

HARD COPY

On Blue
and Yellow

CLOSED

YOUNG PEOPLE LIKE TO CONVEY A MESSAGE WITH FASHION AND USE IT AS A FORM OF COMMUNICATION, A METHOD OF EXPRESSION.



Malgosia Bela in 1998.

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Polaroids: Private archive



Sophia Lewis prepares a Jil Sander fashion show in 1998.

CLOSED AND PHILOUZE is our new unisex collection, created in collaboration with Michael Philouze, New-York based stylist and *Vogue* menswear editor. While this capsule incorporates the values which are important for the youth of today - from sustainability to gender-free expression-, it's also an ode to the nineties. Not just fashion-wise: **MICHAEL PHILOUZE** and our womenswear designer **SOPHIA LEWIS** met in the 1998 while they worked for Jil Sander between Hamburg and Milan. Michael Philouze, born and raised in Paris, was the assistant of the stylist Joe McKenna and Sophia Lewis, originally from Wales, was a studio assistant at Jil Sander. It was the time of "less is more"-minimalism - and the era of supermodels. One of them was **MALGOSIA BELA**, who worked with Sophia and Michael on her first job. She joined the two of them to discuss the collection, its background - and what it means to be European.



Reunited in Hamburg: Sophia Lewis and Michael Philouze in 2021.

MICHAEL PHILOUZE

Sophia, do you remember when we first met?

SOPHIA LEWIS

Sure, I will never forget it. It was in summer 1998, we were in our early twenties working for Jil Sander – and we hit it off immediately. And there was actually no other possibility because we were in a little room for two weeks every day to prepare the fashion show, we just had to get along!

MICHAEL PHILOUZE

I remember we both wore white gloves all the time, because there were racks and racks of white shirts. It almost felt like a fashion lab.

SOPHIA LEWIS

Yes, no coffee in the room, everything had to stay clean! The models weren't allowed to bend down, because the clothes were steamed. You would hold the models, while I was putting their shoes on ...

MICHAEL PHILOUZE

It's almost 24 years ago, but the music from the show, by Frédéric Sanchez, is still on my mind. A distant memory, staying in my head forever. Everything was so perfectly executed. The pace, the aesthetic of the house, the tunes ...

SOPHIA LEWIS

Malgosia, what are your memories from back then?

MALGOSIA BELA

I remember your friendly faces when I walked into that little room full of clothes. It was my first job as a model. I was 21 and had just moved to New York from Poland two months before we met. I had never done a show before, I had no idea how to do it. The atmosphere was very, very focused – almost religious. Everyone was full of respect and kept their voices low. We didn't have smartphones, there was no distraction.

SOPHIA LEWIS

Yes, there was this unbelievable level of discipline, combined with creativity – I'm still very grateful to have learned that. Jil Sander was extremely focused. Joe McKenna, the stylist, was the same – such a perfectionist.

MALGOSIA BELA

I had no experience with clothing or silhouettes, and I was watching closely what he was doing. It resonated with me because that's how I grew up. My mother used to say: no matter what you do, even when sweeping the floor, you must do your best. That's exactly how everything was done – with dedication, focus, 100 per cent. We see less and less of this kind of involvement today.

MICHAEL PHILOUZE

What else do you both miss about the nineties?

SOPHIA LEWIS

Focus is an important key word. I can't get things to stop blinking on my computer or my phone now, I'm always online. In the nineties, we had the chance to focus.

MALGOSIA BELA

I feel the same way. It was so different – I would go to the business centre of the hotel to e-mail my parents in Poland once a week!

MICHAEL PHILOUZE

The nineties were also the last big fashion decade. In the nineties, fashion was what became now a reference for the 2000s, the 2010s. It's the last decade that shaped fashion as we know it.

MICHAEL PHILOUZE

Not only these special moments in Milan connects us – we're also all European. What does that mean to you both?

MALGOSIA BELA

I'm very proud to be European. Being Polish, Europe is a huge topic for me right now. We have this anti-European government which might try to lead Poland out of the EU and that's why we talk a lot about what it means to be European – with my son and my husband, who is British. Being European used to be something we took for granted. Recently because of the atmosphere, with Russia, Brexit and so on, it's time to redefine it and recognise what it truly means to be European. For me, it's a strong sense of community, which is something I missed when I lived in the States. It also means roots, history, common values – it's okay to be different, there's always a common base.

SOPHIA LEWIS

Being European equals community – and freedom. I have just received my German citizenship, I'm half German and half British now. Of course, Brexit was a big question mark for me. So many things are great about the values of the EU, about being together as a team, about having so much freedom, about that understanding between nations. Why would anyone want to give that up?

MICHAEL PHILOUZE

To me, being European is just grounding. I'm half French, half German and I feel grounded in Europe because everything is familiar. Even though I have been living in the States for most of my life, it still feels like an adventure. There's always something new and unfamiliar which keeps

The **CLOSED AND PHILOUZE** collection will be available by mid-April.

things exciting. I'm glad that I'm able to spend a lot of time in Paris – and it's always nice to be in Germany, too. I'm very happy that I had the opportunity to create a collection for Closed with Sophia and come to Hamburg several times. Especially as working in Germany has always been something I have wanted to do.

MALGOSIA BELA

When did you have the idea to create a collection together?

SOPHIA LEWIS

Michael styled several campaigns for Closed. While he was in Hamburg during one of the lockdowns, we had dinner at my place with my 17-year old daughter – and he asked her about the topics that are important for the youth of today. We talked about sustainability, gender-free expression, "less is more" – and were reminded of our youth in the nineties. That's when we thought about designing a collection for Closed.

MICHAEL PHILOUZE

The whole process felt like a nice continuation of our friendship. It was a very nice flow of exchanging ideas and creating something together. We always used to be a good team, and nothing has changed about that.

MALGOSIA BELA

How would you describe the collection?

SOPHIA LEWIS

It's a small collection of gender-free wardrobe basics. Extremely modern, with a message behind it. Young people like to convey a message with fashion and use it as a form of communication, a method of expression. That's something that we wanted to capture. As you get older, you tend to forget that and see clothing as something practical. Simplicity is another idea that was important to us – after all, that's how Michael and I started, with Jil Sander, the "queen of clean". Minimalistic, the sharpness of the message, editing everything until perfection – it was about going deep into the details. And of course, there are also sustainable aspects to the collection: we used eco-friendly fabrics and techniques – for example, organic cotton, recycled nylon, and mineral dyes. Almost everything is produced in Europe.

MICHAEL PHILOUZE

It's timeless, it's comfortable, it's for everyone. It's something I'm very proud of. And I can't wait to see who is going to wear it.