The World of Anna Sui is a Fashion and Textile Museum exhibition. Image ©Joshua Jordon.
‘When I made my first punk collection in Spring 1994, I wanted to make it positive. The concept of nihilism was never me, anyway. I could never believe there was no future. DIY, on the other hand, I could buy into because I felt I’d always done everything myself.’

Anna Sui remains one of fashion’s eternal optimists: in referencing punk, she captures the style and essence of the movement rather than the nihilism and self-destructive elements. Relating it to her own experiences, Sui highlights the energy and bravado of the punks in her work. As a designer Sui also acknowledges the discipline of the punk aesthetic in its British incarnation. Rarely does she create a literal interpretation in her designs; when punk does emerge in one of her collections it is with her own unique take on it and mixed with other, seemingly incongruous elements, such as influences from the legendary French interior designer, Madeleine Castaing.
Teddy Boy Ensemble (Top row)

Autumn 1992

Mohair **Jacket** and **Skirt** and silk **Shirt**

Mohair umbrella; Glass collar/bracelet and fob by **Erickson Beamon for Anna Sui**; cotton/spandex socks; mohair-covered cowhide shoes by **John Fluevog for Anna Sui**

As well as recalling the designs of Balenciaga, one of Sui’s design heroes, the 1992 collection also included a series of jackets inspired by those worn by Johnny Rotten of the Sex Pistols in the 1970s. Sui herself had met Sid Vicious (Rotten’s band mate) and his girlfriend, Nancy, in London in 1977 and had spent an evening in their company. These jackets were in turn styled after versions worn by the Teddy Boys in the 1950s. Sui was particularly influenced by the style of these ‘drape jackets’, which were long, single-breasted and sporting velvet-trimmed collars. Here the jacket, made from mohair, is worn as part of
a suit and is accessorised with a matching tartan umbrella as well as shoes. As usual, Sui shows total commitment in her design and styling.
Leopard Punk Dress (Middle row left)

Spring 2013

Silk **Dress** and nylon **Petticoat** with nylon/spandex net **T-Shirt** and **Leggings**

Aluminium/porcelain/plastic necklace and bracelet by **Erickson Beamon for Anna Sui**; studded cowhide shoes

For Spring 2013, Sui combined two completely disparate ideas blending the aesthetic of the legendary interior designer Madeleine Castaing (1894–1992) with her own personal experience as an habitué of London’s and New York’s punk scene. The result illustrated Sui’s astonishing ability to weave autobiography into her collections. Dominant shades of blue and leopard print referenced the interiors of Castaing, a fan of the mid-nineteenth-century period that followed the chaos of the French Revolution and Napoleonic upheaval, known as the Second Empire. Making a connection between the chaos of social
and political upheaval and the anarchy of punk, Sui delivered a collection that celebrated her own passionate attachment to idiosyncratic style. This leopard print dress reflects perfectly Sui’s two main inspirations for Spring 2013 with its ‘girly’ empire silhouette, counterbalanced with its punk-inspired ripped nylon mesh T-shirt, leggings and studded shoes. Sui loves opposites and is always fascinated by the ‘good’ girl/‘bad’ girl contradiction.
Slash 'n tie T-shirt Dress (Middle row centre)

Spring 2001

Glass rhinestone studded nylon Dress

Cowhide/glass belt and nickel/glass earrings by Erickson Beamon for Anna Sui; Nylon hose; Glass/cowhide shoes by Ballin for Anna Sui

The Spring 2001 collection was highly autobiographical, including many ensembles that reflected Sui’s Mudd Club, thrift shop aesthetic. The Mudd Club (1978–83) was a major fixture on the New York club scene and was seen as the complete antithesis of the glamorous Studio 54. Sui describes the style of the girls at the Mudd Club as ‘downtown road warrior goddess’. This duality was reflected in a series of dresses that appeared to be slashed randomly with a razor whereas in reality they had been meticulously made from intricate pattern pieces and then embellished with glass rhinestones. As usual the inspiration for the
collection was multilayered, including a photograph of the designer Anya Phillips wearing one of her own body-con dresses. This photograph was taken by Ed Bertoglio and his girlfriend, Maripol (one-time stylist to Madonna), who documented the Manhattan nightlife scene together in the 1980s.
‘I have to say I was impressed by the dress-code discipline of the British take on punk.’
Zebra Punk Party Dress (Middle row right)

Spring 2007

Silk chiffon Dress with nylon Petticoat, Leggings and Gloves
Brass/glass/plastic necklace by Erickson Beamon for Anna Sui;
cowhide boots by Ballin for Anna Sui

For Spring 2007, Sui combined influences of 1980s’ British music with those of 1780s’ French costume, inspired by Sophia Coppola’s unusual historical approach in her film, Marie Antoinette (2006). Like Coppola, Sui’s own take on history is often anachronistic and iconoclastic. In this vein, the Spring 2007 collection combined references to Vivienne Westwood’s and Malcolm McLaren’s punk fashions of the mid- to late 1970s, for example the ripped meshed leggings and armlets paired with this dress, as well as Westwood’s 1981 ‘Pirate’ collection, characterised by its loose-cut billowing silhouettes together with influences of 1780s’ French costume. The boots with straps and buckles
referenced the pirate, while the monochrome print recalled the strict dress colour code of the New York clubs of Sui’s youth, such as Max’s and CBGBs.
Punk Cat Ensemble (Bottom row left)

Spring 2013

Cotton with patches **Shirt** and polyester/cotton jacquard **Waistcoat** and **Skirt with** nylon mesh **Leggings** and **T-shirt**

Plastic clutch by **Ali Rapp for Anna Sui**; aluminium/plastic bracelet by **Erickson Beamon for Anna Sui**; Straw/glass cat-ear hat by **James Coviello for Anna Sui**; cotton necktie; patent leather cowhide shoes by **Ballin for Anna Sui**

This outfit blends elements inspired by Madeline Castaing (the use of jacquard and blue denim) and Sui’s experience of punk, reflected in the guitar motif on the tie as well as the nylon mesh leggings and T-shirt and the plastic of the clutch bag. The shoes add glamour, while the cat-ear hat adds an extra idiosyncratic twist typical of Sui’s style. The blend of inspirations was also reflected in the soundtrack for the catwalk show, which included tracks by the Ramones and other punk bands as
well as French musical tunes. Sui’s shows are famous for their visual creativity as well as their rock concert soundtracks, which together reflect her total vision for each collection.
Punk Jumpsuit (Bottom row centre-left)

Spring 2013

Cotton denim with embroidery **Jumpsuit** and Nylon mesh **T-Shirt**

Glass collar by **Erickson Beamon for Anna Sui**; studded cowhide shoes by **Ballin for Anna Sui**

Channelling as inspiration for the Spring 2013 collection the style of French interior designer Madeleine Castaing, the predominant colour of this outfit is blue, denim in this case, decorated with embroidery. Sui’s clothes always incorporate intricate details. The zips are an allusion to ‘biker’ chic, while the ripped nylon mesh T-shirt references punk. The studded shoes evoke the tribalistic use of studs in punk accessories although the design of the shoes adds a feminine note to this otherwise tomboyish ensemble, reflecting Sui’s attraction to contradictory juxtapositions.
Mohair Cobweb Sweater Ensemble (Bottom row centre-right)
Spring 1994
Satin **Dress** and mohair **Sweater**
Nylon socks; cowhide shoes by **John Fluevog for Anna Sui**

‘Punk style was so nihilistic … I wanted to make it more positive …’

Sui’s Spring 1994 collection revisited grunge and combined it with elements of punk style. The mohair cobweb sweater seen here is typical of the punk style associated with Vivienne Westwood’s and Malcolm McLaren’s Seditionaries label, which provided a sartorial identity for the punk movement in the mid- to late 1970s. The short metallic satin dress adds a ‘girly’ note referencing the Riot Grrls, a highly politicised musical movement renowned for their ‘little girl’ look, as well injecting a touch of positive glamour that contrasts with the more nihilistic viewpoint of punk.
Silver Peruvian Ensemble (Bottom row right)

Spring 1994

Hand-painted/silk-screened/studded metallic cowhide **Jacket** and **Skirt and cotton T-shirt**

Cotton cap by **Peruvian Connection for Anna Sui**; poly/nylon socks; metallic cowhide boots by **John Fluevog for Anna Sui**

This ensemble, while referencing punk with its leather skirt and biker jacket also has a ring of ‘glam rock’ about it due to the metallic silver. The ‘perfecto’ jacket is customised with silver studs and an image of Sui’s beloved dolly head (a recurrent Sui motif) by artist Michael Economy. This outfit with its blending of punk, biker and glam notes embodies the ethos of ‘bricolage’ (the borrowing of symbols and imagery from diverse sources), a defining feature of subcultural style.
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