

Nicole Dextras  
Artist Statement

A-Dressing the Future

The *A-Dressing the Future* series looks at the worlds of adornment and language in a dystopian scenario of survivors, where the fragility of life is palpable, words melt and grow while the need for beautification and status persists. This work dresses the survivors of this dystopian future in plant-based garments that epitomize the resourcefulness of future creatives in the face of material shortages. It also questions our dependency on language and our conviction of its certainty.

This new series begins with the launch of a fictional magazine Jardin Culture, set in the near future by an eccentric editor who decides to revive the printed page into a compelling montage of images. This first issue is one of many to come, which will endeavour to present a socio-political context for environmental issues. The pretext of the editor establishes a platform for a variety of topics including disassociation with the natural world, the industrialization of disposable goods and the devaluation of language in media. In addition, the composition of the layout facilitates the correlative aspects of my bodies of work in photography, sculpture and fashion design. Furthermore there is an implicit irony in addressing man's disconnect with nature in a publication that sees itself as the purveyor of grand lifestyles and trends. My purpose in these matters is to remain, in the words of artist Ree Morton: "light and ironic on serious subjects without frivolity." <sup>1</sup>

My satirical approach is based on my commitment to present topical issues from a tolerant yet complex perspective. The words of Andrew Brown, author of Art and Ecology Now, (Thames and Hudson, 2014) sum up the current state of my art practice. In the Re/Create chapter, where my work is featured, he writes:

Prototypes, experiments, hypotheses and beta tests are among the approaches adopted by the artists in this section. Radical in intent and iconoclastic in method, they seek to challenge the status quo and disrupt conventional habits. Consequently, humour and playfulness are characteristic of a number of projects found here... (They) like every joke, reveals a truth of some kind. (182)

I have chosen the magazine over the book format for *A-Dressing the Future* because unlike the book, which has physical and authoritative weight, the magazine is generally understood to be light and accessible. The magazine also lends itself well to a serial and seasonal structure, which will enable further iterations on the same theme. For example, Jardin Culture's first issue "HortiCulture" takes the Baroque garden as a starting point for man's claim over the natural world. The next issue, "AgriCulture" will expound on the concept of the mechanization of the land and civilization. This is the beginning of an ongoing body of work that will produce other magazines that relate to fashion, beauty, architecture, nomadic shelters, food supply and design.

My images are arranged into two page spreads and the only text is by the editor, who has no writing staff or advertisers. In essence it mirrors my own art practice, which survives precariously on experimentation, shoestring budgets and elbow grease. Like the editor, Dexter Nicholson, the artworks that grace these pages are a trio of nom de plumes based on my name: Nicole Vivian D'Extras, Jean-Xavier Destroches and Élocin Sartxed. In so doing I have created a parallel universe for my diverse art practice that allows me to infiltrate it from numerous perspectives.

The clothing designs of the Nicole Vivian D'Extras (NVD) label are a new moniker for my *Weedrobes* series, which consists of garments made out of live plant materials as a critique on the world of fast fashion and other expendable consumer products. From its inception in 2005, the *Weedrobes* series posed questions about the future ramifications of unsustainable practices. *A-Dressing the Future* fast-forwards the viewer into a dystopian society where the present fashion industry has collapsed and designers such as NVD create clothing from the organic materials at hand. This new magazine format allows me to further animate the backstories that were created for each garment. For example *Camellia Countessa* whose elaborate pannier dress is based the early tradition of willow branches in corsetry, now takes her rightful place in the garden of Versailles. Forthcoming editions will set the stage other *Weedrobes* characters such as the *Queens of the Desert* who live in a desiccated SoCal landscape tinged with soupçon of withered Rodeo Drive prestige.

The fictional Jean-Xavier Destroches is a photographer and his bio (like the others in the Contributors section) is constructed from factual experiences. He is the personification of my long standing interest in photography and my personal progression from film to digital image making. He encapsulates my penchant for abandoned spaces and my study of the poetic nature of decay. Photographs from my travels also allow me to take this discourse from the personal to the global such as juxtaposing my *Urban Forgers* wearable sculptures to the Teepeeeland squats in Berlin.

Élocin Sartxed (my name backwards) is a sobriquet, which integrates my more formal sculptural works, such as three-dimensional text. They indicate a new era where language is ephemeral, no longer solid or reliable due to the degeneration of objective journalism and the hyperbole of advertising. Hence the dystopian trepidation regarding the written word has led artists such as Sartxed to erect words that melt and grow in the landscape. Words like Culture made from living grass or Resource made from lake ice replace the stories usually found in magazines and the editor encourages the reader to spin their own story in the blank white spaces on the page.

The editor's pseudonym Dexter Nicholson acts as a platform for a timely discourse on dystopian themes. We are presently realizing the impact of non-regulated industrialization on our environment and as a result much speculation about our future has infiltrated popular culture. My outlook on the future is not based on sci-fi fantasy but rather on a reflection of the escalation of climate change problems we are facing today. For example, just in the past few months my home city of Vancouver Canada has witnessed record droughts followed by

intense fires where strict water usage bans had to be implemented for the first time in its history.

My intent with this new work is to offer an alternative to the reductive post-apocalyptic fictions depicted in Hollywood films, where the hero, often male and often white, must save the world from catastrophe. Instead *A-Dressing the Future* presents a world that is not on the brink of nuclear war but one where a succession of natural disasters cause the economy as we know it to collapse. Unlike the survivors of drama driven plots, this scenario envisions the determination to rebuild as a dominant force. I take this cue from the resilience and empathy demonstrated time and time again in a wide variety of tragedies from the Quebec Ice Storm to Hurricane Katrina. Therefore the survivors in this new world are not the scantily clad warrior chicks portrayed in video games. They are more akin to the people who already exist at the margins of society today: they make sustainable clothing, they produced zines, and they forage for local foods. Although I am fascinated by the historical depictions of future fashions from the kitsch Barbarella to the costumes of Jean-Paul Gaultier for the Mad Max movies, I predict that forthcoming generations will not be wearing shiny silver outfits but in all likelihood clothing made from a derivative of pomegranate peels.

*A-Dressing the Future* is at once a retrospective of my past works and a new launch pad for forthcoming creations in a format that is inexpensive and accessible. The inclusion of my work in the Art and Ecology book alongside contemporary artists such as Futurefarmers, Vaughn Bell and Tattfoo Tan supports my use of nature based materials as a common ground for inclusive dialogue that provoke questions about consumerism through humour and grace. In my world, dresses are made of flowers, words made of ice melt in the landscape and poetry is found in nature's roots. Like the aliases in this new work, I chose to address issues of the past, the present and the future through art.

1. Diehl, Carol (December 3, 2009). "Ree Morton, New York at the Drawing Center". Art in America.