



Figure 66.

Carlos Villa

Kite God, 1979. Paper pulp, gauze, rooster and pheasant tail feathers, 87 x 109 x 2 in. Collection of the artist.

(PHOTO: CHARLES STEPHENIAN)

Part of a series of coats and cloaks begun in 1971, *Kite God* is a reflection of Villa's personal, hybrid mythology. Canvas, feathers, handmade paper, and other natural materials have been painstakingly layered and stitched together in a repetitive, meditative process of delicate handiwork. The result is a magical garment, invested not only with the power of the ritualized labor that went into its creation, but with the spiritual and animistic associa-

tions of the feathers, implying flight, and a communion with nature. However, the coat is lined with taffeta, a material that Villa associates with the ceremonial garments of Catholic priests. By including this man-made material, Villa evokes the sense of ritual and mystery familiar to him from his upbringing in the Catholic Church. The cruciform shape of the coat is also a reference to the influence and psychic significance of Christianity. Encouraged by his cousin, artist Leo Valledor, to study the work of Henri Matisse, Villa was strongly influenced by Matisse's designs for and of the Chapel of the Rosary in Venice, including a paper maquette of priestly vestments. By blending these diverse traditions in a single

garment, the coat reflects not only Villa's concern with the mystical, but the hybrid and syncretistic character of his Filipino American identity. In fact, the proportions of the coat are based on measurements of his own body. By essentially mapping powerful symbols from various religious and artistic traditions onto an image of his own physical form, Villa creates a portable emblem of his own spiritual, cultural, and intellectual mythology. The coat creates a tangible relationship between the spirit world and the body, speaking not only of the transcendence of Christianity and the animism of shamanistic beliefs, but of a complete fusion of the two.