

"It's all about Privilege."

Undermining Abercrombie & Fitch

Tom or Judy Moore

CW: Racism, ableism, nazis, fascist aesthetics, capitalist hellscapes.

Undermining Abercrombie and Fitch

In 2012 I had a brief obsession with Abercrombie & Fitch. I remember it was 2012 because A&F released a video with shirtless models miming to Call Me Maybe by Carly Rae Jepsen. I was working in a video shop in Notting Hill, West London, and customer serving a lot of preppy people dressed in A&F's luxury sports wear. As Abercrombie's twitter account said at the time, "It's all about privilege."

They had a flagship store on Savile Row, which upset all the old bespoke tailors who had made the street so famous. The shop was in a huge old building with a columned entrance. A 20ft black and white photo of a muscled, hairless torso was flanked by shirtless and smiling men having their photos taken with young girls visiting the city.









Inside it was very dark and the air was thick with sickly perfume. The walls were woodlined and the clothes slightly hidden or stacked on low tables. Every time I went it seemed uncomfortably busy, with people only half looking at the unremarkable hoodies and sweatpants but plenty of people queueing up to buy them. Up on a balcony, two shop assistants danced to upbeat contemporary pop, Taylor Swift and Party Rock Anthem.

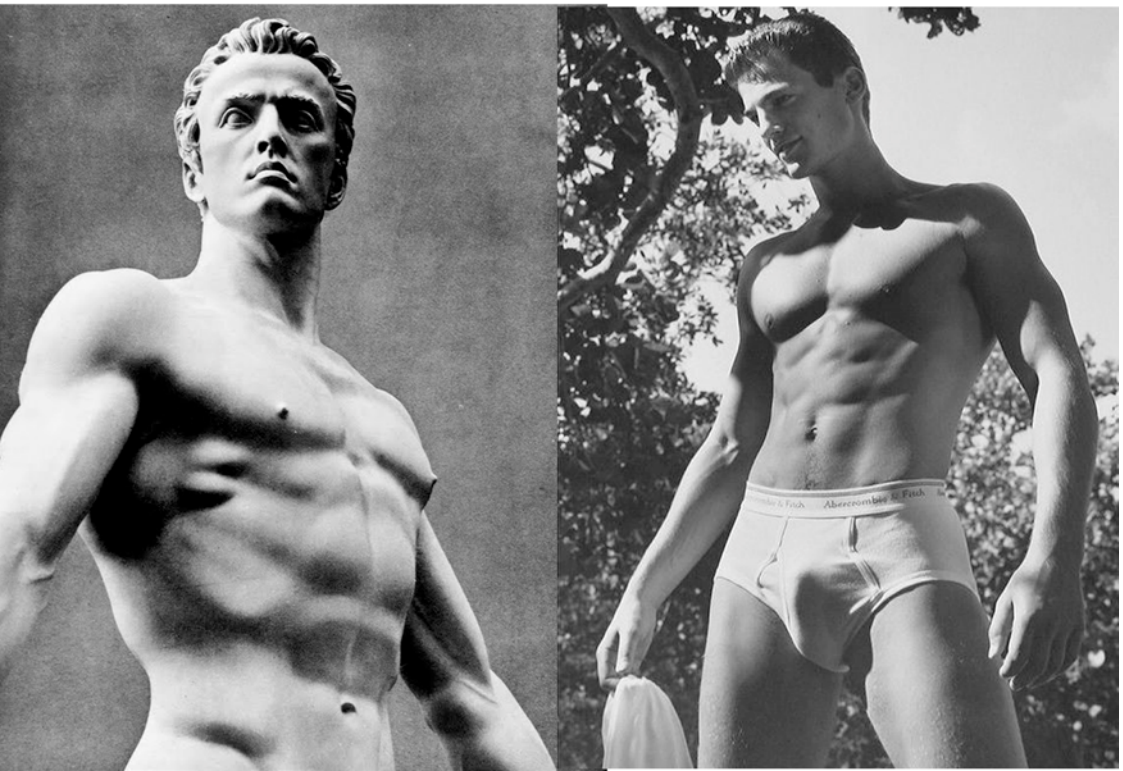
The decor was fascinating to me. It was modelled on a private gentleman's club except instead of old cigars and whiskey it smelled like candy and the old white men were replaced with packs of teenagers. High on the walls, where the clothes cabinets stopped, there were the paintings. Clichés of heroic looking white boys carrying esoteric sports equipment. A hyper totalitarian aesthetic, romantic, nostalgic, and extremely fetishistic. At the bottom of the stairs was even a bronze statue, dressed awkwardly in underpants and neck extended as if looking into a disturbingly pure future.

Much of Abercrombie's advertising imagery was being produced by photographer Bruce Weber. I actually have a soft spot for his work. Hs portrait of 19 year old Matt Dillon from 1983 is a heart melter, eyes closed, knotted brow, wide lips and knocked back cowboy hat against a pale grey sky. This, like much of his portrait work, relies on dreamy, troubled and beautiful young men. His work for A&F extends from here, but the broken noses and reckless danger of his earlier pictures are gone. Replaced with a different kind of danger. Here the men are presented as invincible, ready to go, and with total ease. "It's all about privilege."

It's these themes that bring us directly into to 1930's Nazi aesthetics, the body fetishisation of Leni Riefenstahl and the overblown heroic posturing of Arno Breker. I read about the many scandals that A&F had run up against. Hiding disabled staff members in storage rooms away from customers, Black models being sent home from shoots,



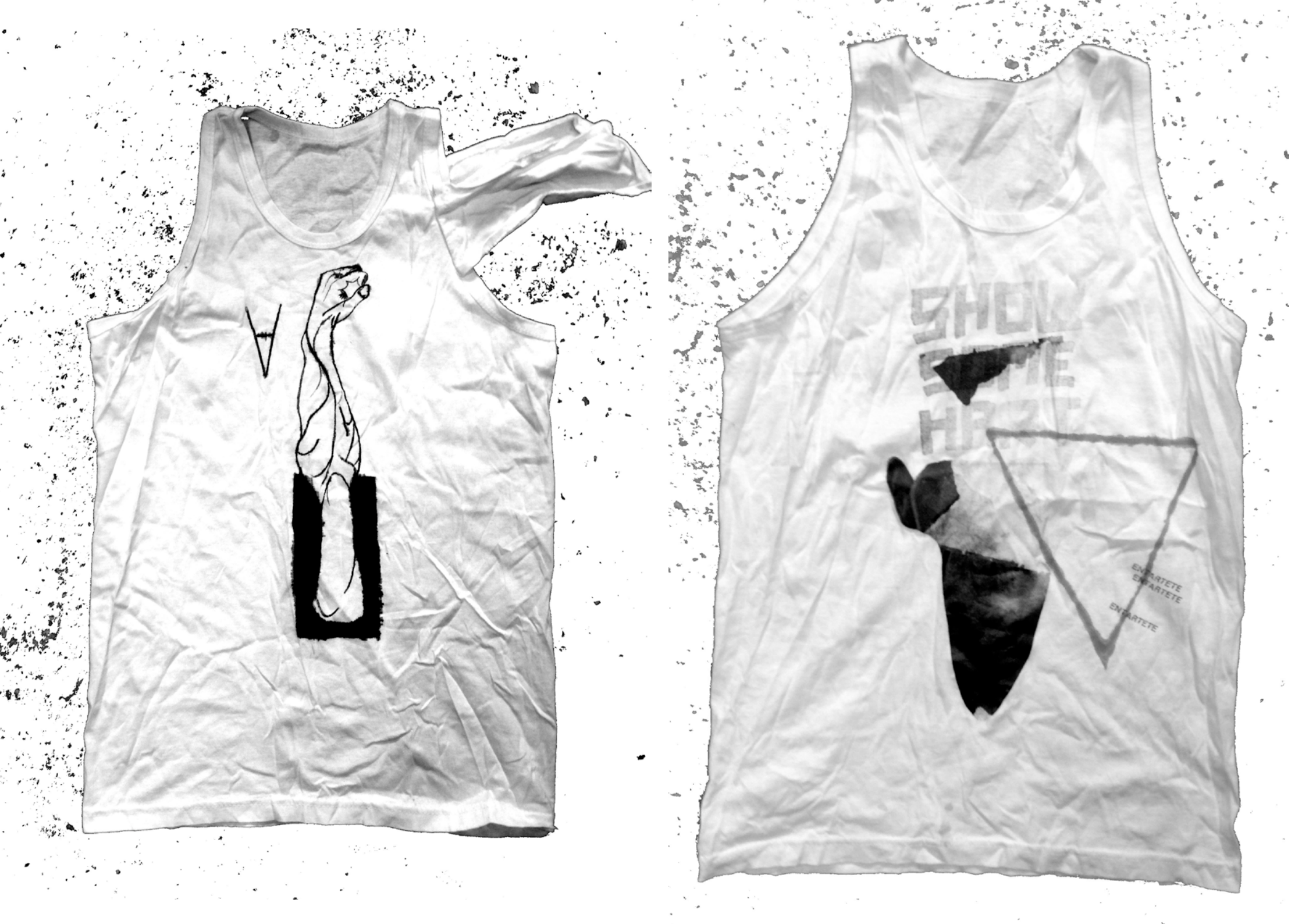




and a graphic tee printed with racist cartoon characters "Wong Brothers Laundry Service, two Wongs can make it white!" Branding that played to the worst impulses, strength by association, bullying masked as humour, exclusivity and segregation.

I made a series of drawings, collages, and prints on shirts and vests, attaching scraps of fabric, bandages, lift up flaps and white flags. Drawings that played to the opposite impulses expressed in the branding, vulnerability, dirtiness, selflessness, and a brave weakness. Some of these items were sewn with cut up fragments of A&F merchandise, found after months of searching through South London's charity shops. The touch of poison needed to synthesise an antidote. This was a witchcraft project, salvaging romantic dreamboats from capitalist fascism.

Pictures: Matt Dillon by Bruce Weber, Abercrombie & Fitch Interior, Saville Row, Bruce Weber for A&F, From Olympia by Leni Riefenstahl, Statue by Arno Breker, Bruce Weber for A&F, From Olympia by Leni Riefenstahl, Bruce Weber for A&F.



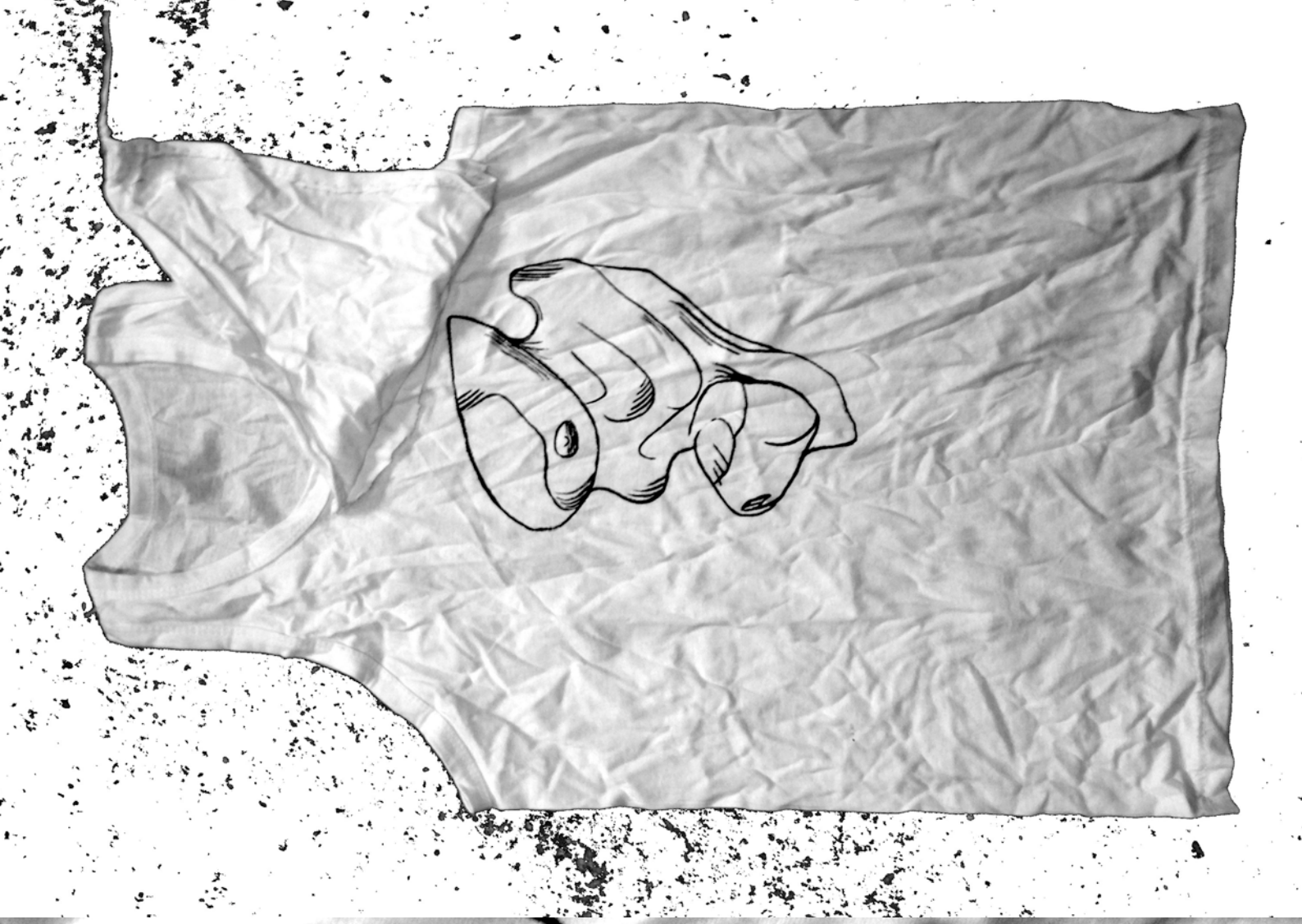



REVENGE




FORGETMENOT






STAY POOR




THE
LONELY SEX




SHOW
SOME
HART


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2019