

## Yarn Setting

Does the wind of history flutter through the leaves of fashion journals of past centuries? Can the details or even the outlines of those explosions of class struggle – such as the bourgeois revolutions of 1848 or the libertarian social experiment of the Paris Commune of 1871 – be read in the details and the outlines of past fashion? Such details and outlines have been snapped up and out of history for these reworked fashion plates. These re-workings came into being through an arduous manual labour of reproduction that is itself outmoded. These ephemera are not simply recovered, but remade. Fashion and its accoutrements are recovered as repetitive labour, reinforcing the repetitions and the labours that structure fashion itself, an eternal return of the ever same in the guise of the new. Perhaps we can discover in these re-fabrications, if not also in the originals, a small feature that betrays, in the vocabulary of fashion, the ructions of history: maybe a red ribbon necklace remembers the slice of the Guillotine. Then again, *en revers*, like shot silk, the cut out, blacking all details, might be an abstraction that reveals all the more blindingly the hidden lining of fashion's frivolity, a transference of its deadly drive: in the outlines of headgear, perhaps, the contours of liberty caps. Here are women, at least in ideal form, their heads gently turned to reveal the faux-vitality of the fakest of pinkest cheeks. The fashion plates insert them graphically into commodity relations. Their negation as silhouette in the copied version apes the invisibility of the female hands and bodies whose labour made their beautiful trappings. Their heightened colouration draws attention to the ways in which fashion disguises and embellishes and leads women into the realm of artifice. Her nature is no longer nature, but historical because commodified. History does shudder through the folds in more or less invisible ways and pastiche teases it out, or at least beckons it to sashay a while. Violence now disguises and now parades itself when the cut is the deepest of things and the hang is to die for.

Esther Leslie, 2008.

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