

# NANCY PRICE

## Hopeless...Romantic

January 9<sup>th</sup> - February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2009

Reception: Friday, January 9<sup>th</sup>, 8pm - midnight

(reception for members and invited guests only)

Note...

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When a Woman Smiles Her Dress Should Smile With Her, 2008



## Hopeless...Romantic: Nancy Price at Stride Gallery

By Stephen Horne

In this exhibition at Stride Gallery, Nancy Price is presenting several works that involve us in an intertwining of craft and the art of *haute couture*. Her memorial to Madeleine Vionnet—arguably the most important modern French *couturier*—demonstrates Price's interest in the history and traditions of garment making. In this work, Price re-created an actual Vionnet gown. Madeleine Vionnet practiced from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century until the Second World War curtailed the activity of her house of couture. Price's commemorative work is titled *When a Woman Smiles Her Dress Should Smile with Her*, which could be understood to refer to the fit of Vionnet's designs to the "natural" body. Vionnet is well known; first, for conceiving the *haute couture* garment as a work of art to be lived with, and secondly, as an employer who provided progressive working conditions such as day-care and maternity leave for her employees. Vionnet was dedicated to living her life as a creator of unique works rather than products. She was also a successful woman of industry and commerce. These three factors of Vionnet's life and work have been a sustaining inspiration for Price.

Nancy Price states her position thus: "All crafted objects are an extension of (my) body, including architectural environs such as the home." In this theme of the home, the proximity of clothing to architecture is revealed as Price directs us to that unique place of paradox: home is a protection from trouble, at the same time being the source of troubles, perhaps of the very concept of trouble. Clothing, simultaneously covering and emphasizing one's skin, is a layer of the home and its architecture, of shelter and expressivity. In *couture*, fabric, body and movement interpenetrate.

The celebrated bias cut (across the cloth diagonal to the grain) that Vionnet used to create a woman-centred design has everything to do with what Price calls "fitting." This term derives from the actual practices of creating textiles and garments that consider the body "in the round" and the body in motion as intended sites. Price then expands the term to introduce themes such as belonging, or, conversely, difference. If we speak of fitting in the sense of a "fitting-in," we refer to the act of conforming, of blending into one's surroundings, of avoiding attention or controversy. This, a condition of "at-home-ness," is often a source of comfort and security. One is in one's place through self-concealment: through identity. This sort of concealment would be an obstacle to any creative expression; an aspect of the work's emotional material located in the dark underside of family and community.

On becoming-other, estranging oneself or becoming inappropriate, one may be called a "misfit." Such estrangement provides for encounters with surprise and uncertainty that, according to Elizabeth Grosz, attest "...to the artistic impact of sexual attraction, the becoming-other that seduction entails."<sup>(1)</sup> The estrangement she is referring to here is found in the process of letting-go, especially the letting go of one's home grounding, of "fitting." This might be taken literally but is

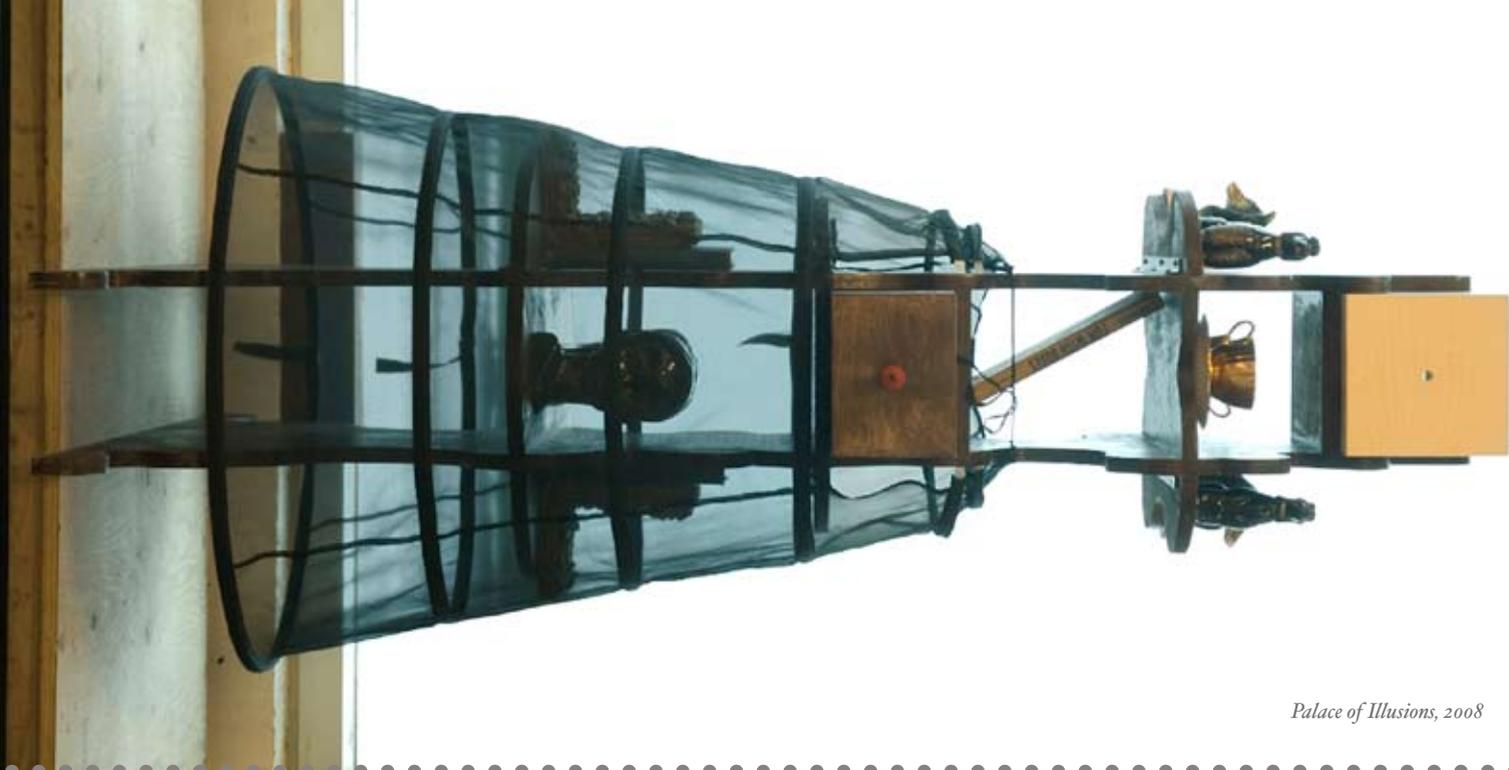
**Artist Biography:** *Nancy Price* was born in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario and has resided between in Nova Scotia and Alberta the last two years, and in Nova Scotia for the previous 13 years. She has degrees from the Ontario College of Art (1984) and the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design University (2002). She has received awards and award nominations for her work. Her design and textile experience includes periods working in Italy, Japan, and the Stratford Festival wardrobe department in Ontario, as well as teaching at the Alberta College of Art and Design in Calgary, and NSCAD University in Halifax. Her distinctive accessory designs have appeared in boutiques alongside international clothing designers, and in film. Her work has appeared in several exhibitions.

Much of Price's current work addresses the notion of "fitting" both literally and metaphorically, often with regard to her own "fit" within various situations. Nancy is interested in the interactive relationship of textiles animated by and extending both body and personality.

Textile curator and academic, Wendy Landry states:

"Price's work directly relates body and home décor as parallel modes of materiality constituting our socialized spatial environments that establish our fit and aspirations to, or our comments on, diverse dimensions of behavior and civility. These works also expressively delineate the intimate fit of dress with bodily anatomy and movement, as well as with social identity."

**Writer Biography:** In his writings on photographers such as Hiroshi Sugimoto and Thomas Demand, *Stephen Horne* has explored the re-invention of photographic imaging under the impact of conceptual art. His book *Abandon Building* (2006) presents a selection of writing on such photographers, from Robert Frank to Lynn Cohen. Horne has taught and lectured at universities and art colleges in Canada and Europe and currently lives in Montreal.



Palace of Illusions, 2008



far more interesting when transferred to the context of artistic discovery, where one has the obligation and the means to perpetually upset one's own founding constructions: the "deterritorializing" or reconfiguring of boundaries by which one "...separates a body from the earth, from nature, from its world."<sup>(2)</sup> In this sense, resistance to "fitting" means something subtler than mere individualistic non-conformism but consists of those processes of excess and differentiation that ultimately are the outcomes and expressions of sexual difference.

At this point we might consider what these works of craft, *couture* and perhaps utility are doing in an art gallery. So far, the convention of the art gallery or museum involves a suspension of instrumentality, (the use of one thing to get to another.) What is presented in a gallery is there to be considered as a thing in its own right, not to be used or touched or otherwise "completed." In this case, Price enlists the contemplative convention of the gallery to direct our attention to a founding notion of craft that is not based in "utility." The German/American philosopher Hanna Arendt explicated the "uselessness" of art as a virtue, and Richard Sennett, following Arendt, has developed her insight in his recent essay *The Craftsman*. In this essay, he argues that the value of works of craft rests not in their usefulness but in the fact that they embody the desire to do work well for its own sake. This attitude aligns "craftsmanship" with artistic sorts of production more than with the production of domestic equipment. Taking the next step, we can reconnect with Elizabeth Grosz who identified this production for its own sake, this "excessive and useless production," with the profusion and differentiation that are for her constitutive of both art and nature. I would add that these are the operative terms within Nancy Price's conception of "the fit" and "the misfit."

With these works that traverse the boundaries of art, *couture* and craft, Price considers what is implied with the notion of "fitting" or its alternative, to not "fit." Her conjunction of meticulous crafting and attention to varieties of detail are revealed in a work such as "Go On..." (2008). She has incorporated a series of expressionistic phrases or slogans appropriately spelled in the fabric by burning out the letters from the dress's material. The imperatives she proposes (living, loving, dying) are all processes of dispersal, of ways in which a self is fractured, multiplied, lost, or displaced. These are Nancy Price's alternatives when faced with the constraints of "fitting." At the same time, she uses processes and techniques that recollect aspects of tradition. Thinking through making and thinking in materiality, Price reshapes the body and its capacities such as movement and gesture, while crossing from moments of comic absurdity to expressions of genuine reverence, between the materials and forms of popular or folk culture and high modernist *couture*.



Go On, 2008

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1. Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2008, 7
2. Elizabeth Grosz, 7
3. Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2008

# STRIDE

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## STRIDE GALLERY

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Gallery Hours: 11 AM - 5 PM, Tuesday - Saturday

This is a Stride Gallery brochure written by Stephen Horne who has been chosen by the artist because of his particular interest in the project. These publications provide regular opportunities for diverse writers to publish work that furthers critical discourse about contemporary art.

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IMAGE NOTES:  
 Images courtesy of the artist

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