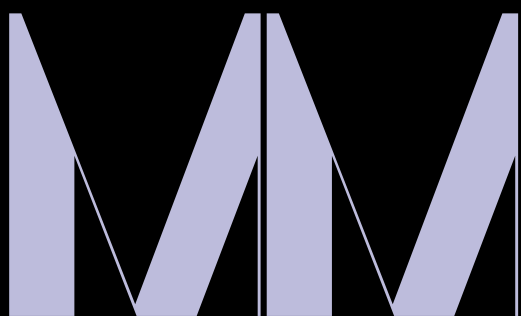




THE ANTWERP SIX

**ANN DEMEULEMEESTER
DIRK BIKKEMBERGS
DRIES VAN NOTEN
WALTER VAN BEIRENDONCK
MARINA YEE
DIRK VAN SAENE**

**28.03.2026
- 17.01.2027**

MoMu — Fashion Museum Antwerp



Flanders
State of the Art

THE ANTWERP SIX

**MOMU CELEBRATES 40 YEARS OF THE ANTWERP SIX
WITH A UNIQUE EXHIBITION IN 2026**



**Marina Yee, Dries Van Noten, Ann Demeulemeester,
Walter Van Beirendonck, Dirk Bikkembergs, Dirk Van Saene — 1986**

In 2026, MoMu celebrates the 40th anniversary of the international breakthrough of the Antwerp Six with a major, authorized exhibition. The Six -Dirk Bikkembergs, Ann Demeulemeester, Walter Van Beirendonck, Dries Van Noten, Dirk Van Saene and Marina Yee- have become a reference point in international fashion and an almost self-evident benchmark for everything Belgian fashion has represented over the past decades.

The exhibition highlights the unique trajectory that connects these six exceptional designers. It began with their studies at the fashion department of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp and resulted into six highly influential solo careers. The show takes you back to the context and spirit of the 1970s and 1980s, when the Six were studying and taking their first professional steps.

Fashion was changing rapidly: the Parisian haute couture-inspired classic style faced competition from a new wave influenced by music, technology and a desire for societal change. Punk swept in from London with Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren as key figures, followed by the extravagant New Romantic style that flourished in London nightclubs like The Blitz. Fashion and music merged on album covers. Meanwhile, young Italians such as Gianni Versace and Giorgio Armani were reinventing menswear in different ways, while Thierry Mugler, Claude Montana and Jean Paul Gaultier made headlines with bold fashion statements. In 1981, Yohji Yamamoto and Rei Kawakubo sent shockwaves through the Paris fashion scene. Antwerp at the time had a vibrant, experimental art scene and a thriving nightlife, with clubs frequented by Academy students. The passionate Antwerp fashion students traveled to London, Paris, Milan and New York to soak up the energy of new styles in fashion and music. They partied together, but above all, they worked hard. Despite different backgrounds and interests, a synergy gradually emerged.

When the Six graduated in the early 1980s, the economic climate was far from favorable. Yet a dynamic arose in which friendship, shared ambitions and an extraordinary zeitgeist reinforced one another. Belgium's struggling clothing and textile industry prompted the government to launch a five-year Textile Plan, introducing unprecedented support measures to revive the sector. By investing in young talent through initiatives like the 'Golden Spindle' competition and the large-scale campaign 'Mode, dit is Belgisch' ('Fashion, this is Belgian'), the Textile Plan became a catalyst for the Six's international breakthrough.

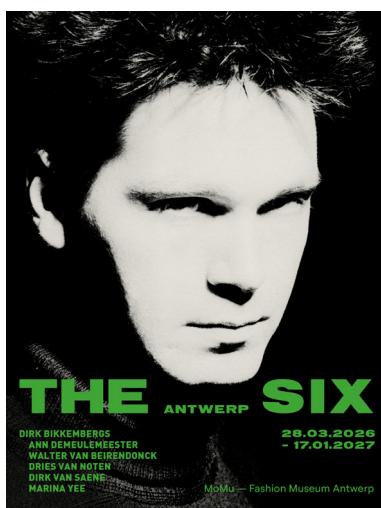
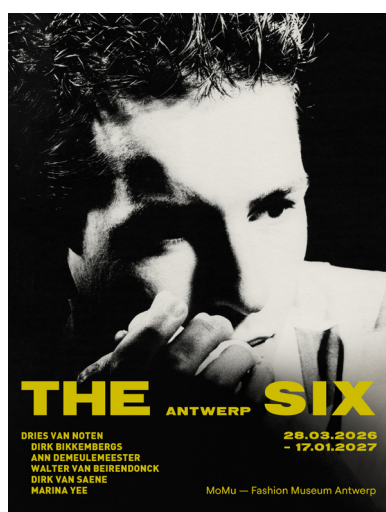
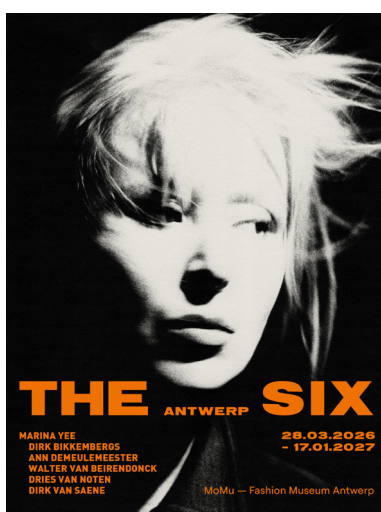
In 1986, they joined forces to present their work at the British Designer Show, where the international press discovered them. They visited London for only five editions before moving on to show individually in Paris. The exhibition sheds light on this short but decisive period that led to their global success.

Today, the Antwerp Six have paradoxically become a powerful brand, even though the group never intended to function as one. They never operated as a label, fashion house or collective. The exhibition ultimately reveals, through a striking scenography, the significance of their individual paths and achievements.

This exceptional exhibition will continue for a full ten months, from 28 March 2026 through 17 January 2027. It will moreover be accompanied by an extensive series of public events.

‘The Antwerp Six helped shape recent fashion history. We are immensely proud that we can bring the work of these six iconic designers together for a unique, in-depth view of their legacy and their influence.’

Kaat Debo, Director MoMu

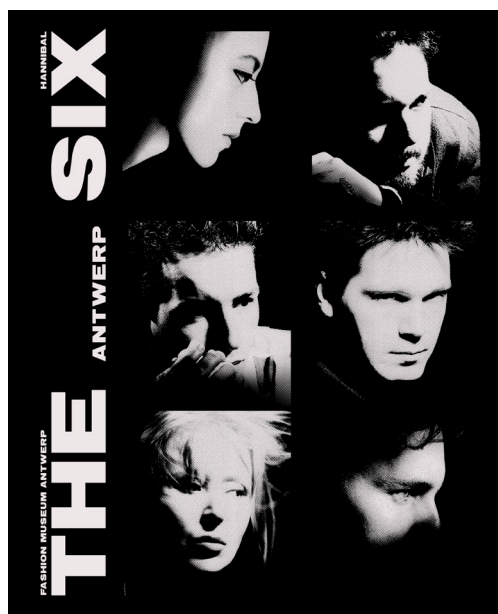


PRACTICAL

The Antwerp Six
from 28/03/2026 until 17/01/2027
at MoMu - Fashion Museum Antwerp
more info momu.be

The exhibition *The Antwerp Six* is an initiative of MoMu – Fashion Museum Antwerp, in collaboration with the City of Antwerp and with the support of EventFlanders.

PUBLICATION



THE ANTWERP SIX

Hannibal

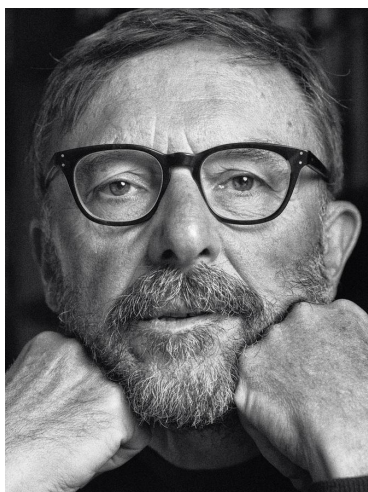
This richly illustrated book celebrates the 40th anniversary of the Antwerp Six – the groundbreaking designers Walter Van Beirendonck, Ann Demeulemeester, Dries Van Noten, Dirk Van Saene, Dirk Bikkembergs, and Marina Yee – and explores the unique creative journey that connects them. Featuring insightful essays by leading fashion experts including Tim Blanks, Angelo Flaccavento and Eugene Rabkin, the volume offers an in-depth look at the lasting impact of these iconic designers on contemporary fashion.

Published by Hannibal, the book is available in Dutch and English from late March 2026.

The Antwerp Six, 352p, hardcover
Dutch and English version
EAN 9789493416536
69,95€

ABOUT THE CURATORS

Photo: © Ronald Stoops



Geert Bruloot — is a curator, retailer and pioneer of Belgian fashion. In 1983, he co-founded the avant-garde shoe shop Coccodrillo together with his partner Eddy Michiels in Antwerp, followed in 1986 by Louis in Antwerp, a boutique dedicated exclusively to Belgian designers. He played a key role in launching the Antwerp Six and shaping Antwerp's reputation as an international fashion city. In 1993 he contributed to the establishment of the Flanders Fashion Institute, the precursor to Flanders District of Creativity (FDC), and has since curated several exhibitions on fashion and design, exploring the emotional and cultural meaning of clothing and footwear. He is the curator and author of 'Footprint: The Tracks of Shoes in Fashion' (2015) and has been closely involved with MoMu's projects and exhibitions.

Photo: © Charlie De Keersmaecker 2025



Romy Cockx — is curator at MoMu since 2019. She has curated exhibitions since 2008 for the Archive and Research Centre for Women's History in Brussels, the Fashion Museum in Hasselt and for DIVA, the Museum for Diamonds, Jewellery and Silversmithing in Antwerp. She has explored different curatorial approaches in collaboration with film and theatre directors and interior designers such as Axel Vervoordt and Gert Voorjans. Recently, she curated 'Fashion & Interiors. A Gendered Affair' (2025) 'Man Ray and Fashion' (2023) and co-curated 'P.LACE.S – Looking Through Antwerp Lace' (2021) and 'Willy Vanderperre Prints, films, a rave and more' (2024).

Photo: © Charlie De Keersmaecker 2025



Kaat Debo — Kaat Debo is director of MoMu, the Antwerp Fashion Museum. She studied literature and philosophy at the universities in Antwerp and Berlin, and joined MoMu in 2001 as a curator working on the museum's exhibitions and publications. From 2007 to 2008 she was editor-in-chief of A MAGAZINE, and in 2009 she was appointed general director and chief curator of MoMu. Since joining MoMu she has worked with some of the world's leading fashion designers and fashion houses. During her 20+ years at the museum she created more than 50 exhibitions, of which she curated several herself. She helped expand the museum's international reputation, a.o. by traveling its exhibitions around the globe from Paris and London, to Tokyo and Melbourne. She oversaw the extensive renovation and extension of the museum between 2018 and 2021. She lectures regularly on contemporary (Belgian) fashion.

PROGRAMME

Throughout its ten-month run, 'The Antwerp Six' is accompanied by a wide-ranging public programme. From openings and performances to workshops and youth projects, the highlights below offer just a glimpse of what's to come.

Opening Weekend

*Saturday & Sunday, 28 & 29 March 2026,
from 10:00 AM until 6:00 PM
MoMu*

Join MoMu for the opening weekend of 'The Antwerp Six'. Discover the exhibition as it opens to the public, or join a free guided tour led by a MoMu guide. Families are welcome to take part in a drop-in workshop, where you can create your own pin-back buttons inspired by the Antwerp Six. The museum library opens its doors with a special display of Belgian fashion ephemera, offering a closer look at rare and playful printed materials. From dedicated fashion lovers to curious passers-by, everyone is invited to enjoy an inclusive weekend filled with exhibitions, tours, workshops and activities for all ages.



Photo: Jeroen Broeckx



Photo: Jeroen Broeckx

REVERSE

*Friday, 17 April 2026, from 5:00 PM till 8:00 PM
Theaterplein, Stadsfeestzaal, Vrijdagmarkt
and MoMu*

REVERSE is a creative fashion project for young people aged 16 to 25, developed by MoMu in collaboration with Alex Akuete. The project offers an open and welcoming space where young people can explore their creativity, discover their talents and imagine new futures through fashion. Many participants are passionate about fashion but may lack access to networks or role models within the sector. REVERSE connects them with fashion students, teachers and professionals who act as buddies rather than mentors, encouraging mutual learning and exchange without hierarchy. Fashion becomes a shared language that brings different experiences and perspectives together. Through hands-on workshops, participants develop new skills, gain insight into the fashion world and build confidence in their creative voice. The project culminates in a public fashion show, where they present their work to a diverse audience — a celebratory moment that highlights their talent and strengthens belief in their ideas, ambitions and dreams.

Wave Together

*From April 2026
MoMu*

Wave Together brings young people and professionals together through open, low-threshold encounters that spark connection and opportunity. Founded by Bianca Luzi (CEO Raf Simons), Sara Joukes (business manager of MoMu) and Alex Akuete (founder of Xray Community), the initiative creates spaces where informal conversations can inspire, motivate and make a real difference.

Each edition invites participants to meet as equals, to find a surf companion on the same wavelength. These encounters can grow into concrete collaborations, from internships and short assignments to studio visits or creative trajectories. Hosted across cultural and heritage institutions in Antwerp (a.o. deSingel, Arenberg, Permeke Library), Wave Together focuses on genuine, human connection — offline and online.

SEW WHAT

*From Friday, 20 November 2026
hetpaleis*

With SEW WHAT, MoMu invites young audiences to take a fresh look at the clothes they wear every day and the impact on their own media consumption. This new performance about fashion, identity and sustainability is aimed at young people aged 10 to 14 years. The production is a collaboration between MoMu and hetpaleis, and will be created by the upcoming theatre maker and costume designer Sam Beddegenoodts, whose chosen concept is the outcome of an open call. Fashion is part of everyday life, yet behind every garment lies a complex story of production, consumption and responsibility. Through creative storytelling and engaging visual language, SEW WHAT makes these hidden stories tangible. The performance encourages young people to think critically about the impact of fashion on people and the planet, while addressing the pressure young people face from media consumption in their search for identity through clothing. It invites them to reflect on more conscious and sustainable choices, now and in the future. Following its premiere on 20 November 2026 at hetpaleis, SEW WHAT will be performed multiple times in the week that follows, primarily for schools, before going on tour to reach young audiences beyond Antwerp.

Makerspace

*from Fall 2026
Permeke Library*

In collaboration with Permeke Library and Kubus, its youth library, MoMu supports a pilot fashion maker space launching in Fall 2026. This makerspace invites young people aged 15–25 with an interest in fashion and creation, particularly those who face barriers to traditional education pathways. In an open and welcoming environment, participants experiment with materials, machines and techniques, discovering upcycling, repair and craft practices while exploring the environmental impact of fashion. Young people actively shape the project, co-creating activities and communication with guidance and coaching. Through workshops, talks and digital formats, MoMu connects creativity, sustainability and new learning opportunities.

ABOUT MOMU



Photo: © Stany Dederen

MoMu presents two temporary exhibitions each year. In the ground-floor gallery, smaller exhibitions and installations are shown. MoMu's temporary exhibitions are known for their immersive scenography: rather than merely displaying objects, they invite visitors into the world of the designer or theme. For every exhibition, the space is completely transformed, making each visit a unique experience.

The collection presentation on the ground floor sheds light on avant-garde Belgian and international fashion, with an alternating presentation of silhouettes and archive material from the museum's collection of more than 38,000 items. The selection will change regularly to display as much of the MoMu Collection as possible, from contemporary fashion to historical clothing, textiles and accessories.

If you'd like to shop for emerging design talent or exclusive pieces, visit the MoMu Shop. There you'll also find classic museum memorabilia and original souvenirs, many locally and sustainably produced. The MoMu Café completes the MoMu experience, offering freshly prepared meals from sandwiches and bowls to soup and hot dishes. A welcoming space to work, study, and connect with others, for visitors, passers-by, and the local community.

Discover MoMu's full programme of guided tours, workshops, family Sundays and much more at momu.be.

COLLECTION

The collection consists of clothing, accessories, and textiles, as well as more unexpected pieces such as tools, machines for textile production, patterns, and fashion show invitations. MoMu's collection policy focuses on the work of Belgian designers and alumni of the fashion department of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp. Prominent names from the contemporary international fashion world are also represented in the collection.

The collection grows every year through acquisitions, loans, and numerous donations, and now consists of over 38,000 pieces. This makes the MoMu Collection the largest and most important collection of contemporary Belgian fashion in the world. The museum continually receives international loan requests for pieces from its designer collection. MoMu's historical collection of Western European costume and textile is a continuation of the collection of the former Costume and Textile Museum Vrieselhof.

In 2011, the historical collection was enlarged with an important acquisition. Over 2,000 objects from the 18th, 19th, and first half of the 20th century were acquired from the private collection of Ms. Jacoba de Jonge, complementing the existing MoMu Collection.

In addition to the fashion and costume collection, the museum also houses a vast library collection. The MoMu Library is an academic library for historical and contemporary fashion, textiles, and ethnic costume. With over 15,000 books, an archive full of valuable reference works, hundreds of contemporary and historical magazines, and a fast-growing digital database of images, the MoMu Library is one of the top in its field worldwide. MoMu believes that direct contact with materials and techniques can be very educational. That is why MoMu has created a study collection, a separate collection intended to teach visitors about fashion by allowing them to study objects up close.



Photo: © Jeroen Broeckx

ANTWERP TODAY

City of Independent Fashion

Throughout its exciting and multifaceted history, Antwerp has always enjoyed a privileged relationship with fashion and textiles. Not only does it operate as a stimulating hub for new trends and experimental brands, Antwerp also has a vibrant and thriving retail scene, which attracts devoted shoppers and style aficionados from all around the globe.

Antwerp fashion relies on edge, distinction, fearlessness and creativity, as well as a willingness to foster individual voices. The city embodies the spirit of the avant-garde and Antwerp designers make their own rules, instead of following industry standards. The whole industry has been keen on supporting Antwerp designers, acknowledging that their collections brought welcome excitement and cutting-edge style to contemporary fashion.



Photo: © Giovanni Giannoni

Wouters & Hendrix for Meryll Rogge

While Antwerp's most renowned names — such as Dries Van Noten, Walter Van Beirendonck, Ann Demeulemeester, and Christian Wijnants — firmly occupy the high-end segment, the city's fashion ecosystem thrives on entrepreneurship. This spirit continually fuels the creation of brands with strong identities, distinctive perspectives, and an international following. Think of Bernadette, Façon Jacmin, Arte Antwerp, Und Uli, Mr Mittens, Talking Walls, Toos Franken or HNST Studio, which has successfully developed the most sustainable jeans in the world. Antwerp designers are bold and innovative, they think globally from the very beginning, showing an eagerness to cross borders and share their storytelling abroad.

This passion for creativity can also be felt within the city's retail scene, displaying an impressive number of fashion stores whose desirable goods not only appeal to local clients, but also to an increasingly international clientele. Pioneering and influential designer stores include the likes of Houben, VIER, Atelier Solarshop, Garden, Noise, National or Renaissance, which stocks pieces from Julie Kegels and Meryll Rogge. Marjan Eggers, who has been buying collections at Louis for decades, is keen on nurturing young names and curates clothes beautifully. When the store opened in 1986, Louis was the first to stock Ann Demeulemeester. Today, you will find great pieces from the likes of Marie Adam-Leenaerdt, Marina Yee, Maison Margiela or A.F. Vandevorst.

Antwerp has a wide range of specialty stores as well, which offer high-quality footwear, accessories and bags -as well as undergarments- including the likes of THIRON, Lies Mertens, Kaai, or Ophelia Lingerie. Wolk-Antwerp focuses on stylish and sustainable men's apparel, ranging from knitwear and shirts to socks and T-shirts, all made in natural fibers. Every year, KOMONO collaborates with rising graduates from Antwerp's Royal Academy of Fine Arts, resulting in the most striking and extravagant eyewear you will find in the city. High-end jewelry is a category that has grown over the years, informed by the legacy of Wouters & Hendrix, which was launched in 1984. Brands like Mass Lee, Fragille, BOBBY or Studio Collect fly the flag for a contemporary -and patiently crafted- take on designer jewelry, making Antwerp a truly beloved destination for luxury connoisseurs.



Julie Kegels

Photo: © Alex

OUT-OF-THE-BOX

3 Antwerp Projects pushing Fashion forward

Antwerp fashion has always been defined by its willingness to think outside the box, looking for innovative -as well as engaging- ways to reframe and recontextualize our industry. Whether it be media, design, or textile sourcing, Antwerp creatives keep looking for influential and unconventional ways to foster new initiatives. Today, sustainability, generosity and social awareness have become key, leading to the birth of projects that are not only imaginative, but also respect the ecosystem while giving back to the community.

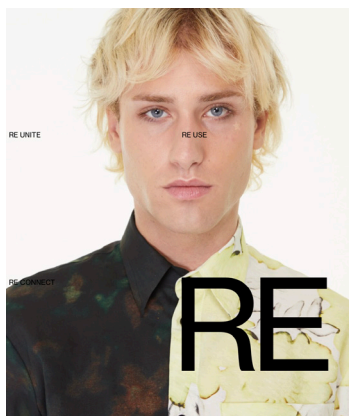


Photo: © REantwerp

REantwerp

A talented designer and alumnus from Antwerp's Academy, Tim Van Steenberghe has been active in the industry for more than 20 years, running his eponymous brand and showing his collections in Paris. He joined forces with journalist Ruth Goossens, as well as non-profit organization GATAM, to launch REantwerp in 2023, an inspiring brand reconciling sustainable beliefs with social reinsertion. REantwerp can therefore be envisaged as a response to the growth of fast fashion, which alienates consumers from the intrinsic value of their clothes. Supported by the city financially, REantwerp has operated following three key principles: RE-think, RE-act and RE-unite. Rewiring the fashion industry today -and its harmful effect over our environment- means that REantwerp works with amongst others deadstock fabrics, from the likes of Dries

Van Noten, Essentiel or Christian Wijnants to name a few. This endeavor promotes circularity and reduces waste, a huge problem within the textile industry. Repurposing is, in fact, an important feature of Belgian fashion, and insiders often forget that Martin Margiela was the very first designer to rework vintage garments and integrate them within his avant-garde collections, a complete shock for press and buyers at the end of the 1980s.

Each garment designed by REantwerp is manufactured locally, too, and sold in their own store, located on Kleine Markt 7 in the heart of Antwerp. Affordably priced, REantwerp's pieces are, produced in small numbers to guarantee high-quality standards. This atelier process means many pieces are one of a kind, reformulating the notion of exclusivity for a discerning clientele.

Besides sticking to its sustainable ethics, REantwerp also collaborates with refugees who end up finding their place and position thanks to the work they do for the brand, as well as their craft sense and manufacturing skills. By placing the person at the center of fashion production once again, REantwerp makes a powerful humanistic statement that goes against the ruthless logics of fast fashion and its unfair treatment of garment workers. Fashion can be done in a respectful and altruistic way, which is precisely what REantwerp stands for. In November 2025, REantwerp won the Emerging Talent of the Year prize at the Belgian Fashion Awards held in Antwerp.



Photo: © REantwerp



Photo: © Bakermat

Bakermat

Founded by designers Cedric Jacquemyn and Quinten Schaap, Bakermat is an exciting and forward-thinking entrepreneurial project that fuses advanced technology with textile education.

Not only is Bakermat a physical textile shop in the center of Antwerp -located on Kleine Markt 7- it also has an online digital library, pushing textile sourcing into the future. When Jacquemyn graduated from Antwerp's Royal Academy of Fine Arts, he didn't know how to connect with fabric suppliers, a common problem shared by many graduates who have decided to launch their own brand. Using his 15 year expertise as a designer, as well as his precious experience of running his own high-end label, Jacquemyn decided to open Bakermat in partnership with Schaap, helping students connect with textile suppliers that work in ethical and sustainable ways. Bakermat therefore advises professionals -as well as a growing group of textile enthusiasts- on which fabrics to choose for their designs while promoting relevant suppliers to a new and curious audience.

In a spirit of total transparency -and preparing for upcoming EU regulations- Bakermat evaluates and chooses its fabrics based on their environmental -as well as social and economic- sustainability. The team provides accurate data on its products, manufacturing partners and suppliers, which is updated on a regular basis. Local designers -such as Ann Demeulemeester, Natan, Walter Van Beirendonck, Jan-Jan Van Essche or Christian Wijnants- have partnered with Bakermat often, offering leftover fabrics from their previous collections that can be bought directly in-store.

Bakermat vets its new suppliers before engaging in long-term relationships. Verified data is requested, focusing on raw materials, impact reduction efforts and supplier network.

One of Bakermat's key assets is its impressive digital library, which is built from physical and existing materials, scanned and turned into 3D textures. Schaap, who is the Head of Digitization for the Antwerp-based company, wants to democratize this technology, making it more accessible to students and upcoming designers. Bakermat recently partnered with MoMu by hosting RE/SOURCE, a temporary textile fair giving customers access to surplus stock from Bakermat's partner textile manufacturers. For one day only, the tables of the library were covered with over 1000 samples of deadstock fabrics, which could be purchased on the spot. Not only did Bakermat offer materials from heritage suppliers and local producers, it also used the event to promote innovative manufacturers with a strong design focus. Some of those suppliers have, in fact, been making fabrics locally since 1870.



Photo: © Alies Torfs

Instead of overconsuming clothes, Bakermat strongly encourages fashion students -and sewing lovers- to create their own clothes while making conscious choices that start with fabric, the very essence of all garments. Bakermat hopes to educate a new generation of designers for whom sustainability is no longer an option, but needs to be a fundamental part of the design and manufacturing processes.



Photo: © ENFNITS TERRIBLES

ENFNITS TERRIBLES

We caught up with Dries Vriesacker -Founder and Creative Director of ENFNITS TERRIBLES Magazine- to discuss the Antwerp Six legacy, approaching print in a fresh manner, and who his favorite upcoming Belgian designers are.

When you were growing up as a teenager, what did the Antwerp Six mean to you?

That is hard to answer. To me, it feels as though the Antwerp Six were always around and part of the fashion landscape. And while they were designers I looked up to, they also seemed so far away from my world. I remember going to Paris Fashion Week for the first time when I was 18, sneaking into an Ann Demeulemeester show. That was such a big moment for me, seeing the models walking down the runway in their looks. We were trying to act normal, but my friends and I were freaking out on

the inside. We were so proud of having attended a show of the Antwerp 6, even though Sébastien Meunier had designed the collection. That was a time when it was still relatively easy to sneak into shows, something I would encourage anyone into fashion to do. I try to get young people in with me as often as I can.

What do you think made those designers so special and in the end different from the rest?

The fact that they came out as a kind of collective, supporting each other, was rather special. Their undeniable talent was a key factor, too, but I also think they were grounded and humble in a world of divas and pretentious insiders. Each of them stood for something different, which means they complemented each other well.

How would you define Belgian fashion in a nutshell? And would you say that the Antwerp Six share similar traits?

Defining Belgian fashion is not easy, because it does not have one single aesthetic. I guess Belgian designers are faithful to their own style. They are all committed to their own universe -a trait they all share- as well as the belief that design can be experimental, emotional, and independent at once.

We're witnessing a new wave of Belgian designers going to Paris now and showing their collections there. Which ones do you like the most?

Out of all the new Belgian designers, I am most excited to see Julie Kegels every season. It is fascinating to watch her grow with every new show. I am also a big fan of what Meryll Rogge does. And the work of Marie Adam-Leenaerdt has been growing on me lately. Belgian women are doing a great job and I love to see their creations!

How do you envisage the legacy of the Antwerp Six, and in what ways does it still inspire young designers?

The legacy of the Antwerp Six is larger than life and goes way beyond their individual careers. They proved that a small country like Belgium could produce world-class fashion with a radical point of view. This movement has paved the way for other Belgian designers to go out there and make a name for themselves. Internationally, I feel like being Belgian immediately gives a level of respect and credibility to designers, but also to other creatives from Belgium.



Photo: © ENFNITS TERRIBLES



Photo: © ENFNTS TERRIBLES

You decided to embrace print after years online, which was a bold move. Why was it an important step for you and for ENFNTS TERRIBLES as well?

Embracing print is something I've been thinking about for years, but it finally felt like the time was right. We have been building a sound online community over the past 8 or 9 years, which is key when it comes to making print work. Many posts and stories expire online, so we wanted something lasting. A print magazine demands that you pause to examine its content: looking at a picture in a magazine is therefore totally different from viewing images online. Going into print is not about chasing nostalgia either. It is about creating something that still matters when your WiFi is down or some American billionaire decides your views do not fit his algorithm anymore. Making our first print issue taught me so much and I totally fell in love with that medium. The feedback to our very first issue was deeply encouraging, too.

Who, in your mind, is the enfant terrible of Belgian fashion? And for what reasons?

I would say Glenn Martens, if you look at contemporary icons. He disrupts fashion from the inside out while mastering its codes. As far as the Antwerp 6 are concerned, Walter Van Beirendonck is their enfant terrible. He does not care about trends, or whatever the market demands. He operates within his own beautiful world, inviting others to join in instead of catering to a selected few.

Is there a pedigree that comes with being Antwerp-based? How do global insiders perceive the city today?

Absolutely! The legacy of the Antwerp Six created a global standard for the city to come up with creatives thinking independently and challenging the system, while prioritizing ideas over spectacle, work ethics over clout. Antwerp is small enough to stay grounded, yet culturally dense enough to feel international. That is the good thing about growing as a creative in this city, as you get to know influential people easily. In my mind, Antwerp stands for quality, craft, and a kind of intellectual boldness. If you want to work and grow here, you should have a distinct point of view, and not being afraid of pushing it.

NEW BEATS

Creativity, Pragmatism and Independence

Entrepreneurship continues to be a driving force in Belgian fashion, nurturing a culture of innovation, individuality, and excellence. Today, a new generation of female designers is emerging at the forefront of the industry, each distinguished by a unique sensibility and a contemporary vision.

When Marine Serre graduated in 2016, she helped pave the way for a new generation of female designers launching their own labels. Her distinctive visual language and experimental approach quickly positioned her within the international fashion landscape. Her training within the Belgian fashion education system played a role in shaping the positioning and credibility of her eponymous label. Today, Serre is an established Paris-based designer with a strong global presence.



Photo: © Bella Spantzel

Florentina Leitner

Several other designers have been cultivating this strong belief in independence and craft combined, making sure their clothes are relatable and inventive, while keeping them wearable. Think of Julie Kegels' subtle take on surrealism, Marie Adam-Leenaerdt's sleek and experimental minimalism, Meryll Rogge's subversive take on bourgeois dressing or Florentina Leitner's girly playfulness. Despite having very different clients and audiences, these designers offer collections that are imaginative yet pragmatic. In the realm of accessories, Stephanie d'Heygere subverts everyday items to turn them into jewelry pieces, a Belgian tradition that goes back to Martin Margiela and his focus on ordinary items. Antwerp is a city that fosters and promotes creativity, as well as the luxury of being an independent name.

Designers like Jan-Jan Van Essche, Bernadette or Christian Wijnants launched brands that are now established in fashion, enjoying an international visibility that goes from Europe and the United States to Asia and Australia. What the Antwerp 6 successfully did was setting high standards for Belgian fashion and therefore make Belgian names as prestigious as Japanese ones. The Japanese were, in fact, the first wave that shook up Paris to its core in the early 1980s, with shows that were radical and refreshing. When the Antwerp 6 got to London in 1986, they triggered the same interest -and excitement- among British buyers and press, although their clothes were perhaps not as provocative as what the Japanese delivered. Ever since then, Antwerp fashion has



Photo: © Pietro Celestina

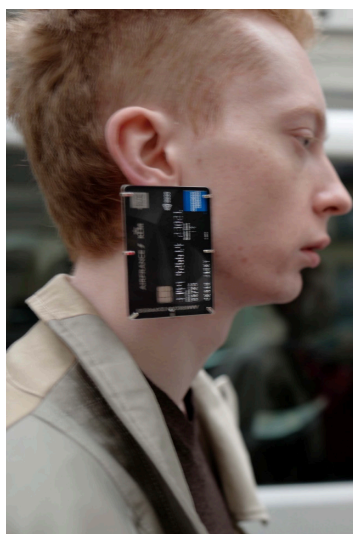
Jan-Jan Van Essche

been described as edgy and avant-garde, while retaining a tangible sense of reality. Just look at upcoming names on the Antwerp scene, such as Und Uli, Nadav Perlman or Marcel Sommer. Their clothes may be experimental and beautifully crafted, they're nevertheless conceived for everyday life, making them particularly relevant today.

The beauty of Antwerp fashion is that it does not limit itself to the high-end designer segment, and there are many success stories, which are also worth mentioning. Tom De Poortere, together with founder Inge Onsea has done a great job at Essentiel, turning a local name into a huge business. Nathalie Vleeschouwer built a reputable brand, offering stylish womenswear, menswear and accessory lines. Café Costume, led by Bruno Van Gils, reinvented the idea of the traditional suit, offering intelligent solutions to a younger clientele. In the realm of urban sportswear, Wouter Hoste's ANTWRP offers considered yet qualitative garments. Even children can get the designer treatment in Antwerp, thanks to Vicky Vinck and Maan Kids, her line of colorful and playful clothes for girls, as well as style conscious teenagers.



Nadav Perlman



Stefanie d'Heygere

Antwerp's New Beats covers an impressive range of collections, aesthetics and lifestyles, all powered in a city that has the feel of a cozy village. In many ways, creating fashion in Antwerp has its advantages. The city is close to major fashion capitals, while keeping its own creativity and integrity intact. No wonder fashion is promoted by the city and its institutions, as Antwerp understands the importance of designer clothing as a way to communicate with the world, using its talented fashion designers as dynamic cultural ambassadors.

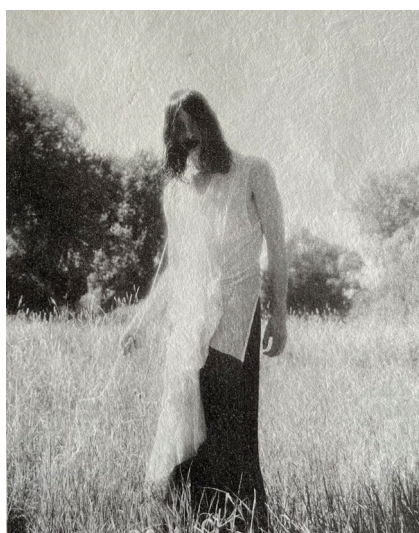


Photo: © Mijla Laakso

Marcel Sommer

GLOBAL APPEAL

Understanding Belgian Influence within Fashion Circles

When the Antwerp Six first came to the fore in 1986, they put a spotlight on Belgian names, creating a sense of excitement not only around their work, but also in the ways Belgian schools grew their individual voices, finding the right balance between fantasy and pragmatism. The success of the Antwerp Six indirectly led to the founding of MoMu. The legacy of the Antwerp Six therefore lies in the way it elevated Belgian education -and creativity- to make Belgian fashion names even more desirable, encouraging foreign students to move there and enroll at some of their best schools.



Photo: © Aliès Torfs

In 2026 -40 years after the Antwerp Six went to London as a group for the very first time- it is incredible to see the number of successful designers who are either Belgian or simply benefited from the virtues of the Belgian educational fashion system, which has, in fact, managed to stay accessible while keeping the highest standards possible.

Over the past decade, we have seen more and more designers graduating in Belgium -mostly from the Antwerp Academy or La Cambre Mode[s]- and getting top jobs within prestigious maisons, such as Matthieu Blazy at Chanel, Anthony Vaccarello at Saint Laurent, Meryll Rogge at Marni, Glenn Martens at Maison Margiela & Diesel, Julian Klausner at Dries Van Noten, Nicolas Di Felice at Courrèges, Raf Simons at Prada and Pieter Mulier at Alaïa. Antwerp's Royal Academy of Fine Arts and La Cambre Mode[s] in Brussels have in fact become leading schools in the world, not only nurturing the creativity of students through their committed teaching, but also empowering them to become future industry talents with impressive careers. Experienced headhunters, company directors and influential insiders attend their graduation shows on a yearly basis, keen on discovering tomorrow's bright young fashion stars.

Belgian schools keep on attracting promising students from all around the globe, and many of their graduates have enjoyed stellar career paths, such as Demna Gvasalia for instance, who made Balenciaga one of fashion's most important brands before heading to Gucci as Artistic Director in March 2025. Other famous names include the likes of Nadège Vanhee-Cybulski at Hermès, Haider Ackermann at Tom Ford, Taro Horiuchi at Kolor



Photo: © Aliès Torfs



Photo: © Alles Torfs

and Antonin Tron at Balmain. For Brandon Wen, Creative Director of the fashion department at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, the ongoing influence of the Academy can be explained by how it teaches flexibility to its students while ensuring their individuality and adaptability grant them a step ahead:

"I believe that in Antwerp we give ourselves the space to be defined and at the same time undefined. While our education has structure and tradition, it also leaves a lot of room for interpretation and translation, which is extremely important in an artistic upbringing. Our students and graduates become resourceful and polyvalent because of their cleverness and their ability to define and master what they cannot easily manage or understand."

Pragmatism is also an important trait within Belgian fashion, coupled with a distinctive low-profile attitude. Belgian designers are famous for being humble as well, and managing their egos in ways that make them desirable for high-end designer conglomerates. For Tony Delcampe, who has been heading the fashion department at La Cambre for several decades, Belgian education fits many of the requirements sought after by the industry now:

"Within the Antwerp Six, fashion tended to be approached in a grounded yet creative way, implying that clothing itself was always at the core of their work, research and vision. At La Cambre Mode[s], we focus on the construction -and deconstruction- of garments, with an emphasis on tailoring and the idea of functional clothes. We're not dealing with visual fantasies as teachers, but the very nature of clothing itself. As far as the current success of Belgian designers is concerned, it has a lot to do in my opinion with savoir-faire and a certain savoir-être, a notion that encompasses humility, craft and respect, as well as keeping one's ego in check."



Photo: © Alles Torfs

A NEW DIASPORA

Antwerp Graduates Around the World

If the influence of the Antwerp Six has been felt within fashion for decades, there are many graduates who left Belgium after their studies and found success elsewhere, interestingly staying away from the main fashion capitals.

Today, fashion is a global industry and digital tools have allowed upcoming designers to get noticed while engaging with fashion on a daily basis, whatever their location may be. This has, without a doubt, triggered a nomadic wave of talents using the know-how and expertise they gathered during their Belgian studies to launch their own labels in Asia, Europe or the United States. Think for instance of Tim Coppens who lives and works in New York, Rushemy Botter who is currently Amsterdam-based, or even Julia Ballardt and Nico Verhaegen, two graduates of the Academy who launched 'Milk of Lime' in Berlin. Antwerp graduates are very much sought-after and respected, delivering a unique blend of character, innovation and strong personal taste, while understanding the codes and commercial framework of the fashion industry.

Photo: © Elif Gunduz



Grounds

Throughout the years, the Royal Academy of Fine Arts has nurtured close relationships with students from China, South Korea and Japan, making the school a beloved destination for overseas students. Whether or not they choose to return home after graduation, those designers often launch their eponymous line, sticking to the spirit of independence and entrepreneurship that has shaped Antwerp as an exciting and forward-thinking fashion destination. Mikio Sakabe set up 'Grounds' -his own label- in Tokyo, but he shows in Paris and travels to Antwerp often. Hyein Seo, who is from South Korea, received praise for her collections and their challenging edge, renewing with an Antwerp tradition of pushing experimentation. Other recent examples include Shanghai-based designer Shuting Qiu, as well as Seoul-based Minju Kim who won Netflix's Next in Fashion in 2020. Sometimes, designers choose to launch their own brand in Antwerp, which is the case for Wujic Jo who graduated from the Academy in 2017. His eyewear line named 'Wujic Jo Antwerp' is designed in Antwerp, while its manufacturing takes place in Japan, a perfect illustration of the special bond between East Asia and the Belgian city.



Shuting Qiu

Every year, the renowned Royal Academy of Fine Arts welcomes 1st Year Students coming from more than 40 countries, making it one of the most international schools in the world. Being taught fashion in Antwerp is as reputable as a 'Made in Belgium' label, regardless of what your nationality may be. This is part of the Antwerp 6 legacy -which clearly does not limit itself to Belgium- and has embraced the entire world from its humble beginnings. There's a certain prestige that not only comes with being a Belgian brand nowadays, but also from being able to take part in its exceptional teaching system, which has kept standards high over the years.

SUPPORT AND TRAINING

Fashion Department

The fashion department of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp is viewed as one of the most important and most influential fashion trainings in the world. The training combines a robust knowledge of traditional techniques with a significant emphasis on creativity and individuality. The Academy produces students with a distinguished respect for craftsmanship, a healthy critical eye on fashion and a talent for innovation. The Royal Academy of Fine Arts is one

of the oldest in Europe. It was established in 1663 by David Teniers the Younger, who was one of Europe's most prominent painters at the time. For three hundred years, the school focused on the fine arts. In the 1960s, the school expanded and new courses were added, amongst which was fashion. Beginning in 1963, the department was led by Mary Prijot. Linda Loppa became chair of the department in 1983. She worked hard to promote the fashion department to important journalists and designers. In 2006, Walter Van Beirendonck became head of the department, a position he held until 2021. With Brandon Wen leading the fashion department since 2022, the programme maintains its strong international appeal, welcoming students from around the world.

antwerp-fashion.be



Photo: © Allie Torfs

Flanders District Of Creativity (FDC)

As the Flemish headquarters for design and fashion, Flanders District of Creativity supports designers and entrepreneurs in design and fashion, with tools, knowledge, and a strong community that truly empowers them to move forward. FDC provides advice and guidance, opens doors through international actions, brings recognition with, among others, the Belgian Fashion Awards, and inspires and stimulates collaborations by organizing events such as Fashion Talks.

flandersdistrictofcreativity.be



Photo: © Allie Torfs

Fashion Management Summer School

Since 2012, the University of Antwerp organises a summer school in Responsible Fashion Management in collaboration with the Institut Français de la Mode (IFM in Paris). The training is geared for professionals and students who wish to immerse themselves deeper in the various dynamics of the fashion industry for 10 days. In Antwerp, the emphasis naturally lies on the (support of the) creative and independent designers, while in Paris, the participants receive insight into the dynamics of the luxury industry. The participation of creative designers, business students and professionals with diverse backgrounds ensure for an exciting cross-pollination.

uantwerpen.be

EXPERIENCE FASHION IN ANTWERP

MoMu Fashion Walk

Explore the city with the MoMu guides and discover Antwerp's bustling fashion scene. Join the Fashion Walk in a group (Dutch or English) or as an individual visitor (only Dutch). Let yourself be taken along to the places that have been determining factors for the development of Antwerp as a fashion city.

momu.be



Photo: © Dries Luyten



Photo: © Dries Luyten

Shopping in Antwerp

The diversity of the fashion scene in Antwerp is also reflected in the range of shops available and you can find everything within walking distance. Whatever your personal style, you are sure to find elegant pieces from large fashion houses, trendy boutiques, small independent shops and avant-garde concept stores.

visit.antwerpen.be



MoMu - Fashion Museum Antwerp

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