

Viktor & Rolf  
photography Laetitia Negre





























all clothing *Viktor & Rolf Fall 2016 Couture*

Production: *Susie Babchick @ Ridley Scott Associates*

On set production: *Marianna Frannais*

Stylist: *Lotta Aspenberg*

Casting Director: *Juergen Schabes*

Makeup artist: *Elias Hove @ Jed Roots*

Hair: *Robin Pawloski*

Set design: *Anna Burns at LalaLand*

Set Built: *Belmndo*

Photographer's assistant: *Sebastian Böttcher and Ben James*

Runner: *Daniel Smith*

Makeup assistant: *Rachel Freeman*

Stylist assistants: *Neesha Champaneria*

Set design assistants: *Stephanie Kallergi and Flaminia Veronesi*

Retouch: *Unit 7 retouch*

Location: *Frank Merritt Studio*

Equipment: *The Pro Center*

Catering: *Venerdi*

Driver: *John Taylor*

Models: *Sarah Abney @ Fusion Models NYC, Loe Topalov @ Supa Model Management, Jack Price @ Supa Model Management, Jordan @ Supa Model Management*

# Vagabond

## Some call it art

by Catherine Somzé / photography Inez & Vinoodh (portrait)

Modern art and fashion have always been closely intertwined. Artistic trends succeed each other in pretty much the same way as fashions do; fashion merges art and life as modern art never will. In the Netherlands, breaking boundaries between disciplines has become a trademark of all good art and design. Dutch fashion designers Viktor Horsting and Rolf Snoeren, better known as Viktor&Rolf, have dedicated their lives to doing both. Together with other luminaries of their generation such as Alexander McQueen and Hussein Chalayan, they have changed the rules of the haute couture game, and have helped on their way the increasing acceptance of fashion as art. Some call it anti-fashion.

For almost twenty-five years now, Viktor&Rolf have been walking off the beaten track of haute couture both by inspiration and necessity. Their strategies, often borrowed from conceptualism, have involved poster distribution, smashing ceramics on the catwalk, as well as testing the endurance of their models. In the Fall/Winter 1996–97 collection, Viktor&Rolf went on strike as a statement against the high tempo of haute couture “seasonal” work; for their first couture collection they created breakable accessories; and in *The Fashion Show*, their Fall/Winter 2007–08 couture collection, they literally put their models “in the spotlight” by having each of them carry several. They commented on fashion using fashion. They made art.

And they did much more than that. They founded an internationally successful brand and cultivated fruitful collaborations with cutting-edge photographers such as Ines van Lamsweerde, and Blommers and Schumm. They were hired by L’Oréal to develop a line of fragrances including the popular Flower Bomb, and did *prêt-à-porter* for fourteen years with stores in Paris and Milan. About a year ago, they decided it was time to stop designing for the factory-made clothing industry, and to go back to their “studio.” Since then, Viktor&Rolf have been able to fully dedicated to haute couture again.

This Fall/Winter season, they present “Vagabond,” a collection dedicated to their own past collections. Excess, repetition, and self-references are key to creations that feature button-clad basic daywear and military garments, generously embroidered with leftover fabric from previous seasons. From their headquarters in Amsterdam, a historical mansion on the Herengracht, Viktor&Rolf talk to ZOO Magazine about fashion as autobiography, experimentation, and the importance of beauty in everything they do.



**Catherine Somzé: What does it mean for haute couture to be a laboratory, “a place to experiment”?**

Viktor Horsting: Experimentation is very important to us. It’s a method. On a very practical level, every collection has a new idea but also a technical challenge. There is a new “invention” coming about.

Rolf Snoeren: It means for us it’s a free zone to do whatever we want to do without any restrictions.

**CS: You mention that there’s a technical achievement and there is an idea. I imagine the technical achievement has to do with the idea.**

VH: Always! With “Vagabond,” we were thinking about time and history. How can we use our own history to create something new? Literally. So, that was the idea we started with. We were also thinking, how can you look at your own history and be equanimous about it? We wanted to have a Zen attitude about our own history.

**CS: What do you mean?**

VH: We translated that by taking all of our fabrics from past collections, and weaving them together without regard for which type of collection or which season they were coming from. We just created a new fabric out of the old.

**CS: Where did the idea to take your own history as a starting point come from?**

RS: Maybe to look at the past and move on.  
VH: We had stopped working with ready-to-wear and were wondering what could be the next step after that. How can we make sense of everything that we’ve done, how can we write a new chapter but without getting rid of everything we’ve done before.

**CS: But you’ve always been forward-looking in you work, so why look back?**

VH: I don’t see a contradiction there. Every season, it happens. You ask yourself what to do next and you ponder about what you’ve done

previously. Maybe it’s like that for creative people in general. When you’re faced with having to, or wanting to, create something new, there’s always the void. And the question is always what am I going to make?

RS: Stopping ready-to-wear, breaking with that part of the industry, was important. We were thinking, why does everything have to be new every time? Why not look at the old, why not look at everything we have?

**CS: Is “Vagabond” a comment on the fleetingness of fashion then? The need to constantly do something new?**

RS: Maybe not so much on the notion of the “new,” because you always want to create something new, but rather on the fact that everything you’ve done and worked with has to go away...

**CS: So it was perhaps more about sustainability.**

VH: And then taking fabrics as symbols. We were not just working with materials, we were working with the materials as symbols of previous collections and ideas of the past. So, it’s not only about the sustainability of the materials — literally upcycling materials — it is rather about the sustainability of ideas. That was the thinking behind it.

RS: That’s quite an accurate comment...

**CS: How did you translate that idea into shapes, silhouettes, forms?**

VH: The material dictated the forms in this case.

**CS: But you also used military jackets for instance. What informed that choice?**

VH: Good question... there were military garments, there were jeans, there were also some trench coats as well as shirts. First, the material itself suggested daywear but then we also added tulle. I don’t really know! There’s something utilitarian about it...

RS: There was definitely a reference to utilitarianism in order to create to an everyday atmosphere.

VH: I also think it had to do with the fact that we wanted to create a look which suggested wearability, or an everyday use at least. And even if it was just a suggestion, that was the frame of reference. The technique, weaving, was really about the basis of clothing, fabric making. Before “Vagabond,” we had made collections that had been quite far removed from the idea of wearability, from clothing as such.

**CS: Such as the “Wearable Art” collection, for which you created dresses out of printed canvases that looked like paintings, with frames and all?**

VH: When we stopped making ready-to-wear, we asked ourselves once again, what does couture mean for us.

RS: The “Wearable Art” collection was a literal translation of the idea that our fashion was art to be worn. And lots of the time, our work starts with language, and then we visualize that language. Let’s take an example. People often talk of “red carpet dressing.” We then literally created a collection using red carpet! We just wanted people to think about that phrase, we wanted simply to communicate to people what that means, literally. It’s a visualization of words. VH: The thinking behind “Wearable Art” was the same.

**CS: But with “Vagabond” you referenced yourselves.**

VH: We often take our own history as a frame of reference. It’s a recurrent theme in our work. An important work in that sense is the dolls we started making in 2008 to celebrate the tenth anniversary of our label at the Barbican. The dolls wore miniature versions of iconic pieces from the past. It’s not necessarily fashion per se but the thinking behind it is similar to what we also do in fashion. RS: Perhaps the “Vagabond” collection was more literal than before though, but we also see our work as an autobiography. The clothes say something about us. It tells about how we feel rather than about what we think is an upcoming fashion trend for instance.

**CS: In this sense, you’re as much conceptualists as you are expressionists...**

VH: You’re the first to say that, but I think you’re right. We usually start talking to each other and drawing. “Doodling” would actually be more appropriate. It’s about those moments that you do something semi-consciously while talking or doing something else. In meetings, for instance, I need to draw because otherwise I can’t concentrate, and there’s always a kind of spontaneity to those drawings. We take them as starting points.

**CS: I must say this sounds totally different from your drawing process in the documentary *Because We’re Worth It*, which seemed very formatted and according to set conventions in fashion drawing.**

VH: It was the filming. People who film always want to see you draw but it can never capture the spontaneous moment. Because I sit with the camera looking over my shoulder and it just does not work that way.

RS: And each season the process is different anyway...

VH: For the “Vagabond” collection we started with the weaving idea.

**CS: Your work is also as much about craft as it is about ideas. Your haute couture is just as much conceptual art as it is wonderful craft.**

VH: I think beauty is an important word in everything we do. And for us, there is beauty in ideas, but then the execution needs to be beautiful as well. When you think about conceptualism, the idea as such could be sufficient, and then the execution may not be as important. For us it’s not the case, we like both! And then we try to balance.

**CS: And you yourselves! You also always look so sharp and boy-like on photographs. Do you see yourself as embodiments of your own art?**

VH: There is always an element of play. We are very aware of the importance of “looking good” on pictures, and looking good means looking dead serious. When you smile, your face is in action, and at risk of falling prey to deformity! [laugh]

**CS: Since the beginning of your career, you have at times taken the stage yourselves, and played a role in your own fashion shows. During “Wearable Art” for instance you helped the models undress, and hung the pictures that were originally folded around their bodies on the walls.**

VH and RS: We take the stage only if we really must. [laugh]

**CS: So you’re performers in spite of yourselves...**

VH and RS: Yes...

**CS: ...if the concept requires it, then you do it.**

VH: Yes. And then, every time we say “never again”...

RS: ...and then this idea pops up and then you have to do it, again!

**CS: You’re working on your new couture collection — can we get a hint of what it’s going to be about?**

RS: We don’t give hints.

VH: We’re very superstitious. [laughs]

**CS: Superstitious? That things won’t work in the end?**

VH: No, it’s just not good to talk about these things before hand, also because it’s fully in process.

**CS: So, there’s an element of surprise and magic about a new collection coming into being.**

VH: Hopefully! We constantly ask ourselves, “What is it going to be?”

[www.viktor-rolf.com](http://www.viktor-rolf.com)