

Dutch *by* Design

by Monika Auch

Holland is a densely populated and flat country, a patch of land rescued from the water and protected by dykes. Nothing is left to nature: rivers run away from the sea, water levels are regulated by pumps (forget windmills), and each natural reserve is thoughtfully cultivated. Does the closeness of the inhabitants in these architected surroundings breed creativity? What makes Dutch design so skillful, tongue-in-cheek, and provocative, yet harking back to long-lost traditions?

Note additionally, that textile mills and all other craft-related industry vanished about 100 years ago—ultimately facilitating the freedom to reinvent. Institutions like the **TextielMuseum** in Tilburg, the **European Ceramic Workcentre** in Amsterdam, and the **Glass Studio** in Leerdam were updated with FabLabs, CAD/CAM machines, excellent technical assistants, and European outreach programs—staunchly defying severe governmental cutbacks. Dutch museums attract visitors with exhibitions like experimental ecologic textile design at the TextielMuseum, fascinating contemporary fashion at the northern **Groninger Museum**, and the breathtaking *Catwalk* fashion show at the **Rijksmuseum** in Amsterdam.



In modern societies, we have lost touch with the material world. We live surrounded by screens, in climate controlled environments, under artificial light—and all at a very fast pace. The return to craft in the new millenium is based on a human desire for contact with tangible objects—for making stuff. Yet, in these times of computerization, we cannot go back to the past. Young artists and designers are not falling for a false romanticism of handmade products when smart CAD/CAM knitting, weaving, embroidery, laser-cutting, and 3D-printing machines can readily relieve them of such time-consuming drudgery. Supported by government programs, this generation uses new automated techniques to search for less wasteful modes of production



ABOVE: FRANCIS WILLEMSTIJN *Collier Haar* Human hair, glass, jet, silver, textile, 2006. Private collection, US. Photo by the artist.

LEFT: WINDE RIENSTRA *Stjerren oan it Firmamint (Stars in the Firmament)* Mohair, crystal, wood, lurex, silk, production TextielLab - sewing, handknitting, crochet, embroidery, 2014. Purchased with support of the Mondriaan Fund. Photo: Michel Zoeter.

and aesthetically intelligent ways of recycling. At the same time, they honor the human touch and pay tribute to handmade qualities.

This is the complex background to this small selection of Dutch makers who illustrate issues in jewelry and fashion related to the body. Deeply interested in Dutch traditions, they work with a wide range of old and new textile techniques—and the institutions that facilitate such experimentation—to innovatively combine craft and technology.

Fashion designer **Winde Rienstra** has a fascination for spatial structures surrounding the human body. Her three-dimensional hybrid designs are a fusion of jewelry and fashion. In her collection *Stjerren oan it Firmamint (Stars in the Firmament)*, she returns to her origins in Fryslân. In this Northern Dutch province stretching along the North Sea, natives proudly speak the original Frisian language, and preserve it with an indigenous TV and radio station.

Rienstra's main inspiration is Eise Eisinga,

the 18th century astronomer and wool comber by trade who built his own planetarium in Franeker. His mathematic precision and attention to detail served as a blue print for her collection. Commissioned by the TextielMuseum, Rienstra realized her ideas within the museum's excellent **Textiel-Lab** facilities. The sparkle of Swarovski crystals and the subtle use of silver thread and silk embedded in the soft wool echoes the night sky. Rienstra's daring experimental laser-cut bamboo and cardboard shoe designs highlight her feeling for handwork, craft, and detail in this intelligent combination with innovative technology.

Francis Willemstijn translates Dutch heritage into jewelry. In her *Gejaagd door de (Gone with the Wind)* series, she interprets the many customs around a mourning period, especially the role of costume and jewelry. Inside a local community, dress and adornment communicated which stage of mourning the bereaved was in, e.g. a completely black attire, or some specks of grey, white, or even color. Mourning jewelry was

customarily made of materials like hair, jet stones, and garnets. The modern design and precise use of material in the pieces exudes a superb aesthetic aura that supercedes any morbid association.

Her pieces are also inspired by the way of life in fishing communities. The braiding techniques and knots in the (horse) hair are copied from those used to mend fishing nets in villages around the Zuiderzee bay area in the Northwest region. Willemstijn's jewelry is proof of the strength of the Dutch cultural heritage. The pieces are a connection between past and present, between tradition and innovation, between death and life.

Artist **Afke Golsteijn** works with the old craft of taxidermy, turning dead animals into jewelry and sculpture. With a heyday in Victorian times, the recent comeback of this art form is dominated by female artists, who often exhibit a remarkable switch from the testosterone-laden 'trophy kill' manifestations of yore.

It is difficult not to think about death when looking at this work, but Golsteijn transforms the morbid into a thing of beauty and contemplation. In her work, actual animals (at times sourced from the meat industry) are combined

with material such as glass, silver, textiles, and embroidery. An ordinary bird has undergone a metamorphosis into a glamorous star. The decorations on the animals are meticulously done, which makes the applied skill both respectful and empathetic.

Golsteijn's work often refers to Greek myths and fairytales or reflects critically on contemporary themes. The necklace *Hyperallergenic* refers to cruel cosmetic industry testing on rabbits for side effects and allergic reactions.

Emerging fashion designer and **Neffa** founder **Aniela Hoitink** offers us a glimpse of the future of fashion with the *MycoTEX* dress design. Based on the qualities of organic mushroom growth, this new way of producing textiles and clothing advances a solution to wasteful production methods in the fashion industry. She looks at textiles as an extension of the skin and mimics natural properties of fungal growth in order to improve the properties of traditional materials.

Hoitink uses *mycelium*, the roots of mushrooms, and lets them grow on a mould into a biodegradable tissue. The fungal material is an alternative to synthetics with several advantages. The final garment is built out of modules that can be replaced or grown to the wearer's wishes, such



AFKE GOLSTEIJN (collaboration with **FLORIS BAKKER**) *Bird Necklace* (from the *Jewellery* collection)
Bird head and wings and, beads, gems, thread, taxidermy, beading, stitching, 2008.



ANIELA HOITINK *MycoTex Dress* 350 self-adhering discs made of 100% mycelium (mushroom roots) textile, 2015.
MycoTex mycelium textile disc sample *BELOW*.





as adjusting the sleeve length. With *MycotEX*, any potential waste is eliminated. When the garment goes out of fashion, it can be composted. The growth of fungal textiles is environmentally friendly and makes the spinning of yarns, weaving, or knitting unnecessary. No chemicals are needed and the biodegradable fabric will even nurture other plants.

A graduate of the prestigious **Antwerp Royal Academy of Fine Arts**, fashion designer **Marga Weimans** pushes the boundaries of fashion into architecture and art. In her 2006 debut collection *The power of my dreams*, she explored her Surinam-Creole roots and the role of black women in our current complex global culture. The work expresses her smart reversal of a disadvantage into a driving force. Her 2009 collection *Wonderland* is inspired by traditional decorations, jewelry, and fabrics found in *Afrikaanderwijk*, one of the poorest neighborhoods in Rotterdam. She created a fantasyland where dreams can come true, a land where people can escape from the chaotic city.

Depending on each theme, she incorporates different combinations of materials, from natural organic fabrics to architectural elements like wood mixed with fiber glass. The **Groninger Museum** has staged several exhibitions of Weimans' powerhouse couture and avidly collects her work.

Ineke Heerkens is a multi-disciplinary jewelry maker. Her necklaces are conversation pieces, providing the wearer with often unexpected social contact regarding the organic forms, the refined play of color, and the unusual material. Heerkens makes her jewelry through energetic and intuitive processes involving a variety of techniques, including screenprinting, digital design, and traditional metalsmithing.

During a residency at the **European Ceramic Workcentre**, she worked with clay to develop an unexpected Baroque and aesthetic visual language that relates to the 17th century Dutch auricular style. She found "the directness of clay very appealing... The marks and displacements produce amazing curlicues and ornamental shapes." Heerkens also used the classic potter's wheel to make oval beads to which she applied glazes with very refined hues of color. To make the ceramic gems into wearable jewelry, she dyed silk yarns in matching colors and used a Japanese braiding

MARGA WEIMANS dress from the *Wonderland* Collection (2009).



ABOVE: INEKE HEERKENS *Sentimental Sediment*

Ceramic, cotton, silk, lurex, artificial silk, hand-shaped clay, glaze, hand-braided cord, 12.6" x 8.8" x 1.5", length cord 57", 2014.

Photo: Eddo Hartmann.

LEFT: WILLEMIJN DE GREEF *Green 01* Necklace, nettle, hemp, flax, glass, zinc, about 59" x 19.6", 2010. Production TextielLab / Nationaal Glasmuseum, Leerdam. Purchased with financial support of the province of Noord-Brabant. Photo: TextielMuseum.

technique to fabricate cords. Most of her ceramic pieces are already in private and museum collections.


Jewelry maker **Willemijn de Greef's** work shows the revival of craft techniques from the 1960s, while tapping into recent environmental issues. Her work is reminiscent of the much-ridiculed technique of macramé before the iconic "knotted chair" by designer **Marcel Wanders** hit the scene in 1997. Any connoisseur of textile art will associate Greef's pieces with the huge sculptural rope works of **Magdalena Abakanowicz** or the woven and braided linen monochrome wall hangings of **Leonore Tawney**.

De Greef's *Green 01* necklace (commissioned by the TextielMuseum) is made entirely from reused and ecofriendly materials. De Greef asked a spinner to handspin ecologically produced hemp yarn into threads. In the TextielLab's workshop for braiding ropes and elaborate tassels, the threads were twisted together with left-over yarns found in the museum attic. The process of twisting different cords together was repeated until the desired thickness was achieved.

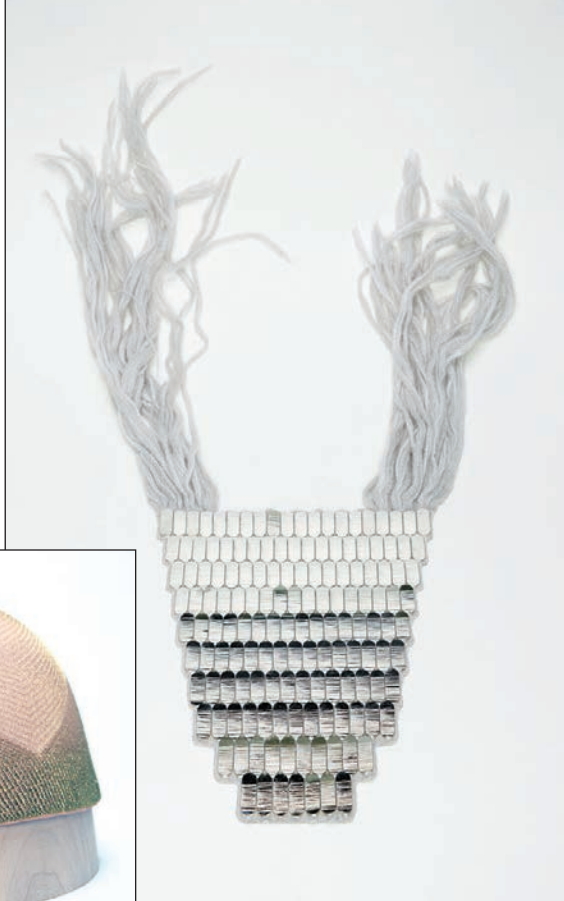
To complete the necklace, De Greef added glass beads specially blown at the **Nationaal Glasmuseum** in Leerdam.

Uli Rapp received her Masters degree in jewelry design at the prestigious **Sandberg Institute** in Amsterdam. Old world splendor and nifty high tech are combined in her laser-cut smart-material jewelry. Fascinated by Elizabethan dress decoration, she translates lace motives into soft contemporary bling.

Rapp's necklaces, brooches, and earrings interpret a love for antique gemstones and pearls contrasting with chunky chains. Her collections have developed rapidly into a sophisticated style by use of smart materials. She invented a technique to apply medical plastic between textile layers; all pieces are skillfully handmade in screen print on lightweight soft materials so you can heap them on without being weighed down. The combination of a contemporary artist's tools with the hint of past splendor create scintillating pieces for bold wearers like musician Boy George and designer Nathalie Rykiel.

A woman with long, wavy brown hair and dark lipstick is shown from the waist up. She is wearing a black t-shirt with a white graphic print. She is wearing a multi-strand necklace made of various chains and beads. Her right hand is raised to her head, and her left hand is resting on her hip. The background is dark.

ULI RAPP *Uli Collection* Necklace,
medical plastic, textile, screenprinting,
dimensions variable.



LEFT: EMILIE PALLARD AND NIELS HEYMANS *Casting Spells (helmet)*
Gold embroidery on braided natural leather, 4.3" x 8.6" x 8.2", 2012.
CENTER: EMILIE PALLARD AND NIELS HEYMANS *Casting Spells (plastron)*
100% woven Mohair, 100% polyester embroidery, RVS laser-cut metal, 14.1" x 17.7" x 19.6", (with mohair strings: 39.3" x 14.1" x 19.6"), 2012.

RIGHT: EMILIE PALLARD AND NIELS HEYMANS *Casting Spells (cape)*
Laser-cut lining fabric, 100% acetate, 55.1" x 21.2" x 21.6", 2012.
All works produced at TextielLab, commissioned by TextileMuseum, Tilburg.

The amazing work of **Emilie Pallard** and **Niels Heymans** embodies masterly craft skills and computer technology. Pallard graduated cum laude from the **Design Academy Eindhoven** in 2010 and works as a designer in Amsterdam. Heymans is an expert in computer skills. Their work challenges the boundaries of physical tactile textiles and materials, crossing into the realm of virtual textiles, which leaves the viewer with a baffling sensory experience—you can actually feel with your eyes!

On commission from the TextielMuseum, their *Casting Spells* collection was designed and produced in the TextielLab. Pallard's poetic drawings were the starting point for a number of accessories made from textiles and leather. The collection consists of a plastron (breastplate) that represents water, a gold embroidered leather helmet that refers to the sun, and a cape that symbolizes the air.

Pallard and Heymans explore the field in between virtual and craft, fantasy and reality. Their *Casting Spells: Virtual Textile 01* design (used to create the laser-cut cape) embodies the wind in a virtual impossibly floating furry textile, a very apt contemporary tapestry.

Willemijn de Greef www.willemstijn.com
Afke Golsteijn | Idiots www.idiots.nl
Ineke Heerkens www.inekeheerkens.nl
Aniela Hoitink | Neffa www.neffa.nl
Emilie Pallard and Niels Heymans
www.emiliepallard.com
Uli Rapp www.ulirapp.com
Winde Rienstra www.winderienstra.com
Francis Willemstijn www.franciswillemstijn.com

European Ceramic Workcentre, Amsterdam
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TextielMuseum, Tilburg www.textielmuseum.nl

—*Monika Auch is a visual artist, writer, and editor based in The Netherlands. Working as a medical doctor, she studied textile design and printmaking at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy, Amsterdam. A true hybrid of science and art, she investigates "the intelligence of the hand"*
www.monikaauch.nl
www.stitchyourbrain.com