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ARTISTS' STATEMENTS



# WRANGLER AND DAVID BUCKINGHAM

THIS GRITTY LA ARTIST IS WRANGLER'S LATEST MUSE

David Buckingham is waving around a mean-looking power saw. "This baby could cut down the Statue of Liberty in 30 minutes," he chuckles. Dazed are in downtown Los Angeles to meet the rising American artist, and Wrangler's figure of inspiration for their premium Blue Bell line's A/W11 collection: Tony Ward is "playing" him in Wrangler's campaign. The actor and model had to get used to wielding a plasma cutter in 120-degree heat for the role.

The floors of Buckingham's studio are piled high with rusted sheet metal, scavenged and sliced out of the Californian desert from the skeletons of abandoned cars, trucks, hay balers and cotton threshers. His desert missions can get a little risky; aside from the rattlesnakes, he's been held at gunpoint before. "Crazy people live out there, miles and miles from a paved road or anything," he explains. "Devil worshippers, Jesus freaks, meth addicts, survivalists, isolationists, jack-rabbits, road runners..." The artist even stumbled across Charles Manson's decaying school bus in the Mojave desert - and came home with some of its metalwork. "That school bus has been sitting in the desert since the Manson family lived in it," he shrugs. "No windows, no tyres, it's sunk into the dirt, and there's rats and birds living inside..."

After cutting his teeth in New York's Rivington School, Buckingham relocated west, finding inspiration in California's

pop art history. He appropriates slogans and references culled from American pop culture, hammering out wall sculptures that transform weather-beaten metal into art. It's won him some notable fans: Seth Rogen hangs Buckingham's art on his walls, Diane Keaton recently dropped by the studio, and Wrangler's creative director Alessandro Vigano saw a reflection of Wrangler's great outdoors tradition and approach to denim in Buckingham's renegade methods: "Modern creations, made out of historic materials, made in the USA."

No brand gets to boast of a heritage as authentically all-Americana as Wrangler; founded in 1904 by Charlie & Homer Hudson, Blue Bell started out making tough denim clothing for railroad workers, launching Wrangler in 1947 when they set their sights on the prairies and began engineering jeans for cowboys.

This year, its Made in USA range has come full circle back to those roots, using American cottons and weaving its jeans, shirts and

jackets in the Cone Mills factory in Greensboro, North Carolina, where Blue Bell was founded. As creative director, Vigano gets the pleasure of rummaging through Wrangler's long history, digging out archive pieces for inspiration; the starting point for Blue Bell's A/W11 collection was a vintage Wrangler corduroy shirt from the early 50s, printed with square blocks of colour, around the time the American pop art movement was beginning to flourish.

Those original Wrangler details that make their denims so iconic (and much copied) remain unchanged - "W" stitching, watch pocket, felled seams, flat rivets - but they're joined with softly worn-in finishes and four modern fits for men: regular, slim, fitted and anti-fit. This season's nod to Buckingham and pop art comes in the reds, greens, blacks and blues of the collection's selva denim, muted for winter. The artist's rough, tough lifestyle meanwhile, is probably the best test of denim since Wrangler's cowboy days. "Metal is not easy to work with," he laughs, standing in a pair of jeans ingrained in rust and dust. "It fights back."

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bluebelljeans.com

