

Interview with Sara Thorn – Sara Thorn is an influential Australian fashion and textile designer celebrated for her bold, illustrative, and highly decorative prints. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Thorn partnered with fellow designer Bruce Slorach. Together, they established iconic, avant-garde labels and storefronts like ‘Abyss Studio’, ‘Funkessentials’, and the ‘Galaxy Emporium’ retail store.

I was born in Melbourne, so I followed the Melbourne trajectories. I was in form 5 when I went to the first **Boys Next Door** at the **Crystal Ballroom** event and I became a fan.... And a lot of those people went to Swinburne Community school and so did my brother Barrington. I mixed with those people, and I was always interested in fashion as well.

I have always been a creative person, and I contemplated going into painting, fashion or jewellery and I decided to go into fashion... I was exposed to the Melbourne punk scene and I was going to the Crystal ballroom at 15 – I was banned from going out and I used to spend 3 hours creeping back into my bedroom so my parents didn’t know I had gone out – I didn’t have car but who did was the most popular person... I lived in Hawthorn... I used to catch a tram to the Crystal Ballroom and go to a party after every gig at the Ballroom... I didn’t take drugs or drink a lot – it was a very stylised time and there was a way of talking and walking – It was a real rejection of sexuality.... it was very anti-healthy lifestyle - you didn’t do sport, you stayed up all night, ate junk food, danced, went to parties, took speed... a culture about not being in the daylight – it was very judgemental against people who wore the wrong clothes – very insular, cliquey, we are really important...people came from all over Melbourne to be part of that scene – the outcasts and rejects who didn’t fit in who all came together – to be part of an elaborate labyrinth of personalities – it was a hybrid Melbourne arty culture – everybody were artists....

The St Kilda scene:

I remember seeing Radio Birdman at the Ballroom – they were the first kind of energy that fit.... the Melbourne thing was not as raw.... Andy Warhol, dandy, everyone was skinny, everyone took speed – shooting up, marijuana wasn’t around, cigarettes were big, beer was big, it was leading a glamorous life... what captivated me was the artiness. The alternative to the ordinary and it was like an elite club... it was very on the edge.... I felt I belonged there because I didn’t connect with other cultures... I liked the subterranean element – poetic Patti Smith... I have an angst side, and my angst side loved it... I would see **Rowland S. Howard** play, and he was really skinny and emaciated looking and his heart was pouring out and that really spoke to me at the time....

The worst thing was how misogynistic that era was – the males would just want to have sex with you – it was very male orientated – all the girls were girlfriends of the boys – there were some amazing women around – **Anita Lane, Genevieve McGukin** – they matched the boys with their look... but a lot of them became hardcore heroin addicts... they were older than me and I liked what they were doing.... Melbourne was like a playground.... It was like you didn’t take things seriously... it was a world that existed outside of the world.... we would mock the world and not take it seriously.... Things weren’t policed... it was part of that age as well.

There were nooks and crannies, everywhere with mirrors and everyone looked at themselves when they walked past.... The Crystal Ballroom, was an old run-down ballroom; it was a pose-a-thon...everyone compared their op shop purchases... I went to Spain and came back with all these amazing winkle pickers...I went to London in 1978 and saw the **Sex Pistols** and **The Clash** and so when I came back, I had some prestige....

If you liked certain music that no one else liked, that bonded you.... I used to spend a lot of time in record stores... **Pipe Imports**... It was run by a German guy who sold the most insane German electronic records....

The fashion in London, the fact that you could be creative and self-express, shapes... The Crystal ballroom went downhill and started to attract a mass market crowd....1981 etc. I wasn't interested in a lot of the people who were part of the music scene at that time.... I hated **JAB** and **Teenage Radio Stars** – I thought they were suburban dorks.... I didn't think anything was 'punk' – it was a lame term and nobody wanted to be labelled as 'punk'... Punk now is so inclusive but at the time it was exclusive – I was part of arty punk as opposed to suburban punk or try hard punk... JAB were try hard punk and well I used to hate them... **Teenage Radio Stars** I thought were shit – suburban guys doing their thing.... I am from a European background, so I don't relate to that thing... I couldn't stand **The Models** – pop punk.... the bad bands are what people perceive as punk, **JAB**, **Teenage Radio Stars**, the **Negatives**.... the good bands **Boys Next Door** had an elitist attitude, **Young Charlatans**, I was in love with Rowland S. Howard. It is like looking at a fruit bowl... different kinds of fruits... exotic...

Fashion:

I am more of a visual person.... That's why I wandered into fashion... as opposed to music... The concept was to bridge art and fashion. At that time the only people who were around was **Jenny Bannister** and **Flamingo Park** – apart from that it was incredibly commercial and lame – there wasn't much of an artistic voice – when I started my business with Bruce it was more from desperation.... we got a studio fairly quickly at Commerce House in Flinders St, and we got some money from his dad to start...

Bruce did the prints initially and I did the shapes... he had the most incredible practical ability.... The fusion of my ideas and vision and his talent really came together in this business – our first collection was screen-printed... The **Meat Market** in North Melbourne, they had this access workshop and these big tables – we started the business by buying fabric from **Job Warehouse** and printed on it.... we put an ad in the paper and found this woman called Angela who was out in St Albans.... Bruce did the patterns and we bought fabric, printed it, cut it made it and started selling it and it just happened.... all the right things at the right time... back then it was easy because you could buy fabric... cotton jersey and buy a roll of offcuts and print it and we would spend all day printing the fabric and cutting it up into t-shirts and mixing and matching prints and create this original look – it very much came out of the punk ethos and you didn't have to be trained... you could find your own voice.... we created our own culture... magazines were the only way you could get access to international culture... I was influenced by NY culture and the UK fashion world...