



Mark Titmarsh Todd Robinson

Images:

(front) Mark Titmarsh, *Model*, (detail) 2011
Acrylic on paper (dust jacket)

(centre) Mark Titmarsh, *Resort*, (detail) 2011,
Acrylic on paper (dust jacket)

(inside panel) Todd Robinson and Mark Titmarsh,
Bespoke Painting Beta, 2011, Performance view

MOP Projects

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Australia

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Thursday to Saturday 1 – 6pm
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Public Fitting

Mark Titmarsh (Editor)
Todd Robinson

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public fitting

Wet and Wild



This exhibition is an art and fashion collaborative project between Mark Titmarsh and Todd Robinson. It features a live performance where paint is poured onto a series of garments worn by models. The project grew from informal discussions around a work by Robinson titled *Shirt Drawing* (2004), where a store bought shirt is disassembled, pinstriped by hand then reassembled. The ideas also grew out of Titmarsh's previous interventions into garments and fabrics as a part of his practice of expanded painting. Both artists meet in the act of marking surfaces, fabrics, and bodies in inverted relations between fashion and painting. The outcomes of this production-performance include garments, video, paintings, and their combination as a productive infrastructure forming the project titled *Public Fitting*.

The artists discussed the intersections between art and fashion, paint, fabric and their individual practices:

Mark Titmarsh: I am thinking of a spectrum that runs from Alexander McQueen's *Robot Paint Dress* to the images of Kenyan protesters sprayed by police trucks with pink-coloured water. The first is a moment on the catwalk in the Spring Summer collection of 1999 and the other an incident during political protest and civil disobedience in Kampala 2011. While McQueen doesn't seem to quote Yves Klein neither do the Kenyans refer to yellow stars or pink triangles. However both scenes stripped of their political and aesthetic details are immediately graspable as peculiar moments in painting. Paint in an excessive or ecstatic state drenches and exceeds a supporting surface, it soaks the clothes, runs away, pours down, dripping, almost scarring the humans who dare to wear clothes as canvas touched by colour.

Todd Robinson: When I recall the McQueen dress it always strikes me as the quintessential fashion event, the spectacular production of the fashion moment, a particular kind of staging that fashion hasn't matched since. The model rotates on a circular panel set into the floor and the paint is applied by spray guns deployed by pre-programmed robots used in automotive manufacturing. It's also a peculiar moment in painting because paint becomes a terrifying substance for the non-painter. It has to be avoided, it is dangerous and shouldn't be put on your body, you have to wash it out immediately, with the whole normative kind of response to getting paint on you. Paint is generally associated with artists, commercial painters, children, home renovators, but outside of those sanctioned areas it is a de-stabilising substance. Our response to paint and dirt is the same, and is undergirded by a vague sense of shame, which is probably why its used

as a punitive kind of crowd control by the Kenyans, it marks you out in some way and it also ruins your clothes up, changes your public impact entirely.

Mark Titmarsh: Paint gets on everything, even in the painter's studio there is constant vigilance to make sure it is staying put in all the right places. It is part of its physical nature that it will attach itself secretly and furtively. I remember when we did the first tests on your calico jacket in my studio, I threw paint over your back but most of it missed and sprayed across the whole studio hitting dozens of works, some of which I could clean up, others I had to live with because cleaning meant destroying something already partially completed and others I did not discover till weeks later.

Todd Robinson: I was thinking while looking at a dress I am considering for the show and wondering if it was enough as a fashion proposition. I then had a look at the image of the 'bespoke painting' performance done in your studio and recognised how dramatically paint (literally) impacts on the garment and effaces the surface. The dress is demure in style, with a faint hint of a 1950s natural waisted silhouette, with a pencil skirt, and loose fitting blouse. A move away from this kind of figuration could detract from the gesture, interrupting the letting-go of paint. The paint splattered on garments, brings a contingency, a wetness, an abject quality to the human figure. By looking at the results and thinking about the process I realise I've become enamoured with painting and its basic kind of materiality, as opposed to images or objects on the wall.

Mark Titmarsh: I am wondering what you think of those historical moments when artists become fashion designers and vice versa? I am thinking of a long line through Sonia Delaunay, Henri Matisse, Salvador Dali, Jenny Holzer, Vanessa Beecroft, Sylvie Fleury and Takashi Murakami? I am also wondering about the ways art and fashion can sit together or synergise. For example, fashion can be considered an art form, or clothes can be exhibited in art museum, as with *Savage Beauty*, or fashion can be equated with art, as in Issey Miyake, or in another part of the map, art can be printed on clothes like Mondrian's paintings or fashion photographers can be seen as artists, such as Helmut Newton and artists like Cindy Sherman as fashion photographer.

Todd Robinson: That is difficult to address because the instances you mention are quite different, even incommensurable. I think the practice of making clothing is quite different from art making. Fashion, when it has been considered an art form in the broadest sense, as in decorative or wearable arts, still projects its difference from art. However there are those productive historical moments when collaborations like Salvador Dali and Elsa Schiaparelli produce a significant outcome for fashion. While others appear to quite productive for art, as with Vanessa Beecroft when she draws on the spectacle of fashion, its veneer and seductive power. The public mobility of clothing and its desirability as a commodity have been attractive aspects for artists when they want to move beyond the bounds of the



gallery into everyday life. For some the garment might become a platform for visual ideas as with the Yves Saint Laurent Mondrian dress, which is not necessarily a satisfying result for me. By contrast Sonia Delaunay's work addresses the notion of an underlying human vitality and a basic carnality in image making which lends itself to the worn form. Likewise Hélio Oiticica draws on some of the more basic interconnections between fashion and art with his desire to dissolve that divide between the two and ultimately bring art and life together. His Parangolé are basically worn paintings, large rectangular pieces of fabric that utilise the wearability of fabric as a logical extension of his painting practice, rather than simply printing a 2D image on a 3D object.

Mark Titmarsh: Oiticica is very interesting in the way he uses colour as object and event, turning paintings into wearable structures that put colour into space and time. Colour in his work becomes something you can walk into, it is spatio-temporal and dynamic, rather than ultra thin and static.

Todd Robinson: Is that your interest in painting on living people? Is it a logical extension of your practice? I would like to know what are the productivities for you, what kind of constraints and potentialities are realised through painting on clothes and models.

Mark Titmarsh: I am interested in finding out where paint can't go, what kind of formal structures and situations will not let painting in. So far I haven't found any. So with this collaboration I am interested to find out how much painting I can do in relation to the creation of a wearable garment before it will stop me. As you say it goes much further than taking an image from a completed painting and printing it onto a garment. What is happening here is much closer to what goes on in the studio, some kind of introduction and insight into the act of making. When I get on a ladder and pour paint from a great height onto the model laying on the ground I am approximating something I would do in my own studio with other materials such as canvas, aluminium, Perspex, paper, dust jackets and so on. These are the chance events of liquid turbulence when it impacts on the uneven surface of the garment wrapped around the human form. The paint can look like Pollock, or a violent attack, or a fetish event, a collision between two practices, a tender synergy with unusual unpredictable outcomes. In all of them something of the natural flow and flux of liquids is revealed, also the dynamic shape of the human body, the pull of gravity as paint falls and impacts and then drips from a hanging garment. So many small truths come from this basic theatre of paint and fabric, the human form and the earths gravitational pull.

Todd Robinson: It has been argued that performance practice is now determined by a relationship to technology, in particular that video as a mobile medium decouples performance from any need for an audience. Video turns any ephemeral performance into an enduring document and artefact, such that there is no need to perform live. However in *Public Fitting*, the live

aspect of the event is paramount, including the human form, the dynamism of paint, the spontaneity of it all. The staging of the whole production highlights the significance of the moment in the processes of making. It turns the production process inside out, as you say bringing the studio into the gallery. While the catwalk is seductive, it is rarely a zone of production, usually a form of presentation that focuses on garments. It is not the same as a performance where action and relationships between protagonists and artefacts are laid bare. In a fashion show the presentation of garments come forward and models despite their singularity, recede somewhat. One is looking at 'Fashion' in that kind of staging, it foregrounds a staging-of-fashion-garments. *Public fitting* retains the same focus on the garment but through a shift in the mode of production, the process of fetishisation is exposed. By challenging the mystique of the garment and revealing the act of making in such a way a series of other nested questions arise, what is intended, what is arbitrary, where is the virtuosity of both fashion and painting? That is what is so captivating for me about a project like this. It exposes the contingencies of making in contrast to a traditional system of production where the constraints are predetermined and out of view. In *Public Fitting*, the situation is all potentiality, exposed to viewers and exposed to flux, a flow of action, making garments of paint.

Mark Titmarsh: In all of that I am thinking about the infrastructural environment where things take place such as the gallery, the theatre and the catwalk. The more I think about the catwalk the more fascinating it becomes, the more I want to go there with paint. I am fascinated by that little raised structural element, that puts the catwalk up above the floor into a space like that place behind the proscenium arch in the theatre and the cinema. But there is more to the catwalk because it comes out at you, it penetrates the invisible wall of the theatre and comes right at your face, right into your world, right into where I am here and now in space and time. It is quite shocking and thrilling and totally seductive. It also says a lot about the live nature of what we are doing in this project. It is not happening in the studio behind the scenes, it is happening in the gallery on the opening night, with paint doing its unpredictable thing in the moment, with the colour of paint meeting the colour of fabric right before your eyes, with models dressing and disrobing and the visibility of the human form fleeting by and in the end, an experience of living colour in all its extravagant everydayness.



Images:
Alexander McQueen, *Robot Paint Dress*, 1999
Reuters, *Opposition Politicians in Kenya sprayed with Pink Water*, 2011

Mark Titmarsh and Todd Robinson, August 2011