

# salartoria

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A+D

# sartorial flux

Curated by Valérie Lamontagne

September 7 – October 21, 2006

Left to right:

Alyce Santoro, *Sonic Fabric*, 2005

Despina Papadopoulou, *Day-for-Night: Modular Extensible Reconfigurable*, 2006

Heidi Kumao, *Monitor II: Audio Activated Dress*, 2005

Hoyun Son, *Unspoken Series*, 2005-ongoing

Joanna Berzowska, *Kukkia: Kinetic Electronic Garment*, 2005

Leonardo Bonanni and Cati Vaucelle, *PushMyButtons*, 2006

Valérie Lamontagne, *Peau d'Âne*, 2005-2006

Cover: front image, Despina Papadopoulou, *Courtly Bags*, 2000 /

back image, Leonardo Bonanni and Cati Vaucelle, *CoolMeDown*, 2006

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## The Connected (Social) Spaces of Wearables

The exhibition *Sartorial Flux* investigates the field of wearables—from the imaginative to the functional—through a presentation of custom-designed garments plumbing the social, cultural, and technology possibilities of networked and reactive fashions. While garments and accessories take on increasingly polydimensional roles adapted to our mobile lifestyles, technology provides us with opportunities for the development of ad-hoc networks and real-time data representations and exchanges. The increasingly chameleon facet of technology provides us with a context in which clothing becomes fluidly linked to immediate social, urban and environmental flux.

Technology and fashion have always been linked in their production and aesthetic lineages. Modern fabrics and mechanical modes of production have democratized the way clothes are fabricated and consumed. Further innovations into high-performance fabrics (sports, military, medical) have pushed the material possibilities of garments and accessories to service variously expanded needs and applications. Bradley Quinn notes how "Fashion, as an essential component of everyday life, provides the ideal means for information technologies to be constantly accessible and widely relied upon as they become indistinguishable from clothing."<sup>1</sup> Social and technological changes in the realm of popularized, miniaturized and networked electronics is now changing the way we perceive and will increasingly "experience" what we wear. The sartorial choices we make each morning are set to become increasingly versatile, mutable and multi-layered in functionality and symbolic import.

*Sartorial Flux* features the work of 8 designers working in the field of interactive fashion technologies. Coalescing aesthetics preoccupations with playful functionality, the works presented at A+D gallery speak to a desire to create garments reflecting the dynamic qualities of the social and information-rich networks we inhabit and navigate in our quotidian circuits. Borrowing in equal parts from advancements in ubiquitous technologies and the resurgence in craft practices and DIY ethos in the field of physical computing and hobbyists, the works in *Sartorial Flux* are hybrid responses, artistically imbricating technology and fashion.

# Artist as Techno Fashion Designer

## **Alyce Santoro *Recycle, Repurpose, Re:sound***

In an age of accessories, personal entertainment / communication devices and gadgets, Alyce Santoro's *Sonic Fabric* (2005) re-invest a once novel technology: the audiocassette player. The custom-fabric garments and objects Santoro has created—a dress, umbrella and string of Tibetan Tell-Tail Thangka Flags—are composed of equal parts recycled / pre-recorded audio cassette tape and polyester thread woven on a small commercial Dobby loom. The idea to use cassette tape as source materials for an “audio” fabric came from Santoro's twinned fascination with the sailing practice of using magnetic tape as wind indicators (due to tape's durability and sensitivity to wind volatility) combined with research into the Tibetan practice of creating prayer flags printed with mantras, or sacred sounds. Resulting in what could be described as an analogue i-pod interface, *Sonic Fabric* re-purposes the now derelict technology of audiocassettes to imbue it with a new purpose and audience. Quinn has noted how reconstruction through the use of vintage clothing / materials in fashion creates polymorphous notions of time. “Just as old fabrics have acquired unique texture and patina that cannot be simulated in new ones, their forgotten histories bring the past into the present, evoking narratives of the garment's lived experience.”<sup>2</sup> Activated by a re-tooled cassette player used to “read” the fabric's surfaces, *Sonic Fabric* permits the wearer to randomly access a fragmented and fluidly reconfigured audio-rich history.

## **Despina Papadopoulous**

### ***Somatic Circuits, Shifting Perceptions & Eco Modernism***

Clothes make the man (or woman) it is said—but what of its ability to shift somatic experiences? Despina Papadopoulous' wearable investigations are articulated through shifting perceptions and social connectivity. *HugJackets* (2004) features two jackets with the fronts emblematically quilted with conductive fabric and the backs patch worked with LED grid patterns. The jackets' intrinsic relationship to one another is expressed during the act of two wearers' embrace causing the conductive fabrics in the front to close an electric circuit and actuate its lights. *ClickSneaks* (2005) was created out of a desire to have comfortable shoes (sneakers) be infused with the alluring sonic reverberations of the high-heeled gait. *Courtly Bags* (2000) are performative accessories which surreptitiously envelope the wearer in a storm of light and staccato electronic chirps. Revealing the subtle relationships we cultivate with our adornments and accessories these works irrevocably shift our somatic encounters with fashion. *Day-for-Night: Modular Extensible Reconfigurable* (2006) is inspired by 1960s icon Paco Rabanne who championed the use of experimental materials and pre-fabricated objects in his creation of jewel-like chain-linked dresses—ironically described by the designer as ‘unwearable.’<sup>3</sup> *Day-for-Night* takes these same experimental strategies to create a dress comprised of 436 white circuit boards linked together by metal rings. Each panel of the dress is autonomously addressable, as well as solar-powered, further expanding Rabanne's legacy of craft / modernist design into the 21st century.

## **Heidi Kumao *Connectivity, Sonic Landscape***

Increasingly clothes have the capacity to monitor, reflect and interact with public social spaces. Invested with mutability, flux and acuity our fashions become not only a reflection of who we are, but where we are. *Monitor II* (2005) is a noise-level barometer dress which harnesses the qualities of a stereo monitor to graphically represent the wearer's immediate audio sphere in real-time. A proportionate relationship is established between the sonic ambient environment and the relative intensity of the dress' illumination of 500 LEDs. *Monitor II* is a responsive garment providing a visual correlation with the wearer's proximal noise sphere that forges an acute relationship with the urban landscape – the ultimate source of high decibel sound.

## **Hoyun Son *Performativity, Social Irony***

Fashion's use of the uniform archetype suggests authority all the while subverting its normatively ascribed iconography. Andrew Bolton in expressing how we negotiate increasingly nomadic spaces notes how: “Designers of supermodern clothing, in borrowing the look of quasi uniforms, negate this functionality [control and authority]. In so doing, they address the imbalance of power that is explicit in the ‘clothing’ of transitional space.”<sup>4</sup> Taking the construction safety vest as a departure point, Hoyun Son's *Unspoken Series* (2005-ongoing) straddles multiple social taboos to reveal the hidden thoughts of its wearer. The Chicago municipal safety vests have been embedded 840 red and green LED's to permit the display of text. The vests have been programmed for various social contexts to reveal messages that the wearer would otherwise not pronounce in public. In one example, the vests were worn by “L” (the Chicago metro system) passengers to display at once humorous and confrontational messages such as: “Took my seat...I am not happy!” and “Look you are trapped...are you happy?” The vests have also been adapted to gallery settings in which they display equality prevocational messages addressed at the artworks on display and their producers. *Unspoken Series* prompts the public to participate in a heightened social interaction, paralleled in performance art strategies from George Grosz's 1918 Berlin promenades dressed as “Dada Death” to present-day Mathew Barney's performative video allegories of myth and ritual.

## **Joanna Berzowska *Memory, Intimacy***

Garments contain memory. Their shape, wear and tear, fibers, style and technologies used in their production—impact the wearer's relationship to the sartorial as it spans various temporal pathways from artifact of time past to present social actuator. Joanna Berzowska's wearables probe the charged emotive possibilities of dress through memory-rich technologies and kinetic behavioral scenarios. *Kukkia's* dress neckline is decorated with three dynamic flowers that mechanically open and close over 15 second intervals. Made of felt and silk, the flower petals integrate Nitinol wire, a memory-based shape-shifting alloy. The Nitinol content of the flowers metamorphizes the flora's shape, causing the delicately mobile petals to pull together when heated and blossom again as the alloy cools. Automata and mechanical life forms have marveled audiences since the 17th century and before. However, Barbara Maria Stafford cautions how today's automata, seemingly seamlessly incorporated into all aspects of

life, incites a more sinister reflection. Notes Stafford: “A cross between an animated object d'art, a child's rotatable toy, and a recombinant experiment in bioengineering, the posthuman automaton continues to be enmeshed in the dark dealing of replication.”<sup>5</sup> *Kukkia's* animated blooms are further proof of our on-going fascination—eerie and delightful—with kinetic life forms.

## **Leonardo Bonanni and Cati Vaucelle *Therapy, Tactile Interfaces***

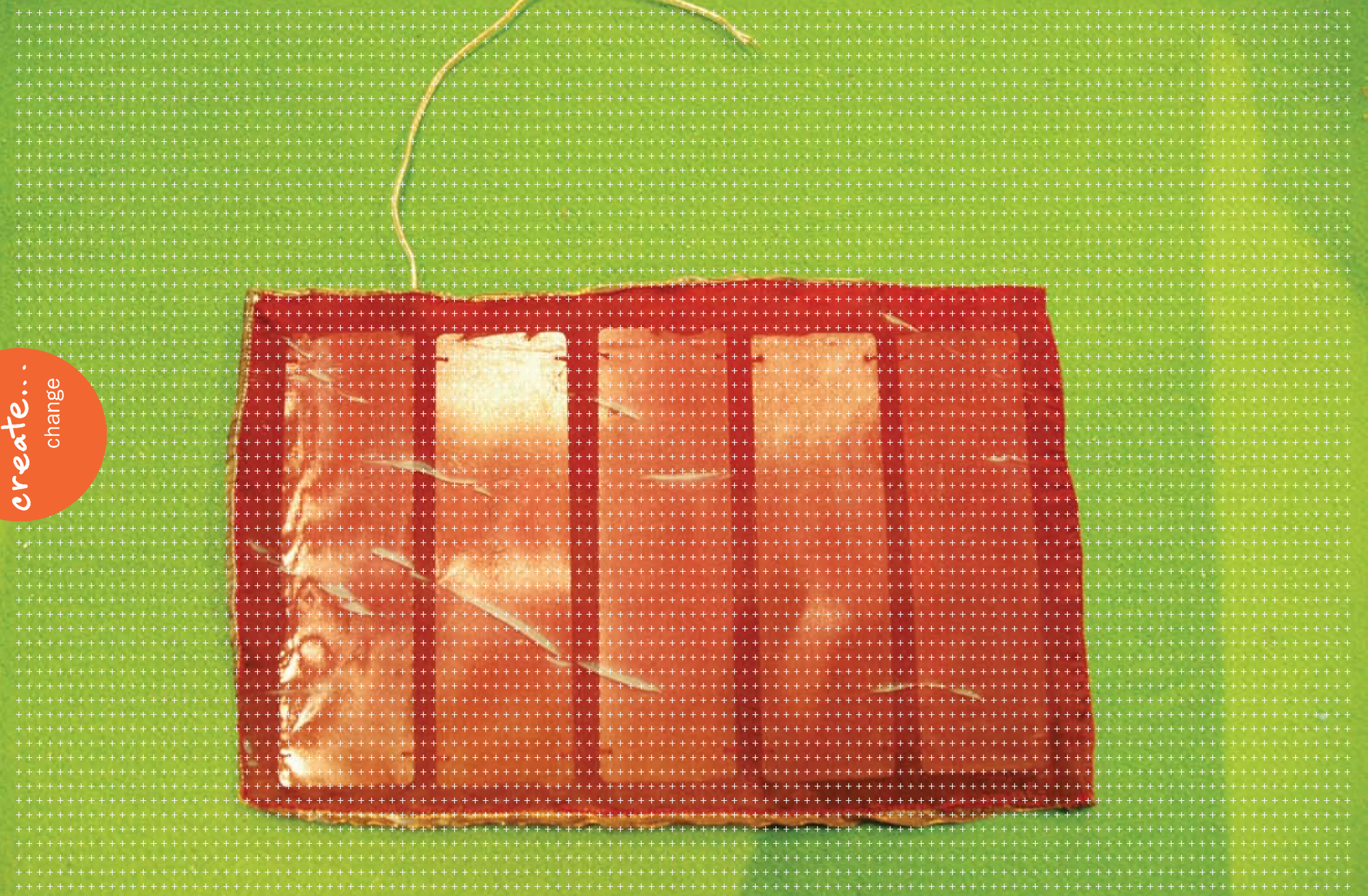
Taking the perception-changing experiments and therapy-centered works of artists such as Lygia Clark to a technologically driven conclusion, the works of Leonardo Bonanni and Cati Vaucelle are adapted to specific psychological conditions necessitating tactile intervention in the form of compresses, touch, pain-delivery and physical restraint. *CoolMeDown* (2006), an electronic wrap, delivers a cooling sensation akin to treatments given to schizophrenia patients. *HurtMe* (2006), a pain-generating bracelet with an inflating band and plastic teeth, has potential in the treatment of self-mutilation patients. *PushMyButtons* (2006) proposes a remote approach to applying touch therapy via surgical brushes is designed for patients with intimacy issues or medical conditions necessitating isolation. *SqueezeMe* (2006) stimulates therapeutic auto-embrace via pneumatic chambers integrated into a vest, a strategy having been shown beneficial in the prevention of panic attacks and the management of autistic or aggressive children. The proposed accessories—having direct medical implications for the democratization of care scenarios—provide an opportunity for, and inquiry into, portable, intimate and self-administering forms of treatments. As therapeutic prosthetics the series of works by Bonanni and Vaucelle are at the cusp of scientific / phenomenological research quixotically addressing social and physical needs embodied in wearable technologies.

## **Valérie Lamontagne *Weather, Cosmos, Fairy Tale***

In the Charles Perrault fairy tale “Peau d'Âne” a young princess, whose stepfather's riches are dependant on his gold excreting donkey, orders the impossible from her doting father in order to avoid having to marry him: three dresses made of immaterial materials: the sun, moon and sky. *Peau d'Âne* (2005-2006) incarnates these “impossible” dresses in a material form. A weather antenna culls fluctuating atmospheric data thus transforming the dresses and reflecting the changing barometric characteristics of sky, moon and sun. The “Sun” dress is constructed of an intricately embroidered circuit pattern of 128 LEDs set into motion by real-time changes in UV, solar radiation and sun intensity readings. Cultural historian Marina Warner, analyzing the symbolic and social implications of fairy tales, has suggested that shape shifting and metamorphosis through costume is often a trope for a heroine's self-actualization. The donning of new threads in tales connotes a physical as well as social desire for “liberation” from the confines of tradition, family and husband in the quest to discover one's “true” self.<sup>6</sup> Thus, clothes, the ultimate interface through which ‘self’ is displayed to the outside world, provide an actual and symbolic pivot point between self (heroine / wearer) and other (society / public). In *Peau d'Âne* the dresses are conferred with additional powers: connectivity to the cosmos and weather patterns.

## **Valérie Lamontagne, *Curator***

<sup>1</sup> Bradley Quinn, *Techno Fashion* (Oxford & New York: Berg, 2002), 1. / <sup>2</sup> Bradley Quinn, *The Fashion of Architecture* (Oxford & New York: Berg, 2003), 68. / <sup>3</sup> Linda Kamitsis, *Paco Rabanne* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1999). / <sup>4</sup> Andrew Bolton, *The Supermodern Wardrobe* (London: Victoria & Albert Publications, 2002), 15. / <sup>5</sup> Barbara Maria Stafford and Frances Terpak, *Devices of Wonder: From the World in a Box to Images on a Screen* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2001), 47. / <sup>6</sup> Marina Warner, *From The Beast to The Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (London: Vintage, 1995).



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