

LFW AW15 Highlights: Gareth Pugh

The highly anticipated ten-year anniversary show focuses on female empowerment and a British revolution that goes far beyond fashion

By [James Hostford](#), Photo Editor (2014/15)

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Behind the scenes in the build up to the show. Image: James Hostford

Gareth Pugh's return to London Fashion Week was dark, intense, and captivating. The critics' favourite designer sent an army of gothic warriors marching through the marble hallways of the capital's Victoria and Albert Museum.

Pugh broke from his trademark monochromatic colour palette by crudely smearing Saint George's Cross across the models' faces. The arrestingly stark makeup encapsulated the show's themes of passion, combat, and sacrifice.

The show was presented in a cavernous, marble-floored hall in the eerily quiet V&A. The sound of heels clicking against the stone echoed as members of the audience took their seats. Lonely spotlights in the corners of the room provided scant relief from the hall's consuming darkness.



A young woman prepares herself for sacrifice in the opening scenes. Image: James Hostford

The show began with a short film directed by Ruth Hogben, depicting a young woman preparing herself for sacrifice. The actress cut off her long blonde hair, covered herself with red paint and then set herself alight, setting the scene for a collection of military silhouettes. The flames from the video continued to cast a sinister glow over the catwalk as the first model marched forward.

The figure that emerged was clothed in a flowing skirt, a leather tabard, and a Roman helmet. The resemblance to Britannia served as an unambiguous reminder that this was a homecoming show.

Elsewhere in the collection, the military theme grew clearer. The rigidity of above the knee patent-leather boots forced the models to march with identical intensity. Jackets were fastened with neat rows of polished silver buttons. Helmets were secured with bright silver chains, swinging angrily in time with the march.



Models were adorned in St. George's red cross

whilst voices chanted: "Who are you?" Image:
James Hostford

Pugh reminded us of the femininity of his warriors by juxtaposing the stiff textures of the military-wear with soft fur coats and inflated duvet-like dresses. The contrast between textures amplified their effect, embedding them in the memories of the audience.

The pattern of strong contrasts permeated throughout the show. One model wore tight black leggings below a stiff leather tabard, exhibiting the curves of her hips but hiding those of her chest. Another wore a luxurious long-haired busby hat alongside a dress with a stiff, high collar. Polar opposites were employed in the styling of the clothes as well as the textures. Waist-hugging dresses were fused with high collars and broad shoulders. The effect was to stress the femininity of Pugh's warriors without deteriorating their strength. Just like the figure of Britannia, Pugh's soldiers were defined by their femininity, but they still proved incredibly powerful.



Flying a revolutionary flag. Image: James
Hostford

The final model in Pugh's breathtaking show embodied the feminine warrior theme with perfect clarity. She was bare-chested, wearing a Roman helmet and a flowing skirt, and carrying an immense scarlet-red flag. The audience's deafening applause affirmed that Pugh deserved the hype surrounding his catwalk presentation.

London was clearly glad to welcome back the designer, although it isn't clear if this feeling is mutual. Pugh recently confessed: "This city is where everything started for me, my entire creative family is here, so it's in everything I do. It's my home." However, the brutality of this show suggests that the creativity inspired by living in London is not derived from a positive experience. The dominance of matte blacks, the roughly cut hair, and the smeared face paint suggests that London inspires pained creativity for Pugh. The intense football chants asking, 'Who are you?' playing throughout the show hinted at the designer's bittersweet national identity.



Models resembled soldiers. Image: James Hostford



The gothic pieces empowered the female form. Image: James Hostford

The initial impression of the makeup was that it was a celebration of his nationalism. On reflection, it seems that Pugh used his show to applaud feminine warriors like Boudicca and Joan of Arc for standing up to oppression by using masculine strength. The flag carried by the final model of the catwalk resembled more the flag of revolution than that of England.



Gareth Pugh himself makes a brief and modest appearance after the show. Image: James Hostford



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