

DIRK VAN SAENE

HANNIBAL



BAM! magazine
Summer 1990

DIRK VAN SAENE

*. 1990. "BAM" was a Belgian magazine
the Antwerp Six all worked for in some shape
or form.

Back then it was always the same team:
Ronald Steops (photographer), Inge Gognard (make-up),
Kirstina De Coninck (model) and me (Stylist).

We mostly shot in Ronald's old studio or on the
streets of Antwerp - we'd jump on a tram, shoot
in front of shop windows, in the middle of a
zebra crossing with people walking by: part.
We'd never ask for permission because it
didn't occur to us!

After Gis Brødahl, Kirstina became my
model. Ronald introduced me to her and
I knew immediately.



This veil is made by Stephen Jones.
The words are made out of pipe cleaners and
inspired by Mazzy Star and Hole song titles.

FOREWORD

DIRK VAN SAENE is quite possibly the most headstrong of the Antwerp Six, which, in relation to that particular group, is of course incredibly telling. In a world where the biggest careers hinge on visibility, Dirk doesn't particularly care to be perceived. Outside validation has never been of real importance to him. Louise Bourgeois, one of his great idols, once confessed: "I fear the predatory quality of people — that people are coming to gobble me up; asking me more than I can give." Just to say: Dirk doesn't like interviews or talking about his work either. When we first came to him with the idea of a monograph, his answer came swiftly: "A book? Not a book!"

We wrote it down immediately, as a potential title.

Dirk was the last of the Antwerp Six without a personal monograph. For us, that was an inconceivable thought. How can you withhold a dedicated overview of an artist this singular? A man who has worked for more than forty years across fashion, painting, ceramics, jewellery, textiles and photography, and never once accepted that these are separate disciplines. Who graduated from Antwerp's Royal Academy of Fine Arts, won the second Golden Spindle, and stood among the six who drove a van to London and rerouted fashion history — and then, of the six, became the hardest one to categorise: the Surrealist, the master of taste and craft who folds fashion and art into trompe-l'oeil constructions and meticulous narrative gestures. Who, with his husband Walter Van Beirendonck, ran some of the most ground-breaking stores Belgium has ever seen — *Beauties & Heroes*, *WALTER*® — shopping concepts that arguably foreshadowed some of today's most famous stores. Who forewent an international career (Jean Paul Gaultier called), firmly planting himself in Antwerp so he could teach at the Academy. Much of the talent running houses in Paris and Milan these past twenty years passed through his graduation class. Who has superfans across the world: women who never truly believe it's the end and are prepared to wait years for a Dirk Van Saene collection to drop, then collect it like gold dust.

If you want true conversations with an artist like this, patience is everything. So we were patient. And when Dirk signalled he was ready, we sat at our living room and studio tables, with hundreds of photographs, invitations, zines, clippings and other ephemera spread out and Dirk speaking, remembering, doubting, laughing. Our wish, from the very beginning, was for the reader to get as close as possible to his mastery, his impeccable style, his humour, his incredible mind. So when he told us that he wanted every text written out in his own hand — as if you were reading his personal journal — we knew the book had found its form. It was frankly the only honest option for a man who wrote his show invitations on torn-off personalised magazine covers and enclosed metro tickets, so guests would be sure to find their way to his *défilé*.

We know introductions like these also often want the subject contextualised in his particular era. This book scoffs at any type of chronology, because Dirk refuses it too. Plus, set one of his pieces from 1990 next to one from 2009 and you would be forgiven for thinking they were made in the same week.

He said "Not a book!" It became one anyway.

Headstrong.



AUTUMN-WINTER
1989-1990



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AUTUMN-WINTER 1989—1990

ANTWERP

* That wig was a character.
We called it "het ratje" or "the little rat."
It was completely worn out and inspired by
"Les Incroyables et Merveilleuses":
The young people who, after the French Revolution,
shocked people by being entirely anti-fashion!
The women were dressed in sheer fabrics in the
late 1700s, inspired by Greek antiquity,
with half wigs ("postiches") that did not match
their natural hair colour.
The men wore vests and shirts with huge collars
and comically large cravats.
They were at the forefront of something and
in my opinion they were the first punks!



INSTALLATION
**“THE FRONT ROW”,
2026**

MOMU — FASHION MUSEUM, ANTWERP



The Gallerist, 2026
Metal, rubber, Jean Patou sunglasses, wicker





The Movie Star, 2026
Stoneware, acrylic paint, ostrich feather plumeau





This look, An(neke)
Vandevorst wore during
my S/S 1991 show.
These people, for me,
were my family.
The little troupe
I gathered around me.



AUTUMN-WINTER
2019—2020
'Hand-bag' in leather

AUTUMN-WINTER
2019—2020
Hand-painted 'leg' stockings and
'floating heel' slingbacks



This little T-shirt is from S/S 1997.
I was inspired by those posters you see,
taped to the lampposts, when someone
has lost their cat - sooo sad, but I
always find them beautiful:
the layout, all homemade, with "Reward"
written on them and a telephone number...
All very emotional!

The whole Punk period I find very fascinating!
But I always temper it with a sweeter,
funnier side, not too heavy-handed.
Even Punk, for me, has to be allowed a smile.

DIRK VAN SAENE

REWARD

476-0212

• GREEN EYES

• WHITE AREAS ON FACE

• DARK GREY TAIL

• GREY + WHITE CHEST

• HER NAME IS KITTY
SHE'S 2 YEARS OLD
AND WEARS A RED COLLAR.
SHE IS VERY SWEET
SO YOU DO NOT HAVE TO BE
AFRAID SHE WILL SCRATCH
YOU. WE AND HER FRIEND
WILLIAM AND PUCK MISS HER

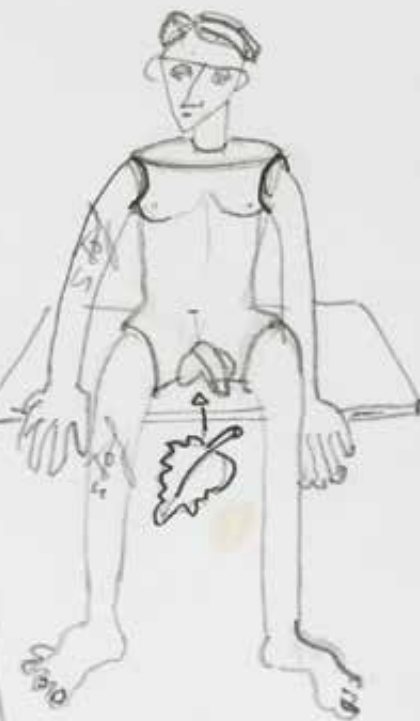
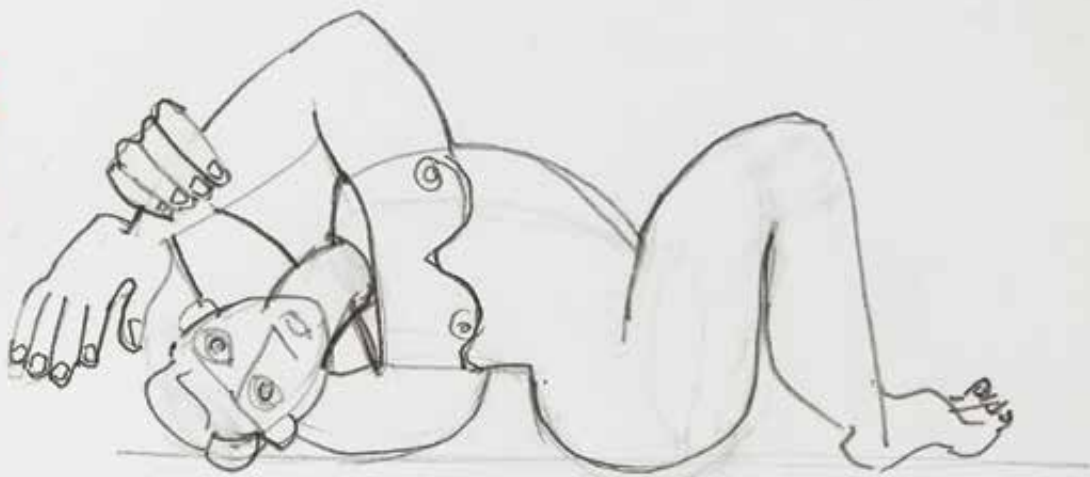
• WHITE FEET

TERRIBLY !! IF YOU HAVE SEEN HER, PLEASE CALL VS
AT NUMBER : 476-0212 • THANK YOU. DVS.





This work has a painting, hanging against the wall, with a slit cut into it. Underneath is a chair, with a ceramic head on its backrest. The head pushes through the slit in the painting, so that the "flat" painting and the 3D head meet in the same work.







x An "ear-ring": a golden ring that hangs
from your ear.

**"AN ANGEL,
KISSING SPRING",
2023**



170

**Walter Van Beirendonck and Dirk Van Saene,
photographed by Ronald Stoops, 2014**

It's true that I watch over Walter a little -
not protect him exactly, but keep an eye out.

On everything - on what he eats - on all of it.

I am the more rational one in the relationship;
he is a creative dreamer, the kind who lives
inside his head a lot of the time.

Though so am I, in my way. We would not
have lasted otherwise.

It is simply that one of us has to remember
the everyday things and that has mostly been me.

**"16.600 days...", 2022
Stoneware, wood
95 x 40 x 27 cm**





Three seasons. Three shows. Not a single piece sold. So now the money was gone, I went to do commercial work for a while. I worked as a designer for Bontsons (people called it the "Burberry of Belgium") and for Scapa. Looking back, I don't regret any of it. But I do think, perhaps I should have sold at least one jacket!

For those three shows I had no manufacturers, no sponsorship, no institutional support. Every single piece was made by hand, by my dear friend Elke Hoste.

Which also meant there was no possibility for production afterwards.

That was the situation. We were completely free, and completely unprepared at the same time.

During that period, she lived with Walter and me in our apartment. She and our Bull Terrier "Sado" would sleep together on the couch.

We worked day and (many times) night.

We had the best time!



SPRING-SUMMER
1991

A woman is the central figure, wearing a form-fitting, shiny, light-colored outfit that appears to be made of latex or a similar synthetic material. The outfit is decorated with numerous vertical and horizontal strips of reflective, metallic-looking tape. She is standing in a room with a warm, reddish-brown color scheme. In the background, a large, illuminated sign with the word 'TAXI' is visible. To the right, a group of people are seated, watching the woman. On the left, a person is partially visible, wearing a red hat and a brown jacket. The overall atmosphere is that of a fashion show or a performance event.

I had latex pieces,
edged with
Dymo-tape;
little embossed
strips of text
running around
the edges;
I was completely
mad about
the artist
Jenny Holzer,
her truisms,
all of that
and the whole
atmosphere of it
is in those
latex pieces.



This is Inge Onsea
who modelled for me.

They all had a choker
around their neck,
with their name
and height on.



SPRING-SUMMER
1991
Hand-painted show invitations



These invitations I found at the Waterlooplein flea market in Amsterdam.

There was a stall selling photographs from porn films. I thought they were perfect for my second show.

I wrote the word "invitation" over the picture in red nail polish and put a little stamp with the information of the show, on the back.

Every invitation was different. You got a "pièce unique".

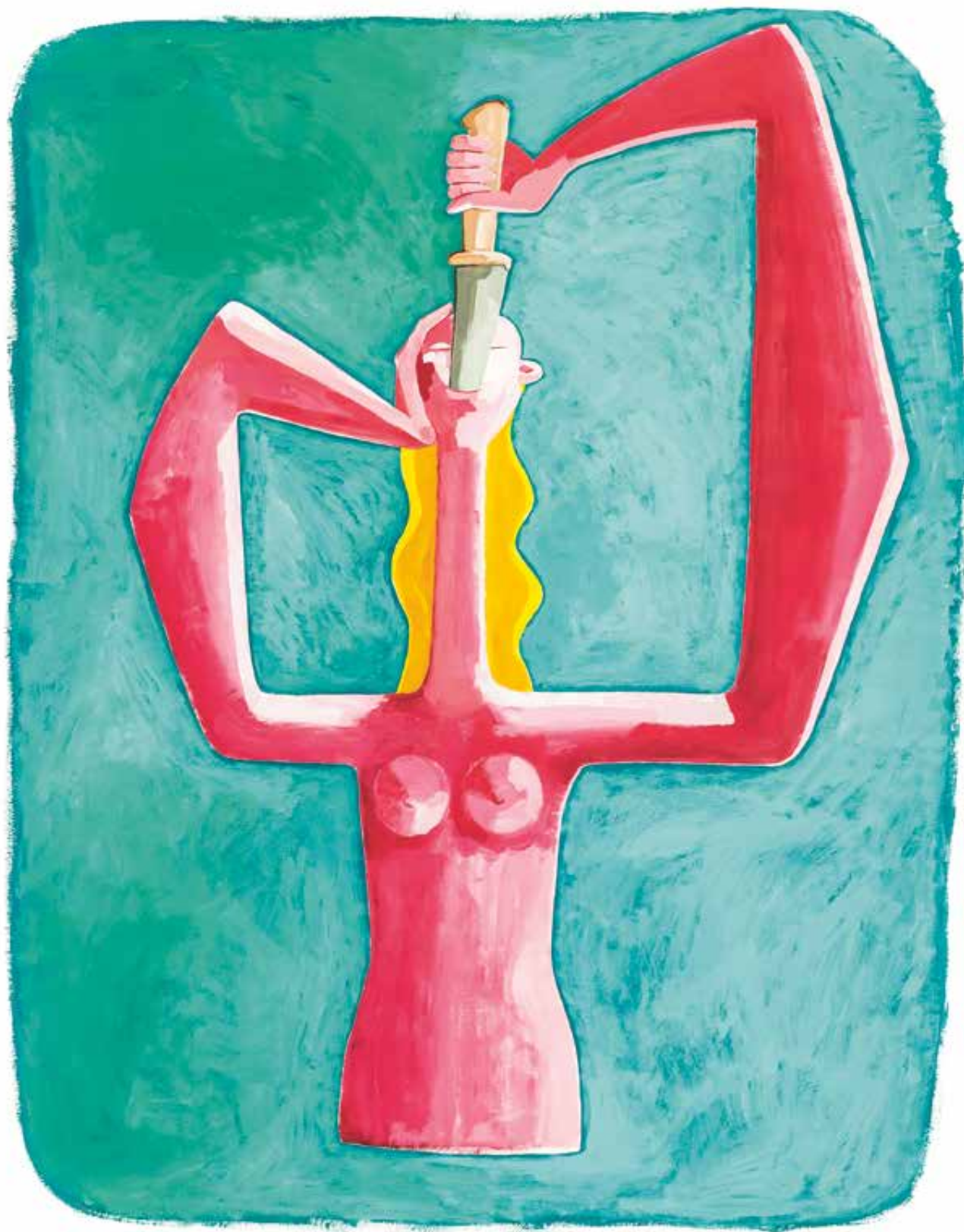
**"STORIES OF HOPE
AND DESPAIR",
2021**



230

***"Love Will Tear Us Apart, Again..."*, 2021**
Acrylic on paper
150 x 118 cm

**"STORIES OF HOPE
AND DESPAIR",
2021**



231

***"You Ought to Be in Pictures... Oh What a Hit You Would Be..."*, 2021**
Acrylic on paper
150 x 120 cm



This is my very first ceramic piece.

The first one I ever made, at the European School when I was ten, perhaps twelve. It's the only work I have ever glazed.

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SPRING-SUMMER
1989
Invitation image
Model Cris Brodahl

curriculum door Crissie Brodahl

Dirk,

Dirk is fijn maar klein
net een konijn
hij mag er zijn

van uw vriendin
de spin



At one point in my career, I needed a CV.
I called Cris Brodahl and asked her,
rather in panic: "Can you make me a CV?"
"Of course" she said and sent me this.
I treasure it deeply!

DIRK VAN SAENE

"It's been a blast!"

HANNIBAL



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