

Klavers van Engelen :

The Master of Forms and Body



SHOPWINDOW COLETTE, 1998

Niels Klavers had a nice debut into the fashion world with his multi-sleeve coat for the Colette in 1998, which probably initiated and marked the first impression of his unique style: the organic forms and constructions of fabrics as well as the flattering shapes of different silhouettes in interaction with human body which his brand Klavers van Engelen, in collaboration with Astrid van Engelen, became famous for.

Although Klavers van Engelen has been quite a success in the fashion industry during its 10-year history, the more interesting and intriguing part of the duo-designers' work probably exists in their side projects featuring artists from different disciplines or exhibitions commissioned by museums or biennales. Unlike the runway collection, a theater costume or an installation of an exhibition does not have the perfect models to complement the outfit; however, it also provides more possibilities in terms of how the somewhat strict rules of fashion design can be deconstructed, then integrated and represented in a more flexible, experimental and artistic way.



In the performance *Show Me Your Second Face* of the Japanese artist/pianist Tomoko Mukaiyama, K.V.E tried to incorporate fashion into the music performance by creating this huge and bizarre installation of fabric that covered up the artist and the piano in the beginning and gradually unfolded and transformed into this beautiful and conceptual dress. The installation possessed an interactive relationship with the artist and the piano, which made the whole installation become something more than just complementary in terms of its existence and movement on the stage.

The whole performance, as the artist intended to, therefore posed a question on the audience about the visibility of music and how it can be blended into a complete theatrical performance.



SHOW ME YOUR SECOND FACE, 2007-08

The sense of movement and fluidity can also be seen in the project Ideal Woman of the Centraal Museum Utrecht in 2003. Exploring the boundary and trying to redefine or rediscover the image of an ideal woman with a futuristic vision, K.V.E came up with an outfit capable of shifting between different volumes and shapes as it blossoms like a flower. The complicated and well-folded layers of the outfit make the 3D extension of the fabric more elegant while at the same time seem also to symbolize the complexity of modern women: they are beautiful, they are strong, they are capable of changing and they are really on their own. A similar notion of how K.V.E tried to construct clothes as an organic entity also appeared in Flower Garden of Arnhem Mode Biennale 2005, for which K.V.E literally made a big installation of clothes whose shapes are in great resemblance of flowers. The massiveness and the manipulation of colors and forms conveyed a clear message that a garment can also be given life and be treated or regarded as something more organic and attached to our own physicality.



IDEAL WOMEN, 2003



Despite the fact that K.V.E made such a contribution to the idea of conceptual fashion design by making all these artistic and idea/concept-oriented works, they are also keen and passionate about the functionality of what they make. In the project Reality Machine for the Netherlands Architecture Institute in 2003, K.V.E made some anomalous designs by dislocating and relocating parts of the clothes to the human body and created this twist in terms of their functions. The sharp and direct visual images strongly convey the message of breaking the norm and the system to which we may be too accustomed to be aware of. And at the same time, the clothes prove to be perfectly wearable as well with their composition deviating from the fashion convention.



REALITY MACHINES, 2003



Transferring from the conceptual ideas to the down-to-earth practical fashion design that shows on the runway is not something easy but apparently well done by K.V.E. Various experimental approaches that focus on the relationship between forms, colors, constructions, fabrics, volume, shape and human body can easily be seen in K.V.E's runway collections. As a commercial fashion label, K.V.E has always managed to find a great balance to fill in the gap and make a subtle transition between the very conceptual initiatives they started out with and the very practical, wearable and elegant clothes. For example, in their A/W collection 2009, they were inspired by a single oil stain on water, which has an unique glamour from its irregular shapes and the iridescent colors. The outcome was also satisfying when people see models walking down the runway in organically structured dresses that flow around the human body with a gentle touch.



A/W COLLECTION, KLAVERS VAN ENGELEN, 2009

In general, K.V.E's both experimental and practical approach enriches the Dutch fashion world by its continuous inquiry and exploration of movement, fluidity, and interaction between the clothes and the human body. After K.V.E made its grand coming-back to the fashion world two years ago by winning the first Mercedes Benz Dutch Fashion Award, people expect to see more of the K.V.E designs shown in Milan, Paris or Barcelona. In the meantime one may also look forward to more projects and installations of various sorts in the future, which might as well prove to be really inspiring and intriguing as it usually does!

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