



Cycles of Making and Memory:

Slow Textile Reconstruction
and the Emotional Durability of Materials

Exegesis in support of a practice-based Thesis

Meng Hu

Master of Design
Auckland University of Technology
2026

Design and text by Meng Hu
Proofread by Ingrid Dubbelt

Abstract

This practice-led project investigates how slow, reconstructive textile practices, informed by emotional memory and intergenerational dialogue, can extend the material potential and emotional durability of overlooked materials. It considers how cyclical and reflective processes, together with light-mediated perception, may open up a more intimate and emotionally grounded understanding of sustainability.

The project develops a body of textile-based sculptural light works through slow and intuitive making, engaging with cycles of making, memory, and transformation. Overlooked materials, including textile fragments, loofah fibres, yarn, and reclaimed lighting components, are reconstructed through repeated practices. Their material possibilities gradually emerge, bringing together light, shadow, texture, and layers of memory that shift from past traces to present encounters and future emotional connections. When unlit, the works exist as quiet sculptural forms that evoke fragments of memory. When illuminated, they become subtle light sources that activate emotional connections through gentle interactions between light and material.

Informed by my father's handmade practices, the project reflects on intergenerational approaches to making and material use. Acts of repair and reuse, once driven by necessity, are reconsidered within a contemporary context of overconsumption. The work engages with cycles of material transformation, making, and emotional experience. These processes reflect historical, contemporary, and emerging layers of meaning which gradually accumulate over time. Through this practice, emotional durability is understood as something that develops through sustained engagement, cyclical processes, and evolving relationships between people, materials, and memory. In this research, sustainability is understood as a relational process grounded in care, memory, and ongoing engagement with materials.

Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Attestation of Authorship	v
Table of Images	vi
Acknowledgements	viii
Ethics Approval and Consent	ix

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction	11
1.2 Structure of the Exegesis	12
1.3 Positioning the Researcher	13
1.4 A Relational Research Position	14
1.5 Rationale	15

Chapter Two: Context and Related Practice

2.1 Sustainability and Fast Fashion	18
2.2 Material Storytelling and Reconstruction	19
2.3 Intergenerational Dialogue and Emotional Durability	20
2.4 Light, Perception and Spatial Experience	22
2.5 Positioning the Research	24

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Material Engagement	27
3.2 Material Reconstruction	28
3.3 Dialogue as Method	29
3.4 Slow Practice	30

Chapter Four: Practice Development

4.1 Origins of Making	34
4.2 Early Material Exploration	36
4.3 Intuitive Making and Material Development	39
4.4 Light and Perception	43
4.5 Reconstruction and Material Transformation	45
4.6 Refinement and Structural Development	51

Chapter Five: Conclusion

5.1 Contribution to Knowledge	58
5.2 Limitations and Future Development	59
5.3 Reflection	60

Bibliography	62
--------------------	----

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 Acknowledged, not 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.

26/04/2026

Table of Images

Figure 2.1 Aiko Tezuka, *Talisman (system)*, 2018. Embroidery with the threads extracted from readymade fabric.

Source: <https://aikotezuka.com/talisman-system/>

Figure 2.2 Celia Pym, *Darned Postcard*, 2019. Postcard and string.

Source: <https://celiapym.com/work/darned-postcard/>

Figure 2.3 Ernesto Neto, *Leviathan Thot*, 2006. Lycra tulle, polyamide fabric, and Styrofoam balls. Installation view.

Source: <https://www.tanyabonakdargallery.com/exhibitions/230-ernesto-neto-leviathon-thot-pantheon-paris/>

Figure 3.1 Iterative cycle of material engagement and reconstruction in the research process. Researcher's own diagram.

Figure 3.2 Early material experiment combining discarded plastic packaging and stitching to explore material transformation. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure 3.3 Early material testing comparing variations in loofah form, colour, and structure, alongside layering experiments with wool felt. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure 3.4 Testing a textile sample under illumination to examine changes in material perception. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure 3.5 Reconstruction experiment using an unused metal filtration mesh, dismantled and recombined with textile fibres. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure 3.6 Intermediate stage of crochet experimentation documenting the gradual development of a textile structure through repetitive hand-making. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure 4.1 Drawing developed in response to my father's handmade irregular glass floor. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure 4.2 Archival photograph of a handmade stone sculpture by my father, incorporating living plants within carved rock. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure 4.3 Studio pinboard documenting early material explorations, including textile offcuts, mesh, yarn, and mixed-material tests. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure 4.4 Loofah plant in its growing state alongside an early observational sketch developed from photographic references. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure 4.5 Tonal studies derived from dried loofah through observation and material testing. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure 4.6 Encounters with dried plants at Piha Beach during family walks and material observation. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure 4.7 Early-stage textile experiment combining loofah and dried plant fragments through intuitive stitching and binding. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure 4.8 Felting process showing the consolidation of layered fibres into an integrated textile structure. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure 4.9 Process experiment embedding fibres into loofah through felting, generating emergent abstract mapping structures. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure 4.10 Unintended light projection observed during hand-stitching in a domestic living space. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure 4.11 Light and shadow effects emerging during the felting process, as light interacts with variations in fibre density and translucency. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure 4.12 Detail of mesh textile sample under directional light, examining transparency, density, and the extension of layered shadows. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure 4.13 Re-cutting leftover mesh to examine how fragmentation alters the material's structure and edge conditions. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure 4.14 Fragmented mesh strips arranged to explore separation and recombination within the material structure. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure 4.15 Assembly under ambient lighting conditions. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure 4.16 Assembly under directed lighting conditions. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure 4.17 Assembly under intensified lighting conditions, showing expanded shadow projection. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure 4.18 Raw loofah material prior to cutting and reconstruction. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure 4.19 Loofah fragments reinforced with machine stitching along the edges. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure 4.20 Hand stitching process used to assemble loofah fragments into a flexible textile structure. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure 4.21 (Left) Close-up of stitched loofah under light, revealing irregular shadow patterns. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure 4.22 (Middle) Shadow projection created by layered loofah fragments. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure 4.23 (Right) Backlit loofah fragments highlighting transparency and layered material qualities. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure 4.24 Brushing and loosening fibres from dismantled textile samples during the reconstruction process. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure 4.25 Fibre filtering process using a hand carding tool to distribute textile fibres across the loofah. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure 4.26 Reconstructed loofah fragment with embedded textile fibres, demonstrating interaction between different material properties. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure 4.27 (Top) Loofah fragment with machine-stitched edges prepared for early felting and layering experiments. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure 4.28 (Middle) Detail of the loofah surface showing edge instability after repeated felting and fibre accumulation. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure 4.29 (Bottom) Reconstructed loofah fragments following process refinement, demonstrating the integration of felting and subsequent stitching reinforcement. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure 4.30 Development of perforated structures in loofah through iterative material drawing, manual cutting, and fibre integration. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure 4.31 Reconstructed loofah textile sculpture under varying lighting conditions. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure 4.32 Conceptual sketch visualising the final reconstructed loofah installation. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure A.1 Exhibition overview of *Cycles of Making and Memory*, Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery, AUT, 2026. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure A.2 Installation details of *Cycles of Making and Memory*, Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery, AUT, 2026. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure A.3 Viewer encounters with *Cycles of Making and Memory*, Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery, AUT, 2026. Researcher's personal archive.

Acknowledgements

I want to express my deepest gratitude to my family, especially my father, whose handmade creations have been at the heart of this research. His way of transforming overlooked materials into objects filled with imagination and warmth has continually inspired me to explore the emotional potential of textiles. I also thank my mother and my family in China for their endless patience, love, and quiet belief that I could build something meaningful far from home.

My sincere appreciation goes to my supervisors, Senior Lecturer Jennifer Whitty and Dr. Jyoti Kalyani, for their invaluable guidance, encouragement, and generosity throughout this journey. Their support helped me find clarity in both my research and my creative direction. I am deeply grateful for their trust in my process and for giving me the freedom to explore materials and emotions in my own way.

I would also like to thank my classmates and studio peers for their feedback, warmth, and shared curiosity. The exchanges and conversations we had in the studio enriched my thinking and helped sustain my creative process. My heartfelt thanks also go to my friends who stood by me during moments of doubt and offered kindness and understanding.

Lastly, I dedicate this work to my son, whose presence reminds me daily of care, patience, and renewal. This project is as much about rediscovering memory as it is about love—like a quiet light that continues to grow.

Ethics Approval and Consent

This project received ethical approval from the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTC).

AUTC reference number: 25/394
Approval date: 28 November 2025

All research procedures were conducted in accordance with AUTC guidelines. Informed consent was obtained where required.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This practice-led research investigates how reconstructive textile practices and emotional storytelling can foster renewed relationships between people and materials through emotional engagement and reflective making. Situated within contemporary discussions of sustainable design within a fast fashion context, the project responds to the limitations of predominantly technical approaches to sustainability, which often prioritise efficiency, recycling, and material optimization.

While there is merit in these approaches, they often overlook the emotional and experiential dimensions that influence how materials are valued and retained over time. Drawing on personal, intergenerational experiences, this research explores how memory, care, and embodied making can contribute to what design researcher Jonathan Chapman (2005) describes as emotional durability.

In this study sustainability is reframed as a relational and ongoing process shaped by interactions between people, materials, and memory. In this context, acts of reconstruction are understood not only as methods of reuse, but as opportunities to reactivate emotional connections and extend the perceived value of overlooked materials.

The creative component, *Cycles of Making and Memory*, consists of a body of textile-based sculptural works that reimagine overlooked materials through slow and reflective making. Leftover textile fragments, loofah fibres, yarn, and reclaimed lighting components found in my studio are used to explore how reconstruction can transform everyday materials into sculptural forms that explore the relationships between light, shadow, texture, and memory.

The study is guided by the research question:

How can slow reconstructive textile practices, informed by personal memory and intergenerational dialogue, extend the material potential and emotional durability of overlooked materials through cyclical rhythms and light-mediated perception?

This question prompts an exploration of how reconstruction can renew care and emotional attachment to materials shaped by personal experience and everyday understanding.

Methodologically, the project follows a slow and reflective design approach, valuing time-based engagement, embodied making, and ongoing reflection. The research develops through repeated cycles of making, observation, and reflection, through which emotional responses to materials gradually emerge.

Through this approach, the research engages with broader conversations around sustainable design by connecting emotional durability with material potential through everyday acts of care and reconstruction.

Within this research, sustainability is approached as an ongoing relationship between people, materials, and motors, extending beyond the technical process of reconstruction. In this sense, sustainability involves maintaining meaningful and lasting relationships between people, memory, and the material world.

The following chapters outline the conceptual background, contextual review, and methodological development of this research.

1.2 Structure of the Exegesis

This exegesis consists of five chapters.

Chapter One

Introduces the research question, rationale, and positioning of the study.

Chapter Two

Situates the project within contemporary textile and sustainable design contexts.

Chapter Three

Outlines the practice-led methodology and methods, focusing on reflective making, iterative experimentation, and material engagement.

Chapter Four

Analyses the creative outcomes of *Cycles of Making and Memory*, examining how the works embody emotional reconnection, material reuse, and sustainable material practice.

Chapter Five

Concludes the study by addressing the research question, summarizing key findings, and outlining limitations and future directions.

1.3 Positioning the Researcher

When life slows down, emotions find ways to endure. I was born in Jinzhou, a coastal city in Northeast China, and studied in Beijing. Over the past decade, I was based in Guangdong Province, immersed in the fast-paced world of fashion, occupied with speed, production, and the pursuit of newness. Within this rhythm, I gradually distanced myself from my family. When my father showed me his handmade creations, I often responded without much attention, not realizing that those small and imperfect objects carried the warmth of time, memory, and care.

Becoming a mother changed how I understand time, care, and creativity. Motherhood encouraged me to slow down, to observe more gently, and to rediscover what had been overlooked. Through this shift, I began to recognize that materials and memories can reveal new meanings when time is allowed to unfold.

My relationship with materials began long before this research. Growing up in Northeast China, I was surrounded by my father's handmade creations; playful constructions made from glass, wood, and found materials. These imaginative objects, created without formal training, quietly shaped my earliest understanding of making, even though I did not pay much attention to them at the time. His way of working—intuitive, resourceful, and attentive to materials—gradually influenced how I came to understand making.

After moving to Aotearoa New Zealand, I began working more intimately with textiles. I recognized echoes of my father's practice in my own, transforming the ordinary into something quietly meaningful. His way of repairing and improvising informs my approach. I began to see materials as participants in a dialogue of memory, touch, and renewal. My father's handmade works, from mosaic glass floors to miniature landscapes, influence how I think about design, acting as a dialogue between two ways of making: his intuitive, informal practice and my reflective, research-based approach. Acts of stitching, folding, and reconstruction became moments where personal memory and creative inquiry intersect.

Through this process, sustainability is understood not only as material reuse, but as emotional durability—the capacity of materials to carry care, patience, and continuity over time (Chapman 2005; Fletcher 2012). Reconnection with materials becomes a way of reactivating embedded emotional presence, turning making into a quiet form of remembering. This transition from fast fashion to reflective making shaped the values underpinning this research: care, slowness, and emotional continuity.

Making became a way to reconnect with moments I once ignored and to awaken emotional memory embedded in materials; overlooked materials and textile fragments become spaces of reflection.

In this way, material reconnection operates as both a method and a conceptual framework. It informs how I approach reflective textile practice and how I seek to extend the emotional life of overlooked materials through transformation. Materiality, memory, and care converge to form a circular and emotionally grounded approach to sustainable design.

Through this project I position myself as a designer, daughter, and mother, navigating between inherited intuition and critical reflection; a perspective that shapes the practice-led and auto-ethnographic nature of this research, where making becomes a way of exploring care, continuity, and emotional renewal across generations.

1.4 A Relational Research Position

My practice is grounded in care, emotional continuity, and an appreciation of the quiet beauty in everyday life. I see making not as a pursuit of perfection, but as an encounter between emotion and material, where materials carrying traces of past experience and relational memory, participate in shaping meaning.

Slowness, for me, is a way of paying attention. Acts of reuse and transformation become gestures of care, shifting sustainability from a technical goal into a reflective process of remembrance and renewal.

Within this research, these values function as both personal beliefs and methodological principles, guiding my approach to reflective making and emotional storytelling.

1.5 Rationale

The study contributes to contemporary textile discourse by demonstrating how material relationships and intergenerational dialogue can extend the emotional life of materials and foster more intimate relationships between people, materials, and everyday objects. Through this approach, the project demonstrates how sustainability can be approached not only as material efficiency, but as emotional durability.

Chapter Two: Context & Related Practice

This chapter establishes the contextual foundation of the research. It begins by outlining significant terms of the study, before positioning the research within discussions that consider how making by hand and material reconstruction, within an era shaped by fast fashion, overproduction, and consumerism, can generate forms of emotional knowledge.

Throughout my time in the fast fashion industry, materials were often treated as disposable resources, shaped by rapid production cycles and constant demand for newness. This condition created a disconnect between people and materials, where garments are designed for short-term use rather than long-term attachment. While conventional sustainable design frameworks focus on material lifecycle and resource optimization, they often overlook the emotional relationships that influence how materials are valued and retained. As theorist Glenn Adamson (2018) suggests, craft practices can reorient attention towards the sensory and affective dimensions of making, particularly in contrast to the flattened efficiencies of digital production.

Building on Chapman's concept of emotional durability, this project proposes that sustainability can be repositioned beyond technical models of recycling and efficiency, to be understood as a relational and experiential process grounded in care, memory, and continued engagement.

Within this broader discourse, my own background also shapes the direction of this research. The handmade ethos of my father's creative practice, formed during a period of material scarcity in China, offers an early example of resourcefulness, intuitive repair, and emotional attachment to materials that might otherwise be overlooked or discarded. My later decade of experience within the fast fashion industry provides a contrasting perspective on speed, disposability, and digital consumption.

Together, these inherited and professional experiences reveal why material reconnection—through slowness, reuse, and care—has become a central concern of my practice.

In addition, light is introduced not only as a functional element of illumination, but as a perceptual and emotional medium within this research. Rather than being treated as an external effect, light plays an active role in revealing material structures, shaping spatial experience, and activating emotional responses embedded within reconstructed materials. Through its interaction with porous, layered, and fragmented surfaces, light enables materials to be experienced beyond their physical form, allowing memory, texture, and atmosphere to emerge in subtle and shifting ways. In this sense, light becomes a key component in understanding how material perception and emotional engagement can be extended through reconstructive textile practice.

Extending on these contexts, the following sections explore how contemporary textile practitioners explore ideas of emotional continuity and material storytelling. Aiko Tezuka unravels woven textiles to reveal hidden temporal layers within material; Celia Pym explores care and repair through intimate acts of mending; and Ernesto Neto creates sensorial textile environments that invite bodily perception and collective experience.

These practices demonstrate how materials can hold memory and emotional resonance, offering important contextual references for this research. Together, they suggest that material is never neutral but a living thread connecting emotion, time, and touch (Neto 2006; Pym 2017; Tezuka 2020).

2.1 Sustainability and Fast Fashion

Contemporary sustainable design has largely focused on material efficiency, recycling systems, and circular production models. However, within the fast fashion industry—where I previously worked in fast-paced production contexts—materials were often treated as disposable resources shaped by rapid production cycles and constant demand for newness.

This condition creates a growing disconnection between people and materials, where garments are valued for their immediacy rather than their longevity. They lose their capacity to carry memory, care, and emotional attachment, becoming reduced to temporary commodities caught in accelerated cycles of consumption.

This disconnection reflects broader critiques of contemporary systems. As Jennifer Whitty (2021) argues, fashion has become out of sync with the values, mindsets, and wisdom of its time and place, revealing a misalignment between industrial production and lived material experience.

Consequently, sustainability within this context is frequently framed in technical terms—such as recycling and material optimization (Fletcher 2012). This also reflects a growing disconnect between sustainability frameworks and lived material practices, where abstract models fail to engage with the everyday experiences of making and material use. As Chapman (2005) argues, emotional durability is essential in extending the lifespan of products by fostering deeper attachments between people and objects, suggesting that sustainability must be understood not only as material efficiency but also as a relational and experiential process.

2.2 Material Storytelling and Reconstruction

Material storytelling in this research refers to the way materials communicate through transformation, texture, and the traces of time, rather than through explicit narrative representation. Materials are understood as active participants that carry and generate meaning through processes of reconstruction. This idea resonates with anthropologist Tim Ingold's (2013) notion of "thinking through making," where meaning emerges through the dialogue between hand and material. In this way, I understand slow practice as a tactile mode of thought in which time, repetition, and touch allow materials to hold memory and care.

Tezuka's practice of partially unravelling woven textiles offers a poetic exploration of this idea. By loosening threads from their original structure, she reveals hidden temporal layers embedded within the material. Her work demonstrates how material transformation can function as a form of storytelling, where time, memory, and process become visible through the act of deconstruction. Through this process, Tezuka reveals the internal structure of the textile is exposed and the history of the material becomes perceptible. This positions deconstruction not as destruction, but as a careful and reflective method of uncovering material narratives.

In this research, material storytelling is not produced by form alone, but through the interaction of material, light, and spatial arrangement. Light changes how reconstructed surfaces are read: it reveals internal structures, projects shadows beyond the object, and allows meaning to shift between visibility and concealment.

Through this interaction, storytelling becomes perceptual as well as material, with emotional associations emerging through repeated encounters rather than fixed representation. This includes engaging with non-traditional materials such as loofah. Rather than revealing an existing structure, reconstruction generates new material relationships through cutting, stitching, and reassembly. The loofah's original form is disrupted, and through reconstruction, it takes on a different way of existing. At the same time, leftover textile fragments are no longer seen as discarded remnants, but are reconfigured through stitching and composition, carrying traces of their previous use into new material contexts.

In this way, reconstruction becomes a process through which material potential and emotional durability are simultaneously extended. This not only redefines how materials are understood but also shifts their role from passive resources to active participants in meaning-making. Their value is no longer fixed or predetermined, but emerges through interaction, transformation, and use over time. Meaning is further activated through the interaction between material, light, and spatial transformation, where light reveals material depth and enables otherwise hidden relationships between texture, memory, and form to become perceptible.

Image removed by author due to copyright

Figure 2.1 Aiko Tezuka, *Talisman (system)*, 2018. Embroidery with the threads extracted from readymade fabric. The work reveals hidden material structures through partial unravelling, illustrating reconstruction as a process of material transformation and the uncovering of memory.

2.3 Intergenerational Dialogue and Emotional Durability

Intergenerational dialogue in this research refers to the transmission of knowledge, values, and making practices across generations through observation, memory, and reinterpretation rather than direct verbal exchange. This dialogue is grounded in my experience of observing my father's intuitive making processes, where repair, reuse, and improvisation were shaped by material scarcity. These practices are reinterpreted within my own work, which operates within a contemporary context of material abundance and overproduction. Alongside this, is the concept of emotional durability, introduced by Chapman (2005) to describe how objects can remain meaningful and valued over time. This concept emphasizes the relationships that develop between people and objects. It has been further developed by Kate Fletcher (2012) and Rebecca Earley (2017), who highlight the roles of care, memory, and emotional engagement in extending the life of materials.

Within contemporary textile practice, British artist Celia Pym provides a relevant point of reference for understanding how care, repair, and emotional continuity can be expressed through material practice. Working with worn garments and visible mending, Pym transforms acts of repair into a language of care, where textiles retain traces of time, use, and emotional attachment. Through stitching, layering, and repetition, her work accumulates evidence of attention and presence, allowing materials to carry ongoing emotional significance.

Pym's practice reflects what textile scholar Jessica Hemmings (2012) suggests that tactile engagement enables emotional connections to emerge through closeness of touch. Her work demonstrates how repair can function not only as a technical act, but as a sustained emotional relationship between people and materials.

Emotional memory refers to the subtle feelings and associations embedded within materials and everyday gestures. In the accelerated rhythms of contemporary life, these traces are often overlooked. Yet within slow and repeated processes of making, such latent emotional connections may gradually reemerge. Through acts of touching and reconstructing materials, these hidden affections can return to awareness.

Ingold (2013) describes how human gestures and material responses continuously shape one another. Similarly, Hemmings (2012) argues that textiles carry traces of time and emotion, quietly communicating care and presence beyond spoken language.

Within this research, emotional memory does not reside directly in inherited objects but emerges through the act of making with overlooked materials. These materials act as triggers that reactivate personal and intergenerational experiences during the making process.

Image removed by author due to copyright

Figure 2.2 Celia Pym, *Darned Postcard*, 2019. Postcard and string.
Through visible repair, the work preserves traces of care and use, revealing how mending allows everyday materials to carry ongoing stories and relationships.

In a discussion of craftsmanship, sociologist Richard Sennett (2008) notes that knowledge develops through embodied experience and repeated practice. In this research, the process of cutting and stitching recalls my father's intuitive approach to making, not through replication but through embodied recognition. Repeated handling, reconstruction, and recontextualization embody renewed emotional connections while sustaining a quiet dialogue between care, time, and human presence. Over time, these processes allow memory to gradually evolve and accumulate.

In this way, emotional memory functions as the foundation of the research, informing how materials are perceived and engaged. It provides the basis from which emotional durability can later develop through continued interaction, reconstruction, and care. This transition from memory to ongoing engagement aligns with Chapman's (2005) concept of emotional durability, which describes how objects remain meaningful through sustained relationships rather than replacement.

In contrast to Pym's work which focuses on repairing and preserving existing garments, this research shifts toward reconstruction as a process of transformation. Rather than maintaining an object's original form, overlooked materials are reconfigured into new structures that invite renewed engagement. As such, intergenerational dialogue does not solely concern the continuation of past practices, but also their reinterpretation. The values of care, resourcefulness, and attentiveness observed in my father's making are translated into a contemporary context shaped by overproduction and waste. Through slow reconstruction and repeated engagement, materials accumulate layers of meaning, allowing sustainability to be understood as a relational and experiential process rather than solely a technical one.

2.4 Light, Perception and Spatial Experience

Light and perception refer to the ways in which materials are experienced through illumination, shadow, and spatial interaction. In this research, light functions not only as a visual condition but as an active agent that reveals internal structures, enhances material texture, and creates shifting spatial experiences. This is particularly evident in porous materials such as loofah, where light moves through openings and fibres, producing a dynamic interplay between visibility and obscurity that shapes how materials are perceived. In this way, perception becomes dynamic and embodied, shaped by movement, proximity, and changing conditions.

This understanding aligns with phenomenological perspectives, particularly those of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962), who describes perception as a relational and embodied experience shaped through interaction between the body and its environment. As such, perception is not fixed, but continuously formed through movement, attention, and sensory engagement. In this sense, light becomes a critical component of material storytelling, enabling meaning to emerge through interaction rather than fixed representation.

Rather than treating textiles as static surfaces, Brazilian artist Ernesto Neto envisions them as living structures that breathe, expand, and connect. His practice transforms material softness into a spatial experience of care, where fabric, scent, and gravity interact to create environments of shared emotion. Within these suspended and translucent installations, the viewer is invited not only to look but to feel—to inhabit a space where boundaries between body, material, and atmosphere gently dissolve.

Neto's large-scale works such as *Leviathan Thot* (2006), as shown in Figure 2.1, embody a philosophy of coexistence and interdependence. Using mesh, spices, and weight, he constructs sensorial architectures that transform material interaction into emotional continuity, encouraging slowness and attention. His practice demonstrates how sensory perception can cultivate a shared sensorial awareness, allowing viewers to feel through touch, movement, and atmosphere (Neto, 2006.; Pallasmaa, 2012). Viewers move within these flexible spaces as if entering an organism, where the act of breathing becomes part of the artwork itself.

Image removed by author due to copyright

Figure 2.3 Ernesto Neto, *Leviathan Thot*, 2006. Lycra tulle, polyamide fabric, Styrofoam balls.
The installation demonstrates how material and space shape embodied perception through proximity and interaction.

This understanding informs the direction of this research, where sensory connection is translated into a more intimate and material-driven expression. Rather than creating immersive environments at an architectural scale, this research operates at a smaller and more intimate scale, where engagement is guided by close observation and perceptual sensitivity rather than full-body immersion. Focused on how overlooked materials can generate subtle spatial experiences through light, shadow, and texture, textile structures become extensions of this emotional language, inviting presence and contemplation through atmosphere and material tactility. These quieter and more domestic gestures shift the experience from collective immersion toward personal perception, revealing how sensory awareness can sustain emotional continuity within everyday material environments (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

In this research, light functions as a critical medium that reveals internal material structures, enhances texture, and transforms how materials are initially perceived. When interacting with porous materials such as loofah, light produces layered shadows, varying degrees of transparency, and visual patterns that extend beyond the material into surrounding space. Through layering, spacing, and the positioning of light sources, the arrangement of these elements shapes how the work is experienced. Rather than presenting a single fixed visual impression, the compositions reveal different spatial and material qualities under varying lighting conditions. Light, shadow, and perspective make the relationships between materials more perceptible, allowing viewers to notice subtle layers of texture, depth, and structure.

The careful arrangement of materials and light therefore becomes central to the work's experiential structure. It shapes how the work is perceived and how emotional connections gradually emerge through attentive observation. In this way, emotional durability is not embedded in the object itself but develops slowly through sustained attention and perception.

2.5 Positioning the Research

This chapter has examined how contemporary textile and installation practices engage with material transformation, care, and sensory perception. Through the work of Aiko Tezuka, Celia Pym, and Ernesto Neto, different approaches to material engagement reveal how meaning can emerge through making, time, and interaction. Together, these practices provide a foundation for understanding material not as passive matter, but as something that carries memory, experience, and relational value.

Through combining these perspectives, this research proposes a distinct position that integrates material reconstruction, emotional engagement, and perceptual activation through light. Rather than revealing existing structures (Tezuka), repairing existing objects (Pym), or creating large-scale immersive environments (Neto), this project focuses on and explores the potential of reconstructing overlooked materials into through light, texture, and layering new forms that generate both spatial and emotional experiences.

As such, sustainability is positioned as a form of emotional continuity and relational engagement, establishing the foundation for the methodological exploration developed in the following chapter.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This research adopts a practice-led methodology (Gray and Malins, 2004), in which making functions as both the subject and the method of inquiry. That is, knowledge is generated through cycles of experimentation, reflection, and material engagement, allowing understanding to emerge through doing.

The methodological structure is organized around four interconnected approaches: Material Reconstruction, Dialogue as Method, and Slow Practice. While each method has a distinct focus, they operate simultaneously and inform one another throughout the making process. Together, these approaches form a responsive and iterative system that unfolds through cycles of detachment, reconnection, reattachment, reactivation, and regrowth.

Reflection is embedded within the making process through studio documentation, including photographic records of material experiments, archived test samples, reflective notes from making, and recorded everyday conversations.

These methods are applied through iterative material experimentation, where decisions are shaped by the behavior of materials, structural limitations, and perceptual outcomes. This process enables the research to respond directly to the research question, testing how reconstruction can extend both material potential and emotional durability.

Central to this methodology is an attentiveness to materials as active participants rather than passive resources. Working with fabric remnants, domestic fragments, and light-related elements shifts the focus away from novelty and optimization toward care, continuation, and reconstruction. Making is guided by touch, repetition, and embodied familiarity, allowing intuitive decisions to emerge through sustained material engagement. The process remains open and nonlinear, with unexpected material responses and emotional encounters informing shifts in direction.

This approach aligns with Ingold's idea of thinking through making (2013), where knowledge emerges through embodied engagement rather than abstract planning. It also connects with contemporary understandings of practice as research in which artistic practice generates situated forms of knowledge (Borgdorff, 2012).

Rather than focusing solely on textile aesthetics or thinking about short-lived consumer needs as I would have in my fast fashion practice, this methodology foregrounds the emotional and often latent memories embedded within materials, positioning reconstruction and making as situated responses to lived, intimate experience.

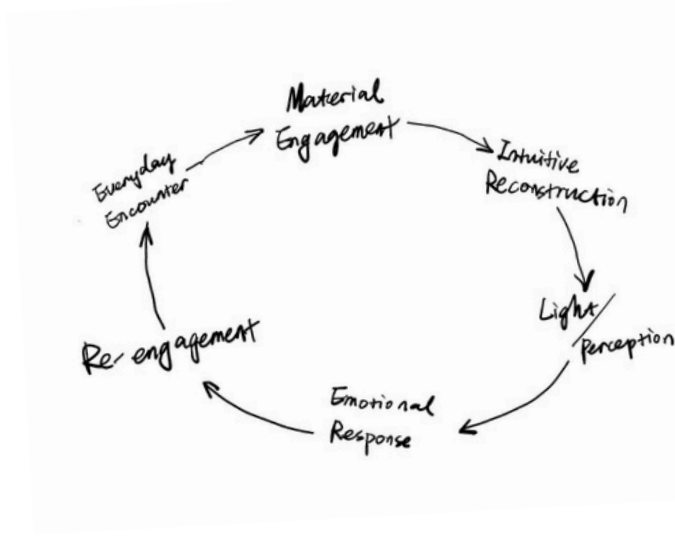


Figure 3.1 Iterative cycle of material engagement and reconstruction in the research process. The diagram illustrates how everyday encounters with materials lead to engagement, intuitive reconstruction, perceptual interaction through light, and emotional response, which in turn encourage re-engagement and ongoing material exploration. Researcher's personal archive

3.1 Material Engagement

In this method, materials are approached as active participants rather than fixed or predetermined elements. The project does not privilege a single material or aesthetic outcome; instead, it maintains an open and responsive relationship with materials. While decisions are not always pre-planned, they emerge through ongoing engagement with materials, shaped by touch, attention, and experience.

Materials emerge through everyday life and studio practice; leftover textile samples from garment production, yarn and threads from previous making processes, fibre fragments from sweaters, gifted materials such as dried loofah, and overlooked lighting components in domestic storage. These materials exist as overlooked resources—materials that are often dismissed, discarded, or not considered for use beyond their original function—whose material potential can be rediscovered through attentive making.

In this process, decisions emerge through ongoing engagement with these materials, shaped by touch, attention, and experience. These materials are selected not only for their availability, but for their structural, tactile, and perceptual qualities, particularly their capacity to be transformed through reconstruction and to interact with light.

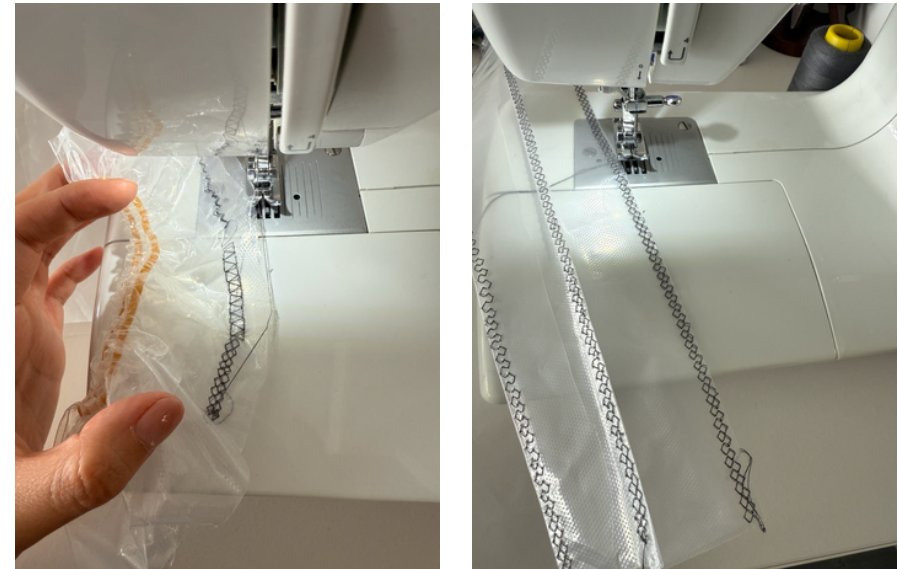


Figure 3.2 Early experimentation with discarded plastic packaging investigated how repeated engagement revealed material behaviour and new possibilities for material transformation. Reflecting on these responses, subsequent making decisions emerged through the material itself rather than predetermined outcomes. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure 3.3 Early material testing comparing variations in loofah form, colour, and structure, alongside layering experiments with wool felt. These comparisons helped identify how differences in material density and combination could inform subsequent material decisions. Researcher's personal archive.



Figure 3.4 Testing a textile sample with and without illumination revealed how light altered the perception of its texture, density, and translucency. This experiment reinforced the role of light as an active part of material engagement rather than simply a means of illumination. Researcher's personal archive.



Material engagement in this research extends to include light as a material-perceptual medium, where its positioning, intensity, and interaction with materials are explored alongside physical making processes.

Material engagement unfolds through slow, tactile processes of deconstruction and reconstruction such as layering, stitching, fabric bonding, felting, compressing, and combining different fibres and textile fragments. These processes are carried out through iterative experimentation, where each material response informs subsequent decisions and guides the development of the work.

In this way, materials act as catalysts for emotional and sensory associations. Their textures, translucency, and structural behavior invite intuitive responses that allow memories and experiences to surface indirectly through the making process. This sensory recognition becomes research insight when moments of material familiarity are identified and reflected upon.

Documentation methods, including photographic records, archived test samples, and reflective journaling, are used to capture both the visual outcomes and the associated emotional responses during this process. Material intuition, shaped through long-term exposure to familial and domestic making environments, guides the process in ways that are felt rather than consciously recalled. Through material engagement, this research positions making as an ongoing relationship between body, memory, and material life. The act of working with overlooked materials shifts attention away from novelty and optimization toward care, continuation, and attentiveness. Material engagement is therefore not about selecting the “right” material, but about remaining receptive to what materials reveal through reconstruction and experimentation.



Figure 3.5 Reconstruction experiment using an unused metal filtration mesh, dismantled and recombined with textile fibres. Working across the contrasting rigidity of metal and softness of fibre revealed how reconstruction could shift both the structure and perceived identity of an overlooked material. Researcher's personal archive.

3.2 Material Reconstruction

This method focuses on material reconstruction as a practice-based approach that connects material experimentation with personal memory and emotional experience. My creating process often begins with a feeling or atmosphere linked to my father's handmade objects. These memories function not only as sources of inspiration but also as methodological prompts that guide how materials are selected, combined, and reconstructed in the studio.

For example, he created a glass floor from irregular fragments, allowing light to pass through unexpected openings. He stitched coloured yarn through a worn pair of boots, transforming damage into a visible gesture of care, and carved a channel into a stone so that a flower could grow through it. He also assembled small sculptures from overlooked everyday materials. These actions demonstrate an intuitive approach to combining materials and allowing unexpected transformations to occur. Growing up around these practices shaped my sensitivity to material hybridity, reconstruction, and light, which now inform my own practice.

Material reconstruction in this research emerges through processes such as sewing, layering, binding, felting, and cutting. These techniques are applied iteratively, where each stage of making responds to material behavior, structural limitations, and interaction with light.

Reflection forms an important part of this method. Emotional and material responses are documented alongside informal conversations during the making process allowing insights to be revisited and inform later design decisions.

3.3 Dialogue as Method

Dialogue, in my research, functions both as a process of making and as a mode of understanding. My father's approach to making is spontaneous and intuitive. He rarely explains his thinking verbally; however, through observing his actions and informal conversations, I have gradually come to understand a way of thinking that values reuse, improvisation, and playfulness over precision. While my father and I both work with materials found in everyday environments, our approaches are shaped by different contexts. His making emerges from necessity and intuition, whereas mine is informed by reflection, research, and an awareness of material meaning within a contemporary context. In this sense, my practice moves between analytical attention and intuitive response, rather than fully aligning with either.

The dialogue referenced in this research emerges naturally rather than through structured interviews or deliberate questioning. While drinking tea or working alongside one another, my father may casually comment on a material, a texture, or a tool. These moments prompt me to reconsider my own assumptions and habitual ways of working.

As we belong to different generations and social contexts, our responses to the same materials often differ. This difference becomes a productive source of insight. For example, while I initially focused on repair as a central strategy, my father reminded me that repair in his generation often resulted from material scarcity rather than deliberate sustainability. In contrast, our contemporary condition is characterized by excess consumption and accumulation. This exchange shifted my perspective from repairing objects toward reconsidering overlooked materials already present in everyday environments. As a result, the project developed through processes of reuse and reconstruction rather than restoration.

Many of these exchanges are nonverbal, drawing on Albert Bandura's concept of observational learning (1977). When I observe my father making or modifying objects, his gestures reveal a rhythm that is both practical and attentive. I often find myself echoing these movements in my own studio practice as I work with and rearrange materials. This approach also aligns with Maureen Lander's intergenerational weaving practice where knowledge is transmitted through material engagement rather than formal instruction. becomes a form of dialogue that carries cultural, emotional, and personal memory across time (Lander 2012). Through these exchanges, dialogue becomes a method for generating insight through observation, shared making and embodied interaction.

3.4 Slow Practice



Figure 3.6 An intermediate stage of crochet experimentation, documenting the slow and repetitive process of building and adjusting the textile structure by hand. Working without a predetermined final form allowed decisions about density, tension, and structure to emerge gradually through making. Researcher's personal archive.

Slow practice, within this project, represents a rhythm of making and a way of living. In a world shaped by speed and constant production, slowing down becomes a conscious shift toward attention and care. In this research, slow practice functions as a methodological approach that shapes how decisions are made and how the making process unfolds over time. As Ezio Manzini (2015) suggests, slowness in design creates space for awareness and care, turning the act of making into a dialogue with time.

Through touching, repairing, reconfiguring, and reactivating materials, the rhythm of my practice is deliberately slow, as each piece develops through repeated touching, stitching, and reflection. This process is iterative, where materials are revisited, reworked, and refined over multiple stages, allowing gradual development rather than immediate resolution. In this way, crafting becomes a form of embodied understanding shaped through the movement of the hands.

Documentation methods—including photographic records, archived samples, and reflective journaling—are used to capture these stages of development, allowing the evolution of materials and decisions to be critically reflected upon. Working slowly also reflects the ethics of care described by Fletcher (2012), who understands sustainability as an intimate and relational act. Working at a slower pace allows attention to remain on the material and the relationships it carries.

Together, reconstruction, slow making, and intergenerational dialogue, form an integrated practice-led framework in which material exploration, reflection, and iterative making operate simultaneously to generate research knowledge. This knowledge is evidenced in the final textile works, where reused materials, layered structures, and light interactions reveal evolving relationships between material, memory, and making. It is also demonstrated through the documented process of experimentation, including photographic records, archived samples, and reflective journaling, which capture how ideas and material decisions develop over time. The project therefore demonstrates how iterative making processes can produce new understandings of material reuse, emotional connection, and sustainable design thinking.

Chapter Four: Practice Development

The creative practice developed through several key stages: Origins of Making, Early Material Exploration, Intuitive Making and Material Development, Light and Perception, Reconstruction and Material Transformation, and Refinement and Structural Development. Each of these stages reflects a shift in material engagement, from initial observations and intuitive responses to more focused processes of reconstruction, light interaction, and structural refinement. These stages are outlined in the following sections.

4.1 Origins of Making

Growing up, I was surrounded by my father's intuitive constructions—improvised rock formations, everyday repairs, and an irregular glass floor assembled from fragments of discarded windowpanes. This floor was not sealed or uniform; its uneven, hollowed structure allowed light to pass through, revealing objects placed beneath the surface. In some cavities, my father arranged artificial flowers, small stones, and even a tiny toy sailboat.

Looking down at the floor as a child, I experienced a layered spatial perception; above was the domestic interior I occupied, while beneath my feet existed a miniature world, carefully composed yet partially hidden. This experience shaped my sensitivity to light, transparency, void, and layered spatial depth perception, where absence became a condition for imagining beyond the surface. It formed an early perceptual framework which later informed my approach to material and installation-based work.

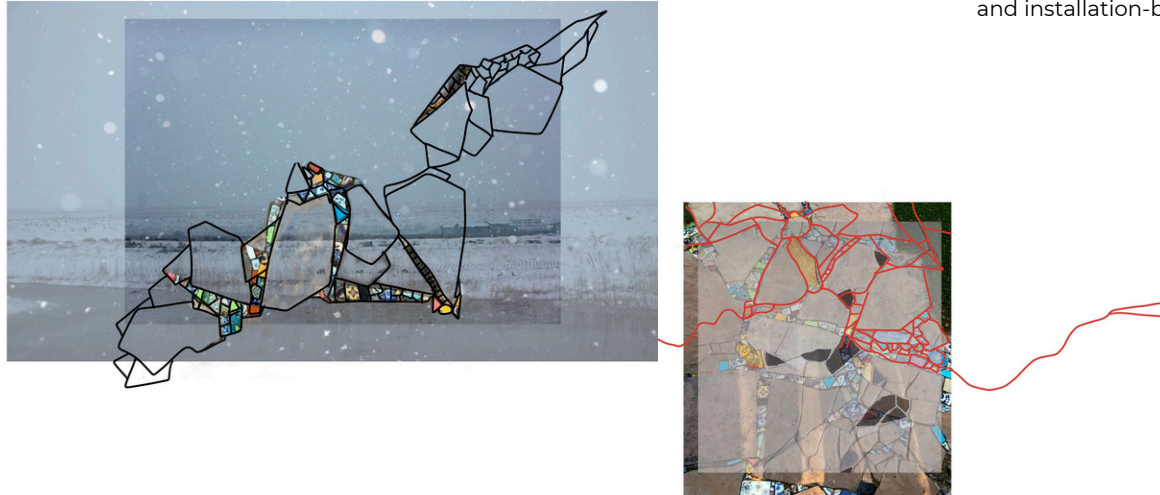


Figure 4.1 Drawing developed in response to my father's handmade irregular glass floor. Researcher's personal archive.



Figure 4.2 Archival photograph of a handmade stone sculpture by my father, incorporating living plants within carved rock. Researcher's personal archive.

At the time, these constructions were not understood as “art” or “design”. Beyond the spatial experience created by the glass floor, other domestic gestures also shaped my early understanding of materials. These included worn leather boots reconstructed with leftover yarn from my mother's knitting, extending their life beyond wear, and stones deliberately carved with narrow gaps so that plants could grow directly from the rock. In these moments, materials that seemed unrelated—hard stone and living plants, industrial footwear and domestic yarn—were brought together through acts of reuse and transformation. Rather than concealing wear, these interventions allowed materials to continue and coexist in visibly altered states.

These examples demonstrate an early exposure to material hybridity and reconstruction, where value was generated through transformation rather than replacement. Rather than approaching textile practice with a predetermined outcome, I was drawn to processes that echoed these early experiences: working with what was available, accepting irregularity, and allowing materials to guide decisions. This shift marked the beginning of the practice-led process, where making becomes a form of inquiry rather than execution.

4.2 Early Material Exploration

Early Material Explorations and Testing

Early material explorations focused on layering, transparency, and the combination of contrasting materials, including mesh, yarn, foil, translucent plastics, and textile remnants. These materials emerged from what was already present within my immediate environment, reinforcing a working method grounded in availability and attentiveness rather than deliberate sourcing.

In particular, the influence of my father's intuitive and resourceful making is embedded in this approach. His way of working—using whatever was available—has shaped my sensitivity toward overlooked materials. These materials are therefore not treated as neutral matter. Their specific structures, textures, and conditions of use influence how they are handled, shaping both the making process and the outcomes that emerge. This principle of working with overlooked materials remains consistent, while later stages develop this approach further through more specific material focus, such as loofah.

Through stitching, cutting, and assembling, I explored how different materials interacted through contrast—soft against rigid, opaque alongside transparent, and organic textures combined with industrial surfaces. These explorations revealed how material density and layering affected visual balance and light transmission. Several combinations proved unsuccessful, particularly where layering became too dense, limiting light transmission and reducing spatial depth. This prompted a shift toward more open and porous structures in later stages. By working through unresolved experiments, I began to recognize which material relationships aligned with my research focus and which did not; a critical stage, demonstrating how early experimentation became a process of learning through rejection, gradually refining the direction of my practice.



Figure 4.3 Studio pinboard documenting early material explorations, including textile offcuts, mesh, yarn, and mixed-material tests. Researcher's personal archive.



Figure 4.4 Loofah plant in its growing state and an early observational sketch developed from photographic references prior to obtaining the material. Researcher's personal archive.

Material Arrival: Loofah, Domestic Cycles, and Relational Sustainability

Loofah entered my practice through everyday relationships. Rather than selecting materials through predefined sustainability categories, my attention shifted toward how materials circulate within lived contexts. In casual conversation with a close friend, I learnt that loofah (sponge gourd) plants grew abundantly in her family's backyard. While fresh loofah was consumed seasonally, surplus produce was left to mature and dry, becoming fibrous and hollow over time. This revealed a domestic practice shaped by care and long-term engagement with a natural, regenerative material.

Encountering loofah in its dried state revealed a material already embedded within cycles of growth, use, and transformation. I began to sketch its internal structure from photographic references, as part of an iterative process of observing, imagining, and making. Its fibrous structure, lightness, and porosity resonated with my ongoing exploration of transparency, fragility, and material memory.

Through close observation, subtle tonal variations—pale yellow, beige, soft brown, and muted greens—became visible. These variations informed a slower process of observation, where small details began to guide later decisions. Each close study generated new directions for experimentation, allowing the material to guide both visual sensitivity and conceptual development.



Figure 4.5 Tonal studies derived from dried loofah through observation and material testing. Researcher's personal archive.

Dried Plants, Accidental Encounters, and Material Afterlives

Throughout this research, different materials appeared at various moments—some briefly influencing the process before disappearing from the final outcome. These encounters, although not always visible in the final works, remained important to the development of the practice.

During visits to places such as Piha Beach, as shown in these field encounters, I observed dried grasses and weathered vegetation shaped by wind, salt, and time. These encounters suggested that material presence continues beyond biological life. Even when dried or broken, this vegetation retained traces of environmental forces and lived time.

Although it did not become central to the final work, it influenced my approach, observation, and attention. In this context, dried plants functioned less as materials for direct use and more as moments of encounter that shaped how material awareness developed within the practice.



Figure 4.6 Encounters with dried plants at Piha Beach during family walks and material observation. Researcher's personal archive.

4.3 Intuitive Making and Material Development

Material Exploration Through Intuitive Making

During early experimentation, dried plant fragments and loofah were introduced into a porous textile surface and integrated through stitching and binding. The materials responded differently to touch and tension, allowing form to emerge through bodily engagement.

The embroidered lines do not function as illustrative elements, but as traces of making, registering pauses and moments of decision. At this stage, the work did not aim to resolve a final form but to explore how materials might coexist within a textile structure.

As experimentation progressed, the porous structure of the loofah revealed a strong material presence. Its lightweight yet structured form allowed stitching to pass through while maintaining openness. By contrast, dried plant fragments introduced more recognizable imagery. As the project aimed to evoke emotional resonance rather than represent specific forms, identifiable elements risked directing interpretation too explicitly. Moving away from dried plants therefore became a conceptual decision that supported a more open and interpretive material language.

Through this intuitive process, the work gradually moved toward a textile structure shaped through material dialogue, where decisions emerged through interaction and sensory observation.



Figure 4.7 Early-stage textile experiment combining loofah and dried plant fragments through intuitive stitching and binding, documenting material interaction and process development. Researcher's personal archive.



Material Consolidation Through Felting

Felting became a key turning point in the project. It revealed how different and often overlooked materials could be reconfigured within a single surface. Through slow and repetitive engagement, dispersed fibres gradually stabilized into a unified textile structure. What became significant was not the technical process itself, but how it revealed new relationships—materials that initially appeared incompatible could interlock, producing new textures and densities.

This shifted the focus from material accumulation toward the reconstruction. Felting enabled fibres and fragments to be recombined, revealing new visual and tactile possibilities. In this sense, felting functioned as a method of discovery, moving the work from exploration toward integration.



Figure 4.8 Felting process showing the consolidation of layered fibres into an integrated textile structure, marking a transition from dispersed material exploration to a unified surface.
Researcher's personal archive.



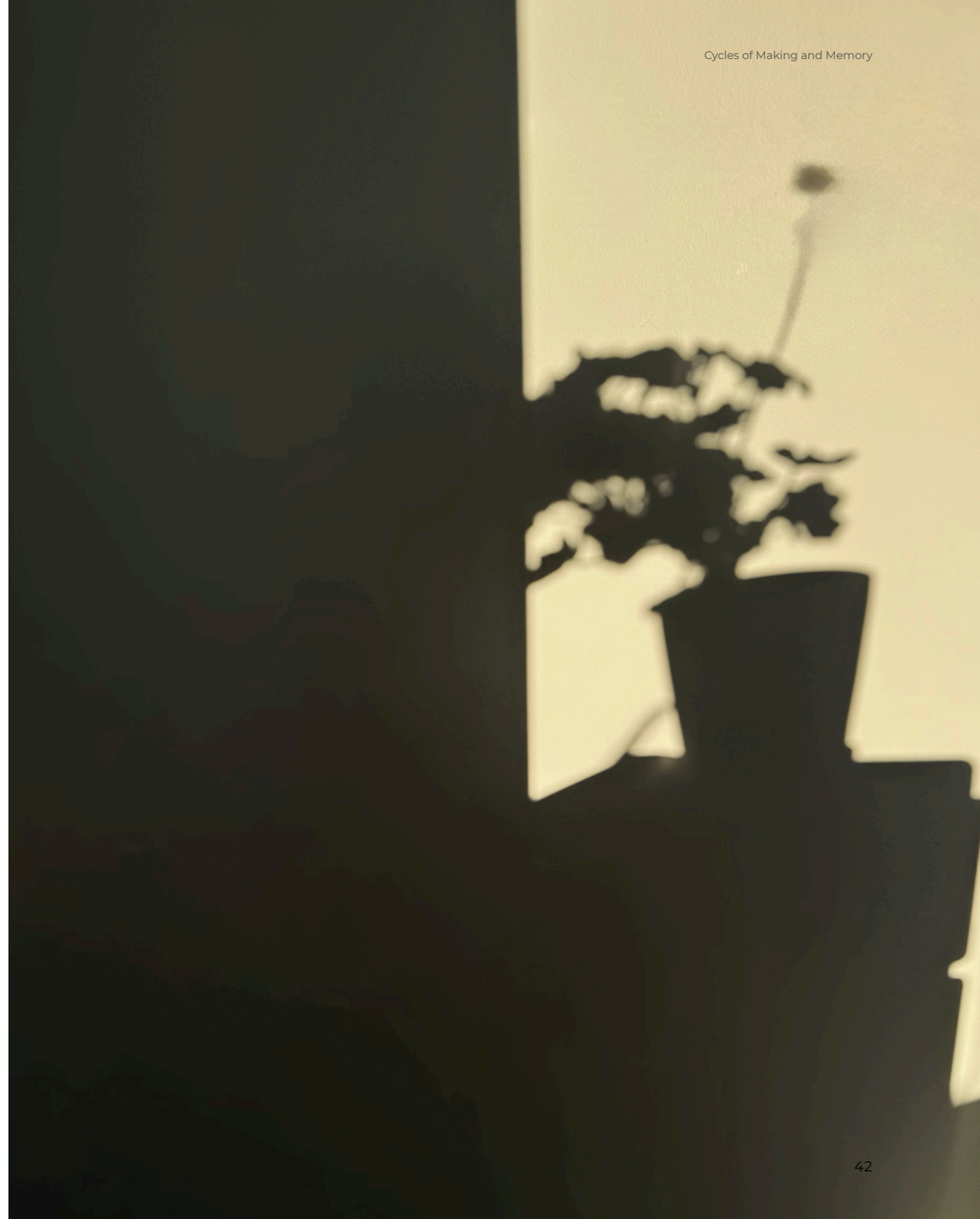
Figure 4.9 Process experiment embedding fibres into luffa through felting, generating emergent abstract mapping structures. Researcher's personal archive.

Emergent Mapping Through Material Interaction and Felting

As fibres accumulated, abstract formations emerged. Fibres were embedded into the porous surface of the loofah, forming irregular clusters and pathways. These patterns began to resemble a form of mapping—not as literal geography, but as an affective spatial relation shaped by lived experience.

These forms remain abstract, inviting interpretation rather than prescribed fixed meanings. As Hemmings suggests, textile works often invite sensing rather than explicit storytelling (2012). In this sense, the patterns function as spatial metaphors generated through making. Felting and stitching act as forms of material dialogue. Fibres interweave within the porous structure, creating layered surfaces where materials begin to correspond, and meaning emerges through relationships between materials, aligning with Ingold's notion of "correspondence" (2013).

Figure 4.10 Unintended light projection observed during hand-stitching in a domestic living space. Researcher's personal archive.



4.4 Light and Perception

Light, Shadow, and Emergent Perception in Making

While working on the felting table, unexpected visual qualities began to emerge in the interaction between light and material. The illuminated surface of the table functioned as a light box, allowing light to pass through the textile samples during the making process and making the shadows and tonal variations within the material more visible.

This revealed how closely making is connected to everyday perception. The visual effects discovered during felting echoed moments of attention given to light and shadow in daily life. This relationship resonates with the phenomenological perspective of Merleau-Ponty (1962), who suggests that art reveals how the world is experienced through embodied perception. These visual effects extended beyond material properties connecting to embodied perception.

Through this process, I gradually realized that the presence of light offered different modes of engagement. Without illumination the textile work appears primarily as a sculptural object; the viewer encounters the texture and structure of the material itself. When light interacts with the textile surface, however, shadows extend into the surrounding space creating spatial experience through interplay of light and shadow.

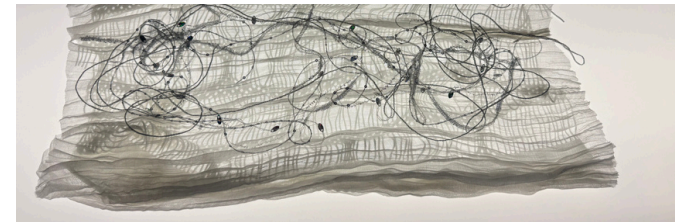
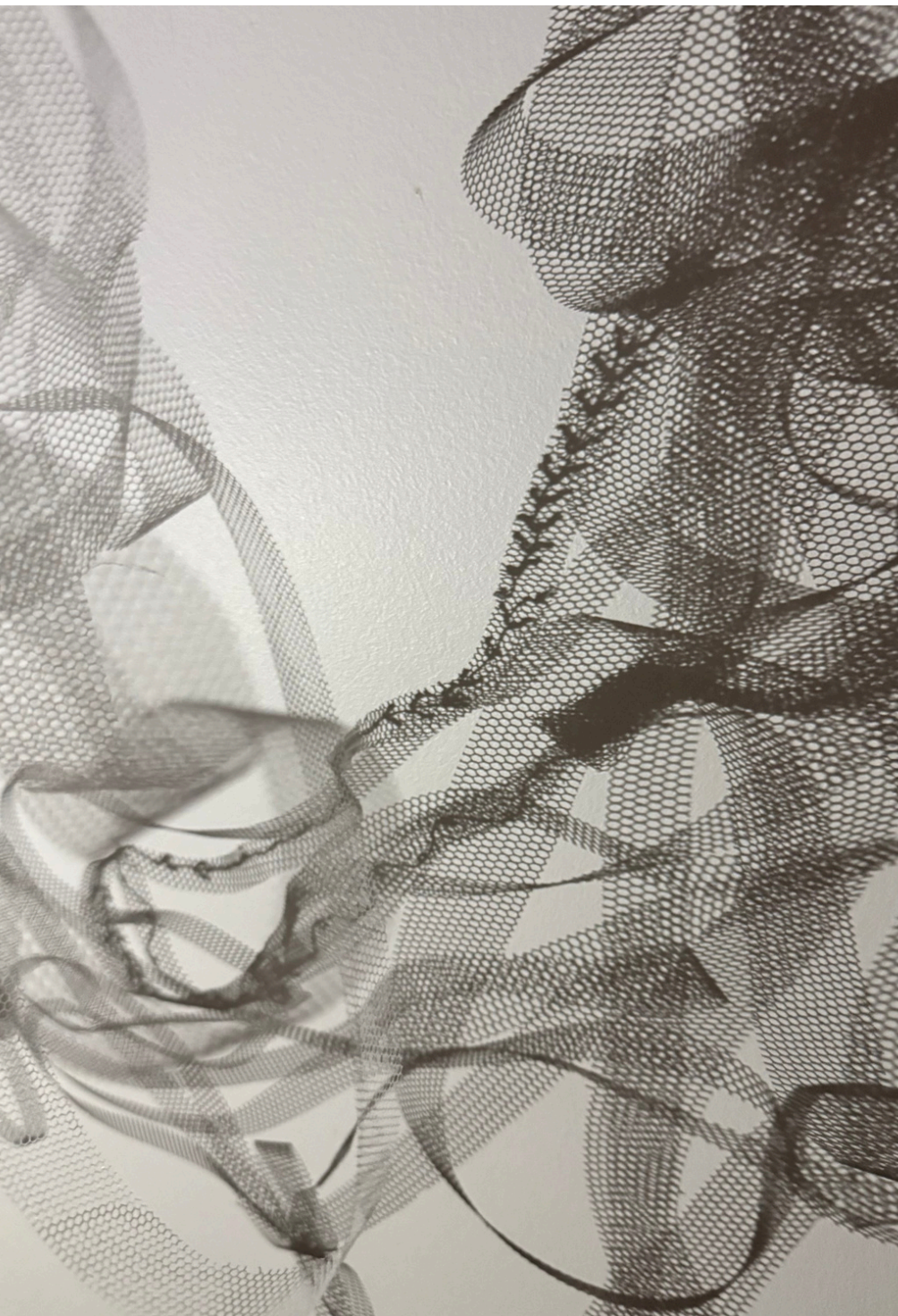


Figure 4.11 Light and shadow effects emerging during the felting process, as light interacted with variations in fibre density and translucency. Researcher's personal archive.



From Material Exploration to Light Interaction

In the earliest stage of the practice, the exploration focused on the materials themselves—particularly the ways different physical elements could interact through making. As the process developed, the work extended beyond just the physical materials to engage with external elements such as light.

This shift marked a new stage in the project, where attention turned to how light behaves across different materials and textures, and how these interactions expand perceptual potential. Here, light operates as a relational element connecting material, and space.

Figure 4.12 Detail of mesh textile sample under directional light, examining translucency, shadow density, and the extension of layered shadows. Researcher's personal archive.



Figure 4.13 Re-cutting leftover mesh to examine how fragmentation alters the material's structure and edge conditions
Researcher's personal archive.

4.5 Reconstruction and Material Transformation

Material Fragmentation and Reconfiguration

In order to better understand the element of light, I began experimenting with leftover mesh in the studio, cutting the original textile into narrow fragments and reassembling them in different arrangements.

While initially testing light interaction, the act of cutting revealed another possibility. By separating a continuous textile surface into individual strips, the material gained a different sense of movement and potential. Elements that once belonged to a single object began to operate independently, forming new relationships when reconfigured. This process resonates with the work of Tezuka (2020), whose practice involves unravelling textile structures to reveal new material relations.

Through twisting and reconstructing these fragments, the material began to appear in multiple configurations, revealing how altering the form of a material could extend its expressive potential.



Figure 4.14 Fragmented mesh strips arranged to examine how separation and recombination alter the material's configuration.
Researcher's personal archive.

Light Interaction and Spatial Extension

Following these experiments, I explored how lighting conditions influenced spatial perception. The same arrangement was observed under different lighting conditions, beginning with diffused natural daylight, followed by directed artificial lighting, and finally intensified spotlight or flash. Although the structure remained unchanged, shifting light revealed different spatial potentials.

Light passing through translucent fabrics and layered materials produced overlapping shadows and diffused edges, creating a sense of depth and spatial ambiguity. Shadows extended onto surrounding surfaces, expanding the perceived scale of the work. These shifts introduced new spatial possibilities, while also evoking a more intimate and reflective engagement, where the material seemed to oscillate between presence and absence.

These variations became more visible when tested under different lighting conditions (see Figures 4.15–4.17).



Figure 4.15 Assembly under ambient lighting conditions.
Researcher's personal archive.



Figure 4.16 Assembly under directed lighting conditions.
Researcher's personal archive.



Figure 4.17 Assembly under intensified lighting conditions, showing
expanded shadow projection.
Researcher's personal archive.

Reconstructing Overlooked Materials

As the process of making continued, attention turned to emotional durability and material connection (echoing Chapman, 2005). The practice focused on overlooked, mundane materials within everyday environments, including textile remnants, yarn, and domestic materials such as worn garments and fabric offcuts.

Within this context, loofah was selected for further exploration. Its structure was cut into fragments of varying shapes and sizes. Working with fragmented forms became both a material and conceptual strategy. Each piece was treated as a discrete unit, carrying its own texture, density, and visual character. When reassembled through stitching, these fragments did not merge into a uniform surface but retained their differences while forming a larger whole. The reconstructed textile surface becomes a composite structure.



Figure 4.18 Raw loofah material prior to cutting and reconstruction.
Researcher's personal archive.



Figure 4.19 Loofah fragments reinforced with machine stitching along the edges.
Researcher's personal archive.

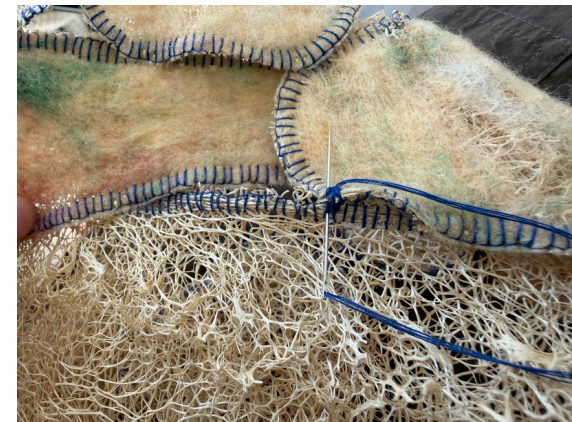


Figure 4.20 Hand stitching process used to assemble loofah fragments into a flexible textile structure.
Researcher's personal archive.

Discovering Light Through Material Reconstruction

During the process of stitching the loofah fragments together, I started to observe how light interacted with the material surface. The porous and irregular structure of the loofah caught and dispersed light, producing shifting shadows across the reconstructed forms.

The fragmented openings and moving shadows reminded me of the perforated glass floor my father built during my childhood—an irregular structure that allowed light to pass through in unpredictable ways. Rather than treating light as a visual effect, illumination became an active element that shaped how memory was perceived through material structures. In this sense, the loofah functioned as a medium through which light, material, and personal memory intersect.

Figure 4.21 (Left) Close-up of stitched loofah under light, revealing irregular shadow patterns. Researcher's personal archive.



Figure 4.22 (Middle) Shadow projection created by layered loofah fragments. Researcher's personal archive.



Figure 4.23 (Right) Backlit loofah fragments highlighting transparency and layered material qualities. Researcher's personal archive.



Exploring Material Possibilities to Extend Material Potential

Further experiments focused on how additional fibres could extend the structural potential of the reconstructed loofah. The textile fragments used in this stage originated from discarded sample garments from my earlier work in the fashion industry, including fibres extracted from knitted samples and decorative garment trims. At the same time, a piece of metal mesh from my father's toolbox was introduced into the experiments, creating a contrast between soft fibres and rigid structure, which gradually began to influence how materials were combined and spatially arranged.

These textile fragments carried traces of unfinished designs, others reflected past aesthetic decisions or production processes. While no longer functioning as garments, they remained connected to earlier stages of my design experience.

These materials were dismantled, brushed, loosened, and filtered before being embedded into the porous structure of the loofah. Through this process, the textile samples gradually transformed into loose fibre clusters. Reconstruction enabled overlooked materials to be reactivated.



Figure 4.25 Fibre filtering process using a hand carding tool to distribute textile fibres across the loofah. Researcher's personal archive.



Figure 4.24 Brushing and loosening fibres from dismantled textile samples during the reconstruction process. Researcher's personal archive.



Figure 4.26 Reconstructed loofah fragment with embedded textile fibres, demonstrating the interaction between different material properties. Researcher's personal archive.



Figure 4.27 (Top) Loofah fragment with machine-stitched edges prepared for early felting and layering experiments. Researcher's personal archive.

Figure 4.28 (Middle) Detail of the loofah surface showing edge instability after repeated felting and fibre accumulation. Researcher's personal archive.



Figure 4.29 (Bottom) Reconstructed loofah fragments following process refinement, demonstrating the integration of felting and subsequent stitching reinforcement. Researcher's personal archive.

4.6 Refinement and Structural Development

Material Constraints and Process Refinement in Loofah Reconstruction

A key technical reflection emerged while working with the loofah fragments. The initial approach involved tearing the material into smaller pieces, stabilizing the edges through machine stitching, trimming them, and repeatedly adjusting the fragments within the developing structure. As the process unfolded, repeated manipulation weakened the stitched edges. Due to the porous and fragile nature of the loofah fibres, the stitching occasionally loosened or tore under repeated handling.

This prompted a reconsideration of the sequence. Instead of stabilizing the fragments before shaping the structure, the process was adjusted so that the arrangement of the loofah fragments occurred first, followed by stitching to reinforce the final composition. In parallel, loose textile fibres produced through brushing were integrated into the surface through felting, allowing them to interlock with the porous structure. In this process, decisions around material handling began to emerge through close engagement with the fibres. Softer textile fibres were prioritised for felting and integration, while more fragile loofah fragments were handled with minimal stitching to avoid further damage. Refining the sequence of arranging, felting, and stitching became a response to the material's properties.

Revisiting experimental fragments that had remained only partially explored became a way of reactivating their potential and reintroducing them into the evolving practice.

Developing Perforated Structures through Material Experimentation

At this stage, earlier experiments with light and shadow projection resurfaced in my reflections. The interaction between light and perforated structures suggested the possibility of introducing openings within the loofah surface. Laser cutting was tested but burned and darkened the edges, producing unstable and visually harsh results.

As an alternative, organic forms were drawn directly onto the loofah surface using hot glue. These gestural lines partially stabilized the fragile structure while responding to the material's natural texture. Selected areas were then manually cut away to form openings, and the edges were reinforced through hand stitching.

During this process, different colored threads were tested but did not initially produce satisfactory results, as the colours appeared overly dominant and visually distracting, shifting attention away from the material itself. This contradicted the intention to foreground the loofah's own material qualities—its texture, porosity, and traces of time—where meaning emerges through subtle, evolving interactions rather than imposed surface effects.



Figure 4.30 Development of perforated structures in loofah through iterative material experimentation, involving hot glue drawing, manual cutting, and fibre integration. Researcher's personal archive.

Top: Organic forms drawn using hot glue to stabilise the fragile loofah surface.
Middle: Manual cutting to introduce perforations within the material structure.
Bottom: Integration of textile fibres and stitching, exploring the balance between intervention and material integrity.

Material and Light Interaction in the Reconstructed Loofah Installation

This stage presents a spatial test of the reconstructed loofah installation. By assembling loofah fragments, the material forms a soft structural surface. When illuminated from behind, light passes through the porous structure revealing its internal texture.

A shift in perception occurs between unlit and illuminated conditions. When unlit, attention is drawn to surface qualities such as tactile texture, stitching, and attached textile fibres. When lit from behind, the internal structure of the loofah emerges, surface elements recede, reversing the relationship between surface and interior.

This interaction between material and light does not rely on fixed imagery or defined forms, but unfolds through shifting visibility, where structure and traces of reconstruction move in and out of focus.

Rather than inviting direct interpretation the work engages perception through shifting relationships between light, material, and space. These shifts in visibility create a perceptual experience where material and light move in and out of focus.

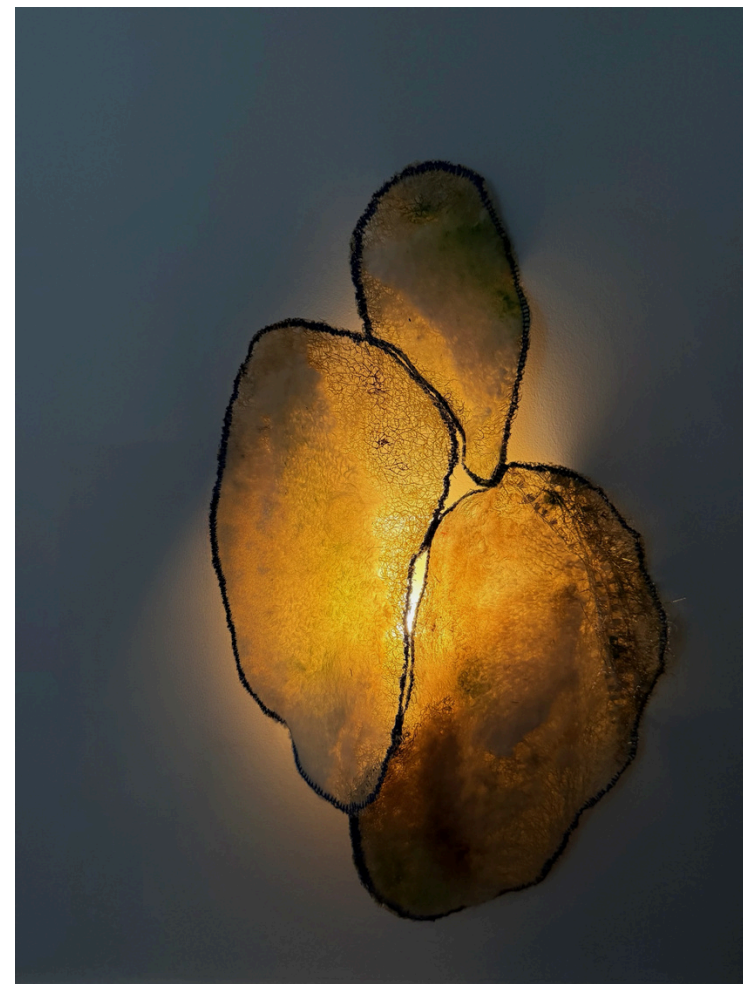


Figure 4.31 Reconstructed loofah textile sculpture under varying lighting conditions.
Researcher's personal archive.

Left: The installation when unlit, revealing the muted tones and subtle colour variations within the layered loofah and textile fibres.
Right: The installation when illuminated from behind, activating the translucent qualities of the porous material and enhancing the emotional resonance of the reconstructed textile surface.

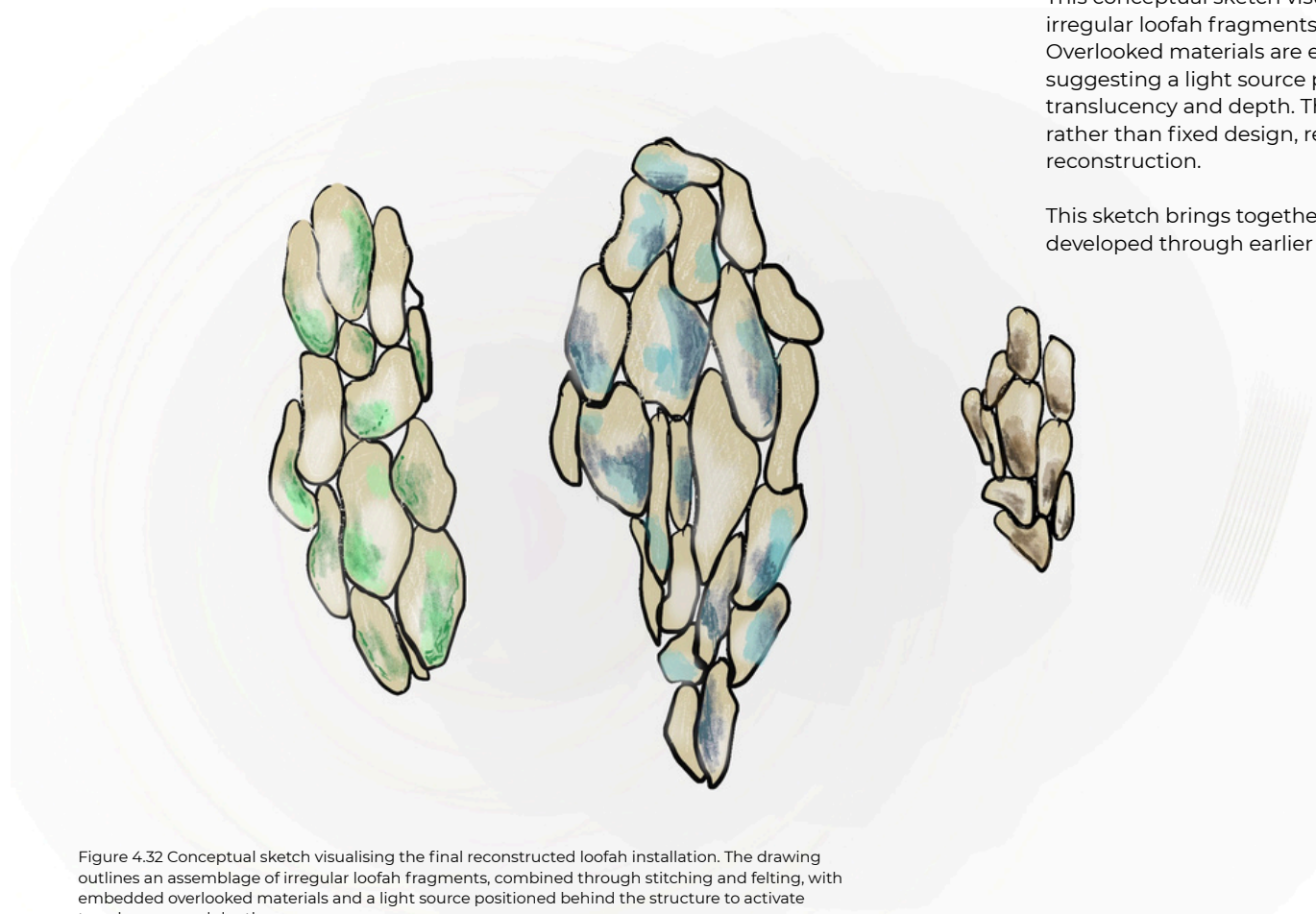


Figure 4.32 Conceptual sketch visualising the final reconstructed loofah installation. The drawing outlines an assemblage of irregular loofah fragments, combined through stitching and felting, with embedded overlooked materials and a light source positioned behind the structure to activate translucency and depth. Researcher's personal archive.

From Material Exploration to Final Installation

This conceptual sketch visualises the final work as an assemblage of irregular loofah fragments, combined through stitching and felting. Overlooked materials are embedded within the porous structure, suggesting a light source positioned behind the surface to activate translucency and depth. The form develops through accumulation rather than fixed design, reflecting an ongoing process of reconstruction.

This sketch brings together the material and perceptual insights developed through earlier experiments.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

The project explores how reconstructive textile practices, informed by personal memory and intergenerational dialogue, can extend the material potential and emotional durability of overlooked materials.

Through a series of reflective studio experiments, overlooked materials were revisited and reactivated through processes of tactile making, layering, and structural reconstruction. Through cutting, stitching, felting, and spatial installation, the practice investigated how material structures, and light interaction reveal new possibilities within everyday materials.

The investigation suggests that sustainability can be understood not only through the reuse materials, but through reengagement with their material presence and emotional associations.

This reengagement is shaped through cyclical making and shifts in perception. The practice demonstrates how reconstruction and slow making can contribute to forms of emotional durability rather than representing memories directly. My work approaches emotion in a more abstract way, allowing materials and spatial qualities to evoke subtle connections that viewers may relate to through their own experiences.

The following sections summarize the contributions of the research and reflect on possible future developments.

5.1 Contribution to Knowledge

This research demonstrates how processes of reconstruction can extend both the material potential and emotional durability of overlooked materials. The project shows how overlooked materials can be reorganized and transformed through tactile making.

The study contributes methodologically by showing how slow and iterative making processes can function as a form of material inquiry. Through cycles of testing, and refining materials within the studio environment, understanding emerged directly from engagement with materials. This approach highlights material sensitivity and embodied making, where knowledge develops through the continuous interaction between hand, material, and process.

A further contribution lies in the exploration of emotional durability through reconstruction. Overlooked materials carry traces of previous experiences. Through reconstruction, these materials become sites where new experiences and emotional associations gradually accumulate.

Reconstruction is not a single act of transformation but an ongoing and layered process. Each stage of reconstruction introduces new meanings and emotional associations, allowing materials to continue evolving over time. Reconstruction reveals materials as temporal layers where past experiences, present making, and future possibilities intersect.

Durability emerges not only through the physical continuation of materials, but also through the accumulation of emotional relationships shaped through cyclical engagement and changing perception. In this way, sustainability can also be understood as emotional continuity that develops through ongoing reconstruction.

5.2 Limitations and Future Development

While this research explores reconstruction, the scope remains limited to the materials explored within this project. The practice primarily focused on loofah fibres and textile fragments as starting points for reconstruction.

Future research could explore a wider range of materials. Another limitation relates to the emotional dimension explored within this project. The works developed in this research primarily reflect one particular form of emotional connection, emerging from my own memory, care, and reflective making; emotional experience is as complex and diverse as each individual, this work is my personal interpretation.

Future research could also explore how these approaches may be applied within a fashion context, particularly in bridging practice-led textile experimentation with industry systems shaped by speed and production. This may also open possibilities for slower approaches to fashion practice that value reconstruction, material reuse, and reflective making.

5.3 Reflection

Rather than presenting a fixed conclusion, this research suggests that reconstruction remains an ongoing process. Through acts of making, materials continue to evolve as they accumulate new experiences, meanings, and emotional associations. Reconstruction becomes both a method of and a way of thinking.

Each act of reconstruction introduces new layers of experience, a cyclical mode of engagement, where practice and reflection continuously inform one another. The shifts in perception—particularly through light and spatial interaction—enable materials to be re-experienced beyond their initial appearance. Materials are no longer understood as fixed entities, but as evolving structures shaped through perception, memory, and ongoing transformation. Looking back, the value of this research lies not only in the final project, but in the gradual transformation of understanding that grew throughout. What appeared as separate experiments, material tests, and incomplete outcomes has, over time, revealed itself as a connected and meaningful path. The trajectory of the research process became central to the work itself.

For many years, my understanding of design was shaped by my role within the fast fashion industry, where I was involved in product development, material selection, and coordinating with manufacturers. My practice was driven by speed, market demand, and commercial return. Design was often reduced to surface judgement—whether something looked attractive or could generate desire. Over time, this repetitive cycle gradually distanced me from the reasons I had wanted to become a designer. The design element became increasingly external, and I often felt that I was functioning more as part of a production system than as someone thinking critically through creative practice.

It was only when I entered a practice-led mode of research that another understanding began to emerge. Through making, and reflecting, I began to experience what that connection meant. Material exploration became a method of inquiry. Each gesture, hesitation, failure, and unexpected discovery carried its own form of knowledge. In this process, making became a way of asking questions rather than simply providing solutions.

This shift also changed how I understand the relationship between process and outcome. I now see that the final work can never fully contain the complexity of the journey that produced it. Some experiments may not appear directly related to the final project, and some outcomes may seem unresolved or imperfect. Yet these moments remain essential, as they document how thinking evolved. They are not detours away from the research, but evidence of its movement.

I often think of this research as similar to climbing a mountain. Along the way, there are interruptions, side paths, and changing directions that may feel uncertain or disconnected. Yet from a distance, these paths reveal themselves as part of the same journey. They shape perception, test understanding, and ultimately open new perspectives. This research can be understood as a nonlinear process, where shifts and uncertainties shape understanding over time.

These reflections have also led me back to the cyclical concept, which has become increasingly important in both my creative and personal thinking. Materials carry past lives—traces of use, memory, and time. Through reconstruction, they do not simply become “new,” but enter another stage of becoming. This process parallels human experience. Just as materials are reworked and transformed, my own understanding of design has also been reconstructed through this research. Reconstruction, therefore, is not only a material act, but also an internal and philosophical one.

This reshaped how I understand sustainability. It is no longer limited to material selection or waste reduction but extends to how relationships are sustained—between past and present, memory and matter, making and meaning. Emotional durability emerges within this space. It is not only about preserving objects, but about creating conditions in which memory, reflection, and connection can continue through transformation.

Ultimately, this research has made me realize that design is not separate from life. It is not only the shaping of objects or experiences, but a way of understanding how we live, remember, and change. To reconstruct materials is, in some sense, also to reconstruct the self. In this way, design becomes not simply a professional practice, but a philosophical mode of engaging with the world.

Bibliography

Adamson, Glenn. 2018. *Fewer, Better Things: The Hidden Wisdom of Objects*. London: Bloomsbury.

Bandura, Albert. 1977. *Social Learning Theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Borgdorff, Henk. 2012. *The Conflict of the Faculties: Perspectives on Artistic Research and Academia*. Leiden: Leiden University Press.

Chapman, Jonathan. 2005. *Emotionally Durable Design: Objects, Experiences and Empathy*. London: Earthscan.

Earley, Rebecca. 2017. "Circular Design Futures." *The Design Journal* 20 (supplement 1): S421–S434.

Fletcher, Kate. 2012. *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles: Design Journeys*. London: Earthscan.

Fletcher, Kate. 2012. "Durability, Fashion, Sustainability: The Processes and Practices of Use." *Fashion Practice* 4 (2): 221–238.

Gray, Carole, and Julian Malins. 2004. *Visualising Research: A Guide to the Research Process in Art and Design*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Hemmings, Jessica, ed. 2012. *The Textile Reader*. London: Berg.

Hemmings, Jessica. 2012. *Warp and Weft: Woven Textiles in Fashion, Art and Interiors*. London: Bloomsbury.

Ingold, Tim. 2013. *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*. London: Routledge.

Lander, Maureen. 2012. "Intergenerational Knowledge and Contemporary Weaving Practice." In *The Textile Reader*, edited by Jessica Hemmings, 285–291. London: Berg.

Manzini, Ezio. 2015. *Design, When Everybody Designs: An Introduction to Design for Social Innovation*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1962. *Phenomenology of Perception*. London: Routledge.

Neto, Ernesto. 2006. *Leviathan Thot*. Installation. Panthéon, Paris. <https://www.tanyabonakdargallery.com/exhibitions/230-ernesto-neto-leviathan-thot-pantheon-paris/>

Neto, Ernesto. 2006. *Ernesto Neto*. Paris: Fondation Cartier pour l'Art Contemporain.

Pallasmaa, Juhani. 2012. *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*. 3rd ed. Chichester: Wiley.

Pym, Celia. 2017. *On Mending: Stories of Damage and Repair*. London: Bloomsbury.

Pym, Celia. 2019. *Darned Postcard*. <https://celiapym.com/work/darned-postcard/>

Sennett, Richard. 2008. *The Craftsman*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Tezuka, Aiko. 2020. *Aiko Tezuka*. Tokyo: Kenji Taki Gallery.

Tezuka, Aiko. 2018. *Talisman (system)*. <https://aikotezuka.com/talisman-system/>

Whitty, Jennifer. 2021. *Earth Logic Fashion Action Research Plan*. London: Earth Logic.

Appendix

Final MDes Exhibition – Practice Display

29 May 2026

Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery, Auckland University of Technology

Cycles of Making and Memory was presented as part of the final Master of Design exhibition. The installation brought together the final material outcomes developed through the practice-led research, showing how overlooked and discarded materials were re-engaged through slow making, reconstruction, and light.

The final exhibition brought these material experiments together within a shared space, allowing their relationships with light, texture, and memory to be experienced collectively. Through the final installation, light became part of how the reconstructed materials were perceived, revealing their renewed material potential and supporting the emotional connections developed through the making process.



Figure A.1 Exhibition overview of *Cycles of Making and Memory*, Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery, AUT, 2026. Researcher's personal archive.



Figure A.2 Installation details of *Cycles of Making and Memory*, Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery, AUT, 2026. Researcher's personal archive.



Figure A.3 Viewer encounters with *Cycles of Making and Memory*, showing interactions between the body, material, light, and shadow. Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery, AUT, 2026. Researcher's personal archive.