

MARA COSON SLEEVES

If a sleeve could let out a sound it would be onomatopoeic, or loooooong as it feeeeeeels when written out, with "l" as the pin sticking out of it, as it slides itself upon the arm hole. But not easy as magnets, or bolts, as I'd always imagined, not as easy as taking a cylinder of jersey and gluing it onto an armhole. That the void along the pattern is an arm hole, a something that is nothing like sleeveless is a kind of sleeve. What the rest of the world knows as the butterfly sleeves is not the same thing that we call butterfly sleeves in the Philippines—that's a whole other sleeve of history. Not the soft, short flowing sleeves that we recently connected in a jigsaw puzzle to the shoulders of rose-cheeked fairies floating above the lily pads, with streams of light bursting from the tips of their fingers. We are talking about the butterfly sleeve of the *terno*—two filled in voids of an archway, two upside down French-tipped nails, two ends of sliced bread, sandwiching the wearer and round the thirties onwards, a single piece ensemble we call the *terno*. I am told that if you break down the *terno* today, the single most definable element, or the part that represents the whole, would be its sleeves. And yet who really gives much thought about sleeves, though hardworking as they are, catching our sweat

Edith Nakpil Rabat, 1956, in a Slim Higgins *terno*. "A single piece of pearl-grey silk satin is draped, slashed, and folded over to form a geometric point. There are no side seams on this garment, only one in the center back. Mauve silk roses are tucked underneath one of the folds." Photo by Chat Peypoch, from the collection of Mark Lewis Higgins and featured in the SLIM: Salvacion Lim Higgins book. This *terno* is currently in the collection of the V&A.



on a hot or nervous day, keeping us cloistered in a water-resistant shell when it rains, giving us the appearance of slimmer arms when we need diversion but not a shawl, keeping our elbows from stray sauces, signaling to the nuns of my childhood the level of immodesty I seek to level. A friend said that what's curious about sleeves is that they wrap the part of the body that moves the most, and that it has the strange task to cover up several joints with a single pair of cylinders.

It is Saturday and I am looking at a woman from 1913 named Pilang, hair down and big, looking back at the camera, and behind her, a message: A mis seres mas queridos, to my dearest ones... I feel looked at, in a hoodie now so shrunken it compresses my arms like a BP monitor, my mind reading formal attire, not immediately taking into account that she had removed her pañuelo. It reminds me of when I used to be intimidated by older kids who would show off their cool by tucking the upper-half of their t-shirt under



Armi Kuusela wearing a Slim Higgins terno in 1953. Kuusela, from Finland, was the first ever titleholder of the Miss Universe pageant, and fell in love with the Philippines and a man named Virgilio Hilario.

the arm hole and create a Sydney Opera House on their shoulders as if always ready to spike a volley ball. Here, her sleeves look like elephant pant legs—default arms akimbo, as they say in the wild about gorillas or bears when they make themselves bigger and more threatening. Good gauze. I was also told that the baro, which was the gossamer blouse of the traje de mestiza—baro, pañuelo, saya—that would eventually evolve into the terno, which means to match, doesn't make sense if you look at it as the single piece it is. I was

told that the baro, the reason why the piña fabric could have been so sheer, was not the heat but because the Spanish did not want us to hide weapons underneath all the fabric. Well, as Nick Joaquin wrote, "Paco had no intention of snuggling up with a married woman old enough to be his mother — nor by the least flick of an eyelash did she ever indicate she had anything up her sleeve except a lady's arm..."

And my thought returns to the two end slices of white bread, the last

page of an imagined kineograph showing the scene of these sleeves being air pumped to make various balloons in various studio sets before they became now down to the flattened pleated hard power sleeves that they are — loose, boom, poof, bell, pagoda, but also beside it other arms that carried long sleeves and short sleeves and folded up sleeves and no sleeves and hidden sleeves, and back to the insistent fate of this power sleeve, opening as the Suez Canal did, and then later, pushed out and upwards with the starchy leg of mutton sleeves of the belle epoque, and then softening and receding after Pilang's time, towards the birth of jazz and all that jazz, where it continued to relax so that we could dance.

I am looking at a spider woman. It is the 1930s and her black dress is embroidered with spider webs and her sheer sleeve is essentially one big spider web ending in perfect scallops. She has one white flower in her cleavage, like a spider waiting for a fly to catch, and she, anonymous now, is holding a rolled-up certificate with a ribbon, seated at the edge of the chaise lounge, as if about to say —

And it makes me wonder, did they ever get their sleeves caught by the knob of a door, dip them in soup, accidentally catch fire, have an

insect crawl up inside, want lanterns or capes or poets or bishops or the sleeves of a future cotton t-shirt, wipe their upper lip sweat, or tears, did they ever get their sleeves to stop a fall, or not too much consider them at all?

NOTES

Pilang and the spider woman, along with great examples mostly taken in studios, were featured in Gino Gonzales and Mark Higgins' *Fashionable Filipinas: An Evolution of the Philippine National Dress in Photographs 1860 - 1960* (Slim's Legacy Project Inc. and Suyen Corporation Inc, 2015). If you're curious to read further, start with Stephanie Coö's *Clothing the Colony* (Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2019) for a sociocultural history of the Philippine dress. To study patterns and sleeve construction, Salvador Bernal and Georgina Encanto's *Patterns for the Filipino Dress: From the Traje de Mestiza to the Terno (1890s - 1960s)*. (Cultural Center of the Philippines, 1992). Notable designers include Ramon Valera, Slim Higgins, and many more, including those that studied in Slim's Fashion & Arts School. To see more terno designs, Mark Lewis Higgins and Sandra Lewis Higgins's *SLIM: Salvacion Lim Higgins: Philippine Haute Couture 1947 - 1990*. (Slim's Legacy Project Inc., 2009) Paco was referring to Concha Vidal in the novel of Nick Joaquin, *The Woman Who Had Two Navels* (Bookmark Inc., 1991. First published in 1961.)

SETH SHAPIRO

AMERICAN MANUFACTURING

Hope this one is better: A fashion crisis occurs when there are too many clothes but no good ideas to go with them. All-in-all, fashion must follow a story, a narrative or architecture. In this sense, there is no such thing as "good" or "bad" taste. It is "good" when it follows a story and when it does not, it is "bad."

If you do not like the story, it is impossible to like the fashion. Good or bad fashion: nothing is worse than mistaken identity. That is why we designers are always trying to change fashion (in self defense). But no matter how beautiful or imaginative the clothing is, if it does not tell a new story, it only worsens our dependency on the old story..

Martin Margiela forewarned us by writing "Fight to get in, Fight to get out" on one of his garments.

His subsequent disappearance reveals a passionate desire to change the narrative.

Following in his footsteps, I devised my own exit strategy, fleeing New York City's runways to live in books and dreams.

In books & dreams > another world is possible > where we can go to reinvent time > in this space only the illusion of fashion is necessary > as if with a flick of a wrist and snap of a wand > the dream lives on...

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