

## A Fashion Fairytale

Once upon a time, two slightly delusional characters by the names of Britt and Fred started telling tasty stories together. The result is young label [FredfarrowBrittavelontan](#): the love child of Fred Farrow (26) and Britt Avelon Tan (28). Fred and Britt translate their unique, almost naïve, outlook on the world into quirky, whimsical, rather absurd fashion collections. Their focus on material- and texture development is outstanding, making [FredfarrowBrittavelontan](#)'s last fashion show a 'bloody' fantastic fresh breeze on Amsterdam Fashion Week.

Interview by Lisa Goudsmit

"It took me four years to paint like Raphael, but a lifetime to paint like a child." Fred Farrow memorizes these famous words by Picasso when we discuss the way he and his girlfriend, Britt Avelon Tan, design fashion. Like the Spanish painter, the duo uses childlike imagination to create a certain image. Britt: "We are non-conformists. We like what others tend to call 'weird stuff', and scan the borders in which people can accept this 'weirdness' as being perfectly normal. It is important for me to show that it is ok to be different." Fred: "We want our collections to be whimsical: naïve in a

way, but also with a childlike playfulness. Through our work we express ourselves; we integrate and translate our ideas into garments, inspired by the techniques of *haute couture*."

Fred and Britt both graduated as fashion designers from ArtEZ, Institute of the Arts in Arnhem, in 2010. They started their label [FredfarrowBrittavelontan](#) two years ago. "During our studies, when we were not officially a professional duo yet, we already worked together. We helped each other by critically judging each others





PHOTO BY KAREN PAULINA

creations”, the pair explains. “I feel that it is always better and more fun to work as a team”, Britt continues. “This way it is less likely to lose yourself in your own work. Also, two minds know more than one.” Fred: “Our qualities really complement each other.” Fred and Britt are a couple: both professionally and romantically. “But we keep our professional and private life as much separated as possible. We can disagree at work, but do not continue the discussion at home”, Britt explains.

Already used to working together, but not officially owning a shared label yet, the couple decided to move to Paris – appositely the city of love and fashion – after their graduation. Fred and Britt still live in the French capital and have their own workplace and showroom there. “I think it is important to explore new surroundings for your own development. And we already had some connections in Paris, which helps when you’re a young designer”, Britt explains. “Besides that, Paris still knows many seamstresses and embroiderers. Craft and handiwork are important to us.” In the meantime, Fred won

the Frans Molenaar Couture Award, the renowned prize initiated by the namesake Dutch designer. Putting their newfound winnings to good use, Fred and Britt completed their first collection together: Caturday, for Spring/Summer 2012. Inspired by online movies of cats, which were then on an unexpected peak of popularity, *FredfarrowBrittavelontan* created both a fashion collection as well as a psychedelic short movie that holds the middle between a moving fashion shoot and an absurd artistic commentary on the popular cat movies. As Fred states: “With our work, we reflect upon the world; this can be inspired by either the Internet, movies or art, or whatever we see happening around us.”

After the Frans Molenaar Couture Award, Fred and Britt both received stipends from the Mondriaan Fund, which helped to create their last two collections. Fred and Britt have been displaying their work at Amsterdam Fashion Week since 2010, a total of four times so far. “The first time we participated was as part of the Green Fashion Competition 2010, in which we competed with a couple of sustainable garments. Since that first experience we showed three collections under our own label.” This first presentation to the Dutch national fashion audience already showed what is an important pillar in the aesthetics and ideals of *FredfarrowBrittavelontan*: the couple tries to produce as

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sustainable as possible, while refusing to use materials such as leather and fur. This search for ‘green’ fashion was taken to a next level in their latest Autumn/Winter 2013 collection, named ‘Shearing a bed’. Inspired by the flowers and plants in the Parisian garden of the grandmother of a friend, Fred and Britt decided to use natural materials to dye their cloths. Britt: “We always try to come up with eco-friendly solutions. The garden, as well as said grandmother’s knowledge of natural colour pigments, served as a direct inspiration for the colour use in the collection.”

The designers took their ideas on natural colouring pigments even further when they decided to use their own blood to dye yarn. Fred: “A famous colour is Oxblood Red, which is traditionally attained by using oxblood. We liked that this pigment naturally changes shades throughout time, but since we create animal friendly fashion, we didn’t want to use oxblood. So we used our

own blood instead. Our intention was to experiment, not so much to make a statement.” Since the quantity of their own blood they could take knew its limitations, Fred and Britt only dyed a small piece of fabric this way.

This piece dyed with the human pigment was really used in the collection as part of a long hand woven dress (with elastic weft threads), executed in colours like bright yellow, sea blue, and of course ‘bloody’ red. In its colour use, textures and technique, this garment objectifies the visual idea the couple had in mind with ‘Shearing a bed’. Throughout the entire collection, *FredfarrowBrittavelontan* used the technique of ‘gestures’: chunky knits, and sometimes even only a few coloured wires, create the suggestion of a completely coloured surface. This idea of gestures was adopted from the aesthetics of another source of inspiration, being the work of abstract

expressionistic painters Pierre Soulages, Brice Marden and John Hodgekinson. Fred: "After the great success of Jackson Pollock, these artists felt like everything had already been done once. So they returned to the base: the colours and material of paint. We translated this abstract idea of colour use into our own dying-experiments, using natural pigments and wax. At the same time, we translated the abstract expressionist's ideas of gestures into our textures in the fabrics."

'Shearing a bed' shows how the couple adapts different aspects from the world around them, and combines them into a completely new story. Not only the Parisian garden and abstract expressionists, but also Wes Anderson's movie 'The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou', inspired *FredfarrowBrittavelontan*. This became literally visible in the red hats the catwalk models wore during the show, resembling that of Bill Murray's character Steve Zissou in the movie. But the movie also served as a source of inspiration in a more figurative way. Britt: "Besides the hat, the light blue of the suits in the movie returns in our collection; the animals in the movie are depicted in the same naïve matter we create garments; and the researchers in the story personify the way research is an important part in our working process. In general, Wes Anderson's vision resembles ours: his absurd view on the world is something we identify with."

Throughout our conversation, this naïve, rather absurd outlook on the world keeps returning in the stories behind *FredfarrowBrittavelontan*'s

collections. The Spring/Summer 2013 collection 'Solla Sollew', was named after a 1965 children's book by Dr. Seuss, 'I Had Trouble in Getting to Solla Sollew', in which the main character is on the search for the mythical city Solla Sollew, where troubles do not exist. Britt: "Dr. Seuss's ideas are amazing. He educates life lessons in a non-moralistic matter, accompanied by great drawings. In our collection, the names of the garments were derived from his books." It is not hard to see why Dr. Seuss speaks to Fred and Britt: the stories and drawings in his books create a magical, colourful world, comparable to the fashion of *FredfarrowBrittavelontan*.

Currently, the duo is working on their new collection Spring/Summer 2014, for which they are still in their research phase. After this season, they also aspire to open their own webshop. Fred: "So far our only point of sale is our showroom in Paris. It is difficult to convince buyers of our commercial potential; first we have to show certain continuity in our style. Although we do not have our own production yet, this is also a fun phase. Now we can operate on a very personal level: we can adjust the garment for our customer, like adding extra embroidery for example."

This personal approach combined with the artistic craftsmanship and a unique vision promises a great future for *FredfarrowBrittavelontan*. Their imagination is refreshing, and has the power to create whimsical worlds in the likes of Dr. Seuss and Wes Anderson. Even the fashion duo's website proves that an online platform can

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PHOTOS BY PETER STIGTER



serve as a creative environment, combining beautiful images with colourful movies and poetry-like humorous texts. The absence of information on the website stimulates the visitor's fantasy, just like their fashion. It will be interesting to witness how *FredfarrowBrittavelontan* will develop within the next couple of years. To end with a wise statement from their website: 'Appreciateartandacornsyrup.' And they lived happily ever after. ●

The atelier and showroom of *FredfarrowBrittavelontan* can be found at 79, Rue de Rebeval, 75019, Paris

[www.fredfarrowbrittavelontan.com](http://www.fredfarrowbrittavelontan.com)