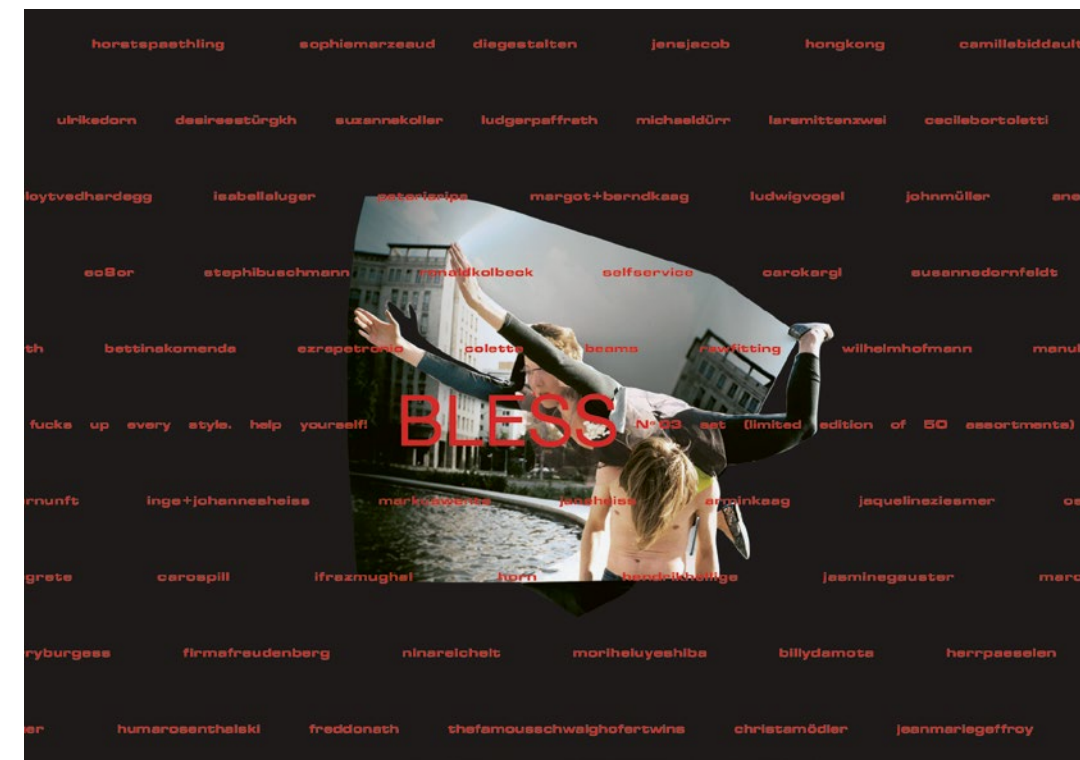


BLESS
 (Limited Edition) N° 00
 Fits Every Style! Cut & Try.



(Limited Edition of 60 packs à 3 T-Shirts) N° 02 **BLESS**
 Fits Every Style! Wear and don't care.

RADICAL MODESTY

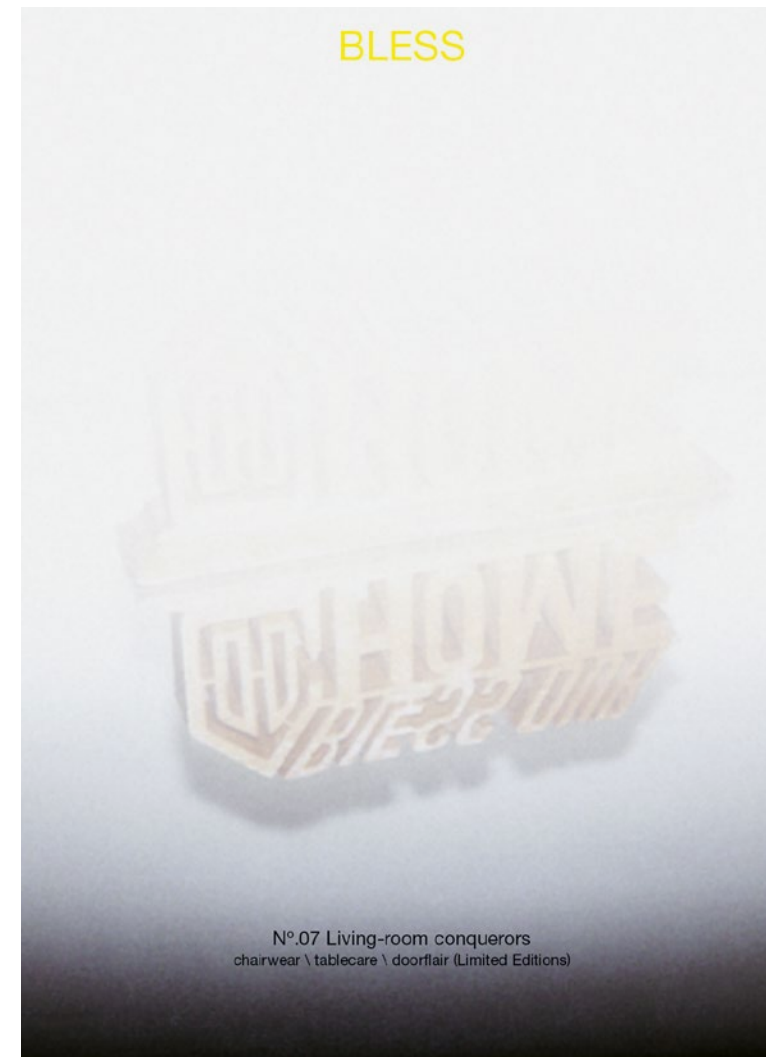


Berlin-based brand BLESS has been occupying a “third space” for over 25 years now, hovering somewhere between contemporary art and fashion, with intellectual, pragmatic, tongue-in-cheek products. As their turn-of-the-millennium aesthetics are discovered and mined by emergent generations of creatives, this essay takes input from a wide variety of voices, proving how their designer-as-artist medium was distinctly ahead of the curve. WORDS BY JEPPE UGELVIG



N° 04 A, B, C, D and E are bags.
(limited Edition of 100 bag systems) Stylerfree.

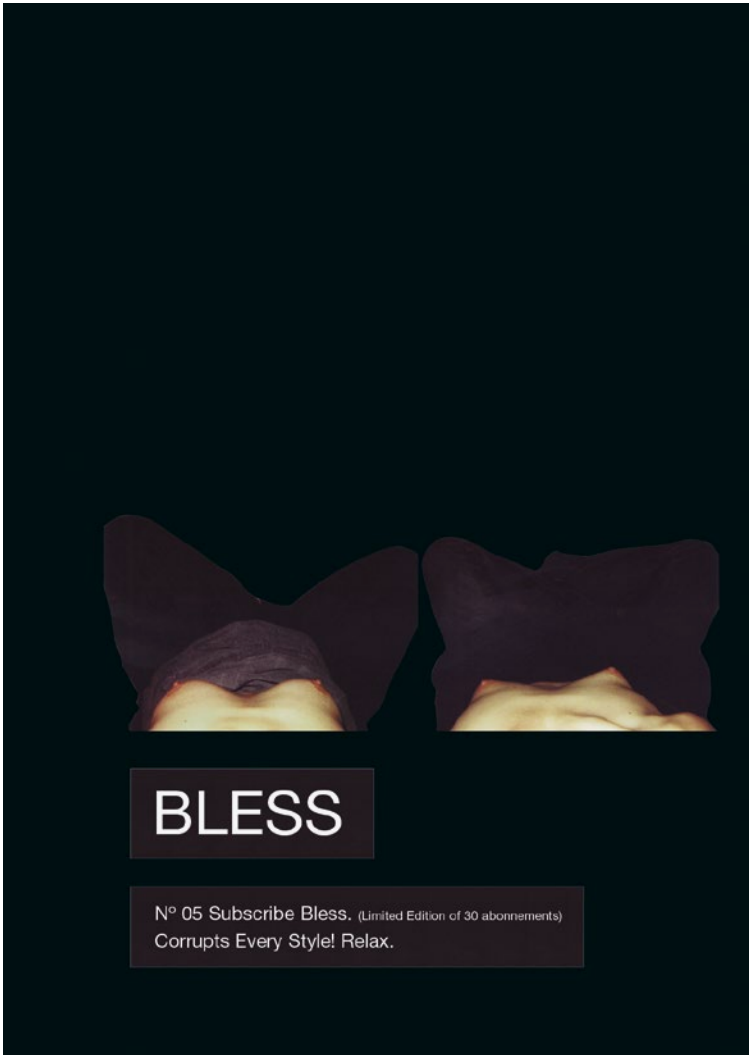
BLESS



N° 07 Living-room conquerors
charwear \ tablecare \ doorflair (Limited Editions)

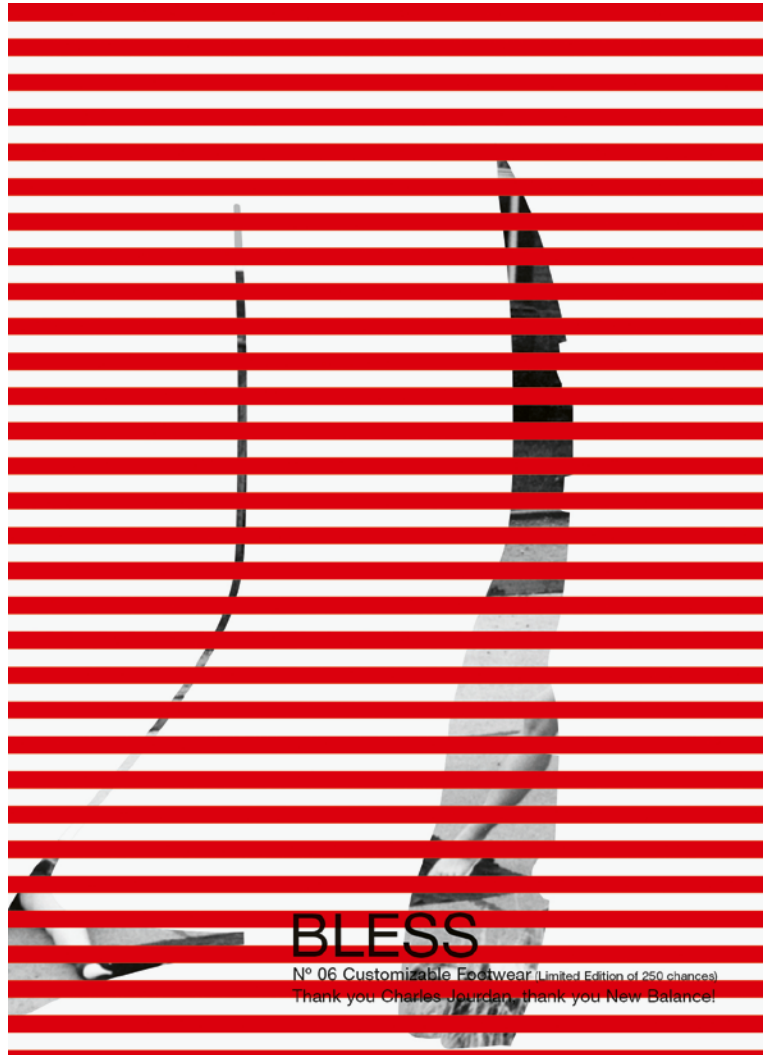


BLESS
number of
found pieces
number of
apostrophe interpretation
N° 08



BLESS

N° 05 Subscribe Bless. (limited Edition of 30 abonnements)
Corrupts Every Style! Relax.



BLESS

N° 06 Customizable Footwear (limited Edition of 250 chances)
Thank you Charles Jourdan, thank you New Balance!



N° 09
Merchandising
Buy, buy!





The social complexity and artistic multifacetedness of BLESS compare to that of a human being: easily impressive, impossible to distill. In fact, BLESS is a person—a mythological persona of sorts, rumored by many but only ever directly described in a few precise sentences by the collective itself, still listed on the collective's puzzling archive-website.

She is an outspoken female—more woman than girl. She's not a chosen beauty, but doesn't go unnoticed. Without a definite age she could be more between her mid twenties and forties. B. hangs around with a special style of man. She has no nationality and thinks that sport is quite nice. She's always attracted by temptations and loves change. She lives right now and her surroundings are charged by her presence. She tends to be future orientated. —BLESS

For a woman who has been active in art and fashion for 25 years, BLESS remains notably elusive, yet permanently in demand. Her legacy, starting in the Parisian anti-fashion scene of the 1990s by way of Maison Martin Margiela, *self service magazine*, and the concept store Colette, continues to be discovered and mined by emergent generations of creatives who go looking for a "third space" in the fringes of the stifled industries of contemporary art and fashion. Their intellectual, pragmatic, but always tongue-in-cheek products are staples for a global network of fashion and design collectors, many of whom pilgrimage to the brand's livable apartment-showroom, BLESS Home in Berlin's Prenzlauer Berg neighborhood, to experience the full immersion via the live-in shopkeeper who, over chats, try-ons, and baked goods, performs as the brand's official custodian. Concurrently, the duo—comprising Desiree Heiss and Ines Kaag, from Austria and Germany respectively—has held a stable presence in museums and biennales and are currently celebrating their 25th birthday with a year-long program at KW in Berlin. BLESS may have emerged from the adventurous hip lifestyle narrative of turn-of-the-millennium fashion consumption (known then as "customizing"), but it has far outlived it, namely by building out an actual design philosophy that reads as part productivist, part idealist.

When they showed their *Merchandising* collection in 1999, "genderless fashion" was a topic among a few individuals working in fashion industry. BLESS was the first to introduce this concept as a whole collection at Paris Fashion Weeks, as a guerilla fashion show taking place inside other shows. They videoed their friends' performance: holding standing tickets, sneaking into various fashion shows, and exploring them freely. The outcome was exhibited next to their installation room at Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, curated by Stephanie Moisdon and Nicolas Trembley. It was "Art meets Fashion" or "Fashion meets Art" in its deepest sense. —Nakako Hayashi, editor

Summarizing their own biography as "plain perseverance," BLESS's idiosyncrasy as artist-designers in a continuously changing system of artistic production, distribution, and exchange is a testament to innovation—not only of form but of the very role and function of design in life and society. The duo met at a French fashion student prize in 1993 and decided to collaborate upon graduation, releasing their first product, a semi-transparent woman's top, with a cryptic poster campaign around the streets of Berlin and Vienna. Their earliest projects—such as subscription-based clothing, customizable footwear, and fashion pop-up shops inside museum—spoke the conventions of fashion manufacture and consumption in a playful but critically adept manner, at time when "underground" was still just

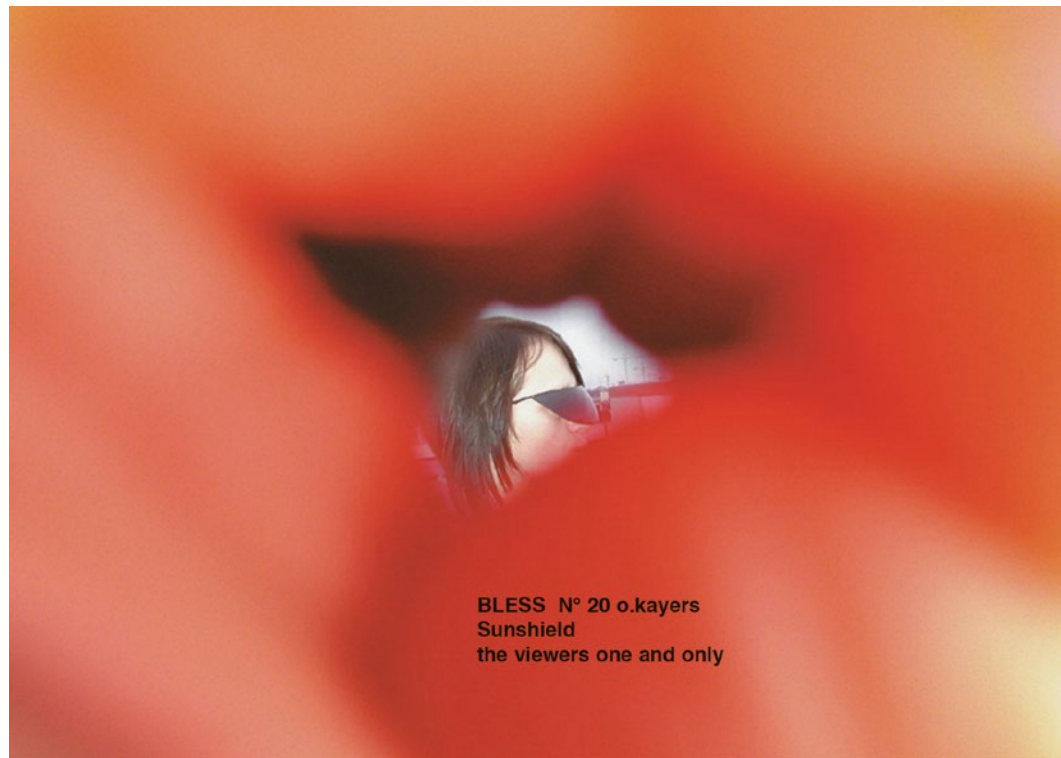
"TODAY, BLESS'S INNOVATIONS
SEEM PHOTOTYPICAL
IF NOT PROPHETIC."





BLESS N°16 Shoe escort

BLESS N° 19 Uncool



BLESS N° 20 o.kayers
Sunshield
the viewers one and only



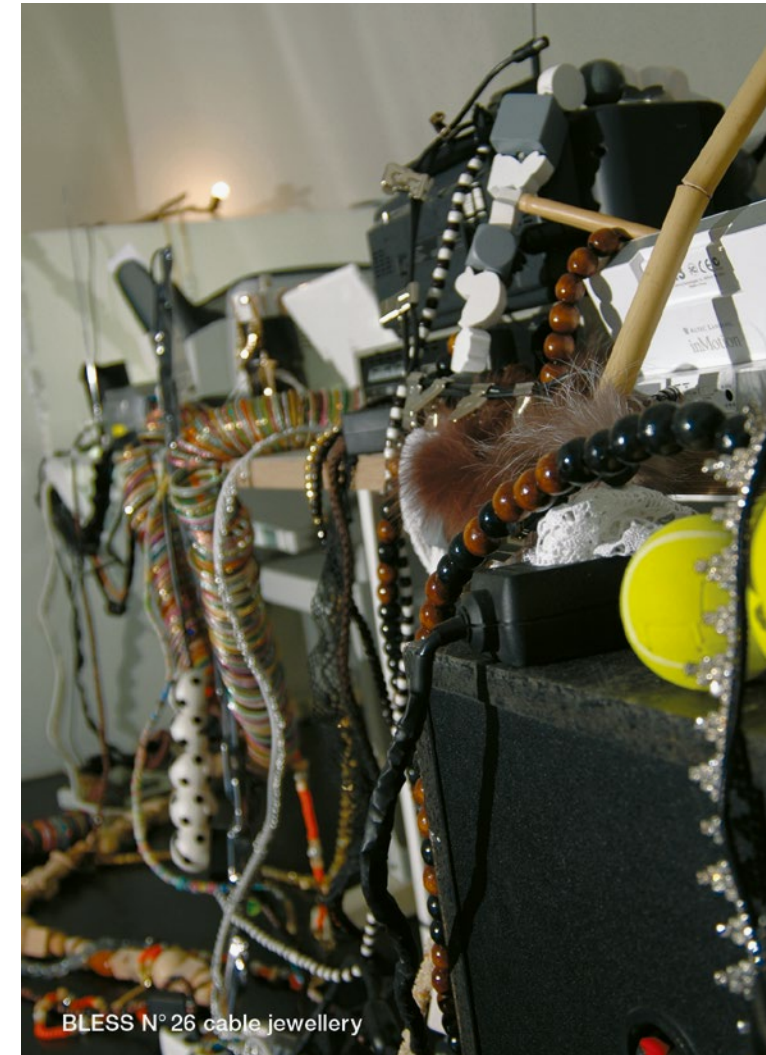
BLESS N° 25 uniseasoners
Life vs. consumption.
If you don't throw your money out of the window, it won't re-enter through the door.



BLESS N° 22
Perpetual home motion machine



BLESS N° 23 The bringer.
Expander shoes
Rainhat/Sunhat
Senior clothing
Extended remix
Hatbra
Make-up glasses
Cotton magic hoods
Clothes extensions
Towelbag
Frontpoilers
Headset
Environmental bells
Goodluck bringer



BLESS N° 26 cable jewellery



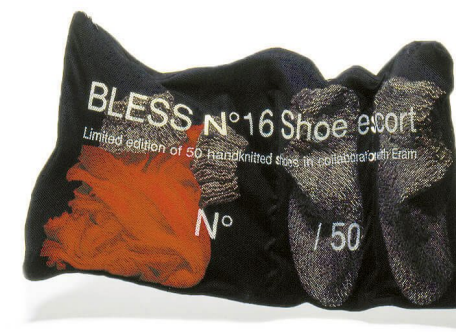
beginning to be economized by an emergent hipster class in the capitals of Europe. BLESS didn't fashion themselves as namesake auteurs with a ready-to-wear product range, but approached the industry parasitically and mimetically, releasing a single product at a time, such as the "N°1" denim and leather "Bootsocks" that offered a warm added extension to any kind of shoe, or "N°2," a set of disposable t-shirts made from light interfacing fabric, meant to be worn only once ("They imply another rhythm of use—throwing clothes away instead of holding onto them like a fetish"). In defiance of traditional brand models, "N°9," their first collection of garments, was promoted with a guerilla-style action at Paris Fashion Week, where friends in the industry wore pieces while attending other fashion shows around town. The hidden-camera documentation felt like part fashion documentary, part prank video, and was exhibited at Musée Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris by the fashion week's end; by denouncing the conventional marketing system through art and playing with the dynamics of hype and insider knowledge typical of the industry, BLESS also managed to conjure up a strong auratic value around their new product line.

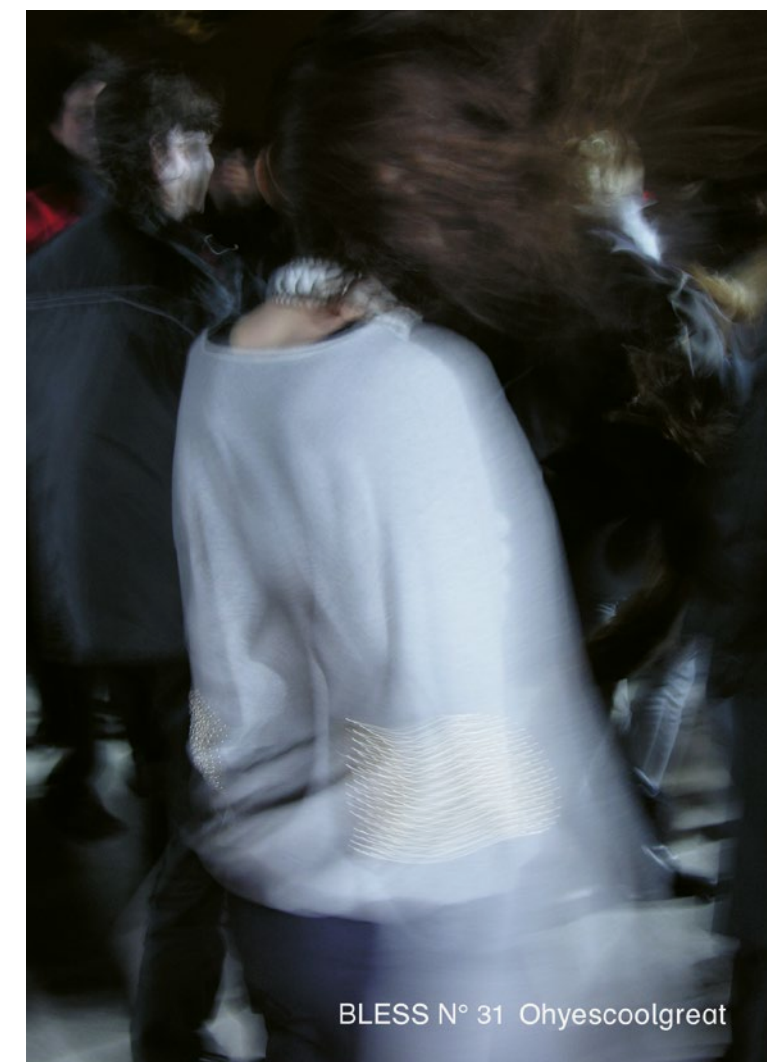
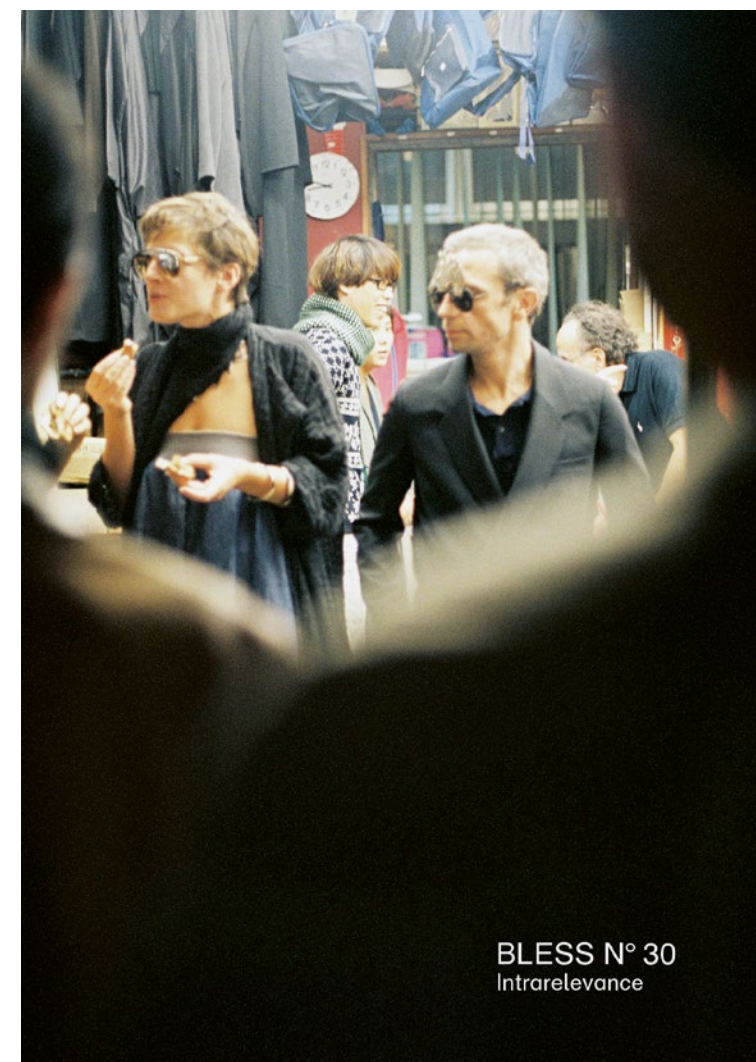
I remember meeting Bless team in Paris around 1996, and they asked me to wear their makeup collection, which was an elastic string with a type of sheer eye patch that covered one eye. So when I put it on, they said to me, "You have been blessed now." I will never forget that; it felt as if it was the best day of my life. And I never took it off. Just wore it out every day as if it was a permanent makeup. —Susan Cianciolo, artist, fashion designer

In today's hyper-saturated market of esoteric micro-brand merchandising, BLESS's innovations seem prototypal if not prophetic, but it's important to note that they were realized by responding earnestly to economic precarity. Manufacturing and staging fashion shows are expensive, and in the late 1990s fashion industry that was rapidly exporting its supply chains, "go big or go home" was increasingly the ruling mantra. BLESS did what felt natural and necessary to keep their radically independent practice going, but decided to thematize it rather than keep their struggles covert. Their collection "N°10," consisting of nothing but vertical cut-out outfits made available by various brand sponsors (from Kostas Murkudis to Levi's and supermarket chain Carrefour), was further formalized in the collection "N°12," entitled "Team-ups" which, rather than re-purposing branded goods, was devised as a proper collaboration between BLESS and other brands. This led to multiple, and sometimes very hyped, limited-edition designs for a broad range of clients, including jewelry company Bucherer, Levi's, high-street retailer H&M, and department store Galerie Lafayette, as well as Adidas, for whom the duo crafted a limited run of sneakers made of non-sportive materials, such as lace, suit fabric, and sweatshirt fabric (the first in Adidas's history, by the way).

BLESS invented, probably out of sheer necessity, a strategy that became defining for the networked brand-reality of today's social media fame-stacking technique: the collaboration. —David Lieske, artist, DJ, and former gallerist

In the same spirit, they responded to their first invitation to the art world (the first Berlin Biennale, in 1998, curated by Nancy Spector, Hans Ulrich Obrist, and Klaus Biesenbach) by making a fashion commercial in the form of a video artwork: CCTV footage of inconspicuous commuters in Berlin's Alexanderplatz, where only fleeting signage indicated the presence of BLESS products. The point (beyond a salient critique of urban surveillance) was to redirect attention back to their own product line, which has remained their main focus since their debut. BLESS is earnestly committed to the product form: how it's made, its modest ability to reform our daily lives. For the duo, it is a genuine aesthetic typology that may present artistic values and ideals to the public in the most effective and humane fashion. From their open-edition wallpaper line and their rock wine glasses to their recent mobile sauna installed inside a Mercedes in the courtyard of KW in Berlin, BLESS's work takes the product seriously as something that may engender, as they say, a creative *savoir-vivre*: the art and practice of everyday life, a quotidian philosophy in the spirit of Michel de Certeau.





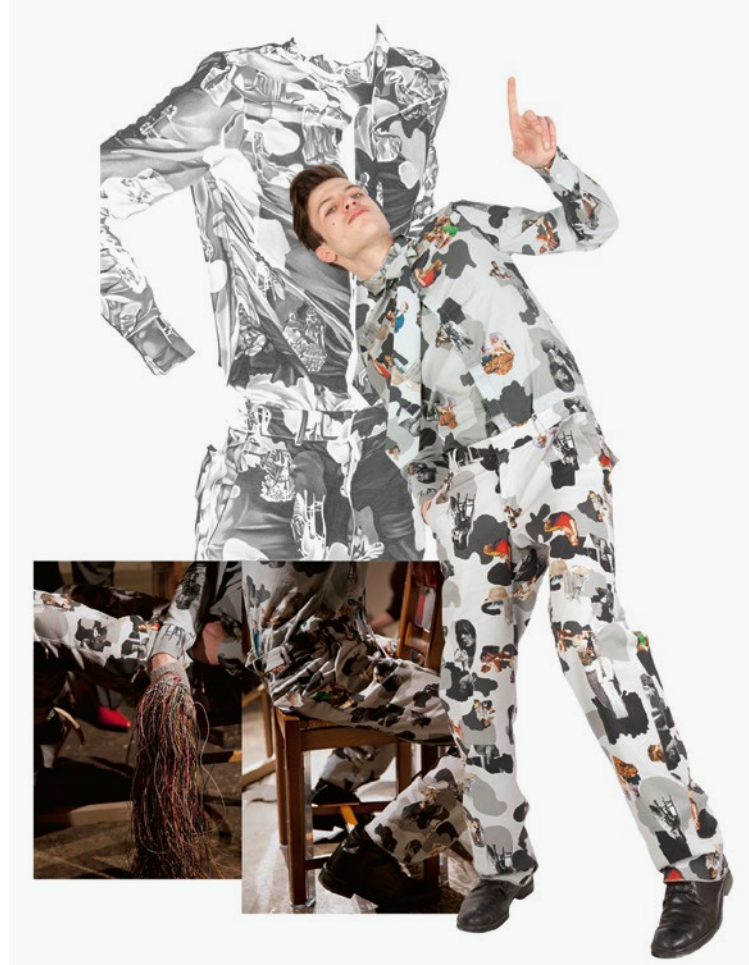


BLESS N° 42 Plädoyer der Jetztzeit (Pleading for the present moment)
Rare thoughts as a currency for rare products

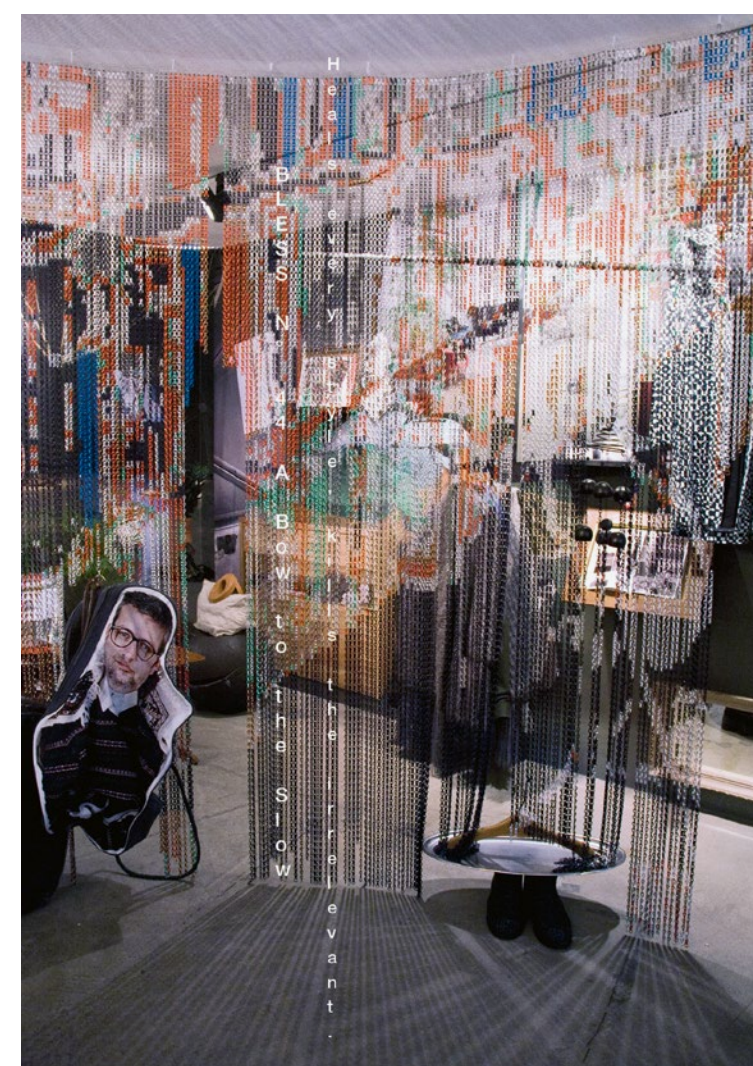
BLESS products are intended to be used only by those who really need them. They are intended to serve a function. They are utilitarian, but in the most expanded or subterfuge sense. It is simple to say for something, but much more difficult to actualize it, make it your own, to produce its necessity. The monetary is the most simple of all complex exchanges that occur between the consumer and their object. We ask that you describe your need and in return you may receive it free.

Please indicate clearly the product you would like as well as your phone number or email address. Bring or post your response to the following address: BLESS SHOP, PARIS 14, Rue Paradolain, 75003 Paris, France

BLESS N° 43 Know Howowow



BLESS N° 39 Heartringers



BLESS N° 46 Contemporary Remediation
In beautiful seriousness:

As announced earlier BLESS is tempting to touch new grounds in its way of procedure to act and interact with the present time.

- 1 Finding it more and more outmoded to stick with the old fashion businesses classical twice-a-year rythm mode, N° 46 is not a collection. Not yet.
There will be no presentation nor showroom.
- 2 Instead each client can send a wishlist of items he would like to order from BLESS in a total exclusivity for one season, as its own personal and unique BLESS product, may it be an accessory, a piece of garment, a whole outfit.
- 3 Depending on the volume and kind of the incoming wishes, BLESS herewith promises to elaborate at least 1 item per shop.
- 4 The results form in consequence the collection.
- 5



BLESS's work finds its origins in real, personal needs, translating these into holistic solutions. They aim for simplicity and comfort in everyday life, while striving for visionary foresight, underpinned by the goal of wanting to shape a liveable existence in relation to work, activity, and leisure. Their playing field is life, and their motivation is everyday practicality, as well as a belief in the possibility of influencing the future right here, right now, shaping the way you'd want to live it. They gaze at the everyday without covering up or beautifying it. They capture given realities as they are, asking what can be adapted and changed within a certain situation, looking for niches to restore mobility and agency. — Anna Gritz and Krist Gruijthuisen, curators

The BLESS philosophy is exceptional because it bridges an intensely humane attitude to fashion with an unmistakable "cool" factor, which feels particularly rare in an age in which fashion's only currency seems to be cynicism. Could pants be shoes? Could coats be chairs? Could a museum be a shop? Could a shop be a home? Could architecture be made a souvenir by way of a trolley suitcase? Could a design degree be an art collective? BLESS's questions are endless and range from pure practicality to whimsical absurdism, and many of them make themselves known in their very product title, from "Chairwear" to "Hoodponcho." Their work can be understood not only to thematize design production but to actively redefine it, with their product output serving their audiences and consumers as excuses to learn and reflect on design, art, and aesthetic service today. As the collective has matured and the systems of art and fashion around them have transformed more than once, it is this philosophy that is palpable with increasing clarity.

I think I discovered Bless through an advertisement for a wig in Self Service in the 90s that they produced later for Martin Margiela. We became friends, and I modeled for them at different times, even once with my son. I met new people through these events, and we became a sort of "Bless Family" gathering together every year. Their conceptual approach related to contemporary art strategies has always interested me. It is an alternative to fashion "products." I invited them to several shows I curated at museums or galleries. The other day I was cleaning my storage and found the wig in its original packaging. It is fresh as the first time I saw it, making me think that they have permanence in fashion. —Nicolas Trembley, curator

That BLESS remains, somehow, an insider's name is due to the collective's own radical impermanence and orientation towards the future. While building up a recognizable aesthetic idiom of oversized silhouettes, textile repurposing and up-cycling, and performative functionality, the practice remains chimerical at its heart. In the past few years alone, the duo has branched into design pedagogy (at the Sandberg Institute), public monuments (in Switzerland), and tennis wear (with artist David Lieske). They come and go from museums, galleries, and fashion weeks, driven by their own instincts and desires and supported by a tight social network of collaborators and audiences. As a result, the project remains largely difficult to grasp even in the internet age, despite their comprehensive (if challenging to navigate) digital archive on their website, which lists every single BLESS product and exhibition ever made. Publicity demands repetition, but BLESS has never had time to linger too long in their own heritage, even if countless artists and designers have borrowed directly from their work. This disloyalty to commercial and artistic institutions is not so political as much as it is an extension of their holistic approach to creativity, which crosses methodologies and forms without making a big deal out of it.

"They approached the industry parasitically and mimetically."



+49 30 27 59 65 66 strop@blesseberlin.com

BLESS N° 48 Presuture
 Location : Saturday, 02.03.13 lunchtime, at a BLESShome in Paris

BLESS S
+33.1.4

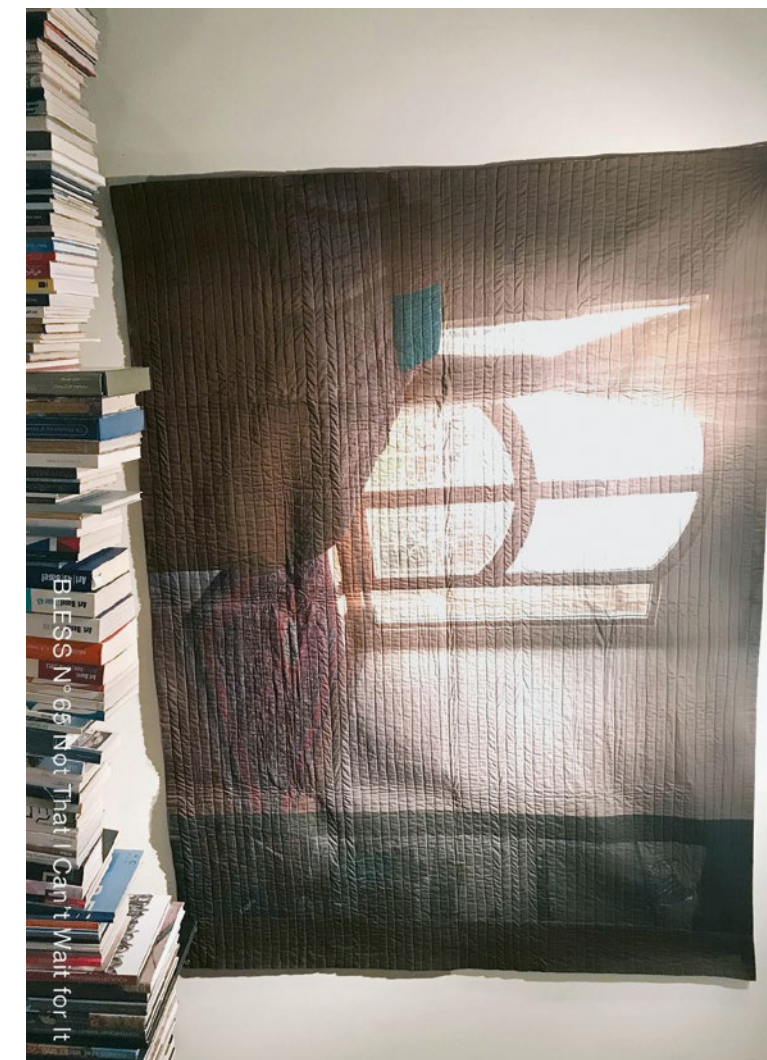
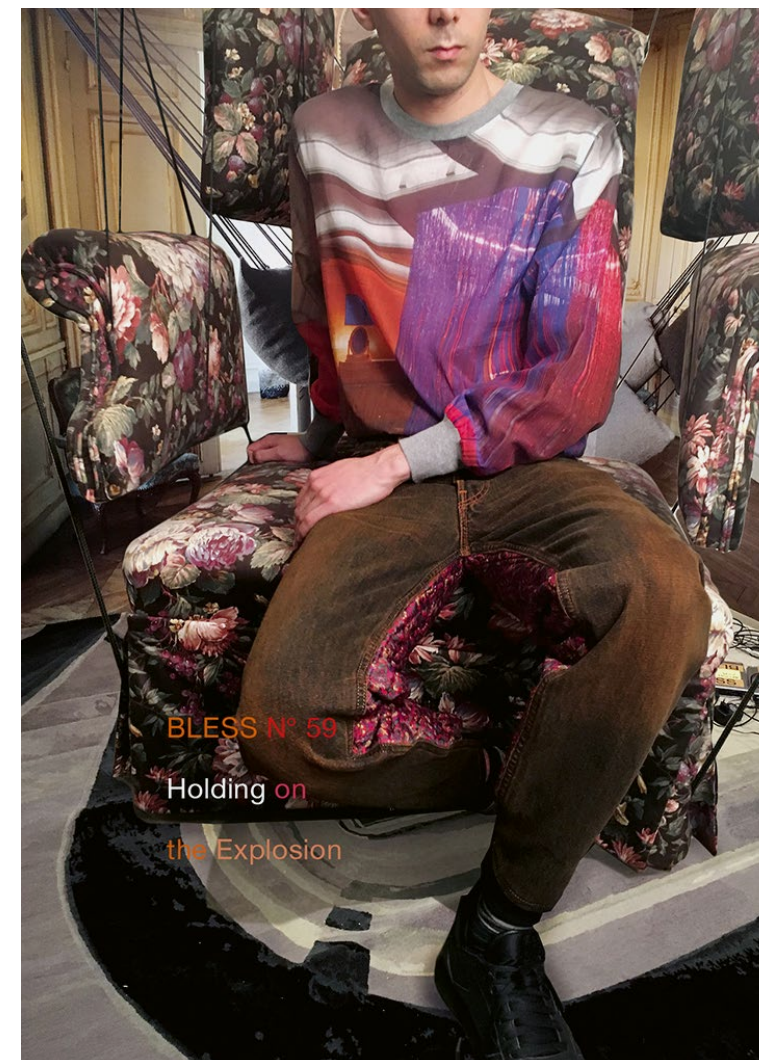


BLESS N° 50 Todaying



BLESS N° 49 Alternarrative







It was Christmas 1997; I was on vacation in Paris walking down Faubourg Saint-Honoré and stumbled across the recently opened Colette, a store I have not heard of and the likes of which I have never come across before. At the Water Bar in the basement I saw Polly Mellen and André Leon Talley. Upstairs I came across the architect Jean Nouvel shopping for Christmas presents. I must be at the right place, I thought to myself. On the second floor, I came across what I later learned was BLESS “No. 1”—the “Bootsocks,” made of denim, an unexpected juxtaposition of two things related but different. On a postcard attached to it were printed the words “Fits Every Style.” Intriguing, not trying too hard to please, enigmatic, and effortlessly beautiful—I was hooked. Little did I know then that I would be hooked for 25 years, an obsession that continues to grow. The question why is a little unfathomable: perhaps it is the conceptual rigor and acuity of the work; perhaps it is a form of directness mixed with a sense of vulnerability; perhaps it is an unexpectedness that makes the work always seem fresh. But I remember that moment at Colette clearly and vividly—it was like first love, a love that continues to give overtime, a moment one never forgets. — Mark Lee, architect

BLESS came up in the decade of so-called “relational aesthetics” in art, and, in several instances, the collective ended up grouped with its key protagonists, such as Douglas Gordon and Liam Gillick, who emphasized networked “social production” over the appreciation of the fetishized object of art. At first glance this makes sense—think of BLESS’s relational takes on both art and fashion activity, in which they frequently swapped out fashion shows for football tournaments, housewarming parties, and swimming pool hang-outs, or staged massage parlors and pop-up design shops inside museums. But BLESS’s non-methodology rejects the relational as a product in itself while simultaneously examining relations—between producers, consumers, systems, products—more deeply. Over the years, countless products have been named after important friends and collaborators (can a friendship be a shirt?), while their ongoing “Wallscape” series of custom wallpaper tracks, with a nod to artist Louise Lawler, in select domestic and institutional spaces inhabited by BLESS products. Engaging with BLESS—be it as a producer, collaborator, spectator, or consumer—is a creative learning experiment, an exercise in the facilitation of novel design experiences, always with a profound ethics and a distinctively Germanic sense of humor. This attitude shows that BLESS is not anti-intellectual but rather intellectually pragmatic—something closer to artist Michael Asher, who, like BLESS in the design world, has been a methodological beacon for many an artist. Ultimately, BLESS’s subversiveness is motivated not by critique but by curiosity: an observation of the many values and uses of design combined with a pragmatic impulse to redefine them.

Towards the end of the 25th anniversary gathering in August, Lesley, the most recent BLESS Home resident, relayed a conversation she had had with another guest earlier on in the day, where it was remarked that, for an audience of 200-or-so people wearing over 25 years of one label’s clothing, no one quite looked like another. We agreed that they were right; we couldn’t name anything else that has had such chronological consistency while sidestepping the routine habit of aesthetic redundancy. In short: we all looked crazy, in our own special way. —Christian Oldham, artist **K**

Started by Desiree Heiss and Ines Kaag in 1997, BLESS’s apartment-showroom is based in Prenzlauer Berg, Berlin. The brand is celebrating their 25th anniversary with a year-long show at Berlin’s KW Institute for Contemporary Art.

Jeppe Ugelvig is a curator and cultural critic based in New York and London. His criticism has been published in magazines such as *Artforum*, *frieze*, and *Spike Art Quarterly*.

ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF THE ARTISTS.