

'No 53 — MICHAEL LANDY and his father's sheepskin coat'. *Fantastic Man* Online. 10 October 2018

FANTASTIC MAN

No 53 — MICHAEL LANDY and his father's sheepskin coat "I destroyed it." — MICHAEL LANDY

Fantastic Man: What single garment is key to your personal style?

Michael Landy: My dad's sheepskin coat. I destroyed it, along with all my other worldly possessions, over two weeks in 2001 in a project called 'Break Down'.

How did 'Break Down' work?

We set up a 100m long conveyor belt, arranged in two figures of eight, in the former C&A building on Oxford Street. Individual items were put in these yellow trays which travelled round the belt until they reached a dismantling booth, where someone would break each object down into its constituent parts.

Why was the coat so important to you?

During the project it kind of came to represent my father, in a way. I felt that if I destroyed it something bad would happen to him – so it ended up being the last thing we destroyed. Even though it's not a garment I wore that regularly it became a signifier for something else.

Did it represent him in a positive way?

It's strange... he had an industrial accident in the 1970s, but just before that my mum saved up and bought him this sheepskin coat which he never wore. It just became this thing that hung in the cupboard for years. Eventually it was handed over to me, but I was never big enough to inhabit it; my dad was a tunnel miner so much bigger physically than I am.

Did you plan on it being the last thing you destroyed?

No, not at all. The whole thing – seeing and then destroying all your worldly possessions – it's a bit like witnessing your own death. I had to throw my mum out of the exhibition because she was crying. Seeing my dad's coat going round and round for two weeks was another one of those paranoid moments. It's such a loaded object: it became something meaningful within the family over the years.

Do you ever regret destroying it? Or anything else?

No, nothing apart from my lucky Arsenal hat. It's interesting, it's only when you take something apart – when you un-pick it and really look at it – you can see how beautifully crafted it is. I had this very beautiful blue jumper from DIRK BIKKEMBERGS that I bought in Belgium; it was lovely to destroy.

After you had destroyed everything, what was the first item of clothing you bought?

Sadly, it was from GAP. I literally only had the blue boiler suit I had worn for the show so my friend KARSTEN SCHUBERT took me to GAP and bought me some new clothes. I think he was sick of the boiler suit.

Was that straight after?

No about a month after.

A month! That is dedication. Was it difficult to leave the boiler suit behind after so long in it?

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No, I couldn't wait to get out of it, but I was waiting for someone to take pity on me and buy me some new clothes. My relationship to things did change for a while; I really didn't want to consume but at the end of the day it is a part of life. It's a completely natural state of affairs as humans.

The concept of uniform often comes up in your work – is it an important thing for you?

Yeah, a uniform makes everyone the same, without hierarchy – one unit, one totality – but they also delineate different groups of people. I always sit on the tube and look at the guys in their suits and ties, another kind of uniform, and think that it's just an extension of school, you know? This ill-fitting uniform that you are forced to wear, one that you've tried to personalise or make your own in some way, and you are wearing it to go somewhere you probably detest! You know GILBERT AND GEORGE? They wear the same thing every day, go to the same restaurant everyday...I can understand that because it takes away all those individual decisions, anything that could distract from their art. I can understand that, but I wouldn't like it.

Can you describe the state of your wardrobe? Are you a tidy guy?

I am. Everything is ordered and I'm always indiscriminately throwing stuff away. As soon as anything gets a hole in it I'll throw it away.

That must be a hangover from 'Break Down'.

Definitely.

MICHAEL LANDY is a London-based artist. His exhibition 'Scaled Down' is on until 17 November at Thomas Dane Gallery, London.

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