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As told to Katy Diamond Hamer, 1183 words.

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On working together

The designers behind Eckhaus Latta discuss collaboration, color choice, and the difference between art institutions and retail spaces. You recently had an exhibition titled *Possessed* at the Whitney, and completed a runway show for Spring 2019. I wanted to just start talking about the Whitney, and about the word "possessed." It's a double entendre; a state of mind—to be possessed by a demon or a devil—and the action of owning something or an object. Can we start here and speak about what possession means to you both?

Mike Eckhaus: For us, possessed is the state of—not in the exorcism sense of being possessed—but in the sense of work and motivation, and striving for something.

Zoe Latta: Also, you can possess something, and be possessed by something. Consuming something is a very similar act. We were really interested in the question posed by the exhibition regarding the difference between retail space and art institutions. We were interested in how both spaces utilize both meanings of the word and could execute both uses of the work.



Installation view of Eckhaus Latta: *Possessed* (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, August 3–October 8, 2018). Photo by Thomas McCarty.



Installation view of *Eckhaus Latta: Possessed* (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, August 3-October 8, 2018). Photo by Thomas McCarty.

Mike: We are a fashion brand, and so really just possessed in poses. There is a similarity in how they're structured as words, and what operates as reality or a potential reality within the overall exhibition of the space.

Zoe: For Mike and I, we really don't like coining something, but appreciate how poetic the word is, and it is open for interpretation. I'm glad you gathered both, we like that it has options.

The Whitney show is accessible to both fashion and art lovers. It also features forms of display that result from your collective collaboration with other artists such as Martine Syms. I saw also Jay Latta included in there, so I'm assuming that's a relative. How did you choose who to work with?

Zoe: We have pre-existing relationships with all the artists in the show and Jay is my dad. We're not positioning ourselves as curators, but we found that the artists that we chose to work with were all asking a similar a question in terms of the function of their work, referencing a utilitarian object. They're all successfully making art with these questions [and we are inviting] other people to ask that question.

So for us, it was a really collaborative effort. We were never assigning different fixtures to people.

How do you work as a team? Do you find that you each bring certain skills and strengths to the brand? What are those strengths? Weaknesses?

Mike: I think we've always naturally gravitated towards different things in Eckhaus Latta. It's a very shared experience. There will be times we'll refer to each other as consultant, or a kind of critic or...

Zoe: ...a support system.

Mike: In designing the collection, we both draw a lot, and then we present ideas. Then through a lot of back-and-forth we share everything, and at the end of the day it becomes Eckhaus Latta.

Zoe: We don't have different titles, or roles even. We know what the other person is doing, and honestly it's just enough work for two people, or more than enough. We always say we can't really imagine doing this alone, and I don't think any fashion designer does it alone. In addition, we also have an extraordinary team that works with us that does have more specific roles, but at the end of the day they wear many hats, too.



Installation view of *Eckhaus Latta: Possessed* (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, August 3-October 8, 2018). Photo by Thomas McCarty.



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In regards to the Whitney show, how there's a lot of up-cycled, pre-existing clothing that you use. How did you come across the original garments, since there are so many consistent colors and an unusual color palette? Did you dye them?

Zoe: Some of it is dead stock fabric and some of it is used, but we dyed and washed all [of the garments] ourselves. "Dead stock" is the term for when it's leftover material for a product that was never made. It's not secondhand, because it's not used, but it's sold as excess. Some of the garments in the Whitney show we made out of just our fabric, and then others we acquired through extensive thrift shopping.

Looking at Spring 2019 and the clothes in the Whitney, I was wondering what motivates your color choice and your color palette for a season?

Mike: Some of it is from textiles that we come across, and that starts to build out a palette. We also work with what people are responsive to. There are definitely certain colors that we both love that we always gravitate towards, but they're not commercial colors. We are always asking, "Hey, do you like that kind of acidy-greenish looking color?" We just love that color.

Zoe: We haven't overdosed on it yet.

Mike: Yeah, we haven't overdosed. It's been a push and pull of how much is enough of it, and how people, besides us, respond to it. Which, some people love that color, but it's definitely not something that is universal.

What advice you might give to young designers?

Zoe: For us, we're not really big on planning, and we're not really that retrospective either.

Mike: No. We sweat a lot.

Zoe: We plan a lot, but it's not like psychotically strategic. We like to leave room to be intuitive and to make, not necessarily last-minute decisions, but decisions that feel genuine. With that said, I feel like it's just as simple as, follow your gut and work hard.

Mike: Yeah. I definitely think it's important to follow your gut and work hard. Fashion is a lot of work, and I think no matter what position you are entering into from life, if you really want something, it just definitely requires a lot of care and a lot of work.

Zoe: And don't be afraid to make mistakes.



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Collective recommendations/influences for Mike Eckhaus and Zoe Latta:

We both really love Joanna Newsom.

Comme des Garçons, Maison Margiela, and Helmut Lang

Friends in our community

Family

New York and California

Name

Mike Eckhaus and Zoe Latta

Vocation

Fashion designers

Fact



Mike Eckhaus and Zoe Latta. Photographed inside their exhibition *Eckhaus Latta: Possessed* on August 2, 2018 at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Photo by Thomas McCarty.

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