



Mobile Garden Dress, 2011

'The decaying aspect of my art is very much part of the process. My art work is about having an authentic experience of nature, one where we are not separate from the natural world and one where there is beauty in all of life's cycles. The modern expectation of humans staying perpetually youthful and fresh is not only unrealistic but the cosmetics and fashion industries are laughing at us all the way to the bank.'

NICOLE DEXTRAS

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Canadian, b. 1956

Nicole Dextras creates ephemeral works inspired by the socially engaged art practice of Joseph Beuys and a commitment to sustainable living. She began her *Weedrobes* series in 2005 as an experiment in making clothes and accessories from plants. Her original concept of clothing as a link between the body and the land has now evolved into an ongoing investigation into consumerism, the fashion industry and our relationship with the built environment.

Each *Weedrobes* project operates in four stages. It begins as a garment made from plant materials, designed with a high degree of craftsmanship and attention to detail to mimic actual clothing; upon closer examination, it becomes apparent that the garment is made from leaves and flowers and is held together with thorns; and each unique piece is created with what is in season at the time and what is available in the artist's garden in Vancouver, in abandoned lots or in compost piles in local parks. In the second stage, the clothing is photographed being worn in urban settings that contrast with the natural materials and origins of the clothes. The third stage involves interventions in shopping areas, where the wearer discusses consumerism and environmental issues with passers-by. In the fourth stage, the garment is returned to nature by being placed in a garden or park setting and allowed to decompose.

A development from the initial *Weedrobes* project, *Urban Foragers* is a series of works that Dextras describes as 'wearable architectures that support a sustainable lifestyle for the new urban nomad'. Each item of clothing can be transformed into a temporary shelter and can also enable the growing of food. The *Mobile Garden Dress*, for example, consists of pots of edible plants and a hoop skirt that converts into a tent.

According to Dextras, 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 ecosystem'. As with all of her work, the ephemeral qualities of the piece symbolize the vulnerability and fragility of our ecosystem. Wearing nature not only emphasizes the fundamental link between humans and the natural environment, but also focuses attention on the implications of throwaway consumer goods.



Skunk Cabbage Slippers, 2008



Yucca Prom Dress, 2005

Art and Ecology Now, Andrew Brown, Thames and Hudson, 2014