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# Falling-Apartness

## Vessels of Decay

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A thesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
of Master of Design

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## Abstract

### Falling-Apartness: Vessels of Decay

Falling-Apartness takes the position that there is inherent decadence in decay. Objects and places that have been discarded are eventually reclaimed by decay where they exist as a shadow of former vitality until oblivion. This research project seeks to disrupt the temporality and placement of decay in clothing by pushing the structural limits of its tangibility and function. Through this, the project seeks to challenge the role of clothing as providing shelter, warmth or protection by designing clothing that seeks to expose the vulnerability and mortality in its wearer as it decays by ripping, un-weaving and crumbling apart. Perspectives on decay, clothing, fashion and death are explored through writers such as Daniel Trigg, Ghassan Hage, Walter Benjamin and Giacomo Leopardi. The Aesthetics of Decay, a set of principles, were incorporated as they observe the key reactions of the relationship between clothing and wearer. Practice-based and reflective-practice methodology are implemented to position iterative design and diarising as methods to gain new knowledge as part of an original investigation involving practice and the outcomes of that practice. Falling-Apartness seeks to explore and contribute to the dialogue between decay, clothing, fashion and death. It is a recognition and inquiry into the decay between whole and disintegrating, life and death.

Keywords: Clothing, Decadence, Decay, Fashion Design, Found Objects

You must fix your heart,  
And you must build an altar where it swells,  
When the storm, it gains and the sky, it rains,  
Let it flood, let it flood, let it wash away,  
And as you stumble through your last crusade,  
Will you welcome your extinction in the morning rays?  
And as the swarm it calls, we lay in the foundations of  
decay.

- *My Chemical Romance, Foundations of Decay*

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*Attestation of Authorship*

*I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted or the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.*

*Signed:*

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## Research Question:

How might a disruption in the temporality and placement of decay in clothing and wearer push the limits of its tangibility and function, contributing to dialogue on decay, clothing, fashion and death?

## Introduction

Decay and decadence are etymologically intertwined, 16th Century *décadence* is defined as decay, a deteriorated condition. Since earlier they existed as a singular word, Latin as *de-* ‘apart or down’ and *cadere* ‘to fall.’<sup>1</sup> Anthropologist Violeta Schubert discusses the nuances of the term decay by first referencing the Merriam-Webster dictionary definition; decay as a gradual decline in strength and vigour, a decline into a worse condition.<sup>2</sup> Through her lens of the Macedonian language, their word, *raspagjanje*, describes a decay that is scattered and omni-present, where it exists everywhere and nowhere.<sup>3</sup> The project therefore defines decay as a falling-apartness, the process of falling-apart from a former state of vitality. This fashion led inquiry examines the relationship between clothing and the wearer as a process of falling apart and us as vessels for decay, just as clothing is.

We carry it with us, embody it and enact it on the world.

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1 ‘Decadent | Etymology, Origin and Meaning of Decadent by Etymonline’, accessed 13 May 2023, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/decadent>.

2 Ghassan Hage, *Decay* (Durham, UNITED STATES: Duke University Press, 2021), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aut/detail.action?docID=6711054>.

3 Hage.

# Open the Cascading Curtains

## Structure of this Exegesis

The first chapter, *The Foundation of Decay* establishes a contextual foundation for this inquiry through analysis of several creative works. With a focus on decadence, fragility and transience, work by illustrator Takato Yamamoto and artist Margit J. Füreder will be analysed. This section also positions *Falling-Apartness* in ways of fashion-design practice, look and aesthetic in comparison to fashion designers Hussein Chalayan's 1993 *The Tangent Flows* and Martin Margiela's 1997 9/4/1615 collections. *The Foundation of Decay* is critically informed by the theorising of decay by anthropologist Ghassan Hage and philosopher Dylan Trigg.

*Evanescence Hue* builds upon this foundation through discussion of the methodologies that have been implemented to carry out this inquiry. This includes Practice-Based Research (PBR) and Reflective Practice. Included in the next section *Golden Thread, Ritual Shroud* the different methods that have been used to generate findings and propel the progression of the project are explained. *Golden Thread, Ritual Shroud* is an exploration of what decay might look and feel like, the textures involved, the craft and the perspective behind it. This is shown through iterative design methods in different mediums; mood boards, ceramics and flax weaving which has led to the burial of fabric and found objects. Reflective practice describes the two diaries used throughout the research project as data collectors, one for sketches and wide format notes and the second for contextual development and findings.

In *Dawn* (Part 1) the practice employed for the development of the project towards the decay of clothing are documented and discussed with key findings and development. In *Dusk* (Part 2) the clothing and wearer are brought to life through material conversations and reflections through poet Giacomo Leopardi's *Dialogue Between Death and Fashion*.

# **Chapter One Contextual Framework**

## Foundation of Decay

## The Magus

In his book *Necrophantasmagoria*, Yamamoto depicts The Magus, an enigmatic figure wearing layers of clothing decaying on top of a blacked-out background.<sup>4</sup> Atop the Magus' head, he wears a hat shrouded in pearls that seem more akin to small rocks, the lace at his neck and wrists like an algae bloom. He is doused in detailed frills at his neck and wrists, contrasted with draped fabrics cascading in waves of entrails from his waist down. A crescent moon sits dormant to the left of his head. A littering of granules flows into a whirlpool, spreading out past a partially swallowed skull. The granules tip over a ledge invisible to the eye, taken by the darkness. Eventually spilling down, its materiality disintegrates into the blackness and what is left gathers at the bottom of the illustration. An individual asleep underneath, blanketed by roses and thorns. Growing from this, contorting bones grow from the roses. A small sleeping face slowly becomes absorbed in the spill of the void.

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4 Takato Yamamoto, *Necrophantasmagoria Vanitas*, n.d.

Figure 1. Takato Yamamoto, *The Magus*, inked illustration, 2004.

The stark blackness of the background brings out the details of the work. Like putting a spotlight on something displayed in a darked-out room. It casts a black hue upon the entire work, the details of the world in this illustration spilling out inside the blackness, becoming invisible and disappearing. Within the Magus' hands is a sphere like a partially broken egg, inside is the same owl that is perched on his shoulder. The lore behind this illustration describes how he can manipulate this orb to show him fantasies of many things. They manifest, floating out of the pool under the moon, melting and altering their shapes together until they disappear into the blackness.

Falling-Apartness is concerned with envisioning clothing that exist in a decaying state, a place of continual transience, positioning the wearer at the behest of decay. A key concern of the project is to explore the role of decay in fabrics and found objects and to investigate the aesthetic use for them if they were to be resurrected into clothing artefacts. For Yamamoto, decay is illustrated through the whimsical transience and the decadence of objects in their intricate fragile beauty that oscillates between present and absent.

Trigg similarly suggests that when an object is subjected to decay, we become intrigued because it does not reflect its prior splendour.<sup>5</sup> Yamamoto's Magus and his other works reflect a gravitation towards decay by invoking curiosity through odd shapes, fragmented forms and choices of imagery. The Magus ask viewers to depart from the perspective that all decay is visceral, grotesque or revolting, rather, it can also have qualities akin to rebirth, transformation and evanescence. Trigg goes on to state, "Having fallen from active time, the ruin becomes disjointed from time," which can be similarly applied to objects as well.<sup>6</sup> Through a state of transience, objects become more noticeable. This state of transience is reflected in the elongated form and silhouette, of the Magus. Both my practice and the illustration depict motifs like the melting of different fabrics, its edges disappearing into the blackness of the background, the decayed fabric's edges turning to dust as it falls. It also has led me to use a variety of fabrics and found objects to reciprocate that curiosity in the fragmentation and transience of different materials through different processes of decay and how that might change the wearer.

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5 Trigg, *The Aesthetics of Decay: Nothingness, Nostalgia, and the Absence of Reason*.

6 Trigg.

The fragility of the details in Yamamoto's work influences the style and pattern of embellishment in later iterations of the buried clothing. As observed in *Burial*, when the ruffles on a shirt become fragile and begin to fall apart, they leave traces of overlocking that is now redundant to form and function. Thin, apprehensive lines have paved the way for the imaginary in the *Magus*. Similarly, the details on my illustrative inquiries have reflected gestures of the decay. I have also tried to incorporate a frilly, decadent, eccentricity throughout the selection of my found objects and curated them through a process of decay to reflect the aesthetics conveyed in *The Magus*.

Illustrations from his other book *Rib of Hermaphrodite* also demonstrate a strong aesthetic sense of *Falling-Apartness*. Works such as *Vampire-Metamorphosis II* and *Burial Games* all depict dramatic scenes of a human (or vampire) shrouded in a variety of decadent materials, however, they all have deteriorated aspects. They seem to be falling apart, transforming, or emerging as lost fragments of something. It feels as though they are in decline of their prior state of pristine, their vitality slowly declining and a transient decay ensuing until oblivion. The decay outlives the death of the figures in Yamamoto's illustrations, pervading until nothing is left to fall apart.

Figure 2. Takato Yamamoto, *Vampire-Metamorphosis II*, inked illustration, 2007.

Figure 3. Takato Yamamoto, *Burial Games*, inked illustration, 2007.

## The Decision

Margit J. Füreder's paintings are a narrative kaleidoscope of fleeting moments and dramatic gestural landscapes with a focus on human figures. Füreder's process of painting with thick acrylics and other mediums, layers textures on top of each other which coalesce in her artwork.<sup>7</sup> Füreder experiments with harmonic and disruptive tones of colour and movement.

The Decision depicts a woman who seems to be emerging from the background into the foreground, walking towards the observer, her lower legs and feet hidden by tall black grass, that is scratched into with white streaks. There is a dark splattering seeping outwards from her head and arms as if she is emanating decay that is warping and fragmenting the space around her. Layers of blocked out, detached squares emerge from the painting, decaying in and out of the foreground and background. In The Decision she floats between existence and mortality, the threshold between life and death, negotiating the line between real and transcendental.<sup>8</sup> Füreder, as though an archaeologist, excavates and reveals the forms underneath the surface, exposing an intimate state of transformation through decay. The variety of mediums she uses slowly begin to mix and layers dry and decay as others are iterated on top, revealing forms that emerge from the painting.

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7 'Once Upon a Time', margitfuereeder, accessed 7 May 2023, <https://www.margitfuereeder.com/blank-mpvle>.

8 Margit J. Füreder, '2020', margitfuereeder, accessed 7 May 2023, <https://www.margitfuereeder.com/2020?pgid=l3b8qtgc-b3f70cfd-5b75-409c-90b2-e2b395715de0>.

Figure 4. Margit J. Füreder, *The Decision*, acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 2020.

According to Trigg, decay in objects and places are an attack on a fixed image of temporality and progress, especially in contemporary society.<sup>9</sup> With a hyper fixated mentality towards things that are pristine and new, we devalue decay and imperfections. Nature itself is rejected or at least resisted. Füreder has honed her craft of layering and excavation which explored imperfections and at times allows for a co-designing relationship between herself and the mediums, letting go some of her agency.

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9 Trigg, *The Aesthetics of Decay: Nothingness, Nostalgia, and the Absence of Reason*.

This is perforated in this research project, the element of spontaneity and embracing imperfection through the lack of agency during the burial processes. A similar crafting and curation process to Füreder's developed through the collection and assortment of the fabric and found objects into clothing. As I worked the unwashed decayed fabric and found objects with my hands, they shed dirt and some of their parts slowly came undone or broke apart. Like the work of Füreder that it is in constant transformation, these fragments contributed to the decadence, the sense of decline, the loss of pristine, even if not seen directly. Slowly, the fabric and found objects are changing and they exist in a transient state.

Deterioration has become integral to the visual language of Falling-Apartness. A deterioration of the silhouette is imagined to be one that is elongated with the found objects and details embellishing the clothing. The silhouette of the figure in Füreder's painting notably mirrors the verticality of the forms produced from the draping section and will contribute to the final silhouette design.



## Mapping the Land

Of import to this inquiry into decay is Hussein Chalayan's 1993 graduate collection *The Tangent Flows* that incorporated garments which were buried in one of his friend's gardens for six weeks filled with iron fillings. After it was taken out of the ground, the clothes had assumed a rich golden-brown patina.<sup>10</sup> The iron had stained the fabric permanently, the richness of the colours and the textures evoking deterioration, desiccation and further the extent of burial processes on clothing. On this he mentions in an interview, "...I liked the idea that you can look at clothes and immediately understand that they went through something, or that they were the result of some action."<sup>11</sup> This collection had engaged in letting go of agency by being underground, the natural processes that occur invisible to the eye.

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10 Caroline Evans and Caroline Edwards, *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity and Deathliness* (Yale university press, 2003).

11 Dazed, 'Inner Space: Hussein Chalayan', *Dazed*, 5 August 2013, <https://www.dazeddigital.com/fashion/article/16705/1/inner-space-hussein-chalayan>.

Figure 5. Hussein Chalayan, *The Tangent Flows*, photograph of garment buried with iron, 1993.

Figure 6. Hussein Chalayan, *The Tangent Flows*, photograph close up of garment patina, 1993.

Figure 7. Hussein Chalayan, *The Tangent Flows*, photograph of model wearing buried dress at show, 1993.

Falling-Apartness has taken inspiration from the action of burial and exhumation as I was fascinated with that ritual. I wanted to build on Chalayan's statement, the action of putting an object through something and the reaction of people recognising something had happened. What would then happen if clothing and found objects were put through a process which initiates rapid decay and how would the relationship between clothing and wearer change? This was a main point of difference, rather than burying garments I had designed, I was concerned with observing the decay in found clothing objects and then reimagining their fragments as they fall apart, into clothing.



Figure 8. Te Rina Coffin, *Buried Blouse*, with model Jabez Perida, 2023.

A collection that plays with the concept of temporality is Martin Margiela's 1997 *9/4/1615*.<sup>12</sup> In this collection he disrupts the temporality of clothing and depicts how time has departed from its linear journey. Margiela worked alongside a micro-biologist to use bacteria in clothing. After leaving the bacteria on the garments to sit, it began to grow and interact with the fabric. He explores the temporality of decay through this process where it would normally take years to decay this way, succeeding in a matter of days. This introduces a key aspect within the discussion of decay and time for this project, where *Falling-Apartness* explores a disruption in the temporality of decay in clothing. Unlike Margiela, the disruption comes from the relationship between decaying clothing and living wearer. As two forces they enact change upon each other rather than from the nature of the material.

Figure 9. Martin Margiela, *9/4/1615*, photograph, collection on display, Netherlands, 1997.

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12 Evans and Edwards, *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity and Deathliness*.

There are similar elements between Chalayan's and Margiela's collections. They explore the process of life, burial and resurrection, which reflect the natural cycle of creation and death, and that of the consumer cycle of buying and discarding. In Margiela's collection, accelerated decay reflects the accelerated consumer cycle. This research reflects on fashion's ability to incessantly renew itself, however, the individual pieces of clothing are left to decay once discarded.

Figure 10. Martin Margiela, *9/4/1615*, photograph, collection on display, Netherlands, 1997.

This project decays clothing and found objects before using them in design as an inquiry of objects in decay. The importance of mixed fabrics and found objects is due to the variant nature of decay in different forms. It is not simply about collecting these things and burying them and putting them together but about the relationship these objects will have to each other and the wearer. By applying methods of design to the clothing and it being worn, the clothing is invigorated. Intimacy between clothing and wearer demonstrate the connection our bodies have to decay and mortality. The clothing on wearer becomes a disruption of temporality and vessel for decay.

## The Aesthetics and Temporality of Decay

This project aims to disrupt the temporality and placement of decay in clothing by pushing the structural limits of its tangibility and function. Hage reimburses this, stating that decay has a temporality, a pace of existence and a spatiality. We notice decay more when it occurs at what we consider to be an unusual rhythm or pace, either too quickly or too slowly.<sup>13</sup> This project has incorporated a set of processes; fragility, deterioration, transformation and invigoration which transform both the living wearer and the decaying clothing. Through these decaying processes Coming-Apartness challenges the role of clothing as providing shelter, warmth or protection is challenged.

Decay enhances fragility in the clothing and the wearer, as they are now active participants in the experience of continual falling-apartness. It embodies and acts as deterioration upon the wearer by exposing their vulnerability and mortality as it disintegrates by ripping, un-weaving, crumbling. As the structural integrity of clothing is decreased, the act of someone wearing it makes it deteriorate even more, triggering it into rapid decay. Through the act of wearing, the decayed clothing becomes animated, it becomes invigorated. This disruption in temporality and defiance in what we presuppose the purpose of clothing to do is explored. What transformations, related to decay, occur in both the wearer and the clothing? What becomes of the value of ourselves and clothing in the face of disruption in temporality and placement? What is the dynamic interplay of living wearer and decaying clothing and vice-versa?

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13 Hage, Decay.

This project explores these questions by positioning itself with Hage's statement that, "many theories presuppose that decay, the death of some prior forms of organising or being, is necessary for creativity, innovation and rejuvenation."<sup>14</sup> This project interprets this as, the decay of clothing, the death of its prior forms, is necessary for creativity, innovation and rejuvenation of its modern rendition.

Reflecting this, clothing artefacts and fabrics have been selected to undergo burying processes which accelerate exhibited signs of decay and deterioration. In this stead, the project designs clothing which are perpetually suspended in a state between decay and rejuvenation, through the dynamic between decaying clothing and living wearer. This brings attention to the temporality of the modern clothing artefact, where decay exists as a prolonged death, its materials unable to be changed by human agency to complete the cycle with expected temporality. That is, many artefacts of modern clothing are discarded yet do not decay as quickly as our understanding of when they should. This struggle in avoiding decay and death is reflected in philosopher Walter Benjamin's observation:

The modern woman who allies herself with fashion's newness in a struggle against natural decay represses her own reproductive powers, mimics the mannequin and enters history as a dead object.<sup>15</sup>

Benjamin expresses how fashion creates death through its avoidance of decay by constant renewal and at the same time renders the wearer lifeless. This statement explores how struggling against natural decay in pursuit of fashion, that is, constantly renewing oneself, ceases the transience of aging, the deterioration of the body, where she therefore is like the mannequin, as a stationary object. Benjamin's view of the modern woman is reversed in this project, where rather than entering history as a dead object, avoiding decay by reinventing oneself, the wearer enters as a transient object, one of continuous transformation and mortal fragility. The wearer and the clothing alike become ornaments disrupting time through a reciprocal relationship of change.

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14 Hage.

15 Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', 1942, 9.

## Constraints

Constraints on the project were placed as controls for the selection of found objects and the burial process. Natural fabrics and synthetic fabrics were integrated at later stages as they reflected the confrontation of accelerated decay and death in modern clothing that is discussed above. It is recognised that in the project there is an element of high-risk. Decay in clothing tests the limits of structure and therefore evokes fragility where there is high-risk of ruination. As the clothing is decayed further by the act of wearing, the risk of ruination is increased. Rather than manage this, as a co-designer to the project it has been embraced. As the clothing is worn or handled it continued to fall apart, only worked on to fill a form or embellish it with other similarly decayed found objects and materials. It is this falling apart and exposing the wearer that is part of the core transformations.

The Aesthetics of Decay has informed the palette where earthly, deathly colours and tones have been utilised. A lot of these have come about by using ivories or creams that can be easily imbued with colours from the dirt and iron that is buried with them. Clothing which had less structural integrity were adopted with darker base colours to observe how decay may take on different colours within different bases, but to also add variety to the palette. The constraint is avoidance of fluorescent or strong colours of high vibrance, this was to restrict the colour palette from varying too much and distracting from the embellishment of the found objects.

The use of found objects within the project is part of the invigoration of decadence in the wearer enacting on the decaying clothing. As a participant in fashion, incorporating a mixture of found objects at varying states of decay, furthers a sense of indulging in declining splendour, decadence. As part of the conversation of invigoration, the found objects were selected on a basis of being disjointed with time. That meant, finding objects that have a sense of decadence about them, it is not an easy thing to define and therefore was largely influenced by Yamamoto's illustrations. The use of pearls, frames, doilies and other assorted beads and jewellery for example, are manifestations of decadence, sourced mainly from second hand and vintage shops, in a state of decline.

## **Chapter Two Methodologies**

Evanescent Hue

## Practice-Based Methodology

Practice-based methodology is an integration of research and creative practice. Guided by practice-based research, my iterative design process has enabled me to explore a variety of mediums and methods to reimagine clothing through decay. It has allowed for the project to progress towards exploring the relationship between decaying clothing and living wearer. Reflection on the making and their development processes has been part of practice-based research and as a result, significant insight into the selection of the main materials to be fabric and found objects was gained. By integrating design, making, research and reflection, it has revealed new opportunities that has ultimately yielded creative outcomes, which has manifested as the making of clothing artefacts.

## Reflective Practice Methodology, Action Research

Reflective Practice methodology has allowed me to actively observe and analyse practices through diarising although it did become complicated as the project progressed. Reflective practice and action research allowed for critical analysis of the iterative design process and planning for the next steps. The use of action research became complicated as the processes evolved, as partial agency was let go and the invitation of material transformations occurred during the processes of decay. This is important to note as the action research oscillated between present and absent, continuing to transform even as the clothing was made and worn.

## **Chapter Three Methods**

Golden Thread, Ritual Shroud

## Engaging Decay

### Iterative Design Cycle

This research project challenged me to use different methods and mediums of exploration. In previous work I had solely used a linear design process which habitually consisted of, concept development, mood boarding, palette and fabric selection, design generation, design refinement, making and presenting. In this project I adopted a more opportunistic approach to my iterative design cycle using different mediums to evoke discourses and inquiries into surface texture, weaving, character and form. This dynamic approach offered unique insights into aspects of decay in different mediums that I was then able to apply to a range of materials, a variety of fabrics and found objects to generate a deeper discourse into the aesthetic and transient properties of decay in clothing.

## Evoking Reflection

### Diarising

Throughout the project I had adopted the use of two key diaries. The first focused on sketches and intermittent notes, these were opportunistic. For example, the different glaze experimentations in the ceramics section were noted as this data was necessary for further exploration or improvement and sketches of fabric or observations were made sporadically. The second diary was concerned with literary and concept-heavy documentation. It included key texts at pivotal intervals of the project, their annotations, and detailed planning notes. The separation of these two diaries meant that I was able to organise them despite their still correlated functions and find information faster by keeping them isolated.

## **Chapter Four**

### DAWN (Part I)

## Cascading Rituals

Cascading Rituals is the name given to the initial experiments, this section demonstrates the key learnings and opportunities that occurred which led to progression, insight or a pivot in the inquiry. This section, DAWN, covers the mediums used for exploration of surface texture, form, materials and narrative and their development through the use of the above methods. From this practice-based investigation I have gained a depth and breadth of insight in the subject of decay in different mediums and through different means. These findings have revealed how I was able to capture the beauty and decadence in clothing.

## Mood Boarding

Mood boards are a collection of visual objects, curated to effectively communicate concepts, ideas, feelings and moods.<sup>16</sup> As the project progressed the mood boards would be iterated, substituting or omitting images.<sup>17</sup> This was a process of visual iteration, it acted as a guide for the direction of the project. An example of this is Yamamoto and Füreder's work which were included in Mood III. The mood board reflected the tone, aesthetic and physical manifestations of the project through texture, form, silhouette, subject, details and colour palette.

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16 Tracy Cassidy, 'The Mood Board Process Modeled and Understood as a Qualitative Design Research Tool', *Fashion Practice* 3, no. 2 (1 November 2011): 225–51, <https://doi.org/10.2752/175693811X13080607764854>.

17 Cassidy.

## Mood I

Prior to decay becoming the central aspect of inquiry, the initial mood board explored desiccation through textures and forms. There was a dryness, a rawness to it, containing images of hair-like fabrics, shell-like silhouettes, frayed, matted fabrics and dry, plant-derived materials. The research at this time was concerned with an inquiry of mahi raranga<sup>18</sup> and Kākahu in the forms of traditional Māori weaving experiments and traditional Māori cloaks.<sup>19</sup> This research was rich in practices that were akin to that of the later adopted burial process. Mud tanning techniques used by Māori to darken black threads extrapolated from harakeke, described a process which required the threads to be submerged into solution before being dunked and left overnight in iron rich mud.<sup>20</sup> The results were a darkened fibre that could be used as thread to weave the cloak together. Notably, I was more intrigued by the prominent level of acidity left in the threads and how that would cause the textile to disintegrate at a fast rate over time.<sup>21</sup> Here were the first traces of the disruption of temporality in decay. Although in a different medium, I began to be intrigued by the disruption of time that the decay in these fibres possessed and was equally aware of efforts for the invigoration and preservation of fibres contained in Māori cloaks. From this, I observed that act of burying materials were both derived of very different contextual and cultural backgrounds and yet the act of burying or submerging beneath the surface of the earth both evokes conversations of decay.

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18 Traditional Māori weaving and techniques.

19 Awhina Tamarapa, *Whatu Kākahu: Māori Cloaks* (Te Papa Press, 2011).

20 Rangite Kanawa, 'TRACKING THE BLACK: APPROACHES TO RECONNECTING TĀONGA KĀKAHU (MĀORI TEXTILES) TO PLACE OF ORIGIN', *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, no. 31 (2018): 15–27.

21 Kanawa.



Figure 11. Te Rina Coffin, *Mood I*, mood board of printed images, 2022.

## Mood II

An iteration was required when the draping experiments I had conducted did not seem to reflect the progression of the project towards more specific concepts. The project itself became a reflection of solely traditional practice which was both constraining and not adding to discourse on the inklings of decay. Additionally, the technique and knowledge required to go explore mahi raranga and Kākahu were too deep for this project. After reflection of what I had achieved by exploring this mood board, a new iteration was made. This iteration meant a shift in the project, it was a visual indication of change.

The second iteration was a purely aesthetic exploration of decay and its relationship with clothing and wearer through imagery of intricate textures, details and vertically elongated forms. Through a purely aesthetic exploration of the project's direction, elements of decay were identified and given precedent. From this iteration, Yamamoto and Füreder's work emerged.



The final iteration of the mood board was concerned with visualising and refining the imagery of the project as well as its potential design outcomes. It was used to syphon down and focus on a more intentional visual inquiry into the decadent and disruptive aspects of decay that had only been hinted at prior. This board reflected on the burial practice experiments and the amalgamation of knowledge ascertained through ceramic, flax and draping experiments. It gave a sense of suspended temporality and an environment and atmosphere in which the wearer might adorn her clothes. This mood board visually discusses the elements of *The Aesthetics of Decay* and the relationship between decaying clothing and wearer. It does so by demonstrating elements of fragility and deterioration in the details of Yamamoto's work and the images of the frayed collared coat, shirt and scarf. Transformation and invigoration shown through a combination of images were used to explore environment, these were situated at an abandoned cement factory in Warkworth. I posited that perhaps she lived amongst the ruins of a decaying place that had long lost its function, left to decay until oblivion. The ruins of the factory, like the wearer, exists in a state between decay and invigoration as she finds fragments of clothing, adding them to her dress, the building around her falling away and yet also teeming with life. Visiting and acknowledging places like these were central to initial curiosity in this inquiry and a revisitation of that wonder is obvious in this final iteration.



## Ceramics

The use of clay in the project began with a fascination in the transience of clay and its ability to exist in many forms. The process of making raw clay into a form and before firing, the ability to be broken down, re-processed and made again is circular and transient. Clay in its malleable form can be adapted into many different forms, an aspect I investigated was the use of clay on a spinning wheel. By gutting and splaying the inside of the clay upon the wheel I was able to observe intriguing forms, which were iterated to display different aspects of transience and at times vigour. Invigoration of the ceramic vessels usually occurred once it was fired. Exploration using glaze, which was used as a textural exploration of deterioration and invigoration. Deterioration through firing processes which further reduce and make the form more fragile and invigoration through glazing which elevates the surface texture of the vessel.

## Feeling Form

In the initial clay throws, the greatest focus was on becoming familiar with clay and exploring how texture and form come together in an object. I was observing the lines embedded in the texture of the surface and the gradients it made. From different angles the shadows would dance around the inside of the piece, its transience even as a solid object demonstrated a unique likeness to decay. As dynamic form emerged, I was also curious about how an artificial aging process might change the textural surface of clay pieces and its potential to disrupt the image of vessel.

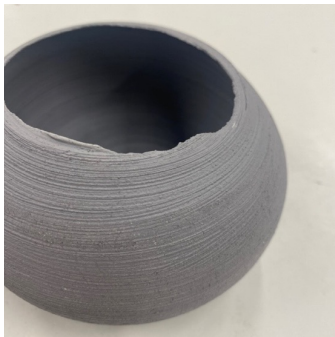


Figure 14. Te Rina Coffin, *Feeling Form*, thrown clay, 2022.

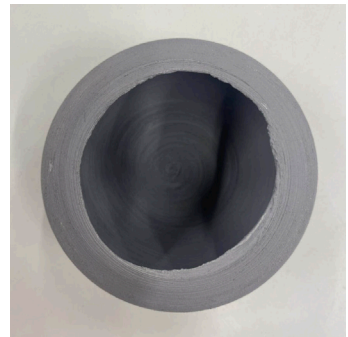


Figure 15. Te Rina Coffin, *Feeling Form*, thrown clay, 2022.

## Fragmenting Surface I

From this curiosity, research into different treatments that could apply to the surface of clay objects was conducted. I employed methods to recreate a desert-like fragmentation on the surface. After throwing clay into a form on the wheel, I dry the outside layer before adding layers of sodium-silicate and drying again with a heat gun before slowly pressing it out from the inside to split the outer layer of the clay. By pushing from the inside out it stretches the outer surface of the clay and the sodium silicate which has bonded that outer layer splits, pulling the surface apart and fragmenting it. The diagonal lines that are pulled by the fragmented texture have been adapted into the final clothing as handsewn lines of beading, slowing the vertical nature of the silhouette.

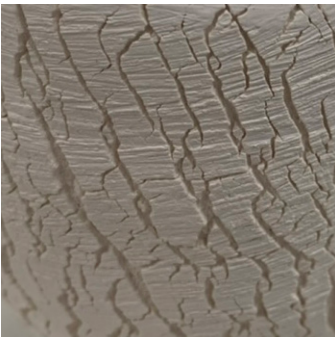


Figure 16. Te Rina Coffin,  
*Fragmenting Surface 1a*, thrown clay,  
sodium-silictae, 2023.



Figure 17. Te Rina Coffin,  
*Fragmenting Surface 1b*, thrown clay,  
sodium-silictae, 2023.

## Fragmenting Surface II

In this refinement of the prior experimentation, I wanted to see how far clay could be pushed in terms of fragmentation. A slightly different method was employed where I threw a cylindrical form before applying a thick layer of sodium-silicate and then re-throwing the same piece. As it spun around, I pushed from the inside out and it expanded, the thick coats I had applied splitting the surface, resulting in a surface with large gashes creating deep crevices.



Figure 18. Te Rina Coffin, *Fragmenting Surface IIa*, thrown clay, sodium silicate, 2023.



Figure 19. Te Rina Coffin, *Fragmenting Surface IIb*, thrown clay, sodium silicate, 2023.

## The Façade of Decay

Another key experimentation concerned the glaze of ceramics. This glaze is a magma glaze, and on the black clay it made uniquely patterned circular or barnacle-like craters on the surface. One could liken this to attributes of decay in Yamamoto's work as they are both a visual disruption of age and therefore temporality of decay.



Figure 20. Te Rina Coffin, *The Façade of Decay*, thrown clay, magma glaze, 2023.

Margiela's aforementioned collection is similar, employing a singular firing process to create the surface texture (around 8 hours) which by earthly processes may have taken decades or years. As a surface texture investigation, it produced a façade of decay, becoming something that is temporally indistinguishable, a rock of nature or a crude bowl made years past?



Figure 21. Te Rina Coffin, *The Façade of Decay*, thrown clay, magma glaze, 2023.

## Raku Firing Series

The process of raku varies greatly upon the circumstance and the materials available; this experiment was an inquiry into the letting go of agency as a part of decay's process. The nature of decay is that to an extent you are unable to predict what it may do to the material involved. The Raku Firing Series was integral to this insight and the adaptation of aging and decaying processes to fabric and found objects. Found leaves, the flame and aeration all played parts into the making of unique textural surfaces. This resulted in the surface of the glaze discolouring and fragmenting. In the vessel that had no glazing, the black clay became fragmented from the firing process and garnered a rich dark smoky layer on top.



Figure 22. Te Rina Coffin, *Raku Firing Series a*, thrown clay, raku glaze, 2023.



Figure 23. Te Rina Coffin, *Raku Firing Series b*, thrown clay, 2023.



Figure 24. Te Rina Coffin, *Raku Firing Series c*, thrown clay, 2023.



## Mahi Raranga

Mahi raranga, the traditional Māori practice of treating and weaving flax, used the elements of deterioration and transformation within The Aesthetics of Decay. It was concerned with not only the transformation of one form to another but the deterioration of the material it was made of.



Figure 25. Te Rina Coffin, *Kumara Kono*, woven harakeke, 2022.



Figure 26. Te Rina Coffin, *Kumara Kono*, woven harakeke, 2022.

In this series I learnt how to weave the *kona*,<sup>22</sup> *kono*,<sup>23</sup> and a *puti puti*.<sup>24</sup> Weaving would start with a folded shape (need to insert image) before then being turned inside-out into a two cornered bag. The duplicity of a slow transformation that harakeke undergoes from being flexible and malleable (green) to rigid and tough (brown) until finally beginning to break down as it deteriorates demonstrates the disruption of temporality. This process was reflected in the burial practices, where the fabric transformed from pristine to decaying and fragile. In the experimentation with harakeke, I wished to capture the point of no return and the layers of aging at play. I found that, the point of no return occurs once the fabric and found objects have entered the ground and been covered, locked in a transient state of decay.

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22 a two-cornered bag.

23 a four-cornered bag.

24 a flower.

Within the realm of mahi raranga, I had also tested the idea of found objects. These were second-hand duvet covers. When I had reflected on these experiments, it had deviated the inquiry by taking a literal approach by applying methods of mawhi raranga to found objects. This was because there was no inquiry into the aesthetic properties of decay. When compared to the contextual framework that developed out of the close readings and the parallels amongst the other practices and methods, this was a major outlier, and the project was promptly redirected. This redirection was guided by the Mood III mood board.



Figure 27. Te Rina Coffin, *Kumara Kono*, woven harakeke, 2022.



Figure 28. Te Rina Coffin, *Woven Sleep*, woven second-hand duvet inners, 2023.

# Burial

## Rust I

This project was concerned with the states of decay in fabric. I felt that it was necessary to observe decay and its influence on fabric through a burial process. This was initially brought about through childhood, where memories of gardening with my parents was looked upon fondly. The use of soil that brings about life and vigour and its ability to then take that life back was an initial curiosity. The first was Rust I where I buried silk fabrics wrapped with iron from my family's rusted brazier. The series of experiments I employed were aimed at observing the effects of fabric decay in different environments. The two shown above are enhanced images of the exhumed fabrics. One was damp in soil (Figure 21.) and the other was completely submerged (Figure 22.). They were both successful in demonstrating decay in fabric through absorption of colours, iron cuttings that had fused with the fabric and the fragility of the fabric. From this, I began to question the extent of the decay. What decay would occur if the variety of materials were left to the elements without many variable controls like the first experiment? How would the different materials react and change?

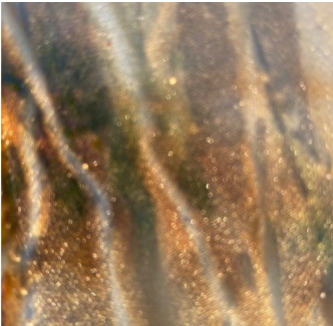


Figure 29. Te Rina Coffin, *Rust Ia*, iron, buried fabric, 2022.



Figure 30. Te Rina Coffin, *Rust Ib*, iron buried fabric, 2022.

## Rust II & Dirt

These questions were inquired in the next following series, Rust II & Dirt. This was another collection of buried fabric, packaged before they were exposed to dry air, in the bags they remained damp from being thrust out of the ground and sealed.



Figure 31. Te Rina Coffin,  
*Buried Blouse*, blouse, 2023.



Figure 32. Te Rina Coffin,  
*Buried cotton knit*, cotton, knit,  
2023



Figure 33. Te Rina Coffin,  
*Buried silk*, silk, 2023.



Figure 34. Te Rina Coffin,  
*Buried cotton blend*, cotton  
blend, 2023.

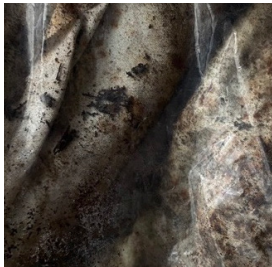


Figure 35. Te Rina Coffin,  
*Buried Japanese Silk*, Japanese  
silk, 2023.



Figure 36. Te Rina Coffin,  
*Buried Army Surplus*, canvas,  
2023.

The blouse is now transient in time, the once pristine cotton stained by dirt that crunched when handled. The shoulders seemed to sit away from where they were originally intended, threatening to shed themselves from the body of the garment. The ruffles had become tacked together where they once flounced. As I lay it onto the wearer, more dirt and pieces of shrivelled fabric began to fall away. It was retaliating against the force of a living being wearing it. Once the wearer had the garment on, she was animated as somewhat of a transient object, suddenly her image was fragile and disfigured like the blouse. As I handled the blouse to make it sit in place it ripped at the shoulder, exposing more skin, literally holding on by a thread. The collar and buttons of the blouse remained intact, as they were barely able to function. The back had completely fallen away, the only discernible features were the right shoulder which was mostly intact and a sliver of coagulated cotton that hung from the centre back to the side seam, draping in a frayed mess. The left sleeve from the back view also exposed a large section of the back, leaving the wearer very exposed.

It was clear from this experiment that in preparation of the final



Figure 37. Te Rina Coffin, *Buried Blouse Soiled*, Cotton blouse

burial, an even greater variety of fabrics were required to diversify the aesthetic and textural properties of decay. This was then considered for the selection of clothing which incorporated laces, velvets, satins, cotton muslin, taffeta and brocade. Materials such as the canvas were omitted as they were hardly tarnished by the burial process and did not match the concept inferred in Mood III. These are explored further in DUSK.

## Unlined, Lined

### Unlined Diary

Sketching in an unlined diary was used to iterate and process ideas reflected in the mood boards, ceramics, mahi raranga, burial and draping processes. It was a means to internalise, reflect and plan the next action.

Reflections in the journal, would include loose contemplation of the sketch, processes and what I would hope to pursue to further the line of inquiry. I found this method helpful as a form of venting, as the sketches progressed, I became more accustomed to the style of them tapered to the research and referencing some of the aesthetic inclinations of Yamamoto's work and the layered fragmented style of Füreder.

Although elements of the drawing endorse a sense of grace and fluidity, it does not necessarily reflect the core inquiry of decay as clearly as the top sketch. This then required further iterations and refinement. The style of the body of the second sketch was employed for future iterations but the style of drape and Grecian reference was omitted, instead turning towards a more gothic-esque decadence.

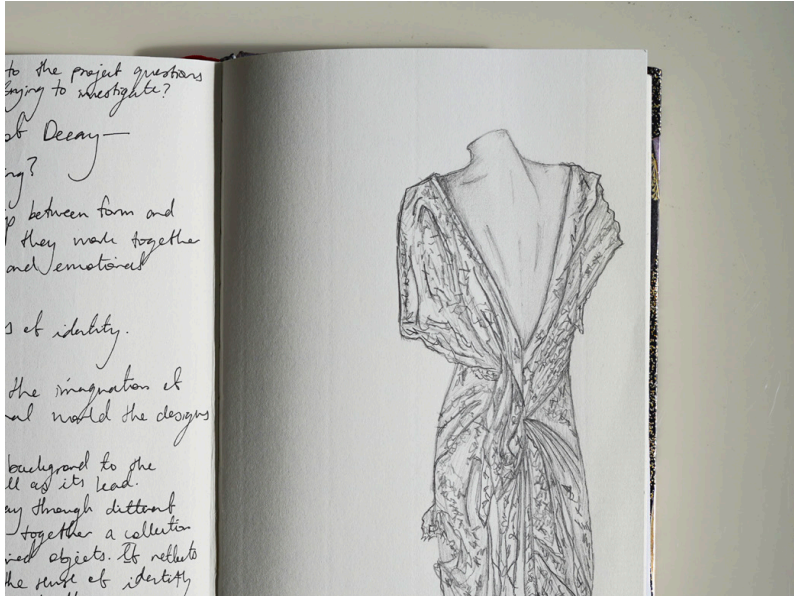


Figure 38. Te Rina Coffin, *Unlined Diary sketches & contemplation b*, ink on paper, 2023.



After draping the decayed fabric I was able to reflect a bit more about the nature of my practice. I had especially thought about how both Margiela and Chalayan had aimed the garments had then returned them toward. I had done mine the other way around. It was like constructing new things from decay vs them deconstructing things they made. I think that there are parallels between my process and some of the decay / stripping / destruction processes that I had learnt for treating fabric and my treatment of fabric before making it into something. The work becomes more of a conversation of reconstruction vs deconstruction and perhaps even a mix of that. I think my next step is to consider what other designers have tried to say about their collections and then see where I sit. Whether, simply put, I agree with them or not and why.

After the draping exercise I did today, I can honestly see why Chalayan's and Margiela's work is so profound. After putting a hand about through the burning ritual, it was really beautiful. It was also really peaceful to use the decayed fabric. There is more of a presence with fabric rather than a garment when you feel it, it could be anything. Ironically, that decayed material becomes invisible in some way, having the same possibility it was used than the final garment.

What do I want to say by saying and using fabric?

Figure 39. Te Rina Coffin, *Unlined Diary sketches & contemplation a*, ink on paper, 2023.

## Draping

Draping of different fabric at key points during the project reflected the shift between having the final clothing artefacts on a body versus suspended as an object. During the research there was a tension between whether I would visualise someone wearing the outcome or if it would be its own object without a subject within it. Through observations of other processes such as ceramics and mahi raranga, I had noticed that they had required me to enact upon them. This at first was an inkling, which developed into the integral relationship between wearer and clothing. It is clear from prior discussion that a wearer is integral to the invigoration of clothing, even more so when it is decayed. Draping helped rectify this as it was necessary to place fabric onto a mannequin, which mimics the wearer.

I had first used simple draping to accentuate the decaying process of the fabric, however, the decay observed in the found object, the blouse was more visually successful in reflecting the close readings and its more complex themes. Rather than being limited to fabric and designing in response to it, it provided the opportunity for an amalgamation of resources to be explored and therefore a more extensive physical representation of decay through its aesthetics and nature.



**Chapter Five: DUSK (Part II)**  
Crusted Pearls, Sullied Fabric

## DUSK

This section, DUSK, applies the findings of the experimental methods and adapts them into the line of inquiry concerning decay by exploring how it manifests on clothing and the wearer. Discussion of the final clothing for the exhibition and the display will be covered as a demonstration of the learnings in this project.

## Burial Types

### Refinement of Burial Process

The burial practice that was applied for the final work is built on Rust II & Dirt. The found objects and fabric were buried together under topsoil in Tauranga, the same place it had been in for the last two experiments. This was used for the final work as the colour and rate of accelerated deterioration was to an extent predictable and was successful from the two priors. I had everything, including the beads, necklaces, fabric and clothing touching the dirt while buried. This was extremely important as having the more natural fibred clothing near the top, was shown they would deteriorate faster as they were more exposed to rain seeping through and changes in soil temperature. The oxidation of the parts of found objects I had selected and the deterioration of the pristineness, would occur at an accelerated rate if they were buried directly touching dirt, which would expose them to moisture, minerals and organic life.



Figure 40. Te Rina Coffin, *Dirt Encrusted Pearls & Blouse*, Buried blouse & Pearls, with model Jabez Perida, 2023.

## Initiation of Falling-Apartness

My iterative design cycle was improved to accommodate for the relationship between clothing and wearer. It was clear that parts of the process needed amendments:

Initial iterative cycle: Concept development, mood boarding, palette and fabric selection, design generation, design refinement, pattern making, sewing and presenting.

Amended iterative cycle: Elements of decay as concept, mood boarding, close readings of key works, selection of found fabrics and objects, burial process, exhumation, draping, hand-stitching of clothing and embellishments, wearer fittings and relational observations, fixes, and presenting.



## Approaching Clothing

The contextual framework and each of the initial experiments contribute to considerations for clothing design elements, construction techniques and the interplay of decay on silhouette, proportion and fit of final work. Yamamoto has expressed before that his illustration style is 'Heisei Estheticism' which derives from Japanese Ukiyo-e manga and contemporary gothic horror.<sup>25</sup> The design of the clothing references intimacy to the body as well as a mix of gothic elements such as the intricate handwork, ruffled collars and cuffs and lace as consistent markers. These have been selected as they strongly display the effect of decay on the structural and functional elements of clothing. As a seam becomes decayed, it becomes weak, disintegrating and exposing the inner workings of the clothing, endings such as collar, cuffs and lace demonstrate these aspects effectively.

I have employed artisanal techniques in the draping, manipulation and embellishment of the clothing. More specifically, hand-stitching, hand-beading and pintucking to secure seams, found objects and embellishments. This choice was made for two reasons. One, because of the delicate nature of the decaying clothing and the ability to exert more control over the construction of the clothing by hand and two, to reflect the intimacy of the relationship between living and decaying. As I manipulate the clothing by hand, it also enacts on me, marking my hands with dirt and tarnish and falling apart as it wills it, challenging my skills and adaptability to invigorate it.

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25 PHANTASMIC, 'Takato Yamamoto', PHANTASMIC, accessed 16 May 2023, <https://phantasmic.com/collections/takato-yamamoto-1>.

The interplay of decay on silhouette, proportion and fit are now more clearly defined. From Füreder's and Yamamoto's work there is a clear association of the concept of decay to an elongated silhouette through lengthening or displacing proportion. To integrate elongation into the silhouette, the clothing is designed in a way which displaces the proportions of the body. Decay often occurs at the behest of gravity, creating a pulling down of materials towards the ground. Elongation of the silhouette is a recognition of this element of decay and aims to demonstrate the effect of decay on the wearer, as if she is slowly being pulled down as her clothing disintegrates.

The verticality of the clothing and the corresponding details are integral and affect the design of the proportion. I have designed the clothing to challenge the expected lines of proportion. To do this, I have adopted imagery from *The Magus*, where he is clothed in a blouse which slowly deteriorates, however continues to cascade down in billows. The deterioration of the top begins at the shoulders, where a frilly collar lies on top of an elongated doily-like shoulder lace, disrupting the proportion which follows the waist, hips and legs. Displacing the proportions of the body slightly by shifting them down creates an illusion encasing the real body, which demonstrates multifarious nature of the relationship between decay and the body.

## Clothing on Wearer, Wearer in Clothing

### Falling-Apartness Observations and Development

Clothing on wearer and wearer in clothing fascinations are evoked through the Aesthetics of Decay elements fragility, deterioration, transformation and invigoration and an integration of the romantic poem by Giacomo Leopardi, *Dialogue Between Fashion and Death*. The clothing is observed upon the wearer, now fragile and embellished with decadence which falls apart as the wearer slides it on. Dust from the dirt cascades off it, threads rip apart and fragments fall. The wearer, as well as accelerating the decay, invigorates it with their vitality.

*Dialogue Between Fashion and Death* explores the powerful connection between clothing and mortality.<sup>26</sup> Despite it being written before the development of the fashion industry's modern system of consumerism, it has a lasting sentiment. The poem presents fashion as kin to death, equally profiting by incessant change and destruction, although in different ways. Fashion describes its capacity to engage with our transience and fragile mortality by swearing loyalty to Death as it exerts decay on us, "Do you not remember we are both born of Decay?"<sup>27</sup> This is manifested as numbness, fatigue and discomfort by trends and customs that administer piercings, tattoos, diets, corsets and bonded feet under the pretence of adornment. Decay within the poem is more about a decay of the mind and body to remind us of our fragility and mortality through self-inflictions. To explore the use of adornments found objects were sourced from opshops, second hand and vintage stores. These places often house objects that are in some state of deterioration and are therefore in their temporally correct state of decay. I hoped to seek these pieces out to fragment their whole by accelerating decay.

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26 'Dialogue Between Fashion and Death | Vestoj', 25 March 2014, <http://vestoj.com/dialogue-between-fashion-and-death-on-giacomo-leopardis-poem-and-the-thin-veil-between-fashion-and-mortality/>.

27 'Dialogue Between Fashion and Death | Vestoj'.

As adornments they have an interplay with the wearer, they enact on the wearer as embellishment, another layer of transformation as the materials decay at different accelerated rates. The wearer enacts upon the adornments, perhaps beads fall from necklaces and metal in necklaces break as she moves, furthering a sense of fragility and deterioration in the clothing but also a sense of human frailty. The conceptualisation of Fashion and Death in Leopardi's poem further articulates that we are at their whim, unable to negotiate with fashion the extent of our mortality and instead are subjected to decay.

Figure 41. Richard Avedon, *From In Memory of Mr. and Mrs. Comfort*, a fable by Richard Avedon with model Nadja Auermann, photograph, 1995.

The project observes that rather than mortally struggling against decay and therefore fashion and death, the wearer becomes part of the clothing's transience. Trends within fashion are fleeting, as soon as they are incarnated, they are also doomed to die, and they reflect our own ephemeral nature. As with *Falling-Apartness*, Leopardi's poem is not a dialogue that is meant to make us feel belittled, it is simply an exploration of our nature and our relationship to fashion, clothing and decay. It is fashion's ability to renew itself which seems to avoid decay, but this project objects, what if we, as clothing and body succumb to decay? There is an opportunity to explore the undeniable beauty in decay's release, a way to come to terms with our own mortality through the experience of decayed clothing and the relationship it has with our bodies, which is reflected in its character.

Figure 42. Richard Avedon, *From In Memory of Mr. and Mrs. Comfort*, a fable by Richard Avedon with model Nadja Auermann, photograph, 1995.



**Conclusion: Findings**  
Vessels for Decay



Figure 43. Te Rina Coffin, *Buried Blouse & Pearls in motion*, buried blouse & pearls, with model Jabez Perida, 2023.

Through the exploration of decay in different materials, the nature of decay was revealed in mood boarding, ceramics and harakeke, which provided insight and was adopted for the investigation of the relationship between clothing and wearer. Disruption in the temporality and placement of decay through burial and design processes demonstrated that there is a dynamic exchange between decaying clothing and living wearer. These exchanges form *The Aesthetics of Decay*, described the processes as fragility, deterioration, transformation and invigoration. The clothing embodied and acted as deterioration upon the wearer which exposes a vulnerability and fragility that challenged the role of clothing as providing shelter warmth or protection. Through *The Aesthetics of Decay*, the value in decaying materials when applied to clothing revealed that the transformation, we see in decaying clothing is akin to our own transience. As an undead corpse dressed in decadent clothing, we emerge, defying the temporality of decay and vitality, clothing and mortality. The act of wearing decaying clothing deteriorates and simultaneously invigorates the clothing, where the wearer is found to have the ability to reanimate the clothing in a way which mirrors a liveliness, at the cost of further decay.

The final work that is in progress harnesses the learnings from DAWN (Part 1). It will consist of four full looks where they will be designed for a wearer and for exhibition. I will be demonstrating the four different aspects of The Aesthetics of Decay within them, with each look corresponding to either fragility, deterioration, transformation or invigoration. Rather than each look being of similar quality, I would like to in this way, highlight an aspect in each one. When on the wearer, they will elongate the body and emphasise their respective aspect. For the exhibition, the presentation will be slightly different, where they will hang, encasing a torso and cascading towards the ground. These will be suspended from chains and fixed to the ceiling. By presenting them this way, from afar it brings attention to the elongation of the silhouette by being suspended, evoking curiosity or perhaps uneasiness.

Upon closer inspection, the fragility in the details, with diagonal hand-sewn seams, beading and embellishment using the found objects will imply the disruption of temporality and placement. This is by hand-sewing diagonal, cracked lines of beading and embellishment which disrupts the vertical line of gaze. They will be allowed to be touched by the public, as still actively decaying clothing, I hope they will be experienced through touch. This demonstrates the wider conversation of how not only the wearer can impact the clothing, but observers, those that interact with the clothing will be enacting their force on the clothing. The nature of decay manifests in the final work through burial processes and the handwork that will pull them together and embellish them as they coalesce on the body.

Falling-Apartness wished to build upon the dialogue between decay, clothing, fashion and death that throughout fashion's history has reflected our own mortality, to reposition the meaning of clothing. The burial process of fabrics and found objects builds on an amalgamation of prior methods undertaken by Chalayan and Margiela, reinterpreted as a direct inquiry into our relationship with decay. The research also builds upon the dialogue between fashion and death which are apt in quality and quantity. Alexander McQueen's gothic-esque shows exhibited macabre lower jaw and spine metal jewellery in his Spring 1998 collection, Yohji Yamamoto's Fall 2015 collection playing with enigmatic silhouettes of cloaked death and elegance and Thom Browne's Fall 2015 collection of funeral attired models.<sup>28</sup> Aesthetics toying with interpretations of death and human frailty are recurring themes, Falling-Apartness contributes to this by revealing the hidden transformations of decay in the relationship between clothing and wearer.

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28 Essay: Dialogue Between Fashion and Death | SHOWstudio', accessed 14 May 2023, [https://showstudio.com/projects/behind\\_the\\_seams/dialogue\\_between\\_fashion\\_and\\_death](https://showstudio.com/projects/behind_the_seams/dialogue_between_fashion_and_death).

The research focused on the intimacy of decay enacting on clothing and wearer, however, there is an opportunity to take the research further. Discussions of texts from Trigg, Hage and Leopardi have contributed to this research project as part of a larger dialogue into the nature of decay and its relationship with humanity as it encroaches all parts of life. Leopardi's poem ends with a poignant thought that the unification of Death and Fashion would result in the following century being referred to as the 'century of death.'<sup>29</sup> How fitting is it that this poem reflects the universal state of mind in the 21st Century, long before its conception. Our own sense of impending doom towards decay is a by-product of consumption, proliferated by the bond between Death and Fashion. Fashion and Death exert their influence on human mortality through incessant renewal, which drives us to co-operate, the clothing enacting upon us and our bodies enacting upon the fabric. However, as part of this dialogue, Falling-Apartness recognises that we have the choice to embrace our ability to become vessels for decay by accepting our prognosis as transient beings or lean into the rhetoric the world wishes us to and become truly dead objects.

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29 Dialogue Between Fashion and Death | Vestoj.

## Final Collection Reflections

During the final making period, the clothes and materials were dyed, dried and draped. The dyeing of the garments dug out of the ground transformed their flat earth toned colours to create more dynamic colours and textures. The final collection revealed the oscillation of the research between life and death, vigour and deterioration, structure and fluidity.

The collection demonstrates and embodies the research fully, being made from and incorporating elements that I have explored throughout the masters programme.

In the future I will continue to refine these processes as they are my central ethos as a designer and artist.



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## **Appendix**

Falling-Apartness Pre-Exhibition



Appendix figures 44, 45, 46 & 47 by Te Rina Coffin, *Falling-Apartness: Vessels of Decay*, photographs, 2023.







F a l l i n g - A p a r t n e s s :  
Vessels of Decay Exhibition







Appendix figures 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55 & 56 by Te Rina Coffin, *Vessels of Decay*, exhibition photographs, 2023.















