

**Verena Michels**  
Trümmerfrau

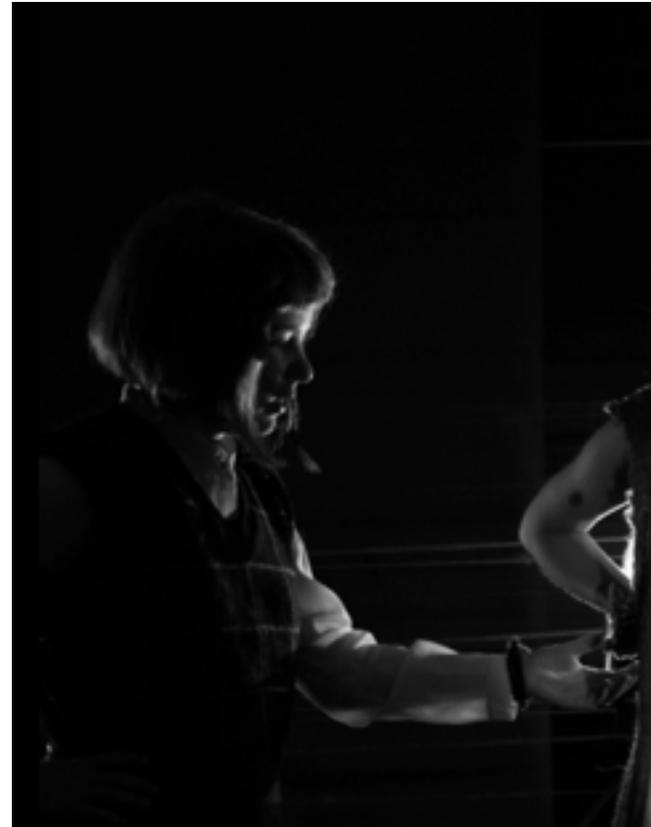


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Name: Verena Michels  
Object: Fashion designer

*“From misery  
and trouble  
the best  
things  
grow.”*

- Verena Michels



Verena Michels grows up in Germany, close to the Dutch border. At 20 she moves to Amsterdam. Before the Rietveld Academy I attended the AMFI. I gained important knowledge and a set of technical skills but felt I could not grow there. The years at the Rietveld were more experimental and helped personalize my design process. Looking back, the combination of both educations made a lot of sense.

My thesis started with the question of how political and economical

circumstances influence fashion. I wrote from a German perspective and compared Western to Eastern Germany. These two different economies showed how capitalism has been, and still is, what drives mainstream fashion. Fashion in East Germany was restricted by their centrally planned economy. It felt exciting to understand how much this influences a whole society. Many interesting ideas were born within this restricted area and made me realize, “From misery and trouble the best things grow.”



Name: Verena Michels  
Fashion designer

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'The years after the war were characterized by hardship, poverty and shreds. Material was scarce and the only way to get clothes or textiles was on the black market. My icon of that era was the "**Trummerfrau**" or woman of the shreds. These were women who, in the absence of men, re-built the German cities after their destruction. Their hard physical labour led to empowerment and emancipation. At the same time, they rebuilt their private lives and their looks, re-using anything they could find. Marine beddings were turned into jackets, rubber tires became shoe soles and old Nazi flags were made into evening dresses. For years this do-it-yourself mentality lasted. Women preferred to buy textiles and not clothes because they had the skills to make clothes at home.'

'I always liked the poem **Inventur** by Guenther Eich. It describes someone collecting, naming and counting everything he has left after the war. He describes their new function, like using a pair of socks as a pillow and cardboard as a mattress. This mirrors my own concept; I gathered materials I like and tried to forget their conventional function. I experimented with wool and ended up finding a way to create a textile from wool without knitting. The technique is inspired by the way "moving blankets" are made industrially.'

The result is something that looks more flat than a knitted textile and has a different structure. The technique does not require special equipment. You can do it at home on your sewing machine and it is easy to learn. I always wanted to create a way of production that I can teach my friends and collaborate with them.'

Before I started my final project, I did a three month internship with Conny Groenewegen, an Amsterdam based designer known for her innovative knitwear collections. It influenced my way of looking at material. I learnt to manipulate texture and the weight of materials and I practiced creating silhouettes by following the material.'

'I only use wool yarn. Most of it I found at Kobor, the alternative store of mr. Koopmans. He collects millions of yarns companies get rid off and sells them at a fair price. The different qualities I use define the look of each garment. One looks and feels like a woven structure, one like a knit, and the weights vary from very light to heavy like a rug. I got the idea for this technique the moment I saw the work of German artist Rosemarie Trockel in real life. It is her work too that made me decide to keep my own technique minimal.'



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(1945-1948)

Four million out of sixteen million homes in Germany were destroyed during Allied bombings in World War II, and four million were damaged. Half of all school buildings, large parts of the infrastructure, and many factories were damaged or destroyed. According to estimates, there were about 400 million cubic metres of ruins.

**Trümmerfrau** is a term that can be translated as 'ruins woman' or 'shred woman'. It is the German name for women who, in the aftermath of WW2 helped to clear and reconstruct the bombed cities of Germany. Hundreds of cities had suffered significant bombing and firestorm damage, and with many men dead or being war prisoners, this enormous task fell to a large degree on the German women. Trümmerfrauen, both volunteers and regular workers, worked in all weather. They were organized in columns of ten to twenty people.

Their first concern was to work on the restoration of their country after the bombings, every day, in exchange for a hot bowl of soup. But while restoring ruins, the concern to rebuild their own lives re-emerged. One element of establishing one's life again was clothing, for every day, and for social events with the prospect of meeting a partner.

Due to material rationing and material deficits there was a severe shortage in textiles and clothing. One had to be pragmatic and creative:

- a vest was made from oven mitts
- dresses from marine beddings
- jackets created from military blankets.



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Especially shoes were barely available: the solution was found by building them from wooden leftovers. - shoe soles and heels could also be produced by re-cycling rubber wheels.

The documentary "Kleider machen Deutsche" (Clothes make Germans) is about material rationing and deficits during World War 2 and the years after.

The film also talks about how fashion has been important for self-esteem and self-motivation even in times of poverty and hardship and it visualises German solutions. One woman tells us a story about how she was so desperate to find material that her father brought a bunch of Nazi flags home for her instead of burning them as he was assigned to, so his daughter was able to sew a dress for herself and go to a ball.

Another woman talks about how her dad made her a shirt from pillow cases, and how she loved wearing this personal item, even when today she realises how ugly it was.

There was a desire to finally dress elegant again after years of depression, and women came up with outstanding solutions: Some would use an empty coffee jar and wrap a scarf around it, and the result looked like a Nophretete-style hat, which was very fashion forward at the time. According to the taste of the decade, to finish a look, stockings were a must- but since they were not available, many girls found out that an eyebrow pencil could do the trick and they would draw a line on their legs which resembled the look of nylon stockings.



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Blouses made from parachute silk were looking rich and elegant as well. In addition to the DIY solutions and creative ways of re-cycling, a solution for getting materials or even garments was the black market. Next to food and other goods, one could trade for example cigarettes for clothes.



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The transition from war to peace was a time that can be described as a vacuum ("Niemandszeit"): Salaries were not being paid, grocery cards ("Lebensmittelkarten") handed out before were not valid anymore, banks and shops and businesses stayed closed.

The black market was the only way to come by food and clothing and especially in cities they were the only way to survive. The deficit grew with the end of the war.

People were forced to grow their own food, and the cities who acknowledged the hardship provided land to farm, for example in an old zoo in Hamburg.

Anything was being used to feed one's community: frogs, snails, berries, acorns, nettles, mushrooms of all kinds and dandelion were included in the so called emergency and standby recipes of the time.

Also remarkable:

- sausages were made from fish
- pie from coffee ground
- soup from fodder beet. Despite these pro-active solutions there was a permanent shortage in food supply that resulted in extreme malnutrition.

Due to the immense destruction during the war, it was possible only very slowly to stabilise the economy again. Chronic supply shortages ensured that black market became a more and more indispensable complement to the controlled economy.

There was a:

- chronic shortage in housing,
- energy supplies, shoes and clothes.
- for lack of baby clothes newborns in hospitals were sometimes wrapped in a newspaper to warm the baby on the way home.

Demonstrations against the severe shortages that existed in the countries of the Bizonie (the combination of the American and British occupation zones) took place in 1947. The situation was a greenhouse climate for black markets and only several years later the situation was re-established and it slowly went down.



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Dies ist meine Mütze,  
dies ist mein Mantel,  
hier mein Rasierzeug  
im Beutel aus Leinen.

Konservenbüchse:  
Mein Teller, mein Becher,  
ich hab in das Weißblech  
den Namen geritzt.

Geritzt hier mit diesem  
kostbaren Nagel,  
den vor begehlichen  
Augen ich berge.

Im Brotbeutel sind  
ein Paar wollene Socken  
und einiges, was ich  
niemand verrate,

so dient es als Kissen  
nachts meinem Kopf.  
Die Pappe hier liegt  
zwischen mir und der Erde.

Die Bleistiftmine  
lieb ich am meisten:  
Tags schreibt sie mir Verse,  
die nachts ich erdacht.

Dies ist mein Notizbuch,  
dies meine Zeltbahn,  
dies ist mein Handtuch,  
dies ist mein Zwirn.



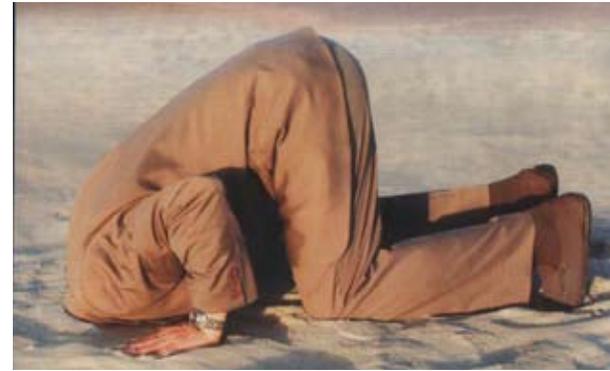
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Name: Repetition  
Object nrs: 35-40



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Name: Repetition  
Object nrs: 41-44



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Name: Lines Construction  
Object nrs: 45-50



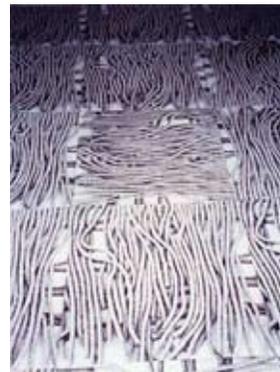
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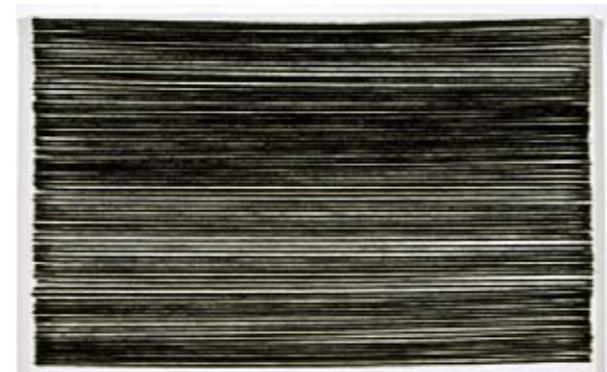
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Name: Lines Construction  
Object nrs: 51-53



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Name: Design Inspiration & Drawings Apron  
Object nrs: 55-60



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Name: Design Inspiration & Drawings Apron  
Object nrs: 61-66



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Name: Apron  
Object nrs: 67-76

Name: Inspiration  
Object nrs: 68

Name: Drawings  
Object nrs: 74

Name: Inspiration  
Object nrs: 73 & 76



67



68



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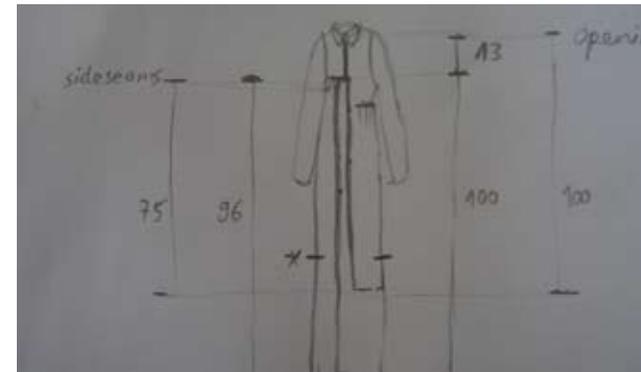
73



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Name: Drape  
Object nrs: 77-80



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Name: Drape  
Object nrs: 81-87



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Name: Line Up  
Object nr: 88



Name: First fittings (1)  
Look 1 object nrs: 89-94



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Name: First fittings (2)  
Look 2 object nrs: 95-102



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Name: First Fittings (3)  
Look 2 (details) object nrs: 102-106



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Name: First Fittings (4)  
Look 3 object nrs: 107-110



107



108



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Name: First Fittings (5)  
Look 3 object nrs: 111-115



111



112



113



114



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120

Name: First Fittings (6)  
Look 4 object nrs: 116-119



116



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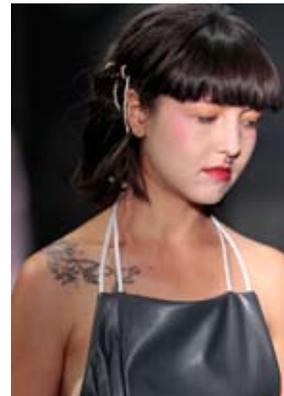
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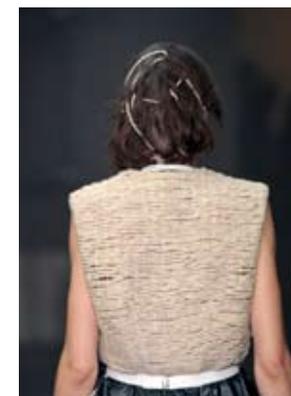
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knit



knit open & dense



knit open & dense



knitted weave



handmade  
knitting tool



sketch knit &  
weave



inspiration knit



knitted shoes  
prototype



knitting experiment



knit



knit woven



sample pink wool



sample Icelandic wool



sample extra thick wool



sample blue Alpaca



wool



Icelandic wool



alpaca



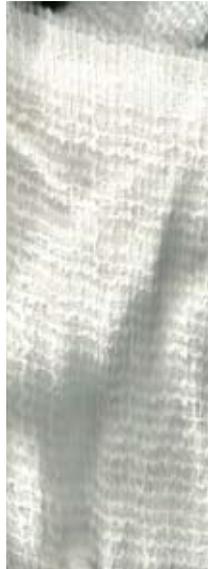
Inspiration



sample quilt alpaca



blue shiny manmade



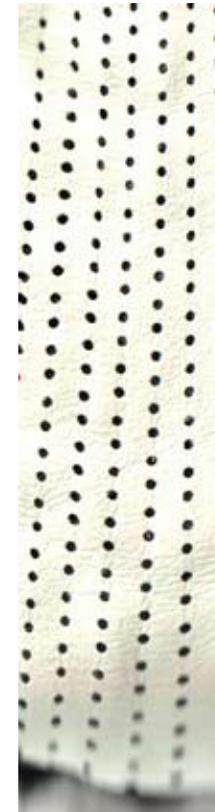
wool  
nanutti tesucci



furniture material  
with structure



sample quilt  
with filling



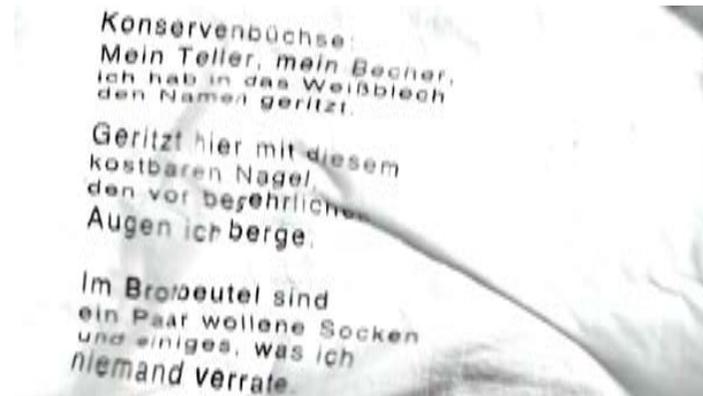
sample fake  
leather



thread



composition



sample text as structure

Name: Photoshoot \_\_\_\_\_  
Object nr: 1-7



Name: Photoshoot  
Object nr: 2-7



Name: Photoshoot  
Object nr: 3-7



Name: Photoshoot \_\_\_\_\_  
Object nr: 4-7



Name: Photoshoot  
Object nr: 5-7



Name: Photoshoot \_\_\_\_\_  
Object nr: 6-7



Name: Photoshoot  
Object nr: 7-7





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On the contrary, German psychologist Galen V. Bodenhausen claims that consumption is linked with aberrant, antisocial behaviour. The Northwestern University psychologist states that money doesn't buy happiness and neither does materialism: His research shows that people who place high value on wealth, status and stuff are more anxious and depressed and less sociable than people who do not.

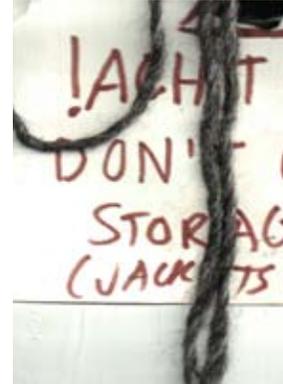
His new study shows that materialism is not just a personal problem, but also an environmental one. Galen V. Bodenhausen: "We found that irrespective of personality, in situations that activate consumer mindset, people show the same sorts of problematic patterns in well-being, including negative affect and social disengagement."

The study was conducted with colleagues Monika A. Bauer, James E.B. Wilkie, and Jung K. Kim, and appears in Psychological Science.

The negative effects of consumerism can be measured in their consequences on the environment, too.

- the increase of the globe's temperature
- as well as acidifying oceans
- melting glaciers are primarily driven by human activity.

Many of the affordable products we buy depend on cheap, often exploitive overseas labour that does not respect environmental regulations. Therefore, the idea of reducing one's possessions and to live with much less serves your well-being, provides flexibility and reduces your carbon footprint. The trend of a greener lifestyle with minimal consumption goes hand in hand with greener technology and sustainable businesses. Germany has proven that green consciousness and traditional thriftiness can lead to economic success.



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Name: Credits  
Trümmerfrau  
2013-2016

**Fashion design**

by Verena Michels  
Text taken from Verena's thesis on  
Trümmerfrau, Black Market & Leftovers  
**contact:** verenamariamichels@gmail.com  
**website:** verenamichels.tumblr.com

**Graphic Design**

Tamara van der Laarse  
clublederhosen.wordpress.com

**Photography (shoot)**

by Lutz Baumann  
<http://www.lutzbaumann.com>

**Hair and Make-up (shoot)**

Maike Kopka  
Maike.Kopka@gmail.com

**Location:**

Kobor Garens, with friendly  
support of Koos Koopman

**Models Shoot:**

Jerusa van Linth  
Elsemieke van der Heijden  
Alexandra Karpilovski  
Carina Erdmann  
Judith Siemons

**Models Show:**

Eun Kyoung Hwang  
Jerusa van Lith  
Elsemieke van der Heijden  
Melissa Tun Tun  
Maggie Wong  
Antonia Breme

Photo's Fashion show (Paradiso)  
by Peter Stigter

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*“In der  
Beschränkung  
zeigt sich erst  
der Meister.”*

- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

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