

# Shell Shock

THE SHELL-TOE SHOE IS NO LONGER JUST  
A BASKETBALL SNEAKER. IT NO LONGER BELONGS TO ADIDAS.  
AND IT'S COME A LONG WAY SINCE THE DAYS THAT RUN DMC CLAIMED  
IT AS THEY'RE FAVOURITE PIECE OF FOOTWEAR. THAT MUCH IS  
CLEAR FROM JENS ANDERSSON'S PHOTOGRAPHY PROJECT WHICH BRINGS  
US SCENES FROM THE LIFE OF A SHELL-TOE HEADED MAN.







— While it's obvious that the *shell-toe*, originally introduced by adidas in 1969 has become one of popular culture's most recognisable icons devoid of it's basketball roots, Andersson manages to add even more dimensions to the shoe.

As he explains - 'I've always been interested in sub cultures and how people adapt to living in city environments and I've always been a SuperStar fan. So to me it is an important symbol that represents branding.

Our main protagonist isn't just the star of the story, he's also literally SuperStar: a series of images featuring a man with a shell-toe for a head. Andersson's work uses humour as a tool to make us think. "There always has to be entertainment value in something. I think it's important because you want people to react, to give them creative ideas."

"Most of the people I know are in some way heavily influenced by brands." But for someone who has worked on ad campaigns for such brands as WESC, Kangol and Bellows Skateboards, it's interesting to note how un-advertising the SuperStar project actually is. Nor does it conform to the Adbusters world of anti-advertising which was so fashionable throughout the nineties. Perhaps the situations are too surreal to be framed in those terms or just too personal to the photographer.

Jens' fascination with the shoe started early on in life. "When I first saw a pair, they were impossible to get in Sweden - so they were very sought after. I had a thing for them and tried to get them from abroad for so long. I was around twelve when I first saw the shoes, but I only got my first pair in 1990 when I was sixteen."

It would be easy to see the piece as a artists statement about consumerism, about how we identify ourselves with brands and products in this way, but the narrative of the images doesn't let us off that easily. "I empathise and sympathise with the man in the story." He is put in situations that I would never get into, but in a way does things I wanna do but in actual fact don't. Part of his motivation is he wants to be recognised and stand out - to be that special guy, but not so special that people can mock him or that it totally separates him from other people."

The beauty of this work is that it is rich in visual references and humour, and yet eludes singular definition and reading. "I've sent it to people I know at adidas, not that I want to sell them the idea or anything, but just to keep them posted on what I'm doing and I've received some nice responses, but it's a big company so beyond the people I know there, I have no idea what they think of it. As I said before it's not really the fact that it's an adidas shoe, it's that it's the shell-toe, it's something beyond branding." Putting the shoes into a different context has relieved them of their global brand heritage in a way that only art can.

This is just the start for the shell-toe man. More adventures and situations have been planned as well as a gallery show and a book.



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