresh silhouette and sophisticated look. Can you tell us about its concept and tips on how to style it?**

The light package down coat is a newer fashion favorite, and yet it has already turned into a classic. I felt that its aesthetic possibilities were not yet exhausted and looked for new materials, silhouettes and proportions. As for the cashmere blend wrap coat, I designed it with interesting sleeves and an inside belt which allows for elegant draping at the front. The coat is quite feminine, but you can also combine it in a sporty way.

**I LIKE TO THINK OF MY SIGNATURE AS INVISIBLE. I PREFER TO REDUCE AND ONLY ADD WHAT’S NECESSARY.**

**This collection is as modern and minimal as previous seasons, yet the pleated skirt is amazingly dramatic and seems to have a slightly different charm. Can you tell us about your intention to include it in this collection?**

That skirt is a good example of how new combinations and proportions evolve. The pleated wrap long skirt, with its swinging pleats, complements the flared silhouette of the double-faced coat in a feminine way. You can combine it with the sweatshirt for a fresh statement. To balance it all out, wear the look with a chunky sneaker.

**When people hear +J, the first item many of them think about is shirts, since they play such a key role in these collections. Can you share a few tips on how people can wear the shirts in a way that suits them best?**

I sometimes use the white shirt as an example for my idea of purity, but I have always seen the shirt as just one element in a complex collection. Once you have a sophisticated, tailored shirt that fits your body well, you look for the same kind of ease in the jacket and pants that go with it.

Today, formal shirts are worn over pants, as a shirt jacket or in place of a dress, which makes the perfection of sartorial details even more important. You can combine a tailored shirt with a heavy coat





for a contrast of strength and sensibility. Or you simply wear the coat on naked skin.

**There's this seasonal concept of: "Our world is preparing for a new beginning. The mood is sober, yet hopeful. Comfort is key, paired with a natural contemporary elegance." How is this reflected in the collection?**

We are still shaken from the pandemic and cautiously optimistic that we have mastered it. We return to social life, but we want to feel protected. This collection explores new oversize silhouettes with a controlled fit and variations of substantial winter classics. Comfort has become dear to us. We want to feel a personal shell. This need is answered by luxurious sweatshirts and pants from cozy cashmere to wool flannel.

I wanted to put a shine on life and express its preciousness, so I worked with a slightly shimmering techno satin. Our life starts all over again at the hopeful end of the pandemic. We feel sexier and appreciate a sensual feel and look in clothes. I lifted the quality of basic items to another level and reworked them in a more luxurious, seductive way.

**What inspired the color palette for this collection? You've incorporated gorgeous reds and blues.**

Visual whites and variations of red, especially for shirts and knits, are energy pools within an understated color range of black, graphite, khaki and shades of caramel. The subdued overall palette draws attention to the volumes, cuts and silhouettes.

**What kind of feeling are you hoping to inspire in those who wear items from this collection?**

I think actual feelings are too private to be inspired by fashion. But I would like to encourage a certain attitude of confidence and sensual well-being.

**Tell us more about the bags debuting in this collection.**

Our collective idea of bags has changed in the last decades. Practicality and thoughtful design are at the core, and we tend to look for unisex shapes. Bags are essential items, we consult them as frequently as our smartphones. The main points for me were storage space, handiness, an appealing modern shape and solid, tactile leather. The large shopper can replace a briefcase.

**Looking at this season's outerwear, sweats, and knits, what makes this collection stand out?**

This winter's collection features distinctive silhouettes, upcycled classics, sensual textures, an emphasis on value, luxurious tailoring, and proportions which respond to our new sense of comfort. It offers a sophisticated look for everyone.

**What is +J to you?**

+J is a laboratory of the future to me. I am trying to materialize what I feel about the reality around me. I hope to catch vibes, needs and desires and, accordingly, design fresh appearances, which encourage us to feel renewed and sink in with each living moment. ■



#### ABOUT JIL SANDER

German designer Jil Sander started her career as a fashion editor. She founded her label, JIL SANDER, in 1968. A longtime participant of Milan Fashion Week, Jil Sander has achieved international success for her forward-thinking designs. Though she has since left her eponymous label, her immense influence remains. In 2009, Jil Sander launched the first +J collection with UNIQLO, which centered on the concept "Open the Future," clearing the way for new possibilities in clothing.

"TODAY" AS PERCEIVED BY DESIGNER JIL SANDER









SHOP THE +J COLLECTION

All items are subject to availability.





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