



*Tish Weinstock as she prepared
to close Conner Ives' AW24
show in an upcycled bridal look
© Ella O'Gorman*

CONNOR IVES' AW24 COLLECTION TAKES FLIGHT

All eyes on Ives as his Swans sashay through the Savoy...

Being backstage at a Conner Ives show and witnessing the designer's dexterity and attention to detail firsthand can only be described as an electrifying experience. Amidst the sea of pre-show preparations, I observed the designer's latest offering - fittingly entitled 'The Swans'.

At only 28 years of age, the American designer's career has reached heights that many can only dream about. After graduating from Central Saint Martins in 2020 he was nominated for the revered LVMH prize in 2021. Now, fresh from receiving his BFC Foundation Award at The British Fashion Awards last December, Conner has been preoccupied with melding maturity and sophistication together in a manner that is meaningful and commercially viable. His approach to this task was simple - he emulated the high society swans of Truman Capote's New York and gathered his closest companions, his 'swans,' which included Ella Richards, Tish Weinstock and Chloe Nardin. The result? An "aspirational" visually arresting AW24 collection that was a touching tribute to the testament of friendship.

Whilst Ives' previous collections have been characterised by American culture, sportswear and female 'archetypes,' this assemblage veered in a new direction, honing in on the seismic impact his relationships have had on his work process and identifying methods in which he can "make the everyday woman fall in love with the clothing."

This collection marked Ives' departure from NEWGEN'S complementary catwalk space. As The Savoy's newly appointed 'Style Advisor,' the designer situated his first standalone show in the hotel's opulent Lancaster Ballroom - a historic setting which lent a captivating credibility to his unique imitation of a debutante ball.

Internet sensation Alex Consani opened the show in a spaghetti-strapped silk black dress paired with a wide black headband, an omnipresent accessory amongst fashion enthusiasts this season. This was followed in close succession by covetable creations styled by Vanessa Reid - slinky blue and black dresses complete with lace and carabiner hooks, billowing bias-cut gowns and faux shearling scarfs. A particular highlight were the mirrored appliques that shone under the lighting fixtures applied by FARO, which commanded a collective gasp backstage.

One of the most meritorious aspects of the collection was Ives' inclusion of upcycled materials. Vindicating his commitment to sustainable consumption, he followed on from the example his soda tab dress set last season and set about replenishing the superfluity of waste in our "capitalist fuelled society." This was conveyed through an array of vintage textiles, embroidery made using safety pins sourced from miscellaneous sewing kits and the jersey styles this season which were made from deadstock military surplus. When approached about the key looks featured in this collection, Ives remarked, "The mini dresses with the trousers. It was once a Qing Dynasty wall tapestry, a 300-year-old piece of fabric that was not in the best shape.' Ives thoughtfully distinguished this dress by bypassing the extensive textile restoration process that his piano shawls have entailed in the past. Instead, the piece was left blemished, untouched and that was exactly how Conner wanted it. "I was eager to embrace the imperfections," he shared.

When approached about the feathered angular hat that accompanied a ruched graphic t-shirt with 'Ives ice Cream' inscribed across the front, the designer explained, "It was a vintage knight templar bicorn hat that I found when I was in America at Christmas, it's 200 years old, it was basically falling apart." Referencing Vivienne Westwood's 1994 'Cafe Society,' when Kate Moss famously closed the show wearing a purple bicorn hat with a Magnum ice cream in hand, this ensemble was also imbued with a personal touch as Ives' great grandparents had an ice cream factory in Minnesota. "I love the way that these ideas and inspirations intertwine," the designer admitted, "I always find myself thinking, how can I create these stories?"

The collection also successfully riffed on nostalgia yet discarded any sentiments relating to Y2K or the myriad of microtrends that have gripped the media in recent months. Instead, it exemplified Ives' individualism and his resistance to being recognised solely as a 'Y2K designer' or defined by cookie-cutter categories dictated by trends. 'I love the way we did the t-shirt dresses that everyone knows, but there's also a real push this season for more refined pieces. I was looking for something a little more grown up, elegant and aspirational,' he added candidly.

This elegance was certainly enhanced by Ives' close collaboration with Jimmy Choo's Sandra Choi again this season, producing nuanced iterations of their ubiquitous boots, mules and heeled slippers. These classics were revitalised through his application of chocolate-coloured lizard-embossed calf-skin on their exterior and the inclusion of bespoke hand-painted patterns by the artist Rosie Mennem.

Finally, for the bridal showstopper, Ives looked to Tish Weinstock, who wore a delicate floor sweeping dress crafted using gauzy white organza and headphone wires which had been meticulously woven into coiled flower-like motifs. "Our embroidery factory in Kolkata, India, they're next door to a headphone factory," Conner elaborated, "This dress is an incredible testament to their work as they went next door and swept these neglected headphones off the floor and that's what was used in the embroidery." When the designer saw this textile two years ago and heard the context behind it, he fell in love with the story' and "kept it in the back of my head for years until I knew that we'd have a moment with it." And a moment most certainly was had, with 'The Swans' show transpiring as one of the most resplendent shows held in London this season.

As Conner Ives gazed intently into the monitor whilst the show took place, it was evident from his tears of anticipation and the small amendments he made to the garments as they waited in formation that his entire AW24 collection was a labour of love that he poured not only his entire self into but also many borrowed attributes from his many muses. 'This show had every girl that I've met and worked with, it felt like such a seminal moment,' he confessed, 'I'm really feeling it right now, I just feel really honoured to do what I get to do every day.'

As the finale concluded to the sound of Björk's "Headphones," and rapturous applause, I congratulated the designer and left, deeply engrossed in the world of Connor Ives and already anticipating what he is going to do next.

Words by Ella O Gorman



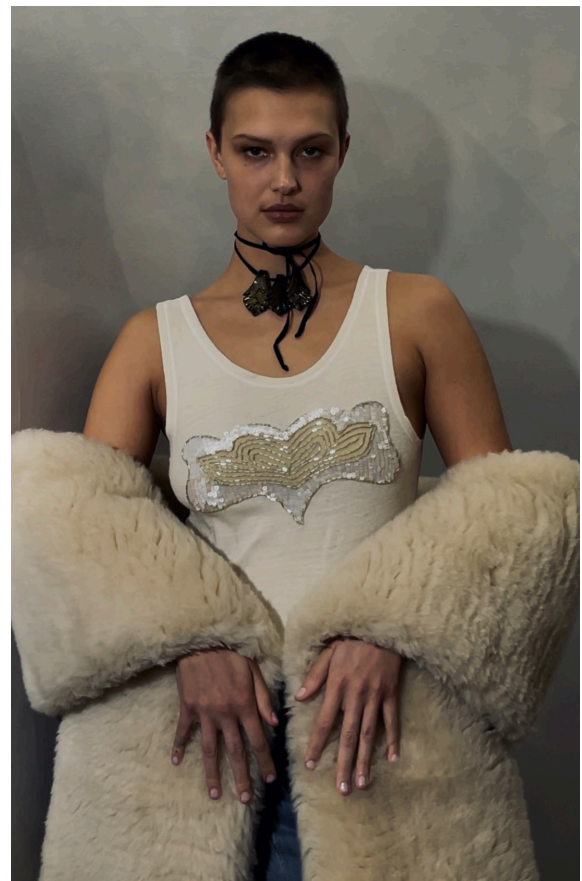
From left to right; Josephine Sidhu wears the collection's bicorne hat, Chloe Nardin wears the Qing Tapestry dress with trousers.
Images © Ella O'Gorman



Backstage Beauty- Makeup by Lucy Bridge © Ella O'Gorman



Rayssa Medeiros and Ella Richards © Ella O'Gorman



Celina Ralph wears a bead embossed vest © Ella O'Gorman



Precious Lee poses in a faux shearling hat backstage © Ella O'Gorman

