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Residency Retrospective: Marcia Kure

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Section: Artists in Residence at the V&A

Earlier this year, [Marcia Kure](#) was our Visual Artist in Residence. She was with us for 3 months and used this time to prepare for an exhibition at the [Purdy Hicks Gallery](#).

Usually based in America, we had a chance to catch up with Marcia a few weeks ago at [1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair](#). She had been working on writing a retrospective of her 3 months at the V&A, and I wanted to share it with you below as it's a lovely overview of what residents spend their time doing whilst they are here.

Visual Artist in Residence: Marcia Kure January – March 2014

Introduction

The goal of the residency was

- To have a period of 3 months to focus my work and expand my artistic practice.
- To interact with visitors and conduct workshops with staff of the V&A and members of the public
- To make new professional connections
- To use artwork and objects in the archives of the V&A, the Colthworkers' Centre and the Museum of Childhood to create a new body of work

Savile Row: On the Road of Tailors

I was lucky enough to visit some tailors on Savile Row, thanks to the kind assistance of Lorraine Mitchell who had existing contacts at both the tailors and the V&A. She went over the history of Savile Row and its tailors. Savile Row is the street in London where men's suits are individually fitted and created from raw materials to its final product.

The stores and workshops at Savile Row were nothing short of astonishing. It is, after all, the place where the term 'bespoke' was invented, a place where the finest clothes are made from the finest components, where carefully selected materials are transformed – by snips of scissors, precise stitches, and hands steadied through years of practice – into works of art. The street tells a story of the importance of knowledge and preservation, and of how tradition is not simply a shadow of the past, but a living, breathing thing, an act of carrying over from the past to the future that continues to be relevant today.

My experience at Savile Row opened doors to a tale of preservation, connection and community.

Influence of Alexander McQueen

One artist who mastered that skill of reinterpretation grounded in tradition of tailoring was Alexander McQueen. He apprenticed at Anderson & Sheppard, where he studied the craft of tailoring. He went on to explode the fashion world's sense of form with extravagant shapes and elaborate ornaments, all meticulously fabricated.



Alexander McQueen in the rabbit suit.
Sundays Observer Fashion Supplement by Tank
© Nick Knight

What attracted me to the man who wore the rabbit suit was his technical prowess with the chalk and cut, his understanding of history and how he was able to turn it on it's head, reinterpret it in new and innovative ways. His understanding of the relationship between cloth and the body spoke to me. McQueen would cut a pattern on a models body and in his clothing make the relationship of cloth and the body apparent.

"He would do a black coat, but then he would line it with human hair and it was blood red inside. So it was like a body. It was like the flesh with blood"
He reinvented the catwalk extending it into the world of theater, making his work a mixture of "sabotage and tradition" – a contradiction of misfits and high fashion.

Some of these concepts I have taken and adapted in my work.



Marcia Kure, Freud and the Conformist, 2014
Wool, polyester, cotton ,thread, synthetic wig and soft toy
158 x 79 x 122 cm
Shown at the Perdy Hicks Gallery, London, after V&A Residency

Inspired by Savile Row and Alexander McQueen, I worked out a body of new pieces: haphazard and careless, like an extension of sketches, drawings, or like a three-dimensional collage of odd juxtapositions, composed out of fragments and parts. The making of these fabric sculptures draws on traditional textile-making techniques, yet exposes hidden parts and secret panels. The sculptural elements attempt to give shape to a human form and reveal the body's imperfections.



Marcia Kure, The Androgyne IV. Faux Real (from the Androgyny Series), 2014
Kolanut pigment, watercolour, and pencil
On Arches Hot Press Watercolour Paper, 156LB, mounted with reversible archival conservators' adhesive on 100% cotton fibreboard
45.08x60.3x.095cm

Clothworkers' Centre

The Clothworkers' Centre is the textile storage facility of the V&A. The collection is a vast expanse of objects and material assembled from a wide range of time periods and geographical regions. In the study rooms one is able to spend uninterrupted time with works of art. Though most visitors and researchers look for and study specific objects or types of objects, I went there with an idea of what I was looking for but no firm object in my mind. My inquiry was open-ended; I wanted the objects I studied to lead to other objects of interest – to lead me down the rabbit hole as it were. For me, as an artist, close proximity to an object of interest ignites new ways of assimilating information, as I begin to develop a relationship to specific garments and objects.



Kiss of Death, black satin bonnet with pheasant feathers,
Jo Gordon, 1994. Museum no. T.139-1996 © Victoria and Albert Museum



Formal coat, Maker Unknown, 1700-1705.
Museum no. T.327&A-1982 © Victoria and Albert Museum

During the course of my research, I engaged with the other researchers, curators and archivists, discussing projects and materials. This further opened up my visits to the Clothworkers' Centre to new and engaging inquiries. My study was neither finite nor delimited; rather it was composed of a continuous series of new questions as I tested new ideas against the material.

The model of the residency encourages artists to work together with institutions to generate new ideas and bodies of work from the physical and historical stuff collected, assembled, arranged, and preserved. In drawing on this material for new projects together, a living and active archive is formed.

Community Outreach Program at the V&A: Home and Object Project

One of the community outreach projects I initiated and participated in during my time at the V&A was the Home and Object Project. The project proposed that beyond mere form, objects carry meaning; they are emotional containers that we develop attachment to. We are linked to objects by their power to evoke a memory or emotion and their ability to capture a moment in time.

The project involved discussions with myself and participants from the organisation, Capital A; about their lives and about specific objects they possess and carry on their person. Things that remind them of home or give them a sense of place. I was interested in hearing from the participants, who have experienced forms of homelessness for long or short periods, what their object represented for them: a memory, a representation of home or something that gave them a sense of safety, security or independence.