

Excerpts from *The House Project* catalogue:

' The kitchen, in contrast to the dining room, has traditionally (ie. through patriarchy) been the domain of one family member, the wife and mother, and in some instances is reserved for servants. Penelope Stewart has approached this room as an alternate vessel--a bodily replacement. Fitting the entire room-- walls, cupboards, counters, appliances, floor--in silk organza, Stewart suggests the displaced body of the wife/mother. The room itself takes on the characteristics of the wife/mother with an implied sensuality and obvious functionality. It is a room of moveable boundaries, as it can be staked as territory to which no others may gain access, but is as often the common room through which all can pass. It is rarely regarded as privileged site, yet through its function, provides the nourishment of the household--its sustenance. Stewart alludes to the conflation of wife/mother, as a collapse of meaning and function which ensures the well being of the family yet here her actions are not heralded as selfless, determined and committed, rather they are seen as obligatory tasks. Rich with metaphor, the installation deals with the issues of an identity defined by function and questions surrender.' -Claire Christie

'Entering the kitchen, I discovered that it has been completely covered in white organza. I am stricken by the kitchen's impeccably clean and ceremonial appearance. The kitchen is one of the places where I (you?) can work incessantly and tirelessly without ever seeming to manage. Here, instead, dirt has been evacuated through a drastic gesture -- whereby social control's mechanisms are made obvious which operates a complexification, by surplus, by excess, of the notion of "the middle-class white housewife, the historically dominant model of femininity [which] has been constructed around cleanliness." The piece operates a *mise en abyme*: the organza *veil* comes to unveil the invisibility of domestic labour. This piece, a site specific intervention by Penelope Stewart, acts as a skin whose obvious fragility renders it vulnerable to my passage as the intricacy of the linoleum's treatment marks the possibility of my body's reappearance with the original floor's own virtual disappearance. This skin also actively counteracts domestic labour's invisibility since it threatens to end its complicit endurance by a lack of resistance. Critiquing the operations of the dominant patriarchal ideology in its construction of gendered labour, the installation poetically and poignantly expresses the artificiality, the precariousness and the socially imposed nature of women's invisibility.' Sylvie Fortin

See also *Canadian Art*, winter 1994, Tragically Hip by Gary Michael Dault, pg 56 vol. 11 no. 4