

The Master of Muses

By Isabelle Buneo

How Iris van Herpen continues to push the boundaries of haute couture by taking inspiration from anything in order to transcend everything.

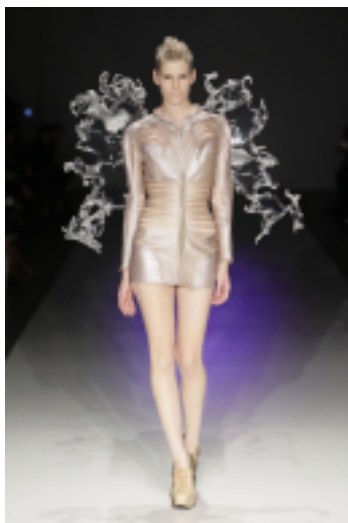
Iris van Herpen, Dutch fashion designer and couturier, is one of the most influential names in the world of haute couture today. Throughout the past decade, van Herpen has established herself as a revolutionary, not only through her incredible designs and impeccable craftsmanship, but also her eccentric and unorthodox approach to fashion.

For van Herpen herself and the Maison of Iris van Herpen as a whole, “haute couture is a transformative force that transcends boundaries and unites multi-disciplinary technologies with intricate artisanal craftsmanship” (The Maison of Iris Van Herpen). Van Herpen understands fashion and haute couture as a powerful force that can transcend conventions and bridge the realms of technology, fashion, and craftsmanship, which makes the brand’s aesthetic so innovative and enthralling.

Van Herpen first began her fashion journey in high school, quickly learning how to embroider, cut, and sew. Her development of technical skills led her to Artez Institute of the Arts. It was here that she studied fashion design before honing her craft at internships with Alexander McQueen and Claudy Jongstra.

Van Herpen launched her own label in 2007 and immediately began experimenting with laser cutting fabrics and printing designs. Since then, she has successfully executed collections containing 3D printed shoes, digitally printed fabrics, and even electrically charged garments.

Although her creations rely heavily upon technology and machinery, much of van Herpen’s inspiration comes from the natural world. In an interview with *Fast Company*, van Herpen spoke on how living in Amsterdam has served as a prominent inspiration, inspiring her affinity for water and the local canals (Segran). Van Herpen’s Spring/Summer 2011 ready-to-wear collection encapsulates the designer’s fascination with the motion of water with garments made from pieces of transparent proprietary acrylic.



Other aspects of the natural world have influenced van Herpen’s collections. Fascinated not only by the beauty of nature but also by its “complex, perfect processes,” Van Herpen is profoundly

interested in the life of fungi (Segran). Her infatuation with plants, fungi, and the environment manifests itself clearly in her Spring 2021 haute couture collection, titled “Roots of Rebirth”. Van Herpen’s goal with this collection was to depict the intricacies of fungi and plant life that, unbeknown to most of us, live beneath our feet. The references to fungi in “Roots of Rebirth” is one of the many examples of van Herpen taking inspiration from the everyday to make otherworldly creations.



Similarly, van Herpen created a custom gown made almost entirely out of recycled Evian bottles for Russian tennis player Maria Sharapova to wear to the 2021 Brit Awards. Although this custom creation speaks to van Herpen’s focus on sustainability within her designs, it also reflects her ability to transform ordinary items, ideas, and images into something spectacular.



Yet one does not need access to a 3D printer or a surplus of recycled water bottles to transcend reality like van Herpen; all one needs is an open mind and a passion for fashion. Iris van Herpen has undoubtedly transformed the world of haute couture and luxury fashion, but anyone can follow in her footsteps and transform their own, personal style by viewing the world as van Herpen does, as an endless gold mine of inspiration. Whether it be the color-blocked seats on the subway, the soft glow of streetlights on rain soaked streets, or the fungi beneath the trees of Central Park, Iris van Herpen proves to the fashion lover that inspiration truly is all around us.

Sources

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