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BLOUINARTINFO, 3 octobre 2013


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BY JANELLE ZARA | OCTOBER 03, 2013



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The LEGO Dress by Anne Sophie Cochevelou

(Photo by Anthony Devlin/PA Courtesy of Anne Sophie Cochevelou)

LONDON — Designer **Anne Sophie Cochevelou**, the creator of **London Fashion Week's** famed **LEGO** dress, is a fashion outsider. After she unveiled a coral-red couture gown studded with about 5,000 colorful plastic building blocks at Somerset House in September, bloggers bombarded her with a series of the same questions — *Which model is your favorite "It" Girl? Which designers do you look up to? Whats your favorite brand?* — to which she mostly shrugged.

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"I found this dress for £5 at the market," she told **ARTINFO**, tugging at her sheer grey chiffon sleeve. As for her LEGO creation, "It's not about a trend that you would follow for the season."

Rather, it nods to a broad spectrum of cultural references. To support 25 pounds of plastic brick, Cochevelou reinforced the skirt with what she calls "neo-crinoline," the kind of metal hoops that were once regularly worn by **Marie Antoinette**. She looked to the ornate jeweled headwear of traditional Chinese opera singers for inspiration on the LEGO-studded headpiece, and to the fringed epaulettes from centuries-old military uniforms while detailing the shoulders. There are, of course, hints at **Lady Gaga's** hyper-decorated sensibilities.

For the past four years or so, Cochevelou has been making jewelry out of LEGOs, originally drilling holes in the bricks and threading them with wire but growing more experimental as she progressed. Despite the irreverence of bringing plastic toys onto the hallowed fashion grounds of Somerset House, the dress falls on the tamer side of Cochevelou's creations. Her London studio, which is also her bedroom, is covered with more sinister effects: bins overflowing with doll parts — baby heads, **Barbie** legs, various plastic arms — and little animal figurines. These, she glues, weaves, and threads onto necklaces, rings, tops, and turbans where other designers would have used jewels or beads. Her purse? Studded with accent LEGOs. A plastic Barbie doll's face peers out from the brooch fastened to the lapel of Cochevelou's hot-pink coat.



Trays overflowing with doll parts fill Cochevelou's studio. Photo courtesy of Anne Sophie Cochevelou

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"It's all about toys and childhood as some common reference," says Cochevelou, who doesn't actually consider her LEGO dress fashion. She considers it more an "architectural performance," performance being the actual focus of her work. While various fashion bloggerati have incorrectly labeled her as a fashion or art student, she is in fact a recent graduate of the **Central St. Martin's** Performance Design program, with an undergraduate degree in literature from **La Sorbonne**. She left Paris two years ago for London's greater tolerance for the avant-garde so that she could pursue costume design. "I didn't have the balance between using my hands and using my brain," she says.

The creation of the dress itself was purely serendipitous. In the spring, she had initially contacted the toy manufacturer to request a supply of bricks for use as props in a "site-specific performance" by her theater company. LEGO said no, predictably, but offered the unexpected opportunity for Cochevelou to design its fashion week promotion. Despite having no formal sewing training, she agreed, and along with fellow Central St. Martin's student **Yueer Zhang** spent a total of 350 hours on the gown's ad-hoc, experimental construction. "You have to consider the weight of the structure and adapt the square shape of the bricks to the rounds of the female body," she explained. The two surmounted these physical constraints by sewing flexible plastic LEGO train tracks directly onto the fabric and snapping the bricks onto them (LEGO commissions must leave these intact). It rained the day of the dress's unveiling, and so the brick-tasseled umbrella was a last-minute addition.

What's next? Cochevelou finds herself fantasizing about an as-of-yet nonexistent career path: official stylist for the toy company. "If I have kids one day, they'll say, 'My Mom is a LEGO stylist,'" says Cochevelou, who has herself strayed away from the family business of engineering. "They're going to love it or reject it completely."