

exhibition guide

YOUTHQUAKE

Longing for eternal youth



INDEX

introduction

theme 1

MINI-ME

theme 2

TO BE YOUNG FOREVER

theme 3

YOUTH SELLS

theme 4

AGING WELL

colophon

YOUTHQUAKE



INTRODUCTION

Forever young. I want to be forever young... It's a matter that always seems to get a great deal of attention in the world of fashion. What we wear and why generally reflects the spirit of the times, but fashion can also bring time to a stop. Over the past century, young people have gotten a stronger say in society, resulting in a social Youthquake. Our culture has become imbued with the desire to be young, to stay young, to look young. And this is nowhere more apparent than in fashion.

YOUTHQUAKE

Fashion provides a universe where being young is obsessed over and ageing is disparaged. Even though nowadays conventional beauty standards are under pressure, the catwalks and fashion campaigns are still dominated by ultra-beautiful, ultra-thin, and ultra-young (role) models. The search for the fountain of youth is constant and it offers an endless source of inspiration for fashion creatives to produce wondrous worlds. At the same time, that source is shamelessly commercialized; the youth inspire, youthfulness sells.

YOUTHQUAKE closely examines the shifting views on youth and youthfulness through clothing, photography and video. Starting with 19th-century fashion that didn't include separate children's clothing, followed by the youth and fashion revolutions of the 1920s and 1960s, up to the turning point when contemporary designers, imaginative and free like a child, approach fashion as an ageless phenomenon.

How has the fashion industry become obsessed with youth, and how has the youth become obsessed with fashion? What are the consequences of this obsession? What role does fashion play in the battle against our advancing years? And can fashion provide an escape from the process of ageing?

YOUTHQUAKE



theme 1

MINI-ME

Room view theme 1 Mini-me, photo: Eva Bomert

Imagine a world where the concept of children's clothing doesn't exist. Children wear the same type of clothes as their parents, with an adjustment in size but a tight and uncomfortable fit. It lacks colour and playfulness - and instead children are made to look like mini-adults. Wealthier parents dress their offspring as lavish smaller versions of themselves, while the labourers dress their children in more practical clothing to earn their daily bread just like mum and dad. This is what the Western world looked like before the 19th century.

YOUTHQUAKE

The way our society today celebrates childlike characteristics is quite a recent phenomenon. During the Enlightenment philosophers such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau first described qualities specific to children such as spontaneity and freedom, but it would take at least another century for the general public to gain appreciation for these traits. Over the course of the 19th century, the child is increasingly regarded as an individual. But it wasn't until the 20th century that characteristics and behaviours typical of children were translated into clothing that literally and figuratively offered room for this - made possible by the upcoming children's clothing industry.

Back to 2021. On Instagram celebrities and their offspring shine in matching designer items. Five or six-year-old influencers in high-end looks are obsessively followed by millions, and the long queues for exclusive pop-up shops are mainly made up by teenagers. Families are becoming smaller and parents invest more and more in their children, both financially and psychologically. And so, just like before the 19th century, the child is a reflection of - the success of - the parent. The mini-me is back and in fashion.

YOUTHQUAKE



theme 2

TO BE YOUNG FOREVER

Room view theme 2 To be young forever, photo: Eva Bomert

‘The youth is the future’ sounds like a cliché nowadays, just as self-evident as the constant exchange taking place between young people and fashion. The youth expresses themselves through fashion, and the fashion industry looks to the streets for inspiration. But where does this obsession with youth come from? Why is the youth so influential? And how is this reflected in the work of contemporary designers?

To understand the fusion between youth and fashion, one must first go back to the roaring twenties. Before this period, adolescence wasn't considered a distinct stage in life: childhood, without the later recognized puberty, transitioned straight into adulthood. This changed at

YOUTHQUAKE

the beginning of the 20th century, partly due to the establishment of compulsory education and the abolition of child labour. Disillusioned by the great number of deaths among young adults during the First World War and the Spanish flu, youngsters celebrated life and rebelled against the restrictive class system. For the first time in history, with school being compulsory, young people spent most of their time together. Their taste in music, fashion and language developed into an influential culture that was set against the oppressive conventions of the previous generation and promoted freedom, emancipation and hedonism.

The sixties brought on a second youth revolution. The post-war baby boom led to the biggest-ever generation of young people who radically opposed the conservatism of the 1950s. Diana Vreeland, then chief editor of the American fashion magazine VOGUE, coined the term 'youthquake'. The latest fashion trends were no longer created in the studios of couture designers, but erupted from the streets and actively spread through the modern post-war mass media. Hot pants, jumpsuits and mini skirts - the less fabric the better - represented this new-found freedom.

To this very day, it's the young generation that sets the trends. With constant exchanges taking place between (sub)cultures, most often online, there's no such thing as a uniform fashion style anymore. New styles emerge from the streets and spread faster than ever through social media. The works of prestigious designers such as Raf Simons and Virgil Abloh (Louis Vuitton) are a complete melting pot. The street is the catwalk, and the catwalk is the street. The trend that started in the 1920s and 1960s shows no signs of stopping.

YOUTHQUAKE



theme 3

YOUTH SELLS

Julika Rudelius, Forever (2016) (film still)

Few fashion icons have grown up in the spotlight as prominently as Kate Moss. In 1990, the then 16-year-old model appeared on the cover of *The Face*, a moment which was later described by stylist Melanie Ward as *'a personification of a youthquake, the so-called 3rd Summer of Love, with Kate as its muse'*. By now, we know every detail of the grungy model's appearance.

Moss is just one of the many ever-younger models that have since become part of the increasingly sexualized images in media.

YOUTHQUAKE

From the moment that young people are recognised as a separate (target) group in the sixties, the marketing of youthfulness is taken much further. The models that advertise the clothing become just as important, if not more important, as the clothes they wear. Fashion trends are made to accentuate the 'perfect body', and brands fully capitalize on this in both their marketing and their fashion collections. Plastic surgery and botox have long ceased to be taboo in the (fashion) world, and the conversation about youthfulness steadily develops into a conversation about holding on to a 'young', attractive appearance - up to the point where youthfulness and desirability seem to mean the same thing.

The eternal search for youthfulness seems to be inherent to human nature. Our visual culture, dominated by the constant stream of images on social media, keeps presenting us with – despite recent counter-movements – unattainable body images. Sex sells sounds a bit outdated in 2021, but to what extent does Youth sells not advertise the same thing? And what are the consequences of this impossible standard?

JULIKA RUDELIUS, FOREVER

“What is beauty?” In the video-installation Forever (2006) by Julika Rudelius, wealthy American women reflect on this personal subject. While lounging by the pool, strolling around the garden or taking photos with a Polaroid camera, the ladies answer – inaudible – questions about happiness, obtaining beauty, and the relationship between beauty and privilege. Their outspoken style, injected lips, and tight-drawn faces make it difficult to guess their exact age.

YOUTHQUAKE

Rudelius plays with perception; the two-screen projection portrays the women as they would like to be seen, without undermining their carefully constructed reality. The five leading ladies are given the opportunity to be who they want to be and share their individual ideas on eternal youth.

JUNO CALYPSO, THE HONEYMOON

For *The Honeymoon* (2015), the British artist Juno Calypso took a solo trip to a romantic resort in Pennsylvania, a hotel usually frequented by couples on their honeymoon. In the series of photographs, Calypso herself – as a single woman – plays a central role, constantly transforming through styling, make-up, masks, and decor. The outlandish hotel rooms form the stage for Calypso's intuitive study on desire, disappointment, and solitude. Calypso's work focuses on exploring themes such as femininity, feminism, gender, and youthfulness. With a visual language that is as terrifying as it is sweet, the artist manages to stop time – and the process of ageing – completely.

JUNO CALYPSO, WHAT TO DO WITH A MILLION YEARS

In the 1960s, the founder of AVON cosmetics, Gerry Henderson, built an enormous bunker under his house in Las Vegas. The underground shelter covers almost 1,500 square metres and includes living quarters, a swimming pool, dancefloor, and gardens illuminated by artificial daylight. In 2018 Juno Calypso was allowed access to the photogenic time capsule, resulting in *What To Do With A Million Years*. Building on *The Honeymoon*, the artist presents a series of self-portraits that capture humankind's most extreme attempts to stop the process of ageing.

The bunker was originally constructed as a means to survive the Cold War but is now owned by a mysterious group that strives to become immortal. Calypso turns the shelter into a metaphor; her eerie view of the underground dwelling reflects the social conventions surrounding youthfulness. During her stay in the bunker Calypso found - not entirely surprising - pamphlets on the latest developments in cryonics: the procedure whereby a person's body is frozen at death to preserve their tissue indefinitely.

YOUTHQUAKE



theme 4 **AGING WELL**

JimmyPaul, ElmoLove, JimmyPaul x Sesamestreet collection, 2019
Room view theme 4 Aging Well, photo: Eva Bomert

From fluffy toys and clowns to every cartoon character possible - the joyful and uncomplicated world of a child universally appeals to the imagination. However short childhood may be, and no matter how seriously the fashion world takes itself, contemporary designers like to take their inspiration from it. Feelings of freedom, nostalgia and escapism keep reappearing in both conceptual and commercial collections. And whether it's Mickey Mouse or Cinderella, the number of collaborations between fashion houses and Disney is hard to keep up with.

YOUTHQUAKE

A bit more nuanced is the approach of cult-designer Walter Van Beirendonck, whose seemingly sweet-looking *Electric Eye* collection (2016) contains a message of social criticism. Dutch designers such as Bas Kosters and JimmyPaul also bring together a childlike and adult perspective in their work; the furry dream is celebrated and crazed at the same time.

Although the world might be obsessed with youthfulness, the ageing population means there is a growing number of people over 65. Their style is increasingly imitated by the younger generation and effortlessly mixed with subcultural trends. The Balenciaga collection by Demna Gvasalia reveals floral dress designs that are older than most of the youngsters who wear them. There's an ongoing search for alternatives; the fashion world is starting to embrace the beauty of older generations. More models over the age of 50 are appearing on the runways, and big campaigns are representing more mature faces (wrinkles and all). There's a new-found appreciation for ageing, with a visible nod and/or 'up yours' to the youth. A symbol of this transition is the 99-year-old icon Iris Apfel: every generation can find an endless source of inspiration in her zany style. Youth is no longer bound by age - '*young at heart*' is a fashion motto that will last you a lifetime.

YOUTHQUAKE

WALTER VAN BEIRENDONCK

At first glance, the *Electric Eye* collection by Walter Van Beirendonck (spring/summer 2016) appears to be a cheerful spectacle. The colourful menswear collection derives its name from David Bowie's song "Moonage Daydream" and features toylike silhouettes and enchantingly sweet motifs that could just as well be patterns for baby or children's clothing. But when you take a closer look, you can make out bright lightning bolts, dark clouds, and a recurring ominous eye.

Underneath the surface of Van Beirendonck's designs lies a sinister message. *Electric Eye* is a social criticism on modern-day culture that, according to the Belgian designer, not only offers a stage to an endless stream of selfies, but also terrorist organisations like ISIS. In other words, a disturbing visual culture that makes it practically impossible to look away.

BAS KOSTERS

Bas Kusters' oeuvre is a passionate plea for softness. Kusters is known as one of the Netherlands' most distinctive designers and creates a universe where clothing, installations, drawings, illustrations, textile art, soft sculptures, and videos enter into dialogue. His energetic work is a reaction to the world around us and addresses topical social issues. Kusters combines a childlike perspective with the explicit rawness of youth culture, creating a surprisingly charming tension. For example, his friendly fashion monsters appear as if they have come straight out of a children's picture book. But a closer look reveals they actually have massive genitals.

And next to the drawing of an endearing teddy bear is clumsily written: “Sexy time!”. Typical of Koster’s creatures are their large eyes that stare at you as innocently as they do penetratingly.

IRIS APFEL BY LUIS MONTERO

The Belgian fashion designer Dries Van Noten describes the 99-year-old Iris Apfel as follows: “She breathes young air, thinks young thoughts, and gathers no dust.

I simply adore her.” Apfel owns three apartments in New York filled to the brim with her collection of clothing, ranging from couture pieces to flea market finds. Apfel started with a textile and decorating business, but could soon count many famous names among her clientele.

When asked about her opinion on cosmetic surgery, her answer is always straightforward: “Unless you have a nose like Pinocchio or you’re in a fire or something, why would you mess with your looks? I know people who have come out looking like a Picasso painting.” In the series by photographer Luis Monteiro, shot in Apfel’s Miami apartment, the symbiosis between fashion and youthfulness is emphasised by the childish accessories and setting: teddy bears, sweets, and dolls have been combined with designs by Gucci, Marc Jacobs, and Giambattista Valli.

HARMEN MEINSMA

Harmen Meinsma is currently based in Rotterdam but grew up with his grandmother in Friesland. In his teenage years, Meinsma started photographing himself and his friends in his grandmother’s attic. Intuitively he focussed on bringing to life his personal fantasies full of unconventional beauty, a theme that still characterises his visual language.

YOUTHQUAKE

Through the series *My Dear Joyce*, Meinsma wants to give his muse Joyce, who sometimes feels like a social outcast, “The feeling that she’s alive again and is the most important creature on earth”. Meinsma’s preference for older female models can be traced back to the overwhelming love of his grandmother. His work is at odds with social stereotypes surrounding ageing and presents youth as an ageless phenomenon.

JIMMYPAUL

JimmyPaul can count many big celebrities among his fans, and not just world-famous stars such as Rihanna and Ariana Grande, but also the wondrous creatures from Sesame Street and Hello Kitty. His exhilarating work explores the boundaries between costume, fashion, and art, and is instantly recognisable by its high fructose and cuteness level. JimmyPaul accurately describes his designs as “One-of-a-kind low-brow fashion pieces, resulting in high-art fashion statements.” In his *Hello Kitty* collection (2020), JimmyPaul pays tribute to both his Asian heritage and his Western upbringing. The eclectic collaboration with *Sesame Street* (2019) on the other hand, is mainly inspired by our universal nostalgia for the world of Big Bird, Elmo, and Cookie Monster.



Ari Seth Cohen, Advanced Style (Project) 2008-ongoing

ADVANCED STYLE

Advanced Style is the renowned project by American photographer and author Ari Seth Cohen. His platform - and now blog, hashtag, documentary and popular book series - is devoted to featuring stylish seniors, which he initially started because of the absence of mature faces in fashion media. On his subjects Cohen says: "I feature people who live full creative lives. They live life to the fullest, age gracefully and continue to grow and challenge themselves." Advanced Style is born from Cohen's personal passion for fashion, and inspired by his relationship with his late grandmother Bluma. He describes her as his best friend and teacher, and it's her energy and attitude towards life that Cohen parlayed into a photographic phenomenon that has become a worldwide movement.

COLOPHON

YOUTHQUAKE. VERLANGEN NAAR EEUWIGE JEUGD

This exhibition is organized by Kunsthal Rotterdam
in collaboration with Modemuseum Hasselt.

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SPATIAL DESIGN Maison The Faux

GRAPHIC DESIGN Willem Stapel / Anneke van der Stelt

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Ron Barneveld, Jan van Vliet, Bart Cuppens tentoonstellingsbouw,
Rotterdam / Decoratelier

LIGHT A.B. Geluidstechniek

GRAPHIC REALISATION Rocka / Cubord / PXL Carpets

COMMUNICATION Sabine Parmentier / Willemijn van Drunen / Anna Kerkhoff

DEVELOPMENT Jeroen van Breugel / Sabiha Taner

EDUCATION AND PUBLIC Simone Dresens / Jamie Deen

TEXTS Leendert Sonneveld

TRANSLATION TEXTS Tara Heemskerk

REPRODUCTIONS EXHIBITION

- Queen Marie Antoinette of France and two of her Children Walking in The Park of Trianon, Adolf Ulrik Wertmüller © Erik Cornelius / Nationalmuseum 2009
- Celebrity Sightings in New York City - September 5, 2016, James Devaney
- Dancing Girls, Sasha (Hulton Archive)
- Four Minis, Evening Standard (Hulton Archive)

Special thanks to the team of ModeMuseum Hasselt

We would like to thank all the artists, designers, and galleries who have enriched the exhibition by loaning artworks

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