

**TALKING  
FASHION**



# TALKING FASHION

FROM NICK KNIGHT TO RAF SIMONS  
IN THEIR OWN WORDS

JAN KEDVES

PRESTEL

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## PREFACE

**F**ashion is, of course, much more than what designers create. To truly understand the phenomenon of fashion one has to look at related fields as well – and ask, for instance, how clothes are staged by photographers, how they are worn by models and stars, how journalists and bloggers write about collections, and how conglomerates market their brands. The work of curators who exhibit fashion and of theorists and historians who evaluate it from a scholarly standpoint also forms an important part of the picture. That is why in *Talking Fashion* experts from a number of different fields are given a voice – in 25 in-depth conversations. This book features, among many others, photographer Juergen Teller, whose pictures are famous for their irony (see the photo of Victoria Beckham on the cover), alongside the legendary model Veruschka, who often found fashion photography simply too boring when working in the industry in the 1960s; or dancer Willi Ninja, whose art of voguing was heavily influenced by fashion images (and who had an appreciable influence on fashion in return), is portrayed next to a designer like Raf Simons, who often drew inspiration from underground cultures (such as voguing) for his collections.

These conversations present a variety of personal experiences, critical reflections and anecdotes. I conducted them between late 2005 and June 2013. Many of them have appeared – in shorter or longer form – in *Spex*, the German pop culture magazine for which I worked as an editor from 2007 to 2010 and served as editor-in-chief from autumn 2010 until spring 2012. Other conversa-

tions were commissioned by Zoo, a fashion magazine published in Amsterdam, by the German daily newspaper Die Welt and by Groove, a magazine devoted to electronic club music. Two conversations – the ones with Helmut Lang and fashion theorist Barbara Vinken – were conducted in collaboration with the Berlin literary scholar and art historian Philipp Ekardt. I spoke with three people specifically for this book – illustrator Jean-Paul Goude, designer Iris van Herpen and photographer Viviane Sassen.

Do these conversations present a consistent picture of fashion? That was certainly not the goal. An interest in the people themselves, their work and their individual views of fashion always took precedence. Yet there are certain recurring themes. One is the digitization of our lives and its – usually positive but occasionally problematic – impact on fashion: from blogging, Photoshop and 3D printing to the global levelling of local styles of dress. The subject of the changing role of the body in fashion also comes up several times: are clothes today, in an era of omnipresent body styling, still worn for the purpose of giving posture, or a habitus to the body, or is it up to the hard-worked body to provide posture on its own – while clothes merely put the effects of that work on display? A number of my interview partners also talked about economic issues: how can an independent brand survive in the new millennium? Should one go along with the ever-shorter cycles in which collections are dumped on the market, or is there a more sustainable way of creating fashion? And last but not least, should one want to seek refuge under the roof of a conglomerate like LVMH or PPR (now Kering)?

In the preface to a book like this, which brings together a number of different perspectives yet always maintains faith in the spoken

*word, I should probably point out that of course the relationship between journalism and the fashion industry is not all sweetness and light. The conditions for arranging an interview with a curator like Valerie Steele or a documentary film-maker like Loïc Prigent are relatively uncomplicated. But anyone who wishes to speak with a designer has a number of hurdles to negotiate. The PR department of the brand in question has to take a favourable view of the interviewer, and the medium for which the interview is requested must be regarded as sufficiently important. But above all there has to be a fitting occasion, for if a designer or brand is not in the process of launching a new line or opening a new shop or exhibition, most PR agents will see no reason to seek publicity in the form of an in-depth interview. Anyone who is lucky enough to land an appointment would do well to avoid asking overly critical questions – unless he wants to be erased from the contact list. Perhaps that is why interviews in the field of fashion often tend to read like mere press briefings in disguise. The goal of a journalistic interview, however, must of course always be to bring out more than a rehearsed PR text.*

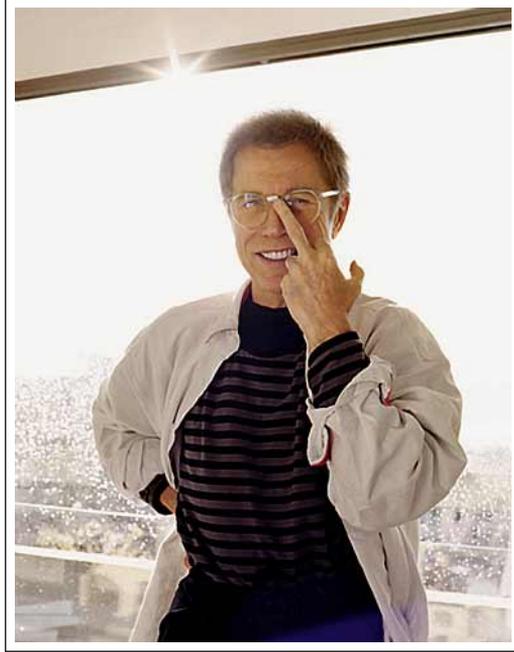
*Thus interviews like these are truly rewarding – conversations with the objective of realizing a different and more profound way of talking fashion; conversations that reveal the diversity and complexity of fashion. I sincerely hope that readers will enjoy reading and looking through this book.*

*Jan Kedves*



*WELCOME*

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# *Jean-Paul* **GOUDE**

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*FASHION ILLUSTRATOR*

*Paris*

Jean-Paul Goude is one of the greatest iconographers of the last half-century, working like virtually no other at the crossroads of fashion, advertising and art. The men and women in Goude's photos seem bigger, stronger, always more beautiful and sometimes a bit wilder than they really are. Goude, who was born in the Paris suburb of Saint-Mandé in 1940, perfected his own unique method of processing photographs as illustrations - which goes far beyond the limits of retouching - while serving as art director for *Esquire* in the 1970s. From his poster campaigns for the Galeries Lafayette, to his TV commercials for Chanel, to the countless portraits of his muse Grace Jones (with whom he has a son), practically all of Goude's oeuvre is unforgettable. Most recently, he contributed to the Kenzo hysteria with his X campaigns.

Monsieur Goude, are your glasses broken? They look like you fixed them with white duct tape.

My glasses are not broken and believe it or not, this little piece of white tape is nothing but another manifestation of my frantic obsession with style ... just kidding! Yet the fact is that my eyes are set too close to each other. The tape on the glasses is just a graphic trick, an optical illusion, a white spot that structures one's features and that – according to me – corrects the problem.

You seem to love such optical illusions. For example in your book *So Far So Goude*, published in 2005, you explain how – as a teenager – you came up with ways to make your shoulders appear a little broader and your legs longer.

As far as I can remember, I've always been very preoccupied with my appearance. When I was a little kid, I wondered why I didn't look as good as the other guys. For example, why didn't I look good in blue jeans? I had no idea at the time that my legs were too short compared with my upper body and that my head was too big for my shoulders. I started noticing these things around adolescence. By the time I reached 16 or 17, I was already doctoring my own clothes.

In your book you call it 'prosthesis'.

Well, in a way, some clothes are nothing but prostheses, which are very often taken for granted. A shoulder pad in a jacket, for instance, nobody notices, whereas a shoulder pad in a T-shirt is considered ridiculous, when actually both devices accomplish the same mission: to improve one's silhouette. I won't mention high-heeled shoes or platforms, which are obvious prostheses that everyone accepts. The same thing is true about wearing a jacket, the waist of which is cut higher than it is *au naturel*; it gives the illusion of longer legs, etc.... Of course, these graphic tricks should be as subtle as possible – one doesn't want to look like a living caricature. After all, the goal is to seduce, to be more sexually attractive.

In the late 1960s, you put several insoles in normal-looking high-top trainers as part of your series *French Correction*, making the wearer six centimetres taller. The concept seems to have been



Basketball shoes from the *French Correction* series, 1970

adopted by Isabel Marant lately – she’s making tons of money with her so-called ‘wedge sneakers’.

Good for her. The *French Correction* was never meant to be commercialized anyway.

In *So Far So Goude*, there’s a picture of your meeting with President François Mitterrand in 1988. At the time, you were commissioned by the French state to stage the bicentennial anniversary in July 1989 of the French Revolution. In the picture, you’re wearing a red, hooded sweatshirt and an olive-coloured army jacket. Was that your way of dressing up for the occasion?

No, it was pure coincidence. The meeting with President Mitterrand was very early in the morning, and we had just flown in from China, where we had been casting amateur dancers and musicians for the bicentennial parade. We were taken directly from the airport to the Élysée Palace to report to the President. We didn’t have a chance to change clothes. I think Mitterrand actually welcomed this type of informality.

You wore your white-taped glasses in a recent TV documentary, too, in which you talked about the legendary Italian fashion illustrator René Gruau. In what way was he important to you?

Gruau was my childhood idol. When I was a kid, he was a huge star, his posters were all over Paris. So, when I decided to become an artist, Gruau was definitively on my mind. Another hero of mine, who unfortunately never became as successful as Gruau, was Tom Keogh, whose erotic drawings I adored. All this explains why my early drawings were so influenced both by Gruau and Keogh. I forgot to tell you, I was about 20 years old when I met this aggressive young agent who couldn’t make up his mind whether or not I was worthy enough to join his stable of illustrators. When he mentioned that he represented Gruau, I told him: ‘If you really want to know whether I’m good enough for you, why don’t you take my drawings and show them to him. He’ll tell you!’ And that’s exactly what Gruau did!

Wow, you must have been very flattered.

Yes, I was on cloud nine. Especially when Gruau called my mother to tell her that I should continue drawing.

So this was all in the 1950s?

Yes, the very late 50s.

Wasn’t that when the big era of fashion illustration was actually over already because of the increasing demand for fashion photography?

Indeed it was. My admiration for Gruau made me choose a dying profession; I don’t hold grudges. I still worship him.

You reversed the development later in your own work: you took up photography, but only in order to produce raw material for your illustrations. You cut up photographs, retouched them and painted on them.

This is why I can’t call myself a photographer per se; I’m more like a graphic artist who manipulates photography, which is different. My career as a traditional fashion illustrator was only very short. Obsessed by making as much money as possible and as quickly as I could, I was turning out mediocre advertising campaigns like hot cakes in the 60s. That’s to say my production was getting worse and worse as time went



Azzedine and Farida, 1984



Constructivist maternity dress for Grace Jones, 1979

by. After three years, my career as a fashion illustrator was over. I was 24. So I started working in different areas, using any kind of technique I could handle – photography, film, stage design, and so on. Only to finally realize that technique isn't everything. It's one's point of view that counts. The way one sees the world. No matter how it's expressed.

What's your take on Photoshop, then? There's no difference between photography and illustration in Photoshop. A few clicks enable you to do what, back then, you did tediously by hand, only much faster.

True, and I use it all the time. But Photoshop is just a machine, a wonderful machine, depending on who works it. If you don't have a point of view, you can play around with Photoshop as long as you want, you'll never find it.

It'd be interesting to talk about another fashion illustrator with whom you were friends and who has been rediscovered lately: Antonio Lopez.

Antonio was a gem, an exceptional fashion artist, a supreme draughtsman, as well as a very charismatic person. He and Juan Ramos – his very own art director and partner – were a creative team, while Corey Tippin advised on make-up. In 1979, I produced an eight-page story for *Esquire* entitled 'Antonio's girls'. Antonio and I lived across the street from each other at Union Square, and we'd hang out together every so often. His studio was like a mini Factory, very stimulating.

Antonio was supposedly responsible for discovering Grace Jones while she was still a model, before she started singing. Is that true?

I don't think so. Antonio probably photographed Grace when she was signed to a modelling agency and was laboriously commuting from Paris to New York, but then so were Peter Knapp, Hans Feurer, Francis Giacobetti and Oliviero Toscani ... I'd say Yves Saint Laurent himself was the one who gave Grace that push both as a model and as a budding entertainer. Disco did the rest, and my contribution came later. Antonio loved Grace. But at the time we collaborated with each other, his favourite models were Pat Cleveland, Donna Jordan, Eija, Patti d'Arbanville, and especially Jerry Hall, his favourite muse and great love. Which brings us to the only time I ever collaborated with Antonio and Juan on a project of my own.

You mean Grace Jones' Constructivist dress?

Exactly. It was 1979 and Grace was eight months pregnant by me. She wanted the child but she also wanted and needed to promote her new album, in spite of her condition. Something had to be done. This is when I came up with this mega-maternity Cubist dress idea that would hopefully solve the problem. I called Antonio and Juan for help. At the time, anything that had to do with Cubism or Constructivism was very much in the air. Klaus Nomi was the man of the hour, and Antonio, Juan and myself were Bauhaus crazy. So, I brought along my books on Constructivism to their studio, and we went to work.

You took many images of Grace Jones in the late 1970s and early 1980s that are iconic to this day. So when you reunited with her in 2009 to shoot a portrait for *V Magazine*, there was the danger of producing something weaker. But the result – which also celebrated the 30th anniversary of your private and working relationship – turned out iconic again. Were you surprised yourself?



*'I became determined to do everything I could to turn things around to Grace's advantage.'*

Grace Jones for *V Magazine*, 2009

Indeed I was, very agreeably so, though this time I was only involved as the photographer. All I had to do for the cover of *V Magazine* was record Grace as she posed in her hat created by Philip Treacy.

No fighting, no arguing?

Absolutely none. If Grace and I fought a lot, a long time ago, I never forced her – or anybody else for that matter – to do anything. I couldn't have, and didn't even try. I suggested, demonstrated, lured, enticed, persuaded, even rescued her more than anything.

Rescued her in what way?

Let's say, by 'protecting her reputation.' I like 'rescue', it's more dramatic, but it's too much. When Grace was pregnant, I came to Paris to visit my mother while Grace stayed at home with soon-to-be-born Paulo. Here I was at Kenzo's, standing in front of the cashier, paying for a small gift for the future mother, when I overheard two young women – pretty hip-looking – putting down Grace in the most malicious manner. They were claiming that Grace's career had hit rock-bottom in Paris, and how nobody cared about her anymore, and that she was finished once and for all ... That was my girlfriend they were talking about! I was so shocked, I couldn't react. But more importantly, I realized what a dangerous position Grace was in at the time – professionally speaking, of course. I took this incident as an omen. And from that moment on, I became determined to do everything I could to turn things around to her advantage.

You just mentioned Kenzo. In 2012 and 2013, you did campaigns for their new creative team, Carol Lim and Humberto Leon.

The X campaigns, yes!



The first X campaign for Kenzo, autumn/winter 2012/13

How did that come about?

Well, Carol and Humberto contacted me and said they'd been hired by LVMH to take over Kenzo, and that they had me in mind for their next advertising campaign. We met for lunch, and I found them very charming. They're both American. Humberto is part Chinese, and Carol's family comes from Korea. Since my wife is also an Asian-American, we had a lot to talk about: Japan, Korea, China, potential problems, hip-hop, kung fu, mangas ... very interesting!

Did you talk about jungles, too? The whole Kenzo aesthetic is very much centred around jungles.

Indeed we did. In fact, we had barely been seated more than ten minutes when they mentioned *Jungle Fever*, my old book from 1981, and how perfectly – I quote – my 'aesthetics' would fit with the brand's spirit. I loved that straight-to-the-point attitude.

Could you explain the iconic X symbol you came up with?

At first I thought about recycling a picture I had done years before, but it didn't feel right. I shot it anyway, but the idea for the X started to take shape in my mind when the Kenzo neon sign was brought into the studio, suddenly giving it a 'showbizzy' atmosphere. And since I had showbiz on my mind, why not choreograph our two models, like dancers on the stage of a theatre, and craft an image that would allow the viewer to look either at the boy or at the girl by simply shifting the printed ad around? You know, like one does with playing cards.

When looking at the ads, one doesn't realize it immediately – but of course you've altered the limbs of the models and made them a bit longer.



Mounia in Saint Laurent, 1985

I had to, because with normal proportions you'd have a hard time holding that pose with the same effortless elegance as the two kids did. Actually, I saw 12-year-old Kenzo fans practising the X during recess, in junior high school, on the internet!

That makes you responsible for some sexy new couples?

I hope so!

You said that you thought about recycling an idea for Kenzo. You seem to do that quite often. For example, there was a predecessor for the legendary cover image for Grace Jones' *Slave to the Rhythm* album – the cut-up mouth – namely the image of model Mounia wearing Saint Laurent from 1985. And your spot for Chanel's *Égoïste* perfume in 1990 was based on an earlier idea that you couldn't carry out.

Let me tell you about the *Égoïste* saga: it all started with a project I had with Farida ...  
Farida Khelifa?

Yes. Farida was the woman who followed

Grace in my life. She had written an extraordinary poem based on an incident she had witnessed during her childhood in the projects in the suburbs of Lyons, where she lived with her family and hundreds of other immigrants, mostly of North African descent. My goal was to take her poem as the basis for a mini pop opera for French television. What fascinated me when I went down to Lyons to do some location scouting was this gigantic drab forest of grey, high-rise buildings riddled with hundreds of windows; and behind every window, I imagined a woman, in a *hijab*, staring outside, sort of spying. As soon as one of the women witnessed something going wrong in the street, they'd all lean out of the windows and scream out their disapproval, before brutally slamming the shutters: *boom, bam, bam, boom*, very strong! Needless to say, the project never got off the ground; a bit too radical I guess and much too expensive for French TV. Coincidentally, six months later, I got a call from Chanel, whose creative director asked me if I had an idea for *Égoïste*, the new scent for men that they were getting ready to launch. I said: 'Well, I might have something ...'

So the projects in the *banlieue* became a luxurious palace, and the Arab women ... were turned into models wearing Chanel gowns, screaming their lungs out to the wind. A good idea is a good idea. It would have been a pity not to use it in one way or another.

And so one could really say that you've always approached your commercial commissions as an artist?



*Égoïste* film set, Rio de Janeiro, 1990

I think I have, since from the very beginning I chose to take advertising and style as pre-requisites for an artistic career. For example, my *Goudemalion* exhibition at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in 2011 was an artistic project. The show in itself was the work of art and it made total sense. It told the trials and tribulations of this character called Goudemalion, from his early childhood to this day: Saint-Mandé, cowboys, Indians, African warriors, tigers, the *French Correction*, Toukie, Grace, Farida, HRH the Queen of Seoul – everything and everybody was there. The show was a big success. I'm lucky!

Is it true that a few years ago, when you found out that a new house was going to be built right in front of your house in Belleville, where you live, you went and bought the airspace in the top floors of the future building to prevent it from blocking your view?

Yes I did, but let me try to explain. Years ago, I bought a little house built on the flank of a very steep hill in the Buttes Chaumont, a charming neighbourhood in the north of Paris, where we lived, my wife, my kids and I. The panoramic view of Paris from our garden was breathtaking. One day, I saw a big crane stick out at the end of the garden and realized that someone was preparing the construction of a building that would not only block our view completely, but considerably shrink the value of my little house. So, I made a deal directly with the promoter: I would buy the air of the two future floors of his building, and when its construction reached the level of my garden, I would turn those two floors into one big studio for myself. Nowadays, I just have to cross my garden to go to work. And I still have my view of Sacré Coeur and the Eiffel Tower. I added more trees and bushes in the garden: it's a jungle out there, really!



# *Rick OWENS*

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*FASHION DESIGNER*

*Paris*

Rick Owens is a prime example of a designer from the underground who has tenaciously maintained his independence despite growing success. Owens founded his label in 1994, and for many years his collections were sold exclusively by Charles Gallay in Los Angeles. Born in Porterville, California, in 1961, Owens achieved his breakthrough with the CFDA Emerging Talent Award in 2002 and soon moved on to Paris, where he lives today. His aesthetic - hedonistic, sombre and always a bit ghostly - is often referred to as 'haute goth'. Owens, who in 2005 began designing furniture, too, is married to his muse, Michèle Lamy, an important patron of designer Gareth Pugh. His company, Rick Owens Corp, is located in the regal Place du Palais-Bourbon directly opposite Condé Nast.

Mr. Owens, since founding your label in 1994 your success has steadily grown – without any advertising at all.

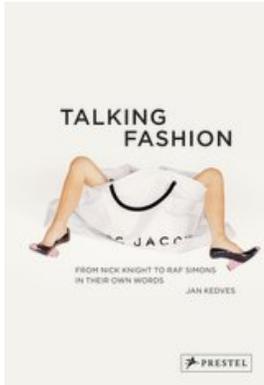
I'd say that this might be one of the reasons for my success. A lot of my clients appreciate the fact that Rick Owens does not advertise, and I assume that if I started doing ads I would alienate a lot of these clients – they would somehow start suspecting my purity. The manipulation of fashion through advertising has become so transparent nowadays, people are aware of every single marketing device that's being used to seduce them. I don't think this is going to work for very much longer. So I guess I am lucky that my label could go without advertising right from the start.

Do you have an explanation for this?

Well, the clothes I designed did sell right away. I took them myself to the stores in Los Angeles where I wanted them to be sold. Granted, I was lucky to meet retailers who were pioneers in fashion; they took a lot of risks on new designers. When they added my collection to their range it sold well immediately. So I gained a reputation for providing clothes that the stores could sell, and I think that established me more than by being featured in magazines or creating hype. I'm not criticizing people who do it another way. But I came more from a retail side, not so much from an editorial side.

Another interesting fact about your business is that you do not sell perfume – normally it's fragrances that generate the largest revenue for fashion labels.

Well, actually I'm in the process of creating a perfume – I'm working on one with a perfumer in Paris, and I'm wearing it myself. But to be honest, I don't know how to sell it. You know, the perfume business works totally differently from the clothing business. Not doing advertising for a perfume would be commercial suicide because there's no way to start a perfume on a small scale. Developing a fragrance and getting it ready for the market is very expensive. So if I launched a fragrance on my own, I would be lucky to break even, and in the context of designer fragrances, mine would probably still look like a weakling. I'd like a little more for my labour of love than that. On the other hand, if I cooperated with a big company, as other designers do, the company would invest strongly in the perfume, and they would expect me to do a big advertising campaign. What would that do to the rest of my company? It would change everything. All of a sudden I'd become a designer who advertises. So the whole thing probably would smell of selling out.



Jan Kedes

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