



FROM CLUB TO CATWALK

Glass dives into the first exhibition on fashion designer Charles Jeffrey, who's been busily tearing up the rule book for the past decade

Writer CHARLIE NEWMAN

Deep within the hallowed catacombs of Somerset House a storm is brewing via *The Lore of Loverboy*, a show celebrating Charles Jeffrey's riotous journey from dancefloor to designer. For the past seven years Jeffrey has been in residence at Somerset House Studios nurturing his LOVERBOY brand. The sought-after residency gives free studio space, subsidised facilities, curatorial advice and help with funding, a dream combination for any up and coming designer. Studios director Marie McPartlin, says, "We look for those who are really pushing the boundaries of practice, often working across multiple disciplines, and definitely interested in being part of a wider artistic community – Charles was all those things from really early on." But rather than keep this fortunate opportunity under lock and key, Jeffrey has always maintained the sense of community that lies at the heart of his practice. Ever the team player, he even organised a community choir at the Studios, which meets every fortnight and will be performing on the opening night of the show.

Somerset House has long been the home of London Fashion Week, garnering and nurturing progressive talent from day one. Even when the world seems to be falling apart, the institution never gives up on the importance of the arts. For Director of Exhibitions, Dr Cliff Lauson, "The public arts sector is a valuable space of creative experimentation and enjoyment to the benefit of all. It's important to have a space for creative risk-taking to prevent groupthink from taking hold, and I think the goal is to get to a place where a thriving cultural scene and cultural exchange are fostered as hallmarks of a flourishing society." Indeed, LOVERBOY is flourishing.



Launched 10 years ago, the label was born shortly after Jeffrey graduated from Central St Martins and was named after the weekly club night he hosted in East London in order to fund his studies and internship in the haute couture ateliers at Christian Dior in Paris. With the fundamentals and rigorous knowledge under his belt, Jeffrey was free to experiment, re-write the rules of the craft and create designs that cross borders and gender boundaries. LOVERBOY signatures include references to his Glaswegian roots, a play on proportional tailoring, a tongue-in-cheek application of print, a devotion to colour and appreciation for texture. Nothing is off limits and couldn't seem further than the stuffy rules of Paris's Federation of Haute Couture. With LOVERBOY you'll find gobstopper rings, cartoon character-worthy hats and footwear that take on an animalistic quality, with toes and claws emerging from the tip of shoes.



In celebration of the brand's 10th anniversary, Somerset House is unleashing the inner workings of its boldest designer at *The Lore of Loverboy*. Across three rooms you'll find never seen before material, artistic collaborations, archival research, film, illustration and painting all told through a sensory lens. Curator Bunny Kinny hopes the exhibition will immerse visitors into the "technicolour world" of Charles Jeffrey "in a way that feels visceral but also informative. Here you'll learn about the reality of what it takes to be an independent fashion business in the UK today. It truly takes a whole village." The reality of being a successful designer for fellow curator Jonathan Faiers "is about having an identifiable aesthetic sense underpinned by wide ranging research, being open to influences wherever they may come from and having a clear vision of the attitudes, beliefs and desires of the people you want to wear your clothes. I hope that visitors feel excited, inspired and seduced."

Kinny was first seduced by Jeffrey's designs "after seeing his primary colour, paint-splattered MA collection I reached out to him to collaborate then, and we haven't stopped since. It's so special to see some of those garments in this show. The feel of the show is chaotic, maximalist and totally LOVERBOY. But in transplanting his world into an exhibition setting, we're also seeking to elevate his work in a new way and consider key garments and artefacts critically in a way that really tells the story of Charles, his brand, and to some extent the evolution of a particular slice of London's creative culture across the last decade."

The youth culture of the late 2000s acts as a heady backdrop to *The Lore Of Loverboy*, with all of its aspirational dreams young designers are first bewitched by. Kinny believes that "a lot of people of his generation will recognise and relate to his reference points of this era and I think we're just far away enough from that time to start to think about it critically". Faiers' adds: "The show has a dramatic, joyous and anarchic energy that we hope encapsulates the ethos of LOVERBOY and it's equally rebellious clientele."

There's a ferocious can-do positivity at the heart of the exhibition which is immensely refreshing in times where creativity feels pinched. Jeffrey emphasises that *The Lore of Loverboy* is "here to shine a light on what we've built and to show that if we can do it, so can you. Visitors can expect to see our journey, our quirks, and have a good laugh along the way. It's about making fashion accessible and fun, reminding everyone that at the end of the day, it's about expressing who you are."

Dr Cliff outlines how, in a "fast-paced industry, with the constant pressure to produce new ideas, this exhibition is a special occasion when he [Charles] can come up for air and appreciate what has been built over that time. In Charles' case, that is not only a truly unique brand and style, but also a community of people and a network of collaborators who are an important part of the mix. At Somerset House, we call ourselves the Home of Cultural Innovators, and Charles' imaginative and collaborative practice really embodies this spirit."

Ever to deflect the individuality the fashion industry churns out, Jeffrey is excited about sharing his journey in fashion. "It's not just about celebrating 10 years of LOVERBOY; it's about sharing our approach to fashion; being creative, approachable and not taking ourselves too seriously."

Have a riotously fun time at *The Lore Of Loverboy* and keep an eye out for a Puckish character swathed in tartan, playing with textiles and the rules of fashion with a cheeky glint in his eye.

***The Lore of Loverboy* opens on June 8 until September 1 at Somerset House, London**



Photography by David Parry



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