

Tartan, tweed and suffragette chic – how London fashion week signalled a gritty Brexit forward march.

By **Jess Cartner-Morley**

# Keep calm and catwalk on



**I**t was early for Burberry on Monday evening, so as I waited I spent some time gazing at the monumental bronzes in the Henry Moore exhibition being hosted in the show space at Makers House. I'm no art critic, so what do I know, but they felt to me to be as much depictions of rolling hills and dales as they were of women. The graceful but uneven humps, the Durdle Door peep-holes, the silent, gruff Jurassic grandeur. Surely, I thought, I'm looking at the British landscape, as well as a reclining nude? Moore's wartime drawings of Londoners sleeping on tube station platforms have a straight-up Blitz spirit patriotism, but there is a sense of nationhood in these sculptures that reminded



me of the radical roots of the ramblers and Stanley Baldwin talking about England in 1924: "The tinkle of the hammer on the anvil in the country smithy, the corncrake on a dewy morning ... the wild anemones in the woods in April."

The last London fashion week, back in September, was held under a fug of post-referendum shock and denial. The message from this week's shows was that with Brexit an impending reality, the British fashion industry intends to do as our prime minister instructed, and make the best of it. There is no union jack flagwaving in fashion, an international industry philosophically and structurally at odds with isolationism, but this week's shows crystallised a new sharp focus on British identity. The look for next autumn is arthouse patriotism.

How to wear arthouse patriotism? Well, you start with a long, silky skirt worn with a tightly wrapped or corsetted waist balanced by a voluminous top half, and a fancy sleeve. There are lots of references here, many of which are drawn from radical culture rather than from an establishment genealogy. The suffragettes, mentioned by several designers including Preen and Bora Aksu, are definitely on the moodboard. So too is the ideal of the hardy but romantic British outdoorswoman – both the aran-knit-wearing moors-yomping type, and the raving-in-a-field-in-a-hoodie kind. Also, there are highwaymen and women, and even Lady Macbeth (as namechecked by Antonio Berardi), in collars high enough to hide behind and falconry-glove sleeves. The standout prints are dense, thorny florals. At Erdem, wild flowers were mixed with tiny fragments of tartan, bringing Scottish

identity into the English landscape.

Like Burberry, Mulberry put the spotlight on the British landscape, but theirs was a softer and more domestic vision. Where Burberry's Christopher Bailey was inspired by Moore's windblown Yorkshire sculpture park, Mulberry's Johnny Coca mused on the country hotels he stays in when he visits their Somerset factories. Wallpaper prints from Mulberry's 1970s archive blended with sturdy tweed jackets that were halfway between the Queen at Balmoral and Lotta Volkova, current high-fashion muse and stylist of Mulberry. Small round handbags were held flat to the palm, somewhere between hat boxes and boxing gloves.

After her show, Roksanda Ilincic talked about a recent encounter with the Queen, and how starstruck she was. Intriguingly, in the iconography of fashion week, the Queen has come to stand for formidable women, rather than for establishment rule. Formidable women were a theme – star of the Roksanda show was Vanessa Redgrave – and never more so than at Preen, one of the standout shows of the week, skewering exactly how we want to dress right now. The long-line silhouette with a corsetted waist was taken from the suffragettes, the dark florals from Carol Ann Duffy. Backstage after the show, designer Justin Thornton quoted the last line of Duffy's reimagining of Little Red Riding Hood: "Out of the forest I come with my flowers, singing, all alone." Bora Aksu's muse for the season was Princess Sophia Duleep Singh, daughter of the last maharaja of the Sikh empire, who in the 1920s could be found outside the gates of Hampton Court, where she lived in an apartment provided by her godmother, Queen Victoria, wearing expensive furs and selling suffragette newspapers out of a satchel.

The most Instagrammed must-

**Onwards and upwards on the catwalk (below, left to right): Preen by Thornton Bregazzi; Erdem; Antonio Berardi; Burberry; Mulberry; Topshop Unique**

have of fashion week was the on-seat freebie at the Topshop show: complimentary tickets to the Hockney and Tillmans exhibitions at the Tate Modern, where that show and several others, including Mary Katrantzou and House of Holland, were held. As well as the Tate Modern shows, and the Burberry-Moore axis, the Christopher Kane show was held at the Tate Britain. Fashion week is righteously proud of its art-world connections, and art as a touchstone of national identity was in the air this week. There were eiderdown-quilt coats on almost every catwalk, and while Coca said Mulberry's were inspired by horse blankets, at Preen they were an homage to Tracey Emin. Last week, Victoria Beckham mentioned another artist of the British landscape, Paul Nash, whose exhibition at Tate Britain inspired prints in her collection. Beckham shows in New York, but her identity and name is so closely linked to modern Britishness that the connection seems relevant.

British national dress is a story of subcultures. The pop, high-street take on arthouse patriotism came at Topshop, which celebrated the rave culture and full moon party travels of late 90s and early 00s Britain, the generation of *Trainspotting* (1.0) and Alex Garland's *The Beach*. This collection was as rich in historical detail as any prim catwalk ode to Victoriana. The half-zip sweatshirts over beach dresses, the handbags from a time when the Fendi Baguette was it, even the French pedicured toenails, were all keenly observed. But it was no nostalgia fest, rather a forward-looking British aesthetic – and one that was available to buy on the Topshop website as soon as the show finished. There is no turning back the clock, so onwards and upwards. British fashion is digging deep for victory.



PHOTOGRAPHS GETTY; REX



## Back to reality ... Lauren Cochrane picks the LFW trends you will actually wear



JW ANDERSON

**London fashion week is great** – but with everything from eiderdown quilts to giant tulle dresses on the catwalk, the connection to what you wear IRL isn't always clear. Rest assured, there are always some takeaways, and AW17 is no different. Here are the trends that will make it to your wardrobe next autumn.



BURBERRY

▲ **Chainmail for going out-out**  
Back in nightclubs of the 90s, you couldn't move for girls in chainmail tops. Get ready to relive that moment – metallics were big this season, with chainmail the alpha take on partywear. JW Anderson's floral dress with feather skirt and chainmail cloak was wonderfully eclectic – and would cause some quizzical looks at Ministry of Sound.



EMILIA WICKSTEAD

▼ **A very big and long chunky jumper over a flowy skirt**  
This is one you can probably trial now, should you have a big jumper and a slipdress to hand – it works well for weather that is almost but not quite springlike. It was a look that got played both on (Topshop, Peter Pilotto) and off the catwalk (among fashion editors) – a sure sign you will be wearing it sometime soon.



TOPSHOP UNIQUE

▲ **The continued polo neck**  
Yes, I know, we're wanging on about polo necks again. Don't fight it. You might be bored to death of that jumper you've been wearing all winter, but get ready to get it out again in a few months – the polo neck was in collections from Emilia Wickstead to Topshop. Face it: necks are not going to be fashionable again for a while.



CHRISTOPHER KANE

▼ **Big earrings**  
It was a lobe-in on the front row, with every alpha editor trying out can't-miss-them earrings by brands from Céline to Loewe. "The bigger the better" was the general rule of thumb. And, judging by the catwalk, ears will continue to be the place to make fashion statements. Earrings were big at Christopher Kane, Emilia Wickstead and Topshop. Excellent news when you realise a jazzy earring means you can wear the most boring outfit ever and it can still be totally Fashion.

▲ **Shirttails poking out under a jumper**  
Burberry mastered this suitable-for-work look – with a longer shirt worn under cropped knitwear, by both men and women in the brand's show. Similar ideas were also seen at Sharon Wauchob and Pringle of Scotland. The kind of trend that you'll be thankful for when you're getting dressed for work in the dark at 7am next November.