



MASKED

MORE THAN 30 YEARS SINCE HER FIRST RUNWAY SHOWS WITH MARTIN MARGIELA AND THE ANTWERP SIX, MAKE-UP ARTIST **INGE GROGNARD** STILL PAINTS AN UNCONVENTIONAL PORTRAIT OF BEAUTY

Story **JANINE LEAH BARTELS**



Photo: RONALD STOOPS

Image from *A Magazine* Curated
By Haider Ackermann, 2005

Image from
Postpunk, *View
On Colour*
magazine, 2000



“I am not anti
make-up. I’m
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different kind
of beauty”



Maison Martin Margiela AW96-97

Photo: RONALD STOOPS; Images courtesy of Inge Groggnard and Jed Root (Paris)

Make-up artist Inge Groggnard won't use cosmetics if she doesn't have to. For A.F. Vandevorst's spring/summer 1999 show, girls' faces were left completely bare, while Hood By Air's autumn/winter 2015 models had flesh-coloured nylon tights pulled over their heads. Groggnard uses the face like a canvas - sometimes in the literal sense - replacing foundation with paint, and manipulating the skin by taping or texturing it.

Maybe it was the fact she never attended a traditional make-up school in Antwerp that endeared her to more unconventional practices with cosmetics. Her experimental looks are rough and even unfinished, an aesthetic she fostered in the mid-'80s while working alongside her childhood friend Martin Margiela, whose dark underground runway shows explored radical new ideas. For his autumn/winter 1996 show, it appeared that models had a black shadow cast from above - an inky brown mask painted across half their face - with distinguished crimson lips.

Her style also matched that of the Antwerp Six, the cult avant-garde group comprising Ann Demeulemeester, Dries van Noten, Dirk Bikkembergs, Walter van Beirendonck, Marina Yee and Dirk van Saene, all graduates from the Royal Academy of Fine Arts. Make-up was limited then, so when Groggnard could not find what she wanted, she made her own; she does the same to this day.

Groggnard's career is indelibly linked to that of her husband, photographer Ronald Stoops, who was there to capture these iconic moments on camera. Far from the conventions of commercial make-up artistry, Groggnard challenges precepts of beauty, making the grotesque beautiful and leaving interpretations to the eye of the beholder.

Where did you grow up?

I'm from Genk. It's the same place where Martin Margiela is from.

You've been friends since you were about 14 years old, right?

Yes. After high school, I came to Antwerp with Martin.

He went to the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp. What did you do?

I was looking for a school where I could study make-up, but it didn't exist; [the Academy] was a school for aesthetics. I had three very easy years. So I followed Martin and we did everything together. I saw his first collection coming out of the Academy, and at that time there wasn't much in the way of fashion in Antwerp either. It started when the 'Antwerp Six-plus' - the plus was Martin - came out of the Academy.

Jurgi Persoons
SS03

“We try to tell a kind of story and not only to put some paint on the face”

You went on to work with Margiela for more than 20 years. What changes have you seen in the shows in that time?

When we started, he chose really strange locations, and people were coming from all over to see them. Now, there are so many new designers that the schedule is really hard. And in the business nowadays, everything is about credits. The freedom we once had doesn't exist any longer.

Can you elaborate on the shift?

In the beginning, people working in the background were not that important. There were no names. For a long time, people didn't even know who was doing hair and make-up for Margiela and other shows. That was something that became very important in the late '90s, when you had magazines and interviews with people backstage, pictures being taken there too, and you also had the internet. Then, make-up artists and hairdressers became really important, and you had brands head-hunting for the right people.

Your make-up has always provided a shock factor at the shows...

That was not the purpose. [Margiela and I] have similar tastes, and the make-up was always done in a rough way. But it never came into our head to shock people. It was just the image that suited us. When you do make-up only to shock, for me it's empty. With us, we try to tell a kind of a story and not only to put some paint on the face. This always worked really well with the ideas behind his collections. And when we thought it wasn't necessary to use make-up, we didn't use make-up.

Would you consider yourself slightly anti make-up?

No. I am not anti. I'm searching for a different kind of beauty.

What is your definition of beauty?

I can't answer that. I've been looking for that answer my whole life. There's so much beauty and ugliness around us that I literally can't define what is beauty. It's very subjective. Beauty for me is maybe ugly for somebody else.

Along with Margiela, you have worked a lot with your photographer husband, Ronald Stoops. How have you forged such a successful working relationship?

It's hard to say. It's just something that grew. I met him more than 30 years ago. He started doing photography, and we worked together with the Belgian people coming from the Academy – students and then the Antwerp Six. It's the same with Martin. Sometimes you meet people and it only takes two words to know you're on the same level. You can discuss things, and when you're not happy, you can say it. The result is the most important, so of course we scream sometimes [laughs], but it's normal. There is also a trust in each other's taste.

Does your best work stem from this kind of partnership?

Yes, because I only can be myself and give more than 100 per cent when I feel good with people. When I don't feel good, I'm blocked.

In 2010, you released a book titled Inge Grognard/Ronald Stoops...

That was about our 30 years working together. There are a few pages on each designer we worked with, but also personal work. The only thing is, the book isn't easy to find now.

Would you do another book?

Maybe in the future, using Ronald's archives, but for that we need a lot of time. Some people are really well organised; we are not. When we started in the '80s, there was no digital photography, so negatives are missing because they were sent out for press and they never came back. Now, it's much easier, as everything is on a hard disk.

You have worked repeatedly with Hood By Air, famously pulling nylons over models' heads for autumn/winter 2015, and more recently you explored exaggerated contour for SS16. Could you explain that look further?

It was inspired by all the YouTube videos you see of people doing contouring. Those were always popping up on Facebook. I always ask myself, “Do they really think they need that to be beautiful?” That was the reason we did it in a rough way. Why would you want to hide a little bit of face behind a mask of so much make-up when you are young and beautiful? It's like, “Ah!” In every person, there is some beauty.

Make-up artists like Pat McGrath are launching their own cosmetics lines. Does this appeal to you?

Not interested. I'm working a lot with MAC [Cosmetics] because they helped me out for years during my shows; if they're missing something, I tell them. But I'm not a very commercial person. For me, it's really important to keep my freedom, so I don't want to have the pressure behind me that something has to sell. The thing is, when I didn't find a product, I made it myself.

So you create your own make-up?

Yes, because I know a little bit about products and the ingredients I need. I always test it on myself, of course. When I need a texture that I can't find in a shop, I make it myself.

Take us through your creative process...

I never sketch. I do a lot of brainstorming in my head when people give me some words or a piece of music, then I open everything that is tucked inside my little room. It's not only filled with make-up – there are also a lot of things in it that I can stitch and that I can glue, like things you can use for children. I put everything on the table that I might need for that process, and then I start. It's easiest when you're still at the research stage. I don't want to bother anybody. I sometimes take pictures and I'll show them to Ronald to give me his backing or critique.

What happens when you go to do the look on someone else?

When I don't know them, I always try to let the hairdresser start, so that I can be on the side and watch in the mirror. I see how the person talks and how they behave, and then you know what to do. Because while most people are easy-going, some are really hardcore. They'll say, “Ah, I am allergic to this!” or, “It doesn't suit me.” So it's a psychological game in a way. In the beginning, whatever face was in front of me, I just did it, but now I take more care.