

“apparel”



Maison Martin Margiela, Spring/Summer 1998 (flat collection)

A deflated creamy neck hole appears repeatedly worn, as if the once resilient elastane polymer had exhausted itself, unable to retract to its original position.ⁱ

A mediocre thrifted dress redrafted over and over, distorting the skirt to buckle the body over and over.ⁱⁱ

Etiolated dead stock army blankets washed slate grey are reconstructed into dust coats and lumpy pants; deflated silhouettes.ⁱⁱⁱ

When strands of fine chain are left to their own accord at the bottom of bags and boxes they erratically clump and knot together. These frustrating entanglements, made from stolen chains, appeared as readymade pieces to adorn the collection.^{iv}

Each collection works a unique material study, comprising of only one or two material conditions, embracing boredom to irritate mediagenic exigency.^v

Children's duvets are drafted into dreary garments, seemingly precariously wedged in; the vestiges of a prior life reclaimed for a second chance.^{vi}

The ill-defined 19th century illness of neurasthenia was established to diagnose a range of symptoms...fatigue, migraines and anxiety. A sinister residue of modernity's euphoric novelty and speed, excessive life took on the psychic personas of apathy and neurotic exhaustion... For clothing, whose primary goal is to solder the self, the neurasthenic condition afflicts the blasé behaviour of seams, stitches and selvedge. This exhibition features the work of three Melbourne-trained fashion designers; Jessie Kiely, Tallulah Storm and H.B. Peace (Hugh Egan Westland and Blake Barns). The THEME between conventions of sartorial craft and the Neurosis of conventional dress.

Situated as a genealogical figure, these practices are seen next to the archival work of famed Belgian designer Martin Margiela, specifically his deconstructivist and artisanal garments from 1988-2008. During this period Margiela became known for a highly idiosyncratic design methodology that fixated over the banal codifications of archetypal garments. With the recursive ruse 'clothes about clothes', he represented an impressive deviation from the deconstructionist designers of his time, who favoured abandoning the anatomy altogether. Instead Margiela embraced the mad rationality of quotidian tailoring, wear and, most strikingly, the toile process itself, as a reflexive testing site. (spliced dresses, enlarged miniatures, knitted malfunctions, flattened silhouettes, reversed shaping, monotonous replicas, reused provisions)

Reaffirming the acumen of Maison Martin Margiela in 2020 is kinda gauche. The fodder for bad memes and museums, PR-BarthesDeconstructor has instantiated itself at the very heart of corporate culture, emblazoned by two of the industry's highest henchmen: Demna Gvasalia and Virgil Abloh. "Gvasalia's capitalist realism, which found its most brutal expression in the Kering sweatshirt, and Abloh's quotation system, each in its own way compliments Margiela's discursive virtuosity — a virtuosity that formed into strategic irony, both aesthetic and economic, in the context of the current identity crisis of luxury industries." (Mateos & Teyssou). How this reversal found its home in factory-line irony is funny: 'false consciousness' as a dress genre. But the bulimic gimmick is quick and leftover bile is a bitch.

"The mass ornament is the aesthetic reflex of the rationality to which the prevailing economic system aspires" (Kracauer). And blah blah we're machinic fleshlimbs. It was Beau Brummell, pedigree human centipede, who gorged and shat out this fascinating uniformed hellscape, our image mapped through endless archetypes (those proliferating

generic garments) that became man's collective material subjecthood, an Armageddon of massification. Somewhere in this dialogue between death and fashion emerged the provenance of the elegant ragpicker, whose debased duty was to scavenge the detritus of industrial society and resuscitate its second-life. And who could inspire more beautiful neurasthenia than the vendor of The ultimate Mass Ornament?

To further refine the rules of the game: authenticity and hardedge chic.

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Jessie Kiely, Maison Martin Margiela, H.B. Peace, Tallulah Storm

Curated by Matthew Linde

Stylist and Hair Designer: Penelope Burke

Stage Build: Liam Osborne

Physical Notations: George Egerton-Warburton

Mannequins: Custom Mannequin Solutions

Archival collection generously loaned by Gregory Stuart Brooks *with additional items thanks to* Kristen Lewis

With special thanks to Robyn Healy, Ricarda Bigolin *and the* School of Fashion & Textiles, RMIT University

i Tallulah Storm



ii Jessie Kiely



iii H.B. Peace



iv Tallulah Storm



v H.B. Peace



vi Tallulah Storm

