

Mode Depesche - Dream Dress

Veronique Branquinho
Fall 2007 Ready-to-Wear Review

Veronique Branquinho's women spend the quotidian in cold houses and studios. In her autumn – winter 2007 show the representatives of those women walk through the Elysee Montmartre wearing between two and four layers as standard. These layered outfits are not of the haphazard kind, not the result of a dressing-up box session (though some are accessorised with green fun-spray down the centre of their hair partings!), rather the layering mirrors the natural manner in which one dresses practically but elegantly for the realities of inclement weather. A polo neck underneath qualifies every sheer blouse; the sheen of a silk shirt is hidden under an elbow length jersey, and where dress hems and sleeves are short all flesh is protected by thick tights, striped leggings and wrist length undergarments. The connotations of her furs are Russian rather than Italian.

This motif of layering to express an ideal does not deviate from previous seasons; the detailing on a smock, the volume of a coat and the cut of a pair of trousers always work together to produce a totality. But with neither the employment of 'gun for hire' stylists or regular advertising campaigns it is clear that reinventing its style afresh every six months is antithetical to the intentions of the label. Rather, with this collection Branquinho is tuning up and reflecting on the fundamental components of her work, as revealed over the decade she has been designing. A-line shapes are more pronounced, as are trouser widths and banded hems to produce a graceful swing. Her crocheted and artisanal knit ponchos are larger, and traditional checks are combined in a variety of sizes. A traditional Victorian working class dresscode of placing white shirts and dresses over black necks and legs, used to such beautiful effect in her last winter collection, are present again. As ever the 1970s are an influence, especially the era's cinematic portrayals of working women. The soft belted trouser suit and an ankle length shirt dress in diagonal plaid for instance would fit seamlessly the women of Woody Allen's *Interiors* (1978). Her sparing use of feminine details such as ties and trimming on collars, cuffs and chest are reminiscent of *reactionary chic* – the 1980's adoption of Victorian and Edwardian styles in line with retrogressive politics – when women looked positively bridal. What is more of a dream dress than a wedding gown stripped of its usual function?

Though the models walked sedately to classical music, and everything was dignified in the Elysee Montmartre, if you are unused to catwalk presentations, perhaps more accustomed to discussing with friends what you are witnessing, asking opinions, looking up close, you would be disappointed at how fast you have to eat up the clothes with your eyes before they disappear and everyone runs off to the next show. Though in its favour, the

structure of the fashion show does successfully transmit something of the artistic process. It highlights that Branquinho is not making a consistent troop of costumes each season from one roll of fabric. She chooses to pick a fabric or pattern and use it for one piece only; last winter a paisley digital print on corduroy, this time a brightly coloured woollen skirt in contrast to the rest of the muted palette. Your mind, in the mad rush, then fixates on this like one does on a favourite item from a real wardrobe, in a cold climate.