



Iris van Herpen on Creating Her Glass 'Dimensionism' Dress

by Hetty Mahlich on 13 June 2022

The visionary designer shared the process behind their latest collaboration with glassblower Bernd Weinmayer and filmmaker David Uzochukwu.

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The couture designer Iris van Herpen's impact upon fashion continues to be immeasurable. As fashion hurtles towards the metaverse, the futuristic, mind-bending creations of the designer are a frequent reference for burgeoning fashion creators who often take inspiration from Herpen's unique interpretations of form, inspired by nature. Back in 2013, Nick Knight, SHOWstudio and the designer collaborated on [a one-of-a-kind dress](#) inspired by the S/S 13 collection. Daphne Guinness was splashed with black and clear water using high speed cameras, then photographed by Knight. The images were used by the designer to inspire a shape shifting dress.

Continuing to explore forward-thinking material and form, Iris van Herpen has now embarked on a second collaboration with glassblower Bernd Weinmayer to create a glass dress. Made of heat-resistant borosilicate glass 'simax', a material more commonly used in science labs rather than fashion ateliers, the garment was formed freely by hand. Captured in a film and series of images by the visual artist David Uzochukwu, with whom van Herpen worked with on her *Sensory Seas* collection, the new dress will be showcased at *Green Metropolis*, an initiative of *Naturalis: Centre for Biodiversity*, early next year. We spoke to the designer to find out more.

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Hetty Mahlich: How does this dress relate to previous experimentations in material and form in your work?

Iris van Herpen: The mystery, power, chaos, and beauty of nature are important influences in my designs. Water is one of the elements that I circle back again and again on in different ways, each time as if refracted through a prism. For my *Crystallization* collection I took a close look at the properties of water in its various states, from its unbounded nature in liquid form to its pristine crystallized structures in frozen form. The [Splash! project for SHOWstudio with Nick Knight](#) was also a study to capture the immateriality and fluidity of water in a dress.

This design - the *Dimensionism* dress - is fully blown from glass. I wanted to show the elusiveness of water. It's always surreal to realise that so much of our own body is water. The way the glass is blown for this dress causes very beautiful reflections onto the skin; it morphs the body and the skin underneath very subtly. It is reflecting [model] Diandra Forrest's inside outside. In contrast, this look also relates to the *Skeleton* dress (2017) that is a white strapless 3-D printed dress inspired by human and various animal skeletons. This look is like a new hybrid skeleton, evolution evolved. Abstractly, you can argue that the *Dimensionism* dress is entwining the *Water* dress and the *Skeleton* dress, making a liquid skeleton.

HM: Why did you decide to work with Bernd on this project and what was the creative process like?

IVH: Bernd is known for his masterful flame-worked borosilicate glass techniques. His craftsmanship skills are pushing the envelope of glassblowing. I've been impressed by his process of inflating the molten glass three-dimensionally. This look has been extremely difficult to make, it has been a process of many months, as the entire look is hollow. Each line of glass you see, has air and plasma inside to achieve the right ghost-like transparency and movement in reflectiveness.

In the process video, it looks so easy, but it took a lifetime of practice and dedication to get to this point. Also, the perfect symmetry was a challenge as when one glass line is inflated, the heat travels and influences other artwork that took a long time to perfect the symmetry. This look has gone beyond any of the techniques we have explored until now, it's on the edge of immateriality. It's closer to being a ghost than being a dress.



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HM: How long did the dress take to make?

IVH: We started brainstorming about this look three years ago in April 2019. From there on, the process has been very spread out with months of working intensely on it and months that were quiet, as it was Covid. Bernd started doing various samples showing us different options for techniques. With the samples in mind, I started making drawings. The final selected design was translated in patterns in the atelier and tested on half-scale mannequins. Then Bernd- who works and lives in the Austrian Alps- started the painstaking process of glassblowing. He worked full time on the dress for several months at the end of 2020 and beginning of 2021. There was a lot of back and forth between him and us getting all the details and silhouette right.

HM: What does the dress say about the future of your work?

IVH: Good question; I don't really know. My design process is intuitive and it's hard to predict the future of my intuition. The looks I'm working on are like a diary, capturing my zeitgeist. In the early years of launching my brand, I started mixing craftsmanship with innovation, and nature, science, art and dance were my biggest sources of inspiration. After a few years I started collaborating with artists and working with other disciplines. Since then, my collections have become more feminine and more intricate, but the same vision of the early years remained. The glass dress embodies this same spirit and is a metaphor for the future of my work; the vision of innovation mixed with craftsmanship, experimentation and collaboration will remain, the aesthetics will continue to evolve.