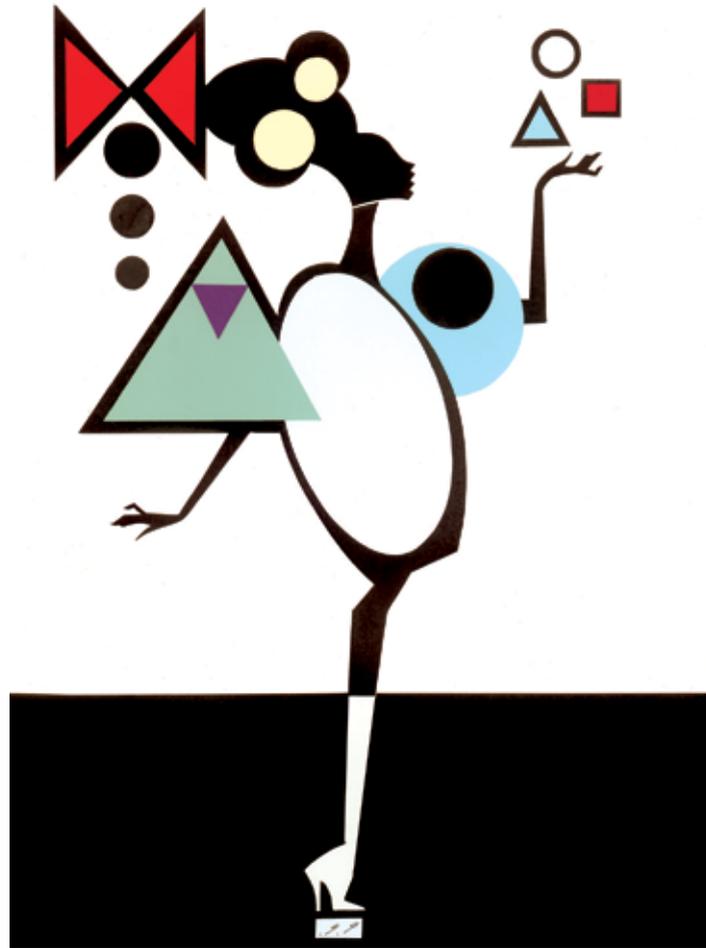


MODEKERN:

A Piet Mondrian illustration for De Bijenkorf



HOUSING FASHION'S HERITAGE

The archives of contemporary Dutch fashion designers Alexander van Slobbe, Spijkers en Spijkers and Piet Paris have been housed at the Gelders Archief in Arnhem and opened to the public. Modekern Arnhem, a coalition that furthers the collection and accessibility of fashion documents, supervised their placement.

by Georgette Koning

There are links with heritage foundations for industrial design, graphic design and typography, architecture, crafts, product design and fashion. The fashion heritage institute Modekern Arnhem will supervise the storage of current fashion designers' archives at the Gelders Archief.

The archives of Spijkers en Spijkers, Piet Paris and Alexander van Slobbe are the first to be stored there and are now open to the public. The archives provide a valuable pool of information for students, researchers and fashion history aficionados. This initiative is aimed at furthering the collection, accessibility, study and exhibition of fashion documents. The designers' sketches, materials, techniques, look books and invitations will be exhibited physically and online. They will serve as a valuable pool of information for students, researchers and fashion aficionados.

Modekern Arnhem is the brainchild of ArteZ Institute of the Arts fashion lecturer and Premsela Governing Board member José Teunissen. A partnership of Premsela, ArteZ, the Museum voor Moderne Kunst Arnhem and the Gelders Archief, it avails itself of existing infrastructure and builds on each organisation's strength and expertise.

Expertise

Previously, archival material was only available directly from designers themselves, Teunissen says. "Under the management of Modekern Arnhem, a majority of the archives can be accumulated and made available to the public. This provides the possibility of more insight into fundamental connections, which in turn can support the forming of analyses and theories in the field of fashion."

Premsela strives to unlock and chart the Netherlands' rich design and fashion heritage. To that end, it also set up the Nationaal Design Archief (National Design Archive), which liaises with heritage foundations for industrial design, graphic design and typography, architecture, crafts, product design and fashion.



Piet Paris

“Why my archives?” That was the first thought that came to Piet Paris’s mind when he received a phone call in late 2010, asking him for a quick scan of his archives. The gentleman who stopped by to appraise his collection was quite positive and bestowed compliments on the designer.

Pieter ‘t Hoen – as he was then called – graduated in fashion design from the Fashion Institute Arnhem in 1988. In his last year there, however, he realised that he was much more a stylist at heart – a creator of images. Although he felt as if he hadn’t quite mastered the art of drawing, he packed his portfolio of sketches after graduation and hitchhiked to Italy. Once in Milan, he bluffed his way into *Vanity*, the top magazine for fashion illustrators at that time.

Today, Piet Paris is at the top of his game. He does editorial sketches for fashion magazines, such as the Dutch and Japanese editions of *Vogue*, and draws for advertising campaigns for department stores including Holland’s De Bijenkorf and America’s Saks Fifth Avenue. He’s also been designing kitchen and tableware accessories for his own brand since 2010.

From slides to scans

Piet Paris’s archive goes back to his student years. He immortalised his early creations on slides. He started scanning his original work about seven years ago. “Around 2005, people would raise their eyebrows if you sent a nondigital version of your work to a magazine,” Paris notes.

He has his own archiving method: his sketches are divided among five A3 boxes, each labelled with a number. The work is filed according to artistic quality. Thus, box 1 contains his best work. The untrained eye would not be able to see much difference in quality between the creations in boxes 1 through 4. Box 5 contains his weaker compositions, many created during the early years of his career. Paris has used this archiving method for the past eight years. “I may come across as chaotic, but I am actually quite practical,” he says. He likes having his work organised and accessible: “I do use my own archive if I need to quickly check on something.”

He also creates designs not meant for clients, but he says he hasn’t yet found time to create a separate box for this portion of his work. Besides the five boxes of sketches, he has a stack of boxes filled with magazines containing interviews and illustrations, another box of work from his university years, and a last box filled with materials that have inspired him. Paris agrees that he keeps quite a large archive but suspects that his mother is his most loyal archivist.

‘I do use my own archive if I need to quickly check on something’

Archiving is very important for a designer, he says. “It’s a pity if you don’t do it from the very beginning, as some work will surely get lost. It’s unfortunate when an oeuvre is stored in bits and pieces.”

He applauds Modekern’s initiative, though he calls its longterm plan “quite an ambitious enterprise.” And it doesn’t come a minute too soon – some designers’ archives, he points out, have already been lost or scattered, such as those of Fong Leng and Jan Jansen, who has auctioned off many of his shoes. Paris says he’d have liked to see the archives of a number of colleagues – Dick Holthaus, for example, a famous creator of youthful fashion in the 1960s, and the trend forecaster Lidewij Edelkoort. And there are also Arnold van Geuns and Clemens Rameckers, who run the design studio Ravage in France and have created uniforms for companies including the Dutch railways and postal service.

Reflection

Paris says archiving makes him look into the past and reflect upon his long career. He first went through this process when he started compiling a monograph of his work from 1994 until 2011, divided according to technique. “I had to research and classify all kinds of things for my book,” he says. “It was a strange experience. Every box I opened, every sketch I saw would bring back so many memories – who the client was, how the sketch came into being, and how much I got paid.” Looking back, he says, he views his past two decades as a distinctive period in his life.

In October 2010, Paris organised a major sale exhibition, which was hugely successful. He sold 150 drawings, and suddenly there was little work left in box 1. But he says he wasn’t worried: “I’ve managed to fill up box 1 again.” He’s meticulously scanned all the drawings he’s sold and knows exactly who’s bought each one.

Paris says he believes his archive contain interesting information for students, who might be inspired by how he’s drawn certain things. But it also contains practical and explanatory information about such matters as an assignment’s briefing and pricing and how a sketch ultimately gets printed in a magazine. “For most of my original work, I’ve also saved the sketches and how it was applied, the actual printed matter,” he says. “This is very useful to see.”

Modekern also wants to archive Paris’s business’s financial data, and he has agreed. He points out that it’s important to present a complete picture, and items such as the 2008 ad campaign contract he signed with Saks Fifth Avenue should not be left out.

Hard to say goodbye

Paris says he finds it unfortunate that he never made use of archive material while he was a student. If he’d known he was able to look inside a museum depot, he says, he surely would have done so. In his capacity as artistic director of the Arnhem Mode Biennale, he visited the clothing archives of the Centraal Museum Utrecht and Arnhem’s Dutch Open Air Museum, which houses folklore costumes.

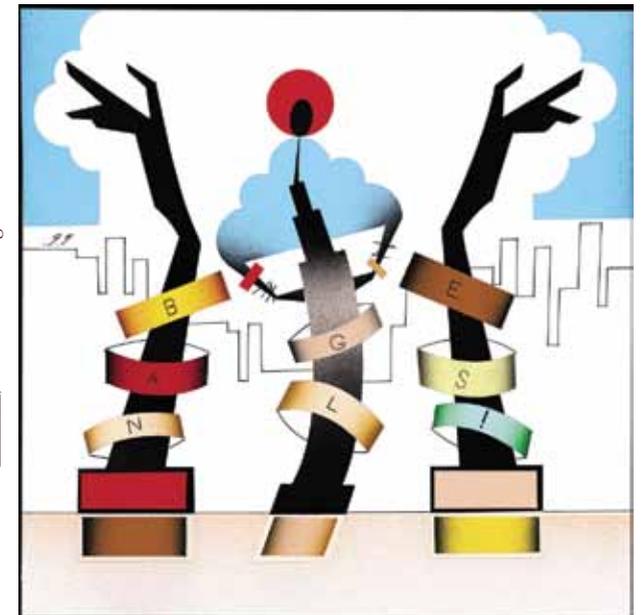


Piet Paris for Elegance Magazine



Piet Paris's book

He says he’d love to delve into the archive of the French illustrator René Gruau (1909–2004), but as far as he knows, none exists. The Hague’s Gemeentemuseum does possess some work by Gruau, who drew for Christian Dior’s ad campaigns. And drawings by another fashion illustrator, Constance Wibaut, are stored in The Hague and Amsterdam. The Amsterdam City Archives classifies Wibaut’s drawings by client; she’s worked for magazines including *Women’s Wear Daily* and, since the 1950s, *Elsevier*.



Piet Paris, Saks Women bangles 2008

Paris says he doesn’t know how his work will ultimately be archived but prefers not to be involved in the process, for the simple reason that it seems like a challenging task. But he knows one thing he’d like to see included: a file of “three million” illustrations he’s torn out of various publications for inspiration. “Those illustrations show how I’ve developed my sense of taste.”

His own archive is fully digitised, but his rule is to keep all the originals. The Modekern archive will only contain items on paper – for example, no drawing materials or pairs of the printed thong pants he designed for Hunkemöller will be included. Otherwise, Paris says he hasn’t yet decided what he’ll hand over to Modekern.

One thing he knows for sure: it won’t be easy for him to part with his work. He says he expects it to be “quite scary” and will have to think long and hard about what he no longer needs. For example, he still has the sketchbooks he used when he was reporting from the Paris and Milan catwalks for the daily paper *De Telegraaf*, and he still leafs through them from time to time. “In the future, they may no longer be on my shelves,” he says. “Sometimes I think it’s still too early to hand them over.” No date has yet been set to pick up Paris’s material, and that’s fine by him.

‘Modekern’s initiative doesn’t come a minute too soon’



Spijkers en Spijkers's AW09/10 collection, The Ballad of Dorothy Parker

Spijkers en Spijkers

The twin sisters Truus and Riet Spijkers didn't need much thinking time when asked whether they were willing to hand over their archives to Modekern Arnhem half a year ago. "We have shown what we're capable of in this past decade. We do things our own way, and we understand why people would like to see our work," Truus Spijkers explains. "We'd be happy if Dutch fashion gets more attention."

The Spijkerses received master's degrees from the Fashion Institute Arnhem in 2000. In that same year, they presented their graduation collection *Girlfriend* to the international fashion press in Paris. Two years later, they set up their label Spijkers en Spijkers. In 2006, with eight collections under their belt, they held their first show in London.

In total, the sisters have created some 30 collections, always in their feminine style and often combined with geometric shapes. In the past two years, they have created four collections annually: two for the lower-priced label *Sis* by Spijkers en Spijkers and another two for their main line.

Deco style

One peak in their 12-year career was the 2011 exhibition *The Mirror Has Two Faces*. It was an ode to strong, independent women with stories to tell, such as Louise Brooks, Eileen Gray and Dorothy Parker – all women who lived in the 1920s and 1930s. "We are quite taken with that time period," says Truus. "We are inspired by art deco style, and this was also the time when modern women started wearing comfortable clothes."

The exhibition at the Museum voor Moderne Kunst Arnhem also gave insight into the duo's working method. One display case was filled with design sketches, fabric swatches and inspiration. As the sisters were preparing the show and its accompanying catalogue, they reflected upon their career and were amazed at how much they had created. Memories came flooding back. "Creating a collection is so much work," Truus Spijkers says. "Looking back at each collection, we were reminded again of what went right and what went wrong, and what others thought about it."

Spijkers en Spijkers AW09/10



Spijkers en Spijkers AW09/10



For example, their fall/winter 2009 collection *The Ballad of Dorothy Parker* received mixed reviews from the press. The Spijkers, on the contrary, believed it was one of the most beautiful collections they'd ever realised, including its campaign photos. Their previous work also brought them new ideas. "We are always inspired by muses," says Truus. "And we thought, 'Wow, we could create other collections based on the same muse, but then in a different way, digging even deeper.'"

The sisters are very happy that their work will be archived and managed properly. This will keep their sketches safe in one place and prevent them from, say, being auctioned off for a pittance. They would have liked it even better, though, if the garments had also been made part of the archives. Not only would this ensure their proper preservation, but the Spijkers say they believe students would like to see the end results in addition to the sketches. The designers have carefully stored the garments in their clothing lines, albeit not at the ideal temperatures. They've also saved the designs in the form of four square metres of cardboard patterns neatly hanging on racks and a box of envelopes filled with basic patterns.

Treasure box

While the Spijkers en Spijkers archive is mainly focused on the company, it also contains material from their study period. One example is a design from 1996, which they entered in a competition at France's Hyères fashion festival. They have a file filled with clippings, which they diligently kept up at the start of their career. However, as fashion magazines started featuring their designs on an almost weekly basis, they stopped archiving these, so the file is far from complete.

The real treasure lies in one big box filled with hundreds of sketches and fabric swatches. Every time a collection is shown, the sketches are stored there. As Spijkers en Spijkers have been working digitally in recent years – although they always put their initial scribbles down on paper – the box has been receiving less new material lately. This, the designers say, is a pity. "Lots of 'rubbish' is no longer stored," says Truus Spijkers, "such as design sketches with annotations about details or fabrics. The advantage of working digitally is that colouring in the designs can be done very fast, and the result looks neat and polished."

Also easy on the eyes are the Spijkerses' ad campaigns, shot by top photographers such as Viviane Sassen. "When we started out in 2002, we weren't doing any shows yet," Truus Spijkers says. "We thought: Let's sell first before we start spending money. But from the very beginning, we did shoot some beautiful fashion photos."

Annual figures

Truus and Riet Spijkers have sat down several times with Modekern staffers, who were also interested in business reports, pricing and production logs. While the sisters themselves see this information as less significant, they say, they understand that it might be interesting for some people to see their very first order, which they



Spijkers en Spijkers's AW09/10 collection, The Ballad of Dorothy Parker



Spijkers en Spijkers AW09/10

'We should never economise on archives'

have kept with pride. However, they're not keen on putting their annual figures in the public domain while they're still in business. "That should happen when we no longer exist," Truus Spijkers says.

Browsing the archives

The sisters are proud that their work will be archived. During their studies, they visited the depot at the Centraal Museum Utrecht, which housed work by Fong Leng, Puck & Hans, and couturiers such as Frank Govers and Max Heymans, as well as French couture dresses. There, they noticed that French couture was much more refined than its Dutch counterpart. It was also inspiring, the Spijkers said, to see colour palettes and craft techniques which are rarely seen nowadays.

They also visited the archive in Gelderland to seek out old blueprints of their studio building. "It was great," says Truus. "I really enjoyed seeing them. We should never economise on archives." Both women also love going to their local library and borrow books from its archives. "To lay your hands on real books is so much more interesting than reading on the Internet," says Truus, "even though one can find a lot there."



Spijkers en Spijkers's AW09/10 collection, The Ballad of Dorothy Parker

For their 2010 Specsavers collection, the Spijkers visited an Italian "collector freak who had fabulous glasses" and owned a collection of spectacles going back a century, says Truus. "We gained so much from that experience. It was such a source of inspiration."

The sisters hope others, in turn, will gain inspiration from their own spectrum of work, characterised by their rich use of colour palettes and distinctive cuts. "We believe we are unique, because we create according to the method 'form follows function'," Truus says. "We place a pocket, decoration or colour on our designs for a specific reason. We hide the seams that usually appear in clothing. Our ingenious patterns distinguish us from other designers."

Spijkers en Spijkers say they don't find it difficult to part with their past work. "Everything will be stored better than we could ever have done it ourselves," says Truus. "In any case, the material will remain our property, and we can always access it. The clothing will remain with us, and actually that's quite practical, since we regularly take out past designs to see how we've done certain things."/>