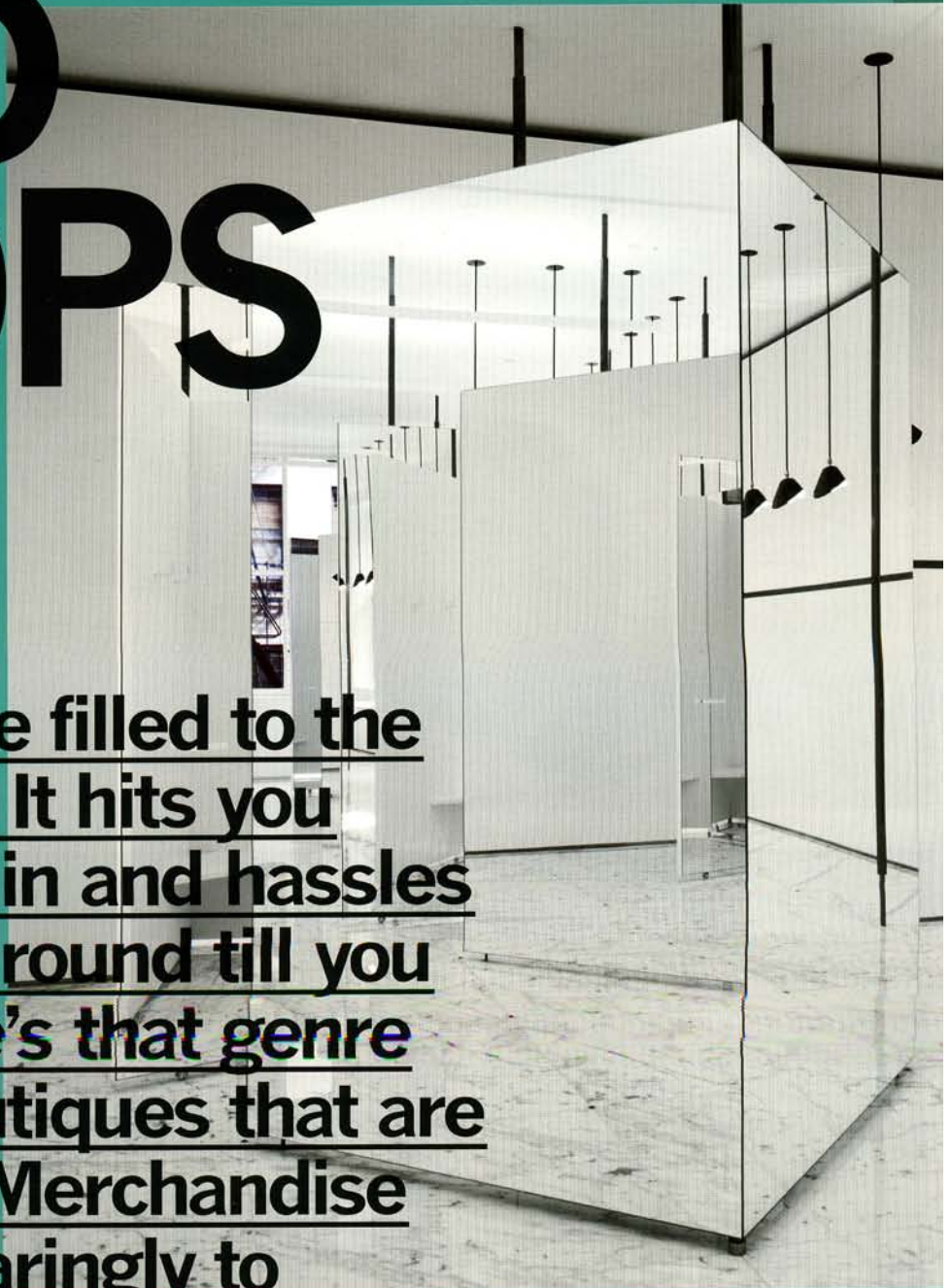
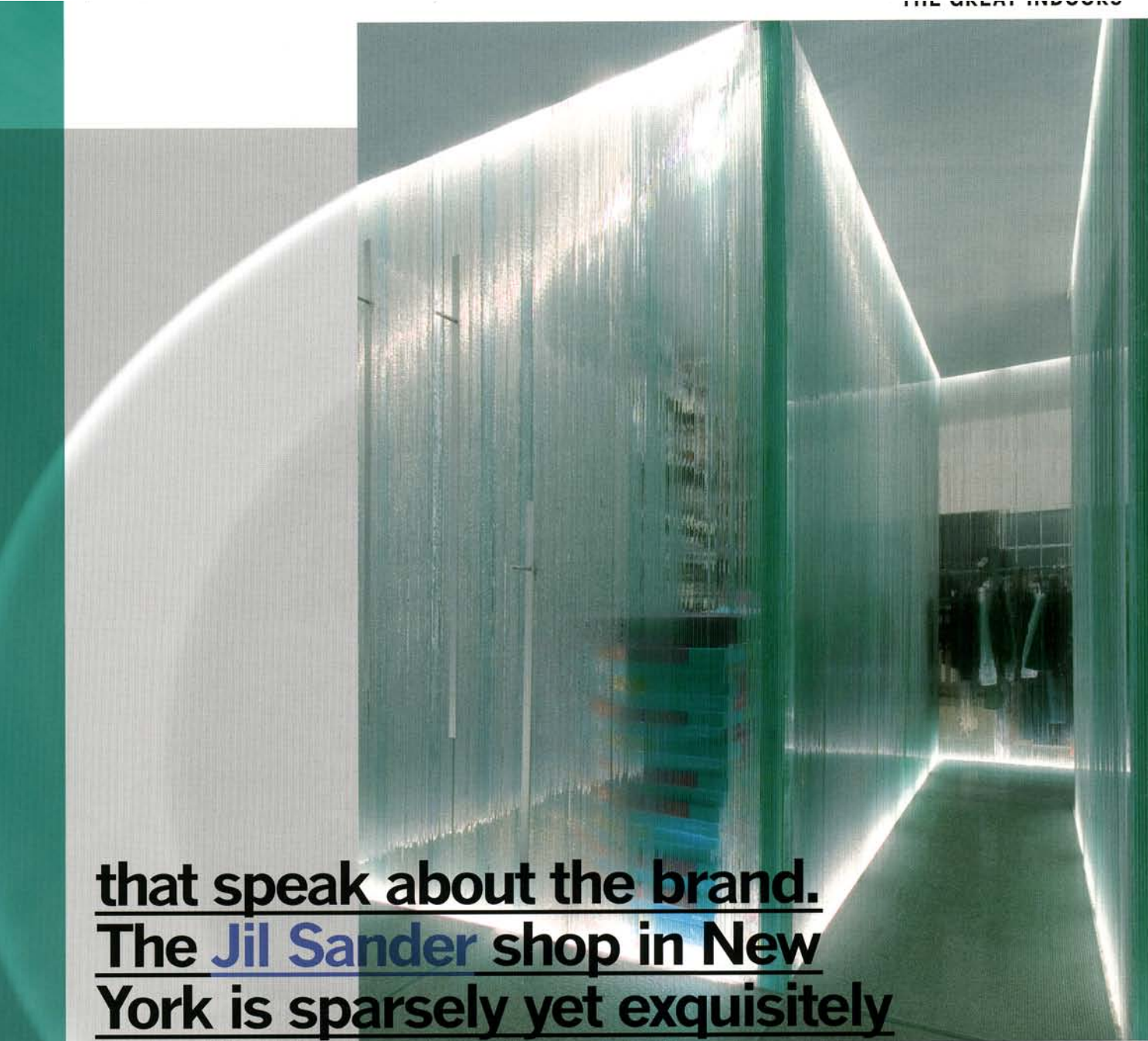


# THE VOID SHOPS

Some shops are filled to the brim with stuff. It hits you when you walk in and hassles you all the way round till you exit. Then there's that genre of high-end boutiques that are almost empty. Merchandise is displayed sparingly to underline its uniqueness. But the apparent emptiness is loaded with coded signals







that speak about the brand.  
The **Jil Sander** shop in New  
York is sparsely yet exquisitely  
detailed, and mirrors here  
confront us with ourselves  
repeatedly from all angles. In  
the **Dal Bat** shop in Granada,  
glass is again deployed to  
conceal merchandise in  
ways that, contradictorily,  
make us covet it even more.  
Enter the Void Shop.

Shops by Germaine Kruij in New  
York and by Antonio Jiménez Tor-  
recillas in Granada.



## The Void Shops

# The Glossy Void

**For the Jil Sander shop in New York, artist Germaine Kruij used mirrors, marble and emptiness to create shifting images of both space and viewer.**

Words **Shonquis Moreno**

Photos **Gert Jan Kocken**

In designing his fashion label's third U.S. shop and its New York flagship, the most inventive and poetic decision taken by Jil Sander creative director Raf Simons was to make artist Germaine Kruij responsible for lighting, fitting rooms and store front, as well as for a staircase linking the ground and first floors. Kruij's art installations typically involve shifting light, architecture, interior space, composition and the passage of time – a description that now applies to the Jil Sander SoHo flagship. So where's the line between art and design?

'I wanted to keep the store close to my work,' says the 37-year-old Kruij, who was raised in Antwerp and now works in Amsterdam. 'I didn't want to reinvent myself, to change just because it was in another context, in a store. I wanted to know what would happen if I kept close to my artwork.'

Indeed. The SoHo shop totals 600 sq m of retail space on two floors, and visitors are made to feel every centimetre of it on entering. Simons chose to keep the double-height, street-level room nearly empty except for a phalanx of mannequins standing on plinths as if ranged along a catwalk. The explicit intention is to use this area to communicate the brand through various media, but such a volume of space, framed entirely in white Carrara marble, can be both seen and intensely felt. In a city where space

comes at a premium, the experience of this emptiness speaks louder than words about purity and luxury. 'Keeping the shop empty in New York is a statement,' Kruij says. 'We thought about the experience of entering Japanese houses, where an empty space has just one function and, in this way, dedicates itself entirely to one subject: music or a painting or a fountain. You heighten what's inside by giving it space.'

### **The experience of emptiness speaks louder than words**

At the rear of the ground-floor interior, narrow panels – mirrored on one side and clad with white Corian on the other – stretch from floor to ceiling, revolving regularly. Kruij borrowed her concept for the blinds from *Daytime*, an installation she's shown in various incarnations and locations since 2003. At the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, for instance, she installed seven vertical mirrored blinds with black backsides in an existing window frame and programmed them to complete a full revolution every 14 seconds. The piece reflected daylight into the →



Each fitting room is a rectangular box made up of two L's: one sheathed in mirror and lined in white Corian, the other sheathed in Corian and lined in mirror.



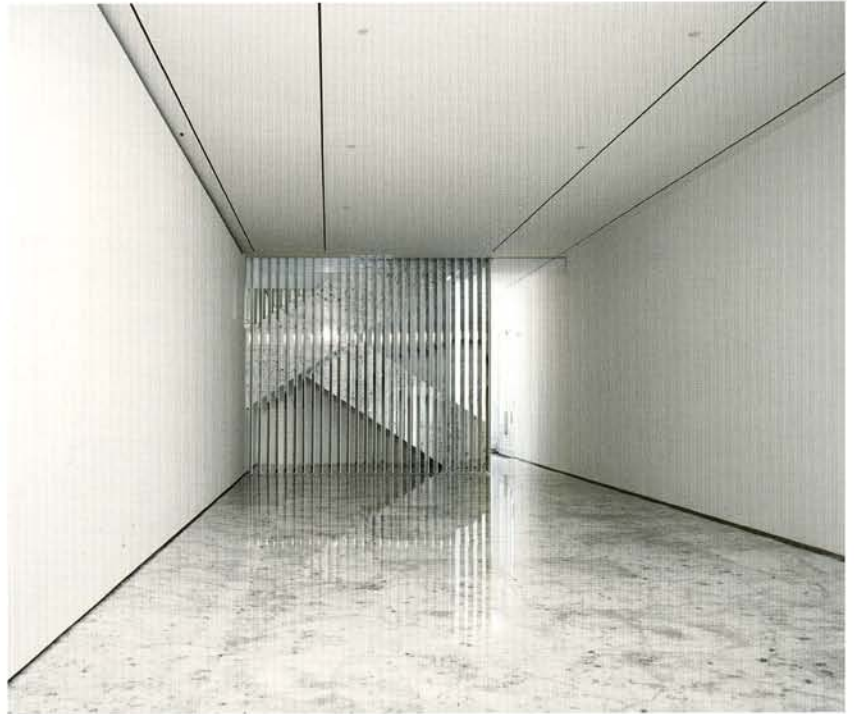
museum while also reflecting the space it occupied into the street. ‘The turning blinds introduce you to what is inside in an introverted way,’ says Kruip. ‘You enter a mental space when you come inside.’ When the panels meet in their revolution, they’re like a closed window, as the Corian momentarily forms an opaque, matte-white wall. When this window opens – by briefly becoming a mirrored wall of reflections – visitors are introduced to themselves within the space: walking, pausing, entering a choreographed void. ‘This is typical of my work,’ the artist points out, ‘introducing a space as a stage and the visitor as an actor.’

‘This basic but essential concept of where performance exists – along with the relationship between the work and the audience – runs throughout Kruip’s work,’ says Emma Robertson, co-director of The approach E2, the London art gallery that represents Kruip. ‘The staged and accidental abstractions and patterns of everyday life are the raw materials for her projects.’

It is partly this staging that makes Kruip a master at focusing the viewer’s consciousness to a fine splinter. *Rehearsal* – an installation that required nearby streetlights to be extinguished – consisted of 580 computer-controlled halogen lamps that were mounted beneath each window of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, directed into the space and then dimmed progressively in 24-second cycles. In the case of *Rehearsal*, Kruip sharpened the viewer’s focus with light; for Jil Sander, she directs the visitor’s focus by reducing the space to a collection of lines and geometry that are as lush (in their materials) as they feel bare (in form). It’s not common to have an empty store, so how do visitors to the flagship know to continue upstairs? When it can be glimpsed between the revolving louvres, the staircase reads as a bright diagonal. Rendered in marble, it forms a seamless extension of the ground floor, peeling upwards and into the level above.

## **‘My work introduces a space as a stage and the visitor as an actor’**

And then there was light. Shifting and reflected light is a major component of the design of the first floor. On initially entering, shoppers are disconnected from the distractions of the city, because windows downstairs are covered; on the first floor, however, the shop and, reciprocally, the city reopen to each other. On this level, where men’s and women’s wear and accessories are displayed, neither Simons nor Kruip wanted to use spotlights in the ceiling; instead they hung Serge Mouille arm ceiling lamps and allowed the windows to draw as much natural light into the interior as possible. ‘Raf was clear that he didn’t want retail light. He preferred daylight, because you wear clothes in daylight,’ re-



**At the rear of the ground-floor interior, in front of the stairs, Kruip installed revolving panels, mirrored on one side, which she borrowed from her piece entitled *Daytime* (2003).**

On the first floor, fitting rooms, typically hidden in corners, stand out from the walls (as do all display surfaces), but they are as subject to change as the light. Each room is a tall rectangular box made up of two L’s: one sheathed in mirror and lined in white Corian, the other sheathed in Corian and lined in mirror, and both set on casters. The mirror reflects the incoming light, the rest of the interior, and the mirrors of the other fitting rooms to generate a confusion of light, imagery and unexpected transparency. When a fitting room is not in use it acts as an architectural intervention, partly open in arbitrary configurations, revealing its partly mirrored and partly Corian interior, and seemingly moving as the shopper passes its reflections. When the fitting room is to be used, the customer can grasp a corner and move it, wrapping the mirror around her body until it’s closed. ‘They’re literally “changing” rooms’; Kruip laughs.

Design or art? ‘I’m not afraid to attach a function to what I make, because I like the viewer to be involved in an active way with it, to be the author of what I’m making,’ Kruip says. ‘And that’s an element common to design. If you make design really good, it’s art. That’s natural.’

Kruip is interested in how art can be a shop, a hospital, a school, a field, a museum – a ‘design’. ‘It’s a very democratic thing. I don’t make distinctions between art and design. It’s interesting to see where art will survive and in which contexts it won’t,’ she admits. ‘But I’m a believer in art, so I’m optimistic.’

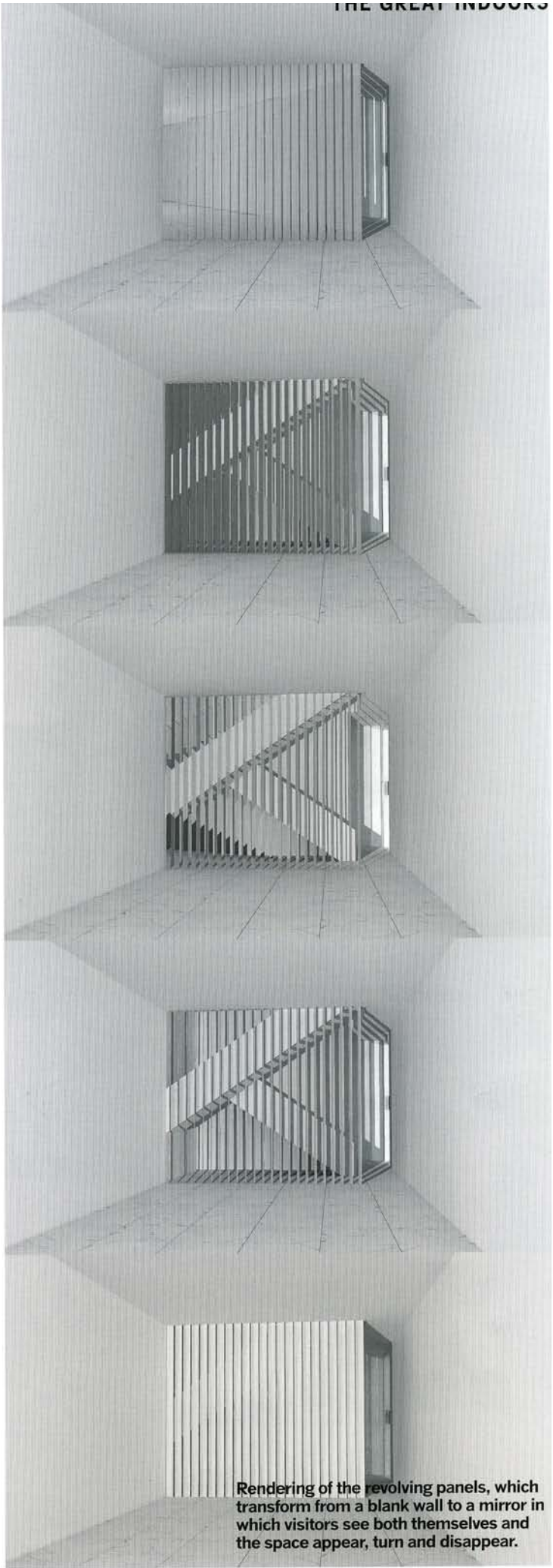
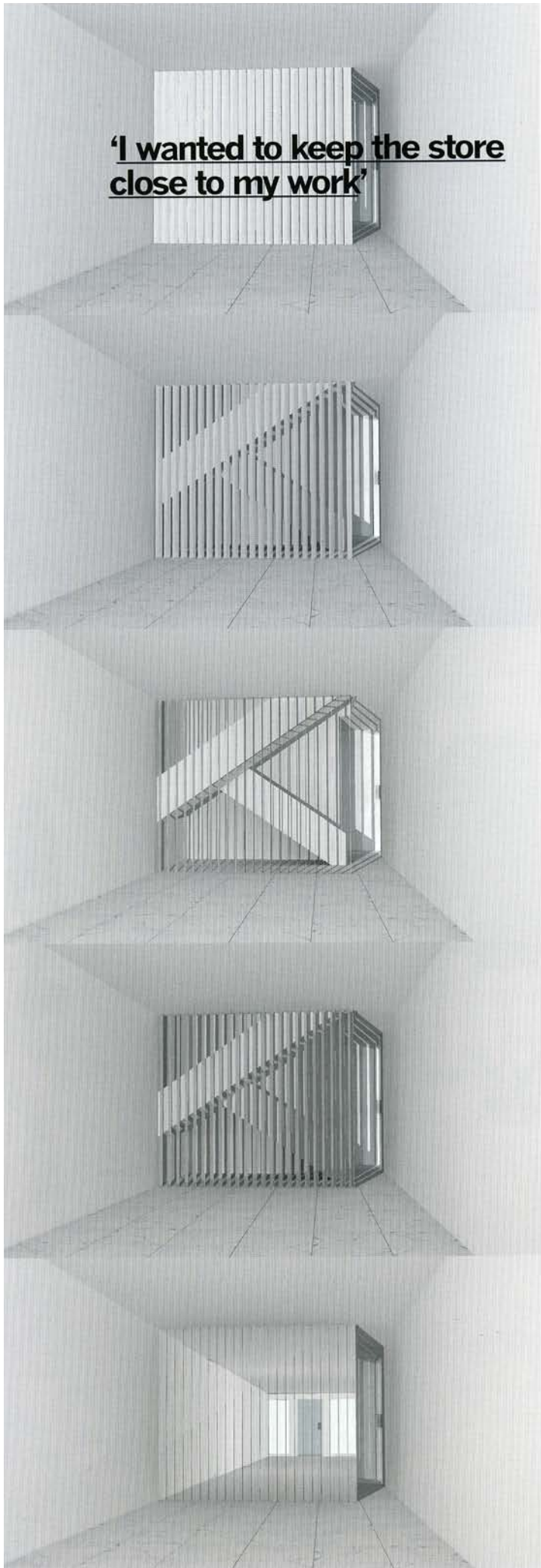


**'I'm a believer in art, so I'm optimistic'**



The street-level space of the Jil Sander store, framed in white Carrara marble, is kept nearly empty except for a phalanx of

**'I wanted to keep the store close to my work'**



Rendering of the revolving panels, which transform from a blank wall to a mirror in which visitors see both themselves and the space appear, turn and disappear.





Both fitting rooms and display surfaces upstairs stand out from the walls.



On the first floor, where fashions and accessories are displayed, daylight fills the interior. The only artificial light here is from Serge Mouille arm ceiling lamps.



# Germaine Kruip's Art Installations

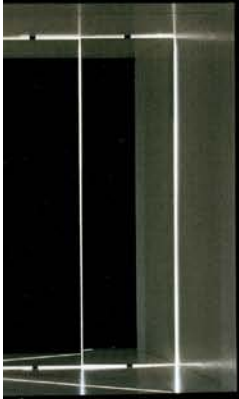
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Dutch artist Germaine Kruip (1970), who studied at the State Academy of Fine Arts and DasArts in Amsterdam, won second prize in the Prix de Rome of 1999. Converting a space into a stage on which the visitor becomes an actor is typical of Kruip's approach to installation art. At the core of each of her pieces is the re-

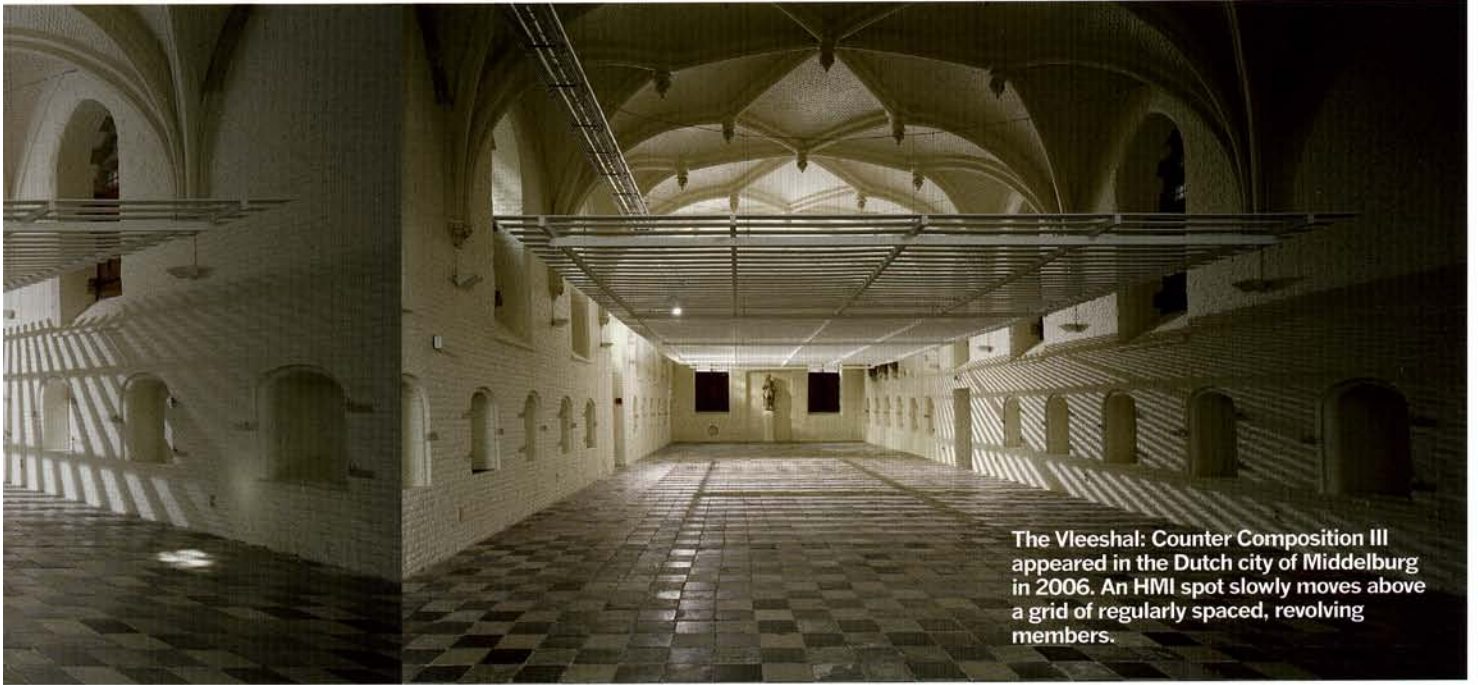
lationship between the artist's creation and the audience. She makes a game of the viewer's perception of her work, which is shown in museums, at exhibitions and elsewhere.



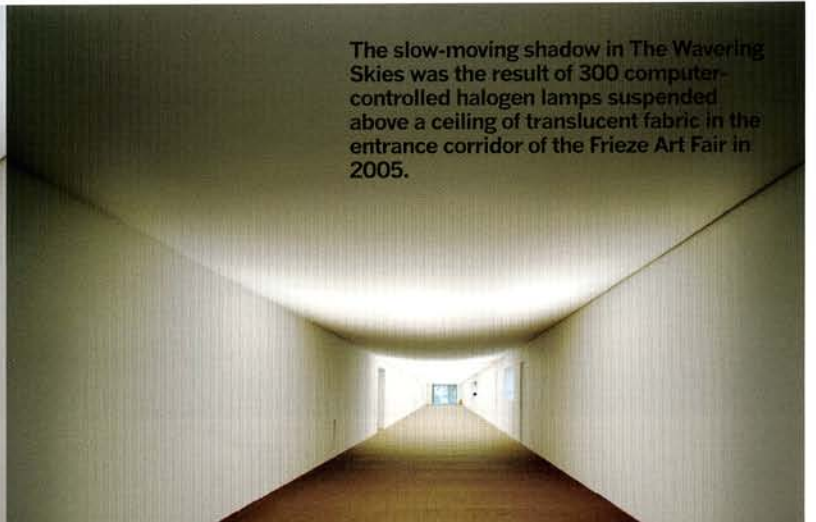




The installation on the lower level of the Jil Sander store is based on *Daytime*, a work that Kruip exhibited at Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum in 2004.



The Vleeshal: *Counter Composition III* appeared in the Dutch city of Middelburg in 2006. An HMI spot slowly moves above a grid of regularly spaced, revolving members.



The slow-moving shadow in *The Wavering Skies* was the result of 300 computer-controlled halogen lamps suspended above a ceiling of translucent fabric in the entrance corridor of the Frieze Art Fair in 2005.