

TANK

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vroom

VERSACE, READY TO WOW
PHOTO BY STEFANO GALUZZI
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were these boots made for walking?

FUNCTIONAL FOOTWEAR OR FORM
FETISHISM? MARLOES TEN BHÖMER
HAS US ALL WRONG-FOOTED

text by Shumon Basar

Imelda Marcos' shoe hoard has become one of those potent cautionary images used as shorthand for the follies of the totalitarian rich. I wonder, though, whether secretly, shoe-buying women everywhere can't quite bring themselves to chide the Filipino first lady for her fatal footwear attraction. After all, Carrie Bradshaw's only flawless love affair throughout *Sex and the City* was with Manolo.

Pick up a pair of shoes by Dutch-born, London-based Marloes ten Bhömer and none of those clichés above seem to comply. If the key commandment of glamorous, upscale shoe design for women is to amplify and exaggerate the curves of the human foot, ten Bhömer's shoes are riotous and sensuous sinners.

Having graduated from the Royal College of Art with an MA in Design Products and attended the London College of Fashion to learn the rudiments of crafting shoes, ten Bhömer approaches shoemaking with a combination of genuine curiosity and strategic amnesia. She knows enough about the technicalities to make sure someone can stand up, but she also knows when it's important to forget what convention dictates.

"Why do shoes have to look the way they do?" she asks. "It's because we are comfortable with the way they look." In an installation she recently curated, she included Amy Mullins' carbon-fibre prosthetic legs. "They don't try to look real," she explains, "and that's what I like." In a way, a shoe is a prosthetic device, something that extends the functionality of the human body. Ten Bhömer's beautiful prototypes unapologetically celebrate the artificiality of the things we wrap ourselves in.

The commercial availability of ten Bhömer's fetishistic creations is still some way off, but she has been in conversation with fellow shoe experimenters United Nude and you'll be able to order custom-made shoes during this London's Chelsea Crafts Fair.

When I ask what size she makes all the prototypes, she replies that they are designed to fit her feet. "Sometimes I don't want to sell my work. I don't know if it will go to the right home." You can see her point. It would be no small shame if her extraordinary creations were filed away as just another option in an Imelda-sized shoe collection.

Chelsea Crafts Fair is at Chelsea Old Town Hall, King's Road, London, from October 18-23. www.craftscouncil.org.uk/chelsea2005

