

needs to be able to relate to architecture through its human scale and clarity. A house facilitates this process of counting and measuring in the best possible manner. Through a clear hierarchical order of whole numbers, everything in the house is interrelated; from the smallest building stone to the rhythm of the galleries and window series, to the overall spaces, the building site, and eventually the city.

With his theories on space, Dom van der Laan follows the classical tradition of building with numeric proportions. Series of robust columns and elementary window rows are organised according to repetitive bay rhythms. Spaces interrelate hierarchically through numeric proportions, such as 1:2, 2:3, 3:4...

However, the dynamics that are so typical of Van der Laan's architecture, are not simply the result of this proportional system as such. For Van der Laan, that system is merely an instrument, like the keys of a piano. He realises these highly unusual dynamics by the way in which he uses his tool to make compositions: interlacing spaces with one another into one narrative, like he is making music. The series of columns in Van der Laan's buildings all have different rhythms that create a spatial dialogue. Window frames, open porticos and doors are not placed following any central axe. They are carefully positioned near corners and always shifted towards each other, creating diagonal and continuous perspectives through successive spaces. This architecture is built as in-between space: the buildings come alive through the interchange between the material of their surfaces and the light.

Within a world of abundant imagery that overcharges our senses, Van der Laan's architecture inspires today's architects through its elementary stillness and austere simplicity.

CAROLINE VOET

www.vanderlaanstichting.nl/en/home

Caroline Voet. *Dom Hans van der Laan. A House for the Mind. A Design Manual on Roosenberg Abbey*, Flanders Architecture Institute, Antwerp, 2017, 224 p.

Fashion

The Successful Balance Between the Commercial and the Creative

Dries Van Noten

Born in 1958, fashion designer Dries Van Noten has passed the milestone of a hundred fashion shows and is celebrating the event with a two-part book. This monumental publication renders the universe of the designer with photographs and video stills. Anyone wishing to familiarise themselves with his style, would do best to view the images from his 100th collection. The show was an anthology of Van Noten's oeuvre: young and old models displayed simple, smartly cut pieces that formed a feast of colours, prints and embroideries. Urban sounds could be heard in the background, a dash of Louis Armstrong, a pinch of David Bowie, a little Pina Bausch and the music from Pedro Almodóvar films. This soundtrack demonstrates the wide range of sources that inspired this Belgian designer. The discerning viewer can spot hints of other cultures. Still the presence of ethnic influences is not as explicit as in collections from a few years back.

At the time Van Noten made much more literal references to kimonos, saris, or Moroccan traditional attire. It is much more difficult to do that in the current politically sensitive climate. A Peruvian sweater with an alpaca motif (the alpaca is a South American mountain llama, which is kept as a pet in the Andes) was subject to major criticism on his Instagram account. Van Noten is quoted as saying in an interview with *The Business of Fashion*: 'If you follow that logic I should only be allowed to be inspired by Belgian folklore'. Nonetheless, he toned down his explicit cultural influences. But his pieces still travel all around the world before they end up on the store racks. A shirt can be dyed in Asia, embroidered in India, dyed again in Africa and sewn together in Belgium.

Still, having been born and raised in Antwerp, Van Noten is no globetrotter. A fascination for other cultures may have stemmed from early childhood. His parents owned a boutique called Nussou's in Essen (a small town north of Antwerp) and later Van Noten Couture in Antwerp itself. As a young boy he travelled with his father to foreign countries



to buy collections. His love of beautiful pieces was inculcated at a tender age and by the time he was twelve he started organising his own in-store fashion shows.

Van Noten is profoundly influenced by the commercial way of looking at fashion. Unlike such fellow contemporaries as Walter Van Beirendonck and Martin Margiela, he would never try to convey big messages with his collections. 'There is no room for political ambition in the world of fashion, even if the objects are inspired by current events', he is once quoted as saying in an interview. And so for him the success of a piece can be directly gauged to how well it sells. Having said that, he still is a supporter of slower fashion. For example, in contrast to many of his competitors Van Noten does not make collections between seasons. One should not expect the very latest trends from this Antwerp man, even though French fashion genius Jean-Paul Gaultier once praised him as someone supremely able to sense what is hanging in the air at any given moment.

The successful quest to find the balance between the commercial and the creative has not done Van Noten any harm. He went to study at the Antwerp fashion academy in 1977. While studying, he already worked for five commercial companies and was assistant buyer in the designer boutique owned by Linda Loppa, a former student of the academy. Together with his contemporaries Ann Demeulemeester, Marina Yee, Walter Van Beiren-

donck, Dirk Van Saene, Dirk Bikkembergs and Martin Margiela, later dubbed the Antwerp 'Six + 1', he scoured hip punk parties and performances. To this day, there are still glimmers of those rebellious influences in his designs. His teachers at the academy also left their mark on him. A Van Noten dress is hardly ever sexy in an explicit way. Many of his hemlines remain chastely below the knee. The influence of the academy's woman director Mary Prijot is clearly present, who disapproved of tight dresses and short skirts.

The designer's early years as a student have also left an indelible mark. Van Noten attended a Jesuit college where priests strode the corridors. The designer duly graduated from the fashion academy with a collection that displayed religious influences. The natural world is another recurrent source of inspiration. Botanical prints can be found in practically every collection for women. His house, *Hof van Ringen* (Court of Rings), a late classicist mansion, is surrounded by a spacious yard with various animals. That mix of modestly cut fabric, distinctive prints, ethnic elements and shades of punk influences make up the fashion designer's trademark look.

Nowadays Van Noten can safely be called the head of a modest empire. He owns boutiques in several countries and his accessories for men and women have a large following. Another remarkable aspect of his success is his having financed every step of the way himself. He opened a small store in Antwerp in 1985, when still a fledgling designer; four years later he had made enough money to buy the *Modepaleis* (Fashion Palace). Van Noten's store is still housed in the gorgeous building on Nationalestraat in Antwerp. The purchase was a symbolic act. After all, the store was located right across from *'t Meuleken*, his grandfather John Van Noten's store, who made his living as a tailor. His great competitor and father-in-law Guillaume Arts, also used to own a store in the *Modepaleis*.

'My greatest goal is to ensure that selecting clothing is an act of self-esteem', the designer once said, aptly summing up his entire oeuvre. In the meantime, Van Noten is steadily building up his brand. Having published a book after his fiftieth collection, he has now added a second volume. The man from Antwerp is content, but like a true fashion mogul he is looking forward: 'I'm not too keen

on doing another 100 shows, but I certainly have enough ideas for the future’.

CHARLOTTE VAN HACHT

Translated by Scott Rollins

Dries Van Noten, Tim Blanks and Susannah Frankel, *Collections 1-100*, Lannoo, Tielt, 2017, 912 p. (ISBN 978 94 0144 61 36). Also available in separate volumes: *Collections 1-50* and *Collections 51-100*.

Film

An Inverted Orpheus and Eurydice

Le Fidèle by Michael Roskam

When, after a Porsche Supercup contest, Gino (Matthias Schoenaerts) sees Bénédicte (Adèle Exarchopoulos) getting out of her racing car in the pits, his interest is immediately aroused. She – nicknamed Bibi – puts her life on the line on the racing circuit; he – nicknamed Gigi – does the same when he carries out armed robberies with his gang of thieves. Both are aware of the risks of their profession. Both are addicted to the kick. But then they fall in love.

Following *Bullhead* (*Rundskop*) (2011) and *The Drop* (2014), *Racer and the Jailbird* (*Le Fidèle*) is Michael Roskam’s third feature film and is similarly set in a criminal milieu. Roskam uses this world as an arena to link together paradoxical elements – innocence, crime, vulnerability, brutishness, feelings and lies – in modern *film noir* productions that are striking for their painterly authenticity and complex, raw and realistic character studies.

While in *Bullhead* the accent was on the absence of love, and *The Drop*, according to Roskam, was a ‘desperate search for innocence’, in interviews he has called *Racer and the Jailbird* ‘my melodramatic fantasy of love and death; of Eros and Thanatos’ – which according to Freud are the most fundamental urges. Roskam sees absolute love as a paradoxical tension between desire and surrender; the feeling of being confined that goes with attachment: ‘Like a dog that lies on the threshold with its head outside’.

What he had in mind was an *amour noir*, his own back-to-front variant of the classic *film noir*. To the



online magazine *The Italian Rêve*, Roskam said, on this topic: ‘Where mostly, love affairs are like a satellite around the crime story, I wanted this [to be] different... This is a love story where crime was the satellite’. In this regard, Roskam took inspiration, loosely, from the Haemers gang, which carried out a series of spectacular robberies around Brussels in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as kidnapping the former Prime Minister Paul Vanden Boeynants and succeeding in escapes from prison several times. *Racer and the Jailbird* also includes a spectacular robbery involving a shipping container; it elicits a boyish admiration, without the violence used being glamorised as is usual in American action films. This brute force is more sickening than anything else.

Shortly after they first meet, Bibi – who thinks that Gigi is in the car trade and commands him not to bring any flowers – asks what his biggest secret is. With utter honesty he answers: ‘I’m a gangster. I rob banks’. This sounds so absurd to her that she has to laugh out loud. However, it gradually becomes clear to her that his answer was no joke. Gigi the gangster is a wild animal that wants to be tamed by love. Their life together only has any chance of surviving if Gigi abandons his illegal activities: if he leaves the underworld for the upper world. Bibi does all she can to get him out of it; *Racer and the Jailbird* is an inverted Orpheus and Eurydice. But it is also a tragedy with an ambiguous ending, but more about that below. (Spoiler alert: the rest of this article contains details of how the story ends.)

The excesses from which *Racer and the Jailbird* suffers detract from the richness of its story: it too often emphasises what we already understand. Gigi surrenders again and again: to the police, to Bibi’s world – which to him is the equivalent of prison. The adage ‘no flowers’ is so good at typifying Bibi’s tough, independent personality that Roskam’s scenarists Thomas Bidegain and Noé Debré (who also worked on Jacques Audiard’s Golden Palm winner *Dheepan*) could not resist the temptation to use it so often that it becomes ridiculous. The same applies to the frequent presence of dogs, usually on a leash or in a cage. Gigi is afraid of them, Bibi isn’t.