

Eckhaus Latta
**“We’ve Always
Felt Like
Welcomed
Outsiders”**

Photography **LAURENT AMIEL**
Styling **SCOTT SHAPIRO**

All clothing **ECKHAUS LATT**













Not your average ‘art-school’ aesthetic: *Alec Leach* explores how Eckhaus Latta is breaking out from the underground while keeping originality at its core.

Since Mike Eckhaus and Zoe Latta founded their namesake label back in 2011, the duo have kept the industry on its toes with their topsy-turvy aesthetic. They make real, wearable clothes that fashion-forward people love to wear, while simultaneously sidestepping trends or obvious commercial plays. The press loves to talk about the duo’s ‘art-school’ aesthetic, which sounds unfairly amateur for a brand that has retailers like SSENSE, Nordstrom, and Opening Ceremony selling its clothes. Really, Eckhaus Latta is all about shades of grey. It thrives when it’s playing with wonky silhouettes, blotchy dye patterns, and mismatched detailing.

The brand doesn’t play by the rules when it comes to business either—its designers have turned the ‘experiential retail’ cliché on its head by putting a pop-up shop inside an exhibition they designed at the Whitney Museum of American Art last autumn, and had toddlers banging xylophones to soundtrack one of their shows at New York Fashion Week. Perhaps it’s easier to think of Eckhaus Latta as 50% clothing brand, 50% an eclectic explosion of interdisciplinary ideas.

But how does an independent label transition from underground oddity to household name? Is there pressure, now that they’re no longer the new kids on the block?

“There’s always pressure, but we have always done what we wanted to do,” the duo explain of their current position. “It feels nice building upon our experiences and refining our craft, not everything feeling new or unknown.” Eckhaus and Latta aren’t turning their backs on what made them so special in the first place; their methodology is evolving in new directions. “We have no interest in being summed up or coined into an aesthetic and don’t want to ever feel like we’re in a rut, making the same thing, season after season,” they add. “This intuitive way of working is what started Eckhaus Latta and will continue to be part of the practice, whatever the output may be.”

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The duo stress that they let collections develop organically. “We never work with specific inspiration or in a thematic manner but rather, draw, sketch, and reflect on the season prior”. You can see them ruminating on their aesthetic in new ways for AW19—they put an original spin on their fan-favourite knitwear, while dressing elegant silhouettes in shaggy wool or layers of beads, the kind you’d find on a car seat in the ‘70s. There’s also the small matter of an UGG collaboration, which really encapsulates Eckhaus Latta’s ability to turn everyday items into curious new oddities. It sounds like the sort of territory an underground name would tread carefully around—were the duo hesitant about collaborating with such a mainstream name? “Quite

the opposite,” they contend, explaining that they were thrilled to rework such an iconic brand. “UGG is inseparable from our teenage memories.... Who doesn’t love comfortable shoes?” So they took UGG’s signature sheepskin and worked it into a square-toed, heeled proposition—a serious shoe wrapped in a fun, love-it-or-hate-it material. They reworked UGG’s singular shagginess into enormous shearling coats, too. After all, texture is an important part of their work; you’ll find the duo tinkering with what they call “the role of hand” all over their collections.

This unconventional approach also becomes evident in their casting—since their first show, they’ve had all shapes, sizes, and ages wearing their clothes. “We like to cast based on an energy,” the duo explain. “This was never meant to be a statement, just how we liked to work—clothes are so much about the person wearing them.” The next step: using their independence to reduce the impact their business has on the environment. “As a small company, we have the ability to be agile and create less waste.” They’ll incorporate recycled yarns into their knitwear, utilise unused dead-stock fabric that would otherwise go to waste, and donate their own unused materials to local schools.

Eckhaus Latta’s dodging of norms makes sense when you remember that neither Eckhaus nor Latta trained as designers—they were studying Sculpture and Textile Design when they met at Rhode Island School of Design. Perhaps that can explain how the duo have managed to grow while keeping their same spirit of unorthodox originality intact. They clearly don’t see the things the way everyone else does, and their work asks questions of the conventional way of working. Why wouldn’t you have pregnant women walk in your shows? Pregnant women need clothes, too. Why can you only sell clothes in fashion retailers? Museums are a cool place to shop, too. Why wouldn’t you turn an UGG boot into an evening shoe? Everyone loves comfy footwear. This way of looking at things in a new way, a way that’s always shifting, always curious, is what keeps Eckhaus Latta so special. It might just be the thing that secures their future, too. “We’ve always felt like welcomed outsiders,” the duo sum up. “And we’re comfortable in that space for now.”

Words **ALEC LEACH**

Photography **LAURENT AMIEL**
Styling **SCOTT SHAPIRO**
Casting **AKRAV**
Hair **EVANIE FRAUSTO**
Make-up **KENTO UTSUBO**
Set design **STEPHANIE CAPPIELLO**

Models
ANETTE, NYA, ANASTASIA,
VICTORIA, SEBASTIAN , JAYA,
NYA, TZIPROAH, SARA