



# SHONAGH MARSHALL

IN CONVERSATION WITH

# STEPHEN GALLOWAY

The word polymath is often cited when discussing STEPHEN GALLOWAY, the most called upon movement director in the fashion industry. Accolades include principal dancer at Ballet Frankfurt, awards for costume design for the American Ballet Theatre and Paris Opera, creative director of ISSEY MIYAKE from 1993 to 1997 and previous creative consultant and choreographer for THE ROLLING STONES. Calling himself a 'fashion midwife' STEPHEN GALLOWAY works with some of the most notable fashion photographers, and has had a part in creating some of the most well known images in fashion history. His spirit, youth in abundance, and unstoppable inquisitiveness has led to this extraordinary career.

SHONAGH MARSHALL: Could you begin by explaining what it is like when you arrive at a photo shoot?

STEPHEN GALLOWAY: I really approach each job as if it's the first time, that's my mindset when I walk in and survey the energy of the room. Once the conversation begins that is when I bring my history of dance into it. Often that has to be a really fast read and it all depends on the level of expertise of the model you are working with. I refer to this part of my job as *the translation*. If I am working with a model for the first time, they will be completely shocked that I am even there. I have worked with models who, when I say 'lean a little bit more into your shoulder' she will lift a foot, it is almost a rejection of my suggestion. A lot of models think at first that I am there because they aren't doing a good job, which isn't the case at all. I am there to contribute something extra.

SM: What is the conversation you have with the photographer in the first instance? Take me through this process.

SG: The first thing I ask the photographer if we are working together for the first time is how they want to do it. They usually say, 'We don't know, we have never worked with anyone like you before'. To which I say 'Well once you have me you'll never want to work with anyone else again' [an eruption of contagious laughter]. I work with INEZ AND VINOODH a lot. I know that every time I walk off set with them we have taken the best possible photograph that could have been taken. They never give up. However, when I am working with someone for the first time it takes the photographer a moment to realise that he or she can relax more than they normally would. Especially when I have an understanding with the model. A lot of the time there are not a lot of words being spoken. Normally I stand right next to the model, I am not in the back, and this is so I can almost see what the model is seeing. I always try to approach the fashion photograph as circular rather than 2D.

SM: You have relationships with photographers that you work with again and again. How do those conversations differ from a new relationship?

SG: It really varies. The first time I worked with JUERGEN TELLER on the CÉLINE campaign (Spring/Summer 2014) it was just when he had started work-

ing with digital and he was so excited because it meant that we could go everywhere, he could move around the model. [Shooting on film often requires very particular lighting set ups, meaning the camera must stay more static]. I never want to know too much about what's going on. This means I am open to change as that's usually when really good things happen. I did a shoot last year where there were three boards of reference images. This included early RICHARD AVEDON and IRVING PENN. It made me think when those guys were doing it they didn't have a mood board. They just walked in and did it. I try not to look at the references really, if it is up on the board I can interpret it but I really don't want to do the same thing. I want to try and make something new.

SM: Throughout your career have you seen the body's role shift in fashion photography?

SG: Yes. We are in a moment where a lot of people are being given the opportunity to take pictures and have them published and seen. I am all for that, but I still need them to be excellent. I need them to be smart. I am not restricting the honesty but within the new wave of fashion photography it is sometimes more about the diversity of the subject than about the actual craft of fashion photography. I still want to see excellence. For me the body and the positioning of it have so much to do with history and art, and understanding what came before you. Perhaps I am making huge generalisations here, but you know I am 60 years old, so I can. I want more than that. I see images that I know are being constructed to be perceived as free. I think to do this there needs to be an understanding of structure and space. Recently I have been finding it a bit too easy, I don't want to look at easy photographs. I want to go in and understand I am looking at craftsmanship.

SM: How would you describe this craftsmanship you're referring to?

SG: To me it is understanding the history of image making and also the technical elements, but then moving past that to create a new visual language.

SM: You said you think something is lost when photographers focus solely on the diversity of their subject, rather than the craft of photography.

## When a really amazing fashion photograph happens it transcends the page. When that ends up being caught, that's the iconic moment

SG: I understand the opportunity to spark a new conversation is a pathway we have to go through and I'm OK with that. I just feel that the diversity and inclusivity elements of fashion photography cannot be the end game; it's just one of the ingredients that allows us to move forward. This might take a while, but I don't want us to become lazy and think that just because we have checked all of the boxes we are creating or expressing something new.

SM: Is this what you mean by what you described as an easy photograph? What is an easy photograph and in your opinion what does a photograph need to have to be a good fashion photograph?

SG: An easy photograph is a photograph that does not make us wonder what's behind the elements that are putting the image together, a photograph that is flat in its perfection. A photograph that doesn't say anything or relay a specific emotion or intention.

SM: To make an extraordinary photograph there is an intimate relationship between the sitter and the photographer; do you ever feel like sometimes you are in the middle of that?

SG: Yes and I go to the front of the line but it can't just be me. I have worked with photographers who don't communicate with their subjects at all. Recently I worked with a young photographer who would not talk at all to this incredible woman he was shooting. She was asking him to help her, 'let's dance' she pleaded. Silence, just clicking. We had to take him aside and say this is not how this works. You have to build the dialogue up, this has to come from the photographer it can't just come from the art director, stylist, the hair, the make-up artist and me.

SM: Body language is the biggest tell and I imagine this starts with you; you really have to believe what she is doing.

SG: It's the live read. Sometimes you have to allow them to realise that themselves. You let them try it, and then if it doesn't work the model and the photographer are the first ones to realise and that's when I step in.

SM: You are like another eye focused solely on the body, especially when the images are being shot on film. The photographer is looking at overall

composition, the stylist at the clothing, the hair and make-up have their area of scrutiny and the set designer concentrates on space.

SG: I really do feel that, I have to see it and I am experiencing it with the model. That being said I never feel that I am trying to be a woman wearing the clothes. My ability to detach comes from my dance and costume background. I have to understand how she might feel in the suit, what is its construction; I understand how the body might feel in it. If it was going to require certain tension in the movement, for example is it too tight in the shoulder? I think the photographer has to be in there with the clothes. I learnt that from INEZ.

SM: What do you mean by tension?

SG: That's what makes it real, that's where the magic happens. There are thousands of gorgeous women out there that could be running down the stairs but if everyone is on the same page that's when it works. It's always about those moments when you feel that everything is being caught at that right second. You can feel it. When you watch dance or ballet and the dancer finishes the movement and it is like [Stephen reaches to the sky flicking his wrist]. The whole audience can feel it. When a really amazing fashion photograph happens it transcends the page. When that ends up being caught, that's the iconic moment.

SHONAGH MARSHALL is a contemporary curator, writer and arts consultant with a specialism in fashion. In 2018, she co-edited the book *Posturing* (2018) published by SPBH and has curated multiple exhibitions including *Isabella Blow: Fashion Galore!* (2013), *Posturing: Photographing the Body in Fashion* (2017) and *English as a Second Language* (2019), which remains on view at Somerset House in London until April 28, 2019.

STEPHEN GALLOWAY is a creative movement director. On set, he collaborates with directors, photographers, creative directors, designers, stylists, models and actors to translate a visual language through the physicality of the body. Originally trained as a dancer in the Frankfurt Ballet, he uses his expertise in body movements to help shape a unique visual aesthetic. He is based in LA.