



Portraits

by mærcel wænders®

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“Mirrors do to truth what bias does to knowledge”

- Marcel Wanders

Portraits

text by Caia Hagel*

Portraits is what happens when the curtain opens on paradise and we see that love is dark, truth is fictional and objects are talismans that allow us to touch our most invisible attributes if we suspend reason, and fall in.

After two decades of laboring to build paradise on earth, these *Portraits*' maker, Marcel Wanders, is in a meditative mood. Behind the curtain, we see him pacing in his metaphoric workshop, staring into mirrors that reflect dystomorphic figures, watching films where dead flowers come alive and virtual interiors hoard secrets. Naked girl lamps watch on, pretending to be happy, while cabinet heads roll off their pedestals and bob eerily on the floor. A giant unicorn rocking horse rocks invitingly back and forth, but when its maker gets on it, we see in his face that this rocking is a tryst with the underworld. If joy in paradise has given way to this deeper, more mysterious layer, we sense it might be because poetry heals the wounds that reason creates.

What becomes of the authentic self in a world of staged selfies? What becomes of the design god's fantasy when he's forced to face mortality and failure in real time? If these struggles are joined by a spiritual dislocation that thrashes beneath the other injuries we try to treat with overwork, hyper-happiness, drugs, ideologies and desperate love, then naming the lies, the fears, the lost loves, the perversions and the phobias, as a way to redeem the worth of the covert imagination and hold taboo into the light—might bring the authentic self back to life—these *Portraits* murmur.

"For a long time, my work was like a Facebook page," says Wanders, "I showed only the most beautiful side, the most beautiful ideas. I wanted to proclaim only the positives. But we know we're not as great as our Facebook pages. It's not really love if you share only half of yourself.

***"Poetry heals
the wound that
reason creates"***



Wallflower Bouquet

2009 | 3+1AP | 51 x 51 x 6" | Aluminum, Glass

A smooth and constant change of colour, offered randomly, is timed to create a shifting virtual flower bouquet reflecting life being perpetually built upon death. Colors are continually picked from a library of photographs of dead flowers. Like our own meandering feelings, choreographed only by emotion, a spatial mood and mesmerizing energy is derived from this pop aesthetic with a technological twist.

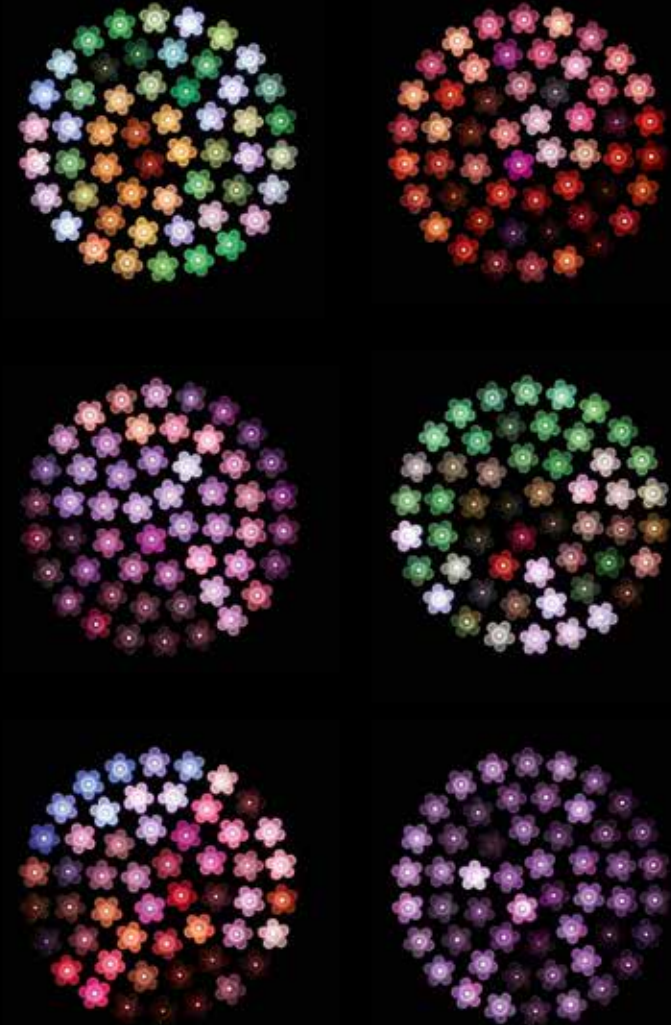
If you're not honest and not complete, then you're loved for the wrong reasons. This work is more intimate, it's what I want to whisper about to people—the hidden me that is disruptive and heavy."

This personal quest's alignment with a collective one, to address the malaise that is boiling quietly in the background of falsity; capitalism's avarice, jihad's mania, mass social media's auto-erotic performance, all gone too far—is brought inside a temple when Wanders asks, "How do I merge the fictional me with the real me?"

The answer is not one that he wants to design into a teacup with a pretty saucer. The answer demands that the logic of design gives way to the lyrical power of art.

Wanders has long been at work on his migration from materialism to conceptualism. His creative trajectory has moved towards ever-greater subtleties: from objects to spaces to filmic representations of life and death. *Portraits* is the coming together of all three. It's an allegorical playground where objects transcend their materiality by being magical, irresponsible, irrational, deviant, dark, emotional, poetic, radical and oracular. *Portraits* are the truth.

**Caia Hagel interviews artists, celebrities, demi-gods and monsters in search of the sublime in 21st century innovation. Her personality profiles, travelogues, art talks and fictions appear here and there in books and magazines, and on digital media and TV networks internationally.*



Monster Chair

text by Marcel Wanders, 2010

One day I will die, I foresee a dramatic ending with some fireworks, some pain and lots of wild music. But after that... it will be silent... silent for a long while...

I will be sitting on a little stool at the head of a large table, ready for an eternal dinner. Seven dark leather chairs with ferocious faces surround the table. Eight sets of silver cutlery and white porcelain plates lay amongst copious amounts of white tulips on a fresh white tablecloth with white ribbons. There will be sparkling crystal glasses ready to be filled with endless amounts of superb wine. Candles will be burning as Callas and Puccini sit in the corner singing heavenly tunes and I will wait for my guests. I will await my seven muses. I will await the seven most important women in my life to dine eternally in their gathered presence.

All the beauty I discovered and hoped to have in my life will suddenly be there for me eternally.

My muses are the true collection of my life. I collect them as if they are butterflies. Throughout my life, my net flies gracefully through the air as I want to catch them without hurting them. I want to treat them with kindness, caution, and respect. I will never pin a butterfly down to keep her from flying. Therefore, I know I am not able to keep them only for myself. (But when they fly away they magically double so I can take them with me wherever I am.) However important this collection is to me, I know that with my inevitable death I will lose not only my life but also my collection of muses.

At that table, after my death, I will wait patiently until my muses fly back to me, to my table for this eternal treat. I will look forward with excitement and hope that they might choose to be with me again. I will hope that I was able to have given them enough respect, love, laughs and

sparkling eyes. I will hope that with time they can forgive my stupidity, disloyalty and little lies. I will hope that I fed them enough flowers and sunshine, poetry and fantasies for them to desire a seat at my festive table. I will enjoy the eternal pleasure of being reunited with my muses. Each muse will find a black leather embroidered chair that is just for her: her solitaire, soft and comfortable, follows the rules of a future contemporary style while conflicting with the rationales of history. Showing the frozen face of a monster, a dragon, seemingly harmless. Only when all seven muses are seated will the party begin. There will never be an end to this orgy of sensibility and passion. We will laugh, we will tease, we will play and we will cry. We will feel connected on the deepest level of our souls. Wine will not give us headaches, sweets will not make us fat, cheese will scent like perfume, for always, forever...

The greater the excitement of being reunited with my collection of muses the crueler and more painful the moment if not all my seven muses will arrive at my table. One of them could decide to stay away, not to join, one of them could turn her back to me.

In this unfortunate event, this dark occasion, this moment of eternal sorrow, I will understand why I deserve my muses' disloyalty. The frozen monster in the free leather chair will come alive. It will step onto the table and reveal its fierce claws. It will spit fire while its black leather skin will turn crimson like fire. From the chest of the monster long sharp needles will spring. With one swift move he will pierce all my loyal muses. I will stay alone at my table, the wine will bloat my skull, sweets will make me obese, the stench of the cheese will make me want to cut off my nose, for always, forever...

But today, I can still serve my muses; I must remember to feed them flowers and sunshine, poetry and fantasies... Eternity might last forever...



Monster Chair

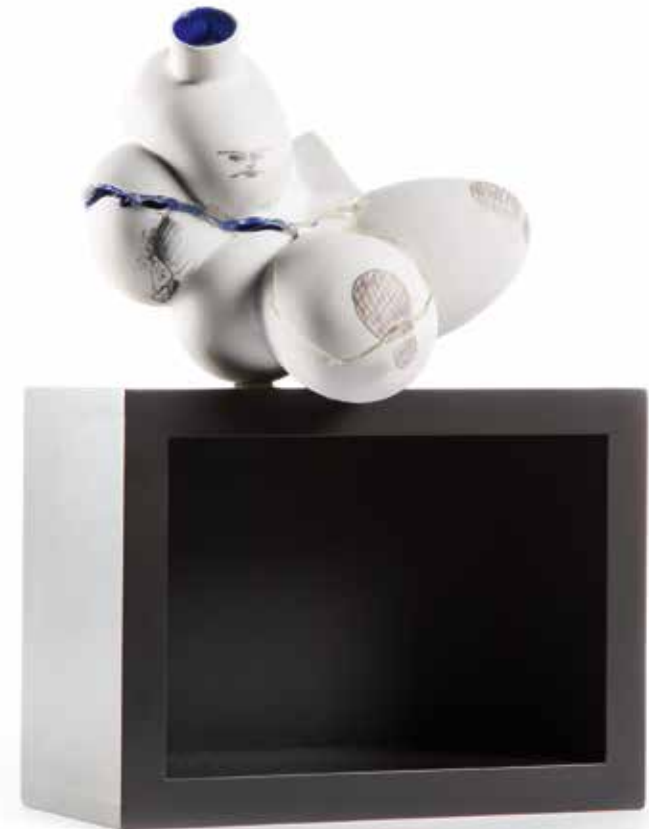
2010 | 7 Unique pieces | 31 x 18 x 16" each
Embroidered synthetic leather

From a fantastical fear and respect of eternal damnation comes an object of beauty and relaxation. As part of the Monster Chair series, and from the artist's vision of the afterlife, come ferocious faces that surround a festive table where muses from his life dine, laugh and play. Yet, within each frozen face lies an enduring reminder representing the threat of eternal punishment. Everlasting mutilation and torture serves as consequence for our mistreatment of those closest to us in this life.

Broken

2013 | 10 Unique pieces | Various dimensions | Diverse materials

Alluding to the duality of the human condition, that which is designed to hold and present beauty possesses its own imperfections. Within these cracks is discovered our own opposing natures, where a part of us desires to live a perfectly lovely existence while the other finds itself unable to do so.





Mondrian Still Born

2013 | 3+2AP | 114 x 228" | Canvas print

Self-reflection and personal disenchantment fuel the passion behind this photo collage of disillusion. From the highest of visions, represented at the lowest level, comes a retrospective that captures the feeling of failure and the essence of mourning. Lasting images combine to present a painful realization of unexpected disappointment in one's self.



The Eurasian Garden Spirits

2015 | Site-specific installation for Oita Prefectural Art Museum, JP
Five balancing egg-shaped sculptures | 5 Unique pieces | 157 x 93 x 93"
PU Coated membrane

Mortality wraps the five seventeen feet tall balloons each depicting painted faces expressed within flower patterns recalling the cycle of life and the ceaseless passage of time. An inflated homage to resurrected free spirits, these pieces are a contemporary re-interpretation of vanitas, a still-life painting of a 17th-century Dutch genre containing symbols of death or change as oversized reminder of their inevitability.





Virtual Interiors

2013 | 5+2AP | 15:55 min; 14:54 min; 18:22 min | Digital video
Music by JacobTV

Cottonwood Spa, Cottonwood, USA – from the series *Virtual Interiors*

To overcome inevitable decay, the artist gives up physical reality and chooses eternity in its place, creating interiors only real in the virtual world. Here, a juxtaposition of serenity and mystique, wonderful, magical interiors take you to the idyllic and strange.



Debauchery Room, Soyuz Centre, Kamchatka Krai, Russia
– from the series *Virtual Interiors*

In these perfect worlds, devoid of human beings, the power of imagination reigns over a distorted location of fantasy, foreboding and menace are creeping out of the cracks of its shiny surface.



German room, Salt Mine, Wieliczka, Poland – from the series *Virtual Interiors*

Portraits 'Unmasked'

Marcel Wanders in conversation with Caia Hagel

Caia Hagel: DH Lawrence once wisely said, "Never trust the teller, trust the tale." As a creative man yourself, I guess it's no surprise that you're telling me you're a liar.

Marcel Wanders: I think artists in general feel that they are liars. We change our minds daily but we do not talk about our daily doubts. I'm talking about mine now, in this exhibition. If I say 'this is my life', and I am honest, even about the ugly things, even about being a liar, then I am being more complete; I am taking self-responsibility. I'm telling people I'm a liar, I've been a liar all my life. But nobody believes me if I tell them I'm a liar.

CH: People don't expect you to admit that you're a liar, especially if they haven't asked. What's made you feel like you suddenly have to tell? And is honesty really a virtue?

MW: I change my mind a lot but I would love to be a person who speaks the truth everyday. I don't, and that's difficult. It's not that I'm that dark. I'm not planning mass murder; it is just the reality of my field. In

"In our quest for beauty, we become advocates of power."

design we all talk about how great we are, how great our designs and our clients are. Power needs beauty and beauty needs power and we are actively, deliberately balancing the two. I feel bad being so positive about what I do while I know I sometimes fail my standards. I really hate that. And I will probably do the same in the future and I hate that even more. In our quest for beauty, we become advocates of power.

I guess this feeling of wanting to acknowledge dishonesty grew with the disappointment of my first hotel [referring to the *Mondrian South Beach Hotel* in Miami, p.16]. This project was very important to me. It was my first big interior project but it was maintained really badly. I had been proud and had been gilding myself with this hotel and when later, it turned out not as I

Self 1

2016 | 3+2AP | 86 x 24 x 24"
High polished stainless steel, Lead
In technical collaboration with Luigi Barei

A cabinet becomes a kinetic piece as a sculptural ovoid abstractly resembling a human head balances and rocks atop to complete the body. Expressing an ominous presence that makes the ethereal connection between body and mind, its empty compartments playfully reflect our feelings, while the ovoid reminds of moments when we are physically in a place but not truly present.



planned and the designed durability faded because of neglect by the hotel operator, it was terrible. People would say "Oooh such a nice project" and I would be dying inside, feeling so bad, feeling so unreal. This started a period of reflection. Ultimately, I went back to the hotel undercover and took pictures of the problems. I made a large scale photo-collage called *Mondrian Still Born* and showed it in my oeuvre show [referring to the large-scale print *Mondrian Still Born*, p.16].

After this collage, I started making videos of what I call *Virtual Interiors* [referring to the video *Virtual Interiors*, p.20], to give up on reality. I traded in reality for eternity.

CH: So the trouble was the disappointment of reality itself. I don't think any building is ever perfect.

MW: Yes, but that's hard. And even if it's perfect to start with, it will not stay perfect. I tried to overcome this in the *Virtual Interiors*. Everything is perfect in those virtual worlds, and perfect forever. It is an everlasting ideal world, it's wonderful, magical, complete, engaging, whole. Yet you feel that something is brutally wrong—the location is idyllic but also strange. It kind of feels good to step into these worlds but then you feel 'what's wrong here?' You know there's someone, a power, that controls this space and that there's something wrong with it, and that this is hidden behind these layers of beauty.

CH: The strangeness you create is nice, though. I love these films. To me they capture something quantum about creation, like the energy that has to form before we ever build a brick. I think you're pushing your profession forward with these kinds of ideas.

MW: Well, we know how to build chairs. It's perhaps only in the outskirts of the culture of design that design still solves real problems. The only innovation you can make now is with technology, and there is no great need for new technologies in making chairs. What we need for the cultural development of objects is a more mature and complete design typology. We need holistic, romantic self-reflection. I feel I need

Self 2

2016 | 3+2AP | 77 x 51 x 22"

Acid dark steel, Lead

In technical collaboration with Luigi Barei



to add this layer to my own vocabulary, to fill the gap between fantasy and reality.

To express a true and complete self in design is new to design. It's new to design to be more honest. If you're playing a role, you know it's a role and you know you are loved for the lies you tell.

CH: Don't you think that's something we all feel in the age of the selfie, where we hustle in digital desperation to brand and market ourselves as people, as if we were a product to sell within an ocean of equal or better products?

"I want to google myself and see something I recognize."

MW: The social media world, selfies, how we all use our digital platforms to advocate ourselves—this is what designers have been doing with their work forever. We don't show the darker, more authentic side of ourselves.

Social media is used as the positive ambassador of self without presenting the real self. Design has started to become more about personal journeys and opinions, but like social media, it still does not represent an honest and complete self.

It's not only designers who are brands, you're right, everyone is a brand today. We all doubt ourselves and we all have moments where we feel our minds are disconnected from our bodies. It's important to feel the emptiness and to be the wobbly head with no expression, scared and waiting for our failure and for our head to roll [referring to the cabinets, *Self 1&2*, p.29-31].

CH: Are these *Portraits* self-portraits?

MW: My girlfriend did say the other day, "you are like your cabinets". She sees in me a person who is not stable and not straightforward, who is disconnected and rocky. I don't settle. I act as if I'm empty in order to be flexible and take any position as an opportunity.

Shiqule Nuhai

2016 | 8+2AP | 63 x 26 x 26" | Ceramic, Glaze
Hand painted by Marcel Wanders

Oversized vessels carry the weight of 17th century Chinese tradition appropriated and replicated in their own style by the Dutch. Replacing the regular cobalt blue used in Delft Blue ceramics with black glaze creates a powerfully stark contrast. Their majestic size recalls emperors placing only the loveliest girls within to transport them to be by their side on their journey to the afterlife.



The *Phoebe* lamps refer to the inhumane, crazy, impossible and destructive world of power, and part of that is me. [referring to *Phoebe 1, 2, 3* and *4*, p.46 - 54] I make decisions everyday that have consequences. I go 'let's cut this fucking tree down so I can make that chair'. I violate certain rules to acquire certain things.

Capitalism is the system I'm part of. I suffer from it while I use it to my benefit. A designer who suggests that he or she is without flaws, is a liar. This conversation is important to me. I don't want to be incomplete; I want to google myself and see something I recognize. So these *Portraits* speak about me, sure, but they also speak about everyone.

The works in this show relate to fear, to uncertainty, to how I'm maybe not the man I hope I am. They're about me feeling vulnerable—about death, about not being truthful, about whether my life has meaning. They're also about me feeling sad and empty, and the cost of doing what I do. Everyday I make myself shine but I want to be able to also feel dark and broken. I want to be seen for who I really am. There is beauty in the cracks; there is value in brokenness. I hope that by truthfully understanding that I am a liar, and acknowledging the imperfect and working through this in art—helps me, and others, to say what we never say, to feel what we never feel, and heal it too.

Portraits is part of the *Personal Editions* collection, an exclusive collection of limited edition pieces that exist at the boundaries of the functional and the non-functional, and of art and design. These special pieces are a playground, a place without restrictions, where Marcel Wanders can bring his most unexpected visions to life. The *Personal Editions* collection combines traditional crafts and industrial processes to offer durability, fantasy and creativity to humanity.

One Minute Sculpture

2016 | Unlimited Unique | Various dimensions, ca 12 x 10" | Ceramic, Glaze

Unadulterated creativity meanders from hand-made sculptures born of the most childlike excitement imaginable. Free formed 3D sketches of lost pets.





Tempter

2016 | 8+2AP | 71 x 94 x 28"
Bronze, Rubber

The utmost magic and wonder of childhood is revisited as a rocking horse transforms into a unicorn. Fantastical in every way, it summons a time of kings, beckoning the desire to recapture youthful imagination. A dark object that looms large, it represents unconditional freedom, the ultimate unbridled spirit inescapably anchored in place and time by the weight of its own existence.

Athanasius I

2016 | 5+2AP | 37 min. | Digital video
Music by JacobTV

From the inception of dead flowers, and created only with them, comes a reverent homage to the enduring quest for immortality. Resurrected by the power of video-tracking, these captivating videos present dead flowers coming alive, with a visionary rebirth that celebrates life and exposes the artist's fascination with and the urge to conquer death.



Athanasius II

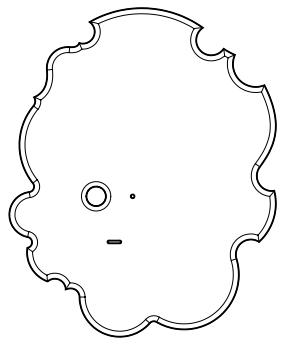
2016 | 5+2AP | 37 min. | Digital video
Music by JacobTV



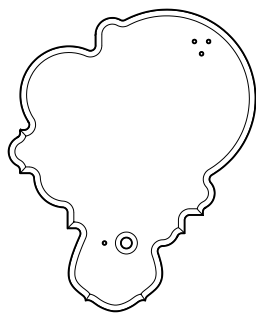
Athanasius III

2016 | 5+2AP | 37 min. | Digital video
Music by JacobTV

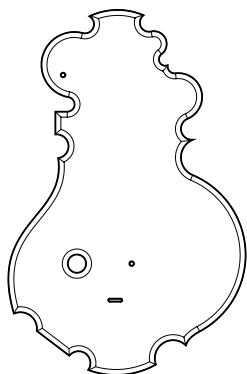




1



2



3

Dysmorphophobia 1, 2 and 3

2015 | 5+2AP | 71 x 57"; 66 x 51"; 79 x 51"
Ultra clear mirror glass, Stainless steel

"Mirrors do to truth what bias does to knowledge"-
Marcel Wanders

Three mystical illusions cast as ghostly characters project a tale of a dark, obsessive belief of a flawed existence. Asymmetrical figures, whose classic beveled outlines are distorted to replicate the experience of body dysmorphia, are delightfully irregular.



Phoebe 4

2013 | 3+1AP | 71 x 30 x 30" | Light sculpture
Mohair weave, Monofil, LED lights, Steel wire

Veiled and hidden by soft light, unclothed women adorned with textile light covers stand uncomfortably as the ultimate statement of objectification. To be seen and to light space, yet provide no function, is evidence of a world distorted by its pompous quest for beauty, using power as leverage. The artistic statement of disregard resonates as human objects slowly and reluctantly shift from side to side.



Phoebe 4

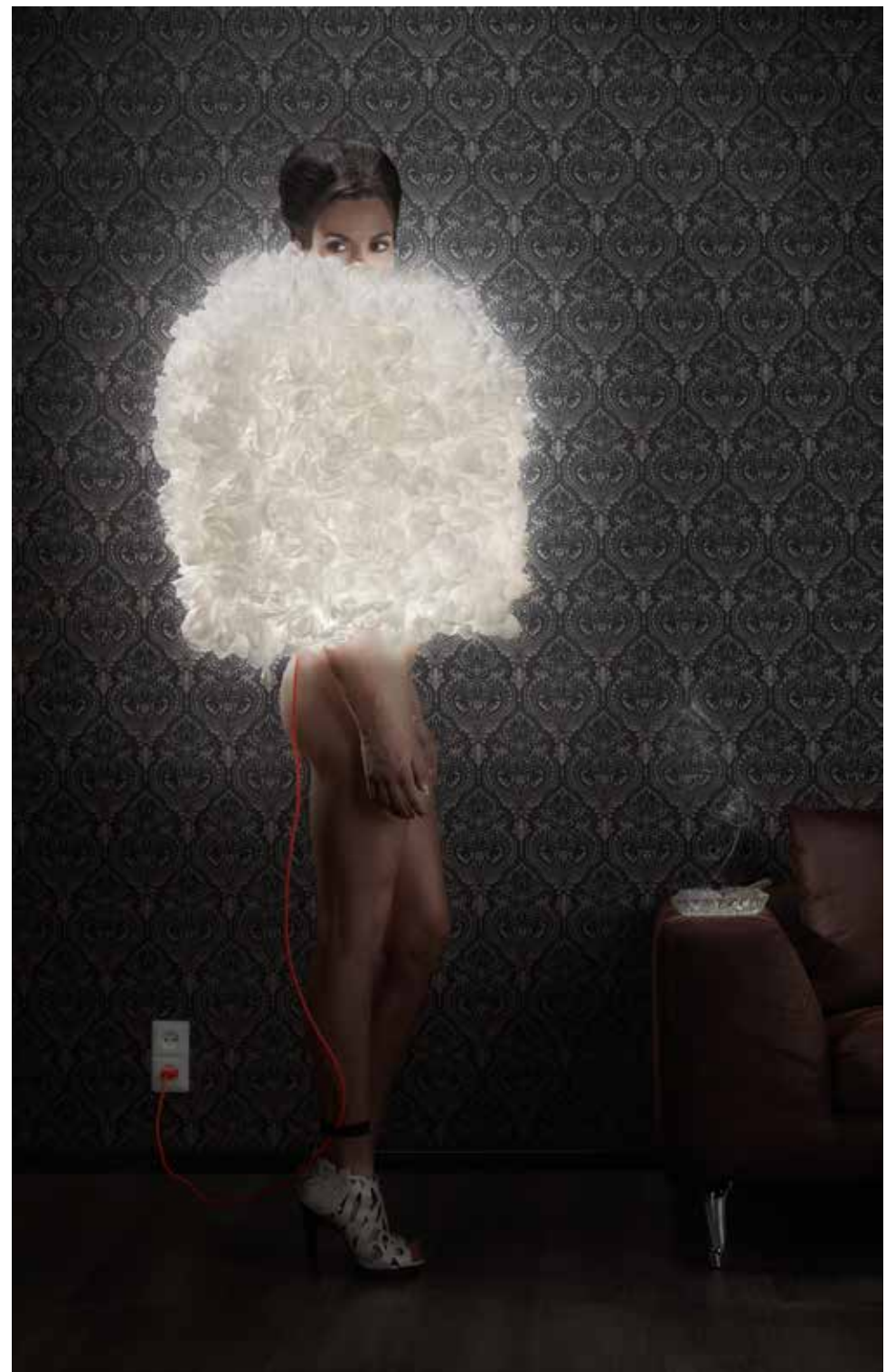
2013 | 5+2AP | 24 hour loop | Digital video

Inanimate textile light covers, serving as props from the video, hang from metal structures waiting to be placed upon naked women's bodies.



Phoebe 3

2013 | 5+2AP | 24 hour loop | Digital video



Phoebe 2

2013 | 5+2AP | 24 hour loop | Digital video



Phoebe 1

2013 | 5+2AP | 24 hour loop | Digital video



Odjurssäte

2016 | 8+2AP | 28 x 51 x 47"
Leather, Embroidery, Wood, Foam

From a fantastical fear and respect of damnation comes an object of beauty and relaxation. As part of the *Monster Chair* series [referring to the *Monster Chair*, 2010], this incredible monster is an enduring reminder representing the threat of eternal punishment. Everlasting mutilation and torture serves as consequence for our mistreatment of those closest to us in this life.



Marcel Wanders

Biography

Marcel Wanders (Boxtel, The Netherlands, 1963) lives and works in Amsterdam. He graduated *cum laude* from the Hogeschool voor de Kunsten (ArtEZ Institute of the Arts) in Arnhem in 1988 after being expelled from Eindhoven Design Academy. In 2014 he successfully completed an Executive MBA from INSEAD. In 1995 Marcel Wanders opened his studio in Amsterdam, quickly coming to worldwide attention in 1996 for his iconic *Knotted Chair*, which introduced the 'tech- of craft' to the world of design.

Marcel Wanders has been the subject of three major solo museum exhibitions. In January 2014, the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, one of Europe's premiere contemporary art and design museums, held his first major museum retrospective *Marcel Wanders: Pinned Up 25 Years of Design*. This exhibition, covering Marcel Wanders' celebrated 25-year career, spread over 17.000 square feet, showcased 400+ pieces in a wide range of media and saw record attendance. In 2012, his Capsule collection was exhibited at Beijing's Capital Museum; and in 2009, the Philadelphia Museum of Art presented *Daydreams*.

Marcel Wanders' work is included in museum collections internationally, including: Brooklyn Museum of Art, NY; Centre Georges Pompidou, FR; Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, NY; High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA; Indianapolis Museum of Art, IN; Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY; Museum of Arts and Design, New York, NY; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX; Museum of Modern Art, NY; Philadelphia Museum of Art, PA; Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich, DE; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, NL; Oita Prefectural Art Museum, JP.

Today Marcel Wanders' studio numbers around 50 international design specialists. He is a prolific product and interior designer and art director, ubiquitous with over 1700+ projects to his name for private clients and premium brands such as Alessi, Bisazza, Flos, KLM, Swarovski, Puma, among scores of others. In 2001 Marcel co-founded the successful design label Moooi, of which he is also Art Director.

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