

Curriculum vitae

Personal information

Willems Catherine, ° November 6, 1971, Belgium, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8565-764X>
www.futurefootwearfoundation.com

Education

- 2009-2015 PhD in Visual Arts, Ghent University (BE) (15.09.2015) *The birth of feet, the re-birth of footwear. Design, Anthropology, Biomechanics* (supervisors: D. De Clercq, K. D’Août, G. Stassijns, D. Van Gogh; jury: T. Ingold, R. Pinxten, K. Verhaert, P. Roosen)
- 1998 Certificate in design, modelling and pattern making of footwear - Ars Sutoria Milano (Italy)
- 1995 Professional degree in shoe making and repairing - Brucemo Brussels (Belgium)
- 1994-1995 Specialized master in Cultural Studies - Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (Spain)
- 1990-1994 Master in Comparative Cultural Studies - Ghent University (Belgium)

Current positions

- 2020-present PI (50%) 3D2WALK, Industrial Research Fund, Ghent University (BE)
- 2019-present Tenured Lecturer (50%), Department of Design, KASK School of Arts & Conservatorium, HOGENT, University of Applied Sciences and Arts (BE)
- 2017-present Founding director of Future Footwear Foundation, externally funded at HOGENT
- 2016-2020 Honorary Lecturer, University of Liverpool (UK)

Previous positions

- 2016-2019 PI research project ‘Future Footwear 2.0’ (70%), Department of Design, KASK HOGENT
- 2016-2017 Consultant for Soul of Africa, London (UK), high quality barefoot shoes, Addis Ababa (E)
- 2009-2015 PhD student at HOGENT, University of Antwerp, and University of Liverpool, UK
- 2013 Visiting doctoral researcher Aberdeen, Dept. Social Anthropology, T. Ingold (03/04-2013)
- 2003-2019 Part time lecturer, Dept. of Design, KASK HOGENT
- 2005-2009 Founder and designer of a brand of handmade summer footwear collections for children
- 2004-2005 Founding member of the Footwear Department, Fine Arts Academy Sint-Niklaas (BE)
- 1999-2004 Freelance footwear designer for several brands and fashion designers
- 1996-1998 Researcher project ‘Art & Education’, Centre for Intercultural Education, Ghent University

Grants, Fellowships, and awards

- 2022-2028 Advanced Research Grant, (30% position), HOGENT (€212.600)
- 2020-2022 Start TT-project, 3D2WALK, Industrial Research Fund, Ghent University (€235.000)
- 2019-2020 Province of East Flanders, Global Project support ‘Sheltering the Kalahari’, funding for Future Footwear Foundation: construction of community building in Namibia (€7000)
- 2017-present Vliir-UOS Travel grants for students (n=6), promotor: Catherine Willems (€6000)
- 2016-present Vivobarefoot, UK based barefoot company research funding (Yearly: €40.000)
- 2009-2015 PhD Scholarship, HOGENT (PhD in the Arts scholarship) (€380.000) 2016-present Project: Future footwear 2.0., PI Catherine Willems, HOGENT (€320.000)
- 2019-2023 Project: On weaving migrating heritage. PI Catherine Willems, HOGENT (€365.000)
- 1998 Research and artistic internship, Academia Belgica, Rome (IT)
- 1994-1995 Erasmus scholarship. Master in Cultural Studies. Universitat A. Barcelona (E)

Supervision:

- PhD’s**
- 2022-2024 Wanda D’Onofrio, University of Liverpool (UK), ‘Weaving Through Science’. Supervisors: Dr. A. Buchanan (UK), Dr. K. D’Aout (UK), and Dr. C. Willems (BE)
- 2016-2020 Rory Curtis, University of Liverpool (UK) ‘Influence of sole properties on the biomechanics of walking on hard and soft terrains’. Supervisors: Dr. K. D’Août (U. of Liverpool), Dr. C. Willems (KASK), Dr. P. Paoletti (U. of Liverpool).
- 2016-2022 Golnesa Rezanezhad Pishkhani, Ghent University, ‘The relationality of past object in

contemporary everyday life: rug production in Northern Iran'. Supervisor: Dr. A. Kreil

PhD committees

2018-present Member doctoral advisory committee of Marius Janusauskas, PhD student at Ghent University. 'Fashionable and Transgressive: Queer Style Effects on Masculinities in Contemporary Indian Fashion'. Supervisor: Dr. Katrien De Graeve (Ghent U.).

Masters

2015-present Scientific supervision of master theses different departments, KASK: 15 students
2005-present Artistic supervision of master student projects, Dept. of Design, KASK: 80 students

Bachelors

Artistic supervision of student projects, Dept. of Design, KASK: 128 students

Teaching activities

2019-present On walking tracks. Master seminar, KASK HOGENT
2019-present Social Design: walking, in BA Fashion Design, KASK HOGENT
2018-present Social Design: theory, in BA Autonomous Design, KASK HOGENT
2009-present Footwear Design: A practice-based course. In BA Design Dept, KASK HOGENT
2020-present Guest lecturer in Master of Arts in Development Studies - University of Namibia (NA)
2015-present Guest lecturer in MA Footwear Design. London College of Fashion LCF (UK)

Organization of Scientific Meetings (selection)

08/02/2020 Organizer Implementation Meeting, COST, European Cooperation in Science and Technology Action CA181136 – European Forum for Advanced Practices. Ghent, BE
17/06/2017 Organizer International scientific Conference on Future Footwear, Ghent, BE
17/11/2014 Member scientific committee Global Fashion Conference, HOGENT, Ghent

Institutional responsibilities (selection)

2019-present Member Research Council KASK HOGENT & Workgroup: mission artistic research
2015-2019 Member representative for KASK HOGENT in VLIR-UOS selection commission
2011-2017 Member training programme commission visual arts, KASK HOGENT

Reviewing activities (selection)

2019 External examiner master students, KU Leuven, Faculty Architecture. 2017-2019
Referee for MDPI journal *Societies* and for *Current Anthropology*.

Membership of scientific societies

2019-present Belgian representative COST, CA181136, European Forum for Advanced Practices

Major Research and Artistic Collaborations (selection)

2019-2024 Initiator of bilateral agreement HOGENT with Master of Arts in Development Studies, University of Namibia (UNAM) for staff and student exchange
2017 FLAM3D and Materialise: www.flam3d.org/family-of-the-future
2016-2018 Kickstarter 'The Original Sandal': decentralized production unit in Namibia with the Ju'Hoansi to re-create their traditional sandal for a city environment.
2016-present Dr. K. D'Août, Univ. of Liverpool. Data gathering and protection (4 joint publications, and common talks at various international events)
2015-present Initiator of ERASMUS with MA footwear design London College of Fashion (UK), Fashion design KASK HOGENT, (1 joint exhibition, Arnhem, 2018)
2005-2010 Artistic and scientific collaboration with Kolhapuri Artisans of Toehold, India (2 joint exhibitions, Design Museum Gent 2016 and C-Mine Genk 2014)

Career breaks

1998-2005 I worked in the creative design industry to refine and develop my artistic skills.
2000 & 2001 I took two five-month pregnancy leaves for my daughters Helena and Marta.

Appendix: All current grants and on-going grant applications of the PI (Funding ID)

Current grants (Please indicate "No funding" when applicable):

<i>Project Title</i>	<i>Funding source</i>	<i>Amount (Euros)</i>	<i>Period</i>	<i>Role of the PI</i>	<i>Relation to current ERC proposal</i>
Continuation of research lines, People, Planet, Feet	HOGENT School of Arts, KASK	212.600	02/2022-02/2028	Main researcher	The research lines People, Planet, Feet are further elaborated, including 3D and new technology options First expo follows at VUB, Brussels, 12/22, at Pilar, technology & art
3D2WALK	IOF Industrial research fund, Association University Ghent	235.000	02/2020-01/2022	Scientific and design coordination	Applied 3D footwear Design. Valorization study: 'How to 3D print footwear that maintains benefits but has a lower impact on body and environment in a closed loop economy'. No overlap with more fundamental ERC focus.
FFF	Vivobarefoot, UK	40.000 yearly	2016-ongoing	Develop mission Coordinate FFF Allocate funding	Distribute funding to mission related activities. Mainly to facilitate cobblers: tools, equipment, building, and workspace.
COST Action CA18136 – European Forum for Advanced Practices.	Horizon 2020	/	Start date: April 2019	Belgian representative, workgroup implementation	Research network with focus on artistic and practice based research. ERC proposal is vision related.

Project 'Future Footwear 2.0'	HOGENT	320.000	2016-present	Promotor: Catherine Willems	The project compared different footwear production systems, from small scaled to mass production and informs the 3D2WALK validation study.
Project 'On Migrating Heritage. The impact of forced displacement on creative processes'	HOGENT	365.000	2019-2023	Promotor: Catherine Willems Researcher: Sofie Verclyte	The project uses the same methodology, starting from the skilled practice of embroidery. No overlap between the project, but a fertile win-win situation.

On-going and submitted grant applications: None

Early achievements track-record Career profile

After finishing my second masters in 1995, I started researching as an anthropologist. A few years later I felt the urge to focus more on my artistic and crafts capacities, studying shoe design in Milan (1998) and entering the professional field as a shoe designer for international fashion designers, later creating my own brand. This experience was rewarding, but didn't satisfy my passion for research and critical reflection on design practices. I then found the perfect combination of research and design practice in 2009; re-entering academia through a combination of teaching and PhD and postdoc research, living and working with cobbler communities in India (Kolhapuri), Finland (Sami), Namibia (Jul'hoan San), the USA (Diné Navajo), and working on urban cases in Belgium and UK.

My academic research and artistic activities merged in 2017 when I founded Future Footwear Foundation (FFF) at KASK HOGENT, which I currently lead. FFF is mainly externally funded and works at international level with different cobbler communities, organizations, artistic and academic institutions. FFF aims to stimulate progress in the understanding of human locomotion and sustainable footwear for body and environment by studying and working with indigenous cobblers. The project I propose here reflects my rather unique combination of expertise as an anthropologist, a shoemaker/designer, knowledgeable in biomechanical studies and with more than a decade of experience working and researching with cobblers, however this proposal focuses on the ontological level of the research.

Funding track record

I have received over €1.700.000 in funding, both for fundamental and applied research as PI or supervisor, as for more practical funding for the communities. The sources are both competitive grants from public institutions as well as private international and local funders.

Scientific and artistic networks

My international networks stem from my various global work contexts, both academic, artistic and professional. I am active within international academic organizations (e.g. as Belgian representative in a COST Action) and developed close working relations with world class design schools in London (London College of Fashion), New York (Parsons), Den Haag (Royal Academy of Arts). I personally initiated institutional collaborations with the University of Namibia, London College of Fashion and the University of Liverpool. My regular working relations with globally prominent scholars on the communities I intend to study, allowed me to bring together these academics with local crafts persons in an International Advisory Board. Besides academia, I have direct contact with high level executives of various multinational companies involved in R&D on sustainable 3D printing: BASF (Heidelberg, Barcelona) and a working relation with world leading 3D companies Materialise (Leuven) and Sculpteo (Paris).

Leadership and supervision

I am the founding director of Future Footwear Foundation, coordinating all financial, research, artistic, and personnel issues, currently managing eight employees/researchers. As a supervisor, I have guided one PhD to a successful defense and am currently supervising 2 PhD students. Furthermore, I take on responsibilities in high level research policy of the KASK HOGENT as member of the research board and recently one of five selected members of a working group developing the overall research vision of KASK HOGENT.

Evidence of scientific and artistic recognition

I have been a frequent keynote speaker and invited speaker at academic conferences (e.g., Global Fashion Conference, Universidad Complutense, Madrid; Wardrobe Conference Copenhagen Business School; Congress of the Portuguese Anthropological Association; Footwear and Wearable Tech Symposium, London) at summer schools (e.g., London College of Fashion) and workshops (e.g. Central Leather Research Institute Chennai, IN, Manchester Metropolitan University, UK). I also submit papers to highly competitive international conferences (e.g., American Association of Physical Anthropologists, Calgary, CA). Besides academia, I am regularly invited as a (main) speaker at international professional conferences (GDS International Shoe Fair Düsseldorf) and events for a wider audience (e.g., Whataboutery @ State of Fashion, Arnhem NL, Fashion as Activism at Antwerp Responsible Fashion Series).

My artistic and research work has been shown at five international exhibitions (e.g., Fashion India Spectacular Capitalism, Oslo S; State of Fashion, Arnhem NL; Why the world needs design anthropologists, Lisbon P; 7th Design Triennial –Conflict and Design, Genk BE). I am co-curating an exhibit-performance event, at VUB Brussels in Oct-Nov 2022 (and later USA), bringing artists from Navajo Nation and Belgium together.

Publications

I have published a total of ten peer-reviewed articles (three as single author, seven as first author), three conference papers/proceedings from prestigious conferences, and one artistic edited volume as editor and contributor. Two articles recently got published one in *Scientific Reports* (<https://rdcu.be/cx5p7>), [one in DAMN Magazine^{o79}](#), and one article is submitted to *Design Studies*. My publications cover a wide range of journals and edited volumes linked to the disciplines I work in: biomechanics, design and design anthropology.

Five milestone publications

1. Willems, C. (2013). 100% bag tanned: action research generating new insights on design processes. *Critical Arts: South-North Cultural and Media Studies*, 27(5), Special Issue: Revisiting the ethnographic turn in contemporary art, 474-489. Citations: 8 (Google Scholar); WoS IF 2019: 0.204. [This article discusses two examples of my experimentation with design and anthropology using action research as a method, combining observations and engagement through making. I describe the use of action research on handmade footwear in two communities in India, to better understand the design process in its context.]
2. Willems, C. (2015). Nuvttohat, perfect for feet. Shoe design as cultural heritage, *Volkskunde*, p. 371-382. WoS A&H Index. [Saami reindeer boots, nuvttohat, are part of traditional cultural expressions, seen from the point of the Saami as indigenous people. I raise questions on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and the protection of traditional cultural expressions, based on my fieldwork data.]
3. Willems, C. Stassijns, G., Cornelis, W., and D’Aout, K. (2016). Biomechanical implications of walking with indigenous footwear. *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, 162(4), 782-793. Citations: 15 (Google Scholar); WoS IF: 2.414. 2019 Journal Citation Reports: 14/91 (Anthropology). [This study investigates biomechanical implications of walking with indigenous Kolhapuri footwear compared to barefoot walking among a population of South Indians. Walking in Kolhapuri resembles barefoot gait and might be considered ‘minimal’. Primary author, based on my fieldwork data.]
4. Willems, C. (2018). Feet and how to shoe them. In: Willems, C. and Roelandt, E. (Eds.), *Do you want your feet back? Barefoot cobblers* (pp. 26-56). Ghent: APE. [The chapter gives an overview of my long-lasting work with cobblers. I co-edited the book, with chapters written by experts in the field of biomechanics and anthropology.]
5. Willems, C. Savage, R., Curtis, R. and D’Aout, K., (2020). Plantar pressures in three types of indigenous footwear, minimal shoes, and Western shoes, compared to barefoot walking. *Footwear Science*, Published online: 13/10/2020. 1-17. [This study assesses whether indigenous footwear can be considered ‘minimal’ by analyzing spatial and temporal aspects of plantar pressure distribution. In combination with previous research on the Kolhapuri footwear, we conclude that the indigenous footwear and commercial minimal shoes, can all be considered ‘minimal footwear’, but with some differences to barefoot walking.]

Evidence of impact of publications, designs and exhibitions

My academic work has gained international visibility and is appreciated by eminent scholars. I was recently among eight authors invited by top-tier journal *Current Anthropology* to write a comment on an article on Tarahumara running (North-Mexico) by Daniel Lieberman, world-renowned biomechanics researcher. My comments were positively received in the ‘Reply to comments’. My academic and artistic work was featured in a UK online short documentary ‘Shoespiracy’ (2019) and a BBC podcast ‘The heel and the Sneaker’ (2020). My research and designs get regular attention in (inter)national magazines and newspapers. My work is featured in *Footwear Design* (2012) by A. Choklat. Art curator Glenn Adamson dedicates a chapter to my work in *Fewer, Better Things* (2018 I am one of the inventors under research by the ‘Politics of Patents’ project (ERC Consolidator grant) on patents and skills. Most meaningful and rewarding are my engagements with the international cobbler groups, and the difference my work has made to local communities. This sense of meaning—and pride—is beautifully summarized in the following quote:

“Maybe for you people from overseas, our footwear looks unique. For us it is what our elders, our ancestors were making. Today, for us, now that we have access to skins again, it seems we have got something back that we thought was in the past and lost.” (from IU !Kunta, a San cobbler)