

Kristen Lubben, "Milagros de la Torre." In *Dress Codes: The Third ICP Triennial of Photography and Vide* (New York: International Center of Photography and Steidl Publishers, 2009)

Throughout her career, Milagros de la Torre has explored the traces of hidden and often violent narratives to reflect on their broader social and political implications, particularly within Latin America. In her 1996 project *The Lost Steps* (1996), de la Torre created detailed records of forensic evidence from several high-profile criminal trials at the Court of Justice in Lima, such as the infamous case of the psychologist who, during police interrogation, used his belt to choke an accused rapist to death. Her enigmatic photographs of these objects, often personal effects and clothing, do little to elucidate the motive or context, pointing instead to complex and passionate histories.

Her most recent series, *Bulletproof* (2008), reflects her ongoing fascination with objects that reveal histories of power. Beguiling in their apparent simplicity, these photographs use a straightforward approach to record what appear to be everyday articles of clothing – a T-shirt, blouse, blazer, or sports jacket – which conceal their rather shocking function: to protect the wearer from gunshot wounds. This designer line, the only one of its kind, is sold in unobtrusive luxury boutiques in Bogota and Mexico City.

De la Torre's highly detailed images reveal small clues as to the garments' true function: a hint of the armored breastplate is just discernable under the light blouse, the small zipper on the T-shirt's hemline provides a clue as to how the armor plate is inserted and removed, the 'platinum' garment labels indicate the level of protection provided. Photographed on their hangers against a white background and printed life size, these disembodied garments float in the frame as though awaiting the viewer to claim them. By denying a human model, the garments also allow the viewer to speculate as to the circumstances of the men and women who wear them, and the dramatic conditions of this necessity. Worn by politicians – including, allegedly, President Obama on Inauguration Day – and the rich and famous, such bulletproof clothing caters to an elite clientele which has come to expect the discrete protection offered by this armor-plated apparel.