

This is the story of a fashion moment that happened
40 years ago and has continued to live a life of its
own to this day.

All those who worked on this project dedicate this
book to Marina Yee, who passed away far too early.

Marina Yee (1958–2025)

THE

FASHION MUSEUM ANTWERP

ANTWERP

HANNIBAL

SIX

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PREFACE

Kaat Debo

In 2026, MoMu celebrates 40 years of the Antwerp Six with a large-scale exhibition and this publication. Today, the Six – Dirk Bikkembergs, Ann Demeulemeester, Walter Van Beirendonck, Dries Van Noten, Dirk Van Saene and Marina Yee – have become an established point of reference in international fashion and an automatic benchmark for Belgium’s impact on fashion over the past decades.

The reactions we received over the past year, even to the mere announcement of the exhibition, were nothing short of overwhelming, and testify to how strongly their influence continues to resonate today. But what explains the enduring resonance of a group of designers who studied together in the early 1980s and, on the eve of their individual careers, temporarily joined forces to present their work internationally, yet never collaborated or created as a collective thereafter?

What connects them is neither a shared aesthetic nor a collective strategy or marketing plan. Perhaps part of the answer lies in the fact that their trajectories touch on themes that are more pressing than ever in fashion today: artistic autonomy, authorship, talent development, the importance of creative ecosystems, the dynamics between centre and periphery, and the impact of a rapidly changing fashion industry on all these issues. The Six understood that there is more to fashion than trend-sensitive consumption; it is a cultural medium, a way of thinking and representing the zeitgeist.

This approach has also manifested itself more recently in their lives beyond fashion. What continues to link their later paths is the idiosyncrasy of their choices and a pronounced focus on creativity and craftsmanship, free from the constraints of trends: Dries Van Noten with a foundation that places the art of making at its core; Marina Yee and Dirk Van Saene in the visual arts; Walter Van Beirendonck in commissions for museums and theatre; and Ann Demeulemeester with ceramics, lighting and furniture design. This approach not only defines their own work, but also had a lasting impact on the international perception of Belgian fashion. The latter is often described as the thorn in Paris’s

side: operating from the periphery, independent and innovative, and moving against the current of the established fashion industry – a modus operandi that is, unfortunately, increasingly under pressure in today's fashion industry.

When the Six took their first steps into the world of fashion, the economic context was anything but rosy. And yet, a dynamic emerged in the early 1980s in which friendship, hard work, shared ambitions and an exceptional zeitgeist reinforced one another. In Belgium, the garment and textile industry was suffering, prompting the then government to roll out a five-year Textile Plan. What followed was an unprecedented programme of support measures aimed at reviving the industry. By investing in young talent, including through talent competitions and a large-scale communications campaign, the Textile Plan acted as a catalyst for the Six's international breakthrough.

Forty years later, the world and the fashion system have changed profoundly, as have the context and conditions for talent development. It is my hope that this exhibition and publication will encourage reflection on how best to nurture, support and challenge talent today. In addition, the museum itself will focus on talent development in the coming year through a comprehensive public programme, in cooperation with the City of Antwerp, Flanders District of Creativity and Event Flanders.

This first authorised publication on the Antwerp Six was only possible thanks to the Six themselves, who generously shared their archives and memories, helping to shape the story we tell on the following pages. Therefore I expressly wish to thank them for trusting us to record their shared history in words and images. I would also like to thank the two curators, Romy Cockx and Geert Bruloot, who conducted the research and developed this ambitious project with incredible dedication and tenacity. Authors Oscar van den Boogaard, Tim Blanks, Angelo Flaccavento and Eugene Rabkin helped bring this extraordinary story to life through their contributions to this publication, which was overseen and published by Hannibal Books. We worked with a fantastic team on the design: Geert Bruloot, in collaboration with Altu, for the exhibition scenography; Jelle Jespers for the graphic design of the book; and Victor Robyn for the design of the campaign visuals and exhibition graphics. The project partners, who provided logistical or financial support – Event Flanders, Flanders District of Creativity and our colleagues from the City of Antwerp – also made an indispensable contribution. Finally, I want to express my heartfelt thanks to the entire MoMu team. This could not have been achieved without their commitment, care and cooperation.

'THE ENERGY IS STILL THERE'

**Geert Bruloot &
Romy Cockx**

This book and this exhibition would not have been possible without co-curator Geert Bruloot (b. 1953), whose life and career are inextricably linked with the Six.

Their joint story begins in 1983, when Bruloot opened his shoe shop, Coccodrillo, together with his partner Eddy Michiels, in the Nieuwe Gaanderij shopping centre in Antwerp. The two soon became firm friends with Dirk Van Saene, who had a shop called Beauties & Heroes in the same arcade, and with his partner Walter Van Beirendonck. A few months later, Martin Margiela popped into Coccodrillo to present his shoe collection to Bruloot. Soon after, Ann Demeulemeester bought a pair of his shoes for her wedding. She took an instant shine to Bruloot and Michiels, even inviting them to her wedding reception.

By then, Bruloot was designing the window of his own shop, as well as those of the Linda Loppa and Closing Date shops. In the run-up to the runway show for the third Golden Spindle competition in March 1985, Dries Van Noten asked Bruloot for help with the scenography, organisation and coordination of the show. This was Bruloot's first encounter with the Six together in one place: "They had tremendous energy and determination. They also all knew exactly what they wanted, and it was amazing to move in the same direction with a group of people."

By then, he was also getting graphic design commissions from Dries Van Noten. In April, he travelled to Japan with the Six. Their friendship grew, and Bruloot became convinced of their potential: their talent and ambitions, but also their worldview. A few months later, he convinced them to go to London to show their work at the British Designer Show in March 1986: "It was an adventure. We were naive, most of us had little experience, but we firmly believed that we were doing something amazing."

When Demeulemeester produced her first full collection in early 1987, Bruloot was so intent on selling it that he opened his own shop, Louis, in order to do so. Later, he would also sell the collections of Dirk Bikkembergs, Dirk Van Saene,

Martin Margiela and Marina Yee. That's how Louis became a meeting point for a whole new generation of fashion talent, including Raf Simons, Olivier Rizzo and Willy Vanderperre, who were intrigued by the success of the Six. At Walter Van Beirendonck's request, for more than 25 years Bruloot was also in charge of the choreography and scenography of the annual graduation show held by the Antwerp Academy's fashion department. That is how he got to know successive generations of fashion students.

The story of the Six started at a time when there was not really such a thing as a Belgian fashion identity. That is why we decided to provide an overview of the era in this book and our exhibition. Geert Bruloot recalls: "Many things that seem evident today were anything but evident in the early years. These days, we are used to a lot in fashion, but in the 1970s and '80s, many things were seen as shocking or were simply not understood. By giving an overview of the international context, both in the exhibition and in the book, I want to show how the Six introduced the Antwerp fashion academy to a new world."

We used the portraits that Patrick Robyn made of the Six for the second Golden Spindle competition in 1983 in the exhibition's campaign visuals. Robyn also took many of the photos in this book. "Patrick Robyn was already dating Ann Demeulemeester before she enrolled in the fashion academy," Bruloot remembers. "He has always had an excellent eye for beauty and helped shape the presentation of Ann's collections from the start. This influenced the other designers, who also began using him as a photographer. He was part of the group, just like make-up artist Inge Grognaard, graphic designer Anne Kurris, and me. Patrick is creative on many levels. Each of his photos is a work of art."

Because the story of the Six spans four decades (five if you count their first steps at the Academy), the exhibition and book required extensive archival research. Fortunately, we were able to draw on the six designers' own archives. "Everyone experienced and held on to those early years in their own way," says Bruloot. "As well as archival research, we also conducted extensive interviews with all six designers. I'm very pleased that we were able to capture their story in words and images, and that they were willing to embark on this trip down memory lane with us. I got to know them in a different way, and it has enriched me. The energy is still there, and perhaps that is the most beautiful thing about this project."





1976-82

YOUNG FASHION TALENT

Walter Van Beirendonck and Martin Margiela were inspired to enrol at the Antwerp Academy in 1976 by an article in *Avenue* magazine promoting its fashion department. The following year, Dirk Bikkembergs, Ann Demeulemeester, Dries Van Noten, Dirk Van Saene and Marina Yee joined them there.¹ They were all taught together and, despite their different backgrounds and interests, a certain synergy gradually developed. Van Beirendonck, the most extreme dresser of the Six, felt at home in the international art and clubbing scene. He soon fell for Van Saene's playful expressiveness. After a while, they were joined by Van Noten, who shed his rigid Jesuit college image. Demeulemeester and her boyfriend Patrick Robyn (who was studying photography) combined their love of punk music with discipline and an eye for detail. Margiela and Yee had already become close while studying art in Hasselt. He was rather shy, while she stood out with her flamboyant, fashionable appearance and remarkable talent for drawing. For Bikkembergs, who grew up somewhat isolated in various army towns in Germany as the son of a professional Belgian soldier, the Academy opened up a whole new world.²

A lot changed in fashion in a very short time. Punk arrived from London, with Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren as its main protagonists. The extravagant New Romantic style, which took off in London nightclubs such as the Blitz, followed soon after. Fashion and music blended beautifully on album covers. In the late 1970s, young Italian designers such as Gianni Versace and Giorgio Armani introduced new ideas to menswear in different ways. Soon after, Thierry Mugler, Claude Montana and Jean Paul Gaultier caused a furore with their distinctive fashion statements. In 1981, Yohji Yamamoto and Rei Kawakubo made their debuts in Paris. The six passionate fashion students travelled to London, Paris, Milan and New York to share in the energy of all these exciting new fashion and music styles.³ They partied together regularly, but above all, they worked hard. They had great ambitions and challenged each other.

They gradually rebelled against the traditional approach of their teacher Mary Prijot, who did not identify with the new fashion scene that these young designers wanted to be part of. When the students wanted to use professional models and a more fashionable styling for their graduation show, things came to a head. Ms Prijot retired in 1982. Linda Loppa took over as head of the department in 1985. She developed the international reputation of the fashion department, thanks in part to the success of the Six and Martin Margiela.⁴

1 Karen Van Godtsenhoven, 'De wonderjaren van de Antwerpse 6+1' (The wonder years of the Antwerp 6+1), in *Mode - Antwerpen Academie 50* (Tielt: Lannoo, 2013), 66.

2 The Six in conversation with Geert Bruloot and Oscar van den Boogaard, unpublished interviews, 2024.

3 Van Godtsenhoven 2013, 75.

4 Sarah Heynssens, 'Tussen avant-garde en traditie' (Between avant-garde and tradition), in *Mode - Antwerpen Academie 50* (Tielt: Lannoo, 2013), 21-22.



Jordan Mooney in front of Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren's boutique Sex, London, 1976, photo: Sheila Rock



Vivienne Westwood, Malcolm McLaren, Jamie Reid, 'God Save the Queen' T-shirt, 1977



Vivienne Westwood wearing her controversial 'Destroy' T-shirt, 1977



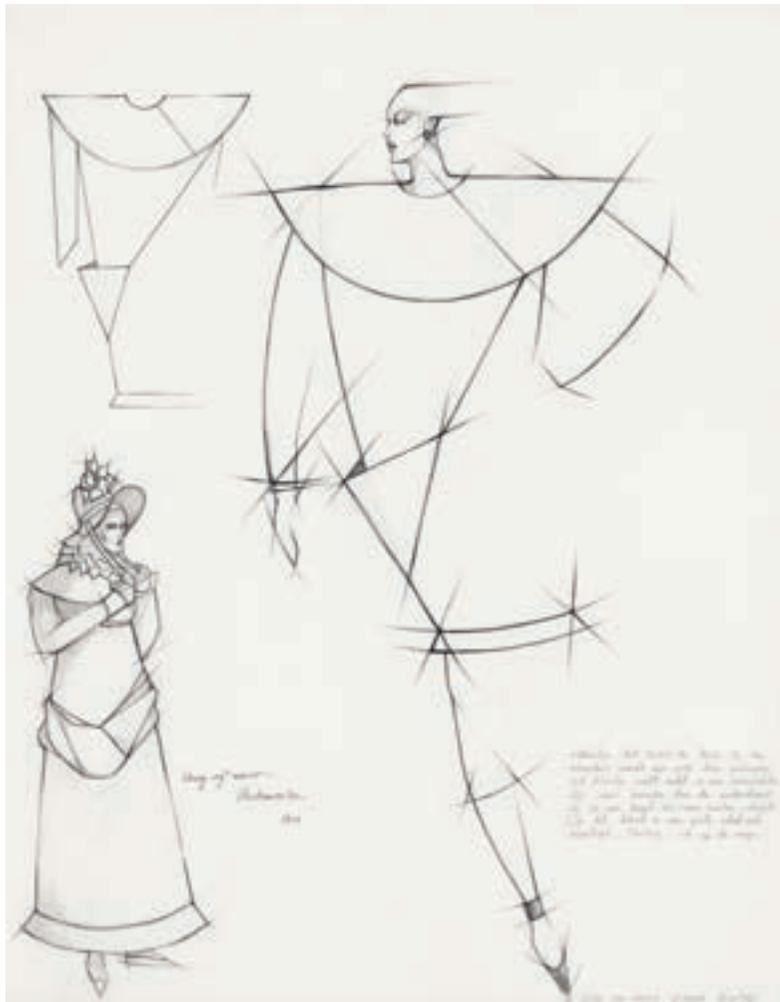
Walter Van Beirendonck, first-year sketches, 1976-77

Each week, students had to copy a historical costume and create a new design based on it. Initially, Mary Prijot required them to draw in pen and black ink, but Marina Yee and Ann Demeulemeester, both talented drawers, refused; the rule was later quietly abolished.



Dirk Bikkembergs, first-year sketches, 1977-78

Dirk Bikkembergs never took drawing lessons but received guidance in drawing from Marina Yee with his entrance exam and was admitted to the first year of the fashion programme. He was immediately captivated by the drawing assignments that would follow.



Dirk Van Saene,
second-year
sketches, 1978-79



Dirk Bikkembergs,
first-year sketches, 1977-78



Richard Hell & The
Voidoids, *Blank
Generation*, album
cover, 1977

Television, *Marquee
Moon*, album cover,
1977, photo: Robert
Mapplethorpe



David Lynch, *Eraserhead*,
film poster, 1977

Blondie, *Plastic Letters*,
album cover, 1978



Marina Abramović and Ulay, *Imponderabilia*,
performance, Galleria Comunale d'Arte
Moderna, Bologna, 1977, photo: Giovanna
dal Magro



SITE / James Wines, L.L.C., 'Notch Building' for
BEST Products Company Inc., Sacramento,
California, 1979



Claude Montana and models in front of the Eiffel Tower, *People Magazine*, 1978, photo: Guy Marineau



Jane Birkin wearing Mugler, A/W 1979–80, 1979, photo: Michelle de Rouville



Visage including Steve Strange in front of the Blitz club, London, 1978, photo: Sheila Rock



Editor Bob Colacello, model Jerry Hall, artist/publisher Andy Warhol, singer Debbie Harry, writer Truman Capote and jewellery designer Paloma Picasso at a Studio 54 party for *Interview* magazine, New York, c. 1979, photo: Robin Platzer



Boy George (right) and New Romantics, c. 1979, photo: Kerstin Rodgers



Second-year collection by Dirk Van Saene, 1978–79 Academy show, photo: Gie Knaeps



Issey Miyake, S/S 1982, photo: Gilles Tapie



Azzedine Alaïa, A/W 1982-83, photo: Horst P. Horst

Azzedine Alaïa, A/W 1981-82, photo: Gilles Tapie



Jean Paul Gaultier for Gibo, A/W 1982-83, advertisement, photo: Jules



Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #96*, 1981



Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Untitled*, 1982



Marina Yee, fourth-year sketches, 1980-81

AUDITION

1.3 NOV. 1989

3



Date: 1.3 November 1989

Hour: 12 o'clock

Hair & Make-up: yes: handover

Clothes: Martin Margiela

F.D.P.: BEIGE H/O R
EYE-LINER: BLACK, PERFECT LINER
H. RUBINSTEIN lipstick
MASCARA: BLACK EYEBOJOTS
LIPGLOSS: IVYITE
DECORAT

③ Martin
 *A VIKON. 50 mm 30" 72.5 Hps 160/165
 AVAILABLE LIGHT. +2 Spots + TL. LIGHT

Designs by Martin Margiela and Walter Van Beirendonck, BAM, no. 3, S/S 1990, photo: Ronald Stoops, styling: Dirk Van Saene

date: 14 november '89

hour: 2 o'clock

make-up, hair: P.D.S: I 2 x. SHI SIDO cycloadow, GLITTER lip pencil.

clothes: Walter Van Buren dmeck

DARK FRONT
SERGE LOIS ALVAREZ

Makaya by S. Gornig 14 15"
TRIX doo ASA.
AVAILABLE LIGHT + SPOTS
+ TL LIGHT



Hair: with face
flat on face

14 NOV. 1989

4

Audition

1985

GOLDEN SPINDLE COMPETITION 3

In 1985, the Six again reached the final of the Golden Spindle competition. By then, they were already designing commercial collections for Belgian brands such as Bassetti, Bartsons and Jacques Laloux. But the competition offered them artistic freedom: the collections (Autumn/Winter 1985–86) they showcased were not judged on wearability or marketability but on concept. The initial scepticism among Belgian manufacturers had given way to enthusiasm, and the competition was gaining international fame. Dirk Bikkembergs won the third edition with an innovative men's collection.¹

In April 1985, the Six headed to Japan again alongside fellow finalist Pieter Coene, as well as Geert Bruloot, who had designed the scenography of the Brussels runway show. Michèle Beeckman, representing the ITCB, Patrick Robyn and journalist Dominique Van der Heyden travelled with them. They presented their Golden Spindle collections during a runway show at the Shinjuku West Exit Prince Plaza Hotel in Tokyo. The Six held a second runway show in an impressive setting with a giant LED screen at the World Expo in Tsukuba, on Belgian National Day. Unfortunately, there were very few buyers or media representatives present, and the audience consisted mainly of children on a school trip.

Back in Belgium, they decided to take matters into their own hands and organise their own runway show. Held in a warehouse on Antwerp's Scheldt quays, it was huge event with a paying audience of 3,000. The press noted that "fashion is in vogue" and referred to "the infamous Antwerp six".²

1 Lut Buyck, 'Gouden Spoel '85 verheerlijkt de man' (1985 Golden Spindle glorifies men), *Knack Weekend*, 27 March 1985.

2 M.C., 'De Zes doen het zelf' (The Six do it for themselves), *Modis*, no. 5, October 1985.

In March 1985, Princess Paola presented the third Golden Spindle award to Dirk Bikkembergs.

Lut Buyck, 'Gouden Spoel '85 verheerlijkt de man' (1985 Golden Spindle glorifies men), *Knack Weekend*, 27 March 1985

Gouden Spoel '85 verheerlijkt de man

De derde Gouden Spoel-wedstrijd voor jonge Belgische mode-ontwerpers zit er weer op. Deze keer ging alle eer en glorie naar Dirk Bikkembergs voor zijn sterk vernieuwende herenkollektie winter '85-'86. De overige vermeldingen gingen eveneens bijna allemaal naar mannenkollekties. Een verslag.

Sinds het ontstaan van het ITCB, uweet wel het Instituut voor Textiel en Konfektie van België dat in het kader van het plan Claes werd opgericht om onze schrijvende textielindustrie van de ondergang te redden, is het onder meer een traditie geworden ieder jaar een wedstrijd uit te schrijven om jong creatief talent in ons land aan te moedigen.

Eén van de zwakste punten van onze konfektie was destijds immers het grote tekort aan, en vaak de totale afwezigheid van enig mode-inzicht. Daarin zijn we inmiddels sterk op vooruitgegaan en de belangstelling voor ontwerpers en stilisten neemt in evenredigheid toe.

Het is in dat kader dat we de zin van dergelijke prestigieuze ondernemingen moeten zoeken. Het is immers pas door jonge talenten de kans te geven zich ten volle te geven in een volledig zelfstandig opgebouwde trendkollektie dat men kan geloven in hun creatieve kracht. Het vertrouwen van de Belgische textielindustrie en fabrikanten is in enkele jaren dan ook steviger en uitgebreider geworden.

Konkurrentie

De lijst Belgische wevers, konfektionneurs en breiers die hun medewerking aan de kandidaten van deze wedstrijd hebben toegezegd, is opzienbarend toegenomen... In plaats van scepticisme en onbegrip delen zij nu van harte in het enthousiasme en de spanning van de deelnemende stilisten.

En last but not least krijgt de Gouden Spoel-wedstrijd stilaan een internationale weerklank, wat het imago van de Belgische mode in het algemeen alleen maar kan optrekken en de mogelijkheden van het jong Belgisch talent in het bijzonder zal verruimen...

Tien kandidaten toonden op 13 maart jongstleden in het Brusselse stadhuis en in aanwezigheid van prinses Paola en mevrouw Wilfried Martens, een trendkollektie bestaande uit vijftien totaal-silhouetten.

Dergelijke kollekties zijn niet als „klaar-om-dragen" bedoeld, maar weerspiegelen wel de tendenzen van wat morgen misschien het straatbeeld zal bepalen. De persoonlijke inbreng, de vernieuwende ideeën en de homoge-

niteit van het geheel zijn dan ook de basiscriteria, en niet direct de draagbaarheid of de verkoopbaarheid van de modellen.

Een internationale jury, samengesteld uit industriëlen, mode-specialisten, mode-ontwerpers en journalisten onder leiding van Daniel Hechter, werd gevraagd het verdict te vellen.

Altijd een benarde opgave, te meer daar de groep zowat werd opgesplitst in enerzijds ervaren deelnemers zoals Ann Demeulemeester, Walter Van Beirendonck, Dries Van Noten, Dirk Van Saene en Marina Yee (waaronder nota bene al twee vorige winnaars) en anderzijds het prille debuterende talent van Mieke Vanneste, Brigitta Tulkens, Bob Verhelst en Pieter Coene. Slechts de winnaar Bikkembergs zit daar (toevallig?) tussenin.

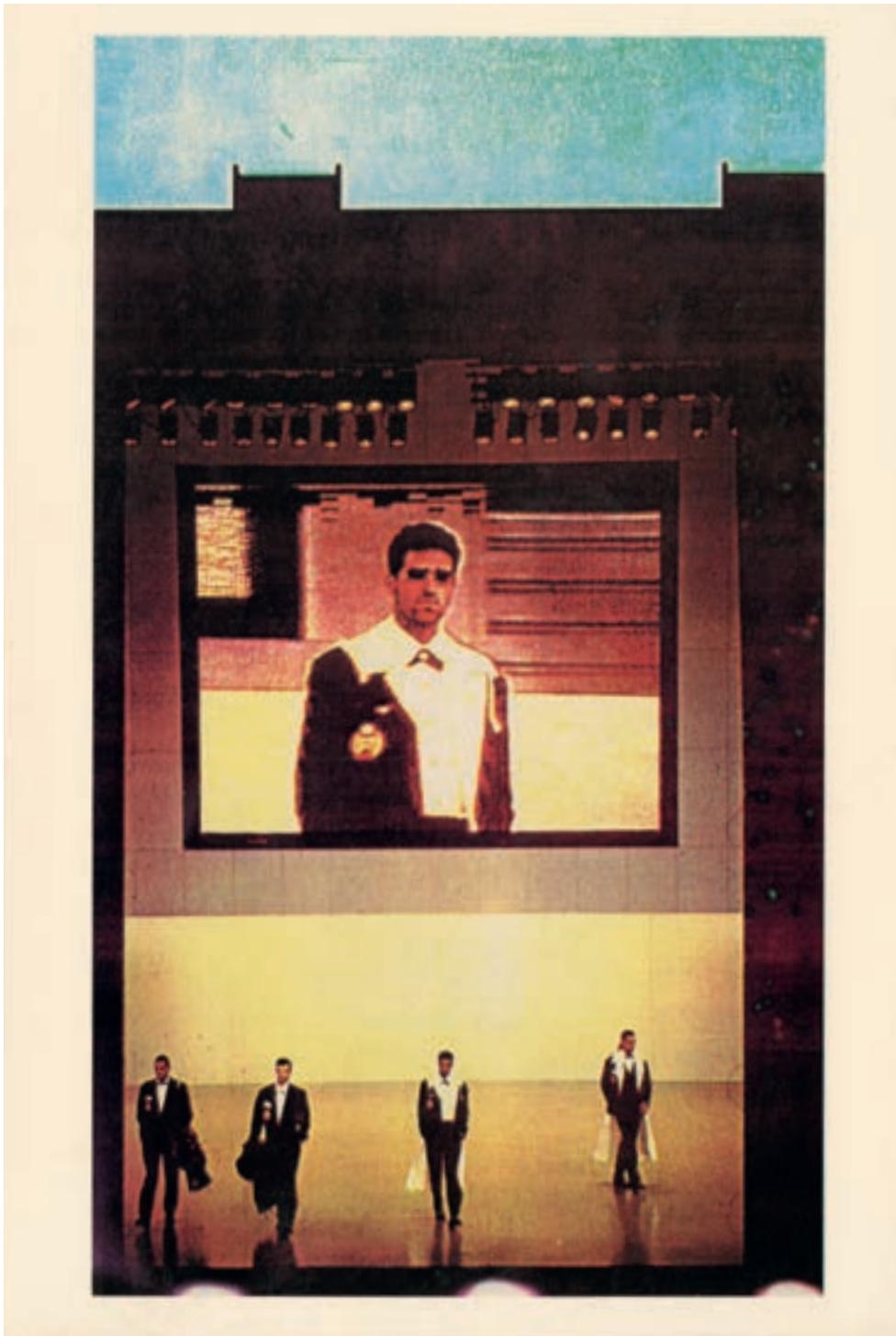
Een nieuwe reglementering van de toelatingsvoorwaarden dringt zich dan ook voor de toekomst op.

Hoe dan ook zorgden ze voor een bonte show die in het algemeen een sterke indruk naliet.

Laureaat anno '84, Dirk Van Saene pakte als eerste uit met zijn (overigens

Dirk Bikkembergs, laureaat van de Gouden Spoel '85: de ontroering maakte zich van hem meester.





Invitation to the opening of Dries Van Noten's store in the Nieuwe Gaanderij shopping centre in Antwerp on 12 September 1985. The invitation features an image of his runway show at Tsukuba, where he showed his A/W 1985-86 collection, along with the other finalists of the third Golden Spindle competition.

pp. 105-107: Dominique Van der Heyden, 'Japon '85', *Marie Claire Belgique*, September 1985



BodyMap, Cat in the Hat Takes a Rumble with a Techno Fish, A/W 1984-85, 1985, photo: Monica Curtin



Kenzo, A/W 1985-86, 1985, photo: Peter Lindbergh



Jenny Holzer, Selection from the *Survival Series*, Times Square, New York, 1985, photo: John Marchael



Prince and The Revolution, *Parade*, album cover, 1986



Iggy Pop, *Blah-Blah-Blah*, album cover, 1986

Beastie Boys, *Licensed to Ill*, album cover, 1986

Tokyo

Toute l'ambiance d'avant-garde, reflétée par la Canette d'Or 85, voilà ce qu'ont présenté à la presse japonaise, les stylistes belges pendant la semaine du Tokyo Prêt-à-porter-Collections 85 à l'hôtel Keio Plaza (Photos: Patrick Robyn).



DIRK BIKKEMBERGS



ANN DEMEULEMEESTER VERHELST



The Belgian press sent home enthusiastic reports on the Tokyo show and on Japanese brands and shops, such as Comme des Garçons and Yohji Yamamoto, which the Belgian designers had already discovered.



WALTER VAN BEIRENDONCK



DRIES VAN NOTEN



DIRK VAN SAENE



MARINA YEE



LA FINALE...



WINTER'85

Deze collecties bestaan uit **unieke** exemplaren en zijn het resultaat van een **intensieve** samenwerking tussen **ontwerpers** en **Belgische modellers, wevers, breiers, en confectioneurs**. Ze werden gemaakt in het kader van het **Gouden Spool**; een wedstrijd die georganiseerd wordt door het **ITCB**, dat tot doel heeft het **Belgische mode-imago**, zowel in binnen- als buitenland te versterken. Deze collecties zijn gerealiseerd vanuit de **persoonlijke** visies van de ontwerpers, **zonder** rekening te houden met commerciële normen.

Ces collections n'existent que **d'uniques** exemplaires et sont les résultats d'une **intensive** collaboration entre les **stylistes, tissérands, tricoteurs** et **confectioneurs** de tendances **belges**. Ils furent confectionnés dans le cadre de la **Canette d'Or**, un concours qui est organisé par **l'ITCB**, dont le but est l'image de la **mode belge**, aussi bien pour le pays que pour l'étranger. Ces collections sont réalisées, par la vision **personnelle** des stylistes, **sans** objectif commercial.

H I V E R'85

M A R I N A Y E E

FABRIKANTEN: - Bonetti, s.a., Brussel - Grano & Chardin, s.a., Brussel - Morano, Izegem - Roger Perlemans - Sals.
 CETTE COLLECTION A ETE REALISEE AVEC LA COLLABORATION DE:
 POUR LA CONFECTION: - Bonetti, s.a., Bruxelles - Grano & Chardin, s.a.
 ACCESSOIRES: - Morano, Izegem (chaussures) - Roger Perlemans (mellieur de chaussures) - Sals (casquettes et chapeaux).



DIRK BIKKEMBERGS

FABRIKANTEN: - Bartoens s.a., Heist-o/-d-Berg - Bonnelisse s.v., Terrel - Debrisaed s.p.r.l., Brussel - "Goffs" Montignies-sur-Sambre - Anc. Ets. Lescallier s.a., Binche - "Oliver" Declercq p.a.s.a., Arbois - Terino s.a., Doornik - Verbracken s.v., St-Niklaas - Wajctex s.a., Brussel - Monarca, Concordia s.a., Sefinal s.v.
 PATRONEN GEMAAKT DOOR: - Arts & Militars, Brussel, ateling kleding o.l.v. Dir Danne & Dir Boyse.
 CETTE COLLECTION A ETE REALISEE AVEC LA COLLABORATION DE:
 POUR LA CONFECTION: - Bartoens s.a., Heist-o/-d-Berg (manteaux) - Bonnelisse s.v., Terrel (cuir) - Debrisaed s.p.r.l., Bruxelles (manteaux) - Goffs, Montignies-sur-Sambre, (manteaux drapés) - Anc. Ets. Lescallier s.a., Binche, (blazers et gilets) - Declercq-Oliver, s.p.r.l., Arbois (pantalons) - Terino s.a., Terrel (chemises) - Verbracken s.v., St-Niklaas (tricot) - Wajctex s.a., Bruxelles (manteaux en nylon).
 POUR LES CHAUSSURES: - Monarca.
 POUR LES TISSUS: - Concordia s.v., (nylon) - Sefinal s.v., (nylon).
 PATRONS REALISES PAR: - Arts & Militars, Bruxelles - sous la direction de MM. Danne et Boyse.



DIRK VAN SAENE

FABRIKANTEN: - Philippe Demant s.a., Brussel - p.a.s.a. Parmentier "Parkin", Zottegem - "De Parc", s.v., Bussels-De Smith, Aalst.
 SHOENEN: - Eurovna - Diest.
 MODELLEN: - Mej, Sabine Begier.
 CETTE COLLECTION A ETE REALISEE AVEC LA COLLABORATION DE:
 POUR LA CONFECTION: - Philippe Demant s.a., Bruxelles - Parmentier, p.a.s.a., -Parkin-, Zottegem - Bussels-De Smith s.v., -De Parc-, Aalst.
 POUR LES CHAUSSURES: - Eurovna - Diest.
 POUR LES PATRONS: - Mej, Sabine Begier.



WALTER VAN BEIRENDONCK

FABRIKANTEN: - Bartoens s.a., Heist-o/-d-Berg - Jérôme, Bartoens s.a., Heist-o/-d-Berg - Bellou, Izegem - W. Cozy p.a.s.a., Zottegem - Cocoon Madras, Renaix - Oliver Declercq p.a.s.a., Arbois - Casteert p.a.s.a., Zottegem - Betty Perne p.a.s.a., Borsbeks, I.M.S. - Eurovna, Diest - Karin, Brussel.
 PATRONEN GEMAAKT DOOR: - Instituut Sancta Maria, 2e P.H.D.R.T., Dourne, o.l.v. Meer, De Cock - Instituut van de Ursulines, 1e A.S.B., Mechelen, o.l.v. Meer, De Rooster.
 CETTE COLLECTION A ETE REALISEE AVEC LA COLLABORATION DE:
 POUR LA CONFECTION: - Bartoens s.v., Heist-o/-d-Berg - Jérôme Bartoens s.v., Heist-o/-d-Berg - Bellou, Izegem - W. Cozy p.a.s.a., Zottegem - Cocoon Madras, Renaix - Oliver Declercq p.a.s.a., Zottegem - Casteert p.a.s.a., Zottegem - Bussels-De Smith s.v., -De Parc-, Aalst - Betty Perne p.a.s.a., Borsbeks.
 POUR LES CHAUSSURES ET LES SARCS: - Eurovna, Diest - Karin, Bruxelles. POUR LES TISSUS: - UCO s.a., Gand.
 POUR LES PATRONS: - Instituut Sancta Maria, 2e P.H.D.R.T., Dourne, sous la direction de Mme De Cock - Instituut van de Ursulines, 1e A.S.B., Mechelen, sous la direction de Mme De Rooster.



ANN DEMEULEMEESTER-VERHELST

FABRIKANTEN: - Bartoens s.a., Heist o/-d-Berg - Steels-Barca s.v., Bornem - De Poorters p.a.s.a., St-Niklaas - Bussels-De Smith p.a.s.a., Aalst (De Parc) - Drogmans-Sephers, Katrijk "Nefertiti" - Driegelinc, Izegem - Chomax, Brussel - Boland en Winder, Brussel - Benoit, Antwerpen - De Weirman, Antwerpen - Brillen "Ann De Meulemeester-Verhelst" - D.H. "New Eye Wear Int.".
 PATRONEN GEMAAKT DOOR: - St-Jozefinstituut, Weftern, o.l.v. Meer, Veuckman, Dever-Schutte, Wichem - R.I.T.O.N., Diest, o.l.v. Meer, Van Noef, De Graef, Verruyse, Van Noef o.l.v. Meer, Kamen - O.L.W. v/b H. Hart, Borgebeut, o.l.v. Meer, Verhille en Neyder.
 POUR LA CONFECTION: - Bartoens s.a., Bruxelles (manteaux, vestes, tailleurs) - Steels-Barca s.v., Bornem (robes, blouses, jupes, pantalons) - De Poorters p.a.s.a., St-Niklaas (tricot) - Bussels-De Smith p.a.s.a., Aalst (De Parc) (collets) - Drogmans-Sephers, Katrijk - Nefertiti - (broderies).
 ACCESSOIRES: - Driegelinc, Izegem (chaussures, bottes) - Chomax, Bruxelles (sac à main) - Boland et Winder, Bruxelles (sac à main) - Benoit, Anvers (lunettes) - De Weirman, Anvers (chapeaux) - New Eye Wear Int. - (lunettes) - Lunettes - Ann De Meulemeester-Verhelst.
 PATRONS REALISES PAR: - St-Jozefinstituut, Weftern, sous la direction de Mmes Veuckman, Dever-Schutte, Wichem - R.I.T.O.N., Diest, sous la direction de Mmes Van Noef, De Graef, Verruyse, Van Noef et Kamen - O.L.W. v/b H. Hart, Borgebeut, sous la direction de Mmes Verhille et Neyder.



DRIES VAN NOTEN

FABRIKANTEN: - Dikaya p.a.s.a., Brussel - Nevelli-Robin s.a., Brussel - Jacques Lafoux s.v., Brussel - Velino s.v., Binche - Charline s.v., Gent - Go-De, Vervoyse s.v., Zvevegem - "De Parc", Bussels-De Smith s.v., Aalst - Neves, Brussel - Declercq-Oliver s.v., Arbois - "Nefertiti", Drogmans-Sephers, Katrijk - Monarca, Lier - Debruyne "Bene", Aalst (pantalons) - UCO s.v., Ledeberg - UTO s.v., Oudenarde - Concordia s.v., Wargem - IWS - Gevaert s.v., Deinze - Liebaert s.v., Deinze - Sapla, Zala - Denderland, Gijzenzele. PATRONEN GEMAAKT DOOR: - Instituut Onze Lieve Vrouw, Gent o.l.v. Meer, Boyle, Meer, Smeekens, Meer, Desutter, Meer, O'Hoovers, Klee 2e A.S.B. - Institut de la confection, Binche o.l.v. Mlle Gdonski, Meer Proux et Mlle Rigo.
 CETTE COLLECTION A ETE REALISEE AVEC LA COLLABORATION DE: - Dikaya p.a.s.a., Bruxelles - Nevelli-Robin s.a., Bruxelles - Jacques Lafoux s.v., Bruxelles - Velino s.v., Binche - Charline s.v., Gand - Vervoyse s.v., Go-De, Zvevegem - Bussels-De Smith s.v., "De Parc", Aalst - Neves, Bruxelles - Declercq-Oliver s.v., Arbois - Drogmans-Sephers, Katrijk "Nefertiti" - Monarca, Lier - Debruyne "Bene", Aalst (pantalons) - UCO s.v., Ledeberg - UTO s.v., Oudenarde - Concordia s.v., Wargem - IWS - Gevaert s.v., Deinze - Liebaert s.v., Deinze - Sapla, Zala - Denderland, Gijzenzele.
 LES PATRONS: - Institut O.L. Vrouw, Gand sous la direction de Mmes Boyle, Smeekens, Desutter et O'Hoovers, Chasse Zime A.S.B. - Institut de la confection, Binche sous la direction de Mlle Gdonski, Proux et Rigo.



BEFORE THEY WERE SIX, THEY WERE SIX

Tim Blanks

The origin story of the Antwerp Six is the greatest road trip in fashion history. In 1986, five plucky graduates of the fashion department of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts – the sixth was too pregnant to travel – rented a van, filled it with their clothes and took a ferry across the Channel to the British Designer Show in search of fame and fortune. The world fell at their feet. Fabulous. Except, like most origin stories, that road trip is a fairy story, buffed to a glorious sheen by posterity.

There is, however, a fairy godfather, a man named Geert Bruloot, who together with his partner Eddy Michiels owned a designer shoe shop in Antwerp called Coccodrillo, among other fashion-adjacent activities. In 1985, he was hired to organise the staging of the third Golden Spindle, a competition established in 1982 as part of a government initiative to promote the use of Belgian textiles and to introduce young designers to the manufacturers of those textiles. The winner of the 1985 Golden Spindle was an Academy graduate named Dirk Bikkembergs. Bruloot was impressed by his shoes. He approached Bikkembergs about ordering them for his shop only to learn that they were made by a company that supplied footwear for the police force and for “ceremonial dancing”, and although they wanted to produce Bikkembergs’s shoes, they had no infrastructure to distribute them. So Bruloot took on the challenge of amassing enough orders to make production worth the company’s while. It was a quixotic scheme. He travelled the length and breadth of Belgium and the Netherlands, but he couldn’t find enough customers for Dirk’s clunky, chunky footwear.

Bruloot, born and raised in Ostend, a mere ferry ride away from the UK, had made many trips in his youth to grab glam gear from London’s Carnaby Street or the King’s Road. Now, with names such as Patrick Cox, John Galliano, Katharine Hamnett, BodyMap and Vivienne Westwood in the ascendant, he felt certain there would be a more receptive audience for Bikkembergs’s shoes in London. Bruloot sounded out Academy graduate Walter Van Beirendonck about joining them with his shoe collection, but Van Beirendonck insisted he wanted to show clothes as well. Bruloot was already working with another Academy graduate, Dries Van Noten, on launching his brand. When he heard about the plan, Van Noten wondered why he wasn’t invited. And that led, inevitably, to three other designers – Dirk Van Saene, Marina Yee and Ann Demeulemeester – who had been part of the same graduating class of ‘81.

Ann begged off because of her pregnancy, but Bruloot felt her participation was important, so she sent her sunglasses project, beautifully presented by her partner Patrick Robyn. The plan was that Bruloot and Luc Willame (Bikkembergs's boyfriend, and the only available person with a van driver's licence) would catch the night boat from Ostend, while the others would make their own way via a budget flight from Antwerp's bijou airport. But somehow the key for the van doors ended up being dropped down a storm drain outside Van Beirendonck's workshop/home, so Bikkembergs's enduring memory of that day is of a disconsolate group standing round a sewer grating wondering how they'd unlock their clothes. Thank heavens for local locksmiths.

When Bruloot and the van reached London, he threw himself on the mercy of Annette Worsley-Taylor, arbiter of the British Designer Show, then shown at the Olympia Exhibition Centre in Kensington. The formidable Worsley-Taylor was unsurprisingly resistant. If Belgian fashion meant anything internationally at that point, it was most likely concealed under geographically non-specific brand names such as Olivier Strelli and Scapa of Scotland. Several seasons later, when she eventually made it to London, Demeulemeester was still encountering buyers who asked, "Belgium, where is Belgium?"

Still, Bruloot managed to wear down Worsley-Taylor and the Belgians were granted some leftover space on Olympia's second floor, adjacent to the bridal section. But, marooned behind copies of Lady Di's wedding dress, they needed to let the world know where they were *fast*. So, they papered the building with flyers. By the second day, intrigued buyers were seeking them out. Fortune had smiled. Imagine if the designers were scattered all over Olympia, rather than grouped together in one row. "I remember it very well," says Bikkembergs. "We each had a very small space, but all of us wanted to present to perfection. We were so proud, so obsessed that we wanted even nine square metres to be the best in the world. So, when people came looking for us, they went from one little booth to another, and they were like, 'Oh, my God, oh my God, another one, *and another one*'. It became strong because it was a never-ending story. And we didn't do it for somebody else, we did it for *ourselves*."

Barneys of New York arrived mid-afternoon on the second day. Dries Van Noten was struck dumb and excused himself when Barneys' Bonnie Pressman and her lieutenant Richard Lambertson introduced themselves, leaving his soon-to-be-business partner Christine Mathys to do all the talking. Pulling himself together, he returned after ten minutes in time for his first order to be written. Next was Lucille Lewin from Whistles, and then Pauw from Amsterdam, three prestigious stores in a row ordering enough that Van Noten's nascent business was able to make his manufacturer's minimum quantities. Bikkembergs's first buyer was also Barneys. By the end of the event, he'd had another 22 orders from all over the world. "There was Maxfield from Los Angeles, Alan Bilzerian from Boston, Charivari... these names, they all sound like history today. They were all there out of the blue." But it's the visitation from star-maker Barneys that has been writ deepest into the legend of the Six.

"We all had different clients, even from the beginning," Walter Van Beirendonck counters. "It wasn't that Barneys came in the beginning and bought us all. I *never* sold at Barneys." In fact, on that first trip to London, Dirk Van Saene didn't sell *anything*. He functions as a kind of Greek chorus for the Six, a droll commentator from the sidelines. "I *did* sell to Barneys once, but I then did a bad delivery, so never again," he concedes. "But the whole story is a bit exaggerated in my eyes. That's also because I never really was successful, of course, so

THREE

SIX



2006



2004



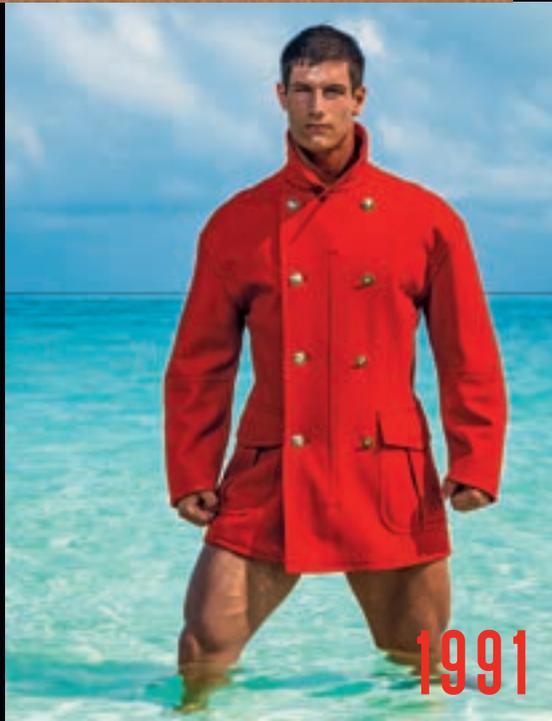
2008



2007



2002



1991



1999

DIRK BIKKEMBERGS

Dirk Bikkembergs has always been fascinated by the transformative power of clothing, with the athletic male body at the centre of his vision of fashion. Everyday things can spark his visual imagination at lightning speed: he is crystal clear about what he wants to achieve, executing his ideas with decisiveness and ambition.

After winning the third Golden Spindle competition in 1985, he launched his label, Dirk Bikkembergs, with a men's shoe collection. These sturdy leather shoes were very different from the elegant Italian men's shoes that were fashionable at the time; they quickly became all the rage with a younger audience. In search of a bigger market, Geert Bruloot convinced Bikkembergs to take part in the 1986 British Designer Show in London, along with the five other young Belgian designers. He presented his first complete men's collection (Autumn/Winter 1988–89) in early 1988, followed in September by his first runway show in Paris (Spring/Summer 1989). In 1991, he established his own production company in Italy, giving him total control over the creative and production process. In 1993, he presented his first women's collection (Autumn/Winter 1993–94), an extension of his men's collection. It included his iconic unisex boots with laces that looped through the heel.

In the early 1980s, the work of American fashion photographer Bruce Weber inspired his vision: Bikkembergs sensed parallel ideals that would influence his entire career. Through the lens of Luc Willame, Bikkembergs developed his own interpretation, bringing it to life with imaginative storylines. The male archetypes on the pages of his stylised catalogues experienced adventures in barracks, on chicken farms and on athletics tracks. Gradually, the themes became more abstract, but the ingredients typical of his collections remained the same. The focus was always on wearability and comfort, with rugged, robust materials paired with technical stretch fabrics and knitwear. Bikkembergs's obsession with architectural precision is apparent in the construction of the clothes, in a combination of primary and classic colours.

By the end of the 1990s, Bikkembergs no longer identified with the seasonal trends and statements of the fashion system. He realised that tracksuits and trainers were increasingly popular, intuitively sensing that they would define the next generation's dress code. He was consumed by a new mission: to invent a clothing language that would transfer the dynamics and symbolism of sport to fashion. Not sportswear for working up a sweat, but fashion that embodied the benefits of sport – freedom of movement, dopamine and sex appeal. He realised that football, and its idolised players, were a conduit to a young and broader audience. In June 2001, he invited the international fashion community to a runway show at Milan's San Siro football stadium. He created luxurious off-the-field clothing that made sports people feel comfortable, and in 2003 became the first fashion designer to officially dress a Serie A football team (Inter Milan). His blazers and trousers in a blend of jersey, cashmere and elastane were a tremendous success because they were just as comfortable to wear as a jogging outfit; they would go on to become a fixture in the product lines of various fashion segments. In 2005, the term 'Sport Couture' was added to the Dirk Bikkembergs label, which by then had expanded to include the Bikkembergs Sport line. Soon, the stylised footballer logo ('pupino') conquered the European streetscape, and Bikkembergs sold millions of leather trainers.

The opening of his flagship store in Milan in 2009 was the culmination of his all-encompassing vision. The store concept – an athlete's luxurious home, complete with gym and sports car to reflect his status – was designed by Bikkembergs. In 2011, at the height of his success, he sold his company.

R.C.

Walter Van Beirendonck

Walter Van Beirendonck is widely seen as one of the most distinctive voices in Belgian and international fashion, with an oeuvre that is consistently radical, playful and socially engaged. For Van Beirendonck, fashion is a form of visual communication, with which he has been testing the boundaries of what is possible for more than 40 years. He transcends seasonal trends with the messages and stories he tells in his collections. In the 1980s and '90s, he included themes such as sexuality, queer identity, AIDS, ecology, war and racism in his designs, at a time when the fashion world was largely hesitant to address such topics. He uses beauty and creativity as positive energy, a shield against fear.

Despite his bold aesthetic, throughout his career Van Beirendonck has combined work for his own brand with more commercial projects as well as artistic commissions for museums and the theatre. He was a stylist for Belgian fashion magazine *Flair* until 1983; from 1984, he spent many years designing for Belgian rainwear manufacturer Bartsons. Later, he worked for brands such as Scapa Sports, JBC (children's collections), Eastpak and G-Star, and also on interior design for IKEA. In 1985, he began teaching in the fashion department of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp. As an educator and mentor, he encouraged critical thinking and personal expression in successive generations of students, first as a lecturer and then, from 2007 to 2022, as head of the department.

Van Beirendonck designed the W.&L.T. (Wild and Lethal Trash) line for German denim giant Mustang from 1993 to 1999. He created a colourful aesthetic in which he combined his fascination for technology, multimedia and high-tech materials with bold, socially engaged slogans. His W.&L.T. runway shows were amazing spectacles, with a cast that challenged prevailing beauty standards. In 1997, Irish rock band U2 asked Van Beirendonck to design the stage costumes for their *PopMart* world tour; he transformed the band members into larger-than-life comic-book versions of themselves. Between 1998 and 2012, he ran the innovative concept store Walter Store and Walter Gallery in Antwerp, alongside his life partner, Dirk Van Saene.

When his collaboration with Mustang ended in 1999, Van Beirendonck continued to radically reinvent men's fashion and contemporary dressmaking under his own name, with collections he still shows each season at Paris Fashion Week. He focuses on precision tailoring and high-quality fabrics, often from English and Scottish weaving mills, blending traditional know-how with innovative methods and technologies – from 3D printing to AI – to create new and exciting shapes. His design methodology has remained the same for more than four decades. He kicks off the design process using collages, in which he juxtaposes specific elements that touch and inspire him, using cut-out words and visuals. Each collection starts from detailed drawings in which he seeks to capture the ambience of the final runway show.

His collections and presentations are developed in close collaboration with creative minds who understand and help to translate his artistic universe, including milliner Stephen Jones, graphic designer Paul Boudens, photographer Ronald Stoops and make-up artist Inge Grogard. The use of slogans and words and his graphic experiments with language, both in the titles of his collections and in his prints, are all part of his signature style. Often, the slogans are fragments of song lyrics, which he combines with words taken from other contexts. Like a *cadavre exquis*, he cuts and pastes these words into new, surrealistic collages.

K.D.





Walter Van Beirendonck, *Wink with Starry Eyes*, S/S 2026,
photos: Anna-Maria Kryvtsova (p. 310), Alex Conu (p. 311)



Dirk Van Saene, A/W 1990-91
p. 323: Dirk Van Saene,
A/W 2003-04

DIRK VAN SAENE

For Dirk Van Saene, fashion is a playful means of expression. It all started with his mother's laundry basket, which he transformed into a crinoline as a child, and an aunt who took his clothing advice seriously. Soon after graduating from the Antwerp Academy's fashion department in 1981, he opened his own shop in the city, Beauties & Heroes. There he sold unique, self-made pieces and later also the collection with which he won the second Golden Spindle competition in 1983. From 1986, he and the other members of the Antwerp Six showed their collections at the British Designer Show in London.

In March 1990, Van Saene financed his first runway show (Autumn/Winter 1990–91) in Paris. Each fashion journalist received their own personalised invitation: a ripped-off cover of their own magazine or newspaper, with information about the show. The starting point for the collection was a painted trompe-l'oeil catsuit, as made famous by 1960s supermodel Veruschka. Each silhouette featured a catsuit (in latex, knitwear or jersey), over which different layers were superimposed: for example, blazers with a bondage harness made of elastic, or latex tunics with quilted, trailing skirts. Italian fashion writer and fashion icon Anna Piaggi was in the audience and loved the collection.

The following season, Van Saene combined fragile tulle garments with hand-painted vintage men's blazers, shirts made from tea towels, and suits made from old-fashioned medical bandages. His runway show for Autumn/Winter 1991–92 was held at a cabaret in Paris, featuring a live performance by torch singer Lola. The show turned into a wild party, with tipsy models dressed in variations on the traditional white man's shirt paired with maxi skirts in heavy, checked woollen fabrics, exuberant feather boas, and chokers made of Christmas garlands.

The collection was not financially successful so Van Saene temporarily put his brand on hold, only to relaunch it in 1994, after several years of commercial work. He pushed the boundaries of conventional tailoring with his Fake Tailoring collection (Autumn/Winter 1998–99), which he presented on a automated catwalk. By integrating lapels, collars, pockets and other details into the clothing, the garments became two-dimensional. The collection exuded subtle luxury, in part through the use of high-quality fabrics and leather. During his Transformations show (Spring/Summer 1998), the audience got an idea of what goes on backstage: make-up artists (Inge Grognaard and team) and hairdressers, together with the DJ, could be found among the spectators, getting the models ready for the show, with outfits changed on the spot.

Van Saene's oeuvre pairs a quirky *tabula rasa* approach (which has sometimes confused his clients) with a love of cut and craftsmanship and a search for new proportions. Surrealist trompe-l'oeil elements, humour and ironic nods to the stylistic features of French haute couture are recurring features of his collections. His affinity for art is apparent in his sources of inspiration, including the abstract imagery of Ellsworth Kelly, the poetic work of Louise Bourgeois, the surrealism of Meret Oppenheim and Claude Cahun, and African art.

From 1998 until 2012, Van Saene and his life partner, Walter Van Beirendonck, ran the pioneering Walter Store in Antwerp. In 2013, he opened his shop DVS, where he sold other Belgian collections alongside his own for several years. For more than a decade, he also taught master's students in the Antwerp Academy's fashion department. Van Saene's fashion career came to a close in 2020 with a successful collection, purchased by (among others) his favourite shop, Comme des Garçons in Tokyo. Since then, he has devoted himself entirely to his new passion: making ceramic sculptures, with solo exhibitions at the renowned Antwerp gallery of Sofie Van de Velde.

R.C.





DRIES VAN NOTEN

Although Antwerp is his home base, Dries Van Noten's gaze is always directed elsewhere. By exploring the world within and through his imagination, he is able to approach and reformulate familiar elements from new perspectives. He surprises his audience by tapping into emotions and bringing about a gentle transformation.

Van Noten concluded his first men's runway show in Paris (Spring/Summer 1992) with several silhouettes for women. Although he staged separate women's runway shows from 1994 onwards, the dialogue between his men's and women's collections has remained a constant in his career. This reciprocal influence is typical of his oeuvre, contributing to a rare continuity: Van Noten avoids abrupt style shifts or declamatory manifestos, opting instead for a gradual evolution that makes his work increasingly powerful. He is inspired by fleeting impressions and personal imagination: a photographic detail; a painting that has caught his eye; a perceived atmosphere. These elements do not form a single narrative, but rather an intricate web of storylines that form the starting point for each collection. The scenography of his shows enhances this story, creating a poetic universe for his imaginary journeys.

Van Noten's design process always starts with materials and prints. Fabrics, colours and motifs are meticulously created and combined. He seeks to create a sense of balanced tension, pairing diverse elements such as opulent prints and menswear tailoring fabrics with unique colour combinations and distinctive embroidery. It is only then that his flowing silhouettes begin to take shape. The fusion of matter and proportion results in a rich, tactile and visual universe, in which sources of inspiration from various worlds engage with one another. References to old masterpieces or pop culture enrich the layered stories he tells. Rather than static objects, his designs are lively images – *tableaux vivants* – that communicate and invite people to discover them. As such, Dries Van Noten showcases his fashion as well as the inner landscape in which it originated.

ANN DEMEULEMEESTER

For Ann Demeulemeester, fashion has always been a complex language that requires an introspective approach. Her designs are meant for people who understand their essence – like Patrick Robyn, her creative partner in life and work. The photos he took of her creations during the 1980s helped define the consistent signature style of the fashion house they founded in 1985, which expanded over time. Demeulemeester's first womenswear show (Spring/Summer 1992) in Paris was a tremendous success.¹ The international fashion press followed her work with great interest, christening her "Queen Ann" and "Ann of Antwerp",² after her adopted home base. She chose to live and work in this city, in a house designed by Le Corbusier, because it sharpened her focus.

Although her silhouettes are fluid and relaxed, a lot of thought goes into their structured tailoring. Demeulemeester's analytical process always starts from the material, seeking seemingly simple solutions to complex dilemmas. In doing so, she challenges gravity, looking for ways to control the material's movement. Her sketches and the perfecting of the patterns play a crucial role in her process, after which she tests the fit of the toiles on herself. This dedication to the perfect fit soon earned her a loyal clientele. In 1996, Demeulemeester launched her first menswear collection, which she presented alongside her womenswear for ten years. After 2006, her two collections were shown separately, even though they are always extensions of each other. Her designs are consistently marked by a penchant for asymmetry, with strategically positioned button fastenings, flowing draping, functional ribbons or straps, and layered silhouettes. Pieces include three-piece suits with razor-sharp tailoring, long, bias-cut silk dresses that she pairs with bold upper garments, and narrow trousers under billowing shirts and Edwardian jackets.

Her meticulous attention to tailoring always goes hand in hand with a sensitivity to atmosphere. Demeulemeester's collections are all about contrasts: poetic and precise, rebellious but also romantic. This is also apparent in her use of black and white, as well as the pairing of delicate fabrics with animal materials, such as horsehair and Mongolian lamb fur. In this way, she translates the tension in every human being between strength and vulnerability into her designs. Leather has been a fixture in her collections since 1993. She drapes it into fluid dresses and constructs edgy corsets with it; long leather gloves reveal delicate skin, while heavy leather boots with lasts sculpted by the designer herself give confidence to every step. Feathers are also a common thread throughout her oeuvre, holding personal symbolic meaning.

Despite Demeulemeester's introspective approach, her collections also contain references to music, art and literature. She is intrigued by the energy of specific artistic creations, channelling this feeling in her own creative process. Arthur Rimbaud's symbolism and charisma, the Dada art of Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray, and especially the poetry of Patti Smith and PJ Harvey fuel her imagination. This shared creative language has culminated in several collaborations and friendships.

In 2013, Ann Demeulemeester left her namesake label. Since then, she has conveyed her distinctive aesthetic in a range of porcelain, glassware, lighting and furniture designs. In 2020, the Ann Demeulemeester fashion brand embarked on a new chapter after its acquisition by Italian fashion entrepreneur Claudio Antonioli, a loyal fan and one of her earliest customers.

R.C.

1 A year later, she was ranked second in the biennial list of boutique owners published in *Journal du Textile*, 12 October 1992, 26.

2 *Women's Wear Daily*, March 1995, *W Fashion Feature*, June 1995, *Vogue US*, April 1997, *The New York Times Style Magazine*, autumn 2006, among others.



Portrait of Ann Demeulemeester, 1991, photo: Patrick Robyn



MARINA YEE

Marina Yee was driven by instinct and her senses since childhood. Gradually, she came to see herself as an artist who makes clothes. Despite her singular talent for drawing, she preferred to create directly on a tailor's dummy, letting her fingers guide her. She often started from existing garments: the feel of the fabric and the piece's volume determined what she wanted to make; then, she figuratively and literally pinned down the idea as it emerged. While this intuitive process came naturally in the last years of her life, it was the culmination of a decades-long quest.

From 1983, she spent several years working as a designer for Belgian manufacturer Bassetti, first in collaboration with Dirk Bikkembergs and later on her own. The duo also worked for Belgian leather goods manufacturer Gruno & Chardin. In 1986, Yee launched a fashion label, Marie, with her business partner Miyoshi Hobo. She showed the collections at the British Designer Show in London for several seasons. After Maison Martin Margiela's first show in October 1988, Yee moved to Paris with Margiela. She returned to Belgium in 1990 and stepped away from the fashion world: she designed costumes for the theatre and also opened a coffee shop in Brussels, the interior of which provided another creative outlet.

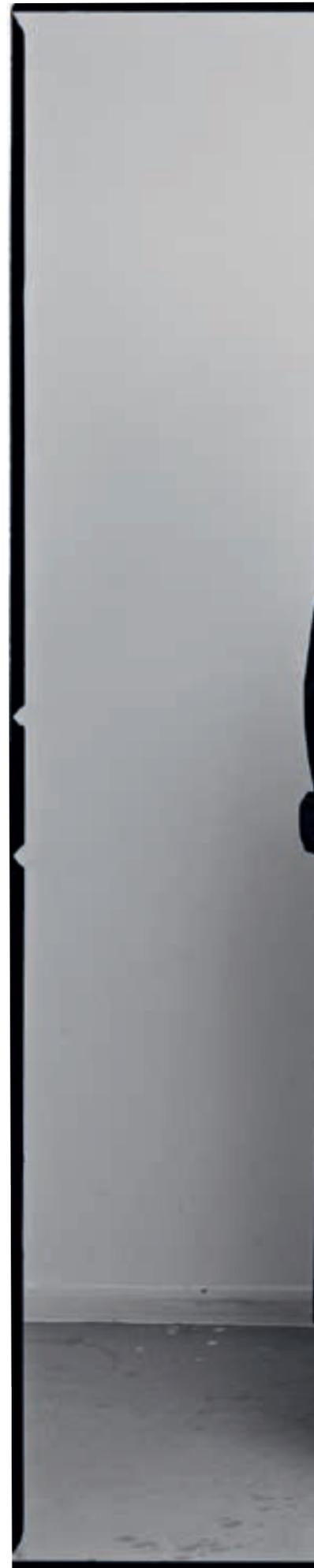
From 1999, Yee designed several collections for Lena Lena, a Belgian plus-size clothing brand. She created lengthening, layered silhouettes with narrow shoulders and a V-shaped neckline, in colours such as white, off-white and indigo. The collections exuded femininity and seduction in a bohemian style, balanced by simplicity and a rough edge. She also designed Bikkembergs's women's line for several seasons, but by then their views on fashion had become too divergent. Ever the free spirit, Yee grappled with fashion's commercial interests and tight deadlines.

She once again distanced herself from fashion, choosing instead to delve deeper into various topics that broadened her creative awareness. She explored various artistic disciplines, creating paintings, collages, objects and interior and graphic designs. Textiles continued to play an important role in her creative expression, fuelled by the urge to rescue discarded and damaged things by creating something beautiful with them.

In 2005, she started to teach, first at the fashion department of the Institut Saint-Luc in Tournai, then at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Ghent and the Royal Academy of Arts in The Hague. Here too she remained resolutely nonconformist, using a playful teaching method to get her students to step outside their comfort zone. In 2017, she tentatively returned to the fashion world, with a capsule collection for the Asian market. In 2021, she established her own fashion label, M.Y. Collection, together with her right-hand man, Rafael Adriaensens. In the years that followed, she was able to sustainably develop the label into an internationally distributed and respected brand, always working on her own terms. The label's focus is on upcycling existing garments into unique creations with extensive hand-made elements, paired with new pieces in the same vein. Yee had a penchant for conceptual details that manifest themselves in the finish of a collar, lapel or cuff. Her creative process was all about reduction, which she described as "simmering something until you have a good base for a sauce"! Her death on 1 November 2025 brought her unique creative career to an abrupt end.

R.C.

Group portrait of the Antwerp Six at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Antwerp to mark the 50th anniversary of the fashion department and the 350th anniversary of the Academy, 2013. As the first alumni to break through internationally and contribute to the school's global reputation for excellence, the Six were honoured during the anniversary edition of the Academy show and asked to be part of the panel of industry judges. Photo: Marleen Daniëls





Dirk Bikkembergs

1959 Born in Flamersheim, Germany

1977–80 Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Antwerp

1980–81 Military service

1981–82 Fourth year at the Antwerp Academy, graduated with highest honours

1983–85 Designs for Gruno & Chardin, Gaffa, Yann, Nero, Bassetti

1985 • Wins third Golden Spindle Award: 'Prize of the National and International Jury' and 'Prize of the Representatives of the Belgian Fashion Press'
• Launches his own label, Dirk Bikkembergs, with first men's shoes collection

1986 • March: British Designer Show, London, A/W 1986–87
• September: Pitti Trend, Florence, S/S 1987
• October: British Designer Show, London, S/S 1987

1987 • March: British Designer Show, London, A/W 1987–88, first knitwear collection
• July: Pitti Uomo, Florence, S/S 1988, first shirt collection
• October: British Designer Show, London, S/S 1988, first shirt collection

1988 • First complete men's collection (in collaboration with Gibo, Creazioni di Matelica and Sicons), A/W 1988–89
• January: showroom, Milan
• February: showroom, Galerie Nikki Diana Marquardt, Paris
• March: Westway Studios, London, A/W 1988–89
• September: first men's show, Paris, S/S 1989

1991 Establishes own production company in Italy

1993

First women's collection
Dirk Bikkembergs Hommes presents Dirk Bikkembergs Femmes, A/W 1993–94, show combined with men's collection, separate showroom, Paris

1996

Launches a second line called Bikkembergs by Dirk Bikkembergs White Label, A/W 1997–98

1998

• Opens Dirk Bikkembergs store in Tokyo, Japan
• First show in Milan, A/W 1998–99

1999

Opens Bikkembergs White Label stores in Japan
Show at Stadio San Siro, Milan, A/W 2001–02

2001

2003

• Official designer for the Inter Milan football team
• Last women's show in Paris, S/S 2004

2004

• Wins Oscar della Moda: 'International Designer of the Year', Rome
• First women's show in Milan, A/W 2004–05

2005

• First line Dirk Bikkembergs is renamed Dirk Bikkembergs Sport Couture, A/W 2005–06
• June: only show for Bikkembergs White Label to mark its 20th season and 10th anniversary, Milan, S/S 2006
• July: buys Italian amateur football team FC Fossombrone
• September: fashion event at Camp Nou stadium, Barcelona
• September: last women's show and last women's collection, Milan, S/S 2006

2006

Presents BIX, his first collection of football shoes

2007

• Each collection features three lines: Dirk Bikkembergs Sport Couture (first line), Bikkembergs by

Dirk Bikkembergs White Label (second line) and Bikkembergs Sport
• June: presents Underwear collection, Florence, A/W 2007–08

2008

Presents Tirosegno, his second collection of football shoes

2009

Opens flagship store at Manzoni 47, Milan

2010

June: men's show in Cape Town during the FIFA World Cup; this show was projected on the Piazza del Duomo, Milan, S/S 2011

2011

• Designs last collection, S/S 2012

• Publication of *Dirk Bikkembergs: 10 Years of Fashion and Football* (2001–2011) (Lido)

• Company sold to Zeis Excelsa
Publication of *Dirk Bikkembergs: 25 Years of Athletes and Fashion* (Rizzoli)

2013

Ann Demeulemeester

1959

Born in Kortrijk, raised in Waregem

1974–77

Studies art in Bruges

1977–81

Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Antwerp

1981–86

Bartsons, Belgian raincoat brand

1982

Wins first Golden Spindle Award

1985

Starts Ann Demeulemeester label with Patrick Robyn

1986

• March: British Designer Show, London, presents sunglasses

• May: Birth of her son Victor Robyn

• September: Pitti Trend, Florence, S/S 1987

- 1987** • March: British Designer Show, London, A/W 1987–88
• October: British Designer Show, London, S/S 1988
- 1988** • March: Westway Studios, London, A/W 1988–89
• October: Atmosphère d'été salon, Saint James & Albany Hotel, Paris, S/S 1989
- 1989–90** Presents her collections at the Atmosphère d'été et d'hiver salons, Saint James & Albany Hotel, Paris
- 1990** Michèle Montagne becomes her press agent
- 1991** • March: Galerie Nikki Diana Marquardt, Paris, A/W 1991–92, showroom
• October: Galerie Nikki Diana Marquardt, S/S 1992, first show in Paris; from then on, two shows in Paris each year
- 1992** 'White Shirt (for Mallarmé)', in collaboration with Rodney Graham
- 1993** 'Antwerp 93' Cultural Capital of Europe – 'Eyes' in collaboration with Patrick Robyn
- 1996** • First men's collection, S/S 1996 (shown with the women's collection), Paris. From then on, four collections per year
• Designs 'Table Blanche' for Bulo, Belgian office furniture manufacturer
• Wins first Flemish Culture Prize for Design
• July: Biennale di Firenze, Florence, 'Ring' – exhibition New Persona/New Universe (Germano Celant)
- 1999** • Opens Ann Demeulemeester flagship store in Antwerp
• 'Poem of Chalk', 'Raven 1', 'Ravens', 'Hearts', collaboration with Jim Dine
• 'Woolgathering', collaboration with Patti Smith
- Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp, 'Bench for the city of Antwerp', in collaboration with Patrick Robyn
Made honorary citizen of Waregem
- 2000** St Andries Church, Antwerp, dresses the 16th-century Madonna
- 2001** First separate men's show in Paris (S/S 2006); from then on, four shows in Paris each year
- 2005** • Opens Ann Demeulemeester stores in Tokyo and Hong Kong
- 2006** • '17 x Ann de hier pour Hyères' at Hyères Festival, guest of honour
- 2007** Opens Ann Demeulemeester store in Seoul
- 2011** Dresses PJ Harvey for the *Let England Shake* tour
- 2013** Leaves the company she founded in 1985
- 2014** Publication of *Ann Demeulemeester* book (Rizzoli/Lannoo)
- 2016** • Université Libre de Bruxelles, honorary doctorate
• Dresses PJ Harvey for the *The Hope Six Demolition Project* tour
- 2019** Tableware & lighting collection, in collaboration with Serax
- 2020** 'New Beginnings', with Claudio Antonioli who acquires the Ann Demeulemeester fashion brand
- 2021** Henry van de Velde Lifetime Achievement Gold Award
- 2022** • Furniture collection with Patrick Robyn, in collaboration with Serax
- 2023** • Pitti Immagine Uomo 102, Florence, exhibition and guest of honour
- 2026** Ann Demeulemeester 'A' Perfume
Made a baroness by King Philippe of Belgium
- Walter Van Beirendonck**
- 1957** Born in Sint-Antonius-Brecht
- 1976–80** Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Antwerp
- 1980–83** Stylist for *Flair* magazine
- 1980–83** OKÉ, sportswear line
- 1982** Vestirama trend show, Brussels, Sado, S/S 1983
- 1984–90** Designs for Bartsons, Belgian rainwear brand
- 1984** Designs uniforms for the hostesses of the Belgian pavilion at the World Expo, Tsukuba
- 1985–2007** Lecturer in the fashion department, Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Antwerp
- 1986** • March: British Designer Show, London, Bad Baby Boys, A/W 1986–87, first full menswear collection
• September: Pitti Trend, Florence, Let's Tell a Fairy Tale, S/S 1987
• October: British Designer Show, London, Let's Tell a Fairy Tale, S/S 1987
- 1987** • March: British Designer Show, London, Dare Devil Daddy, A/W 1987–88
• October: British Designer Show, London, Un autre monde, S/S 1988
- 1988** • March: Westway Studios, London, Shoot the Sun, Shoot the Moon, Be a Star, A/W 1988–89
• October: Atmosphère d'été salon, Saint James & Albany Hotel, Paris, S/S 1989
- 1989** • *King Kong Kooks* comic book
• Twice-yearly presentations of his collections in Paris (showroom or runway show)
- 1991** Rhinosauros Rex, sportswear line for Gianfranco Ferré

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