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E.V. Day: *Divas Ascending*

This spring, *artwithoutwalls* presents the Louisville premiere of E.V. Day's *Divas Ascending* at the Kentucky Center for the Performing Arts. This installation of suspended sculptures featuring retired opera costumes was originally commissioned for Lincoln Center in 2009-2010. Beginning April 14, 2011, eight of Day's stretched, deconstructed, re-imagined and reinvented iconic costumes will hang from miles of monofilament and fishing tackle in the soaring main lobby space of Louisville's Kentucky Center for the Performing arts.

[Listen to ArtWithoutWalls Director Alice Gray Stites speak on this project.](#)



While Bizet's *Carmen*, Leoncavallo's *Clown*, and *Cinderella* (in both peasant and princess incarnations at once) may be recognizable to some audiences, all of the costumes have been transformed, creating new roles, new characters, and new potential narratives. The artist says, "I wanted the sculptures to reflect and refract the specific roles the costumes had played....I wanted to reanimate those lives and give them a future form." Day's *Carmen* wields both her signature fan and a bloody knife; the courtesan *Violetta's* white gown is stretched taut, revealing its armature, its ethereal, transparent form striving for transcendence; the sumptuous, bejeweled fabric of *Mimi-Rigor Mortis*, star of Puccini's "La Bohème," lends a heroic elegance to her rigid, tragic state; and Lehár's *Merry Widow* is suspended upside-down, currency spilling from the top of the sculpture toward the floor, in a witty and provocative vision of how the allure of money and the constraints of gender shaped the *Widow's* fate.

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For over a decade, Day has used women's clothing to explore and expand traditional mythologies and cultural conventions. The first sculpture in her *Exploding Couture* series, *Bombshell*—a blown-up version of Marilyn Monroe's famous white dress—was included in the Whitney Museum of American Art's 2000 Biennial. The following year, Day deployed hundreds of women's thongs in stealth-fighter formations in the exhibition *G-Force*. Day's 2006 large-scale sculpture *Bride Fight* is a spectacular high-tension string-up of two dueling bridal gowns.

"I make sculptures that transform familiar icons of women's empowerment and entrapment into new objects that confound conventional readings of these clichés, and constellate meaning in a range of emotions: anxiety, ecstasy, liberation, and release," says the artist. Day describes the opportunity to work with opera costumes as a natural extension of her practice, since the "recurring themes in my work—explosion, velocity, and spectacle, have an energy that might be termed 'operatic.'"

Humor is also present: Mozart's famous seducer Don Giovanni is presented here in a sculpture of black gloves reaching toward frothy female undergarments,

and Leoncavallo's *Clown* is surrounded by daggers, but the billowing white costume seems to float comically balloon-like, over the space below, a figure of both comedy and tragedy. Day's *Divas* are as regal and imposing as their title, and yet their stretched, altered forms expose myriad possibilities for new interpretations, new narratives. The artwork in Day's installation consists, as she explains in the "interplay between the story of the opera from which the costume came, the moment created by the sculpture, and the physicality of the transformed garment."

Suspended permanently in moments of transition, these *Divas* are indeed *Ascending*, transcending tradition at the intersections of various sources and genres. Day's works are both sculpture and performance, appropriated and invented. The dynamic hybridity of Day's work is reinforced by its presentation in Louisville as a unique, first-time collaboration between *artwithoutwalls* and the Kentucky Center for the Performing Arts.

The exhibition remains on view until October 15, 2011

This project was organized in conjunction with Salomon Contemporary, New York



Works included in the exhibition:

- Violetta* (Verdi, "La Traviata")
- Mimi-Rigor Mortis (Puccini, "La Bohème")
- Carmen (Bizet, "Carmen")
- Merry Widow (Lehár, "The Merry Widow")
- Skirt Chaser (Mozart, "Don Giovanni")
- Cinderella: Distressed Peasant/Princess
- The Clown (Leoncavallo, "Pagliacci")
- Hats



About the artist

E.V. Day is a New York-based artist whose work has been featured in group and solo exhibitions throughout the US and Europe. Day's work is in the collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the National Museum of Women in the Arts, the New Museum, and many others. In January 2011, at Carolina Nitsch Contemporary Art, New York, Day exhibited *Seducers*, a new series of digital prints inspired by her experience as the Munn artist-in-residence at the Claude Monet Foundation in Giverny, France. This spring, new work by Day is being presented in a solo exhibition in San Antonio, Texas, at the Artpace International Artist-in-Residence program. Other recent and upcoming solo exhibitions include Rhona Hoffman