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WHAT'S ON

NICK HORNBY

After creating exclusive sculptures for MATCHESFASHION.COM's 5 Carlos Place, the British artist talks about how he works history, and his obsession with trainers



‘What’s your narrative?’ is the first thing Nick Hornby asks when we meet on a summer’s day at his studio – a sprawling warehouse tucked behind a pair of imposing wooden doors in Notting Hill. As well as being a pleasingly unconventional ice-breaker, the question highlights the sculptor’s preoccupation with the story of Western art, and how artists are linked to one another by the invisible thread of time.

The 38-year-old Brit grew up in nearby Holland Park with two siblings, a lawyer father and a mother who modelled. He developed an interest in architecture and art history early on. ‘We had Bridget Riley and Elton John living nearby, a Sikh temple on one side and we were slap bang in the middle of a social housing development,’ says Hornby. ‘In terms of architectural style, they tried every version of social housing, so there’s low-rise, mid-rise and high-rise, some fake Georgian terraces and some fake Egyptian. It made me aware of the idea of decoration and ornamentation.’



A visit to Charles Saatchi's *Sensation* exhibition at London's Royal Academy Of Arts in 1997 really blew Hornby's mind. 'Up until then, my story was Rodin in Paris, the Renaissance in Florence and the Yorkshire Sculpture Park. I knew there was this idea of linear art history – although I never studied it – this idea of a sense of progress.' Seeing Damien Hirst's *The Physical Impossibility Of Death In The Mind Of Someone Living* introduced him to the idea of post-modernism, and while studying at the Slade School Of Fine Art in London, he started experimenting with video, which he loved for the way it let him tell stories and think about the viewer in a different way. It was while at the Slade that he taught himself to code. 'I was quite geeky. I fell in love with an American and we both became obsessed with object-oriented programming.'

Today, his work, which he programmes via computer software and implements with his team in his studio, has found its own particular place in the artist's canon: producing large works that reference great sculptors from the past, while at the same time creating something entirely new, via complex processes involving both high-tech production methods and traditional handcrafted techniques. The result is large-scale silhouettes and forms in bronze, marble or resin.

RELAXED STYLE



MARTINE ROSE

Embroidered cotton crew-neck sweatshirt

£235



SUNSPEL

Cavendish cotton T-shirt

£90



RAG & BONE

Chore cotton trousers

£225



VEJA

V-10 leather trainers

£116

Hornby creates pieces variously for landscape – in 2017, the Glyndebourne Festival hosted *Sculpture (1504-2017)*, in which he reinterpreted key historic artworks from Michelangelo, Rodin, Brâncusi and Matisse – and for commercial clients – the most recent being a bespoke piece for **5 Carlos Place**, the new MATCHESFASHION.COM townhouse in Mayfair. There is also work for various private clients.

‘I guess I’m guilty, like we all are, of having that crisis of the personal subjective,’ says Hornby. ‘I subscribe to the idea that there is a much more neurotic relationship with the construction of our own identities and authorship, which is why all of my work is grappling with the possibility of trying to make something new. Every single object you see in this room is citational.’ *The Style Report* finds out more.

EVERYDAY UNIFORM



A.P.C.

Loulou corduroy bomber jacket

£365



BALENCIAGA

Logo-print cotton T-shirt

£335



NEUW

Lou slim-fit stretch-denim jeans

£145



Y-3

BYW BBall mid-top trainers

£349

Describe your workspace.

‘It’s a warehouse in Notting Hill. It’s highly theatrical, with faux-Gothic ornamental ramparts that were all here when I moved in.

My pieces are very performative in some respects. They’re meta cubist, meta modern, so it’s very in keeping for them to be housed in a staged, faux-real space. It’s a mixture of storage, show space and production and it’s a flexible, changeable space; the tables are not installed, they’re on wheels.’

Your output is huge and wide-ranging. How do you make it all happen?

‘At the moment, we’ve got a five-metre public sculpture going to the University Of East Anglia, a marble sculpture going to a very significant collector in LA, and a piece going to a shop. Three completely contradictory art spaces. The amount of people working with me varies – I had 10 assistants at one point, and I now have a full-time studio manager, whom I stole from the Chapman brothers.’

How do you concentrate with all the activity around you?

‘I work best in quite weird spaces: airports, train stations, shopping centres and so on. I like noisy, municipal, public spaces where I can work on my computer. It forces me to cut out all the noise and engage with what I’m doing. Also, I love the public. Ultimately, all my work is about interpretations of other people and how I compare with them. A shopping centre is a great place to observe people; they also tend to have cathedral-like proportions. And good air-conditioning.’



What was your education like?

‘School was pretty good, apart from being “in the closet”, which was a bit of a pain. I came out when I was 22. For my generation it was kind of normal, but that’s had a lasting impact on everything. If you look at everything in my studio, you don’t see anything of me in it. I mean you do, but it’s two or three degrees removed. If you spend your entire life pretending to be really macho, trying to get girlfriends and stuff, then you’re very preoccupied with a presentation of self that’s very different from what you really want.’

Do you collect anything?

‘Every time I make a big sale, I buy an artwork. You can’t understand what it means to sell an artwork unless you also buy one. It’s my job to understand the tools of my trade. I started off with 20th-century artists: the first thing I bought was a big, beautiful Henry Moore print, and then I got a Chadwick and a Paolozzi. It’s mainly 20th-century masters in 2D at the moment. I spend more on art than on holidays, clothes or eating out.’

Can you recommend an art gallery?

‘The Garden Museum in London. It’s on Lambeth Palace Road. No one’s heard of it – it’s epic. It was set up to save an old church. Contemporary architecture intervention. You have these multiple narratives all encased in one thing, like a Russian doll: old church, which has its own story, and I have a sculpture there.’

Do you think about fashion?

‘It’s on the to-do list. If I’m honest, sculptures are quite expensive, and at the moment every penny I make goes back into the work. Clothes are amazing things – you can’t love architecture and art and not love the culture of clothes. It’s normally my trainers, which look a bit like spats – black and white chic – and then I just wear a few layers that come on and off. I do love trainers. I have at least 15 pairs.’

OFF-DUTY STYLE



UNITED STANDARD

Logo-print T-shirt

£60



VETEMENTS

X Levi's 615 distressed jeans

£1,025



RAF SIMONS X ADIDAS

RS Ozweego trainers

£329



COMME DES GARÇONS SHIRT

T-shirt PVC messenger tote bag

£260

What's your approach to getting dressed?

'The reality is, I wear at least three costumes a day: studio overalls, gym or running costume and then evening. I'm very normcore. I have 10 of those **Calvin Klein Underwear** T-shirts in black and grey. It's a style that fits me.'

What are you favourite books?

'Shout-out to *Pin Drop* by Simon Oldfield, which commissions short stories and invites actors to read them aloud. It's epic and really fun. A joy. It's what I did on my first date with Harry [his boyfriend]. It was at Dr Johnson's House in London and Russell Tovey read a short story by Julian Barnes.'

Are you interested in interior design?

'Being a sculptor rather than a painter, I'm in tune with functionality and shapes and space. I care about what it feels like when someone enters a space. I think I'd have more fun moving a staircase than choosing soft furnishings.'

Do you feel part of an artistic community in London?

'There's lots of contradicting answers to that. On the one hand, I feel like we're all just trying to move the project forward. A lot of artists, me included, don't hang out that much with other artists. I've got a handful who are confidantes, but I'm over here in west London, I'm not immersed in the art gang. If my mum hadn't got cancer, I probably would have moved east and it would have been a whole different story.'