



**LEEDS  
ARTS RESEARCH  
CENTRE**

# **GIRLNESS**

# **MATTY BOVAN**

# OUTPUT INFORMATION

Title:  
Girlness

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## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION STATEMENT**

Girlness asks the question: What does it mean to be a girl in Britain in 2017? Commissioned by Barbie on its 58th anniversary to make a new collection for their dolls, and a film celebrating girlhood, Bovan chose to explore the subject through the lens of identity, gender and feminism.

‘Bovan, known for his bright, texture-heavy collections, has created a capsule Barbie collection featuring unisex T-shirts, badges, and stickers featuring his distinctive hand-drawn graphics’, wrote Danielle Wightman-Stone in Fashion United. The 2-minute film Girlness portrays young women wearing similarly striking clothes in a suburban context, talking about what it is to be young women.

The collection retailed at Fashion East pop-up space, Selfridges, London, reported in British Vogue; WWD; Fashion United; ID magazine; Dazed; The Fashion Network; and V Magazine. Girlness was screened at Mayfair Collective, with a panel discussion including Susie Bubble and Zoe Broach, Head of Fashion, RCA. British Vogue did an eight-page feature on Barbie’s sixtieth anniversary (September/Autumn, 2019), commissioning Bovan to make a new outfit.

Though commissioned by Barbie – historically, upholders of binary gender values – the collection and the film Girlness show how androgynous adolescent femininity has become. However, while the girls’ colourful outfits and make-up are reminiscent of experimental art band Chicks on Speed, they aren’t presented as ‘deviations’ from the norm; rather, Girlness implies the end of such norms. The contrast between the suburban backdrop and the girls’ appearances recalls punk documentaries, in which Jordan – star of Derek Jarman’s Jubilee – travels from her Sussex home to work at Malcolm McClaren’s shop Sex. The subtext being that, where Jordan would have been abused en route to London because of her appearance, these girls don’t have to leave their neighbourhoods to enjoy the stylistic freedom she and other pioneers helped establish.



If any designer exemplifies the boundless creative energy of this country, it is Matty Bovan. After learning to knit at the age of 11, he became fascinated by the idea of “making fabric your own, making it feel personal” – and since founding his namesake brand, he has scoured the country in search of craftspeople who could do precisely that. Whether sourcing waxed cotton from Lancashire or Scottish wool to be knitted in Leicester, he is dedicated to championing artisanal skills often forgotten in the digital age and trawls the internet in search of new collaborators. “It’s gone from being a cottage industry to finding these people I can work with all around the UK – and the world,” he beams. A wealth of such techniques have been incorporated into the costume for his intricately constructed Barbie: hand-padded and sewn into her dress with golden Japanese yarn, she is the miniature embodiment of his magpie eclecticism. “It’s kind of like Barbie couture,” Bovan reflects. “I wanted her to have the same energy that my runway clothes have... She’s epic.”

– Six Young Designers Dress Barbie for her Sixtieth Anniversary, Oliver Singer, Vogue UK, 02 August 2019.

## Talent show: the London fashion week designers to know this season

With London fashion week starting on Friday, meet the 10 designers about to have a lot of influence on your future wardrobe.

It's become increasingly hard for independent designers to succeed in the fashion business today, but the key is having a unique point of view – and endless grit and determination. Whether it's textile maverick Matty Bovan's magpie mixes of colour and pattern, Steven Tai's offbeat sense of humour, or Supriya Lele's fusion of British and Asian cultures, these are the next generation of designers shaping the way we are dressing

In many ways, Matty Bovan is your archetypal young designer. Wild prints? Tick. Shocking colour clashes? Tick. More makeup than an eighties New Romantic on a big night out? Tick, tick, tick. To pigeon-hole him as just another wacky fashion upstart, however, is to underestimate his enormous potential. Bovan, 27, is a rare thing – a designer who sees textiles with the finely honed eye of an abstract expressionist, from the great tradition of wonderfully original English eccentrics that includes Zandra Rhodes, Vivienne Westwood and Bodymap.

His collection for AW17 includes a whole raft of techniques including crochet, machine knitting, screen printing, digital printing and felting. It's the textile equivalent of sensory overload, but he does know when to stop. "I sometimes see it like I'm making an album and each track has its own personality so you have to approach them differently," he says.

Bovan's career trajectory has been as wiggly as one of his knits. After completing his degree at Central Saint Martins – something he was only able to do with the help of various scholarships – he decided to move back home to his mum's house in York where he set up a studio in the garage. It made economic sense and gave him the headspace to focus on a variety of projects including his ongoing work as a contributing fashion editor for Love Magazine; a print collaboration for Marc Jacobs; and *Girlness* – a film for Barbie's birthday on what it means to be a girl in 2017.

As a child, Bovan was encouraged in his creative vision by both his mother, Plum, and his grandmother who taught him to knit. He also took inspiration from the inventive way his mother decorated the house. "My favourite bedroom as a child was lilac with red net curtains and those wiggly mirrors, as well as disco ball-esque cushions – it was a very intense combination!" For the past two seasons mother and son have collaborated on the accessories – the earrings, charms and necklaces that finish off each look so perfectly.

Bovan's multi-disciplinary approach and his flexibility make him a real talent to watch. While he's already collaborated with his childhood partner in crime, Barbie, he says he would love to dress Bjork and Róisín Murphy. "Anyone who has a strength of character and knows their own style," he says. Just like him.

**Tamsin Blanchard, The Guardian, Wednesday 13 September 2017**

<https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2017/sep/13/talent-show-london-fashion-week-designers-know-aw17-season-lfw>

## **Matty Bovan collaborates with Barbie**

Fashion East's Matty Bovan is collaborating with Barbie to celebrate the famous doll's 58th birthday. Bovan, known for his bright, texture-heavy collections, has created a capsule Barbie collection featuring unisex T-shirts, badges, and stickers featuring his distinctive hand-drawn graphics that will be stocked at the Fashion East pop-up space in Selfridges, London.

In addition, the collection also includes a series of one-off Barbie dolls dressed in Matty Bovan spring/summer 2017 pieces.

"Barbie allows both young boys and girls to unlock their imagination of what a woman can be. There are endless possibilities with Barbie and she carries a kind of timeless quality which is why she still has a huge appeal to both adults and children today," Bovan told Vogue. "Strong female identity is something I grew up surrounded by and something that I found very inspirational - it extends naturally within my own work and practice. I design for myself, but also the female version of me - it's all part of my whole identity."

Ruth Hickman, Selfridges designer studio buyer, added: "Barbie is my dream Designer Studio customer. I'm thrilled that we can celebrate her Birthday by exclusively showcasing Matty's merchandise in the Fashion East Store - the perfect home for this genius collaboration."

To coincide with the exclusive collaboration, Bovan also launched a short film, *Girlness* shot in the designer's hometown of York, which celebrates women with a diverse set of characters who talk about what it means to be a woman for them and their desire to dress up.

Bovan explains: "In this short film, we have taken Barbie's values and attitude, to showcase what female identity means to us in 2017.

**Danielle Wightman-Stonel, Fashion United, Monday, 13 March 2017**

<https://fashionunited.uk/news/fashion/matty-bovan-collaborates-with-barbie/2017031323852>



“She’s fashion’s number one fan. Her favourite colour is pink and at 54 years young she has a waistline most girls would kill for. To celebrate Barbie’s birthday, Matty Bovan is dressing the famous doll and her girlfriends in his SS17 collection ‘Oh Myth’. Exclusively available at the Fashion East store in Selfridges from Friday March 10, Bovan’s Barbies are one of the final collections to appear at the London pop up.

In the collection, fluorescent pinks and cut-throat metallics are collaged in a finger paint meets glitter ensemble. When it was sent down the runway at London Fashion Week, accessories included plasticine pretzel earrings hung under wacky hair dye jobs. It’s a mishmash of childhood fantasy and experimental identity that corresponds to both Bovan and Barbie’s core values.”

Savannah Wai Han Liu, Shift London

[www.shiftlondon.org](http://www.shiftlondon.org)



“This is not the first time Barbie has been reinterpreted by a fashion designer. In fact the company has collaborated with the likes of Charlotte Olympia, Oscar de la Renta, Karl Lagerfeld, Zuhair Murad and most recently Tommy Hilfiger. Bovan’s Barbie collection might be, however, the brand’s most audacious range yet with the dolls dressed in fluorescent pink and metallic ensembles and oversized knitwear pieces, complete with glitter eyebrows and neon accessories. Matty Bovan's Barbie collection launched exclusively at the Fashion East store in Selfridges on Friday.”

Barbara Santamaria, Fashion Network

<https://uk.fashionnetwork.com/news/Matty-bovan-unveils-limited-edition-barbie-collection,803896.html>







The eclectic: Matty Bovan

Image credit: *The Guardian*



“The sassy sure attitude conveyed through the collection mirrors the recent diversification of Barbie. Bovan continues to recreate Barbie as a sign of the times.”

Shift London

Image courtesy of Matty Bovan



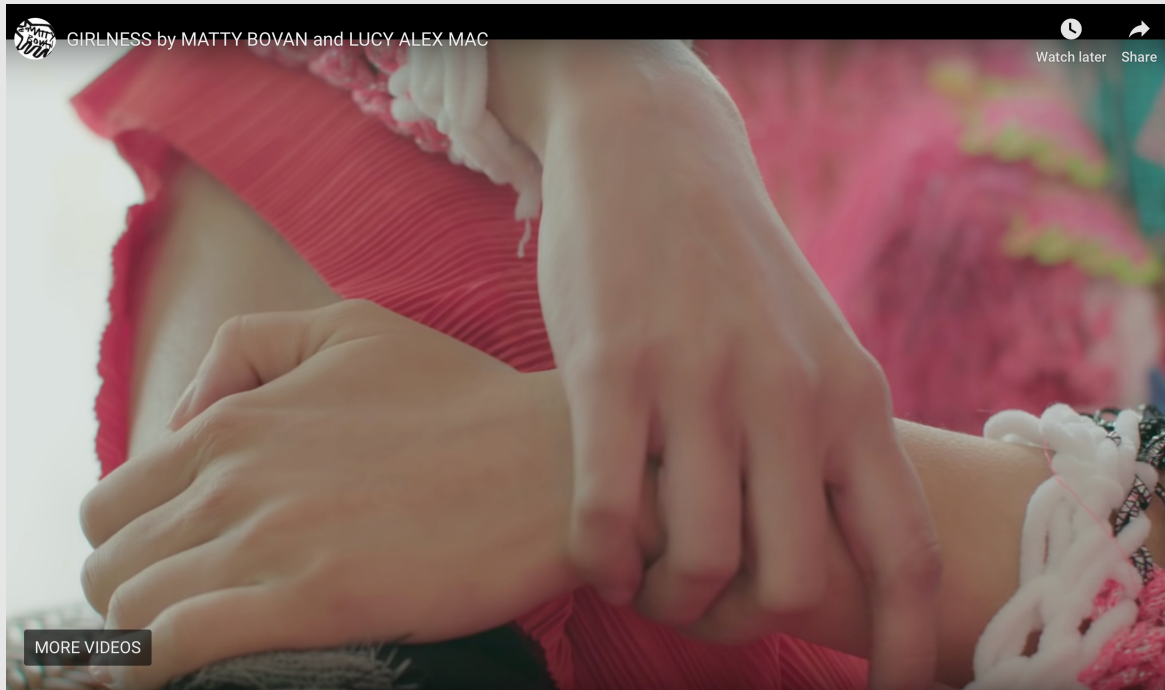
**GIRLNESS**



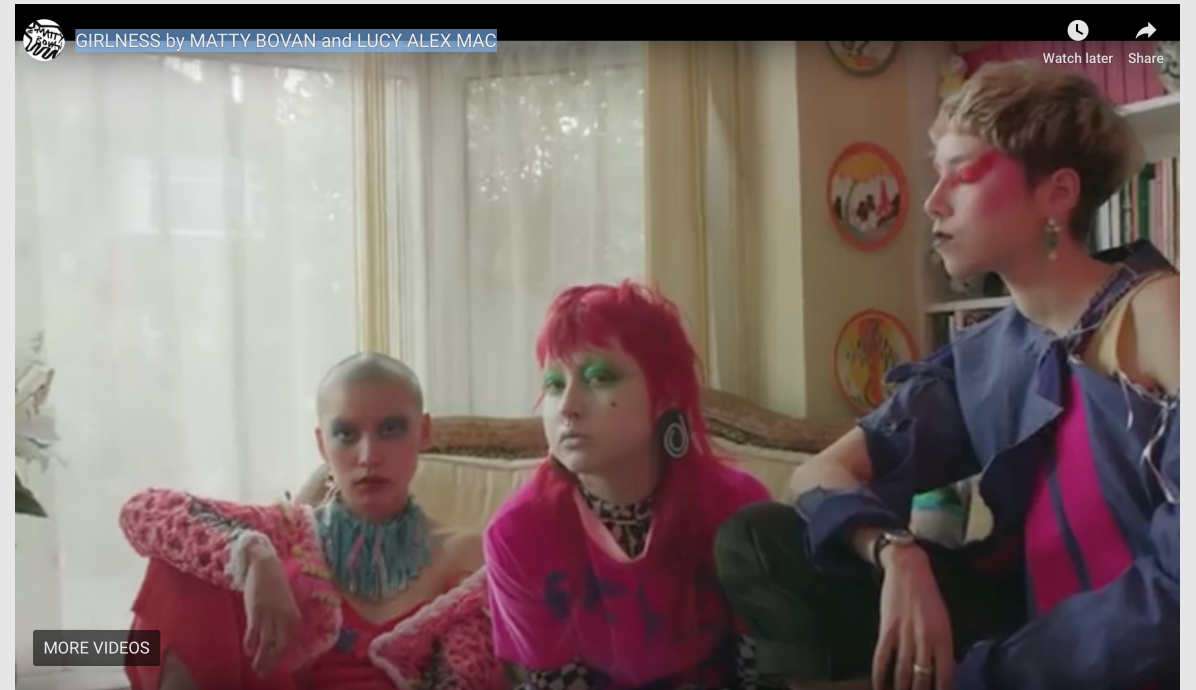
“As if that was all, Matty has teamed up with Lucy Alex Mac on a street cast film about all things girl. Set in and around Matty's family home in York, as well as his grandmother's house, The Knavesmere by York Racecourse, and local pub The Volunteer Arms, Girlness examines what it means to be a woman in 2017. "In this short film, we have taken Barbie's values and attitude, to showcase what female identity means to us in 2017," says Matty.”

Tish Weinstock, i-D

[https://i-d.vice.com/en\\_uk/article/7xb9ae/barbie-gets-a-matty-bovan-makeover](https://i-d.vice.com/en_uk/article/7xb9ae/barbie-gets-a-matty-bovan-makeover)



Still from Girlness by Matty Bovan and Lucy Alex Mac



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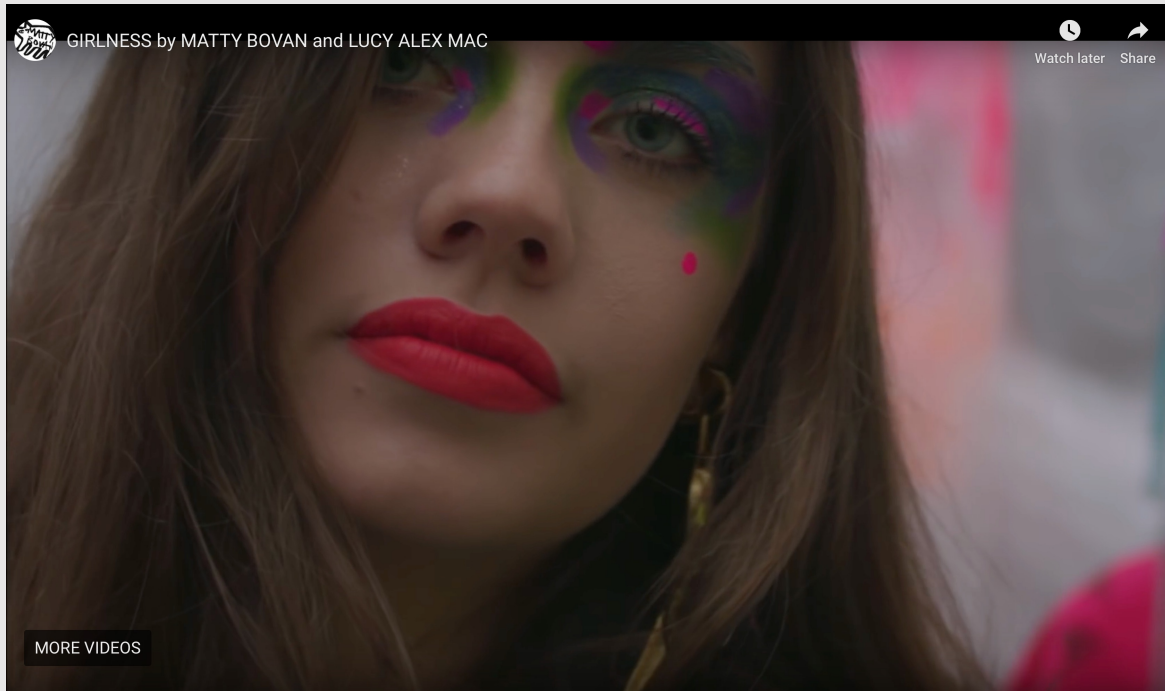




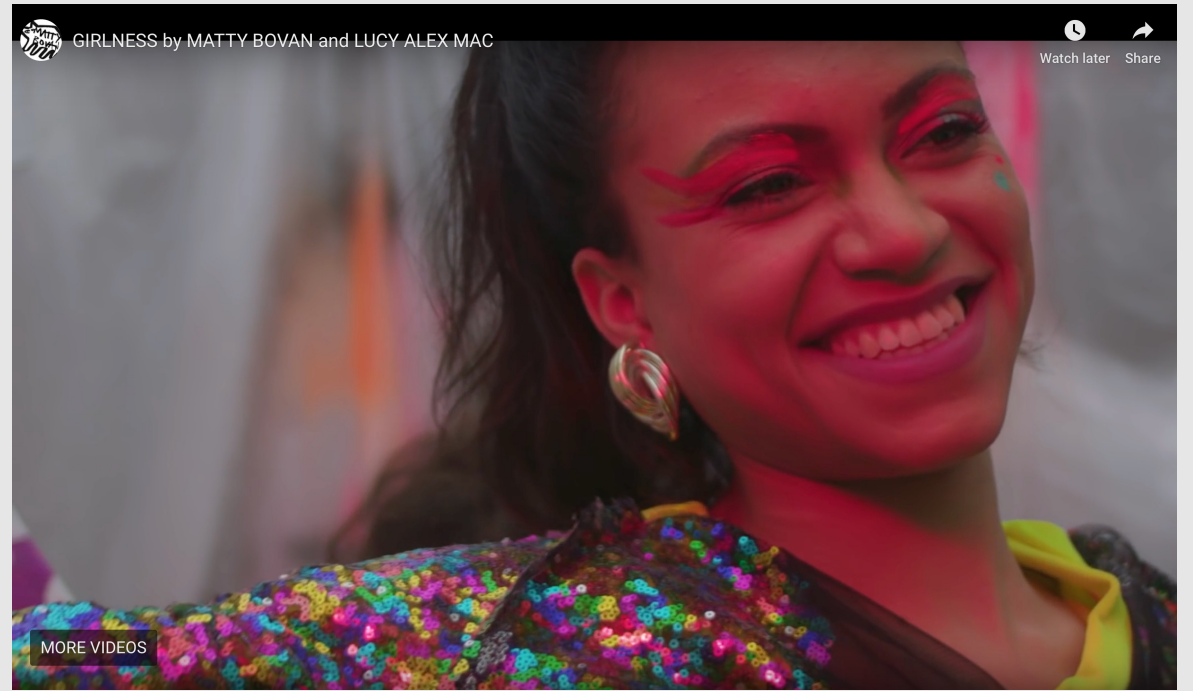
Still from Girlness by Matty Bovan and Lucy Alex Mac



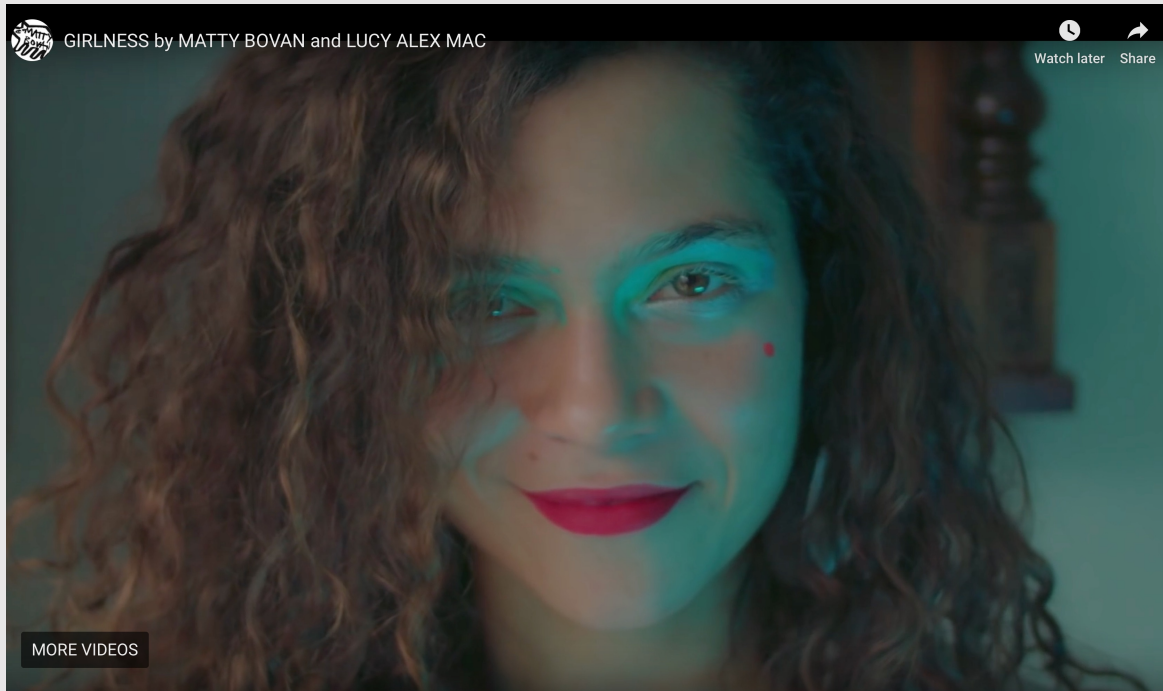
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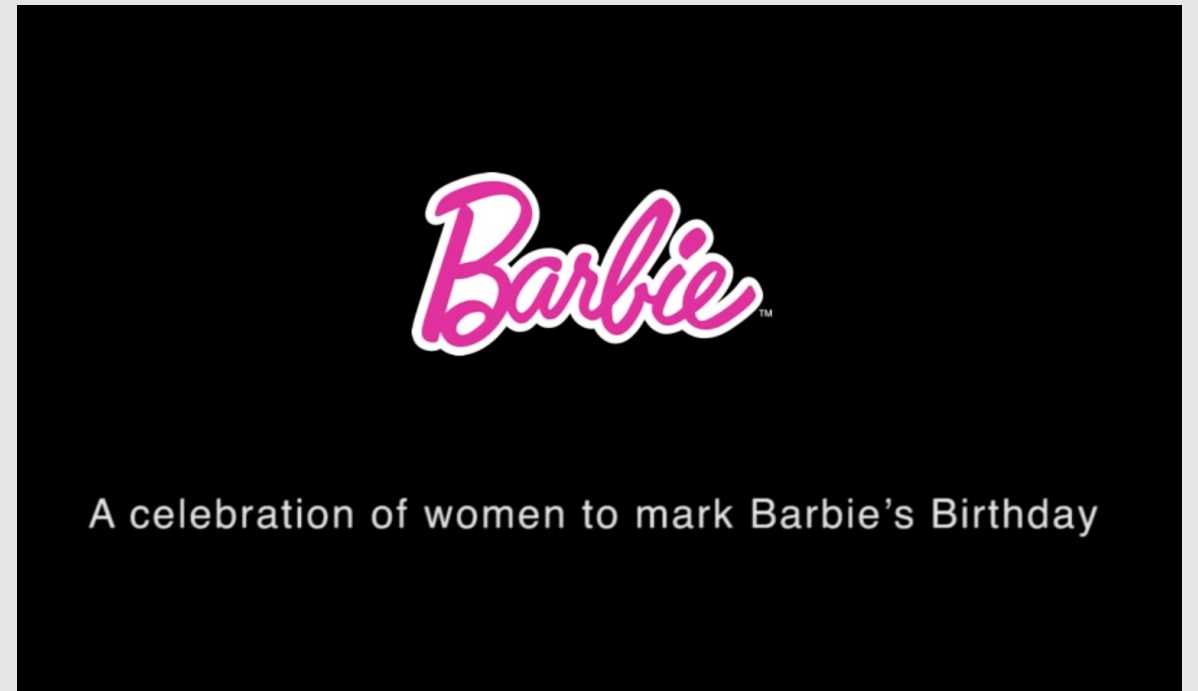
Still from Girlness by Matty Bovan and Lucy Alex Mac



Still from Girlness by Matty Bovan and Lucy Alex Mac



Still from *Girlness* by Matty Bovan and Lucy Alex Mac



Still from *Girlness* by Matty Bovan and Lucy Alex Mac

# APPENDIX

# REVIEWS & PRESS

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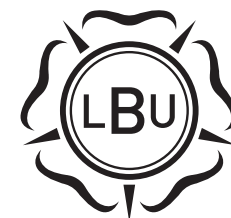
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