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PATCH UP

The skirts that helped heal a nation

*Vlecht in uw rok het patroon van uw leven.
Vrouwen en meisjes van dorp en van stad.
Lichtend symbool van het vrouwelijk streven.
Draagt het verheugd, als de bloem draagt haar blad.*

*Eenheid in veelheid van lijnen en kleuren.
Vormt met uw rok het saamhorig verband.
In het geheel van historisch gebeuren.
Tooit het ontwerp met Uw hart en Uw hand.*

*Stempelt Uw rok met het merk Uwer dagen.
Voert dat wat was en wat is in Uw Vaan.
Heden-Verleden, blijmoedig gedragen.
Siere Uw kleed, uw gezin, Uw bestaan.*

*Work into your skirt the pattern of your life.
Women and girls from village and town.
Shining symbol of women's ambition.
Wear it with happiness, like a flower carries its petals.*

*Unity in many lines and colours.
Create with your skirt the community of
togetherness.
In the totality of historical events.
Show the design with your heart and your hand.*

*Stamp your skirt with the mark of your days.
Carry what was and what will be on your pennant.
Present and past, carried with joy.
Decorate your dress, your family, your life.*

A feestrok, or 'celebration skirt', is a patchwork skirt that was specially made to celebrate the liberation of the Netherlands from German occupation at the end of World War Two. This particular type of skirt is also known as a bevrijdingsrok ('liberation skirt'), levensrok ('life skirt') or oranjerok ('orange skirt').

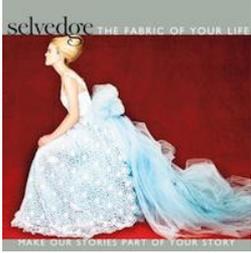
This colourful and special kind of garment has its origins in 1943, when Mrs Adrienne Minette (Mies) Boissevain-Van Lennep (1896-1965), a member of the Dutch resistance, was imprisoned by the Germans. Eventually two of her three sons were executed by the Germans, while her husband died in a concentration camp. She was initially held in a prison in Amsterdam and was then sent to Vught (located in the Netherlands) and later to Ravensbrück (in Germany) concentration camps. While in prison, Mies Boissevain-Van Lennep was secretly sent a scarf (lappendasje) made up of small pieces of cloth taken from the clothing of family and friends. This would later inspire her to develop the idea of the patchwork feestrok.

Following the end of the war in 1945, she became a member of a women's committee that decided to create a garment that represented 'unity in diversity' (eenheid in veelheid); 'new from old' (nieuw uit oud); 'building from the broken' (opbouw uit afbraak) and 'one garment makes unity' (eendracht maakt eendracht). The skirt, or feestrok, was intended to reflect the diversity, unity and rebuilding of the Netherlands after the war.

In 1947 the national feestrok project was set in motion, in conjunction with the Internationaal Informatiecentrum en Archief voor de Vrouwenbeweging, IIAV (also known as the International Information Centre and Archives for the Women's Movement). Based on surviving records, it appears that about 4,000 skirts were eventually made and registered. But it is likely that far more were actually made and worn. Only a few of the registered skirts have survived to the present day, and most are in various public and private collections.

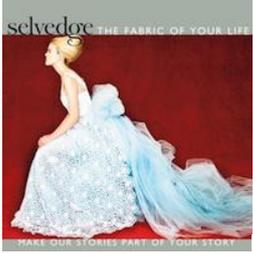
In order for a skirt to be officially accepted and registered, it had to be made up of pieces of colourful material, deliberately sewn onto an old skirt, whereby the old skirt vanished and a colourful 'new' garment was created. At the front of the skirt, near the hem, there had to be at least one triangle in which '5 mei 1945' (the 5th May 1945; a public holiday called 'Liberation Day' in The Netherlands) was embroidered. Some skirts also included other dates, relating to family or national events during the war.

Each skirt was registered and the name, address and date of birth of the maker noted, both in a national archive and on individual cards. A genuine feestrok has an ink stamp on it giving the name of the project and the skirt's registration number. The ink stamp, with its unique number, was often also embroidered. The example in the Textile Research Centre's collection, for example, was registered to Mrs S. M. Slavekooorde, Dorp 235A, Kesteren ▶



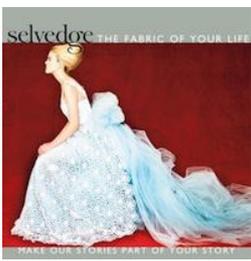
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(northwest of Nijmegen). The skirt has the registration number 1964 embroidered onto it. Once a skirt was accepted and registered it could be worn on the 5th of May anniversaries (bevrijdingsfeest), Koninginnedag (Queen's Day) and other important Dutch national holidays.

A special song was also written in order to emphasise the symbolic meaning of the skirts. During Queen Wilhelmina's 50th and last jubilee on the 31st of August 1948, the queen was serenaded with this song by over 1000 women, all of whom were wearing their own feestrok.

A few days later, on the 2nd of September 1948,
a special exhibition was opened called *De
Nederlandse Vrouw 1898-1948* at
the

Houtrusthallen in The Hague. A special sticker associated with this exhibition can be seen on Mrs S. M. Slavekoorde's registration card. It shows the figure of a woman on a pedestal. Her form and clothing is made up of the Dutch flag, while her arms are orange pennants, which symbolise the Dutch royal family.

This exhibition, and in many ways the feestrok alongside it, is often regarded as the start of the 'modern' feminist movement in the Netherlands and an official acknowledgement of the many important and diverse roles women have played throughout the early parts of the 20th century and the Second World War. ...

Dr. Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood

www.trc-leiden.nl www.mode-muze.nl/themas/de-bevrijdingsrok-nationale-feestrok

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