



Supernova

Hint seeks out rising stars of design

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With the longest name in fashion, **House of the Very Island's Royal Club Division**

Middlesex Klassenkampf, But the Question Is: Where Are U, Now? has a lot of explaining to do. Though reminiscent of the intellectually rigorous indie lines that sprang up but fizzled in the '90s, House of the Very—for short—has possibly achieved what they could not: functioning conceptualism. Prior to this interview, here's what we knew about the Vienna-based, Paris-showing quartet: they belong to a network of underground artists, musicians and film-makers in their native Austria; philosophy is at the heart of their collections; and their pieces—and this really is central to their manifesto, which is surely at the printers now—are intended to be worn by both genders or any degree of "trans" therein. We first met one of the members, Markus Hausleitner, two years ago during Austrian Fashion Week. Flying solo at the time, he was held up as one of Vienna's brightest new stars, along with Fabrics Interseason, Petar Petrov and Ute Ploier. Here, Hausleitner reconnects with LEE CARTER to reveal more secrets about his mysterious new venture that dare not, or cannot, speak its name.





FALL '06, PHOTOS HEIDI HARSIEBER

First, the obvious question—what does the name mean?

The name includes many terms and phrases, just like there are many members of our fashion gang. We struggled for three months to come with it. We had big fun.

So, what do all the terms and phrases mean?

The "House of the Very Island's" part means a closed system, and it's inspired by films like *Paris Is Burning*, with its house fights and vogueing competitions. The "Royal" thing is a little bit of a problem. "Club Division" is our, or my, connection to nightlife. The term "Middlesex" has a double meaning for us. There is the part of the UK called Middlesex, but mostly it's the gender thing, as in which gender you are performing at the moment. It's also the name of a novel by Jeffrey Eugenides. In German, "Klassenkampf" means class war. "Where Are U, Now?" for me means changing, positioning and steadily challenging.

Is it an anti-fashion line, a reaction to the fashion establishment?

I don't think it's an anti-fashion line, but we try to think differently, especially in terms of gender. For example, we insist on doing clothing not just for men or women, but for people. We don't deal with stereotypes, which are boring and ugly for us.

You had a lot to say about gender in your spring collection.

Yes, we tried to merge displaced male and female lifestyles. We linked together images and clichés of 1990's aesthetics, so often influenced by transgender performers: the cross-dresser, the dyke, feminine men, masculine women, queer clubwear, the ridiculously romantic look and avant-garde chic. We tried to achieve a new kind of

aesthetic from a time when queer and gender theory became an important academic discourse.

I take it you're a champion of the disenfranchised?

We present people off the beaten track that nowadays is so full of either the teenage couture fairies lying around in magazines or the "I can wear a sexy dress and high heels and still be independent and strong" MTV lot. We're particularly against the fashion world's careless and cynical "we are so over it" eye-rolling on the topic of politics, as if it were obviously no longer a contemporary concern.

The label sounds very politically conscious then.

Yes, socio-politically. The spring collection, like the one before, was produced in collaboration with Merit, an Austrian association promoting the re-integration of long-time unemployed women. Our tailoring, for example, is intended to help these women in the countryside get back into the work force. We also work with Gea, a shoe manufacturer with a social and political attitude. And everybody gets paid fairly—well, except us. In this way, we try to show different ways or other sides of life or other lives. We try to push change forward slowly. We're not perfect, but we are working on that.

Environmentally, too, your clothes are made responsibly?

Yes. Most of our fabrics are organic and plant-dyed without chemicals, or they're pure wool, linen or cotton. If not, they meet eco-standards otherwise.



Who else works on the label?

The label consists of Jakob Lena Knebl, Martin Sulzbacher, Karin Krapfenbauer and myself. Jakob comes up with the mood of each collection, as well as the images, videos and presentations. Martin also designs at Jil Sander. Karin designs and makes patterns. And me, I'm responsible for everything: pattern construction, press, design, videos. We all studied fashion at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna with Raf Simons, Viktor & Rolf, Jean-Charles Castelbajac and Veronique Branquinho.

What was the biggest lesson you learned from those guest professors?

That life in fashion is not easy.

What's the fashion scene like in Vienna? The last time I was there, it seemed very creative, but very small.

It's a bit frustrating, but at least there is something going on.

How many collections have you made so far?

March will be our third presentation in Paris.

Which collection has been your personal fave?

My favorite collection is still my graduation collection, when I was deep into inventing new forms of pattern construction. My favorite piece from the collection was a black linen suit, which has become a kind of uniform for House of the Very and will be advanced in each collection.

What are some of the non-fashion projects you've been involved with?

For four years Jakob and I have been running [Auto](#), an off-space, artist-run gallery in Vienna. It's quite a cool place. Jakob also works as an artist. For our videos and installations, we work together with Hans Scheirl, a film-maker and artist well-known for [his gay sci-fi film] Dandy Dust.

And you host a series of parties?

Yes, they're called Strom++. Strom is the German expression for electricity, so Strom++ means something like AC/DC. It's political, unhealthy and very, very underground. We play free music for all. I do it together with my friend Miss Klang.

Do you want to see people wearing House of the Very at those parties, or anywhere?

There are a few who we would love to see in our clothes: [philosopher] Judith Butler, [musician] Janine Rostron of [Planningtorock](#), [self-described transgender warrior] Leslie Feinberg.

Is House of the Very making money yet? Is that even a goal?

For sure. Otherwise we'd have to quit immediately and do something reasonable.

Speaking of doing something reasonable, do you think you'll ever shorten the name?

No. People are doing that anyway.

[House of the Very](#) is available in Vienna at [Park](#) (Ruthner & Strasser GMBH Mondscheingasse 20), in Paris at Maria Luisa (38 rue du Mont Thabor, +33 1 42 96 47 81) and in Tokyo at Vacancy Club (B1 Aoyagibld. 1-20_1 Jinnan, Shibuya).
