

Preserving Dutch Fashion Archives. The Fashion Network in Arnhem

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The Dutch Archives Law provides for the preservation of all public archives at the national, provincial and local level.¹ In addition, the corresponding archival institutions are permitted to acquire private archives². Therefore, there is, in principle, a safety net to preserve all the archives of cultural and historical significance for posterity. In the Netherlands, there is a long-standing tradition for archives to acquire private collections that are related to their geographic area. For example, the Gelders Archives, where I work, houses the archives of sports clubs, churches, hospitals, charities, companies, etcetera³. However, although a safety net exists, valuable archives still get lost or are in danger of being lost. Among those threatened are the archives of designers, and more specifically those of fashion designers, which is the subject of this presentation.

In 2001, a Temporary Advisory Committee on Design, established by the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science, noted that almost no attention was being paid to the conservation of design collections, and their archives faced the risk of destruction and oblivion⁴. As a consequence of this report a working group on design archives was set up under the presidency of Premsele, the Netherlands Institute for Design and Fashion⁵. This group reported in 2005 and recommended registering all Dutch design archives as a beginning to securing the archives of designers of national and international importance.⁶ Subsequently, in 2006, a master plan, the Heritage Design Archives, was drafted, which recommended rescuing the 'top 20' of the most important and threatened archives and creating a central register of design archives. The Mondriaan Foundation, financed by the Dutch government, granted € 960.000 for the implementation of the master plan.⁷ As a result from 2007 to 2010, twenty archives belonging to various disciplines of Dutch design, such as graphic design, industrial design, conceptual crafts, and fashion design have been transferred to various archival institutions and museums and made accessible.⁸

The grant also made possible the development of an online database to map the locations of design archives in the Netherlands. The database was established in 2008⁹ and is called NOA, the National Design Archive.¹⁰ NOA lists more than 2,000 Dutch designers, galleries, associations, agencies, and companies holding design archives but while the archives have been identified, not all have been rescued. Without preservation and access to the design archives themselves, it is impossible to study the history of Dutch design as these archives are essential for research, not only of design history in general, but also for the reconstruction of specific design processes.

What is true for design archives as a whole, also applies to fashion design. Until the 1960's fashion designers in the Netherlands copied the examples of Paris' couturiers, but this changed in the 1980's when talented designers started to follow their own ideas and creativity thinking. Dutch fashion design currently is internationally acclaimed; Viktor & Rolf, for instance, is well-known, and Dutch brands like G-star, Mexx, and Oilily are internationally successful.¹¹

Unfortunately, there is no institute in the Netherlands where Dutch fashion is permanently exhibited. There are some museums that manage fashion collections, but exhibiting these collections is not a priority. For fashion archives the situation is even worse. A first step towards the preservation of fashion archives was to undertake a quick survey of the archives of five important designers: Frank Govers, Jan Janssen, Piet Paris, Alexander van Slobbe, and Viktor & Rolf. The survey was financed by the Mondriaan Foundation in 2009 and 2010¹² and included

a description of the importance of the designer, the historical context of the archives, a summary of the archives, a plan for arranging and describing the records, and an estimated budget.

As most of the important current Dutch fashion designers graduated in Arnhem, at the predecessor of the ArtEZ Institute of Arts, it is understandable that José Teunissen, a lecturer in fashion design at the ArtEZ, took the initiative to advocate for the establishment of an institute for fashion heritage to preserve the archives and facilitate research. In 2008, she was one of the initiators of the research project 'Dutch Fashion Identity in a Globalized World',¹³ a collaboration between the ArtEZ, the University of Amsterdam, and the Saxion University of Applied Sciences. Working on this project, she encountered difficulties in both finding and consulting the archives of designers who showed no interest in assisting students and other researchers. This experience supported the view that the transfer of these archives to an archival institution, where they would be preserved and made accessible, would greatly facilitate research. In 2009, José Teunissen started a dialogue with the directors of the Arnhem Museum of Modern Art and the Gelders Archives about the possibility of setting up a fashion heritage institute. The Museum had organized exhibitions on fashion in 2005, 2007, and 2009, and as its collection policy included the disciplines of design, and especially fashion design,¹⁴ it was interested in cooperating and collaborating to establish an institute.

The Gelders Archives is a Regional History Center. These Centers exist in most Dutch provinces and are a merger of the municipal archives in the provincial capital with the provincial archives. In Arnhem, the archives of neighbouring municipalities are also included. Governmental records of enduring value are transferred to these Centers, and private archives are also acquired. The Gelders Archives aims at a balanced and representative collection; that means a collection that reflects themes specific to Gelderland and the Arnhem region, including fashion design.¹⁵ The Gelders Archives already housed important collections for historical research on fashion, such as the collection of a fashion photographer and some magazines. In addition information could also be found on clothing, costumes, and uniforms from past centuries in some of the private archives. Consequently, the Gelders Archives was also interested in collaborating in the institute project.

The initiative of the ArtEZ lecturer José Teunissen resulted in the establishment in 2011 of the Modekern Foundation, Institute for Fashion Heritage. The focus of the Foundation is to collect, provide access to, study, and exhibit the archives of internationally significant Dutch fashion designers. The board of the Modekern Foundation consists of a fashion design lecturer at the ArtEZ, and the directors of the Museum and the Archives. The Foundation functions as a networked organization, i.e. there is no specific building but each partner brings their own strengths to the organization, each having its own responsibilities based on their particular skills and knowledge, operating in their own locations. The Gelders Archives manages the records of important fashion designers; the ArtEZ uses these records for research and education; designers and students can study the fashion archives for inspiration and use the archives to further their development, and the Museum organizes exhibitions based on the archives and fashion objects. Together the three partners manage the Modekern website.

Premsele, the Netherlands Institute for Design and Fashion, with responsibilities for promoting the preservation of Dutch design, welcomed the Modekern initiative and offered a project coordinator until December 2013. Premsele appreciated that the establishment of the Modekern meant that design material that had not yet been collected would have a secure location to be kept and made available for research.

The city of Arnhem and the province of Gelderland subsidized the Modekern from 2011 to 2013 providing € 290.000. For the municipality and the province, the initiative fitted very well with the

policy of both governments to stimulate fashion and fashion design in Arnhem for economic as well as for cultural reasons.¹⁶

The relationship between Arnhem and fashion dates back to 1953 with the establishment of an institute for fashion design.¹⁷ Since 2005 the city has promoted itself as *Arnhem: City of Fashion*. In that year the Arnhem Fashion Mode Biennale was organized for the first time, and repeated every second year until 2013.¹⁸ The biennial demonstrated the current state of fashion in shows, workshops, and exhibitions, with the Arnhem Museum for Modern Art participating as a partner in the exhibitions. Supported by the city, the old district of Klarendal was revived after 2008 as a fashion quarter, inhabited by several young designers. The hotel 'Modez', located in this quarter, opened its doors in 2012.¹⁹ The hotel rooms have been decorated to tell the story of a different aspect of fashion and were designed by designers who had graduated in Arnhem. Work was carried out under the supervision of designer Piet Paris as the art director. Therefore, with the support of municipal and provincial policy and several initiatives in the city, the climate in Arnhem favored the development of the Modekern initiative.

When the Modekern was created, there were no comparable initiatives that could be used as examples. The Victoria and Albert Museum in London has its Archives of Art and Design,²⁰ and the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) in New York has collections that include fashion.²¹ However, in both cases, the acquisition of fashion archives is not related to the importance of the archives per se but to the collections and the curriculum offered on fashion. The creation of the MoMu in Antwerp is the closest example to the Modekern initiative.²² This institute is not only a museum but also an archives but because it houses the institute for fashion design, training, in conjunction with the collection, is possible. However, the MoMu is what the Modekern does not want to be: an institute which covers all functions in one location. Modekern is and will be a networked organization.

One of the first actions of the Modekern was to formulate an acquisition policy. It was decided to focus on the archives of fashion designers who have their own original style and profile where the element of design and conceptual thinking is important. Priority is given to the designers who are linked to Arnhem or broader, the province of Gelderland, followed by other Dutch designers and stylists who designed fashion licensed by Paris's fashion houses. The archives of fashion illustrators and of organizations and institutes that document the development of the Dutch fashion design are also accepted as well as books and other publications on fashion. The acquisition of fashion archives includes not only the records that document the creation process but also those that document the business of the fashion designer.

The Modekern itself does not acquire archives, rather it is the Gelders Archives that does this, in the context of the Modekern. The first archives of importance that the Gelders Archives obtained were the archives of Koos van den Akker,²³ which arrived from New York earlier this year. The Dutchman van den Akker lives and works in New York on Madison Avenue and among his clients are, or have been, Elizabeth Taylor, Stevie Wonder, Cher, Brooke Shields, Julie and Harry Belafonte, and Glenn Close.²⁴ He is most famous for the sweaters worn by Bill Cosby on his shows. The collection consists of 8 linear meters of records, documentation and photos that an archivist is currently arranging and describing. Koos van den Akker donated his archives to the Gelders Archives to ensure that they would be taken care of after his death.

Currently the Gelders Archives is in the process of acquiring the archives of Spijkers & Spijkers and Piet Paris. The two Spijkers sisters received their master degrees from the Arnhem Fashion Institute in 2000 and in the same year, they presented their graduation collection 'Girlfriend' to the international fashion press in Paris. They set up their label Spijkers & Spijkers in 2001 and in 2006 they held their first show in London.²⁵ The Spijkers prefer to keep the garments and the

archives together which means transferring the archives to the Gelders Archives and the garments to the Arnhem Museum but unfortunately this is currently impossible to arrange because of a lack of storage space at the museum.

The acquisition of the archives of Piet Paris is currently being negotiated.²⁶ He also graduated from the Arnhem Fashion Institute. Although trained as a fashion designer, he moved to being a fashion illustrator and his sketches can be found in fashion magazines such as *Vogue*. He has also illustrated advertising campaigns for Saks Fifth Avenue in New York.

Archives and magazines have also been acquired. In 2013, all 40 editions of the Dutch fashion magazine *Dutch*, published first quarterly and later bimonthly from 1994 to 2001, were obtained. Published by Sandor Lubbe, with Matthias Vriens as the fashion editor, the magazine grew into a leading international fashion magazine that served as a model for many subsequent independent fashion publications launching the careers of photographers such as Philippe Cometti and Matthias Vriens.²⁷

Dutch will be used for an exhibition called 'Everything but Clothes' that will take place next year in the Arnhem Museum, the new name of the Museum of Modern Art. The subject of the exhibition is internationally renowned Dutch (fashion) magazines like *Elegance*, *Avenue*, *Man*, *BLVD*, *Dutch*, *The Gentlewoman*, and *Fantastic Man*. They acted, and still act as a breeding ground and platform for Dutch photographic talent and stylists. The Gelders Archives is also planning to acquire those magazines.

In 2013, the Arnhem Museum of Modern Art hosted the exhibition 'Piet Paris's Chambers: The Craft of Fashion Illustration' as their contribution to the Modekern²⁸ with the Paris archives providing the bulk of the material for the exhibition. The show highlighted Paris's successful career and his design process examining his way of working and key developments in his art through sketches, photographs, and drawings. It also showed his special position in the Dutch and international fashion illustration arena. Old and new works were on display side by side in a playful manner designed by Paris himself.

On Friday, June 20, 2014, the Modekern organized a conference on fashion heritage in the digital age. This conference was a project of the Modekern and the Nieuwe Instituut, the national institute for architecture, design and e-culture. The availability in digital form of vast quantities of fashion heritage (dress collections, archives of designers, textile archives, etc.) is drastically changing fashion research today. During this conference attention was given to such questions as: What does the digitization of fashion materials mean for designers as makers and intellectual owners of their creations? What kinds of new possibilities does the new scenario present? What new tools are available to people doing classic fashion research?

In the context of the Modekern, the ArtEZ has produced two monographs: on Piet Paris and on Spijkers & Spijkers.²⁹ Next year research will start for the production of a monograph on Koos van den Akker. This reflects the order in which Modekern will work in future: first, the acquisition of the archives of a stylist by the Gelders Archives, followed by an exhibition organized by the Museum, and finally the publication of a monograph by the ArtEZ.

The Modekern has a website, www.modekern.nl, which is not only used to promote the Modekern and its activities but is also used to deliver an online course on fashion design for secondary school pupils. The nucleus of the website is a database with approximately 60 items covering various aspects of fashion and its history. The study material sheds light on various aspects of fashion – art, identity, sustainability, economics – and the work of internationally relevant Dutch designers. In partnership with an education institute, a practical program has

been created for different education levels and of interest to both boys and girls. The course materials are freely available on the website and easy to use in the classroom.

The website also presents information about the fashion archives by linking the finding aids on the Gelders Archives website. All the Gelders Archives' finding aids are also accessible on the Archives Portal Europe,³⁰ which is an initiative of the national archives in the 28 countries of the European Union, financed by the European Commission. The portal aims to provide access to the finding aids of all archival institutions in these countries and in the near future, will function as an archives aggregator for Europeana, the European heritage portal for digitized items. An important condition for participating in this heritage portal is the digitization of at least part of the documents that are made accessible through the finding aids. Taking part in Europeana will mean that the fashion archives of the Modekern will be present in the Europeana Fashion Portal, which aims to become 'a specialized access point to heterogeneous fashion collections across Europe'.³¹

Started in 2011, the Modekern to date has had several successes so far: the archives of Koos van de Akker have been acquired; an exhibition organized; two monographs published; and a well-attended conference organized. However, the development of the Modekern has not proceeded smoothly in all respects. The acquisition of archives is not a simple process. The designers are interested in the Modekern and intend to transfer their archives to the Gelders Archives, but when an archivist knocks at their door they hesitate. They are afraid that other designers will steal their ideas; they are worried that their copyright will not always be respected; they are concerned that photographers will cause problems because they still own the copyright on photos taken of the garments, and they are uncertain about transferring the archives that they may need to support their future work. Some designers do not want to separate their archives from the garments, but currently the Modekern is not able to store both. To date only Koos van de Akker has been willing to donate his archives, but for him the situation is different as he is at the end of his career and pleased to know that his archives have found a safe place where they will be kept for future generations.

If you want to be successful in acquiring fashion archives in the short-term, you will be disappointed. Rather you will need to focus on the long-term. All designers will end their career at sometime and we will have to wait for that moment to acquire their archives. So there is a future for the Modekern Fashion Heritage Institute!

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Notes

- ¹ <http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0007376> (consulted 18/07/2014).
- ² *Ibid.* article 1 sub c 3.
- ³ www.geldersarchief.nl.
- ⁴ *Advies*, 2001, p. 13.
- ⁵ Merged in 2013 with other institutions in: Het Nieuwe Instituut, national institute for architecture, design and e-culture.
- ⁶ Timmer, 2005.
- ⁷ Knoop, 2010, p. 4.
- ⁸ Knoop, p. 8-10.
- ⁹ Knoop, p. 4, 8-9.
- ¹⁰ <http://www.nationaalontwerparchief.nl> (consulted 18/07/2014).
- ¹¹ Van der Horst, 2010, p. 8.
- ¹² www.mondriaanfonds.nl/downloads/Jaarverslagen/MS_jaarverslag_2009.pdf, 131 (consulted 18/07/2014).
- ¹³ See: www.nwo.nl/onderzoek-en-resultaten/onderzoeksprojecten/73/2300140973.html (consulted 18-07-2014).
- ¹⁴ Museum, 2009, p. 6.
- ¹⁵ See for the current ideas on acquisition of private archives in The Netherlands: Jeurgens, 2007, 36-39.
- ¹⁶ *Masterplan*, 2010.
- ¹⁷ www.artez.nl/mode (consulted 18/07/2014).
- ¹⁸ www.modebiennale.nl (consulted 18/07/2014).
- ¹⁹ www.klarendal.nl/hotel-modez-in-klarendal/ (consulted 18/07/2014).
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- ²¹ <http://fitnyc.edu/11449.asp> and <http://fitnyc.edu/8416.asp> (consulted 18/07/2014).
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- ²⁷ www.modekern.nl/site/nl/activiteit/modekern_verwerft_dutch_magazine/ (consulted 18/07/2014).
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- ²⁹ Teunissen, 2012; Van der Voet, 2013.
- ³⁰ www.archivesportaleurope.net (consulted 18/07/2014).
- ³¹ <http://blog.europeanafashion.eu/about/> (consulted 18/07/2014).