

## Thomas Robles – Couture

*This short summary accompanied an exhibit of three pieces at “Kusina - new works from old friends” a group show at Adelaide McDermot Gallery, Winnipeg, Manitoba in May 2004.*

Haute Couture at its height in the 1950's and 1960's saw resurgence in public interest and sales. Fresh from its conspicuous absence during the war years, women of means clamoured to wear the latest innovations from Cristobal Balenciaga and Hubert de Givenchy among others. If such extravagance was unaffordable – a couture suit could cost as much as \$35,000; an evening gown upwards of \$50,000 – women anxiously awaited the press releases of a fashion house's designs in the hopes of having them copied. Not surprisingly, designers zealously guarded their work, placing them under strict publication moratoria from the media until the appointed date of release.

In an intriguing parallel with genteel society, which was predicated on elegance of bearing and propriety, haute couture masked a wealth of sins, both physical and emotional. This sensual irony between the exquisite beauty of the façade and the ugliness of inner turmoil was a reflection of an age when one's innermost thoughts and feelings were not for public display. Concealment and revelation, therefore, were notions that reflected the artistic expression of the time.

Nowhere was this dichotomy more evident than in the (upper middle to upper class) domestic environment where the woman of the house was often impeccably turned out and expected to embody notions of perfection, which often belied domestic abuse, alcoholism, and depression.

The three pieces in this exhibit pay tribute to the 1950s and 1960s both in spirit and design concept. Each is an original work hand made from vintage patterns of the times, and using upholstery-weight fabrics lined in silk charmeuse.