

## THE BEAUTY OF THE BULGE

Following in the tradition of the fig leaf, the codpiece as we know it evolved out of modesty in the 1400s when previously individual men's stockings were joined into tights. Intended to shield innocent eyes from the evils of rising tunic hemlines, the piously unobtrusive pouch soon took an errant turn and earned its place in the history of male strutting.

By the early 1500s, designers realized the false advertising potential of the little sack and the codpiece began to grow. By the 1530s, men of fashion wore stuffed slings exaggerated well beyond any natural protuberance—often causing noticeable bulges even when worn under skirts. With little space in the engorged casings taken up by the actual family jewels, codpieces were sometimes used for stowing other small valuables. Among those obsessed with preening, the padded units were daringly used as pincushions providing for on-the-spot adjustments of one's outfit.

In the 1550s the Spanish took the codpiece to new heights. Seeking to boast the manliness of their soldiers as they embarked on conquests, they affixed faux erections to their engine covers, a short-lived trend, alas, as the trendy Spaniards, perpetually in need of a new



**Siobhan Arnold**, "The Horror of Nothing To See," 1996,  
Leather, string, upholstery

look, had nowhere to go but down. Under the fashion conscious reign of the effeminate Henry III of France, the codpiece slowly diminished until it fell completely out of vogue around 1600.

Back for one more round, "The Codpiece Project" at Griffin Linton Contemporary Exhibitions in Venice, California, includes contemporary cups by 50 artists asked to reinterpret the male objet d'art. Kim Abeles, Christel Dillbohner, Tom Knechtel, Dan Manns, Manuel Pardo, Lori Precious, Steve Roden, Kerri Sabine, Tyler Stallings, and Daniel Wheeler are among the artists included in the exhibition. Twenty percent of all proceeds will go to Visual Aid, a non-profit organization dedicated to raising money for the photo documentation of work by artists with AIDS.

"Making Mischief: Dada Invades New York" at the Whitney Museum of American Art, November 21, 1996 through February 23, 1997.

"The Codpiece Project" at Griffin Linton Contemporary Exhibitions, December 1, 1996 through January 18, 1997. (310) 452-1014.