



Striding down the middle of the road outside her West London offices, past the wide eyed construction workers - who she confidently introduces herself to as “Princess Fiona of Shrek” - fashion designer and faux fur pioneer, Hannah Weiland leaves no head unturned as onlookers gaze at the furry creations she is adorned in. A vision fit for a land far, far away, in a bright green Shrimps faux fur coat, that trails about 2 ft behind each step that she takes; it is a happy coincidence that her look connotes that of a princess proceeding down the aisle at their own coronation... But this is not a land far, far away and it's safe to say that Hannah Weiland is already an established member of fashion's faux fur monarchy.

Now coveted by everyone from Beyoncé to Hannah's own muse, artist Grayson Perry, the description above doesn't sound dissimilar to the day that Hannah's brand Shrimps was catapulted into the fashion stratosphere, during fashion week in September 2013. When Hannah's close friend Laura Bailey wore the only Shrimps design in existence to the shows, everyone fell in love with the coat and the unrivalled quality of the faux fur. “Laura texted me saying Natalie Massenet (fashion entrepreneur and founder of Net-a-Porter) had chased her down the street in order find out who had made her coat, and I got a call from Net-a-Porter the next day, who placed a huge order which kick-started the business.”

Starting out with that one fur coat, Hannah had barely finished her MA course at the London College of fashion, studying textile design, before turning the coat's successful outing into a fully fledged brand. Hannah was enthralled by the texture, but never even dreamt of using real fur in her designs, so when she discovered the faux fur, that she still uses to this day, she knew that she must seize the opportunity.

Now, 4 years later, Shrimps is a global business with 12 full-time employees, and Semaine has the pleasure of sitting down with it's founder, Hannah Weiland to get to grips with what it is that makes her such a fierce, furocious and formidable faux fur force of nature that is re-shaping the fashion industry as we know it...

Semaine: Where did you discover the faux fur material that Shrimps is so well known for?

Hannah: Through a family friend, who works in fashion and has a children's wear brand, I came across a faux fur and I couldn't believe it was fake. I could not believe it. Even when you blew on it, it parted into a circle, which is the real fur test. I was then put in touch with the manufacturers and

I started dying up my own colours and I made one coat that had these Breton stripes which arrived and I just fell in love. Everyone I showed it to was amazed, I can't even tell you... No one had seen it before. Even the first buyers I showed it to were like "Oh my God!" and when you think about it, that was only four years ago... What else could be new? It's so amazing the things you can do with faux fur now, and I've seen it develop since I started Shrimps.

Semaine: Where did the name Shrimps originate?

Hannah: I called it Shrimps because it's my nickname and I liked the idea of this surreal crustacean representing this really soft faux fur, and obviously Shrimps are pink and I love pink... I drew the logo and I felt like it really suited it. I started with accessories and coats and they're probably my biggest category still. So I started with what I think is still the strongest thing for me, and I think shows that people love a hero product.

Semaine: You've previously cited your grandmother as your biggest source of inspiration, how has this manifested in your collections?

Hannah: This resort collection that is going to come out in November is very inspired by her, I went to her house with my Dad after she passed away and look through all of her clothes and jewellery. She had this amazing sense of style. She would always look her best, always fully made up, and would never wear a heel under three inches even though she was 92. She'd never let anyone else ever do her makeup or hair or nails, she would do everything herself and I think that's why she lived for so long. She had this passion for looking her best, she just didn't give in to old age! With colour and exciting things, I think it's really sad when people say they're too old for it. I love having an older customer, and when I'm designing, I'm like "Oh that's for the chic mum, and that's for the stylish granny". It's really fun to have those differences in age because we definitely have a younger demographic too who buy our accessories, etc.

Semaine: From Ganni to Converse, has it been fun to collaborate with such a wide range of other brands?

Hannah: Yeah, I love collaborating actually. It shows you a whole other world. Converse was amazing and Sophie Webster in the very beginning... I love shoes so working with all these different types of shoe companies it was really exciting to see into that world. I love Ganni, they're the best everyday brand, it was cool to mix the British wackiness of Shrimps with their cool Copenhagen design, I loved combining that - and it sold really well. And then going back to Converse, having the support of them, as a young brand, was really amazing and being able to position yourself alongside brands that you've grown up loving is really fun! Collaboration is definitely something that we want to do more of. We've got an exciting one in the pipeline, but I don't think I can say it yet... It comes out next September.

Semaine: You studied art history, before textiles at London College of Fashion. When you set out to study art did you intend on venturing into design?

Hannah: When I decided to go and study history of art, my teachers at school were like, "we want you to go to art school" and I couldn't decide... But, because I love the more academic side of things, I decided to choose history of art and I went and loved it. I was drawing the whole time I was there, and I wrote my dissertation on Grayson Perry and it was really all about the textiles and the prints and the fabrics, and I wanted to study this more which is why I went to London College of Fashion, and now I feel lucky that I did both. History of art influences my design in so many ways. All of those artists I studied, I research them all the time. And If I didn't have that knowledge, I feel like I wouldn't have my inspiration, now. I'll even look back at old essays and recall niche artists that I would never know about if I hadn't studied it. It's such a good subject, it teaches you about everything; it teaches you about literature, religion, fashion. The combination of art and fashion is one of my favourite things and that's what has led to things like our Faye Wei Wei collaboration for

our set at the fashion week just gone. The collection that I had worked so hard on, and that I loved designing, I wanted to show it in its element, and for me those paintings as the backdrop, and the pale blue carpet... I was so happy!! In all of the interviews, I was like "This is one of the best things in the world, Art and fashion, Art and fashion!!!" (Laughs).

Faye Wei Wei is amazing, she's like a fairy and I'm like a mermaid. She's very whimsical and you got to her studio and she gives you this amazing Chinese tea in an old Chinese teapot, she's really into her heritage. Her studio is full of beautiful shells and feathers which for me is like treasure and it's so beautiful. She's got such a strong aesthetic. I love oil paints, usually I draw with inks but oil paints are so technical in a certain way and when I see her doing it, she is just unreal!

Semaine: Do you spend a lot of your time painting?

Hannah: I do, yes, all of my collections are painted in inks. I come up with a concept for each collection, and then I draw and paint all the prints. Getting those designs made is then a bit of a longer process. The fur development is longer than the silk, the silk is all made in India and the fur is made in China and it's a lot more complicated.

Semaine: Do you feel like you've mastered the world of faux fur?

Hannah: You'd think that you'd run out of ideas about what to do next, and it's amazing because you just don't! I've actually got a whole book inside my head of ideas, it's like this little box, saving them all up for future collections.

I like to think I've mastered the art of faux fur, but so many people are doing it now. With Gucci going fur-free, I think it's so amazing, the younger generation is so supportive of faux fur and they think it's mad to wear real fur, and I agree. It's such an old-fashioned thing, we don't have to wear real fur and it's so cruel. Gucci has a huge younger following and I think Alessandro Michele saw that and made such a good decision. It's amazing, obviously because I love animals, but just showing that anyone can make the change and that it is luxury. I like to think that Shrimps has shown you what you can do with faux fur and how fabulous it can be... and that's why everyone's doing it (she laughs).

Semaine: From 0 to 12 employees in 4 years is an amazing sign of growth, what have been the challenges?

Hannah: Naivety was a great thing to have in the beginning, because maybe if I'd have known certain things, perhaps I wouldn't have done it. I started out without a business plan or anything. When you're outerwear focused it is seasonal. Winter is huge for us and in summer we still sell, but not as much. Stuff like cash flow is so hard, they say that restaurants and fashion are the hardest for cash flow. Sometimes just getting what you want, I always say that "if it were easy, everyone would be doing it" but yeah. I really love it. I feel so lucky that I get to draw and then print it on silk... It's so fun! I just love making art into fashion.

Semaine: And finally, do you have any words of inspiration for aspiring designers?

Hannah: Bust your gut. That's a good one. Sometimes you're kind of into it, but then you know deep down you're not. Sometimes you've got to take a step back. I do a lot of yoga and pilates because if I don't I can't handle the stress. I did yoga this morning at 7:30 and it really does help me get rid of the stress. Find time for yourself, even if it's really early in the morning.

By Kezia Navey for Semaine.