

IN PIECES AND PARTS

HEIDI VOET

Clothes largely determine our appearance in the outside world. We often believe we freely choose what we wear. Only in a number of situations our choice of clothing is imposed. But even when we have a free choice, we are ingrained by many influences. We want to look a certain way because we identify with a specific generation, personality profile or (sub)culture. As such we seek to comply with societal norms and established traditions.

For “In pieces and parts” Heidi Voet replicated the entire contents of her wardrobe, creating a varied overview of more than a decade of public appearances.

In their appearance, people slip from one role to the next. The multiplicity of identities implies the fragmentary nature of a contemporary human’s life. Incongruities in our social conduct may cause us to transgress established standards, at times with a tragicomic effect as a result. Heidi Voet considered this shifting effect when copying the outfits. Whereas the new garments fatefully adopt the shapes and sizes of the wardrobe models, its color and character does not. Traditionally, society has been forced to accept the role of the jester. Which is that of the maladjusted individual who openly displays their failure and upon whom society projects its underlying fears. The extravagant appearance of the clown or jester unveils the condition in which we preserve our own mythical self-image.

Historically, very few collections of clothing stood the test of time. Consumer society stimulates rapid developments in the wardrobe. Media and advertising encourage us to purchase large amounts of clothes from which we gain little more than a vague increase in status. Our fashion awareness does serve investors in ready-to-wear clothing firms and retail chains. Clothing is intrinsically connected to our temporary appearance. For an extensive period of time, the wardrobe is undisclosed from the public eye and remains hanging in the private closet like an empty mould. “In pieces and parts” recuperates a collection of clothing as a sample card of our time. At the opening, a large group of participants will wear all the outfits and form an overview of different appearances in one time and space. While in real life we can only gradually gain an impression of someone’s individual wardrobe, here we are instantly confronted with the complete collection in the exhibition space. Elegance and striving for effect compete with their tragicomic downside. The performance requires no particular talent from the participants, as we are all exceptionally skilled in our role play.

After the opening, portraits of the participants wearing their foolish attire will be exhibited, and the pieces of clothes will be folded and displayed in the three suitcases in which they travelled from Asia to Europe. Heidi Voet had these unique items made by small-scale independent seamstresses in her country of residence in Asia. As clothing codes differ from one culture to another, familiar identity profiles may prove dysfunctional when we venture off the beaten track. Through our attire we reveal whether or not we have assimilated the codes of our new environment. Fashion awareness and education encounter the boundaries between cultural areas. Role models change even more over time. They demonstrate us that we would no longer feel comfortable with our past history and may someday be surprised at what we once wore. Perhaps this explains why we wish to dispose of our wardrobes repeatedly. “In pieces and parts” condenses a particular moment in time, but insights about shifting identity codes will undoubtedly remain relevant in the future.

Filip Luyckx