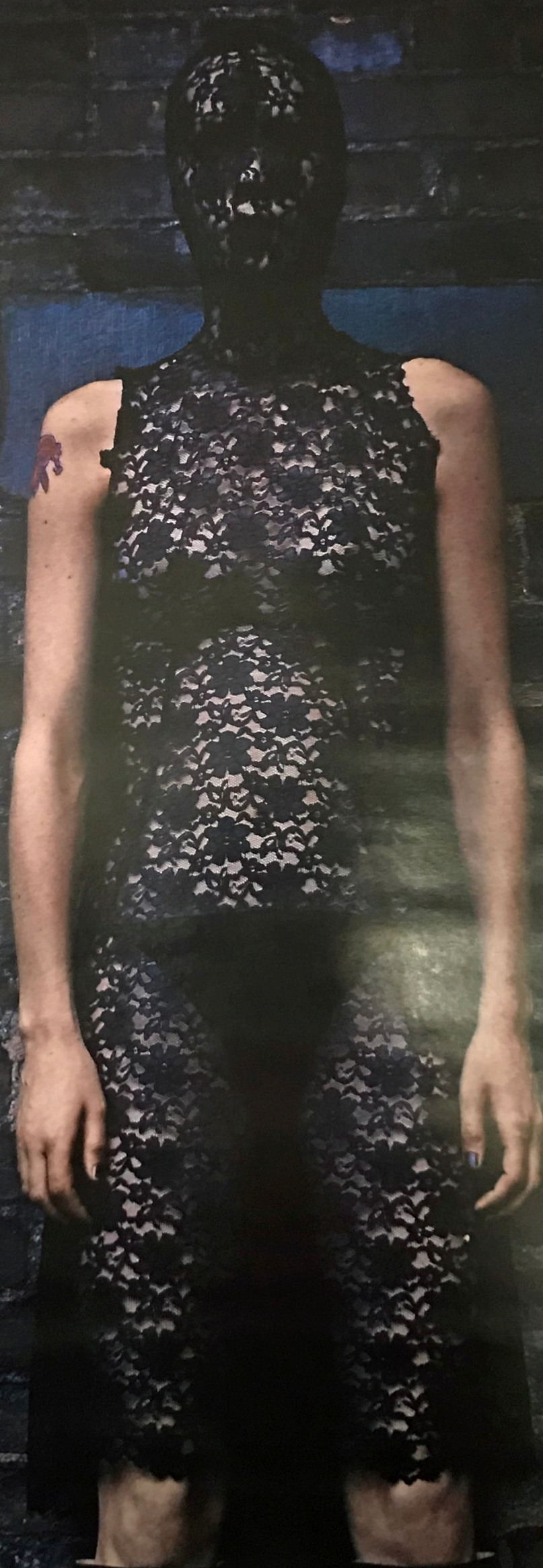


LEE ISSIE DAPHNE GAGA AND ME

SK
BY STEVEN KLEIN



UNITED BY THEIR LOVE FOR THE
ART OF FASHION, LADY GAGA
AND DAPHNE GUINNESS HONOR THE
LATE, GREAT ISABELLA BLOW
AND LEE ALEXANDER McQUEEN

PHOTOGRAPHY STEVEN KLEIN
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DAPHNE GUINNESS AND LADY GAGA
WEAR CLOTHING AND SHOES
(THROUGHOUT)
ARCHIVE ALEXANDER McQUEEN

BRIEFS GUINNESS'S OWN

"I KNOW ISABELLA [BLOW] WOULD BE ABSOLUTELY THRILLED, BECAUSE SHE ALWAYS WANTED TO MENTOR PEOPLE, AND THIS SHOOT MEANS THAT PEOPLE GET IT." —DAPHNE GUINNESS

"This is fucking church," says Lady Gaga, flanked on one side by photographer Steven Klein, and on the other by artist, musician, and fashion doyenne Daphne Guinness. The latter has just flown from Casablanca (she's now based in rural Ireland, but visits the Moroccan city often) to New York and headed straight to a gritty warehouse in Brooklyn where Gaga, Klein, and a treasure trove of Alexander McQueen designs from the late Isabella Blow's archive are waiting for her.

Throughout the early aughts, Lee Alexander McQueen, arguably one of the greatest visionaries of his generation; Blow, the passionate British fashion editor with a penchant for propping up new talents (McQueen, milliner Philip Treacy, and Hussein Chalayan were among her discoveries); and Guinness, a muse who walks only to her own drum, were inseparable. They were a gang, as the Irish heiress to the Guinness brewery fortune tells it. However, this tight-knit fashion family was broken up when Blow, feeling abandoned by her famous protégés, committed suicide in 2007, and McQueen, who was gripped by the loss of Blow and his mother, as well as struggling with depression and the grueling demands of the commercial fashion industry, tragically took his own life in 2010. Following Blow's death, Guinness bought the editor's vast archive, which includes McQueen's first collections. It's been nearly a decade since Blow ended her life, but today is the first time Guinness feels comfortable wearing her spectacular confections.

When Guinness walks into the dark, sprawling warehouse where she'll soon be reunited—in spirit, anyway—with her departed friends, she's balancing on towering black platform boots. There's nothing but negative space where the heel should be—this is one of her signature styles—and the entire crew holds its breath each time she takes a step. She wears a white, high-collared blouse, second-skin leather leggings, a tailored black dress coat, and a cartoonishly tall top hat that sits slightly askew on her mess of black-streaked platinum hair. From tip to toe, she looks like an eight-foot-tall steampunk villain. In reality, she's a thin, almost fragile, five-foot-eight. Such is the transformative power of fashion.

"Daphne reminds me that it's okay to be in pain all the time," muses Gaga while reclining in wardrobe, waiting for her nails to dry. "She taught me to go for it. Always. Fuck it. People just can't understand being in pain constantly for art," she continues. "The way we handle emotional pain is by inflicting some sort of physical pain on ourselves for an art that we love."

Guinness walks out in a black leather McQueen bondage bralette, matching hot pants, another pair of frightening heels, and a black veil. "This isn't normal!" screams Gaga while Guinness debates which breast she should expose. (As the photographs illustrate, she went with both.) "You look fucking amazing." She did.

"I'm boring," says Guinness the next day from her suite at the tony Carlyle hotel on Manhattan's Upper East Side. Though the shoot went until the wee hours of the morning, Guinness's appearance is impeccable. She dons a black-and-gold sequined Biba jacket, sequined pants, and her hands are adorned with enough gems and diamonds to put the Crown Jewels to shame. Guinness curls up on the couch in her suite's parlor. "I'll tell you, I've had a very strange life," she says, pausing dramatically. "My story is: I was at school. Then I fell in love. Then I had three babies. Then I disappeared for about 15 years. Then I got divorced. Then I had to start all over again, and I connected with people who, I suppose, reminded me of my childhood."

Unsurprisingly, Guinness's childhood was anything but ordinary. She spent her summers in Cadaqués on the Spanish coast, where her family lived at the top of a mountain in a renovated 18th-century monastery. Her neighbors were Salvador Dalí and Man Ray. "I didn't fit in with my family," Guinness recalls. "I didn't fit in with my peers. I was always called 'the weird person' and I was a tomboy. I can climb a tree like you wouldn't believe, and I can catapult a crossbow."

Despite these somewhat butch tendencies, Guinness's fascination with fashion took hold at an early age. "I made clothes out of plastic bags," she says proudly. "I used to be in trouble all the time, wearing leather and studs and things I made. Everyone else was in a cashmere sweater and a string of pearls." Still, it was a long journey from rebel heiress to the otherworldly creature she appears as today. Music was also a factor. "I'm a musician, by the way, not a fashion person," she says, after playing a few tracks from her forthcoming debut album. It's a collection of personal, psychedelic rock-influenced songs due for release this spring. She was on track to train in opera at London's prestigious Guildhall School of Music and Drama, but then, in 1987, at the tender age of 19, she met her now ex-husband, Greek shipping heir Spyros Niarchos. They were married that year.

If you look at pictures of Guinness from the '80s and '90s when she was married (the couple divorced in 1999, but Guinness regrets nothing and makes a point of noting that she and her ex are "really good friends"), she's unrecognizable. In place of the punk-tinged couture that's made her a style icon the world over, she wears cheery pastel frocks and modest, colorful suits. "I used to hide [my obsession with clothing] from my ex-husband," Guinness laughs, adding

that she didn't express herself freely through fashion until reuniting with Blow in 1998.

"I reconnected with my art friends, and with Issie [Blow]—because I knew her when I was 16—and it was a natural progression. You know, to be human is to be able to change the way you look. I mean, a cat can't do that," she deadpans.

There was indeed a freedom in the severity of her newfound aesthetic, but while Guinness's gothic beaded McQueen bodysuits, Treacy hats, and chiffon veils were vehicles through which she could become her truest self, they also served as armor that masked her insecurities. "I always dressed to keep people away," she admits. "I felt unattractive. I always wanted to disappear. But then you develop a look and suddenly you're really visible. And when my friends started dying, it was really a hassle because first of all I miss them a lot, but the worst thing was that I was suddenly shoved into the foreground and became the poster child for fashion suicide. I was like, Man, why am I the one that's left here? Where are you? You were all my friends! We were all in this together. Suddenly they were just gone."

Guinness met McQueen more or less against her will. "Issie wanted me to meet him but I wouldn't. I thought he'd be terrifying. I admired him for what he was, and what he did, but I didn't need to meet him. But one day he found me on Leicester Square and yelled, 'Oi, you!' and then we became very good friends," she explains. "He was so generous. We'd talk about our sex lives and stuff—we wouldn't talk about clothes. He never judged me for being me, and I never judged him for being him."

In 2010, three years after Blow's suicide, the editor's family was faced with staggering death duties and had no choice but to put her archive, brimming with fantastical wares by the talents she championed—McQueen included—up for auction at Christie's. Intent on preserving her friend's collection and legacy, Guinness put a stop to the sale and bought the whole lot. "Philip called me up and said, 'Will you buy a hat?' And I was like, What? They're selling it? Can you imagine? So I talked to Issie's sister, Julia, and had them pull the sale. I promised her that I'd keep it safe." Not only did Guinness ensure that Blow's collection remained intact, but she sold a portion of her own couture archive to pay for it. And somewhat ironically, after all that effort to save Blow's sartorial history, Guinness was hardly able to be in the same room as her clothes, much less wear them. "When I bought the collection, I said, I can't wear Isabella's stuff—are you fucking kidding me? It smelled like her. I didn't want to look at it. I couldn't touch it when it was being archived. I found it too difficult."

Even so, it was, of course, money well spent. The collection was celebrated via *Isabella Blow: Fashion Galore!*, an expansive 2013 exhibition at London's Somerset House. Guinness also founded the Isabella Blow Foundation, which, among other things, offers scholarships to London's Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design and aids charities that promote mental well-being.

Those achievements were but two stops on the emotional roller coaster that came with acquiring Blow's wardrobe. In fact, Guinness landed in the hospital after *Fashion Galore's* opening event, and she still wasn't able to go near her friend's fashions. But that changed when Lady Gaga approached her about this shoot with Klein, who was also a member of Guinness, Blow, and McQueen's creative circle. "This shoot was the first time I've really worn it," says Guinness. "It's been almost ten years since she died, and I feel [the archive] is lighter now. I feel I can touch it and put it on. And I know Isabella would be absolutely thrilled, because she always wanted to mentor people, and this shoot means that people get it."

Before stepping in front of Klein's lens, Lady Gaga elaborates on the "church" speech she gave earlier in the day. "This is the church of fashion. If you don't have respect for what Daphne and Steven Klein and I are doing, you don't have a clue, really," she says. "What's sacred about today is that it's Daphne and I, two women who loved McQueen very much, and Steven Klein, a man who loved him very much. And it's a man and a woman who also loved Issie. And another man, McQueen, who loved Issie. And a young girl who never got to meet her but admires and loves her very much. This is about true talents and helping them to be remembered the way they should be."

"This is about art," concurs Guinness. "It's about the passion, and the pain, and the work that went into all of these [clothes]. We're not doing this for money, and I hope it will give some inspiration to young designers, and let them know that they don't have to go work with big commercial brands."

On a less serious note, Guinness also hopes that those who see this shoot understand that there is a sense of humor and irony in her outré ensembles—a trait she learned from Blow, whose wit was as quick as it was sharp. "I mean, it's supposed to be funny for fuck's sake!" she quips. "Just because I dress strangely doesn't mean I'm an axe murderer. But I can't change what people are going to say about me. They're always going to call me weird. And you know what? I don't even mind anymore."