Becoming Peggy

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This thesis examines the intimate relationship between a woman and her architecture, focusing on the importance of the patron’s identity to an existing building: in particular, Peggy Guggenheim and the museum she created for her personal art collection, the Palazzo Venier dei Leoni in Venice. It will engage her narrative from three voices: (1) her own, through archival research of her publicized and private life, (2) personal, through an experiential investigation of her identity in the form of dresses made and worn by the author, and (3) the palazzo, through a spatial study of the architecture. The objective is to establish her place within the myriad of creative speculations that go into the conception of architecture (i.e. concerning site, cultural context, urban situation, etc.) as a potential speculative subject. It argues that in understanding an extant work of architecture through equally creative analysis of material fact, the patron must be included.
“I’m not a collector. I’m a museum.
That’s quite different—much more solid and much more lasting.”

Peggy Guggenheim, Daily American, Nov. 17-18, 1974

This is a creative thesis that depends on not only its written components, but also its visual and emotive presence. In architectural studies and in the design field, we rely on the making and the showing elements of design work, which are invaluable as a means to express experiences that words cannot.

Peggy Guggenheim was an avant-garde patron with a vibrant personality who devoted her life to her collection. She established her own identity as a distinct patron of twentieth century art, a woman who defied convention, and with her collection, defined her place in history. She set herself apart from her Uncle Solomon Guggenheim, who was a well-known art collector during the early part of the century, and continued to rebel against the family name of Guggenheim and the reputation that preceded her. She made her home, at the Palazzo Venier dei Leoni in Venice, open to the public as a museum for the thirty years she lived there until her death in 1979. The palazzo is now only a museum, but the Peggy Guggenheim Collection continues to be her lasting legacy.

The half-finished palazzo on the Grand Canal, which sat overlooked for many years, gained distinction and importance through Peggy Guggenheim’s devotion. Through her, the palazzo reaffirmed its historical significance among the prominent architecture in Venice. Our current understanding and experience of the architecture of the palazzo would not be possible without her. It could have easily existed in relative obscurity without her advocacy. Peggy’s relationship with her palazzo and avid role as a patron is integral to the creative research within the discipline of architecture. Peggy Guggenheim is as much the architecture as the palazzo itself. To understand the architecture one must also understand the patron.

My intention within this volume is to show that by “Becoming Peggy” I have taken my knowledge of Peggy Guggenheim and her experiences and translated them into made objects: a collection of dresses. The dresses are not just static objects; they are meant to be worn, touched, and observed. Peggy Guggenheim intrigued me. I wanted to make dresses for her, to feel what it would be like to be her, and to understand her on a deeper emotional level by wearing them. The experience of making and wearing helped inform me of her narrative as well as what her architecture is about: the moments within, the movement through, and the connection to.

The dresses are physical artifacts that blend fiction and non-fiction, biography and autobiography, and the public and private life of Peggy. As Christa de Carouge
states in *Habit Habitat*, it is an “erotic play of clothing in order to reveal, of disguising in order to explain, which is the object of our visual desire in seeking the presence of truth ….” To wear the dresses was to discover the visual and physical play of clothing in order to relate to Peggy’s relationship to her palazzo.

Finding details about Peggy was essential to revealing truths about her life and authenticity in my work. An opportunity to visit the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum archives in New York City allowed me to do so. There, I gained access to volumes of scrapbooks full of newspaper and magazine articles about her collection, her museum, and about past exhibitions. The published articles emphasize the background of Peggy’s collection and her importance to the history of modern art, yet some impart opinions about her personal life and the choices she made along the way as well.

The archive also includes announcements and artists’ pamphlets from her two previous galleries, Guggenheim Jeune and Art of This Century in London and New York respectively. Although there seems to be no record of the correspondences Peggy received from friends, family, or artists, the letters she wrote to her friends are in their respective archived collections around the country.

The Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice, Italy was pivotal in this work. I had visited the museum twice before formulating this thesis, but visiting for this particular project was different. I knew more about Peggy than I had previously, and this knowledge influenced my perception of not only the art, but the architecture as well. I wanted to understand why I felt a need to find her, any piece of her in the palazzo. I was more critical of the space, and I began to imagine the place as if Peggy still lived there. I began to feel as if she was the reason why the architecture still existed. Even though most of the ‘things’ that made the palazzo into her home are no longer there, her presence is indelible, much like her collection and the palazzo that holds it.

“Becoming Peggy” is written in three parts as an intuitive narrative progression through *Finding Peggy, Becoming Peggy, and Inhabiting P(a)lace*. In *Finding Peggy*, Peggy’s life is compiled from what we know of her through what she left behind. It begins with *Tabloid Memories*, which rely on other people’s opinions and popular media of Peggy’s private and public life. The other fragments that either reinforce the popular conception of who she was or disenchant it, depend on what has been uncovered in her autobiography and the biographies of her family name, in her fashion, in her lovers.


2. Peggy published two memoirs in her lifetime. The first in 1946 was *Out of This Century: Informal Memoirs of Peggy Guggenheim*, the second in 1960 called *Confessions of an Art Addict*. In 1979, *Out of This Century: Confessions of an Art Addict* was published as a compilation of her first two memoirs, and
and in the collection she devoted her life to.

In this volume, there are artifacts that I created out of an impulse to cultivate an understanding of Peggy as a woman and a patron, and consequently her architecture. The dresses in *dressUP* and *Undress* reflect Peggy’s personality in four different styles, a white formal gown, a red party dress, black business attire, and an undergarment. Each dress depicts a piece of her identity, those she showed off publicly and privately: her collection, artists/lovers, correspondences, and her self, respectively. Although the dresses were intended to be worn one on top of the other for the purpose of undressing each layer to reach the slip, individually they relate their own poetic narrative of Peggy.

The making and inhabiting of her narrative in relation to the life and personage of Peggy is embodied in the act of dressing up and undressing. *Becoming Peggy* is a written and visual component portrayed in *dressUP: A narrative, An (Intimate) Interlude: Secrets, Scents, Slips*, and in *Undress: A Patron’s Identity in six moments*, that parallel the fragments of her life revealed in *Finding Peggy*.

A visual collection of three artifacts: letters, hair, and lingerie in *An (Intimate) Interlude: Secrets, Scents, Slips*, were pieces of fiction created by the author to personify the memories that Peggy wants to keep -- the parts of her life that remind her of the desires and beauty she wants to hold onto. These three artifacts have been integrated into three additional dresses, which place Peggy’s private memories and desires in public view: her letters, the intimacy of her hair, and her personal habits. The letters form a rigid strapless dress, which hides curves of the body, but exposes the words she wrote to her close friend. The hair is gathered in a bustle of a black dress. The bustle holds the beauty she sees in her own hair and symbolizes her sexual desires. An understated blue dress carries objects on a long train that emulate her personal habits, such as; jewelry, compacts, lipstick, cigarette case, etc.

The final dress in the collection, the anti-hero dress, is the direct interpretation of Max Ernst’s painting “The Antipope” that portrays Peggy as a provocative figure in what she deemed as a family portrait. It relies on fabric texture and a variety of reds to depict the torn parts of the dress, which also places an emphasis on the nearly exposed body of the wearer to bring the character of the painting to life.

included a few new chapters and a conclusion written by Peggy. “I seem to have written the first book as an uninhibited woman and the second one as a lady who was trying to establish her place in the history of modern art,” Peggy Guggenheim, *Out of This Century: Confessions of an Art Addict* (London: André Deutsch Ltd, 1979), 324.

The collection of dresses in dressUP: a narrative and in Undress: A Patron’s Identity in six moments rely on the context of their surroundings and the use of the author’s body to evoke a response from the reader. They were taken out of the controlled setting of a studio and worn in public places to provide a more provocative context in order to further Peggy’s narrative and tease out an emotional response from not only me (the wearer), but also the audience. My perception of the dresses changed with my surroundings, and knowing I was the one being observed made me more conscious of how I presented myself (and her) in the dresses. The moments in each dress put my body into the research which began at the conception of the dresses and continued through the process of making them. Each design was deliberate, the patterns carefully drafted from my body’s measurements to a specific style, tested and fitted to my body, and the fabric specifically chosen for its color and feeling on my skin. The process of making and wearing the dresses strengthened my insight into the life and personage of Peggy and the narrative that would inform her architecture.

My research of the existing palazzo with its limited architectural documentation, began with its patron, Peggy Guggenheim. Her presence within the palazzo shapes the familiarity of that place. It becomes both a private home and a public museum, in which Peggy moves between the private and public spaces, blurring the line between display and hiding. Inhabiting Palace brings the intimate relationship between Peggy and her palace into focus from two directions; the historical and experiential. Tracing histories is the unfinished history of the palazzo and its importance to Peggy’s own (unfinished) history. A container (the installation) is my interpretation of her personal relationship with her palazzo and the retracing of my own experience in it.

Throughout the entire research process, from the biographical (Peggy) to the artifactual (dresses), Peggy’s narrative is a constant in the work. My desire to engage her presence in the creative process prompted me to gain the necessary expertise to take her narrative further. I acquired the technical knowledge and the applied skills of pattern and dressmaking to construct the dresses. Then, collaborating with a photographer, I was able to advance her narrative while modeling the dresses and evoke my own emotional response to wearing them. This experience prompted an installation that depicted her architecture in the composition and movement through an enclosed space separated by layers of fabric. I was able to strengthen the experiences of my research with the artistry of creative (autobiographical) writing that I attained.

The work is also informed by relevant themes that helped cultivate an understanding of the relationship between a patron and her architecture. The visit to the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice aroused the experiential understanding of
the museum, which then inspired the historical and spatial investigation of the space through a temporary installation. The aspects of archival research from the Solomon R. Guggenheim supports Peggy’s biographical background, which was also expressed in the artifactual evidence of a series of dresses.

This thesis is meant to differ from the traditional thesis in terms of the use of visual components in support of the written text. Precedents have been set by the work of Nora Wendl, Carissa Gavin, Danielle Hermann, and my major professor, Mitchell Squire. The images are not to be read as ‘figures’ to the text, but rather as a visual narrative to communicate what words cannot and will not be designated with captions. In some cases, in which the images are full-bleed or there is only a single image on the page, no page numbers will appear as not to detract from the importance of the image.

The series of photographs found within dressUP and Undress are those of Tia Nii and were specifically created for ‘Becoming Peggy.” Although I am the figure wearing the dresses in the images throughout this thesis, I am secondary to the actual focus of the photographs. It is the narrative of the dresses worn in a particular place that is the subject of the photographs and created to evoke a narrative of Peggy Guggenheim. Individual credits given to the images in this volume are listed in the back.

The layout of this volume is intended to be read with text on the right and images on the left. There is a conscious effort to place a crease in the center of the page when the volume is in print, dividing image and text with a fold. This will allow the reader to view the thesis with images on the facing page and the text on the back. The images that cross the crease in the center are meant to fold out so that they do not lose their integrity and beauty.
I step into the foyer; a Calder mobile suspended in front of me slowly turns from the breeze sweeping in the open door. I pause momentarily, waiting for Peggy to greet me, but all I hear is the shuffling and quiet mumbling of the other visitors. The anticipation of finding her makes me anxious. I try to take my time and meander into each room to view the collection of art that surrounds me. As soon as I enter what used to be her bedroom, I cannot help but notice that white washed walls have replaced the aquamarine color that was once there. I lean a hand on the mantel of her fireplace and I hear her laugh. (Or was that just a woman in the next room?)

I seem to be preoccupied in finding her, pacing up and down the hall looking for the woman I came here to meet. The stark white walls reflect the sunlight that is filtering in from the canal and I have the urge to peel the paint and reveal the vibrancy that surrounded her. The paintings stare at me as if they don’t care what color the walls are. Yet her presence lingers within these walls, in the paintings hanging on them, and throughout the minimally furnished rooms.

Being in the palazzo provokes an affection for her place which mingles with my past memories of the museum and my familiarity with her. This is what architecture is -- something that is more than the building itself, something that allows me to identify with the space and feel it with my entire self. And knowing more about the woman that inhabited the space gives more meaning to her architecture.

I could not help but feel eager to know more. My movement through her palace had stirred my longing to find as much as I could from the architecture itself. I thought about her avant-garde lifestyle as I walked into her drawing room. I sat down on the couch facing the Grand Canal to contemplate her connection to this room, and then I felt a deeper appreciation for her life, her patronage, and her palazzo. My perception of her architecture as more than just a museum or a home, but as a place in which her narrative completes both its history and her own, had been altered by my desire to become her.
Tabloid Memories are a succession of published excerpts depicting a particular point-of-view of Peggy Guggenheim’s life, collection, and patronage. They are a starting point for uncovering fragments of her self from the views compiled from thoughts, research, and other sources. Other pieces of her identity are composed in four parts: Her Fashion, Her Name, Her Lovers, and Her Collection, and include written accounts of her narrative, based on memories and details, revealed one layer at a time.

“Peggy Guggenheim was no run-of-the mill patron. The rebelliousness that would probably have landed a poor woman in jail was, for the niece of the wealthy Solomon Guggenheim, a source of energy. She may not have precipitated the American art revolution, but she was one of its most important catalysts…”


“The 20th century has been blessed with extraordinary, risk-taking women who backed the art of their own time, enriching our own… What Guggenheim fancied, he [J.B. Manson, director of the Tate] asserted could not even be called art. Guggenheim’s belief that it was art, her willingness to put her money where her faith was, is one reason for the enormous change in perception that has taken place since then. The works many thought rubbish when she bought them are regarded as masterpieces today. Her low-slung, 18th-century palace is now a museum visited by 250,000 people a year.”


JS: What was Peggy Guggenheim like?

HS: A very, very interesting woman. Highly personal, original, independent, with a mind of her own. With the talent to detect quality—in human beings as well as in art.

Interview by Joan Simon with Hedda Sterne, “Patterns of Thought: Hedda Sterne,” Art in America, February 1, 2007

“Peggy G is like a character out of Henry James.”

Barnett Newman (Notes on a review of Out of This Century)

“Fabulous Peggy Guggenheim is a woman of enormous contradiction. Alternately naïve, sophisticated, egomaniacal, humble, frivolous and tragic. She is a lady possessed of remarkable intuition, and not a little folly. With the means to give vent to her many passions, she has assembled an amazing art collection…”


“…[S]he was a conversational magnet for much of her lifetime. Forever in and out of love, she was conspicuous dresser—even her sunglasses made news—and, in popular imagination, a more than conspicuous party-giver.”


“Is she real? One can never be certain, for Peggy G lives on the border between naïveté and high sophistication. She is, in fact, surreal. She is also the proud possessor of a Venetian palace…”

Henry Einrich, “Peggy Guggenheim’s Art Comes to America,” Look, Feb 4, 1969


“Miss Grabbe was aware of her legend; it half-pleased her,...
She hoped to be remembered for her architectural experiments, her
patronage of the arts, her championship of personal freedom, and
flattered herself that in Europe this side of her was taken seriously.”

Mary McCarthy, “The Cicerone”

“Peggy was special. She was unique. Peggy was no fool. She
was not just another person who collected paintings. She had purpose.
People flocked around Peggy: she was a focal point. She was open
and sensitive and very intelligent. She had enormous energy. Peggy
liked the people. For her, the artists and their works became the same.
Despite her cynicism, she had a broad taste for the avant-garde. The
art world was centered on Fifty-seventh Street at that time.”

Harry Holtsman, New York, 22 March 1982;
20 December 1986

“Maybe it’s a reaction to the distressing economy, but I’ve
been consumed with the urge to release my inner diva. And what
better role model for fantasies of excess than the art collector and style
eccentric Peggy Guggenheim? She had a nose job in 1920, when such
procedures were dangerous; surrounded with divine artists, husbands
and lovers and even more divine gaggle of Lhasa apsos; presided over
a gallery with curved walls and a turquoise floor; and wore custom
earrings by Alexander Calder and Yves Tanguy.”

Rebecca Voight, “Now Channeling|Peggy Guggenheim,”

8. Description of the fictional character Polly Grabbe, who is based on Peggy Guggenheim. Mary


“Many of us dream of leaving an artistic legacy. Few of us have the means or the determination to do so. Peggy Guggenheim, who was regarded during most of her 81 years as the enfant terrible of her famous family, always lived on the edge of the surreal, both in art and in her daily life. Her extraordinary passion is now immortalized. She is the only American to have her name emblazoned in large bronze letters along Venice’s historic Grand Canal.

In truth, however, Peggy spent a lifetime overcoming basic insecurity about her looks, her wealth and her position. She always regarded herself as one of the ‘poor’ Guggenheims, and so she was, when compared with her uncles who had founded American Smelting and Refining. What she lacked in capital, Peggy made up with two other Guggenheim traits: a superb sense of timing (knowing exactly when to buy) and an almost unnerving ability to seek out the best advisers.

‘Peggy’s paradox is that so much good came out of so much doubt and trial and error,’ says Thomas M. Messer, the director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, which runs the Venice collection and the New York museum. Messer, who first met Peggy in 1956, adds, ‘Everything Peggy did had a touch of elegance. Even if sharp-tongued and proverbially outspoken, she was quite shy and extremely feminine.’”


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“The points judging modern art are originality in a deep sense, intensity, color, composition and poetry—a poem one can either see or imagine easily. People always ask what it takes to be a great painter. I always reply ‘simply genius.’ They also want to know how I judge a painter and painting... A purely instinctive approach makes me feel the quality. When I started to collect, I strived for a historical survey and not necessarily for pictures I liked. After getting the past settled, I started to buy things I liked.”

Peggy Guggenheim, conversation with Life correspondent Peter Dragadze, *Life*, June 18, 1965

“A drive to purchase one’s way into a certain social caste, a longing to share (if momentarily) in the risks of bohemian life or art’s intellectual adventure, a belief in art as a kind of religion (its icons compelling sacrifice), a need to cushion one’s surroundings with objects of beauty or significance — who can say what complex motives go into the acquisition of works of art? The prospect of financial gain was, until recently, low on the list. The single-minded Peggy Guggenheim marched around to artists’ studios in a Paris under the threat of German invasion, armed with a shopping list compiled by her adviser Herbert Reade. ‘A painting a day,’ was her motto — and given the desperate circumstances of most of the artists she visited, only Picasso showed her to the door.”


“What’s more, Guggenheim was a great collector in the sense that Gere and Vaizey define. ‘Collecting must, in our view, significantly alter the repute of the objects collected, not only by adding to knowledge and expanding appreciation, but perhaps even more by conferring status: the collector can make the unfashionable or ignored more central to the culture of the day.’

This is what Guggenheim did. The extent of her commissioning went beyond just what is housed in the Guggenheim in Venice. She was a woman whose commission, certainly after her return to New York, could transform the reputation of an artist. Indeed, the promise of that prestige may have been an aphrodisiac for some of her artist lovers. Without her, Pollock and other abstract expressionists might well not have had art-world status conferred on them so readily.

Art-world sexism followed Guggenheim wherever she trod. One day in 1940 she walked into Picasso’s Paris atelier, seeking to buy a picture. The great master ignored her for several minutes, before dismissing her with: ‘Madame, the lingerie department is on the second floor.’

Sex, money and rude artists - was there any more to Guggenheim’s life? Yes. A determination to commit herself to what she described as ‘serving the future instead of recording the past’, something she did best with the collection of 300 works housed in her palazzo in Venice. But what is particularly distinctive about her collection is the responsibility she felt for the art and the artists she collected.”


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“Although she gave parties and collected pictures and people, there was—something cool and impenetrable about her. She does not fuss. She is capable of silence, a rare gift. She listens, an even rarer gift. She is a master of the one-liner that deflates some notion or trait of character or person...perhaps it is simply the dry tone—the brevity with which she delivers her epitaphs—that one remembers with pleasure.”

Gore Vidal on Peggy Guggenheim

“One night, Peggy reenacted the sinking of the Titanic—her father died on it. She walked from her terrace into the water, completely nude. She took the orchestra with her.”

John Berendt, The City of Falling Angels, 2006

“At the age of 66... her spirit is still saucy; she delights Venice visitors by appearing in her art nouveau sheath of woven gold. Her once shocking art, too, seems to have moved from fashion into history.”

Time, “Collection: Poor Peg’s Treasure,” Jan 22, 1965

“She left a considerable artistic legacy. Opinion within the arts community was often critical of her during her life and after—perhaps because of her exuberant celebration of sexuality; which continued well into old age, not to mention the power she wielded in the art world. Yet she was a key witness, observer, recorder, and finally shaper of the course of twentieth-century culture.”

Mary V. Dearborn, Peggy Guggenheim, 2004

15. Gore Vidal, forward to Out of This Century: Confessions of an Art Addict by Guggenheim (London: André Deutsch Ltd, 1979), xii.


“Her obduracy in contention and her warmth in friendship, her generosity and her stinginess, her plunges into gloom and whole-hearted abandonment to laughter, her puritan streak and her reckless addiction to the erotic were all contradictions of the essence of her personality. The collection, too, was a personal one, for though she had been advised by Duchamp, Read, and others, it owed much more than her detractors were prepared to admit to her own flare and enthusiasm.”

Maurice Cardiff, Memory of Peggy Guggenheim

“Her departure is in my opinion a serious loss to living American Art. The erratic gaiety with which Miss Guggenheim promoted ‘non-realistic’ art may have misled some people, as perhaps her [1946] autobiography did too, but the fact remains that in the three or four years of her career as a New York gallery director she gave her first showings to more serious artists than any one else in the country (Pollock, Hare, Baziotes, Motherwell, Rothko, Ray, de Niro, Admiral, McKee, and other). I am convinced that Peggy Guggenheim’s place in the history of American art will grow larger as time passes and the artists she encouraged mature.”

Clement Greenberg, “Review of Exhibitions of Theo van Doesburg and Robert Motherwell”
The Nation, May 31, 1947

“The beauty of this charming and ingenious display reflects the instinctive sense of values that dictates Peggy Guggenheim’s appreciation not merely of jewelry, or pictures, or sculpture, but of those qualities of mind and spirit that go to the making of a true home. La collezione Guggenheim must be seen for what it is—an adjunct to a living household and not just a picture gallery in which its curator happens to live.”

House and Garden, n.d.


“I don’t even think about love any more. My only love is art and my collection. I think it’s the best thing I ever did in my whole life.”


“Peggy dedicated her life to the proposition that art is the noblest and most valuable of human creations. She did so not only by gathering a unique collection of this century, but also by helping many of its most significant practitioners to make their way in a difficult, often indifferent, world. By doing this she managed, as she suspected she might, to outlive herself in the city where love and death have supremely made the most of mankind’s transcendent dream.”

James Lord, *A Palace in the City of Love and Death: Peggy Guggenheim*

“The incredible thing is that I never believe in failure, and no one can convince me that I cannot move mountains or stop the tide until I have proved myself I can’t. I therefore immediately set out to achieve what I was destined never to accomplish”

Peggy Guggenheim, *Out of This Century: Confessions of an Art Addict*

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Her Name

Peggy Guggenheim was born Marguerite Guggenheim on August 26, 1898 in New York City, to a wealthy Jewish family. She always considered herself a poor Guggenheim relation since her father, Benjamin Guggenheim, had abandoned his partnership with his brothers and his ventures were not as profitable compared to theirs. Even though her father’s estate was in disarray after his tragic death on the Titanic, Peggy still received a modest inheritance when she came of age at twenty-one with her uncles’ help. Once she received her inheritance, she was finally able to be independent from her family.

The moment that gave her a taste of rebellion and the chance to find her way out of her stuffy life came when she volunteered at the Sunwise Turn, a little avant-garde bookshop. It was one of the most influential experiences in her life, giving her an introduction to creative people of accomplishment and opening up her mind to new ideas.

"The people I met in the Sunwise Turn fascinated me. They were so real, so alive, so human. All their values were different from mine."

She began to see her place in human society among artists and writers, people who would continue to influence her way of life and define who she was. She had hopes of finding her place in history separate from the Guggenheim family.

Peggy’s marriage to Laurence Vail in 1922 gave her the introduction to the artists and writers she needed to build a collection of modern art. It was after her marriage ended however that she was able to fully engage the art world. Soon her name had become well known among the art scene in London and Paris. Her uncle Solomon Guggenheim, who collected works of art for his Museum of Non-Objective Painting, disapproved of his niece making a career out of dealing modern art. It was no place for a Guggenheim woman and Peggy revelled in upsetting the conventional family values.

The Guggenheim name had always been associated with wealth, and for Peggy it would seem to have a played a role in her insecurities, especially when she had to make clear to her friends and acquaintances that she did not have the kind of fortune

25. Dearborn, Mistress of Modernism, 34.
26. Guggenheim, Out of This Century: Confessions of an Art Addict, 23.
27. Dearborn, Mistress of Modernism, 34-35.
28. Which is known now as the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City.
they thought she had. It did help that her name was synonymous with money, which
not only gave her the opportunity to do what she wanted by opening up a gallery in
London, but also helped her assemble an impressive collection in a short amount of
time during World War II.
Her Fashion

Venice was said to be the place where Peggy became more proper in her attire and her appearance. She dyed her hair white and then let it grow in naturally gray after years of dying it jet black. She also started to wear more beiges and browns with stylish fishnet stockings. Marius Bewley commented on Peggy in a letter to Clement Greenberg in 1951: “She’s looking much better than she did in America. She dresses better, with a great deal of style, looks younger, and drinks far less.” Peggy enjoyed the experience and the sense of freedom Venice allowed, especially in her choice of attire. She wrote in her memoirs, “in this fantastic city only fantastic clothes should be worn.”

During the 1920s, Peggy enjoyed the attention of the great couturiers of Paris. She had just come into her inheritance and took a trip to Paris. Her mailboxes at her hotel were filled with announcements and invitations to the all the great couturiers of that time -- Poiret, Chanel, Molyneux, and Worth.

Man Ray photographed her wearing an outfit designed by Paul Poiret, the renowned Paris fashion designer of the 1920s. He was known for liberating women from the corset of the late nineteenth century and for his use of simple cuts to create a new female silhouette. Peggy’s dress was inspired by Chinese colors of pink and blue and made into a long, tight-fitting bodice with a gold lamé skirt. She donned an Egyptian-style headdress of a snug double band of gold made by Vera Stravinsky and held a long cigarette holder to compliment the dress. Another outfit she adored was her elegant silvery-gold gown by Fortuny, which she wore for formal occasions in Venice. Fortuny invented the famous finely pleated silk gowns that were based on the ancient Grecian style. Peggy also wore clothes designed by Ken Scott when she moved to Venice, a well-known Milanese fashion designer who used bright, bold colors and flower patterns in his designs. They had been friends since she showed his work at the Art of This Century gallery in New York.

30. Guggenheim, Out of This Century: Confessions of an Art Addict, 38.
Peggy was also a friend of fashion designer Elsa Schiaparelli. They shared a reverence for Surrealism, had a willingness to take risks, and made art their profession—Peggy, through her art collection, and Schiaparelli, through her fashion designs. There are no references made to her having owned any of Schiaparelli’s designs, but Peggy was quite aware of Schiaparelli’s impact on fashion with designs and innovations that set the trends of the Western world.

Peggy commissioned a shoemaker to copy her shoes from slippers she had seen in a painting by the Venetian painter Carpaccio. They were unique “open sandals that came to a point above the inset of the foot.” Edward Melcarth designed spectacles for her in the forms of butterflies and bats that became part of her signature attire. Her jewelry was also a part of her outfits and bold as her personality. Peggy boasted to have had more than a hundred pairs of earrings and collected many of them from around the world. Made of gold, colored jewels, and mother-of-pearl, they were works of art themselves. Alexander Calder and Yves Tanguy created the famed pairs she wore at the opening of Art of This Century. The Calder on one ear and the Tanguy on the other showed that she embraced both abstract art and surrealism. The turquoise walls in her bedroom and the reflection of the canal formed the perfect backdrop to her collection of earrings that hung like her art.

Most of Peggy’s dresses are now privately owned. The Poiret gown has been lost over the years. The Fortuny dress and sable-lined raincoat was given to Jane Rylands. Peggy’s sister Hazel was left her pale mink coat, and Christina Thoresby, her ranch mink coat. Peggy’s granddaughters were given her collection of earrings.

34. Dearborn, Mistress of Modernism, 273.
36. As A Gift for Peggy, the Yves Tanguy earrings will soon be purchased and funds have started to acquire the Calder earrings as well. http://www.guggenheim-venice.it/inglese/peggy.html.
Her Lovers

Peggy Guggenheim wrote her memoirs in a conversational manner, and she shared honest admission of personal failures, tumultuous affairs, and vulnerabilities. It was uncommon for a woman to publish such an act of self-display; it contradicted the “female virtues of modesty and concealment.” Her story is about an independent woman making a name for herself, told through the voice of a friend, lover, collector, and patron. Only after a husband and a few lovers did Peggy begin to acknowledge her own strength. Her gallery and professional activity also allowed her to feel more grounded and independent.

Peggy collected men like she collected her art. She took risks and found a sense of freedom and confidence with each acquisition; her sexuality was part of who she was. Her lovers were the friends, artists, and writers she was constantly surrounded by. Some critics suggest that Peggy had never recovered from her father’s death and would continue to search “in every man she fell in love with, for the father she had lost too soon.” Many of her experiences were brief interactions and others were drawn-out affairs, but most of them did not escape being mentioned in her memoirs. In a 1938 letter Peggy replied to Emily Coleman’s comment that her sexual affairs were as harmful as Djuna Barnes’ excessive drinking. This letter is forceful in conviction and shares an insight into how Peggy felt about her love affairs and her acknowledged strength:

...[M]y fucking is only a sideshow. My work comes first every time & my children are still there. Both the center of my life. Everyone needs sex & a man. It keeps one alive & loving & feminine. If you can’t manage to make a life permanently with inferior people, & thank God I can’t, you must still now & then indulge in a physical life & its consequences. I went without sex for 5 months...last summer. I hope I will never do so again. I find men & man really stimulating but now, thank God I have my own strengths & my inner self to fall back on. John sowed the seeds for this & Garman made them grow by watering. The necessity of falling back on myself.


39. “The rapid turnover of her lovers did not particularly disconcert her; she took a quantitative view and sought for a wealth of sensations. She liked to startle and to shock, yet positively did not understand why people considered her immoral. A prehensile approach, she inferred, was laudable where values were in question—what was the beautiful for, if not to be seized and savored?” Polly Grabbe. McCarthy, Cast a Cold Eye, 113-14.

What follows are Peggy’s thoughts and reflections on her past lovers.

“At this time I was worried about my virginity. I was twenty-three and I found it burdensome. I had a collection of photographs of frescoes I had seen at Pompeii. They depicted people making love in various positions, and of course I was very curious and wanted to try them all out myself. It soon occurred to me that I could make use of Laurence for this purpose.”

“I was living in the exciting expectancy of one about to enter a new love affair. I really only acted from a blind force which drove me on and on. I could not live with Laurence any more as our scenes were becoming more horrible. I imagine when John Holms kissed me I unconsciously decided I would use him to make my escape. John opened up a whole new world of the senses to me, a world I had never dreamed of. He loved me because to him I was a real woman. I refused to listen to him talk, and he was delighted that I loved him as a man. … [L]ittle by little I opened my ears, and gradually, during the five years that I lived with him, I began to learn everything I know today.”

“When [Douglas Garman] came, I fell in love with him. I didn’t tell John. I needed someone human to make me feel like a woman again. After I had been with Garman about a year and a half I began to get the idea of running away from him. I didn’t want to live with him and I didn’t want to live without him. When the fact dawned on me that my life with Garman was over I was rather at a loss for an occupation, since I had never been anything but a wife for the last fifteen years.”


42. Writer and Artist Laurence Vail, Peggy’s first husband. Guggenheim, Out of This Century: Confessions of an Art Addict, 25.

43. Writer John Holms, Ibid., 82-89.

44. Publisher and Writer Douglas Garman, Ibid., 119, 114, 159.
“Humphrey came down to Petersfield for the weekend. Emily [Coleman] was there, and as she was finished with him, she offered him to me as though he were a sort of object she no longer required, and I went in his room and took him in the same spirit.”

“I must have gone to Paris expecting something to occur but I never dreamed for an instant what was in store for me. In spite of the fact that I took every consolation, which crossed my path, I was entirely obsessed for over a year by the strange creature, Samuel Beckett. Beckett told me one had to accept the art of our day as it was a living thing. It seemed ironic that I should create a new existence for myself because I had no personal life, and now that I had a personal life, it had to be sacrificed.”

“He [E.L.T. Mesens] was a gay little Flamand, quite vulgar, but really very nice and warm. He now wanted me as his mistress, so we were to have dinner together. Before Beckett went back to Paris I went off with Mesens and took a diabolical pleasure in doing so.”

“Finally [Yves] Tanguy and I decided to leave together and go to my flat. He had a lovely personality, modest and shy and as adorable as a child. He had little hair (what he had stood straight up from his head when he was drunk, which was quite often) and beautiful little feet or which he was very proud.”

“[Roland] Penrose was extremely attractive, quite good-looking, had a great success with women and was always having affairs. He had one eccentricity and when he slept with women he tied up their wrists with anything that was handy. Once he used my belt, but another time in his house he brought out a pair of ivory bracelets from Sudan. They were attached with a chain and Penrose had a key to lock them.”

45. Filmmaker and critic Humphrey Jennings, Ibid., 160.
47. Surrealist Artist E.L.T. Mesens, Ibid., 178.
“I came back to London giving up the idea of both Beckett and Tanguy. But I soon was in worse trouble. I got involved with an English artist called Llewellyn. The affair was very vague, but the consequences were disastrous. The pleasure gained from it was hardly worth the trouble it lost me.”

“Brancusi was a marvelous man with a beard and piercing dark eyes. He was half astute peasant and half real god. He made you feel very happy to be with him. He called me Pegitza.”

“I was still having a vague affair with Marcel. This never meant very much to either of us; we were almost like brother and sister, having known each other so long.”

“When I began my affair with Max Ernst it was not serious but soon I discovered that I was in love with him.”

“I don’t know why, but Kenneth McPherson immediately gave me a sense of peace, and when I sat with his arm around me I was perfectly happy, happier than I had been for years.”

“It’s terrible to love an Italian and besides that he [Raoul Gregorich] was 23 years younger than I am… I was so lonely for years before I met him and then when I met him I fell madly in love with him. Raoul always maintained that I would go down in history, which statement, though quite exaggerated, I found very touching.”

49. Collector and Historian Roland Penrose, Ibid., 191.
50. Sculptor Llewellyn (name not revealed), Ibid., 194. Trevelyan is the true identity, Dearborn, Mistress of Modernism, 157.
51. Sculptor Constantin Brancusi, Guggenheim, Out of This Century: Confessions of an Art Addict, 211. She does not admit in her memoirs she bedded him, but is mentioned in Weld, Peggy: The Wayward Guggenheim, 195.
52. Dadaist and Surrealist Artist Marcel Duchamp, Guggenheim, Out of This Century: Confessions of an Art Addict, 293.
53. Dadaist and Surrealist Artist Max Ernst, Peggy’s second husband, Ibid., 231.
55. Italian Raoul Gregorich, Ibid., 275.
Peggy was a patron who was alert and responsive and who lived among the artists she promoted, supported, and collected from. It was over a period of eight years that she amassed a historical modern art collection of the early twentieth-century. Peggy’s permanent collection consists of two hundred and ninety works of painting, sculpture, and work on paper of one hundred and thirty-three artists of the twentieth century. It also includes thirty-six pieces of tribal art. Her collection was “personal, biased, and full of risks.”

Peggy did not start collecting until she turned forty, realized she spent the last fifteen years as a “wife,” and was at a loss for an occupation. She decided to open an art gallery in London on the advice from her long-time friend Peggy Waldman who wrote to her on May 11, 1937:

Darlingest Peggy,

…I’m only sorry that you’re so upset and unhappy and I wish you would do some serious work—the art gallery, book agency—anything that would be engrossing yet impersonal—if you were doing something helpful for good painters or writers, or better still, a novel yourself. I think you’d be so much better off than waiting around for G. [Douglas Garman] to come weekends and tear you to bits… I mean that you’d have a more painless perspective if you had another active interest besides, and particularly one that brought you in contact with stimulating people…Anyway I love you, please write again,

Your, Peggy

She opened Guggenheim Jeune in January 1938 with the help of Humphrey Jennings, Wyn Henderson, and Marcel Duchamp. She had found a great mentor in Marcel Duchamp, who showed her “the difference between Abstract and Surrealist art. Then he introduced me to all the artists… I have him to thank for my introduction to the modern art world.” Her first purchase was from the gallery’s first exhibition of Jean Cocteau’s work called La Peur dominant ailes au Courage. She would continue to buy one work from every show “so not to disappoint the artists.”

57. Guggenheim, Out of This Century: Confessions of an Art Addict, 159.
58. Dortch, ed., Peggy Guggenheim and Her Friends, 54.
59. Guggenheim, Out of This Century: Confessions of an Art Addict, 139.
60. Ibid., 166.
After Peggy closed Guggenheim Jeune on June 22, 1939, she wanted to open a museum of modern art in London and sought the help of the art critic Herbert Read. Peggy was armed with a comprehensive historical list, written by Read, of works to be included in the museum, covering the non-realistic movements, such as Cubism, de Stijl, Surrealism, and Futurism. The uncertainty of World War II ended that venture, but Peggy decided that with the money she had set aside for the museum she would buy the art on Read’s list.

She traveled to Paris to “buy a picture a day.” She sought the help of Duchamp and her close friend Nellie van Doesburg. They both had a hand in revising her list and helped build her collection through various visits with artists at their studios. Howard Putzel had also joined in the acquisitions of art with the same intensity as Peggy. “Peggy would build up a historically accurate collection of modern art and have her museum someday.” “She acquired approximately fifty works, thirty-seven of which are still in the collection. At least twenty of those works were purchased directly from the individual, nine from dealers, four from Nelly van Doesburg, and two from Duchamp.”

Peggy fled Paris when the Germans approached the city. On July 13, 1941, she and her entourage, made up of family members and Max Ernst, arrived in New York City. Peggy found a double loft at 30 West 57th Street for a gallery and hired the architect Fredrick Kiesler to design it. She called her gallery Art of This Century and wanted it to be an experience that would encourage interaction with the art and artists or critics whom visitors might meet so that it would be “something out of the ordinary.” Kiesler gave her a gallery that had no barriers between the public and the art, a space which also kept in line with an “aspect of Peggy’s collecting life: a democratic impulse that broke down the barriers between high art and popular culture and insisted that art be viewed in a human framework, not aestheticized as in a museum.” It became a central cultural meeting place for artists, intellectuals, critics, and collectors.

Peggy exhibited American artists and continued to showcase her permanent

61. Guggenheim, Out of This Century: Confessions of an Art Addict, 209.
63. Rudenstine, Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 748.
64. Dearborn, Mistress of Modernism, 195.
65. Ibid., 196.
collection of European artists. For many of the American artists, such as Motherwell, Baziotes, Hans Hofmann, Clyfford Still, Mark Rothko, David Hare, and Jackson Pollock, it was their first one-man show. Peggy would also entertain spring salons (exhibitions) with Piet Mondrian, Marcel Duchamp, James Johnson Sweeney, James Thrall Soby, and herself as jurors. It was Mondrian who convinced Peggy, along with opinions from Putzel and Matta, that Jackson Pollock’s work was invaluable. It was Peggy who would launch Pollock’s career by giving him a contract and devoting four years to furthering his career.\(^6^6\) Her patronage gave Pollock freedom to focus on his painting and become one of the most influential American abstract expressionists. Thirty works of art were acquired “during the few months preceding the publication of her catalogue in May 1942,” and her collection grew to over one hundred and seventy works.\(^6^8\)

Peggy closed Art of This Century on May 31, 1947. “No one has ever forgotten that marvelous place where sculptures hung in mid-air and paintings leaped out at you on invisible arms from the walls. Where miniature picturers revolved in peepshow cabinets, where Marchel Duchamp displayed his life’s work in a suitcase, tables became chairs, and chairs became pedestals.”\(^6^9\) World War II had ended, and she decided to move back to Europe in search of a permanent home for her collection. She joined her friend Mary McCarthy and her husband on a trip to Venice after visiting London and Paris. She fell in love with Venice and decided to stay. Peggy was invited to display her collection at the 1948 Biennale in the Greek Pavilion that was empty because the country was in turmoil. For many American artists this was their first European exhibition. She then found a permanent home for her collection, the Palazzo Venier dei Leoni on the Grand Canal, where it is still housed.

Peggy decided the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation would inherit the palazzo and her collection after her death on the terms the collection remain in Venice and “nothing was to be removed.”\(^7^0\) Leaving her collection to her uncle’s foundation, she felt “like someone who was longing to be proposed to by someone who was longing to marry her”\(^7^1\), as though she was finally accepted back into the family she was so desperate to abandon in her youth.


\(^6^8\) Susan Davidson and Philip Rylands, ed., *Peggy Guggenheim and Fredrick Kiesler: The Story of Art of This Century*, 763.


\(^7^0\) Guggenheim, *Out of This Century: Confessions of an Art Addict*, 371.

\(^7^1\) Ibid., 371.
I stand in front of four dresses that hang lifeless in my closet. I reach in to touch each one and acquaint myself with how they feel. My gut responds to the sensation of the silk between my fingers, and any reservations I may have had about wearing them disappear. While I rummage through the dresses, I am conscious of the narrative I want to create and I grasp onto the slip, the undergarment which Peggy sometimes keeps private.

I take off my clothes and stretch my arms over my head as the slip slides down my body. I smooth out the wrinkles of the imitation silk and shift the tiny straps on my shoulder. I take pleasure in the intimacy it reveals, that element of seduction shown after all the dresses are taken off and the certain self-possession it takes to wear it. My weight shifts and my posture straightens, I feel confident in the slip as I reach for the other dresses. Typewriter keys clink as I pull out the black dress and I can’t help but place them back into their respective closures. I caress the rough fiber of the silk and I find the hidden pocket where a small notebook could be kept. This dress feels the way it is intended to look, professional and sleek. The fit is tailored to my curves and accented with fluid seams and subtle details. It is hard to wear it without conviction and when I fold the dress over my arm, I am delighted in that thought.

Then my eyes linger on the vibrant red dress in front of me. The simple style of the dress and how it wraps around my body seduces me. It is a chance for me to let my inhibitions go and be the person I should be in it. I lay it on top of the black dress and stroke the smoothness of the silk as I lean toward the final dress in the closet. I lift it out and immediately drape it over my arm, so my other hand can grab onto the layers of silk that fall to the floor. Its weight demands a certain kind of presence. I can’t help but dig my hands into the folds and hold onto them, as if I am telling it that I won’t let go.

I place the dresses on my bed and remember that they share a distinct characteristic on left side, either divided by the cut of the fabric or a fastener, which I designed to emphasize the difference between left and right, public and private. It is more apparent in the slip. The black lace contrasting with the cream colored fabric, which conceals the heart and soul (of Peggy). I glance back to the closet and notice another dress hanging further back in my closet. I reach in, my hand wraps around the thickness of the fabric and its rough texture lightly brushes my arm as I pull it out. Various colors of red add depth to the surface of the dress. The myriad of texture causes
a rush of excitement to come over me from the thought of wearing it.

This dress differs from the rest, it demands a more aggressive participation from me to make it come alive. It is designed to be a fragment of a whole, torn from my shoulder to my opposite hip. It bares my breast and my stomach, while covering what is typically exposed in other dresses (my arms and legs). It brings out a confidence in me that not only influences the character of the dress and myself, but also alters how I act in the other dresses.

The more I put myself in the dresses, the more they are a part of me: the creases left from sitting in it, the different weights each dress has, how the texture feels on my skin, and how it moves with my body. I look at the dresses lying together and consider the specific places, private or public, expected or unexpected, that takes Peggy where she does and doesn’t belong. I pick them up and hold them close to my body. I take a deep breath knowing when I walk out that door that I am creating a narrative of the dresses in order to find Peggy’s. Once I put on a dress, I become her.

My bare feet leave a trace on the soft green grass as I walk through a cluster of trees carrying the excess fabric of my dress. The creaking of overhead branches drowns out the distant sound of cars, and I find the ideal place for a private performance. I pause in the center of few a trees and I let the folds of the dress fall to cover my feet. I focus on the trees in front of me, and I imagine someone is watching me, someone who I want to watch me. I don’t hesitate to grab onto my dress and take it off.

As soon as I step out of the pool of fabric, I want to take another layer off. A blur of red catches my eye as the next dress falls. I no longer am aware of the park around me or the fantasy of someone watching me: I am in this moment between staying in the black dress and shedding it, feeling that I am all of these moments. I am the dresses left on the ground and the one I am about to take off, a reflection of who I am becoming.

A train passes by; the clatter of its wheels on the track echoes the rhythm in my chest. I am fascinated by the fast-paced motion and the urgency to be somewhere. This urge to keep up with the rhythm of the train prompts me to shed my uncertainty and hesitation, and leave it all behind. There is purpose to my movement, I want to imitate the blur of the train, obscuring the meaning of private and public with the undressing of each dress I am wearing.
I am obsessed with the feeling of the folds and the weight of the fabric in my hands. I let my fingers intertwine with the creases of silk, listening to it whisper something to me. This room fills with the sound, my body relaxes and I close my eyes. I think about the drink I left at the bar close to the man who could not stop staring. And then my thoughts keep wandering from where I am sitting on the couch to my hand, to the fabric in between my fingers, and then to the deep red carpet at my feet. The dress holds me, but I can't seem to find a decent thought to keep me seated here.

I wear this gown. The weight of the silk reminds me of a burden. It hides the other dresses underneath, almost as though I was hiding a secret. I handle it with care, not allowing it to drag on the ground. I keep it pristine and regard it with respect. And then something changes. The more I wear it, the more I think it needs to be messed with. If this is my collection, my sole identity, the one people see, shouldn't it show the history of where I have been and not remain idle and perfect?

It is too pristine, too much of one thing, too easy to be pretty in. I want to drag it on the ground. I want to show more wear and tear as if I never took it off. I want to be in water to baptize it, to cleanse it, to muck it up. I want the fabric to be altered by the water, to see its movement. I want more, more teasing it out of its so-called beauty.

I am left with the thoughts, the ones in the letters strewn around my feet that no one will read. I gather them up from the dusty desert floor, not wanting them to scatter with the slight breeze. I can smell the dryness of the desert as I crouch closer to the ground. It clings to my feet, like the slip on my skin, as I walk on its cracked surface. The sound of the paper rustling seems to evaporate into the air. I look around me and I am completely isolated. The vast emptiness arouses all my senses, and I abandon the letters on the hardened ground. I grab hold of the slip from the bottom and lift upwards. I let go of the crumpled mass and I walk away from the discarded artifacts unnoticed.
I have sense of calm in the vastness of my surroundings. This is the moment I desire, to forget why I am here. It doesn’t matter. I am no longer alone in the desert; my thoughts are stirred by the faint sound of water that seeps through the dense forest. My own impatience begins to interrupt my moment of calm. It is too much for me and I begin to run into the depths of the trees. I am a blur of red against the bold green leaves that pass by with every stride I take. I soon find myself on the banks of a rushing river. As my feet sink into the sand, I feel the dress begin to draw out my confidence and influence my actions. I take a step toward the water. I grab onto the torn remains of the skirt and lean over the still water at the bank of the river. My reflection isn’t me; it is an obscure portrayal of someone else outlined by bright reds and a nearly exposed body from the tattered dress.

I feel vulnerable, leaning against a forgotten building. My posture reflects my uneasiness with my surroundings, but I continue to wait here while the traffic from above echoes off of the neighboring warehouses nestled under the overpass. I shift my weight and use the building to keep my right side propped up. The subtle sound of silk against the brick draws my eyes downward and I can’t help but notice the delicate pink fabric wrinkled and messy. The slip beneath peeks out from below, but I don’t feel a thing. My mind begins to shift like my body against the building. Light rain taps onto my skin as I become more aware of where I am. I shed my inhibitions and tease out how the dress is making me feel. I ease into my pose and become the dress that is being eyed from across the street, from behind, and from above. I am daring a subtle response from whoever comes upon me under a busted sign. I am no longer waiting for myself to become her, I already am.

The hotel room is all but quiet except for the faint voice of a blues artist coming from the record player across the room. Poised on a soft bed, at ease in my femininity, the red dress slips from my shoulder. The morning light shares in my vulnerability, and, in this moment, I feel seductive. I feel beautiful. I feel like a woman. And I want him to find me and remember this moment with me. I haven’t felt like this in a long time, and, as if the dress sensed my feelings, it softens and responds to my posture. I cannot help but think that maybe Peggy had the same feeling, in the same kind of moment, in which she found herself wanting someone to see her as she was.
AN [intimate] INTERLUDE

SECRETS - dear love  
SCENTS - memories kept  
SLIPS - intimacies between
Undress: A Patron’s Identity in Six Moments

The making and inhabiting of her narrative is embodied through exposing the layers of her identity in six moments of Undress. The undressing motion begins to blur the distinction between Peggy’s public and private identity. In the last moment she is left in her slip which still hides her unmentionable, private self.1

Moments

One: the white formal gown: identity of her collection

Two: (blur)

Three: the red party dress: identity of her lovers and artists

Four: (blur) the black business dress: identity of her correspondences

Five: (blur)

Six: the slip: identity of her self

1. “In this process of distancing, the memory of the body is replaced by the memory of the object, a memory standing outside the self and thus presenting both a surplus and lack of significance. The experience of the object lies outside the body’s experience—it is saturated with meaning that will never be fully revealed to us.” Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1984), 133.
The history of The Palazzo Venier dei Leoni can be traced to its inception in 1748. It was designed by the architect Lorenzo Boschetti for the Venier family, one of the oldest Venetian noble families. Construction ceased at the first floor. Abandoned due to exhausted funds, it is the only unfinished palazzo on the Dosoduro side of the Grand Canal.1 The Venetians nicknamed it the “palazzo non finito,” the “unfinished palazzo.”

The courtyard boasts one of the largest gardens in Venice, full of age-old plants. It has been said that a lion was kept in the garden, hence the “leoni” in the name. The garden had also been home to many other exotic animals when the legendary Marchesa Luisa Casati, a patron of art and fashion, settled into the palace in 1910. She transformed a palazzo in disarray from years of neglect into a magnificent palace on the inside, but retained the decaying exterior. With her bravado lifestyle and sensational parties, she revived the palazzo for a brief time to its almost-grandeur as a completed palace.

After the Marchesa, the palazzo was bought by the Viscountess Castlerosse,2 who installed six black marble bathrooms and central heating. Peggy Guggenheim purchased the palazzo from the Viscountess’s heirs in 1948. With minimal renovations to both the interior and the exterior, her home and collection opened to the public three years later. Peggy also added a one-story loggia, which she called her barchessa3 on the southeast side, to make more room for her collection.

Peggy had always intended to open a museum since her decision to close her gallery Guggenheim Jeune in London. When she moved to New York City, she had a collection to do just that. Her home at Hale House on Beekman Place was intended to also be her museum, but the local regulations did not allow a museum in the neighborhood. She would later open her gallery, Art of This Century, with her permanent collection. Her devotion to art bled into her private home as she would keep some pieces of her collection at Hale House to feel closer to them. When she moved

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3. A Venetian wing for storage of grain and hay. It was designed to imitate the wing of the Palladian villa Emo at Fanzole. Guggenheim, *Out of This Century: Confessions of an Art Addict*, 355-6.
into the palazzo in Venice, she was finally able to live with her art.\textsuperscript{4}

The palazzo had been left unfinished since abandoned by the Venier family. It had been used as a modest boarding house prior to Marchesa Casati’s tenure, and, after the Viscountess, it had seen occupation by three armies. The low-slung building with a presence on the Grand Canal was an ideal place for Peggy, as both a home and museum.

The large interior courtyard was well-suited for parties and an outdoor sculpture garden. The flat roof gave her an ample place for sunbathing; it would be the neighbors’ sign of spring to see Peggy lounging on her roof after a long winter. Her earring collection hung on her bedroom walls like the art in the rest of her home, and the room seemed to be the proper place to not only reflect her own personal adornment, but also the water from the Grand Canal. Her modest furnishings and ornamentation complemented her art collection, placing emphasis on how the room worked together as a personal living space and art gallery.

Peggy also added to the reputation of the palazzo with her scandalous bohemian lifestyle, her highly-regarded art collection, and well-known parties. She soon established her palazzo and collection as a reputable destination. She became known as the l’ultima dogaressa (the last duchess), an honorable title from the Venetians.

Through the history of the palazzo, a trace of each of its previous inhabitants had been left behind. Whether it was piece of local legend, a reputation, or physical changes to the building, the additions could not complete the purpose of its place on the Grand Canal until Peggy became its patron. It was her desire to live with her collection and open a museum that finally completed it. Her place, “now bearing her name on its facade, testifies to the daring imagination, and dedication of a woman”\textsuperscript{5} who ultimately finished the history of the palazzo and of herself.

\textsuperscript{4} In a letter to Clement Greenberg, she said “I am where I belong, if anyone belongs anywhere nowadays”, dated 2 December 1948. Sandra Chait and Elizabeth Podnieks, ed., Hayford Hall: Hangovers, Erotics, and Modernist Aesthetics (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 2005), 41.

\textsuperscript{5} Lord, A Gift for Admiration: Further Memoirs, 110.
A container is a re-action to the tracing of the memory of my movement within Peggy’s palazzo and the inherent need to emulate the relationship she had with her home and museum. It begins with a slow delicate movement toward an opening in the fabric. Tracing the outside surface of the container, the slight breeze from passing by disrupts the fabric and leaves a memory of the movement that has passed. Upon entrance into the enclosure, a bare open space is contrasted with four dividing rows of fabric on the opposite side. At the end of each row, with the exception of one path, a dress of Peggy Guggenheim on display is visible from the threshold of the pathway. When stepping into the intimacy of the narrow paths, the semi-translucency of the fabric obscures the other layers of the enclosure and incites movement between them, creating the play “between the public and the private, between display and hiding.”

The path without a dress continues into a small private chamber with a single object hanging on display, the last remaining layer of Peggy’s privacy, her slip. The longing to touch the fabric, to feel the texture on the skin, especially when compelled to move between the divided paths, deepens the experience. The fabric’s seemingly dormant state alters when it is touched, moved, and passed by. It becomes a pliable surface that reacts to the movement of the body and the gestures of the hand touching it. (The movement through the installation is captured on film: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=80OOvQaWyyp](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=80OOvQaWyyp))

In a sense, this movement is an “imperceptible transition between the inside [private] and the outside [public], an incredible sense of place, an unbelievable feeling of concentration when we suddenly become aware of being enclosed, of something enveloping us, keeping us together, holding us.” The experience is more than just the footsteps that trace the intentions of the installation. It is also the feeling one achieves by being in it, which is not static, but shifts like the fabric by the passing movement.

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6. “Since our feelings and understanding are rooted in the past, our sensuous connections with a building must respect the process of remembering.” Peter Zumthor, Thinking Architecture (Baden: Lars Müller, 1998), 18.

7. The installation’s organization of private ‘side’ her dresses, her public ‘side’ her museum. Both ‘sides’ started to shed that distinction when the installation was experienced. Stewart describes “the spatial organization of the collection, left to right, front to back, behind and before, depends upon the creation of an individual perceiving and apprehending the collection with eye and hand. The collection’s space must move between the public and private, between display and hiding.” Stewart, On Longing, 154-5.

8. Peter Zumthor’s interpretation the tension between inside or outside, which translates into the “thresholds, crossings, the tiny loop-hole door...” Peter Zumthor, Atmosphere: Architectural Environments-Surrounding Objects (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2006), 47.
CONCLUSION(s)

This thesis is a collection of Peggy Guggenheim’s identity through her histories (public and private), her architecture (museum and home), and through personal experience (memories and artifacts) that creates a specific narrative in how we understand and engage architecture. It offers an approach to understand an existing building through the role of the patron as an essential aspect to the creative research that is absent in the discipline of architecture. The patron is the foundation of the existence of architecture, whether the work is commissioned or an existing building, it situates Peggy Guggenheim as a valid asset in the study of architecture. She is rooted in the palazzo; in its meaning as a museum, home, and historical building, and in how we experience it by walking through the space with an awareness of the art, the architecture, and its history. We can then begin to “identify ourselves with this space, this place, this moment, and these dimensions become ingredients of our very existence.”

I have come back to the place where I began; passed the threshold of her museum, through the foyer where the Calder mobile slowly turns from an unnoticed breeze, to sit on the white leather couch facing the Grand Canal. But this time, I slow down to touch the walls, stand in front of each painting, and breathe in the space I am in. I find her narrative in the dusty corners of the rooms, from the memories kept in the closets, and beneath the paint on the walls. I imagine her next to me drinking a cup of coffee while she tells me how much the place has changed since she left; white walls have replaced the colorful ones, doors have been taken off their hinges, and the paintings aren’t where she left them. Does she regret leaving her art collection and palazzo to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation? Not at all she would say, my collection is where it belongs, in my home.

I glance around the room, conscious of her presence in the art on the walls and in the palazzo that bears her name. I walk out into the hallway toward the entrance, where the Calder mobile still slowly turns. Its delicate balance evokes my thoughts about this place that blends with my memories of becoming her. All of this exists because of her. I head back into the quiet side streets of Venice, the sound of the canal echoes off of the surrounding houses as I glance back towards the palazzo, knowing she was right, she is the museum.

further Conclusion

I step onto the dry, cracked desert floor in my bare feet. I feel alone in this act, but this is what I want; something private that I can reflect upon later and remember what it was like to be in that moment. I unwrap the plastic that covers a stark, white dress. It is a dress that I did not make, which sets it apart from the other dresses, with a predetermined identity as an existing artifact. The dress has only been slightly altered by various small, perfume bottles stitched on the inside of the dress and gathered where the heart is, on top of the left breast. They are meant to hold fluid that will affect the fabric, not only on a physical level, but also a visual one.

I pull the dress over my head, shifting my body to get it to fit properly. I fill each bottle with blood and I am careful not to spill. I try to reconcile my thoughts about the pending act and I am already reacting to what is lying against my skin. A distinct odor invades my nose and I try to turn my head away from the smell, but to no avail. It is only a matter of time before it won’t matter anymore. I fall to my knees and cradle my breast as the bottles clink together. I take a deep breath and force the blood to drain out onto the fabric.

The blood saturates the dress and begins to drip through my fingers and trickle down my arm. It does not stop seeping through the fabric. I let it continue until there isn’t any blood left in the bottles. The stain has soaked into the cotton, spreading further from my breast until my entire left side is completely covered. I wait until it dries to do it all over again. The repetitive act of bleeding and the layers of the stains are the visual record of the intimate relationship between Peggy and her palazzo. The dress being the palazzo, the bottles are herself, the blood is her devotion, and I am wearing the experience of that intimacy.

What is left of the dress is ashes. Even though I have been removed from the dress, the experience still lingers and the memory of wearing it remains. It is similar with the other dresses; once I take off the dresses, I am no longer her, yet the experience of Becoming Peggy is still a part of me. This is what architecture is and how it is understood, by the experiences that are inseparable from ourselves and our senses.

“Our domicile becomes integrated with our self-identity; it becomes part of our own body and being.”

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2. Pallasma, The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses, 50. Pallasma also states that, “all experience implies the acts of recollecting, remembering, and comparing. An embodied memory has an essential role as the basis of remembering a space or place.”
Appendix A

What follows is a series to further the narrative of Peggy through the final artifact of the stained white dress. Peggy immersed herself into her collection and her palazzo, and I would do the same with this dress. The blood is absorbed into the remnants of an already-stained white dress. The impact of the images are meant to relate the experience of the moment, but for me the memory of the experience is still present in all my senses.

a.i. Photograph by Tia Nii, July 2009

a.ii. Photograph by Tia Nii, July 2009

a.iii. Photograph by Tia Nii, July 2009

a.iv. Photograph by Tia Nii, July 2009
Appendix B

The following series of images supplements the main images found within this volume in dressUP and continue Peggy’s narrative when the dresses are worn in a particular place.

b.i. Photograph by Tia Nii, July 2009

b.ii. Photograph by Tia Nii, July 2009

b.iii. Photograph by Tia Nii, July 2009

b.iv. Photograph by Tia Nii, July 2009
Appendix C

What follows is a series of sketches of the dresses and the garments\textsuperscript{1} themselves used in dress\textsuperscript{UP} and Undress. These drawings were essential for the design process, from the concept through all phases of making the dress to the completed garment.

\begin{itemize}
\item[c.i.] Sketch of initial design of Peggy’s identity
\item[c.ii.] \textbf{WHITE}
Sketch of the white gown with final material choice and dress
Formal Gown
An elegant dress designed with multiple folds that form into pockets to carry artifacts and a collection.
\item[c.iii.] \textbf{RED}
Sketch of the red dress (shown in pink) with final material choice
Party Dress
A wrap dress designed for a sleek and vibrant look with three buttons on the side designed to resemble the simple style from the 1920s.
\item[c.iv.] \textbf{BLACK}
Sketch of the black dress with final material choice
Business Attire
Professional in its appearance, it is accented with typewriter keys as its closures and dons a pocket for a small notebook.
\item[c.v.] \textbf{SLIP}
Sketch of the slip with final dress
Undergarment
An intimate layer that can be worn under any of the other dresses or one its own.
\item[c.vi.] \textbf{ANTI-HERO}
Sketches of the anti-hero and sketches showing “The Antipope” painting by Max Ernst, initial designs and final dress
Adaptation
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{1} All dress images were scanned by Beeline and Blue of Des Moines, IA in July 2010.
The weight of the "collection" dress/gown seems to feel almost like a 'burden', but a burden willing to carry, worth walking around with.
The "Second" layer - Her Artists

Infamous by the artists she collected something simple, buttons for elegance, reveals the black dress below (hints at the next layer)

I still feel this one is missing something, maybe it is the fabric choice.
The third layer = Letter

idea of having a dress representing Peggy’s intimacy with her friends when she connects with them with her letters.
The final layer: slip, representing her closest identity - herself. What is hidden is parts of her heart and her soul; glimpses into who she really is, parts of her you may never know until it's stripped away.
the dress needed to show the "knot" from the body, to show the organic structure upon the rest of the dress.

red linen was used to represent the draping affect of the look and cotton gauze with gathered fullness. The dress was (is) based on an interpretation of The Antipope by Max Ernst. "The Family Portrait" as Peggy Guggenheim described the painting. The figure of the left was a portrayal of Peggy herself facing Regeen in her white. Ernst places the red and yellow and another...
Appendix D

d.i  SECRETS - dear love
the dress of her letters¹
photograph by Cameron Campbell, December 2008

83

d.ii.  SCENTS - memories kept
the dress of the intimacy of her hair²
photograph by Cameron Campbell, December 2008

84

85

85

d.iii.  SLIPS - intimacies between
the dress of her personal habits³
photograph by Cameron Campbell, December 2008


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