

## Arts &amp; Entertainment

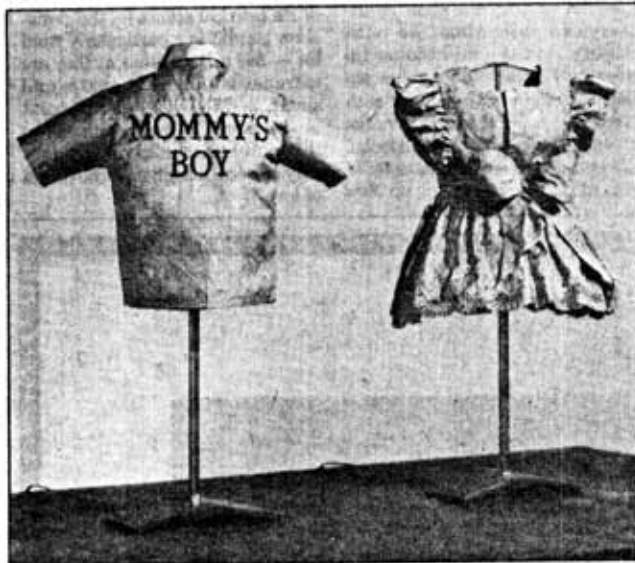
## Fashion adornment: the frill of it all

Southern Exposure  
exhibit constructs an  
unusual viewpointBy David Bonetti  
EXAMINER ART CRITIC

IN ITS current installation, Southern Exposure, 401 Alabama St., investigates the theme of fashion coding in contemporary art. (The exhibition, which includes four high-spirited contributions, all using textiles, continues through Saturday.)

While the issue of how clothing is used to create psychic and social definition has been widely explored recently, the idea that "clothes make the man" is, as every dedicated follower of fashion knows, hardly new. But what was previously the domain of couturiers, fashion writers and clothes horses has now come under the scrutiny of post-modern theorists and artists in their thrall. Be reassured, however, that some of the wit and outrageousness inherent in the subject of adornment saves the investigation from theory-influenced art's usual pedantry.

Gale Jesi's "Mommy's Boy/Daddy's Girl" addresses gender construction through clothing most pointedly. Jesi has bronzed a frilly dress for a girl and a little suit with bow tie for a boy the way that people bronze their children's shoes. She has labeled each appropriately gendered outfit "Mommy's Boy" and "Daddy's Girl." Jesi explains that she has found many little girl's clothes labeled "Daddy's



Gale Jesi's "Mommy's Boy/Daddy's Girl" a bronzed little suit and dress.

Girl," but has yet to come across a little boy's suit labeled its "binary opposite," "Mommy's Boy." Wonder why.

Donna Han's "World of My Own" is a labor-intensive wall-piece that features hundreds of little dolls made from scraps of cloth and left-over buttons and baubles. Hung among the dolls are neo-psychedelic drawings in day-glo colors that underscore her work's *horror vacui*. In her effigies, each of which makes its own unique fashion statement, Han captures the drive toward self-definition that is at the heart of self-adornment.

In "S/he Wore," Marisa Her-

nandez continues her exploration of velvet, a material she is fast making her own. (I can see the ad campaign now — MARISA HER-

NANDEZ IS VELVET!) Hernandez's process is to eroticize a metal object, often purchased in a hardware store, with that most sensuous of fabrics. "Torch" is typical. Hernandez has taken a common metal work light and stuffed it with purple velvet, a simple enough action that creates a charged fetish object. "Ball Pouch," in which three ball bearings dangle from a construction of bunched green velvet with pink satin lining held together with five metal key chains, is perhaps the most erotic of all.

My favorite work here is the installation "Shams," in which Philadelphia-based artists Virgil Marti and Stuart Netsky reinvent camp for a post-Stonewall, post-AIDS, post-disco, post-post generation. Many of the old icons are acknowledged — Bette Davis rules — but with a new spin based on the fact that the closet has been exploded, and anyone who wants is now privy to what used to be in-jokes.

You have to mount the stairs to the small upstairs gallery, and when you do, weary of the climb, you confront Jacqueline Susann's

immortal words from "Valley of the Dolls": "You've got to climb to the top of Mount Everest to reach the Valley of the Dolls..." Across the room on the wall is pinned a postcard of Bette Davis holding a pillow embroidered with the adage, "Old Age Ain't No Place for Sissies."

And in the center of the room piled high as Everest is a mound of pillows, each vying for the prize of "Most Garish," inscribed à la Davis with words of camp wisdom. The sources are identified only by the author's initials, but half the fun is figuring out who uttered what outrageous sentiment.

For those who can't make it to the Artaud district by Saturday, here follows a sampler:

"It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearance." — O.W.

"Nice girls don't wear cha-cha heels." — unattributed.

"As far as I'm concerned, being any gender is a drag." — P.S.

"Too much of a good thing can be wonderful." — M.W.

"It's necessary in order to attract attention, to dazzle at all

costs, to be disapproved of by serious people, and quoted by the foolish." — J.J.

"The trouble with some women is that they get all excited about nothing — and then they marry him." — C.

Answers will not run in the Sunday paper.