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# Level best

VERONIKA PERSCHE'S KNITS



Veronika Persche calls her work knit design: such a definition gives little indication of the joys to discover. Yet in a short time a striking resemblance to Dutch artist M.C. Escher emerges: her graphic patterns reflect his metamorphosis drawings. Her work is reminiscent of a journey around Escher's staircases – overwhelming, intriguing and mystifying – it's not clear how either move from one level to the next. One thing is sure, if Escher could knit there's a strong chance he and Persche would have got on famously.

Born in Klosterneuburg the 31 year-old Austrian had a creative upbringing; her mother sewed whilst her father studied graphic design and architecture, her grandfather was a woodcarver and family friends included performing artists. It is entirely logical that Persche became a designer and these influences explain her style – precise design with organic handcraft and the theatrics of performance.

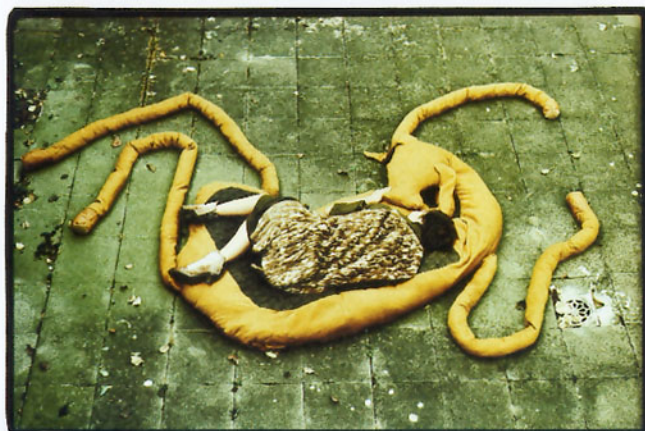
Since graduating from Spengergasse college in Vienna 1999 Persche has built a formidable body of work based around flatbed machine knitting. She is mistress of myriad techniques and has created a range of accessories and garments. But perhaps Persche's greatest talent is repeat patterns. Her skill in manipulating the inherent grid system of knit, to draw the eye in every direction is rare. By treating the knit as a fabric her geometric 'escheresque' patterns cover the work yet remain contemporary and versatile; a fact demonstrated ▶











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most notably in her 2006 collaboration with Sander Lak to produce knitted men's coats in oversized houndstooth patterns.

Using jacquards Persche explores her love of colour. In 'windrad' a windmill inspired pattern dances across the knit, and 'rodaxl' distills the essence of Braille and morse code. The latter is the most technically interesting, forming the missing link between her flat and 3D patterns. By manipulating coloured stripes through tucking sections of the knit (a form of on-machine gathering), a physical depth is brought to the piece and is key to introducing a third dimension.

Persche has developed this idea further through the use of latex and elastane which shrinks and expands the knit, forming dramatic and sculptural surfaces; 'drach' and 'droptupf' being the most striking. Here Persche's strong colour contrasts distract a little from the beautiful texture. It's tempting to remind her that Escher's work was often monochrome and point out that other designers who use similar patterns and colour palettes (such as weaver Eleanor Pritchard) keep a simple flat background.

Paradoxically the most awkward thing about Persche is a result of one of knit's finest qualities: its vast and irresistible design possibilities. When a designer is as gifted as Persche it is difficult to know when to stop but by adding so many aspects she can undermine her own strength. It would be wonderful to see her patterns on different scales – draping huge sections of it rather than using it as a limited motif.

As a textile designer who makes great fabrics but stops experimenting when it comes to a final piece Persche is not unusual. So far only collaborations with other designers have fully resolved her graphic jacquards but by exploring sculptural shaping and becoming more ergonomic she could finally do justice to the fabulous quality of her textiles. ●●● **Ruth Bridgeman**