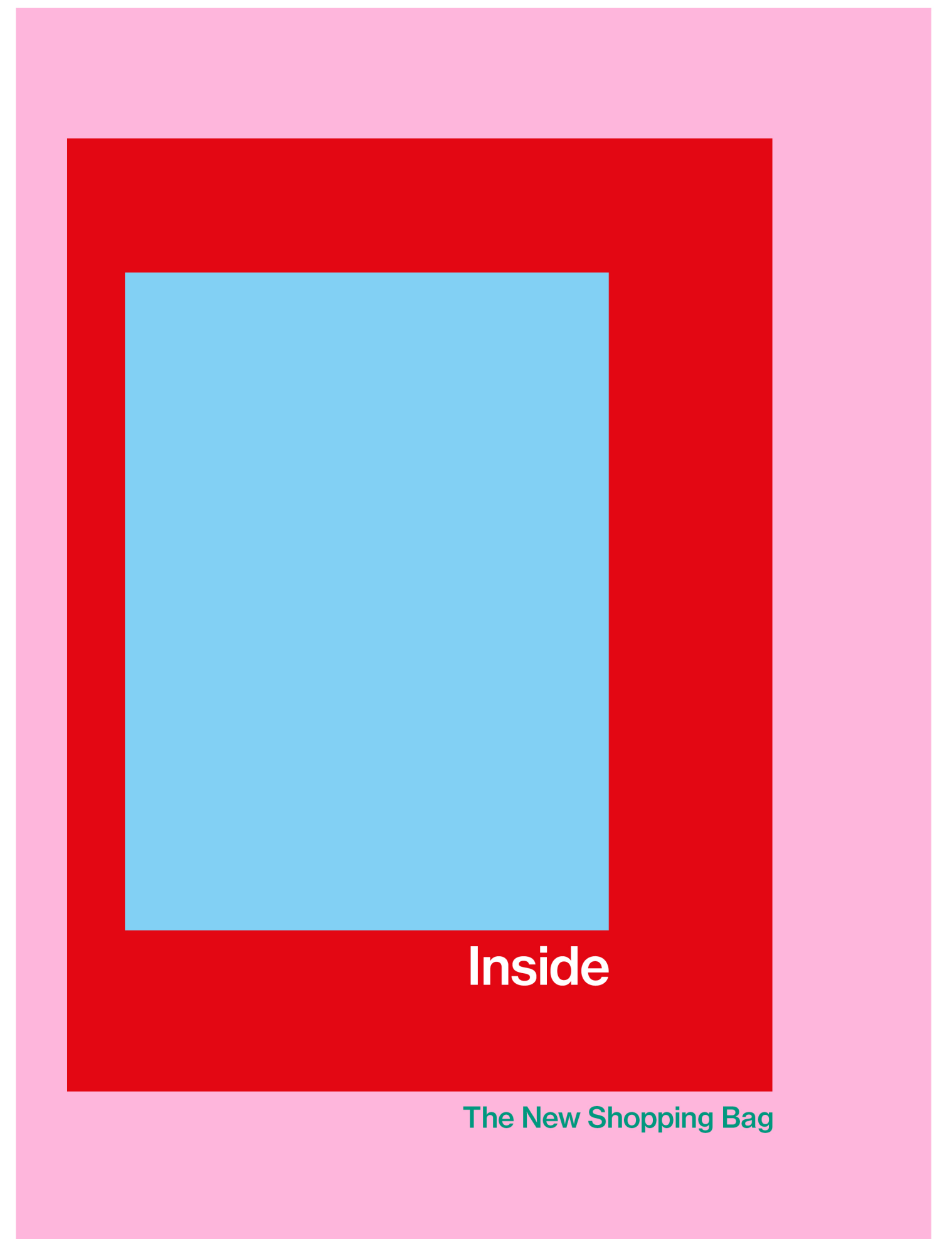




Inside

The New Shopping Bag

**SUSAN BIJL®**







Amalie at Krabbesholm Højskole, Skive,  
wearing The New Raincoat in Black, 2024



Rinke at the Esch, Rotterdam, with The New Shopping Bag from the HAY collection, 2019





Jan with The New Backpack in Echo & Arise, 2024



Billie with The New Foldable Backpack, Minerals collection in Git & Rhodo, 2017



Describe yourself in three words.

Meryem: Organized *rwina* (chaos) – does the translation count as the third word?

Najate: Kind, trustworthy, *gezellig* (friendly).

Where are you now?

Meryem: At a crossroads, figuring out new mum life with a baby and an eight-year-old son while figuring out what direction to go in with my work. At 41, you might say it’s a case of a mild mid-life crisis, lol.

Najate: With my sweetest daughter, Meryem, helping her with my newborn grandson.

Tell us something about you and SUSAN BIJL.

Meryem: When I started creating content more professionally, I made a list of brands I wanted to work with, and SUSAN BIJL was very high on that list. So, one day, while visiting the store to buy a bag, I asked if they worked with creatives and were willing to collaborate with me for Instagram. At that time, influencer marketing wasn’t very common practice, so they told me no, but a couple of months later, I got a DM asking if I was still interested in working together on a special collection. Since then, I’ve art-directed a campaign for the brand, and the whole family has modelled for various campaigns. It reminds me to not be afraid to go after what you want and to not give up, even if it’s a ‘no’ at first.

Najate: When the Rotterdam bag came out, I modelled for that campaign; it was one of the first shoots I did for a brand and my first time posing for a photographer other than my daughter. I got so many sweet comments about it.



Meryem, her son Nori and her mother Najate at De Bokkesprong Children's Farm, 2024

Meryem Slimani & Najate Leklye  
9 August 2024

Najate Leklye & Meryem Slimani are a mother-daughter duo that bring fashion and culture together through photography in which their Moroccan heritage always takes centre stage, with 72-year-old Najate as her daughter’s muse and the internet’s favourite ‘khaltou’ (auntie). We are proud that they represent our brand throughout their work and life.

What ecological measures would you take if you ruled the world?

Meryem: Tax big polluter companies to the max so they might change their ways and put a limit on the number of collections/ pieces each (fashion) brand can produce to limit the volume of resources needed to produce them. In the end, the richest countries and biggest companies are causing environmental damage across the entire world, but the Global South is paying the price for Western consumerism.

Najate: Restore our environment to its natural state because trees give us life, feed animals and give us oxygen. Cutting it all down means that the circle of life is not working properly any more. Fewer cars, and minimize the number of cars to one per family. Why do people have so many vehicles? You can only drive one car at a time!

What would be even better is to make public transportation accessible to everyone. Make it logistically easier and faster to use than cars, and also free or low-cost, especially for people on lower incomes.

How do you brighten up your existence?

Meryem: By staying true to myself, embracing my inner weirdo and (re) connecting with my younger self. Our lives would be a lot brighter if we allowed ourselves to let go of adulting every now and then. Hanging out with my son is a daily reminder to find joy in doing the things I loved when I was younger, like painting, reading or dancing.

Najate: My life is built on love and faith, and I try my best to live day by day.

What part does colour play in that process?

Meryem: Colour is always (sub)consciously part of my life; you’ll hardly find anything black or (sad) beige in my closet or home decor. Even food-wise, something as simple as fresh produce at the market can make me very happy. I remember buying a purple cauliflower just because it was so pretty. During tomato season, I have to restrain myself from buying bags filled with all kinds of colourful tomatoes in all sizes.

Najate: Colour is very important to me. It colours life and my surroundings – clothes, people, nature. I love to hike and admire nature’s beauty. Where I live there is a lot of greenery, and that brings me a lot of joy.

What music have you been listening to recently?

Meryem: I love to ride my bike on summer nights and I have two playlists for that: ‘Hot Mom Summer’ and ‘Yallah Habibi’, basically a mix of oldskool hip-hop/r&b and some Moroccan tunes mixed into it, which is my overall aesthetic always – a mix of the cultures I grew up with.

Najate: I love music, especially classic Arabic songs and Gnawa/Issawa, which are Moroccan music styles and old French chansons. But somehow, I don’t listen to much music anymore. The sounds of my surroundings feel like music now. I love hearing the birds, wind and rain while walking outside or sitting in my garden.

What was your biggest loss?

Meryem: Losing within one year both my grandmother, who partially raised me, and my daughter after 18 weeks of pregnancy was a heartbreak I wish upon no one.

Najate: Everything you experience in life is a gain; I don’t see anything as a loss.





Ebony wearing the ETNOMANIE collection  
by Ellie Uyttenbroek, print design by Mary Pelders, 2018



IFFR Tiger bag in Morocco, 2018





We commissioned still-life photography duo Scheltens & Abbenes to reveal the thoughtfulness behind our designs – by taking them apart. Over the years, the construction has been refined, often in ways that go unnoticed. Every piece of material is carefully considered, balancing durability, functionality and attention to detail. Patterns are designed to minimize fabric waste.

This series offers a glimpse into the complexity behind minimalist design. Read the interview with the artists on page 211.



The New Shopping Bag Large





## The New Pouch Medium



## The New Foldable Backpack Large



## Bertjan Pot

### 14 April 2017

Bertjan Pot is a Rotterdam-based artist specializing in product design. He is best known for the Random Light and his colourful Ropemasks. Each project begins with material research, often resulting in interior products that highlight his fascination with techniques, patterns and colours. He has collaborated with SUSAN BIJL on three multi-coloured collections.

Check out the collections with Bertjan on pages 3, 83, 98, 120, 121, 127-132, 141, 249.



**Describe yourself in three words.**  
Do it yourself.

**Where are you now?**

At the studio, recovering from Milan furniture week. Slowly getting back to work – looking out the window a lot, since the studio garden is sprouting with this lovely weather we are having right now.

**Tell us something about you and The New Shopping Bag.**

The initial request I got from Susan was to design a pattern for The New Shopping Bag. I love patterns, but not on ripstop nylon (which the bags are made of). I used to make kites out of this material, and whenever somebody showed up at a kite event with a print on their kite, it meant they had bought the kite and had not made it themselves... So, to this day, I can't like printed ripstop nylon.

The other thing I have with the SUSAN BIJL bags – and I think quite a few people with me – is that I cannot choose just two colours. You are lured into the shop by all these great colours, and you can only bring two colours home!!!!??? Therefore, I asked if I could do six colours instead of two. ('A simple yet brilliant idea that turned out amazing' – SUSAN BIJL)

**Tell us something about Susan.**

Susan is too modest. As far as I know, she was one of the first – if not the first – to design a durable, thin, foldable shopper to replace the plastic shopping bag. Many people came after her.

I also think the fact that she still does the same bag she started with more than 15 years ago proves she has great intuition, too. That and her modesty is probably a very good business model – at least a very pleasant one.

**What ecological measures would you take if you ruled the world?**

I think it would be good to put more emphasis on taxing or fining pollution rather than on subsidising clean methods. Clean should be the standard, not the exception.

In general, I think we are not paying the full price for everything we buy. For a lot of things, we only pay for the costs of material, labour and shipping, but we are not paying for the cost of cleaning up the pollution or the medical bill for the health issues a worker might have on the other side of the world. If we were paying for all of this, clean and correct products would probably be cheaper than polluting ones.

**How do you brighten up your existence?**

By having as much fun as possible within my work, my job. So I don't need to get it elsewhere. I started as a designer because I like it. I like making things, experimenting with materials, looking at production processes and seeing if I can still do something that nobody has done before. But sometimes it's hard to keep it enjoyable. There are some assumptions by other people about what success means in this business, such as that it might be tempting to do certain things. But those things also take the fun out of my job, which is why I started doing what I do.

**How important is colour for you in your work?**

You can't think of shape without thinking of material and colour, if you want to make real products. It's a trinity. So, a big role, I guess.

**What music have you been listening to recently?**

I used to be quite up to date, but for the last few years, I've been feeling like an old fart and keep falling back on music from a few years back when music was a bigger part of my life. When I want to calm down, I put on *All Is Well* by Sam Amidon, and when I want to wake up, I enjoy a Diplo mix.

**What was your biggest loss?**

My mum, who passed away a few years back.

**What is your ultimate destination?**

Nirvana, but I'm not sure if I'll ever get there :)







Measurements for mould cuttings for The New Shopping Bag at our factory in China. Our patterns are meticulously cut to maintain a straight tread line and to minimize fabric waste.











Femke taking a picture of Rens, Susan, Danny & Pieter at the release of their 'Thank You' and 'The Dots' collection designs, 2016



Our gradient wrapping paper is designed by 75B and was printed by Drukkerij Tripiti (until they closed in 2024)





by Laurence Ostyn

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**  
Laurence Ostyn (Roeselare, 1992) studied Art History at Ghent University and Journalism at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel. She is an art and architectural historian and has been working as a publisher at nai010 publishers in Rotterdam since 2019. In her work, she strives to increase the visibility of underrepresented voices in the fields of art and architecture. She was the initiator of the publication and programme *Women in Architecture* and played a key role in the reissue of *Women in Design in the Netherlands 1880–1940* by Marian Groot.

‘Our dog Alvi is so surrounded by SUSAN BIJL products that whenever she sees someone with a SUSAN BIJL bag, she immediately assumes we know them. Full of excitement and wagging her tail, she greets everyone as if they were an old friend,’ says Vincent, co-founder of SUSAN BIJL. Alvi, the dog, is a friend to all – much like the bag itself. What started as Susan’s personal mission to stop using plastic bags has grown into a globally beloved design icon. And once you own a SUSAN BIJL bag, you know: it’s here to stay.

**FORM**  
In 2000, as Susan sat at her sewing machine, determined to find a solution to the problem of the disposable plastic bags she despised, she took the very product that frustrated her as her starting point. Using brightly coloured ripstop nylon from a kite shop, she created The New Shopping Bag – a bag inspired by disposable plastic bags. She made it deeper and extended the handles, designing a spacious, sturdy and therefore durable bag without losing the key qualities of the original plastic version. The New Shopping Bag remains incredibly lightweight and thin, so you can easily stuff it into your coat pocket when not in use. And just like a disposable bag, it’s made for everyone to use.

This approach – simplifying an everyday object while enhancing its functionality – fits within the current tradition of Dutch design. Take, for example, the *A’dammer* roll-front cabinet (1978) by Pastoe<sup>1</sup>: a colourful cabinet where the ribs of the roller shutter serve as handles at any height. This means users never have to bend down to open it. The power of this design doesn’t just lie in its practicality but in the way it brings a smile to people’s faces when they see or use it. The same applies to The New Shopping Bag by SUSAN BIJL: cheerful and playful, yet free of unnecessary frills. Stripping away excess ornamentation aligns perfectly with the minimalist and functional approach of Droog Design. The Dutch movement’s signature humour and element of surprise result in products that are not only functional but also make a statement. Consider *Chest of Drawers* (1991) by Tejo Remy<sup>2</sup> – a collection of drawers held together with a simple strap. This quintessential Droog Design piece challenges traditional design conventions, making design more accessible, inspiring and playful.





Mylène van de Sande  
Development Manager

Describe yourself in three words.  
Sensitive, individual, sports-loving.

Where are you now?  
Behind my desk at the SUSAN BIJL office.

Tell us something about you and SUSAN BIJL.  
It's not something about the brand, but about the first encounters between me and Susan. Ten years ago, I used to work in an espresso bar where Susan was a regular. She always used to ask for a 'special' sandwich. Usually, I didn't like this, and I could get quite annoyed by special requests from demanding customers. But Susan was very sympathetic and charming, so surprisingly, I liked doing it for her. I had no idea who she was, just a very easy-going person.

What ecological measures would you take if you ruled the world?  
Make all children vegetarian from the moment they start eating solid food.

How do you brighten up your existence?  
By being in the moment, noticing and enjoying my surroundings. The way the outside air feels, smells and looks, the sound of the crispy frozen ground while running, looking at the way the morning sunlight falls into my living room, watching and listening to my two-year-old daughter play.

What part does colour play in that process?  
It has a big influence on my mood. I really enjoy the way different colours interact with each other.

What music have you been listening to recently?  
Moby, The Velvet Underground, Patti Smith, Stevie Wonder, Mariah Carey MTV unplugged.

What was your biggest loss?  
The freedom to just enjoy time.

What is your ultimate destination?  
A place to read, create and watch the rhythm of nature outside, with Léa and Jelle by my side.

Nana Kikuchi  
Office Manager, Japan

Describe yourself in three words.  
My, own, speed.

Where are you now?  
In my cozy room.

Tell us something about you and SUSAN BIJL.  
As I was walking down the street in Kyoto, a family crossed over and smiled at me. Suddenly, they pointed to my bag and shouted, 'SUSAN BIJL! We are from Rotterdam!' It was just like a five-second moment.

What ecological measures would you take if you ruled the world?  
Create harmony between wild beauties and artificial beings.

How do you brighten up your existence?  
The love of everything around me, Arigato.

What part does colour play in that process?  
Looking at cherry blossoms and the saturated pale-blue sky, and following a tiny little petal falling onto my sparkling rosé wine.

What music have you been listening to recently?  
The soundtrack of the anime *Memories by Katsuhiko Otomo*.

What was your biggest loss?  
My dog, Ubu chan.

What is your ultimate destination?  
A happy and calm death.

Naoya Shorin  
Sales Employee, Japan

Describe yourself in three words.  
Blue, spices and overseas. Blue is my colour. Spices have unlimited potential. Overseas is far away, but the existence was always close to my life.

Where are you now?  
Oftentimes around Tokyo, Japan, and sometimes overseas, mainly in Asian countries.

Tell us something about you and SUSAN BIJL.  
I'm one of the new big fans of SUSAN BIJL! It was in the spring in 2023 that I first met the SUSAN BIJL team at a pop event in Hiroppa, a park located in Hasami, Nagasaki Prefecture. The length of time doesn't matter when it comes to being fascinated by something.

What ecological measures would you take if you ruled the world?  
True sustainability is not found in nature, but in our mindset. I want to create a world without too much competition.

How do you brighten up your existence?  
By being charming, no matter how tough things get.

What part does colour play in that process?  
For me, confidence is essential to being charming, and colours embody that confidence. But on the other hand, the day I make a mistake with my colour choice is the day I lose a little bit of confidence.

What music have you been listening to recently?  
Hikaru Utada – her music has been with me constantly since 1998.

What was your biggest loss?  
Sadly, my cat made a snap decision to live with my ex-wife.

What is your ultimate destination?  
To run a small curry shop in the place where I want to spend the rest of my life.





Loes at home in her bedroom, Rotterdam, 2024

Loes Luca  
5 August 2024

Loes Luca has been a prominent figure in the Netherlands for years as an actress, singer and comedian. With her energetic, quick-witted style, she has been involved in countless theatre and television productions, and in films.

Describe yourself in three words.  
Venturous, optimistic, wanderlust.

Where are you now?  
Italy.

Tell us something about you and SUSAN BIJL.  
I have used her bags on various TV recordings, and she has noticed that.

What ecological measures would you take if you ruled the world?  
Ban plastic as much as possible, make air travel more expensive and trains cheaper.

How do you brighten up your existence?  
By doing my best and being kind to others.

What part does colour play in that process?  
I lead a colourful existence.

What music have you been listening to recently?  
Goran Bregović.

What was your biggest loss?  
My beloved husband.

What is your ultimate destination?  
Crooswijk Cemetery, but until then, more work and travel.





Limited edition Furoshiki, a traditional Japanese wrapping cloth, 2023



Maas at school with The New Backpack, Fuzz & Fluo Pink, 2024





nai010 publishers

### Inside The New Shopping Bag

SUSAN BIJL's *The New Shopping Bag* has been a street icon for 25 years. What began as a clever response to the plastic problem has evolved into a globally beloved design staple. The distinctive two-coloured bag – marked by the diagonal flash – originated in Rotterdam and has since become an international phenomenon.

*Inside The New Shopping Bag* tells the story of SUSAN BIJL through the voices of its inspiring community. Bursting with colour, it is a tribute to both the timelessness of the bag and the diverse people who carry it, from Rotterdam to Kyoto.