



whitewall

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THE LUXURY ISSUE

BERNAR VENET - MARCEL WANDERS - ALEXANDRE ALLARD
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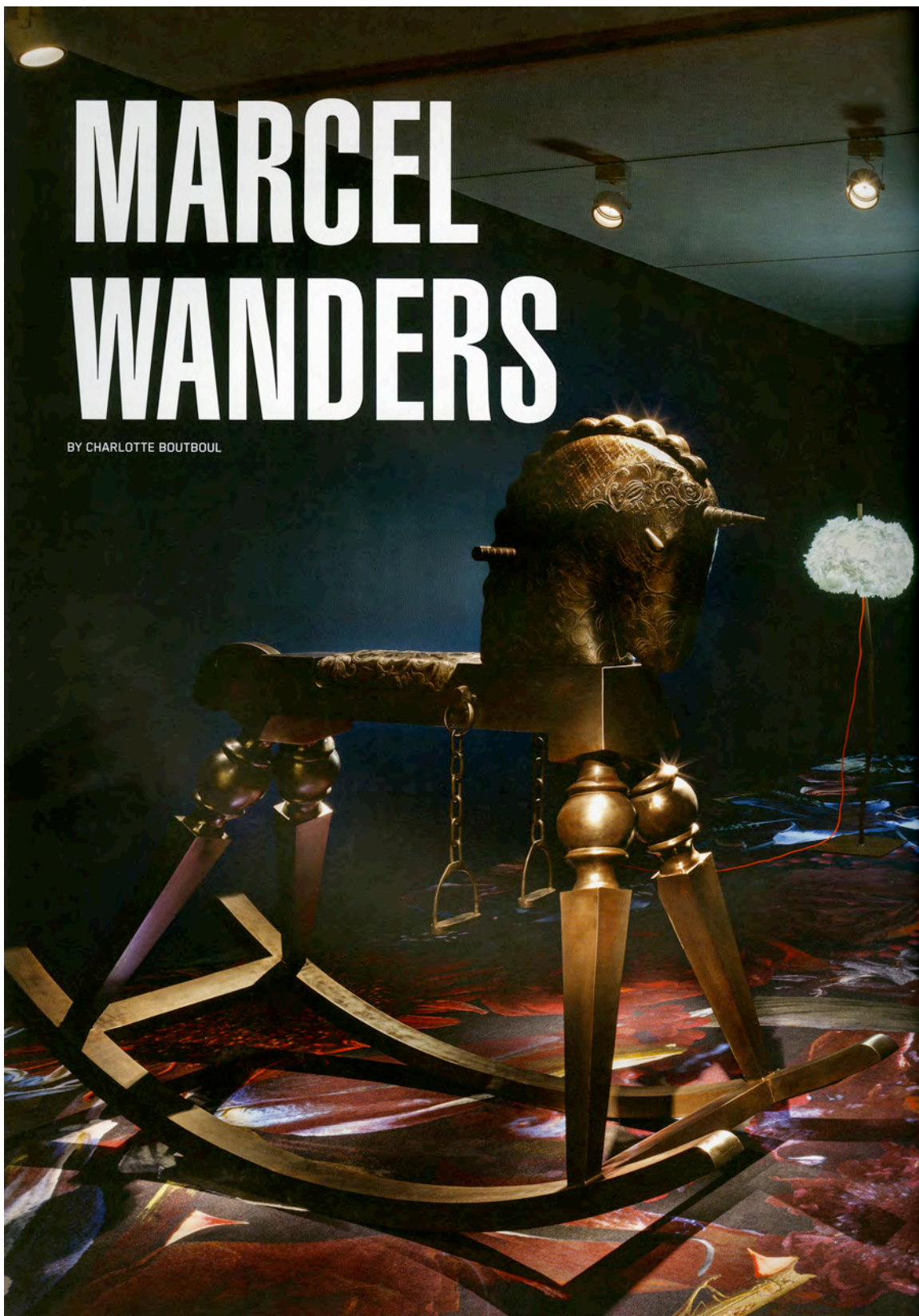
Boutboul, Charlotte. "Marcel Wanders," *Whitewall*, Winter 2016.

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MARCEL WANDERS

BY CHARLOTTE BOUTBOUL



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Installation view of Marcel Wanders: Portraits (February 25-April 9, 2018) at Friedman Benda Gallery in New York. Photo by Andrew Meredith, courtesy of Friedman Benda and Marcel Wanders Studio.

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arcel Wanders is arguably the boldest off-road driver of the world of design. This year alone, he presented the exhibition "Portraits" at Friedman Benda, participated in the group show "Lumières out of the Box" for Baccarat (where he showed his spherical chandelier *Le Roi Soleil*), and created a book for the Rijksmuseum's Gallery of Honor and its precious Dutch masterpieces. He designed the interiors of two hotels: The Mondrian and Iberostar, to open in 2017. He also launched an eyewear collection, "Unseen," for Safilo, and a tableware collection for Alessi, "Alessi Circus." *Whitewall* met with the designer in New York to find out where the tireless and unstoppable Wanders would take us next . . . and also discover some of the reasons behind his daring choices.

WHITEWALL: You presented your first gallery solo show in an art gallery this year, "Portraits," at Friedman Benda, New York. How did it feel?

MARCEL WANDERS: I'd been working on it for several years. It took a bit of time to live up to it. I think it's cool to launch in New York. It's been a dream and I'm pretty excited with the result.

WW: It seems that the objects you exhibited were darker than what you usually do, and had a more intimate feel. What inspired that new approach?

MW: Design for me is an impossible thing. It pertains to how we create a vision for the future. How we spread love and trust in the world—I think that is core to design. Having done that work for 25 years and looking back, I felt very happy and proud, but I also felt it wasn't complete.

There's a whole area in myself that wanted to be shared and find an audience. So in the last years I started making work that was more connected with the emotional aspects of our lives, like pain and sorrow, and maybe madness, or just even disappointment—disappointment with the self, fear. I think all these energies should be in the world of design, but it needs a different podium, a different audience, because it's a different conversation. So that is

the content of the work here. It comes from a need to share a type of message, which I haven't shared before, and I'm really happy to share it.

WW: Could you give me the specific content of one of your pieces as an example?

MW: There is *Phoebe*, which is the girl mannequin dressed up with the light. Designers, artists, and creators usually work with their environment, and every design made finds itself on the line between power and beauty. Power and beauty need each other. Albert Speer needed Adolf Hitler. There is always a cost to creation: What are we willing to sacrifice for beauty? Some people go further than others. This work is about the destructive way to do that. Designers spread love, and it's this big wonderful thing for the world, but there's an agenda and it's fair to be honest about it. You feel in this particular space [where *Phoebe* is standing] there's no one there, but indeed there is someone.

WW: You are currently designing interiors for several hotels, like the Mondrian in Doha, the Iberostar in Majorca, and the Quasar apartment building in Istanbul. In all these buildings, did you mix eastern and western influences?

MW: When we make a product design, we basically have no idea where it's going. But interior designs have no feet—they go nowhere. If you go to Doha, if you go Moscow, or to New York, you need to end up liking Moscow, New York, or Doha, or you'll end up going nowhere. Interior design for us is something that we need to connect to our own culture and to the local culture with also an international atmosphere. Two of the places you mentioned are in the Middle East and have been influenced by local sensations and local ideas, because if you go there I want you to feel like it's exciting.

WW: What makes a project attractive to you?

MW: A project is attractive for a whole bunch of reasons, but the first thing is the people you work with. I can't work on my own; I need to work with



Portrait courtesy of Friedman Benda and Marcel Wanders Studio.

"DESIGN FOR
ME IS AN
IMPOSSIBLE
THING"



Opposite page: Marcel Wanders
Athanassius I, II, III (still)
2016
Digital video
Total running time: 37 minutes
Edition of 5
Courtesy of Friedman Benda and Marcel Wanders Studio.

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**"WHAT I WOULD
LOVE TO DO IS
AN OPERA AT THE
MET. THAT'S ON
MY LIST"**

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people who make an excellent hotel possible. You want to work with people you respect. Then you need to have a plan that is feasible: the position, the building, the budget, et cetera.

WW: You're also publishing a book, *Rijks Masters of the Golden Age*. Why was it important for you to pay homage to 17th-century Dutch masters?

MW: There are two things: One, there is this amazing museum [the Rijksmuseum], which has one room with the most incredible paintings of my country, and that collection didn't have a book. I thought that was very strange and that it would be good to make a book on it, since it wasn't a funny collection of black-and-white pictures, but the best art of my country. To mirror that or to be in the shadow of that work, I felt I needed to come up with the coolest book I can make, without taking any short cuts. So that's what we did.

The second reason I did it is because I'm a designer and I live in this construct of modernism. Modernism is still the present culture, and that of design. One of the big fundamental dogmas of modernism is that the past is irrelevant to the future. I mean, Corbusier thought it was a brilliant plan to wipe out the city of Paris to build new skyscrapers. So if the past is irrelevant for the future, what does that mean for the things we create today? It means that the things we create today will tomorrow be irrelevant. So I'm fighting that notion of modernism; I've been fighting it for the past 25 years. I want to make things able to become truly durable. I don't consider it a project—I consider it a personal honor. That's my reason. The work should have already been done. But I'm happy I get the honor to do it.

WW: Would you say that artists like Vermeer and Rembrandt have influenced your work?

MW: Yes, I'm sure they have. I've seen these works since I was two, and I've seen them multiple times in my life and at multiple periods of my development. And I've seen so many different aspects in their work and I have read so many things about them. It's the type of work you can't really forget, especially if you look not with your eyes but with your heart and with your brain.

WW: You collaborated again with Baccarat. Can you tell me about your collaboration?

MW: We have a very interesting side table we made out of crystal with a lamp inside. But the most important piece is the chandelier, *Le Roi Soleil*, which we made with a new kind of topology. If you want to innovate on the concept of the chandelier, what happens a lot is that people take the chandelier and make a modern version of it by taking out the decoration, the ornaments, and the complexity. So they make it more easy and practical; that's like the modern thinking.

We wanted to find a way to be near to modern people but without losing the complexity. We said, "Okay, we're going to make that chandelier but it's going to end up round." So it's a sphere but with all the elements of a classical chandelier. It bows to modern architecture and design but still honors all the elegance and beauty of a classical object.

WW: You're hard to keep track of. This year you also designed an eyewear collection for Safilo, a tableware collection for Alessi. Do you have any other future design fantasies?

MW: Yeah, of course, some unexpected things maybe. What would you never expect me to do?

WW: I could actually picture you making movie sets or something along those lines.

MW: That's very near. What I would love to do is an opera at the Met. That's on my list. I want to do the best opera ever.

WW: Where would be your favorite city to live in?

MW: I lived in San Francisco last year. I was in Milan this year. Maybe I should move to New York next year, no? A different city every year.

Left and Right:
Installation view of "Marcel Wanders: Portraits" (February 25–April 9, 2016) at
Friedman Benda Gallery in New York. Photo by Andrew Meredith,
courtesy of Friedman Benda and Marcel Wanders Studio.