

ART & CULTURE

< **An Intellectual Fashion | Inez van
Lamsweerde & Vinoodh Matadin** >

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In his column, Donatien Grau speaks to prominent thinkers and creatives about fashion and its connections to contemporary creativity.



Inez van Lamsweerde & Vinoodh Matadin Photography Inez van Lamsweerde & Vinoodh Matadin

Inez van Lamsweerde's and **Vinoodh Matadin's** work is probably one of the most humanist and refined to be seen today. Their art of portraiture encompasses every field of photography, from art to advertisement, from exhibitions to books. The duo have contributed to numerous leading publication in the world, including Vogue France, Vogue US, Vogue Italia, W, Vanity Fair, Interview and Purple Fashion Magazine. Their work has also been presented in an art context, notably in a series of shows at Matthew Marks Gallery, New York, and, most recently, at the São Paulo Biennial in 2011. A monograph on their work, *Pretty Much Everything*, design by M/M (Paris), was published by Taschen in 2011.

How would you connect fashion to elegance?

IvL: I don't think they connect. Fashion to me is a very abstract word which encapsulates a very big universe motivated by money. Elegance is very innate, it is almost unachievable through clothes; it's there or it's not. However, I do believe that Vinoodh and I can find elegance in everyone who steps in front of our camera. But it has nothing to do with clothes.

VM: Elegance is a memory of the past. Style and elegance are two different things: everything that we call style is something we remember from our youth, then we give it a modern twist. What is elegance? Is it a person? An art piece? Each is different.

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What is the role of history and art history in your conception of fashion?

IvL: The basis of almost every piece of fashion is nostalgia, and memories of one's youth, mainly the late teens; when one starts to find one's own identity through hair, make-up, clothes. That's the most defining moment for every human being – discovering who they are and what drives them. The memories of that period are what drives fashion; certainly fashion imagery.

VM: It's also the moment when you discover your sexuality.

IvL: Yes, and how you express yourself to get what you want. The inspiration comes from there, for most designers. As new designers emerge – a different generation – new inspiration comes about. That's how you see fashion constantly evolving; borrowing from the past and reinterpreting it for today. Even if it was something that one found disgusting in one's youth, its sense of nostalgia can mean it can find a place in a designer's collection. It's the same for image-making: in almost every image of ours there's a piece of memory that relates back to that specific period in that time. If you look at American Vogue versus Paris Vogue, you can see that Anna Wintour is from a different generation than Emmanuelle Alt. Anna's coming of age time was the 50s and

the 60s, and that has a big influence on that magazine. Emmanuelle's was the 70s and 80s and you can clearly see the difference in inspiration.

Would you describe fashion as a language and a discourse, as Barthes did it?

IvL: It's a language of signs, of codes, that has to do with status and the projection of who you want to be in your projection towards someone else. The thing that always blows our mind is that the people who think they are outside of fashion or think they have nothing to do with fashion, wake up every morning and decide what to wear, what they want to be, and which language they want to speak with these clothes. If you go for a date, a job interview, or a game of golf, you know the code you need to use for what you want to communicate to the people you're meeting. Everyone is affected by fashion and by these codes. In short: fashion is a daily form of masquerade that communicates culture, gender, and class.

VM: Most people don't even know where these codes come from. They just use these codes and they have no clue that somebody one day invented these codes for them.

IvL: Yes, they're given through role models that obviously have evolved through the years.

VM: The interesting thing is to use these codes and change them. Then people ask questions when looking at an image.

"Yves Saint Laurent and Coco Chanel definitely changed something for women, in terms of feminist empowerment"

The word "intellectual" was coined in a time of great political distress. Does fashion have a political role? And in which way?

IvL: I would like to say that fashion did have a political role in the empowerment of women – even though I hate that word, and I hate talking about it, because I think it shouldn't be an issue and there shouldn't be even a mention of it. But I think Yves Saint Laurent definitely changed something for women. So did Coco Chanel. But in my mind that's where it ends. They really did something for women in terms of feminist empowerment. The way they both portray a very strong, powerful and sexually in control woman was a very political statement, which had a huge influence. After that I haven't seen that much coming in terms of politics and fashion.

VM: It's politics and money.

How would you relate the concept of "fashion" to the one of "style"?

IvL: Fashion is a business, a headliner for a group of things that do not necessarily relate to style. Style is ever-changing.

VM: It's so diverse.

IL: Yes, it's to refer to style as well in terms of artistic practice or handwriting. We could relate to that.

What does fashion have to do with intellectuality ?

VM: Everything. If you want to change things you have to know about them, otherwise you can't do anything. Then you need to have a different opinion, and work to express it.

Lady Gaga is a good example: in the time when the politics of fashion are all about money, she expresses a different voice.

You work together and have developed numerous collaborations. What part does collaboration play in your creative process ?

IvL: It's everything. That's why we're doing what we're doing. It's the big motor. Both of us are not artists in the sense of this need to create something by ourselves in the studio, alone. The energy, the drive for us, is all in the exchange, with the team around us of course, but the biggest collaboration is with the one in front of us, in front of the lens. That is where the heart lies for us.

You work as art and fashion photographers. What is the relation between the two ?

IvL: Fashion is secondary, and everything else too. It's all about the person in front of us, and how much we project ourselves onto that person and at the same time let it come back in the lens. This trust gives us the feeling to give someone a very short time of complete attention and make that person look and feel amazing, like a hero, larger than life, and more beautiful than anything. The way that person walks off the set, just a little elevated, is the big thing.

VM: When we shoot people, we don't do "fashion" – we portray people. And the moment you put the credit, if it's clothes, it's fashion.

IvL: If you put the credit of a lipstick, it's a beauty shot. The context is the big thing.

In two weeks Donatien will be interviewing the trend forecaster Lidewij Edelkoort.