

ARTIST STATEMENT

BOTANICAL WEARABLES

My focus as an artist is to create environmental art and ephemeral installations based on the principles of a socially engaged art practice. The Botanical Wearables segment of my current body of work began with the Weedrobes series, which consists of dresses made from fresh flowers and leaves. The work examines issues of sustainability, consumerism and the fashion industry.

The concept is based on a future world where the desire for goods remains despite the lack of means to produce them. This world is not the overly dramatic post apocalyptic one portrayed in Hollywood blockbusters but one where the slow erosion of natural resources plus the crippling effect of economic breakdowns have caused the fashion industry to collapse beneath the weight of its own greed. Here the elite, still craving status, turn to artists to fabricate garments from the rapid reclamation of the natural world.

This series began as humble desire to combine live plant materials with my personal experience with fashion, which includes growing up in a store and working in a garment factory. Beginning in 2005, every summer I experimented with techniques to create a completely compostable wearable garment. I adapted basket-weaving methods and through trial and error learned much about the local plants at my disposal. As I mastered the technical aspects of the Weedrobes I began to stage street interventions with the garments such as Laurel Suffragette on Robson Street in 2011, in order to discuss issues of fast fashion. These were well received but ironically the garments themselves were so seductive that they also elicited a misplaced desire to consume. The series evolved into the Little Green Dress Projekt where I made twenty-one dresses over a period of two months on site for the Earth Art exhibition at VanDusen Botanical in 2012. Here the decay of the garments was demonstrated to the public for the first time and the concept of accepting the passage of time was more apparent. The project raised questions about the sustainability of the fashion industry and a served as an introduction to slow fashion.

In 2011 during the Occupy movement, I also began the Urban Foragers {house of eco drifters} series, which took on broader social issues such self-sustainable living within a nomadic lifestyle. I created garments that converted into portable shelters while also housing one's food supply. They are inspired by my long-standing interest in portable shelters and my research into low-tech fabrication techniques that minimize the use of plastics and metals. The premise for the Urban Foragers is that the dresses are prototypes that could be multiplied and personalized to create a highly mobile and healthy itinerant community. The

video shot in California explores the concept of sharing food resources as each dress contributes to a communal meal and that the spaces between them allow for flexible common area sites.

In 2013 the StoreFront, *objects of desire series* was developed during an art residency at the Lansdowne Shopping Centre in Richmond BC. It is a faux retail installation consisting of ephemeral fashion items such as clothing, handbags and shoes set up as a trope for consumer culture. The line between desire and ownership is further blurred with standard marketing strategies such as branding and interior design. As I did not have access to the interior of the store, I instigated interventions within the public spaces of the mall. The Extra D'extras MakeOvers performance, where I adorned the hair of shoppers with plants (as a spoof of the ubiquitous lab coat clad department store clerk dispensing beauty samples) was a great success. I also worked with local performers to animate the displayed clothing in the mall. The Mobile Garden Dress, worn by Nita Bowerman made a salad from the vegetables in her skirt, which she then shared with shoppers. Sir William the Explorer played by Billy Marchenski wore a grass and leaf long coat and roamed the mall looking for plunder in exchange for magic beans. StoreFront is an ongoing project with new pieces created every year with the aim of installing a more comprehensive exhibition in the future.

In 2015 I began a new series *A Dressing the Future*, a trilogy of tableaux photographs portraying creative survivors set in dystopian scenarios. The first in this series, *Persephone's Reflection* depicts a roughly furnished fruit warehouse, where invasive plants are threatening to engulf the living space. The agricultural economy has collapsed due to rampant forest fires and a young woman uses her ingenuity and skills to combat the isolation and instability of her situation. In this re-telling of the ancient Greek myth, Persephone eats the pomegranate not as banishment from the living world but because it's healing properties will nourish and sustain her. Furthermore she fashions her stylish clothing from pomegranate peels, dates and fruit leather to preserve her self-esteem and dignity. She copes with her seclusion by building terrariums with figurines of herself recounting her happy childhood in the ancestral orchard. My intent is to offer an alternative to the reductive post-apocalyptic fictions depicted in Hollywood films, which exploit the drama of natural catastrophes to manipulate our current fears about environmental degradation. New pieces for this series are planned for 2016-17.

The *Weedrobes* philosophy is based on being a free thinker, creating one's own sense of style while also raising awareness about the impact of industry on our eco-system. Our most effective tool for change is for consumers to demand more equitable products. It may be impractical to wear clothing made with leaves but our future depends on the creation of garments made from sustainable resources.