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surface

FASHION ARCHITECTURE DESIGN

THE *Fall*
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ISSUE

Free Form

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STYLE LAB

*Experimental fashion from
WU YONG, JAN TAMINIAU
and MARLOES TEN BHOMER*

MOVERS AND SHAPERS

*The artful disproportions
of SHIGERU BAN, XRANGE
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MATERIAL MUTATIONS

*Visionaries MIUCCIA PRADA
and DAI FUJIWARA reinvent textiles
using radical new techniques*

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Foot Loose

Rejecting the formal fetters that have confined footwear for millennia, radical product designer Marloes ten Bhömer elevates your feet and the importance of shoe design

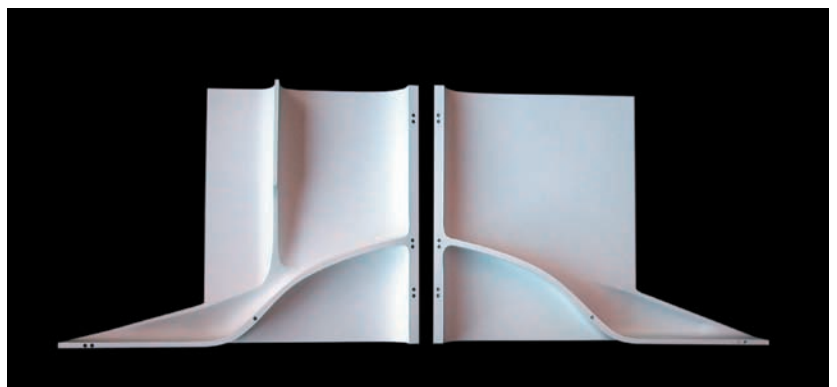
Writer SHONQUIS MORENO

Walking in the shoes of Dutch product designer Marloes ten Bhömer might prove to be a bit of a challenge. "My main objective," she explains, "is to rethink the generic typology of shoes." The London-based, Netherlands-born ten Bhömer, who studied at the London College of Fashion and the Royal Academy of Art before engineering shoes for Alexander McQueen in 2002, explores the relationship of the ubiquitous object to its user. "Shoes are very close to the body and can have a strong influence on the wearer," she says. "Different shoes make you feel differently, so I'm interested in designing for those who live with new fantasies and new definitions of beauty."

To build her unprecedented forms, ten Bhömer painstakingly researches and uses materials, forms and construction methods that are rarely, if ever, seen in shoe design. Her heel-less heels cantilever off the ground without a rear column, while her carbon fiber ankle boots – with the unwearable right angles of a floor plan – resemble an architectural model more than footwear. Nonetheless, they underscore the shoe's first purpose: to shelter our feet. Other pairs are made from shrink-wrapped or paper-machéd leather, carbon fiber or Tyvek. And one can only assume that she's the only cobbler working with industrial tools such as a vacuum former and computer-controlled (CNC) milling programs, and without the most basic building block of shoe design, the last.

Shoemaking has focused largely on the toe and heel; ten Bhömer, however, is altering the entire form with methods that run the gamut from low to high-tech. For one shoe, she mounted a shallow rectangular box on a high-heeled sole and then creased it strategically to follow the sole, refining its shape and obscuring its original pedestrian form. Her Crepla shoe was more complex. The designer used a vacuum former to make copies of a shoe form in a sheet of foam, copying the copy each time instead of the original. With each successive version, the form lost shape and detail. With the copies layered, one inside the other, the interior of the shoe had the greatest fidelity to the original form since it was the first copy. Moving outwards, however, as the copies grew thicker and cruder, the exterior of the shoe became completely distorted. "I try to get as far as possible from conventional shoemaking methods as possible," she says, "and using unusual materials allows me to make fantastical shapes into technically sound products."

Though most of ten Bhömer's experiments have been wearable, they weren't necessarily suitable for long walks. To make a radical shape comfortable, she must play with the position of the heel and the points where the edges of the upper meet the foot. This fall, she will debut a wearable special edition of her early kitten heel sandal, Leathermachéshoe. In attempting to alter an object whose construction has changed negligibly over millennia, ten Bhömer's technical explorations are both pragmatic and iconoclastic. It's simple, she says, "I want to influence what beauty can be." **SQ**



ICONOC-LAST: (Clockwise from top) Marloes ten Bhömer constructed a shoe template from a single piece of folded paper; and invented a leather laminating technique based on paper-maché to create Leathermachéshoe, which will be sold this fall under the label MARLOESTENBHÖMER. CNCshoe was fabricated using computer-controlled milling, typical to the auto industry and, only recently, to architects. Her graphical gloves unfold into wallets. A second pair of Leathermachéshoes in red.