



Mart Visser

DESIGNER, ARTIST AND FOUNDER & OWNER OF MART VISSER

“I just start sketching and see where it takes me.”

Famed fashion designer Mart Visser is trying out something new. Well, new to the public at least. Unbeknownst to most, the acclaimed couturier has always had a passion for art and has been painting and creating pieces for decades. Now, he's ready to show the world what he's been working on for all this time.

HQ

When you enter the headquarters of Mart Visser, located in an industrial area on the South side of town, you can't help but feel inspired. It seems like you're worlds away from the drab warehouses that surround the building. Inside you find sweeping, light-filled office suites that feel more like a loft than an actual office space. An enormous staircase takes you up to the second level, where from the top, you have a perfect view of the ground floor where huge paintings and sculptures by Visser's hand line the vast walls. "I feel like I've become the 3.0 version of myself here. The building houses the ateliers for my ready-to-wear and couture lines, the webshop offices, the ground floor functions as a gallery and it's also the place where I throw my bi-annual couture shows. I'm really proud of the fact that I've been able to bring all aspects of my business together in this space."

“People had no idea that I was also an artist.”

Expo

When looking at the artwork around you, one thing immediately stands out: almost all of Visser's paintings feature the abstract face of a man. "He doesn't have a name or a story. He's completely anonymous, like a blank canvas for people to project their own thoughts and feelings onto. I recreate him over and over again, each time using different colours, textures and painting techniques."

Visser's works are front and centre in the space, but that wasn't always the case. "Four years ago I was accidentally 'outed' by Ivo Niche, who interviewed me on his television show. People had no idea that I was also an artist. The response I got was really exciting. After that, it took on a life of its own, and I started to pursue it more seriously." In October, Visser will show his works at Kunsthuizen in Amsterdam, Leiden and Breda. "I never dreamed that I could actually be this successful as an artist."

Incredible

Visser has been drawing and painting since he was a teenager. "I always had a passion for the arts. But instead of going to art school, I decided to enrol at the Montaigne Academy, now called the Amsterdam Fashion Institute, because I wanted to study something that was more commercial. During and after my studies, I interned at Frans Molenaar, Koos van den Akker and Anne Klein in New York City. After I graduated in 1992, I immediately started my own company. At that time I was the new kid on the block and completely different from the household names. But that worked in my favour; people saw me as a new and fresh voice, so it was a success from the start. My style is best described as timeless. I'd much rather have someone say 'That lady in red looks incredible' rather than only complimenting the design of the dress itself."

Atelier

Just a stone's throw away from the showroom stands a little building with an attic-like ceiling with white-painted wooden beams. This is Visser's atelier and it has a surprisingly tranquil vibe even though the space is filled to the brim with artworks, hung as high as the ceiling allows. On a large table stands a collection of mixed-media pieces: dark wooden tribal statues that have been sliced into layers and combined with sleek, square pieces of lucid acrylic to

create a stacked effect. "That's what I've been working on this week." Visser makes it a point to come to his atelier every day. "Today I started at 7 A.M. and began creating a new piece," he says as he points to a huge beige canvas that lies on the floor. "That's just the first step, the base layer before I actually start painting."

“I've never followed set rules or plans, and don't believe you can only do one thing.”

Path

Visser has also been creating his own fabric collection and has now added rugs to his repertoire. "How cool is this?" says Visser as he pets a shaggy, midnight blue rug. The rug is part of the new collection he created with partner Headlam. "The patterns on some of the rugs are actually blown up details taken from my artworks, so it really feels like everything has come full circle. I think that interior design is sort of a logical continuation of what I do. Designing fabrics and rugs felt really natural to me. It's all about textures and the feel of a fabric, which is what I obviously work with every day as a designer. Decor, design, art, it's all really just so close together; it overlaps in so many ways. I've never followed set rules or plans, and don't believe you can only do one thing. When something crosses my path and it feels right, I usually jump right in. I've never been a person to map everything out before starting something. Most designers work in themes or hold onto a certain structure. I don't do that at all. I just start sketching and see where it takes me. The same goes for my artwork and the fabrics I design. I really just let my intuition guide me." ■

M MART VISSER 3.0 EXHIBITION
October 12th - November 4th
Kunsthuizen Amsterdam • Amstelveenseweg 135
martvisser.nl • kunsthuizen.nl/amsterdam