

to Be

WHAT'S ON
THE DARE'S MIND?

RESEARCH

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HARRISON wears SAINT LAURENT shirt, trousers from VINTAGE CLOTHING STORE, own eyewear
 opposite HARRISON wears own shirt, SAINT LAURENT jacket and shoes, trousers from VINTAGE CLOTHING STORE, BEAMS socks, own sunglasses



In one sequence of the Fabien Baron-art directed CK One campaign, a guy and girl kiss with tongue, he in low-rise baggy jeans and she in a black bra, hotpants and leather ankle boots with a four-inch heel. Panning on the horizontal, a group of models, both young and old, start dancing or play fighting until the camera halts on a fresh Kate Moss. She grips her skirt pockets and tilts her head to one side before slowly reciting the slogan: “The Only One: CK One”. The commercial first aired in 1994, the year that Kurt Cobain died and the O.J. Simpson trial began to form, when clubs and rave xculture were at their peak, and the streets were livid, lurid, drunk with ambition. Thirty years later, that CK One campaign was remade, in some sense of the word, by The Dare for his music video ‘Perfume’.

‘Perfume’ is garish and thrilling. It’s the kind of song that tempts a heavy eye roll and a late-night jump on the bed, air guitar in throw. (You know the one: *I’ve got a new obsession of mine; it’s something I found while shopping online; it’s something that can make a bride out of a whore.*) The Dare—or Harrison Patrick Smith as he introduces himself—then crows, *What’s that smell; It’s my perfume!*, the titular word elongated and stretched, riddled with the magnetism of a star on the edge.

The song features on Smith’s debut album *What’s Wrong with New York* alongside nine other tracks with a total run time of 27 minutes. On the internet, many have attributed labels like ‘indie sleaze’ or ‘American vintage’ to the album, observing

remnants of bloghaus’s squelchy synths, or LCD Soundsystem’s sardonic punk. Smith borrows and bites from past wonders and delights, reviving a movement of a certain MySpace-era jouissance that can only now be recreated with an automated Spotify playlist. “I don’t even think of it as the past,” Smith says. “To me, those works just stand the test of time.”

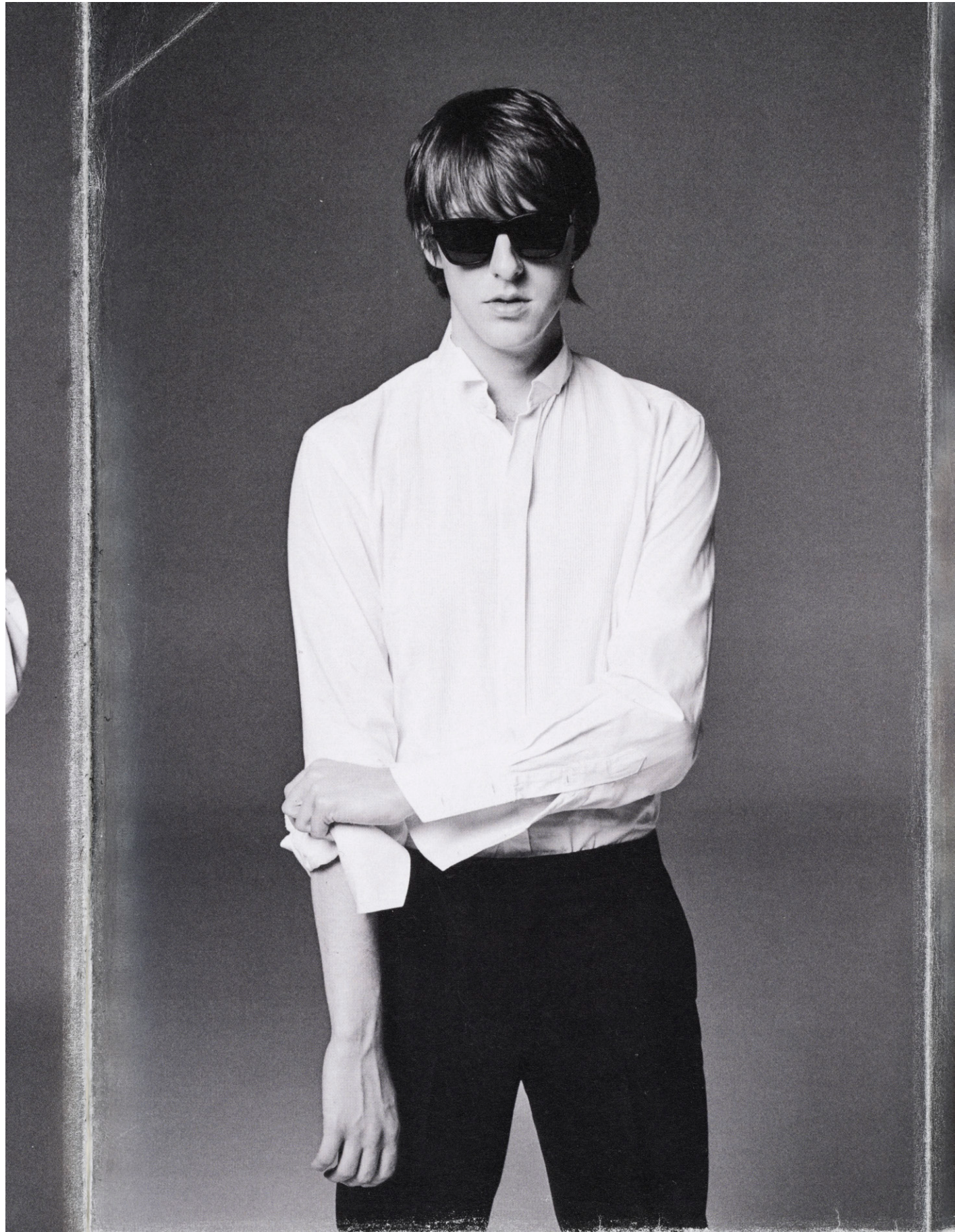
Although Smith doesn’t have a nostalgic relationship to the pastiche of earlier eras, having not lived through them (he’s 30), he remains influenced by music that has endured—those radio hits that bring us together and make life a little more fun. And while critics have called this derivative—“all aesthetic no innovation,” one review read—fans have deemed his music a revival worth celebrating: “The Dare is bringing energy, irony and sweaty dance lores back to a scene that got a little too cool for itself,” someone posted. And he’s doing it all on purpose. He is referencing the past in the hope that his music might have the same lasting effect.

When we set out to make something new, we often return to pre-existing sounds, images or words that give us the confidence to stand on our own feet. For Smith, music from earlier eras does more than motivate him. It is his foundation, the mountain that he has set out to scale. And while borrowing isn’t a novel endeavour in the arts, nor will it be the last time in musical history it is employed, accusing Smith of unoriginality misses the point of his music. He’s not copying. He’s curating.

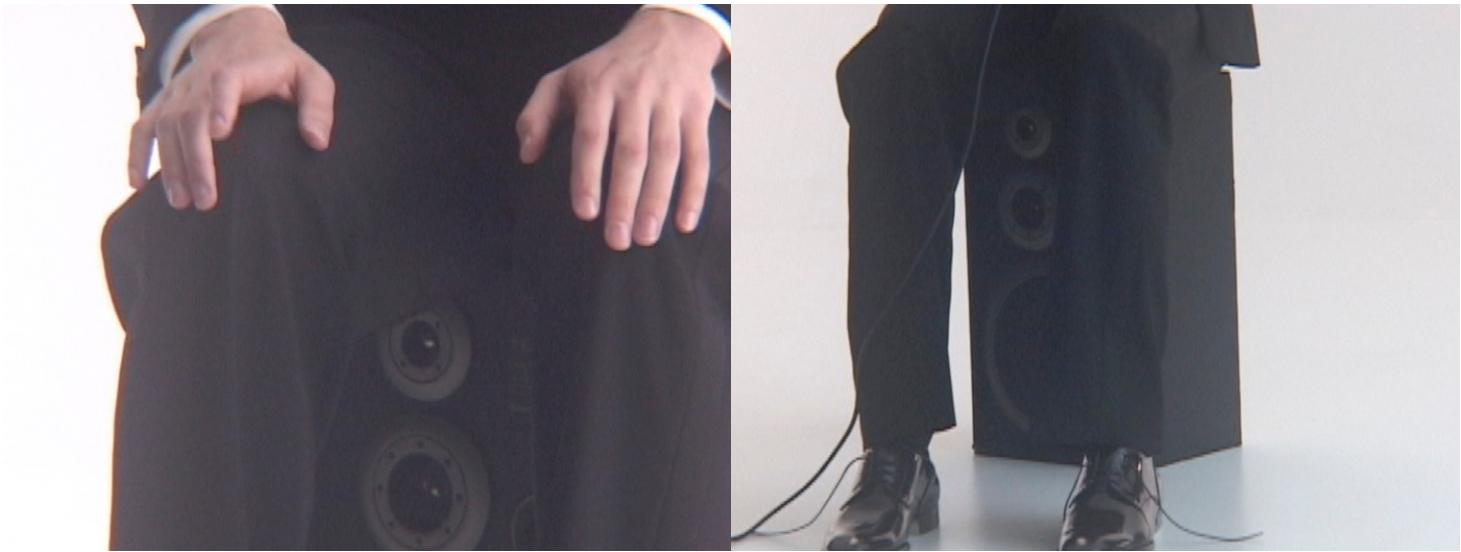
Picking up scraps of memories. Cleaning the court. And he’s in on the joke: “It’s a kind of proclamation of different desires or interests, each line carries its own cultural reference,” he tells me outside the photo studio, Sydney’s 38-degree wind blowing my notes away.

Pulling from a tangled web of dance-punk, grunge, electroclash and disco genres, songs like ‘Fuck the Pain Away’ by Peaches or ‘Atlantis to Interzone’ by Klaxons, Smith revives chaotic thrillers for a generation drowning in curated aesthetics. He explains: “You can take what feels good from something like disco and bring it into the present and try to leave behind what doesn’t hold up.” Such a feat has placed the New York-based producer, DJ and artist in the orbit of some of music’s most influential figures, be that Charli XCX, who once described him as an “encyclopaedia” following the release of their co-produced song ‘Guess’, or PinkPantheress on her singles ‘Stateside’ and ‘Fancy That’, which Smith also produced. He seems to wade in all the right circles and know how to enter all the perfect rooms. When he and Charli XCX first met, he invited her to his apartment, where they played music into the early hours. Perhaps it is his suave, swish demeanour that drew her in, like how if a group of popular kids are in a room impressing each other, sometimes going so far as yielding their own pride and dignity for the other’s pleasure.

I’m not usually one to lay out citations, especially as I believe much of a person’s work is shaped by their particular environment: the



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people, places, experiences and relationships that form them. But there is something slightly different with Smith. He even admits, “I have a constant awareness of what came before, what used to exist in a particular place. Being immersed in that makes me more drawn to the music.” His decisions are strategic.

In 2024, comparisons between Smith and LCD Soundsystem sparked a minor internet skirmish. Moderators of the band’s subreddit began locking posts about The Dare, adding that without intervention, the page risked devolving into “shitposting.” Diehard LCD fans resisted the idea of Smith as a successor and were quick to voice it online. Still, not all of the attention was backlash. Some users countered that not all music “needs to be groundbreaking.”

While Smith and I did not address this episode directly, he did speak about his broader interest in studying artists: “Understanding their lives alongside the music builds a fuller, more complex picture.” Rather than reading his music as a simple riff or reproduction, it can be taken as a kind of anthropological exploration. In the way an academic might construct their thesis using another’s theories, Smith draws on an expansive musical archive to construct his own point of view.

Asked what Smith gains from this type of research, he explains that he doesn’t see it as a “cause and effect relationship”, but rather something he does compulsively. “I just enjoy it,” he adds. “Reading Wikipedia articles, following links, going deep into old, archived sites and blogs, feels like a way of getting a clearer sense of how culture operated, how people behaved, in a way that often gets smoothed over or misremembered.”

He nods, rather enthused, when asked whether this process makes him feel

more confident. “You start to see the same patterns play out again and again. There are even established tropes, the so-called sophomore slump, tensions with record labels, moments where a single is doubted and then unexpectedly succeeds. It takes some of the pressure out of experiencing these things for the first time, because you realise they’re not entirely unique, they’re part of a cycle.” It is not only the formal elements of the past that he borrows—the sounds, imagery and attitudes—but also the camaraderie and vulnerability of people who went out, followed their passion and put work into the world without knowing whether it would fall flat or carry them forward. “When you recognise that, it makes you feel like you’re participating in a broader tradition, rather than navigating isolated challenges or successes on your own.” It helps him realise that he is not alone.

Smith grew up outside of Seattle, Washington. He was raised by a mother who “didn’t really work” and a medical salesman father, who has now passed away. Not particularly musically inclined themselves, his parents still had him learning violin at age four, seeing it as an “important discipline” to know. “It was something close to them,” he told me. “My dad’s sister had her kids learning music as well, and they were one of the families we were closest to. I also picked it up pretty quickly and was relatively good at it. My parents wanted to nurture that from a young age.” He lowers his head, wisps of his ash-brown hair falling forward. He brings a hand to his mouth, and admits, sheepishly, that he hated practising, and still does. “Why?” I teased. “It’s boring!”

Conversation turns to the idea of “virtuosity”. What a word! Virtuosity (noun): 1) the character or skill of a virtuoso. 2) a fondness for or interest in virtu. Apparently,





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it has never been his primary concern: “I’m not trying to present a solution, or even frame something as a problem that needs resolving. It’s more about capturing those contradictions, sometimes even leaning into hypocrisy or complicating my own thinking.” Technical mastery, in the sense of having exceptional skill, is not his aim. Originality isn’t his point. Commitment is. And boy does he commit fully.

If I close my eyes and imagine the inside of Smith’s brain (bear with me), I see racks of CDs and rows of records, each filed neatly away. He assures me that he isn’t a bedroom artist, the type that sits at home and mixes records into one another for hours on end for no one but themselves. These days, he wants to interact with the audience: “I want to shape music in real time, respond to what’s happening,” he says about DJing sets. “If a track isn’t landing, I change it, read the room, and build a kind of journey for people. And with live performance, it’s similar, pulling back energy or pushing it depending on what feels right.” The approach is calm, cool and considered.

Smith moved to New York City in 2018, after studying English literature at Lewis & Clark College, just outside of Portland. In New York he released a steady stream of anxious indie rock music under the moniker Turtlenecked—three albums that were occasionally twee, with jagged and twangy guitar chords and wordy lyrics full of clichés (*You smell so sweet and you taste well*, he moans in ‘Flirtation’). He explains that when he first began releasing

music, he was fascinated by the city and industry it belonged to. “I became obsessed with earlier eras of New York, when you were able to walk around and think, *this is the street where this happened, or this bar used to be here*. When you were surrounded by layers of history and references.”

‘Girls’ was born out of this fascination. In the opening verse, Smith talk-sings: *I like the girls that do drugs; Girls with cigarettes in the back of the club*. Written in under an hour, the track is tongue-in-cheek, sleazy and catchy, with the drums programmed on a four-on-the-floor kick that reverbs like a bee’s buzz. Sonically, ‘Girls’ sits somewhere between electroclash and dance-punk (think DFA records aesthetics). You can also hear echoes of LCD Soundsystem’s ‘Losing My Edge’ for its looping phrases that repeat again and again and again. There are also echoes of Fischerspooner’s ‘Emerge’ with the track’s cold, programmed drums that act as small jabs rather than deep stabs. ‘Girls’ is unserious and lacks pretention; it is a total parody and a euphoric party record. It really shouldn’t be as good as it is.

In August 2025, Smith released *Freakquencies: Vol 1*, a 2000s-inspired instrumental electro-house EP, which sees the bon vivant step out from his role as band frontperson with four stacked and dense tracks designed specifically for the club, party or rave (pick your poison). On a track like ‘Kick’, an acid-leaning groove thumps and drills with a cyber-tinged umph that arouses

the kind of moves we made on *Dance Dance Revolution*, that arcade game with the arrows and stage. The track rises and falls, pulling you in and pushing you out, as if hovering just shy of release. On ‘Modelizer’, a deep, robotic vocal repeats the title over a rigid metronomic drum pattern. Listening, your attention drifts to its micro-changes, the focus on progression rather than intensification.

Unsurprisingly, collaboration—particularly producing for others—is Smith’s ideal creative state. He likes shaping music around another person’s voice, sometimes supporting them, but other times pushing against them, creating a sense of tension—a give-and-take effect. “That interplay has always interested me,” he shares. He offers an anecdote: “When I was younger, I remember thinking, why don’t Danny Brown and Hudson Mohawke make an album together? His voice is so wild, and Hudson Mohawke’s production sits in that more extreme space, it felt like they could really complement each other. I just wanted those two worlds to collide.” Comparing this to his production work he says, “Now I feel like I can actually do that myself, build something around a person’s voice or their lyrics, and treat it almost like a sculpture, responding to what they bring and shaping the track in relation to it.”

This year will see Smith release a remix for Nine Inch Nails’ ‘Shadow Over Me’, as well as a remix with Wet Leg, who he invited to DJ at one of his now-legendary Freakquencies parties while they were in Sydney. Over the



HARRISON wears stylist’s own vintage shirt, GUCCI jacket, own eyewear

years, Smith has brought together a wide range of artists for Freakquencies, including Doss, Dylan Brady, Yves Tumor, Taylor Skye, Geese and Blood Orange. He invites them to play club sets that stretch late into the early hours. In Sydney, he didn’t take to the decks at Liberty Hall until 2am.

Smith likes to bring together artists with distinct and sometimes divergent sensibilities. Asked what motivates this collective approach, he returns to the idea of tension: “When I first started making music as The Dare, I wanted to create a scene around it, I wanted other people to make music in that style. I was almost fantasising about a different kind of nightlife in New York than what I was actually experiencing.” Can he explain why? “I think every time I get close to something, or feel like I’m part of something, I have this instinct to move in another direction. A lot of artists are like that. They don’t want to become complacent or too comfortable, repeating the same thing over and over.” He

then speaks to the role of community: “At the same time, one of the things artists tend to be good at is being around people who are very different from them creatively. You don’t have to make the same work or share the same approach to understand each other or exist in the same space.”

Meanwhile, on stage, Smith has a clear sense of who he is: assured and steady. He tells me how there is less for him to think about while performing. His insecurities reside, and he becomes fully present: “Even just listening to music is a huge confidence boost for me, it feels like putting on a great outfit and soundtracking your life.”

On outfits, Smith mostly always wears a black suit. His trousers are usually tapered and cigarette in width, his shirts are white, with no adornments or flairs on the cuffs or sleeves. His jackets are black, like tuxedo jackets, though he wears his slightly looser, so the shoulders drop. His sunglasses are black Saint Laurent frames that if looked through

closely reveal his doe blue eyes. The suit is a kind of uniform, the kind that Bruce Wayne puts on to become Batman and save Gotham City. Curious what it prepares him for, he says, “It’s more of a unifying force... a grounding thing.” No matter how chaotic his life becomes, whether travelling from Japan to Los Angeles to London, or the numerous hotel rooms on the nineteenth or 31st floors, or the many fans and friends he meets each day, the suit is a constant force; something he can commit to that helps to centre him: “Being a musician is inherently chaotic. While other people might respond by leaning further into that chaos, trying different things or constantly changing how they present themselves, I’ve taken a different approach. It’s more like planting a flag and keeping it there, something fixed in the middle of everything else that’s shifting.”

Smith has always been interested in clothes. He started wearing dress shirts when he was about sixteen and bought a blazer when he first arrived at college.



He gradually incorporated the look into his rotation. “I’m not going to wear a suit to get breakfast at a diner, but when it’s a formal setting, or something like my own event, I like to dress up. In those contexts, it makes sense to wear the uniform I’ve developed.” I put on my Bella Freud hat and asked whether there was a particular item of clothing that he felt especially attached to. He tells me that his mum was a pattern maker and growing up instilled in him an understanding of garment construction. Whenever she would buy clothes for him, she would hem the pant, take in the shirt, showing him early on how clothes are made and the relationship between fabric and form. In terms of specific items that left a mark: “Skinny jeans were a big one,” he divulges, embarrassed at himself. “They were such a strong cultural marker when I was younger. Wearing them felt like you were aligning yourself with something. Like you were trying to be part of a subculture or counterculture. It felt like it said something about who you were.”

A few weeks before meeting Smith, I got word from one of his friends that he might be evolving his look. I found this hard to believe, given that on set when we suggested he wear a white tuxedo jacket, he politely declined. Prying for information, he told me that once he finishes something, he feels an impulse to push away from it and try something different. “There’s no real reward without taking a risk, and if I just kept doing the same thing over and over, it might work, but I’d probably feel pretty unsatisfied.” This instinct to not remake or reproduce applies to his music as well. “With the first album, committing fully to a specific idea helped cut through the noise and create something very clear and defined,” he explains. “Now I’m more interested in making work that’s a bit more complicated, less easily resolved, and more varied in terms of its references, sonically and historically. I want it to feel more expansive. Something broader and more layered.” There is a hyper-awareness to his delivery. “I’m just trying to

introduce my next conversation topic in a way that feels funny and interesting.”

Smith has always been concerned with a mood, an environment that people can latch on to. And while he is still interested in foregrounding his lyrics and constructions, he is also considering more elaborate concepts: “Instead of the words reinforcing the music, the music is there to support the ideas.” He then rattles off musicians Jarvis Cocker, Jim Morrissey and The Magnetic Fields to make the point that these artists knew how to tell a story. These are the artists of bygone eras who have helped generations of musicians, including Smith, not only appreciate but also question the very discipline they operate in. These are the artists who continue to inspire and galvanise listeners today. It’s clear that Smith, who has a lifetime of storytelling ahead of him, belongs to that same lineage. He too will outlast the present.