

Blame's voice carries the most English of drawls, he peppers sentences with 'darling' and 'love' — but actually he spent a chunk of his youth in Spain. It was there — in a small Catholic town just outside Madrid where Spain's military dictator Francisco Franco resided — that he first came to realise the power of fashion. "One summer, a distant cousin and my auntie came out to visit," he recalls. "Well, my cousin, she wore a mini-skirt, which in 60s conservative Spain was revolutionary... All the Spanish men were tongues on the floor, and all the women were crossing themselves. And I thought, 'How bloody fantastic.' I was only about six or seven."

Blame and his family eventually returned to England, to the equally sleepy county of Devon. "Pigs were not my style," says Blame witheringly, so he left the minute he turned 17, first to London and then Manchester. "I ran away from home with 300 quid, which I thought was a bloody fortune, I thought that would keep me going for years. Well, it didn't." His first stop was Vivienne Westwood's store — a pair of bondage pants, a muslin top and a couple of T-shirts later, he'd already burned through a third of his savings. It was the height of punk, after all, and a young Blame was fascinated by the style and attitude of this burgeoning subculture.

Manchester followed, where he was introduced to the likes of Peter Saville, Malcolm Garrett — who designed record covers for Joy Division and Buzzcocks, respectively — and the radical artist Linder Sterling. Through them, he learned about music and art and "what Bauhaus was". By the time Blame was ready to go back to London, he was far less "green" than he was the first time round: "We'd experimented enough with our creativity to start thinking, 'Well I'm not going to get a 9–5 job, am I? Not

looking like this, anyway.' You could still scare old ladies on the bus.

"With punk, I didn't in fact like the music that much to tell you the truth. I thought it was a load of crap, most of it. But it was the attitude. You knew you were in the right place at the right time, even if you couldn't dance to it," says Blame. That attitude would see him and his friends buying suits from second-hand stores to then "chuck a bucket of paint on it, or cut the arms off and join it back together again". Back then it was a cheap way of creating new looks, but that aesthetic of haphazard provocation still runs through Blame's work today. As we speak in his home-turned-studio in East London, jewellery crafted from all manner of found or unglamorous objects — netting, scraps, bits of metal — lies on his living room floor. It doesn't look like much, but when pieced together — as these ones are being for Comme des Garçons' Dover Street Market store — they become objects of unconventional beauty. A bit like a second-hand suit splattered with paint. Blame has a rare ability to elevate the everyday.

"If you mix two things that aren't supposed to be together, and someone is looking at it, they have to look at it twice. So I like being a bit cheeky and mixing two opposites together," he smiles. But it's more than simply being a 'troublemaker', he says: "It's a way of getting someone to read your work more than once. We live in the age of surface, and then [you] click on to the next thing, whereas I like people to get caught up with the image." Juxtaposition is his way of doing it. "I'm really quite good at it — 'cause I'm shameless in how I do it."

Beyond punk-influenced subversion, the other thread that has run throughout Blame's career is collaboration. It has seen him in

many different guises, from acting as a stylist to Neneh Cherry and art director to Björk, to working with designers like Kim Jones and the late Christopher Nemeth. With each one, his role has differed. "You find that your creativity attracts other creatives," he explains. "Like when I first met Björk, I didn't in fact do a lot for her other than encourage her to be herself. Most of the job was actually: 'You are fucking amazing, I wouldn't change nothin' about you,'" he says. It was also Blame who put her in the Margiela sweater for the image that adorned her debut album, but his role extended beyond simply styling the Scandi starlet. "I travelled with her the first few months of Debut coming out just to beat people off with a stick, because they wanted to dress her up as an alien coming down... and I went, 'Over my fucking dead body.' So I was a bit of a policeman for her. Style police," Blame laughs.

"I'm a big fan of [collaborations] to tell you the truth, I know some people can get a bit sniffy about it. The way I do it, I have to like what I'm doing. I mean, if Juicy Couture came in that door," he says, pointing, "I'd tell them to fuck off." Carhartt WIP, however, he likes. "Workwear, I think, is like sportswear, you can take it up or take it down — which is what I like about it. You know, you can smarten it up with something, it's practical, it's hardwearing, all things that clothes should be. They're so disposable now. You know, I get asked for reviews for shows and I just have to say: 'Landfill.'"

But Blame isn't all style and humour, both of which he possesses in abundance — on the day we meet, he is resplendent in brown work boots and one of his own T-shirts, with a cut-out newspaper graphic which reads 'The Second Coming' poking out from his Carhartt WIP

overalls. "I do get quite angry," he admits when asked what he thinks the future holds. "There's a lot of denial going on, on many different levels: on climate change, on racism. It's a big time for the world [just] now. You're either gonna go down the lav' because you buggered it up, or you can do something about it." For Blame, we all have our part to play, no matter how small it might seem. "I'm constantly thinking about ways I can change people — especially with a visual, because visuals can be quite powerful," he says. "That's why I love mucking about on my Instagram." Most mornings over his cup of coffee, he sends out a slew of visuals, accompanied by his trademark quips. "I've only got 27,000 followers or something, but they're all over the world... Brazil, Japan, Argentina, New York. You do build up this funny little community of people who follow your ideas, and I like that about it."

There are reasons to be optimistic, he thinks: "The youth are pretty clued up, they're much more clued up than when we were young." Not to mention the fact that pink hair no longer scares old ladies on the bus, nor do mini-skirts cause such commotion. Of course, the side effect of this for a sartorial provocateur like Blame is that it makes his job somewhat more difficult. Not that he minds.

His reinterpretation of the Carhartt WIP Chore Coat, one of the most humble, utilitarian garments around? Turning it regal, of course. "I wanted it to look like a street gang had mugged a soldier for his medals," he says, a familiar glint returning to his eyes.