



FASHION.

The MoMu Collection
ANTWERP

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FOREWORD

After three years of being closed for renovations, MoMu finally reopens its doors in September 2021. The refurbished and extended museum now includes a brand new exhibition space designed specifically for the display of our own collection. It is this much needed new gallery that has spurred the publication of this book, a curated selection of the MoMu's permanent collection, including the museum's most striking sub-collections, richly illustrated with more than a 1,000 images.

In recent years, a great deal of behind-the-scenes work has been done to optimise the conditions for preserving this collection of more than 35,000 objects, as well as the study collection of around 2,000 objects, and the library collection of more than 43,000 titles. The MoMu team has completed the installation of a new external depository for the preservation of about 80% of the collection. The most fragile sub-collections, however, as well as the library and study collections, continue to be stored in-house. Our internal depot has not only been completely renovated, but extended with a preparation room, conservation studio and photo studio.

Great effort was made in terms of photographing the collection, under the direction of Frédéric Boutié and in cooperation with Belgiz Polat and photographer Stany Dederen. No fewer than 900 collection pieces and 500 objects from the study collection have been newly photographed. We thank all the fashion designers who assisted the MoMu team during these photo sessions with advice on how best to reproduce their designs.

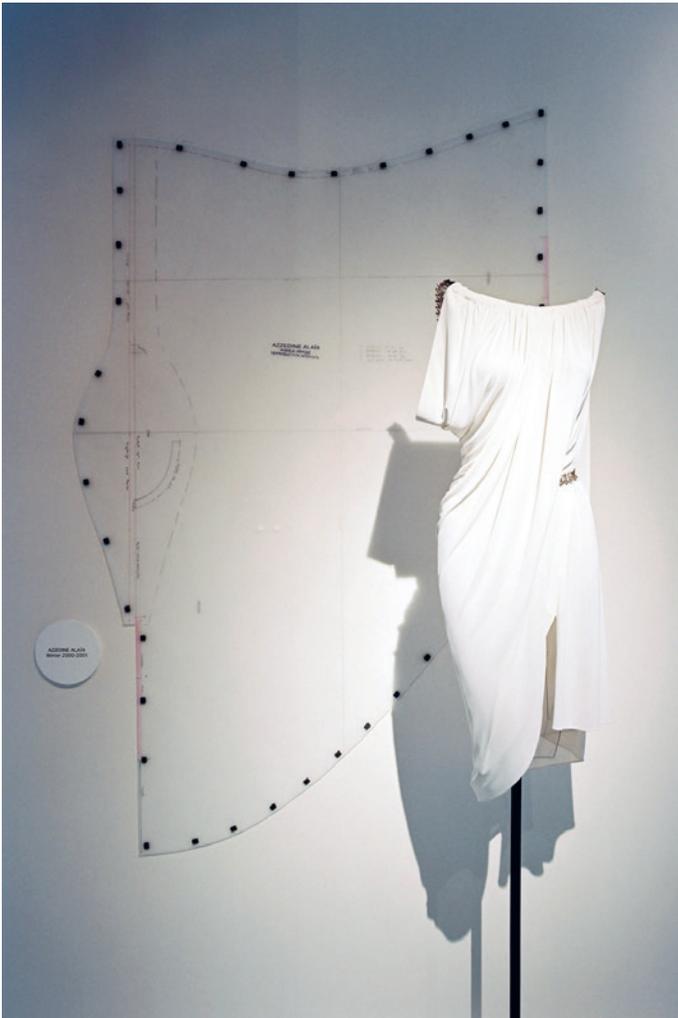
As the museum reopens, we are launching an ambitious initiative around the study collection, which was started in 2012. Based on the conviction that direct contact with materials and techniques fuels knowledge of and enthusiasm for fashion, this collection can now be accessed by appointment, in the library's newly updated reading room. The study collection aims to break down barriers between museum collections and visitors. It is used for scientific research, but can just as well serve as teaching material or as a source of inspiration for an increasingly inquisitive audience. We are also interpreting this object-oriented, hands-on approach into a programme for schools and specific target groups.

Building up a collection, then professionally preserving it and making it accessible, both physically and digitally, is a never-ending task. It is moreover a task that takes place behind the scenes of the museum and is consequentially rarely visible to the visitor. With this publication, we hope to pay tribute to the many professionals who have dedicated themselves to this task on an everyday basis. With this in mind, I extend my heartfelt thanks to the entire MoMu team, and to all those who have looked after the collection over the years. Most especially, I thank the collection team led by Wim Mertens, the conservation studio led by Kim Verkens, and the library team led by Birgit Ansoms. My thanks also to Elisa De Wyngaert and Romy Cockx, who together with Wim Mertens are the curators of the new collection gallery and of this collection book; as well as to scenographers Bob Verhelst, Thomas Van Looij and Michael Smith, and to graphic designer Paul Boudens.

Finally, my sincere thanks go to all designers, donors and lenders who have found their way to MoMu over the years and who have entrusted us with their valuable objects and fascinating stories.

Kaat Debo

Director, MoMu – Fashion Museum Antwerp



THE MOMU COLLECTION: THE ART OF SELECTION

In the spring of 2018, MoMu closed its doors for a three-year renovation. During that time, the museum was expanded with a new exhibition space for presentations of its own permanent collection. From the day it first opened its doors in 2002, until its temporary closure in 2018, MoMu had focused primarily on temporary exhibitions in which its own collection was only sporadically featured. Over the last two decades, we have organised over 30 exhibitions (several of which also toured abroad), developing our own vision on curating fashion along the way. Looking back on that body of exhibitions, it became clear that a fashion museum generates its own visual language, one that is specific to the museum context and different from the layers of meaning in clothing worn on a body. In a museum, fashion is moreover never reproduced as it is in a shop, in a wardrobe, on a painting or a stage, in the street or in a book. Fashion in a museum creates a very specific kind of encounter. Its exhibited character distinguishes it from other contexts.¹

The decision to add in-house collection presentations has brought us the opportunity to reflect on our own exhibition and collection policy. How do we present a collection of more than 35,000 objects, in a way that is relevant to a contemporary audience? How do we work with collection policies set by various directors and curators in the past? What does our collection tell us about the contexts in which my predecessors built collections, and what challenges does today's context pose for tomorrow's collection policy? To help address these questions, I would like to sketch a short history of the MoMu collection and exhibition policies.

Although MoMu itself first opened its doors in 2002, at its current location in the heart of Antwerp's historic centre, the origins of the collection date back to the 1930s,² when a group of local historians and collectors established a Museum of Flemish Civilisation in Antwerp's Sterckshof Castle. They cultivated ambitious plans for a major museum with indoor and outdoor sections, covering all aspects of Flemish cultural history. These lofty intentions were ultimately not realised, but in the meantime, an extensive collection of decorative arts was assembled thanks to a series of donations and loans. There was a lack of a clear acquisition policy, but the collection of clothing, accessories, textiles and textile tools grew apace. In the late 1940s, the archives of the Voortman cotton printing company in Ghent (1790-1890) were acquired – a very important collection of Belgian cotton printing. In 1967, the museum organised a lace exhibition. Despite the lace industry being virtually extinct in Flanders by that time, and little public interest in the subject, the exhibition was a success and even led to the expansion of the museum's lace collection. A small library on textiles and clothing was also established.



By the 1970s, the museum had become too small for its widely varied collections. The Province of Antwerp decided to split it into three different museums, which ultimately became the DIVA, Museum for Diamonds, Jewellery and Silver; the FOMU museum of photography; and the Fashion Museum. In 1977, the fashion museum's clothing and textile collection was moved to Vrieselhof Castle, a provincial demesne in Ranst-Oelegem, on the outskirts of Antwerp, to form the new Vrieselhof Textile Museum (now MoMu). To a certain extent, the rise of the fibre art movement in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as the increasing popularity among young people for training in traditional and artisanal textile techniques, helped emancipate the clothing and textiles collections, contributing to the creation of a separate fashion museum.

From then on, under the leadership of curator Frieda Sorber, a more focused collection policy was developed, with a preferred emphasis on clothing and textiles with Belgian origins or use. Initial steps were also taken towards filling in the gaps in both the lace and the clothing collections, in order to develop well-grounded historical presentations from the 17th century onwards for lace, and from the 18th century onwards for clothing.

In the early 1980s, the museum's collection was greatly expanded thanks to a new costume collection, on permanent loan from the Antwerp Museum of Folklore. Comprising more than 2,000 objects, it was a handsome addition of bourgeois fashion and regional costumes, notably from the 19th century, as well as the early 20th century. Segments of archives from a number of 20th-century Belgian fashion houses were also acquired, including archival material and clothing from the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s from the Brussels couture house Valens, as well as clothing and mercers' materials from the studios of the Roeis Fashion House. Archives such as these provide insight into the decline of handicraft and craftsmanship over the course of the 20th century. They also sketch an accurate picture of how the early 20th-century Belgian fashion sector related to Paris, the capital of fashion, both in creative and in business terms.

The lace collection also grew during this period, primarily through purchases from Belgian families and auctions. Thanks to donations, the archives of two early 20th-century Belgian lace companies, Jeanne Luig and La Campinoise, were also added to the collection. These archives, which included lace patterns, designs and trade correspondence, show how the lace companies adapted to the needs of a changing society. In addition, bead embroidery from Lier, a city located just south-east of Antwerp and a hub for this industry and its international trade connections throughout the first half of the 20th century, was also amply represented by way of archives and objects from various Lier-based companies.

Later, in 2011, the Fashion Museum, or MoMu, made another important acquisition for its historical collection. It concerned more than 2,500 objects, including 250 dresses from the 18th and 19th centuries, and the first half of the 20th century, from the private collection of Jacoba de Jonge, from the Netherlands. This important acquisition was the direct catalyst for MoMu's 2012 exhibition, *Living Fashion: Women's Daily Wear 1750-1950*. The Jacoba de Jonge collection gives exceptional insight into well-to-do women's wardrobes from the 18th to the mid-20th centuries, from morning attire to evening wear, to travel ensembles, maternity wear, dresses for sports and leisure and summer ensembles.



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THE MOMU COLLECTION:
THE ART OF SELECTION







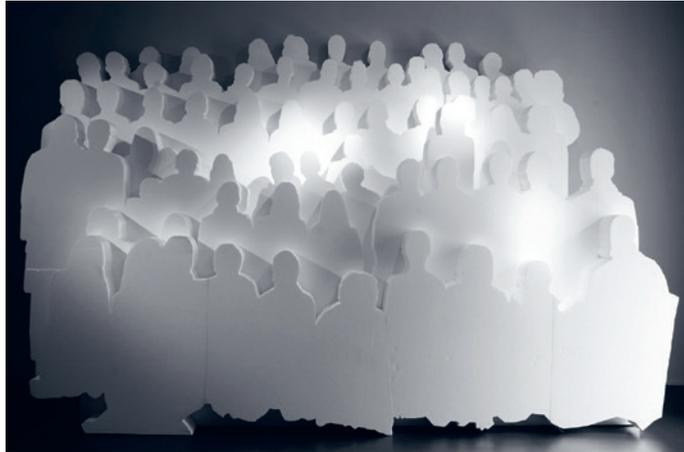
Bernhard Wilhelm: Total Recall, 2007



THE MOMU COLLECTION: THE ART OF SELECTION

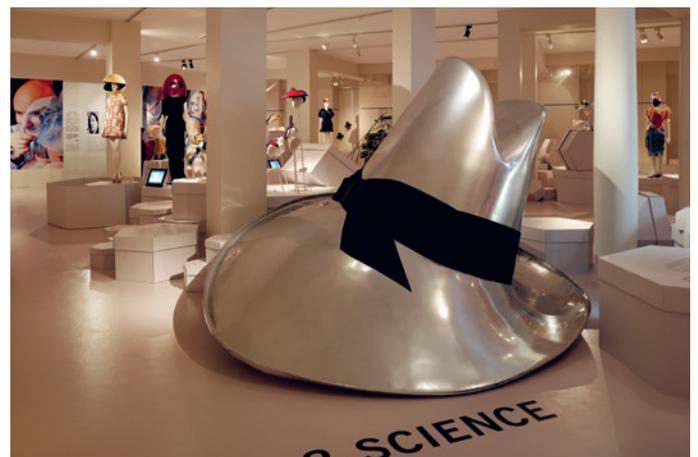
16 In 1998, the Province of Antwerp appointed Linda Loppa as the museum's new director. An alumna of the fashion department of the Royal Academy of Art in Antwerp, with a background in fashion retail and education, Linda Loppa brought a completely new network and new expertise to the museum. In 1996, she was one of the founders of the non-profit Mode Antwerpen, or Fashion Antwerp organisation, which would later develop into the Flanders Fashion Institute (FFI), and which has been active since 2009 under the umbrella of Flanders DC.³ The FFI, a support centre for the promotion and support of the Flemish fashion sector, was a reaction to the growing international success of Antwerp designers and the fashion department of the Royal Academy of Art in Antwerp on the one hand, and the lack of sufficient resources for both fashion education and industry on the other. From the 1980s, Linda Loppa was active as head of the fashion department of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp. Still in that capacity, she steered the school's strong internationalisation and professionalisation throughout the 1990s, until Walter Van Beirendonck took over in 2007. Loppa's extensive networks in both the Antwerp and international fashion worlds, as well as her merits in the field of fashion education, made her the ideal candidate to also lead MoMu into the new millennium. It was through the FFI that the vision evolved to house the museum, along with the fashion department of the Antwerp Academy and the Flanders Fashion Institute, at their current location, a 19th-century building in the historical centre of Antwerp.

In that vision, each of the three partners and neighbours represents a different aspect of fashion: heritage and culture, education, and fashion as a creative industry. The new name of the building housing the three institutions is ModeNatie, or Fashion Nation, referring to the nation companies, or guilds, of the port of Antwerp. These were associations of merchants, often with a cooperative structure, who managed the transport of goods between the docks and warehouses, and were usually organised around one specific type of product. In the Antwerp port area, you can still find former warehouse buildings with these names on their façades. In a similar way, the Fashion Nation brings together the different facets of fashion, as an applied art and as a creative industry.









Stephen Jones & The Accent on Fashion, 2010



In 2001, Linda Loppa's practice-oriented fashion background was combined with Kaat Debo's art-historical approach as a curator, which also brought new impetus to MoMu's exhibition policy.⁴ The exhibition programme sought innovative ways to translate the artistic research practices of contemporary designers into the museum context, which the museum team felt was missing in exhibitions based on a purely art-historical approach.⁵ Even in fashion designers' own practices, with each season's collections following one upon the other at an ever-increasing rate, that research and its fundamental results often get overlooked and never reach the general public. MoMu's approach led to an ongoing, intensive cooperation with designers and artists, and to a focus on new ideas on collaboration and creativity. Equally, the MoMu's exhibition trajectory is a delicate balance between curator and designer, reason and emotion, historical reflection and analysis and artistic freedom.

Malign Muses: When Fashion Turns Back was a MoMu exhibition held in 2004, a collaboration with curator Judith Clark, and was an interesting initial experiment in this context.⁶ The exhibition questioned the position of the curator by presenting the curation itself as a work in progress and literally expanding into an open, collaborative structure involving a scholar (Caroline Evans), an illustrator (Ruben Toledo), an architect (Yuri Avvakumov) and a jewellery designer (Naomi Filmer). The experimental dialogue between academia and art practice that Judith Clark established would continue to be an important driving force in subsequent MoMu exhibitions, including *Yohji Yamamoto – Dream Shop* (2006), *Bernhard Willhelm: Total Recall* (2007), *Maison Martin Margiela: '20' - The Exhibition*, (2008), *Stephen Jones & The Accent of Fashion* (2010), *Walter Van Beirendonck – Dream the World Awake* (2011) and *Dries Van Noten: Inspirations* (2015).

