



museum of arts and design

MUSEUM OF ARTS AND DESIGN TO PRESENT FIRST MAJOR GLOBAL SURVEY OF THE PHENOMENON OF GARMENTING

Garmenting: Costume as Contemporary Art Opens March 12, 2022



Mary Sibande, *The Domba Dance*, 2019. Courtesy the artist and Kavi Gupta, Chicago. Photo: John Lusic.

NEW YORK, NY (January 5, 2022) – The Museum of Arts and Design (MAD) will present *Garmenting: Costume as Contemporary Art*, the first global survey exhibition dedicated to the use of clothing as a medium of visual art. On view March 12 to August 14, 2022, the exhibition examines work by thirty-five international contemporary artists, from established names to emerging voices, several of whom will be exhibiting for the first time in the United States. By either making or altering clothing for expressive purposes, these artists create garments, sculpture, installation, and performance art that transforms dress into a critical tool for exploring issues of subjectivity, identity, and difference.

Garmenting as an artistic strategy emerged during the 1960s and 1970s. Its rise is linked to performance art, as garments used in installations often double as costumes in live and video-based performances. The practice came to increased prominence during the 1990s, its flourishing paralleling the emerging effects of globalization. With its emphasis on craft and the unique object, garmenting has been adopted globally by artists seeking ways to respond

to the twenty-first-century blurring of socioeconomic boundaries, cultures, and identities. While some celebrate the hybridization of cultures resulting from globalization, others protest the fading of regional and ethnic traditions and communities; and many do both simultaneously. No matter their perspective, all these artists' practices were shaped by transnational creative—and commercial—exchange.

The exhibition is guest curated by Alexandra Schwartz, a New York-based art historian, curator, and adjunct professor in the School of Graduate Studies at SUNY | Fashion Institute of Technology. Schwartz remarked, "Despite the current ubiquity of garmenting as a visual arts practice, it has not previously been examined or theorized. This exhibition centers contemporary artists' exploration of dress as a formal trope and critical tool, using the language of fashion to address fundamental aspects of subjectivity, including gender, class, race, and ethnicity."

"*Garmenting* furthers MAD's mission to connect handcraft and design to the global contemporary art world," said Elissa Auther, Deputy Director of Curatorial Affairs and William and Mildred Lasdon Chief Curator. "The artists brought together share objectives of upending tired distinctions between the fine and applied arts, creating work that explores the essential relationship between the body and the garments that adorn it."

The exhibition will comprise garments, sculpture, installation, video, and live performances. Spanning two floors of the Museum, *Garmenting* includes an introduction to the concept of garmenting and its historical antecedents and is organized around five interrelated themes.

FUNCTIONALITY

One of the major issues with which garmenting engages is the traditional divide between the fine and applied arts. Garmenting offers a critique of this division by questioning what makes a garment "functional" (i.e., wearable in everyday life) versus "art" (i.e., for exhibition or performance). This section includes early examples of garmenting such as Franz Erhard Walther's (Germany) interactive *Werksatz (First Work Set)* [1963-69] and *Blue Days* (1996) by Louise Bourgeois (France-USA), and continues with works by Annette Messager (France), Wanda Raimundi-Ortiz (USA), Beverly Semmes (USA), Vivan Sundaram (India), and Nazareth Pacheco (Brazil), among others.

GENDER

Clothing is intimately intertwined with the construction of gender. Traditionally, femininity, and particularly female desirability, has been closely associated with clothing and adornment. Artists in this section, including Zoë Buckman (United Kingdom), Annette Messager (France), and Esmaa Mohamoud (Canada), cast a critical eye on these conventions.

LGBTQ+ identities are also intimately associated with clothing, especially drag. In queer communities, dress has always been deployed in self-fashioning, group formation, protest, and disguise, as in the work of Kent Monkman (Cree-Canada) and Raúl de Nieves (Mexico). Today, societal perceptions of gender seem to be becoming more inclusive overall. Artists have played a key role in effecting these changes. Influenced by feminist and queer theory, many use garmenting to look critically at the construction—and disruption—of gender identities.

ACTIVISM

Artists have long practiced garmenting as an activist gesture, deploying the symbolism inherent in dress—particularly in relation to gender, sexuality, and cultural difference—to help advance a political agenda. For some, the activism is inherent in the making, as for Oliver Herring (Germany), who co-opted knitting's feminine associations to express his feelings as a gay

man. Political expression is tied to performance and protest in works from Jeffrey Gibson (Mississippi Band Choctaw/Cherokee-USA), Sheelasha Rajbhandari (Nepal), Jakkai Siributr (Thailand), and more.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCE

Clothing has always been instrumental to the formation and protection of group identities. Historically, dress was primarily determined by cultural identifiers such as ethnicity, region, religion, and class. Many of these markers have been eroded by industrialization and globalization. For cultures under threat by outside influences, traditional dress can be essential to preserving group identities and histories, as is often the case among Indigenous cultures. By the same token, dress can serve as armor or disguise, shielding individuals and groups from discrimination or violence. Artists in this section, including Nick Cave (USA), Tanis S'eiltin (Tlingit-USA), Mary Sibande (South Africa), and Yinka Shonibare CBE (Nigeria), use the vocabulary of dress to combat threats to, help preserve, or reflect upon racial, ethnic, and cultural identities and difference.

PERFORMANCE

The rise of performance art in the 1960s helped precipitate that of garmenting, and the two practices have always been intimately linked. *Garmenting* includes a live performance series at MAD, and a different artist, including Enoch Cheng (Hong Kong), Jaamil Olawale Kosoko (USA), and A young Yu (Korea), will perform at the Museum each month of the exhibition's run. At all other times, the gallery will feature video footage of past performances by each participating performance artist. While these artists' backgrounds and practices are diverse, they share concerns around how the language of dress affects bodies in motion, often intersecting with gender, cultural difference, and activism discussed throughout the exhibition.

Live performances and activations involving five of the artists whose work is included in *Garmenting* will be presented throughout the run of the exhibition on dates to be announced. In addition, Lexy-Ho Tai (USA), A young Yu, and Enoch Cheng will be leading in-gallery, drop-in workshops for intergenerational audiences.

Enoch Cheng

In a lecture-performance that contemplates the mental health conditions of individuals and society, Cheng explores the relationship between garmenting and personal well-being. Cheng will address the history of how garments have been made, how the various textures of garments contribute to the senses of the wearer, and how the functionality of garments allows or restricts movement. These subjects will be "performed" through the construction and deconstruction of a custom-made garment.

Lexy Ho-Tai

Ho-Tai's wearable art "monsters" will invite audience interaction as they move about the gallery, creating a space to explore the nuances and dualities of being human. The monsters will be accompanied by a live soundscape exclusively created for this performance.

Jaamil Olawale Kosoko

Jaamil Olawale Kosoko is a multi-spirited Nigerian-American poet, curator, and performance artist originally from Detroit. Kosoko's work in performance is rooted in embodied ritual practice, poetics, Black critical studies, and queer theories of the body, including the innovative use of materials, as a means to conjure and craft perpetual modes of freedom, healing, and care when/where/however possible. They will present a new performance work for MAD.

Franz Erhard Walther

From 1963 to 1969, Walther created his *Werksatz (First Work Set)*, a pioneering work of participatory art on view in *Garmenting: Costume as Contemporary Art*. During *Garmenting's* opening weekend, trained facilitators will collaborate with audience members to activate these objects, highlighting the dynamic sculptural qualities of this body of Walther's work. *Werksatz (First Work Set)* has not been activated in New York City in over a decade, making this a must-see event for anyone interested in contemporary art.

A young Yu

Yu will present a choreography contemporizing the Korean shamanic folk dance *salpuri*, which is traditionally centered on rituals that cleanse the spirits of the deceased before joining their ancestors. In this modern take developed by Yu, the dance will explore themes of lineage, land, belonging, and displacement. Dancers Sohye Kim and Pil Jeong will perform live, wearing elaborate reimaginations of traditional Korean ceremonial garments. Beginning in a cocoon-like form, these garments made of Korean silk, embroidery, and ceramic embellishments, will slowly unravel throughout the performance.

CATALOG

The accompanying 136-page catalog, entitled *Garmenting: Costume as Contemporary Art*, will include 35 color plates and essays by Alexandra Schwartz, MAD Deputy Director of Education Lydia Brawner ("Performance and Garmenting"); Rhonda Garelick ("The Sartorial Uncanny"); Karin G. Oen ("Human Qualities and Material Properties: Border-Crossing Costume, Fashion and Garmenting"); and Jonathan Michael Square ("Sophie Possesses Eliza").

ARTISTS IN THE EXHIBITION

Xenobia Bailey (USA, 1955), Raphaël Barontini (France, 1984), Sanford Biggers (USA, 1970), Karina Bisch (France, 1974), Louise Bourgeois (France–USA, 1911–2010), Zoë Buckman (United Kingdom, 1986), Nick Cave (USA, 1959), Enoch Cheng (Hong Kong, 1983), Sylvie Fleury (Switzerland, 1961), Jeffrey Gibson (Mississippi Band Choctaw/Cherokee, 1972), Oliver Herring (Germany, 1964), Lexy Ho-Tai (USA, 1993), Jaamil Olawale Kosoko (USA, 1983), Annette Messager (France, 1943), Esmāa Mohamoud (Canada, 1992), Kent Monkman (Cree/Canada, 1965), Mark Newport (USA, 1964), Raúl de Nieves (Mexico, 1983), Wanda Raimundi Ortiz (USA, 1973), Nazareth Pacheco (Brazil, 1961) Sheelasha Rajbhandari (Nepal, 1988), Hunter Reynolds (US, 1959), Jacolby Satterwhite (USA, 1986), Tanis S'eiltin (Tlingit, 1951), Beverly Semmes (USA, 1958), Devan Shimoyama (USA, 1989), Yinka Shonibare CBE (Nigeria, 1962), Mary Sibande (South Africa, 1982), Jakkai Siributr (Thailand, 1969), Vivan Sundaram (India, 1943), Franz Erhard Walther (Germany, 1939), Saya Woolfalk (Japan, 1979), A young Yu (Korea, 1993), Andrea Zittel (USA, 1965)

CREDITS

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ABOUT THE MUSEUM OF ARTS AND DESIGN

The Museum of Arts and Design (MAD) champions contemporary makers across creative fields and presents the work of artists, designers, and artisans who apply the highest level of ingenuity and skill. Since the Museum's founding in 1956 by philanthropist and visionary Aileen Osborn Webb, MAD has celebrated all facets of making and the creative processes by which materials are transformed, from traditional techniques to cutting-edge technologies. Today, the Museum's curatorial program builds upon a rich history of exhibitions that emphasize a cross-disciplinary approach to art and design, and reveals the workmanship behind the objects and environments that shape our everyday lives. MAD provides an international platform for practitioners who are influencing the direction of cultural production and driving twenty-first-century innovation, and fosters a participatory setting for visitors to have direct encounters with skilled making and compelling works of art and design. For more information, visit madmuseum.org.

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