AB So you don't place any more or any less emphasis on the hand or the machine?

PS No. Our approach has always been to employ the hand and the machine together—in equal measure. There's a beauty and an honesty in using traditional materials and techniques, just as there's a modernity and an originality in using technologically advanced materials and techniques. We're always trying to merge—and strike a balance between—the handmade and the machine made in all our collections. There are so many interesting possibilities at the forefront of technology, which we're constantly exploring. But these explorations are always grounded with a knowledge and appreciation of past craftsmanship, which we have an enormous respect for.

AB In your more recent collections, you seem to be placing more emphasis on the artisanal and the handmade.

PS Yes, you're right. For a while, we'd been feeling that technology was just moving too quickly. Technology has allowed us to push ourselves—and to push our work—forward, both faster and farther. But we began to feel that we were losing "the woman." The reason we started in fashion was to promote our vision of femininity, but we'd begun to lose sight of and get out of touch with our woman. We made a very conscious and concerted effort to curtail our impassioned engagement with technology and to reconnect with the humanity of women. At the end of the day, we're making high-end womenswear, and we never want women to be diminished by the work. It should nudge them forward but never outpace them. Sometimes, when you get too wrapped up in technology and in pushing the boundaries of fashion, the clothes can stop being functional, and that was something that was quite scary to us.

AB Was there a specific moment, or a particular collection, that precipitated your decision?

PS It was our autumn/winter 2014–15 collection, which featured dresses inspired by building insulation. The material was actually a wool jacquard woven to resemble carpet padding. It had the look of felt. We scanned a photograph of the carpet padding, and a photographic jacquard loom wove it. To enhance the impression of building insulation, we brushed the jacquard to give it a hazy, blurry appearance. The process was fascinating from a technological perspective, but the dresses ended up being stiff and heavy. On a visual level they were incredible—their silhouettes were so emphatic. But on a practical level they were quite uncompromising. It made us realize that we had to strike more of a balance between pushing our work forward while still providing women with realistic options for their modern wardrobes.

AB Unlike your use of innovative technologies, which often goes undetected, your use of traditional techniques is more conspicuous, such as the embroideries you incorporated into the finale looks from your autumn/winter 2015–16 collection.

PS We think that's our most technically ambitious collection to date. We wanted the embroideries to look like astrakhan—to have the texture of astrakhan. So we laid all the sequins on their sides, which resulted in a furry-looking, three-dimensional sensibility. They were so densely placed that each ensemble comprised 300,000 paillettes. The shine was so strange—sort of metallic but pearlized at the same time.

AB The hand was also very evident in the pheasant feather dresses from your spring/summer 2016 collection *(page 232)*.

PS Those pieces were incredibly labor intensive and time consuming. Each feather was hand cut and hand linked with metal close-eye screws to create a kind of mesh.

AB Like Paco Rabanne's chainmail dresses from the 1960s.

PS Yes, absolutely. We've always admired Paco Rabanne's merging of tradition and technology. He was so ahead of his time. But whereas his aesthetic was futuristic, ours is very much located in the present—in the here and now.

IRIS VAN HERPEN

Dutch-born designer Iris van Herpen graduated from the Artez Institute of the Arts in Arnhem, Netherlands, in 2006. After an internship at Alexander McQueen, she founded her own atelier, specializing in haute couture, in 2007, and became a guest member of the Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture in 2011. Van Herpen's interdisciplinary design approach involves collaborations with architects, scientists, and engineers to produce garments that combine experimental technology with traditional craftsmanship. In 2013 she debuted her prêt-à-porter collection, to which she applied similar conceptual techniques and construction methods.

AB Your fashions challenge our expectations of the handmade and the machine made. What role does technology play in your creative process?

IVH I work with technology, but the hand and the machine are equal within my design process—they are totally integrated. I'm not any more or any less attached to a machine than I am to my hands. For me, it's a dialogue. In my process, handwork inspires the pieces that are machined and vice versa. They improve and strengthen one another. I regard machines as tools, just as I regard my hands as tools. I tell my hands what to do, and I tell machines what to do.

AB Even among people who are familiar with your fashions, there is a misperception that most of your work is machined.

IVH Yes, I would agree. But between 70 and 90 percent of my work is done by hand—hand cutting, hand stitching. Even when I use machines, the hand is never absent—a machine needs human hands to operate it. Some designers like to give more autonomy to a machine, especially the computer, but I would never let a computer design any part of my work. I want to control every aspect of my design process. I'm okay with working on a computer, but it's not my favorite way of working because it's two-dimensional and non-interactive. For me, handwork is a form of meditation. It makes me go into another mindset, which can be very fertile for new ideas.

AB How would you describe your process?

IVH It's blended in all directions. In my early collections, I did research on certain materials and techniques. Nowadays, my research and investiga-

AB So you no longer spotlight a particular material or technique?

IVH I may highlight a few materials or techniques in one collection, but my collections have become more diversified, and the experimentations are broader and more widespread. My interest is in the process of making. It's the reason why I'm in fashion. The process of discovering something new is my ultimate joy. I'm happy when I finish a garment. But it's the process of making it that excites me. I love getting to know a material. If I feel I haven't mastered a material, I will put it aside and wait. For me, I love that turning point of feeling the control of the material—of having it do exactly what I want. That turning point gives me the greatest pleasure in my process.

AB You are best known, perhaps, for your work with 3-D printing.

IVH Yes, my 3-D-printed fashions generate a lot of attention. I'm sure some people think all my work is 3-D printed.

AB What drew you to the process in the first instance?

IVH I'm fascinated with three-dimensionality. And I'm fascinated with movement. I used to dance—that's really my background—and it infuses every aspect of my design process. In fact, if I were to use one word to describe my work, it would be movement. With 3-D printing, you have a lot of different possibilities to explore movement three-dimensionally. Also, the detailing you can achieve with 3-D printing is extraordinary.

AB The detailing?

IVH You have different levels of quality with 3-D printing. From the outset, I've only worked with the best companies. When you look at the first piece I made *(pages 114–15)*, you can see the fine lines of the print. You can see how the piece has been built up. In one millimeter, there are up to ten lines. It's almost like a fingerprint—it's as detailed as your fingerprint.

AB It looks like a fossil.

IVH Yes, it was inspired by the way limestone deposits form shells. With 3-D printing, I am very much drawn to the organic.

AB Why?

IVH I think it's because in organic structures such as fossils, for instance, you have structures that you can't easily replicate by hand. So, automatically, I'm drawn to working with that amount of detail in 3-D printing. It's much more difficult to create an organic structure because, simply put, organic lines are more complex within the computer than straight lines. File-wise, a graphic structure is much easier to achieve.