

LIZ, TAILOR

A thrift-shop aficionado pushes the right buttons (and zippers) in a show that mines astute couture from Value Village cast-offs



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CURATED

As we round the corner into December, we approach what is referred to – with sometimes wrenching irony – as the festive season. Even moderate socio-phobes will know what I am alluding to: large crowds, small talk, no parking, uncomfortable shoes. I tend to gravitate upstairs to the coat pile. Up there, all is calm, and I might find myself exploring the varied textures, the labels, and even (I confess) the chance spillage from pockets.

It's this kind of inquisitive guilty pleasure that comes to mind when looking at Liz Magor's new suite of works at Catriona Jeffries Gallery in Vancouver this festive (there, I said it again) season – works that I observed in their infancy at Magor's Cortes Island studio this summer, up the B.C. coast from Vancouver. These are the result of the artist's ongoing salvage-and-reconstruction operation. Magor finds her raw materials at Value Village outlets in the East End of Vancouver, cobbling together composite creations which she appends with peculiar accessories. These she presents in groupings, each in its own garment box.

It all starts in the clothing depot. Speaking on the phone from Vancouver this week, she told me that, for the most part, these spaces are cavernous, and that "somehow, the architecture contributes to the experience." The process of selection intrigues her. "There's an endless supply of this stuff, which is both exciting and horrifying." Yet she finds herself soothed. "I definitely go there to relax," she adds, "to remind myself that the world is full of options. Whenever I go down the snake hole, it's because I have forgotten that."

The question of clothing, and of cladding, has a long history in

Magor's work. Her 1979 sculptural installation *Four Boys and a Girl* consisted of slabs of compressed used garments, presented alongside the winch press used to make them, emanating a haunting gravity. (Where did all the people go?) Later sculptures suggested hideouts, with sleeping bags tucked inside hollow logs made of cast polymerized gypsum, evoking a feral drive for shelter. Cast stacks of clothing were reimagined as hiding places for whisky and cigarettes, suggesting the fear of impending scarcity. In a more recent series, Magor took tattered and stained thrift-shop blankets and interpolated them with tiny, tender gestures of repair or embellishment. A cigarette burn might receive the benediction of a stitched rim; a label might be moved, or flipped to reveal the threadwork on its verso side.

Magor's 2012 used-clothing works are an extension of these endeavours, serving also as mini archives of accumulated detritus – cigarettes (new and used), chocolate wrappings, wine corks, and Tim Horton's containers – traces of comforting compulsions we might not immediately present to the world.

Magor says that old used clothes, and the places where you find them, also reveal much about contemporary urban life. "When I am really feeling gas rich, I drive out to Surrey," she says, referring to the Vancouver suburb that reaches back into the Fraser Valley. In the used-clothing depots out here, old blankets from farming communities commingle with saris and South Asian textiles from the city's more recent immigrants. One community ebbs away, and another displaces it, with multiple realities merging in the historical present. "The demographics of the city definitely fetch up in these places almost perfectly intact," Magor says. "I find those elements and then I bring them out to their ultimate conclusions."

Liz Magor: I is being This runs until Dec. 22 at Catriona Jeffries Gallery in Vancouver.



"I definitely go there to relax, to remind myself that the world is full of options," says Magor of her second-hand expeditions, whose purchases she transforms into revelatory tales of urban life. CATRIONA JEFFRIES GALLERY