

THE SHAPE SHIFTER

EXPLORING THE BORDERLANDS BETWEEN THE MANMADE AND NATURAL, DESIGNER INEKE HEERKENS CHALLENGES OUR PRECONCEPTIONS ABOUT JEWELRY. CAROLINE VAN HOEK VISITS THE TALENT'S AMSTERDAM STUDIO WITH PHOTOGRAPHER WENDELIEEN DAAN.



In any creative field—be it fashion, writing, movie directing—three consecutive successes constitute a remarkable occurrence. With a trio of lauded collections to her credit, 34-year-old Dutch jewelry designer Ineke Heerkens has enjoyed such a streak.

It's due no doubt to the brave approach Heerkens takes towards her work. Only in the very last moment of her creative process does she decide exactly which type of jewelry she is making. Will it be a necklace, a bracelet, a brooch? Whatever the outcome, "My first concern is shape," says Heerkens. "I use my own shapes instead of existing ones to create a personal visual language."

That special language can at times be hard to comprehend. "The jewelry asks a lot from the wearer," admits Heerkens. "Not all of it is very easy to wear because of size and outspoken appearance." But even though the designs are unorthodox, Heerkens never completely allows them to compromise practicality. "I am definitely a jewelry maker, not a sculptor," she says. "When I have a work in mind, I think of it as a wearable piece of jewelry." And in the creation of all pieces—

which are concocted of everything from leather to bottle caps—the designer strives to harmonize disparate materials.

Take, for instance, Whirling Leaf (2011), a necklace from her most recent collection, Windland. The central, large green leaf, sculpted in various shades of heated polyethylene, was the element the designer finished first. "There is so much detail and color variation in it," she says. "I needed to balance it with a more neutral element instead of leaving it on its own as a brooch." By opting to add a loop of stainless steel for a voluptuous contour, Heerkens wound up fashioning a piece that suggests the motion of a falling leaf. To her, this effect naturally led to her decision to classify the work as a necklace.

In high school, Heerkens studied textiles—a trade her hometown of Tilburg is known for—and afterwards attended the Gerrit Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam. There, driven by a desire to give a third dimension to two-dimensional fabric, she switched her studies to jewelry and was lucky enough to have Ruudt Peters and Iris Eichenberg as teachers. Their influence on Heerkens' designs is evident: pre-

(OPPOSITE) Ineke Heerkens, wearing her Flourish Green brooch (2005), in her Amsterdam studio. (THIS PAGE, TOP THREE IMAGES) Oplopend Groen brooch (2008). An assemblage called

Alphabet of Shapes (2004-2011) in the studio. Gezet Groen brooch (2007), made from aluminum and a silkscreen-printed textile.



PHOTOS: GEZET GROEN, ANUVAHTRA, HANGENDE STOEL, TOM HAARTSEN. ALL OTHERS, WENDELIEEN DAAN.



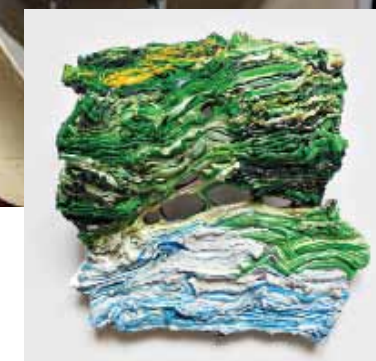
(LEFT) Heerkens sews a piece for the Windland collection in her studio. (ABOVE) Heat-pressed textile, aluminum, and rubber Hangende Stoel necklace (2007).

(CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT) A bookshelf in Heerkens' studio holds art, jewelry, and fashion books—sources for design inspiration, she says—plus other bric-a-brac. A mannequin with her Groene Omhelzing necklace (2007), made from aluminum, fabric, and polyethylene. Stitched and heat-pressed silk-screen textile Flourish Green brooch (2005).



PHOTO: GROENE OMHELZING, CORRIETTE SCHOENMAERTS. ALL OTHERS, WENDELIN DAAN.

(CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT) Whirling Leaf necklace (2011), made from polyethylene, oxidized silver, and stainless steel. Vingerkratje ring (2001), made from oxidized silver. Jewelry from Heerkens' Groen and Groenplaats collections on a table in her studio. Lowlands brooch (2011), made from polyethylene and stainless steel.



PHOTOS: WHIRLING LEAF AND VINGERKRATJE, EDDO HARTMANN. STUDIO, WENDELIN DAAN. LOWLANDS, INEKE HEERKENS.

cious materials are eschewed and each piece—mostly necklaces and brooches—is utterly unique.

Her most daring series to date is Groenplaats (2008), some 15 pieces that call to mind outdoor furniture—fitting, since the title of the series is Dutch for “backyard.” To craft these pieces, Heerkens used images of pool chairs and chaise longues and then cut patterns from fabric and aluminum. Don’t take this effort as a sign that Heerkens is a frustrated furniture designer; it’s that she merely sees “the garden chair as a poetic cultural metaphor for experiencing nature,” she says. “We design and plan our backyard, while plants grow unpredictably. I like the contradiction.”

The shade of deep green that repeatedly appears in her work isn’t for lack of inspiration. “I work mainly in the same color in an effort to distract from the color itself,” she says. “I want people to see the shape first.” The designer chose Mediterranean blue for her first collection, Watergaten (1999), which was inspired by the hugging volumes of water that surround a swimmer. “It’s about this outer cocoon that forms

around your body’s contours and moves together with you like an alien following in your path,” she says. The Watergaten pieces are soft, circular shapes in leather and acrylic that create envelopes of motion.

In Windland, Heerkens evokes—what else?—wind. Brooches and necklaces in the collection bear names like Spring Foliage, Unbelievable Rush, and Torrential Streams, and are meant to give the idea of “flashes of changing colors, textures, and volumes moving along your sides,” she says. “Imagine being on a bicycle going through flat green fields.” The choice to combine aluminum and polyethylene for each piece hints of a tension between the natural and the unnatural. “I don’t make statements in either the positive or negative,” she says, “but I like to make observations.” The products of these observations thus don’t appear to be artificial; instead, like the rich texture of Van Gogh’s impasto landscapes, they walk the line between the traditional and the boldly contemporary. It’s a philosophy that Heerkens sums up this way: “My work is a cross between an iPhone and nature.”