

Discursive Dress

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alludes to the body's veins running through the skin. *Fugitive*, a billowing robe with full sleeves, contrasts with the more stoic *Angel* and is attached to the wall at the shoulders, displaying the back of this garment of gut. Around the work is a faint but large yellow aureole created with egg yolks painted on the wall. Yellow powder, which McConnell creates by sanding the yolk off the wall, falls on both the garment and the floor.

McConnell's works refer directly to the body, particularly the mortal, fragile body for which her dresses in a sense become shrouds. Like the anatomical illustrations cited by Mario Perniola in which layers of the body are delicately folded back to reveal the internal organs of individuals who look like they are merely sleeping, McConnell's garments are clean and bloodless. But unlike the illustrations, which give no indication of dismemberment, decomposition, or death, McConnell's raiments, in her words, "unavoidably speak of mortality."²⁸ While they include materials which indicate there was once life—the casings of gut, egg yolks, and red thread which stands in for veins—her dresses focus on death, primarily because of the absence of the body. Death is reinforced in the presentation of the works. *Angel* floats in the air in an almost ghost-like fashion: light shines gently through the transparent dress, making it appear to glow. *Fugitive* is tacked up on the wall like the memento of a missing person which has taken on a life of its own as its yellow luminosity seems to swell and then disintegrate, falling on the garment and the floor. There is a direct link between McConnell's work and the contemporary representation of body parts, both of which sometimes imply a physical violence or at least emphasize the vulnerability of human bodies. A passage written by philosopher Roland Barthes in *The Responsibility of Forms* elucidates the connection: ". . . it is not possible to conceive a garment without the body . . . the empty garment, without head and without limbs . . . is death, not the body's neutral absence, but the body decapitated, mutilated."²⁹

In Yong Soon Min's *Remembering Chungshindae* (cat. no. 16, illus. pp. 18-19), the body's absence refers to specific acts of physical violence and oppression towards Korean women. The work consists of a *hanbok*, a traditional Korean dress, which has been stiffened with modeling paste and covered with dirt and pine needles. The skirt is surrounded by a pile of charcoal with more pine needles on the top of the mound. A red light inside the dress shines through small cracks, suggesting smoldering coals.

Remembering Chungshindae specifically memorializes the estimated 200,000 Korean women who were forced to serve as "Military Comfort Troops," i.e., sexual slaves, to Japanese troops all across Asia during World War II.³⁰ The empty traditional Korean dress symbolizes the wounded, raped bodies of thousands of Korean women but also embodies more than this specific issue. In the Korean countryside, coal and pine boughs are hung at the birth of a baby girl and have come to symbolize the feminine in Korean culture. The



Above: Yong Soon Min, *Remembering Chungshindae*, 1992, 62½ x 55 x 31"

Left: *Remembering Chungshindae*, detail

