

Bless Designers Desiree Heiss and Ines Kaag on Operating Outside of the Fashion System



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Bless No. 61: *Swimmingtogether*
Photo: Courtesy of Bless



Bless is the creative platform established 21 years ago by Designers Desiree Heiss and Ines Kaag. Though formally trained as fashion designers, the duo has always done more than simply make clothing, and they have consistently resisted conforming to conventional fashion formats. “We have created a working system that’s made-to-measure to our personal needs,” notes Heiss, who resides in Paris; Kaag is Berlin-based. “Alternative” isn’t a buzzword for these two, it’s an m.o., which is evidenced by back-to-back New York Fashion Week installations showcasing their latest projects: *Bless No. 60 Lobby Conquerors*, a furniture collaboration; and a fashion collection titled *Bless No. 61 Swimmingtogether*.

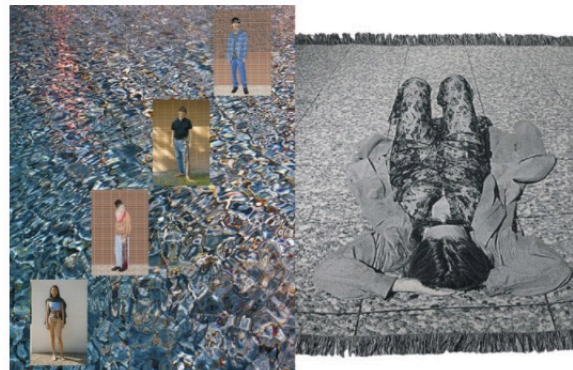
Even before they’d organized as a company, Heiss and Kaag were breaking with tradition. Rather than wait to be discovered, they borrowed money from their parents and placed an ad in *i-D* magazine, listing their phone number next to a Polaroid of a fur wig they had designed. “We were so naive,” says Heiss now. But they were also smart. The ad generated two inquiries: one from Sarah Andelman, who, at that time, had not yet opened Colette; the other from a Martin Margiela press person that resulted in a commission for similar wigs for Margiela’s Fall 1997 show. (The designer insisted they be made from deconstructed vintage fur coats rather than new fur.)



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Bless No. 61: *Swimmingtogether*
Photo: Courtesy of Bless



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Bless No. 61: *Swimmingtogether*
Photo: Courtesy of Bless



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Bless No. 61: *Swimmingtogether*
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Bless No. 61: *Swimmingtogether*
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Bless No. 60: Lobby Conquerors with Artek
Chairwear B: blond goat
Photo: Courtesy of Bless

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Bless No. 60: Lobby Conquerors with Artek
Corner chair
Photo: Courtesy of Bless



Bless's wigs for Martin Margiela's Fall 1997 show
Photo: Condé Nast Archive



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Bless No. 60: Lobby Conquerors with Artek
Chairwear B: coyote
Photo: Courtesy of Bless



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Bless No. 60: Lobby Conquerors with Artek
Chairwear B: blue fox dyed cream
Photo: Courtesy of Bless



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Bless No. 60: Lobby Conquerors with Artek
Chairwear B: persian lamb
Photo: Courtesy of Bless



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Bless No. 60: Lobby Conquerors with Artek
Pillow fan
Photo: Courtesy of Bless



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Bless No. 60: Lobby Conquerors with Artek
Chairwear B: coyote
Photo: Courtesy of Bless



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Bless No. 60: Lobby Conquerors with Artek
Staircase chair
Photo: Courtesy of Bless



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Bless No. 60: Lobby Conquerors with Artek
Chairwear B: silver fox
Photo: Courtesy of Bless



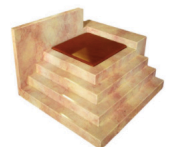
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Bless No. 60: Lobby Conquerors with Artek
Plateau sofa
Photo: Courtesy of Bless



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Bless No. 60: Lobby Conquerors with Artek
Pillow row chair
Photo: Courtesy of Bless



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Bless No. 60: Lobby Conquerors with Artek
Bench riser
Photo: Courtesy of Bless

Two decades later, Heiss and Kaag are still playing with pelts. At the Mathew Gallery tonight, the pair will install the hairy “chairwear” they developed with the Finnish furniture company [Artek](#) for a project that debuted at the Chicago Architectural Biennial last year. Some of these fur-cloaked chairs are also included in a show that opened last night in Soho to celebrate the release of Bless’s lookbook *No. 61 Swimmingtogether*, which appears in the latest issue of New York indie magazine *299 792 458 m/s*. Since 2004, Bless has published its collection lookbooks in niche journals. “For us, it’s a great service to our clients,” notes Heiss. “All the magazines we work with have overlapping values systems, and most of them are quite small and niche products, too. So, in teaming up, we get access to their world and they get access to ours, double-spreading the content.” Such a partnership also creates new, unique channels of distribution.

Though Heiss avers that she and Kaag have “quite naturally shifted out of the fashion world,” their own getups—Heiss wore a sweater with wooden bead elbow patches and Kaag, a fur-lined zip-front jacket—suggest otherwise. So does their lookbook, which contains pieces that touch on current trends without succumbing to trendiness. As Heiss and Kaag don’t design for ideal types, the clothes are shown on friends and colleagues, who wear swimsuits, denim, and athleisure styles. There’s even a man in what looks to be a printed dress, something we’ve seen a lot of this New York Fashion Week. “We just do one collection and whoever wears it, does; whoever wants it, grabs it. There is no distinction [between menswear and womenswear] for us,” says Heiss. “It’s more like basic clothing,” pipes in Kaag. “We just do what we do. Bless is just our life, actually.”

Bless No. 60 Lobby Conquerors at [Mathew Gallery](#) and [299 792 458 m/s](#) at [Westreich Wagner](#) are on view through March 4.