

Sculpture

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E.V. Day makes sculptures that perform as symbolic visual descriptions of aspects of our culture. She is an ethnographer who has turned her scrutiny toward her own social and political environment. Yet the work does not lecture. It benefits from a postcolonialist and post-Structuralist modesty. Day does not promote an agenda or predict a solution. She chooses to exhibit a *telling* object. We are presented with a view that, ideally, will entice us to reconsider some condition of the status quo.

Her primary current topic is identity construction. For example, the formatting of gender in a consumer-driven, information-saturated, and increasingly technological society is the focal point of two important series: "Exploded Couture" (1999) and "Dissected Wetsuit" (1999).

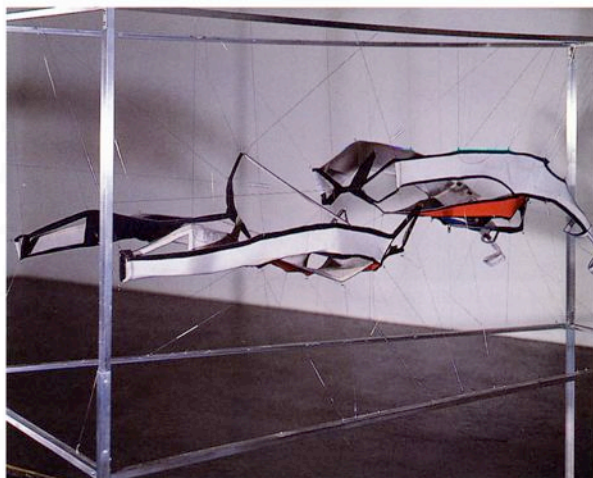
Works in the two series are based on specialized adaptations of common commodities. These hybrids—evening gowns and wet suits—are manipulated and recontextualized to expose the bizarre lurking within the familiar. It is a provocative means to gain the attention of an audience and a device that was mined extensively by the Surrealists. Day presents deconstructed clothing as sculptural objects, disassembled in a way that stretches the material and function of the object to expose seams and create rents, breaks, and fragments without losing sight of the whole. Into and between these ruptures, wires, filaments, and screws are inserted to create an organizing web and unite the disorganized form.

Day's "Exploded Couture" series clearly illustrates her search for a form that revamps and reconstructs a foundation object. The base forms for the group are designer evening dresses. *White Bombshell* (1999) features a dress much like the one worn by Marilyn Monroe in the famous 1950s film still in which she stands over a

subway vent, smiling rapturously as she attempts to hold down a billowing skirt. Day has pulled the look-alike apart. Flags, scraps, and tatters of netting and silky fabric are suspended between taut, stretched lengths of glistening monofilament joined to the shiny pods of a multitude of tension screws.

The sculpture retains a reference to the bodice, waist, and skirt of the dress;

Day has long been fascinated by the billowing clouds of fallout that rise above a nuclear explosion. *White Bombshell* makes direct reference to this baleful knowledge and acts as a loaded link pointing toward and amplifying another kind of knowledge: a prevalent definition of womanhood that presents the seductive feminine as predatory and destructive. Day uses the sculptures that make up the "Exploded Couture" series to redefine

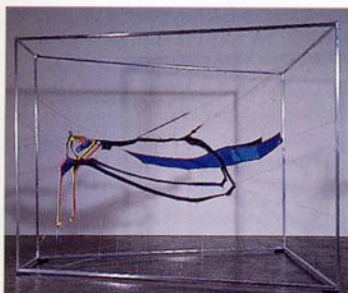
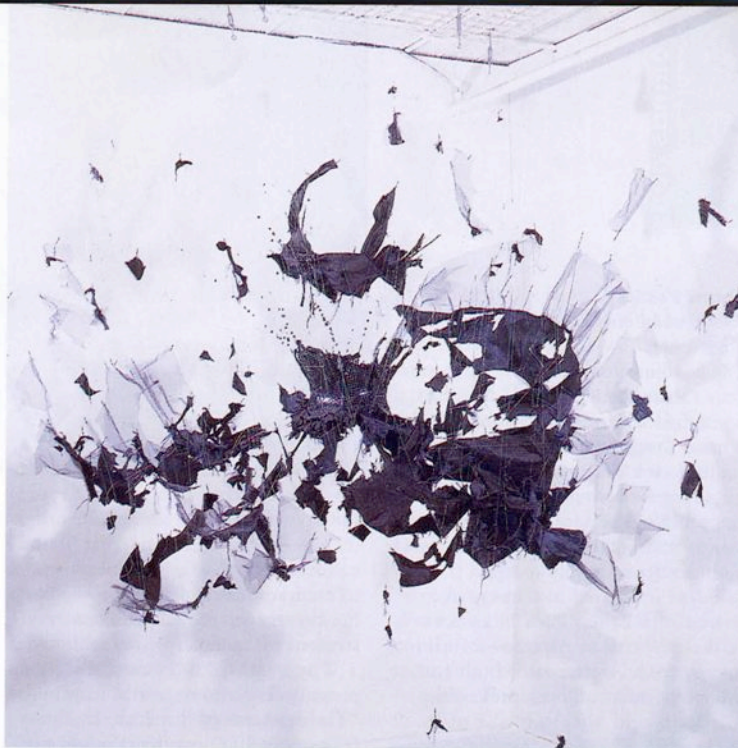


though the whole is fragmented, the pieces are realigned in a semblance of their original configuration and refer plainly to an absent feminine body. The fabric construction is placed several feet above the floor of the gallery and appears to be floating in the moment of coming undone. The sustaining web of thread and screws that extends from ceiling to floor is hardly invisible but does not detract from the integrity of the work. In fact, the auxiliary structure glitters bewitchingly and augments the focal form like jewelry.

this definition. She shows the explosion that occurs when a subject reverses herself despite social confines and when identity is revamped from within to rewrite a negative self-stereotype. The series showcases the ecstasy implicit in a release of pressure that accompanies a joyful blowout—each installment of "Exploded Couture" exposes a perpetual, tantalizing, optical transformation.

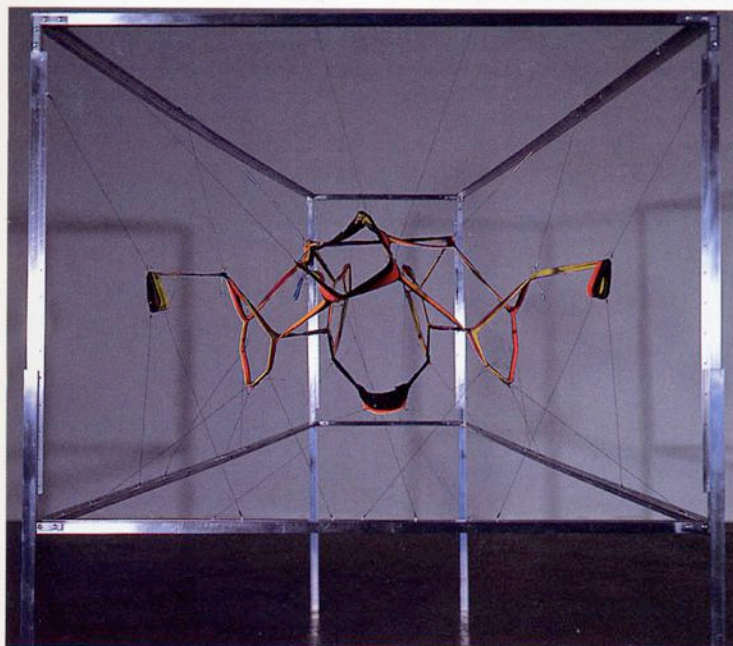
The "Dissected Wetsuit" (1999) series explores similar issues, but with a twist. Day pushes her exploration of

identity construction to include the much-touted and impending merger of technology with biology. She builds potential post-humans—fantasy figures—using neoprene wet suits to define their forms. A wet suit is designed to function as a second skin and to prepare the human body to thrive in abnormal conditions, but it is also meant to enhance the body it covers through seam line, shape, and color. It is a means to rewrite an identity by manipulating, ideally improving, the function and appearance of the physique. Day slices the suits along



their original seam lines, then stretches them on aluminum surgical wire inside wire frames to imply anthropomorphic creatures. These dissected, reconfigured, and tautly stretched forms are presented as provocative, aggressive, and sexually alluring composites of technology and flesh.

Clockwise from above: *Black Bombshell*, 1999. Dismembered dress and monofilament, 8 x 8 x 8 ft. *Wetsuit (2)*, 1995. Wet suit, aluminum, and surgical wire, 6 x 8 x 4 x 1.5 ft. *Wetsuit (3)*, 1995. Wet suit, aluminum, and surgical wire, 6.5 x 8 x 6 x 2 ft.



They are displayed like beckoning trophy specimens culled from a natural history museum and serve as testaments to the culture's faith in the transcendental potential of fashion and technology.

E.V. Day pursues a dedicated approach to a carefully crafted production that is thick with penetrating observation, but she does not forego aesthetic pleasure. Material, placement, and construction are managed to promote a playful, erotic, exotic, and sometimes ecstatic visual experience. In this way, these sculptures, ripe with nostalgic and art historical references, benefit from a veiled homage to Baroque sculpture—especially that of Bernini. They are consummately sensual and alluringly kitschy because, as in *The Ecstasy of St. Theresa*, an implied physical joy, even a trace of low-brow delight, frames and modifies the cogency of the underlying critique.

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