

Charles Ray

Fashions , Feature

Martin Margiela

Spring Collection

Mannequins are images of ourselves with the guts ripped out; we dress them up to display our merchandise. Charles Ray's latest work *Fashions* (1996) and fashion designer Martin Margiela's spring collection both focus on the living model as mannequin. The relationship between real and imitated body pushes the envelope of each, creating worlds in which the living and the unliving slip back and forth, begging the question of what is actual and what is fabricated. Fashion and art inspire the possibility of an alternative reality: a world whose frame is drawn between our consciousness and representation.

Ray's film lasts approximately 15 minutes and portrays a woman perfectly posed on a rotating pedestal. The clothing she wears was created by Ray on the model's body. This tableau vivant recalls the earliest form of picture making, in which a scene is presented on stage with silent and motionless costumed participants. Each rotation of the model is another tableau taking us into the world of the hippie, the cocktail hostess, the Ancien Régime grande dame, the disco queen, the Dutch milk girl. In this snapshot glimpse into Ray's perception of the world of fashion, not only is time shifted, but the model's body is altered by the cut of the materials used. One image reveals her legs and upper body in a tight, bright miniskirt and draped halter top that is stuck to her body with bright blue packing tape. The next ensemble distorts her body into a balloon shape with puffed silk that falls to the ground creating a mock evening gown. These garments are something other than clothing: they become objects in themselves, manipulating the body on which they rest. The model, who remains anonymous, has a body that can play both gender roles - androgynous and robust, her tattooed and muscular physique is used as a tailor's dummy off-screen. Ray's interest in turning the body and clothing into sculpture goes back to his early work, beginning with the 'Plank Pieces' from the early 70s and *All My Clothes* (1973), and, as the film shows, he has maintained an interest in the

About this review

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[Back to the main site](#)

relationship between fashion and sculpture as it relates to the objectification of the body.

This season, Margiela's showroom comprises white decor with a field of imitation sunflowers planted on the floor. (All sales and press meetings take place amid the flowers.) The tailor's dummy is the foundation of the collection. A simple, unfinished square of fabric becomes a skirt or a dress with an irregular hemline. Linings, interface, ties, sleeves, shoulder pads, squares of fabric: these inter-connective sinews are the stuff of Margiela's design. His analysis of the circulatory systems of fashion has become the material one wears: recycling the foundations of fashion and turning them inside out. The model wears a tailor's dummy that has been cut open, autopsied. Like the serial killer in *Silence of the Lambs*, the wearer of the dummy hides their body behind another, thereby blurring the distinction between what is real and what is facsimile.

An earlier collection by Margiela from 1994 included Barbie and Ken clothing scaled up to adult human sizes. (Barbie was one of the first dolls to have her own accompanying wardrobe.) As children, we dress our Barbie, Dawn, G.I. Joe and Ken dolls to mimic the adult world, experimenting and internalising the customs we see around us - but taking the pre-existing and recycling it into fashion jars our notions of what and how we are supposed to be. Margiela goes against the grain of the fashion world, creating items that undo their own function: such as sweaters whose arms are sewn together, to be draped solely over the shoulders as people are apt to do; or a pair of sleeves, covered with tattoos, intended to be worn underneath another shirt.

The worlds to which clothing gives us access to are historical and psychological ones. Externalising our visions and fantasies, these glimpses into our desires find a major locus in fashion and art. There we can create a world in which to see ourselves realised as something other. Fashion, conceived in both Margiela and Ray's work, provides access to a transformative experience, something that alters accepted norms and blurs the boundaries of our perception.

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Frieze

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