

Rice Apron Collection-Spring 2008

by

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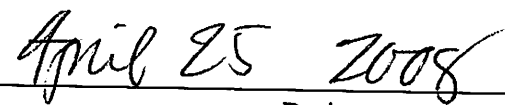
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At the conclusion of my Masters Degree in Fine Art at the University of Georgia, I developed an interdisciplinary practice utilizing dress and fashion as a vehicle of expression to investigate topics of identity, ethnicity, and gender. The *Rice Apron Collection-Spring 2008* is a series of sculptural garments that explore aspects of the social and historic study of domestic dress, as well as my family's lineage and relationship to these garments. The pieces are exaggerated, non-functional variations of traditional clothing; manifesting a hybrid of cultures and identities in a conceptual self-portrait that is not only a physical interpretation, but also an indication of ideals.

I became interested in fashion and dress, as a language of articulation and medium because of its intense power to evoke a reaction from the viewer. We all have an interpersonal relationship with clothing, as our wardrobes consist of some of the most intimate objects we possess. Our clothes touch the most private and personal parts of our bodies; moreover, they are the first communicators of our identities within an increasingly global culture. I am interested in using those predisposed experiences with cloth to fuse an intimate connection with the viewer.

The study of fashion was an essential component in the Rice Apron Series. Over the past year I have commuted to the Savannah College of Art and Design-Atlanta to study under leading professionals in the fashion industry, Professor Sachiko Honda for technical sewing, draping and flat pattern making, and Professor John Bauernfeind for sketching, concept development and design. Following my initial Rice Apron from 2006, I felt it was mandatory that I learn proper design and garment construction techniques in order to convey my ideas seamlessly; craftsmanship was intensely important to the work.

The designing process began with fashion sketches, technical flats,



draping, flat patterns, muslins, readjustment of patterns to muslins, (this step could encompass three to five rejected muslins and patterns) and the final garment construction. Before sewing the panels together, I basted each row together to ensure accuracy in stitching. All of the seams are French seamed, and the channels that contain the rice are double French seamed for security. Apron #1 has hand embroidery with a Dutch lace inspired pattern filled with rice. The embellishments were created with a form of trapunto. I filled the



lace design with one grain of rice at a time, through one, single opening. Apron #3 has modified welt pocket openings to thread the ribbon through the waistband. I intentionally used only a limited amount of techniques in the development of the garments. I did not want the pieces to become "show-cases" of my sewing capabilities, but rather a careful editing process to express only the essentials to the aprons.



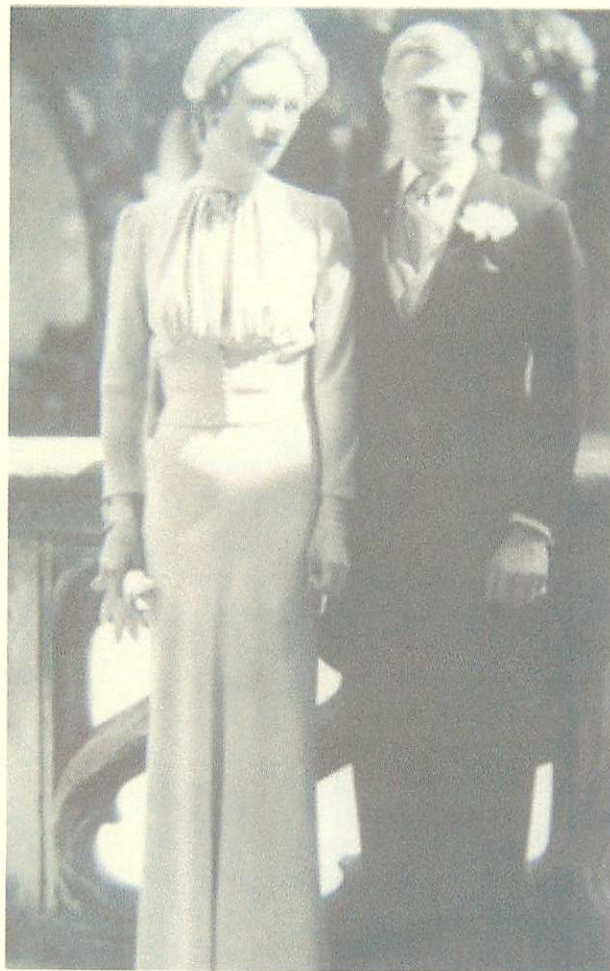
Conceptually, the study of fashion is integral to the work as it is the expression of dress in the current global culture. It is constantly changing to suit economic, social, political and cultural needs. In addition, it engages all levels of socio-economic class, lifestyle and inspiration. Fashion highlights cultures' values and priorities; it is a form of self-portraiture, a performative act, we all engage in each day.



Hussein Chalayan

Fashion designer, Hussein Chalayan embodies my aspirations as an artist. He works both in the applied arts of fashion as one of the most innovative, conceptual and technologically advanced designers in the world. Moreover, he manages a separate career as a fine artist working with mechanics, film, video and fashion. Both his fashion collections and fine art explore gender

agency, politics, cultural dislocation and predetermined social codes. In his spring 2007 collection, Chalayan chronicles the history of fashion, as well as his own evolutionary work in a series of dresses that move. The hemlines of the skirts shift according to the history of twentieth century fashion silhouettes, seamlessly with no wires or evidence of a technological presence. His work inspired the necessity for industry standard craftsmanship as it expresses the relationship that fashion has to the work; without the proper craftsmanship, the series would convey "home-sewing" which is sub-standard in the fashion industry, as well as the "domestic" role of the maker.



Wallace Simpson

Rudimentarily, each apron embodies a different culture that has cultivated my identity. The aprons are hybrids combined with wedding dresses. In a traditional wedding dress, the train forces the wearer to walk in a forward motion to matrimony. The organza fabric used through out the series suggests veiling and concealing, yet it is completely transparent. The silhouettes of the aprons are inspired by Wallace Simpson's wedding dress and Paul Poiret's hobble dresses. The Poiret influence references a control from a male to inhibit movement on behalf of a woman. She is forced to "hobble," and essentially remain nearly immobile.

The aprons are garments, which are meant to protect the garment and are traditionally linked to a feminine, domestic space. In contrast to the traditional wedding dress train, the Rice Aprons have backwards trains that force only backwards movement away from the traditional domestic roles that females are stereotypically linked to. The wedding dress is the garment and rite of passage that brings a woman to the role within the apron. The pieces are pejorative towards the symbolic function of the apron and domesticity. The aprons themselves also explore perceptions of economic class and social standing.

The first apron in the series has symbolic reference towards my Dutch heritage. The rice embroidery on the breastplate was inspired by traditional Dutch curtains in my family's home. The functionality of the curtains allowed the viewer to see outside while the outside viewer was unable to see inside the window, enabling the person inside the house with the position of power, privilege and voyeurism. Meanwhile, in the evening, when the lights are on, that privilege was given to the outside viewer. However, when peering inside the

house, the impression intended for the outsider looking in was wealth and privilege. Therefore, again, making the insider in control of the content of perceptions.



Apron #2 is a panel construction, like Andrea Zittel's apron series and uniform projects, which began my interest in studying farther into the social implications of the apron as a dynamic article of clothing, containing multiple



Andrea Zittel

layers of discourse. Moreover, much like Ann Hamilton, Zittel's career is not simply defined as a fiber artist, but rather a fine artist that frequently uses fiber as a means of conceptual expression. Her engagement with the six-month garments (in which she wears a single outfit for a six-month period) rejects the fashion industry and its over-consumption. Though I have a more reverent approach to fashion, I still find her work to be compelling. The white shirt is symbolic of the American white-collar worker, an androgynous symbol because of its lack of buttons. Men's shirts button up from the right and women's shirts button up from the left, as historically wealthy women were dressed by servants. The idea places the female in a combined position of power and submission.



Apron #3 is symbolic to my history to bureaucratic paperwork. Every single immediate family relationship in my life is bound together by a series of paperwork. My parents, spouse, brother, I am not connected to anyone through blood relationships, but rather a trail of bureaucracy. The red references a previous performance and installation, *Paper Work Reduction Act Notice*.

Canadian-Muslim artist, Farheen Haq, inspired these works; she uses performance and video in combination with fabric, as she re-interprets traditional cultural practices for women. In the Rice Apron series, the reference is gentler and less aggressive than the message as conveyed in the previous works. The third apron is defined by the juxtaposition of my unknown Asian, blood relations, and known bureaucratic American relations.



In all of the aprons, as an overwhelming theme, the use of rice as a medium came from veiled memories of my infancy in South Korea before I was adopted. As a baby I suffered from malnutrition, a memory that remained within my sub-conscious my entire life. These experiences translated into a continuous form of worry, which manifested in an obsessive, conscientious nature. An example of this behavior is depicted in the photograph where I am carefully eating a bowl of rice. Even as a young child, the unforgettable memory of starvation encouraged me to eat each individual grain of rice. I would methodically and carefully pick up each grain with my fingers until there was nothing left. The rice has nothing to do with an eating disorder, but rather a

deeply rooted worry about survival that stemmed from birth. In addition, the rice is not just an over simplification of ethnic qualities, but rather to my ignorance to my Asian heritage and overwhelming Eurocentric upbringing.



In a more personal approach, the rice in the garments embodies the concept of worry, but also makes visible the physicality of life itself. The aspect of bodily pain is conveyed through the weight of these burdens and experiences in a metaphysical sense. It also describes my studio practice. For the last calendar year, I have been working an average of twelve to twenty hours, daily, seven days per week since June to learn the fashion techniques in order to execute this body of work. Nearing the completion of the project I would work until my eyes were so blood shot, I could no longer see to stitch. I have suffered consistent back pain, weight gain, and extreme exhaustion to understand and create the work. The garments are the bodies; the fabric is like the skin. The rice is akin to

cellular organisms and blood cells flowing through the veins of the body. The rice *is* the living element in the work.

In conclusion of my thesis project and Masters degree I am pleased with the interdisciplinary nature of my education. The Lamar Dodd School of Art gave me a strong conceptual foundation and the Savannah College of Art and Design-Atlanta fused an equally robust technical knowledge. I feel well poised to continue my work as a fine artist and begin a career in the applied arts of fashion design.