

I have heard about Lynn Ban's awe-inspiring collection of clothing for many years and when I saw it in person, albeit only a small sample of it, I was indeed, in awe and inspired. Who wouldn't be? Even someone with little knowledge of fashion or design would be envious of what Lynn has acquired from her over twenty-five years of collecting.

A collection that started when she serendipitously stumbled upon a Courrèges 1960s black paillettes evening gown at Goodwill on the Upper East Side of Manhattan and paid a mere \$20 for it. This was the first of numerous gems Lynn found while sifting carefully, dutifully and meticulously through the various flea markets that New York City lent to her missions. "Back then I was far more likely to find something of worth and history than I am now" says Ban but that certainly does not deter her from trying.

From an early age Lynn had an intimate attraction to fashion. Her mother was always very into clothing and dressing and fashion was just always around her. "I was always looking at magazines and books, fashion just was, and always will be an innate part of my life." Lynn's curiosity and enthusiasm about art led her to study Art History in college, which she says just helped further her appreciation for beautiful things in general.

Although Lynn's degree in Art History is useful when it comes to collecting, it is more about a "personal feeling and attraction to a piece of clothing" than it is about knowing its history. When she finds a piece that she would consider purchasing Ban makes it clear, "I do not buy a piece because of its provenance, or because of the designer name attached to it or because of where it's from. It's a really personal thing, I buy something because I truly love it and want to wear it." Ban's compilation of pieces range from clothing made as early as the 20s "I have a few early pieces, but they are so fragile and since I really wear my pieces most of my collection is from the 60s, 70s, 80s through present."

Lynn certainly does not collect clothing so that the clothing can sit perched in a closet collecting dust. She loves wearing her pieces which "she would never dream of altering. I do not purchase things that don't fit, sure if it's slightly big I'll make it work but if I cannot wear it, I will not buy it." A mentality that is not common among all collectors but something she feels strongly about. "Do I wear things twice? You mean, in public" she answers my question with her question. "I don't think I have had to yet and I'm hoping that I have many, many more events in my life to wear my pieces to, and many, many more pieces to add to my collection to wear to these events."

These precious pieces are not just thrown on a hanger and randomly placed inside Lynn's closet (regardless of how fabulous said closet is) but rather stored in her archive located in downtown Manhattan. To ensure her collection remains in pristine condition the clothing is kept prudently in acid free boxes, in a temperature-controlled environment intended to preserve her treasures just as they should be.

This is until Lynn calls upon something that she wants to wear and then by memory can recall where each item is stored and retrieves it.

From her vast collection, which is vast enough that Lynn does not even know how many pieces make it up, she still has her favorites. When asked to pick one she compares it to “picking a favorite child”, which is an impossible task but at the top of her list is a “couture Givenchy by McQueen ‘Siren Gown’, which is a fully beaded, mermaid style dress that I got in 1998, which I think was his second Couture collection” Lynn describes with an understated thrill. “The work that went into creating this dress, and how I feel when I put it on is indescribable. Lee McQueen’s work was absolute genius, the evolution of his designs from his couture down to a black leather coat from his ready to wear was, and still is, a brilliant mark in fashion.”

Just because she already owns one iconic couture Givenchy dress does not mean there isn’t room for another. When I ask Lynn if there is anything she really covets at the moment she immediately, enthusiastically remarks that she would “love to add a couture piece from a Riccardo Tischi for Givenchy collection, his work is unquestionably flawless.” Judging by her already impressive collection and relationship with the designers, one might assume that Lynn will soon add this to her archive.

With the many vintage items in Lynn’s collection and so much history behind each of them surely every piece has a story attached to it, and one in particular stands out to Ban the most:

“Oh this is a good story. While rummaging through a thrift store nearly twenty-five years ago (when it was still possible to find good things in them) I came across a Yves Saint Laurent 1960s brown and white couture bouclé suit. I bought it cheap, I can’t imagine I spent more than \$50 for it. Then I was researching, or just looking through a book and I came across a picture of Saint Laurent sitting with Catherine Deneuve in the back seat of a car, and she is wearing the exact suit. Same buttons, same everything.”

It is the same untrained, yet wholly knowledgeable eye and creative sensibility that Lynn so instinctively has that has loaned itself to her recognizing priceless gems in thrift stores, as it has to her so successfully starting her namesake jewelry line. In just the few short years since the launch of Lynn Ban jewelry in February of 2011 it has graced countless pages of magazines and has been spotted on the chicest of celebrities solidifying the lines’ presence in the industry.

“I design for a strong and confident woman, someone who is fashion forward and not afraid of experimenting. My customer is looking to make a statement.” And how could one not make a statement wearing one of Lynn’s signature pieces? With collections such as Mugler, Givenchy and McQueen being her biggest influences, making a statement is almost an understatement. “It’s the drama that I have adapted from these collections that can be seen in my designs” Ban says quite matter of

factly. "As a jewelry designer my creations are most definitely influenced by the clothes that I collect and which I have seen over the years. It is their shape, the sculptural quality and, of course, the drama. I love the contrast between light and dark. I always use white diamonds and black diamonds. I think that brings in an element of uniqueness to my pieces."

With an artist like David Bowie influencing Lynn as well she need not worry about losing her distinctive, yet wildly sought after eye. Bowie's bright influence helped introduce the first use of color into Ban's most recent collection. "There is always a pop element in my collection, doing the guitars and the lightening bolts were inspired by Bowie for sure. The colored electric guitar earrings are very Ziggy Stardust, always so original, way before his time."

While she's influenced by many I ask Lynn about collaborating with just one. Without pause she firmly answers "Rick Owens." It really comes as no surprise as I am pretty sure she is currently wearing his designs head to toe but after further explanation her reason is even more apparent. "His aesthetic to me is really what I model myself on, someone who has created such a look, such a strong image, which is super luxury and has a definite hard edge. Season after season he maintains his core." Which is something any designer, clothing or otherwise, would seemingly want to follow. Ban goes on to explain "Rick can do the same silhouettes over again but bring them back in different fabrics and create something totally familiar yet utterly different. The result of this genius is a devoted customer who is so loyal they keep going back each season and ultimately become a collector."

It is that same mentality that Lynn has adapted into her own designs. She understands what her clients like and what new ones might be attracted to. Ban never wants someone to invest in one of her pieces and turn around a short time later and think, "This is so last season". She designs so people don't tire of her pieces yet have the desire to build on them. "You want devotees, you want fans." One fan she would love to make is of Lady Gaga, "I'd love to see her in one of my designs!"

Lynn speaks about making and becoming a fan with authority, as she herself is a huge collector of Rick Owens for that very reason. Her love for his work started at its inception and grows as each collection is presented. Noting his Spring Summer 2013 collection to be her favorite. More specifically it is an "amazing lacquered black python coat" that she covets as it is "so me." Even more specifically, she describes the piece with extreme admiration and astute detail. "What I love about it is that it's so edgy, tough and rock 'n' roll but yet it has this beautiful, almost Balenciaga like silhouette from the 60s. It is sculptural, artistic and cool and I love it."

It is not hard to imagine Lynn bearing his coat by any stretch of the imagination. Her day-to-day wardrobe consists of an envious amount of Rick Owens peppered with the minimalism of Céline with bits of Haider Ackermann mixed in, whom she also has a strong adoration for. "His last collection was so sexy. I loved the structure. The shape of the jackets could immediately and effortlessly transform who ever is lucky enough to wear them."

Not being able to stop there listing her favorite collections from Spring Summer 2013 Lynn adds Riccardo Tisci for Givenchy's recent collection as well and eventually adds Alexander Wang to her list of beloved collections. Lynn explains that one of the things she loves most about fashion is that it is "always evolving" and forever giving its fans something to be excited about. "I love that there is always something new happening, a new designer or a substantial change." One of the changes Ban is referring to and especially excited to see refers to Nicolas Ghèsquiere's somewhat swift exit leading to Alexander Wang's somewhat curious, yet overly welcome, placement at Balenciaga. "I cannot wait to see what Alex sends down the runway in February" a sentiment I believe shared by many right now.

There is most certainly a likeness to the designers Lynn registers among her favorites and a sense of parallel regarding their aesthetics. It's not about the darkness I suspect but rather about the strength these designers embody, much like the strength Ban exudes in her own jewelry designs, in her personal collection of clothing and in her life in general.

Lynn Ban the person is much like Lynn Ban the collection, strong, edgy, smart and beautiful. There is certain warmth to Lynn, as well as a playfulness that also translates to her designs and to her stunning collection. No matter how serious the piece of clothing may be, like the overly dramatic vintage black velvet Mugler dress Lynn was wearing when I met her for the first time, she manages to make it look infinitely stunningly yet perfectly wearable at the same time. This is what Lynn Ban is all about because as she plainly states, no matter what the piece is, what era it came from or who designed it, her mantra remains that "clothes are clothes and clothes are meant to be worn."