

BJARNE MELGAARD'S
A B U S E O F
C H I C N E S S

THROUGH INEXHAUSTIBLE MINING OF THE DEPTHS OF HUMAN CONSUMPTION, BEHAVIOR, AND WASTE, ARTIST BJARNE MELGAARD HAS SHINED A SPOTLIGHT ON THE UNDERBELLY OF MODERNITY. FREQUENTLY HAILED AS THE ART WORLD'S ENFANT TERRIBLE, MELGAARD TELLS KEVIN MCGARRY HE'S READY TO MOVE INTO EVEN DARKER TERRITORY—FASHION.

PHOTOGRAPHY DARREN SYLVESTER
FASHION AVENA GALLAGHER



SWEATSHIRT (AROUND WAIST),
PANTS (OVER SHOULDERS), GLOVES
CALVIN KLEIN COLLECTION
T-SHIRT (THROUGHOUT)
BJARNE'S OWN



HOODED MAXI **TELFAR**
JEANS AND SOCKS BJARNE'S OWN

New York's standing as a pillar of the art world is just about undisputable, but over the past five years of post-recession boom, the city's life as an art capital has been somewhat at odds with its evolution into a capitalist utopia: a gleaming shopping mall is a great destination for buying art, but it's not an especially hospitable place for the artists who make it. Maybe something about New York's bohemian grit going on life support explains the meteoric rise of Norwegian-born artist Bjarne Melgaard. A sculptor, painter, and novelist who arrived in Manhattan in 2009, Melgaard, 47, has since emerged as a kind of folk hero, emphatically melding pop culture, subculture, abjection, and expressionism into an unstoppable one-man art movement.

Quintessentially foreign, Melgaard is also a true New Yorker in the sense that he is a workaholic who came to town to win. He's certainly no stranger to controversy: earlier this year the *Evening Standard* dubbed him the most famous Norwegian artist since Edvard Munch, following the uproar over his work "Chair," in which a mannequin of a topless black woman in a leather fetish get-up is bent over backwards to provide a seat for its owner, Russian billionaire, art collector, and beautiful young white woman Dasha Zhukova. Scintillating as all this was, Melgaard hardly needed putting on the map. The artist slowly but surely began showing in New York in 2000, and stepped up his pace over the years to the point that he has been making entire exhibitions in matters of weeks. Killer shows at the 2011 Venice Biennale and later that year at Maccarone Gallery paved the way for a 2012 stunt at the then-fledgling Lower East Side gallery Ramiken Crucible: a pen containing two white Bengal tiger cubs, named Sonia and Tanya, modeling collars and tiger-print capes alongside racks of opulent adult diapers and graphic Richard Kern photos. More recently, Melgaard was a standout at the 2014 Whitney Biennial, presenting a big room containing sex dolls, anthropomorphic furniture, a video loop of gay lovers who hate each other, and an explosion of other crafts and housewares that combine to create a vibrant, nightmarish scene.

Melgaard is easily recognizable by his steroidal swell and craggy, brutishly hand-some jaw. But earlier this summer, at his high-rise apartment in Manhattan's garment

district, it wasn't the hulking artist who answered the door, but his mother, visiting from Oslo. Half his size, with a warm and inviting disposition, she politely excused herself to walk his tiny dog. As Melgaard produced a coconut water from an array of Juice Press products in the fridge, he quickly confided that after a couple of colossal years in art, change is imminently afoot. "I want to do new things, some new stuff with my life," he said. "I'm kind of bored with the art world."

The art world hardly seems bored with him, however. In the past year he mounted seventeen solo exhibitions and institutional installations all around the world. "Doing show after show becomes really meaningless after a while," he continued. "There's just a limit to how much you can put into the idea of a show. I want to expand and try new territories."

The arena that he has his sights set on is one even more generally reviled than that of snobby curators and collectors: fashion. This September, during Paris Fashion Week, Melgaard will debut his line, BJARNE, for buyers. Developed in collaboration with creative director Babak Radboy, of *Bidouin* magazine and Shanzhai Biennial fame, the idea, in a nutshell, is "streetwear for people who don't like streetwear," and its intent is to tap into the metrics of consumer desire a little more directly than is possible with art. Catherine Breillat is the unauthorized spokesmodel for the line, which is something the French director may or may not know. Ironically, Melgaard hasn't even seen her latest film, *Abuse of Weakness*, which is as central a motif to the line as are the initials C.B., recurring throughout. Titled "the casual pleasure of disappointment," BJARNE's first collection is already set to split into two diffusion lines: "Housewife" and "Disappointment." "Housewife is only black-and-white," he says, "and Disappointment is really regular clothing, streetwear, like sweatpants, tracksuits, sweats, and hoodies." With ten e-commerce Web sites and nearly two dozen branding campaigns shot by "the world's most disillusioned photographers," BJARNE is primed to explode as forcibly as its namesake, not as an ironic artwork donning the mantle of a clothing line, but as a fully functioning brand whose prodigious volume of commodity stands parallel to Melgaard's own relentless rate of production. **KEVIN McGARRY**

SHIRT CUSTOMIZED **CALVIN KLEIN**
PANTS (THROUGHOUT) BJARNE'S OWN





COAT YOHJI YAMAMOTO
BELT BLESS
CLOTHING (WORN UNDERNEATH)
BJARNE'S OWN

CREATIVE DIRECTOR BABAK RADBOY
HAIR JOHN RUIDANT (SEE MANAGEMENT)
GROOMING CEDRIC JOLIVET (SEE MANAGEMENT)
STYLIST ASSISTANTS PATRIC DICAPRIO AND MITCH McGUIRE



JACKET ADIDAS ORIGINALS
MASK JESSICA SCOTT FOR BJARNE MELGAARD