

WHAT'S IN A NAME

- WORDS - LISA GOUDSMIT -

MY FASCINATION WITH THE USE OF LANGUAGE IN THE FASHION WORLD IS A NEVER-ENDING LOVE STORY. WE ALL KNOW THE OLD ADAGE 'A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS', BUT THERE ARE TIMES WHEN A NAME CAN CONVEY MORE THAN EVEN A THOUSAND IMAGES PUT TOGETHER. NOW THE TIME HAS COME TO SHINE OUR FASHIONABLE MAGNIFYING GLASS ON THE EVERLASTING TREND OF GIVING GARMENTS A PERSONAL NAME.

Are you a Dutch woman who buys her pair of jeans at a local fashion chain which name rhymes with the words He, She and Me? (Let's not say the name out loud, because why would I give them free publicity, when they've used my name without asking first!) Well, this particular chain has named their denim collection after girls, and the 'Lisa' is one of their most popular models. So there's a good chance I'm hugging your bottom at this very moment, making it look as good as possible. And ladies, you are very welcome.

Now why would a company choose specific 'human' names to describe their different jeans models? Apparently, they associate certain names and their connotations with specific designs. Now, I wonder: what do a pair of jeans and I have in common? Am I blue? I hope not. Am I stretchy and flexible? Well, I do like to think so; I'm not that old yet and I took a few yoga classes last year. Do I make your behind look good? Honestly, I'm more interested in making my own behind look nice and firm, hence the yoga classes, but hey, whatever makes you happy. Am I a feminine, fashionable, classic yet tough creation that never goes out of style? Bingo. That's it. So, the mystery of the 'Lisa' jeans is solved; they obviously named it after me. All of a sudden naming items of clothing after people makes sense. Sometimes, you just have to figure out the connection; it's like a game.

The Amsterdam Fashion Institute has its own brand called 'Individuals', which is developed by 3rd and 4th year students. The brand attempts to have an ongoing look, and actually succeeds rather well in doing so. But maintaining a certain style can be quite challenging, since the group of designers is made up of different students each year. The challenge may be difficult, but at the same time, that's where the strength of 'Individuals' as a brand lies. As the name of the brand already indicates, the ever-changing combination of individual ideas are the reason that 'Individuals' remains interesting and dynamic. To honor the students who design the garments, their designs are named after them. So, the brand 'Individuals' includes for example a 'Jesse' dress, 'Anne' trousers and a 'Bram' jacket. This adds a nice personal touch to the line and it's a true justification for the use of names.

In other cases, designs are named after sources of inspiration. In the fall of 1965, Yves Saint Laurent created his Mondrian collection, featuring dresses which were obviously inspired by the geometrical paintings of Dutch painter Piet Mondrian - or Mondriaan, to use the Dutch spelling of his name.

What's in a (n)a(me)? The Victoria & Albert Museum in London as well as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City own what is probably the most famous dress from this collection: the classic white-red-blue-black-and-yellow-blocked model. But in the beginning of 2012, the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam - which might be considered The Met of the Netherlands - bought a slightly lesser-known dress from YSL's Mondrian collection: a beige-black-and-yellow-blocked version, with less obvious references to Mondrian's paintings. Yet the Rijksmuseum, which does not own a large collection of contemporary fashion items, considered just the name enough of a reference to art to spend € 30.000 on the dress to add it to its collection. This made me wonder: is the name given to a fashion item enough to transform a garment into a piece of art - even in the eyes of people who don't consider fashion to be art. In addition, can such an item be worth a lot of money to a prestigious art museum? Apparently, naming fashion items after well-known sources of inspiration is quite a lucrative marketing tool. In 1956, movie star and princess Grace 'Gracia' Kelly (why do people keep changing their names?) appeared on the cover of Life Magazine with an Hermès bag covering up her pregnant belly. The bag was named Kelly and wound up being the first 'it-bag'. In front of (and due to) Grace's belly, a royal classic was born. The bag became tremendously popular with people waiting for years on end to get their hands on it. Less than 30 years later, Hermès performed its same magic again when it designed a bag for actress Jane Birkin: the legendary 'I-want-it-I-want-it-I-want-it-Birkin' bag. Oeeeeee, je t'aime...

So in conclusion, it's clear that naming a fashion item is as important and can be as difficult as naming a newborn baby. Just like a child, a design is hopefully considered to be a perfect creation of its maker. Therefore, naming it can be just as big of a struggle as choosing a name that your kid has to carry all of his or her life. (Guess you didn't think of that one when you had little Apple, did you Gwyneth? Or were you hoping for some kind of iPod-for-life-deal?) But since those wonderful pieces of fashion are all individual characters, they deserve a fitting name. And now if you'll please excuse me, this Lisa is going to put on her 'Lisa' jeans, grab her 'Birkin' bag and throw on a 'Bram' jacket to go out and see the Mondrian dress at the Rijksmuseum, and show the world some 'Lisa-ness'. Au revoir.



IRIS VAN HERPEN

Iris van Herpen (born 1984 Wamel, The Netherlands) started her own label Iris van Herpen in 2007. She studied Fashion Design at ARTEZ (Arnhem) and did internships at Alexander McQueen in London and Claudy Jongstra in Amsterdam. Iris van Herpen stands for a reciprocity between craftsmanship and innovation in technique and materials. She creates a new direction of couture that combines fine handwork techniques with futuristic digital technology. The essence of van Herpen is expressing the character and emotions of a unique woman and to extend the shape of the feminine body in detail. Iris: "For me fashion is an expression of art that is very close related to me and to my body. I see it as my expression of identity combined with desire, moods and cultural setting." For her AW12 collection she was inspired by "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea" and used nature and the aquatic world as influences. Her innovative creations looked like architectural pieces, accentuating mostly the shoulders and hips while depicting sea creatures. Materials she used to help create the structural looks were leather, synthetic boat rigging, plexiglas and copper.