

# ARTFORUM

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I N T E R N A T I O N A L

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PAUL B. PRECIADO ON REVOLUTION

CY GAVIN



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This attention to the possibilities of such concerns as a conduit for critique framed “Performing My Self-archive, My Other Body: An Autobiographical Installation Art Performance, An Institutional Critique,” Sibayan’s most recent exhibition at Silverlens. The artist converted the gallery space into a makeshift office, with a map of the world and a die-cut wood silhouette of Sibayan wearing the scapular. For the duration of the show, the artist and her assistant continually sorted through boxes of archival materials spanning Sibayan’s career. Whereas a conventional archive is passive and disciplined, the reconfigured exhibition space provided a context to unsettle its governing structures, prompting a dynamic questioning of what constitutes an archive and its address—its motivation and its public. A vital aspect of this gesture was Sibayan’s reimagining of the artist’s talk. Rather than reproduce the traditional arrangement, with the artist positioned as the ultimate authority, she invited practitioners from varied fields to engage in small group discussions; the inclinations of the participants shaped the trajectory of these conversations.

For Sibayan, self-archiving and self-institutionalization are ways to expand the imagination of the institution and thereby to critique it. The distinction between the performance and the archive in her work is, for her, key to the criticality of the endeavor, particularly as it unfolds within the white cube. In this sense, the artist’s performance as author and animator shortchanges the institutional currency conferred to the archive, releasing it from its aloof bins and boxes.

—Carlos Quijon Jr.

## MELBOURNE

### “Apparel”

NEON PARC

At the far end of Neon Parc’s long, dark, windowless gallery, spotlights illuminated an arrangement of mannequins modeling outfits in various states of deconstruction. The mise-en-scène approximated an abandoned shopping mall: The mannequins—some very old, unclothed, and covered in dust—stood on platforms made from discarded building materials, and around the perimeter of the installation sat some miscellaneous office chairs, a decommissioned water boiler, and an ancient piece of projection equipment. Here, fashion was a site of ruin envisioned from some point in a postapocalyptic future.

In creating such an atmosphere, Matthew Linde, the curator of “Apparel,” channeled the subject of his exhibition, the oeuvre and influence of Belgian fashion designer Martin Margiela. The designer’s catwalk shows, in which models drift through abandoned warehouses, parking garages, or metro stations freely intermingling with audiences, have often been compared to Situationist *dérives*. More significantly, he was renowned for recycling found garments, recutting or splicing them together to form one-off pieces. In making his revisions, Margiela foregrounded the concealed features of a garment’s construction, the seams and darts that would help mold it to the wearer’s body; the labels, stamps, and lining that belong on its invisible interior; even the linen canvas or pattern paper templates used in the drafting process.

It’s been said that Margiela’s models don’t wear his clothes; rather, his clothes wear their models. Garments such as his featured flat-pattern leather jacket (Spring/Summer 1998)—constructed like an accordion so as to lie perfectly flat on a shelf—demote the body to secondary importance. This inversion is nowhere more evident than in his iconic dressmaker’s mannequin vests and jackets (Fall/Winter 1997–98), for which he took the materials, shape, and stamp of the tailor’s dummy and further adorned them with half-finished jackets and dresses, in many instances with pins or basting stitches left on view. At Neon Parc,



View of “Apparel,” 2020.

video documentation of this runway show played on a lone monitor turned on its side to accommodate the original vertical format.

But the subject of “Apparel” was not Margiela alone; the show also examined his impact on several young designers. His designs were shown alongside selected works by Jessie Kiely, H.B. Peace (Blake Barns and Hugh Egan Westland), and Tallulah Storm—all of whom, like the show’s curator, studied fashion design at Melbourne’s RMIT University in the past decade under the influential tutelage of Ricarda Bigolin, Robyn Healy, and Chantal Kirby. H.B. Peace presented a suite of draped-silk “ghost dresses” that cover the wearer from head to toe. Recalling Margiela’s signature face masks that render his models anonymous, like headless mannequins, the ghost dresses were layered underneath stiff blazers made from tissue silk lining and cotton organdy, the latter material sometimes used as interfacing in blazers. This gesture of inverting inside and outside, invisible and visible, comes from Margiela. It is seen, for instance, in his couture label top (Spring/Summer 2001), a halter neck entirely constructed from fashion labels patchworked together. Storm’s open-faced singlet and a strappy evening dress made from a sumptuous, custom-printed Dutch velvet were spliced with protruding fragments of a pink-polyester child’s quilt (a nod to Margiela’s iconic duvet coats, also represented in the exhibition). Kiely—who has, in the past, experimented with designing collections using algorithms—worked closely with an unremarkable found dress in navy crepe de chine. She unpicked the dress’s seams to examine and reimagine its pattern as the basis for an entire collection, redrafting its curves and cuts, and using padding to distort the wearer’s body.

Linde acknowledged that his exhibition was unlikely to impact the established discourse on Margiela. It was, rather, a polemic against certain trends in the art/fashion crossover scene in Melbourne. Here, in recent years, subcultural fashion tropes percolated in art schools, then fully permeated parts of the art world, often centering and celebrating the identity politics of the makers and their models, or more accurately “nodels”—nonprofessional models. By contrast, Margiela and those most profitably influenced by him deprive the body in a deeply anti-identity, anti-humanistic way—as if to say that liberation lies not in freedom of expression, but in freedom from its prescriptions.

—Helen Hughes

**CORRECTION:** In the May/June issue, in a review of the work of Maximilian Schubert [pp. 169–70], it was stated that the artist and his gallerist, Natacha Polaert, approached the Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation for a loan of the late artist’s work to be installed not in the gallery but in Schubert’s studio as he completed work for the show. However, it was the foundation, not Schubert and Polaert, that, in keeping with the ethos of Gonzalez-Torres’s work, insisted the piece be installed in the artist’s studio instead of the gallery. *Artforum* regrets the error.