

# VOGUE

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The Great Journey

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"But you know that we don't like  
to talk about precious things...  
When something so pleasant  
happens to you, you want to keep  
it only for yourself! Do you agree  
with me?"

MONICA  
BELLUCCI

Photographed by SZILVÉSZTER MAKÓ, wearing **BALENCIAGA** and **CARTIER**



Aren Fold Tote in Mega Laurel Visetos  
MCM

Special bags Spring/Summer 2024

# MCM

and KATIE CHUNG





What are the similarities between Korea and Germany? Probably not many...but in the realms of fashion and creation, anything is possible, and both cultures can serve as catalysts for inspiration and beautifully crafted designs. MCM is a German brand, but today, Katie Chung, the creative director, is incorporating global influences into the label’s emblems. Her Korean roots, combined with her English education, time spent in Paris, along with MCM’s German heritage, have created a fusion of silhouettes that contribute to the brand’s distinctive style. Her initial foray into the industry began at the age of two, alongside her mother and aunt. From that point onward, her destiny became clear—fashion was the path to follow. Katie Chung has set out with the aim of reintroducing the label to a younger audience, leading her to rediscover the profound meanings embedded in its designs and mythical prints. Each influence is approached with innovation and uniqueness, integral to the brand’s philosophy since its inception. Today, Ms. Chung views the brand through an intercultural and modern lens, shaping a dynamic and intersectional identity that draws inspiration from every corner of the world.

CAROLINA BENJUMEA. How did your interest in fashion begin?

KATIE CHUNG. Well, I guess in my case, I started in the family business since I was only two years old—which I don’t have any memory of [laughs]—when my mother and Auntie started the brand, I didn’t really have any other choice than spending all my time in the design studio and helping them. So, I guess it was pretty natural for me to be part of the fashion industry and have an interest in fashion.

C.B. Fashion is an industry that touches different spheres; it’s not only clothes, it’s art, it’s culture. It’s a lot of things. So how do you draw inspiration from different artistic disciplines to give a multi-dimensional aspect to your collections and the brand?

K.C. I don’t usually decide to consciously seek inspiration from somewhere or something. I don’t really decide, “Okay, today I’m going to get inspiration,” and then go to see an exhibition. It’s not like that. I think that every little thing that I see and hear piles up, and then each puzzle piece is put together and produced—that’s how it usually works for me and for the brand. I usually try to receive various sources of artistic information and input without being *too* filtered...

C.B. Are there things that inspire you more than others? Are you more sensitive to specific things?

K.C. I like words! I prefer books over images because then I feel like I have space to imagine and create from there.

C.B. That’s interesting! Is there a particular one that you feel very inspired by?

K.C. It might sound boring, but I like philosophy-related things and books about the mind and things that you *cannot* really see in real life. I guess because what I do is *more* about the visual.

C.B. How do you manage to appeal to younger generations while staying true to the DNA of the brand?

K.C. This is the part that I thought about the most when I arrived here. MCM’s pattern, the Visetos monogram, consists of three elements: Laurel, diamonds, and the logo itself. We decided to come up with something new, thinking about how to appeal to the younger generation today and make them love it more. The “Visetos” motif is the classic iconic heritage pattern and “Lauretos” is the new iteration based on the original but with a contemporary spin. So we took out other elements and played only with Laurel. The goal was to create a new communication tool by *transforming* the form a little bit and interpreting it in a more *modern* way without straying far from the existing core value of MCM.

C.B. To understand this, did you study the behaviors of the new generation, or how did you come up with the idea that this will appeal to younger people?

K.C. First of all, I’m 38. And also, I have a son who inspires me greatly so he’s from a way younger generation. Also, I try to communicate with younger people, you know, in the office or around me—to really *listen* to their opinions and their interests. I ask a lot, “What do you do?” and gather a little information to make a decision.

Himmel Triangle Pouch in Lauretos and Aren M Pup Charm in Visetos MCM





“MCM is a brand that tries to catch those changes and applies them to the design as soon as possible.” – Katie Chung

C.B. The social and cultural backgrounds are really important to be able to understand a brand. So, I would like to know what social and cultural changes, movements or behaviors have had the most impact on the brand.

K.C. I think the invention of the mobile phone was the most impactful thing that happened to us, and in general as well, because this tiny device can replace so many things now! People don't have to carry many things anymore. Therefore, our use and purpose for various types and sizes of bags has changed in some respects. The MCM famous backpack, symbolizes the flexibility of versatility and adaptation, it was created to enhance free movement. So, with just one bag you can cover many occasions, leaving both hands free for a mobile phone or new technology. I believe that influenced and impacted the MCM product developments the most. MCM is a brand that tries to catch those changes and applies them to the design as soon as possible. Sustainability is one of the things that we're trying very hard for as well. Also, COVID has affected us a lot. These new elements, like mobile phones, have an impact on design later on.

C.B. So, the brand has had a really long and rich history since its founding in 1976. How do you envision the brand's evolution under your direction? How do you think it has changed or evolved over the years?

K.C. MCM has been created through the vision of male designers before. As I'm a female designer, I have a different gender view. I expect something different; to be more neat, modern, and sophisticated. As a working woman and mother, maybe that impacts my vision and perspective.

C.B. The brand also has a German heritage, right? But now it also has Korean influences. What is the main difference between German fashion and Korean fashion? And what do you think is the most similar about both fashions?

K.C. Each person has various interests and tastes, so it is difficult to clearly state the differences and similarities between each country, I guess. If I have to pick one, I think both countries like *practical* things. That's how I see it in design or anything in life, not just fashion. But as for differences, I feel like

Germany likes to be bolder and stronger, with long-lasting design codes, while Korea is [speaks in Korean] “PPALLI PPALLI” which means *quick quick*, because we are very sensitive to trends and changes. I guess that could be the difference. And it's not only for fashion; it's just a general thing and it impacts design.

C.B. I believe you studied at Central Saint Martins, which is in London, and you are now based in Korea and you work for a German brand, which is really interesting in terms of inspirations and different backgrounds. How do you think these cultures have shaped your creations and your design aesthetics?

K.C. Well, *definitely* my time in Europe! I studied in the UK and also lived in Paris for four or five years and this helped me to understand the MCM Brand from a European perspective faster. That perspective and experience were very useful in this global brand because MCM is all over the world. Although it's not an obvious design like “East meets West,” but based on my experience, I try to delicately express each other's *fine* taste through small details together with a broader perspective.

C.B. As you said, MCM has a presence in a lot of countries. How do you ensure that the designs

you propose for MCM are cohesive globally, yet adaptable to each culture?

K.C. There's something about *global* taste. I believe that there's a general understanding of what is beautiful. And even though there are many different tastes and differences around each country, I guess they all *integrate* or combine together and become global tastes these days. Luckily, with the internet, we share information and tastes more easily. I feel like the meaning of beauty or design is coming closer together nowadays.

C.B. What specific aspects of your personal style and your vision in fashion have you implemented since you arrived at MCM?

K.C. I was mostly working in men's wear before, which is quite the opposite in terms of gender. Because of that, I



Himmel Zip Pouch Charm in Lauretos MCM





have a sense of *androgyny*. You know, I always feel drawn to some kind of pretty yet masculine aesthetic that women find beautiful! MCM is genderless and I think that kind of androgynous mood is still there and visible in my handwriting. I like neat things, so that aspect of my personal taste is reflected as well. Tailoring is something I tried to bring when I joined, like a menswear tailored jacket, because it's so wearable for both genders. Before, MCM was more focused on streetwear aesthetic references, and then I thought tailoring, which is one of my strengths from men's wear, would definitely add something new.

C.B. That's very interesting, especially because today androgynous fashion is one of the main movements in the fashion industry. And what aspects do you believe make your designs innovative and disruptive?

K.C. People are usually comfortable with what they *have* done, including me. I guess to be innovative and disruptive is not to be afraid of change. To accept and reflect the Zeitgeist. Not being afraid of changes, I guess that's the biggest, most important movement right now.

C.B. And is there a brand or a designer you would like to collaborate with?

K.C. MCM is definitely a collaboration-friendly brand and we've been doing that quite a lot. It's difficult to name a specific brand or designer in advance, but we have many upcoming collaborations with brands I've wanted to work with since I first joined MCM, so we are all looking

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forward to this! The next one is coming *soon*.

C.B. You have also mentioned that the Bauhaus movement is connected with MCM. So why does it have such a big influence and how does the spirit of this movement impact your creative decisions?

K.C. The Bauhaus spirit has always been present with MCM, even before I came, as it's from Germany. Another thing is, as I said before, with German and Korean influence,

*functionality* is one of the *most* important factors for both countries. So, when we design things, I always try not to forget the “form follows function” motto from Bauhaus. Making a beautiful design is very important but we want to test the utilization of items in advance before we start designing something.

C.B. What's your approach on sustainability, and how do you see it involved in future collections?

K.C. I think it was one of the most surprising things when I first came here because MCM thinks very deeply and takes sustainability issues very seriously trying to find the

best solutions. So we want to talk about this when we're 100% sure about it because it's an important issue. We don't want to release things that claim to be sustainable when they're not. But I think there will be really good news very soon. We are working on many things at the same time. It's definitely taking time because we wish to create something that we're all 100% happy with and a change with difference for MCM, which takes time.

C.B. When do you think is coming out?

K.C. I think at the next press day we're planning to release some exciting developments and updates. It's a long-term project..

C.B. Can't wait! We can see a big balance between classic design and futuristic materials in the brand. What challenges do you encounter while you try to blend tradition and innovation, and how does this contribute to the brand's uniqueness?

K.C. That includes sustainability; there are *constant* challenges with technical updates. But MCM started with a DNA that made it a *unique* brand which will *not* be lost. So, we try to keep the brand's DNA while updating techniques. I believe it's like mixing things, balancing between classic design, futuristic materials, Europe and Asia—all these different kinds of *hybrid* movements in design. It is one of the core values of MCM. Keep working on it and updating the technique is one of the key factors.



Aren M Pop Charm in Visetos  
MCM

Ella Boston Bag in Lauretos  
MCM

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