



JIL SANDER
BY JIL SANDER

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FOREWORD

Jil Sander by Jil Sander is a book by Jil Sander. It was produced in close collaboration with art director Irma Boom and author Ingeborg Harms, accompanied by publicist Nadine Barth. Irma Boom and I spent many days and hours going through my archives and developing a visual aesthetic that was both fresh and innovative. Our goal was lightness, a vibrant rhythm, and untrodden perspectives. As always, and despite the considerable effort involved, the goal was to make the outcome feel effortless, almost like second nature. Ingeborg Harms has been a long-time observer and supporter of my design work, and we have had many discussions about the message of my collections. Her insights into my creative process and motivations are the result of countless conversations over the years.

From my earliest days as a fashion magazine editor before designing my first collections, I had the opportunity to leave behind what had become trivial and irrelevant and in doing so, open up new spaces of possibility. The 1950s and '60s were by no means easy times, and yet the euphoria of those decades—and that all-encompassing quest for new beginnings—remain a driving force in my work in fashion and textile development, product design, interior architecture, and garden design. Looking back, I realize I was part of a broader reawakening that influenced my childhood in Hamburg. I was witness to a democratic reconstruction, a clearing-away of anything standing in the way of a better future. We now find ourselves in another period of upheaval and renewal. I hope it inspired this book.

Jil Sander

Glass is not only a material, it's a medium. Jil Sander's flacon approaches the material with sculptural verve. The design imparts a power and presence that contrasts with the prevailing French perfume aesthetic of the day. The solid cube emerges as a means of enclosing the ephemeral essence, of containing it much as the body does the soul. In their juxtaposition, the bottle and its contents offer a glimpse into the art of giving lasting form to the ephemeral.



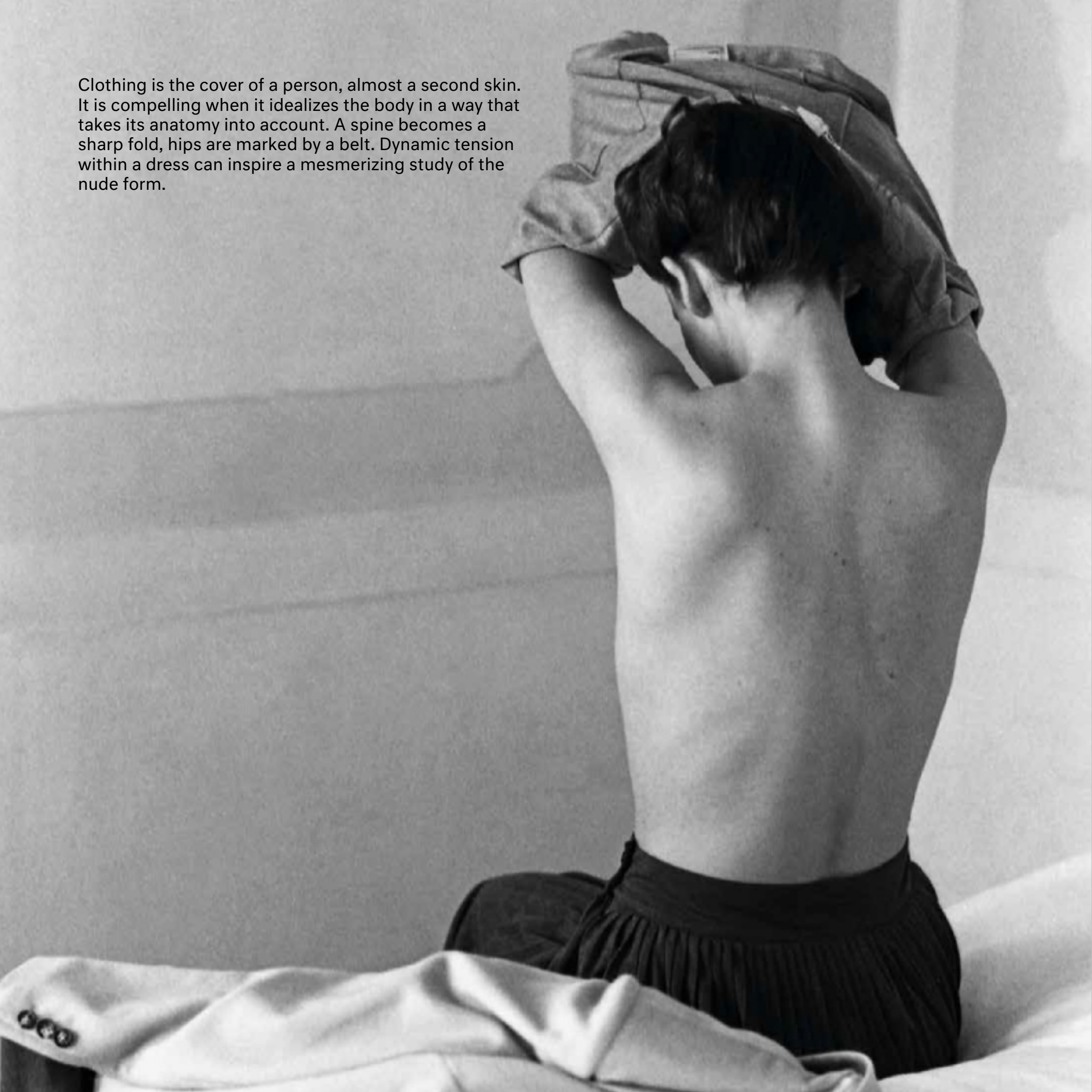







A key strength of Jil Sander's designs lies in their ability to harmonize with and anticipate the body's movements. They not only captivate from the frontal runway view but also reveal their potential from every angle, like a mobile made of fabric.

Clothing is the cover of a person, almost a second skin. It is compelling when it idealizes the body in a way that takes its anatomy into account. A spine becomes a sharp fold, hips are marked by a belt. Dynamic tension within a dress can inspire a mesmerizing study of the nude form.







On the left, a screen print resembling painted porcelain has been hand-applied to the completed garment. On the right, a tribute to the artist Agnes Martin, likewise printed on the finished shirt. The canvas belt on the left has been hand-dyed as well.



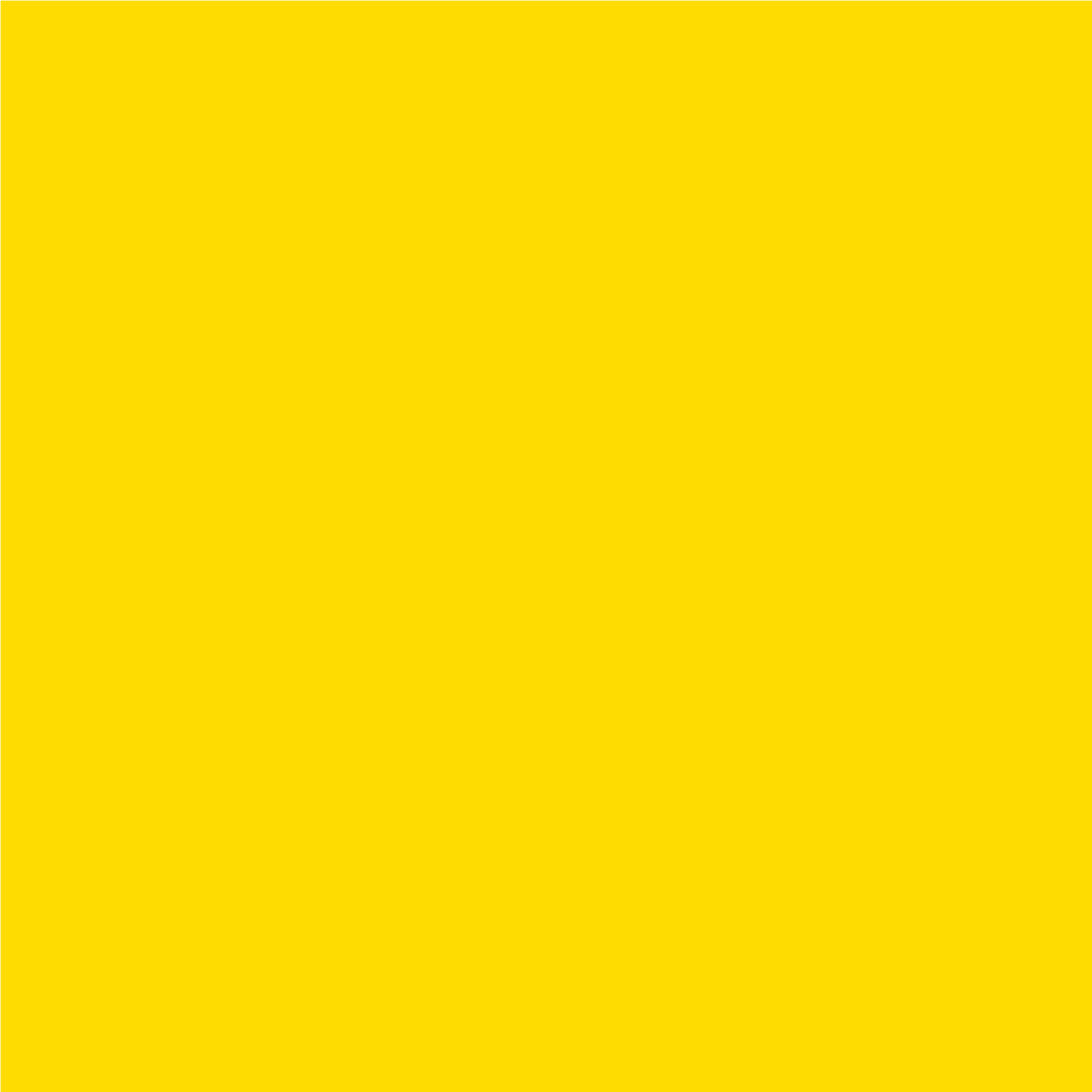
The British tailoring of Savile Row served as a benchmark for Jil Sander, but she reduced their typical canvas and horsehair interlining by half, thereby removing the stiffness from the shoulder and infusing it with a vibrant sense of elegance.



The pleated dress on the right, created through technical processing of the fabric, is inspired by Agnes Martin.







THE KALEIDOSCOPE

Jil Sander views this book as an experiment, one that delves deep into her design world, her values, her thought process and perspective. It uses a zoomed-in view to convey an impression of how the designer's fashion works in the intimacy of being worn. With some room for speculation, one could say that her creations have a particular connection with the early childhood body, where sensory experiences have not yet been confined to a few limited zones. Every detail is equally significant and meticulously crafted. Irma Boom's visual storytelling mirrors the keen eye that finds fascination in the intricacies. She has meticulously curated the Jil Sander archive and the cinematic documentation of runway shows, handpicking them with an artistic sensibility. Her visual constellations illuminate the rich tapestry of ideas woven into Jil Sander's work, its subtle interplay of colors and sculptural quality. The overall composition also serves as a reminder of how nuanced and multifaceted Jil Sander's minimalism can be, which Carla Sozzani, founder of the concept store 10 Corso Como, once referred to as maximalism. When Jil Sander reduces, it is not out of a love for austerity, but a deliberate effort to amplify the essence of cut and fabric: "You can only leave something out if you're sure that the energy remains intact. I like this obsessive commitment to the development of nothingness." The designer eliminates features that divert attention from the core message, especially decorative elements lacking a conceptual basis. The result is a dynamic tension, a delicate equilibrium where every detail adds up to the promise of the whole. It may have well been this blend of precision and relevance that endeared Jil Sander to the younger generation, particularly when she chose to design her +J collections for the Japanese essentials brand Uniqlo, making her one of their own.

The designer has always been close to the material world. "Just try it on," she says, "I won't explain it." It follows that when you don her clothing, it speaks for itself. We literally feel drawn in, intuitively connected to the garment, defined as it is by a clear silhouette that exudes a self-assured presence in space. The necklines and details showcased on the following pages, in the zoomed-in view, are no less articulate. Specially developed materials, seams that betray their construction, sophisticated inner apparel design: all

speak to the ways that Jil Sander, in a silent pact with her admirers, strives for perfection beyond optics alone. In contrast to garments that are destined to be stowed away in the depths of closets, her designs are on a quest for something elusive: the soul of a piece of clothing. It is with this intent that she ventured into the realm of fabric design, drawing inspiration from its idiosyncrasies, discovering new avenues of craftsmanship, experimenting with unconventional proportions to compelling and innovative ends. The tangible result for wearers is a deeply felt self-assurance, a confident posture, an aura free from inhibition.

Jil Sander does not think of her work in terms of a chronological autobiography. She has always been focused on the present and looks at what lies ahead. She is convinced that her aesthetic was there from the beginning and has continued to develop and evolve over time. It is in this spirit that the text of this book traces two of her favorite figures: the kaleidoscope, like the one she designed with the artist Mario Merz for the Florence Fashion Biennale, and the spiral. The observations in *Jil Sander by Jil Sander* whirl kaleidoscopically alongside Irma Boom's visual interpretation of the designer's work, returning again and again, from different perspectives, to central aspects of the Jil Sander story.

Her roots are in the future, inspired by the ethos of modernity. Born in Wesselburen, Jil Sander grew up as a postwar child in Hamburg, a metropolis where almost all the cultural influences that could shape a young life had been swept away. Once again, what Walter Benjamin wrote in 1933 about his contemporaries rang true: "A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body." Even as a schoolgirl, Jil Sander showed a strong, almost allergic aversion to attempts at restoration. The disapproval of a teacher only fueled her defiance. She didn't want to wear girlish dresses; she wanted to be herself. What was on offer in women's fashion during the 1950s seemed transparently coercive. It imposed rigid roles on women; in a country still

predominantly controlled by men, women were only regarded as something when considered objects of desire. The designer's birth during the waning days of World War II coincided with a societal collapse, one from which only a steadfast commitment to the future could offer a way out.

But she didn't start with an entirely blank canvas; she deconstructed the existing elements of fashion. Every professional step, every aesthetic gambit was driven by a sense of unease in the face of a tired system—a system that stoically pressed on. As a fashion editor, Jil Sander led a forward march through fashion's institutions, sparing no effort to overturn convention. She has remained true to this method. Her work can be seen as a continuous process of evaluating, revising, and replacing the dysfunctional. Even today, she is in her element only in the act of designing, in relentlessly searching for solutions untainted by the dust of ages. The fact that this approach didn't result in fantastical sci-fi designs owes much to the designer's unwavering sense of "class," which was strongly influenced by her Hanseatic ties to England. No less defining was her sense of quality, regardless of the era. It fed her forward-thinking instincts, drawing her into a dynamic spiral of continuous recourse and innovation. Her appreciation for the cultural highlights of past epochs is reflected in her collaboration with the Italian architect and interior specialist Lorenzo "Renzo" Mongiardino, who furnished her Hamburg townhouse in the Renaissance style. In a similar way, Jil Sander reinterpreted historical elements, drawing inspiration from British men's tailoring, couture bias, sportswear, the basics industry, and the know-how embedded in workwear and uniforms. Her wide-ranging exploration culminated in a vision of modernity that transcends gender.

A not insignificant factor in Jil Sander's success is that her approach did not result in a rigid style mandate. Long before the fashion industry's idealized body standards came under scrutiny, she tailored and stylistically diversified her collections to accommodate the diverse physiques of a global clientele. "I made sure that personalization was possible, also in the way you combine things. I always kept things close to people." Despite all the designer has done for the dissolution of gender stereotypes, she was never content with unisex collections. Inspiration from men's fashion was adapted

to female proportions and feminine elements were made accessible to an increasingly metrosexual male world. The highest quality and most refined techniques and materials were available to both women and men. This book explores, among other things, how gender is approached at Jil Sander. The story begins with footwear, encompasses the sensory fascination with innovative fabrics, and culminates in the signature Jil Sander runway walk.

Jil Sander by Jil Sander highlights the aspects that led to the designer's worldwide esteem. It dispels the notion that she stands exclusively for business attire. Her collections are very feminine in ways that transcend clichés. Not only did she rethink the everyday professional performance, but the entire lives of women and men, by moving away from occasion-specific fashion. She also did away with the costly and time-consuming rituals that made clothing a central occupation for women. She herself did not want to be tied to her walk-in closet, but rather be confidently dressed for any situation from the morning on. In the 1990s, she made headlines by stating that she preferred a T-shirt from the GAP to boutique goods. She found inspiration in sports, utility, and expedition wear, helping to make basics socially acceptable. Despite initial hesitation, she also integrated ornaments and prints into her distinctive style. Among her most influential achievements was the modernization of the suit, which she designed to be lightweight and comfortable without compromising its elegance. Although often celebrated for her timeless fashion, she never settled for the status quo. She saw each collection as an opportunity to rethink cuts, fabrics, and processing techniques. Her eye is that of an artist seeking to escape convention. "Can you tailor?" she was asked at the beginning of her career, "Can you sew?" "No," the designer responded. "All I can do is look. I think with my eyes."

For all the revolutionary innovations that Jil Sander brought to fashion, the fundamental paradox of her creative achievement and success as an entrepreneur is easily overlooked: the designer is unusually shy, desirous of harmony, and avoids conflict whenever possible. Her fashion aimed to protect, evoke respect, make one attractive, and render the individual impervious to attack. The Horst P. Horst portrait for American *Vogue* reveals much of this side. However, it is only in the portrait by his student Francesco Scavullo, created for the first perfume campaign for her brand and indelibly linking Jil Sander's face to her fashions, that one can truly grasp the determination of a highly sensitive young woman on a mission to transform her weaknesses into strengths.







Prior to stepping onto the catwalk, Jil Sander urged her models to assume a relaxed, confident posture free of dramatic posing. A key directive was “NO HIPS,” that is, no hip sway. The result was the distinctive Jil Sander walk—composed, upright, casual. Dynamism came courtesy of the cuts and fabrics, which were exciting enough. The designer sometimes whispered to models at the backstage entrance, “Think of your mother.”



The gold leaf stripes of this sweater-skirt ensemble playfully reference Italian artist Lucio Fontana's *Concetto Spaziale*. The authentic gold print is a fashion statement that values substance over make-believe. Contrast between the understated stripes and dynamic slits adds an additional sense of tension and dynamism. The gold-accented slit at the front of the skirt evokes Fontana's slashed paintings.



“I was born wearing a white shirt. It’s my lab coat.”
Jil Sander redesigned the white shirt season after season using superfine Sea Island cotton, a material even more costly than silk. She justified this with her sense of the zeitgeist, which quickly tires of familiar solutions and craves fresh proportions and tactile sensations.





