

## **New York in the Moment: “Quicktake: Rodarte” with Lisa Airan, M.D., February 11, 12:52 p.m.**



“Oh, I really like that dress!” exclaims **Dr. Lisa Airan**, standing in front of a mannequin displaying a stunning cobwebby confection at “Quicktake: Rodarte,” the Cooper-Hewitt museum’s dazzling if brief chronicle of **Kate and Laura Mulleavy**’s work. It’s no wonder Airan falls for this outfit, since today she is wearing a Rodarte ensemble that could be its twin: a loosely knitted, loopy dress and matching cardigan in red, white, and black, subtly shot with metallic thread.

Airan is the ideal person with whom to visit this exhibit with; although Rodarte is not the easiest brand to find in stores, she owns so many pieces that she says frankly she’s lost count. (Airan does recall the first piece she ever owned, a beige chiffon dress decorated with multicolored Swarovski crystals from Rodarte’s second collection.) But Airan is the furthest thing from a mindless consumer—she’s actually thought a lot about what makes the label so special.

“They’re not like anyone else,” she says of Kate and Laura Mulleavy, the sisters behind the line. “It’s a different vision, very artistic. They begin with a story for every collection and they build from that story. I really like the individuality, and how it looks different on different people, and how it changes depending on how you wear it.” To demonstrate, she pulls off the Lanvin belt that is cinching her waist, and her spidery dress becomes longer and slinkier—and thus less practical for work. (After our sojourn in the museum, Airan will spend the afternoon clad in Rodarte, seeing patients.)

Unlike so many costume museum exhibits, where the clothes are displayed under glass in galleries that are nearly pitch black, you can easily reach out and touch these garments (but don’t try it.) Here the well-lighted room provides an opportunity to view the details of Rodarte’s incredibly complex designs, a chance to feast your eyes on craftsmanship that is sometimes hard to fully appreciate as the clothes whiz by on a runway.

Commenting on the way the various Rodarte moods are represented in the exhibit—from airy, fairy pastel parfais to tough, lady vampire fantasias—Airan observes that “it shows their progression from whimsical to avant-garde.” She is especially drawn to an installation meant to look like a charred, burned room, whose ambience recalls Rodarte’s spring 2010 runway show. “That show was my favorite. The staging! The girls! It was so different from everything else I saw that Fashion Week.”

She peers with particular intensity at one outfit, a mélange of woven leather and artfully tangled strings. “I tried that on!” She explains that the ensemble, which is so elaborate it’s difficult to tell at first blush what elements it consists of, must be built on the body in a precise order: first the skirt, then the sweater, and then the abbreviated jacket—so the sweater’s strings can be woven through, and lastly the belt.

If these Goth layers are very different from early Rodarte, where a gossamer Grecian-goddess aura permeated the clothes, it nevertheless shares with them a freshness, a startling originality that has always characterized the Mulleavys’ work. Airan remembers fondly the dress she wore for her wedding luncheon in the woods in Tuscany: “pink chiffon with feathers around the neck—so pretty.” When she told Kate Mulleavy where and when she wore that frock, the designer was beyond thrilled. “Kate told me that when they designed it, they totally imagined someone wearing it in the woods!”

—*Lynn Yaeger*

Photo: Carmel Wilson