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# Personal style: Stuart Semple

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 As told to David Hayes **OCTOBER 18 2013**


I treasure the painting overalls that my grandmother gave me before I went to art school [at Bretton Hall in West Yorkshire]. I always have them with me. My nanna gave me my first paint sets and art books and we always talked about art and poetry. I don't know where she got them – they're just baggy, 1970s overalls with big pockets. I wear them every time I paint a picture; I've worn them since I was 17. There is a little bit of every painting I have ever made on them, as I wipe my brush on my overalls.

When I went to college I stood out – everyone else wore plain boiler suits and I had something with a bit of style to it.

Growing up in the 1990s in Bournemouth I was into indie style – I wore checked trousers and jumpers that were too baggy and had holes in them. Grungy, but in a naff sort of way. The group Placebo were a big inspiration. [Lead singer] Brian Molko was amazing; it was as much about how he looked as what he sang. I used to travel up to Harvey Nichols in London and buy Hard Candy nail varnish.

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Now I've moved my studio back to Bournemouth, it's strange that I stand out again. I don't think my style is that outrageous but people beep their car horns at me or shout out of the window. In Shoreditch [east London] I just feel like everyone else.

I'm not sure if being an artist means you have to have a style of your own. In the past there was [Hockney](#), Dalí, Warhol, who were very distinctive and had their own identities. Their persona was part of their art. I don't think there is anyone doing that now. There are certain codes of what you wear to your own opening – you've got to wear the knackered Converse trainers so everyone knows you're the artist, you've got to look weird. I don't know which way to play that. People expect something of you – they look at my work and it is quite "fashiony" and they think, "What is he going to be like?"

Fashion was important to me growing up – not what designers were making or what the collections were, but more about style. It was how a shoot was styled that mattered to me. Fashion shoots still inspire my work. I read loads of fashion magazines. Some of the best contemporary portraiture is happening in fashion photography today. My work has that glossy, pop-culture feel so you could say that fashion has a direct influence on what I do. I hang out with fashion people sometimes but I don't enjoy it very much. I went through a period of going out when I first moved to London but now I work too much.

As for clothes, I like a bargain. I shop in charity shops and eBay is great. I bought a pair of Michiko Koshino jeans for £6 the other week. I love them. The most expensive thing I've bought recently is by Helmut Lang. I bought a couple of pairs of trousers (now £165) a few seasons ago. And I've a really nice Prada satchel that I'll wear with really knackered secondhand jeans ...it's that mix of high and low I love. The problem is, when I have nice things I can't resist having a go at a painting. I get inspired and I don't always get to put the overalls on in time. My overalls sum up my style because everything I own has a bit of paint on it.

*'Suspend Disbelief' runs to October 21, The Heritage Rooms, Victoria House, Bloomsbury Square, London.*  
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