



When Fashion Imitates Art

The International Center of Photography's yearlong triennial takes an inspired look at all that glitters | By Rachel Wolff |



Brooklyn-based video and performance artist Kalup Linzy loves to play dress-up. As Taiwan, an aspiring lounge singer, Linzy goes minimal in a black long-sleeve leotard and a sunflower in his hair. As Tyrone, one of the few males in Linzy's arsenal, it's baggy pants and a tight white tank. The artist favors sequined minidresses when he portrays Latisha the Diva, and as the promiscuous Katonya, Linzy tends toward ill-fitting frocks, platinum tresses and a five o'clock shadow. It's not high fashion, but Linzy's adventures in role-play are certainly rooted in style—the idea that part of who we are lies very much in what we wear. His dressing up and dressing down to shift appearance, gender, sexuality, personality and even age is in many ways what the fashion industry is all about.

Linzy is one of 34 artists selected to participate in the International Center of Photography's third triennial of photo-based works and video. Each ICP triennial is built around a theme ("Ecotopia" in 2006 focused on environmental change; "Strangers" in 2003 broached themes of trust, intimacy and isolation between an artist and subject) and this year's exhibition brings together recent fashion-centric works by artists from 18 countries.

Titled "Dress Codes" and on view October 2 through January 17, the show includes works by artists both established (such as perennial dress-up queen Cindy Sherman) and emerging—creating a cross-generational dialogue on the role and implications of fashion in art. As his contribution, Linzy will

screen *Sweetberry Sonnet* (2008), a collection of not-so-family-friendly music videos performed with panache in his various personas.

Perched on a corner one block north of Manhattan's Bryant Park, ICP has certainly noticed the flashbulbs, tents and glitterati that descend on the area twice annually, for fall fashion week in February and spring fashion week in September. The 35-year-old museum has long wanted to peg exhibitions to these presentations, and a few years ago ICP curators decided that the best way to do so would be to devote a full year of programming to the topic.

"Fashion photography is an incredibly creative, inventive and widely followed form of photography to which no major museum in New

York has given major, sustained treatment," says ICP curator Christopher Phillips. "No one had ever looked at the whole, sweeping range of historical fashion imagery all the way up to contemporary."

Since its launch in January, ICP's Year of Fashion has included shows dedicated to Edward Steichen's Condé Nast years, current fashion photography and Richard Avedon's groundbreaking repertoire (up through September 20), among others. "Dress Codes" marks a departure from much of this year's exhibitions as not one fashion photographer is included on the roster.

"The idea from the beginning was that the Year of Fashion would conclude with an international survey of recent work made not by

PHOTOS: ROSLER COURTESY OF ARTIST AND MITCHELL-INNES & NASH; NEW YORK: THOMAS COURTESY OF ARTIST AND LEHMAN MAUPIN GALLERY; O'NEAL: COURTESY OF ARTIST



FASHION FLUX

Clockwise from top left:
"Invasion," 2008, Martha Rosler;
"Lovely Six Foota," 2007,
Mickalene Thomas; "Ettersburgl,"
2008, Janaina Tschäpe;
"The Ark Collection," 2006,
Wangechi Mutu; Still from
"New Movements in Fashion,"
2006, Nathalie Djurberg;
"Antony," 2000, Alice O'Malley.



professional fashion photographers," explains Phillips, who, along with ICP curators Carol Squiers and Kristen Lubben and writer Vince Aletti, fills out the show's four-person curatorial team. "The point is to present work by artists and photographers looking at fashion, style, design and clothing as instruments of self-presentation."

There's a sense of solidarity achieved in casting such a wide, international net—particularly among female artists, who account for 24 out of the triennial's 34 participants. It's a lesson that fashion's impact on a woman crosses international lines. Hence the skepticism, for example, in the work of Swedish video artist Nathalie Djurberg. Her 2006 clay-animation film *New Movements in Fashion* imagines a group of ethnically diverse, stick-thin models

reverting back to toddler-like tendencies. They crawl, cry, suck on pacifiers and play with rattles.

It's not all satire, though. Phillips holds that whether it is for love or loathing, "young artists are more comfortable incorporating fashion into their creative process and materials than the generation before them." Fashion is an effective tool for cultural critique, but it is also a gateway to fantasy and reinvention. In her 2004 series "Lacrimarcorpus" (Latin for body of tears), Janaina Tschäpe clothes a model in an original costume from the early-19th-century premiere of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's play *Faust*. The woman is apparition-like with bubbles floating around her head, grazing her shoulders. (she wears a necklace, actually,

that Tschäpe made by inflating condoms. "They're much more flexible than balloons," she says. "And they don't pop.")

If Tschäpe's work represents fantasy, artist Mickalene Thomas is all about reinvention. The New Yorker channels '70s America by photographing strong, self-assured black women in vintage apparel and interiors. Born in 1971, Thomas returns to the era nostalgically. "We as a society had just come from segregation," she explains. "For black women in particular there was a sense of freedom in discovering their own identities. Whether it was through black power or hair power, I see that particular time as opening the door for black women to really come to the forefront of society."

Though conceptually rigorous,

the careful styling of Tschäpe's and Thomas's photographs brings to mind the sort of avant-garde pictorials seen in many fashion magazines today. Aletti holds that this sort of borrowing does, indeed, go both ways. "Art's influence on fashion is so widespread and so much outside the classic sense of what fashion used to look like," he says. "I think many more fashion photographers today are influenced by Larry Clark, Nan Goldin and Lisette Model than by traditional fashion photographers like Cecil Beaton."

It's all pretty cerebral stuff, but that's not to say these artists don't indulge in designer duds from time to time. Tschäpe attended the São Paulo Fashion Week this past June, and Thomas has a weak spot for Comme des Garçons. **M**