

Amant

Women's History Museum

Grisette à l'enfer

Amant, Brooklyn, NY

September 18, 2025—February 15, 2026

Grisette à l'enfer is the first institutional exhibition in the United States by Women's History Museum (WHM), the collaborative art and fashion practice of Mattie Barringer and Amanda McGowan. Working across garments, sculpture, print, video, and performance, WHM examines the visual and material culture of fashion to trace the entanglements of femininity, labor, and value. They often reconstruct historically lost subjectivities shaped by the ways fashion exploits the emotional, psychological, and social desires projected onto the feminine.

The exhibition at Amant lends its title from the *grisette*, a figure that emerged in 17th-century France to represent the working-class women behind the fashion industry—milliners, seamstresses, flower-makers, and shopgirls who were both producers and consumers of style. Frequently romanticized in literature and art, *grisettes* were celebrated for their autonomy, financial independence, and creativity, yet routinely sexualized and reduced to stereotypes. The *grisette* was revered and dismissed in equal measure and occupied a space of contradiction—neither muse nor menace, both visible and overlooked. WHM returns to this figure not to reclaim her as an ideal, but to examine the tensions she holds: at once a laborer and a symbol of style, exploited and inventive, legible and unstable.

Grisette à l'enfer, or “*Grisette in Hell*,” invokes this archetype as a contemporary avatar of survival and exhaustion through newly commissioned sculptural installations, a couture garment series, and a set reminiscent of *Théâtre de la Mode*—a 1945 traveling exhibition of miniature haute couture mannequins. The *grisette* inhabits an environment that reimagines the aesthetics of bygone retail spaces, overtaken by nature and decay, an echo of economic systems in decline. WHM's reinterpretation replaces postwar optimism with a vision of post-capitalism: 18th-century mannequins on loan from The Metropolitan Museum of Art alongside others, cast in wax and welded steel, clothed in distressed garments fashioned from hosiery, coins, bobcat claws, mother of pearl and antique casino chips, porcupine quills, taxidermied pigeons, and ermine tails. Their figures populate a ruinous commercial landscape as draped fabrics spill from skylights, a shop counter becomes a reliquary, and the boutique is recast as a shrine to desire unraveled.

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Through this tableau, WHM insists on the relevance of the grisette—not as a relic of fashion past, but as a lens through which to view the enduring conditions of gendered labor, aesthetic production, and social precarity. *Grisette à l'enfer* mines retail culture to illuminate the overlooked spaces where style and fantasy have long converged. In this realm, the feminine is not simply adorned—it is occupied, strained, and continually redefined.

Women's History Museum was founded by Mattie Barringer (b. 1990) and Amanda McGowan (b. 1990) in 2015 out of the desire to create novel and previously unseen images of beauty. The duo engages with fashion as a medium that has the potential to exist beyond regurgitative spectacle and the ability to change the fabric of reality. Their art practice is dictated by meticulously sourced historical materials and collaborations with other artists who often double as models in their fashion shows. Solo exhibitions include *Museum Manu* (2025), Company Gallery, New York; *Screens*, Forde, Geneva (2024); *The Massive Disposal of Experience*, Company Gallery, New York and CCA, Berlin (2022); *MORT de la MODE...Everything Must Go!*, Company Gallery (2021), New York; Women's History Museum Biennale: *Poupées Gonflables*, Springsteen Gallery, Baltimore (2019); *Her Bed Surrounded by Machines*, LUMA Westbau, Zurich (2018); *OTMA's Body*, Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York (2018). Recent group shows include those at Rumpelstiltskin and the Pratt Manhattan Gallery, New York; Analog Gallery, Beacon, New York; Champ Lacombe, Biarritz, France; Fitzpatrick Gallery, Paris; Performance Space, New York, and the Contemporary Art Centre, Riga, Latvia.

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