

DRESSCODE

Dress as an Artistic Symbol

Anoush Abrar & Aimée Hoving (CH), Julie Becker (USA), Daniele Buetti (CH), Hussein Chalayan (TUR), Alicia Framis (SP), Marie-Ange Guilleminot (F), Jacqueline Hassink (NL), Elma van Imhoff & Saskia van Santen Kolff (NL), Helmut Newton (USA), Yoko Ono (Japan / USA), Paulina Ołowska (PL), Lucy Orta (UK), Beverly Semmes (USA), Yinka Shonibare (UK), Jana Sterbak (CZES), Eve Sussman (USA), curated by Gianni Jetzer

Historisches und Völkerkundemuseum, St. Gallen

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The exhibition DRESSCODE brings together many different approaches to using dress as a vehicle in contemporary art. The artists show how such apparently simple objects as clothes are charged with symbolism and can be interpreted artistically to "read" like traces of the present. The works address social issues, including cultural identity, gender, security, emancipation and power hierarchies, and the exhibition as a whole demonstrates how messages relating to such matters can be conveyed by dress. In DRESS CODE clothes become an instrument of communication, an artistic code.

"Code" is here understood as a system in which symbols from one form of representation are transformed into symbols belonging to another. The signals emitted by fashion are classed as symbols. Roland Barthes referred to them as "codes vestimentaire" – dress codes. Whereas fashion is arbitrary in the sense that its referential relationships are open-ended, the artists in the exhibition operate with symbols relating to specific subject areas. These artistic clothes can be used as a medium for communicating clearly defined messages. In DRESS CODE art and fashion interact to generate social constructions of male and female, social power and individual power, and personal imagination.

Anoush Abrar & Aimée Hoving compare in their photographic work *Bal des Débutantes* the worn clothes of mothers and daughters before an important celebration. In *Suburban Legend* Julie Becker seeks for a myth in the movie *The Wizard of Oz*. Daniele Buetti pairs melancholy and vanity in his video *Sweet Memories*. The fashion

designer Hussein Chalayan has produced clothes with pronounced architectural qualities. Alicia Framis helps women achieve greater freedom and fearlessness with "dog couture" capable of withstanding dog bites. Marie-Ange Guilleminot uses her dress sculptures as a vehicle for communicating personal messages. *Haute couture* salons appear as a locus of longing and power in Jacqueline Hassink's photographs. Elma van Imhoff & Saskia van Santen Kolff use instructions for making a red dress to investigate the social networking of fashion. Helmut Newtons work, which he started in the fashion business, is connected with the cold attraction of female models. Yoko Ono gave scissors to the audience at one of her performances and let them cut her dress to pieces. In a dance performance Paulina Olovska acted out the alphabet wearing a red dress. Lucy Orta creates protective islands from clothes forming tent-like sculptures. Beverly Semmes has produced an installation consisting of an oversized dress as a mark of both power and isolation. In his installations Yinka Shonibare reflects on colonial history and cultural identity. In her performance *Remote Control* Jana Sterbak uses a hooped skirt steered by a woman sitting inside to address issues of mobility and imprisonment. Eve Sussman evokes the social order of the Baroque period and its sumptuary regulations in a film recreation of Velázquez *Las Meninas*.

The exhibition is part of the series "Schnittpunkt | Kunst und Kleid | St. Gallen" being mounted at the Textilmuseum, the Kunstmuseum, the Kunst Halle and the Historisches Museum.