



D U C H

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denim



stock frock

"In the future everyone will be famous for 15 megabytes," says electronic media artist Nancy Paterson. The 40-year-old Canadian became fashionable on the wired arts circuit with her latest work, 'Stock Market Skirt', a garish prom number whose hemline rises and falls according to changes on the equities market.

The premise of her unwearable installation is straightforward enough: fashion responds to economic times with the wholesale yo-yoing of hemlines (skirts rise to the top during good times and plunge when money's too tight to mention).

A straight-shooter a million miles removed from the aloofness of academe and the inanities of the fashion world, Paterson conceived the work in response to the emergence of the Internet. "The Net's a mile wide and an inch deep," says Paterson, who has been a roadie on the info highway for over 15 years and is disillusioned with most Web offerings. "It's like watching TV quiz shows: there's a thin veneer of information with no content to it."

Paterson's cyberfeminist take on the time-worn conceit is loaded with meaning. And, unlike other telerobotic art works, 'Stock Market Skirt' is not only about the Internet but in part made by it. "This is the only one I know where the Internet controls the art work," says the artist. "The only way the viewer can interact with it is if they go out and buy a thousand shares. But it's more than that, it's sex, money, technology and fashion bound up in the one piece."

Making the piece was a fashion nightmare in itself. It's not as if the software needed to run the motor is available off-the-rack, and interesting as the intersection between high fashion and high technology sounds in theory, in practice it's an uncomfortable fit. "I'd be in stores telling the shop girls that I needed fabric that would go with my stepper-motor project," recalls Paterson. "Conversely, when I spoke to people in the computer-art field I'd tell them that I made it with a micro-processor controlled Singer. They'd heard of everything but they had never heard of Singer."

Paterson has no expectations that anyone – woman or drag queen – would actually want to wear the thing. "It's deliberately a 1950s-style party dress, kind of ugly in a way but it's not fashion." The next piece, however, is a dress that doesn't do anything and is intended to be worn. Paterson's aim is to make bandwidth groupies out of couture lovers. "I want to make this magnetic core memory dress that they all want. It will be made from magnetic core memory tape, which is really precious – the stuff's gorgeous," she says, sounding like any fashion fiend dying a thousand deaths over Calvin Klein's new cashmere blend. "I've also been gathering some beautiful circuit boards. It will be a historical piece, a wearable and expensive history of computer memory. I promise you, by the time I'm finished it women will want it." Even if she continues to meld fashion and art successfully, Paterson is not likely to let success go to her head.

"The whole architecture of being famous is changing. People will be in the spotlight for little tiny chunks of data space, so the whole notion of notoriety changes with that." Besides, unlike most people in the digital and fashion scenes, she's in no hurry to air-kiss butt. "Wired magazine is the Penthouse of the electronic art world, with airbrushed centrefolds of computer consoles," she jibes, pausing. "Now they'll never print an article about me." † Horacio Silva

