ADELLE LUTZ

View:Re:View

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Like the optical illusion of a vase that shifts into two confronting profiles and then back again, Adelle Lutz’s art and interventions are based on simple perceptual manipulations that yield unexpected, often unstable readings. Almost all her works, from her performance-generated costume to her sculptural and environmental projects, are based on concepts and materials directly related to the body or dress. In “The Wedding Party,” Lutz dresses furniture and household items with ruffled skirts, chinos, y-fronts, and a lace-hemmed half-slip imbuing anonymous and mundane objects with idiosyncratic character and unexpected humanity. This use of clothing as the expressive form for her ideas necessarily engages her in the discourses of identity, gender, and culture, all issues inextricable to dress; and her designs, no matter their primary genesis, inevitably retain clothing’s allusive narratives of social address.

When Richard Martin included Lutz’s work in his landmark exhibition, “Fashion and Surrealism,” he situated her costumes in a netherworld of fashion and art. Her “Ionic Dress” which was a literal interpretation of a columnar gown conformed to surrealism’s ironic take on classicism, and her brick-patterned “Urban Camouflage” tailleurs suggested an affinity for the surrealist notion of the body as a site of architectural effects and strategies. Like Meret Oppenheim’s “Fur-Lined Teacup,” Lutz’s recent suite of surrealistic chairs sprouting hair is astonishing, even disquieting, but curiously not off-putting. Her silken-tressed chaises are so well groomed that they project luxury, charm, and propriety even as they allude to a fetishized feminine sexuality. In contrast to most surrealist enterprises, her art is notable for its absence of misogyny and dark pathologies. Her affinities have always cleaved to Duchamp rather than Dali, with her sur-reality much more simply and directly achieved than the tortured
imagery and tricky libidinous juxtapositions to which many surrealists fell prey.

Because many of her sources and references are extracted from the obsessively consumerist and cheerfully conformist culture of low- and lower-middle-brow America—wood-grained paneling, plastic flowers, velvet paintings, and aluminum garden furniture have all at some point figured in her designs—there is a danger of assuming an implicit critique in the kitschiness of her imagery. In fact, her work is invariably an affectionate celebration of the oddities she discovers in the everyday. Still, despite her apparent whimsy and good humor, like the Dadaists, Lutz is consistently, if subtly, subversive.

Over the years, she has explored the idea of clothing as a simultaneous mechanism of concealment and revelation. Beginning with the notion of dress as the most superficial construction and representation of identity, Lutz cites the architectural and horticultural iconography of suburbia in designs for an archetypal American family.

Another series penetrates beyond the image projected by our clothes by suggesting the naked body beneath. Basic apparel components of impeccable modesty are embroidered with a naturalistic pattern of body hair. This unnerving disclosure underscores the extent to which clothing succeeds in obscuring any explicit manifestation of our physical and animal nature.

Next, Lutz reveals the miraculous structure of the human body by describing its musculature. Her rendering is illustrational, clinical and observant, but deliberately deprived of the uncannily forensic.

Finally, far from the localized geography of the American suburbs she extends her references to a global range of Eastern and Western costume traditions. Paradoxically, as her exploration expands, her focus becomes more introspective. Glowing elements of skeletal structure and internal organs are isolated and appear ghostlike, emerging and receding on garments of culturally diverse provenance. As she divulges the anonymous components of our bodies and thus our commonality, the obfuscating and prejudicial consequences of dress are exposed. In her adept manipulation of clothing as a medium, Adelle Lutz reveals its awesome communicative power.
WOOD SUIT
Urban Camouflage Clothing, 1986
Costumes for True Stories, directed by David Byrne, 1986
Photograph by Annie Leibowitz
Courtesy Annie Leibowitz

BRICK SUIT
Urban Camouflage Clothing, 1986
Costumes for True Stories, directed by David Byrne, 1986
Photograph by Annie Leibowitz
Courtesy Annie Leibowitz

‘THESE COSTUMES ARE GENERIC, THEY ARE NOT TERRIBLY SUBTLE....’
"THERE ARE NO HIDDEN MEANINGS THE EQUIVALENT OF BEANS ON TOAST"

"I WANT PEOPLE TO GET IT IMMEDIATELY, RECOGNISE THE OUTFIT"
LEFT
FIR COAT
Urban Camouflage Clothing, 1986
Costume for True Stories, directed by David Byrne, 1986
Photograph by Adelle Lutz

ABOVE RIGHT
STUDY FOR A CLASSICAL COLUMN

BELOW RIGHT
BIG AND BEAUTIFUL, STUDY FOR A CURTAIN-KAFTAN
Urban Camouflage Clothing, 1986
Costume for True Stories, directed by David Byrne, 1986
RIGHT
MUSCLE SUIT, 1997
(worn by David Byrne)
Costume for David Byrne’s ‘Feelings’ Tour, 1997
Photograph by Phyllis Galembo

‘...NO THOUGHT WAS MADE TO POSTERITY’

DRESSED OBJECTS, 1998
TOP LEFT: LA MADRE
BELOW LEFT: TIO GUILLERMO
Collaboration with David Byrne
Photograph by David Byrne
"...GIVING A CHARACTER
WHAT IT ASKS FOR AND
NOTHING MORE...UNLESS
IT WANTS CONFUSION"
LEFT
VELVET SPINE, 2001
Photograph by Adelle Lutz

ABOVE LEFT AND RIGHT
CORPORATE ADAM + EVE (ADAM), 2001
Photograph by David Byrne
SELECT EXHIBITIONS

2002 Under/Covered, Färgfabriken, Stockholm, Sweden
Cache-cache camouflage, Musée de Design et d'Arts Appliqués Contemporains, Lausanne, Switzerland

2000 The Wedding Party (with David Byrne), Lipanje Puntin Articontemporanea, Trieste, Italy
Rock Style, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA; Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Cleveland, USA; Barbican Art Gallery, London, UK

1999 Exquisite Corpse, Creative Time, Sales Fifth Avenue, New York, USA
Dressed Objects (with David Byrne) Weinstein Gallery, Minneapolis, USA
1998 Glory! Success! Ecstasy! (with David Byrne) Praterinsel, Munich, Germany

1996 Art, Design and Barbie, World Financial Centre, New York, USA
Red Windows, Barney's, New York, USA

1995 Bloom: Fashion's Spring Gardens, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA
1994 New 42nd St. Art Project, Creative Time, New York, USA
1992 Christmas Installation, Barney's, New York, USA

1990 Out of the Woods, Common Ground, London, UK

SELECT FILMS

1997 Costume design for Lulu on the Bridge, Redeemable Features, directed by Paul Auster.
1995 Production designer, Bono segment, Inner City Blues: The Music of Marvin Gaye documentary directed by Earle Sebastian
1990 Co-directed with Sandy McLeod, Red, Hot and Blue, Its Too Darn Hot video for ABC special seen in 35 countries to benefit AIDS organizations
1989 Costume design for Checking Out, directed by David Leland
1987 Costume design for Making Mr. Right, directed by Susan Seidelman
1986 Costume design for True Stories, directed by David Byrne

SELECT THEATRE/PERFORMANCE

2000 The Hidden Sky, directed by Ben Levit, Prince Music Theatre, Philadelphia, USA
1997 Feelings, David Byrne concert tour Drowning, directed by Alison Summers, HERE Theatre, New York, USA
1996 Romance Language, directed by Alison Summers, Circle in the Square Theatre, New York, USA

1995 Punch and Judy Get Divorced, directed by David Gordon, American Music Theatre Festival, Philadelphia, USA
1989 Green, costume for Michael Stipe, R.E.M. concert tour
1988 Loco Lena & Lenz, directed by Joanne Akalitis, The Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis, USA

1984 Stop Making Sense, Talking Heads concert tour, directed by David Byrne; Stop Making Sense documentary film, Talking Heads concert tour, directed by Jonathan Demme
1984 The Knee Plays, artistic associate with Robert Wilson and David Byrne; The CIVIL WarS, directed by Robert Wilson, Tokyo, Japan

SELECT MUSIC VIDEOS

Talking Heads, Burning Down the House, 1983; This Must Be the Place (Naïve Melody), 1983; Road to Nowhere, 1985; Love for Sale, 1985; all directed by David Byrne

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Judith Clark Costume