

**A Vindication of Disorderly
Women: Using Contemporary
Fashion Design to Respond to and
Portray the Historical Exclusion of
Women from Tailoring Practice**

Gemma Goldfinch

2026

**Exegesis in support of practice-based Thesis
Master of Design
Auckland University of Technology**

(This page was intentionally left blank)

Abstract

Women have been discriminated against and excluded from areas of clothing production throughout history. In the Early Modern period (1500-1800), “disorderly women” reacted to their exclusion from tailoring guilds by mending and altering second-hand clothing for profit, despite the legal and societal barriers they faced. Fashion designers have explored feminist theory, historicism and unruly design through their practice. This research builds on all of their work and creates a new space through a fashion design practice that merges these contexts.

This research vindicates the disorderly women by using contemporary fashion design to respond to and portray the historical exclusion of women from tailoring practice. Practice-based research is supported by historical research and material culture studies. Storytelling and visual language are used alongside the principles of unruly design as methods that inform the approach to contemporary fashion design.

While the exclusion of women from tailoring is explored through the design output, the work focuses on celebrating the resilience and creativity of disorderly women. The way we wear clothing is questioned, resulting in disorderly garments. The garments empower women by encouraging creative freedom. This research contributes to the discussions about gender equality in the fashion industry. It shows that understanding the past is important to having effective conversations about the future of the industry.

Key Words

Fashion design, feminism, historicism, historical garment making, unruly design, tailoring, disorderly women

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 for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed

28 / 4 / 2026

Acknowledgements

To my supervisors, Andreas Mikellis and Lisa McEwan – Thank you for your support and encouragement. I appreciate the passion you have given to this project and the way that you challenged me. Your advice and perspective has taught me so much. Thank you for giving your time and energy to my work.

To my mum, Catherine, and granny, Margaret – I am deeply grateful to you for teaching me to sew. This project was built out of the knowledge you passed down to me. Thank you for your support, feedback and encouragement throughout this process.

To my dad, Andrew – Thank you for showing me the importance of creativity and for your ongoing support.

To my family – Thank you for your support. Thank you for always encouraging me to be creative.

To Mieke – I am deeply appreciative of all your support. Thank you for always being there no matter what I needed and believing in me. Thank you for your perspective and encouragement.

To my peers, Abby and Malika – The environment you created in studio has fuelled this project. Having you both around to bounce ideas off has enriched my work.

To Derek Nelson – Thank you for proofreading my thesis. I appreciate the time and consideration you gave my work.

To my friends – Thank you for supporting me and offering a fun place to take a break.

I would also like to acknowledge AUT for granting me a Postgraduate Research Scholarship. It gave me the ability to focus on the research and invest more in the material costs.

Thank you to all the disorderly women in my life. Mum, Granny, Narnie, Nana, Aunty Rachel, Aunty Rachael and Steph, you are my role models and have inspired this research every step of the way.

Lastly, Evie, Greta Noah and Anika, being your big sister encourages me to be a disorderly woman. I hope my work inspires you to be creative.

List of Figures

Figure 1. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Chemise</i> , 2026	cover
Figure 2. <i>Italian textile fragment</i> , 16th Century	1
Figure 3. <i>Italian textile fragment</i> , 15th-16th Century	4
Figure 4. Maria Grazia Chui for Dior, <i>Spring 2017, Look 18</i> , 2016	10
Figure 5. Judy Chicago, <i>The Female Divine, Runway Set for Dior Haute Couture</i> , 2020	10
Figure 6. Muccia Prada and Raf Simons for Prada, <i>Autumn 2025, Look 26</i> , 2025	12
Figure 7. Muccia Prada for Prada, <i>Autumn 1988, Look 31</i> , 1988	12
Figure 8. Madeline Vionnet, <i>Models in bias cut gowns</i> , 1930,	13
Figure 9. Elsa Schiaparelli, <i>Jacket from the Circus Collection</i> , 1938	15
Figure 10. Elsa Schiaparelli, <i>Lobster Hat</i> , 1930s	15
Figure 11. John Alexander Skelton, <i>Autumn 2026, Look 12</i> , 2026,	17
Figure 12. John Alexander Skelton, <i>Autumn 2026, Look 20</i> , 2026	17
Figure 13. Paul Harnden, <i>Jacket, Skirt and Shoes</i> , 2025	18
Figure 14. Karim Fares for Archivio J.M. Ribot, <i>Capsule XV, Autumn 2023</i> , 2023	19
Figure 15. Paul Harnden, Ben Rivers and James Holcombe, <i>Still from "The Lunch"</i> , 2026	20
Figure 16. Thompson and Co, <i>Cage Crinoline</i> , 1860-1865	22
Figure 17. Vivienne Westwood, <i>Corset and Mini Crini from Spring 1985</i> , 1985	23
Figure 18. Vivienne Westwood, <i>Autumn 1995</i> , 1995	23
Figure 19. Simone Rocha, <i>Spring 2026, Look 54</i> , 2025	24
Figure 20. Elena Dawson, <i>W. Cape Ties and Red Brooch</i> , no date	25
Figure 21. Alessandro Mendini, <i>Poltrona di Proust</i> , designed 1978, made 1981	27
Figure 22. Rei Kawakubo, <i>Autumn 2025, Look Two</i> , 2025	30
Figure 23. Glenn Martens for Y Project, <i>Autumn 2021, Look eight</i> , 2021	31
Figure 24. Glenn Martens for Y Project, <i>Autumn 2021, Detail of Look eight</i> , 2021	31
Figure 25. Ann Demulermester, <i>Six Hole Dress</i> , 1998	33
Figure 26. Rei Kawakubo for Comme des Garçons, <i>Clustering Beauty</i> , look 3, Spring 1998	34
Figure 27. Rei Kawakubo for Comme des Garçons, <i>Clustering Beauty</i> , look 36, Spring 1998	34
Figure 28. Rei Kawakubo for Comme des Garçons, <i>Body Meets Dress, Dress Meets Body</i> , 1996	35
Figure 29. <i>Italian textile fragment</i> , 16th Century	36
Figure 30. Marcellus Laroon, <i>Fair Lemons & Oranges</i> , 1688	39
Figure 31. Janet Arnold, <i>Pattern from Patterns of Fashion</i> , 1964	41
Figure 32. Judy Chicago, <i>Emily Dickinson place setting, The Dinner Party</i> , 1974-79	42
Figure 33. <i>Italian textile fragment</i> , 16th Century	46
Figure 34. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Visible History</i> , 2024	47
Figure 35. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Initial Moodboard</i> , 2025	48

Figure 36. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>(Mostly) British Fashion 1300-1900</i> , 2025	50
Figure 37. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>(Mostly) British Fashion 1300-1900, Detail</i> , 2025	50
Figure 38. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>(Mostly) British Fashion 1300-1900, Detail</i> , 2025	50
Figure 39. Vasamuseet, Jacket found in the wreck of the Vasa, c.1600-1628	51
Figure 40. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Vasa Jacket</i> , 2025	51
Figure 41. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Embroidery Samples</i> , 2025	52
Figure 42. Jane Bostocke, Embroidery Sampler, 1598 5	2
Figure 43. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>14th Century Womenswear</i> , 2025	53
Figure 44. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>14th Century Womenswear</i> , 2025	53
Figure 45. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Annotated toiles, 14th century womenswear</i> , 2025	54
Figure 46. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Half scale draping experiment</i> , 2025	56
Figure 47. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Draping experiment</i> , 2025	56
Figure 48. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Moodboard iteration</i> , 2025	57
Figure 49. <i>Italian textile fragment</i> , 16th Century	58
Figure 50. <i>Italian textiles fragment</i> , 16th Century	61
Figure 51. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Screen Print</i> , 2026	61
Figure 52. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Toile fitting</i> , 2026	62
Figure 53. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Sewing detail</i> , 2026	63
Figure 54. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Treadle</i> , 2026	64
Figure 55. <i>Italian textile fragment</i> , 16th Century	66
Figure 56. <i>Italian textile fragment</i> , 16th Century	69
Figure 57. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Print file</i> , 2026	69
Figure 58. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Print progress</i> , 2026	69
Figure 59. <i>Italian textile fragment</i> , 16th Century	70
Figure 60. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Print file</i> , 2026	70
Figure 61. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Print progress</i> , 2026	70
Figure 62. <i>Italian textile fragment</i> , 16th Century	71
Figure 63. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Print file</i> , 2026	71
Figure 64. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Print progress</i> , 2026	71
Figure 65. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Print mock up option one</i> , 2026	72
Figure 66. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Print mock up option two</i> , 2026	72
Figure 68. <i>Suffragettes in 'Votes for Women' sashes</i> , 1905	74
Figure 69. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Disturber sash</i> , 2026	74
Figure 70. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Disturber Sash</i> , 2026	75
Figure 71. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Chemise</i> , 2026	76
Figure 72. <i>Chemise</i> , 18th Century	77

Figure 73. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Chemise</i> , 2026	77
Figure 74. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Jerkin</i> , 2026	78
Figure 75. <i>Jerkin</i> , c.1555	78
Figure 76. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Trousers</i> , 2026	78
Figure 77. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Bodice detail</i> , 2026	81
Figure 78. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Bodice detail</i> , 2026	81
Figure 79. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Disturber sash detail</i> , 2026	82
Figure 80. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Disturber sash detail</i> , 2026	82
Figure 81. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Disturber sash</i> , 2026	83
Figure 82. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Chemise detail</i> , 2026	84
Figure 83. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Chemise detail</i> , 2026	84
Figure 84. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Trouser detail</i> , 2026	85
Figure 85. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Antique cutlery</i> , 2026	87
Figure 86. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Jerkin detail</i> , 2026	86
Figure 87. <i>Dorset button</i> , no date	88
Figure 88. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Trouser detail</i> , 2026	88
Figure 89. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Washers</i> , 2026	88
Figure 90. <i>Breeches</i> , 1780s	89
Figure 91. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Trouser detail</i> , 2026	89
Figure 92. Gemma Goldfinch, <i>Trouser detail</i> , 2026	89
Figure 93. <i>Italian textile fragment</i> , c.14th Century	90
Figure 94. <i>Italian textile fragment</i> , 16th-17th Century	93
Figure 95. <i>Fragment of a chausable</i> , Mid 15th Century	96
Figures 96 to 101. Paul Chapman, <i>A Vindication of Disorderly Women Exhibition by Gemma Goldfinch</i> , 2026	98-100
Figures 102 to 123. Jack Hancox, <i>A Vindication of Disorderly Women Look Book Images</i> , 2026	101-114
Figure 124. Jack Hancox, <i>Chemise detail</i> , 2026	119

Contents

Abstract	I
Attestation of Authorship	II
Acknowledgements	III
List of Figures	IV
1.0 Introduction	1
2.0 Contextual Review	4
2.1 Disorderly Women	6
2.2 A Vindication of the Rights of Women	8
2.3 Fashion Designers and Feminist Theory	9
2.3.1 Maria Grazia Churi	10
2.3.2 Miuccia Prada	11
2.3.3 Madeline Vionnet	14
2.3.4 Elsa Schiaparelli	15
2.4 Fashion Designers and Historicism	16
2.4.1 John Alexander Skelton	17
2.4.2 Paul Harnden	18
2.4.3 Archivio J.M. Ribot	19
2.5 Feminist Theory and Historicism	21
2.5.1 Vivienne Westwood	23
2.5.2 Simone Rocha	24
2.5.3 Elena Dawson	25
2.6 Unruly Design	26
2.6.1 Poltrona di Proust	27
2.7 Fashion Designers and Unruly Design	29
2.7.1 Rei Kawakubo	30
2.7.2 Glenn Martens	31
2.8 Feminist Theory and Unruly Design	32
2.8.1 Ann Demulermester	33
2.8.2 Rei Kawakubo	34

3.0 Methodology	36
3.1 Methodological Statement	37
3.2 Methods	38
3.2.1 Reflective Design Practice	38
3.2.2 Historical Research	39
3.2.3 Material Culture Studies	40
3.2.4 Storytelling and Visual Language	42
3.2.5 Unruly Design	44
 4.0 Project Inception	 46
4.1 Project Origins	47
4.2 Visual Explorations	48
4.3 Material Explorations	51
5.0 Design Proposal	58
5.1 Design Considerations	60
5.1.1 Fabrication	60
5.1.2 Patternmaking Techniques	62
5.1.3 Construction Methods	63
5.2 Final Research Question	65
 6.0 Documentation of Process	 66
6.1 Print Development	68
6.2 Patternmaking	73
6.3 Construction	80
6.4 Fastenings	86
 7.0 Discussion	 91
 8.0 Conclusion	 94
 9.0 Appendix	 96
9.1 Exhibition	97
9.2 Look Book	101
 References	 115

(This page was intentionally left blank)



1.0 Introduction

Figure 2. *Italian textile fragment*, 16th Century, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/>

¹ Osman Ahmed, "2025 Was The Year Of Fashion's Big Reset, So What's Next?," *British Vogue*, December 29, 2025, <https://www.vogue.co.uk/article/fashion-trend-predictions-2026>.

² Ahmed, "2025 Was The Year Of Fashion's Big Reset, So What's Next?"

³ Zoe Gunn, "Revolving Door: A Complete Guide to All the Fashion Creative Director Moves of 2025," *Luxury London*, December 4, 2025, <https://luxurylondon.co.uk/style/high-fashion-creative-director-moves-2025/>.

⁴ Gunn, "Revolving Door: A Complete Guide to All the Fashion Creative Director Moves of 2025."

⁵ "Why Are Only 12% of Fashion's Creative Directors Women?," Substack newsletter, *1 Granary*, February 18, 2025, <https://1granary.substack.com/p/women-make-up-74-of-fashion-courses>.

⁶ International Labour Office, ed., *Moving the Needle: Gender Equality and Decent Work In The Garment Sector in Asia* (International Labour Office, 2021), 3, https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@asia/@ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_807523.pdf.

⁷ International Labour Office, *Moving the Needle*, 3.

⁸ Jonah Waterhouse, "Why Are There Still so Few Women Designers at the Top of Fashion?," March 14, 2025, <https://www.vogue.com.au/fashion/news/women-designers/image-gallery/252ca792c47d19870c695261fd6b6057>; 1 Granary, "Why Are Only 12% of Fashion's Creative Directors Women?"; Emma Childs, "Where Are All the Women Designers?," *Marie Claire*, September 12, 2025, <https://www.marieclaire.com/fashion/lack-of-women-designers-creative-directors-in-luxury-fashion/>; Julie Boone, "Women in Fashion: The Industry's Persistent Gender Imbalance," *Nss Magazine*, March 31, 2025, <https://www.nssmag.com/en/fashion/40501/female-artistic-directors-absent-fashion-industry>.

⁹ Childs, "Where Are All the Women Designers?"

Labelled by Vogue as fashion's 'Great Reset',¹ luxury fashion saw drastic changes throughout 2024 and 2025.² The creative directors of 21 prestigious fashion houses were replaced over the two-year period.³ Of the 21 appointed, 14 were men and seven were women.⁴ Gender equality has not been achieved in the fashion industry. Eighty-eight percent of fashion's creative directors are men, despite women making up 74% of fashion design course graduates.⁵ It is also estimated that 80% of garment workers are women.⁶ The majority of these women work in developing countries for low wages in poor working conditions.⁷ With this in mind, should the fashion industry be 'resetting'?

The creative director appointments sparked debate regarding the reasons women do not reach positions of influence in an industry where they are the main consumers.⁸ The debate focused on the barriers women face today⁹ but rarely mentioned fashion's long history of excluding women.

This research uses contemporary fashion design to respond to and portray the historical exclusion of women from tailoring practice. A group of women referred to by historian Beverly Lemire as “disorderly women”,¹⁰ mended and altered clothing in the Early Modern period (1500-1800).¹¹ They worked in a disorderly way because they were excluded from male only tailoring guilds. This research honours their contributions to fashion history and explores what they could have created if they did not have to work on the periphery of the clothing trade.

This exegesis aligns the work with other designers who have explored feminist theory, historicism, and unruly design through a contemporary fashion practice. Feminist theorists, philosophers, historians and design theorists provide the contextual positioning of the research.

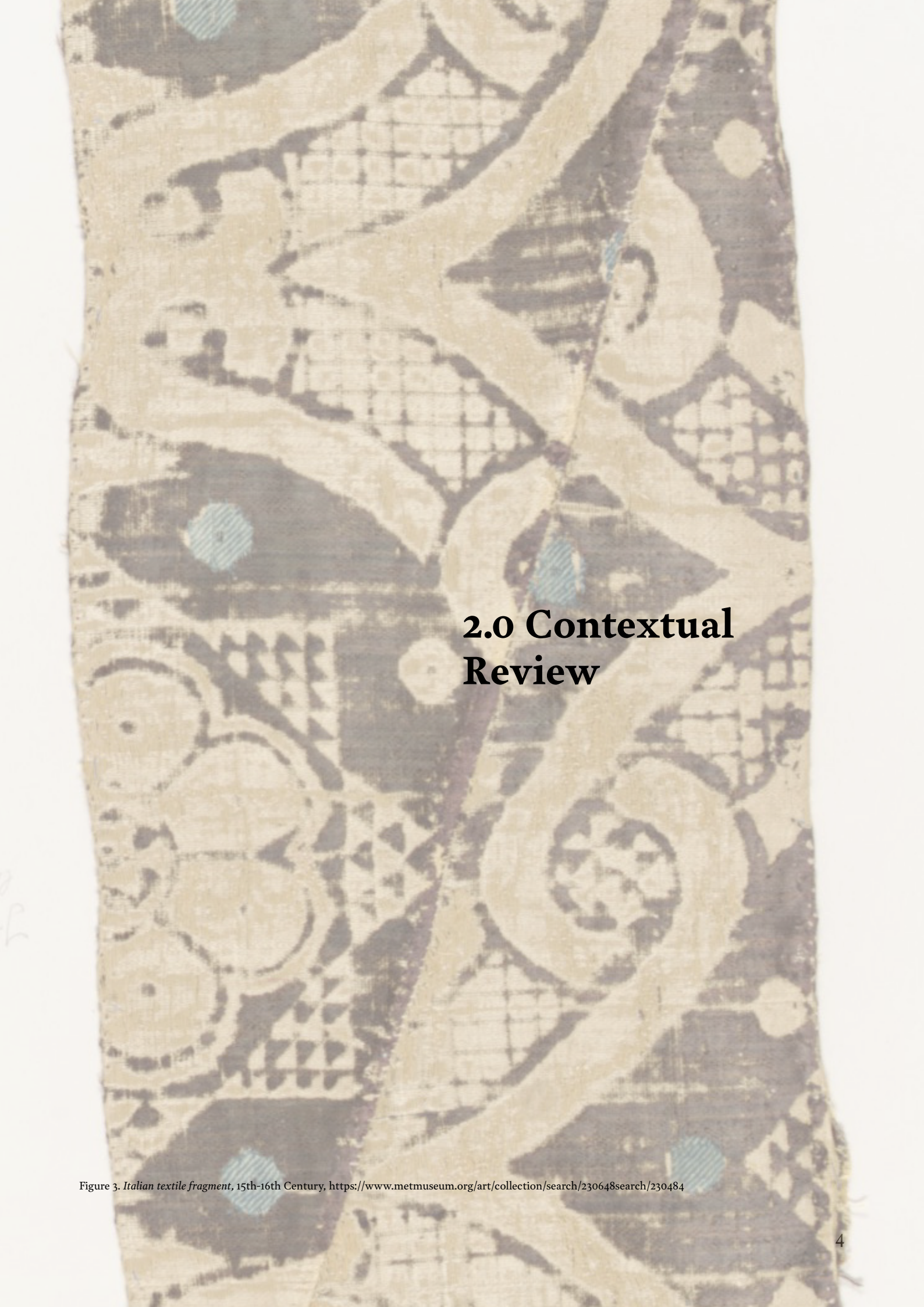
The work is guided by a practice-based methodology that is supported by historical research and material culture studies. The practice-based research is undertaken through historical garment replication, storytelling and visual language, and unruly design. The research is documented through the Project Inception, Design Proposal and Documentation of Process chapters of the exegesis. The practice-based research results in a series of garments that reinterpret Early Modern fashion through the principles of unruly design.

By reimagining what Early Modern fashion could have looked like if women had had creative and sartorial freedom, the importance of encouraging creative expression is revealed. This research aims to show the significance of the historical exclusion of women from tailoring practice. It adds a new dimension to the discussion that was started following fashion’s Great Reset.¹²

¹⁰ Beverly Lemire, *Dress, Culture and Commerce: The English Clothing Trade before the Factory, 1660-1800* (Macmillian Press Ltd, 1997), 100.

¹¹ Hamish Scott, “Two Crises and the Making of the Early Modern Period: An Historiographical Review,” *Social History* 40, no. 4 (2015): 427.

¹² Ahmed, “2025 Was The Year Of Fashion’s Big Reset, So What’s Next?”



2.0 Contextual Review

Figure 3. *Italian textile fragment*, 15th-16th Century, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/230648search/230484>

This research explores the origins of gender inequality in the fashion industry. The way women defied discrimination and created a space to profit from clothing manufacturing is explored through stories of disorderly women. While no one fashion designer has responded to the history of gender discrimination in fashion using historical and unruly garment-making techniques, aspects of this research can be aligned with the work of some key fashion designers. This contextual review examines how this research sits alongside designers influenced by feminism, historicism and unruly design, and designers whose work intersects more than one of these themes.

2.1 Disorderly Women

This research explores the lasting impact of excluding women from active participation in the design processes throughout fashion history.

The formal way to trade in altered or mended second-hand clothing in the Early Modern period was through a tailor. Tailors were required to be part of a guild, but in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, tailoring guilds used guild statutes to formally bar women.¹³ This meant women were unable to access the training or protection that guilds offered.

In the Early Modern period, there were few opportunities for women to access paid work. Women continued to illegally mend, alter and trade in second-hand clothing to earn money to supplement household income.¹⁴ They existed in a world of contradiction. Women were expected to mend and alter clothing within their household, but could not apply their skills to make money.¹⁵

The existence of their work outside of formal trade systems means these women's history is fragmented. Much of what we know about them comes from their ridicule in literature. In *Women, Production and Patriarchy in Late Medieval Cities* (1982), Martha Howell describes how literature portrayed market-women as shrews and often depicted them as sexually aggressive.¹⁶ By presenting working women as unfeminine, other women were discouraged from pursuing financial independence.

¹³ Sofi Thanhauser, *Worn: A People's History of Clothing* (Penguin Random House, 2022), 39.

¹⁴ Lemire, *Dress, Culture and Commerce: The English Clothing Trade before the Factory, 1660-1800*, 95.

¹⁵ Lemire, *Dress, Culture and Commerce: The English Clothing Trade before the Factory, 1660-1800*, 99.

¹⁶ Howell, Martha C., *Women, Production, and Patriarchy in Late Medieval Cities* (University of Chicago Press, 1986), 182.

These women also faced legal prosecution from tailoring guilds and other authorities. Leicester city fathers described tradeswomen in the sixteenth century as “evil persons... hawking abroad from house to house”¹⁷ because they challenged the livelihoods of men appointed by the city fathers. In the late seventeenth century, women in France and Britain were allowed to establish dressmaking guilds.¹⁸ In 1702, provincial English tailors responded to these guilds by campaigning for government legislation to ban women from working in the clothing trade.¹⁹

These cultural and legal barriers did not stop women from participating in the clothing trade, but did leave them vulnerable to exploitation when mass manufacture began.²⁰

Beverly Lemire described these women as disorderly women in *Dress, Culture and Commerce* (1997). Her book gathers together evidence of women defying guild statutes and continuing to do work they had always done.

¹⁷ Lemire, *Dress, Culture and Commerce: The English Clothing Trade before the Factory, 1660-1800*, 100.

¹⁸ Melissa Huber and Karen Van Godtsenhoven, *Women Dressing Women: A Lineage of Female Fashion Design* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2023), 20.

¹⁹ Lemire, *Dress, Culture and Commerce: The English Clothing Trade before the Factory, 1660-1800*, 102.

²⁰ Lemire, *Dress, Culture and Commerce: The English Clothing Trade before the Factory, 1660-1800*, 102.

2.2 A Vindication of the Rights of Women

The title of the research refers to Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). The text is one of the first written examples of feminist philosophy. Wollstonecraft discusses the lack of education for women and rebuts the idea expressed by Jean-Jaques Rousseau, that women's education should be focussed on preparing them for marriage.²¹ She argues that education is the key to women's emancipation, stating "Strengthen the female mind by enlarging it, and there will be an end to blind obedience."²²

Wollstonecraft was writing at the end of the Early Modern period. Disorderly women were working class and likely would not have read *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*,²³ although, the fact that it was published shows that feminist ideas existed at the time of the disorderly women. Wollstonecraft's focus on education is a concern of disorderly women. They are forced to work outside of the trade system because they do not have access to the education afforded to members of tailoring guilds.²⁴

A Vindication of the Rights of Women paved the way for the other feminist theorists and designers discussed in this research. Wollstonecraft's legacy continues to be felt today. This research acknowledges her contribution to the foundation of feminism.

²¹ Theresa L. Crater, "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman by Mary Wollstonecraft," EBSCO, 2023, <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/vindication-rights-woman-mary-wollstonecraft>.

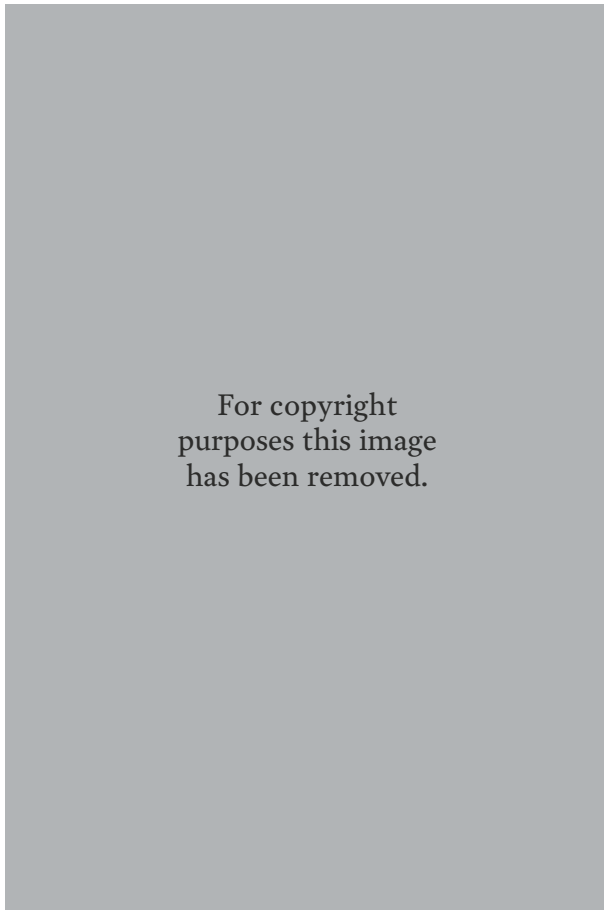
²² Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication Of the Rights Of Woman : With Strictures On Political and Moral Subjects* - ProQuest (The Humbolt Publishing Co, 1792), 41, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2634006284/>

²³ Crater, "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman by Mary Wollstonecraft."

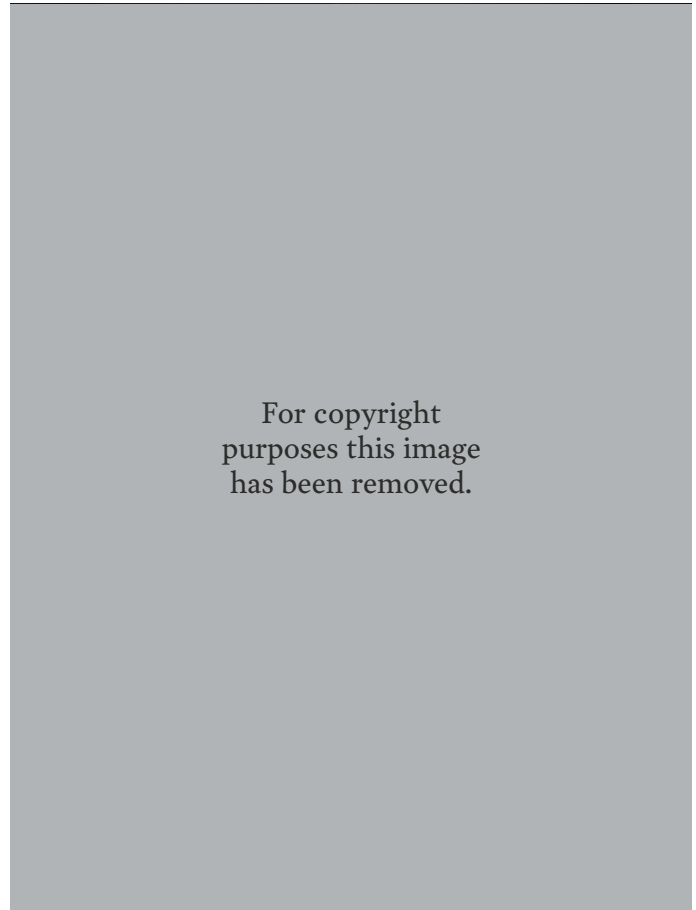
²⁴ Lemire, *Dress, Culture and Commerce: The English Clothing Trade before the Factory, 1660-1800*, 102.

2.3 Fashion Designers and Feminist Theory

The impact of the way disorderly women were treated is still felt in the fashion industry. Despite their underrepresentation, women creative directors run successful luxury brands and bring feminist ideas to a wide audience. This section examines how women designers have explored feminism through their work.



Above: Figure 4. Maria Grazia Chiuri for Dior, *Spring 2017, Look 18*, 2016, <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-2017-ready-to-wear/christian-dior/slideshow/collection#18>



Above right: Figure 5. Judy Chicago, *The Female Divine, Runway Set for Dior Haute Couture Spring 2020*, 2020, <https://salon94.com/exhibitions/dior-x-judy-chicago-the-female-divine>

2.3.1 Maria Grazia Chiuri

Maria Grazia Chiuri was Dior's only woman creative director since the company's inception in 1947, and was replaced by Johnathan Anderson in the Great Reset.²⁵ Chiuri placed feminism at the centre of her work for Dior.²⁶ T-shirts featuring the title of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's 2012 TED talk, *We Should All Be Feminists*, went down the runway in her debut for Dior (fig. 4). Chiuri was criticised for using feminism as a marketing ploy because the t-shirt retailed for US\$710.²⁷

Although profit is Dior's top priority, Chiuri's collaborations with feminist artists on Dior's runway presentations show that *she* aimed to use her platform to highlight the work of feminists. Figure 5 shows Chiuri's collaboration with artist Judy Chicago, *The Female Divine*.²⁸

²⁵ Julia Teti, "Dior's Creative Directors Through the Years: From Christian Dior to Maria Grazia Chiuri and Jonathan Anderson," *WWD*, April 24, 2025, <https://wwd.com/fashion-news/fashion-features/lists/dior-creative-directors-1237093279/>.

²⁶ Jess Cartner-Morley, "Maria Grazia Chiuri's Dior Debut Spells out Her Feminist Message," *Fashion, The Guardian*, September 30, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2016/sep/30/maria-grazia-chiuri-christian-dior-debut-feminist-message-paris-fashion-week>.

²⁷ Christina Cacouris, "Dior's Faux Feminism," *UnHerd*, June 11, 2025, <https://unherd.com/2025/06/diors-faux-feminism/>.

²⁸ "Dior x Judy Chicago: The Female Divine," *Salon 94*, accessed April 6, 2026, <https://salon94.com/exhibitions/dior-x-judy-chicago-the-female-divine>.

2.3.2 Miuccia Prada

bell hooks defines feminism as “a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression.”²⁹ Ending the oppression of women includes women having the right to choose what they wear. Catherine Martin, Prada’s collaborator on the costumes for *The Great Gatsby* (2013), said Prada’s practical feminism expresses through garments “what it means to be a woman, a powerful woman, and a working woman, and a mother, and a homemaker, and a sexual being.”³⁰ Although there is power in the slogan tee, Muccia Prada embedded feminism into Prada’s design language.

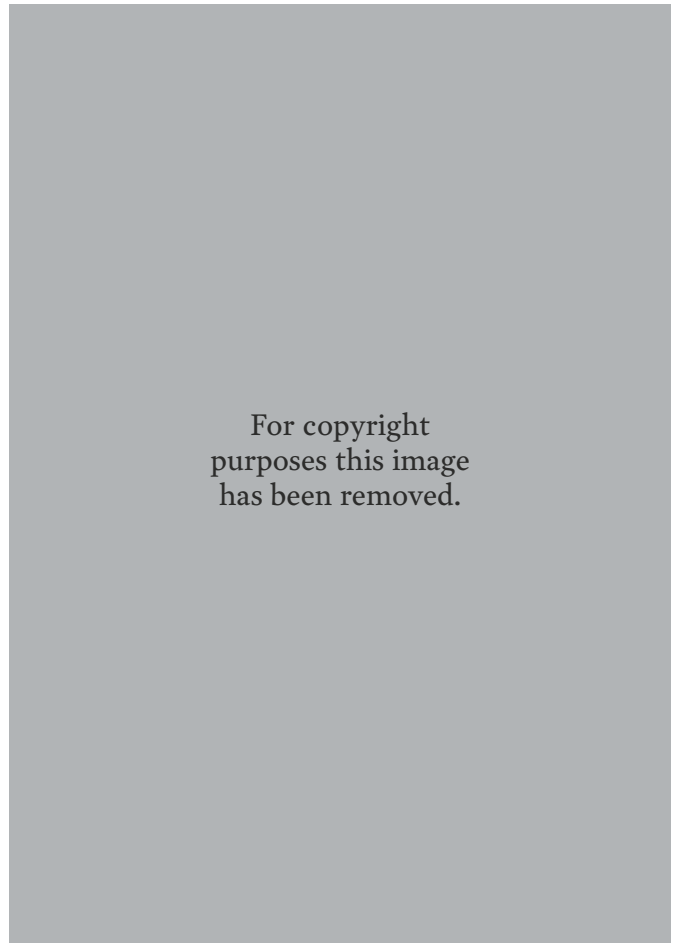
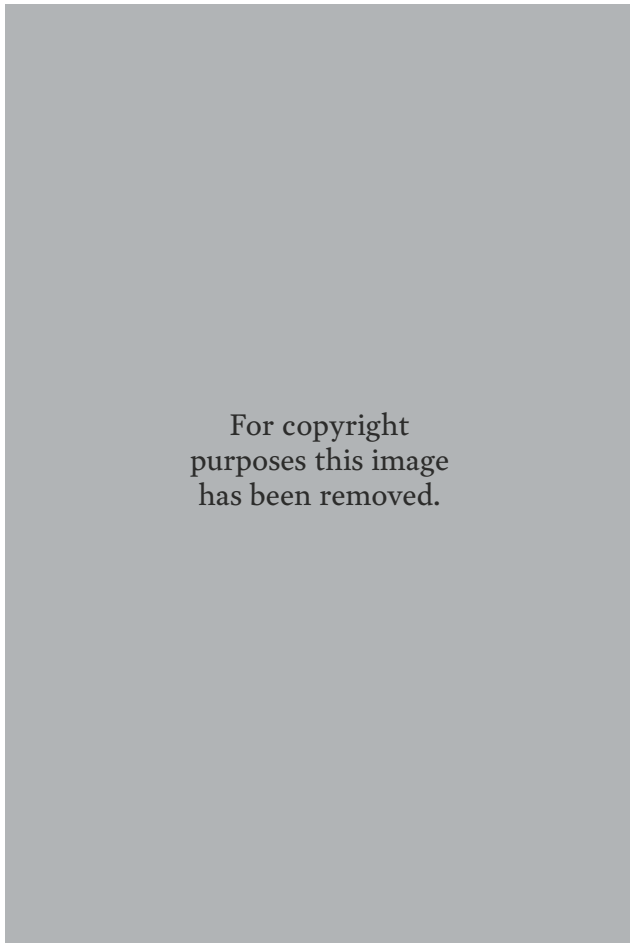
Prada’s involvement in the women’s liberation movement³¹ informs how her experiences as a woman are translated into her designs. Carol Hanisch’s paper *The Personal is Political* (1969) examined how consciousness raising, achieved through discussing the experience of being a woman,³² was important to advancing the women’s liberation movement. Prada’s career has been an ongoing discussion of the experience of being a woman.

²⁹ bell hooks, *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (South End Press, 2000).

³⁰ Wendell Steavenson, “How Miuccia Prada Sees the World,” *Vogue*, February 13, 2024, <https://www.vogue.com/article/miuccia-prada-march-cover-2024-interview>.

³¹ Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas, *Critical Fashion Practice: From Westwood to Van Beirendonck* (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2017), 90, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aut/detail.action?docID=4770912>.

³² Carol Hanisch, *The Personal Is Political*, 1969, 4, <https://www.rapereleiefshelter.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/PersonalPolitical.pdf>.



Above: Figure 6. Muccia Prada and Raf Simons for Prada, *Autumn 2025, Look 26*, 2025, Photographed by Umberto Fratini, <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/fall-2025-ready-to-wear/prada/slideshow/collection#26>

Above right: Figure 7. Muccia Prada for Prada, *Autumn 1988, Look 31*, 1988, <https://www.prada.com/nz/en/pradasphere/fashion-shows/1988/fw-womenswear>.

Prada's Autumn 2025 Ready to Wear collection asked the question "what is feminine beauty today?"³³ It has feminine details but rejects idealised beauty in favour of oversized silhouettes executed in thick fabrics³⁴ (fig. 6). Silhouette and detail connect this collection to her first collection of Autumn 1988. In this collection Prada rebelled against the sexualisation of women that 1980s Italian fashion promoted.³⁵ She instead offered women easy to wear pieces that had a quirky personality without being traditionally feminine (fig. 7).

³³ Nicole Phelps, "Prada Fall 2025 Ready-to-Wear Collection," *Vogue*, February 27, 2025, <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/fall-2025-ready-to-wear/prada>.

³⁴ Phelps, "Prada Fall 2025 Ready-to-Wear Collection."

³⁵ Steavenson, "How Miuccia Prada Sees the World."



2.3.3 Madeline Vionnet

“Often asymmetrical, they were designed to show the beauty of the body in motion; she wanted ‘to dress a body... not to construct a dress.’” - Caroline Evans and Minna Thornton on Madeline Vionnet, *Women & Fashion: A New Look*

Early twentieth-century couturier Madeline Vionnet, highlighted the natural beauty of women’s bodies in her bias-cut designs. Fabric cut on the bias has more stretch than fabric cut on the straight grain, making it cling to the body while allowing for movement.³⁶ From the 15th century to the 20th century, womenswear was cut around structural undergarments, not the female form.³⁷ Vionnet’s designs resisted the flat boyish garçon style of the 1920s,³⁸ instead celebrating women’s natural bodies (fig. 8). They gave women freedom of movement without being shapeless.

Her commitment to shaping garments around the body, not around undergarments, remains the approach of contemporary fashion designers today. She gave women a modern style, dressing them for their new lives with techniques she pioneered. In this way, her work can be seen as feminist.

³⁶ Winifred Aldrich, *Metric Pattern Cutting for Women’s Wear* (Mills & Boon Ltd, 1976; Fifth edition, Blackwell Scientific Publications, 2008), 5.

³⁷ Phelps, “Prada Fall 2025 Ready-to-Wear Collection.”

³⁸ Steavenson, “How Miuccia Prada Sees the World.”



Above: Figure 9. Elsa Schiaparelli, *Jacket from the Circus Collection*, 1938, <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O15665/the-circus-collection-evening-ensemble-elsa-schiaparelli/?carousel-image=2025PD4607html?page=7fulltextPDF/7AEC469AD1214CDEPQ/1?accountid=8440&sourceType=Books>.

Above right: Figure 10. Elsa Schiaparelli, *Lobster Hat*, 1930s, <http://theclosethistorian.blogspot.com/2015/06/hat-histories-elsa-schiaparelli.html>



2.3.4 Elsa Schiaparelli

Elsa Schiaparelli disrupted haute couture with her surrealist designs. Schiaparelli epitomised the New Woman movement of the 1930s, as she was a self-supporting single mother and business owner, involved in public life.³⁹ While her surrealist garments challenged the expectations placed on women, she built her company making “sensible, useful items for women.”⁴⁰

Her surrealist pieces, some created in collaboration with Salvador Dali, contrasted sexuality and humour with elegance in an industry that reinforced traditional ideas of femininity. The Circus Collection (1938), challenged gender norms within clothing by juxtaposing haute couture with the absurd.⁴¹ The garments were cut using conventional tailoring and dressmaking techniques but embellished with Surrealist surface detailing and accessories.

Schiaparelli challenged the conventions of haute couture, giving her New Woman clients an attitude of witty intelligence.

³⁹ Jennifer Sweeney-Risko, “Elsa Schiaparelli, The New Woman, and Surrealist Politics,” *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* 17, no. 3 (2015): 314, <https://doi.org/10.5325/intelitestud.17.3.0309>.

⁴⁰ Sweeney-Risko, “Elsa Schiaparelli, The New Woman, and Surrealist Politics,” 313.

⁴¹ Sweeney-Risko, “Elsa Schiaparelli, The New Woman, and Surrealist Politics,” 314.

2.4 Fashion Designers and Historicism

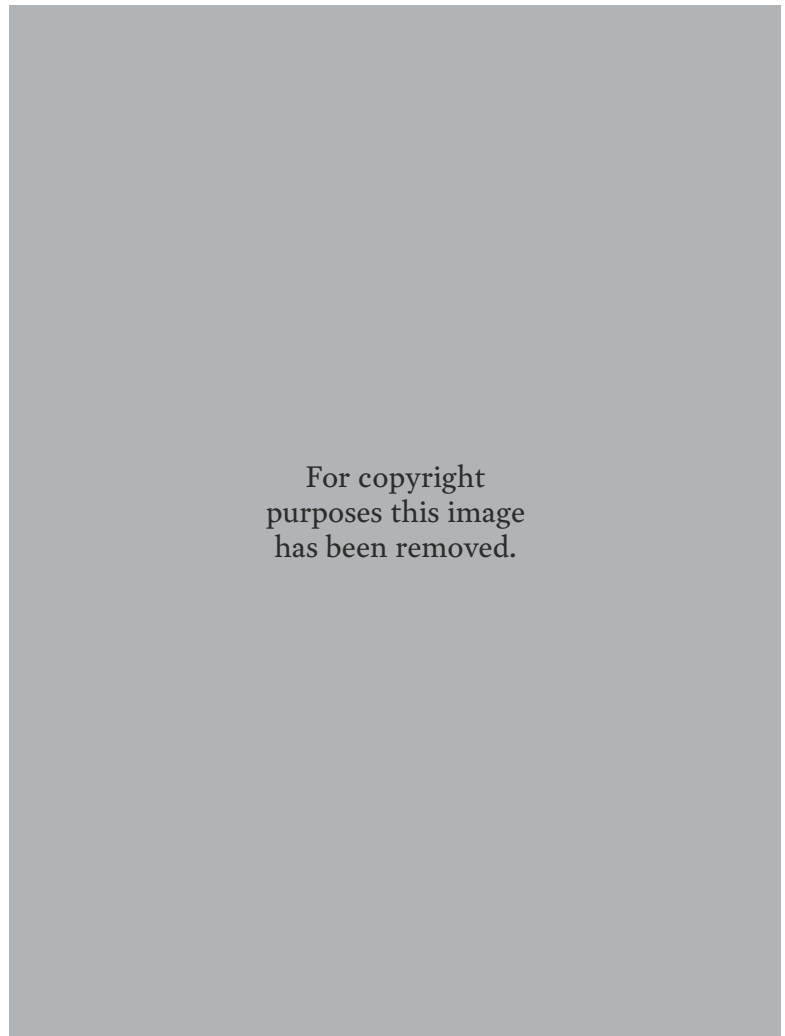
In *Fashion at the Edge* (2003), Caroline Evans wrote, “Modernity... can be imagined as pleated or crumpled time, drawing together past, present and future into constant and unexpected relations.”⁴² This metaphor merges ideas developed by philosopher Michel Serres, pleated time, and historian Lynda Nead, time as a crumpled handkerchief. Evans used the metaphor of crumpled or pleated fabric to describe how designers in the 1990s approached historicism.⁴³ This research aligns with contemporary artisanal designers whose work can also be understood through the crumpled fabric metaphor; John Alexander Skelton, Paul Harnden and Archivio J.M. Ribot.

⁴² Caroline Evans, *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity & Deathliness* (Yale University Press, 2003), 22.

⁴³ Evans, *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity & Deathliness*, 22.

Right: Figure 11. John Alexander Skelton, *Autumn 2026*, Look 12, 2026, Photographed by William Waterworth, <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/fall-2026-menswear/john-alexander-skelton/slideshow/collection#12>

Below: Figure 12. John Alexander Skelton, *Autumn 2026*, Look 20, 2026, Photographed by William Waterworth, <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/fall-2026-menswear/john-alexander-skelton/slideshow/collection#20>

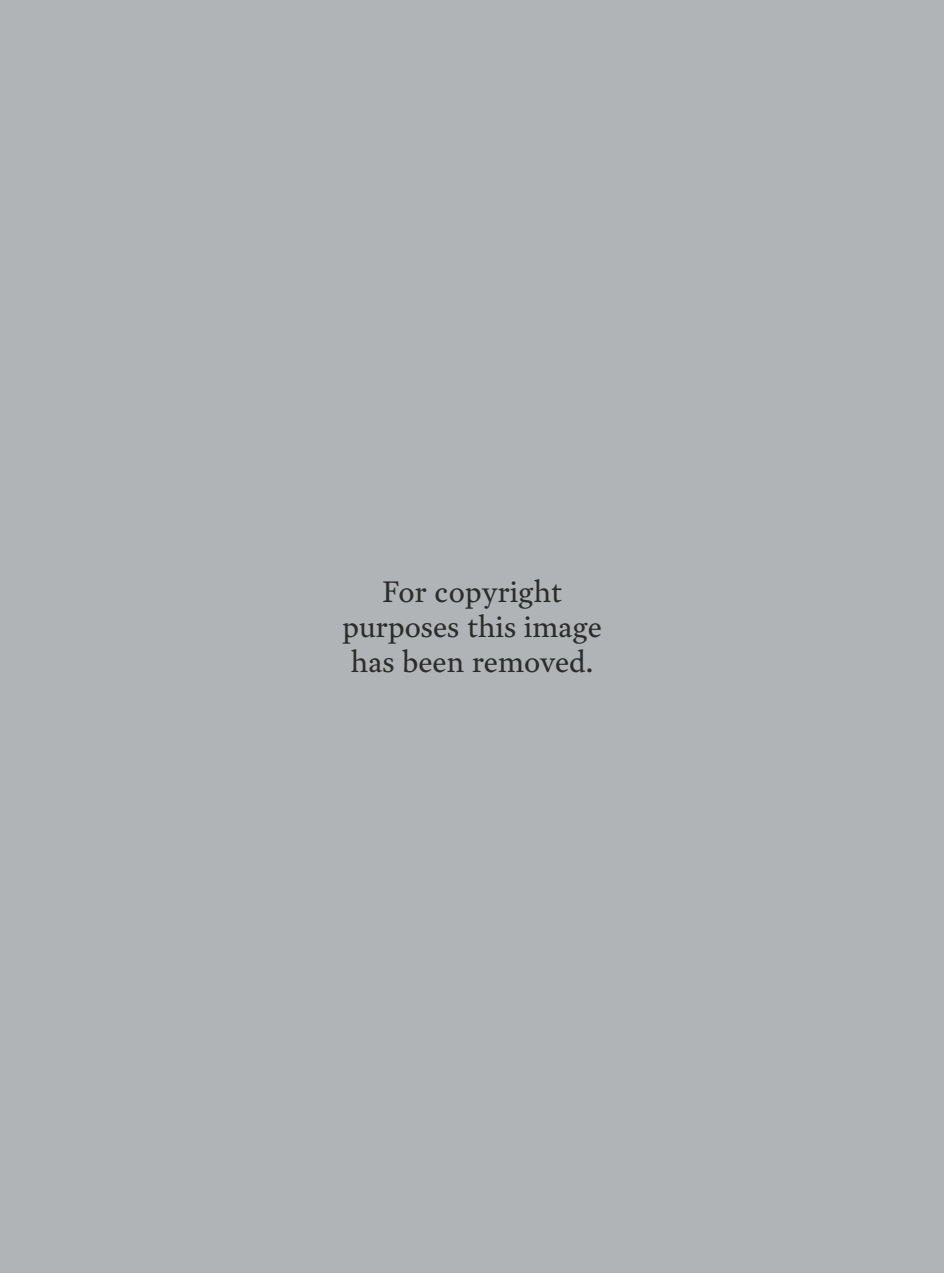


2.4.1 John Alexander Skelton

John Alexander Skelton uses Evan's idea of crumpled time to bring the past into the present, retelling stories through clothing. Otherworld, his Autumn 2026 menswear collection, finds inspiration in Celtic mythology and ritual in Neolithic Britain. In the collection's press release Skelton said, "It was important to bring this into my own world and not fashion some sort of archaic costume."⁴⁴ The designer references what is known about Celtic clothing, using the colours of their natural dyes and prints inspired by Celtic decorative motifs⁴⁵ (fig. 12) and references to nineteenth-century workwear, which are part of Skelton's designer handwriting, inform the silhouettes. The Victorian references combined with Neolithic inspiration, crumple together time, telling an otherworldly story.

⁴⁴ John Alexander Skelton, "Press Release: John Alexander Skelton CXX," *Show Studio*, January 17, 2026, <https://www.showstudio.com/collections/autumn-winter-2026/john-alexander-skelton-cxx/press-release-john-alexander-skelton-cxx>.

⁴⁵ Skelton, "Press Release: John Alexander Skelton CXX."



For copyright
purposes this image
has been removed.

Figure 13. Paul Harnden, *Jacket, Skirt and Shoes*, 2025,
Photographed by Ben Rivers, <https://www.instagram.com/p/DNDLthwtSWw/>

2.4.2 Paul Harnden

Paul Harnden's Dickensian garments, like the ensemble in figure 13, use print and a quirky sense of proportion to bring Victorian fashion into the present.⁴⁶ Harnden pushes against the industry's constant desire for newness and, like Skelton, shows us the value of the past, by crafting clothes and shoes using heritage fabrics and nineteenth-century making techniques. As he does not give interviews; his only method of communication is the garment and the photographs and videos released on Instagram alongside each collection.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Lou Stoppard, "Searching for Fashion's Most Reclusive Designer," *GQ*, 05 2022, <https://www.gq.com/story/searching-for-paul-harnden>.

⁴⁷ Stoppard, "Searching for Fashion's Most Reclusive Designer."



For copyright
purposes this image
has been removed.

Figure 14. Karim Fares for Archivio J.M. Ribot, *Capsule XV*, Autumn 2023, 2023, <https://24aug.jp/pages/archivio-j-m-ribot-br-capsule-xv-23aw-collection>

2.4.3 Archivio J.M. Ribot

Karim Fares of Archivio J.M. Ribot makes tailored garments from antique fabrics, trims and clothing, imagining they are from a fictional man's archive called J.M. Ribot.⁴⁸ The past is literally brought into the present by making something new from something old, demonstrating the crumpled fabric metaphor.

⁴⁸ "Karim Fares," with shop rin art association, August 22, 2024, <https://shoprinartassociation.com/en/fashion/583/>.

For copyright
purposes this image
has been removed.

Figure 15. Paul Harnden, Ben Rivers and James Holcombe,
Still from "The Lunch", 2026, <https://www.instagram.com/p/DUsw4ffjYYu/>

Storytelling is integral to the brand identities of all three designers, as they create a world for their garments to exist in. The videos Harnden releases alongside his collections communicate this well. His 2026 film *The Lunch* (fig. 15) depicts a couple having lunch in a forest, showing the world for which his garments are designed.

Skelton, Harnden and Fares are also connected through their use of historical manufacturing techniques. History is not just a visual influence, it is embedded in the way they make clothes. Harnden and Skelton work with mills to develop their own textiles using traditional looms,⁴⁹ and Fares uses vintage fabrics.⁵⁰ They all use hand finishing techniques.⁵¹ Evans' crumpled fabric metaphor is evoked during the manufacturing process, not just in the finished garment, connecting these designers with makers of the past. Their use of artisanal production is part of a global revival.⁵² In a fashion industry where consumption has reached an all-time high,⁵³ people are looking to designers to offer a respite. Skelton, Harnden and Fares draw on nostalgia for a pre-industrial era, showing there is a place for the past in the present.

⁴⁹ Stoppard, "Searching for Fashion's Most Reclusive Designer"; *Fashion in Motion* / John Alexander Skelton behind the Scenes, directed by Victoria and Albert Museum, 2018, 2:49, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Uu-1pyWeHw>.

⁵⁰ vowi, "Archivio J.M. Ribot: Be Honest to Your Vision," *Vowi*, January 29, 2025, <https://vowi.us/archivio-j-m-ribot-be-honest-to-your-vision-by-ink-karim-fares-mascarar-11/>.

⁵¹ vowi, "Archivio J.M. Ribot"; Stoppard, "Searching for Fashion's Most Reclusive Designer"; *Fashion in Motion* / John Alexander Skelton behind the Scenes.

⁵² Alessandro Gandini, "Neo-Craft and Nostalgia," in *Exploring Nostalgia Empirical Studies of Contemporary Experiences and Practices* (Routledge, 2026), 37.

⁵³ Subhasis Ray and Lipsa Nayak, "Marketing Sustainable Fashion: Trends and Future Directions," *Sustainability* 15, no. 7 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15076202>.

2.5 Feminist Theory and Historicism

This research understands the intersection of history and feminism through the work of Virginia Woolf and Linda Nochlin. In *A Room of One's Own* (1923), Woolf examines the access women had to education, their financial dependence on men, and their lack of space to work without distraction. She shows how men's access to these things is why they have written more great works of fiction.⁵⁴ A study of the history of fiction is interwoven with personal anecdotes and fictional stories. Linda Nochlin's essay *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?* (1971) uses art historical analysis to show how academic fields could bring depth to the demands of the women's liberation movement.⁵⁵ Both authors write with an understanding of their field's history, and the role women have played in it.

Vivienne Westwood, Simone Rocha, and Elena Dawson use their understanding of historical womenswear to give women agency through garments that were historically symbols of oppression.

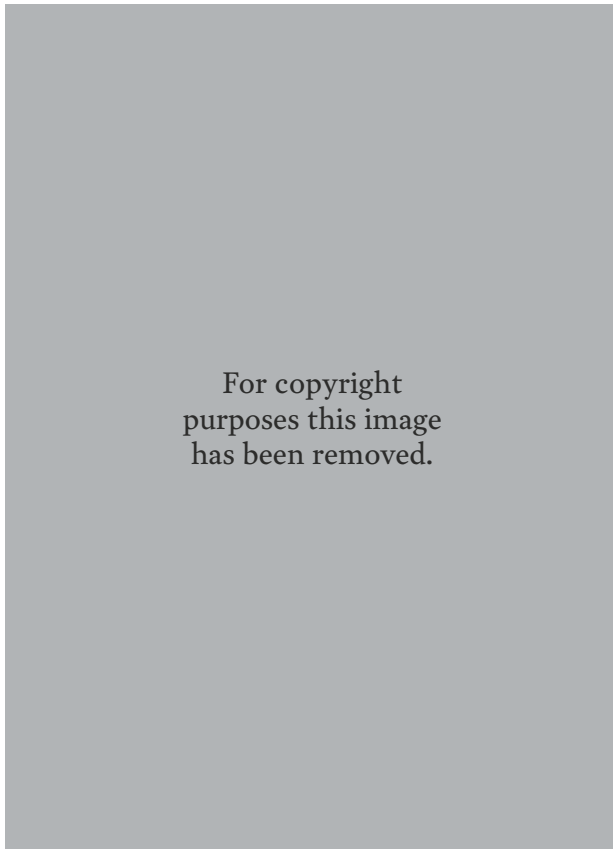
Westwood and Rocha's garments celebrate women. Femininity, joy and humour are central to the resistance in their work and this research. Portrayals of historical women tend to focus on their subjugation. They rebel by showing historical women were creative, portraying them as colourful, spirited and defiant.

⁵⁴ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (Hogarth Press, 1929)

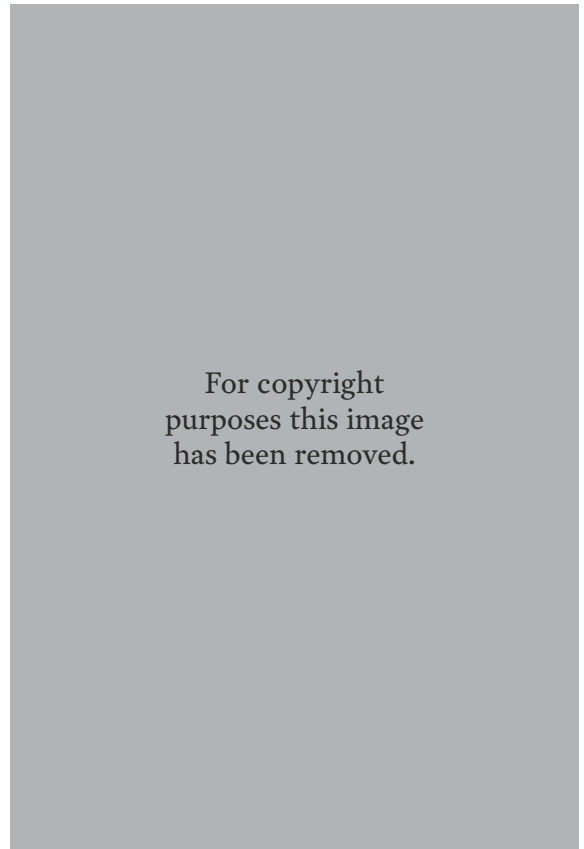
⁵⁵ Linda Nochlin, *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?* (Thames & Hudson, 2021).



Figure 16. Thompson and Co, *Cage Crinoline*, 1860-1865,
<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O58867/a-favorite-of-the-empress-cage-crinoline-thomson-co/>



For copyright
purposes this image
has been removed.



For copyright
purposes this image
has been removed.

Above: Figure 17. Vivienne Westwood, *Corset and Mini Crini* from *Spring 1985*, 1985 <https://nordicpoetry.co.uk/products/vintage-f-w-1988-runway-black-leather-mini-crini>

Above Right: Figure 18. Vivienne Westwood, *Autumn 1995*, 1995, <https://90srunway.tumblr.com/post/9182648223/nadja-auermann-vivienne-westwood-fw-1995>

2.5.1 Vivienne Westwood

Vivienne Westwood's use of historical undergarments examined the history of sexuality and challenged contemporary ideas of femininity. Her exploration of corsetry and the crinoline challenged the view that these garments were restrictive. Her *mini-crini* (1985) (fig.17), highlighted the significance of the physical presence the crinoline gave women.⁵⁶ The swinging of the mini-crini showed that how the garment moves gives it sexuality.

Westwood did not look to androgyny to create a powerful woman, as she “never thought it powerful to be like a second-rate man. Femininity is stronger.”⁵⁷ Women's empowerment through clothing is not solely about comfort and practicality. Westwood's idea of female sexuality gave agency to women. Her reinterpretations of historical garments showed that discarding the past narrowed the ways women could present themselves. Like Woolf and Nochlin, Westwood communicated history in a way that resonated with contemporary audiences.

⁵⁶ Evans and Thornton, *Women & Fashion*, 150.

⁵⁷ Evans and Thornton, *Women & Fashion*, 154.

For copyright
purposes this image
has been removed.

Figure 19. Simone Rocha, *Spring 2026, Look 54*, 2025, Photographed by Alessandro Lucioni, <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-2026-ready-to-wear/simone-rocha/slideshow/collection#54>

2.5.2 Simone Rocha

Simone Rocha uses the idea of some garments being “historically female”⁵⁸ to make a feminist statement. Her overt femininity rebels against regression, highlighting women’s right to choose how they present themselves.⁵⁹ The florals, lace and bows that are motifs of Rocha’s work are infused with meaning by references to historical fashion, literature and art.⁶⁰

Like Westwood, Rocha uses the crinoline as a feminist statement. Her Spring 2026 Ready-to-Wear collection is about the “acute self-awareness”⁶¹ we have as adolescents and how it never really fades. Asymmetrical crinolines feature in the collection (fig. 19). The crinolines are a feminist statement because they are feminine and imperfect in a world that values masculine strength.

The inclusive casting in Rocha’s runway presentations shows that her brand of femininity aims to empower all women regardless of their race or body shape. This reflects the theory of intersectionality explored by bell hooks in *Feminism is for Everybody* (2000). hooks states, “As long as women are using class or race power to dominate other women, feminist sisterhood cannot be fully realized.”⁶² While Rocha’s garments are expensive, her ultra-feminine style is made accessible through social media, something she thinks is “fantastic.”⁶³

⁵⁸ Alex Kessler, “Simone Rocha On 10 Years Of Putting Women Centre Stage,” *British Vogue*, September 20, 2021, <https://www.vogue.co.uk/fashion/article/simone-rocha-10-year-anniversary>.

⁵⁹ Lauren Cochrane, “‘A Layer of Defiance’: Simone Rocha on How Her Ultra-Feminine Styles Won over Women - and Men,” *Fashion, The Guardian*, February 25, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2025/feb/25/a-layer-of-defiance-simone-rocha-on-how-her-ultra-feminine-styles-won-over-women-and-men>.

⁶⁰ Cochrane, “A Layer of Defiance.”

⁶¹ Luke Leitch, “Simone Rocha Spring 2026 Ready-to-Wear Collection,” *Vogue*, September 21, 2025, <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-2026-ready-to-wear/simone-rocha>.

⁶² hooks, *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*, 18.

⁶³ Cochrane, “A Layer of Defiance.”



Figure 20. Elena Dawson, *W. Cape Ties and Red Brooch*, no date, <https://ink-clothing.com/en/Woman/detail/Elena-Dawson/NONE/id=15552>

2.5.3 Elena Dawson

Elena Dawson's treatment of historical womenswear, in her contemporary practice, is influenced by her grandmother and takes a "semi deconstruction"⁶⁴ approach. This can be compared to Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. Both Dawson and Woolf's portrayals of history are interspersed with personal anecdotes, and fictional stories. Dawson's grandmother was a dressmaker and this influences her use of historical references.⁶⁵

The femininity in Dawson's garments is protected from clichés because of her grandmother's influence. She works directly on the dress form and is influenced by Gothic Victorian fashion.⁶⁶ Deconstructionist philosophy informs her decision to stop working on garments before they are finished.⁶⁷ This suspends them within the process of garment-making and allows for unfinished seams to unravel as they are worn.

⁶⁴ Eugene Rabkin, Elena Dawson: A Room of One's Own, June 16, 2020, <https://www.stylezeitgeist.com/elena-dawson-a-room-of-ones-own/>.

⁶⁵ Rabkin, Elena Dawson.

⁶⁶ Rabkin, Elena Dawson.

⁶⁷ Rabkin, Elena Dawson.

2.6 Unruly Design

Unruly design is a product design movement that seeks to undermine “the existing paradigm of functionalism.”⁶⁸ Influenced by surrealism and postmodernism, some twentieth-century product designers rejected the modernist idea that form follows function.⁶⁹ Rather than returning to aestheticism, unruly design questions the way we define form and function.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Wouter Eggink, “Rules of Unruly Design : Lessons from the History of Anti-Modernist Aesthetics” (PhD, University of Twente, 2011), 59, https://www.academia.edu/92289456/Rules_of_Unruly_Design_Lessons_from_the_history_of_anti_modernist_aesthetics.

⁶⁹ Eggink, “Rules of Unruly Design : Lessons from the History of Anti-Modernist Aesthetics,” 11.

⁷⁰ Eggink, “Rules of Unruly Design : Lessons from the History of Anti-Modernist Aesthetics,” 79.

⁷¹ Athanasios Manavis et al., “Transformed Objects: The Influence of Unruly Product Design,” *MATEC Web of Conferences* 112 (2017): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1051/mateconf/201711208014>, <https://doi.org/10.1051/mateconf/201711208014>.

1. The five principles of unruly design are:
2. The convergence of different fields of study
3. References to popular culture or recognisable symbols
4. The creation of a complex form
4. The use of preexisting objects
5. The incorporation of unconventional materials⁷¹

For copyright
purposes this image
has been removed.

Figure 21. Alessandro Mendini, *Poltrona di Proust*, designed 1978, made 1981, <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1247425/poltrona-di-proust-armchair-mendini-alessandro/>

2.6.1 Poltrona di Proust

Alessandro Mendini's *Poltrona di Proust* or *The Proust Chair* (1978) (fig.21) follows the main principles of unruly design.

1. It combines Baroque furniture design and Pointillism.
2. The Louis-Quinze chair is a recognisable form. A Paul Signac painting was hand-painted onto the chair to create the pointillist effect. The title of the chair references a literary figure, Marcel Proust.⁷²
3. It brings together unrelated symbols creating a complex form. Detail is created through the wooden carving and the painting.
4. While the chair was made by Mendini, the final object appears to be a painted antique chair.
5. Principle five is not followed. The chair is made from painted wood and upholstery,⁷³ conventional materials for this style of chair.

⁷² "Poltrona Di Proust | Mendini, Alessandro | V&A Explore The Collections," Victoria and Albert Museum: Explore the Collections, accessed April 25, 2026, <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1247425/>.

⁷³ Vic. Albert Mus. Explore Collect., "Poltrona Di Proust | Mendini, Alessandro | V&A Explore The Collections."

The Proust Chair is an example of postmodern design as it is a convergence of existing forms and images. The unruliness of the design comes from the subversion of the form-follows-function hierarchy. Although it is a functional armchair, the design's main consideration is form. Mendini explores how historical references can be given new meanings, showing that the function of form can be more than just aesthetic.

2.7 Fashion Designers and Unruly Design

Many rules dictate whether a garment is fashionable. Historically, there were even sumptuary laws that defined what different classes of people could wear.⁷⁴ Some garments designed by deconstructionist fashion designers since the 1980s can be examined through the principles of unruly design. This section examines how Rei Kawakubo and Glenn Martens used unruly design. The intersection between unruly design and feminism is also explored through the work of Rei Kawakubo and Ann Demuldermeester.

⁷⁴ Sandra Niessen, "Interpreting 'Civilization' through Dress," in *Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion, Volume 8: West Europe* (Berg, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.2752/BEWDF/EDch8009>.

For copyright
purposes this image
has been removed.

Figure 22. Rei Kawakubo, *Autumn 2025, Look Two*, 2025, Photographed by Isidore Montag, <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/fall-2025-ready-to-wear/comme-des-garcons/slideshow/collection#2>

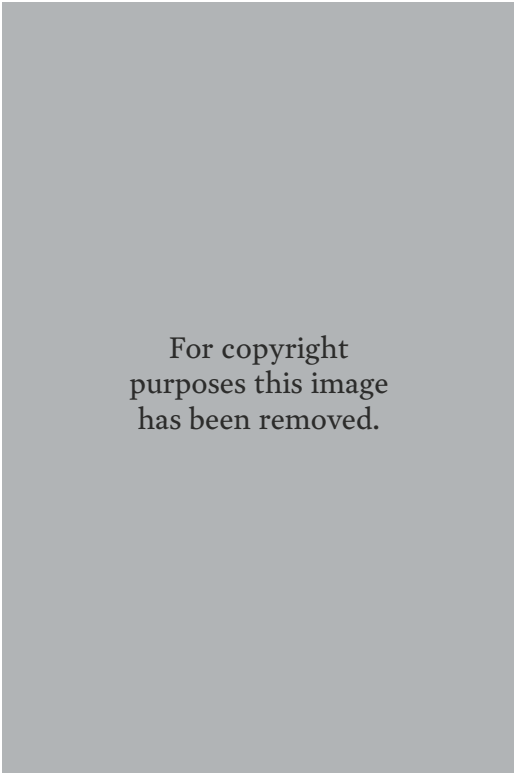
2.7.1 Rei Kawakubo

This research considers Look Two of Comme des Garçons Autumn 2025 collection an example of unruly design in a fashion context. It subverts traditional menswear suiting to make a statement against “big business, big culture, and global systems.”⁷⁵ These things keep our society structured, by rebelling against them Rei Kawakubo offers an unruly alternative.

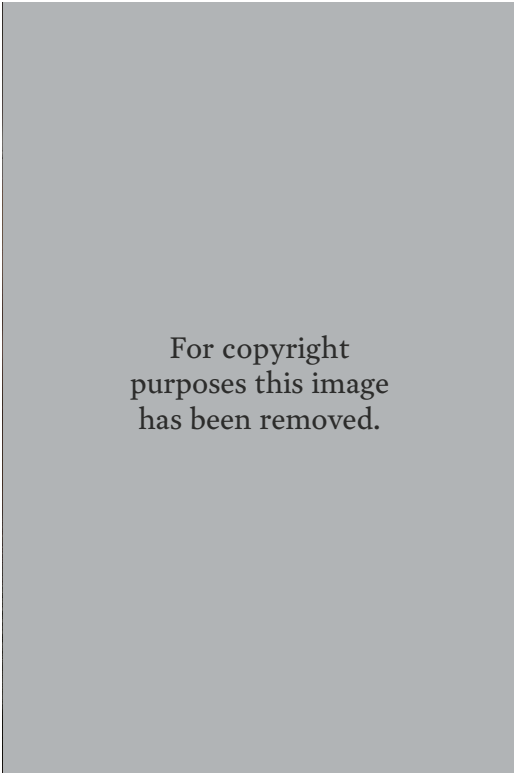
The look can be explained through the unruly design principles.⁷⁶ Principle one, the convergence of different fields of study, is represented in the way Kawakubo merges sculptural forms with contemporary fashion design. Principle two, references to popular culture or recognisable symbols, is followed through Kawakubo’s use of traditional suiting fabric and memory markers. The abstract ensemble has a collar and lapel. Principle three, the creation of a complex form, is achieved through the convergence of many forms, with the garments looking more like a sculpture than an outfit. The look uses unconventional materials, following principle five, to give it the stiffness and structure it has. This is unusual but adds to the presence of the ensemble.

⁷⁵ Sarah Mower, “Comme Des Garçons Fall 2025 Ready-to-Wear Collection,” *Vogue*, March 8, 2025, <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/fall-2025-ready-to-wear/comme-des-garcons>.

⁷⁶ Manavis et al., “Transformed Objects,” 2. <https://doi.org/10.1051/mateconf/201711208014>



For copyright
purposes this image
has been removed.



For copyright
purposes this image
has been removed.

Above: Figure 23. Glenn Martens for Y Project, *Autumn 2021, Look eight*, 2021, Photographed by Giovanni Gannoni, <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/fall-2021-ready-to-wear/y-project/slideshow/collection#8>

Above right: Figure 24. Glenn Martens for Y Project, *Autumn 2021, Detail of Look eight*, 2021, Photographed by Giovanni Gannoni, <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/fall-2021-ready-to-wear/y-project/slideshow/details#11>

2.7.2 Glenn Martens

It can be argued that in his work for Y/Project, Glenn Martens takes an unruly approach to how we wear our clothes. Look eight of Autumn 2021 (fig. 23) features a sweater with three neck holes and two pairs of trousers layered, with a wire waistband holding the larger pair on.⁷⁷ This look can be worn in a variety of ways. It challenges the notion that there is a correct way to wear something.

The look follows the principles of unruly design. Martens uses recognisable garments, a sweater vest and woollen trousers, to create a juxtaposition between the ordinary and the unruly. A complex form is created on the body through layering and detail. The use of wire in the trousers is unconventional. It allows the wearer to distort the garment and choose how it fits.

Kawakubo and Martens' understanding of the rules of fashion is key to the success of their unruly approach. This knowledge allows them to subvert the garment's original purpose. Unruly design is a method that incites disorder, a rebellious exploration of the possibilities of clothing.

⁷⁷ Luke Leitch, "Y/Project Fall 2021 Ready-to-Wear Collection," *Vogue*, January 24, 2021, <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/fall-2021-ready-to-wear/y-project>.

2.8 Feminist Theory and Unruly Design

The intersection of feminism and unruly design is evident in the work of Ann Demuldermeester and Rei Kawakubo. They challenge how clothing should be worn and constructed, questioning ideas of womenswear inherited from historical fashion. This research understands their approach through the work of feminist poet and essayist Adrienne Rich. Through her poetry, Rich rebelled against male-dominated literature, to create an androgynous language.⁷⁹ *The Stranger* (1972) refers to the language of oppression as “a dead language.”⁷⁹

If I come into a room out of the sharp misty light

And hear them talking a dead language

if they ask me my identity

what can I say but

I am androgyne

⁷⁸ Malik Muzamil Muzaffar and Peer Salim Jahangir, “Female, Power of Language: An Analysis of Adrienne Rich’s Poetry,” *International Journal of English Language, Literature in Humanities* 5, no. 11 (2017): 247.

⁷⁹ Muzaffar and Jahangir, “Female, Power of Language: An Analysis of Adrienne Rich’s Poetry,” 247.

For copyright
purposes this image
has been removed.

Figure 25. Ann Demulermeeester, *Six Hole Dress*, 1998, <https://www.vaniitas.com/product/ann-demeulemeester-black-triple-wrapped-dress-spring-1998-2/>.

2.8.1 Ann Demulermeeester

Ann Demulermeeester designs for strong, self-assured and intelligent women. Her conceptual approach challenges preconceptions of how clothing is worn. Many of these concepts explore the tension between masculinity and femininity. Demulermeeester's minimalist design language shows that unruly design does not have to look unruly. This language is her version of Rich becoming androgyne.

Her six-hole, triple-wrap dress (fig. 25) was designed through the eyes of “a little kid who doesn't know anything about fashion.”⁸⁰ By approaching the design process this way, Demulermeeester engages with unruly design. The dress offers a child's perspective on the form-follows-function conversation. Children have a simpler worldview but have not had their creativity limited by society's rules. Therefore, the dress is simple, just a rectangle with six holes, but can be worn in many ways. By approaching design through someone else's eyes, Demulermeeester can deconstruct her preconceived ideas about fashion.

⁸⁰ Laird Borrelli-Persson, “Ann Demeulemeester Shares the Stories Behind the Looks in Her Retrospective at Pitti Uomo,” *Vogue*, June 15, 2022, <https://www.vogue.com/article/ann-demeulemeester-shares-the-stories-behind-the-looks-in-her-retrospective-at-pitti-uomo>.

For copyright
purposes this image
has been removed.

Left: Figure 26. Rei Kawakubo for Comme des Garçons, *Clustering Beauty*, look 3, Spring 1998, <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-1998-ready-to-wear/comme-des-garcons/slideshow/collection#3>

Below left: Figure 27. Rei Kawakubo for Comme des Garçons, *Clustering Beauty*, look 36, Spring 1998, <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-1998-ready-to-wear/comme-des-garcons/slideshow/collection#36>

For copyright
purposes this image
has been removed.

2.8.2 Rei Kawakubo

Rei Kawakubo's unruly approach to design reimagines the aesthetic and function of clothing. She also challenges the form-follows-function hierarchy. The function of the garments is to communicate a concept, meaning the form is the function.

Kawakubo's womenswear is feminist because it is designed to give the wearer autonomy. How sexuality and femininity are communicated through clothing has evolved over time. When her designs were deemed unsexy, she responded that she believes sexiness comes from the individual, not their clothing.⁸¹

Her designs challenge how fashion's form communicates sexuality. Comme des Garçons Spring 1998 collection *Clustering Beauty*,⁸² played with where we expect volume in clothing. Circular flounces cascade off the shoulders in look three (fig. 26) and cartridge pleats create a cylindrical silhouette in look 36 (fig. 27). This collection is romantic and sensual without relying on revealing silhouettes. Her work aims to understand the possibilities of clothing and the body, appealing to people's intelligence rather than their desire to express sexuality.⁸³

When she uses elements associated with femininity, like lace, ruffles, flounces, or bustles, she approaches them in unusual ways. This prompts the wearer or viewer to examine their preexisting ideas about the element.

⁸¹ Evans and Thornton, *Women & Fashion*, 157.

⁸² Laird Borrelli-Persson, "Comme Des Garçons Spring 1998 Ready-to-Wear Collection," *Vogue*, 2017, <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-1998-ready-to-wear/comme-des-garcons>.

⁸³ Evans and Thornton, *Women & Fashion*, 157.

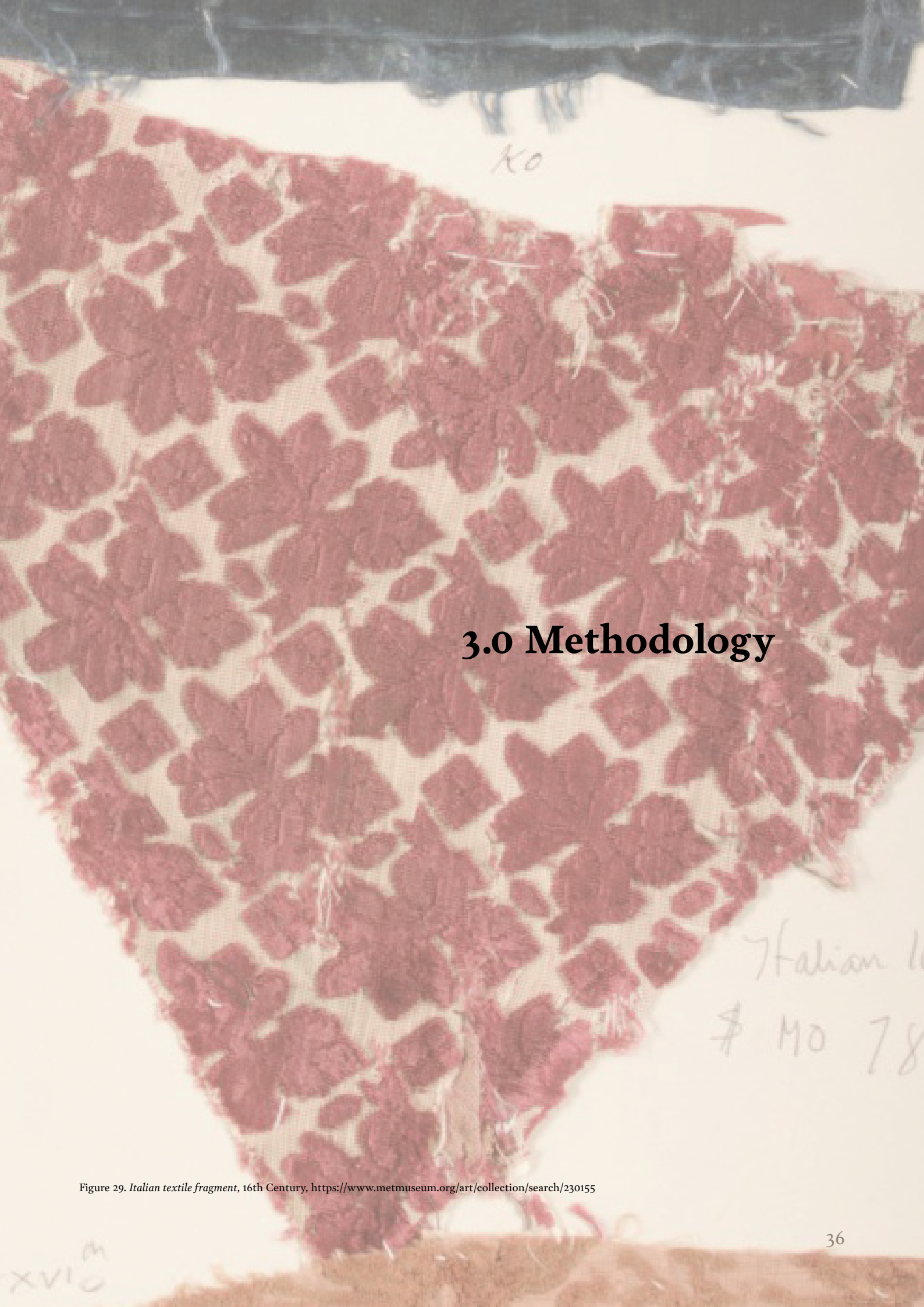
⁸⁴ "Comme Des Garçons Spring 1997 Ready-to-Wear Collection," Vogue, August 3, 1996, <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-1997-ready-to-wear/comme-des-garcons>.

⁸⁵ Vogue, "Comme Des Garçons Spring 1997 Ready-to-Wear Collection."

Figure 28. Rei Kawakubo for Comme des Garçons, *Body Meets Dress, Dress Meets Body*, 1996, Photograph by Paolo Roversi, <https://www.anothermag.com/art-photography/13045/paolo-roversi-reflects-on-his-longstanding-relationship-with-rei-kawakubo>

More radically, Comme Des Garçons' Spring 1997 collection *Dress Meets Body, Body Meets Dress* (fig. 28), explores the shape of the body itself.⁸⁴ "Lumps and Bumps"⁸⁵ were added to the body, and the clothes were shaped around them. With this collection, Kawakubo subverts the clichés of femininity associated with the body, creating an unruly language. This research views Kawakubo as someone who can bring together history and feminism through unruly design.

For copyright
purposes this image
has been removed.



3.0 Methodology

Figure 29. *Italian textile fragment*, 16th Century, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/230155>

3.1 Methodological Statement

This research uses a practice-based methodology to communicate the origins of gender inequality in the fashion industry through a series of garments. Linda Candy and Ernest Edmonds define practice-based research as “an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge, partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice.”⁸⁶ Fashion design research is suited to a practice-based approach because it uses physical making as a research method. The practice-based methods used in this research are reflective design practice,⁸⁷ historical garment replication,⁸⁸ storytelling,⁸⁹ and unruly design⁹⁰. These methods allow for the creation of garments that reveal links between the past and present.

Qualitative research methods support the practice-based research. Historical research⁹¹ and material culture studies⁹² are used to understand the origins and significance of disorderly women to gender inequality in the fashion industry today. Based on these understandings, practice-based research explores how the story of disorderly women can be communicated through the language of contemporary fashion design.

This research demonstrates the importance of understanding the historical origins of gender inequality in order to create work in response to it. In this way, this research builds on the work of Virginia Woolf and Linda Nochlin.

⁸⁶ Linda Candy and Ernest Edmonds, “Practice-Based Research in the Creative Arts: Foundations and Futures from the Front Line,” *Leonardo* 51, no. 1 (2018): 63, 127752183, https://doi.org/10.1162/LEON_a_01471.

⁸⁷ Donald A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner : How Professionals Think in Action* (Routledge, 1992).

⁸⁸ Sophie Pitman and Paula Hohti, “Remaking Dress History: Applying Reconstruction Methods to Early Modern Textiles and Clothing,” *Textile History* 54, no. 1 (2023): 4–9, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00404969.2024.2409295>.

⁸⁹ Michael Wilson et al., *Storytelling Research Methods: Meaning Making and Interdisciplinary Knowledges across Borders* (Routledge, 2026), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003274445>.

⁹⁰ Manavis et al., “Transformed Objects.”

⁹¹ Karen Saucier Lundy, “Historical Research,” in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods* (SAGE Publications, Inc., 2008), <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412963909>.

⁹² Ian Woodward, *Understanding Material Culture* (SAGE Publications, Limited, 2007), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aut/detail.action?docID=366918>.

3.2 Methods

3.2.1 Reflective Design Practice

Reflection is important when undertaking practice-based research. This research aligns with the theories outlined in Donald Schön's *The Reflective Practitioner* (1992). Reflection-in-action is decision-making undertaken while in practice. It relies on tacit knowledge.⁹³ It does not require analytical techniques but does require the practitioner to be aware of their decisions. Reflection-on-action is the analysis of the outcome of practice.⁹⁴ This requires documentation, journaling and sketching, to analyse outcomes and decide next steps.

Iteration is a fundamental part of reflective design practice. An iterative process is required because the best result is unlikely to be achieved on the first attempt.⁹⁵ Design can produce unpredictable outcomes, and a reflective process can be used to identify and evaluate the issues that arise. Practitioners seek to correct these issues through a series of iterative prototypes. Sometimes problems are corrected, and sometimes the iterations produce new knowledge.

Reflection-in-action is used in this research to help understand how tacit knowledge influences design decisions. Reflection-on-action is used to analyse toiles, which are garment prototypes, to achieve the desired fit and silhouette. Toile images are annotated to evaluate their success. The process of iteration and reflection allows refined designs to be produced.

⁹³ Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner : How Professionals Think in Action*, 42.

⁹⁴ Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner : How Professionals Think in Action*, 182.

⁹⁵ David C. Wynn and Claudia M. Eckert, "Perspectives on Iteration in Design and Development," *Research in Engineering Design* 28, no. 2 (2017): 153, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00163-016-0226-3>.

3.2.2 Historical Research

The purpose of historical research is to analyse links between contemporary issues and their historical causes.⁹⁶ Karen Saucier Lundy describes historical research as the primary research method of historiography. She defines historiography as going “beyond data gathering to analyze and develop theoretical and holistic conclusions about historical events and periods.”⁹⁷ Primary and secondary sources are examined to draw theoretical conclusions.

The author or creator of a primary source should be considered to understand how their perception of an event was shaped by their biases.⁹⁸ There are fewer primary sources produced by women, lower-class people and minority groups.⁹⁹ The perspectives of surviving primary sources should be examined holistically to identify which perspectives are missing. Secondary sources should also be analysed for biases and considered for their relevance.



Figure 30. Marcellus Laroon, *Fair Lemons & Oranges*, 1688, <https://isiswardrobe.blogspot.com/2016/07/hsf-2016-travels-wool-gown-1680-1712.html>

Historical research is used in this work to reveal the origins of gender inequality in the fashion industry. I have chosen to focus on the experiences of disorderly women as portrayed in Beverly Lemire’s book *Dress, Culture and Commerce: The English Clothing Trade before the Factory, 1660-1800* (1997). Women’s exclusion from guilds is understood through *Worn: A People’s History of Clothing* (2022) by Sofi Thanhauser and Martha Howell’s *Women, Production and Patriarchy in Late Medieval Cities* (1986). Early Modern literature informs my understanding of how women were viewed at the time. *The Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward and Unconstant Women* (1615) by John Swetnam is a primary source that reveals how deep-rooted misogyny was in Early Modern society. Depictions of market women in art (fig. 30) help to develop my image of disorderly women and their work.

⁹⁶ Lundy, “Historical Research.”

⁹⁷ Lundy, “Historical Research.”

⁹⁸ Lundy, “Historical Research.”

⁹⁹ Lundy, “Historical Research.”

3.2.3 Material Culture Studies

This research uses material culture studies to analyse clothing and garment-making techniques from the Early Modern period. In *Understanding Material Culture* (2007), Ian Woodward defines material culture studies as the study of societies through objects.¹⁰⁰ Physical garments made by women in the Early Modern period were unable to be accessed for this research, although garments from this era exist in museums in Europe and the United States,¹⁰¹ geographical distance has prevented the researcher from having access to them. As such, this research uses both visual research methods, such as analysing images of garments and their historical context, and historical garment replication, a practice-based method.

Studying the past through the replication of historical garments is an increasingly recognised method of historical fashion research.¹⁰² The *Textile History* journal dedicated a special issue to the significance of this research in 2024. Researching through replication reveals insights about historical garments that cannot be understood by analysing them.¹⁰³ Replication allows the researcher to understand the techniques required to construct the garment and their significance to the period. It also allows the garment to be worn. This deepens the researcher's understanding of the maker and wearer's experience.

¹⁰⁰ Woodward, *Understanding Material Culture*, 12.

¹⁰¹ Garments are studied from the online archives of the Victoria and Albert Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the London Museum.

¹⁰² Pitman and Hohti, "Remaking Dress History."

¹⁰³ Pitman and Hohti, "Remaking Dress History."

Dress historian Janet Arnold's *Patterns of Fashion* series approaches material culture studies through historical patternmaking. Arnold examines extant historical garments and creates patterns for replicating them (fig. ?). Each pattern is accompanied by contextual historical research, providing the context for the garment.

This research uses Arnold's approach to study Early Modern garments through replication. Arnold's books are used to create accurate patterns. Early Modern hand-sewing and embroidery techniques are used to examine the work that disorderly women undertook. The hand-sewing and embroidery techniques used are pick stitching, hem stitching, insertion stitching, drawn thread work, smocking and herringbone stitching.

These historical techniques continue to be used in the final garment design and construction phase of the research to tell the story of disorderly women through garment making.

Figure 31. Janet Arnold, *Pattern from Patterns of Fashion*, 1964, <http://www.cardinal-creations.com/projects/jacobean-jacket>

For copyright
purposes this image
has been removed.

For copyright
purposes this image
has been removed.

Figure 32. Judy Chicago, *Emily Dickinson place setting, The Dinner Party*, 1974-79, <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/en-AU/objects/166098>

3.2.4 Storytelling and Visual Language

Storytelling is a research method that communicates, tests and creates knowledge.¹⁰⁴ Storytelling is defined by Michael Wilson, Antonia Liguori and Emily Underwood-Lee in *Storytelling Research Methods* (2026) as “a process where knowledge is constructed and disseminated in a reciprocal exchange between teller and listener” and a “place where knowledge is processed.”¹⁰⁵ Storytelling uses stories to produce new knowledge by analysing assumptions and beliefs.

Judy Chicago’s seminal feminist work, *The Dinner Party* (1979) (fig. 32), uses visual language, a form of storytelling. Ricia Anne Chansky (2014) discusses Chicago’s “development of an alternative visual language that charted her narrative of the self.”¹⁰⁶ The stories of 39 mythical and historical women are told through the traditionally feminine techniques of embroidery, needlework, ceramics, and porcelain painting. These women’s stories are told using techniques they would have understood and may have practised,¹⁰⁸ adding authenticity to Chicago’s work.

This research uses storytelling to explore an imagined world where disorderly women have the creative freedoms women have today. Clothes are designed through the eyes of a disorderly woman who is pushing back against the rigid societal expectations placed on women in the Early Modern period. The use of storytelling aligns with Ann Demulmeester’s way of designing through a child’s eyes.¹⁰⁹ By designing from the perspective of a historical woman, I am challenging the preconceptions I have about clothing as someone born in the twenty-first century. Like Chicago, I am using techniques that disorderly women would have understood to tell their story.

¹⁰⁴ Wilson et al., *Storytelling Research Methods: Meaning Making and Interdisciplinary Knowledges across Borders*.

¹⁰⁵ Wilson et al., *Storytelling Research Methods: Meaning Making and Interdisciplinary Knowledges across Borders*.

¹⁰⁶ Ricia Anne Chansky, “When Words Are Not Enough: Narrating Power and Femininity Through the Visual Language of Judy Chicago’s *The Dinner Party*,” *A/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 29, no. 1 (n.d.): 61, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08989575.2014.921983>.

¹⁰⁷ “The Dinner Party by Judy Chicago,” *Brooklyn Museum*, accessed March 25, 2025, https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/dinner_party.

¹⁰⁸ Katy Hessel, *The Story of Art without Men* (Hutchinson Heinemann, 2022), 352.

¹⁰⁹ Borrelli-Persson, “Ann Demeulemeester Shares the Stories Behind the Looks in Her Retrospective at Pitti Uomo.”

Below is the story that will be told through the language of contemporary fashion design:

A young disorderly woman, in a city in Early Modern Britain, supplements the family income by mending and altering garments for money. She is busy and transient, moving between domestic and market spaces.

She finds a box of fabric scraps. She is tired of wearing clothes that hinder her ability to work and move through the world, that take time to put on and make her physically uncomfortable. She takes the box of fabric and, single-handedly, stands up to the rigid societal expectations of how women should dress and fashions a wardrobe that disorders the idea of clothing that society has. She uses the skills she has to do something for herself.

References to Early Modern garments tie her to the period. The box of fabric is represented in a series of prints. To undertake this project and wear the garments, she would have to be intelligent, creative, brave and fed up with the way things are.

But, this never happened; she never existed. It is all an illusion, something I wish had happened, so I have made it up. She is someone who could have been. Her existence is not tied to a single place or time, reinforcing the fact that she is simply an idea. What is real are the techniques used to make the garments; these represent the skills of real women who existed and who passed their craft down through the generations.

Offering what could have been, then taking it away, creates a sense of loss for what could have been if societal expectations and the role of women in fashion history had been different. This sense of loss is something I have often felt while undertaking this research. By revealing history's inequities, my work asks the present not to repeat the same mistakes and to allow women equal opportunities to succeed in fashion.

3.2.5 Unruly Design

Unruly design deconstructs the rules of design.¹¹⁰ Early Modern clothing signified class and gender more clearly than clothing today.¹¹¹ Sumptuary laws dictated what fabrics different classes were allowed to wear.¹¹² These laws and cultural expectations kept women in restrictive clothing. By implementing the unruly design principles, the Early Modern garments explored through material culture research are disordered.

The story that informs the garment-making in this research is of a woman frustrated by the sartorial rules of the Early Modern period. Unruly design offers a way not just to break these rules, but to discard them entirely.

¹¹⁰ Eggink, "Rules of Unruly Design : Lessons from the History of Anti-Modernist Aesthetics," 79.

¹¹¹ Susan Vincent, *Dressing the Elite: Clothes in Early Modern* (Berg, 2003), 2.

¹¹² Vincent, *Dressing the Elite: Clothes in Early Modern*, 117.

This research uses the five principles of unruly design to guide the approach to garment-making.

1. The convergence of different fields of study

This research is situated across the fields of history and fashion design. Both historical research methods and garment design methods inform the design output. Historical research allows me to communicate the story of disorderly women through the garments I make.

2. References to popular culture or recognisable symbols

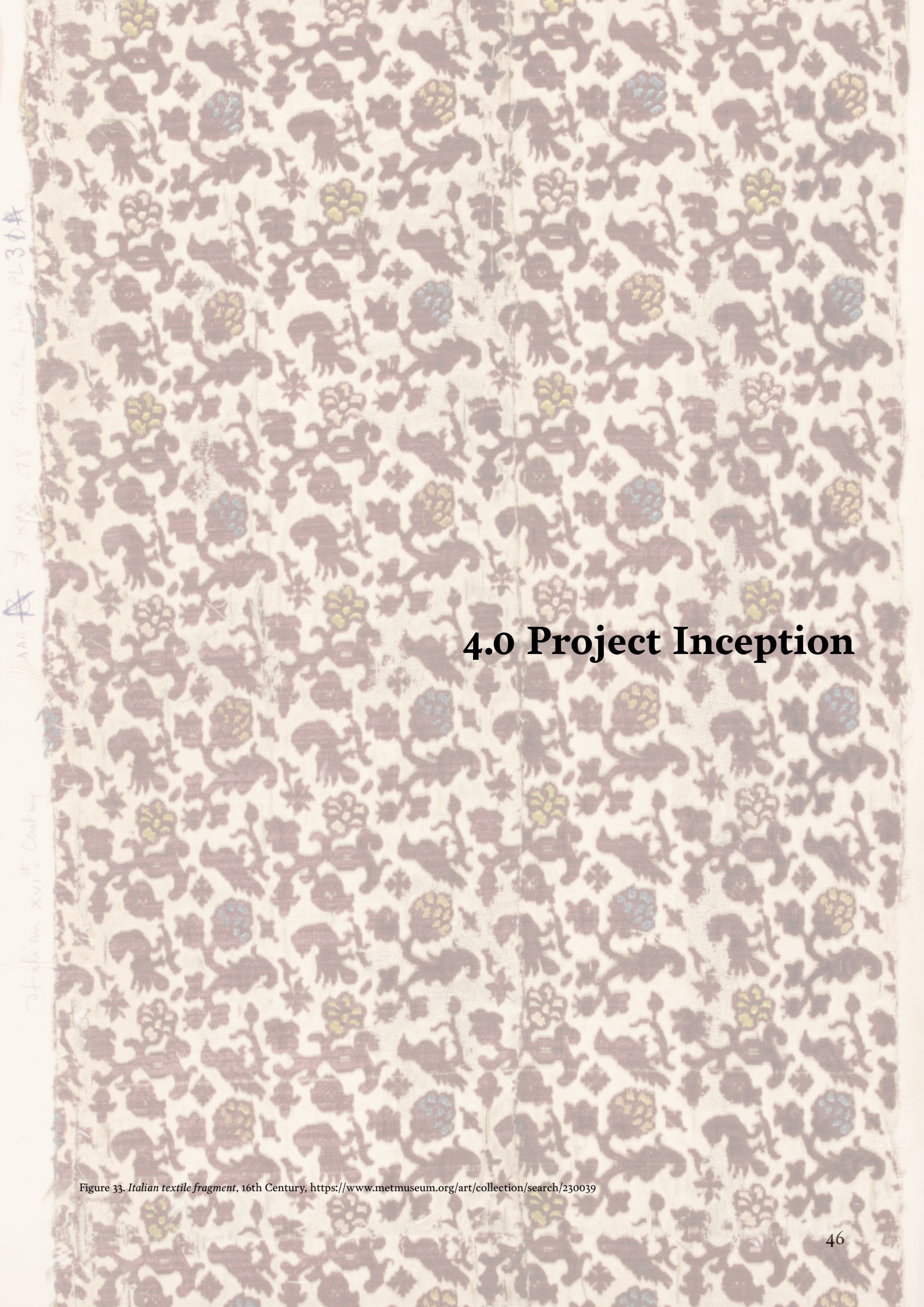
The Early Modern garments that are referenced are recognisable symbols of the period. They still carry associations with women's subjugation. These garments as symbols are disordered, challenging preconceptions of Early Modern clothing.

3. The creation of a complex form

Each garment is a complex form. It is a storytelling device that brings together past and present. It is also visually complex. Cut, print, fastenings and hand-sewing finishes are used to make garments that are complex in detail and construction.

4. and 5. The use of preexisting objects and the incorporation of unconventional materials

Principles four and five converge in this research. Preexisting objects are used as fastenings. This is an unconventional use of materials. Antique cutlery is bent to make clasps. Dorset button-making techniques are used to turn washers into buttons. Heel plates are also used as buttons. These objects reference the disorderly women's use of found or stolen garments. They also create disorder because they are removed from their usual environment. Using unconventional objects as fastenings reflects the philosophy of unruly design as it questions why some objects are used to fasten garments and others are not.



Staphan XVI^e Century
AAG # KPA 78. Similar to PL30A

4.0 Project Inception

Figure 33. *Italian textile fragment, 16th Century*, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/230039>



Figure 34. Gemma Goldfinch, *Visible History*, 2024

4.1 Project Origins

This research project builds on the work done in my undergraduate degree. My graduate collection, *Visible History*, focussed on garments worn by women who made clothing. Each look started with a tailored piece that replicated a historical garment. Traditional textiles and patterns were used to create a collection that felt both new and from a distant time. The collection was grounded in traditional hand-sewing techniques like pick stitching and smocking. The focus on traditional techniques, historical visual references and the women makers who came before began with my undergraduate collection. This research builds on that work, further exploring the ideas and skills I developed making *Visible History* to deepen my understanding of historical fashion and gender inequality in the fashion industry.



Figure 35. Gemma Goldfinch, *Initial Moodboard*, 2025

4.2 Visual Explorations

Moodboarding helps to communicate the feeling and visual language of a fashion collection.¹¹³ This process is iterative as the moodboards evolve with the concept. The moodboard is created on the wall in front of my desk, providing a constant reminder of the visual language I intend to use.

The initial moodboard focussed on how masculinity and femininity were represented in nineteenth century photography. The moodboard has a strong visual language and the tension between masculinity and femininity is clear. There was a disconnect between the ideas I was exploring in my research and what the moodboard represented. At this point I turned to the structure of a timeline to conduct the visual research.

¹¹³ T. D. Cassidy, "Mood Boards: Current Practice in Learning and Teaching Strategies and Students' Understanding of the Process," *International Journal of Fashion Design, Technology and Education* 1, no. 1 (2008): 43–54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17543260802015154>.

(*Mostly*) *British Fashion 1300-1900* (fig. 36), brings together historical and material culture research to understand how working- and middle-class British people's clothing changed over the centuries. It charts the changes to fashion caused by the establishment and then decline of tailoring guilds.

Britain's role in the Industrial Revolution and the widespread nature of its empire made it a significant player in the development of the modern fashion industry.¹⁴⁴ A large amount of the evidence for women's exclusion from tailoring comes from Britain. Therefore, the timeline is contained to British fashion to show the impact tailoring had on the fashion industry today. The timeline also focuses on working and middle-class people as this research is centred around people who made clothing.

The timeline charts the changes to fashion caused by the establishment and then decline of tailoring guilds. It is a form of material culture study because it allows visual material to be brought together to study patterns of change. By juxtaposing the development of men's and women's fashions, the timeline shows how clothing was used to subjugate women.

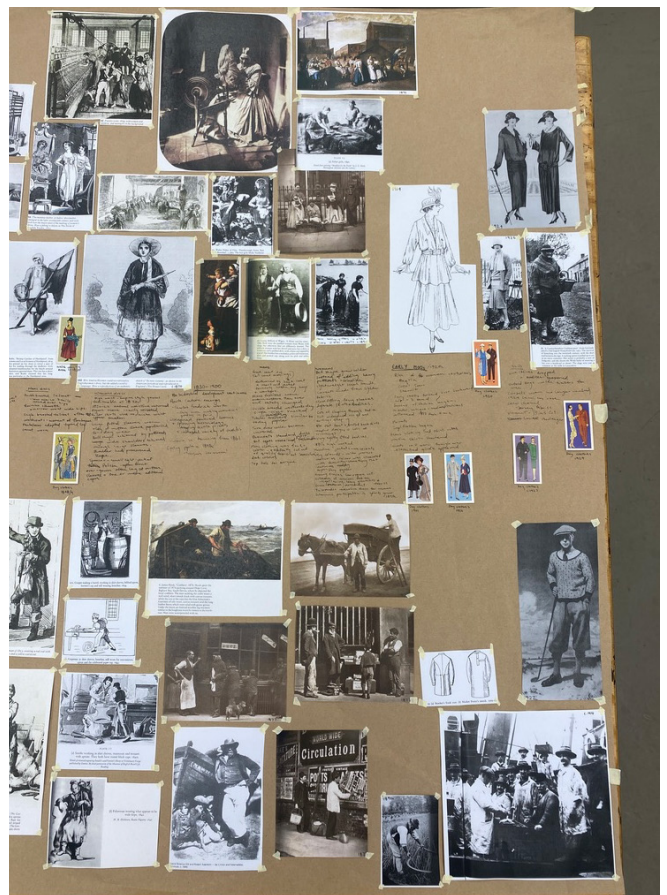
This research project is not long enough to effectively honour the variety of ways women have contributed to six centuries of fashion history. The timeline was used to decide what era of history and what group of women to focus on. While this project focuses on disorderly women and the Early Modern period, the timeline remains relevant. It shows how Early Modern fashion was shaped by the preceding centuries and how, in turn, it shaped the fashion that came after it. It also shows the types of garments disorderly women would have been altering and mending.

¹⁴⁴ Andrew Godley, "The Development of the Clothing Industry: Technology and Fashion," *Textile History* 28, no. 1 (n.d.): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1179/004049697793711067>.

Following page, above: Figure 36. Gemma Goldfinch, (*Mostly*) *British Fashion 1300-1900*, 2025

Following page, below left: Figure 37. Gemma Goldfinch, (*Mostly*) *British Fashion 1300-1900, Detail*, 2025

Following page, below right: Figure 38. Gemma Goldfinch, (*Mostly*) *British Fashion 1300-1900, Detail*, 2025





Above: Figure 39. Vasamuseet, *Jacket found in the wreck of the Vasa*, c.1600-1628, <https://digitaltmuseum.se/011024617523/jacka>



Above right: Figure 40. Gemma Goldfinch, *Vasa Jacket*, 2025

4.3 Material Explorations

The material culture study involved the replication of a jacket that was found on the wreck of the Swedish warship, *Vasa*, that sank in 1628. The aim of replicating the jacket was to understand and communicate the labour that went into making a garment in the Early Modern period. The jacket features on the timeline.

Historical patternmaking techniques were used to cut the jacket without the aid of blocks. As there are no measurements of the original jacket, I chose to fit it to myself. Darts were added to make it fit a woman's body. The entire garment was hand sewn and took 30 hours. Timelapse videos of the process evidence the labour that went into the jacket.

While the process explored the role of the tailor more than disorderly women's work, all clothing was hand sewn in the Early Modern period. Through hand-sewing this jacket, I was able to comprehend the amount of time and labour disorderly work required. This is carried through into the rest of the work.

¹⁵ "Timeline," with Statens maritima och transporthistoriska museer, *Vasamuseet*, October 18, 2019, <https://www.vasamuseet.se/en/explore/vasa-history/timeline>.



Above: Figure 41. Gemma Goldfinch, *Embroidery Samples*, 2025

Below: Figure 42. Jane Bostocke, *Embroidery Sampler*, 1598, https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/embroidery-a-history-of-needlework-samplers?srltid=AfmBOqc8uTF_22nhMouKW01BhNz4vkTryEEJFU4KoXPxCxBooyjf4_X



¹¹⁶ "Embroidery – a History of Needlework Samplers · V&A," *Victoria and Albert Museum*, accessed April 22, 2026, <https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/embroidery-a-history-of-needlework-samplers>.

For many centuries women made embroidery samplers, which are pieces of fabric with different stitches, patterns and elements (fig. 42).¹¹⁶ Embroidery samplers are used, in this research, as a form of material culture study. Making these embroidery samples was a way to understand the significance of samplers. They allowed me to practice new techniques and gave me an archive of techniques to draw on when designing garments. The embroidery techniques used were drawn thread work, insertion stitching, darning, patching and sashiko stitching.

Like the Vasa Jacket, this process helped me understand the skills disorderly women used. Each technique was timed to see how much could be achieved in 5, 10, 15 and 30 minutes. This communicates the time-consuming nature of the techniques. Documenting the time that went into making clothes in the Early Modern period helps me to understand why clothing was so valued.



Above left: Figure 43. Gemma Goldfinch, *14th Century Womenswear*, 2025



Above right: Figure 44. Gemma Goldfinch, *14th Century Womenswear*, 2025

A practice-based approach to the timeline is conducted through three-dimensional sketches of historical garments. These garments are not exact replications of past clothing, they are quick studies of extant garments and garments depicted in art from the fourteenth century to the eighteenth century. Three-dimensional sketching of historical garments is used to deepen my understanding of clothing's history, in particular the way the gendering of clothing production shifted over time. Historical patternmaking and iterative toiling are used to achieve the correct fit and silhouette. Reflective practice, (fig 45), is used to evaluate the toiles and uncover alterations that need to be made.

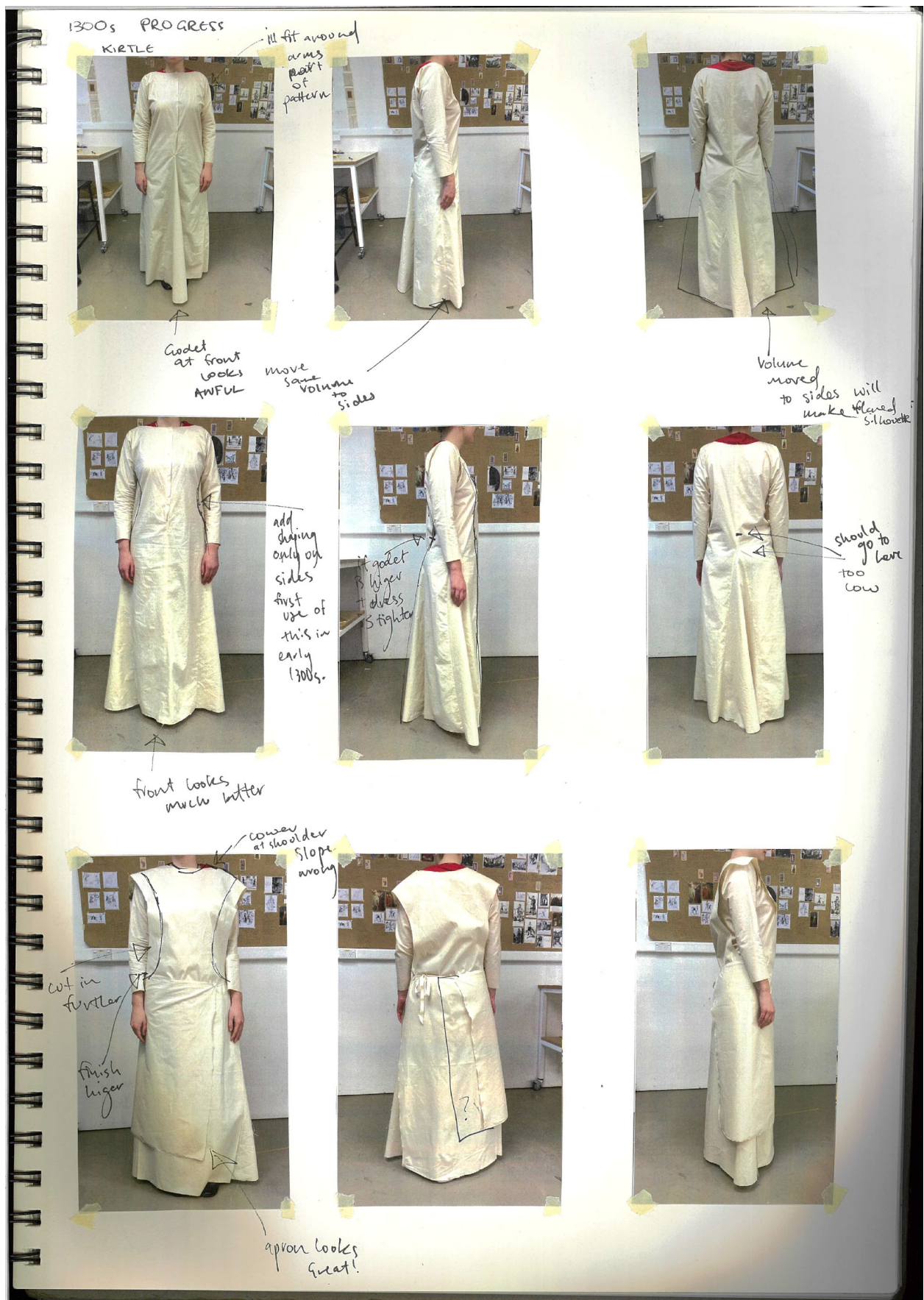


Figure 45. Gemma Goldfinch, Annotated toiles, 14th century
womenswear, 2025

Through wearing these garments, I am able to gain valuable insights into the differences between historical and modern dress. I was also able to feel the difference between wearing historical men's and women's dress.

Some insights gained were:

Layering was an important feature of historical dress. Washing clothes was more difficult than today, therefore easy-to-wash undergarments protected outer garments from contact with the body. Wearing such layered pieces felt bulky and more cumbersome than modern clothing.

The layers and fastenings, particularly on laced garments, made them time consuming to put on. This meant people in the past had more awareness of the process of getting dressed. Today convenience is valued and we have lost these daily moments where we are forced to pause.

Many of the garments used large amounts of fabric and were heavy. I am not used to wearing such cumbersome garments. There was a noticeable difference in my freedom of movement when wearing menswear versus womenswear. The men's garments had been made to work in. They were also still perceived as modest even if some layers were removed. The women's garments were longer and from the fifteenth-century onwards more restrictive of the upper body.



Above: Figure 46. Gemma Goldfinch, *Half scale draping experiment*, 2025



Above Right: Figure 47. Gemma Goldfinch, *Draping experiment*, 2025

Draping is a pattern cutting technique that involves working directly on the dress stand or the body. The second moodboard (fig. 48) informed my experimentation with draping. The moodboard explored depictions of the female body in art, therefore working directly with the body made sense. These experiments were unsuccessful. They were evidence that the ideas I wanted to communicate about the female body were underdeveloped and did not connect with the historical research and earlier, more successful, material culture experiments.

On reflection, the images on the moodboard told a story, but the direction the project was taking felt lined with clichés of femininity. Focussing on the female body did not link strongly with the historical research that is central to this project. There was also no clear design language to follow as the moodboard was too broad.



Figure 48. Gemma Goldfinch, *Moodboard iteration*, 2025



5.0 Design Proposal

Figure 49. *Italian textile fragment*, 16th Century, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/230280>

This practice-based research culminates in a wardrobe of garments. Rather than making a collection, a concept that did not exist in the Early Modern period, I am creating the wardrobe of a disorderly woman.

The garments tell the story of a disorderly woman who is fed up with the rigid societal expectations that dictated what women wore in Early Modern Britain. She uses her skills to make something for herself. By exploring how historical women found creative alternatives when excluded from tailoring guilds, this research begins to make up for the centuries women were sidelined in creative practice. Designing through the perspective of a disorderly woman allows me to expand my understanding of how clothing can look and function.

I am taking an orderly approach to the foundations of the collection; fibre and fabric type. Using the unruly design principles, disorder is created through patternmaking, print placement, construction, and finishings. The use of screen printed fabrics adds to the disorderly nature of the garments.

Historical hand-sewing and embroidery construction techniques create cohesion and ground the garments in the past. The use of artisanal techniques aligns the work with designers like John Alexander Skelton, Paul Harnden, Archivio J.M. Rivot and Elena Dawson.

The creation of garments that enhance a woman's sexuality is inspired by Miuccia Prada, Madeline Vionnet, Elsa Schiaparelli, Vivienne Westwood, Simone Rocha, Elena Dawson, Rei Kawakubo and Ann Demuldermeester. These designers show that sexuality is not just about how a woman looks. Their garments portray a version of sexuality that comes from a woman's intelligence, creativity and vivaciousness. The disorderly woman's wardrobe frees the woman from clichés of femininity, instead the sexuality of the garments comes from the woman who wears them.

5.1 Design Considerations

5.1.1 Fabrication

The garments are made from fabrics with the same fibre composition that disorderly women would have worn. In the Early Modern period working class people wore linen, cotton, wool and leather fabrics. Undergarments were made from linen or cotton, and outer garments were made from wool, leather or linen. Therefore, fabrics using only these fibres are used in this research.

Heritage fabrics are used to give the garments a sense of historicism. The fabrics used in this research are a mix of hand and machine woven fabrics. A handwoven cotton muslin is used for the undergarments. This is the fabric closest to the skin, meaning the feeling of the clothing will be similar to the Early Modern period. Handwoven fabrics behave more similarly to the fabrics of the Early Modern period as they are made using the same techniques.

Ideally only handwoven fabrics would be used but the transition to mechanised looms limit their availability. While fabric created using mechanised looms behaves differently to historical fabrics, there are fabrics that are woven using them that date back to the Early Modern period. Twill, muslin, tweed, oilskin and herringbone fabrics were all used in the Early Modern period and are used in this research.

A series of textile prints are created based on images of European textile fragments found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's archive. The fragments date back at least 200 years. Their age means that the fragments are worn, strangely shaped and are missing parts. Some of my garments are wider than the printed fragments. This shows the tattered edges of the original textile, communicating the origins of the print.

In this research the fragments are printed in their original colours. Historically the patterns would have been woven into or block printed onto the textile. The prints are created using screen printing. Having the creative freedom to make work like this is a modern privilege. By using a modern technique, the historical illusion is broken.

However much I want my version of the disorderly woman to exist, the one who fashions a new wardrobe in her own way, she does not, showing how important it is to protect women's creative and sartorial freedoms.

Below: Figure 50. *Italian textiles fragment*, 16th Century,
<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/230516>

Figure 51. *Gemma Goldfinch*, *Screen Print*, 2026



5.1.2 Patternmaking Techniques

This research combines historical patternmaking techniques with the principles of unruly design. This patternmaking method is developed from the way disorderly women worked. Unlike tailors, they did not make garments from bolts of fabric. They altered existing garments, keeping them up to date as fashions changed. The patternmaking process I use replicates extant garments from images extracted from museum archives and then takes an unruly approach to altering the garments. Each garment challenges how Early Modern clothing was worn or constructed. A witty disdain for the rules of Early Modern dress gives the woman agency instead of merely pointing out how restrictive the clothing was.



Figure 52. Gemma Goldfinch, *Toile fitting*, 2026

The patternmaking techniques used are deliberately constrained to ensure the garments tell the story I want them to. This approach embraces my limitations as a patternmaker. I am not a trained tailor, but neither were disorderly women. While I have had access to design education, the majority of my practical skills are self-taught. This, along with the respect I have for disorderly women, is what enables me to authentically tell their story.

The garments are fitted to me because the woman in my story is making the clothes for herself. Fitting on yourself is a different process than using a fit model or a mannequin. The garments can only be viewed in a photograph or mirror (fig. 52) and there are places on the body that are difficult to pin. This challenge helps me to design contemporary garments through the perspective of disorderly women.



Figure 53. Gemma Goldfinch, *Sewing detail*, 2026

5.1.3 Construction Methods

The garments are constructed using a mixture of hand-sewing and sewing on a treadle sewing machine. The mixture of hand work and semi-mechanised sewing highlights the importance of the maker, as all of the construction is powered by me.

The hand-sewing techniques connect me to the disorderly women because they would have been using the same techniques. By including using them to construct these garments I am helping to ensure their continued use. The hand-sewing techniques used are pick stitching, hem stitching and slip stitching. Embroidery techniques are used to add detail to the garment. The embroidery techniques used are drawn thread work, smocking, herringbone stitch and insertion stitching.

Although the treadle sewing machine is an invention of the nineteenth century,¹¹⁷ this research presents it as a symbol of the consequences of excluding women from tailoring. Because women did not have guild protection, when Ready-to-Wear manufacturing began, they were vulnerable to exploitation.¹¹⁸ Since the seventeenth century, impoverished women have been subjected to oppressive and unsafe working conditions to make cheap clothing, a practice that continues today.¹¹⁹ The invention of the treadle sewing machine solidified the place of Ready-to-Wear manufacturing by increasing the speed of production.

The treadle sewing machine is also very heavy and difficult to move from place to place. Mine is located in my bedroom (fig. 54). As all of my machine sewing is being done on this machine, my garments are being produced in a domestic space. This connects me to the disorderly women because they also worked from their homes.

¹¹⁷ American History Museum, "1846 - Elias Howe Jr.'s Sewing Machine Patent Model," *Smithsonian Institution*, accessed April 12, 2026, https://www.si.edu/object/1846-elias-howe-jrs-sewing-machine-patent-model%3Anmah_630930.

¹¹⁸ Lemire, *Dress, Culture and Commerce: The English Clothing Trade before the Factory, 1660-1800*, 43

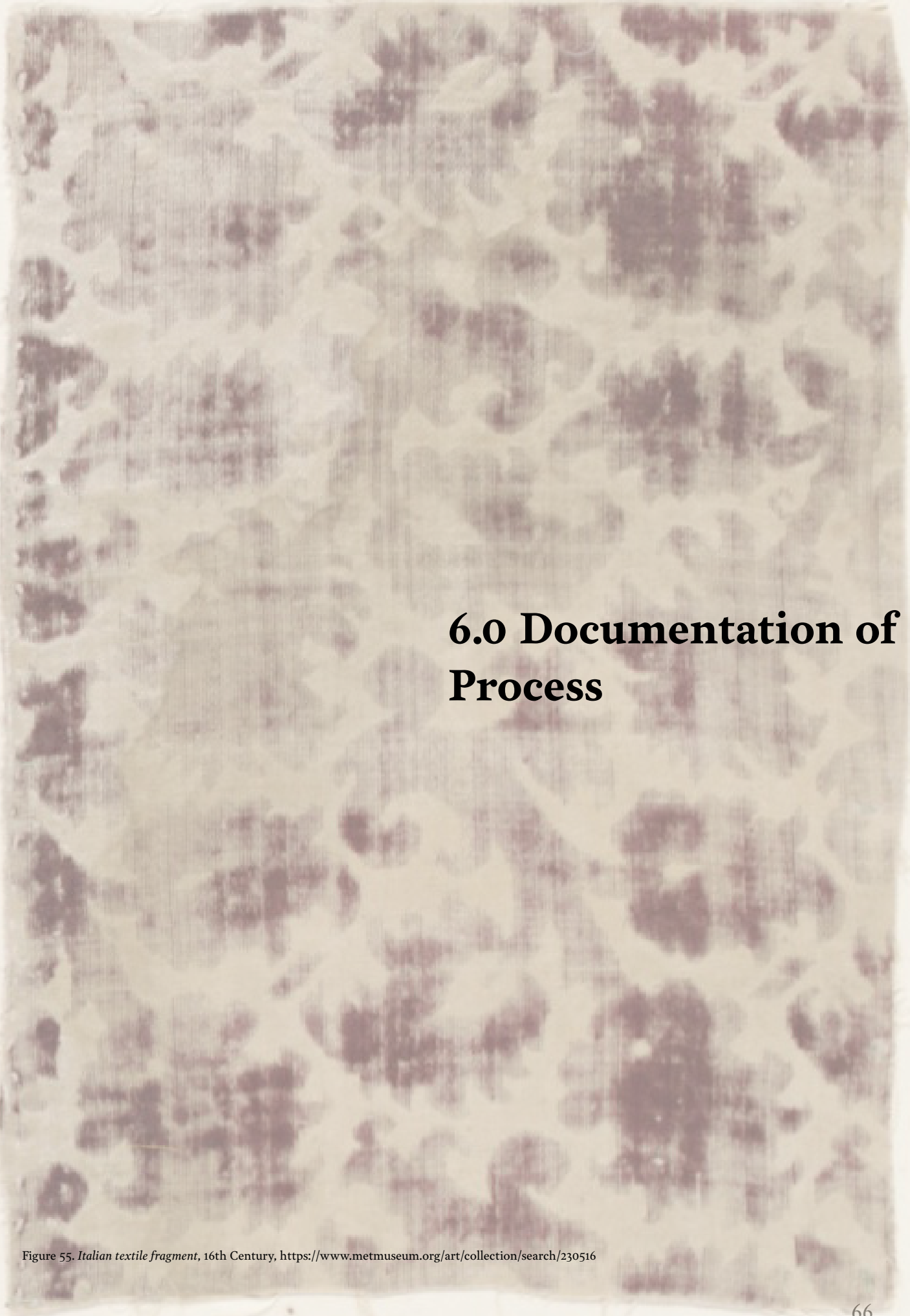
¹¹⁹ International Labour Office, *Moving the Needle*, 3.



Figure 54. Gemma Goldfinch, *Treadle*, 2026

5.2 Final Research Question

How can contemporary fashion design respond to and portray the historical exclusion of women from tailoring practice in order to vindicate the “disorderly women”?



6.0 Documentation of Process

Figure 55. *Italian textile fragment, 16th Century*, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/230516>

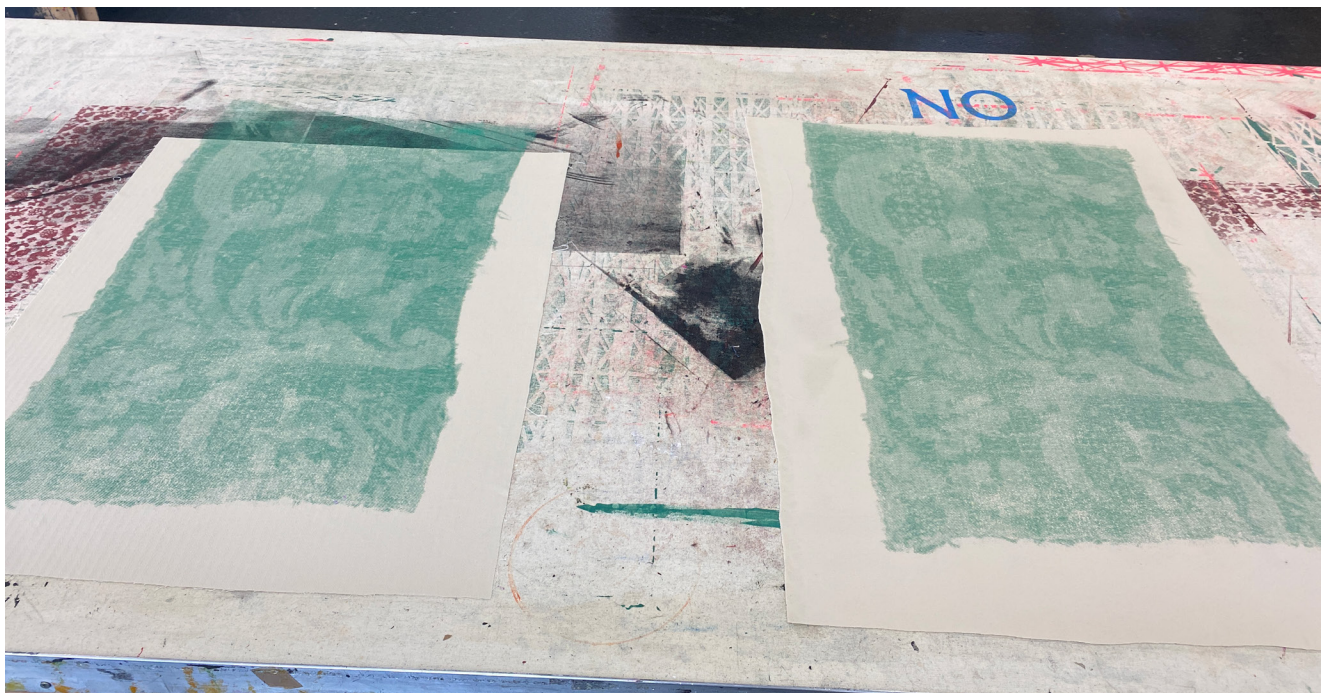
The design proposal provides clear structure to create the garments. Each stage of garment making followed the ideas outlined in the design proposal. Decision making required a combination of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action.

6.1 Print Development

To develop the screen prints, I chose a series of fragments. They are all from Early Modern Europe and therefore could have been found by the disorderly woman, although their survival makes it more likely that they were from the aristocracy as does the fact that they are all silk. The use of these textiles challenges sumptuary laws.

As the prints are used to show that the garments are contemporary, I wanted it to be obvious that screen printing had been used. To achieve gradient, I experimented with various halftone techniques, deciding to go with line over the more conventional round because it has a correlation with the threads in woven fabric.

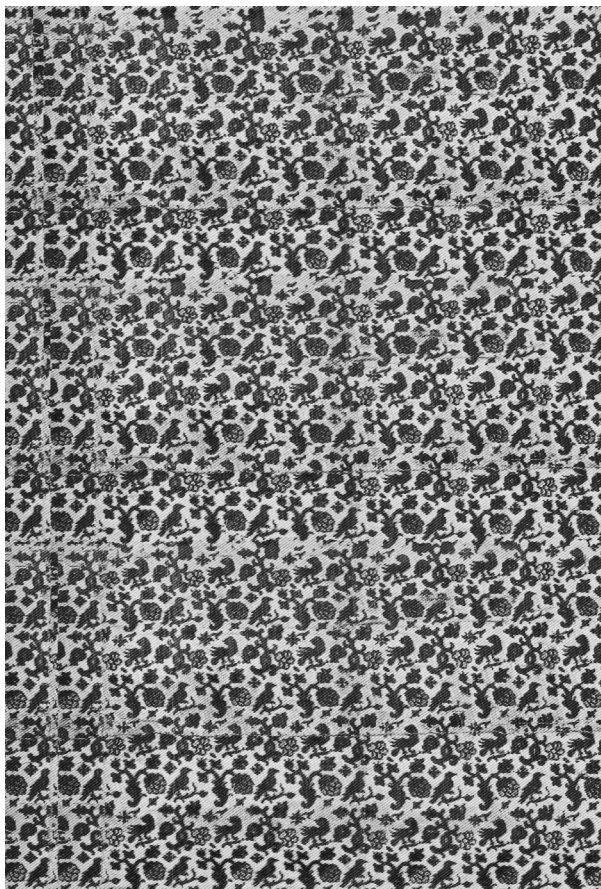
Colour is brought into the wardrobe through the prints. As screen printing is being used to replicate a historical fabric with a modern technique, I wanted to use the original colours of the fabrics. The screen-printing ink produces a different depth of colour than the dyes used in the Early Modern period. This helps to bring a modern feel to the clothes.



Above right: Figure 56. *Italian textile fragment*, 16th Century, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/230280>

Above Leftt: Figure 57. *Gemma Goldfinch, Print file*, 2026

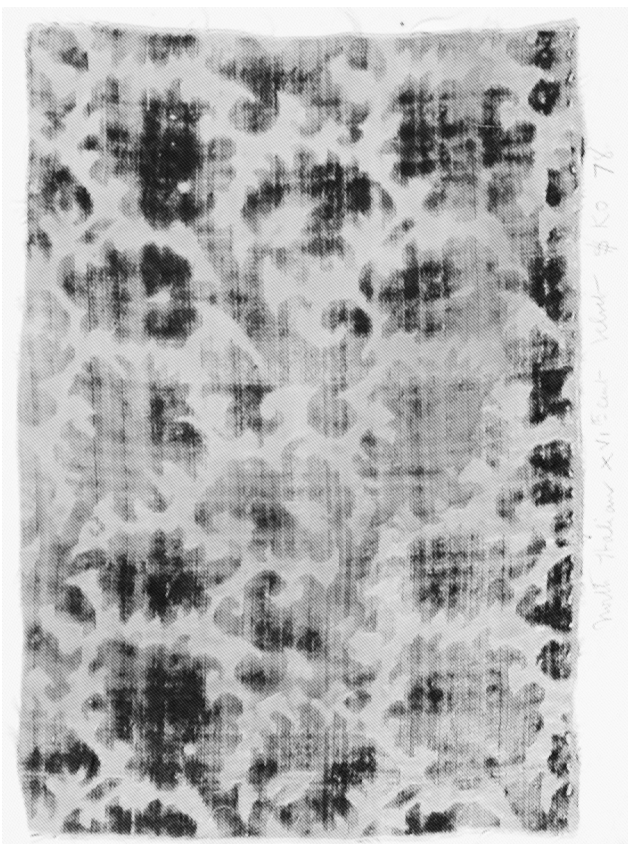
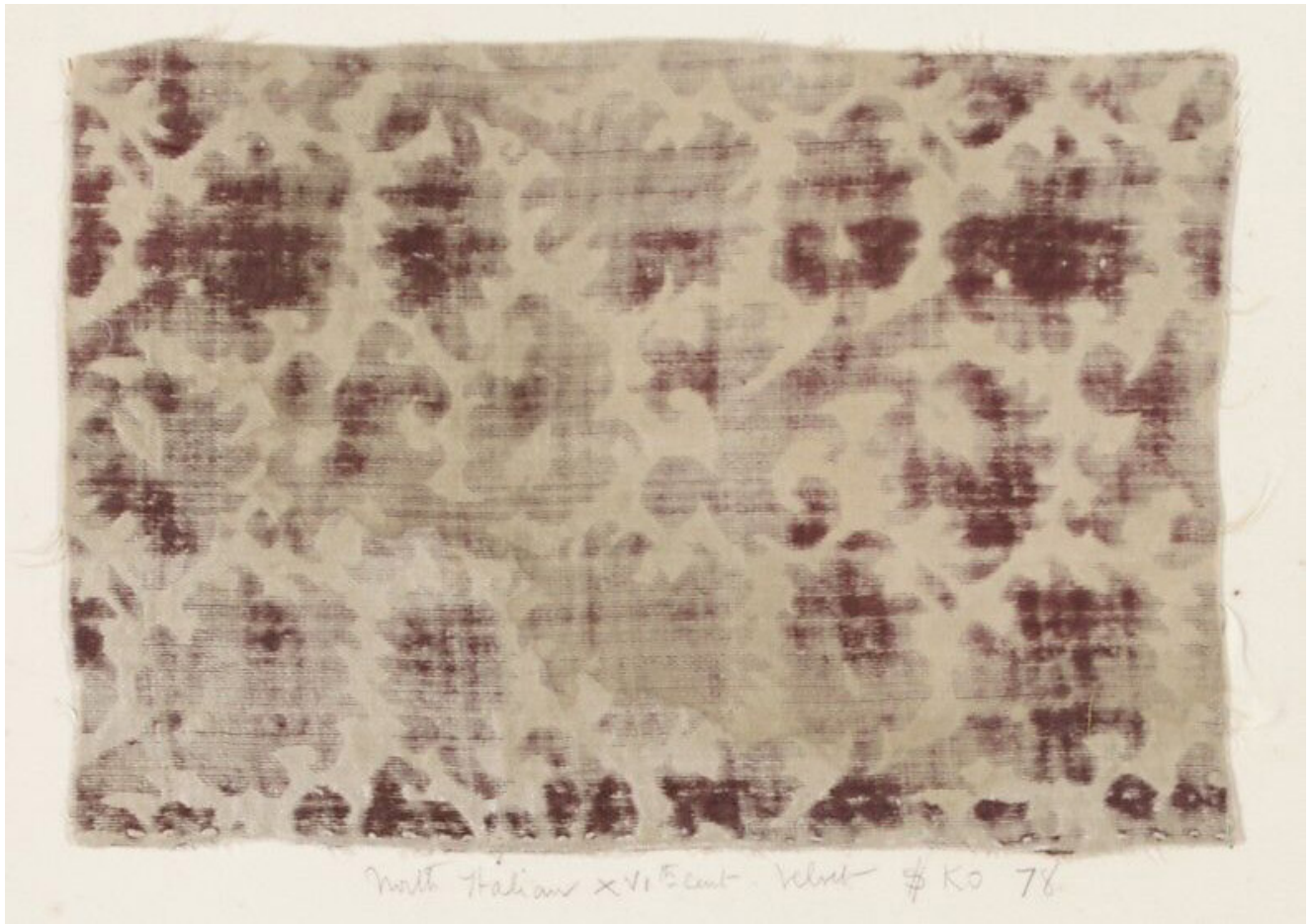
Above: Figure 58. *Gemma Goldfinch, Print progress*, 2026



Above: Figure 59. *Italian textile fragment*, 16th Century, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/230039>

Left: Figure 60. *Gemma Goldfinch*, *Print file*, 2026

Right: Figure 61. *Gemma Goldfinch*, *Print progress*, 2026



Above: Figure 62. *Italian textile fragment, 16th Century*, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/230516>

Left: Figure 63. *Gemma Goldfinch, Print file, 2026*

Right: Figure 64. *Gemma Goldfinch, Print progress, 2026*

To decide on where print is included or which print to use, Photoshop was used to quickly mock up different options. Reflection-on-action was used to evaluate which prints to use where.

I also experimented with the way the print was placed on the garment. On some garments the print extends to the edges of the fabric, functioning in the expected way. Initially all prints were going to work like this, but I decided it did not communicate that the print had come from a fragment, so other prints are more fragmented, with pattern pieces laid so the edges of the print remain visible.



Above: Figure 65. Gemma Goldfinch, *Print mock up option one*, 2026



Above Right: Figure 66. Gemma Goldfinch, *Print mock up option two*, 2026

6.2 Patternmaking

The decision about what garments to make was done by considering what the disorderly woman would need in her wardrobe. As she would have a limited wardrobe, it was important that the garments could be worn interchangeably to make a range of looks.

The patternmaking process was done in two stages. The initial stage used historical patternmaking techniques to replicate historical garments. The Jerkin and Bodice are examples where the patternmaking process stopped at this point. Other garments used more explorative patternmaking. Following principle two of unruly design they use extant historical garments as pattern references, and reference popular culture through recognisable symbols. The historical garments referenced remain recognisable in the final garment. Merging historical and unruly approaches to patternmaking results in garments that communicate complex meanings. Therefore, meeting unruly design principle three, the creation of a complex form.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Manavis et al., "Transformed Objects."

The sash top (fig. 69) began through the replication of a petticoat pattern. It is a simple pattern that uses four widths of fabric and gathers them together into cartridge pleats. Instead of wearing it as a petticoat, it is scaled down and worn as a top. The off the shoulder style references Votes for Women sashes worn by suffragettes (fig.68). This honours the significance of the feminist movement to this research.



Above: Figure 68. Suffragettes in 'Votes for Women' sashes, 1905, <https://loc.getarchive.net/media/suffragettes-mrs-john-blair-mrs-n-de-r-whitehouse-mrs-jl-laidlaw>

Above Right: Figure 69. Gemma Goldfinch, *Disturber sash*, 2026



Figure 70. Gemma Goldfinch, *Disturber Sash*, 2026



Figure 71. Gemma Goldfinch, *Chemise*, 2026



Above: Figure 72. *Chemise*, 18th Century, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/84369>

Above right: Figure 73. Gemma Goldfinch, *Chemise*, 2026



The chemise uses the pattern for a 18th Century chemise as the base. Two large circular flounces are added, as if bursting out. Positioning these to create the desired 'bursting' effect required multiple iterations. Initially the flounces fell too flat, requiring more volume. I also chose to remove the sleeves that feature in the original garment to give the chemise a more contemporary feel.

While the trousers and jerkin use traditional patternmaking techniques, they still engage with unruly design. Jerkins were usually made from leather and worn by men in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Breeches were also only worn by men. The reinterpretation of these garments as womenswear disorders the rigid gendering of clothing in the Early Modern period. This gives the disorderly woman freedom.



Above: Figure 74. Gemma Goldfinch, *Jerkin*, 2026

Below: Figure 75. *Jerkin*, c.1555, <https://www.londonmuseum.org.uk/collections/v/object-118831/jerkin/>

Right: Figure 76. Gemma Goldfinch, *Trousers*, 2026

The decisions about fit and silhouette require reflective design practice. Both reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action are used to make these decisions. Reflection-in-action is used as many decisions are made in the process, relying on tacit knowledge. Toiles are annotated to reflect on the success of the fit and silhouette and to decide where details need to be placed, using reflection-on-action.

6.3 Construction

With each garment, construction moves between hand and treadle sewing. This process relies on reflection-in-action. Construction decisions consider what is appropriate for the fabric, which relies on learned knowledge gained from handling the fabric. When hand stitching, applying different amounts of tension can produce different results. This relies on tacit knowledge.

The bodice highlights the insertion stitching technique and the sewing produced by a treadle machine. An interlaced herringbone stitch is used down the arm. This piece is designed to be a layering piece to add detail to a look. When worn under a vest, only the sleeves are visible.



Right: Figure 77. Gemma Goldfinch, *Bodice detail*, 2026

Above: Figure 78. Gemma Goldfinch, *Bodice detail*, 2026





Above: Figure 79. Gemma Goldfinch, *Disturber sash detail*, 2026



Above right: Figure 80. Gemma Goldfinch, *Disturber sash detail*, 2026

Smocking is used to create tight gathers. Both text and cable stitching are used to hold the smocking pleats together. To strengthen the reference to the suffragettes and show the connection between suffragettes and disorderly women, the sash top is embroidered with the word 'DISTURBER' (fig. 81). Leicester city fathers referred to disorderly women as "disturbers".¹²¹ This shirt reclaims the word, depicting empowerment through nonconformity.

¹²¹ Lemire, *Dress, Culture and Commerce: The English Clothing Trade before the Factory, 1660-1800*, 102.



Above: Figure 81. Gemma Goldfinch, *Disturber sash*, 2026

The chemise uses exposed seams to insert the circular flounces. This helps to create the effect of the fabric bursting out of the dress. It also creates texture as the fabric frays. The rest of the garment is constructed using French seams or flat felled seams. This shows that the exposed, fraying seams are intentional. Traditionally undergarments were embroidered and the use of herringbone stitch on the neckline and armholes acknowledges this.



Above: Figure 82. Gemma Goldfinch, *Chemise detail*, 2026



Above right: Figure 83. Gemma Goldfinch, *Chemise detail*, 2026



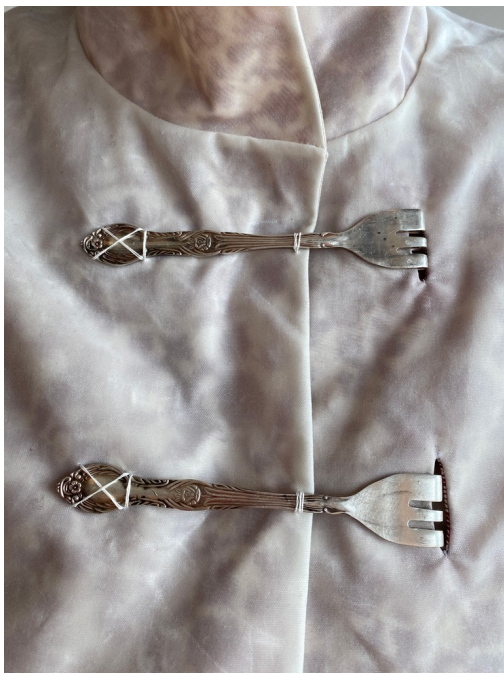
Figure 84. Gemma Goldfinch, *Trouser detail*, 2026

The trousers combine workwear finishes, in this case flat felled seams and hand finishes. The hand finishes used are herringbone stitching, hem stitching and pick stitching.

6.4 Fastenings

We interact with fastenings more than any other part of a garment. The fourth and fifth principles of unruly design direct the choice of fastenings. The principles state that preexisting objects and unconventional materials should be used. In the place of buttons, clasps and zips, found objects are used. This disorders how we view the function of objects. When wearing the three-dimensional sketches, I observed that you interact with the fastenings more on historical garments than modern ones. Since I am referencing historical garments, the wearer will interact more with the fastenings and notice the disorderly nature of the ones I have chosen.

Each object required a different process to work as a fastening.



Above: Figure 85. Gemma Goldfinch, *Antique cutlery*, 2026

Above right: Figure 86. Gemma Goldfinch, *Jerkin detail*, 2026

Antique Cutlery

To create clasps from cutlery, it needed to be bent. I used a range of fish knives and cake forks because they are small and therefore light enough for the fabric to hold. I chose cutlery that was detailed and beautiful because I want the fastenings to elevate the garment.

A vise was used to flatten the cutlery so it would lay flat against the body. At first the forks were difficult to bend so I experimented with heating them up. This damaged the silver plating causing it to crack and discolour. Instead, an electromagnetic sheet metal bending machine was used to make the initial bend. Then the cutlery was returned to the vise to close the clasp.

The process did not work on all of the pieces of cutlery. The thicker, silver-plated pieces were unable to be bent, and broke. This showed me I should look for either full silver pieces, or thinner, smaller pieces.

To attach the cutlery, I embroidered around the base. Spanish snap buttonholes are used as the other side of the closure. They are made following the instructions in *Couture: the Art of Fine Sewing* (1993) by Roberta Carr.

Two antique cake forks are used as clasps on the Jerkin (fig. 85).

For copyright
purposes this image
has been removed.



Above: Figure 87. *Dorset button*, no date, <https://www.craftcourses.com/courses/dorset-buttons-york>

Below: Figure 88. Gemma Goldfinch, *Trouser detail*, 2026

Above right: Figure 89. Gemma Goldfinch, *Washers*, 2026



Washers

To turn washers into buttons I used a button-making technique that originated in the early seventeenth-century.¹²² Dorset buttons are made by winding thread around a ring (fig. 87). Developed in Dorset, the first buttons used horn rings but expanded to use metal.¹²³

I used antique washers instead of Dorset rings. Unlike the rounded Dorset rings, washers are flat, creating a different shape. I also wanted to ensure that the washer was visible so the wearer could identify the object. To do this I did not keep my stitches close together as expected in traditional Dorset technique. Since I did not want to use new washers, a range of different sizes were used. This contributes to the disorderly nature of the work.

¹²² "Four Hundred Years of Dorset Buttons," *Gold Hill Museum*, n.d., accessed April 23, 2026, <https://goldhillmuseum.org.uk/buttons/>.

¹²³ "Four Hundred Years of Dorset Buttons."

Above: Figure 90. Breeches, 1780s, <https://collections.vam>.

Below: Figure 91. Gemma Goldfinch, Trouser detail, 2026

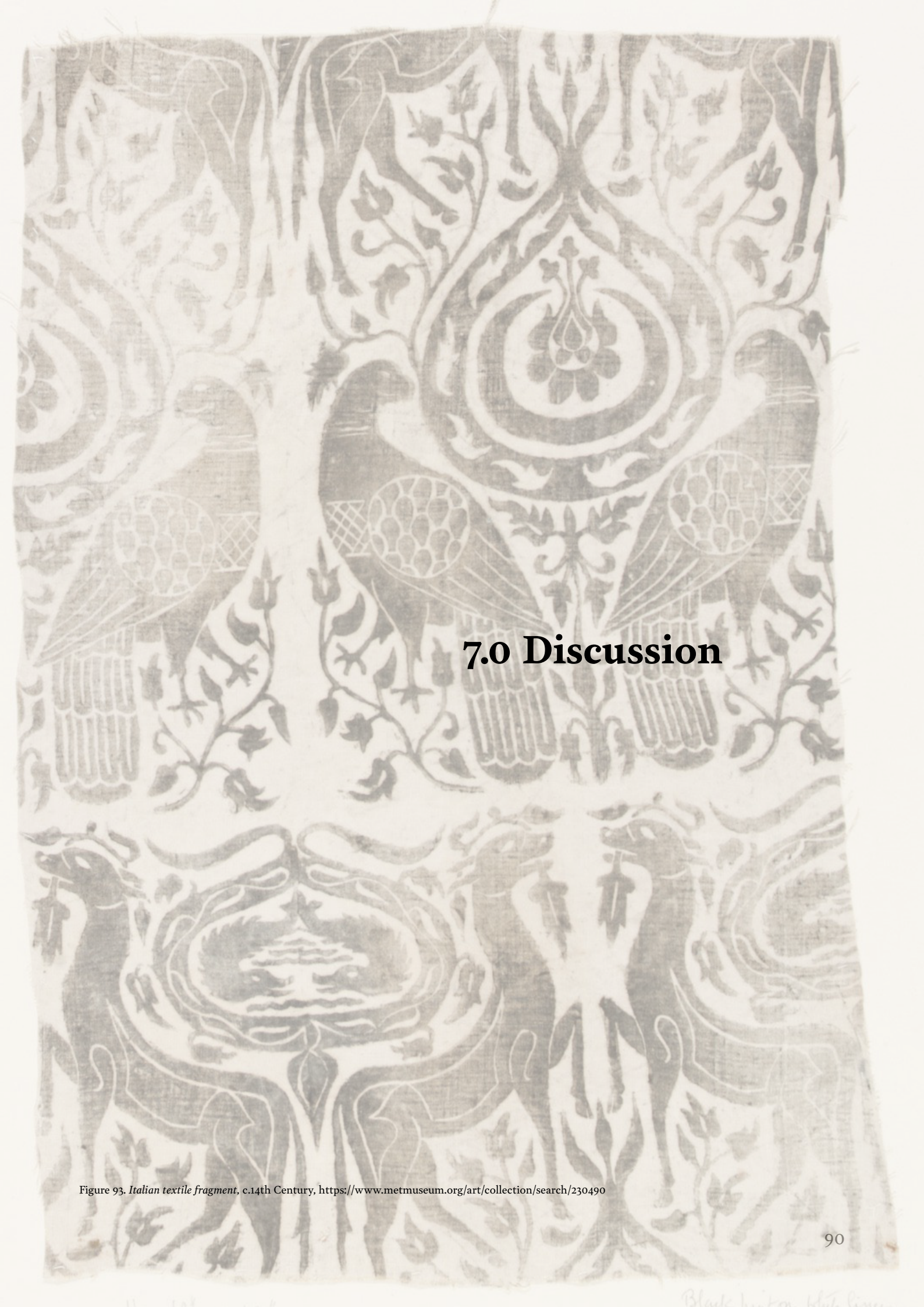
Right: Figure 92. Gemma Goldfinch, Trouser detail, 2026



Heel Plates

Heel plates required no modification to be used as buttons. They already have holes that can be used to attach them to garments. Because of their unusual shape, they sit around the buttonhole. This subverts the traditional interaction between button and buttonhole. The button usually covers up the buttonhole but using heel taps serves to highlight the buttonhole (fig. 91).

Heel plates are used to fasten a trouser front. The fold open front (fig. 92) references a pair of breeches from the 1780s (fig. 90).



7.0 Discussion

Figure 93. *Italian textile fragment, c.14th Century*, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/230490>

This research tells the story of disorderly women through contemporary fashion design to respond to and portray the historical exclusion of women from tailoring practice. Aspects of this practice can be understood through comparison to a range of designers. The desire to empower women through clothing connects it to Miuccia Prada, Maria Grazia Chiuri, Vivienne Westwood and Simone Rocha. The use of historical garment making techniques aligns the work with artisanal designers such as John Alexander Skelton, Paul Harnden, Karim Fares and Elena Dawson. The use of unruly design to question existing rules of fashion aligns the work with Glenn Martens, Ann Demulermester and Rei Kawakubo. However, this work stands independently of these designer's work. It refers to and is guided by aspects of each, but uses the story of disorderly women, to reflect on the origins of gender inequality in the fashion industry. The value of the research is in the development of a methodology that allows for historical women makers to be portrayed, through contemporary fashion design, with the respect they deserve.

The practice-based research approach allows for the story of disorderly women to be told through a language they would have understood. By incorporating historical research and material culture studies, a depth of knowledge about these women was acquired. This allows their story to be told authentically to communicate my respect for the creativity they showed in the face of adversity. Storytelling and visual language combined with the unruly design principles translated the historical and material culture research into the language of fashion design.

The playfulness and spontaneity created through unruly design and curious colour palette, rebel against the image of historical women as repressed. While acknowledgement of their repression is part of the work, the focus is on celebrating their creativity and resilience. The garments seek to empower the women who wear them, encouraging them to take up space and be heard.

The historical techniques that resulted from the material culture studies are used to honour the skills of makers from the past. By incorporating them into my designer handwriting, their continued use is ensured. The use of these techniques comes from a desire to honour the people who developed them. This is communicated in the work through the time given to learning and applying the techniques.

A limitation imposed on the research is the choice to focus on disorderly women. They are not the only example of women's exclusion in fashion's history but for their story to be told with the necessary consideration, the scope of the research had to be constrained. The detail of the research and the attentiveness that went into final design outputs honours the disorderly women. Had the scope of the project been too broad this would not have been possible.

This research is also limited by my singular perspective. A discussion of intersectionality through bell hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody*, is included in relation to Simone Rocha's work. This research is undertaken from my perspective as a young Pākehā woman and focuses on the experiences of my ancestors, working-class British women.

While there was adequate evidence of disorderly women's work to undertake this research, the documentation of their existence was fractured, difficult to find and academic. Exploring the disorderly women's story through contemporary fashion design, as I have done, seeks to communicate the significance of their work. However, there is also scope for their history to be shared in other ways, for example, in a non-fiction publication written for broader audiences.

8.0 Conclusion

Figure 94. *Italian textile fragment*, 16th-17th Century, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/230311>

Contemporary fashion design is used to tell the story of a group of historical women. Their portrayal uses contemporary and historical techniques to vindicate the disorderly women, showing what was lost by not allowing them to work as tailors.

These garments exist in a space between history and modernity. Historical techniques are contrasted with the use of screen printing and an unruly approach to design. The garments could not have been designed by a woman in the Early Modern Period. Societal constraints would have made it too difficult for her to design and wear garments like this. Instead, this research uses contemporary fashion design to imagine an alternative history. The research could only have been undertaken in the modern era, where women like me have creative freedom.

While I hope women of different races, ages, classes and body shapes would feel empowered in these garments, this research would be enriched if designers with perspectives different to my own were to build on it. Therefore, this research encourages other women to embed feminist theory and an understanding of the past into their fashion practice. As stated in my discussion, conversations around gender inequality in the fashion industry also would benefit from histories of women's exclusion being documented in more readily accessible ways.

The practice-based methodology developed by undertaking this research project will continue to inform my fashion practice. This thesis provides a structure to respond to and portray the stories of other women who were excluded from fashion history. The designer handwriting developed through this project will also continue to inform my work to bring historical techniques into a contemporary fashion space.

Because they were excluded from tailoring guilds, disorderly women had to be creative in their approach to garment making. This research celebrates their creativity, granting them the chance to be free in a way that would not have been possible in the Early Modern Period. It ensures disorderly women's contribution to fashion history begins to get the recognition it deserves.



9.0 Appendix

Figure 95. *Fragment of a chausable*, Mid 15th Century, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/461087>

H 20" x 18" # K09-78 Venetian Gothic style velvet - late XVth C.

9.1 Exhibition

The exhibition featured the final wardrobe, comprising 16 pieces. The garments were hung on two rails, evoking the idea of a wardrobe. By positioning the garments in the middle of the gallery space, visitors could walk around them and get an up-close view of the details. The exhibition proved very interactive for visitors. People felt the garments, peered inside, and talked about which pieces they would want to wear and how they would wear them. Seeing others interact with the garments was the perfect way to bring the research to a close. The intention behind this work was to bring the story of disorderly women to more people, and the exhibition made that possible.

A film was made to complement the pieces. The film showed how the clothes work on the body. The garments were styled in six ways, showcasing the wardrobe's potential. While the film was created without a narrative structure, it conveys the idea of a disorderly woman making her own clothes. Shots of the treadle sewing machine and hand sewing are interspersed between shots of the garments being modelled. Underscoring the film is the sound of the treadle machine sewing. This was the soundtrack to the creation of the garments. It also created the exhibition's atmosphere. The visuals and soundscape give the viewer a glimpse into how the work was made, communicating the importance of honouring makers of the past in this thesis.



Figures 96 to 101. Paul Chapman, *A Vindication of Disorderly Women Exhibition* by Gemma Goldfinch, 2026





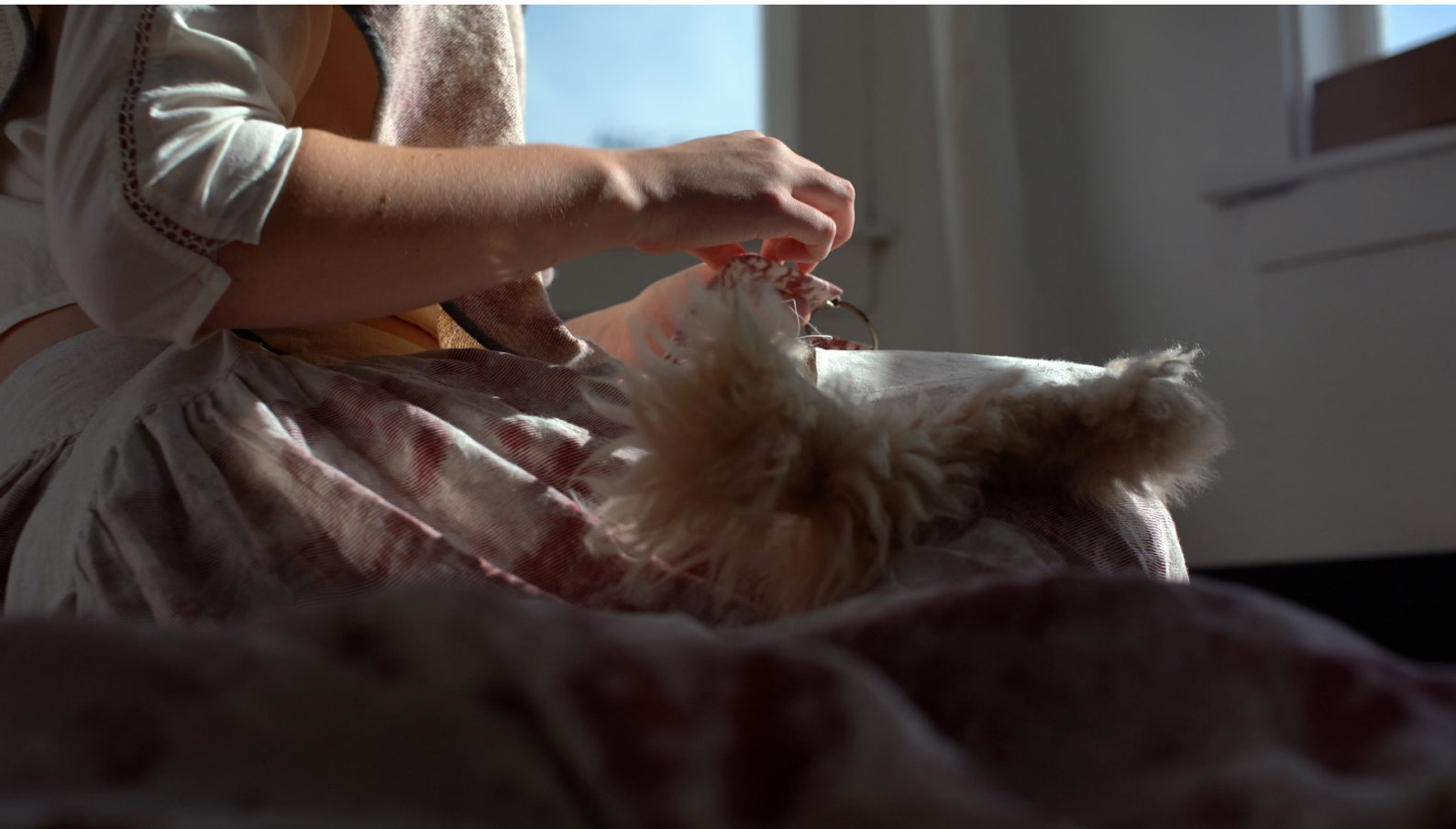


9.2 A Vindication of Disorderly Women Look Book

Figures 102 to 123. Jack Hancox, *A Vindication of Disorderly
Women Look Book Images*, 2026

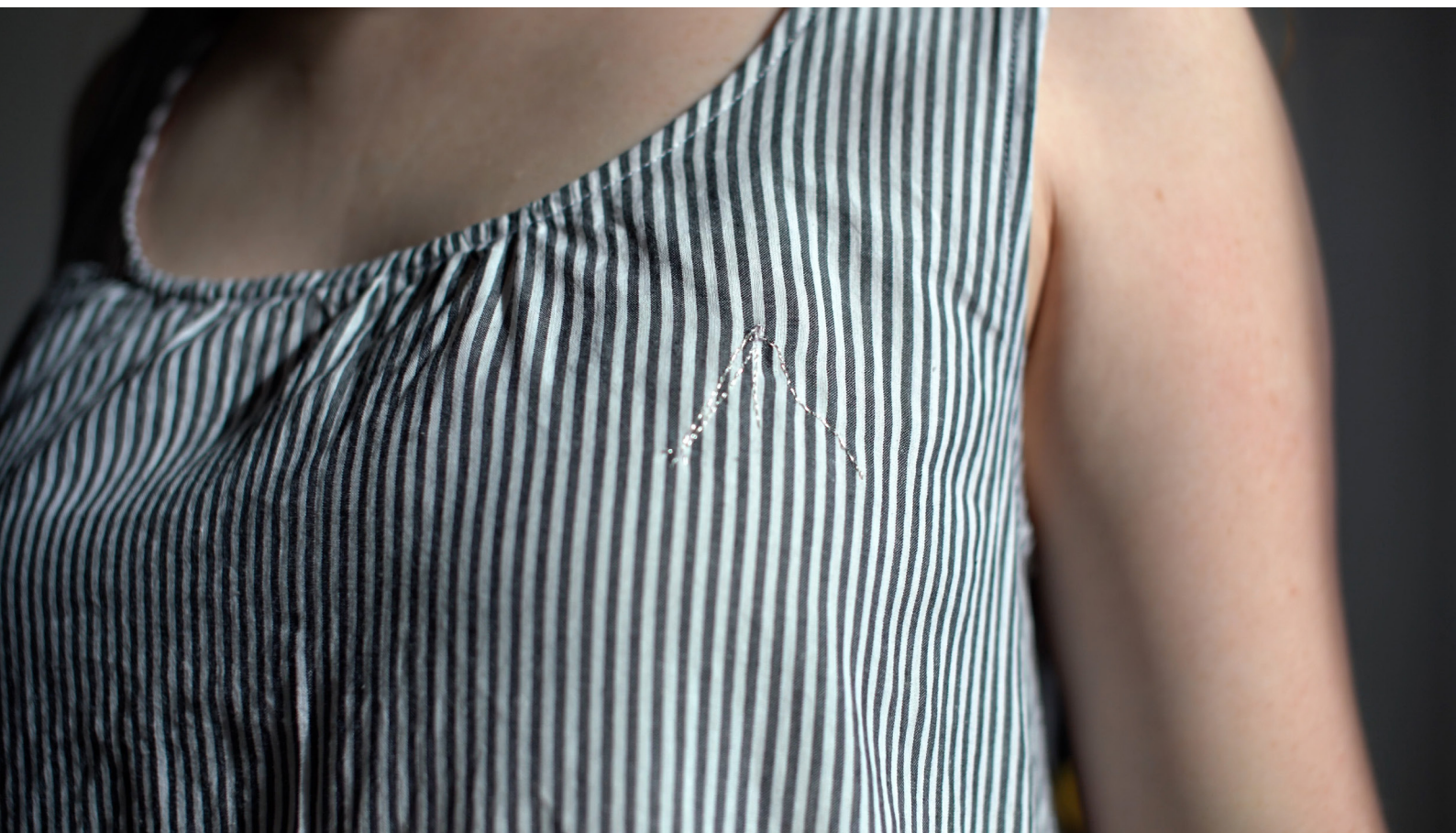


























References

- 1 Granary. "Why Are Only 12% of Fashion's Creative Directors Women?" Substack newsletter. 1 Granary, February 18, 2025. <https://1granary.substack.com/p/women-make-up-74-of-fashion-courses>.
- Ahmed, Osman. "2025 Was The Year Of Fashion's Big Reset, So What's Next?" *British Vogue*, December 29, 2025. <https://www.vogue.co.uk/article/fashion-trend-predictions-2026>.
- Aldrich, Winifred. *Metric Pattern Cutting for Women's Wear*. Mills & Boon Ltd, 1976. Fifth edition. Blackwell Scientific Publications, 2008.
- American History Museum. "1846 - Elias Howe Jr.'s Sewing Machine Patent Model." *Smithsonian Institution*. Accessed April 12, 2026. https://www.si.edu/object/1846-elias-howe-jrs-sewing-machine-patent-model%3Anmah_630930.
- Boone, Julie. "Women in Fashion: The Industry's Persistent Gender Imbalance." *Nss Magazine*, March 31, 2025. <https://www.nssmag.com/en/fashion/40501/female-artistic-directors-absent-fashion-industry>.
- Borrelli-Persson, Laird. "Ann Demeulemeester Shares the Stories Behind the Looks in Her Retrospective at Pitti Uomo." *Vogue*, June 15, 2022. <https://www.vogue.com/article/ann-demeulemeester-shares-the-stories-behind-the-looks-in-her-retrospective-at-pitti-uomo>.
- Borrelli-Persson, Laird. "Comme Des Garçons Spring 1998 Ready-to-Wear Collection." *Vogue*, 2017. <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-1998-ready-to-wear/comme-des-garcons>.
- Brooklyn Museum. "The Dinner Party by Judy Chicago." Accessed March 25, 2025. https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/dinner_party.
- Cacouris, Christina. "Dior's Faux Feminism." *UnHerd*, June 11, 2025. <https://unherd.com/2025/06/diors-faux-feminism/>.
- Candy, Linda, and Ernest Edmonds. "Practice-Based Research in the Creative Arts: Foundations and Futures from the Front Line." *Leonardo* 51, no. 1 (2018): 63–69. 127752183. https://doi.org/10.1162/LEON_a_01471.
- Cartner-Morley, Jess. "Maria Grazia Chiuri's Dior Debut Spells out Her Feminist Message." *Fashion. The Guardian*, September 30, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2016/sep/30/maria-grazia-chiuri-christian-dior-debut-feminist-message-paris-fashion-week>.
- Chansky, Ricia Anne. "When Words Are Not Enough: Narrating Power and Femininity Through the Visual Language of Judy Chicago's The Dinner Party." *A/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 29, no. 1 (n.d.). <https://doi.org/10.1080/08989575.2014.921983>.
- Childs, Emma. "Where Are All the Women Designers?" *Marie Claire*, September 12, 2025. <https://www.marieclaire.com/fashion/lack-of-women-designers-creative-directors-in-luxury-fashion/>.
- Cochrane, Lauren. "'A Layer of Defiance': Simone Rocha on How Her Ultra-Feminine Styles Won over Women - and Men." *Fashion. The Guardian*, February 25, 2025. <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2025/feb/25/a-layer-of-defiance-simone-rocha-on-how-her-ultra-feminine-styles-won-over-women-and-men>.
- "Comme Des Garçons Spring 1997 Ready-to-Wear Collection." *Vogue*. August 3, 1996. <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-1997-ready-to-wear/comme-des-garcons>.

- Crater, Theresa L. "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman by Mary Wollstonecraft." *EBSCO*, 2023. <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/vindication-rights-woman-mary-wollstonecraft>.
- Eggink, Wouter. "Rules of Unruly Design : Lessons from the History of Anti-Modernist Aesthetics." PhD, University of Twente, 2011. https://www.academia.edu/92289456/Rules_of_Unruly_Design_Lessons_from_the_history_of_anti_modernist_aesthetics.
- "Embroidery – a History of Needlework Samplers · V&A." *Victoria and Albert Museum*. Accessed April 22, 2026. <https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/embroidery-a-history-of-needlework-samplers>.
- Evans, Caroline. *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity & Deathliness*. Yale University Press, 2003.
- Evans, Caroline, and Minna Thornton. *Women & Fashion : A New Look*. With Internet Archive. London : Quartet, 1989. <http://archive.org/details/womenfashionnewl00evan>.
- "Four Hundred Years of Dorset Buttons." *Gold Hill Museum*, n.d. Accessed April 23, 2026. <https://goldhillmuseum.org.uk/buttons/>.
- Gandini, Alessandro. "Neo-Craft and Nostalgia." In *Exploring Nostalgia Empirical Studies of Contemporary Experiences and Practices*. Routledge, 2026.
- Geczy, Adam, and Vicki Karaminas. *Critical Fashion Practice: From Westwood to Van Beirendonck*. Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2017. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aut/detail.action?docID=4770912>.
- Godley, Andrew. "The Development of the Clothing Industry: Technology and Fashion." *Textile History* 28, no. 1 (n.d.). <https://doi.org/10.1179/004049697793711067>.
- Gunn, Zoe. "Revolving Door: A Complete Guide to All the Fashion Creative Director Moves of 2025." *Luxury London*, December 4, 2025. <https://luxurylondon.co.uk/style/high-fashion-creative-director-moves-2025/>.
- Hanisch, Carol. *The Personal Is Political*. 1969. <https://www.rapereliefshelter.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/PersonalPolitical.pdf>.
- Hessel, Katy. *The Story of Art without Men*. Hutchinson Heinemann, 2022.
- Hooks, Bell. *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*. South End Press, 2000.
- Howell, Martha C. *Women, Production, and Patriarchy in Late Medieval Cities*. University of Chicago Press, 1986.
- Huber, Mellissa, and Karen Van Godtsenhoven. *Women Dressing Women: A Lineage of Female Fashion Design*. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2023.
- International Labour Office, ed. Moving the Needle: Gender Equality and Decent Work In The Garment Sector in Asia. *International Labour Office*, 2021. https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@asia/@ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_807523.pdf.
- "Karim Fares." With shop rin art association. August 22, 2024. <https://shoprinartassociation.com/en/fashion/583/>.

- Kessler, Alex. "Simone Rocha On 10 Years Of Putting Women Centre Stage." *British Vogue*, September 20, 2021. <https://www.vogue.co.uk/fashion/article/simone-rocha-10-year-anniversary>.
- Leitch, Luke. "Simone Rocha Spring 2026 Ready-to-Wear Collection." *Vogue*, September 21, 2025. <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-2026-ready-to-wear/simone-rocha>.
- Leitch, Luke. "Y/Project Fall 2021 Ready-to-Wear Collection." *Vogue*, January 24, 2021. <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/fall-2021-ready-to-wear/y-project>.
- Lemire, Beverly. *Dress, Culture and Commerce: The English Clothing Trade before the Factory, 1660-1800*. Macmillan Press Ltd, 1997.
- Lundy, Karen Saucier. "Historical Research." In *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*. SAGE Publications, Inc., 2008. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412963909>.
- Manavis, Athanasios, Georgios Pliatsios, Eva Dimou, Apostolos Korlos, and Panagiotis Kyratsis. "Transformed Objects: The Influence of Unruly Product Design." *MATEC Web of Conferences* 112 (2017): 08014. <https://doi.org/10.1051/matecconf/201711208014>.
- Mower, Sarah. "Comme Des Garçons Fall 2025 Ready-to-Wear Collection." *Vogue*, March 8, 2025. <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/fall-2025-ready-to-wear/comme-des-garcons>.
- Muzaffar, Malik Muzamil, and Peer Salim Jahangir. "Female, Power of Language: An Analysis of Adrienne Rich's Poetry." *International Journal of English Language, Literature in Humanities* 5, no. 11 (2017).
- Niessen, Sandra. "Interpreting 'Civilization' through Dress." In *Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion*, Volume 8: West Europe. Berg, 2010. <https://doi.org/10.2752/BEWDF/EDch8009>.
- Nochlin, Linda. *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?* Thames & Hudson, 2021.
- Phelps, Nicole. "Prada Fall 2025 Ready-to-Wear Collection." *Vogue*, February 27, 2025. <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/fall-2025-ready-to-wear/prada>.
- Pitman, Sophie, and Paula Hohti. "Remaking Dress History: Applying Reconstruction Methods to Early Modern Textiles and Clothing." *Textile History* 54, no. 1 (2023): 4–9. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00404969.2024.2409295>.
- Rabkin, Eugene. Elena Dawson: A Room of One's Own. June 16, 2020. <https://www.stylezeitgeist.com/elena-dawson-a-room-of-ones-own/>.
- Ray, Subhasis, and Lipsa Nayak. "Marketing Sustainable Fashion: Trends and Future Directions." *Sustainability* 15, no. 7 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15076202>.
- Salon 94. "Dior x Judy Chicago: The Female Divine." Accessed April 6, 2026. <https://salon94.com/exhibitions/dior-x-judy-chicago-the-female-divine>.
- Schön, Donald A. *The Reflective Practitioner : How Professionals Think in Action*. Routledge, 1992.
- Scott, Hamish. "Two Crises and the Making of the Early Modern Period: An Historiographical Review." *Social History* 40, no. 4 (2015): 427–45.
- Skelton, John Alexander. "Press Release: John Alexander Skelton CXX." *Show Studio*, January 17, 2026. <https://www.showstudio.com/collections/autumn-winter-2026/john-alexander-skelton-cxx/press-release-john-alexander-skelton-cxx>.

- Steavenson, Wendell. "How Miuccia Prada Sees the World." *Vogue*, February 13, 2024. <https://www.vogue.com/article/miuccia-prada-march-cover-2024-interview>.
- Stoppard, Lou. "Searching for Fashion's Most Reclusive Designer." *GQ*, 05 2022. <https://www.gq.com/story/searching-for-paul-harnden>.
- Sweeney-Risko, Jennifer. "Elsa Schiaparelli, The New Woman, and Surrealist Politics." *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* 17, no. 3 (2015): 309–29. <https://doi.org/10.5325/intelitestud.173.0309>.
- Thanhauser, Sofi. *Worn: A People's History of Clothing*. Penguin Random House, 2022.
- Vasamuseet. "Timeline." With *Statens maritima och transporthistoriska museer*. October 18, 2019. <https://www.vasamuseet.se/en/explore/vasa-history/timeline>.
- Victoria and Albert Museum, dir. Fashion in Motion / John Alexander Skelton behind the Scenes. 2018. 2:49. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Uu-1pyWeHw>.
- Victoria and Albert Museum: Explore the Collections. "Poltrona Di Proust | Mendini, Alessandro | V&A Explore The Collections." Accessed April 25, 2026. <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1247425/>.
- Vincent, Susan. *Dressing the Elite: Clothes in Early Modern*. Berg, 2003.
- vowi. "Archivio J.M. Ribot: Be Honest to Your Vision." *Vowi*, January 29, 2025. <https://vowi.us/archivio-j-m-ribot-be-honest-to-your-vision-by-ink-karim-fares-mascarar-11/>.
- Waterhouse, Jonah. "Why Are There Still so Few Women Designers at the Top of Fashion?" March 14, 2025. <https://www.vogue.com.au/fashion/news/women-designers/image-gallery/252ca792c47d19870c695261fd6b6057>.
- Wilson, Michael, Antonia Liguori, and Emily Underwood-Lee. *Storytelling Research Methods: Meaning Making and Interdisciplinary Knowledges across Borders*. Routledge, 2026. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003274445>.
- Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication Of the Rights Of Woman : With Strictures On Political and Moral Subjects* - ProQuest. The Humbolt Publishing Co, 1792. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2634006284/fulltextPDF/7AEC469AD1214CDEPQ/1?accountid=8440&sourcetype=Books>.
- Woodward, Ian. *Understanding Material Culture*. SAGE Publications, Limited, 2007. <http://ebook-central.proquest.com/lib/aut/detail.action?docID=366918>.
- Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. Hogarth Press, 1929.
- Wynn, David C., and Claudia M. Eckert. "Perspectives on Iteration in Design and Development." *Research in Engineering Design* 28, no. 2 (2017): 153–84. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00163-016-0226-3>.



Figure 124. Jack Hancox, *Chemise detail*, 2026