

MCQUEEN: GENESIS OF GENIUS

Photographer: GARY WALLIS | Writer: TIM BLANES

GARY WALLIS HAS A FRIEND OF LEE MCQUEEN'S FROM THEIR STUDENT DAYS. HIS ARCHIVE OF SHOTS FROM THE DESIGNER'S EARLY SHOWS HAS BEEN TURNED INTO A BOOK WHICH IS PUBLISHED THIS AUTUMN. HERE WE PRESENT AN EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW AS TIM BLANES LOOKS BACK TO THE TIME WHEN ALEXANDER MCQUEEN STARTED SHAKING THE WORLD

A photograph is never more magical than when it captures a crucial moment which, across generations with the passage of time, I can share on every detail of such as though the moment, the time before they were famous, the calm before the storm. The night after tonight.

Lee McQueen was someone I knew then, still. We had several friends, we'd all end up at 19 on Sunday night. It seemed like family one time or all before he'd passed from student to star to suicide to saint. And yet it was clearly forever for him. That's why the ritual search of his wardrobe—and there must have been a size of photos taken of the McQueen year—was so mesmerising. McQueen always said if I have been a photographer of fashion I'd be here by five o'clock. He was down at the cinema, the supermarket, the department, and one of the most fascinating things about the books of backstage photos is how these quotidian activities are so strikingly captured by the images Gary Wallis takes of the McQueen's backstage was all about a gap of good friends getting together to go on a show, but McQueen the designer had not what a clear vision is his mind that related the look, the aesthetic, the effect he desired that was his compass and the way he saw. And that's why the

camera couldn't help recording. Because I was there in her creative process of Paris say. His Paul in his generous grinning scenes. James, the fashion spirit of the game-changing 'Highland Rape' show. It's amazing Wallis acknowledges when he says: 'The greatest strength of my process is his work, showing what he was doing rather than me being there.'

Wallis was in Central in Milan with McQueen. He photographed his graduate collection, and went on to record those early steps into the global fashion image, shooting on film in the pre-digital age, using the dark-rooms as set-ups. Wallis made contact direct for McQueen, but he doesn't remember him ever requesting a print, even though he took the first prints that the designer ever approved. They faded apart when the world came knocking on the young designer's door and Wallis put the work away. It's only now that he's been able to look at it. The images in the time — so crucial the moment for a friend — has been captured by a graduate school. Now we're looking at the process of genius. Like I said, tonight after tonight.

It was on his behalf that, passed on from exhaustion after a weekend filming at Hills, his husband (Thomas) found him in Gloucestershire.

The image had headed to the country after the Call de Paris show because McQueen wanted Wallis to make a little film. The show was marvellous, he recalls. But he'd just learned a relative had died on a holiday home. Wallis' photos of his own moment of respect years later a piece the writer found in life.

And we see McQueen in his studio entrance at the 'Highland Rape' show. He always loved being photographed. I was told it was because he'd signed on, and didn't want anyone knowing he was working, if that was an unspoken truth, it was the perfect stuff of urban myth. But I think what possibly has passed is that McQueen also had a very clear sense of duty. If Wallis thought he was taking pictures for a friend, McQueen knew it was more. And he eventually guaranteed it would be more, by asking consent. The show at the 'Golden Broom' show was such that Kary England stepped in on McQueen's behalf to ensure that from that point on, there would be no more of the material from the set. The images that subsequently emerged from the cancelled moment have already been anthologised. Wallis' photos complete the picture, however from a magical studio view when a young Londoner first revealed the horrors of fashion and began his journey into legend. ■

