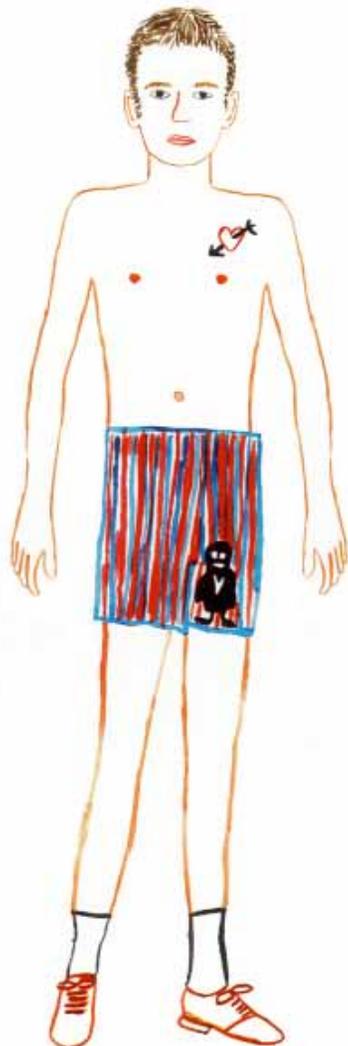
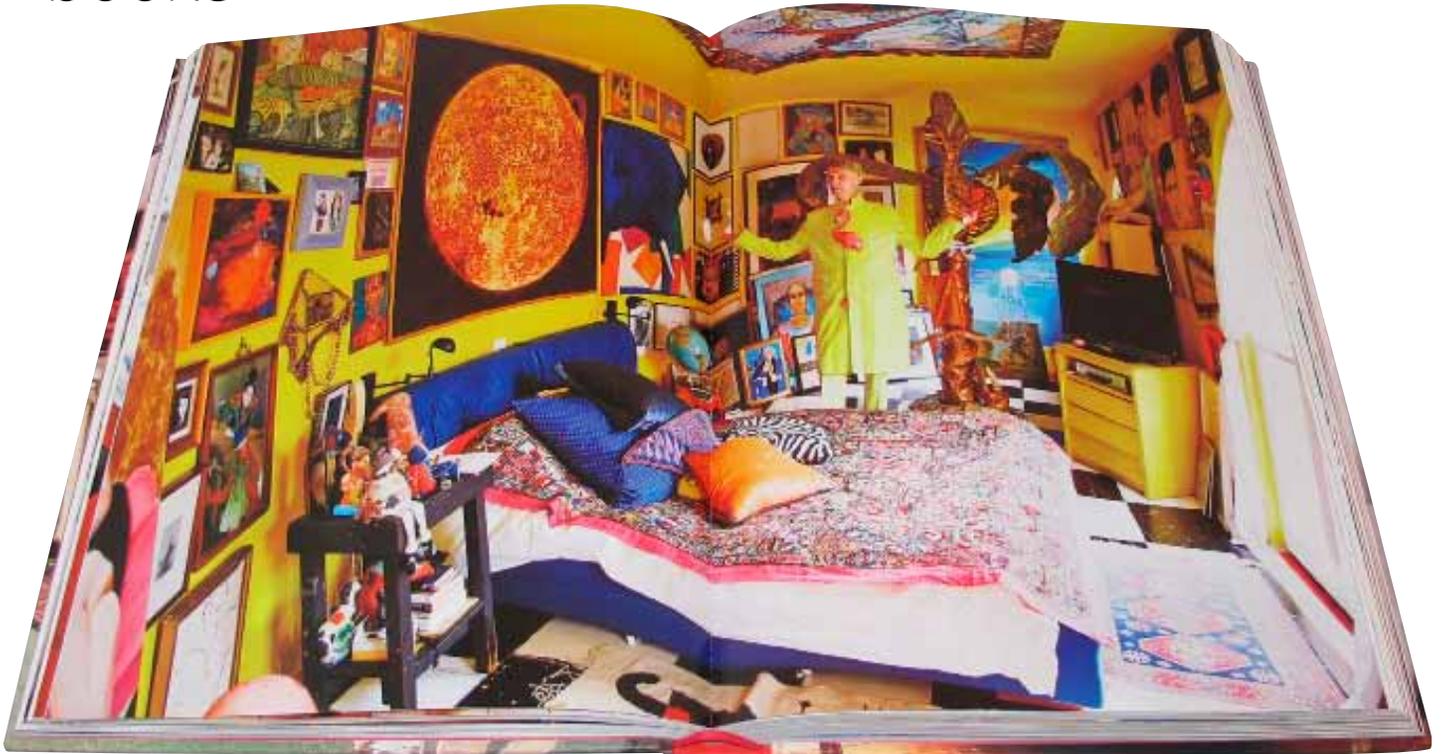


books



FASHIONABLE SELBY (by Todd Selby; Abrams, rrp £22.99) As any loyal reader of *The World of Interiors* knows, one of the joys of the magazine is to imagine how your life might be if you woke up in *that* bed, or ate your toast at *that* kitchen table. For the third installation of what has become a successful formula – round up 40-odd trendsetters and photograph them among their stuff – photographer Todd Selby has knocked on the door of the fashion industry. On this premise, I gingerly opened the book expecting to see ‘fashionable’ people posing with their collection of vintage Alaïa jackets. Instead, what we have here is a lively glimpse into the corners of an industry where eccentric outliers, among them an illustration professor, a knitter, shoemakers, shop owners, and one woman who makes frankly revolting-looking headpieces with human hair, are working with creative abandon.

It is when Selby focuses on people’s working environments that the book is at its best. As disparate as the group is, both professionally and geographically (Britain, France and Japan are the most represented), his subjects have certain things in common. All of them are incredibly untidy, with piles of books and objects covering every inch of space. Only an LA product-design studio and a Parisian spectacles atelier have surfaces clear enough to put down even a cup of tea. None of the interiors is grand. Many are ramshackle, utilitarian spaces which provide a backdrop for the occupants’ work. All share that indefinable air of cool. There are also, mysteriously, a lot of plants. Do these people know something we mere mortals don’t about a link between photosynthesis and the right side of the brain?

Selby’s approach is to take one or two snaps of their desks and shelves, and to supplement this with shots of moodboards and details of eye-catching objects. The resulting pages are a riot of pattern, saturated with colour, with the feel of an artfully curated scrapbook. When you finally come across two sisters making simple leather bags in a plain white studio, it’s a welcome breath of fresh air. Selby’s masterstroke is to reveal the process as well as the product, which renders the prosaic surprisingly fascinating. It also helps that most of his subjects work by hand, like the shoemaker snapped filing down a last with one of more than fifty tools laid out on his workbench.

Selby’s argument, I suppose, is that there are still truly creative people in an industry now worth \$400 billion per year, working outside the mass-market, homogenised, global fashion juggernaut. I found myself being drawn back to the book’s eye-popping delights. For an outsider, it is intriguing to see the skill that goes into the embroidery on a Chanel bag, the design process behind making giant, gold dinosaur eggs for Louis Vuitton’s windows, or 50 sequin-encrusted jackets, one for each American state, made by the man who dressed Elvis in a gold lamé suit. Selby doesn’t completely escape the more pretentious elements of the fashion industry, however. One woman describes herself as a ‘progressive regressive fiber entrepreneur’. After all, this is still fashion, darling ■ AUGUSTA POWNALL ▷