

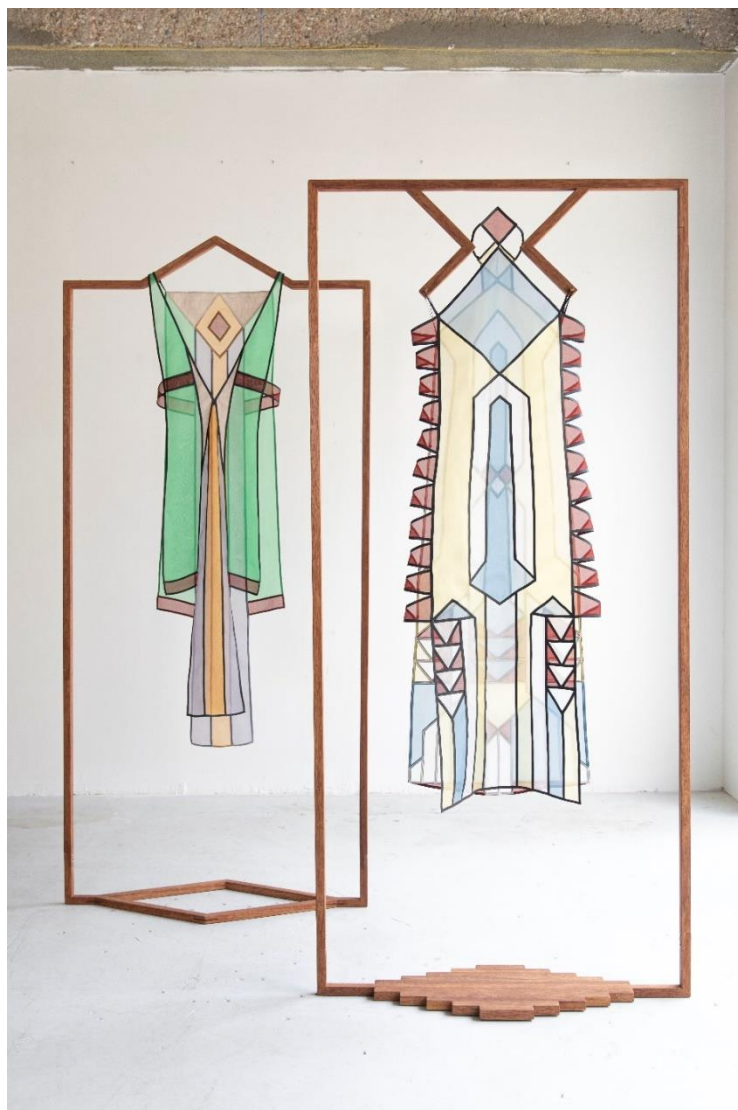
Les petits pois sont verts...

Les petits poissons rouges...

Mauricio Limón de León

in collaboration with Adriana González Hulshof

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An unassuming stained-glass window in Adriana González Hulshof's house in Amsterdam was the starting point for the collection of haute couture dresses designed by Mauricio Limón and Adriana González Hulshof realized by Atelier Caraco in Paris. Surrounded by clear rippled glass panes, abstracting the world outside, the window's central stepped motif is made up of slender vertical and horizontal pieces of glass in orange, mauve, green, and burgundy hues, held together by strips of lead forming a metallic grid. Turned on its head, the shape evokes Dan Flavin's fluorescent light sculptures in his "*monument*" for V. Tatlin series, a streamlined version of the Constructivist tower dreamed up by the Russian artist and architect in his project for the Monument to the Third International (1919-1920).

Named *Westerstraat 87* – the address at which the stained-glass window in question can be found – the inaugural creation faithfully replicates, down to its colour scheme, the symmetrical arrangement of the central decorative motif that grows outwards from an amber core, adjusting it here and there with the proportions and volume of a (slender) female body in mind. The one notable addition is a red diamond shape framed with yellow that cuts into the otherwise unadorned crew neckline of the stained-glass window-turned-dress, matched by an audacious low V-shaped cut at the back, which lends the dress a dynamic edge. The see-through silk fabric conveys the translucency of the stained glass, hemmed in with leather in lieu of lead.

Westerstraat 87 is one in a growing collection of flimsy open edition dresses, each inspired by a different Art Deco stained-glass window found mainly in Amsterdam and other Dutch cities, as titles like *Utrecht* attest. Coming fast on the heels of Art Nouveau with its predilection for organic shapes drawn from nature, curved lines and asymmetrical patterns, the international Art Deco style which flourished in the interwar period – consecrated by the landmark Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes held in Paris in 1925, from which it derived its name – was, on the contrary, known for its use of stark geometrical forms, loud colours, zigzags or straight lines, and a concomitant fondness for symmetrical motifs. Inspired by elements of Art Deco architecture, the dresses conceived by Limón and González Hulshof exhibit some of those traits.

A certain playfulness characterizes Art Deco's decorative idiom, which is reflected in the fanciful title chosen for the collection as a whole, as opposed to the individual dresses. *Les petits pois sont verts... Les petits poissons rouges...* nods to the eponymous oil painting by the French architect and painter Yves Laloy (1920-1999), which André Breton owned and found suitably ambiguous. The visual equivalent of a calembour (pun), this hybrid image features twin fishbowls that are at once faces with tiny fish and pea-sized dots in lieu of features. The contrasting, predominantly red and green colour scheme of the dual figure presented against a light mauve background has affinities with the palette of *Westerstraat 87*, which may explain why Limón made the connection, whether consciously or not.

The titular words are written out beneath the image in a child-like scrawl, using alternating colours for each letter. An unedited version of the work graced the cover of the

second edition of Breton's seminal book *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* (Surrealism and Painting) of 1965, thus ensuring that the label 'Surrealist painter', which Laloy himself deemed too limiting, stuck. That very year, in fact, the painting was included in 'L'Écart absolu', the 11th International Surrealism Exhibition at the Galerie de l'œil. In 1958, which is when he first met Laloy, Breton wrote the introduction to the catalogue accompanying a solo exhibition at another Parisian gallery, La Cour d'Ingre, dedicated to the then still relatively unknown artist, who came to painting from a background in architecture. In this text, subsequently reprinted in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, Breton relates another of Laloy's works – depicting a rainbow with a human head – to 'the admirable sand paintings of the Navajo Indians, made in a day and unmade at nightfall', which he sees as tied to a system of cosmogonic beliefs.¹

Put like this, the ephemeral 'sand paintings' that the Navajo people make to summon spirits and conjure creation myths in ceremonies such as the Nightway sound like the tapestry that Penelope weaves by day and unweaves by night in an attempt to ward off her suitors in Homer's *Odyssey*. The Navajos, the majority of whom live in the US states of Arizona and New Mexico, are also renowned for their elaborate weaving designs, featuring among other red diamond, lozenge and other geometrical patterns reminiscent of the Art Deco motifs that inspired the dresses in the first place. But the link with indigenous artistic and sacred practices in Latin and North America is more immediate than that.

When Mauricio Limón and Adriana González Hulshof – who grew up in Peru and Mexico before moving to the Netherlands at the age of ten – first conceived of the project together, they looked to textiles from Mexico and Peru as well as Dutch stained-glass windows for inspiration. Limón met the former director of Amsterdam Art Weekend during his stay at the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, where she had her office at the time. In the span of the residency year, González Hulshof saw Limón develop an interest in Latin American crafts, which went hand in hand with more importance given to the domestic sphere in his practice, illustrated by such works as *Trust Comes on Foot and Leaves on Horseback* (2016). Conceived for the open studio days at the Rijksakademie, this immersive multi-media installation comprising paintings, video work and a mural painting, saw the artist's studio transformed into a domestic interior fitted out with woven rugs and tapestries made in Morocco, Iran and by the Fulani people of West Africa.

González Hulshof felt the need to become part of the creative process, especially in the area where contemporary art meets high-end fashion, just as Limón was about to relocate to Paris to move into a live/work studio space located on the top floor of Atelier Caraco, a collective of costume designers whose founder Claudine Lachaud is a family friend. Limón tends to work with a close-knit group of collaborators, more often than not relatives or friends of his, and this project is no exception. A Mexican industrial designer based in Paris, Chimi Gutierrez, was drafted in to produce the elegant wooden frames on

¹ A translation of the French original is available on the André Breton website:
<https://www.andrebreton.fr/work/56600100339970>

which the works are displayed in a gallery setting; these are an integral part of the design, as they turn the dresses in sculptural objects. The niece of Limón's wife, Justine Olguin, a slip of a girl and an artist in her own right, modelled the diaphanous Ur-dress with great aplomb in the short video clip demonstrating its potential as an item of apparel that can be worn.

For Limón, these works are an extension of his practice as a painter. In fact, the four dresses made to date were conceived in dialogue with a series of twelve paintings executed with white potassium alum and occasionally black ink on wooden panels. Whereas the slender wooden frames on which the dresses are hung are fashioned out of a light, rosy-coloured timber called *acajou* in French – a generic term that refers to tropical wood – different types of scrap wood found in a lumber yard on the outskirts of Paris, serve as a background for the predominantly white alum paintings. These take cue from the irregular forms, shades, textures, and ring patterns of walnut, pine, maple, palisander, ebony, cherry and ash trees, espousing their shape, following the outline of a tear, responding to the marks that make each unique.

The titles of the alum paintings, from *Corset vert* to the serial *Garde-robe*, hint at what they depict, albeit in an abstracted form. 'Garde-Robe', literally meaning 'ward-robe', is how Claudine Lachaud refers to the repertory of costumes spanning different periods and styles that the seamstresses at Atelier Caraco consult when designing outfits intended for the theatre and other performing arts. Caraco specializes, among other, in different techniques of undergarment and corset-making, which are well-represented in the 'Garde-Robe'. While living above Atelier Caraco, the artist could peruse this archive at his leisure. In the resulting *Garde-robe* series, details of appropriated sewing patterns and vintage costumes appear in truncated form – a sleeve here, a bodice there – punctured by holes and adorned with stripes. There is undeniably an element of fetishism involved in this fixation with corsets and other 'bodyguards', which stand in a metonymic relation to the body parts that they are meant to conceal and guard.

Text by Agnieszka Gracza

Mauricio Limón de León (Ciudad de México, 1979) works with video, installation, painting and performance. Through these practices he approaches subjects related to public domain, informal economy, sexuality and power. He is a former alumni of the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam, NL (2016-2017). Limón received "Jóvenes creadores" Grant, MX (2011); Annual Grant of The Pollock-Krasner Foundation, NY (2010). His work has been shown in Mexico, US and Europe in: Rozenstraat 59, Amsterdam, Netherlands (2017); Pinchuk Art Center, Kiev, Ukraine (2014); Galería Hilario Galguera (2017, 2014, 2008), Museo Tamayo (2014), Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil (2014), Mexico City; KunstMuseum Bonn, Germany (2013); San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco, CA, (2010); CA2M, Madrid (2010); Museo de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, (2005). His work has been acquired by Frank Demaegd Collection, Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, CA; Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporaneo, MX (MUAC); Colección Cisneros, NY.