



Rubber Love

Photography by Dan Cole, courtesy of the Fowler Museum at UCLA

The fantastical dress-sculptures of Brazilian artist **Adriana Bertini** have turned heads across four continents since she began making them in 1997. Her raw material, condoms destined for incineration or landfills until she repurposes them for art, is certainly unusual — but the success of her project is founded more on her incredible skill. Fusing experiences in fashion and activism, Bertini has single-handedly crafted a new and powerful way to talk about AIDS prevention, and invented some pretty ingenious ways of working with latex in the process.

Without a precedent for how to sew the tricky material, Bertini experimented to come up with some 40 unique ways of cutting and shaping it, including melting, collage, sewing, embroidery, tapestry, and crochet. Not one to rely on convention, Bertini also devised a process using organic dyes to achieve the vivid candy-colored hues of her garments. Handmade from start to finish, it takes at least 1,000 condoms for each ensemble, and one wedding dress took 80,000.

Bertini's interest in art and social projects began

at a young age, inspired in part by parents she says gave her "a liberal and politicized education." Motivated by the urgency of the cause, she began volunteering to help with AIDS prevention in 1994. The continued growth of her project, which has expanded over the years to include increasing varieties of sculptural clothing, installations, performances, and educational workshops, is fueled as much by Bertini's explosive creativity as by her desire to help change the course of the global pandemic.

The clothing is designed for exhibition rather than wear, but Bertini hopes the spectacular quality of her international exhibits will generate new and positive associations for condoms, leading to more frequent use. That women and girls are among the fastest growing population of new HIV/AIDS infections worldwide adds a sense of urgency to Bertini's seemingly playful enterprise. "Condoms must be so basic like a pair of jeans, and so necessary like a great love," she says.

—Annie Buckley

❖ **Adriana Bertini:** www.adrianabertini.com.br