

Ruth Dupré

Hatchery and other Fabrications

What is the connection between fashion and art? Dress and accessories have always been a means of self-expression, a display of wealth and social standing. Dupré's works nod in the direction of 17th-century France, where the court of Louis XIV was the very acme of excess. In 1680, the king had forty wigmakers, and the Countess of Martignon paid her hairdresser 24,000 francs to make a new excessive hair sculpture every day, which sometimes caught light in the chandeliers. Stealing wigs in the street was common. Pressure from heavy wigs caused serious inflammation of the temples.

Dupré has developed these ideas of flamboyance and exaggeration in dress to create sculptures that are just about wearable – Picardels (an Elizabethan word meaning ruffs), tunics, dresses that would tear if worn, hats and tiaras. The headgear seems to offer comic challenges to the head itself. Is this really wearable? Is it too precarious? Will it cause pain? They hover at some strange mid-point between wearability and flightiness. They are only as settled as birds are settled.

The relationship between art and fashion has always been fluid. Dupré has worked with paint, paper, collage, plastic, textiles and metal, to create work that sits somewhere between the expressive, the free yet decisive, and the exact.

The drawings and paintings allow the materials to flow, to nearly fail. The watercolours are allowed to run, but only so far. The collages are wild, daring and immediate - monoprints are applied to torn paper shapes, and liquid paint drooled on top.

These two-dimensional works have informed the textiles. Fabric is approached in the same manner, slightly sideways, with a sense of decorum, but with hysteria building up just underneath the surface. Excess can so easily spill over into the ridiculous. Dupré calls her faux dresses Facades, partly as a homage to Rothko who called his paintings by the same name, but mainly because they are obviously one-sided. They are presenting a face to the world. Behind it there is nothing, a blank. The hats and Picardels are wearable, but also flamboyant and loud. They walk the tightrope of daring expression, as does the most exciting couture. The approach to all the materials is similar. The strokes of pen, brush or needle are expressive, free yet decisive, exact.

Excess can so easily spill over into the ridiculous. The fashion designer John Galliano once said that a hat can be a veil, or an alibi, a head turner or a friend. Dupré's garments/facades are certainly veils, intending to celebrate, cover, enhance, exaggerate the wearer. Whether or not they become friends is yet to be seen, but it is an attractive goal for a garment.

Private View 5st October 2017

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Venue: Arthouse1. 45 Grange Road. London SE1 3BH

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