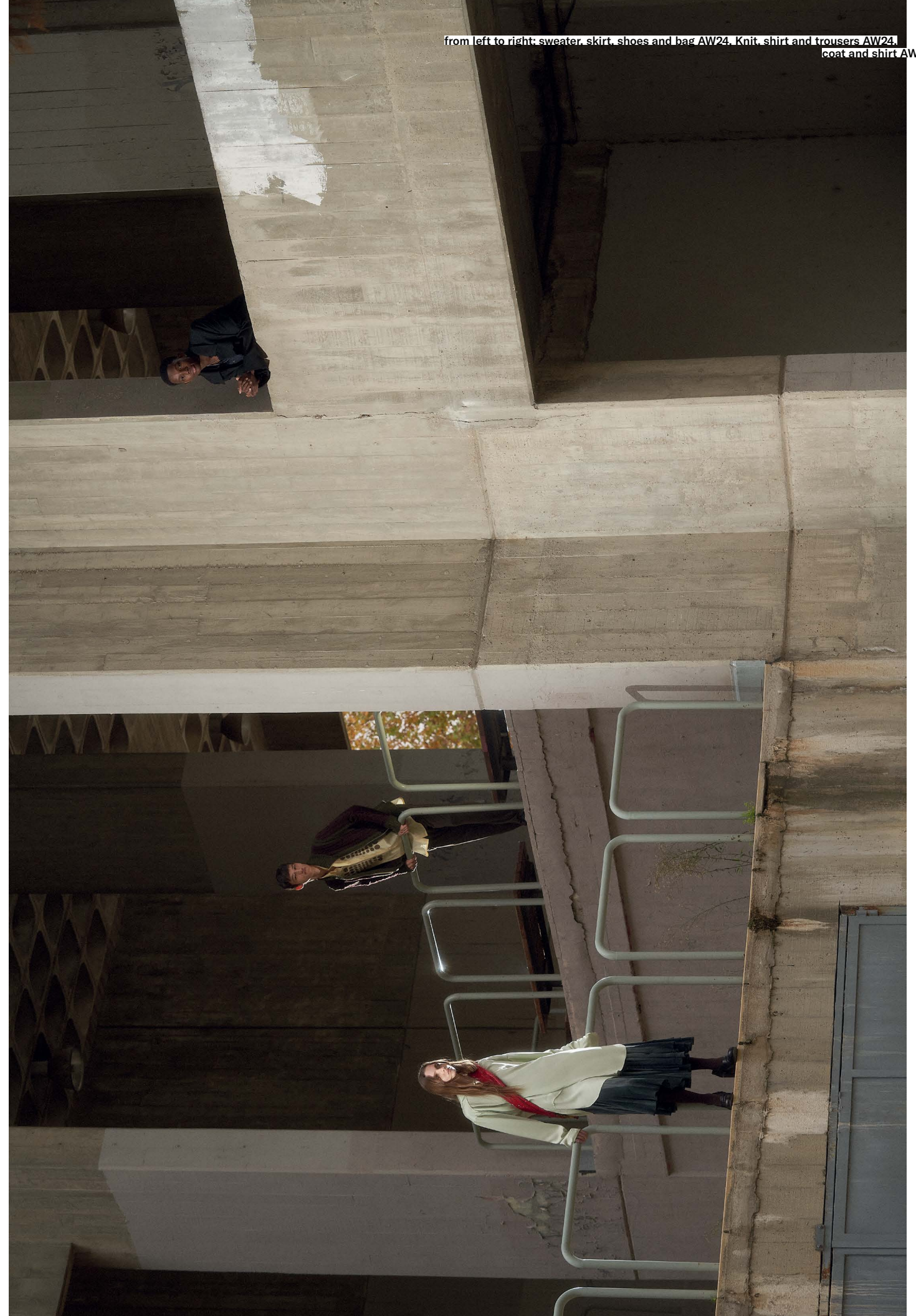


CUM AS YOU ARE

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all clothing EDWARD CUMING

from left to right: sweater, skirt, shoes and bag AW24. Knit, shirt and trousers AW24.  
coat and shirt AW24.



On a fossick through the racks of Paris' Dover Street Market, we came across the stripey, colour-blocked clothes of Edward Cuming, a Madrid-based designer who was rumoured to be Australian. It was imperative that we organise a call to verify his national identity. He hopped on a Zoom a few months later: we saw his beach-blonde hair and cracked golden skin, and we comfortably closed the case. It turns out that Cuming shies away from his 'Australianism', in favour of building a brand with a global presence.

Madame Rat. Scratch the Itch. Bottom Heavy. Fraying Lung. Ascension. Open Heart. Wet Collage. Cum.

These are eight of the thirty-eight titles attributed to pieces in *010*, Edward Cuming's tenth clothing collection. Numbers resemble progress for Cuming, who labels each collection of his namesake brand to mark his refinement of technical tropes, development of ideas, and deeper investigation into materiality. Cuming likes to label his collections this way so the work "feels continuous and growing." He says that the subsequent *Collection 011* was approached like a puzzle, through a process of joining "circle edges" and "square holes" until each fit neatly, like links in a chain. "I was putting different fabrics together and trying to come up with different compositions that felt pleasing. That's what the collection ended up being: a complete mood board of all the fabrics that I didn't have the strength to say no to." He found harmony in pairing random pieces that, together, felt cohesive.

In look one, Cuming created a dress by stitching a spliced women's T-shirt with a draped jacquard skirt. Throughout the whole collection this kind of melding is exercised, as the designer plays with the back and front of garments, opposing the stiffness of one side with the lightness of another. In the sixth look, Cuming pairs high-waisted frayed silk shorts, cinched with a mustard ribbon. A flesh-tone cotton T-shirt falls a third of the way from the model's shoulder and two-thirds above her elbow. On the T-shirt are outlines of foliage, printed in a lime green hue and inspired by the landscapes of Tabboo!, a New York-based artist and performer. The foliage is overlaid with a cyan pompom that stems up to the model's sternum bone. This paradox of fluid silk and rigid cotton, blue flora and green fauna, sliced fabric and patched designs, is intended for the young, spirited dresser, keen to test and wear clothes that are not obviously natty, yet still swish.

Asked whether the customer is considered each season, Cuming admits that he tries not to think "too strategically" about them. "A lot of our language feels honest and consistent—some things land, some things don't. Even when they don't, I try and do it again. That's how you build a core offering organically. You've got to drill the ideas." Pieter Mulier of the French house Alaïa thought similar when he produced ballet flats in different renditions over three seasons until they were, finally, a cult hit. In October 2023, Cuming applied this ideal to his Cum Jeans, a product that would have "its own name and its own world and could start to establish the brand in a new light." On [edwardcuming.com](http://edwardcuming.com), there are six versions of the Cum jeans, each crafted from 100% recycled cotton and tailored in a slim, straight or bootleg fit. The jeans vary from white, mid to dark indigo washes and have a distinctive reverse cut-out patch at the knee and hem, as if Grandma sewed it after a tumble on the bike. On the back waistband is a camel-brown leather patch with the letters CUM rendered large, for, as the product details say, "a touch of luxury." The jeans circumvent the pressure that Cuming (and many independent designers) feel to create consistently original work. The reality of producing clothes is that "it can't be 100% newness each season," he asserts with conviction.



sweater, skirt, shoes and bag AW24.



sweater, skirt, shoes and bag AW24  
opposite: turtleneck, skirt and bag AW23.



Repetition is a comforting habit for the designer, who revisits past research to reprocess information. Cuming learnt this method during his master's degree at Central Saint Martins, the esteemed design school in London's Granary Square. The first assignment he received was a research task with no specific brief. "They wanted us to produce whatever we wanted and after six months we were to present our work with absolutely no guidelines. It could be a collection, a book, a film." Cuming researched extensively for four-and-a-half months and then attempted to identify points of connection in a giant binder-cum-coffee table book, filled with images that "have or had power." He realised that research was more than perusing books in a library: knowledge could be attained on the street, watching passers go by on their morning commute, or, as he muses, "filming yourself in different clothes and understanding the way they feel." To this day, he keeps resonant images somewhere accessible, in case he finds something different in them, something fresh. He does so from his studio in Madrid, where he moved three years ago to be with his partner of over ten years.

His immigration from the beaches of Sydney's Eastern Suburbs to Madrid's concrete jungle seems random, though it begins to make sense when you associate the provincial climate of both cities. From his childhood home in Bondi, Cuming recalls the "urgent feeling of wanting to see other things and feel a part of the wider world." This culture-junkie sensibility arises from the world Australians are fed via books, social media and film. "We're always looking to America or to England or Europe," he says, disheartened by Australia's derivativeness.

Cuming is one of countless Australians who have left in search of the majestic 'else'. It is surprising when he recognises the fact that Australians feel singular in this idea. "It's the exact same attitude in Spain," he illuminates, ensuring that we do not feel alone in our crisis. "Even though Spain is a one-and-a-half-hour flight from Paris, a lot of people in the industry here think we are on the periphery. There's a bit of an attitude that everything is better outside." While identity has formed a key component of building social profile, Cuming is shy about his Australianism. "We don't make it clear to people. Not many people know where I am based or where I am from. You have to deep dive to understand the connection."



"I feed off the energy of other people. They find their way into my work."

Having spent twelve years abroad, Cuming now feels disconnected to the industry in Australia. "I'm not aware of what is going on," he admits with a slight bleakness in his tone. "The industry in Australia seems to have become more and more washed down and sanitised. Maybe money isn't being put in the right space, or maybe the consumer has just become interested in something bigger. Maybe Australia is another byproduct of the Zara-fication of the world." Cuming still believes there is a market in Australia, nonetheless. He recognises that there are clients looking for originality and people who have spending power to purchase. He compares the spending power to Spain, where it is noticeably lower and more difficult. "It's a country that's been through so many economic crises. Spending €600 on a shirt is not in the zeitgeist."

Cuming has not always felt connected to the Spanish community at his doorstep. Refusing to paint me a false picture, he makes a brushing comment that Madrid is not usually "a point of influence". "I love living here, but it can feel a little bit homogenous," he continues. Cuming quickly recovers his judgement sharing that Spanish lifestyle and the way people live and interact is still "incredibly nourishing" to his process. "It's not a city that shuts down early. People want to be out with each other. People want to be social. I feed off the energy of other people. They find their way into my work."

Madrid offers Cuming the energy of a bustling city without the overwhelming stress or constraints often associated with hubs like London or Paris, which can be stifling for an independent creative. "It is close enough to all the fashion capitals, so the community that I need to grow the brand is within reach," he shares. "I feel separated enough to keep my head screwed on and have a normal routine life." Madrid's regulated production costs and sophisticated production systems also make it an appealing base for a young business to grow. The business practices and ideals of Spanish companies do differ significantly from those elsewhere, though, create challenges, particularly when navigating smaller-scale production and working with factories accustomed to a model of exponential growth.



blazer AW22, shirt, denim and shoes AW24.  
opposite: dress, denim and shoes AW24.



from left to right: blazer AW22, shirt, denim and shoes AW24, dress, denim and shoes AW24.



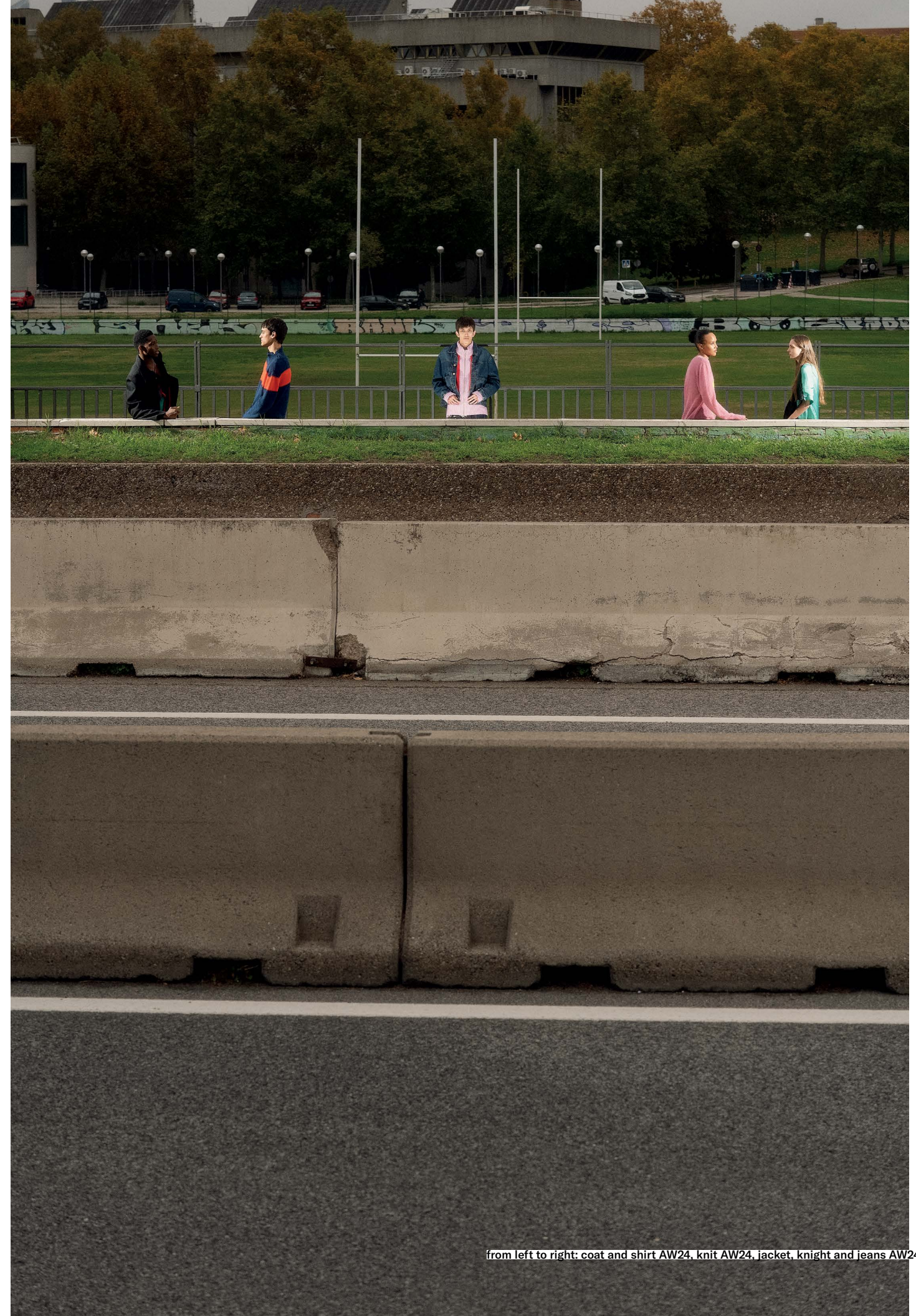
from left to right: t-shirt and denim AW24, shoes stylist's own, turtleneck, skirt and shoes AW23.

The evolution of Spain's fashion industry from the 20th century to the early 21st has been marked by significant consolidation. The industry used to consist of numerous large companies like La Seda de Barcelona and Industria y Confecciones, who focused on single business activities and textile production, and catered predominantly to the local Spanish market. In the last five decades, the landscape has shifted with the surge of fewer but significantly larger corporations such as Inditex, Desigual, Mango, H&M and Zara. It would be remiss not to mention luxury brands Balenciaga, Loewe and Manolo Blahnik, who have contributed to the prestige of Spanish fashion around the world. These luxury brands opt to distance themselves from their roots, with the tenacity to market themselves as global entities. A similar strategy can be observed with Edward Cuming, as the brand positions itself as an international business, focusing on accessibility and distribution, not geography.

For many emerging brands leveraging platforms like SSENSE, wholesale serves as an indispensable channel to expand brand awareness and reach a broader customer base. It wasn't until 2024 that Edward Cuming introduced a more comprehensive e-commerce offering, enabling direct distribution to a global clientele spanning the United States, Korea, Japan and Eastern Europe, among other regions. Despite this growing global presence, Cuming remains keen on nurturing a personal connection with buyers. In conversation, he recounts a 60-year-old architect in Miami who recently discovered the brand and has since become a loyal customer, drawn to the tactile appeal of the garments. Relationships like these provide Cuming with greater control over the narratives and messages communicated.



from left to right: top and skirt SS24, denim and shoes AW24, knit, shirt and trousers AW24, shoes stylist's own. coat, shirt and trousers AW24, shoes stylist's own.



from left to right: coat and shirt AW24, knit AW24, jacket, knit and jeans AW24, dress AW24

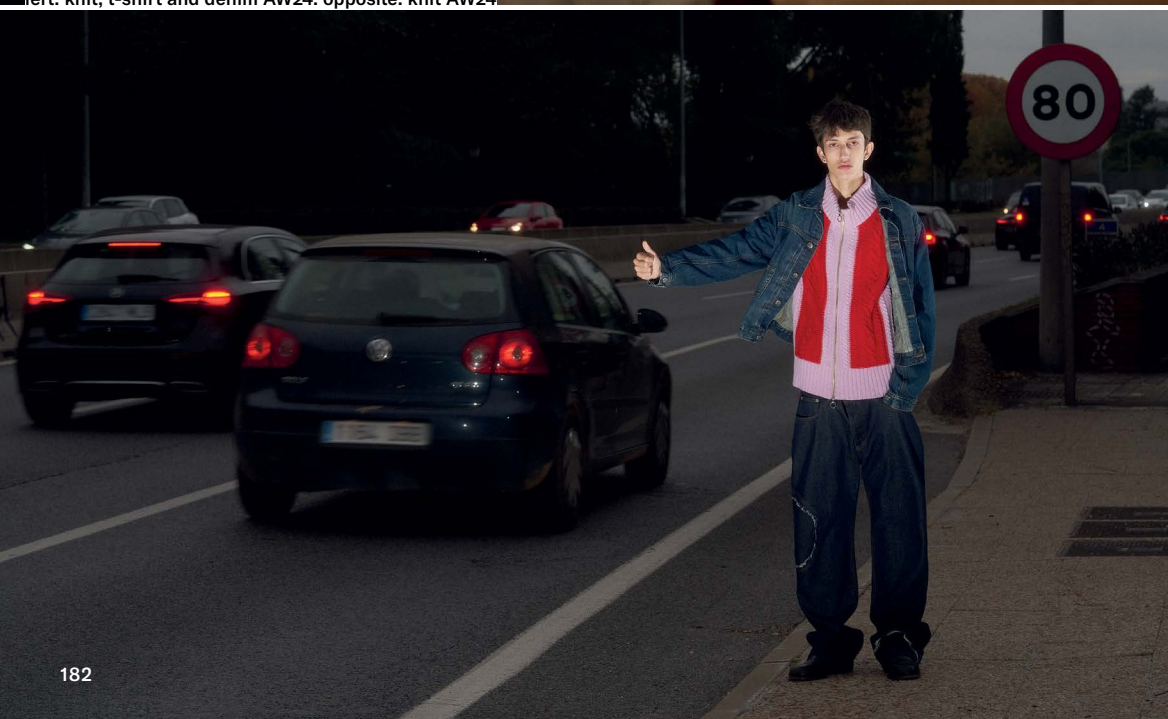
Refining these messages is Patricia Villirillo, who started collaborating with Cuming as a creative director and stylist at the brand's launch in 2019. Villirillo, or Patty, as Cuming endearingly refers to her, is, in "the world of clothes", tasked with assembling looks and creating links between the disparate pieces in each collection. "Without even talking about it, she understands when I am mixing things. She knows exactly why I am doing it, and she's going to take that on board and make it even stronger. She trusts my decisions and I trust her direction."

At his studio, Cuming has employed an ex-student assistant designer who is across design development and production organisation. There is also a full-time head of atelier, who works in an "agile" way and is open to any experiments. Cuming tries to bring in friends from Central Saint Martins too. "I find it interesting to invite people who I studied with who now work in the industry, especially for my assistant designer. It gives him new ideas and fresh eyes." One of these friends is shoemaker Adam Signature, who has a small shop in the Province of Reggio Emilia in Italy's north. Signature and Villirillo grew up in Italy together and have come to refine the aesthetics of the brand with patched details that emphasise the overall language. "My relationship with Patty and Adam is very important, because it starts to build pillars of the brand's universe. As much as newness is important and the industry seems to want more and more of it, consistency is something that you have to prove."

And prove he does with eleven seasonal collections thus far that affirm the presence of a brand operating from the periphery. Rather than focusing on the 'why?' Cuming centres himself with the 'what' and 'how': how do we operate from afar? How will we function? How do clothes interest buyers? What's next? "At the end of the day," he acknowledges with the relief of a chapter's end, "we're making clothes. We're making things that are meant to be desirable." To tweak a well-known phrase, it is the desire, not the desired, that he loves. [EXEUNT]



left: knit, t-shirt and denim AW24. opposite: knit AW24



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