

SOPHIA BRENN



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DRESS 14 | SHOES 9 AU / 40 EU

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Style |



THE SHAPE of THINGS to COME

After walking the runways of London, Sydney, Copenhagen and Milan in 2023, there's no stopping Australian curve model Sophia Brennan

words by PATTY HUNTINGTON

Photographed by Marnie Adams

Photographed by Sybil Stephens (top), Alex Osler (middle)

When Sophia Brennan opened the 'Henne' show at Afterpay Australian Fashion Week (AAFW) 2023, it felt like the needle had finally moved on the issue of curve models in this country. Looking ultra-glamorous in a pair of aviators and a floor-length tan vegan leather coat over a sheer, full-length tube dress, Brennan's look was the opening statement of the sophomore AAFW show of Henne designer Nadia Bartel. And, remarkably, this was not a so-called 'size-inclusive' fashion brand that caters up to a size 26, as showcased at AAFW's Curve Edit show in 2022. Rather, this was a mainstream brand designed by a celebrity that doesn't even offer extended sizing.

"People said in the media [including *The Sydney Morning Herald*] that they thought it was tokenistic. But, for me, that experience was anything but tokenistic; it was actually very authentic," says Brennan, who's a size 16. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the average dress size of the Australian woman is 16-18. To clarify, that is five-six sizes larger than that of the average (aka 'straight-sized') runway model, who wears a size six to eight, with runway samples usually only ever made in those sizes. Henne – which offers up to a size 16 in its ranges – tells *BAZAAR* it sampled several of this show's key looks in both an 8 and a 16.

Despite the inroads made on international runways during the past three years by curve-model pioneers such as Ashley Graham, Paloma Elsesser, Precious Lee, Tess Holliday and Jill Kortleve, the majority of runway models remain straight-sized. After critics slammed the Melbourne Fashion Festival in March for failing to include models over a size 14, AAFW had more curve models on its 2023 runways than ever before, including Casadeo Jesus, Mia Brennan, Rosita Alaman and Bell Campbell, who were integrated into the regular shows.

"As bigger models, we don't want to be part of an outlandish statement about body diversity anymore. We just want to be included and given the same opportunities as our straight-sized peers," says Brennan, who moved to London in late 2022 and now models under the professional name of Sophia Brenn. "Henne gave me that opportunity and they didn't second-guess it, like, 'Oh, maybe we shouldn't have her open. Maybe we should put her in the middle somewhere.' It was like, 'Oh, this looks fab on you. Great. That's the first look. Done.'"

All up, Brennan walked in seven AAFW 2023 shows. Three months earlier, she'd made her London Fashion Week debut walking for London-based Brazilian size-inclusive designer Karoline Vitto in the event's Fashion East emerging designer showcase. Then, in August, she walked for Gammi at Copenhagen Fashion Week, and in September, for Karoline Vitto again, this time at Milan Fashion Week for Vitto's Spring 2024 show, which was sponsored under the 'Supported by Dolce & Gabbana' initiative.

"What happened this year has been beyond my dreams," says Brennan,



TOP TO BOTTOM Brennan, backstage at Gammi spring/summer 2024; Henne at Afterpay Australian Fashion Week 2023.

who's now walked alongside some of her curve-model idols. "Meeting Paloma Elsesser at Gammi – that was incredible. And in Milan when I walked for Karoline Vitto, Ashley Graham opened the show, and I came out second behind her. That was such a huge moment for me, and I really had to pinch myself!"

On Elsesser and Graham, she adds: "They are my queens. They are amazing women and they've lit a little fire in my belly. I think it takes so much courage to be [among] the first and to be navigating a space that has historically been so close-minded. They've provided the references for creatives to see that we can be shot and seen through a fashion lens and look fierce doing it. Also, the more runways they walk, the more sample sizes are created to give to up-and-coming curve girls to be shot for editorial."

Long before Brennan started grappling with the size police of the fashion industry, she had to contend with the equally draconian aesthetic gatekeepers of the dance world, where this has always been in and eating disorders are rife. According to a 2014 study published in the *European Eating Disorders Review*, dancers are three times more likely than the general population to suffer from an eating disorder.

"There are a lot of mirrors that I had in the performing arts industry that I [now] have in fashion," says Brennan, who was born and raised in Sydney and studied hip hop, jazz and musical theatre. She gained an Advanced Diploma in Performing Arts from Sydney's EDSInternational academy and later worked for EDS as a choreographer. "I struggled as a courier dancer to get work, so I fell in love with choreography and the creativity behind dance and also mentoring younger performing artists," she says.

In 2017, she entered an online competition run by Australian curve-model specialist agency Bella Management. Founded by Chelsea Bonner, Bella Management launched the career of Robyn Lawley, to date Australia's most successful curve model.

The Melbourne Fashion Festival was not the only runway showcase to receive criticism of late. Despite the rise of body diversity on international runways in recent years, *The New York Post* proclaimed in late 2022: "Bye-bye booty: Heroin chic is back". In March, in response to the models of the Fall 2023 show season, *Nylon* magazine suggested "the industry's 'body positive reckoning' was always performative, and the most recent runway season confirmed it."

"I was on the ground at London Fashion Week catting with many other peers and I'd be lying if I said the result wasn't deflating," says Brennan, who's represented by Models 1 in London and IMG in Australia. "But it wasn't for a lack of options. We were there, we were working the castings. I don't buy into that [argument] – our bodies were just trending for a season or two. I think that's a ridiculous statement. When it comes to fashion weeks, the issue is that everything is so last minute. Size diversity needs to be an afterthought. For me, fashion is most exciting when it offers a different perspective and not when it's always the same."

Her dream job? Walking for Alexander McQueen at Paris Fashion Week. Shooting a campaign for New York fashion label Khaite. And snubbing a fragrance campaign, where she could display her dance skills. "Curve models are not going anywhere" she says. "We're here to stay."

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