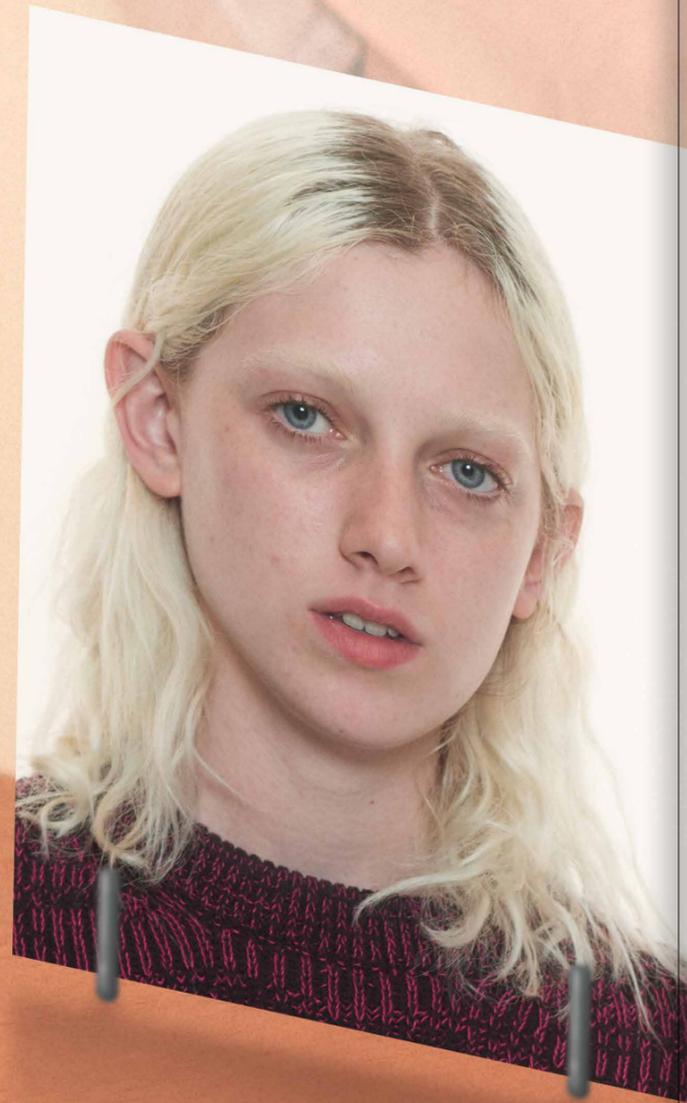


words by Calum Gordon

Aries: Clash of Cultures



If there is one thing that perhaps best defines fashion at present, it is the clashing of high- and lowbrow aesthetics. Balenciaga now sells chunky sneakers and graphic hoodies; Gucci pays homage to bootleggers; Louis Vuitton joyously collaborates with Supreme, and Burberry with Gosha Rubchinskiy. As a design practice, streetwear has become the lingua franca of fashion as a whole, and any notion of division between traditional luxury and the street has been swept aside.

All of which seems a little bit funny to Sofia Pranterera, the Italian-born designer and co-founder of category-eschewing British label Aries, who has been designing this way since the mid-'90s. "I fought against it before," says Pranterera of her penchant for clashing disparate cultural references. "I always felt that was maybe a shortcoming in what I did, that I was interested in these two very, very different things."

A graduate of London's Central Saint Martins, Pranterera worked at the seminal Slam City Skates store before going on to co-found the streetwear label Silas. It was also at that store—a '90s "hub" for London-based creatives who needed to earn some cash—that she met Fergus Purcell, the man responsible for *that* Palace triangle which adorns the back of just about every teenager in East London. (He has since gone on to create graphics for the likes of Calvin Klein and Marc Jacobs.) In 2009, the duo co-founded Aries together, a womenswear collection that melded Purcell's esoteric visuals with Pranterera's high-low aesthetic, creating collections that comprised of silk dresses and screen-printed t-shirts.

"I think there's an element of it that came from my mother," says Pranterera of her signature style. "She is an author and a philosopher... [But also] she writes trashy novels. She's always had a passion for trash culture, or counterculture, mixed with quite a highbrow kind of background. In her novels, no one can really understand where she's coming from, because she'll have some quite interesting theological points in a novel about vampires." The "tension," as Pranterera describes it, between seemingly opposed viewpoints or aesthetics is integral to her work. It has seen her adopt a highly-collaborative practice, working not just with Purcell, but also the fashion photographer David Sims, with whom she created an Aries book last year, and a currently-unnamed English conceptual artist, set to be unveiled later this year.

This ethos of collaboration also underpins Aries' forthcoming pop-up store in London's Covent Garden, which will see the brand working with the likes of the quintessentially English womenswear label Hillier Bartley and Blondey McCoy, the Palace skateboarder and artist, who also has his own label, Thames. Additionally, there will be fine jewelry and furniture, as well as skateboards by another Palace-affiliated label, Wayward Skateboards. Pranterera is also currently in talks about a potential installation, created in partnership with *Frigidaire*, an Italian youth-culture magazine that was prominent during her upbringing in Italy, which she describes as being somewhat similar to *The Face* or *i-D*, but with a left-wing slant. "It was about a clash of cultures," she says.

All of this together makes for a heady and diverse mix of reference points, in a way that is archetypically Aries. "I think people always found the fact it was coming all from the same brand was quite confusing," says Pranterera of the brand's formative stages. In 2018, however, it all makes perfect sense." **K**

ARIES IS A CULT LONDON-BASED WOMENSWEAR STREETWEAR BRAND FOUNDED BY SOFIA PRANTERA AND FERGUS PURCELL IN 2012. IMAGES COURTESY OF ARIES. PHOTO CREDIT: DAVID SIMS AND FERGUS PURCELL