

METRO PICTURES

Pechman, Alexandra. "Stella McCartney and Cindy Sherman Team Up for a Bold New Project," *VanityFair.com* (September 22, 2020).

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SPLENDOR IN THE GRASS: *Untitled #609*, 2019, by Cindy Sherman, which features a landscape knit sweater and fur-free leopard-print coat from Stella McCartney's autumn 2016 collection.

Schiaparelli and Dalí, McQueen and Hirst, Vuitton and Murakami: Fashion designers and artists have long joined forces to demonstrate the power of creative energy in true collaboration. But for Stella McCartney and Cindy Sherman, it's more than just an industry partnership, it's a friendship—though not without a hint of starstruck fandom.

"I am just a massive—to say the least, huge—fan," McCartney gushes about Sherman on a phone call, the former in London and the latter from New York.

Little artifice exists between the fashion force and the chameleonic photographer—perhaps ironically, given their mutual interest in the varied selves a woman presents. The two surmise they likely first crossed paths at the 2011 Met gala and then at subsequent events. As McCartney recalls, "I always sort of bowed down at Cindy's feet like 'I worship you!' and she's always been embarrassed." (Sherman laughs, not denying it.) Their friendship developed into a loose working relationship: Three years ago, McCartney gave Sherman full access to her brand's archive for whatever she wanted to do with the clothes.



UNDER COVER: *Untitled #615*, 2019. All clothing from the Stella McCartney spring 2017 menswear collection.

“You sort of didn’t care what we were doing this for, like if we should do this for an ad,” Sherman says to McCartney. “There was no set outcome or some kind of business purpose.” McCartney adds, “I think that’s why it works.”

That easy rapport and resulting collaboration inspired Sherman’s latest series: 10 large-scale untitled works, scheduled to be shown at New York’s Metro Pictures gallery, opening September 26 by appointment and available for online viewing at the gallery website. In the photographs, Sherman poses as characters who challenge fixed ideas about gender and often appear as couples, nearly all dressed in Stella McCartney styles.

When McCartney released her menswear line in 2017, she wanted to explore a collaboration with Sherman, who had shied away from male portrayals. McCartney visited Sherman at her New York studio and ended up giving her carte blanche to pick pieces from the new line as well as her past womens wear collections. McCartney was surprised to learn that Sherman sources most of the looks in her work from thrift stores, not designers. “I thought, Oh, she must style it for months! I thought it was a really big ingredient,” McCartney says. “And I found it hugely inspiring and liberating that it was so natural.” In turn, Sherman felt free to explore, slowly sending McCartney images of her work as she finished: “Whenever I’ve consciously tried to do men, I felt like it was hard to look ambiguous as a man,” Sherman explains. “One of the issues keeping me from doing it was having decent and convincing wigs, and the other was clothing.” McCartney quickly replies, “Who’d have thought?!”



LAYERS OF MEANING: *Untitled #610*, 2019. Houndstooth cape and bag from the Stella McCartney autumn 2014 collection, and sweater from the spring 2017 menswear collection.

One of Sherman's first questions when making the new work was: "What does a man pose as?" Her experimentation manifested as couples, perhaps as brother and sister, partners, or maybe two sides of the same person. "I would do the male character first and then just add a little bit of lipstick or mascara and change the outfit," she says. "My thought was how easily one can view someone as male or female." She found herself attracted to bright colors and patterns in McCartney's clothing, and offset them on fantastically colored outdoor backgrounds, created from photographs Sherman took while traveling in Bavaria, Shanghai, and Sissinghurst, in England.

"When I look at the work that's come out of it, you don't know whether it's womens wear or menswear, and I think that's one of the sides to our house that's very much our taste," McCartney says. "The art you've produced here is strangely aligned with what I do in my work. But better." She paused, both of them laughing at her summation. "Yours is way better."