

Iris van Herpen

What does she create?

Iris van Herpen designs extraordinary fashion that blends **technology, art, nature, and science**. Her clothing often looks futuristic and sculptural—like it belongs in a museum or a science fiction movie. She's known for using cutting-edge techniques like **3D printing, laser cutting, and digital design**. She also experiments with unexpected materials like **metal, silicone, glass, and magnets** to create garments that move like water, breathe like lungs, or grow like coral.



🧒 Childhood

- Born in **1984** in **Wamel**, a quiet village in the Netherlands surrounded by rivers and countryside.
- Grew up with a strong connection to **nature**, which sparked her love for organic shapes and natural movement.
- Loved **ballet dancing**, and the flowing shapes of dance inspired her later clothing designs to look as if they're in motion.
- Enjoyed **drawing and sculpting** from a young age—she was always creating something with her hands.
- Was fascinated by the **tiny details** in natural objects, such as the shape of shells, bones, and spider webs.
- As a child, she didn't dream of being a fashion designer at first—she just loved making beautiful things.

🎓 Education

- Studied at the prestigious **ArtEZ University of the Arts** in **Arnhem**, one of the top fashion schools in the Netherlands.
- While studying, she learned about **classic fashion design**, including sewing, draping, and tailoring by hand.
- She stood out for her love of **experimental materials** and her unique ideas inspired by science and art.

- Took an internship with **Alexander McQueen** in London, a famous fashion designer known for theatrical and imaginative clothes. This changed the way she thought about fashion forever.
- While working with McQueen, she learned how to combine **emotion and storytelling** with cutting-edge craftsmanship.
- After graduating in **2006**, she began pushing the limits of fashion using modern tools like **CAD (computer-aided design)** and collaborating with scientists and engineers.

Career

- Founded her own label, **Iris van Herpen**, in **2007**, when she was only 23 years old.
- In **2010**, she became the first designer to ever show a **3D-printed dress** on a runway, which made headlines around the world.
- Accepted as a **guest member of the Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture** in Paris in 2011—this is a huge honour and means she’s recognised as a true haute couture designer.
- Her collections have names like “**Crystallization**,” “**Voltage**,” “**Biopiracy**,” “**Hypnosis**,” and “**Sensory Seas**,” often based on **scientific concepts** like magnetism, fluid dynamics, or the nervous system.
- She works closely with scientists from fields like **physics, biology, and architecture** to design clothes that **mimic nature** or explore how the human body connects with its environment.
- Her work has been shown at top museums like the **Metropolitan Museum of Art** in New York and the **Victoria and Albert Museum** in London.
- Celebrities including **Beyoncé, Lady Gaga, Björk, Grimes, and Tilda Swinton** have worn her designs on stage and at major events.
- She continues to lead the way in using **fashion as a way to explore the future** of humanity, the body, and the natural world.

Quotes from Iris van Herpen

“I see fashion as a way to express new ideas about what it means to be human.”

“Nature is the biggest inspiration—it’s where the magic lives.”

“I don’t see technology and craftsmanship as opposites. They can work together to make something truly poetic.”

“My work is about transformation—not just of materials, but of how we see ourselves.”

Art

Embers of the Mind

Embers of the Mind is the second of four large-scale **aerial sculptures** created by Iris van Herpen for her “**Hybrid**” presentation during **Paris Haute Couture Week (June 2024)**. These sculptural works hang suspended on steel tubes, constructed on floating sheets of tulle. The piece evokes **swirling rhythms of wind and mental embers**—capturing creative energy and internal transformation

Artistic Techniques & Materials

- Crafted using her signature **moulage technique**: draping and sculpting directly on tulle, not the human body
- Tulle sheets layered with **hand-stitched silk fragments**, built up in **tens of layers of oil paint**, ink, intense chalk, and silk paint to achieve **lava-like three-dimensional textures**
- Suspended to appear weightless, yet heavy with layers—an illusion that balances invisibility and bold tactility .

Concept & Meaning

- The sculpture reflects van Herpen's **inner creative processes**, likened to embers stirring in the mind, or wind caught in motion
- It explores themes of **catharsis and transcendence**: releasing constraints of physical reality and time, embodying personal transformation
- Presented after a retreat to nature in rural Netherlands, the piece is deeply inspired by **natural cycles and mental flow**

Embers of the mind



Sensory Seas catwalk collection 2025

Iris van Herpen's Sensory Seas collection is inspired by the amazing shapes and colours of the **ocean** 🌊 and the **human brain** 🧠! Her magical dresses look like **jellyfish** 🐙, **corals** 🪸, and flowing sea creatures. She used clever techniques like **3D printing** 🖨️, **laser cutting** ✂️, and **hand-painting** 🎨 to make each dress move like waves in the sea. The colours are soft and watery—**blue, lilac, green, and coral**—just like a colourful underwater dream 🐚. Some of the dresses even seem to grow and breathe like living things! Iris worked with scientists and artists to bring her ideas to life. Sensory Seas shows how fashion can be full of science, beauty, and wonder 🌟.



Look 1



Look 3

Sculpting the Senses Exhibition 2024

Imagine stepping into a magical world where fashion and science come together like in a fairy tale! In Sculpting the Senses, over 100 beautiful dresses and art pieces are on display to spark all your senses 👁️ 💡. Some dresses look like shimmering jellyfish, whirling water, or glowing coral, while others remind you of fossils or outer space. You'll also hear special music and see lights that move gently—just like the ocean or your own breathing 🌊. At a museum in Paris (and later in places like Singapore and Brisbane), Iris teamed up with scientists, artists, and even natural history museums. The result is a fun adventure that shows how clothes can be more than just something you wear—they can make you feel and imagine new worlds! 🌍



Collaborations with technical experts



The first 3D printed dress to be shown on a runway, from the Crystallization collection 2010. The wedding dress was a product of Iris van Herpen's collaboration with Julia Koerner, a computational architect.

Designing for the stars



Tilda Swinton in paper dress by Herpen This image shows her in a minimalist, sculptural silhouette—the dress's structure highlights van Herpen's signature blend of traditional craftsmanship and avant-garde design.

Lady Gaga is wearing a sculptural, glossy black ensemble from Iris van Herpen—complete with an architectural glossy finish and bold, three-dimensional shoulders. This look exemplifies van Herpen's merging of fashion with avant-garde technology

