

TAKING A BOW

In celebration of *Glass'* 15th year, we take a look at the emblem of the year across fashion, design and art – the bow

Writer CHARLIE NEWMAN



Berthe Morisot, *Portrait of Isabelle Lambert*, 1885. Pastel on paper, 39 x 37 cm. Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia



Jean-Louis Forain, *Dance Card*, c. 1888. Pastel on paper mounted on canvas, 50 x 61 cm. Private collection

Bow mania has arrived. Bulging out of hemlines, bursting from scrunchies, perched atop tablescapes, nestled around candelabras, bedecking manicures and hiding in galleries, the bow is inescapable. But why does it feel so potent now?

Perhaps the gloomy winter weather combined with the cost of living crisis asks for a cheap thrill to bust the blues. Enter the bow. A hangover from the Christmas season, it conjures up dizzy memories of gift-giving and receiving, decorations and jollities. While the Christmas tree may have come down, the bow is here to stay.

Since launching Shrimps in 2013, designer Hannah Weiland has consistently played with the bow across all of her collections. For Weiland the bow “is just something I have always loved ... For me it also represents my love of fabric and textiles. I love how it is functional as well as aesthetically pleasing, a pretty object that literally holds things together. I have used it throughout our collections as a decorative element, a functional element, a printed element, a beaded element ... the list could go on!”

Weiland’s love affair with bows harks back to “first days of school, red satin bows dangling at the end of blonde plaits”. Now, you can find bows in Shrimps Spring Summer 2024 collection – gathering mohair hoods in shades of fuchsia pink and emerald green, blooming out of dresses or reincarnated as pearly bows across jewellery and hair pieces.

Designer Emilia Wickstead also works with hair bows, but this time she supersedes them, matching the bows to her current collection’s fabric of choice. This season, Weiland was inspired by the bows “represented through decorative architecture, ornate plaster ceiling work and beautiful engravings”, finding the “almost figure of 8 or an infinity sign” symmetry pleasing to the eye.



SHRIMPS
Photographer MAX KINDERSLEY



SIMONE ROCHA



BERNADETTE
Photographer LAURENCE ELLIS

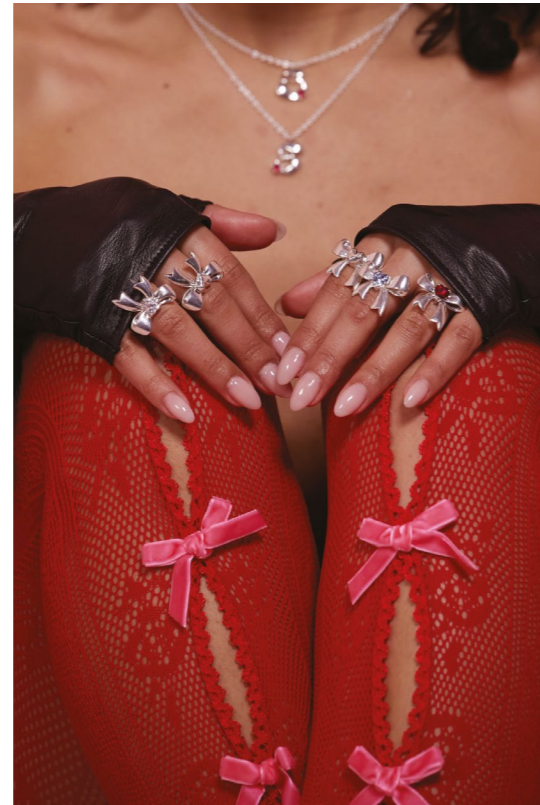


BERNADETTE
Photographer LAURENCE ELLIS

Bows take on familial symmetry at the Tate Britain's *Sargent and Fashion* exhibition, where we find mother and daughter wearing matching ballet slipper pink bows jauntily tied at the top of their heads in *Mrs Carl Meyer And Her Children*, 1893. The bow takes a more dramatic turn in *Lady Helen Vincent, Viscountess D'Abernon*, 1904, where Sargent secures a dusty pink, thick ribboned bow to her bust, adding a dainty sense of lightness to her operatic black satin dress with billowing, pillow-like pink sleeves. Today, we find bows anchoring award-winning designer Roksanda Ilinčić's angular designs, using contrast ribbon to gather waistlines.

Just as Sargent's models wore bows inter-generationally, so too do mother and daughter Bernadette and Charlotte De Geyter, immortalised in their Antwerp-based brand Bernadette. Founded in 2020, Bernadette is "a brand that stems from conversations between a mum and a daughter. We keep the brand very close to us, to our memories, to our experiences and desires. We are attracted to feminine, non-apologetic beauty, and the bow for us represents this." While the bow may bring up "a lot of nostalgic, girly, and playful feelings, reminiscent of a time where we were young and free", the motif has evolved and continued to develop through to adulthood, displayed at Bernadette where you'll find oversized regal bows resting atop one-shoulder gowns, or heavy, full-length bows spilling over opulent evening dresses. These are bows that exude the strength and confidence of old Hollywood glamour with a dash of daring thanks to primary-coloured stripes and the bustling rustle of sweeping taffeta. Bernadette's designs are "to be worn in an effortless way for the women that are not afraid to still be a girl at heart" while giving voice and confidence to the modern woman.

For this is where the magic of the bow trend lies – an affirmation of women championing women, of fourth-wave feminism all sealed in a bow. The bows trend is an example of the strength of the female voice in the fashion industry today (note how most of these designers are women) and a fantastical display of freedom of expression.



STEFF ELEOFF
Photographer ALYSSA LANCASTER



John Singer Sargent
Mrs Carl Meyer and her Children, 1896
Oil paint on canvas; 201.4 x 134.0 cm
Tate. Photo © Tate



Sargent and Fashion Installation view with La Carmencita, c.1890 and costume. Photo © Tate (Larina Fernandes)



SIMONE ROCHA



SIMONE ROCHA



SIMONE ROCHA

If you go weak at the knees for the ballet core trend, opt for independent LA-based label, Lisa Says Gah, for bows knitted into chunky jumpers, tied delicately onto chunky puffer jackets. Think ballerina off-duty. My812's rose pink balletic bow dresses could be taken straight out of the Royal Academy's *Impressionists on Paper* exhibition, where you'll find Edgar Degas' dancers stretching and dancing, Jean-Louis Forain's *Dance Card*, c.1888 and Berthe Morisot portraiture, all suckers for a bow. For the Y2K devotees, Ashley Williams' mini skirt with a smattering of bows or Steff Eleoff's silver gob stopper bow rings.

At the other end of the bow spectrum you can't miss the stomping riot of bows at Chopova Lowena. For its Spring Summer 24 collection, the brand splurged bows over snow-style boots, hair pieces and beyond to punkish effect. Far from prim and proper, Simone Rocha's bows counteract with her utilitarian parkas, rippling silk draping and stiff collars, climbing its aesthetic peak with ribbons trailing along the floor like a modern-day fairytale. Looking for more texture? Reach for Saloni's cult velvet dress fastened with diamanté bows dripping down your chest like armour.

Perhaps you lean more towards the femme fatale energy of the bow? Look to Lado Bokuchava whose bows pierce ballet slippers and fasten leather corsets. The juxtaposition of sugar and spice and all things nice with the dominatrix ferocity of his designs is both jarring and thrilling, a contrast that the *Cute* exhibition at Somerset House explores thoroughly. The etymology of the word cute comes from the Ancient Greek 'acutus', roughly translating as 'sharp'. In the exhibition, cute comes sharply into view as a capitalist symbol, embodied in Hello Kitty's red bow whose origins began 50 years ago during the 1970s oil crisis, and as an eerie symbol of the fetishisation of youth. The bow feels unsettlingly sinister and fabulously fun all in one gulp in this exhibition, a magnificent display of the nuance of reality.



LADO BOKUCHAVA
Photographer TORNIKE AIVAZISHVILI





ASHLEY WILLIAMS



Hello Kitty installation in the CUTE exhibition at Somerset House.
Photographer David Parry PA for Somerset House



CURATED BY TOMASA



Hello Love by Hattie Stewart on display on Somerset House's River Terrace in celebration of CUTE.
Photographer David Parry PA



Setsuko Tamura, 'Fancy Note' notebook, 1960s-1970s. (c)Setsuko Tamura. Courtesy to Yayoi Museum



Sugar coated pill works on display in the CUTE exhibition at Somerset House. Credit David Parry PA for Somerset House

If bows feel a little too infantile for your wardrobe why not experiment at home instead? Entrepreneur and founder of online homeware store Glassette, Laura Jackson, saw her crafty bow hacks go viral when she used them to dress up presents, tablecloths, candles, crackers and menus. So too did florist, author and designer Willow Crossley's contrast bows that adorn vases, arrangements and napkins. Our collective appreciation for craft has grown exponentially since the lockdown, forcing us to slow down, pause and reflect. Online retailer Curated By Tomasa gathers handmade local and artisanal products from various cultures, citing its greatest inspiration as "folklore, with its traditions and customs that help us remember our roots". Tomasa's mohair bow scrunchie symbolises "femininity and playfulness" and is available in a rainbow of Wes Anderson shades, made in a small ethical family-run factory in A Coruña in Spain.

Rejoice in supporting women and craftspeople from across the world with the frivolous tying of a bow. Still not convinced? Then farfalle pasta will have to do. See, you really can't get away from it.