

# Sensory Overload: Clothing and the Body

Clothing and adornment are not just for protection, decoration, or expression—they are items that evoke the human form, on or off a body. Potentially reflections of personality, symbols of allegiance, and conveyors of meaning, they may enhance certain body parts or distract from others. Contemporary artists use dress—or the idea of it—to explore larger cultural issues as well as notions tied to the body itself.

The six artists whose works are featured in **Sensory Overload** create pieces that play to the metaphorical capacity of clothing and adornment while simultaneously addressing notions of wearability and the body as site. They create garments and large-scale accessories that tend to impede or extend the physicality of the body itself, and that make the body both an armature and an integral part of the presentation of the piece.



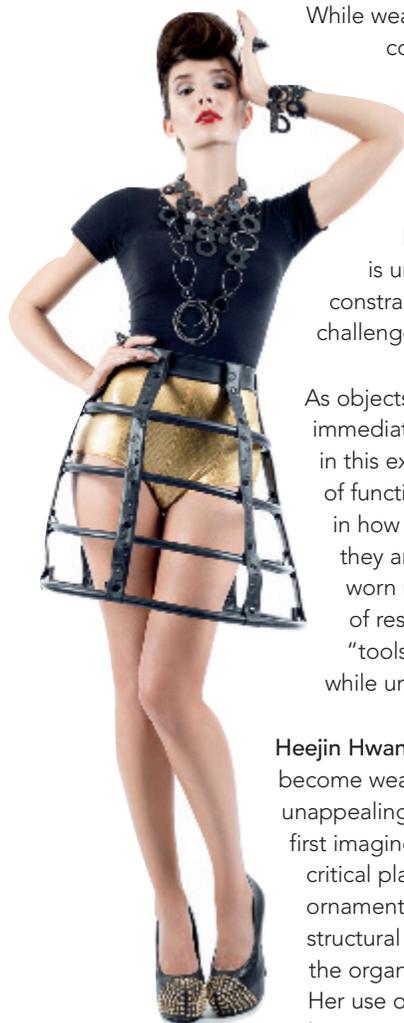
(above)

**Heejin Hwang**  
*Sensuality II*, 2011  
Steel wire

9 1/2 x 21 x 5 inches  
Courtesy of the Artist  
Photography: Jim Escalante

(left)

**Kathleen Nowak Tucci**  
*Tube Skirt*, 2013  
Recycled motorcycle inner tubes and plastic snaps  
19 x 20 inches diameter  
Courtesy of the Artist  
Photography: Janine Joffe



While wearable, the work is more sculptural and concept-oriented than it is functional in a traditional sense. It calls attention to the body as a mediating factor, as a site for gathering and exchanging information. These pieces operate in a metaphorical manner similar to, but also beyond, clothing. Whether it is understood as protective, revealing, or constraining, the work is made with the body in mind even when it challenges traditional expectations or normal conventions of dress.

As objects meant to be worn, garments and other types of adornment are immediately sensual—despite any other aspirations they embody. The works in this exhibition reflect the blending of contemporary concerns—questions of function, ornament, display, the body—and a longstanding interest in how we understand and interact with the greater world. In this way, they are both things that might evoke a certain personal reaction when worn next to the skin and things that could encourage a different type of response, or even an urge to dialogue, in others. These pieces are “tools” that mediate the human experience with the world-at-large, while underscoring the necessity of those interactions.

**Heejin Hwang** (South Korea) uses steel wire to build complex structures that become wearables. While the scale may seem imposing and the material unappealing to the touch, the wire is lighter and the structures softer than first imagined. This is significant to Hwang who feels that the body is a critical player in the meaning of the work. She states, “Only when the body ornaments are perfectly installed on the wearer, does an emotional and structural rapport begin.” Further, Hwang plays with the balance between the organic body and the oversize adornment that frames and houses it. Her use of steel wire allows her to create shapes and forms—structures—that support or are directed by the body, creating both an unexpected harmony as well as a visual tension.

Utilizing personal but familiar inspiration—such as vintage hats, Amish bonnets, and the colors of a town in India—**Janice Jakielski** (Massachusetts) creates wearable objects and adornments that mediate human interaction with the world. Jakielski plays with the notion that as we become more technologically adept, our interpersonal relationships and our sense of self shift. Using humor, she meticulously crafts wearables with ambiguous functions—helmets with blinders, goggles with

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embroidered screens instead of lenses, and single bonnets with room for two heads. Her works imply blissful self-absorption or harmonic interactions between multiple persons. Of it, she states: "By disrupting or enhancing the senses, my props make possible an exaggerated self-awareness, a break in the normalcy of daily experience. With the body dressings, I am creating a threshold space between reality and the imagination."

Interested in work that is "exaggerated" in size and concept, **Kelly Nye** (Ohio) makes wearable sculpture that references—or in some way utilizes—the body, yet also moves beyond it. Her oversized floral corsage rings and sweet-accented neckpieces are both extravagant and imposing. Not easy to wear—which is part of the artist's intent—they turn sweet things, sometimes associated with women, into overpowering, somewhat menacing, burdens. They are items that would have to be negotiated to proceed through a room—drawing attention while limiting movement. These works play right into those of her *Crème de Pêche* series. Inspired by vintage undergarments, these pieces accentuate areas of the body that are often identified as "problem areas." Using humor and highly tactile materials, Nye draws attention to the female form and how it is constructed in a physical sense as well as socially and culturally.

**Rachel Timmins** (Maryland) is interested in the complex relationship between spectacle, costume, and identity. While her colorful, shiny, and oversize wearables may seem like hybrids or mutants, they also provide a humorous and playful platform to talk about the place of an individual relative to the rest of the world. In fact, it is hard to characterize her objects—works like large-scale lobster claws that someone would wear like gloves, or headpieces/torso forms that completely cover the upper half of a person but leave the bottom half completely exposed. While challenging notions of wearability and definability, these exaggerated items quickly raise questions about how we structure our personalities, attitudes, and modes of communication. Timmins work ties into the idea that what we wear can connect not only to personal expression but also to transformation—offering possibilities for change and self-reflection.

Using recycled rubber bicycle and motorcycle inner tubes, Nespresso coffee capsules, and other recovered materials, **Kathleen Nowak Tucci** (Alabama) creates adornment and garments that both react to and stand apart from the body of the wearer. While the size of the work makes it seem imposing and the materials may seem like unusual choices for wear, Tucci crafts pieces that respond well to movement—they shift and flex and sometimes make noise. Her use of recycled man-made products stems from a desire to minimize waste from an ecological standpoint. Adding to that, these familiar materials are transformed when they are made wearable. Aspects that may often go unnoticed, such as smell, texture, or noise-producing capability, are magnified as Tucci pushes them into the realm of the wearable.



**Yulie Urano**  
*Cocoon*, 2010  
 Silk  
 20 x 29 x 2 inches  
 Courtesy of the Artist  
 Photography: Cameron Gee

**Yulie Urano** (New York) spins yarn into thick strands that she manipulates into sculptural objects that seem to be sweaters, collars, bodysuits, and other wearables. Using knitting and interlacing as a metaphor for the blending of cultures that impacts her as a first generation Japanese-American, Urano makes work that is about her experience of the world. The artist's physicality in the process



(top)  
**Rachel Timmins**  
*Anthony*, 2014  
 Spandex, thread, polyester stuffing, powder-coated brass, stainless steel, and plastic dog squeaker  
 5 1/2 x 4 1/2 x 4 1/2 inches  
 Courtesy of the Artist  
 Photography: Joseph Hyde

(left)  
**Kelly Nye**  
*Les cuisses (un porte-jarretelles)*  
 from *Crème de Pêche Series*, 2009  
 Copper, found plastic peaches, pigmented silicone, industrial felt, lace, and garter clips  
 17 x 24 x 10 inches  
 Courtesy of the Artist  
 Photography: Andrew Neuhart

of making, where she basically knits the ropy strands of yarn by hand, links the work directly to her senses. Simultaneously the structure and shape of the pieces themselves—with the thick strands and sensuous shapes—would have a direct impression on any wearer. Her work seems comforting, yet the atypical design—such as a hooded "sweater" with no armholes—challenges notions of use.

**Lena Vigna**  
 Curator of Exhibitions