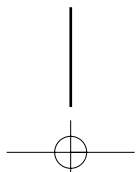
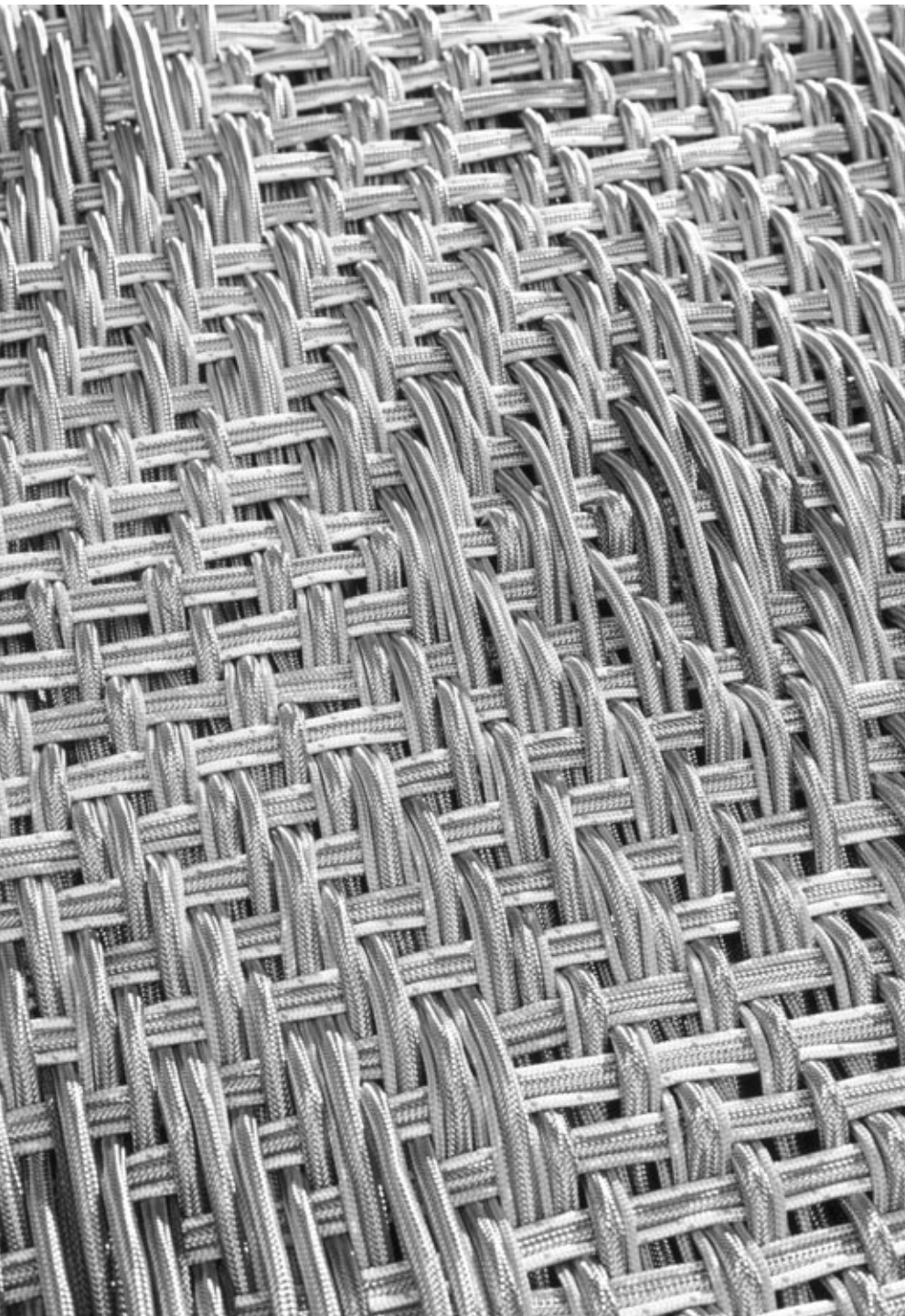
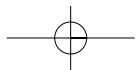


Variations in a Serious Black Dress

14 February 2004 - 20 March 2004

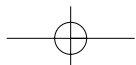
Canberra Contemporary Art Space, Canberra

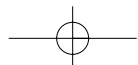
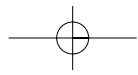


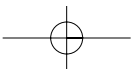


For Juilee Pryor, and her deep understanding of Black.

Codpiece #2 (Henry VIII) 2003
Next page: *Variations in a Serious Black Dress* installation
CCAS Gorman House Gallery







of Works

Variations in a Serious Black Dress #1 2002
Asiatic angel – greeted by a young nipple.
Polyester, nylon and polypropolene on wood.

Variations in a Serious Black Dress #3 2002
Goyesca – Abby gently lays down.
Polyester and polypropolene on wood.

Variations in a Serious Black Dress #4 2003
Japanese smile in translucent, transcendent polyester.
Polyester and polypropolene on wood.

Variations in a Serious Black Dress #5 2003
Dry and calm, casually looking away.
Polyester and polypropolene on wood.

Variations in a Serious Black Dress #6 2003
Filled with engaging body...and she smiled.
Polyester and polypropolene on wood.

Variations in a Serious Black Dress #7 2003
Lola goes North.
Polyester and polypropolene on wood.

Variations in a Serious Black Dress #8 2003
Agnes, cupping her breast.
Polyester and polypropolene on wood.

Variations in a Serious Black Dress #9 2003
Holding her breath. 7 January 1536.
Polyester and polypropolene on wood.

Variations in a Serious Black Dress #10 2003
Teresa on her knees. Head down.
Polyester and polypropolene on wood.

Variations in a Serious Black Dress #11 2003
Strictly porn.
Rubber.

Variations in a Serious Black Dress #12 2003
Neo Gothic Barbie lost in knottOed fantasies.
Polyester and polypropolene on wood.

Variations in a Serious Black Dress #13 2003
Holding her last born son.
Polyester and polypropolene on wood.

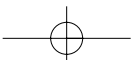
Variations in a Serious Black Dress #14 2003
Pheromones perculating like atoms in the rainbow.
Polyester and polypropolene on wood.

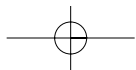
All the works approximately 2 x 2 metres.

Codpiece #1 (Felipé II) 2003
Stainless steel braided hose, nylon and polypropolene on wood .

Codpiece #2 (Henry VIII) 2003
Stainless steel braided hose, nylon and polypropolene on wood .
15.5 x 15.4 x 18m

Codpiece of an unknown ruler in the Golden Age 2003
Stainless steel braided hose, nylon and polypropolene on wood
1.35 x 1.35 x .32 m





Introduction

Canberra Contemporary Art Space (CCAS) is pleased to present *Variations in a Serious Black Dress*. This the first major solo exhibition by artist Dani Marti, is comprised of thirteen 'black dresses' and 'three codpieces'. The exhibition presents audiences with a thought-provoking comparative analysis of contemporary visual art and craft practice.

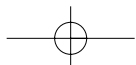
Whilst the presentation of Marti's exquisite canvases are linked with the art movements of Formalism and Minimalism, their specific references are the intricate patterns of the fabrics found in Baroque and Renaissance paintings. The artist transforms the painted surface into hyper-real fabric swatches.

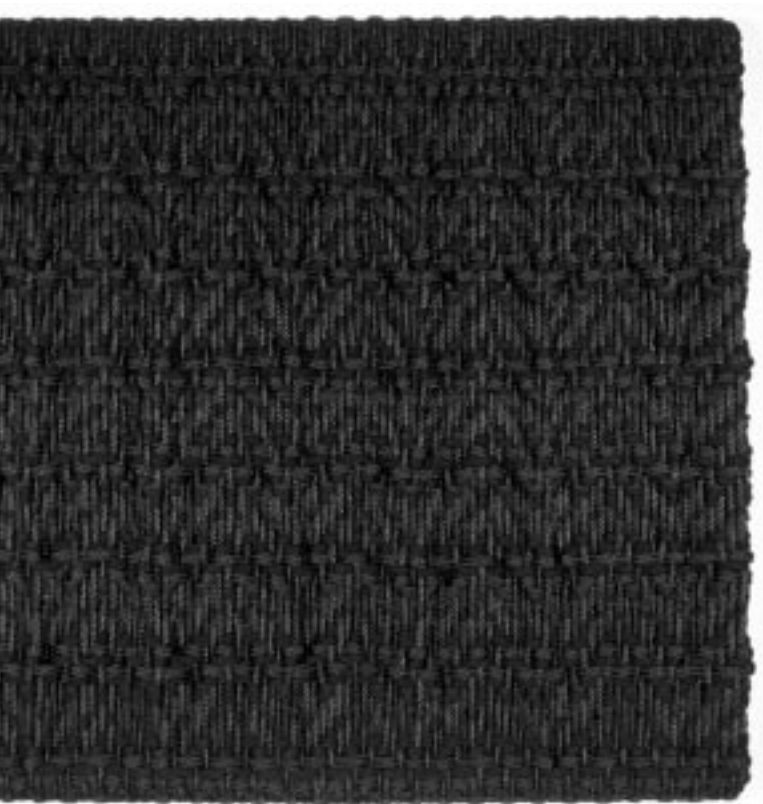
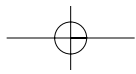
This publication is produced on the occasion of the exhibition. It is with thanks to Sherman Galleries, Arc One at Span and The Museum and Galleries Foundation of New South Wales (MGFNSW), that its luxuriousness reflects that of the works in the exhibition.

CCAS and The MGFNSW are delighted to tour *Variations of a Serious Black Dress* in Australia during 2005/06.

Lisa Byrne
Director
Canberra Contemporary Art Space

Redwork 2002 detail

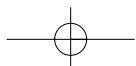


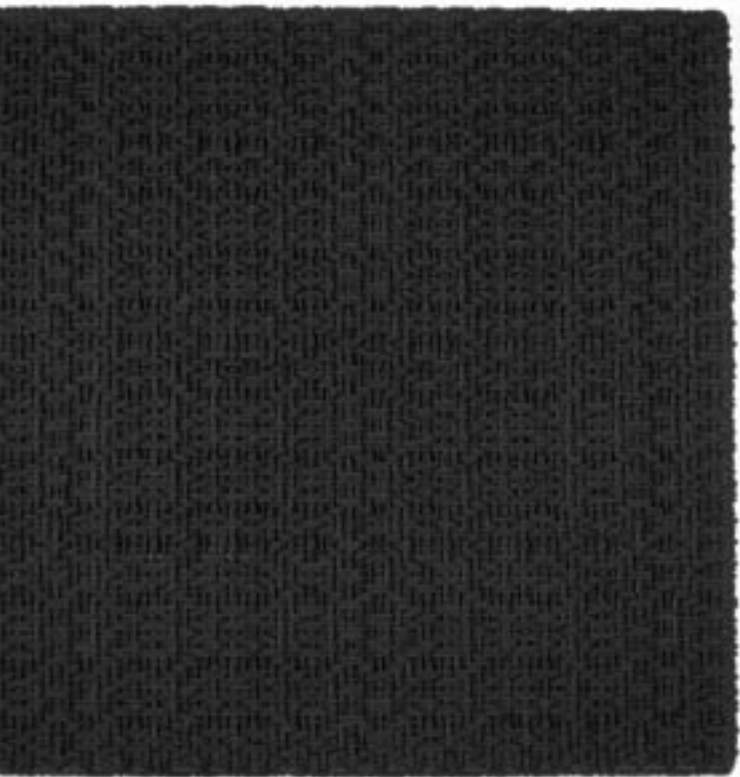
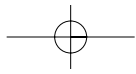


Variations in a Serious Black Dress #1 2002
angel – greeted by a young nipple.



Variations in a Serious Black Dress #3 2002
Goyesca – Abby gently lays down.

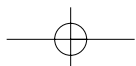


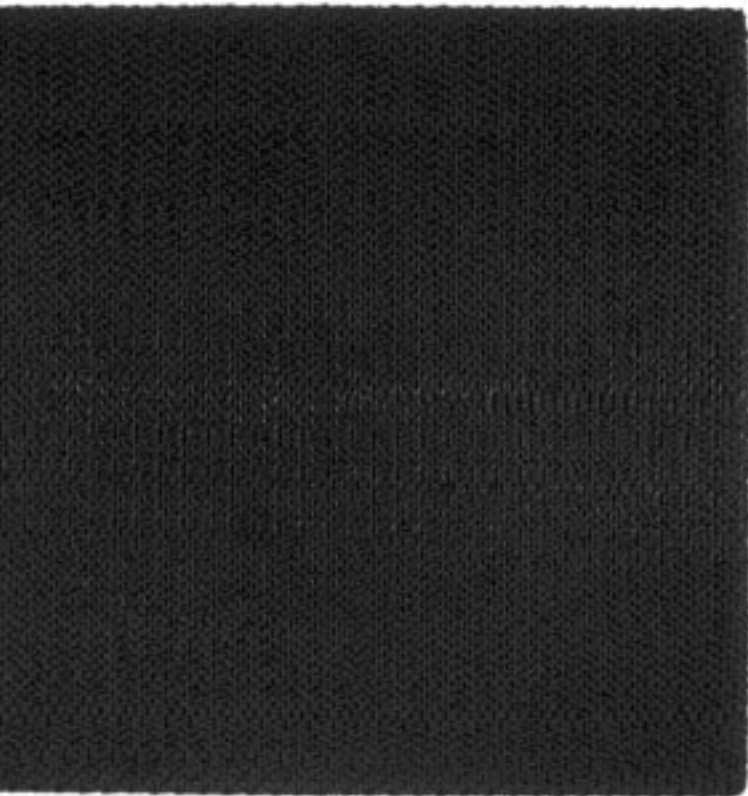
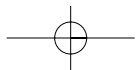


Variations in a Serious Black Dress #4 2003.
Use smile in translucent, transcendant polyester.



Variations in a Serious Black Dress #5 2003
Dry and calm, casually looking away.





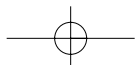
ons in a Serious Black Dress #6
with engaging body...and she smiled.

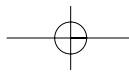
Baroque Minimalism: Variations of a serious black dress

Fourteen black squares: the women

It might seem audacious to regard the darkened squares of Rothko's Chapel series, with their deeply imbued spirituality, as a respectable front for latent eroticism, but Dani Marti's latest body of artwork, *Variations of a Serious Black Dress*, does exactly that. At first glance Marti's series of works (fourteen in number, just like Rothko's Huston chapel) seems typical of abstraction's high seriousness and Rothko's Formalism. Aall or nothing affair, of massive black squares.

Stripped back to the material purity of layers of oil on canvas, Rothko's chapel works consisted of nothing but Greenberg's painterly matter, the work of art reduced to painting's two-dimensional surface upon which the luscious nature of pigment exhibited itself in the depths of its intensity. A viewer contemplating these surfaces entered into the paradoxical discourse of a void that was full and empty at the same time. Were these works cleansed of all representational elements in order to saturate the canvas with the full nothingness of the higher order of pure spirit? Or, as





substance did they remain just that—
y expressive of the material plane and full of
of substance? Evoking this same deep
of abstract expressionism's paradoxically
and empty void, Marti's series is a reminder
Rothko's temple to the spirit is reached
e enjoyment of the physical plane of matter.

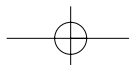
unlike Rothko, is unashamedly sexual, and
black surfaces are charged with latent
as emphasised in his titles: for example,
1 Asiatic angel, greeted by a young nipple
formalism of the black square functions as
tjacket which conducts you from the
a cheeky nipple to the abstract plane of
ll, and nothing. The tight two-dimensional
Formalism functions like an elevator,
and sublimating erotic energies more
sociated with the Baroque. The trajectory
the one elaborated by Deleuze in *The Fold*,
is on the Baroque, in which he traced the
d torsion of matter from its denser forms
y to the abstract strata which he named
soul¹. As such, in Deleuze's schema,
n's immanence folds into transcendence in
nt which is exemplified in Bernini's *Saint*
from the feet, up through the spiralling
her upwards gaze and expletive of breath.
the marble folds of her receptive fabric that
issance is transmuted: sartorial pleasure
icism reach apotheosis in one ecstatic
Any number of Baroque canvases of the

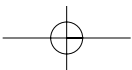
European masters – Goya, Velázquez, El Greco - have similarly traded on the evocative
draping of fabric around the body to amplify the passional aspect of the spirit, and
Marti follows in this tradition with an evocative reinterpretation of the sparse planes of
pure Minimalism.

However, Marti has no need to inscribe a body swathed in cloth – to literally represent
flesh and limbs and El Greco's heavenly ascent- as in the familiar tropes of the
Baroque. It is enough to draw the eye in to the torsions and tensions of Marti's woven
surfaces, to translate the passional impulses into the movements paradoxically frozen
within the weave, and to read the sensibilities of the attached personalities there. In a
sense the representation of bodies is superfluous, the personality rendered both more
abstract and more intimate – distilled through the passion for representational cloth.

If Rothko had achieved the seemingly instantaneously transformation of so-called brute
matter of the painterly surface to the spiritual plane, Marti follows a similar trajectory,
but through a Baroque flourishing of the bodily drama inherent in his woven surfaces.
However, the movement of Baroque ascension is replaced by Minimalism's overall
saturation of the surface and the passion of Marti's works is not necessarily turned
heavenwards. His channeling of the spirit more complexly compounds with wayward
sexualities bordering on the perverse.

This, of course, takes place in the associative train set up in the viewer's mind. Marti
is merely suggestive. The titles might be provocative but ultimately it's up to each
viewer to bring her/his own experience to the work, to mentally lay one's body into his
surfaces, of which it must be said that they are not to be confounded with the stuff of
mere realworld garments. Firstly, his overblown swatches are of such a scale as to
dwarf the body of the viewer². Marti's large black squares (2 metres by 2 metres) are
of the dimensions to arouse the sensations of a full body caress as one finds oneself
falling into the lustre of his surfaces, depth upon depth. Excess of size presses close
with the intensity of a perfume or a bodily memory. The magnification effect is such
that the viewer is brought so close as to experience the sensation of being shrunk
inside, to voyage through the fabric with an intimacy that is like bodily contact.





s falling into fabric is becoming a Marti trademark: the becoming-particle of a ering a molecularized space. It happened literally in *Looking for Felix* – in which ysisically entered a cube of layered walls of shimmering bead curtains³. Very much nner of Blake's mental traveller the "ratio of the Spectator's Organs (of " is altered. (Milton, Plate 28, 18)⁴. The torsion of the Baroque is translated into onal plane inflected with Romantic depths, which draw the viewer into an ontact with the surface. For there's no doubt that the associations of the fabric sh, of skin against cloth – not to mention the S&M intimations of Marti's silky, if cords and ropes – implicate the viewer.

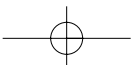
egree of mental travelling triggered by each of these works is modulated by the lationships established within each woven surface. Different emotional tones are each of the dresses. For, in the manner of the Old Masters, Marti is creating hrough what is given out by the "passion for cloth", hinting at the psychosexuality rsonality. When you read the full titles, *Holding her breath, 7 January 1536*, 2003 ric, looks like brocade, after Catherine of Aragon) or *Goyesca - Alba gently lies* 3 (inspired by intricate rich Spanish fabric), the relationship which the viewer ith each 'scrap of cloth' develops along emotional lines. Marti has eliminated the epresentation – to paint a likeness of each of his Muses, some of whom are and others historical – by drawing on the latent associations of cloth.

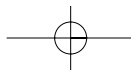
on for cloth" has been analysed in psychoanalytical terms in the case study of lt, a distinguished French psychiatrist (*La passion des etoffes chez un neuro- .G.G. de Clérambault* by Y. Papetti, B. Freminville, F. Valier and S. Tisseron, rambault was a collector of all forms of exotic cloth, who poured his passion into or rare cloth, Indian, madras, Oriental fabric brocaded with gold and silver." (Joan ad My Desire, 65)⁶ In her chapter, "The Sartorial Superego", Joan Copjec draws r links to Clérambault's enthusiasm for drapery in art, for not only was lt a collector of cloth, but he also delivered a series of highly popular courses at Arts in Paris, in which he would use Moroccan drapery to reinterpret classical A contemporary, Joseph Kesell, noted that "Clérambault was the first to consider folds of clothes as the signature of a race, a tribe. He conducted his research n tunics, Greek chlamys, Roman togas, Arab cloth. He studied their curve and

their signature, he made them speak." (ibid, 72) However, the fact that none of Clérambault's peers took his study at face value – an anthropological study of race and tribe – points to peer agreement on the underlying libidinal coding of cloth. Instead, the work of Clérambault, has been re-interpreted, in turn, as an important psychoanalytic study of a man too passionately attached to cloth – an obsessional, a fetishist. He exemplified the failure of " 'the will to unwrap', an unaccountable defaulting of desire" in "halting at the initial stages of the complete sexual scenario" (ibid. 69). In other words, his desire was fixated in fabrics, confirming the underlying psychosexual connection between cloth and eroticism.

Marti expands on this idea of libidinal coding and the psychosexual portrait which can be established through a meditation on the connotations of cloth. The differences could already be seen in the work of old masters, in the way, for example, Gainsborough had a hand hold a feather at crutch height against a silk dress (again the lustre) in *The Honourable Mrs Graham*, or Murillo graced a velvet bodice with pearls. When Marti titles *Black Dress #7 Neo Gothic Barbie lost in knotted fantasies*, 2003 it's a portrait in which the "fluffiness" of her sexuality is evoked directly from sartorial cues. *Agnes cupping her breast* (after Agnes Martin – the grid), 2003 is a tightly woven – held-in – with little action on the surface. Very much like an Agnes Martin work, it is all subtle changes: minimalism surprisingly imbued with sexuality. Across the fourteen black dresses the tone ranges from the restrained to *Variation #13 Pheromones percolating like atoms in the rainbow...*(madness totally irregular, crazy weave, young crazy sexual energy) 2003. Or *Strictly porn*, 2003 woven entirely in black rubber, is a work in which rigorous and rigidly knotted columns combine the wild pleasure of 'strict' with the discipline of the grid.

Other titles play up the psychosexual charge of the taboo "without which eroticism cannot exist" (Bataille, *Eroticism*, 139)⁷. Marti's snatch of words – *Teresa on her knees. Head down* 2003 – is enough to evoke sacred transgression. Or, in the manner of Genet, the smuttier his titles, the more Marti's works withdraw into the pristine. "I then understood why the handsomest adolescents give themselves to the vilest old men. Nothing can defile them. Their beauty guards them. " (*Miracle of the Rose*, 101)⁸ In the matt black surfaces of absorption of the "dresses" nothing dirty stays written. They can be filled with as many fantasies as one pleases. Like absolution, sins are transmuted in their inky depths.





Variations of a Serious Black Dress installation detail
CCAS Gorman House Gallery

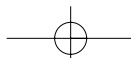
Three steel floorpieces: the Men

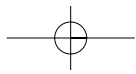
The 'codpieces', as Marti calls them, are also formally high Minimalist, the masculine counterpart and counterpoint to the dresses. Like a Carl Andre grid of blocks, they establish themselves as floorworks – sculptures which literally take the floor, centre stage, in the manner of traditional pontificators or rulers. And Marti has titled them to match: *Codpiece (Felipé II)* 2003; *Codpiece (Henry VIII)* 2003; *Codpiece of an Unknown Ruler in the Golden Age* 2003, again invoking the Baroque.

Woven in a tight meshing of steel cords, with tiny flashes of colour, they recall armour and the balzoned patterns of Toledo's steel-smiths, and carry the stamp of aristocratic bearing. The codpiece is a formidable and worthy obstacle to sexual gratification, akin to Clérambault's fabrics as symbols of withheld sexual pleasure. They build up anticipation of the majestic cock, which is not to be unveiled. The king or ruler's symbolic phallus, upon which his power is hinged, is reboxed and resublimated⁹. Metal, shields, blazonry, heraldry: these references compound a complex of regal power reduced to aesthetic sign and conform a purchase on masculinity which manifests to this day in commercial branding (Wilkinson's pair of rapier swords selling razors). The codpiece, protecting the precious body parts producing the royal sperm, publically conflates masculinity and sexual potency. Thus, in designating these sculptures as 'codpieces,' Marti is exploring the resonant, resilient association of the dominant masculine tropes of potency and strength; and, further, emblematically representing the intensity of the power in its compaction into tight impermeable surfaces.

The dresses, by contrast, are more open to flirting – and ecstatic sublimation. Partly through the habits of interpretation established by Rothko, the intensity of their material surfaces easily transmutes into spiritual planes. The codpieces remain more grounded, of the earth, and the regime of the sign. The women soar; the men compact in an exercise through which the sublimation of sex into power is achieved by forceful repression.

Dr Ann Finnegan





s

Deleuze, *The Fold*. (London: Athlone, 1993).

Marti, *missing spain*. Casula Powerhouse June 2000 Sydney. The scale of this 'swatch' was such that when it was suspended from the top floor of the Powerhouse it extended over three stories, and hung just over the viewer's heads.

Marti, *Looking For Felix*. First Draft, December 2000 Sydney.

Blake, *Milton*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 1979).

Other notable Marti 'portraits', empathetic studies which reflect character qualities, essences of the personalities, include *Different Trains (after Steve Reich)* 2002, *Divine, 100%* 2001 and *Ann (year of the snake)* 2002.

Copjec, *Read My Desire*. (Cambridge. Mass. & London: MIT Press, 1994).

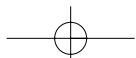
Bataille, *Eroticism*. Trans, Mary Dalwood (London: Marion Boyers, 1987).

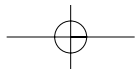
Genet, *Miracle of the Rose*. Trans. Bernard Fretchman. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971).

The association between the phallus and power was first elaborated by Jacques Lacan, "The Signification of the Phallus", in *Ecrits*. Trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977). Slavoj Žižek has since elaborated on the political implications of this concept in several books, notably *Tarrying with the Negative* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993)

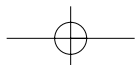


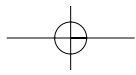
Yellow work #3 2002
Sherman Galleries installation





Redwork#2, 2002

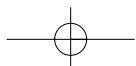


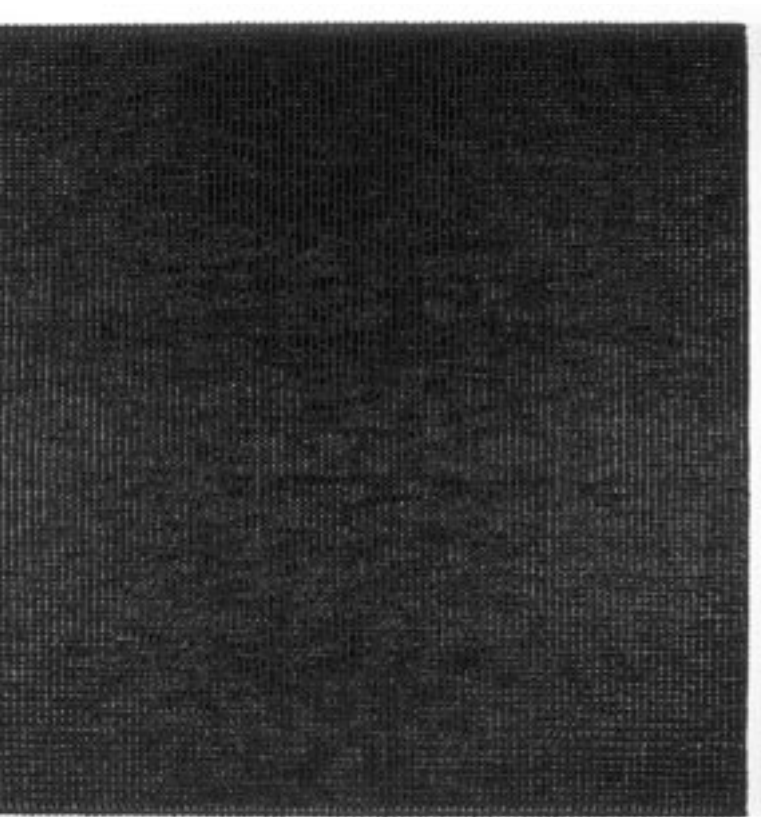
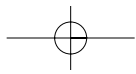


Redwork #3 2002, Sherman Galleries installation

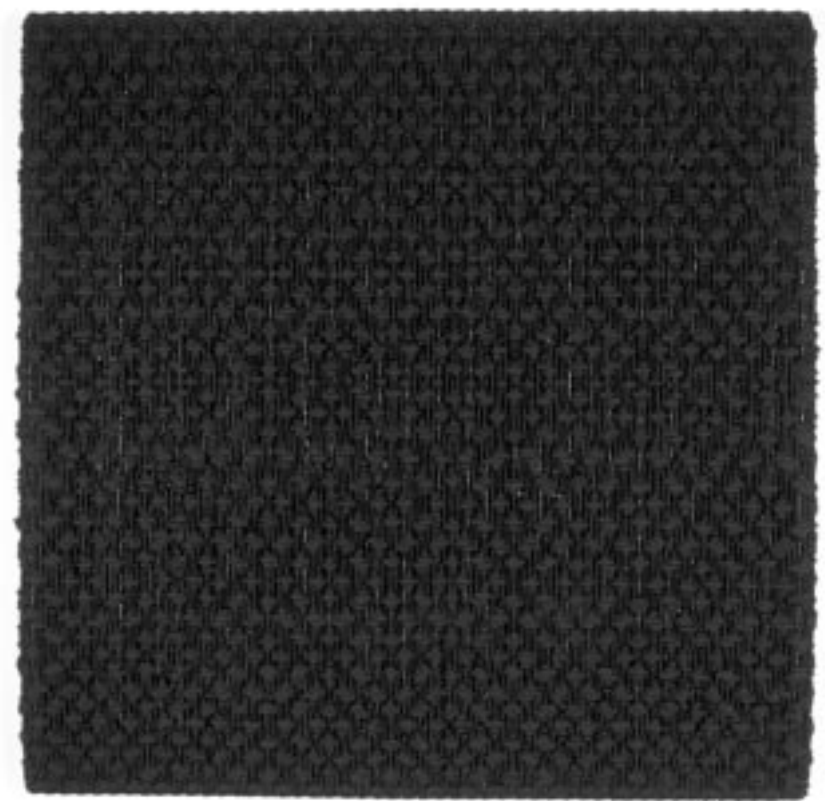


Variations of a Serious Black Dress #7 2003
Lola goes North.

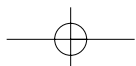


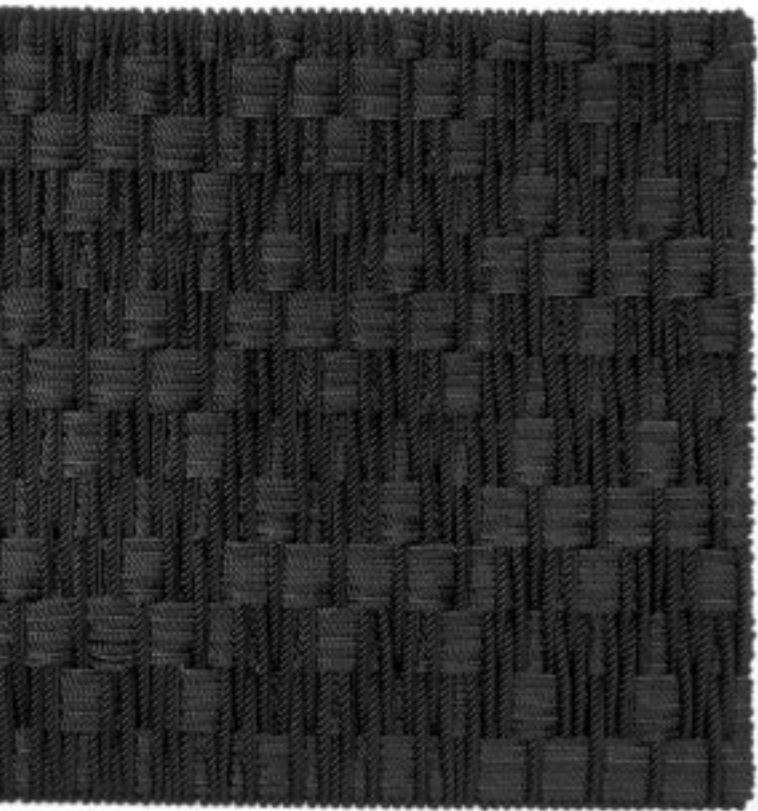
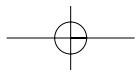


Variations of a Serious Black Dress #8 2003
cupping her breast.

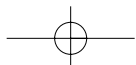


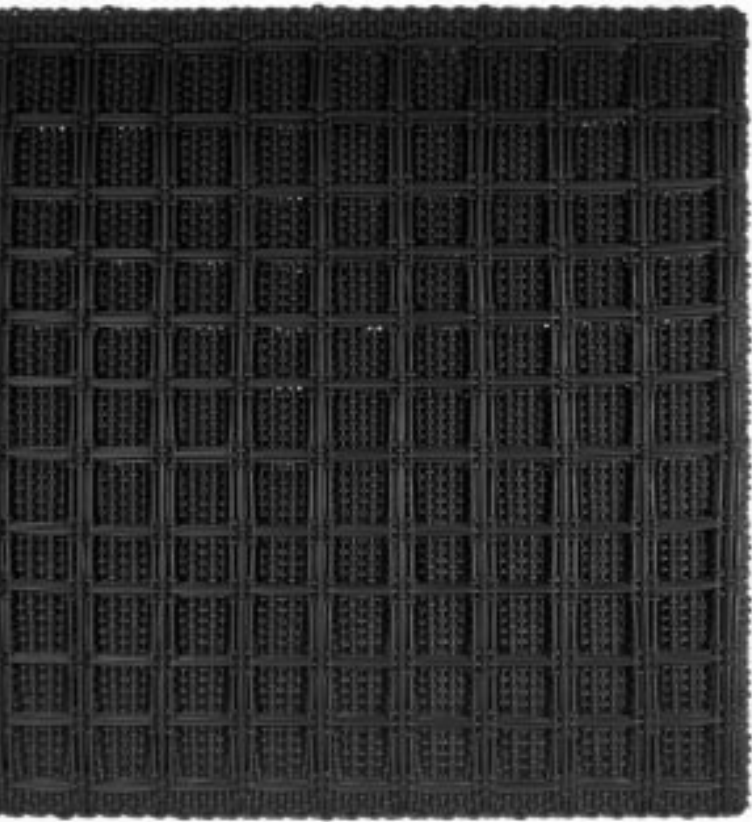
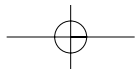
Variations of a Serious Black Dress #9 2003
Holding her breath. 7 January 1536.



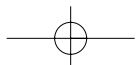


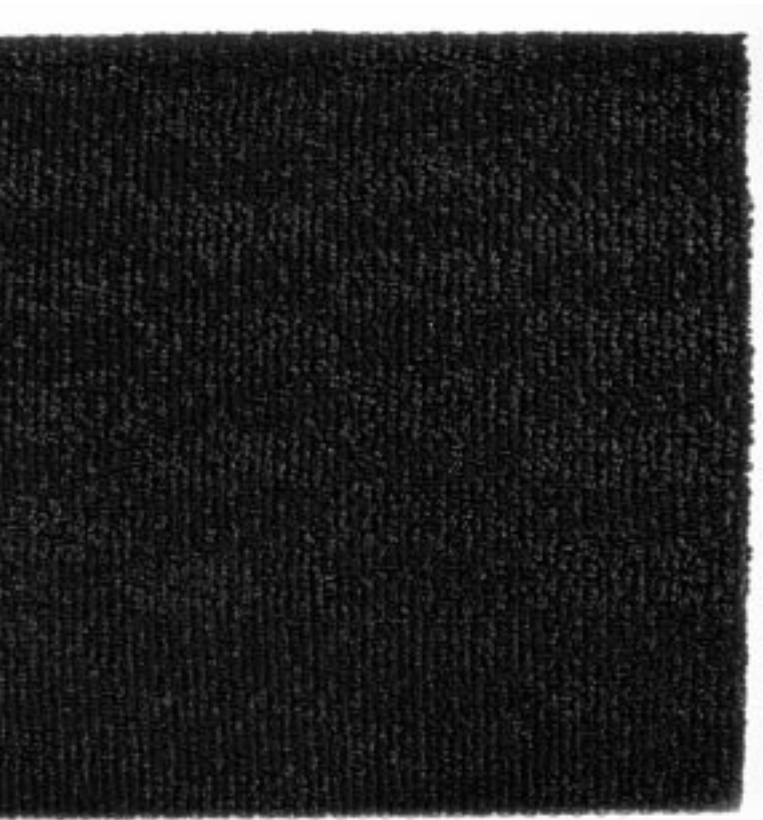
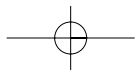
ons in a Serious Black Dress #10 2003
on her knees. Head down.
ite page: detail.



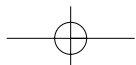
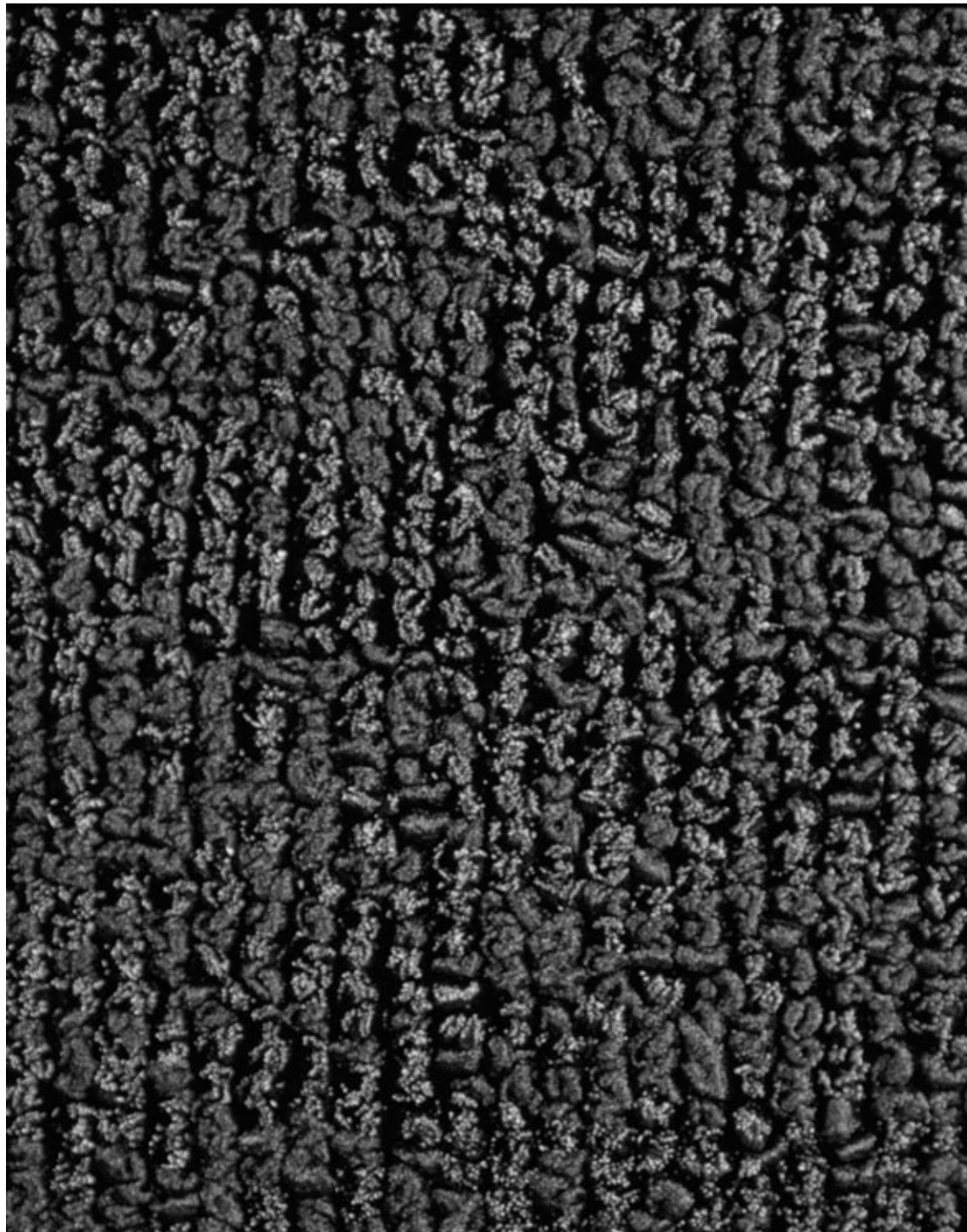


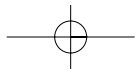
ons in a Serious Black Dress #11 2003
y porn.
ite page: Detail.





ons in a Serious Black Dress #12 2003
othic Barbie lost in noded fantasy.
ite page: Detail.

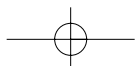


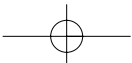
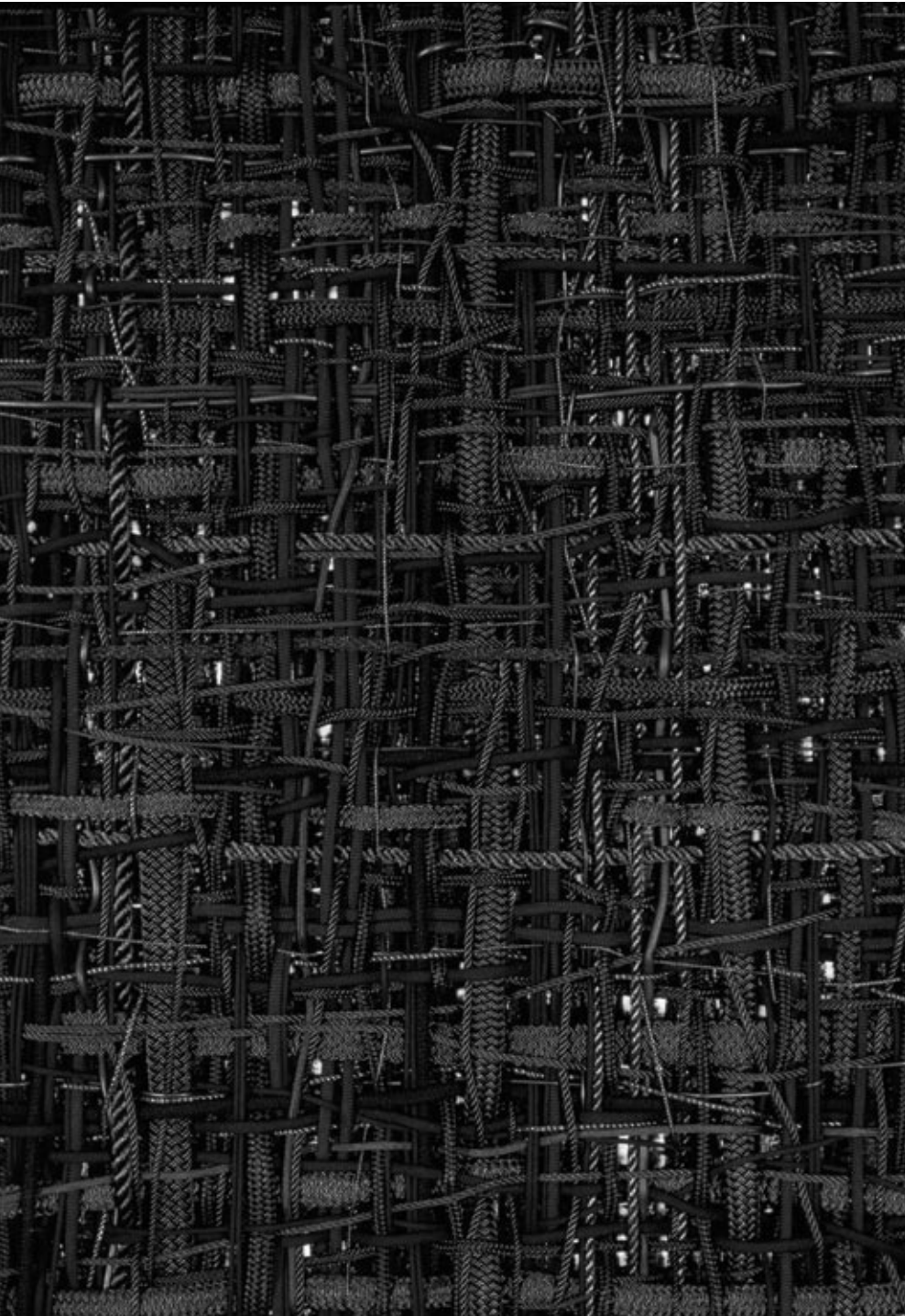
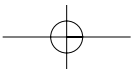


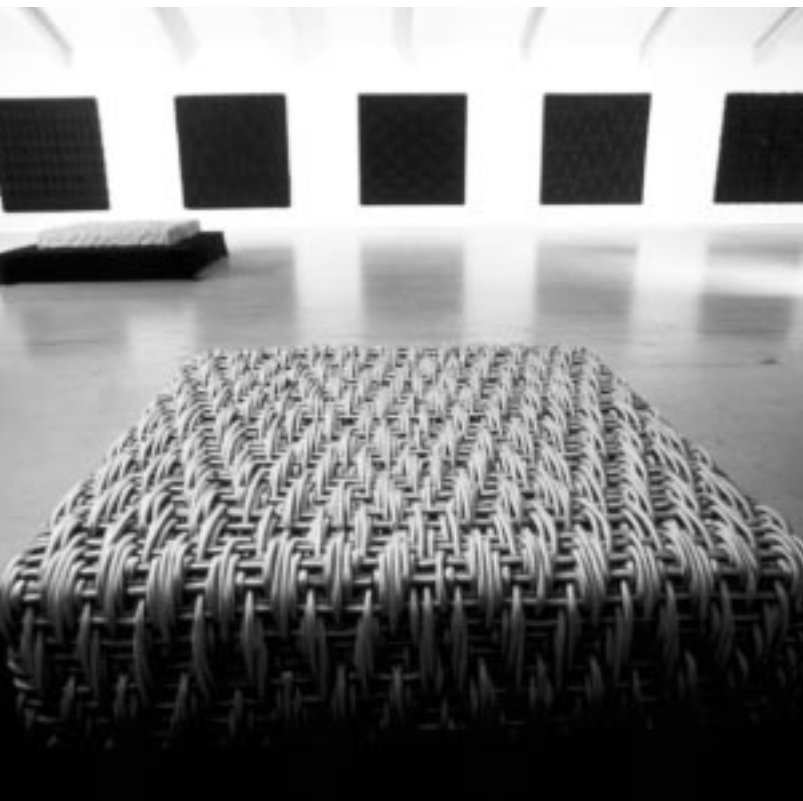
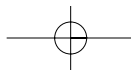
Variations in a Serious Black Dress #13 2003
My mother's last born son.



Variations in a Serious Black Dress #14 2003
Pheromones perculating like atoms in the rainbow.
Next page: Detail.







piece of an unknown ruler in the Golden Age 2003
previous page: Detail.

Variations of a Serious Black Dress is produced on the occasion of the exhibition at

Canberra Contemporary Art Space
Gorman House Arts Centre
Ainslie Ave Braddon 2612 ACT

13 February – 20 March 2004

Director Lisa Byrne
Exhibition Manager Stuart Bailey
Program Assistant Michael Ascroft

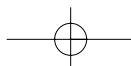
Curated by Lisa Byrne
Catalogue Design Anna Zagala
Printed by Goanna PTY LTD
Exhibition and tour management Stuart Bailey, CCAS and Dominique Nagy MGFNSW

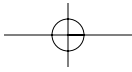
This CCAS exhibition is toured by the MGFNSW.

Financial support for the exhibition catalogue is gratefully acknowledged by Sherman Galleries, Sydney and Arc One at Span, Melbourne without which this publication would not be possible. CCAS wishes to thank Simon Kronenberg, Bill Wright, Gene Sherman, at Sherman Galleries and Suzanne Hampel, Arc One at Span.

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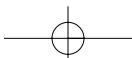
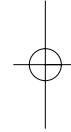
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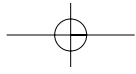




Dani Marti wishes to thank the following people for the generous support of this project –

Lisa Byrne, Stuart Bailey and Michael Ascroft at CCAS, Simon Kronenberg at Sherman Galleries, Sydney, Suzanne Hampel at Arc One Galleries, Melbourne, Dominique Nagy at the Museums and Galleries Foundation of NSW, Nick Mitzevich, Gitte Weise, Natasha Kowalski, Michael Foley, Erica Stead, Dr Ann Finnegan, Ian Hobbs, Miquel Banus, Teresa Folch, Robert Nelson, Dr. Charles Greene, Phil Drummond, Elisa Marti and my parents.





Variations in a Serious Black Dress

Dan Verti

