

‘WHEN WE FIRST STARTED *WORLD* WE NEVER SET OUT TO SHOCK. *WORLD* IS QUITE SIMPLY AN EXTENSION OF BOTH OF OUR PERSONALITIES – LOUD, FORWARD-THINKING, RISK-TAKING, CREATIVE AND DARING. WE HAVE NEVER BEEN FENCE SITTERS AND NEITHER IS *WORLD*. IT IS A LEADER.’

DENISE L’ESTRANGE-CORBET

WORLD





2008 collection, *Art groupie*, included printed Salvador Dalí-inspired floating lip motifs as well as stylised silhouettes of faces in profile in the style of French artist, poet and film maker, Jean Cocteau. These worked extremely well in a collection that also included playful surrealist details such as appliquéd hand-shaped pockets on cotton knit dresses and merino polo neck tops knitted with shell-buttoned gloves in situ.

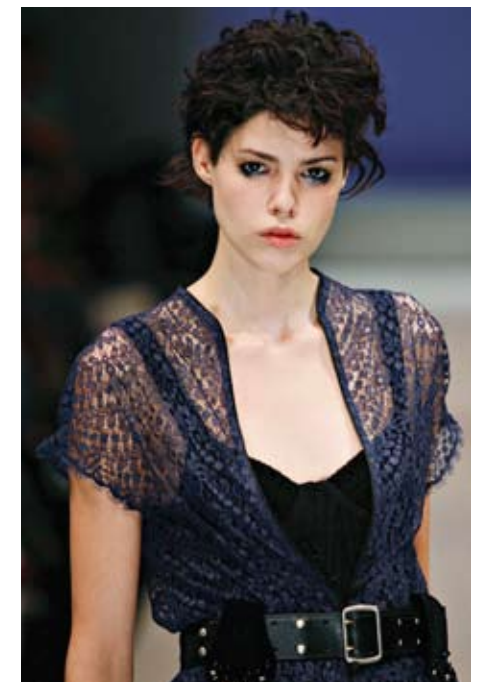
The *Art groupie* collection marked the debut of Sylvester's first menswear collection, the direction for which was gleaned from several generations of male icons, including rock musicians (Iggy Pop and Mick Jagger), artists (René Magritte and Jackson Pollock) and film stars (especially ultra-violent Alex from Stanley Kubrick's *A clockwork orange*). For this collection she also evoked her earlier menswear-inspired collections including *Le petit garçon* (Autumn / Winter 2002) and *Young ideas go west* (Spring / Summer 2006–07), which channelled Chairman Mao. *Art groupie* menswear debuted in Sylvester's first dedicated menswear salon, which opened above her High Street store in March 2008. Like the collection, the space features a multitude of references that Kate in a June 2008 M2 magazine article described as 'modern, retro and surrealist', the latter seen in the store's most standout feature, a series of bowler hat light shades that Sylvester said is 'Magritte meets *A clockwork orange*'. Sylvester designs her menswear collections in tandem with her womenswear collections. 'I think of them as a couple.' In the *Art groupie* collection, 'pearly king' matches with a 'pearly queen' outfit, just as the *Royally screwed* collection includes a 'Prince' and 'Princess' ensemble.

The design of a new collection begins after the 'dust settles' from the previous one. 'At that point I have a vague feeling of where I want to go next. Somehow or other I have to find the new concept and they always seem to just come. It's amazing! Concept is definitely the key thing for me.' Sometimes a concept will drive the search for fabric and different textures; at other times, it is the textiles that will generate a concept. For *Wolf*, for example, Sylvester knew she wanted to work with textures and, in particular, leather, fur and lace. She then thought of a narrative that would support the use of these materials. When she encountered the Victorian fairy tale *Little Red Riding Hood* she found inspiration for clothes that would look great in all the textiles that she wanted to work with. 'After I came up with the concept for *Wolf*, I knew I had four characters – Little Red Riding Hood, the grandmother, the wolf and the woodsman. They drove the collection.' At this point in the process, Sylvester usually makes many sketches alongside her design assistant. 'I designed for all those characters and all the designs had to somehow fit that concept. But no theme can be as simple as that, and I knew I didn't want a nostalgic Victorian Brothers Grimm version of *Little Red Riding Hood*. There's got to be something that twists it or skews it and for that I used a book on American fashion that a friend had given me, which included profiles on outré American fashion designers Pauline Trigère and Norman Norell. They were New York social celebrities who designed for their own social set. I knew I wanted to echo these seventies' socialites to give me the twist I needed to make the concept modern.' *Wolf* ended up being 'a train smash of a very old fairytale with Fifth Avenue society ladies'.

The idea for the more contemporary angle of the 'nutty fusion' in *Wolf* resulted in a collection that included high-necked, crystal-pleated dresses, Prince of Wales pattern tweed suiting, belted late sixties' crisply-tailored coats



Kate Sylvester, *Royally screwed* collection show S/S 2008–09, Rosemount Australian Fashion Week 2008



Kate Sylvester, *Stop your sobbing* collection show A/W 2006, Air New Zealand Fashion Week 2005

Advertisement for Kate Sylvester, *Art groupie* menswear collection A/W 2008



Knitting and sewing pattern books from Margarita Robertson's collection



Campaign image for NOM*d, S/S 1990-91

knowledge of international high fashion, which would sign post the way to NOM*d's aesthetic.

As successful retailers, the Robertsons were 'acutely aware of what keeps a label going and what makes it go downhill'. Many of the international designers stocked by *Plume* today share strong stylistic sympathies with NOM*d. One such example is the unconventional cutting and styling, and moody colour palette, of avant-garde Belgian designer Martin Margiela. From 2000 *Plume* branched out to carry garments by a younger generation of Japanese designers including Jun Takahashi.

Although she never formally trained in pattern design or clothing manufacture, Robertson learnt to sew at an early age, encouraged by her Russian-born, Greek mother, who arrived in New Zealand with her Ukrainian husband as refugees in 1951. Robertson is the third of six Gladiadis children and the first to be born in New Zealand. She recalls that her mother had 'a natural feeling towards style and fashion' and used to sew clothes for her and her siblings. Later, as teenagers, 'She encouraged us to make our own clothes and so we'd often be making things on Saturday afternoon to wear out on Saturday night.' Robertson remembers that her mother had a big box of remnants – she called it her *baulla* (chest) – that Robertson and Findlay rummaged through when they needed fabric.

Both mother and daughters preferred the European *Burda* pattern books, from which they had to trace their patterns, to the more popular American pattern brands that included pre-graded (sized) pattern pieces. Working with *Burda* patterns allowed Robertson to think more flexibly about pattern design and she recalls that she would often change the patterns around – 'taking the front off that dress and the back off another and putting them together'. This more lateral way of thinking about garment construction became an important element of the NOM*d signature, seen clearly in the witty, playful mixing-up of traditional clothing features and the unpicking and refashioning of vintage clothing.

At the start of her career as designer of NOM*d, Robertson recalls that people were sceptical whether she could forge a successful career living in Dunedin. 'Everybody would say to me, "If you want to get into the fashion industry you need to be in Auckland."' However, for the Robertsons the attraction of Dunedin stayed strong. 'Both our mothers lived here; we were their only children who stayed. Our business was growing, we were happy in Dunedin.' They also had wool spinners Alliance Textiles, operating out of the old Roslyn Knitting Mills, close to hand in Mosgiel for their supply, and Robertson liked the fact that 'we were perhaps the only manufacturer of our type that actually wholesaled and exported to Australia out of Dunedin'.

From 1986 the Robertsons have produced two NOM*d knitwear collections a year – for summer and winter – and two types of knitwear each season. 'We had fully fashioned garments that came out of Tekau Woollen Mill, which were made on their fabulous old machines in a very, very fine twenty-one gauge knitting; and then we had cut and sew, which were made in Auckland by whichever knitter we were using at the time.' The available machinery restricted the styles Robertson designed and output was also limited. 'We were compromised by the fact that due to commitments to their own brands we had difficulty in meeting delivery dates to our wholesale

clients.'

The closure of Alliance Textiles in 1999, the dissolution of the New Zealand Wool Board in 2004 and the closure of the Tekau Woollen Mill in 2007 had a major impact on smaller garment companies such as NOM*d. 'One of the things that we've really believed in is trying to keep everything that we sell made in New Zealand. We didn't really want to have to go offshore. By that time we were committed to producing fully fashioned knitwear, the finer gauge being made solely by Tekau Knitwear and heavier gauge styles being produced by an Auckland knitter that was happy to work with our "left-of-centre" ideas. However, we struggled to find a knitter in New Zealand for our fine gauge styles when Tekau closed, so we commissioned a small range of existing styles to be produced in China.' Disappointing results and the complexities of ensuring quality control with few contacts in China made future collaboration unattractive to the Robertsons. 'Fortunately, our local manufacturer had purchased a finer gauge knitting machine.' So in the following season all production returned to New Zealand.

Robertson notes that from the beginning, 'We had a pretty strong following. Even now when I talk to people the thing that they remember us for is our knitwear.' With regard to styling, Robertson's earliest knitwear designs offered an alternative to 'that whole eighties' *Dynasty* thing – shoulder pads, power dressing, nipped-in waists and all that. In fact we used to have boxes of shoulder pads, which instantly made everyone look V-shaped. It was all so flattering, especially with your high heels. You used to fit the pads onto the Velcro strips in your jumpers and you were transformed! NOM*d offered a completely different approach to dressing, a far more relaxed and a "one-size-fits-all" aesthetic.'

With the publication of the ground-breaking New Zealand fashion and style magazines *Cha Cha*, *PLANET* and *Pavement* the Robertsons developed a national profile for their distinctive knitwear, which featured in inventive photo shoots initiated by Robertson and executed by talented, creative photographers.

Robertson also participated in New Zealand's premier fashion events of the eighties and nineties – the Corbans Fashion Collections and the Wella Fashion Collections that succeeded it. In the programme accompanying the Corbans Summer 1994 show, images of NOM*d garments took the caption: 'Wild femininity leaves seams exposed. Out-of-the-ordinary knitwear for emphatic individuality. Cotton vests and lacy knits hug the body, but free the spirit.'

Over time it became apparent to Robertson that the public perceived NOM*d to be part of *Zambesi*; that in many people's minds the two labels were intertwined. This was not surprising as *Zambesi* stores were well stocked with NOM*d knitwear and it was one of the few New Zealand-made brands they sold. NOM*d often teamed *Zambesi* with their own label in photo shoots for advertisements and at fashion shows. 'The interesting thing was that NOM*d instigated the whole confusion with *Zambesi* as we showed the collections one after the other and even collaborated on the music.'

While Robertson and Findlay enjoy warm personal and working relationships – 'we're really close as sisters and quite close in our aesthetic in some ways but we're not involved in each other's businesses' – Robertson wanted an individual identity for NOM*d. This realisation propelled the



NOM*d on Planet magazine cover, issue 4, 1990



Campaign image for NOM*d, 1988



like I'd come in through the back door. I didn't feel like I'd earned it and I didn't have the confidence to say, "This is what I do. I design clothes."

Reflecting on *Zambesi's* establishment and evolution Elisabeth remarks, 'It evolved without us driving it. We didn't actually have a plan. We didn't think, "We're going to create a collection and go out and sell it." It's happened the other way for us. We're doing our thing and people want to hop on board. It's pulling rather than pushing and that's what seems to have worked.'

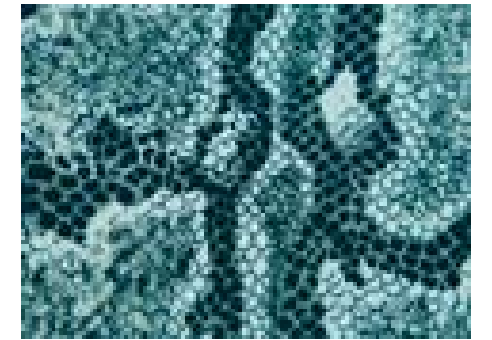
A significant element in *Zambesi's* contemporary design-led collections is the incorporation of detailing from vintage dress – 'old clothes, new ideas' as Neville puts it. Elisabeth loves 'playing with the idea of modern concepts while revisiting past detailing and old dressmaking techniques; exploring my passion and interest in clothing'. Her attraction to vintage clothing developed while she was growing up in Dunedin. 'I've always loved old clothes, especially some pieces that my mother had.' One garment, particularly, has influenced many garments in *Zambesi* collections over the years: 'Mum's dress from the forties is in a blue cotton voile or organdy and has a bias panel in it that we used in our Spring / Summer 2007–08 collection. I have used the details many times over the years. You can wear it back to front and it has amazing darting detail just under the bust with beautiful handmade rouleau buttons. It has this incredibly dramatic sleeve that we've used on plain shift styles.' One of these styles, the 'Phoenix' dress featured in their first L'Oréal New Zealand Fashion Week show in 2001.

Zambesi collections often subtly incorporate elements of historical styles; inspiration springs from even a single design element in a vintage garment. A frill effect at the back of her mother's blue dress inspired Elisabeth in 1999 to design an A-line skirt cut from raw felt. Using a stiffer and thicker fabric, the final effect was far removed from the original dress and inspired the skirt's name – 'Fantail'. Reworking the scale, colours and patterns of vintage prints is another way Elisabeth uses past designs. *Zambesi's* Spring / Summer 2007–08 collection included fabrics suggested by a vintage shirtdress in a snakeskin printed viscose, which acted as the starting point for the signature *Zambesi* print 'Reptile'. The pattern was also printed onto fine sequined fabric to provide a different texture to the collection.

Every *Zambesi* collection starts from 'the fabric and thinking about what I can do with it'. Elisabeth selects her textiles instinctively. As Margo White wrote for *Metro* magazine in October 2002, '*Zambesi* is a label born of Findlay's profound, visceral pleasure in texture, in which the material is the muse and inspires the design.'

Selecting fabric is a continuous exercise for Elisabeth – it is ongoing throughout the year, rather than being something she does just before beginning the design of a new collection. Elisabeth holds back some of the fabric until she thinks the time is right to include it in a collection. This approach helps confer timelessness to *Zambesi's* designs. 'I believe that every fabric I select is valid outside of any fashion trend.'

For Elisabeth, the design process is a very instinctual one. She communicates her ideas to her pattern-makers through sketches, notes and discussion. A paper pattern is made in a size ten and a calico is cut and assessed on the body. If the calico looks promising, a first sample is cut and made. If the style is not working, the garment is modified, the pattern altered and



'Reptile' reworked 1950s vintage textile design for *Zambesi*, *Lucid* collection S/S 2007–08



Fabric swatches for *Zambesi* collection S/S 2008–09

Campaign image for *Zambesi* collection S/S 1994–95



'Oversize ladder' dress and lace bodysuit in look book, *Lonely Hearts, Brains for dinner* collection S/S 2009-10



Sketch by Carmel Pritchard for [garment details] *Lonely Hearts, Electric doom* collection A/W 2009

Lonely Hearts is a collaboration between three young designers – Steve Ferguson, Helene Morris and Aimee McFarlane. The trio met through their shared interest in sport and the label initially drew its inspiration from sportswear and streetwear. Although t-shirts and hoodies continue to appear in *Lonely Hearts'* collections, the designers have achieved their ambition to get deeper into edgy, urban, forward-looking fashion. At its inception *Lonely Hearts* was unafraid of bucking the trends of the moment and made its mark with adventurous prints featuring pop culture references in post-modern, quirky combinations: drag racing and grunge inspired the Autumn / Winter 2009 *Electric doom* collection; the Spring / Summer 2006-07 *For peace* collection tackled nuclear disarmament via Dr. Seuss.

Cornering the market for scrunchies – elasticised fabric hair ties – while in her early school years was an indication that Aimee McFarlane would grow up to do something creative with fabric. McFarlane assembled all of her mother's leftover fabric scraps and pasted them into a little sample book. 'I took my swatch book to school and people would pick out which fabric they wanted, pay me fifty cents and I'd go home and make a scrunchie.' Unfortunately, within a couple of weeks McFarlane had saturated her market – a good lesson for the future.

While Helene Morris was 'never really that big on sewing', from an early age she was aware of the effect clothes had on her public persona: 'I'd go to school really early and take other clothes in my bag. That was when I was about six years old. I can remember being in the toilets at school at 8 a.m. changing into a different outfit to the one my Mum had dressed me in.'

Steve Ferguson was 'anti-establishment' as a youth. After becoming 'anti-everything', he took up skateboarding as a lifestyle choice – a move that made him image conscious. 'Skateboarding is an image-based sport. Having the right clothes and the right shoes and the right skateboards was important back then. Creative expression is also a huge part of skateboarding.'

In the late nineties, while McFarlane studied for a fashion design degree and Morris a degree in graphic design, both at Massey University in Wellington, Ferguson travelled as a snowboarder, turning professional in 2000. From this time he was sponsored by ultra-cool Auckland-based urban street label, *Huffer*. The deal involved him in the designing of what he describes as 'board sports-inspired fashion'. *Huffer* contracted Ferguson to carry out research and development while he travelled around the world. When he first started skateboarding, Ferguson remembers that 'there wasn't much gear around. Then, it was all about customising your own stuff.' By employing Ferguson to adapt *Huffer* clothing to meet current trends on the national and international snowboarding circuit, the label kept a finger on the pulse of the competitive youth-orientated market. Ferguson would spend week-long stints at *Huffer* working intensively with the designers Steve Dunstan and Dan Buckley, on winter outerwear and casuals such as the *Huffer Function* collection, before travelling to his next snowboarding destination. *Huffer* would then send him garments and drawings. Ferguson says, 'I'd write all over them, cut things off, add stuff to them, or draw on them and send it all back' – work not dissimilar to what he did to customise his clothes when he was a teenager. Ferguson then received samples of all 'his' garments, accompanied by A4-sized fabric swatches to select the colour palette. *Huffer* would also ask him to suggest names for individual styles as

well as for collections.

It was while studying at Massey University that McFarlane and Morris became friends; their shared interest in design and winter sports formed the basis of their friendship. In 2001, after a number of trips to Aspen, Colorado, and while Ferguson was there on a professional snowboarding trip, the trio formed friendships – and Morris and Ferguson became romantically involved. During their second-to-last season in Colorado in 2002, Morris and McFarlane began formulating a plan. McFarlane explains: 'We definitely had an urge to make the most of our collective talents. We decided that going back to New Zealand would be the best option if we wanted to start something because it's home and we'd have a better idea of how to go about doing things. Also we'd know people who could help.'

Back in New Zealand in 2003, Morris and McFarlane began to work on ideas for their own product, while Ferguson continued his work for *Huffer*. 'Helene and I had been throwing around ideas about bags and she'd been doing some prints and Steve had been helping with ideas as well. We ended up developing a design for a circle bag.' McFarlane describes it as 'a circular-shaped bag made from two wire rings covered with printed and stitched fabric'. The fabric for these bags featured prints designed by Morris that were produced in a number of colourways. 'Looking back, they took me about twenty hours. It was so time-consuming. I probably made about fifteen of them. And thinking about our costings now, they were so under-priced. It barely covered the materials and the printing.'

McFarlane took some of the bags into *Artikel*, a fashion and design store, owned by Angela and Geoff Gordon, in Wellington's Wakefield Street. The Gordons took three to see how they would sell. 'After that we sold them in the Wellington and Auckland *Ruby* stores.'

After this initial success, the two designers decided on a name for their fledgling business – *Lonely Hearts Club*. Angela Gordon suggested that Morris's prints would go well on t-shirts, so McFarlane and Morris planned a printing project as the label's next step. 'I spent a lot of time making two different t-shirt shapes that we liked and Helene came up with a couple of prints.' Rather than single placement prints, Morris designed her graphics as repeat patterns, which were produced as continuous prints on fabric that was later cut and made into t-shirts. According to Ferguson, 'At that time not many people were doing yardage prints.' One of the earliest continuous t-shirt prints, and a favourite of McFarlane's, is Morris's charming jigsaw-like pattern depicting interlocking line drawings of cartoon monsters, humans and penguins.

Because their printing runs were short compared with those of larger fashion labels, the *Lonely Hearts Club* designers had to convince their printer, Levin-based Levana Textiles, to carry out special orders of continuous printing with the frequent changes in colour that would allow them to produce t-shirts in a range of colourways from a small production run.

To complement the t-shirts, McFarlane and Morris designed a range of embroidered miniskirts, but these were 'miscellaneous pieces' rather than items from a coherent collection. 'We weren't really sure what we were doing apart from making things.' Ferguson says, 'The interest in our designs was greater than we expected. I think what got us through were those cool t-shirt designs. Luckily, they all sold.'

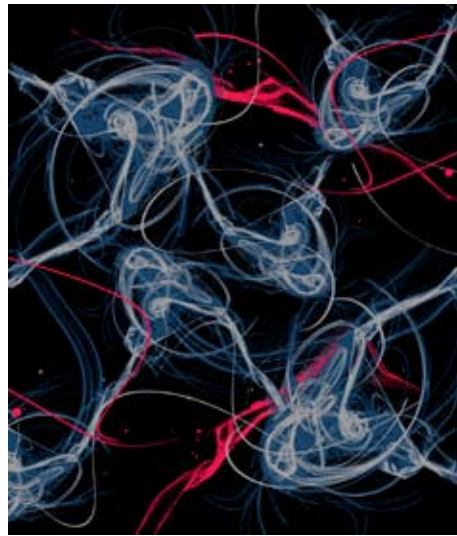
In 2004 the trio moved to digital textile printing using Sam's Print, in



Mood board for *Lonely Hearts, IOU nothing* collection A/W 2008



'Monsters' textile design by Helene Morris for *Lonely Hearts Club* t-shirts, 2003



'Chemical' textile design by Emma Hayes for *Cybèle*,
Hi-fiction science collection S/S 2007–08



'Equus' textile design by Emma Hayes for *Cybèle*,
Blue blood collection A/W 2007

Cybèle, *Halcyon* collection show A/W 2009,
Air New Zealand Fashion Week 2008

Winged creatures and flight have become favourite themes in Wiren's work, and are expressed in key garments from previous collections – the 'Monarch' dress from her Spring / Summer 2006–07 *Fly now* collection (see page xx) and the 'Phoenix' garments from her Autumn / Winter 2008 *Eclipse* collection (see page xx). For the Quest pieces in her Autumn / Winter 2009 *Halcyon* collection, structural elements suggest wings, such as wide extended sleeves, with deep slits, and ties that gather fabric into wing-like shapes. A shimmering silk satin, used for more luxurious pieces, portrays large kingfishers dipping and diving; their iridescent wings blurred in flight. These colours reflect the glimmering early morning sunlight on a dark ocean. A smaller textile design, 'Constellation', printed on billowing light silk, depicts clusters of minute stars echoing the night sky and, in particular, the Pleiades star cluster pivotal to marine navigation. Also in *Halcyon*, a kingfisher's wing inspired a formalised art deco-style pattern of overlapping feathers, which is represented on the 'Zenith' dress through elongated panels, cut and pieced together from a palette of jewel-like coloured fabric influenced by the natural colours of the bird. The overall effect of the body-conscious, tubular silhouettes channels eighties' fashion.

Six full-time staff, including Wiren, design and produce *Cybèle* collections at the label's Karangahape Road workroom. An important development for the label is its relationship with fashion public relations and sales company, H30 Fashion Bureau. This Tokyo-based company has been very active in representing and selling Wiren's work in Japan and the Middle East. Employing dedicated agents to work internationally is important for Wiren, who likes to understand the markets she enters and recognises the importance of representation on the ground. 'It is all about establishing and maintaining relationships.'

A growing international profile has resulted in further recognition of Wiren's work. She was sponsored by New Zealand Trade and Enterprise to show at the 2007 New Zealand Paradise Week in Tokyo, alongside *Huffer*, *Sabatini White* and *NOM*d*; featured in German publisher Daab's *Young Asian Fashion Designers* book in 2008; and won the Development category in the 2008 Air New Zealand Fashion Export Awards.

Wiren sees fashion design as a process of continuous development: 'I work in an intuitive and organic way, progressing my ideas from season to season, within which there is always an innate design aesthetic.' This is evident in her body of work to date, which *Dominion Post* fashion editor Carolyn Enting describes as 'a continuum of exquisitely subtle silhouettes and sophisticated fabric treatments that evolve with every season.'





Doris de Pont
Reversible raincoat, screenprinted cotton furnishing fabric and polished cotton
1985



Doris de Pont
Blazer, hand-screenprinted cotton, Adrienne Foote textile design
Tutu, nylon tulle with satin cord edging
1988-89



Helen Cherry
Wrap dress, printed viscose/elastane jersey
A/W 2005



Workshop
Single button peak lapel jacket, boiled wool stretch suiting
French cuff "Origami" shirt, hand-screenprinted cotton, Enuake Sirikage textile design
T-shirt, hand-screenprinted cotton, Enuake Sirikage textile design
Slim tailored trousers, wool/polyamide/elastane blend
A/W 2005



Karen Walker
'Pearl' shift dress, hand-screenprinted wool blend, Katie Lockhart and Mikhail Gherman textile design
Etiquette collection S/S 2000-01
Collection of The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa



Crane Brothers
'Jubilee' jacket, merino
'President' shirt, cotton
Tie, merino
'Bayonet' trousers, merino
2008