Trainers or sneakers are a huge part of fashion’s multi-million pound industry, with high end brands now moving in on the action created by the original Terrace Casuals movement of the late 1970s and early 1980s. This exhibition celebrates the impact Liverpool had on this global fashion phenomenon.

Counter Culture: Obsession, Style and Place is an exhibition that brings together artefacts, photography, magazine references, interviews and other modes of storytelling to demonstrate the impact and significance that branded labels, sportswear and in particular ‘trainers’ had in respect of Terrace Casuals - their obsessions, style, dress codes and the resonance to geographical place and in fashion history. Sneakers, trainers, kicks, web, stripes, shelltoes, creps, beaters, trabs or trainees, whatever you call your footwear, there is a particular tribe who are obsessive about theirs.

On display in the Atrium Gallery, you will find carefully sourced and curated original trainers that offer insight to the phenomena of today’s sneakerhead culture. Exhibits represent the humble beginnings of match days at Anfield where the adidas family, Samba, Mamba, Bamba and Kicks were spotted, to the iconic shoes that brought Liverpool’s style codes to the mass media – the adidas Trimm Trab, the rare underdog Mitre Memphis, the super-scarce adidas Forest Hills exclusively sold in Liverpool. In addition, the ubiquitous Stan Smith - a Terrace Casuals classic - the adidas SL Loop are all represented together with a recent and local edition, the Kirkdale – adidas’s nod to the birth place of the Casual movement.

Over the last six months, Paul Owen has worked alongside Brendan (Jockey) Wyatt and Jay Montessori whom have first-hand experience of the movement and the style codes that were born from the football terraces. Through Transalpino, a global deadstock destination, they continue to source artefacts from personal and private collections to fulfill a demand for the style obsessed Casual. In addition to the footwear, Paul Owen has been working with photographers, archivists and experts from within and around this fashion movement and has uncovered photographs from personal and public archives that support the early timeline of the Terrace Casuals. On display are a selection of original social documentary and reportage images from Merseyside by acclaimed photographers such as Tom Wood, Ken Grant, Talitha Jussa and Rob Bremner in addition to photographs from personal collections that depict the style of young Liverpool Football Club fans both home and away at that time. From as early as November 1977 you can see the transition from the green and blue ‘snorkel’ parkas worn with flares to the more street cred straight denim jeans, tennis sportswear, Peter Storm cagoles and black and white adidas Sambas. This was the beginning of Liverpool’s very rapid and changing style codes. Historical reference points are also made to the impact the Cunard Yanks had on the City’s earlier generations. These transatlantic workers were pivotal in developing a sense of pride, confidence, innovation, and early adoption of style trends born from their time in New York. Further insight has been gained from interviews with Robert Wade-Smith, the founder of one of Liverpool’s most successful shopping destinations, and Peter Hooton the narrator of the cult documentary Casuals: The Story of the Legendary Terrace Fashion (2011).
Sneakers, trainers, kicks, webs, strides, soles, creps, beaters, trabs or trainees, whatever you call your footwear, this city has a culture devoted to this multi-million pound industry. Counter Culture, Obsession, Style and Place is a collaborative exhibition which demonstrates how Liverpool is in a league of its own when it comes to the obsession with footwear.

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