

HARRIS Jane and WALSH Bernard (UK)

'Virt'uous Dress - paper

Jane Harris' work reflects the evocative nature of material and is informed by contemporary and historical textiles. The diverse characteristics of cloth provide an intrigue that has fundamentally directed a collection of work, which is now entirely 3D computer graphically (CG) animated (Ph.D. study at the Royal College of Art (RCA) (1995-2000) established the use of relevant digital media and collaborative partnerships, with individuals and industry that enable present work). They reference former physical process and practice both in terms of the textile/ garment form, the choreographic body movement and the invisible body image, absence and presence. The folds and shadows in the 'fabrics' reference the traditions and representations of cloth in the historical context of fine art and design. The visual reference to the body in these animated works deliberately renders the garment as a cast, emphasising the beguiling qualities of fluid material and form. The choreographed and layered movement in the pieces explores space and time. The works speak not only to the histories of fabric depiction but also to the contemporary context of new technology, contemporary dance, absence and presence.

Bernard Walsh's work incorporates practice and theory, which plays visual imagery into written and presented texts. Focusing on "place", and in particular definitions of the "commonplace", his work challenges the authority of perceived values and conventional standards by interrogating the status of "high" and "low" art in relation to the continuous development of contemporary art practice.

A broader context of textiles and costume moves between spaces of identity, social interaction and construction. The 'space between' includes the motion or existence of dress in real and virtual space, this may be in the form of a painting, photograph or a digital environment for example. The depiction of dress in all of these forms is subject to a viewers interpretation which is often guided by a sense of a particular circumstance or period.

Artists are presently forming their own critical discourses and philosophic readings or interpretations of absence and presence using many forms of guise and medium. The analysis of textiles and dress takes on many different perspectives. Joseph Boyce's suits, composed of compressed, felted, solid, sculptural material, portray a heavy, sombre presence, which contrast with Caroline Broadhead's ethereal human castes that activate light through the circumstance of their environment. Within this there is also a gender issue at play, as both artists represent their own gender through the form of their work.

In contrast to this Gillian Wearing offers a more ambiguous representation of her own identity by using either self-effacement or inclusion within her work. She traverses a seemingly detached point of view. Richard Billingham is the 'outsider' who never appears within. Photographic portraits of his family substantiate his existence.

Textiles and dress in all these examples play a prominent part in how we interpret the values of each individual artist, their own concerns, their own background.

Digital media proffers a new form of ambiguity in terms of motion, dress and gender.

Jane Harris's work builds upon a traditional knowledge of textiles and dress that is re-evaluated and 'rendered' using 3D computer graphic tools. The work transcends category and serves to inform us of an alternative world that is digitally constructed, one that looks beyond simulation of what we know and creatively challenges our perception of what is 'real'.

The authors will explore aforementioned contemporary work in a broader frame of reference that includes past representation of textile and costume as part of a definitive form of identity and portrayal. By looking at painters such as Holbein, Van Dyke, Vermeer, Ingres, Sergeant, Degas and Klimpt, both the mundane and decorative form of dress as guise lead the enquiry as beauty for beast and beast for beauty become interchangeable.

Dr Jane Harris is a Senior Research Fellow at Central St Martins College of Art and Design and visiting lecturer, Goldsmiths College, London. Her work has received awards from The Arts Council of England (2002), The Arts and Humanities Research Board (2001) and the Hi-Tech Award, The Arts Council and Channel 4 (1996). Jane's work has been exhibited and presented extensively in the UK and internationally.

Bernard Walsh is the Deputy Senior Tutor, Visual Arts, Goldsmiths College, University of London and a lecturer on the M.A.Fine Art Course at Central St Martins School of Art, London. His studio based practice incorporates a range of mechanical reproducible forms; written, recorded, published texts, photo/screen/digital prints and video projections. He works around issues of identity, good and bad taste and notions of a 'common' place.
