



An encounter with Carol Christian Poell, the 33-year-old Austrian fashion designer specialized in men's styles who in 2005 presented his first women's collection, which will doubtlessly be followed by a second and third . . . High-fashion styles and organic, experimental materials . . .

Carol Christian Poell

interview by LUCIANO CIRELLI

Luciano Cirelli: In your latest women's collection you used animal blood: what interested you about this material?

Carol Christian Poell: In this collection we used primarily leather and conducted research on the various effects of blood because we were interested in "giving back life" somehow to the leather, coloring it with an "organic" material like blood. I needed a primary material extrapolated from a living being, but not wool (the lamb is simply sheared); skin seemed more suitable even if, after the animal has been killed, it becomes a dead material. Hence the blood, the element that in certain ways represents life. I was interested in the idea of giving back life to the leather by dyeing it with blood.

Giving back life . . .

Yes, giving back life . . . evidently it is an esthetic aspect, as well as conceptual. I was interested in the color of the blood, which by its chemical nature is the only one that changes tone with the passage of time.

On leather?

Of course, it is precisely the air that makes it change . . . I would never have been able to obtain the same effect with any other color or colorant . . . and then it is also natural. In this collection I used the "fleshy" side of the leather, the interior side, the side that was then painted with blood. Actually, we are noting that, in the pieces already made, the color of the blood changes con-

tinually; one day it will become mold and perhaps succumb to decomposition. This topic interests me a lot, and not just conceptually . . . I am not an artist, I have no intention of creating works of art; I am a designer and I want to make real clothes using a series of artisan's skills. This is how such strong dresses were born—in any case, dresses, not sculptures or paintings. For me the passage from concept to application is fundamental. Before all else I am an artisan, not an artist. I think first of the product (dress, jacket, pants . . .). I am an artisan and therefore I use my hands; evidently I try also to use my head . . . I try to follow the thought that lies behind my manual ability—the reflection that, through “making clothes,” I have learned something.

In this collection there is a clear fragmentation of the dress; could this be understood as a separation of the body, as a complement to the body?

I do not think of dress as a complement to the body, rather I seek to annul the body; actually, I consider it only a volume and a three-dimensional form. As you can see, in my images I have even erased the mouth, eyes, and all that which gives identity to a person.

Would you have done the same to a man?

Yes, even for the men's collection I tried to focus the attention on the clothes. It often happens that the clothing falls into the background, because sometimes in a presentation the personality of the model is stronger. At the basis of my research there is no single type of woman or single type of man I refer to: I am interested in the body as a volume . . . the personality must be added by who buys the garment, which really must not be associated with the image of who presents it. That's where the trilogy comes in . . .

What is trilogy?

Trilogy means focusing on one piece at a time. I did not want to begin the women's collection, the first one, with a total look to associate with an image or a style, rather I wanted to deal with one piece at a time. We began with the lower-body pieces . . . that will be followed by a second phase . . . and a third . . .

And each time a new “complement to the clothing” . . .

Exactly; “look, there is a pair of pants, there is a skirt . . . but you'll never see the complete look . . .” Attention to every single garment.

So you'll continue on this foundation?

The next time I will add what goes above or under. It is called *Le corps pré senti*. I am trying to somehow understand the body . . . but still I have not succeeded. This is the volume that forms the body and therefore I try to treat it as such. As you see in the collection there is something that represents a



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jacket, but there still is not everything, there will also be a shirt . . . in the trilogy there will be space for everything, but I want to do one thing at a time: "monotypology." I am very interested in focusing, concentrating my work on a single garment. Where is it written that I have to do a complete collection . . . I want to concentrate on a single garment to make it read well.

Do you think that in the second passage of this trilogy—the next collection in October—this message will be clearer?

I do not know, but I think not. Certainly it could be better clarified through the media, the press; it is more difficult to explain it to a customer because for him you can do whatever you want in a fashion show, on the condition that you have the pieces to put in the showroom.

Is it perhaps a condition more linked to the female body? Men need more complete clothing?

Yes, this was initially a project for men, but then it didn't seem so appropriate . . . it should have been the Spring-Summer 1999 collection, which was never realized. The men's collections in any case have had a total look since various seasons; it seemed correct to begin the women's collection with a new story.

Do you see differences between making clothing for men and for women?

Women's collections are very limiting, contrary to what I expected. With the men's collection I am able to push myself a lot without falling into the ridiculous, regardless of the two extremes of saying too much or not saying anything; there is a very subtle line where you can easily fall. With the women's collection I expected to be able to do anything, and instead I realized it is much more limiting because it is so normal to exceed, to fall into excess.

Perhaps the line you speak of is broader and so you grow accustomed to it, you are easily distracted . . .

On a woman anything goes well and so it is less stimulating, and more banal.

The body, be it male or female, is to be beautified or is it to be clothed?

To be beautified I wouldn't say, that serves no purpose. Even for me sometimes it is important to be aware of the uselessness of what I do. I begin with the presupposition that I must clothe, I clothe

a person because in some way he needs to be covered (since the beginning). Clothing is a means of self-expression for people, it is an idiom; I give them some words!

