



AMIE

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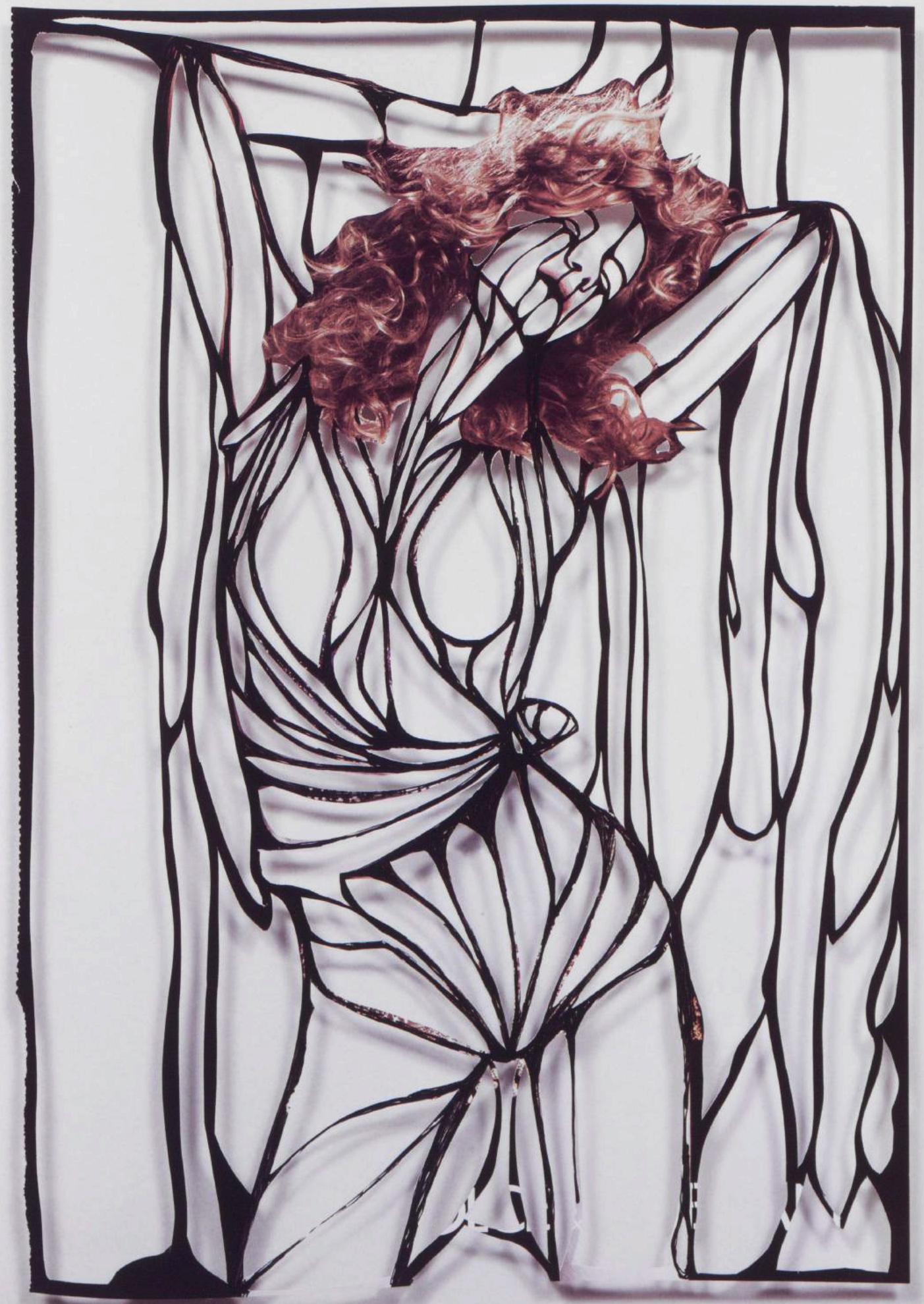






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and given formal shape time and again in art, literature and language. A beauty that is based on image, an image that is nothing more than an average of all aesthetic desires at any given moment.

But average doesn't exist. It promises to be the closest to the truth, but in fact it's the farthest away because it's constructed. The Mona Lisa, the Venus de Milo, Beatrice, Cleopatra, Mary Magdalene – these images are clichés in themselves. But what does true beauty look like? Some rely on its power, others think they've summed it up like the French philosopher Simone Weil: 'beauty always promises, but never gives.'

Using a pen Dicke applies lines to the contemporary icons she grew up with. Flowing lines of beauty, not unlike the billowing attire of Sandro Botticelli's women and the angels in medieval altar pieces. But also lines of sorrow. Christy is crying. And Naomi. And Kate. The spaces between the lines – the fashion, the jewellery, the smooth skin – vanish under Dicke's cutting knife. Words can be

discerned between the lines in some of the works, 'Can't control this urge', 'All is full of love'. Spread out over the body, the letters merge with the lines.

Dicke makes an intervention in the icon, appropriating the exemplary beauty. This intervention points up the artist's ambiguous approach: attraction yet at the same time a critical view. It's as though, having once appropriated the beauty, Dicke edits herself.

Decay

How to give form to oneself in the midst of these universal images foisting themselves on us as the norm, the standard? Amie Dicke found her approach while a student at the Willem de Kooning Academie in Rotterdam. Like a statue, she made a

'Beauty is desired in order that it may be befouled; not for its own sake, but for the joy brought by the certainty of befouling it.'
Georges Bataille

pressing of her legs from crutch to toe in marzipan. Treacly sugar oozed all over. The negative of her body as a pillar of sugar. The image proved more fragile than she'd expected. Three years, the baker had said it would last. But even by the next day the sugar sculpture was splitting and caving in. The permanency of Dicke's attempt to position herself appeared to be an illusion. The space between her legs – manifested as sexy and absurd – is now no more than a memory. Femininity, it seems, is not static, cannot be captured. Uncontainable.

Like an endless exercise, Amie Dicke returns time and again to images of beauty, to explore new ways of relating to them. Each photo has to be wrestled with afresh, handled. And each image acquires a piece of Amie Dicke.

Her series of female images goes back to 2001. In that year, the models were a life-line. On bus shelters, towering on buildings. Glowing lips and shining eyes enticing you, tempting you, as the song says: 'All your dreams will come true [...] you

just insert personality here'.¹ Ready to be out with the viewer's fantasy. Dicke's first works were sad, with striking hollowed-out spaces that they were left wafer-thin and fragile. Integrated into a delicate gossamer sculpture, the wall or hanging on a thin rope from the ceiling. By making an assault on the inaccessibility of the image, Dicke managed to elicit an involvement. A universal image of beauty. As though seeking fulfilment of the promise Simone Weil spoke

Many of the early cut-outs are, therefore, of a woman who has been cut out. Dicke sought much, and in so doing she

destroyed her subject. Woman's dark side was laid bare – constructed beauty is assaulted. The artworks recall an extraordinary image of female transience: Mary Magdalene, carved out of wood by Donatello in 1455. Once the most desirable of Biblical women, there she stands taunted and tormented by life. Her hair and ragged dress imprison her in swaths of curling lines.

Innocent beauty and provocative decay – those are clichés that Dicke collects from public life, from art, from literature, as rough footage. And like the majority of clichés, they serve as identification markers by which to orientate one's life. 'This,' she says, 'I'll read it to you, this is what I mean.' She quotes *Narziss and Goldmund*, Herman Hesse's

novel about the friendship between an intellectual and a melancholic.

Goldmund thought that he, that every human being, was flowing, for ever being transformed, to finally vanish into nothingness. 'Perhaps, thought Goldmund, fear of death is the root of all our image-making, and perhaps, too, of all our intellect. We shrink from death, shuddering at our frail

instability, sadly watching the flowers fade again and again, knowing in our hearts how soon we shall be as withered as they.'²

Perhaps it's the certainty of decay that makes beauty so attractive. By liberating the models from fashion, by preventing those from the weekly or monthly magazines from ending up in the wastepaper basket, Dicke makes them eternal. The lines and cut-outs underwent a process that you could call an aesthetic coming-of-age. *Julia in Yves Saint Laurent, Rive Gauche* (2004) resonates with an en-

Beauty and the Beast

cut-out, ink on calendar paper, 2004

tirely different mood from that of her early works. The lines spiral luxuriantly around the model. Soft, grey lines like the curlicues on a Moulin Rouge poster from the heyday of Art Nouveau. Delicate, elegant and resolute. A deliberate destruction of the image, yet proclaiming a regained control of the image. The beauty of the models, constructed as universal image but as transient as the fashion they sell, gives way to a new, enduring beauty.

2. Herman Hesse, *Narziss und Goldmund*, translated from the German by Geoffrey Dunlop, Penguin Modern Classics 1959.

1. From: Walker Lee, 'You just insert personality here'. Album: *Manny's Tattoo Parlor*, 2000.



Calvin Klein
collection

LOVER
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