



MEN'S SUITS CHARLES LEDRAY 2009 COMMISSIONED AND PRODUCED BY ARTANGEL, PHOTOGRAPHY BY TOM POWELL, COURTESY SPINONE WESTWATER, NEW YORK

The Art of Disguise

Charles LeDray is one of America's most fascinating artists. And in some ways, his work is the gayest, even though he doesn't actually speak about his sexuality publicly. But if you dig deep, all the signs are there. His sculptures – incredibly detailed copies of everyday objects scaled down to a third of their real life size – sometimes express it overtly in their titles (one work, featuring various kinds of casual and industrial men's hats hung in a line on the wall, was titled *Village People*). But often it's a realisation you get from just *looking* at it.

His first large UK exhibition is *Men's Suits*, a commission from the arts organisation Artangel that's taken LeDray over three years to make. As James Lingwood, Artangel's co-director explains, there are three sections in the work: "The first is a tailor's dummy dressed very smartly next to a table of ties. The second is a display rack and a table with piles of T-shirts and things like that. The third looks more chaotic – piles of stuff on ladders, an ironing board... it looks like a preparation for things to be consumed again. Within that there's this rack which has clothes hangers without any clothes on." Typical of the kind of

detail LeDray employs, Lingwood adds: "He's made all those by hand. Metal ones, plastic ones he's had cast and wooden ones he's carved – 50 or 100. Just looking at these hangers with nothing on them, that's an amazing visual moment."

So, what does it all mean? Well, you have to make your own mind up (LeDray is guarded about his work). But when previously asked about the work *Village People*, he is on record commenting, "It's all drag isn't it?"

"Clothing is broadly speaking a surrogate for identity," explains Lingwood. "You can construct your identity, at least partially, through the choices that you make. What does wearing a suit mean? And I suppose in a way, one of the questions is – do these things reveal identity or do they conceal it? Is it camouflage or projection?"

If there's one thing most gay men appreciate (apart from – well, you know), it's the ability to adapt depending on the circumstances. Straight acting, butch or camp? "It's all drag." ■ Joe Heaney

For more details, visit www.artangel.com