

Inherent Vice: Hidden Narratives, July 23, 2022-January 15, 2023

Inherent vice, also known as inherent fault, is the tendency in an object or material to deteriorate or self-destruct because of its intrinsic internal characteristics, including weak construction, poor quality or unstable materials, and incompatibility of different materials within an object.

—American Institute for Conservation (2021)

This project was born of conversations about how we as conservators and curators can make behind-the-scenes work more accessible. Though museums typically present meticulously mounted garments in clean, well-lit galleries, their storage closets are full of shattered silk, degraded net, and corroded beads—all examples of inherent vice.

In the summer of 2021, we started a discussion about what to do with 31 extremely degraded garments. We could leave them in storage, too fragile to teach from or exhibit; pour resources into stabilizing them; or look at them as openings for new understandings. With the board's approval, we began the process of deaccessioning, formally removing these garments from the collection and transferring them to RISD's Apparel Department for student use. Several of these works were recently displayed in their decaying state in this space.

A wintersession 2022 course explored the topic of inherent vice. In the spring, an apparel studio class offered students the chance to dissect the garments, while a textile silkscreen class created new work in response to the prompt "hidden stories." The students' artwork is presented here with a selection of deaccessioned garments.

The deaccessioned garments' damage is a mixed blessing. We wouldn't have had these conversations if they weren't falling apart. In storage, these pieces would have continued deteriorating; now they have been preserved digitally, considered deeply, and transformed creatively.

Kate Irvin, Curator of Costume and Textiles

Anna Rose Keefe, Assistant Conservator of Costume and Textiles

Jessica Urick, Associate Conservator of Costume and Textiles

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CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Christopher Pak, b. 1993, RISD MFA 2023, Textiles
Wedding/Mourning Suit, 2022
Wedding dress (D61.043.1, ca. 1865) and bodice (D62.017.47, ca. 1905); pieced and hand-stitched
63.5 x 152.4 x 5.1 cm (25 x 60 x 2 inches)
Courtesy of the artist TL76.2022.1

Christopher Pak, b. 1993, RISD MFA 2023, Textiles
Skirt as a Veil, 2022
Digital print on paper
58.4 x 88.9 cm (23 x 35 inches) each
Courtesy of the artist TL76.2022.3

Under the camera's gaze, I began an intimate relationship with a wedding dress from 1865, manipulating it around my body to negotiate desire, memory, and objecthood. Playful draping and free associations with history and ceremony evolved into a skirt suit inspired by childhood memories of my mother. The bomber style of the jacket recalls pop, punk, and queer appropriation, while the papery, pale yellow fabric evokes hemp robes worn in Korean mourning rituals. The skirt doubles as a veil, in reference to the *sseugaechima*, a Korean "veil-skirt" worn during the Joseon dynasty. I used photography and garment making to navigate femininity and masculinity, to assimilate and deviate, and to conceal and reveal the layered complexities of identity.

—Christopher Pak



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Christopher Pak, b. 1993, RISD MFA 2023, Textiles

Mirror Dress, 2022

Dress (D61.012.1, ca. 1913); pieced and hand-stitched

45.7 x 152.4 x 5.1 cm (18 x 60 x 2 inches)

Courtesy of the artist TL76.2022.2

A decaying bodice delicately picked apart and turned inside out reveals a mirror image of the inside and outside layers. Released from its original corseted form, the dress becomes an abstraction of body and femininity.

—Christopher Pak



Xinyuan Wang, b. 1998, (Brown MPA 2022)

The Last Hurrah Textile Book, 2022

Linen damask weave; painted, embroidered, and beaded

38.1 x 38.1 cm (15 x 15 inches)

Courtesy of the artist TL77.2022

Textiles carry the shapes and memories of the people for whom they were designed, even after those bodies and garments have decayed. In this book, discarded scraps of Gilded Age garments are blended together, carrying memories and intimacy into a new life.

—Xinyuan Wang



Natiana Alexandra Fonseca, b. 1999, RISD BFA 2023, Textiles

Raw (artist book), 2022

Deaccessioned Gilded Age garments (D56.203.5, ca. 1912; D57.195.8, 1880–1900; D68.108.28 cs. 1913), craft paper, original text; quilted

25.4 x 20.3 cm (10 x 8 inches)

Courtesy of the artist TL78.2022

I was born in Brookline, Massachusetts, to two beautiful Black immigrant parents. Growing up as a Black child in New England is a very jarring and disorienting experience. The landscape has been gutted and rearranged from what it once was pre-colonization. I don't think that my parents like this country very much. I don't necessarily think that they want to live here, but the mining and depletion of labor and resources from their home countries has not



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left us many options for other places to go. I'm not sure if you are aware, but they are not very nice to immigrants in this country.

The environment that I inhabit was not constructed for me to exist comfortably. Yet, here I am, speaking to you from within this museum that has also played a role in complicity with racism. Yet, here I am, despite everyone who told me no. Despite all of the violence, here I am.

Here I stand.

Here I lay.

Here I rest.

I invite you to not only hold this object within your hands but your heart as well.

—Natiana Alexandra Fonseca

Emma Naughton, RISD BFA 2023, CCD NCSS, Textiles

Middle?, 2022

Silk overcoat (D61.012.1b, 1913), knit stockings (D61.043.1f,g, 1865), found fabrics of unknown material, polyester ribbon and thread, rayon/cotton gimp trim, antique beaded trim, and found lamp base and frame; hand-sewn

Courtesy of the artist TL69.2022

This piece, *Middle?*, recontextualizes deaccessioned garments. After spending decades inaccessible in the museum archives, they are turned into something infinitely more accessible that could exist within the home.

—Emma Naughton



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American; or; French

Evening Dress Bodice, ca. 1855

Silk satin bodice; silk tulle overskirt embellished with lamella metallic stars and gold metallic purl; silk satin and silk velvet trim

132.1 cm (52 inches) (length) overall

Museum Collection DS83.015A

It requires imagination to see beyond the deteriorated, soiled silk net of this bodice, which was recently deaccessioned from the museum's collection. Once it was a confection of frothy tulle, sparkling star-shaped spangles, and hyacinth-colored velvet trim—part of a ball gown seemingly made for a princess. The dress's construction suggests that it was sewn hastily, without considering longevity, perhaps to achieve a glamorous effect for one night. Its metal spangles create an effect similar to the gold kintsugi repair references in the textile length in the background.

—Anna Rose Keefe, assistant conservator



American

Evening Dress, 1880s-1890s

Silk damask with silk velvet trim, embellished with glass beads, sequins, and silk-floss embroidery

Gift of Lila and Martha Wetherbee D56.203.31.ab

This late-1800s dress, now deaccessioned from the collection, arrived at the museum in the 1950s in poor condition, with heavy staining throughout and a shattered silk lining. Garments differ from other works of art—before entering museum collections, they tend to have been worn, lived in, and treated as functional objects. Stains and wear speak to the history of a garment. This dress may have been tucked away for years after use, a precious link to memories, events, or loved ones. It now serves as material and inspiration for RISD student projects like those displayed here.



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Last Hurrah (Take One), 2022

Performers: Gabriela Cantú (RISD MA 2023, Global Arts and Cultures), Kailin Hartley (RISD BFA 2024, Apparel), Madi Hough (Brown AB 2022, Anthropology and International and Public Affairs), Cathy Kim (RISD BFA 2023, Textiles), Christopher Pak (RISD MFA 2023, Textiles)

The collaborative spectacle *Last Hurrah (Take One)* allowed participants to develop personal connections with recently deaccessioned dresses, bringing them to life in a new way. As we played and lounged in the garments, I was reminded of my frustration with museums and the inability for touch in traditional displays. Garments are meant to be worn, felt, and lived in, yet the museum's space does not allow for this. Wearing the tattered dresses felt liberating in that it transgressed strict museum boundaries. This performance piece allowed us to let go of the rules of conservation and develop our own memories with these garments.

—Madi Hough

Kailin Hartley, b. 2002, BFA 2024, Apparel

Natiana Alexandra Fonseca, b. 1999, RISD BFA 2023, Textiles

Last Hurrah (Take Two), 2022

Video documentation of performers wearing a selection of Gilded Age dresses

5:08 minutes

Courtesy of the artist TL70.2022



I felt it was important that these dresses have an exuberant and lively ending. In our first collective farewell performance (see images projected on the wall to the right), we wore the dresses in a park to give them one last hurrah. Our second performance, captured in this video, responded to the 2022 Met Gala, which, ironically, presented “Gilded Glamour” against a backdrop of growing wealth inequality. Of course, we had to do our own red carpet in our real Gilded Age dresses. This final cut of the video brings these ideas full circle: the dresses are destroyed in a performance that calls attention to the fragility of contemporary society and makes fun of our fixation with social media and celebrity culture.

—Kailin Hartley

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Alexandra Emberley, RISD MFA 2023, Textiles

Petticoat Jacket, 2022

Horsehair lining from petticoat (D37.066, 1850–1900), wool, felt, silk organza, polyester gabardine, threads (various), and brass and bronze buttons; embroidered, digitally printed

Courtesy of the artist TL89.2022.1



Alexandra Emberley, RISD MFA 2023, Textiles

Felt Work III, 2022

Raw wool, mohair, mohair locks; hand-felted, combed top

Courtesy of the artist TL89.2022.2

An uncanny sense of things being familiar but different inspired *Petticoat Jacket*. In imagining a textile for a foreman's coat, I explored a method of both/and. I remembered the workers who perished in the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire in New York on March 25, 1911. I thought of Aesop's fables, such as "A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing" and "The Wolf and the Lamb," of deceptive surfaces and tyrants with no regard for reason. I also thought of outliers and dreamers and unseen forces. I was inspired by the petticoat's materiality: brittle seams that came apart easily, its collection of stains and blemishes, the residue I washed away after handling it, its squashed ruffles and flaking trim, the linen tie, a single button, its indeterminate odor.

—Alexandra Emberley



Yukti V. Agarwal, Brown | RISD Dual Degree 2024, BFA Textiles and

Theory and History of Art and Design | BA Contemplative Studies

Brown Bodies, White Cotton, 2022

Cotton skirt (D84.109, 1917) with hand-drawn marks in ink

Courtesy of the artist TL95.2022

This skirt is a space for colonial catharsis. These marks catalog and pay homage to the projected 400,000 Indian cotton farmers who took their lives between 1995 and 2018. One of the world's dirtiest, bloodiest crops, Indian cotton was central to British colonialism and that legacy continues today.

As I sat with other students and doodled outside the Benefit Street house of the slave-ship owner John Brown, this project collaged



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bodies and thoughts onto the fabric, connecting those who harvested, processed, wove, and stitched with contemporary brown-

skinned women making their marks. With age, the cotton shed its facade of whiteness and became brown—brown like the bodies that made the skirt and harvested the cotton; brown like the bodies that deserve justice.

—Yukti V. Agarwal

Em Kapp, b. 2002, RISD BFA 2024, Textiles
Untitled, 2022

Cotton plain weave, immersion dyed, silkscreen printed, discharge-dyed

182.9 x 182.9 cm (72 x 72 inches) approx.

Courtesy of the artist TL79.2022



I was drawn to a deaccessioned dress that, despite barely having been worn, developed flaws and cracks and rotted away in storage. The primary purpose of donating it was to preserve it, but the nature of the fabric conflicted with this desire.

Most textile and apparel donations to museums come from a small group of wealthy people. What happens when such a narrow group determines what is preserved? Will pieces collected today stand the test of time, or will they fall apart? With these questions in mind, I formed a pattern referencing the nature of aging. The print, a monochromatic red, fades in and out as torn pieces of fabric dangle from vines and vegetation entangles and grows into the fabric.

—Em Kapp

Gabriela Cantú, RISD MA 2023, Global Arts and Cultures
Mujer, 2022

Linen, cotton, silk fringe, straw braid

Courtesy of the artist TL88.2022.1

Gabriela Cantú, RISD MA 2023, Global Arts and Cultures
Muñeca, 2022

Linen, synthetic tulle, silk ribbon

Courtesy of the artist TL88.2022.2



My interest in craft, gender, class, and Latinx historical and cultural analysis informed these dolls. I thought about what would have

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warranted such an elaborately designed dress. *Muñeca* (doll) wears a frilly pink dress typical of a quinceañera—a 15th-birthday celebration, when a girl is made to feel special, dolled up and perceived as ready to take on traditional expectations of women. The second doll

considers what was happening in Mexico during the United States' Gilded Age. *Mujer* (woman) represents Adelitas, or women who fought in the Mexican Revolution (ca. 1910–1920). Equipped with rifles and ammunition, they protected themselves against violent gendered militia attacks, exercising their autonomy in community with one another.

—Gabriela Cantú



Julia Park, b. 2001, RISD BFA 2024, Textiles
My Grandmother's Closet, 2022
Cotton and silver foil; silkscreen-printed
Courtesy of the artist TL86.2022

The garments in the museum are far different from the ones my grandmother in Korea wore. Inspired by the question of missing narratives, my silkscreen design captures the merging of Korean and Western cultures in women's dress in the 1960s and 1970s. When my grandmother was in her twenties, the integration of Western style into Korean clothing was noticeable. Eastern and Western fashion styles coexisted, with some women wearing Korean traditional hanbok and others wearing heels and silk dresses with collars and pleats. The border of my print is inspired by intricate oyster-shell inlay, often applied as decoration in Korean closets.

—Julia Park



Kathy (Seo Young) Kim, b. 2001, RISD BFA 2024, Textiles
Death as the First Step of Birth, 2022
Cotton plain weave; immersion-resist-dyed, silkscreen-printed, and discharge-dyed
182.9 x 274.3 cm (72 x 108 inches) approx.
Courtesy of the artist TL80.2022

The word *fragility* comes up when I think about inherent vice. I decided to feature the rose motif in my pattern to signal that fragility, to make the connection between the limited lifespans of flowers and clothes. As I was designing, I was reminded of our class conversation about whether a limited lifespan is in fact bad. Just as the



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deteriorated museum dresses have been re-created by students into new pieces, death might be seen as the beginning, as rebirth.

—Kathy (Seo Young) Kim

Madi Hough, b. 2000, Brown A.B. Anthropology and International & Public Affairs 2022

Untitled, 2022

Paper made from dress scraps [D56.005.13 (ca. 1913); D56.203.5 (ca. 1912); D57.195.8 (ca. 1880-1900); D60.034.59 (ca. 1911); D68.108.28 (ca. 1913); D78.079.10C (ca. 1925)], old newspapers, and magazines
Courtesy of the artist TL81.2022

We have had to lean into a love/hate relationship with these dresses. They crumbled at our touch, yet we had to embrace this loss to make something new. Although destruction ran rampant in my mind, I felt the need to give these garments a second life, remaking the scraps from the first Last Hurrah performance into paper, because garment construction is undervalued as a feminine craft, rather than seen as high art.

—Madi Hough



Nina Hong, b. 2002, RSD BFA 2024, Textiles

A child's dream feast, 2022

Cotton plain weave and gold foil; screen-printed and immersion-resist-dyed

Courtesy of the artist TL82.2022.ab

Workers are breadwinners for their families. For this silkscreen I thought about the Gilded Age working class and how my parents labored endlessly to provide for me and my brother. Here, my own dinner table is transformed into a child's dream feast. Parents often conceal their struggles from their children. In my design, the small chips in the utensils and china evoking this struggle are highlighted with gold foil, referring to the Japanese technique of kintsugi, wherein cracks are repaired with gold.

—Nina Hong



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Seyoung Hong, b. 2000, RISD BFA 2024, Textiles

Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire of 1911, 2022

Cotton plain weave and gold foil; immersion-dyed, silkscreen-printed, and discharge-dyed

182.9 x 274.3 cm (72 x 108 inches)

Courtesy of the artist TL83.2022

This print depicts the missing narrative of the human cost it took for safety and health regulations to be implemented in garment factories. Shadowy discharge-dyed motifs on a dark background create a ghostly effect alongside falling figures illuminated with gold-foil transfer.

—Seyoung Hong



Silvija Meixner, RISD BFA Apparel 2023

Sample Book, 2022

Fabric samples in a book, printed with dress trim (D60.034.59, ca. 1911; D77.076.5, ca. 1896)

33 x 27.9 x 5.1 cm (13 x 11 x 2 inches)

Courtesy of the artist TL87.2022

These textile samples were primarily created using a lace collar removed from a deaccessioned bodice. A variety of methods were used, employing the lace as a stencil and a stamp both on contemporary fabrics and deaccessioned fabrics from the museum collection. The dye used is sun-reactive, giving these garments a chance to respond to light after a long period of dark storage.

—Silvija Meixner



Theodore Roelofs, b. 2001, RISD BFA 2024, Textiles

Greater Empires Have Fallen, 2022

Silk plain weave immersion-dyed and silkscreen-printed with safflower, hibiscus, madder, logwood, and iron; polyester lace trim

182.9 x 182.9 cm (72 x 72 inches)

Courtesy of the artist TL84.2022

Decomposing Gilded Age garments languish in storage at the RISD Museum—glamorous yet repulsive in the colonialism, working-class exploitation, and environmental pollution they represent. Some activists have called today a second Gilded Age, as wealth inequality and colonialism remain, braced by state violence and police brutality.



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This piece—silk dyed with light-sensitive safflower, overdyeed with hibiscus and madder, and printed with hibiscus, logwood, madder, and iron— is meant to fade over time. The synthetic edging evokes lingerie or curtains, suggesting concealment or delicacy. When the silk decomposes, all that will remain is a “frame” of polyester, presenting the absence of what once was.

—Theodore Roelofs

Yue Xu, b. 2001, RISD BFA 2024, Textiles

Untitled, 2022

Cotton plain weave; immersion-dyed, silkscreen-printed, and discharge-dyed

Courtesy of the artist TL85.2022

I was initially inspired by Gilded Age women who recorded in their travel diaries passionate observations about the waves and sea storms. They actively sought out new identities and adapted to new environments during their journeys. This prompted me to think about my own trips across the globe, during which I stare at the scenery flicking through the windows of the car or plane. It is as if these transient landscapes might carry away my yearning and uncertainty and give me hope. The final print shown here depicts ghostly silhouettes of ships amidst restless waves, a visionary map.

—Yue Xu

