

# Photographers Without Borders

By [STEPHEN HEYMAN](#)



Hilary and Irina at the St. Regis Hotel – Self Service, 2006 *Inez van Lamsweerde & Vinoodh Matadin*

Covering more than two decades, “[Pretty Much Everything](#)” (Taschen, \$700) is the first comprehensive monograph of the celebrated Dutch photo team [Inez van Lamsweerde and Vinoodh Matadin](#). The three-volume set, which includes a silk-screen print, jumbles together over 600 photos: some began as advertisements, while others first appeared in gallery shows. If the resulting mix — glamorous celebrity portraits, androgynous fine art photos and mannerist fashion editorials — feels a bit schizophrenic, that’s kind of the point. Van Lamsweerde said the book was constructed, in part, to show that the distinctions between these genres matter less and less (at least for in-demand photographers like her and her husband). “Sometimes our work that’s been published as an advertising campaign ends up on the walls of a museum,” she noted. A full interview with Van Lamsweerde is after the jump.



**You had a big [retrospective in Amsterdam](#) last year, but this is the largest compilation of your work so far. What struck you when putting it all together?**

Yes, this is the biggest. The show in Amsterdam was 300 works. This is 666. What struck us was that so

many of our inspirations are still the same as 26 years ago, when we started working together. And so much of our “body language,” as you might say, that the models project is similar to what we were doing in the beginning. Everything sort of still flows in the same way.

**The arrangement of the photos is interesting. You have advertising work and editorial work, traditional portraiture and conceptual, fine art work all blended together in a seemingly random order. Obviously, that was intentional. What was the thinking behind it?**

It’s all coming from the same two people. For us, the idea was never approaching this book as a chronological review. It’s so much about how all our images connect together, the way they exist in our minds, the way they relate to each other. The advertising and the editorials — everything sort of feeds together — we don’t necessarily make that distinction. We’re much more about, “Let’s make this image as good as we can. And see where it belongs.” In this book, it’s much more about the combination. How these two pages next to each other relate to each other.

**I want to mention a specific example where two very different photos are presented in the book side by side. One of them is of a gentleman named Andy in a yellow polo shirt who has feminine hands and a French manicure. On the opposite page, there’s a complicated fashion photo, with a beautiful model wearing a court jester hat and a big fur. She is holding a chocolate doughnut. Do these photos talk to each other? Do they exist in the same universe at all?**

Andy is part of a series that we made call “The Forest.” His own hands are replaced by the hands of a woman. That particular series — four portraits of men, all laying down, with female hands grafted on by computer — had this dichotomy between a fear factor and oppression, a certain unease in seeing a man photographed in a female pose. But at the same time you can kind of imagine the life of these men — how, if they showed or could be in touch with their female sides, there would be much less frustration, and more openness, even on a political level. The picture next to it was made for Vivienne Westwood. The chocolate doughnut for us has a sexual reference. And [the model’s] jolliness while holding it refers maybe to that secret suburban sexual life, to an underground fascination.

**But the one on the left looks like something you’d see in a gallery, and the one on the right looks like something you’d see in a glossy magazine. You’re saying they’re connected?**

By putting them next to each other, in our heads there’s a story there. We see a certain perversity there that is present in both images. Maybe they’re a family, maybe they live next door, maybe there’s a secret underground club? It triggers all these associations for us.

**Most of your work is commissioned. An advertising client will want you to promote a product, or a magazine will want you to help tell a story. A lot of that work is collaborative. Do you ever feel like you have to fight to control the image making? To make sure that it has your stamp on it?**

It always does. It does automatically. Nothing feels limiting to us. I think also it comes with experience, with knowing what you do well. Being able to draw from other moments in your career that inspire you. Something I always say to young photographers is “Stay in school for as long as you can.” Because there will be a moment when you’re out there in the world when you’ll have to do 12 shots in a day and all of them have to be good. The more you can experiment and find your style without that pressure, the better. We’re lucky. We spent five years in art school in Amsterdam. We’re able to define what it is that moves us in a picture, in the face of person.

**Looking through these photographs, there’s almost a shocking diversity of sensibilities: straightforward, absurd, pretty, ugly. ...**

We're always trying to reinvent ourselves. For us there's always this sense of duality, there's always a tension between the beautiful and the grotesque, the spiritual and the mundane, high fashion and low fashion, male and female.

**You guys made [a bit of news](#) lately when you said you would not photograph models under the age of 18.**

I'm happy that we haven't shot models under the age of 18 for the last five years now, at least. It's different with an actress like Dakota Fanning, say, who's a professional and has a support system behind her. ... But it's so intense for a young woman to be judged by her looks only, at such a tender age, for me it's impossible to support it.

**There is a [now famous photograph](#), several versions of which are in this book, of the two of you kissing. It became an ad for Lanvin. How important is that image and what does it say about your collaboration?**

It really says everything. It sums it up. The first images were art images that were shown at the Whitney. Then they became the inspiration for ad campaign. Which was then silk-screened in the museum show from last year.

**It's a very intimate photograph, but it's not a very gentle kiss.**

No, it destroys my face, basically. And that's kind of a visualization of what it would be like for me to be without Vinoodh.