

ZOO MAGAZINE

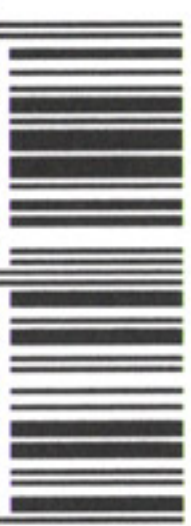
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Julia Stegner by Philip Gay

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Not A Toy: Fashioning Radical Characters

The new book by Greek cultural organization ATOPOS

by Diane Pernet/photography Paul Graves

ATOPOS is a cultural organization based in Athens, Greece. Its name comes from the ancient Greek word *ἀτοπος* which translates as out of the ordinary, eccentric, and unregistered. Since 2003, all of ATOPOS' projects have focused on the human figure in contemporary visual culture, with particular emphasis on the transformation of the body through various forms of expression. "When I started realizing the impact of the phenomenon of contemporary character design in street art, graphic design, animation films, vinyl toys or even advertising, I began to wonder if and how this phenomenon has also influenced the world of fashion," said artistic director Vassilis Zidianakis. And so, the book began. *Not A Toy: Fashioning Radical Characters* represents a personal journey for Zidianakis, as he seeks to identify a character that best portrays his own inner demons. Zidianakis says he relied on instinct when deciding which designers to include in the book, which he edited. "There were cases where I considered a particular outfit as really important in terms of the theme of the book, but unfortunately the image was not powerful enough," he says. "There were other cases where the outfits were not that brilliant but the images were so strong that we decided to include them. Finally, there were several cases where we were not successful enough in 'pleasing' the designer's PR representatives or assistants and, with great regret, their works have been excluded from the book." While researching for *Not A Toy*, ATOPOS looked at more than 5000 images from more than 200 designers and artists. Just over 300 of these images were ultimately selected for inclusion. The pictures are arranged to narrate a story about the characters that live among and within us, perhaps representing our other selves that we normally keep hidden. "Christophe Hamaide Pierson's and Bernhard Willhelm's joint project *Dickfashional* is my favorite image in the book," says Zidianakis. "They have created new characters by decorating male genitals with basic materials and garments. These characters are funny, childish and grotesque at the same time. And to tell you the truth, it has been quite hard for us to convince the publishers, Pictoplasma, to include these images, because they thought that they looked like a teenager's game." "However, these images are a nice surprise for the reader and we pressed really hard for them to be included," he adds. "Also, these images are a direct statement on fashion since Christophe and Bernhard used a cover of *Vogue* for the background on a few of them. I really love these 'light' and airy characters; 'light' because they are not erect!" www.atopos.gr www.pictoplasma.com