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“The Woman Creating an Avant-Garde Destination at Nordstrom’s New Manhattan Store” Sarah Spellings, The Cut. April 9, 2018. <https://www.thecut.com/2018/04/nordstroms-first-new-york-store-features-comme-des-garcons.html>

The Woman Creating an Avant-Garde Destination at Nordstrom’s New Manhattan Store Now Open

We’re living in a menswear moment. The biggest talents and most-talked-about trends are emerging from menswear shows and lines. It’s so big that Nordstrom’s first ever full-collection store in New York — opening this Thursday, April 12 — is dedicated entirely to (you guessed it) menswear.



The Comme des Garçons installation at Nordstrom. Photo: Naho Kubota

Located just below Columbus Circle at 235 West 57th Street, the new store is housed in a sprawling 47,000-square-foot, three-story glass structure, with a giant wooden tree sculpture below a spiraling staircase. Like all Nordstroms across the U.S., it features an impeccably curated shoe section (so many

sneakers!) and brand-specific alcoves with designer clothing. Unlike most department stores, it has a coffee shop and an alcohol bar.

But the new Nordstrom's most exciting aspect is an installation immediately to your right upon entering: a special Comme des Garçons showcase designed by Nordstrom's creative mind and VP of creative projects, Olivia Kim. Although she's based in Seattle, Kim gamely agreed to give the Cut a special preview of the installation via FaceTime. On screen in her office at Nordstrom's Seattle headquarters, she



The Homme Plus section at the Nordstrom Comme des Garçons installation. Photo: Naho Kubota

wore a navy-and-white striped long-sleeve T-shirt and seemed unfazed by the challenge of walking through a store on an iPhone screen.

“Oh my god no, don't even worry!” she exclaimed after my FaceTime camera failed four times. She pointed to a flash of fluorescent pink fur on a pinstriped Comme des Garçons blazer, and we approached her special installation.

Before working for Nordstrom in Seattle, Kim spent ten years in New York, working as a cutting-edge buyer and VP of creative at Opening Ceremony. Back then she was platinum-blond and brand-new to retail. But she quickly gained acclaim from fashion editors for her personal, guerrilla-style approach to finding under-the-radar clothes and brands. On FaceTime in the Nordstrom store, she's no longer platinum blond but still had the same upbeat, disruptive energy that's brought an avant-garde label like Comme des Garçons to a century-old institution like Nordstrom. The project marks CDG's first ever out-



Some of Hundley's posters at the Nordstrom Comme des Garçons installation. Photo: Naho Kubota

of-house installation. Designer Rei Kawakubo's team at CDG gave Kim full creative rein to do what she pleased with the clothes — a real demonstration of her trust.

The result is a high-low haven. Instead of mannequins, some of the clothing is displayed on wooden sculptures built by Kim's creative partner, the artist Marc Hundley. They look halfway between one of Alexander Calder's mobiles (which Kim used as a point of reference) and the anthropomorphized plank from the '90s cartoon Ed, Edd, n Eddy. You'll see the current collection; the runway label Homme Plus; a kids' line; the more affordable Play label; and a hypebeast-friendly clothing line by Kawakubo's mentee, the provocative Gosha Rubchinskiy.

"We wanted to show someone who is a die-hard fan of Rei's every label that she touches," Kim explained. "And for the customer who isn't a die-hard fan, there's so many different ways in which we can introduce the customer to the world of Comme that isn't intimidating."

She talked animatedly with her hands, revealing a small black tattoo of a delicate bird on her palm in between her forefinger and thumb. The same swallow appears in a poster on the installation's walls — all of which are scenes from Hundley's imagination. Fun fact: one looks like a flyer for an imaginary play titled The Fool, but the address and date actually belong to the bar Max Fish, the scene of one of Hundley's wildest nights in New York. "The old Max Fish location," Kim pointed out. "I was probably there too."

The nostalgic NYC posters show the personal touch both she and Hundley instilled to make the installation feel like a literal fashion playground. There's a mini jungle gym that Hundley built as a clothing rack, plus wooden re-creations of city milieu like bus shelters, trash cans, and kiosks. "We want them to get graffitied," Kim said of the posters. "We want people to treat them like posters in a bus station."

What else should we know about the store? "It doesn't have to be about a transaction every single time," Kim said — a refreshing sentiment for a retail veteran. "It's more about inspiring customers to see that we want to show them a really cool product." She ended the call with a nod to her New York days, when all the fashion parties were below 14th Street. "Thanks for schlepping uptown!" she said cheerfully, waving at the screen. Once a NYC club kid, always a club kid.

The Comme des Garçons installation will be on display through fall 2018.