

Art

Clothes tailored into fresh

By Dorothy Burkhart
Mercury News Art Writer

THE Garment as Metaphor" — clothing as art, to wear or wear not — pulls together an exciting variety of work. Currently at the San Jose Art League, the show is a lot livelier than it sounds.

Imaginatively curated by Jeanne Aurel-Schneider, who has used the garment image in her own work for years, this ambitious project boasts work by more than 30 artists from around the country. The best of them are engaged with ideas about art that are communicated with varying degrees of effectiveness and visual enticement.

Lively, of course, is no way to describe John Battenberg's bronze casting of a World War I helmet. This early sculpture, from Battenberg's fey series of uniforms and related icons emptied of human form, remains evocative today. Like Battenberg, Carlos Villa's work taps an inner chord. Villa's cloak of feathers and canvas — when it isn't on somebody's back it can be displayed as sculpture — transcends the here and now, evoking shamanistic ritual. There's a spiritual quality also to Dawn Hart's "Perfector of Wisdom" — a ritual kimono made of onion skins and other weathered materials.

Lynne Streeter also deals with metaphor in her disquieting collection of blue objects hanging from the ceiling. Formed of remnants of old clothes, weathered with time, in which pins and other things have been embedded, they have a certain "Mommy Dearest" quality.

The sky's the limit on the materials stitched into some of these pieces. Visually seductive is Kristen Petersen's surrealist crowd-pleaser, "Nail Dress." The strapless

gown sports thousands of nails (be sure to peek at the back) and recalls Duchamp in its perverse beauty, surprise and double meaning.

Interestingly, few faces or bodies appear in most of these pieces, yet the human presence is definitely felt. Margaret Herscher is an illusionist, casting pieces of clothing in bronze. In "Queenie," a witty assemblage of bronze, wood and steel consisting of parasol, sweat pants, glasses and ladder, we get clues to Queenie's persona but not the complete picture. This piece could have missed by a mile, but doesn't, because there's something hilariously profound in these bronzes.

Wrapping twigs with plastic and cloth, and using the kimono as inspiration, Gyongy Laky sketches brightly colored configurations ("Kimono Boogie," for example) that playfully dance on the wall. Think Mondrian, but curvier.

Artists have been known to weave lobster claws, locks of hair, even plastic eyeballs and charms into their fantasy creations. Designer Estelle Akamine uses shoes. And her passion for shoes is matched by her passion for "reinventing" goddess myths. Her wonderfully bizarre sculpture, "Blue Kali," is based on the Hindu goddess who liked a good time. Akamine's lady sports sunglasses, dances on a bunch of hats and is surrounded by an open-work frame of shoes. Surreal. Is this a fashion-forward statement or what?

The Garment as Metaphor

Where: San Jose Art League, 66 N. Market St., San Jose. (408) 287-8435

When: Noon-4 p.m.
Tuesdays-Saturdays; to 7:30 p.m.
Thursdays. Through Feb. 11.

