

## Alice Channer

### THE APPROACH

Cascades of white silk satin drop from ceiling to floor to form Alice Channer's sculpture *Tight Skin* (all works 2011). Printed on the semi-transparent fabric in delicate colors are enlarged images of snakeskin and lizard print, one borrowed from a stretched sleeveless undershirt, the other from a skirt. Set on either side of this curtainlike structure in Channer's recent exhibition "Body Conscious" were two shimmering metal sculptures, each about human height. To the right, *Shift* is a lean, irregular steel cylinder, sizable enough to conceal a tall person standing inside—a beautiful woman, let's just say. Strange cutouts in the sculpture's edges suggest the curving armholes of paper sewing patterns. Occasional colored elastics are stretched top to bottom; notches cut into the stainless steel on either end fix the trimming in place. Swelling around the bottom lies a flat expanse of pleated fabric, curling around the mirrored edges like a gray pool of thick, metallic liquid. To the left of *Tight Skin* was the second steel sculpture, *Slip*, which is screenlike and undulating, with detailing similar to that of *Shift*. On the wall a thin, curving

metal shelf held more pleated polyester, whose varying dyed bands of color create condensed, wavy patterns: The suggestion of gently wavy hair is enhanced by this work's title, *Volume and Body*.

How often a desirable woman's hair and clothes are equated with water: flowing, shimmering, cascading, falling. Marilyn Monroe's body was once described as having been poured into its skintight lamé gown: the fantasy of woman as infinitely pliable. The sculptured heroines and goddesses of the ancients were draped in fabrics that appeared wet, to render the undulating garments heavier, the shadows deeper. With all the skirts, tops, slips, and dresses lying around the show, its absent center was a female body; but this presumed female was not a 1950s sex symbol, nor a Grecian ideal. She would be a thinking, private person, working through her relationship to the world beginning from the skin and extending outward, stopping first to examine the layer of fabric closest to her, then moving to the immediate space around her, perhaps the auralike cylindrical volume described by *Shift*.



View of "Alice Channer," 2011.

Just as a body is solid yet mostly liquid, the fabrics cut and shaped to adorn it exist between wet and dry—first dyed in baths, sometimes industrially pleated by steam, then swirling around the body—and yet behave like a thin, dry barrier, protecting the body underneath. Endless transferrals, between flatness and corporeality, dryness and wetness, dematerialization and weight, things slinking and puddling on the floor and others standing coolly upright, were forever at play in the exhibition. In *Deep Skin*, a hand-drawn snakeskin pattern is rendered on marbled paper—a liquid process wherein the paper is dipped in ink and made to resemble the hard surface of stone: again wet producing dry, the light paper mimicking weighty marble.

Channer's silken or metal objects are rough-cut and unedged; this is an artist who abhors the hem and the finish, which would weigh her fabrics and her sculptures heavily to the ground. Draped from the ceiling, pinned to the wall, weightless on a shelf, or hung in space, everything here was as if suspended—like a body floating in water, or a thought forever caught in midair.

—Gilda Williams