

All by SELASI Spring/Summer 2023 In conversation with CAROLINA BENJUMEA
Photographer FRANCESCO ZINNO Fashion Editor VERONICA BLAGOEVA
Casting by ODDA Studio Models DYLAN AYADI and GIFT NYAKUTA @Anti-Agency

Ronan

Mckenzie

(Selasi)

Back in 2020, as meetings were held on zoom, people were clapping on balconies, working in pyjamas became acceptable, and COVID was the most popular term on Google, photographer Ronan Mckenzie turned to design and creativity as a way to spend her days during lockdown. Little did she know that she would be sewing the firsts threads of her future brand, Selasi. Having worked for magazines like i-D, T Magazine, WSJ, and Vogue US, fashion was no stranger to her. But with shootings and events cancelled all over the world, she found joy in creating clothing for herself, adding another facet to her long trajectory as an artist, designer, photographer, stylist, and founder of the creative space 'Home'. Conceived in the comfort of her house, the uncertainty of lockdown, and the most intimate place within herself, she started by picking some fabrics, added a visual identity, and then she gave it a name: Selasi, meaning "God hears me" in the Ewe Language. Her use of colour and silhouettes, which envelope every curve, are an ode to the body and the skin as well as an invitation to connect deeply with every garment. The brand has gained immediate recognition in the industry, and it now has two collections and support from stockists such as SSENSE and Browns in the United Kingdom. In a conversation with Ronan Mckenzie, she tells ODDA Magazine about the unexpected journey she has undergone since 2020 and why, more than just a clothing brand, "Selasi is pure joy".

CAROLINA BENJUMEA. You have a really big trajectory as a fashion photographer. We can say that your name in the industry was already established. Why did you come up with the idea of founding your own brand Selasi?

RONAN MCKENZIE. Selasi came about as a fun passion project, something just for me, something not work-related linked to my photo practice or curatorial practice. As a place where I could freely, wholeheartedly, uncompromisingly express my ideas and my feelings, and also to do something with my hands that wasn't admin or computer based or involved communicating with others—as something that I could do and reap the benefits straight away. The idea of having a brand only came about once I started making things, posting things, and sharing, and people were really interested in what I was doing. I thought, if I was going to let these garments go out into the world to be

photographed or worn, it was important to establish the identity and the place they were coming from. So that's how Selasi was born. **C.B.** It is interesting to know that your brand was conceived during lockdown when businesses all over the world froze, and no one was buying and producing anything. Tell us how the process of creating a brand was during such a particular situation and what were the biggest challenges of doing it.

R.M. I didn't face any of the same challenges that perhaps other designers do because I wasn't trying to create a brand. I was trying to have fun and trying to enjoy myself, making something that was for me. I can wholeheartedly say that Selasi is pure joy. Selasi comes from a place of joy, and its expression is pure because I'm not doing it for sales. Although I'm grateful to have two amazing stockists and stores that sell Selasi, Selasi is for me. So, there is no pressure involved, and it's not my sole income, there's really no pressure in its actualization. **C.B.** People's state of mind

during and after the lockdown changed, and the way they think and consume is different as well. You have released two collections since you started. Do you feel like the clothes you created in lockdown are different from the ones you create now?

R.M. I think the clothes I made in lockdown are definitely different to the clothes I'm making now, but only because lockdown was two years ago now. I've grown as a person; I'm two years older than I was. I've had two years more opportunities, two years more stories, two years more exposure to the world and different experiences. The state that I'm in is very different to then, how I feel is different, who I am is different because we change every day and I change rapidly, and I'm in a formative, transformative period of my life and career. Naturally, the garments I want to wear,

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although the foundations may be the same, the clothes feel different because they're for different reasons, because they're for a different me. **C.B.** In your professional life as a photographer and as a designer, what have been the biggest highlights or the moments where you have felt the proudest of yourself?

R.M. The moments I've been most proud of are the moments where I've explored wholeheartedly and tried my hand at something. So, Selasi is one of my proudest moments. Just its existence, just that it has existed at a time and that I did that and that I tried. I'm also proud of 'Home', the gallery space that I run and is now transforming into a malleable, non-fixed locality space and more of a concept—something I always wished I had had growing up, or I guess in hindsight of my childhood, a black owned space to see amazing work and be around inspiring people who want to be

inspired and see beautiful books that are not sticky. I'm proud that I made that space because if I was eight or 18, not 28 like I am now, and I looked up to my future self, I'd be really proud of what I had done. And, of course, my photo work; I'm proud of so much, and I think it's important for me to be. **C.B.** If you would have to describe Selasi to someone who has never heard of it before, how would you talk about it and why? **R.M.** I would like to talk about Selasi in feelings. I would describe it as warm, honest, vulnerable, gentle, but strong and powerful, and I would wait to see what that conjured up for the person. Then, I would probably have an interesting conversation about the differences between what those words mean for them and for me and the importance of context; that is what I love about Selasi—so much conversation to be had and to think about, both for me and for others. **C.B.** So far, the collections have included very feminine, minimal, and sculptural silhouettes that almost hug the body. What do you want your

clients to feel when they wear Selasi? **R.M.** I want people to feel good, because what the clothes mean for me—its different shapes, and because everything is made for me—is so personal. The different garments and different shapes make me tap into different areas of myself and feel differently. But the base of it is that I want the pieces to tap into that part of ourselves where we feel free and light, hot and sexy, fly and cool, like one of those days when you get dressed and you're like, damn, I look fantastic! That's what I hope people who wear Selasi are able to tap into when they wear it; it's not the clothes that will make them feel that way, it's

how they feel about themselves. I think clothes and garments are just an aid to seeing that and accessing those feelings. So, I hope it evokes those feelings in people for themselves.

Make-up Artist
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Assistant Coordinator
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