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Book Review

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***Alexander van Slobbe, and ... and ... and ... by
Alexander van Slobbe et al. (Valiz, 2010)***

This book explores the work and approach to fashion of the influential and visionary Dutch designer Alexander van Slobbe, it is much more than a retrospective of the past twenty years of his work, and reads more like a personal exploration of his own archives and of Van Slobbe's journey as a designer. It covers the growth of Orson + Bodil (founded in 1989) and the shorter-lived Tokyo-based menswear label SO (1993–2003). It discusses their roots in Dutch design and the particular creative approach borne out of the Netherlands that arguably gave a sense

of creative autonomy. It gives an overview of his long-term collaboration with Guus Beumer for Orson + Bodil, highlighting the shift from a branded enterprise working in prêt-à-porter to a small production line focused on individual handmade pieces that reacted against the speed of the fashion system. It brings together ideas, opinions, and images in a manner that seems to reflect the creative process of the designer, focusing on process and intention in both its contents and feel of the book itself. Van Slobbe questions approaches to fashion and particularly trend, seasonal, fast production models preferring to focus on small-scale production that is process led, wearer focused, and collaborative.

In the preface to this book Van Slobbe identifies the influence of Punk and the idea of “collective authorship.” It is therefore no surprise that this book takes an unconventional and collaborative approach. It comprises a series of conversations between partner Gus Beumer and Alexander van Slobbe, writings, reflections, and rich visual illustration. Images are used to illustrate process and key preoccupations of the designer as opposed to underlining the facts presented. There is a sense of texture and depth to both visual and written narratives, which is further reflected in the presentation of the book, working between matt and high-gloss pages of text, design, illustration, and photography. Some pages are reminiscent of sketchbook pages whilst others are more like pages from a glossy magazine. As such, this book presents a rare opportunity to understand what is behind the product, enabling the reader to access and explore his motivations and the approach of the designer.

The imagery and interviews are contextualized by a series of poignant essays by high-profile collaborators and associates from fashion, academia, and journalism. The first, “Luxury Commodity or Social Capital: The Fraught Relationship between Art and Fashion,” covers the growth of a discourse between art and fashion in the context of Kant’s artistic theories. It discusses the crisis in art in the 1990s, and puts forth a rationale for art looking to fashion during this period. The essay addresses interdisciplinary approaches that emerged between art, architecture, and fashion in the late 1990s and early twenty-first century and explores the ongoing cultural and commercial dichotomy in fashion. Key practitioners in this interdisciplinary sphere are discussed such as Martin Margiella, Rei Kawakubo, and Victor & Rolf. The communication of fashion in art galleries, and the growth of flagship stores are also discussed.

Another essay is written by Takeji Hirakawa in both English and Japanese and focuses on the designer and his unique approach and significance referring to him as “a free-ranging intellectual, a modernist with true craftsman pride, creating garments with intelligence, five senses and realism” (p. 129). This is followed by an essay, “The SO story,” by Christopher Mollet who runs strategy development offices in Tokyo and Amsterdam. Other writings further expose the approach of the designer: Editor John De Greef writes to the title “Alexander the

Minimalist,” and there is an interview with curator and author Florence Muller by Daniel Bouw entitled “Inside Clothes” that discusses the division between brands and independent designers and the loss of the designer’s status in the 1990s in relation to the mass-market and luxury products. “The Hand of the Maker,” written by Louise Schouwenbery, concludes the book highlighting the importance of the handmade in Van Slobbe’s work and its relevance within contemporary fashion.

And ... and ... and exposes Van Slobbe’s design process, locates his work within both theoretical and commercial debates within the fashion industry, raising questions about globalization, fast fashion, New Luxury, technological influences and fashion’s wider cultural, socioeconomic role. The rich content of the illustrations and images are useful as a narrative in their own right and the text itself is accessible. This book provides insight into Van Slobbe’s work and enables the reader to cross-refer the images and aspects of the designer’s process in the context of current debates in fashion practice and research. The book is engaging on many levels and will serve as a valuable resource for students, practitioners, and those interested in fashion, design processes, and lifestyle.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Special Issue of *Fashion Practice: The Journal of Design, Creative Process & the Fashion Industry* for Autumn 2013: Fashion Branding and the Practice of Fashion

Guest Editors:

Dr. Joseph H. Hancock II, Drexel University, USA

Dr. Anne Peirson-Smith, The City University of Hong Kong

Deadline: March 31, 2012—Authors submit manuscripts for review to Joseph Hancock at jhh33@drexel.edu

This issue of *Fashion Practice* takes a holistic approach examining innovative methods in fashion aesthetics, design, retailing, and merchandizing as related to the process of *fashion branding*. Historically, fashion branding has focused on empirical works associated with consumption and purchasing decisions. However, recent scholarship challenges old methods suggesting that branding is a cultural process that needs to be analyzed from critical, ethnographic, individualistic, or interpretive methods exploring the meaning behind branding and how it is shaping the ways we practice fashion. For this issue, the interrelationships between fashion design industries and their branded marketing will be discussed to imply that branding is a key driving force that has changed and continues to change the entire fashion industry.

Authors are invited to submit papers that examine:

1. New global as well as local niche branded fashion design strategies.
2. Innovative studies of how branding influences fashion design, through such notions of integration and alignment in the production processes or closer to the brand image and brand values. Does the brand overshadow the final fashion design?
3. How various branding strategies will be encouraged—for example: “going green,” mass customization, DIY and online shopping, and other fashion design related practices that have generated new interests for consumers to purchase fashion.
4. How media branding communicates both visual and verbal symbols in fashion generating new cultural and aesthetic variations in the ways consumers perceive clothing styles.
5. Examination of new hypermodern constructs of individual fashion forms and styles that consumers are creating based upon the idea of “personal branding.”

These, as well as any other topic integrating branding and the practice of fashion are welcome.

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