

CLAIRE WATSON

The connection between political ideology and societal behaviors was of great import in Paris in post-revolution times. There was an assumption of a governmental responsibility to care for those who were not able to support themselves within a traditional family scenario. Whilst commencing with what appears to be an altruistic intention, Michel Foucault has summarized this trend thus, "in this dispersed culture, decentralization is associated with two historically important themes—that of assistance and that of repression".¹ The Victorian era has come to characterize a society which insinuated the naturalness of repressive behaviors for the populace. It is known as a time when women had less access to the opportunities of their male counterparts. The repressive environment manifested itself in many ways, including the fashions of the time. Clothes were designed to contort the female form into a more sexually appealing shape. Comfort and ease of action for the wearer was not a determining factor in many of these designs.

Corsets were a key undergarment for achieving this aim. Oft made with industrial strength materials, such as bone and wire, these elements being necessarily combined with latches, hooks, laces, and stiffened fabrics, the intention was to create a suitable shape emphasizing the bust and minimizing the waist (19 inches was considered very desirable). Not surprisingly, corsets were uncomfortable, and in some cases posed a very tangible physical threat to the well being of the wearer. Claire Watson frequently utilizes found materials, objects with a history, to create her subversive works. In this instance, Watson has taken the dainty form of a ladies' kid glove and then stuffed and contorted the form in a process of critical metamorphosis. The resulting artwork challenges the sentimental notions associated with ideas about the women who might have worn such gloves, and what kind of lives they led. Watson has explained her interest in the gloves thus, they "evoke tensions surrounding concealment and disclosure of the human form". She believes that, "Certain objects resonate with a particularly feminine history, however dimly remembered. A collection of ladies' kid leather gloves, some well worn and some pristine, evokes an inheritance of tensions surrounding the social dictates of feminine display, and escape through role playing and costume."

Watson undertook training in the visual arts in the United States and Italy. In 2007 she received a fellowship from the New York Foundation for the Arts, and in 1990 she was the recipient of a Pollock Krasner Foundation Grant. In 2008 her work was exhibited at a number of venues, including Choriner Strasse, Berlin, Germany, Ashawagh Hall, East Hampton, NY and in the Marlboro Gallery Juried Sculpture Exhibition, Prince George's Community College.

¹ Foucault, Michel, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, Vintage Books/Random House, New York, 1994, p.41.



Claire WATSON, *Neither or both*, 2007. Glove leather, wire, sawdust, aniline dye, Each unit 11" x 4" x 3", Courtesy of the artist