

☆☆ Hollywood Remembered ☆☆

Alexander McQueen: The Jack the Ripper of Fashion

By Darwin Porter

His death noose had hardly been removed by London police officers before filmmakers in Hollywood went to work on a documentary based on the short, turbulent life of British fashion renegade, Alexander McQueen.

At the age of 40, and at the apex of his career, he was found hanged in his multi-million pound London apartment, an apparent suicide. Pre-dawn transatlantic calls brought the tragic news to *fashionistas* in New York, who were launching “Fashion Week” collections for the coming autumn.

“Why did he kill himself?” asked supermodel and friend Naomi Campbell. “He had everything to live for.” From the White House, First Lady Michelle Obama expressed her grief about the loss of her favorite designer.

One can only speculate as to why McQueen committed suicide. Major figures in his life had fallen away, including his beloved mother, Joyce, who had died on February 2, following a long illness. “She was the light of my life,” McQueen told the press. Right before Joyce died, her son told her, “My greatest fear is dying before you.” On the day of his suicide, he had been scheduled to attend her funeral.

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He'd experienced a series of losses, including that of his longtime mentor, Isabella Blow, an eccentric stylist herself, who committed suicide in 2007. His 2002 marriage on the island of Ibiza to filmmaker George Forsyth had ended in a break-up. In the aftermath of their split, he'd dated a porn star known only as “Mr. Stag.” The fashion icon later fell in love with another man. Only days before he killed himself, he revealed that they'd broken up. “The bastard Aussie, a real cad, has gone back Down Under.” McQueen said. “And I have his f—cking name tattooed on my arm.”

McQueen dropped out of school when he was 16. Bullies taunted him, calling him “McQueer.” He went to work on London's Savile Row for tailors who catered to Prince Charles. In a suit intended for the Prince of Wales, McQueen famously stitched in the words, “I am a C*NT” into the lining of the jacket.

During the day, McQueen managed a dazzling career in fashion that was skyrocketing as he created clothes for everybody from Madonna to today's Lady Gaga. By night, his life was devoted to “sex, drugs, alcohol, and food.”

As a means of launching his career as a designer, McQueen presented his daring designs on ravaged models who looked like they'd been physically abused.



Alexander McQueen

He was still carrying on that theme in 2009 when he presented his show, “The Highland Rape,” his models appearing in clothing with their bodices ripped, their hair a mess. He was commenting on England's “rape” of Scotland.

As nod to Jack the Ripper, he sewed locks of human hair into the jackets he sold.

He introduced trousers for men called “bumsters,” that barely covered their rear ends. That bold, brassy statement caught on. Today, every jeansmaker in the world creates low-hanging jeans (*décolletage* for the *derrière*?) that barely stays up. Even President Obama has criticized this trend. But the jeans continue to roll off assembly lines around the world.

Queen Elizabeth elevated McQueen to the rank of a commander in the British Empire in 2003. He famously linked his efforts with the House of Givenchy in Paris, but soon after denounced the designs of the company's founder as “irrelevant.” He later formed a more suitable business bond with Gucci.

One of his latest trends involved accessorizing his models with platform shoes that evoke the hulls of ships.

At the time of his death, McQueen's foibles and eccentricities had been widely bruited around the circles of the terribly fashionable. A McQueen fashion show always carried its share of surprises. If preview audiences didn't like McQueen's design, he was known to moon them.

As the world learned about McQueen's untimely death, his designs were “flying off the racks” in New York, Milan, London, Paris, and Los Angeles.

Hollywood filmmakers should have no trouble preparing the story of his life. The outrageous designer was nothing if not cinematic.

His fashion shows, though troubling, were the most astonishing ever presented. As fashion editor Serena French commented on one of them: “The voyeurism was disturbing, like a Victorian mental-hospital cell, but with clothes. Suddenly, the walls of a glass box fell to reveal a tableau of a naked woman in a demonic mask with a breathing tube. It was bizarre. It was exquisite.”

Darwin Porter, formerly a bureau chief for *The Miami Herald*, is an acclaimed entertainment writer.

His most recent book, from Blood Moon Productions, is **Steve McQueen, King of Cool, Tales of a Lurid Life**. It is hardcover, 466 pages, and costs \$26.95. It is available now from fine bookstores and internet sites nationwide.

For more information on the ongoing literary opus of Darwin Porter, click on www.BloodMoonProductions.com



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