



Martin Grant
&
Julia Morison

MATERIAL EVIDENCE
100-headless woman

An artists' project initiated by
City Gallery, Wellington and
Govett-Brewster Art Gallery.



Suspended animation: 10 dresses by Martin Grant & Julia Morison

I

"What's this? From her royal dais, made of fabrics from all centuries, from those worn by Queen Semiramis to those contrived by the genius of Worth or Pingat, Fashion, parting the curtains, suddenly reveals herself to us, metamorphosed, living, bearing the future..."

Stéphane Mallarmé ¹

The collaboration between fashion designer Martin Grant and artist Julia Morison is an eloquent example of the art and fashion dialogue which has been a major theme in the culture of modernity. Not only does Grant and Morison's project take part in a recent surge of interest in the intimate connections that exist between art, fashion, clothing and the body; but their work also dips back into modernist history, confirming Baudelaire's belief that the phenomenon of fashion contains the secret essence of modern experience.²

Baudelaire wrote at a time when the language and circulation of fashion were becoming more intense and complex than ever before. Fashion, capital and the industrialised city became interdependent expressions of each other and provided the context in which the growing bourgeois class endeavoured to define itself. For Baudelaire, fashion perfectly expresses the flawed beauty of 19th century Western culture, suspended

between the prospect of rapid and continual change and a pathological, impassioned longing for an idealised past. The ideals of beauty, elegance and permanence may be sought more fiercely, more anxiously when they are most under threat. According to Baudelaire, modern beauty mingles the melancholic and the fantastical, the look of mourning with the glamour of artifice; and this divided reality, conveyed by the language and imagery of fashion, is both malaise and glory of a fermenting present.



Giovanni Intra
Studded suit 1990

In art, architecture and design, from Baudelaire onwards, there have been two major responses to what he recognised as fashion's nervous energy and its cultivation of artifice. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries dress reform movements in America, Britain and Germany sought to escape the mannerisms of fashion and to base their apparel on ideals of the simple, the direct and the natural. In like manner the Russian constructivist designer

Varvara Stepanova wanted to rescue dress design from bourgeois artiness; she intended her geometrically printed fabric and simple cutting to feel and look appropriately utilitarian for an industrially based state socialism. For reformers such as these, "dress" and "clothing" were in fact more approved terms than "fashion" which connoted the frivolous, the fantastic, the decorative and the ephemeral. As founding fathers of what became rationalist utilitarian modernism, the architects Adolf Loos and Le Corbusier also invested intensively in the demarcation and control of fashion's effects. Whether it was Loos and Le Corbusier declaring the primacy of English men's fashion, with its austere, restrained "non-style", or Walter Gropius at the Bauhaus recommending that the organisation of the modern home be guided by principles of modern male tailoring, the message was clear – from the vantage point of functionalism, fashion and its seductive train of ornament and intoxicating materiality could be monitored and kept at bay.

It is in the counter-tradition to this mainstream modernist functionalism that Baudelaire's true inheritors are to be found. Significant figures in this counter-tradition would include: the futurist Fortunato Depero designing brightly patterned, anarchically theatrical garments; Fernand Léger eulogising on the restless dynamism of fashion visible in the streets or in shop windows; Paul Poiret, developing his Orientalist style influenced by Leon Bakst's exotic designs for Diaghalev's Ballet Russe; and Elsa

Schiaparelli, whose cicada and butterfly buttons and collaborations with Salvador Dali reveal a fashion sensibility based on the bizarre and the metamorphic magic of dreams. Today, when Le Corbusier's efforts to control and censor the language of fashion seem ill-conceived, fashion more than ever appears to operate as an eruption of fantasy in a difficult world.

II

"Fashion should be considered as a symptom of the aspiration of the human mind towards the ideal, which floats above the earthly coarseness and uncleanness accumulated by natural life, as a sublime distortion of nature, or rather as an ever-renewed attempt to reform nature."

Charles Baudelaire ³

"The uncanniness of the museum display, with clothes suspended in a kind of rigor mortis, offered a seductive example of 'hallucinatory euphoria', a glimpse into a dystopia of depthless colours and inhuman brightness, a veritable imitation of life."

Elizabeth Wilson ⁴

It is a symbolist, sensualist and surrealist vein of early modern sensibility which surfaces in the current project of Martin Grant and Julia Morison. Grant and Morison's 10 dresses are distinctly Baudelairean in the way they combine elegance of shape with a finessing of materials and a strong sense of reality "transformed by dream, corrected, remodeled and adorned."⁵ From a romantically historical vocabulary of fashion and dress design the 10 garments construct a language of poetic strangeness. Like 10 different apparitions or emanations of the 100-headless woman, these dresses assume fashion to be a language of reveries and hallucinations. Premised on a world of fluid and shifting identities, fashion becomes expressive of psychic change, of subjectivity *in extremis*, of fears, phobias and nameless desires.

The excessively tall and slender form of these dress/figures and the elaborate nature of their raiment give them the appearance of a frozen scene from a waking-dream; a somnambulist's mystical pageant. They



Beverly Semmes
Red dress 1992
Courtesy Michael and Eileen Cohen Collection
NYC.

recall Gustav Klimt's elongated women immersed in the narcotic haze of shimmering materiality. Each dress, with its uncanny presence and look

of suspended animation, has an almost regal formality, putting one in mind of mythical, oracular personages in states of unapproachable clairvoyance and transformation. In *Rust* with its fine chain mail and *Silver* with its gilded weights and chains, the finely crafted detailing and touches of fetishistic glamour are chilled by an almost haughty remoteness; by a sense of couture as *hauteur*. This is the power of fashion at work, its maintenance of distance, separation and secrets. The transformational power of dreams and the imagination are evoked by *Earth* whose delicately sprouting grass skin suggests an Ovidian moment of metamorphosis from the human to the arboreal; or Elsa Schiaparelli's swallowing of seeds as a young girl to acquire the beauty of flowers.⁶

One way we can read the differences between the dresses is in terms of a movement between clarity, purity and transcendence on the one hand and base materiality, abjection and chthonic heaviness on the other. These different states of being, marked out by the Kabbalistic schema of the 10 sefirot⁷ which structure the work, suggest different modes of subjectivity. The whole project makes sense in terms of Kaja Silverman's assertion that "clothing is a necessary condition of subjectivity – that in articulating the body, it simultaneously articulates the psyche.... Every transformation within a society's vestimentary code implies some kind of shift within its ways of articulating subjectivity."⁸

As Morison herself puts it, this 100-headless woman is "very versatile".⁹ Her wardrobe, which Grant and Morison have created, like an annual couture collection, suggests the multiplicity of

roles available to her, the multiplicity of personae she may take up, given the intimate connection between socialisation and dress. However, while some dresses suggest control and self-containment, others bear evidence of profound psychic and social disturbance – consider the shit stained, pink satin evening wear of *Shit* and the vast yardage of blood stained muslin of

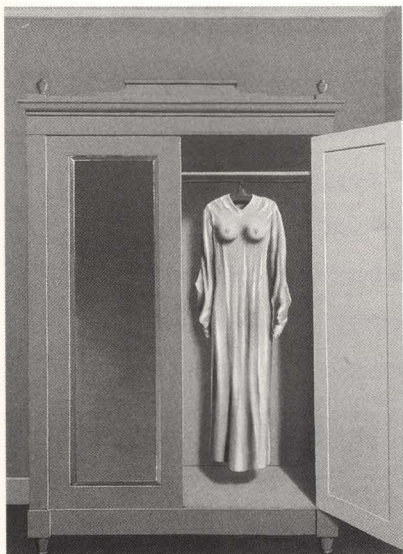
Blood. The ten alternatives then, may represent some form of hysterical, eternal "frock trauma" or haemorrhaging of subjective coherence as much as any positive mobility of role.

In interpreting the project we are continually faced with the difficulty of establishing whether the dresses are embodiments of freedom or bondage, empowerment or imposed restrictions. Another way of putting this would be to say that the dresses propose an irresolvable dialogue amongst signs of individuality within a context of inescapable conformity. The use of the tailor's dummies is a case in point. Morison and Grant's mannequins may initially recall the Surrealists' fascination with these uncanny forms and their use of them in fetishistic, often misogynistic sexual scenarios. They may recall Duchamp's structure in the *Large Glass* with its futile circulation of the "nine malic moulds".

Yet the variety of the mannequins' shapes, representing different historical ideals of the female form, may also represent a range of options for self-invention. Because the machinery of the sartorial subject's construction is so openly displayed, an invitation to re-shape and therefore re-signify the self seems clear. However, these same aspects of the work also remind us of the detailing of vestimentary codes which have pre-formed the subject historically and continue to do so.¹⁰ The fashion system preordains the forms which freedom may take. And so, the variations of symbol and material which occur within the formalism of the Kabbalistic schema (as Grant and Morison use it) parallel the exaggerations of difference which the fashion system allows and exacerbates, the more total and all-encompassing its control.

The fragment from Max Ernst's text which is used on the label for *Lead* says "the truth will remain simple and images will descend even to the ground". This work seems to embody a fundamental and deceptively simple truth about all of the dresses: that is, the primacy of the cut. From paper-thin sheets of rolled lead, Grant has cut a tall, slender shape, a partial pattern for one of his classic black evening dresses. The cut away shape is laid on the ground beside the hanging sheet. The empty space remaining from the cut is doubly visible in the shadow the work casts on the wall. There is a continual play between absence and presence. The lead sheet is imprinted with the texture of fine lace on one side. The cut is like a precise intervention in the dreamy, delirious surface of the lead; like an image crystallising for a moment from the vagueness of memory.

Fashion and art share a potent history of the cut. Germano Celant finds the tailor's cutting of cloth analogous to the cutting of collage materials by the early modernist artist and, more generally, to the modernist dependence on a language of



Rene Magritte
In memoriam Mack Sennett (Homage to Mack Sennett) 1934

© ADAGP, Paris.

intervention and restructuring. "The cut of the scissors is like the click of the camera or the whirr of the movie camera, like the stroke of a pencil or paintbrush: all these activities decisively isolate a form or representation, marking a surface that generates a reality."¹¹ Martin Grant is known as a skilled cutter; his own work owes much to the elegant sensuality of his cutting, sometimes intricate, sometimes stunningly simple. The complexity of the cutting in *Pearl*, typical of Grant's detailed work, or the tracery of seam lines on the invisible bodice of *Transparency*, mirror the abstract, diagrammatic elegance of the Kabbalistic systems which Morison has been using for several years to organise the material and iconographic content of her art.

In *Lead*, the decisiveness and clarity which the cut brings to the indeterminate field provides a metaphor for the ideal of transcendence and incorporeal purity which some of the other dresses explore. *Ash*, *Transparency* and *Gold* offer an ambivalent picture of perfection. They all conjure up a vision of absorption in an ideal, in an overarching system which demands complete fidelity and discipline. The extreme refinement of each dress's elongated form references the stylised attenuations of the modernist fashion drawing as well as the surrealist slender giantesses of Ernst, De Chirico and Dalí; but they also suggest a

sublime anorexia, a desire to escape the humiliating reality of the physical body. The gilded beauty of *Gold*, a sign of alchemical sublimation of the weight and impurity of the flesh into visibility as pure radiance, is ironically displayed here as a condition of bondage. *Transparency* attains its ethereal beauty through virtual invisibility and displacement of the body

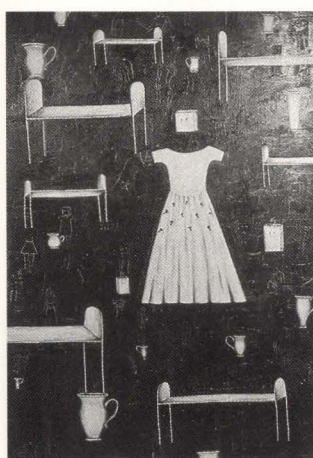
by the purity of the conceptual figure. Perhaps most of all, *Ash* is a disturbing image of the potentially self-destructive end of the pursuit of beauty, of the ecstasy of self-immolation in the name of perfection. And, in a post-holocaust world it is impossible to study ashes or burnt shoes without thinking of the victims of one of our most thorough-going schemes for attaining purity of body and purity of system.

Their openness to the unknown, to the unsettling movements of the unconscious and to the intoxicating qualities of materials place these dresses outside the ken of any purist, rational modernism. Grant and Morison enact a stripping

back to essentials, to the supporting armatures of fashion; but they find no pure base like that which Le Corbusier believed existed and on which he believed a style free of artifice and ornament could be established. Grant and Morison discover only more mystery, more artifice, more gilded stays of appearance.

Faithful to a vision of fashion that is "elaborate, fetishised, neurotic", they affirm what Elizabeth Wilson has called the "profound importance of the superficial".

Allan Smith



SérAPHINE PICK
Untitled (the dress) 1995

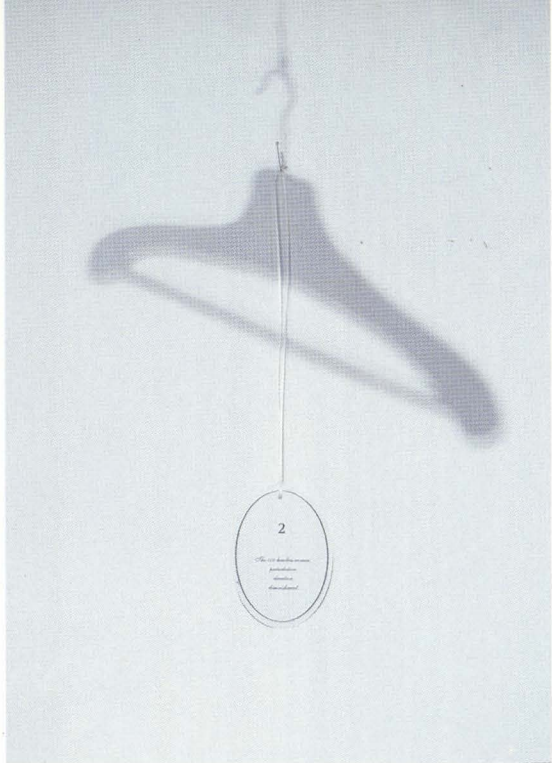
- 1 Stéphane Mallarmé, quoted in Marie Simon *Fashion in art: the Second Empire and Impressionism* Zwemmer, London 1995. p134.
- 2 Martin Grant's and Julia Morison's project would have been at home in the 1996 Biennale di Firenze, *Il tempo e le moda* (Looking at fashion), either in the section devoted to collaborations between artists and fashion designers, or as another example of artwork which uses the discourse of fashion as a point of departure to investigate issues of social, sexual and bodily identity. Other recent exhibitions dealing with similar concerns include Nina Felshin's exhibition *The empty dress*, curated for ICI, and the Arizona State University Art Museum's 1997 exhibition *Art on the edge of fashion*.
- 3 Charles Baudelaire, quoted in Simon. p133.
- 4 Elizabeth Wilson, "Fashion and the postmodern body", Juliet Ash and Elizabeth Wilson (eds) *Chic Thrills: a fashion reader* Pandora Press, London 1992. p15.
- 5 Charles Baudelaire, trans Louise Varèse, "L'invitation au voyage" *Paris Spleen* New Directions, New York, 1970. p33.
- 6 Thanks to Keren Smith for this reference.
- 7 In Kabbalistic lore the Sefiroth are ten aspects or emanations of divine energy in the world understood hierarchically. To reach God the devout must retrace the map of the ten Sefiroth, from ten to one. In her art practice Morison has assembled the Sefiroth as a diagrammatic system with a logo for each nodal point.
- 8 Kaja Silverman, "Fragments of a fashionable discourse" *Studies in entertainment: critical approaches to mass culture* Tania Modleski (ed), Bloomington & Indianapolis, 1986. pp147, 149.
- 9 In conversation with the writer, October 1997.
- 10 As has often been pointed out, the restrictions that the corset and stays imposed on the female body have now been superseded by perhaps more tyrannical regimes of diet and exercise; internal disciplines to control appearances have replaced external ones.
- 11 Germano Celant, "To cut is to think", in Celant *Art/Fashion*. pp21 - 26.
- 12 Elizabeth Wilson, "All the rage", Jane Gaines, Charlotte Herzog (eds) *Fabrications: costume and the female body* Routledge, New York and London 1990. p38.



1

Lead

*Eyeless eye, the 100-headless
woman keeps her secret...
the truth will remain simple and
images will descend even to the
ground.*

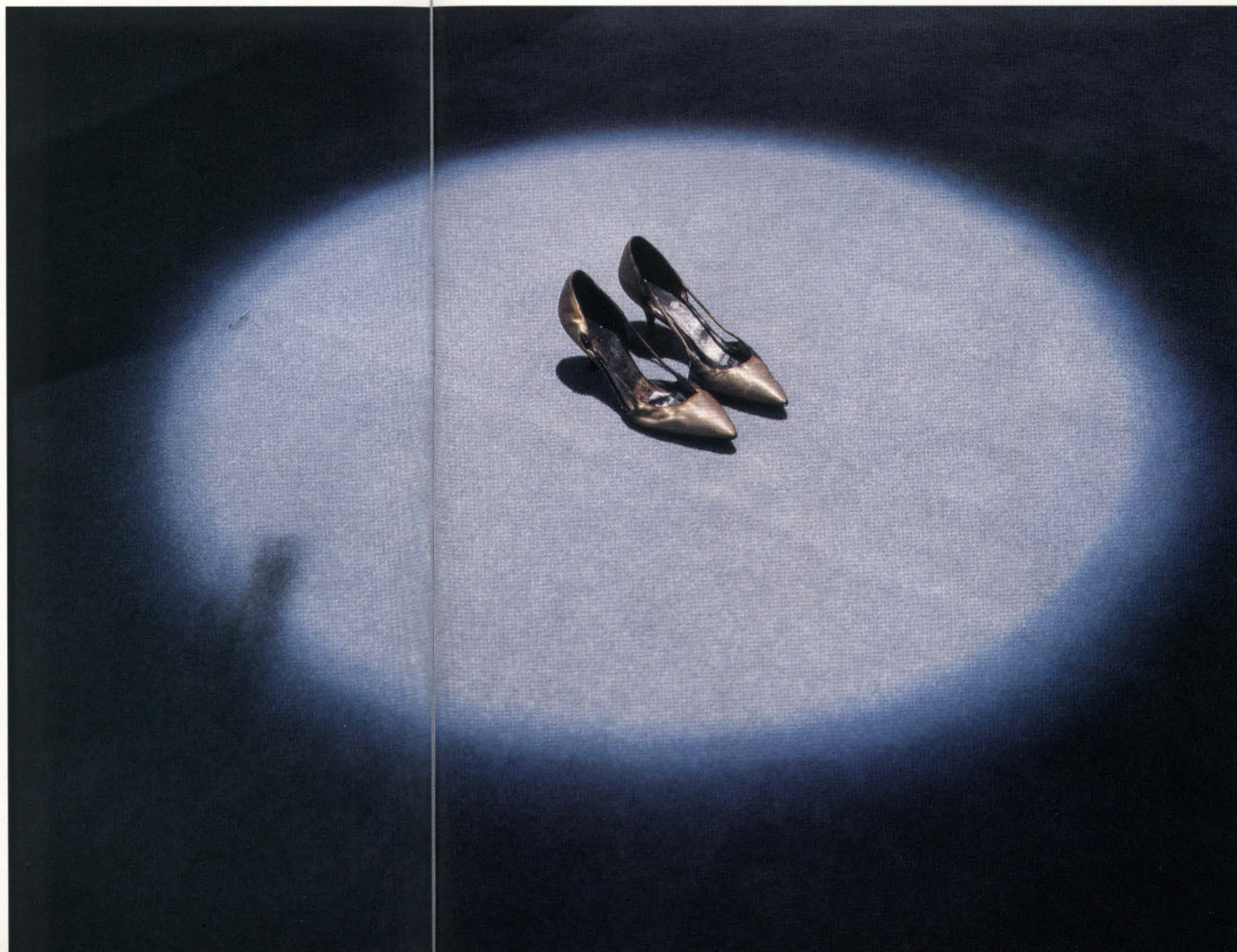


2

Ash

The 100-headless woman:

*Perturbation, elevation,
diminishment.*



3

Grass

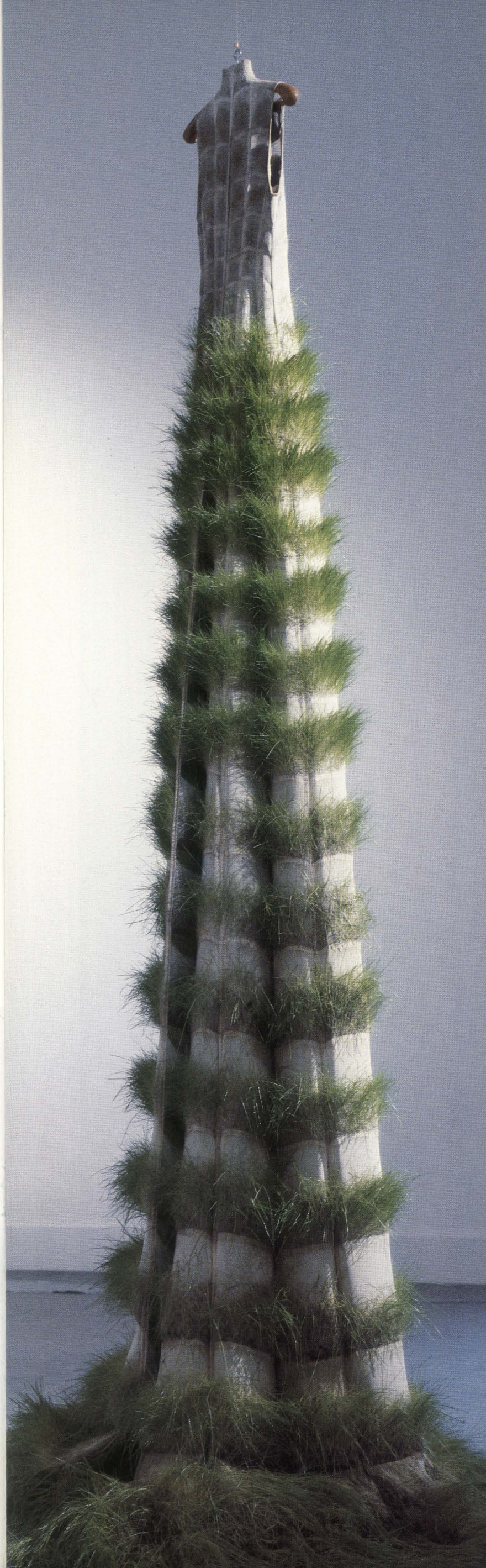
*Eyeless eye, the 100-headless
woman keeps her secret.*

*The immaculate conception that
failed, failed and failed again.*

*The landscape changes three
times, one two, and three.*

*The unconsciousness of the
landscape becomes complete.*

Loplop meets the belle jardinière.



4

Shit

*Eyeless eye, the 100-headless
woman keeps her secret...*

*Nothing can stop the passing
smile which accompanies the
crimes of one sex to the other and
public discharges at any place (all
places being equal). Bring the
wash to a boil to increase the charm
of transportation and the silence of
bleeding wounds, and go on and on
with the daytime, twilight and
nocturnal games.*



5

Pearl

*Eyeless, the 100-headless woman,
smiles in her sleep, preparing the
first touches of grace and unresolved
games; angelic caresses retire to
secret regions near the poles.*

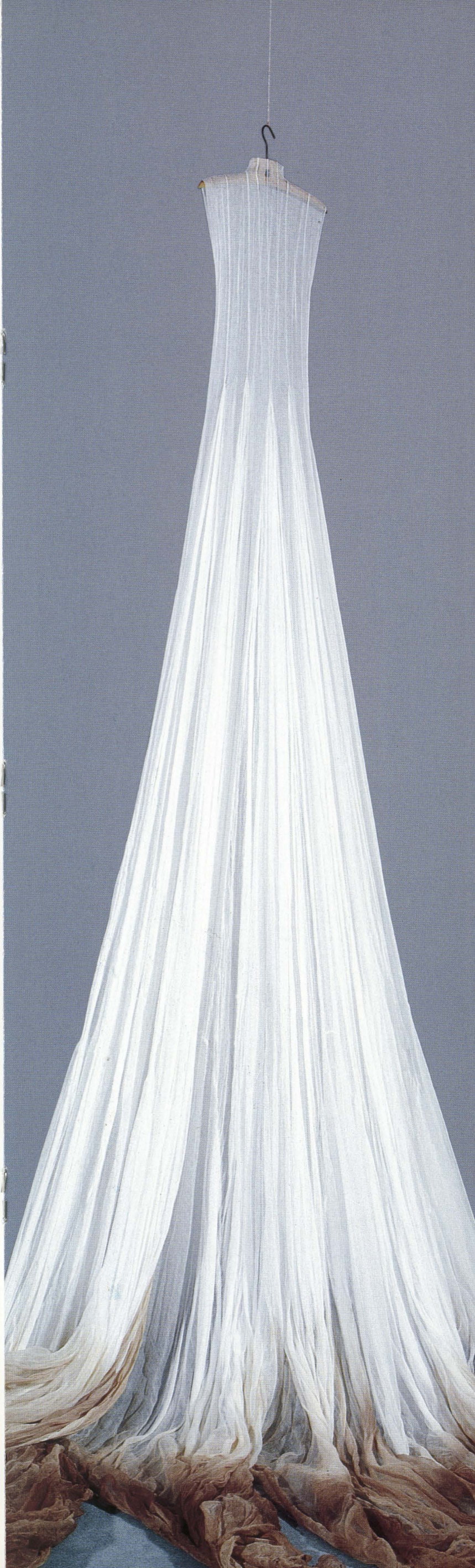


6

Blood

*Perturbation, my sister,
the 100-headless woman.*

*Every bloody riot will help her live
endowed with grace and truth.*







7

Oxidation

*Eyeless eye, the 100-headless
woman keeps her secret.*

*Living alone on her phantom-
globe, beautiful and garbed in her
dreams.*

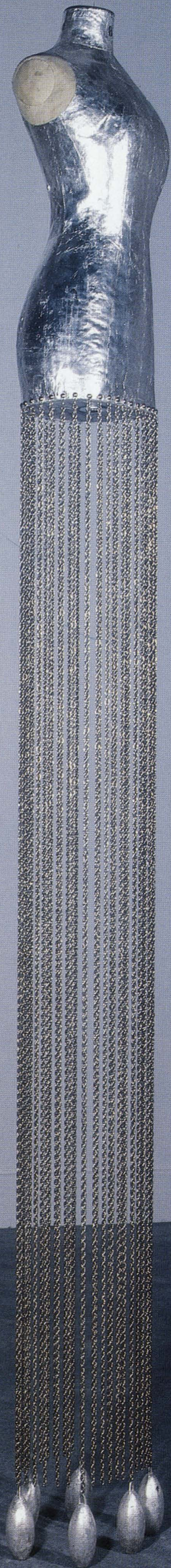
*Her smile, the fire, will fall like
black jelly and white rust on the
flanks of the mountains and her
phantom globe will find us at
every halting place.*

8

Silver

*Eyeless eye, the 100-headless
woman keeps her secret.*

The moon is beautiful.



9

Gold

*Eyeless eye, the 100-headless
woman keeps her secret.*

*Odour of dried flowers — or: I
want to be the Queen of Sheba.*



10

Transparency

*Lighter than air, powerful and
isolated: the 100-headless woman
flew away.*

*To evoke the seventh age which
succeeds the ninth birth.*

*Germinal of the invisible eyes,
the moon and Loptop trace ovals
with their heads.*





"I see ten Albertines": the fabric of nocturnal memory

Invitation to a soirée

Haute couture has always kept an eye on the arts, its discourse habitually spilling over into poetry, or geometrics. Cutting and draping luxurious cloth approaches sculpture in its attitude to form as geometry, to curves and planes in relation. Put another way, there is in fashion a tendency to pursue the ideal that makes the body subject to the infinite permutations of the couturier's art. This pursuit of the ideal, the quality of the imagination where women transmute into line and gesture, gives fashion commentaries their radiance, and the expectation that through the artful arrangement of fabric, we can approach the sublime.

Correspondingly, the "fine" arts have shown a preference for deconstructing the sublime, or at least for reconsidering the materiality of the body. In *Material evidence*, Julia Morison and Martin Grant have created ten pieces for the wardrobe of what they call the "100-headless woman", and in doing so, they bring together the discourses of art and couture. Grant, an Australian designer and Morison, a New Zealand artist, both now working in France, have collaborated on a project that is a playful exploration of subjectivity and the body. These are fantasy works, on the threshold between imaginary and real, the dreamt and the felt. Yet such is their fascination for *la femme cent têtes* and her bodiless body, that Morison and Grant manage to give us the sense this wardrobe is not merely ready to wear, but "always already" worn.

As Roland Barthes tells us, fashion has a language, and many women learn its grammar and syntax at an early age. Perhaps they begin with a shoebox full of paper doll cutouts, swapping clothes and accessories in the playground. Or they sketch fantasy designs for their long-limbed Cindies and Princess Brides, swathing sexless tapering bodies in volumes of cloth. Morison and Grant's wardrobe has something of this dreamy, girlish quality to it. A long narrow sleeve, trailing hems, translucent voile and pink silk flowers match *la femme's* various moods and postures. The 100-headless woman is hardly a sweet-talking Cindy though. There's been no airbrushing to remove the asymmetricality, the blood on her skirt and shit on the side of her dress. Even worse, she's over three metres tall. So what to make of the designers' improper grammar? Who is the

figure leaving her imprint on these massive falls of material?

I am reminded of the giants or djinn who walked the earth before the Flood and mixed their blood with the race of men; or figures from classical mythology like the starry Pleiades; or the billowing forms of colossus women in nineteenth century poster art, floating above a sea of machines and technology. Clearly, the larger-than-life figure that's just stepped out of her clothes has a wildness to her. She's tactile as well as visible, robust as well as vulnerable; the flesh in all its transformations: flesh of passion and of the body, compelling material evidence for a living divinity that, as Luce Irigaray suggests, is in us and between us but has yet to be fully imagined or symbolised.¹ In the 100-headless woman I see a new object struggling to be born; an immense being striding across the horizon, stretching the contours of the eye, twisting and puncturing the skin of being.

The dresses

The grammar for these threshold garments that are neither fully real nor fully imaginary is already in place for Morison as she returns to haunt the alchemical storehouse of the Jewish Kabbal and its symbological table of elements. Each dress represents a genre, each genre could be said to embody an aspect of the goddess's divinity. The theme of ten finds itself repeated here in the transition from lead, ash, earth, shit, pearl, blood, oxidation, to silver, gold and transparency. Through moving continuously between processes of embodiment and disembodiment, the constructions explore the interaction of lived experience with the material. And what is restored in this movement between life and death, absence and presence, appears to be the language of the body: a kind of nocturnal memory that some would call maternal and that Julia Kristeva would call "semiotic".

The figure in lead is made from a flat piece of sheet lead and falls in a double-rolled hem, an undulating surface that alternately absorbs and reflects light. A pattern piece has been cut out from the vertical drop and lies on the floor, suggesting a garment in the very process of construction. But the model is out of step with itself. There is no neat symmetricality between interior and exterior surfaces. The piece cut from the hanging dull strip has undergone a mutation, a deviation from its source. If there is a binary code that rules the grammar of fashion, here it is disrupted to produce a mirror world without meaning, shadows severed from their origin. There *is* a language of the body

operating here, but its source is enigmatic. Like the garment's surfaces that abut improperly against each other, the "maternal" fabric of language meets up with the "maternal" language of fabric, each compelling the other to undergo a strange metamorphosis.

Writing on an earlier Morison exhibition, Elizabeth Knox also noted the way functions migrate, amalgamate, transmute.² *Material evidence* now complexifies that instability through its collaborative nature. Each piece is eccentric, unstable. *Earth*, a quilted butter muslin shift with internal pockets full of earth and seeds and watered daily, is a growing, dirty body that migrates between fecundity and entropy. Its weighted segments suggest hanging gardens, mother of millions, a tidy away for garden tools, shoes, laundry items, but, equally, gravity pulling on pendulous rolls of flesh. A similar ambivalence is displayed in the following piece. Nothing more resembles the luxury of haute couture than a garment demanding fine, close work. In high fashion, handwork functions as its "enabling principle" that is intrinsic to the very nature of the garment.³ *Shit*, complete with fish-tail back, is sewn from a delicate pale pink satin and finished with deep pink silk flowers – a work of love. Profoundly feminine, to one side of its lucent surface, a discomposing brown stain appears. Purity of form and decay meet at the embrasure of the stain which connects both body and covering in a fragile equilibrium.

Likewise, *Pearl* is a dreamy, translucent voile, but the large nacreous pearl floating on the interior may just as easily be an eye, a bony excrescence, a piece of fat or gristle. Recalling the ruthless quality of Proust's x-ray vision which, disillusioned, reached to the interior of things, the floating pearl is an irritant, an abrasion between grit and shell, inside and outside, and emblematic of the lack of fit between surface and depth. In *Silver* and *Gold*, two garments are constructed around dressmakers' dummies, their bodices silver and gold leafed on to the canvas of the mannequin. A silver skirt of chain falls from one model, its airiness restrained with large egg-shaped weights at the bottom of each chain. *Gold* suffers from inertia: the pulley suspending the mannequin has collapsed, and its four suspenders lie on the floor. Both figures raise the question of disinvestment and its limits. What does it mean to un-dress? What is disclosed, and what continues to resist the eye here? The flat leaf surface suggests an impervious layer of body paint; the suspenders, by contrast, a vulnerability, a state of *déshabillé*. In both cases, the body becomes indistinguishable from the

decoration that it wears. To put it another way, there is an erasing of difference between garment and context, an object and its ground.

Where apparel *is* flesh, the body, in fact, becomes the unnecessary accessory. In the wardrobe of ten dresses, that elusive word "material", a bizarre conjunction of sacred and profane, waste and the sublime, is made to lend flesh to the garments which it inhabits. Body and history exist as endlessly representable, endlessly plastic. In the various tensions set up between body and material, mundane and sublime, desire and its frustration, Grant and Morison have used their different visions and languages most productively. The surrealist inflection of the show is one of the most suggestive collaborations between the two.

In fact, the vastness of these garments suggests de Chirico, especially his *Mystery and melancholy of a street* 1914, with its huge shadows falling across narrow spaces, implying a future full of menace and uncertainty for the girl who is rolling her hoop towards them. Morison and Grant appear to seize the spirit of de Chirico but turn it inside out: his vulnerable girl becomes a larger-than-life woman's silhouette that swallows the shadow world in her own rush towards the future and some mysterious metamorphosis yet to be realised. Of course, the strongest surrealist influence is Max Ernst, from whom the exhibition's title is derived. In 1929 Ernst had completed a collage novel entitled *La femme 100 têtes*. A bird with anthropomorphic features called "Loplop" appears in various scenes with a girl or woman. Loplop may represent sexuality, aggression, creativity, but also its opposite: containment, sterility, docility. In any case, it is probably the autobiographical conjunction for Ernst of bird and woman with all the ensuing possibilities for mutation and transformation that draw Morison and Grant into dialogue with him. Again though, they have doctored their source texts. *The 100-headless woman* (or, paradoxically, the woman with one hundred heads) becomes more like a feminine avatar, and rather less predatory than Ernst's Loplop. What they do retain from surrealism, however, is the idea of the dismembered body.

The body in bits and pieces

Psychoanalysis tells us that the passage to becoming a subject is marked by a move away from chaos and negativity, from a kind of formlessness that Freud would have called the death drive. Jacques Lacan coined the term *le corps*

morcelé to describe the early months of existence where the body exists without coherent form, in bits and pieces. This is the Imaginary stage which we must traverse, emerging with both a sense of our own image and how that image interacts with others. The task of language and enculturation is to give us that form: that orthopaedic prop that will enable us to become subjects. Even so, our shape is never absolutely fixed, and images of disintegration return in dream and heightened experiences to remind us of the instability of the body. In fact, Kristeva might respond to Lacan by saying that adult existence needs the destabilising influence of the Imaginary, or the semiotic, because out of it comes growth and renewal. It is the shadowy, recumbent body of dreams, or the semiotic, that returns in this wardrobe for the 100-headless woman. Neither unified nor completely without sense and meaning, the dresses point to the existence of a body with a chameleon-like subjectivity that culture has excised from its grammar. This subjectivity and the objects in which it invests itself are expressed in the wardrobe's excrescences: lead scrolls, earth pockets, the pearl in the voile, visible seams, the full trailing hem, an excessively long sleeve; silver and gold leaf and links. All of these are decorative elements of the wardrobe, but equally fragments of body parts: aspects of a fluid subjectivity recalled in the exhibition's title and reflecting creativity, growth, virility, hope, despair, rumination, dream, aggression, sublimation, truthfulness.

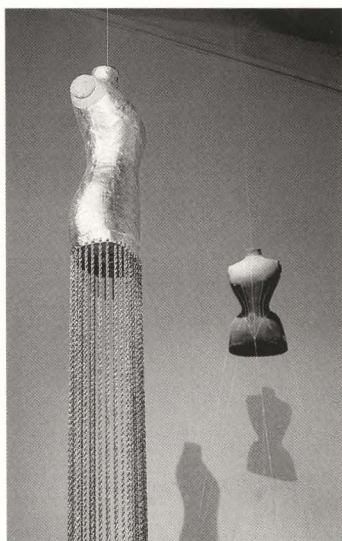
In explaining the phenomenon of the phantom limb, Merleau-Ponty speaks of memory as the refusal of an experience to be forgotten, even when its ground is removed. When someone loses a limb they frequently behave as if their body still has a wholeness, reactivating a past experience in the present. There is a fantasmatic construction of the body outside its neurological structure. Like some osmotic envelope, the body is projected outwards into the environment, on to our clothes, our personal objects. In a similar way, Morison and Grant have built the structure of the memory of the body into these dresses, a memory that Kristeva terms nocturnal: "Not speaking one's mother tongue. Living with resonances and reasoning that are cut off from the body's nocturnal memory the bittersweet slumber of childhood..."⁴

Morison's projects have always involved delving into the unknown, and in working with Grant to create a wardrobe for a woman who doesn't exist, she seems to restore this mysterious, resistant, nocturnal language to our sense of being

in the world. In dream, the dreamer is absent, the "cave of sleep"⁵ producing only imaginary objects and fragments of objects, all brought into association with each other so that we can, with Proust, see ten Albertines, or with Ernst, pursue a "hallucinatory succession of contradictory images ... superimposed upon each other with the persistence and rapidity characteristic of amorous memories and visions of somnolence."⁶ Entities associate metamorphically: thus lead involves oxidation, an entropic interaction between metals; ash with qualities of sublimation is connected to the delicate, lucent framework of transparency and pearl; earth connects to shit and blood; silver and gold are interchangeable. Each genre becomes a fragment, a body part containing the memory of another. So there is a body, but not a body. Lineaments mark themselves on the cloth: a skin, a face, entreating hands, a passion, a sex; heat, coolness, waste, fecundity; all here are woven into the cloth, imprinted as if after a holocaust. We touch the dress and it touches us; we wear the dress and it wears us: we see the dress and it "sees" us. Such contradictory, hallucinatory images arise when the dress bears the imprint of a body's flesh. We see the body's intransigence through its absence, and by the strange lack of fit between perception and representation, dreamer and dream. Art turns out to be an irritant produced by the abrasion of language and sensation, and the 100-headed woman, the grit-produced pearl of Grant and Morison's couture.

Anna Smith

- 1 "Divine Women" *Local consumption* Occasional Paper 8, Sydney, 1986. p3.
- 2 "Privacy: the art of Julia Morison" in *Julia Morison* Jonathan Jensen Gallery, Christchurch, 1993.
- 3 Richard Martin and Harold Koda *Haute couture* Harry N. Abrams for Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1995. p74.
- 4 *Strangers to ourselves* trans. Leon Roudiez, Columbia University Press, New York, 1991. p15.
- 5 In reading Proust, Kristeva makes a comparison between Proust's imagination and the "sensory cave of sleep". See her *Time and sense: Proust and the experience of literature* trans. Ross Guberman, Columbia University Press, New York, 1996. pp227ff.
- 6 Max Ernst, cited in Whitney Chadwick *Myth in Surrealist painting* UMI Research Press, Ann Arbor 1980. p90.



JULIA MORISON is a New Zealand artist currently based in Champagne. She received a Diploma of Graphic Design from Wellington Polytechnic School of Design in 1972 and in 1975 graduated with a Diploma of Fine Arts (Honours) in painting from the University of Canterbury. In 1990 she was awarded the Moët and Chandon Fellowship and has lived in France since then. Morison has exhibited widely in New Zealand, Australia and France, and her work is represented in a number of major public and private collections. She has also designed sets and costumes for several theatre and opera productions.

MARTIN GRANT is an Australian fashion designer who lives and works in Paris. He graduated with an Advanced Certificate in Art and Design from Prahran College of TAFE in 1988, then studied at the Victorian College of Fine Arts. From 1981 to 1989 he created his own *prêt-à-porter* label and in 1991 he began to present his work in London and Paris. In 1996 he opened *Martin Grant Boutique* in Paris. He has created garments for Cindy Lauper, Kylie Minogue, INXS and Crowded House. He has also designed costumes for many Australian films, theatre productions and dance companies.

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