

The background of the cover is a surreal, hand-drawn illustration. The sky is a gradient of yellow and orange at the top, transitioning into a deep red and magenta. A steam locomotive with a tall chimney and a train of four rectangular freight cars is depicted floating horizontally in the middle of the sky. Below the train, a dark, silhouetted landscape of rolling hills is visible, with a fence made of vertical posts running across the foreground. The overall style is painterly and atmospheric.

Viz.

INTER-ARTS

INTERVENTIONS

A TRANS-GENRE ANTHOLOGY

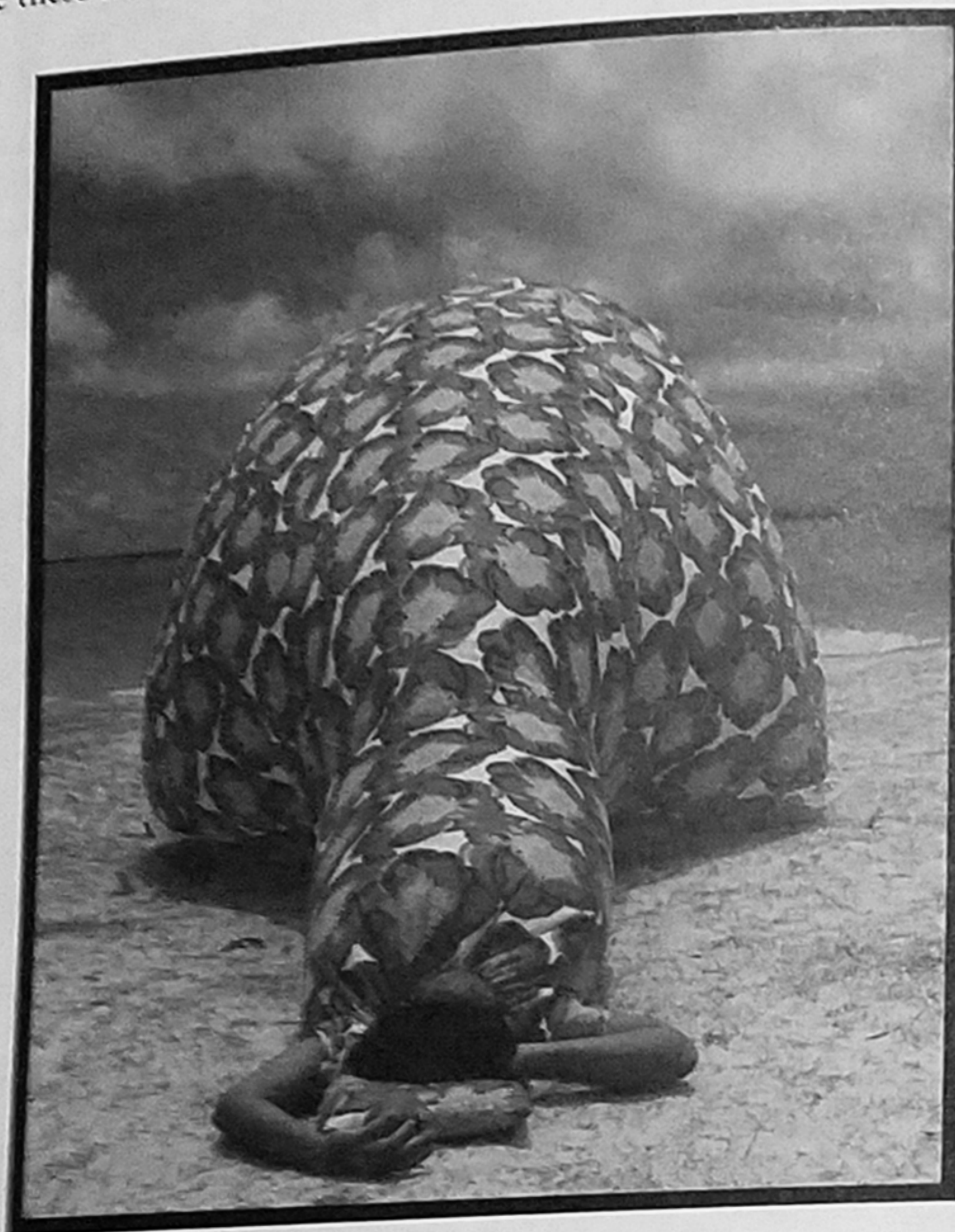
EDITED BY
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The Dress/Tent Project: A correspondence between Linda Weintraub, Robin Lasser and Adrienne Pao

Center for Integrated Media
California Institute of the Arts, Winter 2010
Dear Robin and Adrienne,

[...]
Clothing and shelter coalesce in your ambitious *Dress Tent* projects. Please comment on the role of these objects as primal signs of the civilizing impulse as it does, or does not, relate to the focus of your art practice. — Linda

Dear Linda,
I write this from a well built albeit quite old house in Richmond, California. I look out the window at a sturdy chicken coop, created by my partner Nathan. I see these chickens outside, covered in their feathers, and nothing else. I know they will enter their coop the moment the sun begins to set. I look down at my own attire and see socks, jeans, two t-shirts and a ring on my left hand. I ponder our *Dress Tent* project and this question from you regarding clothing and shelter being one, and most importantly, these objects as signifiers of the civilizing impulse. When I think back to the initial inspiration for this work, I remember wanting to create these clothing/shelter hybrids now known as *Dress Tents*, and thinking rather absurdly: "What if you could wear your own home?" As we pondered the idea further, the fantasy embedding itself in our brains, we quickly took stock of our surroundings, and how we were going to create one of these amorphous entities that only existed as an idea. Time and necessity came crashing in as we realized that I would be in Hawai'i that summer (2005) working on another photographic series and visiting with family. Time and necessity also facilitated our initial inspiration for this body of work — the *Missionary Muumuu Dress Tent*. As we pondered this new-fangled garment, and Hawaiian women, we were immediately beckoned by the muumuu, still considered one of the original *Dress Tents*. A few Google clicks later, the history of the muumuu was revealed. It was brought into Hawai'i by missionaries as a means to cover up native Hawaiian women, to civilize the uncivilized, to lessen the "sexuality" of these typically topless women. What if we blew-up this idea, made the muumuu into a home where this woman could be entered? She could provide shelter, while simultaneously being her own provider. All she needed was this. Could this level of self-sufficiency actually exist? The *Dress Tents* grew out of this initial idea. Here the civilized clothed the "un-civilized," yet this



MISSIONARY MUUMUU DRESS TENT.
Photograph: 40" W x 48" H. Chromogenic Print, 2004.
Robin Lasser and Adrienne Pao

new fiction we worked on creating re-appropriated the colonizer's hand. How can we mix the two, question the power of this garment, and many others to come later on down the road? To be continued... — Adrienne

Dear Robin and Adrienne,
You each referred to the *Missionary Muumuu Dress Tent*, an artwork that offers a compelling historic narrative. The work invites two interpretations of 'missionary': on the one hand, it exposes the invasive strategies of colonizers. In this instance it references missionaries who occupied and captured native definitions of decorum. By imposing the muumuu dress tents on the native women, they expelled an entire population of innocent 'Eves' from their native Paradise. These missionaries asserted European definitions of female modesty. This interpretation seems to focus on the dress theme. It quells acceptance of the naked body and its sexuality.

On the other hand, the photograph that documents this artwork depicts the women wearing the tent-dress lying on her back on an expanse of beach in Oahu under a post-card perfect sky. The woman's arms lie in a seductive manner above her head. It is from this vantage point that the viewer observes the dress billowing toward the open horizon and the sea, presumably offering tent entry to visitors. In other words, she has assumed a missionary position, as if inviting sexual intercourse.

This interpretation focuses on the theme of shelter that separates a public exterior from a private interior. It encourages the expression of sexuality. Please comment. — Linda.

Dear Linda,

I looked up the etiology of "missionary position" sparked by your commentary and question. I wondered if, indeed, the term stemmed from some ideology of the missionaries. Here are a few things I discovered. Answers.com came up revealing the following: a common myth states that the term "missionary position" arose in response to Christian missionaries, who taught that the position was the only proper way to engage in sexual intercourse.

In medieval Europe, partly influenced by Thomas Aquinas, some commentators regarded this as the only acceptable positions since all others were regarded as unfavorable to pregnancy and encouraging pleasure seeking. It appears in ancient artwork of the Romans, Peruvians, Indians, Chinese, and Japanese.

The *Missionary Muumuu Dress Tent* does encourage the expression of sexuality, and, at the same time, alludes to the history of the domination of this expression. While this may seem contradictory, our hybrids intentionally pose questions, on both sides of the isle. The dress tents provide shelter to meditate upon an idea, rather than offering a specific point of view from the creators. The conflation of home and shelter may encourage simultaneous consideration of the private verses public, interior verses exterior, the yin and yang of any given situation or idea.

Having said this, I do feel the early dress tents are based on the expression/suppression of desire, specifically sexuality. However, the topic broadens, over time, to include many facets of human desire.

The emerging *Dress Tents* created for the Hawaiian landscape pose questions around the exotic, tourism, and exploitation of people and the land. The early *Dress Tents* are created for the photograph. The questions posed, deal with photographic theory; the ways in which people and the land, are portrayed, via lens based tradition, centered on the gaze. As the series progresses, the work evolves. The *Dress Tents* migrate, camping in California. The changing landscape shifts the focus of the work. The *Dress Tents* are now immersive multimedia installations, social sculptures providing space for meetings of the mind, as well as experienced as photographs. Our exploration of desire moves away from immediate bodily desire, to our culture's voracious appetite (consumerism), our multi-faceted relationship to ecology, and our treatment of our borders, and those who cross them. Looking forward to our next exchange. — Robin.

Dear Linda,

Interior/Exterior, Public/Private, Disclose/Enclose, Reveal/Hide, Fantasy/Reality, and Modesty/Exhibitionism.

As you suggested in your recent inquiries, the *Missionary Muumuu Dress Tent* offers varying modes of interpretation. While we could suggest one ideal or belief system, we find challenge in playing with that fine line between many modes of translation.

In the *Green House Dress Tent*, the subject is encased in a plastic greenhouse, attached to a shelter, coming up through her shelter, and viewed through the shelter itself. She is a contained object, viewed in situ at a working greenhouse, Color Spot, in Richmond, California. This piece started as a playful look at the fashion of being green. Yet she almost became symbolic of a Victorian woman, framed within her translucent shelter.

At the core of each *Dress Tent* lie an examination of the public and private dichotomy and the confrontation of one's own

desires. Could I enter her skirt? Would I enter her skirt? If I could enter her skirt, what would I see in there? What will she do if I pinch her frilly pantaloons or tickle her feet? Should I tell her I did it? Is it okay to just look? — Adrienne

Dear Adrienne and Robin,

The *Green House Dress Tent* offers a compelling exploration of borders within art, some of which are cultural and some that are physical.

[...]

The *Green House Dress Tent* is structured as a series of portals within nesting borders. The largest border enclosure is a green house that appears in the photograph as an enclosed space that the viewer has already entered. It surrounds a circular gazebo-like tent that serves as a visually permeable but physically restricted space. Inside the gazebo stands the woman wearing a hoop skirt that comprises the third transparent border but no access portals. This fetching, scantily clad woman is the destination for those who traverse each border passing. As such, she suggests an ultimate portal, the genitals of the woman.

You state that you intend, in such works, to address cultural borders. Since borders are both barriers and access routes, *Green House Dress Tent* inspires numerous cultural associations: tillation, seduction, reproduction, desire, procreation, rape, pleasure, refuge, adventure, temptation, frustration, etc.

This theme is augmented by the green house location. The woman stands in the midst of potted flowering plants. If she, too, is considered a hot-house beauty like the flowers in her midst, she suggests a new volley of associations: Barriers protect the woman (chastity?) while trapping energy from incoming radiation (a voyeur?), and heating up (her desire? his desire?). Like the flowers, she too must be shielded from conditions that are adverse to her well-being: storms (of emotion?) and pests (unwanted suitors?). The green house setting is artificial, which includes the necessity of artificial pollination (sexual fantasy?) and investments of energy and resources (seduction?).

In the midst of freely associating the innuendos elicited by this art work, it occurred to me that the title can suggest an entirely different reading if it is not read as 'greenhouse dress' but as 'green housedress'. In this instance your invitation to explore "private verses public, interior verses exterior, bodily desires versus consumerism, and our multi-faceted relationship to ecology" would need to be completely revised. — Linda



GREENHOUSE DRESS TENT.
Photograph: 48" W x 40" H. Chromogenic Print, 2007.
Robin Lasser and Adrienne Pao