



**FASHION  
ANTWERP  
ACADEMY 50**

LANNOO

# FASHION BUT NOT FASHION

BY PETER DE POTTER

'Fashion Design' has been the study identified on the graduation certificates awarded to several hundred Antwerp Academy students over the last 25 years. The majority of such graduates went on to work in the clothing sector, as independent fashion designers, assistants for a fashion brand or in the world of apparel or textile design. Another, smaller group also flew the nest, but they flew in slightly different directions. They did not turn their backs on fashion: in their new professions, they continued to make important contributions to the fashion universe, through styling, art, beauty, exhibition design, scenography and education. Here is a brief overview, in the words of several of the protagonists themselves, of their time at the Antwerp Academy and the importance of those years in their professional lives.

PETER PHILIPS – MAKEUP ARTIST  
CLASS OF 1993

'At school, everyone sat with their noses in the fashion magazines, but while all the others ever thought about was the clothing or the styling, I was mostly looking at the faces. Halfway through, I already sensed that I did not have the same all-encompassing passion for clothes and fashion drawing as the rest. The whole phenomenon surrounding it spoke to me more. As students, we sometimes went backstage to help with the fashion shows or competitions, and there I learned that fashion encompasses a whole set of machinery with many different links, all with the ultimate goal of getting that single, complete image

of fashion to come together on the catwalk. I knew for certain that I wanted to be part of that process, only not as a designer.

'Without the Fashion Academy, I would probably have become a hairdresser, or a graphic designer — I already had that training under my belt when I arrived in Antwerp. The academy taught me that you have to have a story, and that you always have to tell it in an honest and personal way. Most important of all was for the students to develop their own identities. At the same time, we were treated like real individuals, and now that I look back on it, I take my hat off to that!

'Holding on to identity is something I still carry with me, with the understanding that I always work in a team. I am at the service of the designer and, in turn, I contribute to achieving his or her vision. Makeup is a profession. You have to know when you have to do something, but also when you should do just a little bit less — editing yourself as it were. Because, if you turn it into an ego show, you are getting in the way of the designer's vision and can even damage it. You have to avoid that out of respect, if nothing else, because at the academy, I first saw and learned how much hard work and effort goes into realizing a collection.'

Philips followed an evening course in make-up in Amsterdam while still studying in Antwerp. In 1995, he presented his first portfolio to an agency. He has worked for a range of Belgian magazines and at the same time travelled as an assistant for the Paris fashion shows. He first did the make-up under his own name for the Parisian debut shows of Veronique Branquinho and Olivier



Left: The Chanel Show, backstage. © Chanel 2013. Peter Philips at work backstage at the Chanel Haute Couture show, spring-summer 2010, Model: Magdalena Frackowiak.

Right: *She*, fourth year collection by Anke Loh, 1999.

Theyskens. Philips has become an absolute authority in his field, having worked with such photographers as Irving Penn, Inez van Lamsweerde & Vinoodh Matadin, Willy Vanderperre and Steven Klein, and was also booked for the fashion shows of Alexander McQueen, Raf Simons and Dries Van Noten, amongst others. His work has been published in such periodicals as *W* and the French, Italian and American editions of *Vogue*. In 2008, he was appointed Global Creative Director of Chanel Make-up. In early 2013, Philips announced that he would again be available as a freelance make-up artist.

ANKE LOH — SAGE ENDOWED CHAIR, DEPARTMENT OF FASHION,  
SCHOOL OF THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO  
CLASS OF 1999

'Now that I'm teaching here in Chicago, I can look back at my time at the academy in a different light. I remember that period primarily as very intense, and also very confrontational — the teachers always pushing you further and harder to find your own taste and identity. Now, I have immense appreciation for the fact that they persevered in directing and following me, because I was certainly not the easiest of students. It is thanks to that profound search that I found my own place in the fashion world. Without all those questions and experiments, it would never have happened. As a student in Antwerp, the fact that you are literally so close to so many well-known designers also makes a big difference. The feeling of being able to enjoy education at such a high level was something I had not experienced before, for example when I was at school in Germany.

'In the United States, almost all the fashion schools are very industry-focused, but here in Chicago, we are first and foremost an art school. In the US, almost everything is mainstream and consumer orientated. At the art institute in Chicago there is a much greater challenge in choosing a field such as fashion. In my own work, I have always been actively involved in the anthropological aspects of fashion, and in a certain way, teaching is a link to that. You are always dealing with different people, different backgrounds and characters. You have quickly to find an inroad into each personality and push the right

buttons in order to stimulate that creatively. You must also ensure that they never, for a moment, lose their love of fashion.

'I have introduced certain elements from my Antwerp education here. At the same time, I have tightened the focus. As in Antwerp, first year students make a skirt and a top. The second year students have to create three complete looks. In the final year, there have to be five complete looks. The students have to do everything themselves; nothing can be delegated.

'One major difference is that American students are verbally very strong. For me, that took some getting used to. They can explain everything and sell themselves positively. In Antwerp, things were more intuitive. The work had to speak for itself. But that verbal quality is simply inherent to American culture. The differences in social backgrounds are much more extreme here as well; some students come from very stormy situations. All of that is possible here, and it is an enrichment. The Antwerp Academy is certainly well known here and has a very good reputation. In the summers, I sometimes organise study trips to Paris and Antwerp.'

Anke Loh started her own line after graduating from the Academy. Her designs explore the symbiosis of design and technological innovation, which she researches through diverse projects and collaborations. She has designed costumes for choreographic works by Arco Renz, Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker and others. She has also taught at the Fashion Academy in Ghent. In 2005, she was invited to give a lecture at the Fashion Department of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and was immediately hired as a teacher. In 2013, she was awarded her professorship. Her investigation of wearable technology has been further developed in collaboration with science faculties and such companies as Philips and Luminex.

Left: *Le Petit Chapeau Rouge*, fourth year collection by Bernhard Willhelm, 1998. After he graduated, together with Jutta Kraus, Willhelm founded his own label, with men's and women's collections. He has been teaching at the Universität für angewandte Kunst in Vienna since 1999.

Right: *Multi*, fourth year collection by Erik Verdonck, 1993. Erik Verdonck worked on his own label from 2001 to 2005. Since 2003, he heads the Fashion Department of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in the Hague.



Many other graduates later found their way to art education, either exclusively or along with other work. Linda Loppa, who graduated in 1971, began teaching at her alma mater in 1975, first as a visiting lecturer, later as head of the department. In her own inimitable way, inspired by passion and conviction, she brought international renown to the Fashion Department in Antwerp and was the inspiration behind all manner of projects that have since become fixtures of permanent value, such as the Flanders Fashion Institute and the Fashion Museum (MoMu). In January, 2007, after 25 years as a teacher and department head in Antwerp, she became Dean of the Polimoda Fashion School, a private school in Florence, where she continues to share her expertise.

Patrick De Muynck, who graduated in 1990, has been teaching in Antwerp since 1994 and also joined the Polimoda staff in 2009. There are also other Antwerp Academy fashion alumni who are helping to train the new generations: Walter Van Beirendonck graduated in 1980, has been teaching since 1984 and has been head of the Fashion Department of KASK Antwerpen since 2006; Nellie Nooren, Class of 1985, has taught at the Fashion Department of KASK Antwerp since 1987; Katarina Van Den Bossche, a 1990 graduate, is also teaching at KASK Antwerp; Hans de Foer, Class of 1990, Institut français de la mode; Erik Verdonck, Class of 1993, teaches fashion at the Royal Academy of Art in the Hague; Valeska Schmidt-Thomsen, Class of 1994, is a lecturer at the Universität der Künste in Berlin; Ellen Monstrey, Class of 1995, is head teacher at SASK Sint-Niklaas; Maureen De Clercq, Class of 1996, teaches at SASK Sint-Niklaas and the Fashion Department of KASK Antwerp; Bernhard Willhelm, Class of 1998, teaches at the Universität für angewandte Kunst in Vienna; Veronique Branquinho,

Class of 1995, is also at the Universität für angewandte Kunst in Vienna; and Damien Fredriksen Ravn, Class of 2008, teaches at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw.

#### ANGELIQUE RAEVEN – ARTIST – L.A. RAEVEN CLASS OF 1995

'Yes, it is strange that, in these 25 years, there have not been more artists coming out of the Antwerp Fashion Department — you would expect it, somehow. When I was there, I noticed that my fellow students were far more preoccupied with clothes than I was. They saw fashion as something very concrete, whereas for me, it was primarily about the concept. Before that, I had studied at the art academy in Breda, and there, people look down on fashion. But I still wanted to do it, because I really liked drawing and because with clothing, I could change and reshape the image of the body. The school itself was certainly intense; there was a friendly atmosphere, but still a lot of competition. Looking back, I think it was an excellent art training. To the art world, by the way, I do not hide the fact that I studied fashion: there is nothing inferior about it.

'I am almost certain that I would not be making the art I am making if I had not gone to the fashion academy. My work is very influenced by fashion. It is always about appearance, about the body, identity, the image. For me, the way you look is an obsession — it always has been. The fact that I began making art together with my sister Liesbeth was of course also a factor. I came from the fashion world, where everyone is ideal, and her background was in the medical world, where the body is un-ideal. We try to combine these two. As an artist, you are allowed some deviant behaviour: by not identify-