

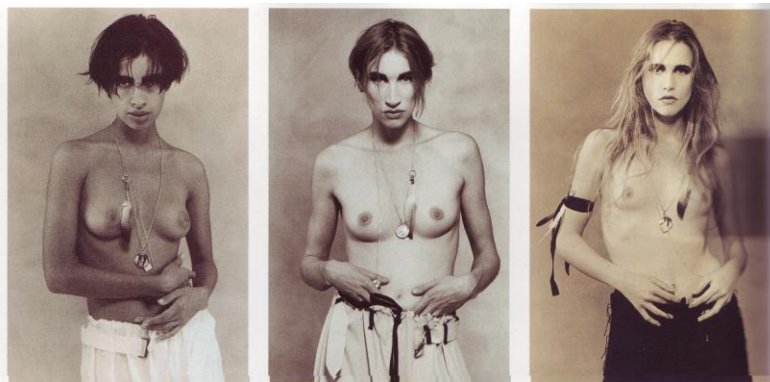


ANN DEMEULEMEESTER

"I like to change a movement, change the way something falls.
It's like cutting an attitude into clothes."

From: SYRINOS 'Icon', in the court of Queen Ann', in *The Guardian*, 8 February 1997.

Spring/Summer 1999 Photo: Paolo Roversi.



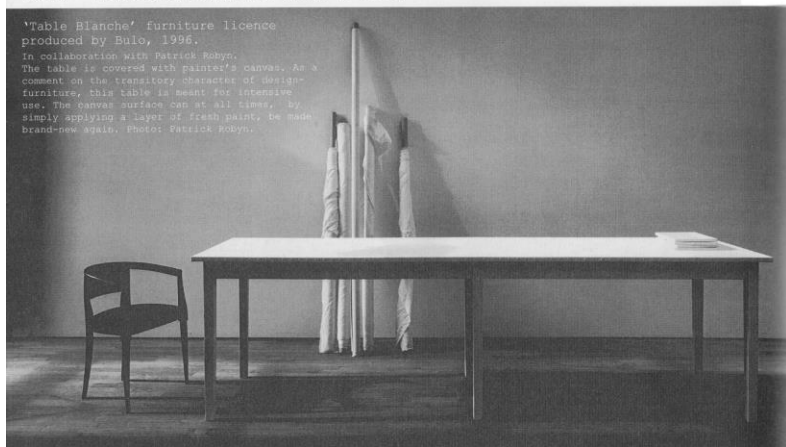
Spring/Summer 1990. Photos: Patrick Robyn. Amulets were designed with the collection. Ann Demeulemeester: "It is a conceptual item, taken from life and re-valuated. I wanted to add an emotional element, something of beauty." From Agnes Goyvaerts, 'iets waar je niets bij voelt, is leeuw', in De Morgen, 12 December 1992.

AN INDEPENDENT SPIRIT, ANN DEMEULEMEESTER HAS STAYED ON A STEADY COURSE SINCE SHE FOUNDED HER COMPANY WITH HER HUSBAND AND PARTNER PATRICK ROBYN IN 1985. HER SILHOUETTES HAVE BEEN STRONG ENOUGH TO OUTLIVE SHORT-TERM TRENDS, AND GRADUALLY CONSOLIDATED HER NAME AS ONE OF THE LEADING DESIGNERS OF AVANT-GARDE, INDEPENDENT STYLES. HER TALENT, AMAZING SKILL AND SUBTLE, QUIET DETERMINATION INTRODUCED IN FASHION AN EMOTIONAL ATTITUDE THAT — IF ANY DEFINITION OF IT COULD BE GIVEN — REFLECTS WHAT IN MODERN CULTURE CAME TO BE KNOWN AS: *soul*.

ANN DEMEULEMEESTER IS CONVINCED THAT SHE MAKES CLOTHES THAT MEAN SOMETHING IN OTHER PEOPLE'S LIVES. AND THAT'S WHY SHE DOES IT. IN HER OWN WORDS: "A COLLECTION IS LIKE CREATING A GIFT FOR AN ANONYMOUS PERSON."

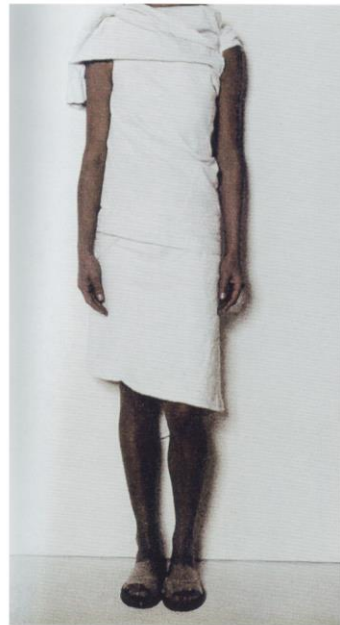
SHE HAS DEVELOPED HER OWN STYLE PAINSTAKINGLY: RESTRAINT AND PURE LINES ARE HER IDIOM, 'DESIGN-AND-NOT-DECORATION' HER PHILOSOPHY. SHE WORKS WITH A COMPELLING SENSE OF ABSTRACTION, SURPASSING CODES, GENDER OR EVEN THE NOTION OF ANDROGyny; HER CHALLENGE IS TO EXPLORE A SILHOUETTE IN DEPTH, IN ALL ITS POSSIBILITIES. THE NON-EVIDENT IS WHAT IS MOST FASCINATING... A DEMEULEMEESTER CREATION LOOKS SIMPLE, BUT PROVES, ON CLOSER INSPECTION, NOT TO BE SO. NO GLITTER AND GLAMOUR, BUT A PLAY OF FLOWING LINES OFTEN CONCEALS SURPRISING DISCOVERIES, AN ARTFULLY CONCEIVED CUT. FOR DEMEULEMEESTER, FASHION IS A FORM OF COMMUNICATION. HER COMPLEX LANGUAGE OF CONTRASTS COVERS A WHOLE GAMUT OF EMOTIONS. THE TENSION IS HIGHLY POETIC — HER CLOTHES REVEAL MANY LAYERS OF 'SOUL'.

'Table Blanche' furniture licence produced by Bullo, 1996. In collaboration with Patrick Robyn. The table is covered with painter's canvas. As a comment on the transitory character of design-furniture, this table is meant for intensive use. The canvas surface can at all times, by simply applying a layer of fresh paint, be made brand-new again. Photo: Patrick Robyn.



"I want to meet the woman, not the designer who dresses her." From: Katherine Betts, 'Ann of Antwerp', in iFrog, April 1997





BLACK AND WHITE ARE RECURRING ELEMENTS IN HER COLLECTIONS, AS DEMEULEMEESTER TENDS TO THINK MORE IN TERMS OF SHADOWS AND SHAPES THAN IN COLOUR AND DECORATION. IT'S LIKE A BLACK-AND-WHITE PHOTOGRAPH, WHICH CAPTURES THE ESSENCE OF SOMETHING. CALL IT 'CHIAROSCURO' OR A PLAY OF CONTRASTS.

SHE STARTS OUT FROM THE PREMISE 'LESS IS MORE', TO ARRIVE AT A SILHOUETTE THAT HAS BEEN PARED DOWN COMPLETELY; IN BLACK AND WHITE, ENHANCING THE CLEAR CONTRAST BETWEEN FORM AND MOVEMENT.

WHEN WORKING WITH COLOURS, SHE EXPERIMENTS UNTIL THE FABRICS ABSORB THE PIGMENT, BECOME TRULY MONOCHROME AND SATURATED — CLOTHES BECOME 'COLOUR', 'COLOUR' BECOMES CLOTHING.

DEMEULEMEESTER LAUNCHED HER FIRST MENSWEAR COLLECTION FOR THE SUMMER OF 1996, HER STARTING POINT BEING THE WISH TO CREATE A 'MALE WARDROBE'. AGAIN, SHE STUCK TO THE BASIC ATTITUDE OF RESPECT FOR THE PEOPLE WHO WEAR HER CLOTHES, THE CLOTHES NOT BEING A FASHION STATEMENT OVERSHADOWING THEIR WEARERS' PERSONALITY. "I WANT TO MEET THE WOMAN OR THE MAN, AND NOT THE DESIGNER WHO DRESSES THEM," AS ANN DEMEULEMEESTER PUTS IT HERSELF. IN OTHER WORDS, CLOTHES NOT LABELS.

IN THE MEANTIME HER 'WARDROBE' HAS EVOLVED INTO A COLLECTION IN ITS OWN RIGHT, INTERNATIONALLY DISTRIBUTED AND APPRECIATED.

IN EVERY COLLECTION HER PREFERENCE FOR GENERATING TENSION BY MEANS OF CONTRASTS IS APPROACHED DIFFERENTLY. OF COURSE, HER COLLECTIONS CHANGE AND EVOLVE, YET THE 'CREATOR' IS ALWAYS RECOGNISABLE. THE GENERAL IMPRESSION IS ALWAYS INTROVERT, POETIC, BUT AT THE SAME TIME THERE IS ALWAYS AN ELEMENT OF DANGER THAT FLASHES THROUGH THE COOL SIMPLICITY. THEY ARE SIMPLE, THE WAY A KNIFE IS SIMPLE. SERIOUS BUT NEVER SEVERE, METICULOUS BUT EXPERIMENTAL, STRONG BUT ALWAYS SENSUAL. ELEGANT WITH A LARGE DOSE OF ROCK'N'ROLL.

ANN DEMEULEMEESTER DOESN'T WORK WITH THEMES. IN HER VIEW FASHION IS A WAY OF LIFE, AND INSPIRATION COMES AS SHE TRIES TO ANSWER THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS SHE HAS ASKED HERSELF. FROM HER ORIGINAL CONCEPT, SHAPES EVOLVE AND A COLLECTION IS BUILT. THE RIGHT COMBINATION OF FORM, CUT, PROPORTIONS AND MATERIAL ENSURES THAT THE RIGHT IDEAS, MOVEMENTS AND EMOTIONS ARE PUT INTO THE CLOTHES.

HOW DO YOU SUGGEST MOVEMENT? HOW DO YOU UN-BALANCE A BODY? HOW DO YOU 'CUT' A GARMENT THAT CHALLENGES GRAVITY? THESE QUESTIONS RESULT, WITH ANN DEMEULEMEESTER, IN CLOTHES THAT EVOKE THE ILLUSION OF MOVEMENT, EVEN WHEN THE WEARER IS STANDING STILL. TROUSERS SLIP DOWN A LITTLE, A CARDIGAN GAPES OPEN, A DRAPED DRESS EXPOSES A SHOULDER: MAINLY IMPRESSIONS OF A CASUALNESS THAT WOULD NEVER BETRAY THE COMPLICATED STUDY WHICH WAS OFTEN REQUIRED TO ACHIEVE IT.

HOW CAN I MAKE A COLLECTION FROM PAINTER'S CANVAS? THAT WAS THE BASIC QUESTION BEHIND THE SUMMER 1999 COLLECTION. THIS FAVOURITE MATERIAL, WHICH SHE HAD ALREADY USED FOR INVITATIONS, DISPLAYS AND EVEN TABLES, WAS 'TRANSLATED' INTO AN ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY WHITE COLLECTION. THE SHAPES, DEVELOPING FURTHER ON THOSE SHE STARTED FOR THE WINTER 1998-99 COLLECTION, WERE CONCEIVED FROM WHAT ANN DEMEULEMEESTER DESCRIBES AS 'ZERO BASE', THE SOURCE OF THE 'SHAPE ISSUE'; TO SET ASIDE THE REPERTOIRE OF TRADITIONAL PATTERNS AND TO CONFRONT HERSELF WITH THE ESSENCE OF A GARMENT: A PIECE OF MATERIAL WHICH YOU CAN WRAP AROUND YOURSELF.

THIS EVER-RECURRING ISSUE, AND THE DIFFICULT TASK SHE HAS SET HERSELF, SEEM TO BE ANN DEMEULEMEESTER'S *raison d'être*. A 'DE-DEPICTED' WORLD, WHICH ALLOWS ENTIRELY NEW IDEAS TO DEVELOP, IN WHICH A SIMPLE INTERVENTION IS ALL-IMPORTANT, IN WHICH NOTHING DISRUPTS THE INVESTIGATION OF THE BODY, OF WEARABILITY. AND A WORLD IN WHICH THE WHOLE GAMUT OF EMOTIONS EVOKED BY A GARMENT — FROM SURRENDER TO REJECTION, FROM SECURITY TO ALIENATION — CAN BE METICULOUSLY CONSTRUCTED ...

THE CLOTH IS HOLY.

Patti Smith photographed by Annie Leibovitz.

