

PROJECTS

Bernhard Willhelm for MISERICORDIA

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Text Brigitte Winkler Photo Kira Bunse

The long white ears dangle cheekily around the little brown faces. On the red and white jackets cats are doing handstands. A happy swarm of children are showing their enthusiasm for the new uniforms. In deepest Peru, in Ventanilla, north of Lima. The children don’t know that a famous German designer has designed them.

“In the back of beyond”, says Bernhard Willhelm. “It’s really interesting to know that our things are being worn in the back of beyond.” He won’t allow praise for his good deed: “We’re always doing projects. That’s the first time I’ve done something for children.”

For children in the Misericordia orphanage. In 1920 Marija Petkovic, who lived from 1892 to 1966, founded the congregation of the Sisters of Mercy. She dedicated her life to orphans and the poor in Croatia and Latin America. Today the order has around 450 sisters on three Continents and in 12 countries. In 2003 Marija Petkovic was beatified by Pope John Paul II.

Appalled by the poverty on their journey through the little Peruvian village, Mathieu Reumaux and Aurelyen Conty have brought a “sportswear humanitarian” project into being. With the picture of the homemade school uniforms in their heads, they returned to Paris and founded the fashion

label called Misericordia. The idea behind it: what is being produced in the dressmaker’s workshops in the village out of 100 % Peruvian materials should be sold throughout the world, the proceeds though benefiting the poor there. Clothing that creates jobs and training places that get children off the street and give orphans a home.

In only their first season, the label was able to finance a brand new workshop. Now, after two years, there is very good pay for the employees and health insurance.

And how did Bernhard Willhelm get involved? “We got to know one another at Premium in Berlin. Mathieu and Aurelyen approached me and I liked the idea”, remembers the designer. They were looking for famous names and Willhelm accepted straightaway. Little tracksuits, T-shirts and a dress for the teachers with matching headgear were produced and everything really in the Bernhard Willhelm style.

No doubt that these little clothes will become a cult. As happened with the blue and white jackets with the clear Misericordia logo. The buyers in the Parisian fashion shop Colette or in Taurus und Twins in Cologne liked them straight off. Why should that be any different with the children’s clothes?



