

Warehouse Market

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T-shirt with Warehouse Market logo (Amsterdam edition) by *bring your own book*. Photo: Jordi de Vetten



Photo: Jordi de Vetten

A quick search of the etymology of “warehouse” breaks down the word into two parts. “Ware,” referring to the goods accumulating and being stored in the “house,” the building or space hosting them. The warehouse is a space traditionally off limits to laymen, where only authorized personnel are permitted. In addition to being a space where things accumulate, it is also a tool of regulation, where goods are certified as adhering to quality standards. At some point, the German equivalent of the term, *warenhaus*, was taken up as an American colloquial expression meaning “a large impersonal institution,” highlighting the association of the warehouse with the bureaucratic proceedings of moving goods around. Items lay in wait, subject to the ebbs and flows of tariffs and taxes that are leveraged as weapons in increasingly unhinged geopolitical maneuvers. “To warehouse,” the verb, can also refer to the act of something (or someone) being confined in conditions “suggestive of a warehouse.” It is in the warehouse, in our age of rampant e-commerce, where unnamed and under-compensated workers fulfill orders, themselves soon to be outpaced by machines.

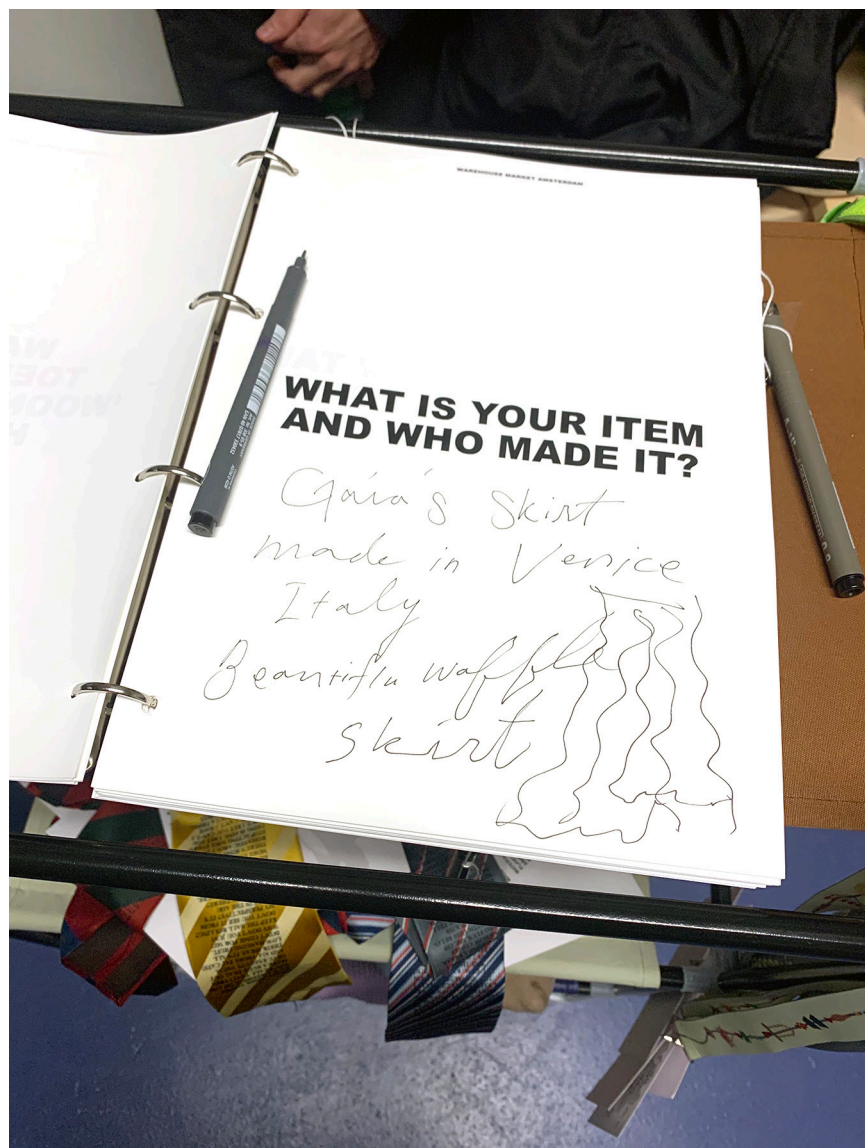
But whereas previously the warehouse mostly referred physically or conceptually to an area confined between two points, where things would temporarily live before being moved to further destinations, the warehouse has grown to include the possibility of transaction taking place directly on site as a “store within a storage space.” This development suggests a distinct moment when the warehouse opened up, bringing both its processes and contents into public view. In recent times, fashion brands have thrown open their doors with the seasonal “Warehouse Sale,” undoubtedly seeking to make an extra

buck on their surpluses, and to gain purchase on the tantalizing assumption that goods previously inaccessible, perhaps one-off, possibly long-forgotten, are now available at a convenient discount. The Warehouse Sale, exudes a certain exclusivity, luring the customer in with the tacit invitation to get intimate with the logistical processes of production and distribution, and perhaps to get closer to the elusive origins of the objects that they wear.



With its interest in exposing the seams of commercial fashion that are usually hidden behind slick facades, it is fitting that the industrious team behind Warehouse turns to this particular shifting node of the supply chain to characterize their amorphous inquiry. Through object-making, publishing, and events, Warehouse invites us to peek behind the scenes into processes of production, assembly, accumulation and distribution—with an emphasis on the relationships forged between them. You may know them for hosting events that collapse the act of production and consumption by inviting participants to construct their own modular clothes together (*JOIN Collective Clothes* by Anouk Beckers), or talks that prompt reflections on the subversive potential of fashion as a mode of highlighting overlooked histories (fashion scholars Tanveer Ahmed and T'ai Smith), dress and fashion performances that are portals into personal narratives (Youngeun Sohn and Philipp Schueller), textured print works that both comment and intervene on production cycles (*Our Rags Magazine* by Elisa van Joolen together with Aimée Zito Lema—a periodical about and printed on paper made from used textile), or regular offerings of various seductive wearables (*SKHSS* by Mika Perlmutter and Lejla Vala Verheus or *Avoidstreet* by Eduardo León). While Warehouse is certainly multivalent and

multifaceted, one of the things they are not is a warehouse in the traditional sense: Rather than the capacious, impenetrable architecture mostly relegated to the urban periphery, their brick and mortar space in Amsterdam is a tiny storefront in the center of town. And, rather than a place where storage, stockpiling, and regulation occurs concealed from view, objects along with their makers, constantly cycle through openly in dialogue with the interlocutors, consumers, wearers on the other side. In this, they confound the confines of the warehouse.



Guestbook. Photo Jordi de Vetten

Last year Warehouse embarked on a new initiative called “Warehouse Market,” a three day local affair (this first edition took place in Amsterdam and was co-organized with *bring your own book*), in which anyone from that particular place, was invited to submit “self-made garments and fashion—or textile related publications.” Upon submission, a series of questions regarding the item’s provenance were requested including the material from which they were constructed, and some less expected ones, such as the number of hours it took to make, whether it was a collaboration, and between whom? The responses to these, written on labels and hung from each item, formed the organizing principle of the market display. Defying typical logics of categorization, objects whose makers share an affinity for synthetics, for instance, might occupy the same shelf, or pieces that required a similar number of hours to make could be found dangling from one rack. These categorizations would then be immediately upended when the display would change the next day to spotlight a different shared characteristic.

By making an invitation that is open to anyone, with no selection process, Warehouse refuses fashion’s market logic, whereby categorizations and

hierarchies of value or merit dictate who participates and what gets sold and circulated. This, Warehouse asserts, is an inherently commercial and Western fashion model that it wishes to forgo. In the Warehouse Market, all manner of category is up for reinvention and interpretation. All makers are welcome, and they decide themselves what it means to “wear,” when is “publication,” and which “fashion.”



And why “market”? Perhaps we should consider Warehouse’s invocation of the market in the lineage of the informal market, by definition a site of exchange that skirts official channels and is removed from the oversight by authorities. Informal markets are enabled by personal networks and technological innovations that allow for direct communication and the quick movement of information. Saskia Sassen locates informal markets as occupying a “systemic edge,” in that they remain illegible to the dominant systems of measurement and representation and are therefore useful tools in identifying areas of expulsion, as well as strategies for subversion. Helge Mooshammer, a researcher, likens informal markets to Michel Foucault’s “heterotopias,” in that they both provide shelter for the excluded as well as harbor all kinds of non-conformity. Informal markets, he asserts, are therefore, “places of both resistance and commodification.”¹ Beyond simply comprising that which happens outside of state regulation, they are defined by that which does not allow for easy access or appropriation by capitalist markets. Informal markets can question categories of exclusion. Warehouse Market, insistently itinerant and informal, embodies this critique and creates space for illegible futures. Purveyors at the Warehouse Market offer confounding objects—to

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Helge Mooshammer, “Other Markets: Sites and Processes of Economic Pressure,” *Informal Market Worlds*, Reader (NAI010 Publishers: Rotterdam, 2015).

be read, worn, or otherwise. The display, organized by thematic revealed by the questionnaire, is deliberately idiosyncratic. After paying a one-time participation fee, sales go directly to the makers, who may participate even if they are not able to be present by way of codes used for virtual payments. The market is also a place where networks of trust are forged and reinforced.



In New York, warehouses are elusive forms, with newer ones relegated to the outer-boroughs—often contested sites incentivized by tax breaks given to corporations by governments who hope to shift responsibility for remediating those disenfranchised areas to the private sector. Or else these architectures have long-since been repurposed beyond recognition as luxury real-estate. Indeed to have a “warehouse market” may be somewhat tongue in cheek, since the physical form of the market, where makers and customers are brought into direct contact with one another through transaction, renders the liminal space of the warehouse where goods are stored redundant. In effect, you could say that the market negates the warehouse. Thus to have Warehouse Market’s second edition, this time a collaboration between Warehouse, Bungee Space, and Lunch-Hour, hosted in the actual active warehouse of Sheerly Touch-Ya, a cavernous hall filled with scintillating imported stockings in Glendale, Queens, New York, is both anachronistic and hopeful. Sheerly Touch-Ya was founded by 1993 by James Chang and in recent years the company’s central warehouse has grown to include a fabrication studio co-founded by his daughter Serena Chang, Shisanwu, as well as several artist studios, under its roof. Thus an ethos of multifunctionality, repurposing, and intergenerational collaboration are already embedded within this space.

Warehouse Market's second edition insists that the warehouse not merely recede into oblivion, subsumed as a real estate trend or marketing tool. Bringing the Warehouse Market project to these premises offers a different spatial consideration. The informal activities of the market, historically occurring on the margins, are brought to the formal space of the warehouse, historically private or hidden from public view. What is fostered is both exchange and camaraderie. Camaraderie, from the French *camarade*, meaning mutual trust and friendship among people who spend a lot of time together, has its roots in the Latin *camera*, meaning chamber or room. Hence to spend time together in the warehouse is to suffuse it with a new purpose, sharing space rather than remaining siloed and thereby piercing the fashion system's historic gatekeeping by making its processes and spaces open to all.



Photo: Jordi de Verten



Warehouse FOCUS provides in-depth reflection on Warehouse projects through the lense of guest authors.

Warehouse Market is a concept by Warehouse that takes place in collaboration with an external partner in various international contexts. This text is written in spring 2025, right before the 2nd edition.

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Ming Lin stewards an archive of found fast fashion poems and, since 2020, has operated the fictional office entity Canal Street Research Association (CSRA), co-founded in a vacant storefront on Canal Street—New York's counterfeit epicenter. She can currently be found in Green-Wood Cemetery as Artist-in-Residence studying strategies of mimicry among in the community of feral parrots living there.