



photos: courtesy of The Frick Pittsburgh

written by VICKY A. CLARK

THE FRICK PITTSBURGH CONTINUES its recent foray into fashion with exuberance, exhibiting a group of contemporary paper recreations of iconic outfits from the past. Ranging from the era of the Medici to the early 20th century with costumes from the Ballets Russes, “Isabelle de Borchgrave: Fashioning Art From Paper” though (January 6, 2019) seems tailor-made for the institution. First there were killer heels, then intimate lingerie; now period ensembles have been placed throughout the museum, creating affinities with the historical paintings.

The show hits all the right notes for the Frick with its connection to history and to art, technical virtuosity, and, above all, material culture. Just as the museum presents the story of the Frick family in a house that was practically untouched after Frick’s departure for New York, these trompe l’oeil apparel give us a glimpse of times past, allowing us to marvel at the textures and details as well as the evolution of style, especially for women.

Isabelle de Borchgrave produces both useable objects for her interior design lines and objects of desire in these paper dresses. After marveling at the oversized collars, the attached roses, the intricate patterns, and the voluminous skirts, thinking about how to walk or sit in some of the more fantastic designs, we wonder about de Borchgrave’s techniques, how she experimented with various processes to make the paper mimic fabric surfaces, the fall of drapery, and all manners of adornment. It is a feat achieved through research and experimentation. Inspired by

SCULPTURAL MASTERPIECES

Tutu I, II, III, 2009
Inspired by costumes for the Ballet Russes Installation at The Frick. All works by Isabelle de Borchgrave (Belgian, b. 1946).

the Fashion Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the artist worked with her friend Rita Brown who had extensive experience in theatrical costumes and textile restoration. Brown worked on the

>>

THE FRICK’S ISABELLE DE BORCHGRAVE EXHIBIT DISPLAYS THE ARTIST’S MAGNIFICENT, COLORFUL PAPER DRESSES

Art or fashion?

<<

patterns and de Borchgrave painted the dresses.

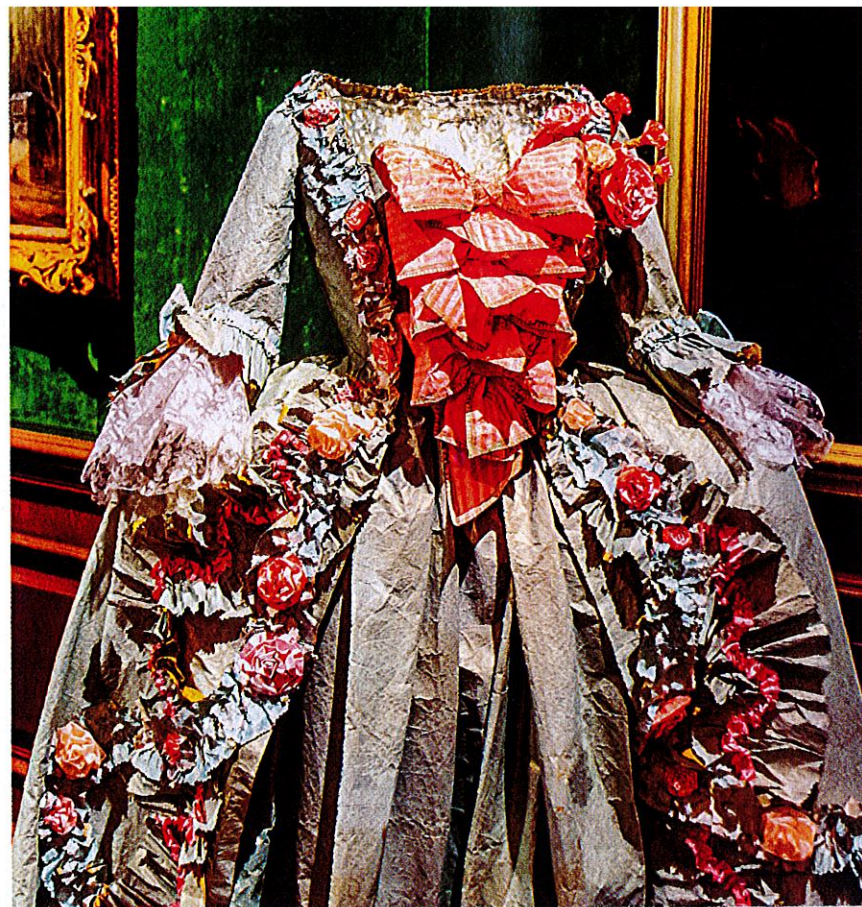
For the artist, her fascinating process is really just a means to an end, or as she put it "a merry and shameless sham," as she considers herself primarily a painter. As curator Sarah Hall said, "she is an artist who processes her experience through the act of making." She derives the most satisfaction from covering the surfaces with color and pattern. In fact, while she uses historic sources, she is not interested in exact replicas, but proceeds "in

>>

PAPER COSTUMES

RIGHT: Madame de Pompadour Court Dress, 2001. Inspired by a ca. 1756 portrait of Madame de Pompadour by Francois Boucher in the collection of Alte Pinakothek, Munich; 56 1/2" x 44 1/2" x 37"

FAR RIGHT: All works mixed media: paper, cut, folded, and molded with acrylic paint, ink, metallic powder, and adhesive; mounted on dress form.



HOME SWEET HOME.

These are friendly words from years ago—but today, you think twice before opening your door to strangers. Will you be comfortable allowing strangers from an unfamiliar home care service into your parents' home? St. Barnabas Home Care is the answer.

For decades, we have provided home care services to people just like your parents, right in their own homes. We are not a franchise service, and every one of our employees passes a background check and drug test. Rest assured, we take caring for your family seriously.

Familiar care in the comfort of home. Contact **St. Barnabas Home Care** today.



ST. BARNABAS

Apart from the Ordinary

724-443-0700 StBarnabasHealthSystem.com

Advice for the life you lead

Advice. Beyond investing.



The WTL Group

UBS Financial Services Inc.

5600 Walnut Street, Suite 2

Pittsburgh, PA 15232

412-665-9900

ubs.com/team/wtlgroup



As a firm providing wealth management services to clients, UBS Financial Services Inc. offers both investment advisory services and brokerage services. Investment advisory services and brokerage services are separate and distinct, differ in material ways and are governed by different laws and separate arrangements. It is important that clients understand the ways in which we conduct business and that they carefully read the agreements and disclosures that we provide to them about the products or services we offer. For more information, visit our website at ubs.com/workingwithus. © UBS 2018. All rights reserved. UBS Financial Services Inc. is a subsidiary of UBS AG. Member FINRA/SIPC. CHUBS-1873874088 Exp.: 10/31/2019

<<

the spirit of" the originals. She allows herself creative license as she indulges her love of color. In order to compare her pieces with the sources, mainly taken from paintings, color photographs of the originals have been placed with most of the outfits.

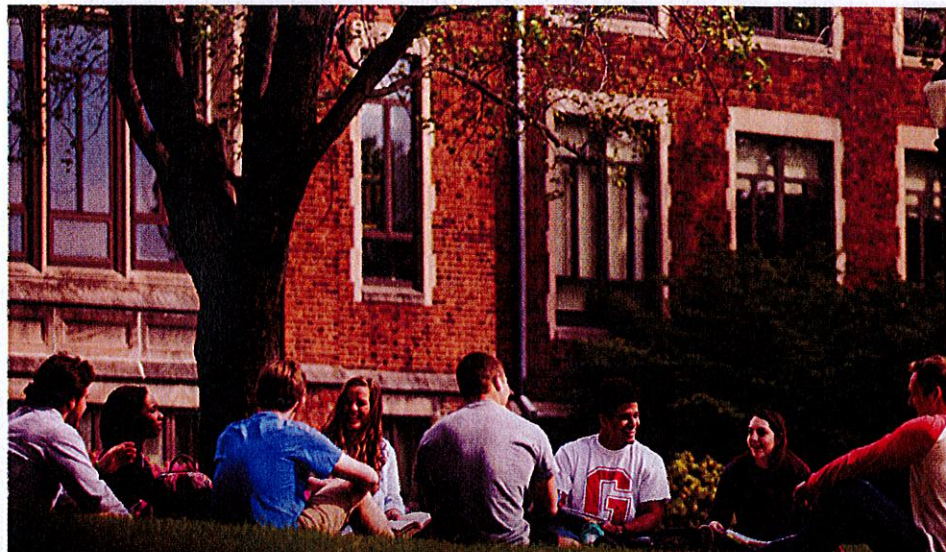
That same interest in affinities, rather than copies, characterizes the installation of the work at the Frick. It is the only venue where the mannikins have been placed in painting galleries, where, in Hall's words, "the domestically scaled rooms and varied architecture serve to activate them in a more cinematic way and help us do a little imaginary time travel...opening up a more imaginative space." For example, Madame de Pompadour's "wedding cake" gown, taken from a painting by François Boucher, stands next to the Frick's Boucher. As Hall reflected, "Isabelle's work is more about inspiration—like the best illusionists, she both unsettles and delights us and shows us more than we would have noticed without her intercession." Since the Frick commissioned de Borchgrave to make a dress based on their painting by Peter Paul Rubens, this kind of pairing will be available periodically for viewers.

In other galleries, the mannikins are arranged like models along a runway, or in the case of the bold costumes for the Ballet Russes, in an arrangement that hints at the movement

of the dancers. The varied heights as well as de Borchgrave's luxuriously colored "fabrics" create a cacophony of color and movement that animate the galleries. Mixing fashion and tableaux, the installation becomes a spectacle itself, strangely reminiscent of the Pageant of the Masters at Laguna Beach, Calif.

It's difficult to know how to categorize this work. Are the outfits fashion or art? The easy answer is that they are both, or as Sarah Hall put it, they are "art that is about fashion." The Frick, which has fashion in its collection, adds information about fashion history in the labels, but de Borchgrave is not about recreating fashion history à la Madame Tussauds. And if this work was placed in the context of contemporary art, there would be references to the changing ideas about the body, class, and race, so the work exists outside of categorization. Perhaps de Borchgrave, like many artists who work outside traditional mediums, needs to craft a new term that introduces the possibility of being both or neither art and fashion. Even without solving this semantic problem, there is no doubt that this is a crowd-pleasing show that can also elicit more serious consideration. **PQ**

Vicky A. Clark is an independent curator and writer, involved in contemporary art and issues since the early 1980s in Pittsburgh.



TRANSFORMING HEARTS, HANDS & MINDS

Grove City College is a true rarity in higher education: A highly ranked, reasonably priced, genuinely independent Christian liberal arts and sciences college. Tuition and costs run about half the national average before scholarships and financial aid. And while many students graduate with little or no debt, the real value of a Grove City College education is in the transformative learning experience.

Our students learn about their place in the world and how to use their talents to succeed not only in life, but to advance the common good.

Come visit our beautiful campus, meet exceptional faculty scholars, and experience an authentically caring community. Learn more about the value of a Grove City College education.

www.gcc.edu



GROVE CITY
COLLEGE

#1 Least expensive
private college
in Pennsylvania

— U.S. News and World Report

"Best 382 Colleges"

— Princeton Review

