



Future Bart
Bodies Hess
2007—2017



























A fetish for the real

— a conversation
with Bart Hess

This book has been published to accompany *Future Bodies – Bart Hess* (24 June – 1 October 2017) at the Stedelijk Museum 's-Hertogenbosch. Together, the exhibition and the publication offer a survey of the work produced by the designer Bart Hess over the past ten years. The project occupies a special place in the series of design presentations the museum has organized since 2009, as we believe that Hess represents a new type of designer. Rather than making tangible and functional products, he experiments with materials to develop concepts that can be expressed in all manner of media. What's more, he has a much stronger online presence and awareness of visual impact than other designers.

When I—Fredric Baas, the curator of the exhibition—spoke to Bart Hess, he told me that he has an 'unrecognizable face'. People at openings and similar events often don't realize who he is, even when he has already talked to them. Another possible explanation, it seems to me, might be the different looks he comes up with so regularly, and with such ease and sense of style. Either way, it certainly has nothing to do with the work he makes. Hess's signature can always be spotted at once, despite the many forms his work can assume and the collaborations that can underpin it. His thoughts on how this comes about are one of the main themes of this conversation. But let's begin at the beginning.

We're in your studio in Eindhoven, Bart, which is a lot calmer than usual. You were born in Geldrop, a village nearby: what brought you back to Eindhoven after spending time abroad?

I returned to Eindhoven after two years in London and another year travelling, which wasn't what I was expecting when I left. I came back to visit my mother, which I combined with a project that was produced in Eindhoven. It was then that I noticed again what a great place this is to work. The creative climate here makes things easier: my work is complex enough, so it's nice to reduce the effort it takes to produce. It's not just a question of having a good studio space and a varied supply of materials: the most important thing is that you can call on people with all sorts of know-how, and who are also familiar with me and my work. All the disciplines are represented here as well and the people are pretty open—everyone shares with everyone else. My relatives might be surprised to hear this, but family has become more important to me in recent years too. I'm talking about my own, actual family, but also my extended family of friends, designers and artists. The bond you've built up with them, the way you can be so honest with each other, that you can genuinely ask for someone's opinion, and the way they can take all sorts of other facts into account without blinking: a sounding board and support group like that is incredibly valuable. Quite apart from all the people I can mobilize to help me with my projects.

Talking about working with other people: one important, long-term collaboration was with Lucy McRae, under the name 'LucyandBart'. Didn't that start here in Eindhoven too?

Yes, it started here. At one point, it seemed as though a section of London had upped sticks to Eindhoven, because Philips transferred its entire design team here in 2007. Suddenly there was a whole bunch of Londoners in the city. I was working on a sort of futuristic skin for my degree project, and I thought it would be nice if I could get it to light up. So I went along to Philips—'Probes', the design department was called. In the end, they couldn't help me. But they loved the project. They were looking for someone who could give visual form to their ideas, their images of the future. That's how I wound up there

after graduation, placing me firmly in a London bubble. Lucy McRae was part of that too, and we hit it off straight away.

The collaboration we eventually called 'LucyandBart' actually came about by chance. One Friday afternoon, we were playing around with materials and ideas after a frustrating week, fiddling with lenses and sticking things on each other's faces. It was great fun, but the camera battery ran out, so we decided to return to it the following week. It became a kind of ritual for us to go and work on 'LucyandBart' every Friday.

It sounds like a special kind of collaboration. You complemented each other, but there was clearly a kind of division of labour too. How would you describe that?

What was good about it was that we were unburdened by any actual knowledge... We were both incredibly enthusiastic: we just did it. Although we didn't know what we were doing, we both immediately realized where the outcome of a session ought to lead. So the photos we took of each other gradually evolved in the right direction.

Lucy has a background in dancing—she used to be a ballerina—so she contributed that aspect, the physical. The way you can play with a pose in order to tell a story more effectively. My contribution was more on the material side,



LucyandBart,
Germination Day Eight
31st May 2008
— Making of

but the roles quickly blurred. It all happened very organically. What also made it a good collaboration was that each of us energized the other, pulling us out of our comfort zones. We kept each other focused that way. Another big advantage was that we worked very easily and freely on each other's bodies. The















