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III. Marilyn Pappas & Sika Foyer: Embellishment, Metamorphosis, and Presence

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The intimacy of wearing garments and textiles, which delimit the boundaries between the body and its surrounding environment, imbues these materials with a sense of spirit, or animacy. Wearing and re-wearing clothing shapes the garment, tender, tensile and tactile, transforming the fashion object in the shape of the wearer. Though difficult to communicate with language, clothing carries *feelings* specific to the garment's life. Mendings, additions, and alterations might further heighten this sense of liveliness in their evocation of subjectivities of previous wearers.



Left: Marilyn Pappas, *Flight Suit*, 1972, mixed media assemblage. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Right: Sika Foyer, *Trojan Horse*, 2022 Installation at KMM Projects, fabric, shredded paper, wood stick on frame. Photo credit: Scott Alari.

Both Marilyn Pappas (b. 1931) and Sika Foyer (b. 1968) create works that build upon the inherent capacity of clothing to suggest a living presence. Through additive, repetitive handiwork, found fabrics, and secondhand clothing, these artists implicate and invoke, often as part of larger reparative sensibilities. Pappas has been a practitioner of fabric assemblage since the early 1960s, bridging “art, craft, folk art, and feminism by incorporating recycled clothing.”¹ Her 1968 work *Opera Coat* was included in the watershed exhibition *Objects USA* (1969-72) and has been described as “equal parts Rauschenberg and bargain basement bin.”² Her engagement with figuration and the body set her apart from other fiber artists of her generation, and continues to inform her work. Describing her early experiments, she writes: “Although the human figure did not actually

appear in these works, it was implied by the character of each garment, its related objects, colors, textures and stitched patterns.”³

In *Flight Suit* (1972), Pappas embroiders and appliques a secondhand aviator jacket and pants, suspending the suit mid-air, as if hanging from a parachute. “Bursting with countercultural, anti-establishment energy,” Pappas reworks militaristic garb into something speculative and otherworldly, for a being who might not exist yet.⁴ Pappas achieves this metamorphosis through the repeated gendered handiwork of stitching, binding, patchwork, and other additive methods, effectively transforming the already-suggestive material of its base garment into hyper-rich fantasy.



Left: Marilyn Pappas, *Knapsack #1*, 1971, mixed media assemblage. Courtesy of [R and Company](#).

Right: Sika Foyer, *Ek Chuah*, 2019, fabric, wood sticks, yarn, wine rack, footstool, ground coffee and acrylic gel. Photo credit: Torrey Utne.

Likewise, Foyer’s practice integrates the repetitive, additive methods of wrapping, unwrapping, and rewrapping with textiles. Foyer swaddles shapes and encapsulates objects while noting the potency of her materials as they undergo this process of change. She describes her work as:

Densely packed sculptures created with discarded materials, fabrics (silk, cotton, wool, nylon), yarn, and small household furnishings, transient transformations into entities with magical skins—“The Second

Skin”—that vibrate to tell their own stories. They are shaped by DNA imprints of people from across space and time, who have performed similar actions and movements for generations.

Foyer considers the persistent, transferable energy embedded in repurposed materials. Thus, Foyer and Pappas share in their use of discarded materials and reclaimed fabrics, as well as in their interest in metamorphosis and animacy of their artworks through their additive practices.

Foyer’s wrapping technique is part of her exploration of her African ancestry and the rituals of wrapping cultures, which combine with her liberation ethics. She considers her work an extension of the concept of the “African trickster,” celebrating indigenous African culture and theology and calling for reexamination of racial biases. In another statement on her work, Foyer notes “The trickster reminds us of who we truly are. He mirrors or flaws and exploits our fears, deepening our understanding of our own motivations and conflicts – ‘what is hidden in plain sight.’ He has a legacy of resilience, always escaping to safety at the last minute.”⁵

Using textiles to form allusions to African mythologies and folk tales in pursuit of socio-cultural affirmation, healing, and survival crossing spatial and temporal expanses, Foyer’s art forms another parallel with that of Pappas. As Pappas continues to create garment-like sculptures, she turns to Greco-Roman mythologies of ancient goddesses as a feminist gesture towards strength, resilience, and persistence:

While the focus of her imagery has shifted from the 1970s and ‘80s to the evolving Goddess series she began in the early 1990s, all her pieces continue to reference the body and persona as expressed through costume, uniform, or regalia. In accessing these abstracted stand-ins for the human form, Pappas personalizes and anthropomorphizes that which we regularly perceive as inanimate or anonymous.⁶

For more information on these artists and their works, visit [Marilyn Pappas](#) and [Sika Foyer](#)’s entries in this issue.

Footnotes

1. Dilys Blum, Mary Schoeser, and Julie Schafler Dale, *Off the Wall: American Art to Wear* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2019), 77. ↵
2. “Marilyn Pappas,” R & Company, accessed May 1, 2023, <https://objectsusa.r-and-company.com/marilyn-pappas>. ↵
3. All quotes are from the artist’s statements within the issue unless stated otherwise. ↵
4. “Marilyn Pappas,” R & Company, accessed May 1, 2023, <https://objectsusa.r-and-company.com/marilyn-pappas>. ↵

5. Jaime Ernestina Ransome, “Legacy & Rupture: A Reflection of Space & Time,” (New Haven: City Gallery, 2021). [↵](#)

6. Caroline Kipp, “Nevertheless She Persisted: Marilyn Pappas’ 60-Year Career,” *Craft Quarterly* (Summer 2022): 10-12. [↵](#)