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A fashion show with no clothing: Artist's works look like dresses, but they're not meant to be worn

Danish designer Anne Damgaard is featured at SITE131's fall show in Dallas.

By Holly Haber|Special Contributor Sep 30, 2019



Danish artist Anne Damgaard's creations are diaphanous works of tulle, gauze and organza that reflect or diffuse light and appear to float in the air, but their structure is highly disciplined. (Stephanie DeLay / Site131)

Anne Damgaard's work looks like avant-garde fashion, but it's not meant to be worn.

"I told her I wanted to do a fashion show," recounted Site 131 gallerist Joan Davidow. "Anne said, 'Oh, I don't show these on people. They're objects of art.' She doesn't even wear them herself."

The Danish artist is a paradox. She holds a degree in fashion and teaches at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts School of Design in Copenhagen, but the pieces shown at Site 131 are sculptures crafted of textiles — not clothes.

"I also think it is quite strange myself because clothing is made for putting on people," Damgaard mused. "I know that it's not rational. If someone wants to wear them they are welcome, but I'm not a house where you come and buy dresses that fit you and you and you, because I want absolute freedom. It's two totally different things."

The exhibition, which runs through Dec. 14, also features Zsofia Schweger paintings, Richard Tuschman photos and Cristina Velásquez collages.

“Anne’s work was very engaging and sophisticated and unlike anything I had seen before,” Davidow said. “Dallas cares so much about fashion, we had to show this.”



She convinced Damgaard to dress 13 live models -- very carefully -- in 13 pieces for the exhibition debut on Sept. 13.

The fall art exhibition at Site 131 features textile sculptures by Anne Damgaard, paintings by Zsofia Schweger, photos by Richard Tuschman and collages by Cristina Velásquez. (Stephanie DeLay / Site131)

It was a challenge because they are complicated constructions, often composed of textile slices linked by little more than single stitches here and there.

The waists are only 24 inches or less, and Davidow recruited dancers from Ballet Dallas, Zion Dance Project and J3 Productions to pose in them.

Damgaard’s creations are diaphanous works of tulle, gauze and organza that reflect or diffuse light and appear to float in the air, but their structure is highly disciplined. She typically works with a single square or oval of fabric that she laser cuts into geometric pieces. She then pleats or drapes them to create ethereal shapes that invoke femininity and lightness of being.

Several incorporate unusual textiles, including an iridescent high-tech polyester organza from Japan that was designed to mimic the structural color of morpho butterflies, whose wing tops aren’t pigmented but refract blue light.

Morphotex fabric looks silver but changes depending on the light, Damgaard pointed out. For instance, it turns red in the afternoon sun. “It’s all of the time about light.”

Damgaard says she wanted to be a sculptor or a painter but felt more comfortable and familiar attending design school because her entire family worked in textile or fashion businesses.



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“I grew up in a small town in a textile area,” she explained. “My parents and grandparents on both sides and all of their siblings and my parents’ siblings all went into the textile industry. My aunt was a famous fashion designer for a big company [Dranella], and my great-granddad made fabrics for furniture and curtains.”

Damgaard’s work has been exhibited in Denmark, Sweden and Germany and collected by European museums. This marks her first show in the United States.

She isn’t bothered by people defining her creations as fashion or art or debating whether fashion is art.

“Just take it for what it is,” Damgaard said. “It’s a human expression, whether it’s painting or a dress or some kind of music. I’m not interested if it is one or the other as long as it speaks to me.”

This may not be her only Texas experience. Damgaard has applied for a residency next year at 100 W Corsicana, the international artist collective in Corsicana.

Details

The show runs through Dec. 14 at Site131, 131 Payne St., Dallas. Open Fridays from noon to 5 p.m. and by appointment. For details, visit site131.com.