

**THESIS**

**MASQUERADE**

**Submitted by**

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**Department of Art**

**In partial fulfillment of the requirements**

**for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts**

**Colorado State University**

**Fort Collins, Colorado**

**Spring 1995**

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**COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY**

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**WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER  
OUR SUPERVISION BY DEBORAH WATKINS MORRIS ENTITLED  
MASQUERADE BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF FINE ARTS.**

**Committee on Graduate Work**

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## ABSTRACT

### MASQUERADE

Masquerade embodies ideas concerning disguise and facade, separation and distance. As a landscape Masquerade is a place which depicts a frame of mind in memory.

I think of this installation as a garden. Natural landscapes are not yet gardens, and they must thrive by chance. Gardens are watered places of planned beauty. They are controlled, contained spaces of ordered and selected abundance. For these reasons gardens have come to mean places of harmony and pleasant viewing of ideal forms in nature.

#### Elements in the Garden

In recent years many artists have utilized empty clothing as an image to express concerns about gender and other political or social issues. By eliminating the body, clothing through reference can focus on complex human conditions. For me, the empty dress provides a simple but content-laden form with which to discuss the feminine and the female body in culture and nature. I use the dress as a metaphor to symbolize interior/exterior/mind/body.

Looking at the empty dresses in Masquerade there is a sense of the body pushing outward against the cloth of the dress. The dress becomes the outermost

boundary of the body, and cloth functions as a barrier between inside and outside. Stiffened cloth assumes shell-like qualities of containment and protection.

The exterior view of the form also reveals messages about age, size ideals and sexuality. These strapless sheath evening gowns seek attention, a desire for attraction. The alluring forms mask the implied women inside. We see only the exterior and consider that we know all about these women. These facades are completed by culturally accepted codes applied to the dresses' forms. I am looking at the codified shell as well as the unknown empty inside.

In Bangkok, Thailand, I remember a temple garden where dozens of stupa had been placed, their glittering structures towering over me. Passage between the stupa was narrow, and I felt dwarfed in their totemic presence. When I designed the dresses for Masquerade, I strove to evoke something of this forest feeling. With the multiple dresses I wanted to create tension between the forms like the passages between the stupa. Since social relationships are suggested, the dresses assemble in a non-touching gathering.

Earth and glass make the floor. These materials were chosen to echo ideas presented in the dresses. As cloth supplies a screen between inside and outside, glass performs as a barrier between up and down. Glass also allows us to see a submerged reflection, an illusion going downward. The floor's glass tiles arranged in a grid pattern intimate a shiny ballroom floor.

Exquisitely formed flowers have long been associated with the unconscious, the body, the feminine, and the earth. Gaily colored corolla and tempting petals sway invitingly to passing bees. Flowers reach upward to the light while their roots dig downward into the earth. Exchanges between the bee and flower benefit

them both through fertilization and nourishment. Choosing to use images associated with natural systems allowed me to derive from and mirror their substance. Undulating edges at the top and bottom of the dresses came from observing the petals of roses. Structural ribbons of wire were suggested from crocus. Because the flower is the sexual organ of the plant, ideas about allure and sexual appeal could be applied to the surface decorations in the motifs of flower festoons. By associating women's dresses to flowers I could think of the whole composition as a garden.

In the ordered arrangement of Masquerade the viewer is denied entrance. Viewing of the dresses must be interpreted by culture's codes. The dresses' shells only permit exterior gazing. Real understanding is barred by the masquerade, the illusion.

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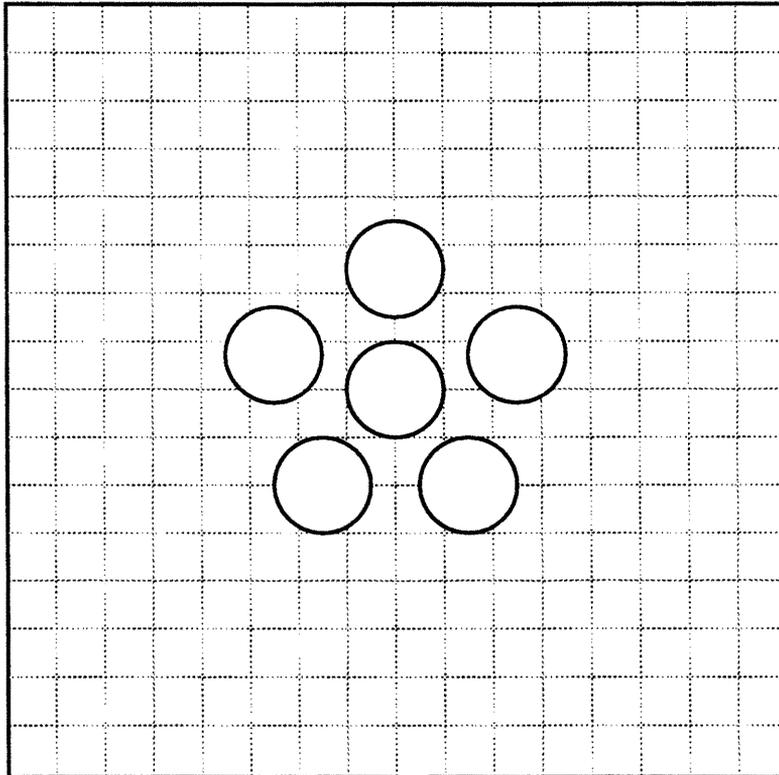


Figure 1. Masquerade Floor Plan  
16' x 16'

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Plate I. Masquerade view of installation  
Mixed media consisting of crinoline, pigment, wire in dresses  
Floor is earth, plywood, glass tiles measuring 12" each  
16' x 16' square



Plate II. Masquerade view of installation  
16' x 16' square



Plate III. Masquerade view of dress  
Crinoline, wire, pigment  
7'4" tall



Plate IV. Masquerade view of dress  
Crinoline, wire, pigment  
74" tall, 40" at top edge, 30" waist, 42" hip