

Bernhard Willhelm

1. When and why did you decide to become a fashion designer?

When I was 18. It was a spontaneous decision. I studied fashion in Trier, and then in Antwerp, followed by internships at Vivienne Westwood and Alexander McQueen. I actually wanted to study botany and I'm wondering whether I should still do it now, since I closed my studio in Paris in August last year.

2. What was the first item of clothing you designed?

A linen hooded jacket that I sewed at home to practise.

3. How do you come up with your ideas and transfer them to the body?

There are always different starting points. I drape a lot on small mannequins. It's a quick option to get pattern ideas, and it helps for the three-dimensional form finding. I look at vintage/ second-hand clothes, and things that have sold well. Then I examine specific processed materials, fabrics, and yarns, and consider how to place them on the body. Patterns and looks are tested and perfected with toiles—inexpensive fabric—before being sewn into the right one.

4. Who are your clothes made for?

For those who like to wear it. There has always been a fanbase in Japan, where our collection was produced for 18 years with the Onward Kashyama Group. Because Tokyo fashion kids are into Antwerp design, they have always been important to us. Rather than in European shops, our clothes are available in Los Angeles, New York City, and then there are also lovers who collect our things.

5. What role does the feeling of the fabric on the skin play—the heaviness or the lightness of the garment?

There are various contrasting elements that define the fabric:
masculine / feminine
cold / warm
flowy / stiff
soft / scratchy
natural / synthetic
recycled / new

It depends on the collection, season, mood/vibes/trends, on how the fabric is used, and what customers in a specific country like to wear in that season. Of course, that often depends on the temperature.

6. Who and what influences your work?

I'm someone who likes to decide on my own how things should look, but I often ask for opinions from people who don't have much to do with my work. That often happens when fitting, since the model always influences the design, too.

7. What significance does the body have in your work?

Fashion is something that only plays around the body. Masculine and feminine elements and consciously chosen contrasts of both are interesting. However, when defining the final look, something abstract/new that doesn't necessarily relate to the body often helps. Then it goes more in the direction of art and especially sculpture. I believe that clothing and the body should be treated very freely when working as a fashion designer. This is the only way to create something new. But of course, the body itself defines the measurements—shoulder, waist, and hip.

8. Beyond their protective function, what function do clothes have for you?

Andreas Kronthaler says, "to attract." Personally, I don't have the ultimate response to this question, but cocooning was yesterday.

9. Does clothing adapt to the body or vice versa?

There are infinite possibilities for how clothes can be worn. The clothing puzzle is ultimately determined by each person according to their own wishes, how adaptable they are, or how flexible their natural environment allows them to be.

10. What is your favourite garment, and why?

I go shopping every week, often it's vintage as these things are always in use. My favourite/most frequently worn items are t-shirts, underwear, and leggings—the rest is changing. I never wear jeans, and strangely enough, never jackets with lapels.

11. What's your current capsule wardrobe?

Asics trainers, cashmere jumper, zip up hoodie, hoodie, t-shirt, nylon/trekking trousers, bomber/army jacket, shorts with leggings underneath, long socks, vintage pieces with errors—discoloured, repaired, too big, too small—simply patina.

12. How is social change reflected in current fashion?

Fast fashion is still very strong in the market, and a lot is copied. The change in design happens automatically because supply and demand determine what is made. More accessories are sold, such as trainers and sunglasses. It's all very superficial and fluid. At the same time, the desire for political and ethical correctness has become stronger, and will be the topic of the future. This is reflected in the demand for organic, bio, and recycled material. People don't want to commit themselves too much to anything because even the educated consumers have consumed enough at some point, and are more and more interested in the non-material.

13. What is the rhythm of fashion?

Depending on temperature and time, to change clothes twice a day, but this can also be ignored.

14. What influence do one's clothes have on others?

I think hygiene and cleanliness are important and are perceived as likeable. Perfume is often very annoying, and too much. It depends on the person, the occasion, and how you feel about yourself. Emotive vs. rational—why not try.

15. Is clothing more painting or sculpture—why?

Colour and form can be expressed through clothing—often concretely with the body itself, or abstractly away from it. Naked and covered, both are possible. Speaking of Greek ideals—one should visit the Glyptothek in Munich.

16. What do you wear when you want to feel confident?

A luxury jogging suit, or all in Ecru (Virgin Vibes...), or a harness in neoprene?!

17. What do you wear when you want to hide?

A cape that makes me invisible, or I stay at home.

18. What question haven't we asked yet and how would you answer it?

I'm not worried about that because we've already come to the narcissistic question 18.



