

KINKE KOOI <> TENANT OF CULTURE

Fittings

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Kinke Kooi

I learned the most since the moment I acknowledged the importance of the things I love to look at and feel sympathy: an important one is things that fit, like spoons in a box or a setting that beautifully fits a stone. But also my hand that slides perfectly in a glove. Mostly in our culture it is been seen from the perspective of the hand, it is one-sided. Imagine it from the perspective of the glove. I think fitting is always relational, like the bee shapes itself to the flower and the flower to the bee.

With all the clothes in my wardrobe I have a relation, good and bad and also abusive. And so have my mother, my sister and my daughter. We talk about it a lot, we share a very passionate interest, we feel the fabrics and look at combinations. The phrase 'don't shrink to fit' shocked me the most because it is so true. And we laugh about the pieces that we hope will fit in the future, because our bodies are changeable in size.

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A model would come in and every single item due to appear in the collection would be fitted on her body. The model would walk around in the garments so the designer could see how the fabrics moved around and caught the light. A glass of water would be poured over the garment to test its waterproof qualities. The model would sit, bend, jump and crawl to make sure the garment fitted well in the most awkward positions. Darts would be inserted with pins, extra space where needed would be cut out with a clever bias cut, just with scissors directly into the garment. At the end of the session the garments looked like mutated, post apocalyptic zombie clothes. Stitches, cuts and pen lines now dominating the previously smooth surface of the item.

Efficiency is rendering this process obsolete, reproducibility being prioritised over fit. In commercial production, industrial patterns dominate in order to meet the demand of mass production. These maintain standardised sizing charts called pattern 'blocks' or 'slopers' ranging from xxs to 2xl. In this method of constructing a garment the focus lies on the 'cut' rather than the drape. It is about the efficiency of what is being cut away, the line is finite, alterations are no longer possible.

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Looking sharp is a complex understanding: in my opinion it means cutting away the unnecessary. My mother never looked sharp in that way but for me

always extremely beautiful: her wardrobe is her palette and her fits her art pieces. She always works with scarfs and drapes them. I think my sympathy for drapes and folds comes from there: drapes are pliable and fittable and I see that as a philosophy. The funny thing is that the only word I remember from my history lessons at primary school is the word fibula. This was a pin used to keep drapings together and you see them still in folkloristic dress. The whole piece of fabric is draped in a dress: I see that as a holistic statement. I have a fear of sharpness because the unnecessary is cut away.

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Pliability and fitting imply a flexibility of form, you could say amorphous or shapeshifting. It is unpredictable and therefore often considered treacherous, like a swamp or a bog, you don't know in which places you might sink. Fashion as a phenomenon has similar characteristics, it is transient and contingent, and categorically changes shape every season. The ability to change yourself to 'fit' is a quality that resonates with the history of women. The ability to shape shift to fit a situation is required. In Western society we regard the steady, the universal and the eternal as higher in rank than the pliable or compliant. Women and fashion alike have a different relationship to changeability, pliability and fit. They therefore also have a different relation to 'autonomy', understanding the notion of autonomous as being separate or cut off from influences. Fashion acknowledges its status as 'influenced' it moves in accordance with the sensibilities of the time. Here we arrive again at the the idea of the fit versus the cut, and the idea of the fibula, gathering the textiles together into a garment. Yet without the occasional cut there would be no fit.. What would a world without any cuts look like?

Text by Kinke Kooi and Hendrickje Schimmel on the occasion of the exhibition *Fittings*.